The Appeal of Faith Development Theory:

A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract of Thesis

This thesis seeks to examine James Fowler's faith development theory from a sociological perspective in order to understand the theory's appeal and function within mainstream British churches.

Assuming that all claims to knowledge articulate the interest of a particular social group, the thesis begins by outlining the intellectual tradition in which faith development theory stands and then examines its social base within Britain. Insights from the sociology of knowledge and the social psychology of religion are used to suggest that faith development theory operates as a theory of identity amongst those to whom it appeals, acting as a legitimising framework for those of a post-liberal theological outlook who work within the context of religious diversity.

Looking at these dynamics in operation through the results of a questionnaire and an examination of relevant literature, it is concluded that faith development theory functions amongst church leaders who are constructing a post-liberal identity, as a framework for interpreting their own faith experience and that of those to whom they must relate.

Finally, we consider the implications of this perspective upon faith development theory for pastoral theology, suggesting that studies of the social effects of Fowler's stages of faith, such as this one, form an important element in the theological assessment of faith development theory, and raise crucial questions about the kind of strategies for the maintenance of Christian identity which are appropriate in the post-modern world.

James Fowler's Faith Development Theory

Faith development theory is presented as an account of the stages through which faith passes during the human life cycle. It is the work of American theologian and United Methodist Minister, James W Fowler. Fowler first published versions of his theory in 1974 in the journals, *The Foundation* and *Religious Education.* However, the fullest statement of his faith development theory is to be found in *Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* which was published in 1981. In this book Fowler sets out his six stages of faith, the concept of faith which informs these stages, and the story of how his developmental theory came into being. Since 1981, Fowler has published several more books which explore some of the implications of his stages of faith, and written numerous articles. His work has also been the subject of several volumes and a large number of articles, both in the USA and in Europe.[1]

Discussion of the issues pertaining to faith development has some precedent within the Christian tradition, both within the fields of religious education and spirituality. However, the faith development theory of James Fowler, as it has emerged over the last twenty years, has been acclaimed as novel and ground-breaking in the breadth of its scope, for it examines themes of development from the cradle to the grave and looks not just at Christian faith, but faith as a universal human capacity.

The theory has achieved a wide influence and application within the mainstream churches, particularly in the USA where it originated[2], and in Britain where it has been taught in

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[1]For a detailed list of Fowler's publications on faith development theory, please see the bibliography.

[2]Already in 1982, Philibert, P.J., in "Moral Maturity and Education Beyond Conventional Morality", in *Review of Religious Research* 23:3 (1982), 292 stated that, "Fowler's work has become widely known and is being accepted with increasing interest among religious educators." By 1992 and the publication of Fowler, J.W., 1992, "Stages of Faith: Reflections on a Decade of Dialogue", in *Christian Education Journal* XIII:1 (1992), 13ff., Fowler could note that *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper & Row, 1981 had sold 60,000 copies in North America, been through 20 printings and been used as a textbook in Catholic, Evangelical, Protestant, and Jewish colleges and seminaries for clinical pastoral education.

theological colleges as a model for pastoral theology and used to underpin various approaches emergent within confessional children's work.[3] Despite its influence, however, faith development theory has not received universal acclaim, either within or outside the churches. Criticisms have centred around two issues: its assumptions and methods, which are held to undermine its claims to be an empirical and descriptive normative theory;[4] and the nature of its theological assumptions which some believe only to accord with a Judaeo-Christian understanding of faith, and which some within the Christian tradition consider unorthodox, preferring to restrict the reference of the term *faith* to saving faith in Jesus Christ.[5]

The influence which Fowler's theory currently enjoys within the British churches, however, raises questions about the reasons for its appeal. And it is the appeal of Fowler's faith development theory which forms the subject of this thesis, particularly, the dynamics at work in the reception of the theory amongst those who have embraced it within the British mainstream churches.

Method and Perspective

The subject under investigation in this thesis has profound implications for the method of study employed. Fowler draws upon two main disciplines: theology and developmental psychology and it will, therefore, be necessary to locate faith development theory within both these traditions of thought in order to understand the way in which the theory has been received both within and beyond those disciplines. Investigating its appeal, however, involves not only an examination of the theory itself, but also a study of those upon whom it has made an impact. We shall, therefore, turn to the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology in order to illuminate the pattern of response which Fowler's theory has

[3]See Chapter Five for a detailed account of the way in which faith development theory is being used in pastoral theology and children's work in Britain.
[4]See Chapter Two for a discussion of the empirical and normative status of faith development theory.
[5]Chapter One considers the comments of Fowler's theological critics.

elicited, and perceive the ways in which his stages of faith have interacted with the lives of those who have been influenced by them.

In doing so we shall be following the methodology of Karl Mannheim who was one of the first to pay particular attention to the social base of beliefs and ideas; first we shall establish faith development theory's intellectual tradition, then its social base, and lastly we shall examine the dynamics in operation between these two in order to discover the theory's social function.[6]

Thus far, in the published literature which will be discussed below, assessments of faith development theory have mostly been constructed from within developmental psychology and theology, the two main pillars upon which Fowler's theory rests. It is, of course, important, in any consideration of the appeal of a theory, to consider its provenance. Resting upon both structural-developmental and theological premises, Fowler's work has its origins in both these disciplines and in the dialogue between them. Understanding reactions to Fowler's work must take into account both the tradition of thought in which faith development theory stands, and the position of its critics and advocates regarding that tradition.

The first task of the thesis, then, is to examine the place of Fowler's theory within the disciplines of developmental psychology and theology. The primary purpose of such an exercise is not to debate whether faith development theory rests upon sound theological or developmental principles, but to consider how the provenance of Fowler's theory within these disciplines affects its potential influence.

It will become clear in the course of this discussion of Fowler's developmental and theological premises, that there is no consensus which would serve as a basis for a universal appeal for his theory amongst academics or church politicians. Indeed, there are serious

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[6]For an account of Mannheim's method, see Mannheim, K., 1936, *Ideology and Utopia*, Routledge, 1991. His methods and our use of them are also discussed in Chapter Three.

questions about the theory's descriptive range and thus its explanatory power or prescriptive use which arise from a discussion of its origins in structural-developmental psychology and post-liberal theology.

In order to understand the effect which faith development theory is having in practice, however, attention needs to focus not only on the stages of faith as they appear in print, but on those who have been influenced by Fowler's work in practice. The second task of the thesis, then, is to investigate the popular appeal of faith development theory. This requires an examination of the function which faith development theory performs within the social lives of those amongst whom it is current. Understanding the popular appeal of an idea or theory has been the particular study of the sociology of knowledge, and thus it is to this discipline that we turn first for illumination of the appeal of faith development theory within the mainstream British churches.

Sociologists and social anthropologists have long treated beliefs and myths as social facts which are intrinsically related to the social life of the communities in which they are current; it is suggested that such beliefs are current amongst a particular group within society because they explain and articulate the social world of which they are a part. It is assumed that even ideas or theories which rest upon an empirical base, may articulate, explain or legitimate a particular expression of social life. Thus, even 'scientific' ideas may be current, not primarily because they are demonstrably correct, nor solely because they conform to previously held premises, but because they perform a useful function in people's social experience.

It is thus to an examination of the social base of faith development theory that the middle chapters of this thesis turn, seeking to identify the particular social group for whom faith development theory expresses or legitimates their experience. Both within sociology and social anthropology, there are a number of theories which suggest the kinds of ideas and theories likely to arise amongst particular social groups in the contemporary western world. In particular we shall draw upon the work of the sociologist, Max Weber and the social

anthropologist, Mary Douglas to suggest, not only that faith development theory is likely to make best sense amongst contemporary western people, but that it is likely to resonate most clearly for socially mobile and highly educated Christians who have responsibilities within the churches.

It is not sufficient, however, simply to identify a social group amongst whom faith development theory might gain currency without some sense of the ways in which the theory might interact with other factors in the lives of individuals. To illuminate this issue, we draw upon insights from social psychology and social phenomenology, and in particular, from studies of identity theory.

Theories of identity, as outlined below, are typifications of experience whereby people locate themselves both diachronically, in terms of their own biographies and synchronically, in terms of their experience of themselves in relation to others. In common with other beliefs current in society, theories of identity appear to most members of that society to be objectively true, but are in fact expressions of particular social experience, within particular cultural contexts, and are thus limited in their explanatory or descriptive potential.

Theories of identity, it is argued here, are necessary in all societies, because they afford people some sense of place, of who they are, and how they may act in the world; they offer a range of possible identities with which people may identify, thus both limiting and enabling particular kinds of social discourse and behaviour. The degree of choice which individuals may exercise in the adoption of an identity, of course, varies according to cultural conditions. In modern societies, the options are much broader due to social mobility and complexity, and many people may synthesise a whole variety of social identities from different spheres of their life in order to be able to function across a range of contexts. Essentially, however, in any society, identification with a social identity enables particular tasks to be performed.

What is suggested here is that Fowler's faith development theory functions as such a theory of identity amongst those to whom it appeals; it enables a particular group of people to make sense of their faith experience in relation, both to the faith experience of others, as they perceive it, and their own faith experience in the past; as such, it empowers them to perform particular tasks within their social world. Such an understanding of faith development theory is in fact hinted at by Fowler himself in his introduction to *Stages of Faith* when he expresses a desire to 'provide names for our experiences and ways to understand and express what we have lived.'[7]

The second task of the thesis, therefore, is to study faith development theory, not in terms of its provenance, but in terms of its social base, drawing upon the perspective found in the sociology of knowledge that any belief, which is considered within a society to be knowledge, owes its currency to its ability to perform a social function amongst a particular social group. It is suggested that faith development theory, although often discussed and treated as objective knowledge about the objective world by those to whom it appeals, is more profitably understood as a theory of identity, articulating and structuring the experience of socially mobile and highly educated Christians who have responsibilities within the churches.

We shall suggest, in our discussion of the provenance of faith development theory, that its appeal is also likely to be strongest amongst those constructing a post-liberal theological perspective and also those influenced by structural-developmental principles; the evidence of social psychology and social phenomenology suggest that such views arise from an experience of complex society, of social mobility, and a genuine encounter with pluralism, whether through education or responsibilities within the church.

Having made the assertion that these are the dynamics at work in the appeal of faith development theory within the British Methodist and Anglican churches, a sample of people

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[7]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper & Row, xiii.

interested in Fowler's work were invited to complete a questionnaire to see whether examples could be found to illustrate these dynamics at work. In 1995, this questionnaire was sent to all those who attended a conference in 1989 at Nottingham University at which James Fowler was the speaker.

The results of the questionnaire presented below, indicate that many of those interested in faith development are in fact highly educated and socially mobile Christians who have responsibilities within the mainstream churches - those to whom a post-liberal perspective is likely to make sense. The questionnaire results also illustrate the ways in which faith development theory is functioning amongst some of these people as a theory of identity, offering a way of interpreting past faith experience, and presenting typifications whereby self and others within the churches may be understood.

The second area from which we seek to illustrate Fowler's stages of faith functioning as a theory of identity is the published uses of faith development theory. This survey is not concerned with explicit critiques of Fowler's work, but with publications which have used his scheme as an explanatory device or to legitimate a particular stance or course of action. Again, as with the questionnaire, we found examples of faith development theory being used as a framework for identity in the lives of highly educated religious professionals.

What we are claiming in this thesis is that the appeal of faith development theory can be better understood if Fowler's work is conceived as an attempt to illuminate his own faith experience, and that of those around him, through the tools of theology and developmental psychology which were available to him. Rather than treating the stages of faith as a normative descriptive model, or as an attempt to prove theological assumptions by accumulated descriptive evidence, it is argued here that the stages are best understood as typifications of identity: providing a series of religious identities, whereby people may locate themselves in relation to others and make sense of their own experience.

Regarding Fowler's theory in this way not only provides insight into strategies for the maintenance of Christian identity within the contemporary western world, but also offers new criteria for assessing the appropriateness of the use of faith development theory within Christian communities. Although all theories of identity may enable people to act meaningfully within the social environment, different theories of identity clearly facilitate different attitudes towards self and others, and encourage different patterns of behaviour. From a theological perspective, reflection upon faith development in practice is as important as reflection upon its theoretical merits: what kind of tasks does faith development theory enable people to perform and what kinds of faith does it help to sustain?

At the conclusion of the thesis, we shall suggest that Fowler's faith development theory is descriptive, but only of a narrow range of people. As such, it has most insight to offer if it is perceived as a theory of identity. Such a perspective allows an assessment of the appropriateness of the theory's use as a tool for pastoral theology and confessional education, not only on the basis of its empirical validity or theological assumptions, but on the basis of the quality of the relationships and attitudes which it encourages and sanctions in practice amongst those to whom it appeals.

Outline of thesis

We shall begin then, by locating Fowler's faith development theory within the disciplines upon which it is most heavily dependent, namely developmental psychology and theology. This discussion will serve not only to outline the main features of the theory but also to suggest reasons for the pattern of published response which Fowler's work has elicited in Britain.

In Chapter One we shall undertake a discussion of faith development theory as theology, identifying the themes which Fowler treats and comparing his approach with previous treatments of these issues within the Christian tradition, which approach will necessitate a discussion of previous understandings of religious and spiritual development. This historical

look at the themes which Fowler addresses will serve to illuminate the features of his theory which belong to the modern context and to illustrate Fowler's own position within the theological spectrum. The purpose of such a discussion of the theological tradition in which Fowler's work stands is to begin to predict the outlines of a likely pattern of response to faith development theory. Such a perspective will enable a review of the published responses to Fowler's work which concentrate upon its theological aspects, and suggest a likely audience for faith development theory amongst church congregations.

The second discipline within which Fowler's faith development theory must be placed is developmental psychology and in Chapter Two we shall seek to place Fowler's work within this field. Fowler draws heavily upon the work of various developmentalists, such as Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jean Piaget and Robert Selman. His reliance, particularly upon the work of the structural-developmental tradition represented by Kohlberg and Piaget, suggests a likely pattern of response: Piaget's work, in particular, has received substantial criticism for its methods and assumptions about the nature of thought. This discussion of structural-developmental assumptions will be rehearsed in order to assess the extent to which Fowler's thesis is vulnerable to the critiques developed against Piaget's stages, and thus to illuminate the responses to Fowler's work which are based upon criticisms of his claims that his theory is normative and generalisable: claims which derive from structural-developmental assumptions. Such assumptions are not universally shared, and thus are likely to operate as limits to the theory's appeal, both amongst academics and amongst church congregations where there is an awareness of such issues.

The remaining chapters will consider the role of faith development theory as a theory of identity. In Chapter Three we shall discuss the method of investigating a belief or idea by examining its social base and social function by looking at the sociology of knowledge. We shall argue that theories such as that of James Fowler are current amongst social groups to whom they are useful in performing some social function, and draw upon the work of Max Weber and Mary Douglas to suggest the social groups amongst whom faith development

theory is likely to resonate. We shall propose that the concept of identity, developed in social psychology, particularly by Erik Erikson, is a particularly useful tool for analysing the appeal of Fowler's stages of faith, and suggest that faith development theory is most useful in helping highly educated and socially mobile western Christians to maintain their Christian identity amid religious diversity. Further use will be made of the study of identity construction in contemporary western society to examine why such professional people might be particularly vulnerable to the changes which have taken places in this society in the last two hundred years. These changes have elicited a variety of responses within theology, but they have also necessitated the evolution of new theories of identity in order that Christian faith can be maintained. It is suggested that what highly educated, socially mobile clergy and religious professionals need within contemporary western society are theories of identity which are rooted within in the Christian tradition, yet which are explicit and dynamic and which draw together some of the myths and influential meta-narratives which are current in the western world; faith development theory is considered to constitute one such theory.

Chapters Four and Five will attempt to illustrate the social function which faith development theory is thought to perform, first, through the questionnaire mentioned above, and second, through the published literature in which Fowler's work is being used as a legitimising or explanatory device and then the final chapter of the thesis will consider the implications for pastoral theology of approaching James Fowler's faith development theory as a theory of identity. The major part of this thesis approaches Fowler's stages of faith from a sociological perspective, using insights from the sociology of knowledge and from the social psychology of religion to examine the social effects of faith development theory. In this final chapter, however, we consider the contribution which this study of faith development theory in operation as a theory of identity may make to current debates within pastoral theology.

First we shall consider the usefulness to pastoral theology of the description we are offering, in this thesis, of the people who are using faith development theory as a strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity. We shall argue that it contributes to our understanding of

contemporary congregations and the dynamics at work between those congregations and their leaders, and we shall suggest that pastoral and educational work within the churches must take seriously the need to help people construct and maintain a Christian identity midst the pressures of the contemporary western world.

Second, we shall consider the implications of our study of faith development theory in operation as a theory of identity, for a theological evaluation of Fowler's stages of faith. We shall argue that the churches must assess Fowler's stages of faith on theological criteria, but upon theological criteria which consider the social effects of faith development theory to be an essential elements in its evaluation. It is maintained, in this final chapter, that this thesis is able to offer to pastoral theology a description of some of the social effects of faith development theory which are necessary to an examination of the tasks which Fowler's stages of faith facilitate and the kind of faith they help to sustain.

Finally it is suggested that this thesis brings Fowler's *Stages of Faith* into dialogue with the work of theologians like George Lindbeck, Ninian Smart and Anthony Thiselton[8] who are seeking to identify appropriate ways of forging a Christian identity in the post-modern world. This study provides one concrete example of a theory of identity which is functional, in social psychological terms, for post-modern people. Faith development theory is able to function in this way because it is explicit, dynamic and enables commitment to particular human communities. A theological assessment of the social effects of faith development theory in this area might prove a useful aid for theologians who are seeking to determine the shape of Christian identities which are appropriate to the post-modern world.

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[8]see, for example, Lindbeck, G., 1984, *The Nature of Doctrine*, London, S.P.C.K.; Smart, N., & Konstantine, S., 1991, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context*, Harper Collins; Thiselton, A.,1995, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, T&T Clark.

Chapter 1 The Theological Provenance of Faith Development Theory

Introduction

In order to see how Fowler's theological perspective might limit his theory's potential appeal we begin our discussion of his faith development theory by considering its provenance within theology. Fowler's work is heavily dependent upon developmental psychology, but the subject of his investigation is into human faith. The subject matter alone does not dictate that Fowler view it from a theological perspective; faith, like any other social fact may, after all, be investigated from a phenomenological standpoint; Fowler, however, writes from a particular perspective within Christian theology and his treatment of human faith reflects his training as a theologian; inevitably, this background shapes his theory and the scope of its appeal amongst theologians and congregations.

In this chapter, we shall seek to locate faith development theory within the discipline of theology. We shall outline the theory's main contours, look at previous attempts made in the Christian tradition to address issues of spiritual and religious development, and, finally, focus upon the normative image of adult faith which Fowler presents as the main key to his own theological position.

In our examination of the stages which Fowler describes, we shall rely primarily on his fullest statement of faith development theory which is to be found in *Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* published in 1981. Fowler had published several versions of his theory prior to this date;[9] he has also made numerous presentations of his work since 1981[10]. However, *Stages of Faith* remains the fullest

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[9]See, for example, Fowler, J. W., 1974, "Faith, liberation and human development", *The Foundation* [Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary], 79, (1974), 1-35; Fowler, J. W., 1974, "Toward a developmental perspective on faith", *Religious Education*, 69:2 (1974), 207-219; Fowler, J.W., 1976, "Faith Development Theory and the aims of religious socialization", in Durka, G., & Smith, J., (eds.) *Emerging Issues in Religious Education*, Paulist Press; Fowler, J.W., & Keen, S., 1978, *Life Maps: conversations on the journey of faith*, ed., Berryman, J., Minneapolis: Winston Press, and Fowler, J.W., 1980, "Faith and the structuring of meaning", in Fowler, J.W. & Vergote, A., (eds.) *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*, Silver Burdett.

[10]See, for example, Fowler, J.W., 1984, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Harper & Row, 1984; Fowler, J.W., 1986, "Faith and the structuring of meaning," and "Dialogue towards a future in faith development studies", in Dykstra, C. & Parks, S., (eds.), *Faith Development & Fowler*, Alabama: Religious Education Press; Fowler, J.W., 1987, *Faith*

statement of faith development theory and probably its best known presentation. *Stages of Faith* also provides an account of the way in which Fowler arrived at his thesis, not only outlining the stages through which he considered normative development to pass, but giving an account of the origins of faith development theory in his own mind: his conception of faith as a universal human phenomenon, his observation of the changes in the ways that people construct such faith, and his reading of developmental psychology; for these reasons, our analysis of the appeal of faith development theory in this thesis will concentrate largely upon the theory as it is stated in *Stages of Faith.*

Fowler's concept of faith

Fowler begins *Stages of Faith* with a description of faith as a capacity common to all human beings. Rather than identifying faith with religion or belief, Fowler regards faith as a matter of universal human concern which is prior to our being religious or irreligious - for all people are concerned with how to live with purpose in a way which makes sense to them.[11] Faith then, is not regarded as a question of considering certain propositions to be true, nor of participating in a religious tradition, although faith is visible in such traditions; neither is faith a separate compartment of life, distinct from the thinking and feeling and acting which characterises human existence. Rather, 'faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions.'[12]

Faith, according to Fowler, also always implies a relationship.[13] Human beings trust in people or things, and they are committed to them, when they declare their faith. The relationship is not between two parties, however, but three. When there is commitment to another in marriage, for example, there is also (at least a partially) shared commitment to the

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Development & Pastoral Care, Fortress Press; Fowler, J.W., 1991, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church*, Harper & Row; Fowler, J.W., 1996, *Faithful Change: the personal and public challenges of postmodern life*, Abingdon Press. For a detailed list of Fowler's publications on faith development theory, please see the bibliography.

[11] Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, Harper & Row, 5.

[12] *Ibid.*, 14. Fowler, here, is summarising the view of faith which he has derived from the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, particularly, Smith, W.C., 1979, *Faith and Belief*, Princeton University Press.

[13] *Ibid.*, 16-23. Fowler, here, is drawing upon the work of H. R. Niebuhr, particularly, Niebuhr, H.R., 1960, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, Harper & Row.

value of marriage. Faith is relationship because it binds people together with others who share their commitments; it is also, according to Fowler, the relationship which concerns human beings ultimately.[14] It is these shared commitments which offer a sense of purpose and meaning and power to act, which confer a place in the social world, and which offer access to social life, which, for human beings who are socially formed, is life itself.

Fowler summarises his description of faith as,

> People's evolved and evolving ways
> of experiencing self, others and world
> (as they construct them)
>
> as related to and affected by the
> ultimate conditions of existence
> (as they construct them)
>
> and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings,
> trusts and loyalties in the light of the
> character of being, value and power
> determining the ultimate conditions
> of existence (as grasped in their
> operative images - conscious and
> unconscious - of them).[15]

Faith, then, in Fowler's understanding, is the construction of the images which shape human life.[16] All people are engaged in such activity, although many are unaware of the process except in moments of crisis, when previously adequate images of reality break down.[17]

It is clear from the outset that such a concept of faith is highly dependent upon a number of developments both within and outside theology which place Fowler's work firmly within the context of modern theological debate. First, Fowler's treatment of faith as a universal human phenomenon is an approach which would not have been possible until this century in the sense that such a perspective is partly dependent upon an awareness of and interest in pluralism which has only emerged in the modern world with the incidence of mass

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[14] *Ibid.*, 18. Here, Fowler draws upon the work of Paul Tillich, especially, Tillich, P., 1957, *Dynamics of Faith*, Harper & Row.
[15] *Ibid.*, 93-94.
[16] *Ibid.*, 30.
[17] *Ibid.*, 31.

migration, resulting in people of very different cultures living in proximity to one another, and globalisation, whereby communications have made people much more aware of the existence of people of other faith and other culture around the world. It is only within such a climate that a tradition of philosophy and social science has developed which admits of the phenomenological treatment of social facts like myth, ritual and, as here, faith.

Prior to the twentieth century discussions of religious phenomena were largely confined within theology or philosophy. Faith was traditionally regarded by theologians and philosophers as a peculiarly Christian, or at least, Judaeo-Christian phenomenon, which is intrinsically bound up with the contents of belief in general, and with saving faith in Jesus Christ in particular.

Fowler's understanding of faith as a universal human phenomenon, then, is heavily dependent upon a number of recent developments in the social sciences, particularly upon the emergence of phenomenology which allows the contents of human consciousness to be examined, whilst setting aside the presuppositions and interpretations of reality which occupy theologians and philosophers. This development in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) allowed for the development of the comparative study of religions found in the work of scholars such as Ninian Smart who seek to construct typologies of religious behaviour and experience across different traditions.[18]

Such an approach paved the way for comparisons to be made between religious traditions. Although there are serious questions to be asked about the extent to which faith in one tradition may be considered identical to faith in another tradition,[19] it is the development of the phenomonological method which has made it possible for faith to be considered a

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[18]see, for example, Smart, N., 1969, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, London, and 1979, *The phenomenon of Christianity*, Collins.

[19]George Lindbeck, for example, argues in *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984) that the experiential-expressive view that all religions express the same truths in different ways is untenable because doctrines perform different lexical functions within different belief systems. Superficial similarities in formulae, therefore, need careful examination before the similarity of the concepts of different traditions can be regarded as demonstrated.

universal human phenomenon and to be discussed as a process of the human mind in common with other mental processes. This method differs from the earlier philosophical tendency to discuss mental processes without detailed reference to the variety of human experience across different cultures and religions.

These developments in the social sciences have paved the way for a theological approach which draws heavily upon the social sciences for its understanding of the human subject. A prime example of such an approach has been that of Paul Tillich (1886-1965) whose openness to the social sciences led him to identify the religious principle as a dimension of the whole of human existence. Tillich considered religious forms of life to be essentially concerned with the existential questions of human existence. In his thought, God could be considered as that which is of ultimate concern to human beings when they invest themselves in that which is capable of bearing ultimate significance.[20]

Fowler himself is directly influenced in this respect by Tillich's approach,[21] particularly by Tillich's challenge to people to consider the values which have central place in their lives, contained in *Dynamics of Faith.*[22] However, Fowler's language betrays more of a debt to H R Niebuhr's understanding of faith.[23] Fowler wrote his doctoral thesis on Niebuhr's work, and has commented himself upon the defining nature of such a choice, 'Choosing the topic of a doctoral dissertation is what Niebuhr would have called a 'moral' act: it is an act of self-definition, as are all acts of significant commitment and self-investment.' [24]

The influence of Niebuhr upon Fowler's theological understanding is clear from the frequency with which Niebuhr's name appears in the text and notes of *Stages of Faith.* In

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[20]Tillich's position is fully expounded in Tillich, P. *Systematic Theology*, London, 1960.
[21]Fowler, J.W. *op. cit.*, 4-5.
[22]Tillich, P. *Dynamics of Faith.* Harper & Row, 1957.
[23]for an understanding of H.R.Niebuhr's understanding of faith see particularly, Niebuhr, R.R, ed., 1989, *Faith on Earth*, Yale University Press.
[24]Fowler, J.W., 1974, *To See the Kingdom: the theological vision of H. Richard Niebuhr,* Abingdon Press, 18-19.

particular, Fowler uses Niebuhr to help to set out his own understanding of what faith is: a universal human relational act which involves the whole person in loyalty and trust.[25]

Niebuhr, in his approach to the concept of faith, began with Luther's conviction that faith is not merely propositional but involves the commitment of the whole person issuing in action.[26] Faith is a question of loyalty or valuing which concerns the orientation of the whole life of the individual. The language of loyalty and value betrays Niebuhr's debt to Josiah Royce (1855-1916)[27] and Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923)[28] and a whole tradition of liberal theology, which considers the human subject from the perspective of philosophy and the sociology of religion and seeks to understand how God might reveal himself to human beings, rather than beginning with revelation itself.

For his definition of faith, Fowler drew upon the approach of Niebuhr together with Tillich's understanding of religion as ultimate concern and Wilfred Cantwell-Smith's insistence that propositional statements of belief are always secondary to the faith which is the relation of trust and loyalty to make his point about faith being an activity of all humans and to emphasise that faith is always relational.[29]

Niebuhr developed his concept of the person developing faith in community in his unpublished manuscript, *Faith on Earth.*[30] He observed that, if an infant experiences faithful responses from its primary carer, it develops trust, not only in the carer, but in the world environment.[31] The line of thought again follows that of Royce, that loyalty to a person, implies loyalty to a cause. Faith is not only a question of being loyal to others and a common cause, but of trusting the faithfulness of the other and of the cause.

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[25] *Ibid.*, 16-18.
[26] see Niebuhr, R.R. op. cit., 1989.
[27] Royce, J., 1908, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, London.
[28] see, for example, Pye, M. & Morgan, R., eds., 1977, *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on theology and religion*, London; Troeltsch, E., *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, George Allen & Unwin, 1950.
[29] Fowler, J.W., 1981 *op. cit.*, 16.
[30] published posthumously in 1989 by Yale University Press, edited by R.R. Niebuhr as *Faith on Earth.*
[31] *Ibid.*, 118.

The other theologian to whose phenomenological approach Fowler is indebted is Wilfred Cantwell-Smith in his distinction between belief and faith;[32] of course, there has long been a discussion within Christian theology about the nature of faith and its relationship to belief. We have already cited Martin Luther's existential approach to faith, for example. It would have been alien to Luther however, to suggest that one might have faith without belief in the propositions of the Christian faith; alien to him to suggest that one might equally well have faith in fate or one's bicycle. Such a distinction between faith and belief has only been clearly made in the second part of the twentieth century, most notably by Wilfred Cantwell-Smith who has insisted that propositional statements of belief are always secondary to faith; faith, as defined by Cantwell-Smith, is the relation of trust and loyalty[33]and may be invested in a whole range of concepts or phenomena.

It is clear, then, in Fowler's use of Niebuhr, Tillich and Cantwell-Smith that he stands within a theological tradition which begins with the human subject and seeks the help of the human sciences. There are moreover, other features of Fowler's understanding of faith which locate his theory within a particular culture and a particular theological orientation to that culture.

Although Fowler does not explore in great detail the role which the unconscious plays in forming the images which shape human faith, he does acknowledge in his definition of faith that many of the mental processes which affect faith are not always available to conscious inspection;[34] clearly, Fowler's understanding of the processes of the human mind, in common with most of the contemporary western world, has been profoundly shaped by the work of depth psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. [35]

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[32]see Fowler, J.W. *op. cit.*, 1981, 14-15 for a summary of Fowler's interpretation of Wilfred Cantwell Smith.
[33]see Smith, W.C., 1979, *op. cit.*.
[34]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 50.
[35]the parallels between Fowler's pattern of development and Jung's concepts of individuation and integration are discussed later in the thesis. For the moment it is important only to note Fowler's assumption that faith involves not only the conscious mind, but also unconscious processes of image formation.

Also of significance for our current discussion, Fowler considers faith to be an active process; faith is not considered a gift to be passively received, but like any conception of the world, it has to be constructed by the individual within the context of their social life.[36] This understanding of faith issuing from a reciprocal relationship between the individual and society is dependent upon the notion that what passes for knowledge of reality within a society, is actually a social product, constructed by members of that society. This view derives from a number of sources within the social sciences, notably from the work of G H Mead (1863-1931) in social psychology. It also owes much to the structural-developmental perspective of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) on whose constructivist approach Fowler is heavily dependent.

There are a number of approaches to understanding how children become adult members of society. Maturation theory tends to view humans as higher primates whose behaviour is determined by selective evolutionary factors. Radical behaviourists like J B Watson (1878-1958) have believed that all humans are fundamentally similar, regardless of background or intelligence. Characteristic of much early experimental psychology, behaviourism focuses upon the prediction and control of particular behaviours rather than upon understanding the structures of the mind and the processes of learning; its implicit understanding of how children adopt appropriate behaviours and attitudes, though, relies primarily on genetic factors. Categories and patterns of thought are perceived to be innate and genetically determined.[37]

A second approach to this question is socialisation theory. The child is perceived to assimilate concepts and rules of behaviour from the surrounding environment in the same way that it learns its native language. The individual is viewed as a microcosm of the surrounding culture, reflecting the structure of society. The focus of study, therefore,

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[36]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 16.
[37]for examples of behaviourist publications, see, Watson, J.B., 1925, *Behaviourism*; Skinner, B.F., 1953, *Science and Human Behaviour*, Macmillan.

becomes the society, rather than the process of assimilation of society's norms. This approach tends to dominate in sociology and social anthropology from the work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) through to the social learning theorists of the mid twentieth century.[38]

A third model of understanding how children become adult members of society is the constructivist model, whereby the child is believed to construct any knowledge which it has. Rather than patterns of thought being entirely predetermined by genetic factors or being simply a reflection of cultural patterns, the child constructs its social world as it becomes an agent within it. The child's increasing ability to act in the adult world is understood to be due, not to maturational processes stimulated by biological triggers, nor to an accumulation of learnt behaviours, but to adaptation resulting from action within the social environment.[39]

James Fowler's faith development theory follows the constructivist model. Heavily influenced by George Herbert Mead, through the mediation of H R Niebuhr, Fowler asserts that the reflexive self, as seen only in humans, can develop only in community. Mead contended that psychologically, the individual self is really social in essence. The problem with which Mead was grappling was that rationalism and empiricism both begin with experience as individual and subjective and result in the problem of how the subjective mind can grasp the objective world. Mead's answer was that the primary fact is not individual subjective experience, but common reality. Without common experience there could be no private experience. For Mead, the self is only evident in doing: in selecting stimuli from the environment and responding to them. A sense of selfhood only emerges when one is conscious of oneself as object. This coincides with the development of language, when the initiator performs an act knowing the change it will effect in the self and in others according to a shared system of meaning. Mead argues that language does not express antecedent

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[38]see, for example, Rotter, J.H., Chance, J.E. & Phares, E.J., eds., 1972, *Applications of a social learning theory of personality*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Bandura, A, 1971, *A Social Learning Theory*, Morristown.
[39]The most notable of constructivist thinkers was Jean Piaget.

thought - it is communication itself. Thus 'man cannot become himself save through the medium of social life.'[40] There is, for Mead, no possibility of a person developing a notion of selfhood, or becoming a human self, isolated from a community.

Although Niebuhr's emphasis was different from Mead's, for Niebuhr was much more interested than Mead in how the individual is able to initiate and innovate, he adopted from Mead the essential point that the individual develops in relation to the community and does so through action within the social environment.[41] Until this point, there is little disagreement between Mead's approach and that of the sociology of knowledge. Fowler's interest in the human as socially constructed agent is modified, however, by the constructivist approach of Jean Piaget (1896-1980).

Piaget's theory of genetic epistemology arose from his modification of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Rather than agreeing with Darwin that species evolve due to random mutations which happen to afford benefits, Piaget proposed that mutations in species are due to intentioned adaptation to novel environmental pressures. These changes result from the action of the organism within the environment.

Piaget argued that intelligence in humans is a particular form of biological adaptation, meaning that people can to operate within increasingly complex social environments. Because organisms are always seeking equilibrium with their environments, more complex structures of thought are always being formed to incorporate new experiences. Organisms, he argued, also have a tendency to organise, and this characteristic is manifested in the attempts of the human mind to integrate functions into a single system. Each adaptation to a new environment, Piaget envisaged, is achieved by *accommodation* - a tendency to change in

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[40]Mead, G.H., *Mind, Self & Society*, University of Chicago Press, 1934.
[41]See, Niebuhr, H.R., 1989, *Faith on Earth*, ed., Niebuhr, R.R, Yale UP.

response to environmental demands - and by the *assimilation* of features of external reality into the psychological structures of the organism.[42]

From Fowler's perspective, faith is a kind of knowing: knowing involves the construction of self, others, world and ultimate environment; different kinds of faith result from adaptation to different environments and assimilation of features of varying external realities into the psychological structures of the organism.[43] Although Fowler regards Piaget's concept of cognition as only one part of his understanding of faith, it is a crucial part, for he claims Piaget's eras of logical development to be necessary although not sufficient for each successive faith stage and he considers the processes of adaptation and assimilation to be the processes by which faith is formed.

This perspective is expanded in Fowler's work with reference to Erikson's studies of psycho-social development, which suggest a correlation between people's experience and their rate of epigenetic development.[44] Fowler comments that although he has not found evidence that faith stages correlate with predictable changes in the life cycle as Erikson suggested, 'Erikson's work has become part of the interpretative mind-set I bring to research on faith development.'[45] Part of this mind-set to which Fowler refers includes Erikson's understanding of faith originating in the 'quality of the child's first mutuality with the conditions of his or her existence',[46] and Erikson's interest in 'the interplay of faith and culture'[47].

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[42]For a summary of Piaget's constructivist approach, see, Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B., 1966, *The Psychology of the Child*, London, and Ginsberg, H., & Opper, S., 1969, *Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development*, Englewood Cliffs, 1979.
[43]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 98.
[44]Erikson himself became interested in ethnology and the influence of socio-historical conditions upon identity when he observed the impact of emigration upon his own self concept; this led him to argue, for example, that modern society is like the ambivalent, uncertain environment of adolescence because its plurality of options throws people into a state of permanent identity crisis, unable to make lasting identifications. See, Erikson, E., 1958, "Identity and Uprootedness in our Time", Address at the Annual Meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health in Vienna.
[45]Fowler, J.W. *op. cit.*, 1981, 110.
[46]*Ibid.*, 109.
[47]*Ibid.*, 109. See particularly Erikson's study of identity crisis and resolution: Erikson, E., 1958, *Young Man Luther*, London.

Fowler's concept of faith then, is heavily influenced by the constructivist approach to understanding how knowledge is acquired. Considering faith to be a kind of knowledge of the self, others, the world and the ultimate environment, Fowler accepts that human beings are social beings whose faith arises from their interaction with the socially constructed world.

The notion that faith might be considered as part of a socially constructed reality is not one which is universally acceptable to Christian theology. Many theologians are concerned about reductionism - determined that faith should not be explained away as a function of a particular social world. However, other theologians adopt the attitude that if the modern conception of the human being is a social one; that human beings' understanding of the world around them is not to be compared to a blueprint of an objective reality, but should rather be considered a complex interpretation influenced by the externalised projections of others, then theology must be able to work with this understanding of the human being, and consider how God may reveal Godself to a human race understood in this way.

Within theology, the approach which begins with a contemporary understanding of the human being and seeks to understand how such a creature could receive revelation from God is associated with liberalism.

During the last century, liberal theology has been partly characterised by its attempts to construct a dialogue with social scientific understandings of the human condition. It is clear from our discussion of Fowler's understanding of faith that his work is heavily dependent upon developments in the social sciences which have happened during the last century. What is also clear from his use of insights from these modern disciplines, is that Fowler stands within a theological tradition which seeks to investigate how the social sciences may better illuminate the human condition and God's relationship with humanity.

Liberalism is a term originally used to describe a particular theological movement stemming from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and exemplified by the work of

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). More generally, however, it is used to describe a type of theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries characterised by a receptive attitude to contemporary science, the arts and humanities, an openness towards Biblical criticism and emphasis upon the ethical implications of Christianity. Authority tends to be located in human reason and reflection upon the scriptures, and truth is understood to be subjective, rather than objective. Liberals, therefore, tend to be open to dialogue with those of other faith and none, in order to discover the truths which they have in common, yet express differently.

It could not be argued that Tillich, Cantwell-Smith or Niebuhr could be considered liberal in all the respects outlined above, and indeed, H R Niebuhr himself would have disputed the label, as he considered liberalism to identify Christ's message with the highest ideals and greatest truths promulgated within a given culture; in his own typology, Niebuhr associated this approach with the 'Christ of Culture whilst he considered the optimum approach to be described by his 'conversionist type' in which culture is considered to be fallen, yet Christ converts within culture, for nature and culture are intertwined.[48] In our definition of liberalism, we do not imply that the highest ideals of a culture are uncritically identified with the gospel, but observe that liberal theologies recognise that humans are formed within society and thus with desires to engage in a dialogue with contemporary cultural understandings of human nature.[49]

All three of the theologians we have identified, in common with Fowler, seek to understand faith from a human and phenomenological viewpoint, using the insights of contemporary psychology, social psychology and the sociology of knowledge, before considering how such human faith might relate to the God of any particular religious tradition. It is no surprise then, that in seeking to understand the changes in human faith which Fowler began to

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[48]Niebuhr, H. R., 1952, *Christ and Culture*, New York, 83ff..

[49]This they also have in common with post-liberal theologies. We shall argue later that both Niebuhr's conversionist type and Fowler image of normative adult faith have more in common with the post-liberal theologies identified by George Lindbeck than with liberal theology as it is traditionally understood. See pp. 35-41 below.

observe happening during the life cycle, he was drawn to developmental psychology; already, in the work of Niebuhr, Fowler had encountered Erikson's approach to faith and met with the constructivist expectation that faith and culture are intertwined; Fowler was already convinced, then, that faith must be understood as a function of the whole person and their orientation to the whole of their socially constructed reality.

Fowler's stages of faith

During the 1960s, whilst Fowler was working in a pastoral context, he observed that people of similar age tended to bring similar problems and perspectives to their faith. In seeking to understand the correlation which he noticed between the different ways in which people shape their lives' purposes and meanings and their chronological age, Fowler turned to the developmental perspective he had already encountered through his doctoral thesis: in particular, he turned to the work of Erikson on psycho-social development,[50] Piaget on cognitive development[51] and Kohlberg on moral development.[52] A dialogue between the views of these three thinkers is presented by Fowler in Part II of *Stages of Faith.*

Believing that the cognitive, psycho-social and moral spheres of human life all affect faith, Fowler conducted structured interviews in which he requested adults and young people to talk about their faith. Out of his research he constructed six hierarchical stages of faith development each of which has seven aspects: form of logic (from Piaget); perspective taking (from Selman); form of moral judgement (from Kohlberg); bounds of social awareness (from Erikson); locus of authority (from Kohlberg); form of world coherence; and symbolic function.[53] The six stages have been summarised by Fowler as follows:

Stage I: Intuitive-Projective Faith:
Imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols, and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting images

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[50] see Erikson, E., 1950, *Childhood & Society*, Norton & Co..
[51] for a summary of Piaget's work, see Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. *The Psychology of the Child.* London, 1966.
[52] see Kohlberg, L. "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialisation" in Goslin, D.A., ed., *Handbook of Socialisation*,Chicago, 1969 and Kohlberg, L, *Essays on Moral Development Vol I*, San Francisco, 1981.
[53] for details of the relationship between the seven aspects and stages of faith development, see Fowler, J.W. *op. cit.*, 1981, 244-5, figure 5:1: *Faith Stages by Aspects.*

that represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one's life.

Stage II: Mythic-Literal Faith:
The developing ability to think logically helps one order the world with categories of causality, space and time, using narrative; one can enter into the perspectives of others; and capture life meaning in stories; symbols are perceived literally and as one-dimensional.

Stage III: Synthetic-Conventional Faith:
A coherent identity is formed within a group, integrating diverse images of self into a coherent identity. A personal faith is formed from conventional elements, the meanings of symbols are implicit, rich and powerful, supporting identity and enabling one to unite in emotional solidarity with others.

Stage IV: Individuative-Reflective Faith:
Critical reflection upon one's beliefs and values and their meaning; an ability to see oneself with the eyes of another; understanding of the self and others as part of a social system; the internalisation of authority and the assumption of responsibility for making explicit choices of ideology and lifestyle open the way for critically self-aware commitments in relationships and vocation.

Stage V: Conjunctive Faith:
Polarities are embraced; there is alertness to paradox and the need for multiple interpretations of reality. Symbol and story, metaphor and myth are newly appreciated as irreducible vehicles for expressing truth. There is openness to the traditions of others and an interest in the unconscious processes of the self.

Stage VI: Universalising Faith:
Paradox and polarities dissolve in a oneness with the power of being; vision and commitment free one for a passionate, yet detached spending of the self in love. An ability to overcome division, oppression and violence and co-operation in God's commonwealth of love and justice.[54]

We have already commented upon Fowler's use of Erikson's psycho-social research. The stages which Fowler describes, however, are more directly dependent upon Piaget's eras of logical development and upon Kohlberg's stages of moral development, both of which are structural-developmental approaches.

As we have seen above, the structural-developmental approach assumes that knowledge is acquired through the processes of adaptation and organisation; Piaget, the pioneer of this approach, considered not only these processes to be universal, but also contended that there

[54]These stages are Fowler's own summaries for the purpose of lecturing and are used with permission.

are categories of thought which are also universally found in human culture, in particular, the categories of logic, causality, space and time.[55] These, he termed structural elements because they are organisational concepts which form a framework for the contents of thought and which he regarded as the building blocks of human cognition.[56]

Piaget argued on this basis that three broad periods of cognitive development are evident. Each stage is an integrated set of operational structures which constitute the thought processes of a person at a particular time[57]. Development involves the transformation of these structures of thought in the direction of increasing differentiation and universalisation[58].

It is this concept of a hierarchical stage sequence which Fowler adopts, in his case claiming that if the elements which make up faith can be found in all cultures, a hierarchical ordering is possible, providing that each new stage incorporates a qualitatively different way of structuring faith. Central to each of Fowler's stages are Piaget's logical eras of development. Each of Piaget's stages is regarded as necessary but not sufficient to Fowler's corresponding stages of faith.

Fowler, as we have observed, adds other aspects to Piaget's concern with mathematical and logical concepts, and in many respects the focus of his work is different from that of Piaget. However, Fowler does enshrine Piaget's eras of logical development at the heart of his theory, draw upon Piaget's notion of structural epistemological development and adopt Piaget's constructivist approach to understanding how children develop. He also draws upon Kohlberg's stages of moral development, themselves dependent upon Piaget's structural-developmental approach.

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[55]Piaget, J., 1971, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, trans. Wolfe Mays, World Meridian Books, chapter one.
[56]for a more detailed discussion of the structural-developmental school and Fowler's use of Piaget's work, see Chapter Two.
[57]Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., 1966, *The Psychology of the Child*, London, 153.
[58]for a discussion of the features of structural theories, see, Comb-Schilling, 1989, *op.cit.*, Chapter Two.

Such a dynamic understanding of faith, running parallel to cognitive development betrays a debt to a developmental understanding of human nature which has gathered influence since Darwin's publication of the *Origin of Species*.[59] Although Darwin's ideas of natural selection and random variation were originally resisted by the Church, because of the threat to Biblical fundamentalism, the problems created for the argument from design and the seeming way in which evolutionary theory seemed to undermine the distinctiveness of human beings, the concept that most things are in process of change and development had exerted a profound influence on some liberal theologians by the turn of the century. In 1899, for example, Edwin Starbuck commented that,

> 'The feature of the study which throws most light on the problem of religious education is the setting forth of the stages in growth from childhood to maturity. Fortunately we are coming to observe tendencies in growth everywhere. Nothing has helped more in interpreting human life and the world about us, has so brought order and purpose out of chaos, as our habit of seeing everything fit into a process of development.'[60]

Starbuck's comments about the pervasive nature of the concept of development clearly refer to the dissemination of Darwin's work in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They also reflect a fascination with the myth of development which has persisted in the western world to this day; biological development being used as a metaphor for the dynamics at work in the lives of nations and as well as in the lives of individuals.

To this extent, Fowler's concern with developmental processes reflects a relatively recent western preoccupation. There are, however, some precedents for the treatment of issues of development within the Christian tradition, and one such area, as Starbuck suggests, is religious education.

Concern with developmental processes for the sake of effective education can be traced back, at least to the Protestant Reformers' emphasis upon the need for appropriate catechesis. Although catechesis is a subject for study in its own right and cannot be given detailed

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[59]Darwin, C., 1851, *On the Origin of Species*, London.
[60]Starbuck, E. D., 1899, *The Psychology of Religion*, Walter Scott, London.

attention here, it will be useful for placing faith development theory within the Christian tradition to consider the origins of an interest in pedagogy and child development within the Christian Church.

Faith development and Religious Education

There is little evidence concerning the emergence of an explicit concern with pedagogy and developmental understandings of children for the sake of catechesis and religious education until the Reformation period. The earliest document which provides any insight into the process of Christian catechesis is the Didache,[61] where there is evidence of pre-baptismal ethical instruction and fasting. However, there is little explicit material about the intentional education of the community from the first few centuries CE. What emerges, rather, is a general pattern of proclamation, participation in sacraments and corporate worship, and a self-conscious abstinence from practices common in the Graeco-Roman world which functioned to emphasise the boundaries of the community. Apart from pre-baptismal instruction, the nurture of the Christian community seems to happened within the context of worship.

This pattern of catechesis operated within a culture where the Christian community was a minority and converts were adult. Instruction in the faith was primarily given to adults and so what happened regarding infant baptism and the nurture of children in this period is unclear.

The earliest reference to the instruction of infants is contained in the eighth century *Gelasian Sacramentary*.[62] Here, sponsors for infant baptism are mentioned as those to whom instruction was given upon the creeds and Lord's Prayer, although in the presence of the children. Whether this instruction was primarily for the benefit of godparents, or intended for the infants is unclear; however, in practice, instruction and baptism had become

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[61] Didache, *The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*, London, 1922, translated by C. Bigg.
[62] Printed in translation in Whitaker, E. C., 1960, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*. SPCK.

dissociated, as had baptism and confirmation. Christian instruction was, in the Middle Ages, largely left to godparents who were charged with presenting children for confirmation with a knowledge of the creeds, the Lord's Prayer and instilled with the moral values of the Church. In an environment where most people in Christendom were baptised as infants, the high profile and cohesive nature of Christian initiation was being lost, and it was in answer to this lack of knowledge about the Christian faith that catechisms began to be written in the sixteenth century. Those written by the reformers concentrated upon scripture and were framed in a question and answer format, demanding personal response.[63] In addition to tackling the ignorance of adults, however, the reformers felt that some attention had to be paid to the question of the appropriate instruction of children. Thus, for example, Luther produced a shorter catechism in 1529 and he and others emphasised the role of the family and of sponsors: Erasmus wrote that 'if parents and godparents won't take the trouble to do this, either themselves or through others, there will be no catechism.'[64] Reforming pastors took increasing responsibility for catechetical instruction of young people and services of worship became occasions primarily for instruction upon scripture and doctrine. In addition, various reformers, especially Bucer attempted to revive the catechumenate and examine candidates for confirmation on Christian fundamentals and moral conduct.

Although the reformers were not primarily concerned with pedagogy, but with knowledge, their concentration upon the spoken and written word had the effect of increasing interest in and commitment to education - not for its own sake, but in order that godly and obedient citizens should be raised up who would be able to read and understand the scriptures and discover there all that is necessary for salvation.

Such an emphasis upon education in order that people should be able to read the scriptures and learn the catechism resulted in a concern that poor people should be taught to read. In eighteenth century England, for example, recognising that, with the social changes

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[63] examples of popular refomed catechisms include, Bucer, M., 1534, *The Larger Catechism*; Calvin, J., 1562, *Genevan Catechism*, and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, 1563, authorised by Frederick III for use in the Palatinate.

[64] in Pelikan, J. & Lehmann, H.T. ed., *Luther's Works Vol 43*. Muhlenberg & Concordia Press, 1955- 65.

accompanying the early industrial revolution, traditional patterns of life and socialisation were breaking down, Sunday Schools became a popular vehicle for basic instruction in the catechism and the three R's. As far as the leaders of the Sunday School Movement, like Raikes, were concerned, such schools were to be a temporary measure until the State should assume responsibility for universal education. Neither was it envisaged that such schools should replace the need for parental involvement with religious upbringing. However, by 1800 the Sunday School had acquired a place in national culture which was to influence the nature of Christian education for generations, so that even in 1870, with the state provision of universal primary education, when the teaching of reading and writing ceased within Sunday Schools, the classroom environment persisted and was deliberately perpetuated by the invention of the Scripture Examination by the Sunday School Union.

The adoption of an educational model for the Christian nurture of children meant that, as developmental psychologies began to emerge in the nineteenth century, it was a short leap from the secular classroom to the Sunday schoolroom. This was particularly true amongst those who shied away from the emotionalism of revivalism. Many, in opposition to revivalism, argued for an approach to children's work which did not require dramatic conversions, but which concentrated upon Christian nurture.

The American Anglican, Samuel Quincy, for example, argued that 'we grow into the Christian life by insensible gradations'. Another of the Old Lights, Charles Chauncy suggested that, 'Grace imitateth nature, beginning, usually, with small degrees and growing up to maturity by leisurely proceeding.'[65] These beliefs were echoed and influenced by the Oxford Movement and the Anglican liberals of the next century who believed infant baptism to be a sacrament of regeneration, and were concerned to assist the baptised to recognise and live by the law of their being. Opposition to an excessive emphasis upon sudden conversions and renewed emphasis upon the sacraments resulted in the kind of approach recommended

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[65] for a discussion of the debate between the New Lights and the Old Lights see E. Brooks-Holifield, 1983, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: from salvation to self realization*, Abingdon, 85.

by Horace Bushnell in *Christian Nurture* in 1847 that 'the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as otherwise'.[66]

It is within this liberal Protestant tradition of Christian nurture that insights from psychology first began to be applied to religious education. Although most Sunday Schools continued to be ungraded and taught by people without training in pedagogy or seeming interest in differentiating between the abilities of children, during the nineteenth century stages of learning began to be devised as the human sciences acquired independence from philosophy and became more empirical.

In 1884, T Ziller produced a stage theory of human development, arguing that the developmental stages of the human race must be recapitulated by each generation. He constructed a curriculum, whereby young children would be taught fairy tales, followed by Robinson Crusoe and stories of the Old Testament Patriarchs. Older children were progressively introduced to the German heroic sagas, the kings of the middle ages and the time of David, the life of Jesus, the prophets and finally the history of the Reformation. At each stage, though, Ziller's real focus was on method. He stressed the need for clarity of articulation, using J F Herbart's five stages of learning: preparation, presentation, comparison, generalisation and application; his model was one of instruction.[67]

The lasting developmental theory to emerge out of the new science of psychology and make a major impact upon education in general and religious education in particular, was that of the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Beginning by observing his own children, Piaget noticed qualitative changes in the way that children approach their environment as they mature. Whilst working on intelligence in children he observed that the wrong answers which were given formed patterns according to their ages. Concentrating on the

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[66]Bushnell, H., 1847, *Christian Nurture*, London, 4th edition, 1880, 4.
[67]for Ziller's work see,Vogt, T. ed., 1884, *Grundlegung zur Lehre vom erziehenden Unterricht*. Leipzig; Bergner, M. ed., 1886, *Materialien zur speziellen Pädagogik*, Dresden. For Herbart's work see, J.F. Herbart, 1897 *The Science of Education*, London, translated by H.M. & E. Felkin.

development of logical operations, Piaget devised four eras of logical development, the outlines of which are sketched below.[68] Although many of the practical implications of Piaget's work had already been foreseen by those interested in the applications of psychology, like Starbuck, the systematic and empirical nature of Piaget's work was extremely influential in education on the European continent and, twenty years later, in British secular education once it became available in translation.

In practical terms, the school of Fröebel was first to make an impact upon Sunday Schools through the work of George Hamilton Archibald, emphasising that the religious development of a child is spontaneous. Piaget's work on cognitive development did not make an impact upon religious education in Britain in practice until Ronald Goldman looked at the implications of Piaget's work at Westhill in the 1960's.[69] Although Piaget himself had abandoned attempts to investigate the symbolic understanding, Goldman argued that Piaget's work on logical development had serious consequences for a child's ability to understand Biblical material. He argued against the use of much Biblical material before the onset of formal operational thought, and suggested, instead, that religious education should be centred upon the experience of children in order to be relevant to them.

Such conclusions were consonant with those of a generation earlier. Spurred on by the Hadow Report of 1931, Herbert Albert Hamilton had criticised the school model of Christian nurture and emphasised the role of experience, and in particular, the participation of children in church life, through worship and the sponsorship of the adult community. Although Hamilton's perspective was approved by the World Council of Christian Education and influenced the educational policy of the mainstream denominations in Britain, its impact upon most Sunday Schools was negligible. Arrested by the second world war, Hamilton's perspective was eclipsed in the post war years by the birth of youth work.

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[68] see page 63.
[69] see Goldman, R., 1964, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, Routledge &Kegan Paul.

Goldman's work, though, had a bigger impact upon Sunday School patterns although much of the debate was held within state educational circles.[70] For those within the churches his work picked up the Fröebelian emphasis of 'watch the child' In 1967 the British Lessons Council produced a new syllabus, *Experience and Faith* and from that *Partners in Learning* was born, providing graded lessons material for the free churches.

In the British context, in particular, it is Goldman's work which provides the immediate background to Fowler's faith development theory. Fowler himself is not heavily dependent upon Goldman's work, and deliberately eschews the very cognitive emphasis which is evident in Goldman's approach, concerned as he was with the development of religious understanding.

Within the Protestant churches, though, as we have seen, there is a long history of interest in pedagogy for the sake of producing well educated and committed Christians. It is, however, particularly in the last hundred and fifty years that a developmental approach has been adopted from the emergent discipline of psychology.

The focus of these developmental models, however, has been upon intellectual understanding of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, however they are perceived. This is an emphasis which distances Fowler's work from that which precedes it in this field. The contrast between Fowler's approach to faith development and that of a more cognitive approach can be seen quite clearly in comparison with Fritz Oser's recently published theory of religious development.[71]

Oser focuses upon the ways in which people construct their relationship with an *Ultimate Being*. He observes that there are empirical differences in the way that such relationships are

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[70] mostly in the pages of the *British Journal of Religious Education*.

[71] Oser's theory of religious development was first stated in Oser, F., 1980, "Stages of Religious Judgement." in Fowler, J.W. et al., *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*. Silver Burdett.

constructed, and that the way in which individuals construct this relationship changes over time.[72] What Oser is keen to discover is whether these changes follow a particular pattern: whether there is a logic of development.

Oser, therefore initiated structured interviews which examined the way in which people construct their relationship with an Ultimate Being. He based these interviews on seven polar dimensions: transcendence v immanence; freedom v dependency; trust v fear; holy v profane; hope v absurdity; eternity v ephemerality; functional transparency v opaqueness.[73] The interviews were constructed in order to try to discover how people operate in concrete situations, and resolve these polar dimensions in practice. This empirical study led to the suggestion that there are five structural stages which describe the ways in which human beings construct their relationship with an Ultimate Being. These stages are hierarchically invariant and the succession rests upon changes in the perception of autonomy and connectedness, differentiation and integration, universality and uniqueness of thought.[74]

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[72] *Ibid.*, 38.
[73] *Ibid.*, 38-9.
[74] **Stage 1**: there is an Ultimate Being (God) on whom individuals are totally dependent. Everything comes from this Being and obedience is required for the maintenance of the relationship. Absurdity is avoided for God intervenes directly in human affairs; when viewed from God's perspective, everything is meaningful.
Stage 2: God can be influenced by our prayers and actions. He is no longer seen as arbitrary. Those who please God receive rewards, thus there is concern for knowledge of the will of God and effort to conform to it. Dependence is mutual.
Stage 3: The Ultimate Being has a separate sphere of influence from that of the human. The relationship with God is mediated, not direct. Many human actions can take place with total freedom from God, although there is dependency concerning ability to love, spiritual growth, metaphysical power etc.
Stage 4: The Ultimate Being is thought to be part of all life in an immanent, rather than transcendent way. This Being becomes the ground of possibility for human freedom, independence. Commitment is a way to overcome lack of meaning and hope and absurdity. A certain quality of dependence is necessary, although it is this which makes freedom possible.
Stage 5: God is immanent in every human commitment, yet transcends these. However, the Ultimate Being can only be known in history. Religious meaning always has social implications. All polar dimensions are regarded as complementary: there is no hope without absurdity; there is a new human solidarity based on the belief that every person is a unique contributor to and participant in divinity. Being religious means being open to ultimate questions, even if these are disturbing - thus religion is a human universal. (39-40). Commenting upon the descriptive range of these stages, Oser asserts that they are universal, and that he has no evidence to contradict this hypothesis.(43) Research indicates that there are clear age trends in religious judgement development,(43) and that those who are not religious follow similar patterns;(45) changes in life style, related to social convention are influential in stimulating a change of perspective;(45) individuals are generally aware of previously having thought differently from the way they did at time of interview.(46) However Oser was surprised to comment that education and social status do affect religious development;(42) he particularly comments upon the way in which targeted religious education can change the way in which children think and react vis-à-vis the polar dimensions.(47) In addition, higher stages of religious judgement have been found to be related to the support available from parents for such development.(47) The following are the studies from which Oser draws these conclusions: Oser & Gmunder 1984; Oser & Gmunder 1988; Dick 1982; Brachel & Oser 1984; Achermann 1981; Klaghofer & Oser 1987

Oser's Piagetian heritage is clear. In terms of method, Oser's structured interviews owe something to Piaget's preference for task orientated study. Piaget's tasks tended to be concrete, and reflection upon the tasks, secondary. Oser, being more concerned with how people solve existential questions in life, proceeds by asking questions about how subjects handle particular life situations. Piaget's influence is also clear in the kind of stages which Oser constructs. These are structural stages which are hierarchically invariant and their succession is based upon increasing differentiation and ability to think in abstract and universal terms. Piaget characterises the hierarchical nature of his own stages as resting upon increasing adaptation and differentiation. It is on this basis that the stages claim to be structural-developmental.

In common with Fowler, Oser is keen to present detailed empirical evidence in order to investigate the notion of a logic of religious development. They both stand in a long tradition of people who have sought to observe and characterise religious development. It is not the spiritual development of the virtuoso which Oser and Fowler study, however, but that of the lay Christian in western Europe. Neither are they only concerned with the growth of the baptised or professed Christian in isolation from those of other professed faith and none; Oser's definition of being religious is being open to ultimate questions; Fowler is concerned with one's total orientation to the world.

Like Fowler, Oser betrays a far more secular outlook than his predecessors of previous centuries, made possible by the post Enlightenment concentration upon human subjectivity, the development of the secular human sciences and the whole process of secularisation, and the theology of people like Tillich who have sought to build a bridge between secular and Christian experience on the basis of common existential conditions and questions, of which God is posited as the ground.

Identifying the background to Fowler's work as this Protestant concern with the need for effective catechesis in order that children should understand the doctrines of Christianity

gives the impression that Fowler's image of faith is more rationalist and cognitive than it actually is. It also gives the impression that Fowler's main concern is with the religious education of children. In *Stages of Faith* itself, however, Fowler is not primarily concerned with the possible applications of his theory in this field although others have made much use of his theory to devise and support a variety of policies within confessional education.[75]

In fact, Fowler's own focus is not even upon Christian faith and its development, unlike his predecessors within the liberal Protestant tradition, like Starbuck and Goldman. Fowler, himself, is concerned both to describe the processes of faith development which he observed taking place in people belonging to a variety of faith traditions, and with development through the childhood years into adulthood. In this respect, Fowler's understanding of faith as a dynamic process has something in common with a much older tradition of conceiving spiritual growth than those which have arisen in Darwin's wake.

Faith Development and Spiritual Growth

The notion that Christian faith should grow and develop is found first in the Pauline corpus. Paul repeatedly urges his congregations to strive for perfection. He says of himself that he has not yet attained the goal of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection and sharing his sufferings, yet encourages the church at Philippi to 'press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ.'[76] Speaking of his ministry to the Colossian church, Paul claims to proclaim Christ in order that he might present everyone mature in Christ.[77] There is a clear sense in Paul's understanding of the Christian life, then, that whilst justification may take place in an instant, subsequent growth into spiritual maturity is expected. Such maturity is characterised in terms of knowledge of Christ and the power of his resurrection and a sharing in his suffering.[78] Paul's ethical demands put flesh on his understanding of maturity: not only withdrawing from the practices of the pagan world, but

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[75]see Chapter Five for a discussion of the applications of faith development theory in British publications.
[76]Philippians 3:14
[77]Colossians 1:28
[78]Philippians 3:10-11

putting on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, all of which result from opening up the self so that the word of Christ may dwell therein.[79] Christian maturity is both a question of interiority and a question of agency for Paul. The Christian disciple must grow in the knowledge of Christ and know the power of the resurrection, but must also bear the fruits of being in Christ in ethical behaviour.

The earliest surviving materials which reflect this notion that growth into spiritual maturity might follow an observable pattern which can be distilled into distinct stages are the writings of the sixth century theologian, Pseudo-Dionysius.[80] He devised a three stage pattern of purification, illumination and assimilation and made a distinction between cataphatic and apophatic theology, cataphatic theology involving the contemplation of God as he is in relation to the world, apophatic theology affirming the basic unknowability of God by approaching God as the one beyond all categories of sensation. Whilst Pseudo-Dionysius considered cataphatic theology to be quite adequate for ordinary consumption, it was considered inferior to apophatic theology which was appropriate to those who aspired to spiritual maturity.

The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius is clearest in two of the most influential medieval writers, St Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and St John of the Cross (1542-91). Both sought, in the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius, to employ stages in their characterisation of the route to spiritual maturity; both regarded that they were charting the details of the observable course of healthy spiritual development, much as one might observe biological development.[81]

Based on their observations of the way that God leads people to spiritual maturity, then, these two writers outlined the journey from conversion, where the immature Christian believes they can do anything in the power of Christ, through serious prayer and the learning of

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[79]Colossians 3:12;16
[80]*The Divine Names* and *The Celestial Hierarchy*
[81]Teresa of Avila, *The Life* XV:12; St John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel.*

detachment until God should bestow the gift of *contemplation. Contemplation* is characterised by an inability to find words with which to pray and concepts with which to articulate the nature of God. This stage is usually received with confusion and resistance, but is regarded by both St Teresa and St John as marking the entrance to the illuminative way. The next stage is entitled by St John, the *night of great distress* and is followed by a sense of dereliction, but concludes in the *prayer of quiet* once the will is conformed to God's will. This is designated the state of *perfect holiness,* from which time the soul is strengthened and purified by God.

In many ways, these stages described by St Teresa and St John are far removed from the stages described by Fowler. The concept of faith with which Fowler operates would have been anachronistic in the middle ages; the subjects observed by St Teresa and St John were chiefly themselves and, unsurprisingly, they did not perceive any need to devise any methods of observation which would satisfy an empirical mind set; neither did St Teresa and St John have access to the kind of developmental models which Fowler has used to structure and inform his theory. However, both St Teresa and St John did make reference to the only model of development at their disposal, which was biological growth, and although spiritual growth was not held to be correlated with chronological development, growth through the life cycle and spiritual growth were held to be analogous.

Crucially, however, both medieval writers, in common with Fowler, conceived spirituality as dynamic phenomenon which would develop in a predictable pattern, best characterised by stages. Also in common with Fowler's theory, the hierarchical models of spiritual development which St Teresa and St John described were concerned, not with the effective catechesis of children, but with the observable course of healthy spiritual development; this concern inevitably involved them in the presentation of a normative image of adult faith as the apex of spiritual maturity.

Evidently, any hierarchical model of religious or faith development is bound to be concerned with normative images of adult faith. Although Fowler's image of adult faith has some features in common with the more cognitive and Protestant tradition discussed above, we are suggesting that in some respects, his understanding of spiritual maturity has more in common with the apophatic way.

It is a truism that most theologians are concerned at some level with normative images of adult faith. In the early stages of the church's life spiritual ideals were based upon the lifestyle of the lay person, and in particular upon martyrdom; however, as the church became more institutionalised and once it was no longer persecuted, clerical and monastic models of Christian maturity began to predominate. Even within these narrow confines, the religious life was valued above the clerical or apostolic life, as a substitute for martyrdom, and in the west, the monastic cenobitic pattern of living was revered for centuries as the most prestigious of all. Stage theories of spiritual development tended, therefore, to arise in this context, as we have discussed, with the contemplative life as their goal - a pattern of living far removed from aspirations possible for the laity.[82]

In the high middle ages spiritual growth tended to be seen in terms of ascent, and the contemplative life was generally believed to be superior to the active. Whereas in patristic and eastern orthodox theology the spiritual life belonged to all the baptised, in the west, spirituality became concerned with interiority and subjective experience, and was treated separately from theology and from liturgy. The spiritual life tended to be described by degrees and stages, the highest of which were generally only accessible to the monastic and clerical élites, or those who emulated their lifestyle.[83]

Clearly it is not a clerical or monastic image of adult faith which informs Fowler's model of faith development. It has already been observed that his understanding of faith has arisen

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[82]Sheldrake S. J., P., 1991, *Spirituality & History.* SPCK, 60 ff..
[83]*Ibid*, 64.

partly from a liberal Protestant background of engagement with the social sciences and clearly, and it is not possible to use such psychological models of development without one's image of the apex of development being affected. Fowler's image of mature faith is clearly partly dependent upon contemporary psychological models of maturity, particularly upon a cognitive developmental approach. However, his image of mature faith is drawn not only from psychology, but also from a theology which has some features in common with the apophatic way. This can be seen most clearly in his description of stage six faith - the apex of faith development - a stage at which paradox and polarities dissolve in a oneness with the power of being and vision and commitment free one for a passionate, yet detached spending of the self in love, and at which symbols are understood to be symbols, and statements about God understood to be metaphorical and yet indispensable when speaking of the God who is unknowable, and it is to Fowler's concept of normative adult faith that we now turn.

Faith Development and Normative Adult Faith

The most revealing aspect of any developmental theory is the image it presents of the apex of development. In Fowler's case, this image is represented by Stage VI of his theory. Fowler describes persons of Stage VI faith in the following way,

> The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community... Their community is universal in extent. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal, and thereby valuable apart from any utilitarian considerations. Life is both loved and held to loosely. Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition.[84]

It is clear from Fowler's description of Stage VI faith that his thought is not formed so much by a cognitive understanding of faith and religious understanding which has characterised the work of Starbuck, Goldman and now Oser, but a theological perspective which expects both the intellect and the emotions, social and spiritual experience, conscious and conscious life to amount to faith.

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[84] *Ibid.*, 200-201.

In this approach, Fowler's self-acknowledged debt is to the thought of H R Niebuhr. In particular, Fowler's image of mature faith is influenced by Niebuhr's understanding of radical monotheism, the only faith, according to Niebuhr, which is capable of bearing ultimate significance and is therefore not idolatrous.[85] Niebuhr distinguishes this from polytheism which involves the investment of the individual in many different concerns, and henotheism which absorbs the individual in a single cause, yet one which is idolatrous, even if worthy, because it is unable to bear ultimate significance. Even radical monotheism is likely to deteriorate repeatedly into idolatry, however, as it becomes identified with historical institutions. However, its maintenance as an image is important because only then can it exert transcendent and transformative power.

Fowler gives an account of radical monotheism in the opening part of *Stages of Faith.* He comments there, that,

> Radical monotheistic faith calls people to an identification with a universal community... If we regard the future of human kind as requiring our learning to live in an inclusive, global community, then, in a sense, radical monotheistic faith depicts the form of our universal "coming faith". It becomes terribly important for us to work with this understanding of faith and to try to formulate and symbolise it so that it exerts truly transformative power over our more parochial faith orientations.[86]

Fowler then goes on to discuss faith as the forming of images: *Einbildungskraft*, the power of forming into one.[87] What he suggests, is that the images we have of the way the world is, even if these images are unconscious ones, deeply affect the way that we live in the world. Although Fowler does not explicitly state this, it does appear, that his exposition of the stages of faith, ever moving towards increasing differentiation and universalisation are an attempt to symbolise Niebuhr's understanding of radical monotheism such that it exerts a transformative influence upon the Church and the world.

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[85] see Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith.*, 23.
[86] *Ibid.*, 23.
[87] *Ibid.*, 24.

The similarities between Niebuhr's account of radical monotheism and Fowler's account of Stage VI faith are not difficult to illustrate and he himself acknowledges that his image of Stage VI faith is greatly influenced by Niebuhr: 'Since I began systematically to work on a theory of faith development it has been clear to me that my normative images of Stage 6 have been strongly influenced by H. Richard Niebuhr's descriptions of radical monotheistic faith.'[88]

Fowler goes on, then, to discuss the process whereby such a radical monotheistic faith may be conceptualised and symbolised such that it is able to exert a transformative influence over people's lives. He does this through a discussion of imagination, claiming that the way in which people act is shaped through the images they hold of themselves and their communities and what is of value. These images, he believes, are not entirely accessible to the conscious mind, yet are powerful enough to shape patterns of relationship and behaviour.[89]

Although Fowler protests that his developmental stages, whilst descriptive, are not prescriptive for Christianity or any other religious tradition, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the most adequate form of adult faith in Fowler's opinion, is radical monotheistic faith as outlined by Niebuhr and as presented in Fowler's Stage VI. Although Fowler claims that he does not regard any stage of his theory to be nearer to salvation than any other, he also asserts that only radical monotheistic faith is capable of avoiding idolatry.[90] The theological inspiration for Fowler's image of the apex of faith development seems clear.

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[88] *Ibid.*, 204.
[89] *Ibid.*, 23.
[90] *Ibid.*, 23.

Rather than simply associating Fowler's image of normative adult faith with that of H R Niebuhr, however, some attempt must be made to place both these theologians in a broader context if the likely pattern of faith development theory's appeal is to be established.

In the early part of this chapter, we provisionally associated the theology of H R Niebuhr with the liberal wing of the church. As we commented, Niebuhr himself would have been unhappy with such a characterisation of his work because he considered liberal theology to be insufficiently distinct from the highest ideals of any given culture. We have already stated that our use of the term liberalism does not imply that the highest ideals of a culture are uncritically identified with the gospel in the work we are discussing, but is adopted in order to focus attention upon the way in which some contemporary theologies recognise that humans are formed within society and thus desire to engage in a dialogue with contemporary cultural understandings of human nature. A theology with which Fowler's theory seems to have much common, however, is that of George Lindbeck presented in *The Nature of Doctrine*. This comparison with Lindbeck's proposals concerning the characteristics of mature faith for late modernity will, we believe, prove illuminating, for both have been formulated in the same milieu, and in response to similar kinds of social, intellectual and theological pressures.

The use of Lindbeck's typology, then, is in no sense meant as a neutral yardstick by which to test Fowler's theory - Lindbeck's model of mature believing, which he terms, post-liberal, is clearly influenced by Lindbeck's background in propositional Protestantism, and by his own ecumenical concerns; rather, the comparison between Fowler and Lindbeck's work is made, to help locate Fowler's theory within a particular cultural milieu, and to help identify some of the particular theological concerns which motivate the writing of both Lindbeck and Fowler.[91]

[91] for a discussion of the particular concerns which shape Lindbeck's typology, see Gill, R., 1997, *Moral Leadership in a Postmodern Age*, T & T Clark.

In *The Nature of Doctrine,* Lindbeck outlines three basic views of the status of doctrine.[92] The first of Lindbeck's types is the *traditional-orthodox* approach which emphasises cognition and intellect and regards doctrines as informative propositions about the objective nature of reality. In this view, the content of revelation is believed to be truths about God who is believed to be external to the created world and able to transcend it. Statements about God are thought to have the same cognitive status as other human statements about empirical phenomena.

The second approach is labelled the *experiential-expressive view.* From such a perspective, doctrines are regarded as non-informative symbols of existential orientations, inner feelings and attitudes. What is primary, is a pre-reflective and unsystematised experience, such as Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence. This is believed to be present in all people, although it may not always be explicitly recognised. What is important about a doctrinal statement is not, primarily, whether or not it is objectively true, but how truly it is lived. A notable exponent of such a view was Søren Kierkegaard His existentialist theology emphasised that truth is subjectivity. The crucial truth about Christianity, for him, is not whether propositional statements conform to their object, but in what relation the subject stands to God. In *A Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Climacus, one of Kierkegaard's characters, says, 'in relation to an existential communication, existing in it is the maxim of attainment, and understanding it, merely an evasion of the task.'[93]

The third approach is that recommended by Lindbeck himself: the *cultural-linguistic* model of doctrine. Here, doctrines are regarded as rules of discourse, attitude and action. They are crucial because they not only express experience, but shape it. Lindbeck argues that there are cultural conditions in contemporary western society which favour the experiential-expressive model. He cites the inheritance from Kant which raises epistemological questions against the traditional model; the rapid changes associated with urbanisation and globalisation which

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[92]Lindbeck, G., 1984, *The Nature of Doctrine,* SPCK, 1-19.
[93]Kierkegaard, S., 1941, *A Concluding Unscientific Postscript* trans., Swenson, Princeton, 332.

have resulted in the privatisation of religion and increased awareness of cultural and religious pluralism; the need for a theoretical basis from which to conduct ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. Other reasons could be added, such as influence of depth psychology in general and Jung in particular, which make a more existential appropriation of symbols attractive.

Lindbeck points out, however, that in some academic circles, the experiential-expressive approach to doctrine is losing ground.[94] This is particularly so amongst those who begin from pastoral concerns, or from the social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology of religion. The perceived advantage of this cultural-linguistic model over the experiential-expressive approach is that it is better able to acknowledge that belief systems exercise a profound influence over the nature of faith, and are not merely a vehicle for its expression. Thus, doctrine 'is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.'[95] Doctrine is not believed to refer to a prior reality in an idealist sense, but is rather an interpretative scheme which structures human experience and understanding of the self and the world, upon the assumption that ultimate reality is a dimension of culture which gives shape and intensity to the 'experiential matrix from which cultural achievements flow.'[96]

One advantage of such a stance is that it is compatible with the pervasive belief that the individual becomes a human self in the context of society and that thought is not antecedent to language. Lindbeck also argues that the cultural-linguistic model is able to allow theologians and religious communities to perform certain functions which are regarded as important in the post-modern western context, such as holding together the claims of superiority of one religious tradition with a belief in the salvation of non-believers. He

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[94]Lindbeck, G., *op. cit.*, 25.
[95]*Ibid.*, 33.
[96]*Ibid.*, 35.

claims that the cultural-linguistic view of doctrine is able to provide a viable route through this problem.

From the cultural-linguistic perspective, rather than the doctrines of a particular tradition being regarded as unconditionally necessary, they may be regarded as conditionally necessary. Thus, given the framework of a particular doctrinal system, any given doctrine may be believed to be necessary and permanent, but only necessary within its framework. Within the framework of Christian doctrine, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity may be held to be conditionally necessary, that is necessary all the while it is desirable to maintain the doctrine of revelation. Other doctrines may be regarded as conditionally necessary, but only temporary due to conditions which may not persist. Thus, the doctrine of transubstantiation may be regarded as necessary within an Aristotelian philosophical framework, but unnecessary once Aristotle is abandoned.

In this way, those who stand within the Thomist tradition may argue that transubstantiation is necessary, without denying that it is unnecessary for those within other philosophical frameworks. Likewise, those who stand within the Christian tradition may insist upon the doctrine of the Trinity without insisting upon it for those who stand within other traditions. In this context, then, Unitarians would be considered heretical, for they try to hold together the Christian doctrine of revelation without the Trinity, whereas the doctrines of Hindus or Muslims would not make lexical sense within a Christian framework. They are, therefore, neither endorsed, nor falsified.

Lindbeck believes that this cultural-linguistic view of doctrine has potential because it enables theologians and religious communities to perform certain functions which may appear necessary to contemporary faith communities[97] In particular, it is likely to appeal to those who wish to dialogue with other religions, whilst maintaining a distinctive faith

[97] *Ibid.*, 30 ff..

identity, and those who have reservations about the wisdom and possibility of demythologisation without remainder, but can no longer subscribe to a traditional view of doctrine.

Nowhere in his *Stages of Faith* does Fowler explicitly state his own view of the nature of doctrine. However, his explicit comments about the way in which faith is constructed in particular stages do give an indication of the approach to epistemology which Fowler believes is most adequate to contemporary faith. In particular, the implicit view of doctrine which emerges from the latter stages of Fowler's theory resembles Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model: Fowler considers that the mature will have rejected a view of doctrine which expects statements of belief to be propositionally true in the traditional sense. They will also have rejected the view that the meanings of symbols can be extracted and expressed propositionally without remainder, or that all religions merely express the same truths in different ways. Rather, a person of mature faith will have come to the opinion, and will work under the assumption that symbols and myths and doctrines are vital and cannot be surrendered but are true in such a way that the truth of other religious traditions is not thereby excluded as a logical possibility. Thus, those best described in terms of Stage V of his theory hold the myths, rituals and symbols of their community as indispensable, yet the value of the traditions of others is not denied. They are able to enter into the thought worlds and experiences of people of other faith and hold their truth claims in tension with their own.

Fowler thinks that the mature Christian need not abandon the particularity of their faith by abstracting existential meanings from the symbols and rituals of their tradition in order to be able to value the faith of others. Rather, the person of Stage V faith is able to perceive the value in the faith of others without it being corrosive of their own faith, or needing to divorce their own propositional beliefs from the myths and rituals in which they are embedded.[98]

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[98]Fowler, J. W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 184 ff..

Clearly Fowler is not commending a traditional orthodox view of faith. He insists that faith is not merely cognitive, but involves the whole person. The assumption that because doctrines correspond to one's own experience, they are thereby superior to those of others, Fowler clearly regards as immature: it is characteristic of Stage III faith, appropriate for adolescents.[99]

Neither is Fowler keen to endorse what Lindbeck describes as the experiential-expressive position. He regards that reflective relativism on the basis that what others believe is really only a different way of expressing what the individual's own group believes is characteristic of Stage IV faith.[100] Fowler is concerned to emphasise that the Stage IV concern to demythologise and extract meanings from symbols and rituals is only a transitional stage and runs the risk of over-confidence in the conscious mind and assimilation of the perspectives of others into its own world view. He states that a mature view requires the adoption of a 'more dialectical and multileveled approach to life truth.':[101] this view, we suggest, has much in common with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic perspective.

Lindbeck himself, is a theologian looking for a way to do theology in the post-modern context. He states that if the current cultural conditions persist, then more and more people are going to find the traditional-orthodox and experiential-expressive ways of believing untenable. Like Fowler, Lindbeck presents as the most adequate form of faith for the contemporary world, a theological framework which allows the particularity of a faith tradition without denying the value of other religious traditions and a view of the human subject which expects all of life and experience to have a bearing on faith.

In terms of understanding the direct influences upon Fowler's faith development theory, Lindbeck's work is of little use, as *Stages of Faith* was published several years before

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[99] *Ibid.*, 224.
[100] *Ibid.*, 174 ff..
[101] *Ibid.*, 183.

Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*. However, the parallels between the two writers concerning their images of a mature approach to faith demonstrate clearly that Fowler's theological inspiration owes not so much to a conservative and heavily cognitive, traditional-orthodox approach, nor even to a liberal experiential-expressive approach, but owes more to a post-liberal, cultural-linguistic way of thinking which acknowledges the formative and irreducible power of symbols, rituals and traditions in shaping human faith, and urges people to celebrate the particularity of their faith tradition without needing thereby to deny the traditions of others.

Conclusions and Implications

We have argued in this chapter that the direction of development in Fowler's stages of faith leads towards a post-liberal way of being religious. Although faith development theory has some parallels with earlier attempts to illuminate the stages of religious development by using developmental psychology, Fowler's work is distinct from that of Starbuck or Goldman, or even Oser, because of the guiding image of faith towards which his theory moves and which is articulated in his account of Stage VI faith. This image of mature faith is heavily and explicitly indebted to H R Niebuhr's concept of radical monotheism and a whole tradition of theological engagement with the social sciences. It is also indebted to the social world in which such theologians have worked. This world is characterised by pluralism and the attitude towards pluralism adopted by those committed to using all the benefits of modern knowledge to understand human beings and how they might be in relationship with God, that there must be ways of being Christian which do not thereby deny the experience of others.

Such observations about the nature of Fowler's faith development theory have clear implications for its potential audience. Fowler's concept of faith as a universal human phenomenon which is actively constructed, dynamic and only partly open to conscious introspection betrays his debt to the social sciences. This fact, alone, locates Fowler's work within the more liberal wing of the Church which has historically been concerned to use the insights which contemporary understandings of human behaviour have to offer. Fowler's image of the most adequate form of human faith, however, suggests that his stance is not to be identified with a narrowly rationalistic or cognitive view of the human being, but rather with a more mystical and holistic understanding of human faith which has more in common with Lindbeck's post-liberalism.

In terms of faith development theory's potential appeal, then, several observations can be made. First, Fowler's concept of faith is likely to appeal to those who are accustomed to living in a plural environment and considering questions of human existence within a multi-ethnic context, conducive to a phenomenological approach; second, Fowler's work is likely to

appeal to those already influenced, at some level, by a developmental approach; third, those finding Fowler's work to make sense are likely to have been influenced to some degree by modern western depth psychology. Fowler's openness to such insights from the social sciences dictates that faith development theory is most likely to appeal to those who are on the more liberal wing of the Church, but also those who are constructing a post-liberal perspective, convinced of the irreducible power of symbols and unconscious images upon the loyalties and choices which constitute faith; people who are concerned to find authentic ways of being Christian in the post-modern world.

In other words, what we are suggesting, is that Fowler's theory is likely to appeal to the same people whom Lindbeck identifies as being likely to be convinced of the importance of his cultural-linguistic view of doctrine: those who are educated in the modern western tradition, find themselves within the Christian Church, have been heavily influenced by the social sciences and seek to find a way of retaining the particularity of their Christian faith , yet who find a traditional or experiential-expressive way of believing no longer tenable.

Whether in fact these are the people who have bought Fowler's books and who have been influenced by his theory remains to be investigated in the latter part of the thesis. Meanwhile, this exploration of the theological provenance of Fowler's theory has, for the moment, served to reveal some of the contours of his work and to sketch the outlines of a potential audience for his stages of faith. The theological sources of faith development theory, however, need to be seen in relation to its psychological aspects. In order to broaden our understanding of the appeal of Fowler's work, then, we turn to a discussion of the theory's provenance within the field of psychology.

Chapter 2 The Psychological Provenance of Faith Development Theory

The concern of this chapter is to locate faith development theory within the field of psychology. Although, as we have discussed, Fowler's investigation into human faith needs to be understood within theological terms of reference, Fowler, himself, understands his stages of faith as a contribution to the debate upon the psychology of human development - a field of study concerned with the processes of the human mind. It is therefore important, in our exploration of the appeal of faith development theory to consider its provenance within the field of psychology.

To a large extent, Fowler's claim for his theory to be considered a contribution to developmental psychology rests on his understanding of his stages of faith as structural stages: as a descriptive model of normative faith development which is generalisable and cross-culturally testable[102]. Fowler's broad definition of faith as a universal human phenomenon, combined with his claim to have described a hierarchically invariant sequence of structural stages, means that he is prepared to offer his faith development theory as a generalisable theory, claiming descriptive and explanatory potential across social and cultural boundaries.

Fowler, thus intends his theory as a contribution to the debate upon the universal features of human development; his stages of faith are presented as a developmental psychology. Clearly there are different approaches within the field of psychology to understanding human development, and if Fowler's contribution is to be properly understood, some account must be given of the psychological provenance of his theory. Such a discussion of the provenance of faith development theory is important, not only for understanding Fowler's work in itself, but

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[102]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith*, Harper & Row, 297-8.

also for comprehending the pattern of response to *Stages of Faith*, both within and beyond the field of academic psychology.

The influences upon Fowler's work

In our discussion of faith as an active process in Chapter One we have already noted that Fowler's understanding of the way in which children become adult members of society follows the constructivist model whereby the child is believed to construct any knowledge which it has.[103] Rather than patterns of thought being entirely predetermined by genetic factors or being simply a reflection of cultural patterns, the child is considered to construct its social world as it becomes an agent within it. The child's increasing ability to act in the adult world is due, not to maturational processes stimulated by biological triggers, nor to an accumulation of learnt behaviours, but to adaptation resulting from action within the social environment.

Fowler, heavily influenced by George Herbert Mead in his understanding of the social nature of human beings, assumes that there is a reciprocal relationship between individual development and the social environment. In his understanding of the sequence of development, however, Fowler's thinking has primarily been shaped by two schools of psychology: social-psychology, particularly through the work of Erik Erikson, and structural-developmental psychology, through the mediation of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg.

The bulk of Erik Erikson's work has centred upon the development of the human self-concept, or sense of identity. Drawing upon Freud's work, Erikson developed a series of eight crises through which human development passes.[104] Crucial to Erikson's approach,

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[103] see pages 23-26.

[104] for Erikson's account of the eight ages of man, see, Erikson, E., 1950, *Childhood and Society*, Penguin 1965, 239-268.

however, is the observation that development is not entirely genetically determined, but is dependent upon appropriate opportunities for development within the social environment.

This emphasis of Erikson's arose partly from his awareness of the impact of emigration upon his own self concept. Out of this experience, Erikson became interested in ethnology and the influence of socio-historical conditions upon identity; this led him to argue, for example, that modern society is like the ambivalent, uncertain environment of adolescence because its plurality of options throws people into a state of permanent identity crisis, unable to make lasting identifications.[105] It also led him to argue that the success of an individual in negotiating the predictable crises of development is dependent upon the availability of appropriate social experience at the right age.

The writings of Erikson have been extremely influential, appealing to thinkers in a variety of disciplines, and Fowler specifically acknowledges his debt to Erikson's work through his fictional dialogue between Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson,[106] and through his attempts to relate his own sequence of development to Erikson's psychosocial stages.[107] Fowler recognises the extent to which both his concept of faith as an overall orientation and his emphasis upon the way in which faith functions to help people cope with life owe something to Erikson's approach.[108] However, in terms of the construction of his stages, Fowler characterises the influence of Erikson, as a 'background against which to hear and analyze the life stories that persons shared'.[109] The nature of the stages of faith themselves, however, Fowler considers to have been much more profoundly influenced by the structural-developmental theories of Piaget and Kohlberg[110] who themselves sought to separate the structures of consciousness from the contents of cognitive and moral reasoning, respectively. Although Fowler rejects both men's attempts to keep cognition and affection separate, he

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[105]Erikson, E., 1956, "The Problem of Ego Identity" *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 4 (1956), 56-121.
[106]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith*, Harper & Row, 41-86.
[107]*Ibid.*, 113, table 3.3.
[108]*Ibid.*, 109-110.
[109]*Ibid.*, 106.
[110]*Ibid.*, 106.

does seek to describe the ways in which contents of faith are successively structured through the life cycle.

Fowler himself, then, understands his theory to be a structural-developmental theory and it is on this basis that he claims his model of faith development to be normative and generalisable. It is by no means easy, however, to establish whether or not Fowler's stages of faith represent a truly structural theory which is capable of describing and explaining features of human development across social and cultural boundaries as Fowler claims. It is, however, an important part of understanding the nature of faith development theory and thus of exploring its appeal to make some assessment of the descriptive range of faith development theory, for the scope of the theory's descriptive potential is partly dependent upon the theory's structural status.

Examining the structural status of Fowler's faith development theory is, however, a complex task. On the one side, Fowler enshrines Piaget's structural-developmental theory at the heart of his stages, claiming that each era of logical developmental is necessary, but not sufficient for the corresponding stage of faith, and incorporates Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning as an element within his stages of faith. On the other side, Fowler has modified various of Piaget's concepts and methods, adding other aspects of development to Piaget's account of cognitive development and broadening Piaget's structured interview technique. Both of these factors are important in any assessment of the appeal of Fowler's work within the field of psychology because the structural nature of Fowler's stages need to be demonstrated if faith development theory is likely to be acceptable to the structural-developmental school.

However, the assumptions and methods of the structural-developmental school are by no means universally held within developmental psychology in particular and within the social sciences in general. Indeed there are reservations expressed about the very possibility of

constructing culturally neutral structural developmental theories at all.[111] Clearly if Fowler's work is to be taken as a structural-developmental theory, its appeal is likely to be affected by the debate about the possibility of structural stages in general.

There is another way, however, in which this debate has bearing upon the appeal of faith development theory. If, on examination of the available evidence, it is concluded that structural accounts of human development which are culturally neutral are not possible to construct, then Fowler's theory must be considered to represent, not a truly structural account of human development, but a description of a more narrowly circumscribed social group; in this case, the appeal of his theory is likely to be limited to those whose social and cultural experience reflects that of Fowler's sample group. This last point will be discussed further in the next chapter. For the moment, however, it is important to establish the contours of debate within the social sciences concerning structural-developmental theories and attempt to locate faith development theory within them.

We shall begin then with an outline of the features of a structural-developmental theory as pioneered by Jean Piaget and embraced by Lawrence Kohlberg and an examination of faith development theory to see how Fowler's work stands in relation to these structural-developmental thinkers. This discussion will further clarify the nature of faith development theory and help to illuminate the response which it has received within the field of psychology. We shall consider the extent to which faith development theory may be considered a structural theory, and the extent to which Fowler is subject to the critiques which have been constructed against Piaget's work, in order to suggest the likely response to faith development theory amongst those who deny the possibility of culturally neutral

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[111] see, for example, the objections raised by H. Gardner, 1972, *The Quest for Mind: Piaget, Lévi-Strauss, and the Structuralist Movement*, Chicago University Press, that structuralist theories have no explanatory or descriptive power beyond western culture; P.A.S. Ghuman, in 1981, "An Evaluation of Piaget's Theory from a Cross-Cultural Perspective", in S. Modgil & C. Modgil eds., *Jean Piaget: Consensus & Controversy*, Lavenham, 273-284, offers a critique of Piaget's method of concentrating his study within one culture alone; M.E., Comb-Schilling, 1989, in *Sacred Performances*, Columbia, suggests that the isolation of knowledge from its sociohistorical conditions is distortive and contends that Piaget's genetic epistemology effectively serves only to ground the values of western democracy in biology in order to combat conservatism, traditionalism and irrationalism. A detailed consideration of the impact of these and similar arguments upon Piaget's and Fowler's work is undertaken later in the chapter.

structural stages. Finally we shall examine the implications for the descriptive range of Fowler's stages of faith if the argument is accepted that faith development theory cannot be considered a truly structural theory.

Structural-developmental theories

First of all, then, we shall consider the question of whether faith development theory can be considered a structural theory of human development. In order to establish this, we shall first outline the features of a structural developmental theory as understood by Jean Piaget who pioneered work in this area. Piaget believed that the evolution of species, including the human species, happens, not due to random mutations, but because of intentioned adaptation to environmental pressures.[112]

As we have already observed, [113]Piaget argued that humans, likewise, learn to act in the increasingly complex social circles in which they find themselves by experience.[114] He regarded intelligence as a particular form of biological adaptation. The organism strives for equilibrium with the environment; intelligence is the instrument which makes this possible. He posited two kinds of heredity: specific heredity, which consists of initial reflexes of the infant like sucking and the palmar reflex and the rate of physical maturation; and general heredity which consists of the two functions, *adaptation* and *organisation.* The tendency to organise is manifested in the attempt to integrate functions into a single system. Adaptation is achieved by *accommodation* - a tendency to change in response to environmental demands - and by *assimilation* of features of external reality into the psychological structures of the organism. Because of the tendency of the human to adapt and organise, new *structures* are constantly being created in order to achieve equilibrium with the environment.[115]

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[112]see, in particular, Piaget, J., 1952, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*, New York, and 1954, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, London.
[113]see page 25.
[114]Ginsburg, H., & Opper, S., 1969, *Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development*, Englewood Cliffs, 1979, 12ff..
[115]*Ibid.*, 16-20.

The processes of *adaptation* and *organisation*, therefore, Piaget considered to be universal human characteristics. In addition to this, Piaget contended that there are categories of thought which are also universally found in human culture, in particular, the categories of logic, causality, space and time.[116] These, he termed structural elements because they are organisational concepts which form a framework for the contents of thought and which he regarded as the building blocks of human cognition.

It is important to note, here, however, that these categories of thought, or structures around which contents of experience may be organised, are not regarded as *a priori* categories of thought like those of Immanuel Kant. Kant argued that the patterns whereby the stream of experience is broken down into discrete experiences are constructed by each individual as the result of the interaction of the social environment with the universally necessary and *a priori* categories of human thought, such as space, time and causality. These categories, he posited as the universal features of the structure of human consciousness.[117]

Piaget's categories of thought were posited as universal, not the basis of the necessary structure of the human brain, but of their existence in all cultures.[118] It is on this basis, also, that Piaget claimed it to be possible to devise a hierarchical sequence of stages which is relevant to all cultures. If the elements of cognition can be found in all cultures and the differences between cultures concern the arrangement of these same elements, a hierarchical ordering is possible, providing that each new stage incorporates a qualitatively different form of reasoning. Each new stage, Piaget argued, represents a move in the direction of *universalisation* and *differentiation.*[119]

Piaget argued on this basis that a four stage theory of cognition is evident. Each stage is an integrated set of operational structures which constitute the thought processes of a person at a

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[116]Piaget, J., 1971, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, trans. Wolfe Mays, World Meridian Books, chapter one.
[117]Kant, I., 1787. *Critique of Pure Reason* 2nd edition. Dent & Sons, 1934, translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn.
[118]Piaget, J., 1972, *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a theory of knowledge*, Penguin, 1972, 33.
[119]for a discussion of the features of structural theories, see, Comb-Schilling, 1989, *op.cit.*, chapter 2.

particular time. Development involves the transformation of these structures of thought in the direction of increasing differentiation and universalisation.[120]

Piaget's first stage is characterised by sensorimotor intelligence which co-ordinates reflex actions and increasingly learns to discriminate between different stimuli for these reflexes. As movements become more co-ordinated, the infant repeats actions to achieve interesting effects. Gradually, means-end behaviour appears, experiments are undertake in order to find new meanings and eventually the infant is able to use imagery to recall an absent object. Until the end of this stage, thinking is pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic and unreflective; the child focuses on organising and refining actions on the immediate environment.[121]

The second of Piaget's stages is entitled the pre-logical and is typically applied to pre-school aged children. Symbolic thought has emerged, whereby an object may be understood to stand for something else, but the images and symbols do not maintain social relations with each other. The poor understanding of causality is manifested in a tendency to confuse the imagined with the real, and perceptual change with real change.

Junior aged children's thought is characterised as concrete-operational thought. Social relations are now maintained with reference to concrete objects, enabling the construction of a system of classes and relations. The final stage, which in western culture begins at around age eleven, is entitled, formal-operational thought. The individual is now capable of abstract thought, able to construct hypotheticals, and thus able to design and conduct sophisticated experiments in which variables can be isolated and hypotheses tested

Although Piaget did not assert that previous modes of thinking are eclipsed by formal operational thought, and although he himself concentrated upon the development of logical

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[120]Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B., *op. cit*, 152.

[121]For a tabular presentation of Piaget's four eras of development, see Kohlberg, L., & Gilligan, C., "The Adolescent as a Philosopher: The Discovery of the Self in a Postconventional World," *Daedalus* 100, (Fall 1971), 1063.

and mathematical concepts rather than more diffuse areas like religious belief and affectation, Piaget believed his stages to be invariant, universal and capable of predicting behaviour.

The features of Piaget's theory which, in his opinion, make it a structural theory and thus render it capable of describing universal features of human development, then, include, the identification of a universal tendency of human beings to organise and adapt to their environment; the isolation of stable categories of thought, like time, logic, causality, etc., which are common to all societies and provide a framework for the contents of thought; the observation that the way in which these categories of thought are perceived and understood changes qualitatively over time in the direction of increased universalisation and differentiation; the assertion that each stage is an integrated whole in which all categories of thought are organised according to the same principles.

Faith development theory as structural-developmental theory

The question with which we are now confronted, then, concerns the extent to which Fowler's faith development theory can be considered to be a structural-developmental theory when examined using Piaget's own criteria. We have already observed that Fowler is heavily dependent upon Piaget's work: for example, his interview technique is derived from Piaget's approach, attempting to gather rich descriptions of his subjects' approach to topics from a structured interview. However, the different nature of Fowler's subject has made it impossible for him to rely on observations of subjects' manipulation of objects, rather than their ability to articulate answers to questions. This difference between Piaget's and Fowler's interview techniques illustrates one of the main difficulties in assessing the structural nature of Fowler's theory because, though he is dependent upon Piaget's approach, his method is much less tight than that of Piaget or Kohlberg; despite this difference, however, Fowler still believes his stages of faith to be stages characterising development in the structures of consciousness.

The structure of faith, according to Fowler concerns the *ways* in which faith appropriates the contents of a religious or ideological tradition.[122] Thus, whilst the contents of a person's faith, their centres of value, their images of power and the narratives within which they may understand themselves to live, may profoundly influence the nature of their faith, there are other differences between the styles of faith which people adopt, which are best described in structural terms; i.e. they concern the ways in which the contents of faith are appropriated: whether the contents of faith are mediated without conscious attention through the process of identification with valued others or are the products of analysis and debate and personal searching; whether beliefs held are considered inevitable and self-evidently true, or a particular expression of a broader reality; whether commitment to a particular religious tradition leads to conflict with other traditions or a collaborative search for meaning and truth. Fowler regards these matters to pertain to the structures of faith. As such they are independent of the contents of faith, and of the functions of the human organism, such as accommodation and organisation through which structures emerge.

Fowler maintained that, whilst the emergence of particular structural styles of faith is partly dependent upon the kind of social experience which people have, the different structural styles which emerge can be related to each other in a hierarchy: that all people begin life with an undifferentiated faith style, but brought up within human society, they will, by the processes of accommodation and organisation, develop successively more complex and differentiated ways of constructing meaning.

Evidently, the kind of society in which people live and the kind of stimulation which they receive will partly determine their rate of development and the level of development which they are likely to attain. However, Fowler, like Piaget and Kohlberg, regards that there is a single sequence of development along which all individuals and societies can be plotted according to the ways in which they appropriate the contents of their diverse religious and

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[122]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op.cit.*, 275-6.

ideological traditions. Each progressive stage is more complex and differentiated, but is not more adequate in a theological sense, merely more appropriate to the tasks demanded of the environment in which it arises.

In these respects, then, Fowler's theory does resemble those of Piaget and Kohlberg: his theory concerns the way in which people construct frameworks of meaning for the contents of their consciousness; he believes he has observed integrated structural stages which change by means of stages and transitions in the direction of universalisation and increasingly complex differentiation; and he considers that on the basis of the concentration of his theory on the structural features of consciousness which operate independently of the contents of faith and the organisational and adaptive functions of the brain, that his theory can be said to constitute a hierarchically invariant sequence which is generally descriptive of human development.

However, despite these similarities between their approaches, Fowler is working with a much broader concept of cognition than Piaget or Kohlberg who restricted their analyses to logical and moral forms of reasoning.[123] Fowler argues that this broadening of approach is necessary because, in a discussion of faith it is not possible to separate out the cognitive and affective functions of the brain. Thus whilst Fowler considers each of Piaget's eras of logical development necessary to each corresponding faith stage, he also adds other elements of human experience; this is done, however, without any discussion of the extent to which these elements constitute an integrated approach appropriate to a structural theory, rather than being an eclectic accumulation of superficially compatible theories.

These criticisms of Fowler's work from those schooled in the structural-developmental approach have appeared in the published literature. D H Webster and Marion Smith, for example, have expressed doubts about the integrity of Fowler's stages. Webster complained

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[123] see, for example, Fowler's comments in *Stages of Faith*, 98-100 and the broad scope of faith development theory compared to the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg demonstrated by Table 5:1 *Faith Stages by Aspects* on 244-5.

that the seven aspects of faith which Fowler identifies seem to have been chosen at random, and questioned why aspects such as volition and humour had been omitted[124]. Smith felt that a false integrity between the aspects was being suggested which ignored the time lag which is experienced by all people in applying new modes of thought to different areas of life.[125] Gabriel Moran has also expressed his concern about the lack of attention paid by Fowler to a framework for relating the schemes of different researchers,[126] the consequence of which has been that M M Jardine & H C Viljoen have argued that Piaget's and Erikson's models do not correlate and cannot easily be placed side by side in the manner which Fowler suggests.[127]

Fowler has also made other modifications to the structural-developmental work on which he is dependent which have an impact upon the appeal of his theory amongst structural-developmentalists. In particular, he has proposed that Piaget's fourth era of logical development which he termed formal operational thought should be split into three stages, dichotomising, dialectical and synthetic thought, corresponding with his own individuative-reflective, conjunctive and universalising stages of faith.[128]

This feature of Fowler's work has raised concern: D H Webster has queried the ability of Fowler to improve and alter the latter stages of the theories of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson who had devised their theories over many years on the basis of well documented empirical study; and this was a reservation shared by Marion Smith who argued that modifications to the theories of three eminent social scientists could not be accepted without research projects testing the hypotheses of the original research[129].

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[124] *Webster, D.H., 1984,* "James Fowler's theory of faith development." *British Journal of Religious Education*, 7, (1984), 14-18.reprinted in Astley, J.1992, & Francis, L.J. eds., 1992, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development*, Gracewing/ Eerdmans, 1992, 81.
[125] Smith, M., 1983, "Developments in Faith", *The Month*, June 1983, 223.
[126] Moran, G., 1983, *Religious Education Development: images for the future*, Winston Press, 1983, 1-27.
[127] Jardine, M.M. & Viljoen, H.C., 1992, "Fowler's theory of faith development: an evaluative discussion," *Religious Education*. 87:1, (1992), 74-86.
[128] See Fowler, J.W., *op.cit.*, Table 5:1 *Faith Stages by Aspects*, 244-5.
[129] Smith, M., 1983, "Developments in Faith", *The Month*, June 1983, 223.

It is clear then, that Fowler's modifications to the structural-developmental approach of Piaget and Kohlberg have aroused reservations amongst the structural-developmental school of developmental psychology. However, Fowler still makes claims for the generalisable nature of his theory as a theory of human development on the basis of its being a structural theory, and it is to an investigation of this claim that we now turn.

Critiques of the structural-developmental method

Fowler's claim to have discerned a generalisable theory of human development is based upon Piaget's assertion that structural theories are universally valid on the grounds that the same categories of thought and sequence of structural development are found in all societies. The differences between cultures, Piaget put down to variations in the content of people's reasoning and the level of cognitive reasoning which the average member of a given society may expect to achieve. Piaget's theory is able to cope with such variations because he contends, in common with Fowler, that the knowledge of the world which the child acquires is only the knowledge of the environment to which it is exposed.[130]

Piaget derived his epistemology from Kant. In traditional philosophical understanding, knowledge was understood to be the accurate representation of reality in itself. Such a view presupposes that there is a single objective reality, and that it can be known. Kant maintained that it is impossible to discern whether our conception of reality corresponds to any posited objective reality because we cannot compare what we have experienced with anything else, and because knowing involves isolating distinct experiences from the stream of experience according to patterns which are not solely the result of our own individual experience.[131]

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[130]for Piaget's views on the scope of his theory and the role of cross-cultural research, see, Piaget, J., 1972, *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a Theory of Knowledge*, Penguin.

[131]Kant, I., 1787. *Critique of Pure Reason* 2nd edition. Dent & Sons, 1934, translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn.

Piaget contended, therefore, that knowledge is whatever a person holds invariant within the changing flow of experience;[132] there is no accessible external reality except that which humans construct. Moreover, he posited that the individual's conception of the world is externalised during the second year of human life, and thereafter is experienced as objective. The more a construct is reinforced by social environment, the more objective it seems. Thus, if the society in which the child grows up has little use for formal operational thought, or even for the concept of conservation, then the child's operational level is likely to develop more slowly through the concrete operational stage and may never reach the formal operational stage of thought at all.[133]

This evidence of a time lag in development across different cultures does not negate Piaget's claim that there is a discernible sequence of cognitive development relevant to all societies. If formal operational thought does not develop in a particular culture, this does not mean that the categories of thought: space, time, causality and logic, are absent.

Differences in the levels of cognitive development have been well documented in cross-cultural studies. In general, western children appear to undergo more rapid development to a higher level than non-western children.[134] Variations explanations have been offered for this discrepancy, all of which relate to environmental stimuli. For example, Greenfield has pointed to the encouragement of scientific thinking in western schooling to explain why western children score better on Piagetian scales.[135] Buck-Morss suggests that rapid development in western children is due to the priorities established by capitalism. She argues that the separation of form from content and the concentration upon reversibility and what remains constant in a situation are useful skills in a capitalist system.[136] She cites the

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[132] see, Piaget, J., 1972, *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a Theory of Knowledge*, Penguin Chapter One.
[133] *Ibid.*, Chapter Three.
[134] see for example, Bruner, Oliver & Greenfield 1966; Price-Williams 1969; Berry & Dasen 1974
[135] Greenfield, P.M., 1976. "Cross-Cultural Research and Piagetian Theory: Paradox and Progress." K. Riegel & J. Meacham eds., 1976. *The Developing Individual in a Changing World Vol. I.*, The Hague, 1976, 322-333.
[136] Buck-Morss, S. 1982. "Socio-Economic Bias in Piaget's Theory and its implications for Cross-Cultural Studies". S. Modgil & C. Modgil eds., *Jean Piaget: Consensus & Controversy*, Lavenham, 1982, 261-272.

evidence of Maccoby and Modiano[137] that there are differences between the performances in Piagetian tests between industrial and peasant children with the same culture, and locates the reason for this difference in acquaintance with the values and norms of industrial capitalism.

However, none of these studies necessarily undermines Piaget's thesis that there is an invariant sequence of development, and that rate and level of development are determined by the experience of the child as it acts upon the environment of its upbringing. The only cross-cultural data which could damage Piaget's theory are evidences of a different sequence of development, or a demonstration that the categories of thought which Piaget believes to be universal are not found in all cultures, or are sufficiently incomplete to seriously distort his account of cognition.

The consequence of cross-cultural work being peripheral to Piagetian studies, despite Piaget's support of such work[138] is that his categories of thought and his stage theory seem to be universally normative and valid without proper justification. In practice, it is difficult to tell which features of Piaget's theory are culturally specific because sufficient cross-cultural research has yet to be undertaken within the Piagetian school. As Piaget has yet had little influence beyond those who accept his general approach, little other research into his theory has been piloted.

Piaget's constructivist theory has the potential to provide illuminating insight into the processes involved in children becoming adult members of society. In practice, however, the abstraction of form from content which enables Piaget to devise a universal theory, draws attention away from the specific features of particular cultures, including the society of its origin, and mitigates against a detailed consideration of how the structures and processes of the human mind interact with the structures, processes, myths and rituals of a particular culture. In practice, therefore, Piaget's theory is treated, amongst those to whom it appeals,

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[137]Maccoby & Modiano, 1969, "Cognitive Style in Rural & Urban Mexico", *Human Development*, 12, 22-33.
[138]Piaget, J., 1972. *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a Theory of Knowledge*. Penguin, 1972, 34.

as universal and normative and educationalists have not hesitated to use it around the world, regardless of any ethical issues which might attend the spread of western educational norms and concepts of cognition.

In the absence of cross-cultural work sufficient to investigate the descriptive range of Piaget's theory, a fundamental question about the possible implications of such cross-cultural work can still be addressed which concerns the extent to which cultural patterns can be conceived to influence the structures of the human brain. Is it possible, in practice, to abstract form from content as Piaget tries to do or does this simply lead to the imposition of the norms of cognition from one society upon other societies, which are then considered, less developed?

As already noted, this question has received some attention within the discussion of Piaget's work. Cole et al. find in favour of Piaget, stating that ' Cultural differences in cognition reside more in the situations to which particular cognitive processes are applied than in the existence of a process in one cultural group and its absence in another.';[139] P M Greenfield highlights her concern that Piaget's stages of cognitive development contain implicit assumptions about the value of the hypothetico-deductive method, characteristic of empirical science, which is neither value free, nor inclusive of all kinds of cognition;[140] Buck-Morss, on the other hand, constructing a Marxist critique, points not to the cultural elements in Piaget's stages, but to the priorities of bourgeois industrialised capitalist society which they reflect.[141]

All these critiques rest on the assertion that one cannot conceive of structures being universal on the grounds that they can be abstracted from the contents of a particular society's concerns because the notion of cognition which is being used, is itself, a socially constructed concept.

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[139]Cole, M., Gay, J., Glick, A.J. & Sharp, W.D., 1971, *The Cultural Context of Learning and Thinking*, Methuen, 1971, 233.
[140]Greenfield, P.M. 1976. *op. cit.*.
[141]Buck-Morss, S., 1982, *op. cit.*, 261-272.

As has already been observed, Piaget stands in the Enlightenment tradition of Immanuel Kant. He enshrines at the apex of this theory the separation of form from content, thus commending the processes of abstraction, generalisation and universalisation. For Simpson, 1974 and for Greenfield, 1976, such an understanding of the goal of development is itself reflective of culturally specific norms.[142] For Buck-Morss, the separation of form from content is parallel to the capitalist concern for exchange value rather than social value.[143]

She argues that western children are rewarded for the processes of abstraction; the more general constants they can identify, the more developed their thought is considered to be. However, although what is valued in western capitalist society and in Piaget's conservation tests, is the observation of constant features, other forms of thought, like the analogical and the dialectical are devalued. Piaget's goal is essentially the divorce of theory from practice, such that principles learned in one context can, in theory, be applied in other contexts.

In practice, however, what is valued in more traditional cultures, is the ability to, for example, conserve weight, in the performance of a particular operation, like making pottery. A western child might be able to deduce the principles of weight conservation of clay, but would not be able to estimate the correct amount of clay to produce a specified size of bowl, nor allow for shrinkage during the drying and firing process.

Critics of this objection to Piaget's theory would argue that what the children of potters have done is to learn a series of procedures without acquiring a more adequate general understanding of how the world operates. Such a criticism presupposes, however, that their world does operate in such a way as to reveal the necessity of a concept of conservation. To these children, though, a general and theoretical understanding of how the world of empirical

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[142]Simpson, 1974

[143]This line of argument is also pursued by M.J. Kanjurathinkal who suggests in *A Sociological Critique of Theories of Cognitive Development*, (Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) that the theories of Kant, Piaget, Kohlberg and Habermas defend ethical values, 'consonant with the requirements of Western capitalistic modes of production and its imperialistic ambitions... In a sense, Western moral values are argued to be universal, necessary, and the best because they are autonomously produced by the transcendent reason, or becasue they are biologically determined, or because they are neccessarily presupposed within the context of rational discourse.' (page 9).

investigation operates may be within their competence, yet is of no social value and thus is not developed, although intervention experiments in which children are taught to conserve prove that such children can generalise if such an operation is seen to be valued by the experimenter.

Such observations do little more than point out that the development of generalised principles depends upon context, in this case upon economic context. This is a point clearly made by Piaget himself and part of the structural-developmental approach. What is of interest, here, is the question of whether the concentration of the experimenter upon operations not valued by the indigenous society, obscures the development of other kinds of thinking not valued by western society. Lévi-Strauss, for example, points out that most traditional societies value complex differentiation, i.e., observation of differences, rather than constants.[144] Is the observation of differences evidence of a different kind of logic, or a manifestation of the kind of rationality already described, but at a less developed stage?

Buck-Morss argues that the emergence of generalised principles or other means of thinking is a function of economic structure. Whether or not the specifics of her argument are accepted, that 'The objective factor of socio-economic structure together with the subjective factor of conscious participation in the abstract levels of the social whole would seem to account for the variables associated with the time-lag in Piaget test performance - '[145] Buck-Morss does raise the possibility that what Piaget has done is to focus only on those operations which are valued in western industrial culture, and that he has ignored the steps which lead to sophistication in other kinds of thinking are valued, thus arbitrarily exalting formal operational thought, limiting the conception of cognition and distorting the sequence of development.

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[144]Lévi-Strauss, C., 1966, *The Savage Mind*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972.
[145]Buck-Morss., S. *op. cit.* 269.

Buck-Morss also goes on to suggest that it is the social reality which children inhabit which determines their perception of reality.[146] Thus, lower class western children perceive law and authority to be an external and immutable force because they themselves experience it as such. They do not have a stake in the making of law, they have no influence in the system. Middle class children experience the legal system very differently because of the position of their parents. It is not just that the flexibility of the system and opportunities for influence within it, or the possibility that the system might be different and could be changed are perspicuous to these children, but that they actually experience the system in these terms. In effect they experience a different reality from the reality of the lower class western child.

This concept could also be extended to explain why children's concepts of authority change. As small children they have little bargaining power. The system of authority is external. Increasing opportunities to participate in social life and manipulate authority, however, present a different reality which must be understood in different terms. It is not merely that perception of reality changes, but their experience of reality which changes.

If this line of reasoning is correct, then how is it possible to construct a hierarchy of realities? How can social reality be better, or more developed, than another? The answer, within a constructivist model, is that one is not better than another in absolute terms, each version of reality is an adequate model of a different experience of reality. However, some versions of reality are much more broadly applicable than others - it is these which reflect the higher stages of development. If Piaget is accurate in his description of the typical experience which western children have, of the contexts in which they have the opportunity to act and reflect, then he may be said to have described a hierarchy of realities, providing that each new stage incorporates a qualitatively different form of reasoning from that of the previous stage. The constructivist model means, however, that what changes is not only the perception of the child, but the reality in which they participate. No reality is more real or valid than any other

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[146] *Ibid.*, 270.

in a pre-Kantian sense although some versions of reality are more reflective of a wider and broader experience than others.

The problem is that in Piaget's account, generalisation and abstraction are valued concepts because they are regarded as more logically adequate. However, the only society which values logical adequacy in such terms, is modern, western industrialised society. Even if Piaget's account of logical adequacy is accurate - the valuing of logical thought, as understood in the western rational tradition, is arbitrary - the product of one particular reality.

The fact that non-western children might not be used to thinking in abstract and generalisable terms, but if encouraged, are able to develop such a capacity, is used by the Piagetian school to claim that concrete operational thought forms the basis of the higher function of formal operational thought. However, little attention has been paid by the Piagetian school to the possibility that there might be operations which western children might be unused to performing because they are of little social value to them, but which they are able to master, given the right stimulation. Examples might include the interpretation of dreams or drawing from the imagination. If there are capacities which both western and non-western children have not developed within their social environments, yet which emerge, given appropriate encouragement, it appears that a single linear model of development is wanting.

The questions which arise from this discussion concern whether Piaget's categories of thought can be sustained as universal, or whether it is only the processes of accommodation and assimilation identified by Piaget which make sense in all cultures; whether Piaget's conception of logic is culturally neutral or whether its use obscures other aspects of cognition which are equally important in understanding people of other culture, and whether the valuing of logical thought, as defined in the western rational tradition, is anything other than arbitrary.

It is to a discussion of logic and the processes of thought across a variety of cultures therefore that we now turn, drawing particularly on the debate within social anthropology which draws on cross-cultural ethnographic data, as such a discussion concerning the very possibility of devising any single linear scheme of development which can be cross-culturally useful, clearly has implications for understanding the nature and status of faith development theory.

Models of Development in Cross Cultural Perspective

In social anthropology the whole subject of development has been fraught with difficulties because of the dichotomy between rational or logical and non-rational or pre-logical thought which has been influential in the history of the discipline. Societies where thinking is characterised by mystery, myth and symbol have been considered 'primitive' and modern societies have been considered developed, basing their thinking upon empirical fact and logical consistency. All this has been loaded with value judgements about the relative worth of different ways of thinking. Although counter instances to this characterisation of the difference between 'primitive' and modern thought have been advanced, the dichotomy has remained influential, prompting the title of Dan Sperber's paper, "Is Symbolic Thought Pre-Rational?"[147]

Sperber considers the view that symbolic thought is pre-rational to consist of three contributory assumptions: that rational thought is a late development in the human species; that conceptual rationality is a late acquisition of the individual; and that rational thought is a more directed and attentive exploitation of symbolic thought.

Beginning with the way in which individuals react to the environment, Sperber identifies three kinds of mental processing: *perception*, which is involved in identification of an object; *symbolic processing*, which involves a trawling of the long term memory for

[147]Sperber, D., 1980, "Is Symbolic Thought Pre-Rational?" in Brandes & Fortes eds., Symbol as Sense, New York.

associations; and *rational processing*, which involves linear and deductive thinking. He argues that although there are some instances in which a perception may be processed by the symbolic device and provide a stimulus from the rational device, the process is always initiated by the rational device. This is clear because some rational behaviour can be achieved without any symbolic processing, particularly in the case of routine behaviour.[148] On the other hand, he argues that any symbolic processing requires rational processing first.

Sperber demonstrates the necessity for rational thought being prior to symbolic thought by indicating that symbols are not chosen for any discrete and obvious reasons. There is no discrete and cross-cultural set of words which operate as symbols. Neither are the evocations associated with their respective stimuli obvious. Indeed, experimental psychologists have demonstrated that any stimulus can produce a variety of evocations and that any evocation can be deliberately paired with any stimulus, such as in mnemonic techniques.

The lack of natural symbolic pairs is usually avoided by anthropologists with the assertion that cultural pairs are learned in socialisation. However, Sperber suggests that knowledge of prior associations is not sufficient to predict which stimuli will get symbolic processing. A subject will not always process symbolically all known cultural pairs, and will not predictably associate each stimulus with its pair. In order to predict when symbolic processing will take place, there needs to be knowledge of the subject's understanding of the context. Any understanding, or conceptualisation of the context, involves activity of the rational device.

Sperber suggests that the factor which determines which object or word will receive symbolic processing is the state of the rational device. 'Whenever the perceptual representation of an additional stimuli in a given context cannot be fully processed on the basis on the resources accessible to the rational device at that moment, symbolic processing will occur.'[149] In other

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[148]Schütz, A. L. 1943, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", *Collected Papers Vol II*. The Hague, 1962, 64-88. On pages 72-3, Schütz discusses different kinds of knowledge, one of which he terms, recipe knowledge.
[149]Sperber, D., *op. cit.*, 38.

words, when the rational device cannot solve the problem it faces, it initiates a non-sequential search for potentially relevant material in the long term memory. The rational device is likely to resort to this method when basic assumptions are challenged and when it is not alert and most information is likely to overload it. Thus, the only information, when the rational device is alert, which is likely to overload it, is information which reaches beyond rational, or culturally acquired schemata.

It should be noted here that in Sperber's terminology, that which is classed as rational is that considered valuable and normal within a particular culture - not that which conforms to western empirical assumptions. Likewise, A L Schütz notes that despite western thoughts to the contrary, much of what passes for rational thought in people's everyday worlds, even in the west, is simply convention, rather than empirically proven knowledge.[150]

Sperber's assertion that symbolic processing happens at the instigation of the rational device means that there are problems for the traditional assumption that pre-rational thinking is symbolic. There can be no such thing as pre-rational thinking. Although the extent to which symbolic processing takes place may vary according to individuals and context, symbolic processing can only happen in people who can already process information rationally. That is, to people who have already some sense of cultural conventions.

Sperber, here is using a definition of rationality articulated by Talcott-Parsons: :

> 'Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by the means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end, for reasons understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science.'[151]

To this extent, the structural developmentalists and Sperber are not in disagreement, for Piaget regards symbolic thought as part of logical process;[152] all biological processes of

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[150] Schütz, A. L., 1943, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", *Collected Papers Vol II.*,The Hague, 1962

[151] Parsons, T., 1937, *The Structure of Social Action*, New York, 58.

[152] See, for example, the account of the development of the semiotic function in Piaget's work in Ginsberg H. & Opper, S., *op.cit.*, Chapter Three.

adaptation and accommodation are rational. Symbolism implies only the making of associations whereby an object may be understood to stand for something else. Where Piaget and Sperber part company is in dubbing this activity, 'pre-logical', which is the name Piaget gives to his second era in which symbolic thought predominates.

In Piaget's work, as it stands, symbolism is a necessary, but early development in the cognitive process which is relied on less often as the child grows. Evidence of symbolic thought in children is associated with a poor understanding of causality, a tendency to confuse the imagined with the real and perceptual change with real change. Although Piaget abandoned his contention that this was also true of 'primitive' thought, his lack of attention to anything but the development of formal operational thought has, along with other cultural developments, made it appear that symbolic thought is faulty in its logic and inconsequential in modern life.

A concerted attempt to stress the ongoing value of the symbolic function has been made by T R Blakeslee.[153] Blakeslee argues that the theory of a single mind, which dominates educational theory (not least through the use of Piaget's work), is a fallacy, because it concentrates only on the processes of the left brain, or rational device. He proposes that the two hemispheres of the brain perform different functions. The left brain is usually used for language, linear thought and logical sequence, but that the right brain stores complex visual patterns. The locations of these activities in the different hemispheres have been confirmed by EEG tests, and by observation of split brain patients. Both halves of the brain are conscious, but the right brain's stream of consciousness is non-verbal and active in dreams.

Blakeslee is not the first to note the importance of the distinct functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. In his essay, "The pre-eminence of the right hand: a study in religious polarity", R Hertz lists many societies in which the right hand is favoured for use

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[153]Blakeslee, T.R., 1980, *The Right Brain*. MacMillan.

and is linked with notions of legitimacy, maleness and superiority, whilst the left hand is neglected and associated with evil, defilement, mystical power and femaleness.[154] He suggests that the Christian Church's tradition of baptising and blessing with the right hand, whilst excommunicating with the left serves as an apposite example within a 'rational' western tradition with its roots in Greek philosophy. Hertz argued that this preference for the right hand, and hence the left brain, is cultural rather than being determined by physiology, and he called for a liberation of the left hand and thus the right brain. He believed most people to be ambidextrous and to be better served by the use of both hemispheres of the brain.

Blakeslee takes up the argument, claiming that the neglect of the left hand in western culture is detrimental because it is linked with a neglect of the creative potential of the right brain and an over concentration upon verbal language.[155] He points to the flexibility of the non-verbal memory and its ability to be able to store and recall information an impression in many ways. Unlike language, it is not restricted to the recall of data in the form in which it was stored. The verbal memory is, however, restricted through reliance upon linguistic activities and formal logic. The inflexibility of the verbal memory can be experience in the difficulty of reciting the alphabet backwards. Visual images on the other hand, can be recognised even if the picture is reversed, as in the case of a photographic negative.[156]

Blakeslee backs up his argument with reference to G Wallas' *Art of Thought*, in which are outlined four stages of creative thought: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification.[157] Blakeslee locates preparation, illumination and verification in the left brain, but the crucial incubation period occurs in the right brain.[158] Experiments carried out in schools, conducted by Meredith Olson and cited by Blakeslee, demonstrate that the most

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[154]Hertz, R, 1960, *Death & the Right Hand*, Cohen & West.
[155]Blakeslee, T.R., 1980 *op.cit.*, 56-57.
[156]*Ibid.*, 42.
[157]Wallas, G., 1946. *Art of Thought*, London, 1946.
[158]Blakeslee, T.R., 1980, *op. cit.*, 49-51.

gifted children use their right and left brains equally, whereas, in western culture, the less gifted use only the left hemisphere.[159]

The work of Sperber and Blakeslee has implications both for an understanding of the development of individual children, and for understanding the evolution of thought in human societies. In the light of these studies, it does not seem possible to sustain a belief that symbolic thought is pre-rational, or that it is prior or inferior to rational thought in any way; it is not appropriate, therefore, to place symbolic thought on a continuum with rational thought, labelling symbolic thought as a less developed and unreliable way of reasoning.

It would seem, on this evidence, that Piaget's account of the development of cognition is at least partial. An adequate account of human knowing would need to include not only an account of the development of logic but also of symbolic process. Piaget's own approach does not preclude this, and indeed, he deliberately neglected work on symbolic process in favour of the more easily quantifiable area of hyopthetico-deductive thinking. Attention would also need to be paid, however, to Piaget's assertion that early rational thought processes are symbolic, and this has the potential to seriously disrupt Piaget's scheme.

There is other evidence provided by Rodney Needham, however, which suggests that Piaget's whole conception of logic is culturally determined. Needham argues that cultural symbolism can be seen, not as evidence of faulty logical reasoning, but as a method of classification which is not based upon hierarchy.[160] Needham comments that, 'The prevalent view is that, whatever the internal constitution of classes, a classification is articulated in a hierarchy and that its discriminations are procured by the traditional method of classical philosophy, namely by logical division.'[161] Needham's argument is that classification need not involve hierarchical division, for it need not be monothetic, but may be polythetic. Thus, while

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[159]Olson, M., 1977, *Visual Field Usage as an Indicator of Right or Left Hemisphere Processing in Gifted Students*, San Diego.
[160]Needham, R., 1980 *Reconnaisances*, Toronto.
[161]*Ibid.*, 44.

traditional procedures of formal logic concentrate upon the formation of a hierarchy of formal properties, Needham argues that other forms of classification may produce non-hierarchical systems. Although such systems of classification may not use formal logic, Needham insists that they are not irrational, but are directed to different ends that hierarchical classification.

The function of hierarchical classification is to be able to make statements about the properties of things in themselves; it concerns formal properties. Thus, each known creature has been grouped together by modern western biologists into a species by virtue of features which are held in common, and each sub-species is differentiated by virtue of the isolation of features which are variant. If such a system is comprehensive and accurate enough, any living creature can be identified according to its formal characteristics and placed in the system. However, what a traditional system of classification, based upon formal properties of things cannot provide, is information about the way in which theses animals are to be regarded by the human race. Classification, in the formal sense, gives no clue about morality or appropriate social behaviour.

However, classification in the analogical sense, Needham argues, is designed, not to give information about the nature of things in themselves, but to give information about the conduct which is expected of a human within society. Symbolism, he contends, is a system of analogical classification, concerned with the order of society. Its classes are polythetic, and the semantic values which are attributed by a community to a particular object may not correspond to its formal properties at all, and may vary according to context. An example might be the Levitical food laws. Their function is not to classify animals as, for example, poisonous or harmless, amphibious or mammalian, but to exercise control over the Semitic community such that it should retain its identity within a complex and changing political environment.

Symbolic thought, therefore, according to Needham, is not irrational or prior or inferior to rational thought. Symbolic, or analogical classification is rather, a system concerned with behaviour and ethics, which cannot be supplanted by a system of classification constructed solely by a process of logical division. It is not a stage in a process of the development of rational thought, but a whole other strand of cognitive and language competence which merits separate study. The degree to which such processes are conscious may change or develop, and may be affected by the development of the rational device. Symbolic though, per se, however, cannot be represented as a stage in rational development.

Such a conclusion has implications for the Piagetian understanding of child development. It was stated above that a structural developmental theory can be sustained, only if the elements of cognition identified can be found in all cultures and the differences between cultures concern the arrangement of these same elements. If Needham's argument is taken seriously, however, Piaget has misrepresented the function of a whole realm of human cognition. Rather than rational, empirical and abstract thought being the natural, universal outcome of human development, as Piaget suggests, it is the outcome of an over concentration upon left brain functions in western cultures.

Implicit in this conclusion is a rejection of the structural developmental premise that the structures of cognition can be abstracted from the contents of one culture and arranged in a culturally neutral developmental sequence. Although the processes of thought, or functions as Piaget termed them, like accommodation and adaptation, may be universal, it is not demonstrated that the categories of thought which he identifies represent structures of cognition which could be regarded as culturally invariant.

As yet it is unclear whether a culturally neutral structural sequence could be abstracted from ethnographic accounts of human development. The only way that satisfactory evidence can be gathered however, is through cross-cultural research which seeks to chart the typical courses of development according to the categories of thought and concepts of rationality

which are indigenous to populations. As yet this evidence is scarce, yet the indications are that Piaget's sequence of development is difficult to maintain as a universally valid theory without seriously distorting the cognitive processes of other cultures than the contemporary west.

Implications for the descriptive range of faith development theory

What, then, are the consequences of these conclusions for understanding the appeal of Fowler's theory? Clearly, whatever reservations there are about the structural and therefore universal status of Piaget's theory, these could be extended to Fowler's stages of faith. We have already seen that in various respects, Fowler's work is heavily dependent upon the structural-developmental perspective of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Apart from the features outlined above, Piaget, Kohlberg and Fowler have all set out to describe the logical, moral or faith development of a particular group of people within a particular culture as a basis for their theories. Although Fowler tries to protect himself from the charge that he makes excessive claims on the basis of a narrow empirical study by claiming that his theory is not necessarily universalisable,[162] he does claim that is generalisable and he does rely, as we have seen, on the same structural-developmental arguments which underpin claims to universality, and expect faith development to follow a broadly similar pattern in all cultures.[163]

Because of Fowler's reliance on Piaget's theory, and to an extent, on Piaget's methods, his faith development theory is subject to some of the same difficulties as Piaget's theory of cognitive development and this fact has clear implications for the pattern of response to Fowler's work within the field of developmental psychology. Fowler claims a generalisable and normative descriptive theory on the basis of detailed study in one country; he has formed a thesis about knowledge amongst those who share his presuppositions about knowledge; and he has failed to test these assumptions through cross-cultural work. In addition, he has

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[162] Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 296-299.
[163] *Ibid.*, 298.

enshrined at the heart of his theory, the necessity of achieving Piaget's stages of logical development before the attendant stage of faith development can be accomplished. Given these facts, amongst those for whom the structural-developmental enterprise seems flawed, Fowler's work on faith development is likely to have little impact.

We have noted, however, that Fowler does seek to modify Piaget's stages in various respects. First, Fowler seeks to broaden the rational, empirical and abstract model of knowledge to which Piaget is committed[164] and it is true that Fowler is unhappy with the restricted nature of Piaget's enquiry, and that he adds other aspects of human perception and experience to make up his notion of faith; notably, he does add to Piaget's series of logical stages, the development of symbolic function. This attention to symbolic function, however, is not allowed to modify the concept of logic which is the basis of Piaget's eras of development. Piaget's stages are still regarded by Fowler as necessary to the corresponding stage of faith development.

One difficulty with Fowler's theory is that, although he shies away from some of the hard and fast claims to universality, rationalism, empiricism and cross-cultural judgements which Piaget is bold to make, his theory still relies on Piaget's eras of logical development which assume that symbolic processing is a way of processing rationally which is faulty in its logic. There is no sense in Piaget's scheme that symbolic thought and analogical classification might seriously modify the concept of rationality and the sequence of development with which he is working.

Although Fowler adds other aspects, like symbolic function, form of role taking and psycho-social development to Piaget's categories of thought he fails to consider the implications of symbolic thought being another kind of competence which might have consequences for the validity of Piaget's eras of logical development or for the identification of logic as a culturally

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[164] *Ibid.*, 101.

neutral category of thought. Although Sperber claims that rational processing takes place in all human minds, it is easier to equate these processes with Piaget's processes of adaptation and organisation, than with a particular notion of what the categories of thought might be. A cross-culturally valid notion of logic would need to include both formal classification and analogical classification. It might then be possible to see that societies have different patterns of development, not simply be at different stages on the same linear scale.

Whilst Fowler does include both rational and symbolic processing as part of his understanding of faith, and clearly does not subscribe to the view that all symbolic thought is faulty in its logic, his developmental sequence is in danger of conveying the impression that maturity depends on the superseding of symbolic thought by rational processing, even if symbols come to be appreciated once more in Stage V. Although Fowler's account of faith in Part I of *Stages of Faith* demonstrates a commitment to the continuing value of symbolic thought throughout the life cycle, as W E Conn has pointed out he is not always faithful to the description of faith at the front of his book in his formation of the stages[165] particularly with his emphasis on the need for demythologisation in order to pass beyond conventional thought. Nor does he pay a great deal of attention to the formal relationships between the various aspects of faith he has identified. This leaves ambiguous the relationship between symbolic thought in Piaget's pre-logical era, and the symbolic function described by Fowler.

It is difficult to assess, then, the impact that Fowler's modifications to Piaget's structural-developmental theory have had on the theory's appeal within psychology. On the one hand Fowler has received criticism from structural-developmentalists, for loosening the tightness of definition necessary to a structural theory; on the other hand, Fowler's changes to Piaget's way of working do not seem to have exempt him from the critiques which have been developed of the whole structural-developmental enterprise. Though retreating from making universal claims about his theory, Fowler still regards it as normative and generalisable

[165]Conn, W.E., 1981, "Affectivity in Kohlberg & Fowler", *Religious Education*, 76:1 (1981), 33-48.

because of its separation of structure from content. Though adding additional elements of cognition and experience to Piaget's concept of logic, Fowler has not dealt with the relationship between logical and symbolic thought, and thus at the same time regards symbolic thought as a distinct strand of development and an early stage of logical development. Though broadening the cognitive focus of development which has the potential of reducing some of the culturally specific content of Piaget's theory, Fowler has failed to demonstrate why the end of development which he envisages is any less imbued with value judgements; whilst Piaget favoured formal operational thought, Fowler favours universalising faith.

Despite Fowler's insistence that no faith stage is more adequate in an absolute sense than any other, however, there are clear indications that he does view Stage VI faith as a more adequate and more desirable faith stance than any other. He chooses theological terms to express this view, claiming that Stage VI faith is the only stage which is free of idolatry. Far from being the logical and culturally neutral apex of a structural scheme of development, Fowler's understanding of Stage VI faith has considerable parallels with H R Niebuhr's conception of radical monotheistic faith, the only kind of faith which is not considered to be parochial and idolatrous is radical monotheism which involves '*loyalty to the principle of being* and to the *source and centre of all value and power.*'[166]

Although Fowler does not explicitly state this, it does appear, that his exposition of the stages of faith, ever moving towards increasing differentiation and universalisation are an attempt to symbolise Niebuhr's understanding of radical monotheism such that it exerts a transformative influence upon the Church and the world. For Fowler, his reliance upon Niebuhr's image of radical monotheistic faith is not evidence that his theory is culturally or theologically biased because Niebuhr did not intend his description of radical monotheism to be restricted to persons of the Abramic traditions. However, it cannot be escaped, that

[166]This is quoted by Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op.cit.*, 23.

although Fowler can describe Stage VI faith and give notable examples of people who have achieved it, like Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton and Mahatma Gandhi, none of the people he has interviewed have been regarded as best described by Stage VI faith. Thus whilst Fowler's enthusiasm for radical monotheism can be understood as the product of a particular theological perspective, it does not explain why it appears at the apex of what is claimed to be a descriptive theory of normative development.

Viewed from this perspective, it is difficult to see the hierarchy which Fowler suggests as a structural hierarchy. Although he claims that each stage is only more adequate than the previous one, in that it is more complex and universal and more highly differentiated, and thus more appropriate to a complex society, he does present Stage VI faith as the faith stage to which all people should aspire, as that with power to exert truly transformative power . Because of Fowler's belief that development is partly a product of social environment, it can only mean that it is important to him to offer people the kind of social experience which would result in the adoption of such a style of faith. And indeed, it would be possible to interpret much of his later work in this way - his notion of *Public Church*, explicated in *Weaving the New Creation*, focuses upon the development of communities whose modal developmental level is Stage V, always keeping in mind the radical monotheistic faith which Niebuhr describes.[167]

It is unsurprising, then, that Fowler's faith development theory has received relatively little enduring attention in the debate about the psychology of human development. The theory does not have the merits of the tightness of Piaget's work with logical and mathematical concepts, and thus is even more subject to charges of the arbitrary exaltation of particular cultural and, in this case, theological assumptions than is Piaget's work.

[167]Fowler, J.W., 1991, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church*, Harper & Row.

The implications of these findings concerning the status of Fowler's faith development theory are not confined to severely restricting the theory's potential appeal amongst academic psychologists, however. If the critique of the structural developmental enterprise, outlined above, is accepted, it raises the possibility that Fowler's theory describes, not a structural hierarchy of normative development, but the stages which it would be necessary to go through in order to reach a particular faith orientation. If this is the case, then the appeal of Fowler's theory is likely to be restricted to a particular social and cultural group of a particular theological persuasion.

If the critique of structural-developmental theory which we have presented is accepted, it could be argued that what Fowler has done is to identify the features of radical monotheistic faith, and trace from childhood, how these features might develop from an undifferentiated consciousness and the parochial concerns of childhood. Viewing radical monotheism as highly differentiated and universal in its scope, Fowler has regarded it as the apex of development. Each stage in the sequence which leads to it can then be construed in terms of increasing differentiation and universalisation.

Even by such a method, it might be possible to maintain that faith development theory is a structural theory if radical monotheism were the most differentiated and universalising form of faith there could be. It is difficult to see, however, how this can be so, for the logical extension of such trajectories is surely a thoroughgoing cultural relativism. This, however, is not what Fowler presents as Stage VI faith, for those best described by Stage VI faith are committed to the absoluteness of their own tradition, the truths of which cannot be known apart from the particular myths and rituals of their own historical faith experience. This absoluteness of the particular is not the logical extension of increasing universalisation and differentiation, but represents the importing of a theological concept, originally developed in order to understand how the death and resurrection of one man could have universal implications. In this context it represents an argument that it is possible to allow value and insight to the traditions and beliefs of others without needing to give up those which make up

one's own identity. It is a way of maintaining the need for peculiar faith traditions within a social environment seduced by the myth of cultural relativism. The absoluteness of the particular, however, is no more or less a myth than cultural relativism. It is a story, a meta-narrative, a framework which allows people to perform the particular tasks they wish to perform. It is a content, and not a culturally neutral structure of faith.

One question with which we have been concerned in this chapter is whether faith development theory is properly considered to describe structures of faith, or whether it is, in fact, describing the way in which human beings may come to adopt a particular content. The importance of the question is that the answer to it determines the status and thus potential influence and appeal of Fowler's theory. If the stages of faith can be considered to function independently of content, then Fowler's theory may be used to understand and explain the differences between people's faith in all times and in all places. If, however, these stages of faith reflect not structures but contents, Fowler's theory is merely descriptive of the faith journey of a particular group of people who share not only a social context, but an orientation towards it. If so, its descriptive range is severely curtailed, and so, as we shall argue in the next chapter, is its potential appeal, for only a restricted social and cultural group is likely to recognise their own experience within Fowler's theory.

Three additional pieces of evidence suggest that Fowler's stages of faith cannot be regarded as culturally neutral structural stages. Because they hint that the same sequence of development may not be found in all cultures and that there are elements of cognition neglected by Fowler's account, these areas of research suggest that not only the contents, but also that identified as the structure of faith, varies according to cultural experience.

The feminist critique of faith development theory

The first area of research concerns the feminist critique of developmental theory which has been spear-headed by Carol Gilligan.[168] Arguing against Lawrence Kohlberg she suggested that he tended to give women low scores for their moral development because of a failure to recognise that women make moral decisions in different ways because their experience is different. Gilligan suggested that many women make moral decisions taking more account of situational factors and relationships than do men. Rather than this necessitating their moral development being arrested at Stage 3, however, she suggested that there are degrees of maturity in relational perspective which were not captured by Kohlberg's stages.

The findings of Gilligan's own work have been subject to critique, and women's faith development is a subject of ongoing debate.[169] Kohlberg, for example, has attempted to refute Gilligan's claims on the basis that women's experience of the social situations which would lead them to develop Stage 4 justice reasoning is limited:

> I suggested that if women were not provided with the experience of participation in societies' complex secondary institutions through education and complex work responsibility, then they were not likely to acquire those societal role-taking abilities necessary for the development of Stage 4 and 5 justice reasoning.[170]

What Gilligan suggests, however, is that Kohlberg's work fails to recognise a whole strand of reasoning, which is not static and associated with Stage 3, but develops along a different trajectory. She suggests that although maturity for all adults can be considered as a balance between differentiation from others and interdependence, the routes which men and women take to achieve such balance are different. She suggests that men tend to fear intimacy and have problems with relationships, leading to a tendency to use notions of rights and justice as

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[168]Gilligan, C., 1982, *In a Different Voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard U.P..

[169]see, for example, Benson, P.N., 1990, *Surrender to God: A Feminist Critique and Reinterpretation*, PhD Graduate Theological Union; Conn, J.W., ed., 1986, Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development, Paulist Press; Cowden, M.A., 1991, *Faith Development in Women: A Comparison of the Moral Development Theories of Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg and the Faith Development Theory of James Fowler*. PhD Diss. Temple Unviersity; Morgan, P.A., 1990, *The Faith Development of Women in Crisis: A Constructivist Window to Intervention*, EdD Diss, University of Houston; Ochs, C., 1983, *Women and Spirituality*, Rowman & Allanheld; Robbins, M.A., 1990, *Midlife Women and the Death of Mother: A Study of Psychohistorical and Spiritual Transformation*, Peter Lang.

[170]Kohlberg, L., 1981, *Essays on Moral Development* Vol I: *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, San Francisco, 340.

the mediation between self and others. Women, however, tend to fear separation and have problems with individuation, this leads them towards decisions based on responsibility for others, which only in mature stages, extends to responsibility towards the self.

Work done by M A Cowden on gender bias in Fowler's theory, which is dependent upon Kohlberg's work, supports Gilligan's main thesis.[171] Studying the faith development of 10 Baptist women, Cowden concluded that there was evidence of the development of an ethic of care amongst these women obscured by Fowler's criteria. Again, using Fowler's model alone, the women would have been described in terms of Stage III faith. Cowden argued however, that such a categorisation was only possible by obscuring a whole facet of development.

This brief look at the gender critique of development theory is not intended to be exhaustive. However, the discussion of such a gender critique is intended to indicate that there may be significant ways in which Fowler's theory misses important aspects of development, even amongst the facets which he selects, which absence may give a false impression of a linear and structural development. What also becomes clear from a review of Gilligan's and Cowden's work is that there are people even within western culture who do not recognise their development in the terms which Fowler has outlined.

Cross-cultural questions from Hawaii

Evidence that Fowler's sequence of development may not be universally found is also presented in a small piece of cross-cultural work designed to test faith development theory amongst 12 Hawaiian Buddhists undertaken by N Y Furushima.[172] Apart from the difficulties of interviewing in the context of alien customs relating to the receiving of strangers, Furushima noted that the contents of people's beliefs seemed to have an impact upon their faith stage, particularly the Japanese virtues of self-restraint, humility, obligation

[171] Cowden, M.A., 1991, *Faith Development in Women: A Comparison of the Moral Development Theories of Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg and the Faith Development Theory of James Fowler.* PhD Diss. Temple Unviersity.
[172] Furushima, R.Y., 1985, *Faith Development in a Cross Cultural Perspective,* in *Religious Education,* Vol. 80 No., 3. 1985:414-420.

and pride. All these virtues, in Fowler's terms would place these subjects in Stage III, yet in other respects, Furushima felt that they were best described in terms of Stage VI faith; evidence of any passage through Stage IV, with its emphasis upon abstract thought and personal autonomy, however, was hard to find.

Another difficulty which Furushima experienced in using Fowler's model to classify the faith of these 12 Hawaiian Buddhists was that it did not seem equipped to take account of poetic language as a different kind of language from rational discourse. Again, this deficiency seemed to make subjects appear at a lower stage of faith than Furushima believed to be warranted.

These, then, are some of the questions which arise from Furushima's work about the normative and descriptive status of Fowler's theory. They have power to query the status of his theory because they suggest that the sequence of development which Fowler has identified as invariant is not universally found, and because they suggest that there are significant elements of cognition which Fowler's theory cannot accommodate, namely that his concept of logic is too narrow, focusing only upon hypothetico-deductive reasoning.

There are serious concerns which arise from the prospect of Fowler's theory being prematurely considered to be normative and universal which are not sufficiently addressed by Fowler's few brief comments in Stages of Faith.[173] Although Fowler himself does not claim universality for his theory, he does claim normativity and has devoted little attention to cross-cultural research. The implications of his use of Kohlberg and Piaget's structural developmental approach and of his claim to have described an invariant sequence of development because of the logical extension of the stages in a universal and generalisable direction, however, make Fowler susceptible to the suggestion that he has used a culturally specific notion of logic to construct a normative model of faith development.

[173]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op.cit.*, 299.

As such, it seems that Fowler is guilty of committing the naturalistic fallacy, that what is, ought to be. Because, amongst the narrow sample group which he has interviewed, a particular pattern has emerged, Fowler has assumed that this pattern is the only one which could emerge, both in western culture and in any other culture. It is by no means clear, however, that at least one of the foundational pillars of Fowler's theory is cross-culturally valid, for Piaget's theory is undermined by the evidence provided above that logic is differently conceived in different societies in ways which are difficult to reconcile with a universal, linear developmental theory: the same conceptions of logic, are not found in all societies, and cannot be forced to fit into the earlier stages of a developmental sequence formulated in another culture without serious distortion.

If this is the case, then what Fowler has actually done, is to describe a process of development which takes place in a particular culture. Whilst, we shall argue that as such, faith development theory is extremely illuminating and an important, though culturally specific contribution to an understanding of the processes of human development, there are serious implications for the appeal of Fowler's theory if it cannot be treated as a normative and generalisable theory.

Cross-cultural questions from India

The third area of research we shall review was not set up in order to test cross-culturally the claims of faith development theory; rather it relates to the developmental models of Erikson, Kohlberg and Jung. Given Fowler's reliance on the work of Erikson and Kohlberg, however, and the parallels we shall suggest between his work and that of Jung,[174] Kakar's work seems to have important implications for the descriptive range of Fowler's theory.

[174] see note 80, below.

Studying the developmental processes of children in India, as children are socialised into the particular myths and social structures of that country, Kakar has produced evidence that the developmental sequence he has observed is different from that described by developmental psychologists in the west.[175]

Kakar argues that within a given cultural order, psychological themes become internalised in the psyche of the individual as a child and are then projected back upon culture's institutions in adulthood. This approach is not dissimilar from Piaget's understanding of socialisation, except that, apart from the processes of internalisation and externalisation, Kakar expects all other contents of consciousness to be subject to cultural variation. This is a perspective consonant with the well established tradition of the sociology of knowledge which expects that human beings are socially constructed.

As within the thought of Piaget and Fowler, within the sociology of knowledge the patterns of thought which emerge in different societies are not regarded as being entirely predetermined by genetic factors or simply as a reflection of cultural patterns, rather, the child is believed to construct its social world as it becomes an agent within it. The child's increasing ability to act in the adult world is due, not to maturational processes stimulated by biological triggers, nor to an accumulation of learnt behaviours, but to adaptation resulting from action within the social environment.

Fowler's understanding of this process begins within a tradition of philosophy which conceives of the person being formed in the context of society; as we have seen in Chapter One, drawing on the thought of George Herbert Mead, through the theology of H R Niebuhr, Fowler asserts that the reflexive self, as seen only in humans, can develop only in community.[176]

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[175]Kakar, S., 1981, *The Inner World.* O.U.P..
[176]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 16-20.

Mead contended that psychologically, the individual self is really social in essence; without common experience there could be no private experience.[177] For Mead, the self is only evident in doing: in selecting stimuli from the environment and responding to them. A sense of selfhood only emerges when one is conscious of oneself a object. This coincides with the development of language, when the initiator performs an act knowing the change it will effect in the self and in others according to a shared system of meaning. Mead argued that language does not express antecedent thought - it is communication itself. Thus 'The self, as that which can be an object to itself is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience... It is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience.'[178] There is, for Mead, no possibility of a person developing a notion of selfhood, or becoming a human self, isolated from a community.

Because Fowler goes on to use Piaget's work in the formation of his faith development theory, however, the implications of Mead's understanding of the social construction of the self do not become fully apparent. The implications of Mead's approach are much more explicit in the work of Berger & Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality.*[179]

Berger & Luckmann suggest that during primary socialisation, which normally takes places within the immediate family, a social world of relevances and meanings is presented to the child who gradually appropriates the categories and value system offered and comes to regard this knowledge as common sense. Once assimilated, these distinctions and values seem to be necessary parts of the objective world. This process, whereby the social world acquires external objective status is termed *objectification* and it happens during the early years of childhood.[180]

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[177] Mead, G. H., *Mind, Self & Society*. Chicago, 1934, 225ff..
[178] *Ibid.*,140.
[179] Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T., 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin, 1971.
[180] *Ibid.*, 78.

Alongside objectification, *internalisation* also takes place; this is the process whereby the structures of consciousness are shaped by the categories encountered in the social world, both enabling and constricting thought. Thus, socially available definitions of the world become the building blocks of thought and the pre-requisite for meaningful action in the world, such that the child emerges able to act in the knowledge of the reaction their action will provoke.[181]

An early example is smiling. Babies do not smile from birth, they observe others smiling at them and imitate them. As the baby's smiles evoke a good response from those around, smiling becomes associated with pleasure: the pleasure of the adult is communicated to the child; they begin to understand one another; they have access to one another's subjectivity. It is this process of internalisation which, Berger & Luckmann claim, forms a basis, 'first, for an understanding of one's fellowmen and, second, for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful and social reality.'[182]

Although individual members of society perceive everyday reality as objective and unquestionable in the main part, Berger and Luckmann contend that much of what passes for knowledge about objective reality is, in fact, the result of the internalisation by the individual of a culturally constructed social world. Implicit in this socially constructed world is what we understand as the human self: as the social world is internalised, this becomes a basis for understanding others and apprehending the world as a meaningful reality.

There is considerable agreement between the approaches of Piaget and Berger & Luckmann about the way in which children become adult members of society: both regard that children are profoundly shaped by their environment; both assert that human development can only happen within the context of a community; both allow a role to the individual as agent as they construct and externalise the world they perceive as objective.

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[181] *Ibid.*, 90.
[182] *Ibid.*, 150.

The difference between the constructivist approach of Piaget and Fowler and the approach taken by Berger & Luckmann, however, concerns the extent to which there are similarities between cultures, and the extent to which these similarities produce a similarly structured human consciousness as individuals internalise their social world. For Piaget and Fowler the perceived high degree of similarity between cultures results in the universal existence of the same categories of thought, which differ only in the degree to which they are developed in the direction of differentiation and universalisation. For Berger & Luckmann, cultural variations are profound enough to affect not only the contents of belief but the structures of consciousness themselves, giving rise to different categories of thought from those dominant in the western world.

Kakar's account of the culturally formed structures of Indian cultures stands within this intellectual tradition. He focuses particularly upon parenthood as the means of transmission of culture. The attitude of the mother is partly determined by the disposition of the individual, but is also influenced by the culture: 'a mother's responses to her infant depend not only upon her emotional stance towards motherhood deeply rooted in her own life history, or upon the inborn constitution of her child, but also upon her culture's image of the role of motherhood and of the nature of the child.'[183] Because the Indian child spends the first five years of life in the company of the mother with few demands placed upon it, and because the child is allowed to dictate the rate of development, the crises of individuation and separation and initiative encountered by the western child and charted by Erikson[184] are not encountered by Indian children until later in life.

Kakar believes this cultural pattern to be crucial in determining the outlook of a whole culture. Whereas the west values ego development and independence, in India, the reverse is true and interdependence is highly esteemed. Because the child does not become

[183]Kakar, S., 1981. *op. cit.*, 11.
[184]Erikson, E., 1950, *Childhood & Society*, Penguin, 1965.

independent of the mother gradually, the independent ego is structurally weaker and thus, so are reflective forms of thinking because these are dependent upon well-established, conscious processes. (Kakar's work could also give rise to interesting studies concerning the correlation between different patterns of child-care and the development of reflective forms of thinking amongst different social classes in western culture.)

Such a lack of ego differentiation has traditionally been regarded by western psychologies as regressive. The interdependence and reliance upon authority and social norms which is characteristic of traditional Indian culture is thought by western scholars like Erikson, Kohlberg and Jung to be appropriate, not to maturity, but to the early phases of development. Thus, for example, Kohlberg's account of moral development requires that a child move beyond morality as a social matter, through morality as a personal matter, to an adherence to a principled higher law. For Kohlberg, the self, rid of egocentric interests should be the mature authority, rather than any external body.[185]

Kakar makes his argument against the universal claims which Karl Jung makes for his development sequence.[186] This is not the place for an extended comparison of the similarities between the developmental sequences proposed by Fowler and Jung. However, it

[185]Kohlberg, L. 1981. *Essays on Moral Development Vol. I:The Philosophy of Moral Development.* San Francisco.

[186]Jung divides life into two phases: that of differentiation and that of integration. The infant begins with a mind which is undifferentiated, that is without consciousness. Gradually, as the mind of the infant interacts with the world, part of the mind becomes modified by the social environment, and this part of the mind is what Jung calls the 'ego'. Ego consciousness develops as children become aware of their own body and boundaries. Jung believes the developmental task of early life to be to establish a stable identity, or sense of self.

Until mid-life the individual is generally unaware of the complexity of their psyche. What happens in the conscious mind is believed to be most important. Unconscious thought processes are unperceived, or at least, their importance is not understood. Relations with the unconscious are those of repression. Dreams, unbidden thoughts and other evidence of unconscious activity are regarded as less important that the affairs of the 'real' world.

Once the individual reaches middle age, however, the extension of the person into the external world and the imposition of the will upon others and upon the self become less important than understanding the way things are for the sake of adapting oneself to them. No longer focused upon the strengthening of the will, attention begins to focus upon the impulses which are required to be held in check. This is what Jung calls the integration of the personality, whereby the conscious ego begins to take into itself some of the previously unconscious processes of the mind.

This is the pattern of development which Jung regards as normative for human development. It does not happen automatically with ageing, but requires the focusing of the attention upon the processes which have been previously unobserved, and the integration of these processes into the conscious identity. The concentration of the human being upon the processes of differentiation for the first half of life is regarded as normal and normative by Jung. The individual is to allow their conscious mind to dictate the agenda and establish itself as independent from others. See Jung, C., 1940, *The Integration of the Personality*, Kegan Paul.

is notable that Jung's sequence requires a concentration upon the establishment of identity and a social role and the extension of the power of conscious reason during the first half of the life which is also apparent in the work of Fowler, particularly in his account of Stage IV faith: this, Fowler suggests, is the period when the young person should be extending themself into a wider and wider social environment;[187] it is the period when the young person should be extending their ability to reason to its limit, and applying that ability to ever more abstract and comprehensive subjects;[188] it is not until mid life, or Stage V that Fowler suggests that any attention might be paid to the unconscious processes of the mind or the processes of what Jung calls integration.[189]

Kakar suggests that the formation of consciousness takes a different from in different cultures dependent upon the social structure and norms which are current in those societies. He suggests that the pattern of extreme ego differentiation which is found in contemporary western society is not found in all cultures. Even if Jung's characterisation of maturity were to be accepted as universally valid, Indian children cannot be said to pass through the same developmental phases as western children because of the pattern of their nurture.

Fowler himself, relies heavily on Erikson and Kohlberg, and aspects of his theory bear a strong resemblance to the work of Jung, as has been examined by Michael Jacobs.[190] For that reason there are consequences for Fowler's theory resulting from the specific content of Kakar's argument against the need for extreme ego differentiation in human development. Fowler himself posits as normative a theory which latter stages, require the development of formal operational thought and rely on a high degree of ego differentiation. It does seem, from Kakar's account that, in Indian culture such ego differentiation is not regarded as a task of development. Not only that, but the different childhood experiences which Indian children have means that their developmental tasks are different. It is not the case that Indian

[187]Fowler, J. W., *op. cit.*, 106 ff..
[188]*Ibid.* 99.
[189]*Ibid.* 198.
[190]Jacobs, M., 1988, *Towards the Fullness of Christ*, D.L.T., 40.

children simply do not develop to the same level as western children, but that they follow different developmental sequences because the worlds which children internalise, especially through patterns of parenting, vary in profound ways and have a significant impact upon the child's psyche.

Conclusions

What is being suggested, then, is that if Fowler's faith development theory is descriptive of any sequence of development, it is a particular sequence, reflecting structures of consciousness formed in a particular society. Cultural environments determine not only the content of beliefs and the level and rate of development but the developmental tasks with which children are faced. Thus, the ways in which meaning is structured across different societies does vary, but it varies in more profound ways than can be encapsulated by a single linear model of development.

Despite Fowler's reliance on structural-developmental theories with universal pretensions, Fowler does acknowledge that his theory might have to be reformulated within other cultures.[191] In practice, however, very few of those who have adopted Fowler's theory as a foundation for pastoral theology or confessional education have considered that his theory might be descriptive only of a relatively narrow group of people: white, western, Christians. And that even within this group of people, the stages which have been elucidated may distort the experience of some people, particularly women and those whose image of faith does not conform to the radical monotheistic faith which H R Niebuhr describes.

Such a conclusion has important implication for the understanding the appeal of faith development theory both within the field of developmental psychology and beyond it. Clearly, within developmental psychology, those who find the structural-developmental approach to be problematic will have problems with any attempt to construct a theory which

[191] Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 298.

is considered culturally neutral on the basis of its structural status. Fowler clearly considers his theory to stand within the structural-developmental tradition, and the pattern of response to his theory within psychology in particular and within the social sciences in general, is likely to be partly determined by this identification.

Thus those already convinced by structural-developmental premises in particular, and by the pervasive developmental myth in general are likely to find Fowler's work of interest, not only within academic psychology, but also within educational circles in the English speaking world where Piaget's work has been extremely influential since the 1960's.

However, even within the structural-developmental school, Fowler's work has been the subject of criticism because of the modifications which he has made to Piaget's work, proposing the notion of soft structural stages, and introducing other aspects of development than the mathematical and logical concepts to which Piaget restricted himself.

The discussion of the provenance of Fowler's theory within psychology which has been undertaken in this chapter has implications for the appeal of the stages of faith beyond this discipline and beyond those engaged in academic study of human development. If the arguments put forward here are accepted that Fowler is describing, not a generalisable and normative account of a linear developmental sequence, but the outcome of a concentration upon particular values within a particular society, it is likely that his theory will have most appeal in those cultures and amongst those social groups whose experience has led them towards the end of development which Fowler describes.

We have already seen, in Chapter One, that Fowler's concept of faith is likely to appeal to those who are accustomed to living in a plural environment and to those already influenced in some degree by western psychology. We have observed that Fowler's openness to insights from the social sciences dictates that faith development theory is most likely to appeal to those who are not only on the more liberal wing of the Church, but more specifically to those

who are constructing a post-liberal perspective, consonant with the image of developed faith which Fowler presents. We conclude that if the descriptive range of Fowler's theory must be considered limited to those white western Christians whom he has overwhelmingly studied, on the basis of the evidence presented in this chapter, it should be expected that the appeal of his stages of faith will be similarly restricted. It is also concluded that Fowler's theory is best conceived, not as an objective and culturally neutral description of human development, but as a theory which illuminates the faith experience of a particular social and cultural group. It is to an investigation of this group and their faith experience that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Three Faith Development Theory in Sociological Perspective

Introduction

In the first two chapters of this thesis, we looked at the provenance of faith development theory within the disciplines of theology and psychology. In the present chapter, we move to adopt a sociological perspective upon Fowler's stages of faith. Whereas in the previous two chapters we focused upon elucidating the likely appeal of faith development theory by looking at its intellectual tradition, here the focus of attention is upon the social base of the ideas about God, faith and development which are presented in Fowler's *Stages of Faith.*

In the first chapter, it was suggested that the appeal of faith development theory is likely to be restricted to those of Christian faith who hold a liberal or post-liberal theological perspective - those accustomed to using insights from the social sciences to inform their theology, and those whose faith is not narrowly cognitive, but embraces a more holistic approach; in the second chapter it was argued that faith development theory is likely to appeal to those with prior knowledge of structural-developmental premises, although it was noted that the questions raised against the structural status of Fowler's stages are likely to restrict his theory's appeal, even there.

What concerns us in this chapter is the social base of developmental theories in general and of faith development theory in particular, with its trajectory of development extending in the direction of what we have termed, post-liberal theology. We are focusing attention, then, upon the social groups who find that developmental theory and post-liberal theology reflect and articulate their experience.

We have already seen in our discussion of the provenance of Fowler's faith development that what Fowler describes as an invariant stage sequence of human development may not be best considered a structural theory which is normative and descriptive of development across the world, but rather is descriptive of a much narrower social group. In the context of this

discussion, it was also suggested that faith development theory's appeal is likely to be strongest amongst those who recognise their own experience there described.

Such a suggestion supposes that faith development theory is espoused, not necessarily because people are satisfied that Fowler has demonstrated the structural claims he has made for his theory, but because they have recognised their own experience of faith development described by his stages of faith.

The assumption that a particular idea or theory is current in society, not because of its intrinsic correctness, but because it articulates the experience of a particular social group is characteristic of the sociology of knowledge, and it is to this discipline that we first turn for insight.

The sociology of knowledge proceeds from the conviction that knowledge is always constructed from a particular social perspective, articulating a particular social interest. So, when Fowler claims in his *Introduction* to *Stages of Faith* that, 'Theories can be exciting and powerful, giving us names for our experiences and ways to understand and express what we have lived.'[192], the question which arises from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge concerns the identity of those whose experiences faith development theory does articulate.

The assumption behind this question is that any theory or belief which passes for knowledge in human society, regardless of its empirical status, performs the social function of articulating and legitimating the social experience of a particular social group. In stating that theories can be exciting and powerful Fowler draws attention to the fact that theories like faith development theory need to be studied not only in print, but in the way that they interact with those who recognise their experience being described by them. The question which arises here concerns the function which faith development theory might perform amongst

[192]Fowler, J.W., 1981. *Stages of Faith*. Harper & Row, xiii.

those whose faith experience it does describe. Why does faith development theory evoke interest and enthusiasm, and to what effect and why do some people believe it to be a reliable source of knowledge about the social world and human development when others find it irrelevant or misleading? In order to investigate the appeal of faith development theory amongst those who espouse it, then, we turn first to the sociology of knowledge.

The sociology of knowledge

The view that beliefs or theories reflect a particular social base and perform a particular social function arose from the deadlock in the debate about the origin of the categories of thought. For over a century, controversy had raged over whether the categories which characterise much of human thought: space, time, and logic, are prior to experience and dictated by the structures of the brain, as argued by Kant (1724-1804),[193] or whether these categories are derived from experience by individuals as they come into contact with the same physical data and draw the same self-evident conclusions.

Emile Durkheim, one of sociology's founding figures,, was unsatisfied by either explanation and sought in his introduction to *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*[194] to outline his sociological understanding of human knowledge. Durkheim began by outlining what he perceived to be the outlines of the debate on the nature of human knowledge. He identified two main and opposing positions: that of the apriorists who considered that all human knowledge can be divided into form and content. For the apriorists the categories of human thought which constitute its form are so fundamental that they cannot be derived from experience but are logically prior to and condition it; the opposing view is that the categories of time and space and logic are inherent in the nature of the data considered, and so perspicuous that they are deduced by each individual as they learn about the world.[195]

[193]Kant, I., 1781, *Critique of Pure Reason* 2nd edition. Dent & Sons, 1934, translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn..
[194]Durkheim, E., 1915, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd..
[195]*Ibid.*, 13.

Durkheim proposed an alternative position which suggested that the origin of the categories of thought is social; that they are collective representations. The categories of thought in use in any society are necessary, not because they are part of the psychical structure of the human brain, but because common categories are necessary to communication about anything between human beings within a society. The categories of human thought are not simple notions which the casual observer could construct, nor derived from the structures of the brain, but are 'priceless instruments of thought which the human groups have laboriously forged through the centuries'.[196] The apparent resemblance between the categories of thought between different societies is due to the concentration and restriction of the notion of reason to empirical data. Thus, where human thought is at its most constrained by physical phenomena, there is a similarity between categories of thought. However, in other areas, beyond the empirical, there is greater scope for variation.

Durkheim suggested that it is in order to preserve communication that society perpetuates the categories which have emerged, thus ensuring that people in the same society inhabit the same world of meaning.[197] Observing that categories of thought differ between societies, Durkheim maintained that their persistence in culture is due to their social function in permitting a shared language of discourse. He argued, therefore, that an understanding of the categories which are basic to human patterns of thought will not be found by examining the thought of the people of one place and time, but that attention must be focused upon the conceptions of reality found in history.

> To know what these conceptions which we have not made ourselves are really made of, it does not suffice to interrogate our own consciousness; we must look outside of ourselves, it is history we must observe, there is a whole science which must be formed.[198]

196*Ibid.*, 19.
197The extent to which this is the case will be discussed later in the chapter with reference to Mary Douglas' work.
198Durkheim, E., *op. cit.*, 20.

In a different discipline, the social psychologist, G H Mead also grappled with the problem of the origins of the categories of human thought.[199] Finding that both rationalism and empiricism begin by positing experience as individual and subjective and result in the problem of how the subjective mind can grasp the objective world, Mead's answer was to suggest that the primary fact is not individual experience but common reality. Without this, Mead stated, there could be no reflexive private reality.

According to Mead, the world provides physical data, but it is the human self in relation to the world which supplies value and meaning. The meanings which are supplied arise from social experience, constrained by language and all the media of social discourse. Humans only become reflexive selves in human community when the individual has learnt to act and to anticipate the reaction of another to that act according to a shared system of meaning.

Here then, are two early formulations of the view that reality is socially constructed, and particularly that what is taken for objective knowledge is a human social product. For the purposes of our current discussion they both make two important assertions: first, that human beings are formed by the social environment into which they are born and socialised. This social environment affects not only the content of their beliefs but is internalised to form the very structures of their consciousness; second, that human knowledge of the world is not knowledge of an objective reality, but knowledge of a socially constructed reality, objectified and externalised by previous generations. The implications of these assertions for our present discussion, is that any claim to knowledge, including a theory of identity, is susceptible of investigation in terms of its social base.

The investigation of the social base of beliefs and ideas first received particular attention in the work of Karl Mannheim whose *Ideologie Und Utopie* is often considered the founding text for the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim attempted to relate all modes of thought to

199 Mead, G. H., *Mind, Self & Society*. Chicago, 1934.

the economic and cultural forces surrounding their occurrence. He argued that all knowledge is constructed from a particular perspective and that the only way to minimise the subjective and ideological nature of particular claims to knowledge is systematically to analyse the social context of all such claims, paying particular attention to the power structures which they underpin.

For Mannheim, the sociology of knowledge was partly a negative discipline in order to restrict the parameters of what could legitimately be classed as knowledge, as, in common with Marx he regarded empirical science as being exempt from social bias. This is clearly not a view taken by more recent scholars who argue that mythological, theological and scientific claims to knowledge all reflect a social base and articulate a social interest.[200] In this respect, Mannheim's work does not illuminate the social function of faith development theory. However, his attempt to relate all modes of thought to the economic and cultural forces surrounding their occurrence initiated a whole strand of sociology, concerned to examine the social base of that which passes for knowledge in society. It is this emphasis of Mannheim's which is of particular interest here - that any claim which passes for knowledge in society (including knowledge about how human beings should behave) arises from a particular social group, and therefore articulates a particular interest within society.

Mannheim suggested that any claim to knowledge has a subjective meaning to the actor; an objective meaning to the society in which it is current, and also a documentary meaning to those who have studied the function of the belief within its social network. This methodology is one which has been taken up within the sociology of knowledge by those who study that which passes for knowledge in society. Allowing a third level of meaning to any socially held belief, beyond its meaning to the actor, or its objective meaning to the community, is what makes it possible to suggest that Fowler's faith development theory performs a social function. This third level of meaning is not necessarily accessible to the

[200]see, for example, Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T.R., 1966, *The social construction of reality*, Penguin, 1971, 194-195.

actors themselves, nor to the community amongst which the belief is held, but may be deduced by a detailed consideration of the social group in which the belief is current, the society of which that group is a part, and other beliefs which are current within this social world.

Mannheim himself tended to rely upon the products of the intellectual élite to provide the systems of thought for his own investigation, suggesting that intellectuals have no interests of their own, but merely articulate the interests of other social groups. The precise relationship between any intellectual statement of a belief system, and those who operate with those beliefs in daily life is difficult to ascertain. Since the publication of Max Weber's work on *The Sociology of Religion* in 1922, however, it has been difficult to maintain that intellectuals themselves have no social interests. The extent to which Fowler's work represents the interests of intellectuals will be discussed later; however, for the moment, it is important to note that for the modern discipline of the sociology of knowledge, any claim to knowledge, whether systematically presented, or an assumption made in the course of daily life is susceptible of sociological analysis along the lines which Mannheim pioneered. In recent years, in fact, the emphasis of the sociology of knowledge has tended to be upon everyday knowledge and its relationship to human behaviour, and hence upon that area of knowledge which relates most closely to the human actor - a concept of the self. This emphasis can largely be traced to the work of Alfred Schütz.

Alfred Schütz (1899-1959) was a social phenomenologist who sought to extend the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Schütz was interested in the sociology of knowledge primarily because he wanted to develop a theory of social action: how people act in their everyday world. His work, therefore, focused upon the world of everyday knowledge in which doubt is suspended and reality is accepted and unquestioned.[201] Rather than working with the systematic thought of intellectuals in print, Schütz was concerned with all that

[201] see, for example, 1943. "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World" *Economica* X (1943), 130ff.

passes for human knowledge in society, with all its inconsistencies and even contradictions. As a consequence, the dialectical relation between human agency and social determination is more evident in his work than in previous work, and he has less investment in presenting knowledge as more systematic than it is. In the world which he describes, there appear to each actor, to be objects and people with discrete properties understood within a tacit framework of time and space and conventions concerning interaction. The ability of an individual to operate in such a world, Schütz maintained, requires knowledge of a particular kind. Not knowledge about an objective reality, but knowledge of how to act and react in particular social situations. Knowledge of one's identity, we shall argue, is knowledge of this sort - knowledge which structures and enables action in the everyday world. It is knowledge of this kind, we shall maintain, that Fowler's faith development theory provides.

Knowledge, for Schütz, is at least partly determined by the necessity for social interaction which is a condition of our growing up in a social world. It is also partly determined by the situations in which individuals find themselves - both socially and historically. Schütz divided this kind of knowledge into categories: habitual knowledge which requires no conscious attention; useful knowledge which pertains to particular circumstances; and recipe knowledge which is patterned, but requires application, and is the most common form of knowledge in everyday life.[202]

This stock of knowledge is structured, according to Schütz, in zones of relevance, depending on the interests of the individual. There is immediate knowledge of persons and places which is unique, precise and exhaustive and which is related to personal friends, work and leisure pursuits; most other knowledge is general and abstract, and is therefore structured in typifications. These typifications or patterns, make meaning and communication possible in a whole variety of everyday situations. It is our particular position in life, historically, socially and biographically determined, which structures these zones of relevance and which

[202]Schütz, A. L., 1943, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", *Collected Papers Vol II.*,The Hague, 1962, 72-3.

informs the typifications which are useful and meaningful to us.[203] Much of what passes for knowledge in society, therefore, is a series of typifications of situations and behaviours and people.

It is the typification of people which is of particular interest in this study of faith development theory, for in common with all developmental psychologies and accounts of the life cycle, it provides typifications of different stages of human life, or different ways of being human. These provide a means of understanding one's own place within the world, not merely in isolation, but in relation to others. Thus, for example, a child understands herself as a child in relation to babies and teenagers and adults. This self understanding is governed by social conventions regarding behaviour appropriate to children, but also, is set within the context of behaviour appropriate to adults, babies and teenagers. This framework of social conventions provides the basis for relating to other children, and to people of other ages, both for acting appropriately towards them, and for interpreting the behaviour of others. These social conventions about childhood, appear to the child, not as conventions which may change according to cultural or historical factors, but as inevitable facts about children and rules of life to be learned. They are acquired by the child as a tacit kind of knowledge - a knowledge of the typical behaviour expected of children in relation to others within society.

This knowledge is what Schütz calls recipe knowledge - a knowledge which is stored in the form of typifications, but which is useful for interpreting reality in a whole variety of social situations. It is such recipe knowledge which developmental psychologies provide and which, we shall contend, Fowler's faith development theory offers. We have already observed that the kinds of typifications which are relevant to people depend upon their culture and upon their own position within society. Whilst Fowler's faith development theory may offer a series of typifications whereby human beings can understand themselves and

[203]Schütz, A. L., 1946, "The Well Informed Citizen, An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge." in *Collected Papers* Vol II. The Hague, 1962, 120ff.

interpret the actions of others. There is no reason to suppose that these typifications should be useful or meaningful beyond a particular social group.

A similar view of that which passes for knowledge in society is held by Berger & Luckmann.[204] Like Schütz they begin with a phenomenological description of the way that life appears to the subject. Although it appears to the individual to be ordered and objective, Berger & Luckmann make it clear that various societies have very different conceptions of reality. The 'facts' of social existence are not objective and necessary, but are contingent and socially useful. What Berger & Luckmann seek to explain is the process whereby social reality comes to appear inevitable and immutable, and why particular groups of people adopt and defend particular beliefs. To do this they use the concepts of objectification and internalisation.

As we have already noted,[205] although most of the time, to most people, most elements of their social world appear self-evident and objective. Each object and category of person appears to have discrete characteristics to be learned and mastered, like colour and number, name and value. However, although these characteristics and values seem to belong to the objects themselves, they are ascribed by society. This process is termed *objectification* and it happens during primary socialisation.[206] The parallel process of *internalisation*, which Berger & Luckmann describe involves the shaping of the child's structures of consciousness by the categories encountered in the social world, such that socially available definitions of the world become the building blocks of thought and the pre-requisite for meaningful action in the world.[207] In turn, their actions upon the world, assuming particular definitions and categorisations, externalise the structures of thought which have been internalised, and reincarnate the social world for the next generation.

[204] Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T., 1966, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin, 1971, 26.
[205] see page 96.
[206] *Ibid.*, 78.
[207] *Ibid.*, 90.

Knowledge, thus appears as knowledge of an objective and external reality which only has to be mastered. Yet, although individual members of society perceive everyday reality as objective and unquestionable in the main part, Berger and Luckmann contend that much of what passes for knowledge about objective reality is, in fact, the result of the internalisation by the individual of a culturally constructed social world which is itself the product of the objectification and *externalisation* of the social experience of previous generations.

Not only is knowledge always knowledge from a particular perspective, however, but it performs the function of legitimating the perspective or social position from which it has arisen, just by objectifying people's subjective experience. Such legitimisation is necessary, according to Berger and Luckmann because humans are plastic and adaptable, able to structure their social life in many different ways, and yet needing a degree of social and psychological stability in order to remain healthy and functional.

Whereas the environment of most animals is limited by their biology, Berger & Luckmann observe that humans can live practically anywhere on the earth and as part of many different social structures. Imposing a pattern on the environment through repeated actions upon it has the result of limiting the possibilities for human existence and producing a relatively closed environment in which it is possible to live with an economy of effort. Social structure is defined as the sum of the patterns of action which have become routine in any particular society. It functions to limit the myriad variations in human existence which are theoretically possible, in order to enable the negotiation of much of life without explicit thought, and the consequent effort and tension and to enable the channelling of energy within specific limits. The patterns which are experienced in everyday life seem inevitable and necessary, and most of them are apprehended routinely, yet they are contingent and subject to change, mere conventions.

For the benefit of social cohesion and human health, however, Berger & Luckmann argue that social conventions, though arbitrary, are protected from change by the theories people

adopt to explain or legitimate them. Such theories about reality and society are possible through language.

Language is a particularly effective way of minimising the way in which life can be conceived. Language also makes possible the construction of alternative realities to that of everyday life. It may be used to refer to one's inner thoughts which are not in the public domain, or to another world of unworldly creatures or abstract concepts. Language thus makes imagination possible: the construction of symbolic universes in which everyday language is used to refer to alternative spheres.

Symbolic universes, it is argued, are particularly effective in legitimating social institutions.[208] They are effective because they are a way of integrating many such social conventions and putting them beyond human control. A symbolic universe safeguards a society from believing that its social structures are arbitrary, and thus preserves the structures which maintain this human reality. Thus, 'On the level of meaning, the institutional order represents a shield against terror.... The symbolic universe shelters the individual from ultimate terror by bestowing ultimate legitimisation upon the protective structures of the institutional order.'[209] A symbolic universe may be mythological, theological or scientific, but its function remains to legitimate the social order and protect the sense which most of society have, that reality is not a perception, but is an accurate and inevitable reflection of the objective world.

In this analysis, Berger & Luckmann assume a great natural conservatism and they attribute this to the need for human society to be structured in order to prevent a dissolution into chaos. Whilst it is not clear that all human beings share the same intolerance for social disturbance, nor clear that a sense of meaning is dependent upon social cohesion, Berger & Luckmann argue that maintaining an existing world of meanings and significances,

[208] *Ibid.*, 123.
[209] *Ibid.*,119-120.

institutions and roles requires less energy than adapting to social change. Particularly, in the case of a society presented with a radically different alternative social structure and symbolic universe, embodied, for example, in a rival tribe, accommodation of the rival way of being would require a great deal of psychological effort, not to mention practical changes. Thus, according to Berger and Luckmann, it is not because change is impossible, or, necessarily because traditional ways of thinking and interacting are intrinsically better than other ways, but because doing things differently requires a great deal of unlearning and such deconstruction and reconstruction requires enormous amounts of energy and a strong impetus.

Learning *about* a new culture is not difficult, but learning to act within that culture requires understanding not only of the grammar and vocabulary of the language, but of the historical and lateral references, the subtleties of context and occasion, the private codes of belonging to each cultural sub-group, and idiomatic ways of expression, derived from the distillation of centuries of myth, ritual and literature. As Alfred Schütz observes, even a simple operation such as rail travel demands great concentration for the stranger, for, not perceiving what is typical and untypical, the newcomer cannot slip into anonymous roles in order to achieve standards means, but must observe and classify behaviours constantly in order to try to find their bearings.[210] Resocialisation into new groups and patterns of interaction, therefore tends to be avoided if other courses are open, for it demands enormous amounts of energy, even for the most simple of operations. It takes a long time for assimilation to take place, even if the individual encounters a new culture of their own volition.

There are clearly political dimensions to this debate which need examination, though they are beyond the scope of this study. The psychological effort of social upheaval may not outweigh the economic oppression experienced by some members of society, for example. However, it is not necessary to adopt uncritically Berger & Luckmann's conservative stance

[210]Schütz, A. L., 1944, "The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology."in *Collected Papers Vol II.*, The Hague, 1962, 102.

to appreciate the point that social conventions, or typifications of behaviour and people are not inevitable reflections of an objective reality, but are objectifications of subjective experience which function to limit the myriad possibilities for human social existence, and thus to facilitate communication and social interaction. Reality, then, is a myth, designed to protect the social world we know and in which we have a role and a meaning. 'Reality' is a series of typifications of the social world which is designed to maintain the social framework which legitimates our role and self understanding.

Part of what passes for 'reality' in any society, as we have noted, are typifications of human self-understanding; a range of legitimate identities which are available to people, whereby they may understand themselves and others within their social world. Depending upon the society and culture concerned, such typifications of identity may be protected by religious, mythological or scientific symbolic universes all of which are designed to make particular forms of human existence appear necessary and meaningful.

The sociology of developmental theory

Of particular relevance to our discussion of faith development theory are Berger & Luckmann's suggestions about the social function of modern developmental psychologies. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger & Luckmann suggest that the function of modern developmental psychologies is to objectify and symbolise the different phases of life, such that they legitimise people's changing experience of themselves: 'the individual passing from one biographical phase to another can view himself as repeating a sequence that is given in the 'nature of things', or in his own 'nature'... he can reassure himself that he is living 'correctly'.[211] Berger & Luckmann argue that it is such assurance of one's place in the world which releases energy to be able to negotiate effectively the tasks of social life.

[211]Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T., 1966, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Penguin, 1971, 117.

From such a perspective, Fowler's faith development theory, alongside other developmental theories can be understood, not only as an attempt to chart the course of universal human development, but as an attempt to objectify and symbolise the different phases through which the faith of many has passed in recent decades in contemporary western society. Although contemporary theories of development may appeal to an empirical framework for their legitimisation, Berger & Luckmann argue that they differ little in their social function from myths of identity found in other cultures.

Berger & Luckmann suggest, then, that developmental psychologies form part of the framework of everyday knowledge which routinely legitimates a whole variety of social institutions and experiences. Although many theories or symbols may help to legitimate the social world, psychological theories of development along with other theories of the life cycle, are particularly adept at structuring and legitimating personal identities, or concepts of the self, making explicit the patterns of social life which are considered normal and legitimate amongst a particular group.

Such a theory interacts in complex ways with personal identities: it provides a framework within which an identity may be negotiated; it offers a range of options for social identity, such that people can interpret their own experience and locate themselves in relation to others in their social world; it suggests a pattern for development and legitimates a particular developmental trajectory. Berger & Luckmann suggest that theories of identity are useful in these ways, because knowledge of one's own place in relation to others facilitates communication and social interaction amongst those who share the same assumptions about the patterns of normal social life and the range of possible social identities. Developmental psychologies, then, are understood as myths which reify and objectify people's experience, tacitly shaping it, although appearing merely to provide objective knowledge about the social world.

Understood from this perspective, Fowler's faith development theory would not be of interest, primarily, for its potential in shedding light upon universal human development, but for the insight which it may afford into the self understanding of a particular social group within a particular social context as they seek to articulate and objectify their experience. Faith development would be understood as a theory of identity, arising and gaining currency within a particular culture, and legitimating the experience of a particular social group.

Such a view of the function of Fowler's faith development theory, however, requires illustration. A detailed study is needed of those amongst whom the theory has achieved currency, and the role which the theory plays in their faith and life before it can be asserted that Fowler's faith development theory does function in practice as a theory of identity. This task will be undertaken in Chapters Four and Five. Before this, however, we turn to social psychology in order to expand upon the nature and function of social identities and the theories which arise about them.

The study of identity

Until forty years ago the term *identity* was hard to find in academic literature. In recent years, however, it has emerged as a variously defined term of reference within philosophy, theology, psychology, sociology and the sociology of knowledge. It has become, in the last thirty years, *the* term whereby a sociological perspective on the problem of human self-definition can be constructed. Self-definition has previously been variously termed as *personality* by psychologists, as *character* within anthropology and as *self* within sociology. It was however, within social psychology that the term identity first emerged, particularly in the work of Erik Erikson.

In the context of his own, and others' immigration into the United States in the period following the second world war, Erikson began to study the processes involved in children's identification with their parents and their struggle to create a meaningful and stable ego. For Erikson, identity became the organising concept of his work, defining personal identity as the

normal way that people are seen by themselves and others; and ego identity as 'the awareness that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesising methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others,'.[212]

Aware of the impact of emigration upon his own self concept, Erikson became interested in ethnology and the influence of socio-historical conditions upon identity and this led him to argue, for example, that contemporary society is like the ambivalent, uncertain environment of adolescence because its plurality of options throws people into a state of permanent identity crisis, unable to make lasting identifications.[213]

The writings of Erikson have been extremely influential, appealing to thinkers in a variety of disciplines. In particular, Erikson's concept of identity has appealed to those already operating with a notion that reality is a human product and that humans are societal products, or in the language of Berger & Luckmann, that reality is a social construction. Thus there have arisen a variety of empirical studies of human self-understanding, particularly in relation to ethnicity, religion, and more recently, cross-culturally.[214]

Peter Berger first took up the theme of identity in *Invitation to Sociology*[215] where he attempted to marry role theory with the human concern to construct biographical meaning. This theme was later developed into a theory of the social construction of identity together with Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Here, Berger & Luckmann

[212]Erikson, E., 1956, "The Problem of Ego Identity." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4 (1956), 56-121.

[213] See, Erikson, E., 1958, "Identity and Uprootedness in our Time", Address at the Annual Meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health, Vienna, and 1968, *Identity: Youth & Crisis*, W.W. Norton.

[214]see, for example, Epstein, A. L., 1978, *Ethos & Identity*, London, who writes about the persistence of ethnic identity in the face of pressure to assimilate and despite the social anthropological orthodoxy that modern societies are characterised by identity based upon association rather than upon family and local groups; Kakar, S. 1981. *The Inner World*. O.U.P. who looks at identity formation within Indian society; McCall, G. J. & Simmons, J. L. 1966, *Identities and Interactions*, New York; Mol, H. 1976, *Identity and the Sacred*, Sage Publications, who has investigated the importance of the concept of identity to human beings. He asserts that chaos is dangerous for all species. All animals need to be able to predict their environment in order to survive. Humans, likewise need a stable framework within which to work, providing stable niches for personal and social identity.

[215]Berger, P. L., 1963, *Invitation to Sociology*, Doubleday.

argue that identity is a key element of subjective reality and that the identities which are available to people depend on their social and familial context.

If knowledge about the world is socially constructed, it follows that knowledge about the self is similarly constructed and that the categories in which we think and experience ourselves arise from particular cultures and are part of the matrix of particular belief systems. Drawing on the work of G H Mead, Berger & Luckmann have claimed that human selves come to being only within human societies. As noted above, Mead contended that psychologically, the individual self is really social in essence; without common experience there could be no private experience.[216]

Berger & Luckmann suggest that during primary socialisation, which normally takes places within the immediate family, a social world of relevances and meanings is presented to the child who gradually appropriates the categories and value system offered and comes to regard this knowledge as common sense. During this process, the child learns to categorise other human beings and to relate to them appropriately. Alongside such knowledge, comes a knowledge of the child's own place and role which is mediated through the parents' addressing of the child. Socialisation is successful when individuals can relate to themselves as others have related to them[217] (although this process is never entirely complete). Thus social identification permits self identification as the child becomes reflexive, internalising the structures of the social world in order to be able to act effectively and think creatively.

Successful socialisation, therefore, shapes a self which is able to apprehend itself in a taken for granted way as, for example, a girl, a firstborn, a Muslim, a servant. Each of these identifications involves and presupposes a particular social structure in which gender differences are prominent and clear, firstborn children are treated differently from other children, there are other religions than Islam, and that there are different social classes.

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[216]Mead, G. H., *Mind, Self & Society*. Chicago, 1934, 225ff.
[217]see, Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. *op. cit.*, 149ff.

Thus, Berger & Luckmann claim, 'One identifies oneself, as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world.'[218] Such self identification means that the individual is confident of how to behave in relation to others in a variety of social situations by adopting the role appropriate to their self-typification and by presuming that others will act according to their roles within the same set of typifications. Thus, by perceiving herself as a girl and a servant, this individual is able to predict and understand both her own behaviour and that of boys and employers in relation to her, according to shared social conventions. Such understanding may be at an explicit, theoretical level, or at a pre-theoretical level, in which event it will not be open to introspection.

The human self, therefore, is a social reality: the self is a humanly constructed object which is meaningful by virtue of the fact that others share the same social categories and perceptions of the possibilities for human identity. Any answer to the question of human identity is particular, presupposes a particular pattern of social interaction and invokes a particular world view and cosmology and defines the person as a social actor in a particular social situation. In every society, these conventions are considered to be objective and real, and it is as part of this necessary and inevitable social matrix that human beings are sure of their identity and role and thus are empowered to act: only an act which is typical is meaningful, thus it is held to be important that one's concept of oneself is consonant with the social roles one plays in order to be understood.

Thus, human selves are organisms which have the capacity for being both subject and object; both being able to act and know that it is the self who acts. Such a reflexive process is dependent upon the acquisition of symbolic competence and this is acquired through the responses of others. Individuals become human selves by internalising the institutionalised structures of meaning, such as language, interpretative schemes for dealing with emotion, and notions of what constitutes social class perspective. Simultaneously with becoming a

[218]Berger, P. L. , 1966, "Identity as a Problem in the Sociology of Knowledge." *Archives Europeennés de Sociologie* 78, (1966), 111.

self, individuals acquire an identity - a notion of where they stand in the social world, and a notion of themselves as continuous beings operating within a variety of different social roles.

Identity is a typification or socially expressed dimension of the self, or what Erving Goffman calls the performed self.[219] It is a concept of the self which draws together various social roles and which is available to the self through subjectification or is defined and realised by others through objectification. These objectifications may be on a number of different levels; in *Society & Identity*, A J Weigert, J Smith Teitge and D W Teitge suggest that there are five levels on which the self may be objectified, or understood:[220] the societal level, whereby any member of society can be categorised using typifications such as gender, age, ethnic origin; the organisational level, which denotes social role in a particular institution, such as occupation; the group level, whereby one is identified in relation to significant others as sister, badminton partner; the individual level, at which one is recognised as having a unique configuration of characteristics: extrovert, thoughtful, unkind; and the pre-theoretical level of the ego, where one appropriates or resists the objectifications of others.

As well as being located in social roles and structures, Berger & Luckmann point out that identities are located in symbolic universes of meaning. Devised to legitimate a particular social order, these symbolic universes, or cosmologies, also serve to legitimate concepts of the human self. Thus, symbolic universes contain theories about identity and identity types: they expound a psychology as well as a cosmology.[221]

The locating of identity in a symbolic universe has been extensively developed by Hans Mol, who has defined religion as the sacralisation of identity.[222] Mol, like Berger & Luckmann, begins with the assertion that chaos is dangerous for all species. All animals need to be able to predict their environment in order to survive. Humans, likewise, need order, particularly

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219 Goffman, E., 1963, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, London.
220 Weigert, A. J., Smith Teitge, J. & Teitge, D. W., 1986, *Society & Identity*, C.U.P..
221 Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T., *op. cit.*, 95.
222 see Mol, H., 1976, *Identity and the Sacred*. Sage Publications; 1978, *Religion and Identity*. Sage Publications.

when the possibilities for human existence are so broad. Religious practices and beliefs operate as sacred underpinnings of particular conceptions of order within a society. A stable social structure provides a stable network of roles and attitudes, and thus stable niches for personal and social identity.

Regarding identity as a stable concept of the self, which is 'founded... on those values which are at the top of the hierarchy - the beliefs, faiths and ideals which integrate and determine subordinate values.',[223] Mol suggests that religion is able to contribute to social and personal integration through four mechanisms: first, by the projection of the social order (including notions about identity) beyond the temporal into some sacred and immutable realm; second, through demanding commitment to a particular notion of one's identity; third through ritual; and fourth, through myth in which various strains of social reality are held together in a coherent, short-hand symbolic account.

Essentially, then, Mol suggests, religions are theories of identity. Although many religious traditions do not deal separately or explicitly with anthropology - and for example, it is only in the last century that theological anthropology has acquired a distinct place in Christian systematic theology - within any account of cosmology, there is an implicit and fundamental understanding of the role of humanity within the cosmic scheme.

Clearly, however, there are other ways of legitimating and making explicit possible concepts of the self, without needing to locate identity within a religious framework. Berger & Luckmann, in the tradition of Durkheim, are careful to point out that a scientific or other mythological world view may function equally well as a religious symbolic universe.[224] Theories about identity are common in societies, whether or not their cosmologies presuppose transcendent divinities. This can be seen for example, in the abundance of theories about the

[223]here Mol quotes Wheelis, A.,1958, *The Quest for Identity*. Norton, 200. Wheelis (who is followed by D. J. de Levita and Robert Bellah) uses a notion of identity as essence, rather than as a negotiable entity dependent upon circumstance as it tends to be used in social psychology. The extent to which identity is plastic will be discussed later in this chapter.
[224]Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T., *op. cit.*,113ff.

life cycle. Most societies impose some social framework upon the process of growing into adulthood, involving rites of passage, and notions of behaviour and status appropriate to each stage. In contemporary western societies, a common scheme for understanding the self in transition through the life cycle is developmental psychology. Faith development theory provides some kind of bridge between this kind of identity theory and a theologically constructed identity.

As we are using it here, identity is taken in its broadest sense to be a concept or typification of the self. The self is understood to be an emergent social reality, embedded in the matrix of social conventions and institutions. The range of possible identities is determined by the social structure, and is made explicit and legitimated in the myths, rituals and theories which make up the symbolic universe. Routinely, identity is maintained through social interaction, the common language which is used, ritual action, and through commonly held theories about identity.

Both religious systems and other kinds of symbolic universe contain explicit and implicit theories of identity and myths of identity type. These types are socially constructed and are consonant with a dominant cosmology. Theories of identity may include notions of role, notions of what a good man or woman might be, or may be located in more abstract concepts, rendering them less vulnerable to social change. They arise to legitimate social identities, but inevitably, in turn, become internalised as elements of those identities.

Theories of identity, then, are embedded in the wider symbolic universe which sustains the whole social order. Although many individuals may have little investment in the status quo for political reasons, it remains the case that their identities have been formed within the current social structure. The difficulties of giving up such an identity, even for better social or economic conditions can be illustrated with reference to groups like the IRA who deeply resent the political status quo in Northern Ireland, yet perpetuate it, partly, one suspects,

because it is as members of IRA cells that they have an identity, a sense of purpose and self esteem.

Identities, or typifications of the human self, then, are defended by all manner of means, and one of these means, as we have noted, is by theorising. Theories of identity not only objectify typifications of human social life, but they justify them, appealing to plausibility structures within the wider symbolic universe in order to establish the necessity and inevitability of social experience. Explicit theories of identity are particularly important, then, when a social order, or a personal identity is under threat.

Alfred Schütz describes this sensation of threatened identity in his account of social marginality in *The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology.*[225] Schütz observes that traditional cultural patterns are not questioned unless patterns of life change, such as in the case of industrialisation or emigration: in such circumstances, new problems emerge; traditional authorities lose credibility; recipes for action and interpretation of the world cease to be shared. In the event of any of these, a crisis may be precipitated whereby the assumptions upon which social life is built may be seen to be situation dependent. This is experienced as a problem of meaning.

Schütz makes it clear that most people do not realise the contingent nature of their social world until they are put in the position of being a stranger - that is of wanting or needing to become a permanent part of a culture in which they did not grow up:

> Any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardised scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world.[226]

Schütz suggests that this situation is not disturbed unless life ceases to cause the same problems with which the cultural pattern has evolved to cope, traditional authorities lose

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[225]Schütz, A. L., 1944. "The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology."in *Collected Papers Vol II.* ,The Hague, 1962, 91-105.
[226]*Ibid.*, 95.

their credence or recipes for action and interpretation cease to be shared. In any of these events, a crisis ensues in which hitherto unquestioned assumptions are seen to be situation dependent and an explicit theory of identity is needed.

The importance of being able to re-establish some stable sense of identity in such circumstances is illuminated by Gerardus van der Leeuw who explains the loss of identity as of a loss of power.[227] Power can be understood in a variety of ways. Most obviously it is associated with authority and is analysed in sociological ways. Power can also be understood psychologically, however, particularly in association with identity, for having a sense of who one is, enables one to act appropriately within a variety of social situations. Although, as Schütz makes clear, identity does not mean that human beings are completely effective and that their understanding of life is without contradictions, it does mean that their sense of self and the world is sufficiently coherent to be able to function.

Van der Leeuw uses power as the organising concept around which he builds a morphology of religions. He claims that 'even when Power is not expressly assigned a name, the idea of Power often forms the basis of religion,'.[228] Salvation, he defines, as 'power experienced as Good'.[229] In the light of the social construction of identity, and the legitimating function of symbolic universes of meaning, the notion of religion as that which mediates power becomes intelligible. Religious systems, like other symbolic universes, offer to individuals contexts within which to construct their own identity. Within the framework of such a system there is a stable niche for identity and therefore power to act. If the framework is threatened however, and is perceived to be threatened by those who have constructed their identity within it, power to act is in danger of being diminished unless strategies such as the construction of explicit theories of identity are effective.

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[227] van der Leeuw, G., 1933, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Allen & Unwin, 1967.
[228] *Ibid.*, 27.
[229] *Ibid.*,101.

A sense of identity we have argued, is necessary to people within many different kinds of society. These identities are routinely maintained in a variety of ways - through language and social interaction and theories of identity. Theories of identity become particularly important, however, when identities are under threat. This may happen due to personal mobility and experience of a breadth of social roles, or because the social structure in which personal identities are embedded is going through a period of change. The particular character of each theory of identity, designed to enable people to function within their social environment, will be dependent upon the cosmological system which is current in that society; that is, theories of identity vary according to the character of the symbolic universe in which they are embedded. A mythological symbolic universe may establish identity by locating it in an immutable time beyond human control. A theological symbolic universe regards identity as given by God. A scientific symbolic universe establishes identities by describing them rigorously and demonstrating their necessity by logical argument.

However, theories of identity not only vary according to the structures of plausibility dictated by their cosmological frame of reference, but they also vary according to the social structure of the society in which they are current because the symbolic universe which arises is a function of its social base. Until now we have concentrated upon the principle that all reality is socially constructed in order to suggest that no conception of reality or identity is a conception of objective reality, but of a particular social reality. The implication of such a view is that people's conception of reality and identity will vary according to social structure. The link between particular symbolic universes and social structure and social position within structure is illuminated by Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols.*[230]

Drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim and of Basil Bernstein on restricted code,[231] Douglas suggests that the cosmologies which arise in different cultures can be related to their

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[230]Douglas, M., 1970, *Natural Symbols,* London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1973.
[231]Bernstein, B., 1971, "Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language." In B. Bernstein (ed), *Class, codes and control Vol I.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

social base. In order to differentiate between different social structures, she identifies two variables: *grid*, which concerns the degree to which a system of classifications (or symbolic universe) is shared; and *group*, which concerns the degree to which social groups are close-knit, using language and ritual as forms of social control.[232]

What emerges from Douglas' account is the observation that the emergence of a particular symbolic universe is dependent not merely upon chance factors, but upon the social structure in place. Moreover, under certain conditions, different cosmologies may be upheld by different social groups within the same society, the character of which will be dependent upon their particular social experience.

This is a view with parallels in the work of Marx. Marx was writing against the view that ideas and intellectuals cause social change. He maintained, rather, that it is economic and material conditions which determine the kinds of beliefs and opinions which people hold. Thus, he maintained that social existence, particularly involvement in economic production, determines human consciousness.[233]

Marx worked with the notion of interest. He maintained that each class has a real interest, which is not identical with its professed or perceived interest, but which defends its existence, and seeks to improve the conditions of its life. Marx's notion of interest - that social groups adopt beliefs which further their own concerns - was taken and extended by Mannheim; he did not restrict this to material class interest as Marx had done, however, although he did believe that decisive conflict only takes place within societies where class has developed, but he broadened the notion of interest to include the real concerns of any social group.

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[232]Douglas, M., 1970, *op. cit.*, 84.
[233]see especially Marx, K., 1929, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In Marx & Engels (eds.), *Selected Works*, London, 1970.

Both Marx and Mannheim expected, then, that different social classes would have different perceptions of reality, even within the same society. Thus theories about reality, or claims to knowledge would depend not only upon the type of social structure, but one's position within it. Evidently, different experiences of social reality also include different experiences of identity, and thus result in different theories of identity emerging. The kind of theory of identity likely to emerge, then, is dependent not only upon social structure, but also upon one's position within the social structure.

It is to be expected, therefore, that any particular theory of identity, should both describe and appeal to a particular social group, both reflecting a their social experience, and in so doing, legitimating it, providing assurance to people that they are living correctly, and empowering them to be effective agents in the social world.

The political perspective provided by Marx's notion of interest offers a note of caution, however, that knowledge constructed from a particular perspective is likely only to be a partial view of reality; it may be constructed in opposition to other social groups with competing claims to land or wealth or respect. Any theory of identity which is current within society, needs to be examined, first of all, to understand the social interest which it does articulate, and the tasks of social life which it is able to facilitate; it also needs to be analysed in terms of the effects which the use of the theory has on other groups within society.

We have undertaken this extensive discussion of the social construction of identity and identity theory in the belief that it provides a fruitful perspective from which to examine faith development theory. Faith development theory is a theory about human nature which is current within certain sections of contemporary western society. Its empirical status as a normative developmental theory is under question, yet it is regarded as objective knowledge about the objective world by influential people within the Christian churches. It has been suggested in this chapter that the appeal of Fowler's stages of faith can be understood if it is

considered a theory of identity, articulating and legitimating the experience of a particular social group within contemporary western society.

It is, therefore, to a consideration of faith development theory as a theory of identity that we now turn. Such a line of enquiry is suggested by the fact that the theory, although not empirically demonstrated to be descriptive of a wide range of peoples, is extremely influential amongst certain groups within the western churches. Such a reaction to Fowler's theory suggests that it performs a social function; that it facilitates the negotiation of particular tasks within the social worlds of those to whom it appeals. It is the nature of the theory itself which suggests that this function might be to articulate, structure and interpret people's experience, for the stages of faith constitute a series of typifications of styles of living - or possible identities - whereby individuals might understand themselves and others, constructing a durable social identity within their social world.

Faith development theory as a theory of identity

We have argued in this chapter, that any answer to the question of human identity is a particular one, that each theory of identity presupposes a particular pattern of social interaction, invokes a particular cosmological view and defines the person as a social actor in a particular social situation. Not only is any theory of identity descriptive of a particular kind of social experience, but, we have argued, it also legitimates and facilitates the performance of particular tasks within the social world, particularly during a period of personal or social change.

It was also noted, above, that different theories of identity are possible to different social groups, dependent upon the social structure in which they are located and the particular social position of groups within those societies. Looking at the particular cosmological system out of which faith development theory arises, we shall draw upon the sociology of knowledge to illuminate the social base which this is likely to reflect. This theoretical discussion will pave the way for an enquiry into the particular kind of social experience

which Fowler's faith development theory articulates, seeking to discover those who find that his stages of faith provide names for their experiences and ways to understand and express what they have lived, through a questionnaire, and through the published literature which makes use of Fowler's theory.

The method of study which we shall use follows that of Karl Mannheim. It begins with an examination of the belief system in which faith development theory is embedded. This involves an exploration of the assumptions which Fowler makes and the intellectual tradition in which he stands. Secondly, attention focuses upon the social base of the theory, looking at the social experience of those who hold the theory as knowledge, i.e., those to whom the theory appeals. Care will be taken to pay attention not only to the social class and status of those to whom the theory appeals, but also, as Schütz recommends, to their subjective view of faith development theory and the uses to which it is put. Finally, a third level of meaning will be investigated, which considers the appeal of faith development theory in the light of the belief system in which it is embedded, the subjective meanings which it has to those who claim it as knowledge, and the ways in which it interacts with their social experience.

The cosmology of faith development theory

We began in Chapters One and Two by looking at the provenance of faith development theory within psychology and theology, or in more sociological terms, examining the cosmology of which faith development theory is a part. This exercise was undertaken in order to understand better the nature of the theory's appeal, and the dynamics which govern its use. To a large extent, this discussion of the provenance of faith development theory within theology and psychology has answered many questions about the nature of the cosmological framework within which faith development theory might function as a theory of identity. It is immediately apparent from that discussion, for example, that Fowler makes appeal to both a theological world view and a scientific one, in which the weight of accumulated evidence is used to construct the predictable patterns in which the world moves.

Some of the theological assumptions that Fowler makes have also already been noted, particularly with reference to the influence upon his work of H R Niebuhr. For example, it has been observed that his understanding of developed faith has many parallels to Niebuhr's concept of radical monotheistic faith and to Lindbeck's post-liberal theology, and these links raise question about the descriptive and normative status of Fowler's developmental sequence. Fowler's commitment to the absoluteness of particular claims to truth and his emphasis upon the importance of the particularity of different religious traditions have also been noticed; he states, for example, that he would expect those best described by the latter stages of his theory to be committed members of faith communities.[234]

Fowler writes from a theological perspective. This is clear from his later works, but also comes through in some chapters of *Stages of Faith*. In Chapter 24, entitled *Faith on Earth*, he reveals his concern that there should be good faith on earth: religious faith which, 'must enable us to live in covenant fidelity with our companions in being... to face tragedy and finitude...to name and face that deep-going tendency in us to make ourselves and extensions of ourselves central in the world... cannot be reduced to the ethical or to the merely utilitarian.'[235] and which 'will be *good* faith - faith sufficiently inclusive so as to counter and transcend the destructive henotheistic idolatries of national, ethnic, racial and religious identifications and to bring us as a human community in covenantal trust and loyalty to each other and the Ground of our Being'.[236]

Yet, despite his own theological perspectives, Fowler, in *Stages of Faith*, does not address himself directly to theological questions. He is not explicitly concerned with the nature of God, nor with the relationship of the faith development which he has devised to Christian understandings of saving faith. He is engaged in a different exercise, which observes human beings as they move through the life-cycle, using an understanding of faith drawn from the

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[234]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *op. cit.*, 207-209.
[235]*Ibid.*, 293-294.
[236]*Ibid.*, 293

social sciences about the constructive nature of human existence, and seeks to establish a pattern of predictable changes through the life-cycle in relation to this faith by weight of empirical evidence gathered from structural interviews. Although his assumptions are theological ones, in his argumentation, Fowler appeals to a scientific symbolic universe, in which what is normal is established by the documented frequency of its occurrence.

Thus, Fowler does not explicitly locate the validity of his typifications of human existence within a theological framework, claiming that God has ordained human life to be so, (although such an assumption may be implicit). Primarily, the persuasiveness of Fowler's claim to have discovered a normative sequence of development rests upon the number of subjects who have conformed to the pattern he describes and the posited structural status of his theory. The symbolic universe within which he operates is not only a theological one, but a scientific one in which faith development is claimed to conform to the laws of nature, not, primarily, as ordained by God, but as observed and documented according to the conventions of social science.

We are arguing then, that the cosmological framework within which faith development theory is set, has both theological and scientific elements. Although theologically its argument is not developed, the theological assumptions which Fowler makes are clear enough to divide his audience along theological lines, appealing to those of religious communities whose faith is considered by Fowler likely to be the most developed, and being inaccessible to those outside established religious traditions. Fowler's audience is not only divided between those of religious faith and those without, but because of his appeal to the norms of social science and the particular nature of his theological claims, the response of people of religious faith has also been divided.

In some respects, as we have discussed above, faith development theory arises from the liberal theological tradition, with its receptive attitude to contemporary science, the arts and humanities, openness towards Biblical criticism and emphasis upon the ethical implications

of Christianity, location of authority in human reason and reflection upon the Scriptures, and truth being understood as subjective.

The importance which Fowler attaches to many of these features can be seen from the stages he outlines. His description of Stage IV faith includes references to the need for symbols to be broken and their meaning deconstructed; it also focuses on the need for authority to be internalised, no longer resting on the word of others, whether explicitly recognised as such or disguised through claims to a monopoly on Scriptural interpretation. Stage V faith focuses too, upon the need to be open to those of other faith and to recognise that no one religious tradition has a monopoly on truth.

All of these factors place Fowler's conception of faith development broadly within a theologically liberal symbolic universe. There are indications, also, however - as we have discussed - that Fowler's theory although it arises from a liberal tradition of theology, with its emphases upon human reason and autonomy, but is also part of an emergent post-liberal concern with the emotions, the power of symbols and myths which cannot be reduced in critical analysis, and a recognition of the limits of human reason, acknowledging the power of the unconscious, and of complex social forces and dynamics: features of Fowler's theory which have been well illustrated by comparison with George Lindbeck's post-liberal theology and are associated with a keenness to emphasise that the myths and symbols of a tradition cannot be reduced to propositions without remainder, interested in the unconscious and affective processes of the mind which limit the powers of conscious reason, and concerned not to neglect the power of culture and religion to structure human consciousness and shape human experience.

It was suggested above, that a theory of identity can only be accessible to those already initiated into the cosmological framework on which it draws. In the case of faith development theory, the cosmology in which it is embedded, we have argued, is best termed

post-liberal. As such, faith development theory is likely to appeal to a similar group as those whom Lindbeck identifies being attracted to his cultural-linguistic model of doctrine.

As we have argued above, this cosmological setting means that the theory is likely to appeal to a particular social base. This is a point made forcibly by Mary Douglas, as we have already noted, and it is with reference to her work that we turn to a discussion of the particular social group amongst which Fowler's faith development theory is likely to appeal as a theory of identity.

The social base of faith development theory

Douglas suggested that there are four basic types of cosmology, each linked to a type of social structure. A cosmology which views the universe as a just and ordered place where all acts are moral and there is a developed sense of transgression is likely to emerge in a society which operates entirely within a single shared system of meaning, and in which social control is tight, resulting in high pressure to conform; social roles are highly differentiated and those who do not conform are regarded as evil and rejected.

A cosmology which tends towards dualism and involves personal deities tends to arise in a society characterised by small groups; within each group there is a high degree of pressure to conform, but the degree to which a symbolic universe is common to the whole society is much lower than in Douglas' first type. Thus, there are a series of small communities, which are distinct from others but which are unstable because of the proximity and potential threat of other universes of meaning. In these groups, roles are more ambiguous, and internal competition is always a possibility; good spirits are associated with the group, and evil ones with the rest of society, all of whom are classed as rejects.

Within a society without such tight-knit social groups a more impersonal and diffuse cosmology is likely to arise. People do not live in such close proximity and thus personalities are less dominant in people's consciousness. The rules which govern people's lives,

therefore, are disembodied and less easy to influence on a day to day basis.[237] Within such a society two distinct cosmologies are likely to emerge: the first amongst the successful, who master the rules which govern life, and are thus able to manipulate them to their own benefit, either through birth or wealth or skill; for them, success is its own justification and the world is rational, secular and unmysterious;[238] the other type of cosmology emerges amongst those who do not succeed: those who are dependent upon invisible forces which cannot be addressed or manipulated; amongst such people there is a tendency towards millenarianism.

The kind of cosmology which is described by the latter and most developed stages of Fowler's theory has most in common with the diffuse and impersonal cosmology of complex and bureaucratic society. Fowler places high value on the shedding of tribal loyalties associated with Douglas' second type, and describes a movement away from the control of the group, so dominant in Douglas' first type, towards personal autonomy. In Douglas' typology, such a high degree of personal autonomy, and tendency to deal in abstract concepts is likely to arise in a complex society, and amongst those most successful in that society, for whom life has some order and purpose and is not experienced as a lottery.

Clearly there are subtleties in the post-liberal perspective we have identified as likely to be characteristic of those to whom Fowler's theory appeals which are not picked out by Douglas' analysis, though Douglas could not be expected to have anticipated cultural developments some forty years into the future. In particular, Fowler's description of Stages V & VI faith clearly indicates that he believes there are limits to rational understanding, and that abstract concepts cannot replace myths and symbols without remainder, elements foreign to Douglas' fourth type. However, the broad indication from Douglas' work is that the kind of cosmology which Fowler's faith development presupposes is likely only to emerge amongst the more successful members of complex societies.

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[237] *Ibid.*, 91-92.
[238] *Ibid.*, 88-90.

It is not only the intellectual tradition within which faith development theory itself stands which offers clues to its social base, however, but the dynamic nature of the theory itself which offers not only as a range of static identities, but an interpretative scheme by which to understand the transformation of personal identity over time.

Amongst any social group to whom Fowler's faith development theory might make sense, then, there is likely to be some experience of transition; there are likely to be social conditions prevalent which mean that static identities are of little use, and which prompt people to ask explicit questions about the continuity of their essential selves over time.

As a dynamic theory, then, it is to be expected that the stages of faith would appeal to those who are in some sense, people in transition. As faith development theory is an explicit account of how religious responses change over the life cycle, however, it is also to be expected that those to whom the theory appeals will have an explicit awareness of themselves as having changed. In particular, Fowler expects that those described by the latter stages of his theory will have an explicit identity, having been through the reflective and detached period of Stage IV faith. Although Stage V faith involves a reinvestment of meaning in symbols and myths and a reinvestment of the self in the community, the unconscious following of convention and the naiveté associated with Stage III faith is never recaptured. Thus the identification with the Christian community beyond Stage IV is forever explicit, and chosen in a way impossible to those never pushed to withdraw from the unconscious identifications which they have made.

Some of the conditions which would favour the adoption of faith development theory as a theory of identity are clearly met in the nature of the social environment of contemporary western culture. We have observed that explicit theories of identity emerge when identities come under threat and various commentators have suggested that in contemporary western society a coherent sense of identity is difficult to maintain because of the particular cultural

and social conditions which persist. With the help of work done on the question of identity in the contemporary western context, then, we shall attempt to shed further light on the social base of faith development theory.

Contemporary Western Society

The complexity of contemporary western society is manifest in a number of ways. First, our society is described as complex because of the amount and frequency of contact with other cultures. Before industrialisation, awareness of cultural pluralism was minimal. Towns and ports, of course, were more cosmopolitan than rural areas and grew more so as technology and colonisation improved sea-faring trade, but it was not until industrialisation that mass movement of populations was possible and commonplace. Mass migrations, like that from the Caribbean to Britain in the 1950's and subsequently from Asia, together with the communications revolution, bringing remote parts of the world into contact with one another has meant that different cultural groups are much more aware of the beliefs and traditions of other groups, and consequently of their own.

Another consequence of industrialisation which contributes to the complexity of contemporary society is the specialisation of labour and the proliferation of social strata with new economic roles. In industrial and post-industrial societies, there is a greater diversity of occupations as the economy grows. Rather than, for example, being involved in the whole process of food production as in more traditional societies, an individual may only witness one stage of the process. Moreover, because of this diversification and specialisation of labour in a mechanised and automated society, the social context which people once shared becomes fragmented. Rather than coming into contact with the same people through the tasks associated with work and home, child rearing and leisure, contemporary people have many different social circles, across which there need be little overlap.

As a consequence, any shared framework of interpretation is also fragmented, as areas of each individual's experience become irrelevant and difficult to relate to the daily work of

others. This is not only true at the conceptual level, of working out how the work of an astro-physicist relates to that of a service engineer, but at the level of social status, working out how a car salesperson should consider their status in relation to a university professor. Such ambiguity in knowing how to view oneself and others may lead to confusion or conflict, or to a concept of identity which is functional only in a limited social context.

The sheer scale of economic production in modern society means an increasing need for standardisation and bureaucracy, whereby people are treated as types of various kinds by anonymous officials. We have already observed, looking at Schütz's work, that typifications in general, and typifications of identity in particular, are necessary in order to handle social life.[239] In modern bureaucratic society, a much higher proportion of life must be understood purely in terms of such typifications and a smaller proportion comes within the realm of direct and personal knowledge. Increasingly people become involved in economic dealings, not merely with their neighbours and those they know personally, but with anonymous others to whom they are known as no more than client or customer, applicant or purchaser.

Another element of the complexity of modern existence is the breakdown of traditional authorities. Of particular relevance in the western world is the demise in status of the credence of the Christian Church which for centuries has enjoyed a position of unchallenged dominance as the arbiter of the supreme symbolic universe. The implications of the Scientific Revolution, with its origins in the discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, could not be contained, however, despite the best attempts of the Vatican, and once combined with the process of technicalisation in northern Europe in the eighteenth century, the dominant symbolic universe, certainly amongst western intellectuals, began to shift towards empiricism.

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[239] see Chapter Three.

The technical specialisation in Northern Europe which accompanied this shift also meant the economic elevation of few countries, thus destroying the rough social parity of pre-1800 Afro-Eurasian agrarian societies. It also meant a new élitism based on empirical science and ownership of the means of production, and a new role for religion, side-lined in the new technology, and now portrayed as the enemy against which the new science would be defined. Interested exclusively in what is empirically viable, the world of science has simultaneously produced material benefits for the West and dictated that the only valuable and worthwhile form of thought is that which brings material benefit: the hypothetico-deductive reasoning characteristic of scientific thought.

This marginalisation of a previously dominant symbolic universe has been combined with an increasing awareness of pluralism. As never before, people living in close proximity hold competing philosophies and world views, and follow very different life styles. An awareness of the variety of beliefs and lifestyles which are possible to human society has also played its part in undermining the authority of the Christian Church. Apart from the significance of this for the churches, pluralism diminishes the number of interpretative schemes which people share, and the emergence of cultural relativism as an epistemological position in the latter part of the twentieth century has even denied that shared interpretative schemes are possible - even schemes as pervasive as empiricism and hypo-deductive reasoning.

Social and geographical mobility also contribute to the complexity of contemporary social life. People are more able to travel and move, not only to different parts of the country and the world, thus cutting themselves off from the culture of their socialisation, but also socially; the emergence and expansion of the middle class since the early modern period has dramatically increased the possibilities for social mobility and economic success; those who are geographically and socially mobile, therefore, are likely to become separated from any context in which the norms and expectations of their upbringing are being reinforced.

Identity in contemporary western society

The impact of such social changes upon subjective experience is enormous; Weinreich observes from his study of identity amongst ethnic minorities in Britain,

> Rapid social change challenges our understanding of how individuals come to redefine themselves and renegotiate their relationships with others in situations of flux.[240]

It has been outlined above, how traditionally, identities are dependent upon on relationships with significant others. The more comprehensive and less disrupted are these relations, the more stable and implicit personal identity is likely to be. The obverse, therefore, is likely to be true that the fewer opportunities exist for the reinforcement of a comprehensive identity, the more unstable and explicitly questioned identity is likely to be.

Earlier in this chapter it was noted that in stable, homogenous societies like that described by Mary Douglas' first type, theories about identity rarely receive challenge, and are therefore, rarely the subject of debate or explicit consideration. However, in modern society concepts of the human self become more explicit because of the daily challenges which they receive: the result of people from very different social backgrounds living in close proximity because of global migration is that different possibilities for human identity come into contact with one another, involving such fundamental areas as dress, food, moral codes and understanding of gender roles; people often move away from their family of primary socialisation, both geographically, and in terms of social class and are therefore cut off from one of the primary contexts in which their identity is reinforced through consistent social interaction; the complexity of contemporary society also means that people need to operate in many different social contexts: their role at work may be very different from their role at home; their various leisure pursuits will involve different social expectations; they will also have to operate within the bureaucracy as anonymous persons, for tax purposes or in order to buy a house or obtain a passport.

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[240]Weinreich, P., 1983, "Emerging from Threatened Identities." in G. M. Breakwell (ed), 1983, *Threatened Identities*, John Wiley & Sons., 149.

All of these roles involve different sets of typifications. At the same time a person may be father, car salesman, prop forward, chairman of the parish council, student at night school, customer in a shop, passenger on a bus, and an applicant for a tax rebate. Moreover, many of these social interactions undertaken will be with anonymous persons who are no more to this man than their typifications: a customer, a shop assistant, a bus driver, an inland revenue official. There may also be little overlap between the worlds which this individual enters, further weakening the possibility for the social reinforcement of a consistent sense of self.

Clearly this is different from a small, homogenous society in which roles are not specialised to the same degree, and in which most people know each other personally and so have a much larger, shared social environment. Moreover, in complex societies, one's roles over time may change more frequently. In addition to the biological and socially framed changes which the life cycle brings, such as puberty and parenthood, modern patterns of work mean that many people change jobs and careers with some frequency, work at several part time jobs, experience periods of unemployment, and retire, not a particular age, but typically at any time between fifty and seventy; modern patterns of family life also mean that many people experience divorce and may have several children with different partners, further complicating the experience of parenthood and childhood.

Whereas in homogenous societies, identities could be quite successfully maintained most of the time through stable and plausible social structures, including personal symbols such as a territory and a name; largely unquestioned social conventions; and transcendent myths locating birth, marriage and death within an a-temporal immutable realm, in the modern context, families change; numbers are used for identification; ancestral ties are weakened by social and spatial mobility; and for each stage in the life cycle and aspect of the self there are a whole variety of schemes of interpretation available; and traditional symbolic frameworks, particularly religious ones, have been demythologised in the face of empiricism and relativised in the face of pluralism.

At the very least, then, contemporary people, in most areas, are coping with a greater number of social roles, and a greater number of possible self-concepts, and fewer universally held strategies for relating social roles to each other. As Weigert, Teitge Smith & Teitge ask, "How many contemporaries respond to sociocultural pluralism so that they continue a sufficiently integrated and continuous sense of identity for organising and motivating their lives?"[241] What is the impact of this complex environment upon the subjective perception of the continuity of the self, both across time, biographically, and spatially, across a variety of social contexts?

Luckmann & Berger discuss this question in their article *Social Mobility and Personal Identity*. They observe that a concept of a consistent self, or identity, is dependent upon the fit between various socially given roles. An important feature of modern life is that only parts of ourselves are required in each domain of our life, and that for many of the transactions and interactions of modern life, we need only perceive ourselves as anonymous performers. This means that people are left alone to ponder their existential identity - or the problem of the consistency of themselves across different contexts - leading to the question of essential identity or concerns about the nature of the real self, which doesn't seem always to be engaged in social roles.

The possibilities for establishing and achieving a secure sense of identity in this society are therefore different from those in more homogenous societies. There is a widely held opinion that more people in modern societies experience identity crisis than in more traditional societies, and there is generally expressed concern that a loss of consistent identity can lead to social dislocation and mental illness.[242]

In a complex and fragmented society, such as those of the west, where there are likely to be a large number of social roles performed by any one person across a variety of social contexts

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[241] Weigert, A. J., Smith Teitge, J. & Teitge, D. W. *op. cit.*, 1986.
[242] see, for example, Luckmann, T. & Berger, P. L. 1964. *op. cit.* 341-2.

and there are likely to be competing symbolic universes and ways of constructing meaning. For individuals, the conflict between different world views - some of them religious and some of them not - will centre in different theories of identity or ways of understanding themselves and others in relation to themselves as a problem of meaning. Those in the contemporary world who alternate between different social spheres will need different strategies from those living in homogenous societies for constructing a sustainable and consistent identity if they are to retain their ability to function in the social world.

The differences between identity construction in homogenous and complex societies are highlighted by L A Zurcher in *The Mutable Self*.[243] He suggests that there are four different self modes: the physical which is concerned with sex differences, personal boundaries and which is associated with the early years of childhood development; the social which is located in an accumulation of social roles; the reflective which locates identity in feelings and ways of acting, standing apart from identification with particular roles; and the oceanic mode which locates identity in ontological states and is based on highly abstract notions about states of being.

Zurcher argues that in a homogenous society, or during periods of social or personal stability most people adopt a social identity which is perfectly functional.[244] However, when faced with social or personal change, where the social roles with which one has identified come into conflict with each other, choices have to be made or a new type of identity forged. During this time of role conflict, the reflective mode is dominant in which, there is reduced capacity to act in social situations because self doubt is paralysing.[245] Such a mode is much more likely in a plural culture than in a homogenous one in which the social mode would be dominant.

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[243]Zurcher Jr., L. A., 1977. *The Mutable Self, A Self-Concept for Social Change*. Sage.
[244]*Ibid.*, 180.
[245]*Ibid.*, 180.

When such role conflicts as Zurcher describes do occur, P Weinreich suggests that resolution is possible in two ways. Either the identifications which one has made need to be re-evaluated within the current framework of values, or a new framework needs to be adopted:

The first option would involve a re-evaluation of the self in the light of current typifications, and a re-identification of the self in terms of different social roles within the current set. Thus a new social role might be established within an existing symbolic framework as the result of a role conflict. Identity, however, would continue to be based upon an accumulation of social roles within the dominant symbolic universe.

The second option would involve either the rejection of the original symbolic framework with its set of social roles in favour of a new symbolic framework: that is, a conversion to a different set of valued social roles and a reinterpretation of identity within a different social context. In this case, identity would still be predominantly based upon social role and may have a tendency to be defensive and to limit social contact to a homogenous group of people in order to minimise further identity crisis;

Alternatively there could be a more permanent adoption of a reflective stance, whereby the individual ceases to identify themself completely with any of their social roles, effectively being a different person in different contexts, one of the dangers of contemporary society which has been recognised as leading to a sense of alienation,[246] and in Luckmann & Berger's opinion to the disintegration of conscience and potentially to criminal activity; they also suggest that the maintenance of a notion of real self as distinct from all social roles requires an enormous amount of psychological energy which makes people susceptible to mental breakdown.[247]

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[246]Luckmann, T. & Berger, P. L., *op. cit.*, 1964, 335. They do not use the term *alienation*, because of the confusion in the literature between this and *anomie*, but speak in various ways of a sense of dislocation which is equivalent to the way that *alienation* is used in common parlance.
[247]Luckmann, T. & Berger, P. L., *op. cit.*, 1964, 340ff.

Another option for identity construction in complex society which Zurcher suggests is a movement towards the oceanic mode in which identity is perceived to be located in much less concrete terms and based upon personal qualities and states of being, rather than upon social conventions,[248] although, as Zurcher acknowledges, such persons are often given a social role by being labelled mystical, prophetic or mad; the reverse is also possible whereby there is a reversion to an identity rooted in the physical person which is rigid, imploded and self-obsessed.[249] Various debates continue about the health of either position, both of which are held to tend towards isolation and narcissism.[250]

In modern society when social roles are complex and often under threat, Zurcher's framework is a helpful tool for analysis. His final suggestion for the establishment of an alternative kind of identity, rather less vulnerable to social change, is particularly relevant to our discussion of contemporary western society, for he suggests that it may be possible to establish a mutable identity which can fluctuate between all four modes, and yet which is not unduly disturbed by such changes, but expects them as part of life.[251]

The suggestions which Zurcher makes for the successful negotiation of a stable concept of identity within modern western society have two features in common: they are explicit identities because all have been through the reflective mode, whether to move onto an oceanic identity, return to a social identity, or to adopt a more flexible and mutable way of being; second, they are dynamic self-concepts. They all acknowledge the need for one's identity to change. This is particularly evident in the case of the Mutable Self in which change is expected and the ability to adapt is regarded as a mark of maturity. Zurcher suggests that any successful theory of identity which is to be successful in contemporary western society needs to be able to justify change and oscillation.

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[248] Zurcher Jr., L. A., *op. cit.*, 1977, 180.
[249] *Ibid.*, 181.
[250] see for example, Batson, C. D. & Ventis, W. L., 1982, *The Religious Experience*, OUP; Lasch, C., 1979, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Norton; Weigert, A. J., Smith Teitge, J. & Teitge, C.W., *op. cit.*, 1986, 118ff.
[251] Zurcher Jr., L.A., *op. cit.*, 1977, 183.

As indicated above with reference to the work of Mary Douglas, however, within contemporary society, with its diversity and complexity, there are differing experiences of social life and degrees of awareness of pluralism. Consequently it should be expected that some sectors of the population are more vulnerable to identity crisis and explicit consideration of the problem of meaning than others; similarly, it should be expected that some people within contemporary western society are more likely to be attracted to Fowler's faith development theory than others, not simply because of an interest in theology or an awareness of structural-developmentalism, but because their experience of the world and of themselves leads them towards an explicit consideration of the question of meaning, and a need to justify their awareness of their views changing over time.

In order to better understand those likely to encounter identity as a problem of meaning, we turn again to the work of Alfred Schütz and then to the work of Max Weber. As we have already mentioned, Schütz makes it clear that most people do not realise the contingent nature of their social world until they are put in the position of being a stranger - that is of wanting or needing to become a permanent part of a culture in which they did not grow up.[252]

However, although such mobility is a possibility and a reality for many, who go to university and enter jobs which require itinerancy, there are still some for whom the communities of their initial socialisation are those within which they die, both in social and in geographical terms. As Luckmann & Berger observe: mobility upwards is not accessible to everyone, even though anticipatory socialisation into the values of the middle class may happen through the media.[253] Amongst the rural and urban working class, and to an extent, amongst the upper classes, such mobility is not the common experience. It is primarily the middle classes who are socially and geographically mobile, and thus the middle classes who

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[252]Schütz, A. L., 1944, "The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology."in *Collected Papers Vol II.*, The Hague, 1962.
[253]Luckmann, T. & Berger, P. L., 1964, "Social Mobility & Personal Identity." in *Archives Europeenés de Sociologie* 7 (1964), 331-344.

are more likely to encounter the problem of a changing identity across time and across different social contexts.

According to Max Weber, however, it is not only travel or social mobility, but study which raises the problem of meaning. In his *Sociology of Religion*, it is the intellectual whom Weber describes as the one 'driven by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position towards it.'[254] The parallels between travel and education should cause little surprise, particularly in the modern climate when much education, particularly adult education is based upon an experiential model.

Weber is intent on discussing different understandings of salvation and relating these to their social base. Although it is not primarily concepts of salvation with which we are currently concerned, Weber's observations are pertinent to a discussion of identity, because, within any religious system as argued by Hans Mol, there is contained an implicit or explicit theory of identity.

Weber is arguing that it is the intellectual who experiences the problems of the world as problems of meaning. Rather than being primarily concerned with salvation from external distress, the intellectual seeks deliverance from internal chaos. Thus,

> It is the intellectual who transforms the concept of the world into the problem of meaning. As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply "are" and "happen" but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful.[255]

The attitude towards the world which results from such an orientation may vary depending on other conditioning factors. However, intellectualism, whether in the religions of India, Egypt, Babylon, the Middle East or the West is, according to Weber, characterised by a quest for meaning and the desire to rationalise and systematise belief and practice.

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[254]Weber, M., 1922, *Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, 1963, 116.
[255]*Ibid.*, 125.

Although, in Weber's understanding, a religious approach dominated by the need to systematise and understand the world in abstract and impersonal terms is often found amongst intellectuals and clergy, such an approach does not naturally arise amongst the laity or the social masses:

> The notion of an impersonal and ethical cosmic order that transcends the deity and the ideal of an exemplary type of salvation are intellectualist conceptions which are definitely alien to the masses and possible only for a laity that has been educated along rational and ethical lines.[256]

According to Weber, however, the explicit treatment of meaning as a problem is not universal but is restricted to the intellectual classes or religious élite. Religion, or faith, for other social groups, is not so cognitive or concerned to be so integrated. Other social groups, Weber argues are less concerned with systematisation. What is being argued here is that education is likely to lead to an explicit consideration of the problem of meaning because through education there is an increased awareness of pluralism and a greater likelihood that previously unquestioned and seemingly inevitable customs and patterns of thought will prove inadequate to perform new tasks. In short, the life of study will have ceased to cause the same problems with which the cultural pattern has evolved to cope; traditional authorities will have been undermined through rigorous study or breadth of experience; and there will have been increased opportunities for perceiving that once presumed inevitable recipes for action and interpretation are not widely shared

If, as was argued above, the emergence of a mobile middle class is one of the notable features of a complex society, and as these are the social groups most likely to experience the highest level of education and the highest degree of social mobility, there are grounds for the suggestion that contemporary western society is more likely to be preoccupied with questions of meaning and identity than more homogenous societies. Such explicit attention to theories of identity is not likely to be found amongst all social groups, but amongst the intellectual middle classes, and as Mary Douglas indicates, the kind of cosmologies and theories of

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[256] *Ibid.*, 103.

identity which emerge amongst such people will also be different from those emerging amongst other groups, because it is their social world which is most fluid and anonymous.

Christian identity and the contemporary western world

We have outlined, above, some of the changes in contemporary western society which have had an impact upon the construction of identity. Various of these changes are of particular relevance to our discussion of the use of faith development theory as a theory of identity because they have had a particular impact upon the construction of identities within a Christian context.

One of the problems with which Christians have had to deal has been the rise of empiricism which, since the seventeenth century has provided a basis for challenging the status of religious and mythological thinking. Although within the churches, and increasingly outside them, it is recognised that science and religion do not seek to provide the same kinds of explanations, and may yet be compatible, the popular demand for empirical proof and demonstrable facts has contributed to the processes of secularisation and lead to the usurping of the Christian framework as the dominant symbolic universe, to be replaced by a scientific one, characterised by hypothetico-deductive reasoning, and capable of producing material benefits.

It was argued, above, that theories of identity are located within a symbolic universe, or cosmology and that any threat to cosmology, thus becomes a threat to identity. In the case of empiricism, an identity located within Christian doctrines is threatened by the claim that any knowledge must be located in empirically testable hypotheses. Christian identity is located primarily in God through Jesus Christ, by virtue of creation, redemption and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Christians are creatures of God, and children, by adoption; those called and

consecrated by God, As God is not a testable hypothesis, it is difficult to locate Christian identity in a framework which would satisfy a modern, empirical mind set.[257]

Another problem for the churches is the dominance in the modern world of hypothetico-deductive reasoning, because it has no religious affiliation, [258] and thus is perceived to challenge all religious perspectives; the technical revolution does not address ultimate or moral questions directly and thus appears to render them of lesser importance; and with its emphasis upon scientific and value-free reasoning, it is implied that any religious belief is arbitrary and irrational and that its incidence in modern society is anachronistic and irrelevant.

This marginalisation of a previously dominant symbolic universe has been combined with an increasing awareness of pluralism, including religious pluralism, as communications improve and mass migrations have taken place. The emergence of relativism, first as a methodology within the social sciences, and then as a philosophical position presents particular problems for religions in general and for Christianity in particular.

Although cultural relativism as an epistemological position has its origins in the Enlightenment and in responses to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, it is only with the rise of the social and historical sciences that attention has been drawn to the extent to which human beliefs and meanings are constructed within a cultural context. Relativism as a philosophical thesis states that truth is not absolute but relative to particular societies or cognitive systems. Each society has its own value system, the meaning of which can be

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[257] Although empiricism is not a new problem for theology, it is, in each generation, a new problem for those educated in the schools of the western world. However, even for those who perceive empiricism - and all other systems of meaning as myths - it is not so easy to irradicate from the mind, when, at formative periods in life, one has identified with them, and in order to be able to communicate or act as a social agent, one must adopt some form of identity, even if contingent.

[258] Needham, R., 1980, *Reconnaissances.* Toronto, 1980, 44ff. He argues that hierarchical classification, such as is found in hypothetico-deductive thinking is concerned only with the formal properties of objects, whereas analogical classification is concerned with values and behaviours relating to objects.

sought only within that system. It is a characteristic philosophy of what has come to be termed, *post-modernism*,[259] and is tenable only in a fragmented society.

The Christian Church, which emerged in an tight-knit small group in the first century Diaspora, and which gradually lost its dualistic cosmological emphasis as it became the dominant symbolic universe of the western world,[260] has traditionally made universal and exclusive claims to truth which do not sit well within such a relativistic context. Again this is a problem not only of theology, but of identity.

In the case of the relativist myth, an identity located in the doctrines of the Christian tradition is undermined because the relativist myth claims that nothing has truth beyond its context; that there is no ultimate reality which can mediate between competing truth claims. The doctrines of Christianity, in which Christian identity is situated, then, can be no more true, in an objective sense, than the doctrines of any other religion or world view. The consequence of this relativistic view is to render Christian identity rather less secure than it has been for previous generations. Rather than being grounded in a reality which is objectively true for all time and all people, the relativistic thesis reduces Christian identity to a contingent and insubstantial option for living, amongst many equally possible alternatives.

The task of coping with the competing myths of empiricism and cultural relativism and of Christianity faces Christians within the contemporary churches, and it is a difficult task because it involves adaptation to a new social structure and a new social structure requires a differing cosmology from the well-ordered and just universe of traditional orthodoxy. Moreover, as we have seen, it is a problem, not only of theology, but of identity for those Christians aware of the conflicting symbolic universes which they inhabit. In addition, the emergence of both empiricism and relativism indicates that in order to survive, strategies are

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[259] for a discussion of the features of post-modernism, see Bauman, Z., 1995, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Blackwell, Harvey, D., *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell, 2nd ed. 1989.

[260] though the extent to which a Christian framework was ever universally accepted is a subject for debate, see, for example, Thomas, K., 1971, *Religion & the Decline of Magic*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

needed to cope with social and ideological change. The diversification of culture, the awareness of pluralism, and the widespread adoption of a pragmatic world view, represent new conditions to which churches must adapt if they are to survive.

Conclusion

The argument being developed here is that Fowler's theory represents one such strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity within the contemporary western world. It is not suggested here that faith development theory is the only strategy available to Christians within contemporary western society for the maintenance of a Christian identity - Lindbeck's account of the development of views of doctrine from the traditional-orthodox to the cultural-linguistic suggests an alternative strategy and clearly there are numerous others not touched on in this thesis which differ widely from the kind of strategy which faith development theory presents; neither are we suggesting that from a theological perspective, faith development theory should, necessarily, be considered an appropriate or adequate strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity - although some theological assessment of faith development theory as a theory of identity will be undertaken in Chapter Six - but it is proposed here, from a social psychological perspective, that the appeal of faith development theory amongst certain groups in contemporary western society can partly be explained because it is able to offer a dynamic and explicit theory of identity which is effective in enabling some Christians to cope with various perceived threats to their sense of identity by structuring their experience of themselves and others in the midst of enormous social and ideological changes.

As such, we suggest that faith development theory is most accessible to those whose world view is consonant with the end view of development which Fowler recommends. If it is accepted that Fowler's theory tends towards post-liberal faith, with many features in common with the cultural-linguistic perspective described by Lindbeck, then it is to be expected that those to whom Fowler's theory appeals will display attitudes and beliefs we have identified as post-liberal: a desire to hold together both cognition, imagination and the emotions as valid

parts of human experience; a belief that the myths, symbols and rituals of a religious tradition are indispensable and cannot be reduced; and a commitment to dialogue with those of other faith, yet without a tendency to reduce all faith to the same core experience; as noted above, such emphases have been linked with Fowler's Stage V faith.

In other words, we are proposing that those to whom Fowler's theory appeals are likely to consider themselves to be best described by the latter stages of Fowler's theory. This is not simply because a theory is bound to be more popular amongst those whom it pronounces mature, but because we have already drawn many parallels between a post liberal theological position and Stage V faith, and indicated that, in Fowler's terms, only those beyond Stage IV will have need of an explicit theory of identity.

Finally we are suggesting that these people, to whom faith development theory most appeals, will be middle class intellectuals who are to some extent, both socially and existentially, people in transition, to whom questions of how to understand themselves through time, and how to orient themselves within a complex social world have become urgent because of their exposure to the social and intellectual development which characterise late modernity and which threaten to relativise and marginalise Christian identity.

We have outlined above, then, our explanation, drawn from the sociology of knowledge and social psychology, for the appeal of faith development theory, despite the questions which hang over its empirical status . In the following chapters we will seek to observe these dynamics at work amongst those who are making use of faith development in the contemporary British churches.

In our observation of the dynamics at work in the reception of faith development theory we have two main points of access: the published references to Fowler's work in which the stages of faith are cited to explain particular phenomena or to legitimate particular courses of

action; and a questionnaire addressed to those who attended one of the few conferences in England which Fowler has addressed, held at Nottingham University in 1990.

We shall attempt, through this questionnaire, and later, through an examination of the published uses of faith development theory, to illustrate how those who find their experience reflected in Fowler's stages of faith, also share his theological and empirical assumptions, come from a specific social base, and have adopted faith development theory as a theory of identity, which legitimates their social experience, and enables them to perform particular tasks within the context of the contemporary Christian churches in the western world.

Chapter Four Faith development theory in practice - a questionnaire

Introduction

It was argued in the previous chapter that it is profitable to view faith development theory from the perspectives of the sociology of knowledge and the social psychology of religion on the grounds that all theories have a social base and perform a function within society. Following the methods of Karl Mannheim and using the insights offered by Max Weber and Mary Douglas, we suggested a social base for faith development theory amongst middle class, intellectual Christians; and following the analysis of Alfred Schütz, Berger & Luckmann and Paul Weinreich, we suggested that faith development theory has the necessary characteristics to operate amongst this social group as a theory of identity. In this chapter we turn from high level theory to look at the actual contexts in which Fowler's work is influential. In particular, we turn to the analysis of a questionnaire sent in 1995 to those who attended a conference held in Nottingham in June 1990 at which James Fowler was the speaker.

The questionnaire does not provide a large nor random sample of Christians in Britain, nor even of middle class and intellectual Christians. It is not able to test hypotheses, therefore, about whether faith development theory only appeals to such groups, or whether it operates as the overarching theory of identity for a large social group. What the questionnaire does provide, however, is a sample of those in Britain who are interested in faith development theory. By investigating the social nature of this group, and its intellectual commitments, the questionnaire will be used, not to try to prove that faith development theory is only espoused by one particular social group in the performance of one social function, but to illustrate the argument set out in Chapter Three that the appeal of faith development theory is partly dependent upon its ability to articulate, structure and legitimate the social and religious experience of middle class intellectual Christians who are seeking to defend a liberal way of believing without submitting to the social and intellectual developments of late modernity which threaten to marginalise and relativise their Christians identities.

In Chapter Three it was suggested that the beliefs which people hold vary according to the structure of society and their position within it, and it was argued that any firmly held belief is linked to a social base, articulating the interest of a particular group; thus, the explanatory power or meaning of a particular belief being dependent on its social context. In other words, beliefs not only have a subjective meaning for the individual, and an objective meaning for the community, but they perform a role both for the individual and for society,[261] which may be unexamined, or may be explicitly known. This third level of meaning, we maintained, may be discovered by looking at the beliefs which are held in a particular society and by examining their relationship to their social base.

Of particular interest to this study of faith development theory are beliefs which are current in any given society about the nature of human beings. Such beliefs are part and parcel of any cosmological system;[262] they guarantee social institutions and the formal relationships between people within a society[263], permitting niches for identity within the social world as it is experienced and offering a role, a status and a purpose to individuals within society.[264]

As Berger & Luckmann point out, although the beliefs which people hold about human nature and possible roles and lifestyles may appear to them inevitable and incontrovertible, such beliefs are context dependent. They are dependent upon social structure and the symbolic universe which is used to legitimate it, upon social position and the myths which are used to articulate the interest of each social group.

Often, as Alfred Schütz has suggested, such theories of identity are implicit and unexamined by those who live by them.[265] However, within a society which is changing, or a group

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[261] Mannheim, K., 1936, *Ideoloy and Utopia*. Routledge, 1991.
[262] Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T., 1966, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin 1971, 95.
[263] *Ibid.*, 119-120.
[264] *Ibid.*, 149ff..
[265] see Chapter I. 13ff.. for a discussion of Schütz, A.L., 1944, "The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology." in *Collected Papers*, Vol II. (The Hague, 1962), 102ff..

which is socially mobile, or in the case of an individual undergoing some marginal experience, such as illness or bereavement, an explicit theory of identity may emerge. When old categories cease to meet new situations, a new sense of meaning and purpose must be negotiated.[266]

One implication of considering identity to be socially constructed is that any theory of identity which is current in society is considered to articulate the interest of a particular group within that society.[267] Thus, the examination of any given belief about the nature of human beings is likely to reveal a particular social base, but it will also illuminate the subjective experience of those holding the belief, and will illustrate the strategies which they use to negotiate their social world.[268]

It has been suggested, therefore, that Fowler's faith development theory, as a theory about the nature of human experience, is able to operate as a theory of identity because it presents a framework consisting of a series of typifications of human life in relation to one another. This allows people to locate themselves within their social environment, both synchronically, as a basis for understanding themselves in relation to others whom they meet, and diachronically, in relation to their own biographical history.

Questionnaire design

When we came to formulate a questionnaire to examine how Fowler's theory is used in practice, then, questions were included which focus upon the nature of the social group to whom Fowler's work appeals and the particular cosmological framework in which the theory makes its fullest sense. With reference to the work of Alfred Schütz and Berger & Luckmann it was suggested that any explicit theory of identity would appeal to those who

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[266] Schütz, A.L., 1944, *op. cit.*.

[267] see Chapter I, 6-7 for a discussion of Karl Mannheim.

[268] Alfred Schütz was particularly interested in subjective experience, see, for example, 1944 "The Stranger, An Essay in Social Psychology."in *Collected Papers*, Vol II. (The Hague, 1962), 102ff.; 1946. "The Well-Informed Citizen, An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge." in *Collected Papers*, Vol II. (The Hague, 1962), 120ff.

have received a challenge to an implicit sense of identity[269] and that this was particularly likely to affect the middle classes: those most likely to be socially and geographically mobile and most likely to be highly educated and therefore to have encountered plurality through academic study.[270] Questions about educational experience and occupation were therefore included in the questionnaire, [271] and a variety of questions designed to illuminate subjects' social experience, particularly of transition and social dislocation, as these are experiences considered likely to prompt the need for both an explicit and dynamic theory of identity. Although the transitions which people experience may be social, brought about through a geographical move, employment, travel or education, we have suggested that they will also be detectable in terms of beliefs about self and others, and God.[272] Questions were also included then to elicit information about subjects' perceptions of the changes in their religious outlook over time.

Thus far, we have mentioned the questions included in this questionnaire on the grounds of its formal characteristics as an explicit and dynamic theory. In addition, questions were formulated to illuminate the subjects' faith commitments and theological perspectives, to see whether they would reflect the concerns of committed Christians, already persuaded of the need for the social scientific investigation of faith and interested in methods of defending their Christian identities which we have termed, post-liberal: desiring to hold together both cognition, imagination and the emotions as valid parts of human experience; believing that the myths, symbols and rituals of a religious tradition are indispensable and cannot be reduced; and committed to dialogue with those of other faith, yet without a tendency to reduce all faith to the same core experience; as noted in Chapter Three, such emphases have

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[269] see, for example, Berger, P.L., 1966, "Identity as a Problem in the Sociology of Knowledge." *Archives Europeennés de Sociologie* 7 (1966), 113.

[270] see pp. 140 for a discussion of Weber, M., 1922, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, 1963.

[271] The criteria used for social stratification are the subject of extensive debate amongst sociologists. See, for example, Marshall, G., Rose, D., Newby, H. & Vogler, C., 1988, *Social Class in Modern Britain*, Hutchinson. Although, subject to debate, the 1991 Census definitions of social class rest entirely upon occupation: Class I: Professional, e.g. clergy, lecturers; Class II: Management and Technical, e.g. Teachers; Class IIIN: Non-manual skilled; Class IIIM: Manual skilled; Class IV: Partly skilled; Class V: Unskilled. (See OPCS 1991 Census Definitions, Section 7.5.1). It is not a simple matter to relate these classes to commonly used classifications such as middle or working class, which invoke factors other than occupation, including background, education, attitudes and self-designations. In analysing the results of this questionnaire, then, we shall use not only the Census Definitions, but also information about respondents' educational experience and J.H. Goldthorpe's scheme of classification and studies of self-designations. See note 260.

[272] for a discussion of the relationship between social experience and cosmology, see Douglas, M., 1970. *op. cit.*, 79-80.

been linked with Fowler's Stage V faith, and thus questions were included to find out how subjects viewed themselves in terms of Fowler's stages.

Finally, questions were included which attempt to focus upon the ways in which faith development theory is being used amongst this group concerning the contexts in which the stages of faith are invoked, the tasks they facilitate and the phenomena they are called on to explain. As we suggested in Chapter Three that faith development theory's main appeal is its ability to articulate the experience of a particular social and theological group and thus provide an interpretative framework for that experience as a theory which presents typifications for identity, care was taken to devise questions which would reveal whether the subjects understood themselves in terms of the faith stages which the theory presents; whether they were constructing their personal biographies in line with the developmental scheme he suggests; and whether, as well as understanding their own experience within these terms, Fowler's model was being used as an interpretative scheme for understanding the experience of others.

Our attention, in the construction of this questionnaire, therefore, was focused in four areas: first, the way in which Fowler's theory may structure people's experience of themselves in relation to others and as such is being used a theory of identity; second, the social class and social experience of those using Fowler's theory; third, the intellectual commitments and theological perspectives of this group; and fourth, the self-designations of this group in terms of Fowler's stages themselves.

The questionnaire was devised in 1995 and sent to those who applied to attend a conference at which James Fowler was the speaker at Nottingham University in June 1990. This conference was organised by the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course (EMMTC), and offered a rare opportunity to hear James Fowler speak in Britain. This group of self-selected people interested in Fowler's work offer a limited but unique access to the dynamics at work amongst those influenced by faith development theory.

The questionnaire was sent to these applicants on the grounds that they would be sufficiently familiar with Fowler's own work to be able to reflect on its importance to them; because some basic information was already held about the applicants to the conference concerning gender, occupation, clerical status and stated reasons for interest in Fowler's work; and because there was no need to formulate additional criteria for the selection of a group with which to work as this group all fulfilled the criterion of having applied for the conference. No pilot study was conducted due to the small number of potential subjects.

The questionnaire was distributed to all 109 applicants; a sample of the questionnaire and the accompanying letter are included in the appendix; 34 completed questionnaires were received which constitutes a return rate of 31%. Due to the small numbers involved, the conclusions we can draw from this study are limited; in the presentation of the results, actual numbers will be given as well as percentages; each question is printed in bold type with an explanation of the intention of the question and a summary of responses; tables of results are included where appropriate.

Results

These three initial questions seek to begin to establish the features of the group interested in Fowler's theory by looking at age, gender and marital status. There was no reason to suppose, from the argument outlined in Chapter Three that the theory should appeal particularly to any of these groups.

1.1 Age

Candidates were asked to specify their age. The results are displayed in summative form.

Table 1.1: Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	% Frequency
<20	0	0
21-40	4	12
41-60	25	74
61>	3	9
None given	2	5
	N=34	100%

25/34 (74%) applicants were aged 41-60, whilst only 4/34 (12%) were under 40, and another 3/34 (9%) over 60.

1.2 Gender

Table 1.2: Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	% Frequency
Male	20	59
Female	14	41
	N=34	100%

More men than women responded to the questionnaire (20:14), although the numbers of men and women who applied to the conference was approximately equal, (54:55).

1.3 Marital Status

Table 1.3: Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	% Frequency
Single	5	15
Married	27	79
Divorced	1	3
Widowed	1	3
	N=34	100%

The majority, 27/34, (79%) of those responding to the questionnaire were married .

Most respondents, therefore, were in their middle years and married although there was a mixture of men and women. There might be some significance in the overwhelmingly middle aged nature of the respondents given Fowler's own expectation that those explicitly aware of their own development would be beyond early adulthood.

1.4 Occupation

Occupation is of considerable interest to this study as it affords insight into the social class and likely social experience of respondents and thus into the social base of Fowler's theory and the function which it may perform in contemporary British society.

Table 1.4.1: Respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	%Frequency	% Cumulative Frequency
National church officer	1	2.94	2.94
Regional church officer	9	26.47	29.41
Local church officer	13	38.24	67.65
Lecturer	5	14.71	82.36
Chaplain	1	2.94	85.30
Housewife	2	5.88	91.18
Other	3	8.82	100.00
None given	0	0.00	
	N=34	**100%**	

Some 23/34 (67%) of the sample were employed by one of the churches, often in educational work, either at national, regional or local level. Of the remaining occupations, the most common was lecturer (5/34 or 15%). The other occupations represented were housewife (2/34), youth worker (1/34), accountant (1/34), and teacher (1/34). A similar distribution of occupations was also found in the data regarding all applicants to the conference:

Table 1.4.2: Conference Applicants by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	% Frequency	% Cumulative frequency
Local church worker	13	38	38
Regional church worker	9	26	64
National church officer	1	3	67
Chaplain	1	3	70
Lecturer	5	15	85
Housewife	2	6	91
Other	3	9	100
None given	0	0	100
	N=34	**100%**	**100%**

75% (82/109) were employed by the churches, 5/109 were working as lecturers, 3/109 as chaplains and 3/109 as housewives. According to the 1991 Census Definitions, with the exception of the housewives, all of these occupations count as professional (Class I), technical (Class II), or Skilled non-manual (Class IIIN). In Goldthorpe's prominent seven

class scheme , all of these occupations belong to the service class; and, according to a study carried about by Marshall, Rose, Newby and Vogler, 72.5% of those classified by Goldthorpe as service class, consider themselves to be middle class. [273] Although assigning the respondents to this questionnaire to the middle class is of limited value, because of the imprecise nature of the term, our findings concerning occupation, do conform to our expectation, shaped by Max Weber, that those responding to faith development theory are likely to be members of the socially and geographically mobile middle classes, particularly those described as intellectuals, who are likely to want to objectify and reflect upon their experience as they encounter the complexities of the contemporary world. We shall discuss the social class of respondents further with regard to Question 2 concerning education.

The response to Question 4.1 concerning occupation is important, however, not only for its bearing on social class, but because it reveals the high percentage of religious professionals - lay and ordained - who attended the conference. Although this finding may partly be influenced by the fact that the conference was organised by an ordination course, faith development theory has clearly been particularly influential amongst some church leaders.

2.1 Education since leaving school
2.2 Professional Training

It was suggested in Chapter Three that the middle classes are likely to be amongst those experiencing social transition in contemporary western society and therefore in need of a dynamic and explicit theory of identity, partly by virtue of education. Education is believed likely to cause a questioning of assumptions about the nature of reality, absorbed during socialisation because it is likely to present students with the problem of diversity of traditions and conventions of thought. This is particularly true of higher education in the liberal tradition which explicitly examines diverse cultures and traditions and seeks to find interpretative schemes through which to understand their relation to one another.

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[273] For Census Definitions, see note 257; for Goldthorpe's scheme, see Goldthorpe, J.H., 1980, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Clarendon; for the study of self-designations in relation to Goldthorpe's scheme, see, Marshall, G., Rose, D., Newby, H. & Vogler, C., 1988, *Social Class in Modern Britain*, Hutchinson, 127.

As Fowler's theory has been presented as a scheme which assists in the negotiation of diversity, it is considered likely to appeal to those whose implicit assumptions about the nature of reality have been challenged. Questions about respondents educational experiences were devised, therefore, in order to investigate whether Fowler's theory does, in practice, appeal to those who have received such higher education.

Table 2.1: Respondents by Education

Education	Frequency	% Frequency	% Cumulative Frequency
Doctorate	5	15	15
Masters degree	8	23	38
Post-graduate cert/dip	15	44	82
Bachelors degree	1	3	85
Other HE qualification	5	15	100
No HE qualification	0	0	
	N=34	**100%**	**100%**

All respondents had received some higher education and 29/34 (85%) had studied at least to bachelor degree level with 28/34 (82%) having some post-graduate qualification. 29/34 (85%) of respondents had also received some of their higher education in religious studies or theology. The implication of the responses to these questions is that faith development theory does appeal to those who are highly educated, particularly within theology. The question whether such education has resulted in existential change and produced a need for a dynamic and explicit theory must wait until answers concerning the sample's perception of their faith changing over time have been reviewed.

3.1 Are you a practising member of a religious denomination? Which?

Fowler's theory assumes a sympathy towards religious faith, particularly in its understanding of the higher stages of development which are held to be possible only within a particular religious tradition. It is expected, therefore, that those to whom the theory appeals as a theory of identity will be members of faith communities because as such they find plausible theological assertions about the nature of reality.

It was also suggested in Chapter Three that a post-liberal approach which consciously experiences traditions, myths and rituals as deeply formative, is likely to arise in a context where people have made a chosen commitment to a social group, such as a church. Social roles are not implicitly understood, nor rigidly assumed to be true for all people; but rather are accepted as part of a necessary, yet contingent, framework in which to live and interact. It is expected, therefore, that those committed to Fowler's theory will also be committed to a faith community. Such commitment may be visible in this questionnaire in terms of church membership or leadership or ordination.

Table 3.1: Respondents by Denomination

Denomination	Frequency	%Frequency
Church of England	25	73
Baptist	3	9
Methodist	2	6
Roman Catholic	2	6
United Reformed	1	3
Scottish Episcopal	1	3
Other	0	0
	N=34	100%

All respondents were active church members. Some 25/34 (73%) were involved in the Church of England and the remaining 9/34 (27%) distributed amongst other mainstream British churches. This response reflects the faith commitments of those interested in faith development theory. As faith development theory itself stands within a Christian theological tradition, those finding the stages of faith plausible and meaningful, as expected, are people of Christian faith.

3.2 Are you ordained?

This question was asked partly to ascertain the level of respondent's investment in religious institutions, and partly in the knowledge that clergy and religious professionals in general often have different priorities from those of their laity, tending towards systematisation and placing a high value upon existential questions.

Some 21/34 (62%) of respondents were ordained clergy, compared with some 50/109 (48%) of all conference applicants. This finding may partly reflect the fact that the conference was organised by the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course, (EMMTC), however, the findings need to be assessed together with the responses to the next question concerning both ordained and lay leadership.

3.3 Please give details of any responsibility held for religious or Christian education (child or adult)

As already mentioned this study is interested in the degree of people's involvement in the institutional life of the churches, but also in stated reasons for interest in Fowler's theory. In order to discuss not only the subjective or objective meanings of beliefs or actions but also any further level of meaning which takes into consideration factors other than the stated intentions of agents, attention focuses upon the roles and responsibilities which people have, giving insights into the contexts, other than education in which they are caused to think explicitly about faith and identity.

Table 3.3: Respondents by Responsibility for Education

Responsibility	Frequency	% Frequency
Adult education	18	53
Youth work	5	15
Children's work	1	3
Parish work	7	20
None	3	9
	N=34	100%

Almost all respondents, 31/34 (91%), whether ordained or not, held some church responsibility for education and the majority, 22/34 (73%) were involved in work with adults, either in a parish situation, or through educational institutions. This suggests that reasons for finding Fowler's work interesting are not confined to the clergy, but are common to those who bear responsibility for nurturing the faith of others.

4.1 Using one or more of the categories below, which of them best describe the religious environments in which you currently feel most comfortable?

agnostic	**atheist**	**catholic**
conservative	**charismatic**	**evangelical**
fundamentalist	**liberal**	**sacramentalist**

This question was formulated to give some indication of the theological disposition of respondents. It has been argued above that Fowler's theory favours a post-liberal theological stance and is therefore likely to appeal to those constructing a post-liberal perspective. The term, post-liberal, however, is our analytical term and is not in common usage. It is a term which we have adopted from Lindbeck to describe a number of features of an emergent and context specific theological position. The terms chosen here, however, were included because they are the most commonly used self-designations amongst contemporary Christians. As the term post-liberal is not in common usage it was not included. Respondents were invited to use more than one label if appropriate in the hope that a combination of terms would be more revealing about their theological outlook.

On the grounds that we have identified a symbolic approach to theology and the Bible are pre-requisites for being considered post-liberal, those who use the terms *conservative, evangelical* or *fundamentalist* on their own or in combination with each other will be taken to indicate a pre-liberal perspective; the use of the term *liberal* alone or in combination with other designations will be taken initially to indicate those potentially open to a liberal or post-liberal perspective as described by Lindbeck and used as a term of analysis in this thesis.[274]

[274]Lindbeck, G., 1984, *The Nature of Doctrine*, S.P.C.K, 1984.

Table 4.1.1: Respondents by Religious Outlook

Religious outlook	Frequency	Frequency as % of respondents
Agnostic	4	12
Atheist	1	3
Catholic	16	47
Charismatic	5	15
Conservative	1	3
Evangelical	8	24
Fundamentalist	0	0
Liberal	23	67
Sacramentalist	13	38

The most frequently used terms were *liberal*, 23/34, (67%), *catholic*, 16/34, (47%), and *sacramentalist*, 13/34 (38%). None used the term *fundamentalist* and only 1, (3%) *conservative*. 8 (24%) felt comfortable within an *evangelical* environment although two of these were also comfortable in a liberal environment. Many responses reflected some breadth of outlook, 21/34 (62%) of people combining than one term.[275] 5 people (15%) described themselves as *charismatic*, of which three also described themselves as *liberal*. According to the criteria adduced above, therefore, only 3 (9%) could be considered pre-liberal in their theological approach, whilst 23 (68%) could be taken initially to favour either a liberal or post-liberal perspective. The remaining 8 (24%) could not be classified as either pre-liberal or post-liberal on the criteria chosen. Before more firm conclusions can be drawn about the extent to which the core of this sample can be considered post-liberal, more detailed analysis is required of the responses to this question in combination with answers to other questions which relate to the theological outlook of the sample. However, the initial impression given is that faith development theory does appear more plausible to those on the liberal wing of the church. Beyond this it is difficult to draw firm conclusions because of the ambiguity of the self-designations which people use.

[275]The most common combination was Liberal, Catholic Sacramentalist (7/34) with 7 others combining 2 of these terms: 2/34 Liberal Catholic; 2/34 Catholic Sacramentalist; 3/34 Liberal Sacramentalist. 4/34 combined Evangelical with Liberal, 1/34 combined Evangelical with Catholic; 1/34 described themselves as a Catholic Charismatic Sacramentalist and 1/34 as a Liberal Catholic Agnostic.

5.1 Using the terms above, how would you describe the religious environment of your childhood?

It has been suggested above that a dynamic theory of identity such as is found in a developmental theory like Fowler's theory is likely to appeal to those in transition. Attention is focused here, therefore, upon the environment of primary socialisation and type of symbolic universe which was experienced in childhood, linked as such environments are with potential strategies for the establishment of identity. An indication of the norms established in childhood gives an indication of the degree of movement away from this environment when a comparison is made with beliefs and attitudes of later life. Any change in theological outlook is held to reflect not only a change in beliefs, but a change in social experience which needs to be understood and accommodated.

Table 5.1: Respondents by religious environment of childhood

Religious Environment of Childhood	Frequency	Frequency as % of respondents
Agnostic	4	12
Atheist	1	3
Catholic	7	21
Charismatic	0	0
Conservative	12	35
Evangelical	5	15
Fundamentalist	2	6
Liberal	8	24
Sacramentalist	1	3

Only 8/34 (24%) used the term *liberal* to describe the environment of their childhood, compared with 23/34 (67%) who used it to describe current religious environments in which they feel comfortable. By contrast, although only 1 person used *conservative* of their current outlook, 12/34 (35%) used it to describe the religious environment of their childhood. These figures suggest a liberalising of outlook since childhood and the suggestion is born out in a more detailed look at the responses. Some 15/23 who used the term, *liberal*, in Q4.1 did not use it to describe their childhood although all of those who used it to describe their childhood, retained it within their self-description. The other designations which were insignificant in the environment of childhood but which were use in Q4.1 are *sacramentalist* (an increase from 1 in childhood to 13 in adulthood) and, to a lesser extent, *catholic* (an

increase from 7 to 16). This pattern of response seems to support the suggestion made in Chapter One that the stages of faith reflect a progression away from a conservative style of faith towards a more catholic and liberal outlook.

5.2 If there have been changes in your attitude to religion since childhood, what is the nature of these changes and what events have triggered them?

This question was formulated to allow respondents to comment in their own words upon any perceived faith development in order to see whether they understood themselves to be in transition, and to examine the extent to which their autobiographical accounts were consonant with Fowler's account of faith development. It was hoped that observations would not only include the character and direction of any changes, but provide links between faith and social experience through the contexts in which changes were perceived to have taken place.

Although 5/34 (15%) did not consider their outlook to have changed significantly, most respondents described changes reflecting a broadening of outlook: 23/34 (67%) spoke directly of a 'broadening', an 'increasing appreciation of other traditions', a decreasingly dogmatic approach or the adoption of a more 'critical' or 'questioning' faith. Other comments included a 'developing understanding of God in relational rather propositional terms', becoming 'more liberal' and 'more responsible for one's own growth'.

Perceived triggers for change were, most commonly, education, 11/34 (32%), and experience of other traditions, 8/34 (24%). Other than a general awareness of a progression, 5/34 (15%) mentioned significant life events like childbirth and the death of a parent; 3/34 (9%) mentioned conversion and another 3/34 (9%), depression or mental illness.

The direction of changes perceived by the sample supports our observations made about the response to the previous two questions concerning respondents' self-designations and their descriptions of the religious atmospheres of their childhoods: that the espousal of faith development theory is likely to reflect a movement of faith in a liberalising direction. Of

those who identified particular triggers for changes in their theological outlook, approximately half confirmed our expectation that such changes would be the result of education or the growing awareness of other traditions.

The impression which is building up from these responses about the social base of faith development theory then, is one of a group of people aware of existential faith changes taking place. In our view such experience makes accessible a dynamic theory such faith development theory as a theory of identity, in the light of which one's own biography may be recognised, objectified and thus legitimated.

6.1 Has the work of any of the following people influenced your outlook?

A list of writers was presented in the questionnaire, chosen because of their influence upon James Fowler's understanding of faith or development. As we have already discussed, the currency of any theory is likely to be determined by the currency of the cosmological framework in which it is embedded and the structures of plausibility which it employs. The scholars listed below are all theologians or psychologists and have had a direct influence upon Fowler's work. It is suggested that Fowler's faith development theory will make most sense to those whose world view is already constructed using some of the same ideas about the nature of reality and human beings. It is expected, therefore, that those most open Fowler's theory will be familiar with a psychological perspective in general, as expounded by Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung, and a developmental perspective in particular, represented by Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson, as well as with theologians who have made use of the social sciences, like Paul Tillich and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. John Westerhoff III and Ronald Goldman were included on the grounds that both of them take a developmental approach to religion broadly similar to that of Fowler. Acquaintance with the work of either of these writers, it is thought, may also predispose people towards Fowler's account of faith development. Fowler's name was included in this list to examine the impact which his theory has had relative to others working in similar fields.

Table 6.1: Respondents by Influence of Psychology

Influences	very much	a little	not at all	no response	total
Wilfred Cantwell Smith	1	6	18	9	34
Erik Erikson	6	15	7	6	34
James Fowler	16	16	1	1	34
Sigmund Freud	5	18	4	7	34
Ronald Goldman	4	12	11	7	34
Karl Jung	6	19	4	5	34
Jean Piaget	4	17	7	6	34
Paul Tillich	9	14	8	3	34
John Westerhoff III	5	13	12	4	34

The most influential figure of those listed, was James Fowler who had influenced 32/34 (94%), which statistic supports our assumption that the respondents to this questionnaire do represent a group of people influenced by his theory. A high proportion of people recorded that they had been influenced by the psychology of Freud 23/34, (68%) or Jung, 25/34 (73%). The developmental perspectives of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget had also been influential, upon 21/34 (62%). The most influential theologian was Paul Tillich, 23/34 (68%). In general people had already been influenced to some extent by some of the figures who have been influential upon James Fowler.

6.2 Please mention any other writers in these areas who have influenced you

Other figures mentioned included pastoral theologians like Michael Jacobs, who, in *Towards the Fullness of Christ*[276] related the developmental perspectives of Fowler, Tillich, Jung, Erikson & Kohlberg, amongst others, and James Hopewell, who offered a different model for understanding diversity in *Congregation*;[277] theologians, H R Niebuhr, whose work was informed by Erikson[278] and who was also a great influence on James Fowler,[279] and George Lindbeck, heavily influenced by a social scientific methodology[280]were also mentioned alongside developmentalists, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, and Robert Kegan, all discussed by Fowler in various publications, and Fritz Oser, whose work was

[276]Jacobs, M., 1988, *Towards the Fullness of Christ*, D.L.T., 1988.
[277]Hopewell, J., 1987, *Congregation*, London 1987.
[278]see Niebuhr, H. R., 1960, *The Responsible Self*, New York, 1963, 118.
[279]see Fowler J.W., 1974, *To See the Kingdom*, Abingdon Press.
[280]see Lindbeck, G., 1984. *op.cit.*.

discussed in Chapter Three. Another prominent social scientist mentioned was Mary Douglas whose work has already been cited.

The question, therefore, elicited a list of liberal or post liberal theologians and social scientists, particularly developmentalists. However, the significance of this list is difficult to assess given the names supplied in the previous question. A more open ended format would have produced more useful information.

7.1 When did you first hear about the faith development theory of James Fowler?

This question and the following two were asked in order to gain some impression of the way in which Fowler's theory has become known in Britain and the contexts in which people are caused to reflect upon faith as a developmental process; such information will facilitate an examination of the suggestions made in Chapter Three about the circumstances in which a transitional theory of identity is likely to arise.

A few respondents, 4/34 (12%) had come into contact with Fowler's work before the publication of *Stages of Faith* in 1981; the rest were evenly spread between 1981-87, 15/34 (44%), before the publication of *Children in the Way*, and afterwards, since 1988, another 15/34 (44%).

7.2 How did you first hear about the faith development theory of James Fowler?

Table 7.2: Respondents by Method of First Contact with Fowler's Work

Contact	Frequency	% Frequency
Reading Fowler's work	5	15
Reading a review of Fowler's work	3	9
Through the Children in the Way report	3	9
Through a taught course	15	43
Other	8	24
	N=34	**100%**

7.3 How did you then pursue your interest in Fowler's work?

Most respondents heard about Fowler's work between 1980 and 1990 through a taught course or through discussions and informal contacts in the churches, which shows the importance of such courses, especially ordination courses and professional development courses for church workers, in the dissemination of Fowler's work. Interest was followed up by reading in the majority of cases and attending the 1990 EMMTC Conference.

This pattern of dissemination of Fowler's work suggests that it is particularly those teaching clergy and religious professionals who have found faith development theory helpful in assisting reflection upon the pastoral task. What is not clear is whether such teaching was focused upon drawing insights from Fowler's work for understanding congregations, or for understanding the self. The focus of the interest of those who encountered faith development theory through such courses and conferences, however, is illuminated in the response to the following question.

7.4 Why were you interested in Fowler's work?

This question was aimed at finding out people's explicit reasons for interest in Fowler's work. This is not the only level of meaning which is claimed, but subjective understanding forms an important part of our enquiry, because it illuminates the situations in which people are living and the circumstances and issues which cause them to reflect upon the nature of human beings and their own sense of self.

Table 7.4: Respondents by Reason for Interest in Fowler's Work

Reason for interest	Frequency	% Frequency
Own faith journey	21	62
Children's work	18	53
Adult education	25	73
Pastoral work	19	56
Developmental Theory	19	56
Other	6	18

Reasons for interest in Fowler's theory were broad and most people expressed more than one. Interest in adult education motivated 25/34, (73%), pastoral work, 19/34 (56%), and interest in their own faith journey, 21/34 (62%) whilst, 18/34 (53%) were interested in children's work. Academic interest in developmental theory was also quite high, affecting 19/34 (56%), whilst 6/34 people, (18%) specified additional reasons for their interest, including concern to find links between religion and counselling; relating to young people; evangelism of children; teaching pastoral theology; ministerial formation; and a personal interest in the theory due to growing up in the USA. In general, interest in Fowler's theory was dependent upon the need for people to perform particular tasks, whether in education or pastoral work; however, for 21/34 people, the performance of these tasks also necessitated reflection upon their own personal faith.

A partial comparison can be made with data concerning all applicants to the conference: some 46/109 (42%) stated adult/parish education as their reason for interest, and 31/109 (28%), children's work, 33/109 (30%) worship, 33/109, (30%) pastoral care and 28/109 (26%) mission. The question regarding personal faith experience had not been included on the application form, however.

What is really of interest to our study however, is the way in which the performance of different leadership roles within the church is linked to reflection upon personal faith. We have argued above, that in order for faith development theory to operate as a theory of identity, it must provide a series of typifications of identity which allow the subject to locate themselves, not in isolation, but in relation to others. The responses to this question, seem to indicate that 21 (62%) of the sample are partially aware of this dynamic in operation in the pastoral and educational contexts in which they work.

7.5 Which of Fowler's own books and articles have you read yourself?
7.6 Please give details of any other publications in this area which you have found helpful

It was of interest for the purposes of understanding how the theory has become known to see whether people had heard about Fowler's work through a review or digest of faith development theory, or whether they had read it for themselves.

Table 7.6: Respondents by Amount of Fowler's Work Read

Books	Frequency	% Frequency
Stages of Faith	25	73
Becoming Adult, Becoming Human	20	59
Faith Development & Pastoral Care	10	29
Weaving the New Creation	2	6
Other	5	15
None	3	9

Although a lot of respondents had encountered Fowler's faith development theory through courses, 25/34, (73%) had read *Stages of Faith*, and 20/34 (59%) had read *Becoming Adult, Becoming Human*, whilst only 10/34 (29%) had read *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*. 31/34 (91%) had read something of Fowler's own work; 3 (9%) stated that they had read most of his work. The majority of the sample group then, had been sufficiently impressed by the accounts they heard of Fowler's work to read some themselves. Other publications which were popular, included Jeff Astley's *How Faith Grows*, which outlines Fowler's stages[281] Westerhoff's *Will Our Children Have Faith?*[282], Michael Jacobs' *Living Illusions*[283] and Francis Bridger's *Children Finding Faith.*[284]

[281] Astley, J., 1991, *How Faith Grows*, National Society.
[282] Westerhoff J., III, 1976. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Seabury.
[283] Jacobs, M., 1993, *Living Illusions*. S.P.C.K.
[284] Bridger, F.W., 1988, *Children Finding Faith*. Scripture Union.

8.1 To what extent has Fowler's faith development theory helped you to...

Task	very much	a little	not at all
Arrive at criteria for characterising mature faith			
Communicate with others in the Church whose approach to faith is different from your own			
Confirm a belief that demythologisation is a necessary step towards Christian maturity			
Describe your own faith experience			
Explain the existence of different styles of faith within the church			
Justify a critical perspective on religion			
Justify encouraging people to move away from literal belief			
Justify your own religious doubt			
Plan all-age worship			
Reflect upon the pastoral task			
Understand how children think			
Understand how Christian nurture might take account of modern psychology			

In order to get a more detailed picture of the ways in which Fowler's theory is being used by those who find it illuminating, the above list of tasks was presented in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which Fowler's theory was helpful in the performance of these tasks. Some of the suggestions focus upon self reflection, such as "Describe your own faith experience", to see whether respondents were aware of Fowler's theory shaping their own experience and self understanding; other suggestions focused upon the extent to which Fowler's theory was helpful in understanding others as well as the self, such as, "Explain the existence of different styles of faith within the Church"; further suggestions concentrated on the contexts in which a developmental approach to understanding faith might be considered useful and invited respondents to pinpoint the contexts in which they felt the need of a conceptual framework such as Fowler's theory offers: "Understand how Children think", "Communicate with others in the church whose faith is different from your own", and "Plan all-age worship", "Arrive at criteria for characterising mature faith" are some examples.

The results are presented in the following table ranked in order of the frequency with which Fowler's theory was considered very helpful.

Table 8.1: Respondents by Usage of Fowler's Theory

Task	very much	a little	not at all	no response	total
Explain the existence of different styles of faith within the church	21	9	1	3	34
Understand how Christian nurture might take account of modern psychology	14	16	1	3	34
Reflect upon the pastoral task	14	12	5	3	34
Describe your own faith experience	12	15	4	3	34
Justify encouraging people to move away from literal belief	12	8	11	3	34
Communicate with others in the Church whose approach to faith is different from your own	11	16	4	3	34
Arrive at criteria for characterising mature faith	11	14	6	3	34
Justify a critical perspective on religion	10	9	12	3	34
Justify your own religious doubt	8	8	15	3	34
Understand how children think	8	16	7	3	34
Plan all-age worship	5	12	14	3	34
Confirm a belief that demythologisation is a necessary step towards Christian maturity	8	15	8	3	34

The task for which Fowler's theory was found most helpful by the largest number of respondents, then, was in explaining the existence of different styles of faith in the church: 21/34 (62%) found it very helpful in this respect; 12/34 (35%) felt that Fowler's theory had helped them describe their own faith experience to a great degree, and another 16 (47%) believed Fowler's theory to have been helpful to some extent.

The four tasks for which Fowler's theory received the highest ratings were all conceptual tasks of explaining, understanding, reflecting and describing; Fowler's theory proved less useful for more practical tasks, one of the lowest ratings being received for planning all-age worship. The remaining tasks for which Fowler's theory had not been particularly helpful to many were those which presuppose quite a cognitive attitude towards religious faith which might be associated with Stage IV faith: confirming a belief that demythologisation is a necessary step towards Christian maturity; justifying a critical perspective on religion; and justifying personal doubt. In each case a small proportion had found Fowler very helpful and a larger proportion helpful to a lesser degree. What is not clear from these responses is

whether respondents had little interest in performing some of these tasks, or whether they simply did not find Fowler's theory helpful for these purposes.

Many of the tasks outlined in this question focus upon understanding or relating to others. The impression given by the responses, therefore is that Fowler's work is adopted mainly for utilitarian purposes. However, two qualifying comments need to be made here: first, that the following question puts these utilitarian usages of Fowler's stages of faith into a slightly different perspective; second that if Fowler's theory is being used as a theory of identity, it must be used to understand others as well as the self. We have argued in the previous chapter that the stimulus for adopting an explicit theory of identity is likely to be a pressing awareness of others whose outlook is different from one's own, yet to whom one needs to relate. The task of understanding others, however, also involves a degree of self understanding, for must be able to locate oneself in relation to those with whom one seeks to relate. Evidence then, of the sample group using faith development theory to understand others and reflect upon the pastoral task, implies a degree of reflection upon their own self understanding and role. This impression is confirmed by the response to the following question:

8.2 To what extent does Fowler's faith development theory...

Impact of Fowler's theory	very much	a little	not at all
Confirm what you already thought			
Give structure to your own experience			
Raise issues and questions you had not previously considered			
Make a practical difference to the way you work			
Stimulate a new way of thinking			

This question was designed to address the similar questions about the ways in which Fowler's work is used, but in a more general and summative style, asking respondents to characterise broadly the way in which faith development theory has influenced them.

Table 8.2: Respondents by Nature of Impact of Fowler's Theory

Impact of Fowler's theory	very much	a little	not at all	no response	total
Confirm what you already thought	13	14	4	3	34
Give structure to your own experience	16	11	4	3	34
Raise issues and questions you had not previously considered	11	15	5	3	34
Make a practical difference to the way you work	7	20	4	3	34
Stimulate a new way of thinking	11	18	2	3	34

Most people found that Fowler's theory was helpful in all these ways: 27/34 (79%) felt that it confirmed what was already thought, which is consonant with the numbers of people already influenced by those who had influenced Fowler himself, Piaget, Erikson, Tillich etc.; 27/34 (79%) found it helpful for structuring their own personal experience (16 of whom had found Fowler very helpful for this task - more than found faith development theory very helpful in any other area); 26/34 (76%) felt that it raised new issues, and 27/34 (79%) that it stimulated new ways of thinking. 27/34 (79%) people also found that Fowler's theory had made some impact on the way they worked, but only 7/34 (21%) had found that it had to a high degree. Again, then, Fowler's theory proved to be of more help conceptually than in terms of making a practical difference. It also proved equally helpful in structuring the sample's own experience as it had in explaining the faith styles of others, a prominent use of faith development theory noted in the responses to the previous question.

8.3 Does your own religious development fit broadly within Fowler's model?

8.4 If yes, in as far as you are familiar with Fowler's terminology, how would you describe your faith, both when you first encountered his development theory, and now?

Respondents were asked Q8.3 explicitly in order to see the extent to which they were recognising their own experience within Fowler's stages of faith. It is a crucial question, because those believing their religious development to fit within Fowler's model will be considered those able to use Fowler's model as a theory of identity, locating themselves

within a series of typifications for the sake of understanding themselves in relation to others and in relation to their own past histories. Although other factors are involved in the construction of identity and further criteria will be discussed, it is essential that those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity locate themselves, at least partially, within the set of typifications which he offers. The response to this question, then, forms the criterion for isolating those using Fowler's faith development theory as a theory of identity whom we shall consider, hereafter, the *Core Group*.

Respondents were provided with the following summaries of Fowler's stages of faith, partly to see how their understanding of themselves in Fowler's terms compared with their descriptions of their religious experience given in their own words; partly in order to ascertain whether they considered themselves to be people in transition; and partly to see if there was a particular transitional point or faith stage at which respondents found Fowler's scheme illuminating as a theory of identity.

Stage I: Intuitive-Projective Faith:
Imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols, and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting images that represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one's life.

Stage II: Mythic-Literal Faith:
The developing ability to think logically helps one order the world with categories of causality, space and time, using narrative; one can enter into the perspectives of others; and to capture life meaning in stories; symbols are perceived literally and as one-dimensional.

Stage III: Synthetic-Conventional Faith:
A coherent identity is formed within a group, integrating diverse images of self into a coherent identity. A personal faith is formed from conventional elements, the meanings of symbols are implicit, rich and powerful, supporting identity and enabling one to unite in emotional solidarity with others.

Stage IV: Individuative-Reflective Faith:
Critical reflection upon one's beliefs and values and their meaning; an ability to see oneself with the eyes of another; understanding of the self and others as part of a social system; the internalisation of authority and the assumption of responsibility for making explicit choices of ideology and lifestyle open the way for critically self-aware commitments in relationships and vocation.

Stage V: Conjunctive Faith:
Polarities are embraced; there is alertness to paradox and the need for multiple interpretations of reality. Symbol and story, metaphor and myth are newly appreciated as irreducible vehicles for expressing truth. There is openness to the traditions of others and an interest in the unconscious processes of the self.

Stage VI: Universalising Faith:
Paradox and polarities dissolve in a oneness with the power of being; vision and commitment free one for a passionate, yet detached spending of the self in love. An ability to overcome division, oppression and violence and co-operation in God's commonwealth of love and justice.[285]

Table 8.3: Respondents by Correlation of Religious Development with Fowler's Model

Response	Frequency	% Frequency
Fit within Fowler's model	24	71
Not fit within Fowler's model	7	20
No response	3	9
	N=34	100%

24/34 (71%) felt their own pattern of development to fit broadly within Fowler's scheme. 7/34 (20%) felt their development was not well described by faith development theory, and 3/34 (9%) made no response to this question. It is this first group of respondents in whom we are primarily interested. Not because other responses to Fowler's work are invalid, but because we are seeking to use this questionnaire to illustrate the dynamics at work when faith development theory is being used as a theory of identity. We have identified understanding one's own development in Fowler's own terms, as a crucial pre-requisite for using the stages of faith in this way.

[285] These summaries of Fowler's faith stages were kindly provided by Professor Fowler himself, and are used with permission.

Table 8.4: Respondents by Self-Allocated Faith Stage

Stage	Then	% Then	Now	% Now
Stage I	0	0	0	0
Transition	0	0	0	0
Stage II	0	0	0	0
Transition	0	0	0	0
Stage III	3	13	0	0
Transition	1	4	0	0
Stage IV	10	43	1	4
Transition	2	9	6	26
Stage V	3	13	11	48
Transition	2	9	3	13
Stage VI	0	0	0	0
Combination of stages	2	9	2	9
	N=23	**100%**	**N=23**	**100%**

Of the 23 responses to this question, no-one located themselves in Stages I or II. 8/23 (35%) believed their stage not to have changed since they first encountered Fowler's theory, of whom 7/23 already considered themselves to be in Stage V/VI. 5/23 (22%) considered themselves to be described, in any sense, by Stage III, of whom only 1/5 felt that they remained at this stage. The most common stage in which people had become interested in the theory was Stage IV, (10/23 or 43%) and almost all respondents now considered themselves to be best described by Stage IV/V or V or V/VI (22/23 or 96%). Consequently, only 1/23 considered their current stage of development to be below the transition between Stages IV and V.

Results show, then, that of the 23 responses to this question, overwhelmingly people considered their present stage of faith to be well described by the latter stages of Fowler's theory. 15/23 (64%) felt that their faith stage had changed since they first encountered the stages of faith. All these changes were in the direction of development which Fowler suggests; none were regressive. There were 8/23 (36%) who felt their faith stage had remained static since encountering faith development theory. 7/8, however, believed themselves already to have reached Stage V or V/VI.

Over a third of the sample, then, recognised their own style of faith described in the latter stages of Fowler's theory, whilst the remaining two thirds recognised their development heading in this direction. Whether contact with faith development theory initiated or accelerated such movement or gave definition to its direction cannot be discerned from this questionnaire.

Some comment should be made on the fact that no-one considered their development to conform to Fowler's Stage VI faith without qualification, although three people did consider themselves to be in the transition between Stages V & VI. Although at first sight this might seem extraordinary, there are no recorded examples in Fowler's research of a subject being interviewed and allocated to Stage VI; the only examples of this kind of faith which Fowler cites are extraordinary figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King Jr. Part of the explanation for people's reluctance to put themselves in this category, then, seems attributable to Fowler's reluctance place people within it. Partly also, it seems possible, that tacitly Stage VI faith has been recognised as an ideal image of faith which, like Niebuhr's radical monotheism, can never be grasped more than momentarily, and for this reason, it would seem arrogant to consider one's own faith to be exclusively described by Stage VI.

To an extent, then, those who located themselves within Fowler's stages are people who consider their faith to be in transition. For some, however, whatever changes there had been in their faith styles over time had taken place before they encountered faith development theory. There are two basic patterns amongst the *Core Group*: those who found themselves in agreement with the trajectories in faith development theory because they had already constructed a faith style consonant with Stages V & V/VI; and those who encountered faith development in Stage IV, for whom awareness of Fowler's stages played a role in helping them reconstruct faith in a style consonant with Stages V & VI.

9.1 What did you hope to gain from attending the conference in Nottingham?

This question provided a further opportunity for respondents to give reasons for their interest in Fowler's work.

The main reasons for attending the conference were to gain a better understanding of Fowler's work and to meet Fowler, himself. Several people hoped for practical help in implementing his theory in the field of children's or pastoral work, and two were interested in conducting research in this field.

9.2 What did you gain from attending the conference?

Most had gained stimulation and a better understanding of Fowler's own emphases. There was disappointment at the lack of attention which Fowler paid to making practical use of his theory in pastoral and educational contexts.

Analysis

In order to illustrate the dynamics at work when faith development theory is used as a theory of identity we shall consider the evidence which the questionnaire offers concerning how Fowler's theory structures people's experience of themselves in relation to others; second, we shall consider the evidence relating to the social class and experience of those amongst whom the theory is so used; third we shall consider the information which the questionnaire has elicited concerning the faith commitments and theological perspectives of this group.

Faith Development Theory as a Theory of Identity

First then, we shall examine any evidence that Fowler's theory is being used to structure and interpret the personal experience of respondents in relation to their past and in relation to others in the present. In order to do so we shall first consider the responses to Q8.3 concerning whether respondents felt their religious development to fit within Fowler's model.

From the results of Q8.3 presented on page 175, we have seen that 24/34 (71%) felt their own pattern of development to fit broadly within Fowler's scheme; 7/34 (20%) felt their development was not well described by faith development theory, whilst 3/34 (9%) did not respond to the question. From now on, our interest focuses particularly upon those who felt their own pattern of development to fit broadly within Fowler's scheme as these are the people to whom faith development theory is understood to be accessible as a theory of identity; this group, then, we shall term, for brevity's sake, the *Core Group*, and those who did not find their own faith style well articulated by Fowler's scheme and who are peripheral to our concern, will be termed, the *Fringe Group*.

The impression given by responses to Q8.3, then, is that over two thirds of the sample were using faith development theory to articulate their own faith style. This proportion is also reflected in the response to Q.2 where 27/34 recorded that Fowler's work had both structured their personal experience and had helped them describe their own faith experience. It is concluded then, that a majority of respondents were using Fowler's theory to understand and interpret their own experience.

We have maintained throughout this chapter, however, that to function as a theory of identity, faith development theory must not only offer an identity type to the individual, but must offer a series of types by which others in the social environment can be understood. The importance of a stable self concept is the power that it offers to become an agent in the social world, knowing how to behave towards others and what behaviour to expect from them. Before claiming that those designating themselves in Fowler's terms are using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity, we shall seek to establish whether these same people are also using the theory to understand others. To do this we shall compare the responses of the *Core* and *Fringe* groups to question 8.1: *To what extent has Fowler's theory helped you to explain the existence of other styles of faith within the Church.*

Table 10.1.1: The extent to which Fowler's theory was helpful in explaining the existence of different faith styles within the Church by Group

Response	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Very much	18	3	21
A little	6	3	9
Not at all	0	1	1
No response	0	3	3
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

It is clear from this table that all those in the *Core Group* recorded that Fowler's theory had helped them explain the existence of different faith styles within the Church: 18/24 (75%) to a large extent and 6/24 (25%) to a lesser extent. Amongst the *Fringe Group* there was a mixed response.

The dependence of the two variables: those understanding their own development in Fowler's terms and those using the same typifications to understand others can be tested by constructing a bivariate table and using the Chi square. First of all the frequencies for the table above were calculated assuming that the variables are independent and answers entirely random using the formula:

$$f_e = \frac{\text{(row marginal)(column marginal)}}{N}$$

Table 10.1.2: Expected frequencies for Table 10.1.1 if the variables are independent

Response	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Very much	14.82	6.18	21
A little	6.35	2.65	9
Not at all	0.71	0.29	1
No response	2.18	0.82	3
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

If alpha (the margin of error) is set at the 0.05 level, (because 2 decimal places are being used) the critical region, with 3 degrees of freedom, would begin at χ^2 (critical) = 7.815. With an obtained χ^2 of 73.26 we would then reject the null hypothesis of independence. For this sample, then, it is concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between those using Fowler's theory to structure or describe their own experience and those finding it useful for explaining the existence of other styles of faith within the Church.

The use of the Chi square confirms then, that the 71% of the sample, which we have termed the *Core Group*, who locate themselves within Fowler's set of typifications of faith, also understand others in these terms. This finding strengthens the gathering impression that Fowler's theory is being used to structure people's experience of themselves in relation to others and as such is being used a theory of identity. We shall now turn to an examination of that experience, understood in social and religious terms.

Faith Development Theory, Social and Religious Experience

In order to examine the question of the social class and social experience of those most influenced by faith development theory, we shall consider the responses to the questions concerning education, (Qs 2.1 & 2.2) and occupation, (Q1.4), as indicators of social class; and questions concerning respondents' religious experience over time, looking at indications of the nature and the triggers for any such changes, (Qs 5.1 & 5.2).

These questions will be discussed in the belief that the responses reveal both whether people using faith development theory have experienced transition and the contexts in which they have experienced it; throughout the questionnaire specific contexts for such reflection were also suggested to see whether they would elicit any response (Q3.3, concerning whether respondents had responsibility for religious education; and Q8.1, which suggested a number of contexts in which such reflection might arise: pastoral work, interaction in the churches; working with children; planning all-age worship); these questions and others (Q7.4 concerning people's reasons for interest in Fowler's theory; and Q8.2 concerning the impact which respondents felt that the theory had on their approach) were also designed to see whether Fowler's theory had proved an aid to such reflection.

In terms of the education which respondents had received, as we have observed, all had received some higher education; 29/34 (85%) holding a Bachelor's degree and 28/34 (82%) having done some post-graduate work, thus revealing a much higher level of education than that of the average population. In addition, to the generally highly educated nature of this

group, 32/34 (94%) specified that they had received some higher education in theology or religious studies.

Regarding occupation, all respondents, and all applicants to the conference were found to be in jobs usually associated with the middle classes. Occupations represented were clergy, church lay workers of various sorts, lecturers, chaplains, housewives, accountants and teachers. It was particularly notable that a high proportion of respondents, both lay and ordained were employed by the churches, totalling 24/34 (71%).

Thus, both respondents and applicants to the conference seem to have had educational and employment experience typical of the middle classes: highly educated and mostly employed in professional occupations with a high degree of autonomy and influence over their own working patterns. Apart from disposing such people towards a more rational world view, the perspective outlined in Chapter Three leads to the expectation that such people are likely to be aware of rapid social change: both in general and personal terms.

Concerning the degree to which this social and educational experience has produced people in conscious transition, the evidence of the questionnaire is more difficult to interpret. When describing their religious outlook since childhood, in response to Q5.2, not all respondents recorded changes in their religious outlook, (5/34 or 15% recorded no such change.). However, 29/34 (85%) did register awareness of either gradual development, or more radical and specific changes:

11/34 (32%) stated that education had resulted in a change of outlook, and 8/34 (24%) stated experience of other traditions as a trigger for change. These changes were described as a broadening of outlook: 23/34 (68%) of respondents speaking directly of a 'broadening', an 'increasing appreciation of other traditions', a decreasingly dogmatic approach and the adoption of a more 'critical' or 'questioning' faith. There were also other more personal marginal experiences which were cited as triggers for change: 5/34 (15%) mentioned

significant life events like childbirth and the death of a parent; 3/34 (9%) mentioned conversion and another 3/34 (9%), depression or mental illness. Overall, 29/34 (85%) of respondents were conscious of some movement in their religious outlook since childhood.[286]

These results would seem to be consistent with the pattern suggested in Chapter Three that those most influenced by Fowler's faith development theory would middle class people who are, both socially and existentially, people in transition. Responses to Q3.3 and Q7.4 make it clear, however, that not only are experience of higher education and contact with other traditions likely to be responsible for explicit consideration of matters of faith and identity, but that other factors are also involved in stimulating such contemplation.

Q3.3, concerning responsibility for religious education, whether of adults, young people or children, revealed that 31/34 (91%) were involved in this kind of work. The significance of this statistic becomes apparent when looking at Q7.4 in which 30/34 (88%) of respondents stated their interest in Fowler's theory as being due to their involvement in either children's work, adult education or pastoral work; of these, 21/30 (70%) also stated an interest in their own faith journey and even amongst the 9/30 who did not claim such an additional interest, there was only one who did not feel that Fowler's theory had structured their experience or described it.

The pattern which is emerging then, from the examination of the responses to these questions is of a middle class and highly educated group of people who are interested in their own self concept because of the contexts in which they have found their understanding of others and themselves to be wanting. Not only as middle class people are they likely to be socially mobile and predisposed towards a degree of detachment from social roles and self reflection, but by virtue of their theological education, pastoral and educational responsibilities within the churches they have found a need to understand others and themselves within a new

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[286] In James Fowler's terms such changes might be a change in content or the structure of faith. As argued elsewhere, such a distinction between structure and content is not believed to be justified.

conceptual framework; moreover as the responses to Qs 8.1 & 8.2 indicate, a significant number have explicitly indicated that they have found Fowler's theory helpful in this respect: 30/34 (88%) finding the theory helpful in explaining the existence of different styles of faith within the Church, (Q8.1); 26/34 (76%) finding it helpful in reflecting upon the pastoral task, (Q8.1); 27/34 (79%) finding it helpful in communicating with those in the Church with a different approach to faith, (Q8.1); and 27/34 (79%) also finding that Fowler's theory was helpful in structuring their own experience, (Q8.2).

Before we leave this question of the social base of faith development theory, however, one question which must be addressed concerns the degree of correlation between those 24 respondents identified as the *Core Group* who are considered to be using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity, and those 29 people perceiving themselves to be in transition or those 30 people involved in pastoral or educational work. What proportion of the *Core Group* consider themselves in transition, or are involved in pastoral or educational work whether as ministers, lecturers in theological education, diocesan advisers or chaplains? Is it true to say that those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity are those in transition or those with particular pastoral responsibilities?

Table 10.2.1: Perception of faith over time by Group

Response	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Faith changes over time	22	7	29
Faith remains static	2	3	5
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

Looking at the table above, 22/24 (91%) of the *Core Group* do consider their faith to have changed over time. There is a high degree of correlation between those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity and those perceiving themselves to be in transition. It should be noted, however, that a considerable proportion of those in the *Fringe Group* also consider themselves to have experienced changes in religious outlook; although the percentage is lower, (70%), it is not the case that all those perceiving themselves to be in transition are automatically inclined to adopt Fowler's stages of faith as a means of self definition. The questionnaire is not, however, designed to examine such a hypothesis, rather to illustrate the

dynamics at work amongst those who do understand the changes they have experienced in terms of the developmental sequence which Fowler has proposed.

When we move on to an examination of those working in religious education of various kinds or in pastoral work, a similar pattern emerges.

Table 10.3.1: Employment in religious education or pastoral work by Group

	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Employment in religious education or pastoral work	20	9	29
Other employment	4	1	5
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

Whilst 20/24 (83)% the *Core Group* were employed as ministers, chaplains, lecturers in religious education or as church officers of various kinds involved in educational and pastoral work, 9/10 (90%) of the *Fringe Group* were also similarly employed. Thus, whilst use of Fowler's theory as a theory of identity might depend to some extent on employment in these fields, such experience of pastoral or educational work does not constitute sufficient cause to adopt Fowler's stages as a theory of identity.

On the evidence examined so far then, there is no real differentiating factor in terms of social class or experience between those in the *Core Group* and those in the *Fringe Group*; those who consider their own faith experience broadly to fit within Fowler's scheme and those who do not. The question which arises from this analysis, then, concerns why Fowler's theory should appeal as a theory of identity to some middle class, well educated church members and not others; to some in social and existential transition, and not others; and to some with pastoral and educational responsibilities, and not others. For an answer we turn to examine the intellectual commitments and faith perspectives of the two groups.

Faith Development Theory, Intellectual Commitments and Faith Perspectives

We have argued above that any theory or idea which is current within a society must be consonant with a cosmological framework in order to be meaningful or intelligible. In the

case of Fowler's faith development theory, its plausibility rests partly upon religious faith. All 34 respondents declared themselves to be practising members of Christian communities; this, therefore, cannot be sufficient reason for attraction towards Fowler's theory as a theory of identity. Other conditions of plausibility which we have identified include a favourable disposition towards psychology, and a theologically post-liberal outlook: desiring to hold together both cognition, imagination and the emotions as valid parts of human experience; believing that the myths, symbols and rituals of a religious tradition are indispensable and cannot be reduced; displaying a commitment to dialogue with those of different faith, yet without a tendency to reduce all faith to the same core experience.

This is the part of the Questionnaire in which the evidence is most difficult to interpret. Although in response to Q8.1, concerning whether Fowler's theory had been found helpful in understanding how Christian nurture might take account of modern psychology, 30/34 (88%) respondents claimed to have found Fowler's theory helpful, concerning the influence of figures like Freud, Jung, Tillich and Piaget, it is difficult to quantify the responses given, and to relate these responses to the self-descriptions provided in Q4.1.

Table 4.1.2: Respondents by attitude towards liberal Christianity

Approach	Frequency	% Frequency
Pre-liberal	3	9
Liberal/Post-Liberal	23	68
Other	8	23
	N=34	**100%**

The general impression created by the responses to Q4.1 is that few respondents could be considered pre-liberal, as few used the terms, fundamentalist, conservative or evangelical,. However, it is difficult to differentiate between liberal and post-liberal outlooks on the basis of the responses given. It is also difficult to interpret the ways in which terms like *evangelical* or *liberal* are being used.

We suggested, above, that the use of the term *liberal* alone or in combination with other designations might indicate a potentially post-liberal perspective, and using this criterion,

23/34 (68%) were taken initially to favour either a liberal or post-liberal perspective and the remaining 8/34 (24)% could not be classified on the criteria chosen or had elected not to answer the question.

These conclusions are very tentative, however, and although using the Chi square, the dependence of the two variables: theological self-designation given in Q4.1, and use of Fowler's theory as a theory of identity seems to be demonstrated - see the tables below - no claims about the appeal of faith development theory can really be made on this basis:

Table 10.5.1: Attitude to liberal theology by Group

	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Pre-liberal	0	3	3
Liberal/Post-liberal	20	3	23
Other	4	4	8
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

10.5.2: Expected frequencies for Table 10.5.1 if variables are independent

	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Pre-liberal	2.12	0.88	3
Liberal/Post-liberal	16.24	6.76	23
Other	5.65	2.35	8
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

Expected frequencies are found on a cell-by-cell basis by the formula

$$f_e = \frac{\text{(row marginal)(column marginal)}}{N}$$

If alpha is set at the 0.05 level, the critical region, with 2 degrees of freedom, would begin at χ^2 (critical) = 5.991. With an obtained χ^2 of 11.38 we reject the null hypothesis of independence. For this sample there is a statistically significant relationship between those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity and those identified as liberal/post-liberal.

When it comes to the results of a similar test of the independence of the two variables involved in the suggestion that those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity are also

those considering their development best described by Stage V faith, however, the evidence is stronger.

Table 10.6.1: Perceptions of faith stages by Group

	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Those currently describing themselves at Stage V	22	1	23
Others	2	9	11
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

Table 10.6.2: Expected frequencies for Table 10.6.1

	Core Group	Fringe Group	Totals
Those currently describing themselves at Stage V	16.24	6.76	23
Others	7.76	3.24	11
Totals	**24**	**10**	**34**

Expected frequencies are found on a cell-by-cell basis by the formula

$$f_e = \frac{\text{(row marginal)(column marginal)}}{N}$$

If alpha is set at the 0.05 level, the critical region, with 1 degree of freedom, would begin at χ^2 (critical) = 3.841. With an obtained χ^2 of 21.47 we reject the null hypothesis of independence. For this sample there is a statistically significant relationship between those using Fowler's theory as a theory of identity and those describing themselves in terms of Stage V faith.

Fowler's theory does therefore, appeal most to those who see themselves in terms of his latter stages; this is also the same group of people which we have tentatively suggested may be constructing a post-liberal perspective. It would appear that, certainly for those who see themselves in terms of the latter stages of faith development, Fowler's scheme is able to provide an interpretative framework whereby the changes they have experienced since childhood can be understood and legitimated, and whereby others whom they encounter through their various pastoral responsibilities can be accommodated and their faith valued.

Conclusions

First, the evidence provided by the questionnaire has built up a picture of those most profoundly influenced by faith development theory as persons of religious faith who hold positions of responsibility within faith communities; they are middle class people who are, both socially and existentially, people in transition; people who through education, particularly in theology, and through contact with various styles of faith through their pastoral and educational responsibilities, have had cause to question and objectify their own faith experience, and become explicitly aware of the changes in their theological outlook which have taken place over time; their current theological perspective is self-described, predominantly, as liberal - using insights from the social sciences to understand faith and religious experience; appreciating the symbolic nature of doctrine; and interested in genuine dialogue with people of other faith, and yet cherishing the particularity of the stories, symbols and rituals of the Christian tradition. Yet, these are the people who also recognise their own current outlook reflected, predominantly in Fowler's description of Stage V faith, which we have identified with Lindbeck's post-liberal perspective.

Second, the results of this questionnaire have offered a picture of the way in which faith development theory functions amongst such people, structuring their faith experience diachronically, in relation to their own histories and, synchronically, in relation to those around them; as such we are seeing faith development theory in operation as a theory of identity, helping those, who through their responsibilities within the churches for pastoral work and Christian education, are constantly meeting people who see faith differently from themselves, yet amongst whom they need to find a role.

Faith development theory, then, is able to provide for such people, a series of typifications of ways of being Christian. Whilst they are able to identify with the dynamic description of faith which Fowler describes because of their own experiences of social and personal mobility, they also recognise their own current outlook reflected in Fowler's description of Stage V faith. This identification allows, not only an objectification and thus legitimisation

of their own faith experience, but also locates it in relation to others who perceived to be at different stages by virtue of their different ages and experience. Such a perspective removes any potential element of threat to the basis of the church leader's style of faith from whose faith is based upon different premises, and suggests a way of conceiving the pastoral and educational task as leading others to a fuller maturity in faith.

Third, we have observed, that whilst Fowler's theory is being used as a theory of identity by the majority of respondents to the questionnaire, whom we have termed, the *Core Group*, there were other respondents whose interest in the theory was less personal. Also of religious faith, middle class and involved in church leadership, these respondents recorded utilitarian reasons for interest in Fowler's theory, and did not align themselves with the latter stages of Fowler's model and his criteria for appropriate adult faith.

However, although the Core Group conformed to many of the expectations formed during the early part of this thesis, the Fringe Group revealed a different audience for Fowler's work which was theologically more conservative, and interested in faith development theory, not for its potential in articulating and resolving their own questions of identity, but for any practical guidance it might offer about the religious education of the young.

Such findings lend some support to the suggestion made in Chapter One that faith development theory arises from a particular theological tradition and appeals to those who have been influenced by the same tradition. They also highlight the point, that people with quite similar social backgrounds and of similar social status may evolve very different attitudes towards developments in culture such as pluralism, empiricism and relativism.

In the following chapter, as we move to discuss published examples of faith development theory being used in mainstream churches, we shall attempt to develop our understanding of the two different attitudes towards faith development we have identified. We shall explore the various ways in which Fowler's work has been cited in British publications, and examine

detailed examples of the stages of faith being used in the construction or maintenance of Christian identities, in order to better understand the ways in which the theory interacts with people's social experience and particularly with their existing theological orientations.

Chapter Five Faith Development Theory in Practice - An Analysis

Introduction

The discussion of the published uses of faith development theory which forms the substance of this chapter performs a function in this thesis which is parallel to that of the questionnaire. Discussed in the previous chapter, this questionnaire was designed to explore the dynamics governing the reception of Fowler's stages of faith by investigating the backgrounds and attitudes towards faith development theory of a self selected sample of those interested in Fowler's work. In a similar vein, our current examination of published material in which faith development theory is invoked to explain or justify a variety of positions, is designed to illuminate further the social function of faith development theory, and thus its appeal. We shall note the uses to which faith development theory has been put in the published literature, the approaches it has been used to underpin, and the elements which have been extracted from it, drawing upon our discussion in Chapter Three of the work of Karl Mannheim.

Mannheim suggested that there are dependent links between the beliefs or ideas which are current in a society and the social groups who adhere to them. He maintained that these links can be understood using the concept of *social interest*, whereby each social group is seen to adopt beliefs about the nature of reality which reflect and advance their own social position.

Also, in Chapter Three, it was suggested, with reference to Mary Douglas' work, that those interested in faith development theory are likely to be successful members of a complex society who are highly educated and socially mobile and who have experienced some sense of personal transition. Faith development theory may function in the social interest of such a group, because its dynamic structure and explicit attention to the questions of meaning raised by an awareness of pluralism, objectify and thus legitimise this group's social experience of the world and the strategies they have adopted in order to cope with their environment.

An alternative way of characterising Mannheim's notion of *social interest*, in this context, uses the social psychological concept of *identity* (though the concept of identity is by no means thereby exhausted). Thus it was proposed, in Chapter Three, that faith development theory might be operating as a theory of identity: presenting a series of faith types which allows people to recognise, articulate and value their own theological standpoint, whilst also offering an interpretation of the faith styles of others.

We have argued that faith development theory can only operate in this way amongst a particular social group: the social group whose style of faith is presented at the apex of the developmental sequence, and those whose backgrounds and experience have led them towards an explicit and dynamic Christian identity.

What we seek to do in the current chapter is to further our understanding of the dynamics at work between this social group and Fowler's stages of faith using the evidence of published references to his work. Although many references have already been made in the course of this thesis to the responses which the theory has elicited in the academic fields of psychology and theology, the focus of attention here is not upon explicit critiques of Fowler's work, but upon articles or reports in which faith development theory is being invoked as an explanation or reason for adopting particular courses of action. It is suggested that an examination of such references to Fowler's faith development theory in the light of the social-psychological studies of identity discussed in Chapter Three, will further illuminate its social function and appeal.

Evidence from published literature

Religious education

Published reactions to Fowler's work in Britain have fallen within two fields: religious education and pastoral theology. The first articles to be published in Britain concerning faith development theory were in the context of the debate on religious education. In Britain, religious education is discussed in two distinct spheres: in the school context and in the

church context. Although there is some degree of overlap between the two, they are governed by different concerns and operate in very different ways. Although the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church have retained a considerable interest in day school education, most state education policy on religious education is now determined by local government.[287] The main journal which exists as a forum for the discussion of such issues is the *British Journal of Religious Education* (BJRE) which is the publication of the Christian Education Movement (CEM). Although the CEM was formed as a charity committed to articulating Christian views on religious education, it now seeks to support the teaching of the major world faiths and increase awareness of the often unstated beliefs and values by which people live. Two Roman Catholic journals have also witnessed discussions of faith development theory: *The Month* is the successor to *The Month & Catholic Review*; The *NewREview* is the journal of the National Catechetical Association. Fowler's theory began to be discussed within these Christian education journals in the mid nineteen eighties, and between 1983-6 eleven articles appeared treating aspects of his work.

The impact of Fowler's work within pastoral theology has been rather slower to be felt. In Britain, pastoral theology is a disparate field, being taught and researched mostly within theological colleges and seminaries rather than in the departments and faculties of universities. Consequently, there is not a great deal of published material in this area which originates in Britain, most of it coming from America. However, there is published evidence that Fowler's faith development theory is being used within the seminaries in Britain, and being used to help clergy, in particular, to reflect upon the pastoral task. Both Fowler's own work and publications which utilise his theory are being used as text books in theological colleges and on courses which are training people for ministry within the mainstream denominations.

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[287] RE policy is currently on the basis of a locally agreed syllabus developed at county level, although church maintained schools have some discretion about the implementation of this policy.

Fowler's work was clearly being read within academic educational circles during the nineteen eighties in Britain[288] and, through the reviews and debate in the journals, achieved a wider audience. The tone of the response to Fowler in this literature was mostly critical. This was particularly the case amongst educationalists, who, in the wake of a fierce debate about Goldman's work in the early 1980s were looking for a more systematic approach to developmental theory, and seeking a more rigorous way of relating the different areas of human development. Although Fowler's theory does attempt to combine different developmental theories, he is not precise about the way in which the differently conceived stage theories fit together[289]. Faith development theory, it seems, then, did not meet the requirements of those within the academic religious education field, looking to move onwards from Goldman's research. Hence the comment of D H Webster that Fowler's theory is best seen as practical theology and not as scientific theory.[290]

Whether or not Fowler's theory is best seen as practical theology, it was certainly seized upon with enthusiasm by people within the churches needing to reflect upon the pastoral task within seminaries, and by those needing to do constructive work amongst children. Marion Smith, a lecturer at Roehampton Institute, concluded her article of 1983 with the recommendation that "the concept of development, the value of talking about faith, and the importance of symbols are three aspects of Fowler's work which deserve to be taken seriously." Indeed, she then went on to conduct a small research project, herself, together with Barrie Miller, on the development of symbolic function[291] and in 1985, used Fowler's theory to write an article about responses to David Jenkins, then Bishop of Durham.[292]

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[288]Between 1984 and 1990 the *British Journal of Religious Education* published seven articles about faith development theory and *The Month* published six such articles between 1983 and 1986.
[289]see, for example, Smith, M., 1983, "Developments in Faith", *The Month*, June 1983.
[290]Webster, D. H., 1984, "James Fowler's theory of faith development." *British Journal of Religious* Education 7, (1984), 14-18 reprinted in Astley, J.1992, & Francis, L.J., eds., 1992, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development*, Gracewing/ Eerdmans, 1992.
[291]Smith, M. & Miller, B., 1984, "Symbol and the Faith Process." *The Month*, October 1984.
[292]Smith, M., 1985, "David Jenkins: a kind of leadership" *The Month*, April 1985.

Other positive responses were made by Nicola Slee, also a lecturer at Roehampton, who highlighted the possibilities in Fowler's work for using Biblical material with younger children[293] - something not recommended by Goldman. Arthur seized upon Fowler's work because it raised the question of the nature of religious maturity, which he believed to be important; [294] and Hyde was pleased with the attention Fowler's work was receiving, nominating him as one of the few people concerned to build upon the insights of the developmental work of the Goldman school which he felt was being eclipsed.[295]

There is also evidence from these articles that faith development theory was making an impact in spheres other than the academic. As early as 1983 Marion Smith said, "interest in Fowler's work has already been shown by several Christian denominations",[296] and her article published in *The Month* in 1986 used data from a conference of Anglican Sunday School teachers during which exercises were completed, devised in order to convey the differences between adult and children's understanding as described by Fowler.[297]

The interest in Fowler shown in the confessional context has been more positive and enduring than in academic circles. This must partly be explicable in terms of the need for those involved in the making and implementing policy to use choose some framework within which to operate. For these reasons, Smith commented in 1983,

> It is not surprising that Fowler's ideas have been seized upon by teachers, preachers, pastors and the intelligent layman (*sic*) concerned to cultivate his faith to greater maturity,[298]

This last article of Smith's affords a glimpse of the way in which Fowler's work has been influential in the British churches in the last fifteen years in a way which is difficult to trace. The questionnaire has already revealed that much of the dissemination of Fowler's work has

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[293] Slee, N., 1985, "Opening up the Bible in Religious Education" *New REview*, Autumn 1985.
[294] Arthur, C.J., 1985, "Religion, Identity and Maturity" *BJRE*, Spring 1985, 48-54.
[295] Hyde, K., 1984, "Twenty years after Goldman's research" *BJRE*, Autumn 1984, 5-7.
[296] Smith, M., 1983. "Developments in Faith", *The Month*, June 1983, 223.
[297] Smith, M., 1986. "Images of God" *The Month*, October 1986.
[298] Smith, M., 1983. "Developments in Faith", *The Month*, June 1983, 225.

taken place informally through workshops and discussions in the churches.[299] The course of such dissemination is difficult to follow, but clearly by 1986 educators within several denominations were being introduced to concepts arising out of Fowler's work. Further evidence of the influence of Fowler's work within the British churches can be found in their reports on children's work, the reports of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI) and in books published on pastoral theology.

The first known reference to the work of James Fowler in a British publication was in 1980 in *Learning and Teaching Together* by John Sutcliffe, then General Secretary of the Christian Education Movement. In his discussion of the *real people* who populate the churches, Sutcliffe emphasised the importance of a developmental perspective in order to understand who people are and how they operate. In particular, he cited the theory of James Fowler, recommended some of his early publications and stated that psychological development needs to be taken seriously.[300]

This reference is important for two reasons. One is that John Sutcliffe was then also editor of *Partners in Learning*, a publication of the Christian Education Movement and the Methodist Division of Education and Youth, providing weekly material for church use and widely used by Methodist, URC and Anglican congregations. The other is that Sutcliffe's book was recommended by the MDEY to the Methodist Conference in their annual report of 1981 on the grounds that,

> it is full of new, and sometimes controversial, thinking about the meaning of Christian education and what changes in church life and thinking will be necessary if its ideas are accepted. The ideas reflect convictions and developments which are increasingly being accepted internationally and inter-denominationally among Christian educational specialists, and it would be sad if Methodism were not to reflect this.[301]

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[299] See the response to Question 7.2, in Chapter Four.
[300] Sutcliffe, J., 1980, *Learning and Teaching Together*, London.
[301] The Division of Education & Youth Report to the Representative Session of the British Methodist Conference of 1981, published in the Conference Agenda, 229-269; 236.

Since then, the MDEY annual reports to the Methodist Conference have cited the faith development theory of Fowler in support of acts of all age worship (1990)[302] and to underline the importance of work amongst parents (1993).[303] Although this amounts to relatively few explicit references to Fowler's work, the nature of these reports is that they are not heavily referenced. What is more significant is the change in vocabulary which has taken place during the last two decades. In particular, phrases such as 'growing in faith' and 'faith development' have largely replaced their antecedents 'child development' and 'growth in grace'. The influence of faith development theory within the MDEY, although inexplicit, is pervasive. By 1993, despite the absence of any discussion of the merits of faith development theory in the report, the comment "one of the key lessons which we all need to learn from faith development...."[304], could be made without needing further justification.

One of the chief documents to which the MDEY reports of the 1990's refer, is *Children in the Way*, the report of the Church of England's General Synod Board of Education, published in 1988 by the National Society. Although a denominational report, *Children in the Way*'s influence has extended far beyond the Church of England. The first such report to have made extensive use of faith development theory, *Children in the Way* looks at the position of children in society, possible styles of outreach to children, models for children's work and ways of providing encouragement for growth in faith.

In this report the stages of development described by James Fowler are outlined, and Fowler's books, *Stages of Faith* and *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* are recommended for further reading, alongside the work of John Westerhoff III.[305] The report states that "our increasing understanding of 'growth' in the life of faith rephrases many of our questions

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[302]The Division of Education & Youth Report to the Representative Session of the British Methodist Conference of 1990, published in the Conference Agenda, 309 ff..
[303]The Division of Education & Youth Report to the Representative Session of the British Methodist Conference of 1993, published in the Conference Agenda, 517.
[304]The Division of Education & Youth Report to the Representative Session of the British Methodist Conference of 1993, published in the Conference Agenda, 517.
[305]for an account of Westerhoff's stages, see, Westerhoff III, J., 1976, *Will Our Children Have Faith*? Seabury.

about our work and relationships with children in the church."[306] Faith development theory is then invoked to support all-age worship[307] and learning, the development of children's spirituality[308], person-centred learning[309] and the necessity for contact between older and younger Christians as part of a sponsoring community[310]. The evidence provided by Fowler about the way in which people at different stages perceive the world is used to urge that those who work with children need to recognise their own pilgrimage[311], that the Church needs answers for its young people concerning its policies and beliefs and that it needs knowledge concerning the tasks which actually face people, both young and old.[312]

It is clear that to some extent, by 1988, those educationalists influential in the Church of England were convinced that Fowler's faith development theory could be of considerable use. It was for this reason that "a Working Party was set up by the Church of England General Synod Board of Education to evaluate research into faith development and its implications for Christian education."[313]

The findings of this Working Party were published by the National Society in 1991, entitled *How Faith Grows*: *Faith Development and Christian Education.* The greater part of this report describes Fowler's understanding of faith, his stages of faith, and reviews some of the criticisms of his approach. Two other approaches are briefly considered: that of John Westerhoff III and the American Roman Catholic scholar, Gabriel Moran, though neither of these receive extended treatment, partly because they are speculative and not based upon empirical research. Although the Working Party states that it does not wish to be dogmatic about faith development theory nor endorse all the implications of the theory, it does suggest

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[306] *Children in the Way*, National Society, 1988, 43.
[307] *Ibid.*, 49-51.
[308] *Ibid.*, 43.
[309] *Ibid.*, 43.
[310] *Ibid.*, 46-7.
[311] *Ibid.*, 56, 58.
[312] *Ibid.*, 61.
[313] Astley, J., 1991, *How Faith Grows*, National Society.

that 'some of the central themes of faith development theory are too important - and many of them too well supported by evidence - to be cavalierly ignored.'[314]

In the last section of the report, attention is paid to the practical implications of faith development theory for worshipping congregations, for schools and for the family. The Working Party is careful to quote Fowler's evaluation of the place of faith development theory in the ministry of the Church:

> It probably is not helpful to think of stage transition or development from one stage to another as the direct goal of pastoral care, preaching, or Christian education. Our first concern, of course, it the proclamation of the gospel and the attempt to help it find a deep and firm rooting in the soil of people's lives. Next we are concerned about the awakening and shaping of vocation in accordance with an understanding of partnership with the action of God. If we are faithful in the pastoral leadership relating to these tasks, faith development, as a movement from one stage to another, will come as a by-product and fruit of our common work and that of the Spirit.[315]

Despite this and their concern not to be dogmatic about faith development, it is advocated that congregations should expect to grow in faith, [316] that the best Christian educators are likely to be in Stage V, [317] that theological training should promote faith development, [318] and that clergy who have not reached Stage V are likely to find pastoral leadership a difficult task because they will have problems dealing with those who disagree with them.[319] There is also an acknowledgement that such recommendations are theologically loaded, to some extent, for it is adjudged that Stage V faith precludes fundamentalism and may be sympathetic to some forms of liberalism as a final stage of adult faith.[320]

Many of the recommendations supported by references to faith development theory are not entirely new, however. For example, a concern to take seriously the experience of the child in the church and the need to consider the whole church as a learning context for the child, is

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[314] *Ibid.*, 50.
[315] Fowler, J.W., 1987, *Faith Development & Pastoral Care*, Fortress Press, 81.
[316] Astley, J., 1991, *How Faith Grows*, National Society, 61.
[317] *Ibid.*, 76
[318] *Ibid.*, 77.
[319] *Ibid.*, 68.
[320] *Ibid.*, 65

clear from the four foundational educational principles of *Partners in Learning*, first published in 1975.[321] In some cases, Fowler's theory is being used to justify beliefs already held by more progressive educationalists within the churches as part of the ongoing battle against the instructional Sunday School model of religious education. Fowler's theory does more than merely reinforce established priorities in children's work, however, as the authors of *Children in the Way* acknowledge: it necessitates the rephrasing of many of the traditional questions. Implicit in this need for switches in vocabulary and sentence structure is a significant change of approach which can also be seen in the reports of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, (CCBI).

The CCBI report of 1976, *The Child in the Church*, is concerned with understanding children's development in order to undertake more effective Christian nurture. The available resources for such an understanding were Goldman's work, and that of Peatling.[322] The report demanded that "Nurture must mean taking seriously each stage of children's growth" and "must take into account our ever-increasing knowledge of child development." It also recommended that a theology of Christian nurture was required, as well as more experimental work in order to better understand child development.

By 1989, and the publication of the CCBI's *Children and Holy Communion*,[323] the vocabulary was significantly different. In the foreword Philip Morgan refers to the advent of faith development theory as one of the reasons why churches have been forced to look again at the issue of children and holy communion. Although Fowler is only cited in the bibliography, throughout, the report speaks of 'how faith develops' and 'growth from faith to faith'. This is a vocabulary directly dependent upon James Fowler's understanding of faith and its relation to human development.

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[321] The four foundational principles of Partners in Learning are, an experiential approach, the Bible as the decisive book, the church year and the church as a community of faith. See, Sutcliffe, J., ed. *Partners in Learning*, 1975, 3.
[322] see, for example, Peatling, J., 1977,"On beyond Goldman: Religious Thinking in the Seventies, *BJRE*, Spring 1977
[323] *Children and Holy Communion*, CCBI, 1989.

The influence of such a vocabulary and the shift in understanding which it represents can be seen even more clearly in the latest CCBI report in this area: *Unfinished Business: Children and the churches.*[324] Fowler is given more explicit treatment along with Westerhoff, Oser and Moran. His contribution is outlined as having opened up a new field of debate and study and having "demonstrated convincingly that faith is by no means static but is subject to change, whether as an experience of growth or regression."[325] However, throughout the report the vocabulary betrays a debt to Fowler, and indeed faith development theory is invoked to justify a number of statements or recommendations: concern for the processes of faith development is held to reflect an increasing awareness of children's entitlement to spiritual development;[326] children's appreciation of symbols and rituals are claimed to develop - an aspect of the life of faith which demands more attention;[327] faith development theory is cited as a helpful aid in demonstrating to churches that children's work is not accomplished by 'teaching about' Christianity;[328] at early stages of development, story telling needs to be story orientated and not response orientated, a recommendation which is said to correspond to insights from faith development theory.[329]

There is an emphasis throughout the report on the need for learning to take place during the whole life cycle, and a connection made between communities in which adults are growing and those in which children are likely to mature;[330] the vocabulary of stages and transitions and life-cycle is freely used, despite reservations expressed about an over rigid approach to such an understanding of faith;[331] warnings are given about the possibility of faith development being arrested; [332] attention to faith development is recommended in order to shed light on why so many young people reject the church;[333] finally there is a cri de coeur that:

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[324] *Unfinished Business: Children and the Churches*, CCBI, 1995.
[325] *Unfinished Business: Children and the Churches*, CCBI, 1995, 37.
[326] *Ibid.*,19.
[327] *Ibid.*,21.
[328] *Ibid.*,22.
[329] *Ibid.*,23.
[330] *Ibid.*,19.
[331] *Ibid.*,38.
[332] *Ibid.*,41.
[333] *Ibid.*,42.

> The Church needs to take seriously the journey of faith, the processes whereby individuals develop and progress, and the significance of the stages and phases through which they pass.[334]

Pastoral theology

Similar concerns are also being addressed within the field of pastoral theology, particularly amongst those who are writing for theological educators, and those involved in chaplaincy in higher education. Pastoral theology as an academic discipline is not well established in Britain (with the exception of Scotland), and as observed by Paul Ballard, in *The Foundations of Pastoral Studies and Practical Theology*,[335] it tends to be conducted on an *ad hoc* basis within seminaries and theological colleges, rather than in universities. Most of the published material available in the United Kingdom is American, reflecting the American sources of most of the recent developments in pastoral theology: clinical pastoral education, the pastoral counselling movement, and the growth of practical and field education in seminaries.

A comprehensive survey of the impact of Fowler's *Stages of Faith* upon British Pastoral Theology is therefore difficult to undertake. However, some indication was given in the questionnaire that Fowler's work is being used to facilitate reflection on pastoral ministry and parish work, several of the few recent British publications in this field do make extensive use of Fowler's theory.

First, Fowler's theory warrants an entry in the *IVP Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* under the heading, 'faith development theory'. Written by Francis Bridger, lecturer in social theology and ethics at St John's College, Nottingham, Fowler's Stages of Faith are outlined and discussed. Although the review of the critique Fowler has received exceeds an examination of the theory's impact, Bridger does conclude that 'Fowler has contributed more than any recent figure to an integrated understanding of faith.'[336]

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[334] *Ibid.*,45.
[335] Ballard, P., 1986, *The Foundations of Pastoral Studies and Practical Theology*, University College, Cardiff.
[336] Atkinson, D. J., & Field, D.H., eds., 1995, *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, IVP.

The importance which Bridger attaches to Fowler's work an be seen from his comments in *Counselling in Context*. Here he describes Fowler's theory[337] and states that 'the counsellor's task would be greatly facilitated by identifying and understanding which stage underlies the counsellee's situation and response.'[338] and that 'in order to counsel a person in distress, it is helpful, even essential, to know where they have reached within the developmental process. It is here that the insights of faith development theory become central.'[339]

Insights from Fowler's *Stages of Faith* are also included by David Lyall, in *Counselling in the Pastoral & Spiritual Context*. During his discussion of pastoral counselling as companionship, Lyall outlines Fowler's model as the latest in a series of attempts since Freud to systematise human growth and development. He comments that Fowler's scheme is 'helpful in allowing counsellors to 'place' clients in terms of their religious development.'[340] He then suggests that the controversy over David Jenkins views on the Virgin Birth can be understood in faith development terms, citing Scott Peck's observation that people who differ by more than one stage in their faith development find it almost impossible to communicate with one another.[341]

More extensive use is made of Fowler's theory in the context of pastoral theology by David Deeks, in *Pastoral Theology: an Inquiry*. Writing in 1987 whilst he was teaching pastoral theology at Wesley House, a Methodist theological college in Cambridge, he describes his book as an attempt to open up a discussion between prayer and reflective work; Deeks cites Fowler's theory as a model by which structure can be given to a quest for holiness which takes account of the depths of experience and allows an interpretation of the past.[342]

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[337] Bridger, F.W. & Atkinson, D.J., 1984, *Counselling in Context*, Harper Collins, 161-164.
[338] *Ibid.*,163.
[339] *Ibid.*, 161.
[340] Lyall, D., 1995, *Counselling in the Pastoral & Spiritual Context*, Open University, 104.
[341] *Ibid.*, 105.
[342] Deeks, D., 1987, *Pastoral Theology: An Inquiry*, Epworth, 91.

Perceiving the aims of pastoral care to involve encouraging people to make sense of their experience within a Christian framework, Deeks recommends the use of Fowler's stages of faith because he believes they 'give Christian form to pastoral care'.[343] Deeks then focuses upon the age-specific issues in emotional and spiritual development, relying heavily on Fowler's stages of faith in an attempt to take seriously the journey of faith. This approach parallels that taken by the CCBI in 1995.

Fowler's faith development theory is also used like this by Michael Jacobs, also writing about pastoral theology whilst involved in theological education through the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course. Jacobs had first cited Fowler's theory in *The Presenting Past*, an introduction to psychodynamic counselling.[344] In this book he suggests that maturity of faith, when measured using Fowler's criteria, can be used as an indicator of human maturity.[345] The text in which he makes most use of Fowler's theory, however, is *Towards the Fullness of Christ* in which he seeks to suggest a framework in which the diverse tasks of pastoral ministry can be understood as part of a coherent role, helping individuals and congregations towards maturity.

The book examines various approaches to the human mind found within modern psychology and considers their implications for pastoral care and Christian ministry. Judging that the aims of pastoral care are often immediate and fragmented, Jacobs seeks to established a coherent framework for the pastoral task, finding a focus in helping individuals and congregations towards maturity.

Jacobs argues that growth towards Christian maturity may happen through life crises, through life changes, through education and through pastoral presence. He warns against a naive concentration on Jesus as a model of maturity, claiming that such a strategy is open to

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[343] *Ibid.*, 86.
[344] Jacobs, M., 1985, *The Presenting Past*, Harper & Row, 1985.
[345] *Ibid.*, 193.

projection and distortion from assumptions which are inexplicit. Bringing together various developmental understandings from Jung, Levinson, Freud, Erikson, Capps, Piaget and Kohlberg, Jacobs regards Fowler's contribution as being one of relating such understandings of the human being to the phenomenon of faith.[346]

Although Jacobs rejects some of the specifics of Fowler's theory,[347] he does seem impressed by the way in which Fowler draws together different developmental approaches and relates them to the theological and congregational context with which Jacobs himself is concerned. Clearly already convinced by the need for pastoral theologians and practitioners to address themselves to the questions raised by modern psychology, Fowler is regarded as a good model for so doing. For Jacobs, 'the pastoral care of growing persons cannot ignore the stages of faith which he [Fowler] proposes.'[348] He adds that,

> These models can, I believe, help a pastor to recognise the different stages towards wholeness at which people are, and at the right time, to assist those people as they move from one stage to another.'[349]

Thus, as Jacobs considers faith throughout the life-cycle, he cites Fowler's research to support his characterisation of the origins of faith,[350] the conventionalism of institutional faith,[351] and the diversity of mature faith.[352]

Here then are several British publications within the field of pastoral theology which make use of Fowler's faith development theory. As we have seen, both in pastoral theology and in children's work there is currently a concern to take seriously the journey of faith, the processes whereby individuals develop and progress, and the significance of the stages and phases through which they pass.[353] It is primarily the work of James Fowler on faith development which is being used to understand this process of growth in faith.

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[346] Jacobs, M., 1988, *Towards the Fullness of Christ*, DLT, 1988, 38-39
[347] Ibid., 125-128.
[348] *Ibid.*, 38-39.
[349] *Ibid.*, 52.
[350] *Ibid.*, 62-82.
[351] *Ibid.*, 83-102.
[352] *Ibid.*, 103ff..
[353] *Unfinished Business*, CCBI, 1995, 45.

Analysis

From a first reading of the literature in which Fowler's theory is cited, the main reason for the adoption of his stages of faith as an explanatory model seems to be pragmatic. It is being adopted by practitioners within the fields of confessional education and pastoral theology, who find it a useful tool for understanding how the stages of children and adults in their cognitive and emotional development will affect their approach to questions of faith.

Mannheim's method suggests, however, that although these pragmatic considerations may be those most readily perceived by the observer and by those persons involved, an examination of the prior intellectual commitments of those using Fowler's stages of faith, and a look at their social position will reveal other factors which affect the appeal and use of the theory.

Religious affiliation and theological outlook

First, there is a great deal of evidence emerging from the published literature which we have examined that those most influenced by Fowler's faith development theory are likely to be of religious faith, involved within a faith community and of a theologically post-liberal disposition. First, whilst there has been some discussion of faith development theory in the secular religious education journals in Britain, its main sphere of influence has been amongst those who formulate policy in the mainstream churches. In particular, as we have seen, Fowler's theory has been used to underpin recommended practices by the CCBI, the Church of England's General Synod Board of Education, and the Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth.

Clearly, those formulating policy within these organisations are of religious faith and heavily involved with the faith community. The same is also true of those writing within the field of pastoral theology; those cited here have all been involved either in theological education or in chaplaincy work and are also ordained members of the mainstream denominations. The audience for their work is also those involved in teaching or providing pastoral care for those

in higher or theological education. Indeed, as Deeks explicitly states, theories like Fowler's are useful in helping pastors understand how faith is structured; helping pastors support parents; helping in the pastoral care of adults; and facilitating self-awareness in the pastor.[354]

Those who are making use of faith development theory in their publications, then, are people of religious faith and involved in faith communities. What is the evidence, though, that their theological commitments are more consonant with a post-liberal theology than with any other stance?

First, one of the points which is most consistently drawn from Fowler's work is the notion that the whole of human development has an impact upon faith: Fowler's understanding of faith makes possible the bringing together of a variety of human development issues under the umbrella of faith development. This is a new departure, for faith is no longer being seen as a part of life, but as a way of living. Thus, Jeff Astley describes his use of the term, faith as 'a way of knowing, valuing, being committed to, and understanding life' [355] and emphasises that faith development theory has implications for all the contexts and activities in which people take part.[356] *Children in the Way* states that 'For a long time our understanding of individuals growing in the Church has been largely in terms of intellectual development rather than faith development.'[357] Fowler's work is here explicitly cited as an aid to broadening the concept of faith and the influences upon it. Such an approach to the concept of faith, it has already been noted is similar to that of liberal theologians like Paul Tillich and places human experience at the centre of conversations about faith and religious education and pastoral theology. This focus upon human experience distances Fowler's work and the way that it is being used from a pre-liberal perspective and locates it within a more liberal theological context. Although the reports do mention that objections have been raised

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[354]Deeks, D., 1987, *Pastoral Theology: An Inquiry*, Epworth.
[355]Astley., J., 1991, *op cit.*, 8.
[356]*Ibid.*, 57.
[357]*Children in the Way* National Society, 1988, 39.

to Fowler's definition of 'faith'[358], there is little attention paid to the impact which a rejection of Fowler's understanding of faith would have upon his theory and the implications for parish work.

A second emphasis which emerges out of faith development theory is upon the telling of stories and the use of religious symbol and ritual. Within a generation influenced by Goldman, such an emphasis upon Biblical material had to be argued for against the prevailing tide. However, in recent reports, written against the backdrop of faith development theory, assumptions about the appropriate use of Biblical material are quite different. Although it is still maintained that children respond differently to stories at different ages, there is a concern to use stories to help to establish children's identity within the faith community without demanding an inappropriate orthodoxy or premature response. Far from avoiding the presentation of any material which might be taken literally when it is not meant literally, as in Goldman's scheme, recent publications work on the assumption that the benefits of telling the stories of the community to young children, in terms of the formation of identity and the possibilities for children to explore their own emotions and experiences through these stories, far outweigh the danger of literal interpretation. Thus, *Children in the Way* recommends,

> To tell an enjoyable story from the Bible is not to guarantee growth in faith. If, however, we are passing on a story that is real to us; if our stories speak to children's experience, if they are part of the Church they see and if their use is consistent with their biblical and theological context, then we may have the opportunity to take on the germination of seeds sown in the enjoyment and imagination rendered by the story.[359]

All God's Children? likewise, focuses upon the telling of story for the sake of the involvement of children in the narrative and their identification with the characters and emotions in the stories, emphasising that such story telling lays foundations for adult faith;[360] *Unfinished Business* claims that

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[358] *Unfinished Business*, CCBI, 1995, 37.
[359] *Children in the Way*, National Society, 1988, 43.
[360] *All God's Children?* National Society/Church Publishing House, 1991.

> There has been an enrichment in churches where there has been re-awakening to biblical metaphors and visions of the faith community. For example, there has been a recognition that the Church has been created and shaped by the faith story which has been passed on to it and that its task is to tell that story.[361]

Likewise, in *How Faith Grows*, Jeff Astley, suggests that, 'The sacramental worship of the Eucharist provides a vast amount of [such] imagery - bread and wine, eating and drinking, standing and kneeling, moving to the altar, the colourful clothing of altar and priest'.[362]

It has already been argued that the eagerness to introduce children to the narratives of the Christian tradition, and the concern to involve children in the worship and rituals of the Christian tradition reflects a move away from a liberal approach to theology in which understanding is of first order importance and a move away from the view that experience is primary. Although, within a post-liberal framework, experience is important and vital, it is the post-liberal understanding that what people identify as experience is defined by the language and ritual and symbolism of their environment. In this view, the stories and rituals and symbols of the Christian tradition assume much greater importance than in a liberal mind set, where experience is viewed as raw and can be expressed within any number of conceptual frameworks. Although this case has already been set out, the point here is that Fowler's theory is not only post-liberal in itself, but that the elements which are most influential in practice reflect and reinforce a post-liberal theological perspective. Thus, Astley recognises the importance of the language of faith : 'It is of considerable help to an individuals to be provided with a vocabulary *into* [sic] which it is possible to grow in the Christian life... traditional words - sin, salvation, heaven, hell - are used. But with accompanying glosses, appropriate to context, new possibilities of meaning can be opened out for people at different faith stages.'[363]; *Unfinished Business* suggests that 'It is important to take seriously children's developing appreciation of symbols and ritual which are so central

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361 *Unfinished Business*, CCBI, 1995, 19.
362 Astley., J. *op cit.*, 69.
363 *Ibid.*, 71.

in their experience of play and fantasy.'[364] There are clearly parallels between this development with attitudes to religious education and the emergence of narrative theology and narrative styles of preaching. This approach is less concerned with asking historical questions of the Bible, than with seeking the truths which the stories convey.[365]

Another emphasis of the reports which can be attributed to Fowler's influence is the concern with spiritual growth throughout the life-cycle. In contrast to previous reports, informed by the work of the Goldman school, in which development was thought only to concern children and adolescents explicit connections are being made between the development of children and the development of the adults around them. Thus, *Unfinished Business*, 'Children seldom grow in faith where adults do not grow in faith.'[366] and *Children in the Way*, 'Growing in faith is a process common to children and adults.'[367] Thus the reports pick up on Fowler's notions of modal developmental level and a climate of developmental expectation within a congregation. Astley comments that the average expectable level of faith development of the adult members of a congregation operates as a 'kind of magnet' and Christian nurture is targeted to it.[368]

Another feature of the way in which faith development theory is being used which bears upon the theological position which is favoured concerns the direction of development and the concepts of maturity which are explicitly or implicitly adopted.

The direction of development in the reports examined above, is rarely treated explicitly. There are repeated references to maturity and to the arrest of development before maturity is reached without much explicit discussion of what Christian maturity might entail. Such an absence of any discussion of the direction of development and the nature of maturity warns of

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[364] *Unfinished Business*, CCBI, 1995, 21.
[365] see for example, Tracy, D., 1981, *The Analogical Imagination*, Crossroad; McFague, S., 1983, *Metaphorical Theology*, SCM.
[366] *Ibid.*, 21.
[367] *Children in the Way*, National Society, 1988, 43.
[368] Astley., J., 199,1 *op. cit.*, 61.

a host of assumptions. This is especially true when the reports are written by an élite and particular group within the churches. The 'target' of Christian nurture is being informed by faith development theory, and yet receives little explicit attention.

It has already been observed that church reports and published articles and books are written by highly educated, often ordained, and certainly influential persons within their denominations. It is also the case that the prevailing tendency to adopt the language of faith development within the mainstream churches is unattractive to more conservative evangelical groups. Indeed, one of the significant groups of critics of Fowler's theory have been conservative and evangelical Christians. Sharon Parks observes in her article in *Stages of Faith and Religious Development*, that conservative Christians experience problems with the relativising notions of scriptural and ecclesial authority implicit in Fowler's theory. Fowler's recommendation that authority should become internal and not dependent upon external institutions is perceived as a direct assault upon the authoritative nature of scripture and tradition. Other difficulties for the conservative mind set, observed by Parks, include maturity of faith being identified with a movement away from salvation by faith in Christ being exclusive, and the perceived reduction of Christian faith to a human universal.[369]

Parks' observations about conservative problems with Fowler's description of faith are born out by William Avery. He states that 'Lutherans are not helped by Fowler's concept of faith as a construing of the conditions of existence. Because Fowler's concept makes faith a human act, it undercuts the radical primacy of the gospel.'[370] He also complains that faith cannot be separated from its object, and that human self-actualisation is not equivalent to faith. In similar vein Richard Osmer suggests that Fowler grants too much of role to nature in the processes of faith development to be faithful to the reformed tradition.[371]

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[369]Parks, S. D., 1991, "The North American Critique of James Fowler's Faith Development Theory", in Fowler, J.W., Nipkow, K.E., & Schweitzer, F., (eds.), *Stages of Faith and Religious Development: implications for church, education and society*, S.C.M. 83-98

[370]Avery, W.O., 1990, 'A Lutheran examines James W Fowler', reprinted in Astley J., & Francis L.J., eds., *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development*, Gracewing, 1991,122-134;127 [first published in *Religious Education* 85, 1990, 69-83].

[371]Osmer, R. R., 1990, 'James W Fowler and the Reformed Tradition: an exercise in theological reflection in religious

Another publication which is concerned to stress the weaknesses of Fowler's theory is the *New IVP Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*. In his article on faith development, Francis Bridger lists as his first two criticisms that the theological basis of Fowler's theory is inadequate, and that he subordinates theology to psychology.

The implication is therefore, that those less critical of Fowler's work and therefore more likely to use his theory to underpin an understanding of children's or pastoral work are more likely to be liberal than conservative. Indeed, this is explicitly acknowledged by Astley in *How Faith Grows*: 'Fowler's faith stage analysis might appear to some to be unsympathetic to fundamentalism (and sympathetic to at least some forms of liberalism?)[372]- although this line of thought is not pursued.[373] This impression is strengthened by an examination of the direction of the growth and development which is suggested by the reports mentioned above. Although there is little explicit discussion of concepts of Christian maturity, there are certainly clear indications of the kind of faith which is being commended.

It is notable that in Bridger's extended treatment of the faith development of children and young people in *Children Finding Faith*, despite his obvious acquaintance with Fowler's work, he is very selective in his use of it. Writing from a conservative theological perspective, and for a conservative audience, Bridger uses insights from Fowler's theory when discussing the covenantal nature of faith, and its origins in a disposition towards trust; he adapts Fowler's understanding of faith as a process to become the exercise of God's gift of faith as an activity, and he draws upon interviews and illustrations from Fowler's *Stages of Faith* when discussing the development of infants and juniors. However, when he turns to adolescent faith, much less attention is paid to Fowler's scheme, and instead, references are

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education', *Religious Education*, 85, 1990, 51-68.

[372] *Ibid.*, 65.

[373] Astley does acknowledge some criticisms which have been levelled against Fowler's theory, e.g. that it is a 'Western, liberal, middle-class, high-brow' description of faith. However, Astley excuses this bias on Fowler's part by claiming that 'squeaky-clean, theoretical neutrality is impossible in these areas.' (46)

made to Westerhoff's *searching faith* and *owned faith.*[374] In so doing, Bridger neatly avoids any discussion of demythologisation, critical distance, internalisation of authority or the embracing of paradox and pluralism which Fowler's latter stages describe. Thus, whilst using Fowler's theory to aid effective communication with young children, Bridger avoids any challenge to a conservative perspective on Christian maturity by avoiding discussion of the later stages of Fowler's theory.

Maturity is a word avoided by Fowler himself. He prefers to envisage a plurality of maturities, maturity consisting as much in the contents of faith as the structure described by his faith stages. However, his employment of a hierarchically invariant model has made it difficult for those using his theory to avoid associating Stages V and VI of his model with mature faith in general and mature Christian faith in particular. Both in the contexts of children's work and pastoral theology, an equation has been made between mature faith and the latter stages of Fowler's theory and this equation is in keeping with the normative claims made by Fowler for the latter stages of his theory. As quoted by Astley,

> although 'each stage has a potential wholeness, grace, and integrity', yet also 'each stage represents genuine growth toward wider and more accurate response to God, and toward more consistently human care for other human beings'[375].

Michael Jacobs also draws upon Fowler's latter stages for his own characterisation of Christian maturity. Already acquainted with, and sympathetic towards, the work of Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg and Levinson, Jacobs was also already familiar with the theology of Paul Tillich, and he had adopted from him the language of faith as ultimate concern. The explicit role which Fowler's theory plays in Jacobs' thought is to form a bridge between developmental psychology and liberal theology.

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[374]Bridger, F.W., 1988, *Children Finding Faith*, Scripture Union, 53;71-73.
[375]Fowler, J.W., 1986, in Dykstra, C. & Parks, S. eds., *Faith Development and Fowler*, Alabama, 1986, 38; quoted in Astley, J., *How Faith Grows*, 1991, National Society, 42.

Jacob's text is littered with references to Fowler's work and the reasons are not difficult to find. First, both Jacobs and Fowler are dealing with the human life cycle and its relation to faith; both have a background in psychology, though Jacob's concern is more specifically psychodynamic than Fowler's cognitive emphasis; both have read and been influenced by Paul Tillich's understanding of human faith; both are also writing from the experience of theological education and addressing ordinands in their books. The overwhelming feature of their shared approach, however, is their shared concept of the end point of development.

Both authors conceive of the end point of development involving both an ability to construct an intellectual critique of faith and a distancing from personal identification with the symbols and rituals of a particular tradition. Both endorse the importance of both an intellectual and an affective engagement with the symbols and rituals of a tradition; both require a particular response to pluralism which involves a universal dimension and movement in the direction of openness, embracing other ways of being human; both believe that mature persons are less concerned with self-preservation and more able to work towards their vision of a just community, particularly through non-violent means.

Although there are differences between how Fowler and Jacobs understand the relationship between Fowler's stages V & VI and Jacobs was later to revise some of his views about Fowler's theory,[376] similar features appear in their working concepts of Christian maturity. For both authors, the mature Christian is able to be open, to appreciate the vision and faith of others and to invest themselves in the future of the humanity without an obsessional need for self-preservation. What this coincidence of concepts of maturity reveals is that firstly, Fowler and Jacobs share a cultural context, one which is characterised by critical thought, pluralism and concern to integrate the subconscious mind; second, that Fowler and Jacobs share an orientation to that context: for both recommend a critical engagement with faith, an open

[376] see Jacobs, M., 1993, *Living Illusions*, SPCK.

attitude in ecumenical relations and a welcoming of the insights and opportunities for integration offered by an embracing of the subconscious mind.

A similar comparison of understandings of maturity could be undertaken with reference to Deeks' work. Having described the development of faith from birth to late adolescence, Deeks focuses upon the question of authority as the crucial question determining adult styles of faith. He comments that many adults isolate faith from the confusing ambiguities of life and he attributes this to the uncritical adoption of authority in adolescence. He states, however, that 'faith locked into a compartment of youthful identity is not adequate for the life crises of the later stages of life.'[377] Equally inadequate, he suggests, is a development of critical faculties to the exclusion of all else, such that intellectualism results. Mature faith, he asserts, is beyond this phase. It transcends intellectualism, accepts imprecision and is open to new insights.[378]

Concerning notions of maturity in the others works we have reviewed, although Lyall undertakes little explicit discussion of adequate and normative adult faith, he does make some interesting comments about the faith of Thomas Merton. Merton, as Lyall observes, was cited by Fowler as an example of Stage VI faith. Lyall describes Merton's outlook in the following way:

> in his search for that which was most truly human,... in his dialogue with Christians who were not Catholics and with monks who were not Christian, Merton did not cease to be who he was: a Christian, a Catholic, a monk and a priest. His spiritual, world-affirming journey did not deny that identity.[379]

Lyall suggests that this balance between openness and the maintenance of identity, described by Fowler's Stage VI faith and exemplified in the life of Thomas Merton is not only an appropriate characterisation of Christian maturity for individuals, but would be an

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[377]Deeks, D., 1987, *op. cit*, 162.
[378]*Ibid.*, 165.
[379]Lyall, D., 1995, *op. cit.*, 105.

appropriate description of a mature understanding of pastoral counselling in a Christian context.[380]

The post-liberal features of these characterisations of maturity hardly need further emphasis. In contrast to pre-liberals, both liberals and post-liberals value a transference of the locus of authority from an uncritical acceptance of the tradition, to a reflective engagement with the tradition in which the locus of authority is the self. However, for post-liberals, the danger of the liberal position is that there is an over-reliance upon human reason and upon the need for demythologisation and a threat to the integrity of Christian identity. This warning can be seen repeatedly in the characterisations of maturity examined above.

In the post-liberal perspectives examined above, however, critical engagement is valued as a part of a mature response. The concern to demythologise and extract meaning is not dominant but there is an emphasis upon the acceptance of imprecision, and the extent to which the conscious control of meaning and significance is not possible. A stage beyond intellectualism and critical analysis is envisaged such that participation in the rituals and liturgies of the community need not be primarily a cerebral experience.

Likewise, although the human self is the proper locus of authority, there is a recognition that humans are formed by their social experience and cultural context. This acknowledgement has two consequences. First, that a higher value is placed upon the rituals and myths of the tradition as being formative traditurs, rather than merely opportunities for the expression of personality. Second, there is concern for dialogue with other traditions following from the realisation that any experience of being human is a particular and therefore partial experience. Open dialogue with other traditions is considered essential, therefore, yet not for the sake of producing some liberal synthesis in which an easy identification is made between elements of different traditions; post-liberals are concerned for dialogue and concerned to

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[380] *Ibid.*, 107.

enter into the riches of the human experience of others, yet they maintain that the extent of such participation is limited because of the particularity of human and religious experience. There is a concern, therefore, to preserve their own and others' distinct religious communities through their own myths, rituals and traditions.

It would appear, then, as tentatively suggested from the evidence provided by the questionnaire, there are two distinct theological groups interacting with Fowler's work in different ways. The larger group, which is broadly committed to Fowler's approach confirms to our description of post-liberal faith: those manifesting a desire to hold together both cognition, imagination and the emotions as valid parts of human experience; demonstrating a belief that the myths, symbols and rituals of a religious tradition are indispensable and cannot be reduced; and displaying a commitment to dialogue with those of different faith, yet without a tendency to reduce all faith to the same core experience. There is also evidence of a smaller group, however, whose use of Fowler's faith development theory is much more selective and eclectic, and whose theological stance is better described as conservative and evangelical.

Social class and the formation of identity

Regarding the social experience and position of those most influenced by Fowler's faith development theory, it is not difficult to make the observation that those who are writing books about confessional Christian education and formulating church policy are likely to be highly educated, influential and often ordained members of their denominations. In the field of pastoral theology, similar comments could be made, those published are highly educated and involved in higher education, and are often writing for an audience of ordinands and chaplains and those involved in theological education. The implication of these observations for the question of whether these people are experiencing personal transition can only be deduced from observations made in Chapter Three about the likely effects of involvement in higher education within modern society.

There is evidence in the literature we have examined, however, that faith development theory is functioning as a theory of identity, both synchronically, to help those with pastoral or educational responsibilities to understand themselves in relation to others, and diachronically, to understand the transitions through which they themselves have passed:

Deeks for example, comments that theories like Fowler's are useful not only in helping pastors in their care of people, both adults and children, but also in facilitating self-awareness in the pastor.[381] What Deeks does not make explicit, however, is the relationship between the pastor's awareness of themselves, and their understanding of their clients or congregations. Self-awareness is not an understanding of one's own internal processes in isolation from others, but an awareness of how one differs from and is similar to the others one encounters and with whom one works. What the minister needs in order to be able to function effectively is a conceptual framework of themselves and their congregations in which the two are linked such that the role of the minister is clear, and such that the Minster is able to deal with people whose outlook is different from their own. Faith development theory could only operate as such a framework if the pastor were prepared to consider their own development in terms of Fowler's stages of faith and accept Fowler's characterisation of the differences in perceptions and needs between the pastor and the client who were at different stages of development. It would appear from Deeks' comments, however, that at least for him, Fowler's description of the different stages is able to provide a series of typifications of faith style in which he is able to recognise himself and others. As such, as we have argued above, it is able to operate for him as a theory of identity.

A far more explicit example of Fowler's theory being used to structure identity in this way is provided by Vaughan Roberts article, "Reframing the UCCF Doctrinal Basis".[382] Roberts begins his article by noting that chaplains often experience the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF)as a problem; tension often existing between chaplaincy and

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[381] Deeks, D., 1987, *op. cit.*.
[382] Roberts, V., 1992, "Reframing the UCCF Doctrinal Basis", *Theology* XCV No.768, 432-446.

the UCCF. This tension, Roberts observes, is often focused upon the UCCF Doctrinal Basis, outlined below:

The doctrinal basis of the Fellowship shall be the fundamental truths of Christianity, as revealed in Holy Scripture, including:

a The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
b The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation and final judgement.
c The divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
d The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the fall, rendering man subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
e The full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God; his virgin birth and his real and sinless humanity; his death on the cross, his bodily resurrection and his present reign in heaven and earth.
f Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death once and for all time of our representative and substitute, Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man.
g Justification as God's act of undeserved mercy, in which the sinner is pardoned all his sins, and accepted as righteous in God's sight, only because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, this justification being received by faith alone.
h The need for the Holy Spirit to make the work of Christ effective to the individual sinner, granting him repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.
i The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all those thus regenerated, producing in them an increasing likeness to Christ in character and behaviour, and empowering them for their witness in the world.
j The only holy and universal Church, which is the Body of Christ, and to which all true believers belong.
k The future personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge all men, executing God's just condemnation on the impenitent and receiving the redeemed to eternal glory.[383]

Disagreement, according to Roberts, usually centres around the exclusive claims and necessity of signing any statement of belief; the narrow definition of Christian faith; individual phrases, such as the infallibility of Scripture; and the unwillingness of many Christian unions to co-operate with other groups who do not adhere to such a doctrinal basis.

Roberts argues that, rather than having to see the UCCF Doctrinal Basis as a problem or aberration, chaplains might conceive of it as part of the natural process of religious development of the human being. Using Fowler's Stages of Faith, he identifies the UCCF Doctrinal Basis with Stage Three faith by virtue of its exclusive claims, traditional and external view of authority and closed attitudes towards other groups. By so doing, he is able

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[383] *Evangelical Belief: A Short Explanation of the Doctrinal Basis of the UCCF*, IVP 1988, 11-12.

to place the faith of many CU members within the framework of his own understanding of Christian maturity, such that,

> The Synthetic-Conventional Faith, the sort of faith represented by the doctrinal basis... [becomes for Roberts] a vital staging-post on the religious journey.[384]

Roberts wants to stress the need for, and strengths of this kind of faith. Clearly, however, he does not regard it as mature faith. This can be seen in particular with reference to Roberts' use of John Hull's notion of critical openness.[385] Rather than authority needing to be authoritarian, Hull argues that it should be authoritative. Authoritative statements can be assessed by criteria other than their existence of self-authenticating claims. For Hull, a critical engagement with tradition is integral to mature discipleship - and for Roberts it is important that CU members are encouraged to move into a critical openness, rather than remaining bound by the UCCF doctrinal basis.

What is interesting about Roberts' article from the perspective of this thesis is not whether or not the UCCF doctrinal basis should be associated with Synthetic-Conventional Faith, but why Roberts suggests that chaplains might find it useful to make this association.

Roberts himself wrote this article out of his experience as a university chaplain and lecturer in religious education. As such he is a highly educated, ordained person, and also someone committed to disciplined, critical examination of faith as evidenced by his citing of John Hull, Robin Gill and Don Cupitt. He clearly is uncomfortable with the exclusive and narrow claims of the UCCF and seeks a more ecumenical and open faith.

As a university chaplain working with CU groups, Roberts admits his own discomfiture when faced by the hostility of these groups and acknowledges that many chaplains can often feel

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[384]Roberts, V., 1992 "Reframing the UCCF Doctrinal Basis", *Theology* XCV No.768, 439.
[385]see Hull, J., 1990 "Christianity and Critical Openness", in Francis, L.J. & Thatcher, A., eds., *Christian Perspectives for Education*, Gracewing.

"de-skilled or rejected by a significant part of the Christian community at the university."[386] Finding a way to relate to the CU, for Roberts, then, is both a professional and a personal issue. In order to be able to work with the CU, chaplains needs a framework for conceptualising their own faith styles in relation to those of hostile groups. Without such a framework, there is the possibility of the chaplain's own sense of self and religious identity coming under threat, and an unclear sense of the aims and objectives of pastoral work amongst the students.

By associating the UCCF Doctrinal Basis with Stage Three Faith and his own stage of faith as Five or Six, then, Roberts has found a framework which both protects his own stance and finds an explanation for that of the CU. The CU may be considered, then, to perform the function of enabling young people, cut loose from their familial ties, to discover a Christian identity and to begin the process of appropriating faith for themselves.[387] The chaplain's role, then, becomes to "to encourage people on and into the next phase."[388] by encouraging, for example, dual membership of the CU and other groups, and a co-operation with other groups in joint ventures.[389]

What we have here again, in Roberts' article, is evidence that Fowler's faith development theory is being used to construct identity, particularly synchronically, i.e. in relation to those of different faith styles within a context where the differences between faith styles cannot be avoided or ignored. Roberts' admission that the attitudes of the CU towards him can easily lead to a sense of being de-skilled and rejected, reflects the kind of loss of energy and power to act which are associated with threats to identity. It would appear also from the evidence of Deeks and Jacobs that such challenges to the identities of clergy and other religious professionals are not uncommonly faced, and thus neither is the need for the development of strategies for identity maintenance. What we see in the work of Roberts, Deeks and Jacobs in

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[386] *Ibid.*, 434.
[387] *Ibid.*, 439.
[388] *Ibid.*, 439.
[389] *Ibid.*, 443.

particular, is evidence that faith development theory is able to offer some kind of strategy for tackling this problem amongst those who would consider their faith best described by the latter stages of Fowler's theory.

Conclusions

The impression which is gained from looking at the published references to Fowler's work, then, broadly reflects the pattern of responses to the questionnaire discussed in Chapter Four. In short, where Fowler's theory is broadly embraced, it is by those whose concept of maturity is consonant with his Stage V faith, which we have identified with Lindbeck's post-liberal perspective: in the literature we have surveyed, most of those who have made use of the theory have emphasised the broad ranging basis of Fowler's understanding of human faith and its relation to the whole social environment, whilst the importance attached to the early introduction of the stories and rituals of the Christian tradition and continued engagement with them has suggested an acknowledgement of the impact of such media in shaping human experience; both of these emphases we have held to betray a post-liberal perspective. The emphasis which is also found in these publications upon growth throughout the life-cycle is significant because of the directions in which growth is envisaged and the ways in which maturity is characterised. Both the directions and the end points of development in the majority of the literature surveyed take up the major themes of Fowler's later stages which we have already identified as post-liberal. Thus, although most of those using Fowler's theory do so within the context of religious education and pastoral theology, they have not adopted Fowler's stage theory purely for pragmatic reasons, rather they have embraced it with its implications for the whole life cycle and in particular for its characterisation of mature faith.

There is another distinct group of people making use of faith development theory in print who do not share Fowler's vision of developed faith, however. These writers have used the stages of faith in quite a limited and selective way, focusing particularly upon the early years of the life cycle, and using Fowler's work to enable more effective communication with

children. They have been careful, however, to distance themselves from Fowler's understanding of the end of development.

The evidence examined here, then, does give some grounds for concluding that Fowler's theory appeals more to post-liberal Christians than to conservative ones. There is also evidence which suggests that those of post-liberal outlook influenced by Fowler's theory are using it to understand themselves in relation to others, particularly in relation to those for whom they are professionally responsible. Those writing about faith development theory are highly educated members of the middle classes, who are often clergy or religious professionals, and who are often addressing the problem of maintaining their own faith style amongst opposing views.

As we have observed, self-awareness does not involve understanding one's own internal processes in isolation from others, but awareness of how one differs from and is similar to the others one encounters and with whom one works. What is needed by the professional within a complex and diverse faith context in which expectations about roles conflict, is some conceptual framework which makes sense of the role of the minister or other church worker; such a framework must be able to relate the professional's self perception to their perceptions of their congregations, thus offering a model for pastoral or educational work. This framework is necessary, as we observed in Chapter Three, if a religious professional is to have some sense of purpose and ability to act within the role.

Both Deeks and Roberts make clear that Fowler's scheme is useful to them because in his stages of faith they recognise both themselves and those with whom they work; the stages of faith are also able to offer them an implicit model for working with their congregations: encouraging the kind of experiences which will facilitate development towards the next stage of faith.

The feeling of being de-skilled and rejected by a large part of the Christian community in universities which Vaughan Roberts identifies, are, then, in some way met by Fowler's theory because the theory justifies or supports the chaplain or minister's faith identity by presenting it as mature, and suggests a way of relating to those of more conservative faith in a way which is non-confrontational. Like others whose identities are placed under threat, religious professionals need some theory of identity which is able to structure and interpret their personal histories and commitments in the midst of religious diversity.

As we observed in Chapter Three, in the context of contemporary western society, those who are particularly sensitive, through education and social mobility, to the conditions of post modernity, are particularly likely to experience some threat to their personal identity, especially if it is partly located within a Christian framework; it is such people who are likely to respond to an explicit and dynamic theory of identity which offers mediation between the empirical and theological worlds and which offers strategies for working with religious pluralism.

Faith development theory offers such a dynamic and explicit account of religious experience. Because it is dynamic it can legitimise the shifts in outlook which modern people experience through social dislocation and education; because it is explicit it can offer to those struggling to articulate and reflect upon their faith, typifications of religious identity which have emerged from the interaction between contemporary western culture and Christian faith.

In the light of these observations, it is unsurprising to find that those to which this literature survey has given access are using faith development theory, not merely for utilitarian purposes, but to defend a particular kind of Christian identity amidst religious diversity and the complexities of late modern society.

In this chapter we have not attempted to discuss whether or not the use of faith development theory as part of a strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity is welcome within the

churches. Such an assessment is properly a task for pastoral theology. It is, therefore, to the implications of the findings of this thesis for pastoral theology that we turn in the next and final chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to consider the consequences for pastoral theology of the findings of this thesis: to indicate those areas of debate in which this study might make a contribution; to draw out implications for future uses of faith development theory within the churches; and to indicate areas for further work in this field.

Throughout the thesis we have sought to examine the impact of faith development theory upon the British churches, looking at those to whom the theory appeals, and the dynamics at work in the reception and use of Fowler's stages of faith. To this end, we have looked at the intellectual tradition in which faith development theory stands, we have examined the theory's social base, and have used the work of sociologists and social-psychologists to suggest reasons for the patterns of response we have found.

The findings of this thesis concerning the social function of faith development theory are set out in the previous two chapters. In Chapter Four, we saw that amongst highly educated, middle class people who are of religious faith, involved within faith communities and who have had cause to question and objectify their faith experience, Fowler's work is performing a variety of functions. It structures their faith experience in relation to their own histories, and in relation to the faith of others, and thus enables the performance of many of the tasks necessary to leadership within the churches. It fosters reflection upon the pastoral task; communication with people in the churches of different styles of faith; understanding children's thinking; and arriving at criteria for characterising mature faith.

In Chapter Five we looked at examples in the published literature of Fowler's stages being used in culturally complex and theologically diverse contexts to enable ministry to take place. The most striking of these examples is that of Vaughan Roberts' account of his use of faith development theory to understand the attachment of many students to the UCCF doctrinal

basis. In this instance, as in others, we observed faith development theory helping clergy and religious professionals to understand themselves diachronically in relation to their own development, and synchronically in relation to the theological outlooks of others, helping them to maintain their own faith style amid religious diversity and to conceptualise their pastoral or educational role in terms of encouraging others into maturity of faith.

In the core of the responses to the questionnaire, and amongst the published uses of Fowler's work, then, an *ideal type* has emerged which affords an outline of the typical features of the kind of person who responds to faith development theory. Such a person is typically middle class, highly educated, and probably with some higher qualification in theology; [s]he is a member of a mainstream church, either ordained or lay, but involved in church leadership either amongst adults or children; [s]he is someone who has observed a development in his/her own faith over time, who identifies most readily with the liberal wing of the church, but whose interest in symbolism, images and the power of narrative makes *post-liberal* a more appropriate description; [s]he views her own faith style to conform broadly to Fowler's description of Stage V or Stage V/VI faith and uses faith development theory both to understand her/his own development and in order to interpret the beliefs and commitments of others within the churches; [s]he uses faith development theory as a framework for understanding self and others, and this makes it possible to retain a post-conventional faith style in the face of sometimes hostile secularism outside the church and sometimes hostile conventional faith within; the adoption of faith development theory also makes it possible for him/her to conceptualise their leadership role within the church: faith development theory gives direction and purpose to her/his role as a teacher or pastor, and enables her/him to invest themselves and use their gifts within the Christian church.

Throughout most of this thesis, we have been engaged in the task of establishing this *ideal type*. In order to do so, we have adopted perspectives and methods from the sociology of knowledge and the social psychology of religion. Given the apparent influence of faith development theory within the mainstream churches in Britain, however, the thesis would be

incomplete, without some attempt to draw out the implications of this *ideal type* for pastoral theology and the future uses of faith development theory.

The Appeal of Faith Development theory in theological perspective

As we turn, then, from the critical and analytical part of this thesis to this final chapter, we are moving more specifically towards a theological perspective. Exploring the implications of our study, in this way, involves a change of discipline and in order to assist this process of reorientation, we draw upon the work of Robin Gill. In *Theology and Social Structure*, Gill offers a typology of the ways in which theologians may make use of sociological studies.[390] In the following few paragraphs we shall briefly review his typology in order to clarify the ways in which this theologically oriented chapter is making use of the sociological study of faith development theory presented in this thesis.

In *Theology and Social Structure*, Gill suggests that there are a variety of ways in which theologians use sociological insights: the first approach which he describes, Gill terms, *religious sociology*, in which sociology is viewed as a useful ancillary tool in analysing the situation to which a theology is being applied.[391] The second approach which Gill outlines, he calls, *the sociology of religion*, which he describes as using sociology to describe the practices of the church in order that they can then be evaluated using theological criteria. Rahner is the cited example of a theologian following this method; a theologian who used sociology in order to describe the practices of the church, but maintained that the social sciences are not directly relevant to the task of evaluation.[392] The third method of combining the insights of sociology with theology, Gill suggests, is more integrated and complex, for sociology contributes both to the descriptive and analytical parts of the theological task. For example, sociology might be used to denote the social context of theology and thus its social determinants; to analyse the practices of the church, rather than

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[390]Gill, R., 1977, *Theology and Social Structure*, Mowbrays.
[391]*Ibid.*, 106-111.
[392]*Ibid.*, 111-117.

merely to describe them; to describe the social effects of a theology and use these as criteria for its evaluation; or to provide a framework for discussing patterns of interaction within Christian ethics.[393]

In this chapter we shall employ the *ideal type* constructed in this thesis both to describe and to analyse the social effects of faith development theory; we shall claim that it is useful to pastoral theology in describing a type of person within the churches and in broadening our understanding of the dynamics at work amongst contemporary congregations; we shall claim that it illuminates, in particular, some of the pressures upon clergy, and some of the strategies employed to combat these pressures; we shall suggest that the social effects of faith development theory which we have identified should contribute both to an analysis of Fowler's work and to an analysis of the task facing contemporary theology as it seeks to enable the highly educated and self aware type which we have identified, to invest themselves and their gifts within the Christian Church.

Making such use of our sociological study of faith development theory depends upon three assumptions: that theologies act as independent variables within society; that the social effects of a theology constitute a necessary and legitimate element of its assessment; and that faith development theory is properly considered a theology and is therefore susceptible of the kind of analysis which Gill suggests. We shall examine each of these assumptions in turn.

First, we examine the notion that theologies may act an independent variables in society. We have assumed throughout the thesis that faith development is socially determined: that it arises from a particular social context and that this context shapes the nature of the theory. That belief systems, including theologies, have social determinants is a commonplace of sociological analysis. What has not always been so readily perceived by sociology, however,

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[393] *Ibid.*, 117-123.

is that theologies, despite their social determinants do not merely reflect the cultural and social conditions from which they emerge, but may also act as independent social forces.[394]

This is a point which Gill makes with reference to the reaction evoked by J A T Robinson's, *Honest to God* when it was published in 1963.[395] Gill suggests that the theological debate caused by Robinson's book led to anxiety amongst lay Christians and an awareness amongst those outside the churches that a bishop was moving away from traditional beliefs. Although the views expressed in *Honest to God* were made possible by cultural and social developments in British society, the book acted upon the public as an independent factor in their assessment of the churches, and upon lay Christians as a stimulus to anxiety. In similar vein we shall argue in this chapter that although faith development theory has social determinants, it also influences the beliefs and behaviour of those who take it seriously and we shall indicate how the study we have undertaken of faith development theory as a theory of identity reveals some of its social effects.

The second assumption we are making in this chapter is that the social effects of a theology constitute a useful element of its evaluation. Gill sets out his argument that praxis should be an element of theological assessment in *Theology and Social Structure*, 1977. Having established that theology does act as an independent variable in society with reference to the social effects of *Honest to God*, he suggests that the social consequences of theology constitute an essential element in assessing various theologies.[396] Not, of course, that it is suggested that theologians can always foresee, nor are always responsible for the ways in which their theories and concepts interact with different social situations. Rather, it is suggested that whilst some theologies may conform to the canons of scripture and tradition, they may give rise to attitudes and policies which render their dissemination dangerous for the health of the churches or the integrity of the gospel. Conversely, other theologies which

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[394] for a recent discussion of religion as social force rather than dependent variable, see Smith, C., 1996, *Disruptive Religion*, Routledge.
[395] *Ibid.*, 84-103
[396] *Ibid.*, 118.

arouse controversy in print, may prove helpful in practice and in particular social circumstances, for the building up the body of Christ. It is the task of theology to evaluate these social consequences, but it is maintained here that the social sciences may contribute both to the descriptive and the critical aspects of this task.

What is being argued here, with reference to Gill's typology, is that a proper assessment of faith development theory must take into account the effects which it has upon individuals and church communities, the tasks it facilitates and the kind of faith it sustains. The sociological analysis we have undertaken, we suggest, may play a part, both in describing the social consequences of faith development theory, and in their analysis.

The third assumption we are making in this chapter is that faith development theory can properly be considered a theology, and can therefore be subjected to the kind of analysis which Gill suggests. An examination of this assumption is made necessary, partly because the focus in this thesis has not been explicitly concentrated upon the function of faith development theory understood as theology; rather, we have focused upon the function of Fowler's stages understood as a theory of knowledge and as a tool for reflection upon the self; an examination of this assumption is also made necessary because Fowler, himself, claims that his stages of faith should not be regarded as sufficient, in themselves, for a theology because they address the structures of faith and not its contents. He argues that theology should properly concern itself with the *centers of value, images of power* and *master stories* which shape our existence; faith development theory, being concerned with the structures of faith[397] - 'the *ways* or *operations* of faith knowing, judging, valuing and committing'[398] - does not, in his view, do this.

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[397]Fowler, J.W., 1981, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper & Row, 274-281.
[398]*Ibid.*, 275.

However, despite Fowler's comments, and the focus of our own study, there are good grounds for considering faith development theory to be a theology which has social effects as a theology. First, we have already argued in this thesis that faith development theory is not theologically neutral, but in fact moves in the direction of Niebuhr's radical monotheism; indeed, each stage which Fowler describes presents a different image of God, culminating in an image which conforms to Niebuhr's description of God as perceived by radical monotheistic faith. It is clear that whilst Fowler's stages of faith might assist people in objectifying their faith experience, reflecting upon it and coming to reinvest themselves within the community of faith, such reflection upon the self has implications for the way in which God is perceived to be and act within the world.

Second, although we have not dwelt upon the effects of faith development theory as a tool for theological reflection per se, the social effects of Fowler's stages of faith as theology can be seen from N F Hahn's work on faith development theory as liberation theology for the middle classes.[399] He argues in his PhD dissertation that faith development theory is, in effect, an indigenous North American liberation theology for the middle class because the metaphor of development opens up for this group greater scope for transformation than does the concept of liberation. What Hahn seeks to do in his thesis is use faith development theory as a bridge between the pastoral ministry received by church congregations and their proclaimed expectation of liberation. He argues that whilst congregations in North America might expect transformation in the form of liberation, in fact they are being transformed through the metaphor of development which they encounter through the pastoral ministry of the Church. Hahn suggests that this is not something to be ashamed of, rather, that God is present in history whenever there is transformation in the direction of freedom.

In order to make this observation, Hahn assumes that human beings have potential for transformation in the direction of freedom; that the divine praxis of freedom and the

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[399]Hahn, N.F., 1994, *Developing Faith - Liberating Faith: Toward a Practical Theology of Congregational Faith Development As a Liberation Theology of the Middle Class*, Ph.D. Diss., Emory University, 1994.

historical praxis of human liberation are co-constitutive categories; and that the image of development which Fowler offers encourages transformation in the direction of freedom. However, these assumptions do not have to be accepted in order to conclude that Hahn has observed faith development theory as theology acting as an independent variable within congregations in North America.

In this thesis, our attention has not been explicitly focused upon the function of faith development theory as theology. Clearly there is scope for such a study, but the focus here has been upon the function of Fowler's stages understood as a tool for reflection upon the self. We have looked at the way in which the stages of faith have affected people's self understanding and the tasks they are able consequently able to perform within the churches. Although the adoption of faith development theory as a theory of identity has social consequences, as we have seen, an encounter with faith development theory does not necessarily result in transformation along the developmental lines which Fowler describes; for example, many of those we have observed using faith development theory as a theory of identity considered themselves to have already reached Stage V faith when they encountered it. Fowler's stages seem, from this perspective, to be more useful in the maintenance of a particular style of faith than, necessarily, in advancing people along the trajectory of development he describes.

However, although our focus has been upon Fowler's stages of faith as a theory of identity, the cosmological framework in which faith development is embedded is partly a theological one. In such a framework, as we have already seen, questions of identity are simultaneously questions of theology. It is on this basis that we consider faith development theory to be susceptible of the kind of evaluation which Gill envisages. Thus, whether viewed as theology or as identity theory, we maintain that the social effects of faith development theory can legitimately studied. We are also maintaining that these social effects can legitimately be incorporated into a theological evaluation of faith development theory.

We are arguing, then, that the use of sociological methods to examine the social base and function of faith development theory allows new elements for assessment to emerge. These elements include the effect of Fowler's work upon individuals and upon the life of the church: the kind of faith it promotes and the kind of communities it sustains. From the perspective of pastoral theology, these are necessary areas for consideration when making an assessment of faith development theory.

This method of assessing the praxis of different theologies is well tried, not least in liberation theology. As we suggested, above, however, sociological insights may be used, not only to describe the social effects of a theology which should then be subject to theological scrutiny, but to inform the very criteria on which theological judgements are made. Such a theological method which draws insights from different fields of study into the formation of its theological judgements has a long precedent in the Christian tradition. In Anglicanism, scripture and tradition have drawn upon the canons of reason, traditionally to achieve logical coherence, whilst in Methodism, following the method of John Wesley, experience has been added to the other three sources of theology.

These four elements: scripture, tradition, reason and experience have become popularly known, through the work of Methodist scholar, Albert Outler, as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.[400] Outler argues that Wesley accepted the unique place of Scripture in theological discourse, but understood this to require interpretation through the distilled wisdom of the Christian tradition, through contemporary canons of reason, and through the individual's Christian experience..

Most previous critical assessments of faith development theory have relied almost exclusively upon scripture and tradition, or upon the canons of reason as found in a particular discipline, such as psychology, whilst those who have found faith development theory helpful, have

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[400]See Outler, A.C., 1985, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley" in Oden, T.C., & Longden, L.R., eds., 1991, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, Zondervan, 21-39.

found its justification in the consonance of the theory with their own Christian experience. What we are suggesting here, is that an integrated theological evaluation of faith development theory should involve not only a discussion of Fowler's methods and assumptions, but an assessment of the kind of faith which Fowler's stages of faith sustain in practice; i.e., there should be a dialogue between the perspectives of scripture and tradition, reason and experience: the reasoned conclusions of those who have considered what might constitute appropriate strategies for the maintenance of Christian identity in the post-modern world, and the experience of those who have found faith development theory helpful as a theory of identity.

The necessity for the employment of such a theological method in the evaluation of the stages of faith arises not merely because Fowler himself is a Methodist, but because his theory, albeit inexplicitly, results from a dialogue between people's Christian[401] experience, elicited through structured interviews, contemporary canons of reason in the disciplines of social and developmental psychology, and an understanding of faith drawn from the Christian scriptures and filtered through the liberal Protestant tradition. An adequate evaluation of faith development theory, then, needs to take into account all of these aspects, and also the way in which this weaving together of these different elements makes an impact upon people's faith.

Assessing the social effects of faith development theory

Having set out our perspective in this way, we now proceed to examine the implications for pastoral theology of the social effects of faith development theory which have emerged in the course of this thesis. Although this chapter cannot undertake a comprehensive assessment of the social effects of faith development theory, there are some clues which emerge from this study about the kind of tasks which faith development theory is able to facilitate, and some

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[401] 81.5% of those interviewed by Fowler for Stages of Faith were Christian, 11.2% were Jewish. These figures are taken from Furushima, R.Y., 1985, "Faith Development in a Cross-Cultural Perspective", *Religious Education*, Vol 80 No.3 (1985), 414-420.

criteria do emerge which may be useful in its evaluation and in the analysis of the task facing contemporary pastoral theology. In the remainder of the chapter, then, we shall outline the ways in which the *ideal type* we have outlined above may be used both for the descriptive and the critical tasks involved in the evaluation of the social effects of faith development theory.

The descriptive task - understanding congregations

The first implication for pastoral theology of the *ideal type*, outlined above, is the description it offers of a number of people within the congregations of the mainstream Christian churches of Britain. As we have seen, those to whom faith development theory most appeals are middle class, highly educated people who have observed a development in their own faith over time, who identify themselves most readily with the liberal wing of the church, but whose interest in symbolism, images and the power of narrative make *post-liberal* a more appropriate description of their current theological outlook.

In offering such a description of people who are constructing a post-liberal perspective, this study forms a bridge between the work of James Fowler and various other developments within theology which emphasise the role of symbols, images and the power of narrative. One example of such a development is narrative theology which is concerned to relate the impressions made by narratives and the insights arising out of them to theological questions; another example is provided by the work of George Lindbeck on the nature of doctrine which we have already surveyed in some detail. Lindbeck suggested that amongst those influenced by the human sciences and those who through contact with other cultures become explicitly aware of the ways in which their particular tradition has shaped them, his cultural linguistic view of doctrine, and post-liberal theology would endure if it is found useful. This study of the social effects of faith development theory provides examples of just such people who are finding the post-liberal approach of Fowler's Stage V/VI faith to be a useful way of maintaining Christian faith.

If the positions reflected by Lindbeck's cultural linguistic view of doctrine and Fowler's Stages V/VI are being adopted by selected groups within the British mainstream churches, as we have suggested, this must be a matter of interest for pastoral theology, for in order to minister effectively to their congregations, clergy need information about and insight into the motivations and faith experience of those in their care. They also need a theology which is able to take account of the Christian church as it is. If academic theology is to speak to Christian ministers and congregations, some account must be taken by theologians of descriptions of those who populate the churches. More particularly, if it is accepted that our *ideal type* provides evidence of a post-liberal perspective being adopted, effective preaching and pastoral ministry must take account of this development.

Of course, it is not being suggested that the parallels between Fowler's Stage V faith and Lindbeck's post-liberal perspective vindicate either of their theories as panaceas for religious faith in general - or even for Christian faith in late modernity. Both reflect a particular cultural context and social base, and articulate particular ecclesiastical and ecumenical concerns, and their appropriateness for pastoral ministry must be assessed upon theological criteria. However, what this thesis is able to offer is some access to the background, motivations and faith experience of some of those adopting a post-liberal, or Stage V, theological outlook. Clearly for the kind of broad and rich description of contemporary congregations which is most useful to pastoral theologians, many other studies must be undertaken and reviewed. As this study has shown, however, an investigation into the appeal of a theory which is current within the churches may reveal an *ideal type*. Parallel investigations into other formulaic claims to knowledge, which are current in the British churches, might also reveal rich descriptions of types found within congregations. Studies might be undertaken for example, which examine the social base and social function of stage theories of bereavement, or of the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator. Such studies would not only be of sociological interest, but would also provide theology with a clearer sense of the motivations, perspectives, commitments, dilemmas and possibilities for those within the

churches. If theologians and ministers are to reach congregations, such a picture of those whom they seek to address seems essential.

The descriptive task - understanding church leaders

Our study of faith development theory has revealed an *ideal type* within British congregations. As we have seen, however, from the results of the questionnaire, a high percentage of those interested in Fowler's work were employed by the churches as clergy, diocesan advisers or chaplains. In addition, many also held positions of responsibility within churches as youth leaders or Sunday school teachers. Although the percentages of clergy and religious professionals amongst the sample may have been influenced by the network through which the conference was publicised, none the less, those interested in faith development theory, to whom we have access, have proved to be church leaders of one kind or another.

As such, then, this study is able to offer to pastoral theology, insight into those who have great influence within the churches, through teaching, preaching and pastoral care. We suggest, then, that this sociological study of faith development theory is able to offer access, not only people who are constructing a post-liberal faith perspective, but to some of the issues which are important to highly educated and self aware religious professionals, the pressures upon them, and the strategies they adopt to help them cope.

Currently, concerns are often expressed, within the mainstream churches, about clergy stress.[402] Whilst many of the causes of clergy stress may be attributed to the expectations of congregations, or the effects of a contracting church, this thesis draws attention to the question of Christian identity and the potential threats to that identity which clergy routinely experience. We have seen, above, that threatened identities lead to reduced competence and higher states of anxiety. We have seen that a sense of one's own place and the place of others

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[402] see for example, the recent publications on the subject: Coate, M., 1989, *Clergy Stress: the hidden conflicts in ministry*, SPCK; Nash, W., 1990, *Living with God at the Vicarage*, Grove Books; Sanford, J.A., 1982, *Ministry Burnout*, Populist Press; Horsman, S., 1989, *Living with Stress*, Lutterworth.

is needed in order to discern one's role and thus to perform effectively. We have also seen the role which an explicit theory of identity is able to play in empowering religious professionals and enabling them to invest themselves in the churches.

Our study has focused only upon one type of religious professional within the churches: those finding faith development theory a useful strategy for the maintenance of their Christian identity. However, it has revealed clergy, who have found a need for a dynamic and explicit theory of identity in order to be able to relate to their congregations and find an appropriate role amongst them. The results of our study in this area also point to the possibility that parallel studies such as we have suggested above, might provide complementary descriptions of the dynamics at work in the lives of the clergy which contribute to stress or its relief.

Further work might be undertaken, then, which investigates the role which formulaic theories of knowledge play in the lives of the religious professionals, not only in the contemporary church, but within religious institutions of other historical periods and cultures. In Fowler's work we have discerned a scheme of knowledge which has been adopted by religious professionals in order to help them maintain their own ways of believing in the midst of the diverse and sometimes hostile views of those amongst whom they must work. There seems to be scope here for further work looking at the function of other hierarchical theories of knowledge which have arisen amongst religious professionals within different historical periods and religious systems.

One such possibility for comparison with faith development theory is the Mahayana Buddhist concept of *skilful means*, set out in the *Lotus Sutra*.[403] Briefly sketched, the doctrine of *fang-pien*, usually translated as *skilful means*, suggests that the various forms of Buddhist teaching and practice are all provisional means, skilfully designed by the Buddha to lead the

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[403]For a detailed examination of the concept of skilful means, see Pye, M., 1978, *Skilful Means*, Duckworth. The *Lotus Sutra* does not introduce any new items of Buddhist belief or practice, rather is suggests a new perspective upon all the existing, diverse mainifestations of Buddhism.

unenlightened towards *Enlightenment*. Each of the means is devised according to the degree of ignorance and worldly attachment of those being addressed. Thus, although to the uninitiated, the many statements of the Buddha in the Pali Canon may appear to be contradictory, they are all authentic and have only one purpose if perceived from the correct perspective.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, therefore, where this doctrine is outlined, the propositions of Buddhism are hierarchically ordered, for some notions must be grasped, both intellectually and existentially, before others. Different devotional practices are also hierarchically ordered, such that even theistic devotion, within an atheistic religion can be considered *skilful means* towards *Enlightenment*.

Thus, the doctrine of *skilful means* in Mahayana Buddhism allows for many perspectives upon the nature of truth and reality. Those who practise devotion may believe the Buddha to be their personal saviour; others believe the Buddha to have spoken literal truths concerning the nature of the world and the nature of the self; those who share the perspective of the *Lotus Sutra*, however, know that all these stages are provisional *skilful means* devised in order to lead the ignorant to *Enlightenment*.

The point of comparison with Fowler's work is not one of content. Clearly, the content of Buddhist belief and devotion is vastly different from that of post-liberal Christianity. The comparison which might be made, however, is one of social function, for this theory of knowledge, allowing a variety of ways of believing to be held together within Buddhism, is thought to have arisen amongst the Sangha, the religious professionals of Mahayana Buddhism.[404] The emergence of the concept of *skilful means* is thought to have enabled the

[404]The *Lotus Sutra* first became important within Mahayana Buddhism five hundred years after the death of Gautama Buddha. It appeared amongst a group of new sutras which were attribued to the Buddha by means of a new doctirne which asserted the continued influence of the Buddha upon the world. Although some Japanese scholars attribute these new sutras to the laity, it is more generally consiered that they were the product of the Sangha.

Sangha to hold together in a single system, their own spiritual preoccupations and ambitions, with the previously often condemned devotional activities of their laity.

Such a concern to hold together divergent elements of the tradition may seem a far cry from the concern identified amongst Christian professionals to maintain their own identity in the face of a diversity of faith perspectives, except that, as we have stated, understanding one's own role requires some scheme whereby one's own sense of self may be related to one's perceptions of others. In the case of faith development theory, the faith of those who hold opposing views is regarded as immature, but appropriate to the background, situation or age of the individuals concerned, thus allowing the religious professional to maintain their own way of believing unchallenged, and to find a role amongst the laity. In the case of *skilful means*, this doctrine also allows the faith and devotion of those who hold different views to be regarded as undeveloped, but appropriate to their background or situation, thus allowing the priorities of the Sangha to be maintained without the need to deny the validity of the devotion of those less advanced on the path to *Enlightenment*.

Although this scheme arises from a very different historical and cultural context from faith development theory and within a different cosmological framework, this brief sketch indicates some possible points of comparison with faith development theory, not in terms of content, but in terms of social function: they are both theories of knowledge which give rise to a hierarchy of ways of knowing the divine; in each case this knowledge becomes ever more explicit and there is no implication that the hierarchical structure will be apparent to most people; in addition, both schemes were adopted by religious professionals who, as we have seen, are likely to need to preserve their own ways of believing in the face of a diversity of faith and practice. Thus both of these theories of knowledge appear to maintain that different forms of faith and devotion are appropriate to different people at different stages and in different life situations. They also both seem to allow the religious élite to invest energy into their own spiritual journeys, without denouncing the devotion of the laity with whom they work or upon whom they rely.

There is much more work to be done before the value of such a comparison could be demonstrated. Christian clergy in the post-modern world, and Buddhist monks of the first millennium think within very different philosophical frameworks and have very different structural relationships with their laity: any study would have to take proper account of that. However, what is suggested from this brief look at the doctrine of *skilful means* is that such a cross-cultural study might prove fruitful, either in this area, or looking at the theory of religious knowledge devised by the Hindu philosopher, Sankara, in the ninth century CE to incorporate theism and monism within one Hindu understanding;[405] or Pseudo-Dionysius' method of holding together the *Via Affirmativa* and the *Via Negativa.*[406]

It is suggested that a comparison of the dynamics at work in the reception of such theories of knowledge amongst religious élites with the study we have made of the appeal of faith development theory might further illuminate the pressures to which clergy and religious professionals are subject. Such studies might also shed further light upon the strategies employed by religious professionals in order to maintain their faith and integrity within diverse faith communities. This would not only extend the work of Max Weber in this area, but would provide a broader base for understanding the dynamics at work between religious professionals and their laities, and yield interesting implications for the training and support of clergy within the contemporary Christian churches.

Such studies might also have implications for the future uses of faith development theory within theological education. We have already noted that some religious professionals have found faith development theory a useful way of conceptualising their own faith styles in relation to those of others; a way of forging an identity and finding a role amongst the laity. Whilst, as was made clear in Chapter Two, we cannot accept Fowler's claim to have produced a structural and therefore generalisable and normative theory of human

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[405]see Alston, G., ed., 1990, *Sankara's Writings*, Shanti Sadan.
[406]see, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*

development, there may still be situations and circumstances in which faith development theory might prove useful in building up the body of Christ. Such a case would be strengthened if evidence were found in other traditions of formulaic theories of knowledge proving beneficial to religious professionals in coping with religious diversity.

Of course, it could be argued that this thesis, itself, is purely an example of a highly educated, post-liberal religious professional seeking to vindicate a theory of faith development which is consonant with her own theological and ecclesiastical interests - and there would be come truth in this observation, for all claims to knowledge, as we have indicated, are located in a social base - however, it is also the case that an awareness of the need which clergy have for formulaic theories of knowledge, highlighted in this thesis, may prevent religious professionals such as the author of this thesis from using Fowler's theory in inappropriate contexts to try to mould the faith of those to whom such a scheme of knowledge can make little sense.

To make the claim at this stage that faith development theory is useful for building up the body of Christ, is however, premature, for although we have discerned faith development theory assisting in the maintenance of a particular style of Christian identity, what we have yet to discuss is the extent to which the resulting style of faith can be considered appropriate for the contemporary British churches. In this discussion and throughout the previous chapter, although we have looked at the ways in which faith development theory is functioning as a strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity, the word Christian has been used in a phenomenological sense to refer to those who describe themselves as Christian and who are involved in the Christian Church. The word Christian, has not, hitherto been used in a theological sense to claim that the social effects of faith development theory as a theory of identity are appropriate to the authentic Christian church. Such an evaluation requires an explicitly theological discussion and it is to such a theological evaluation that we now turn.

The Analytical Task

For the most part, the previous paragraphs have concentrated upon the implications for pastoral theology of our description of those using faith development theory as a theory of identity. We have used our sociological analysis of faith development theory to describe congregations and their leaders in order that pastoral theology might be better informed about the contemporary church. With reference to Robin Gill's work, however, we have already indicated that sociological studies may contribute not only to the descriptive task of pastoral theology, but also to its analytical task, providing essential tools for the critique and assessment of particular theological approaches, and for the construction of theological perspectives which are responsive to the contemporary situation.

Assessing faith development theory

In our methodological discussion at the beginning of this chapter we suggested that, at least in the Methodist tradition, a theological assessment of faith development theory should properly take account, not only of scripture and tradition, but also of reason and experience. In contemporary western society, some of the canons of reason which are relevant to our discussion include the social sciences. In this thesis, we have used insights from sociology, social anthropology, and social psychology in order to analyse the social function of faith development theory. What we seek to do now, is to suggest how these insights might properly contribute to a theological evaluation of our findings.

The first step in this task is to elucidate criteria from our sociological analysis of faith development theory with which to evaluate Fowler's stages of faith from a sociological perspective. It is not suggested that these judgements then be uncritically adopted by pastoral theology, but that such findings might provide a reasoned account of religious experience which would contribute to a balanced theological perspective.

We have suggested in this thesis that faith development theory functions as a theory of identity amongst a particular social and theological group within the mainstream British

churches. In Chapter Five, in order to try to understand why faith development theory is being adopted as a theory of identity, we looked at some of the conditions which prevail in contemporary western society which affect the construction of Christian identities; we argued that Christian identities have been particularly under assault from the emergence of empiricism, hypo-deductive reasoning and relativism, and we looked at the strategies available for the maintenance of a Christian identity amongst those affected by these pressures.

In looking at the kinds of identities constructed by pre-liberals, liberals and post-liberals, we identified the post-liberal approach as being the category into which faith development theory best fits. We also identified those constructing a post-liberal identity as being those who have the greatest need for an explicit and dynamic sense of self.

Within social psychology, as we hinted in Chapter Five, there is some consensus about the kind of identity which is likely to be most successful in the post-modern world. The criterion which social psychologists use to evaluate different strategies for the maintenance of a sense of self, are whether or not these strategies are psychologically adaptive. This, for example, is the criterion being used by Zurcher to assess the relative merits of the different modes of identity which he describes and which we outlined in Chapter V as physical, social, reflective, oceanic and mutable.[407]

In Zurcher's opinion, as we indicated in Chapter Five, whilst a physical mode identity, pre-occupied with the physical boundaries of the self, might be appropriate to small children, in adults it is indicative of an inability to cope with the complexities of life. Likewise, a social identity may function well in limited circumstances, but once its social limitations have become clear, a more flexible approach to identity must be adopted if a self-concept is to be sustainable. Zurcher argues that his reflective and oceanic modes also have their

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[407]See Chapter Five.

disadvantages, in that they tend to inhibit social interaction which is the mainstay of human life. He therefore hopes for the emergence of a mutable identity:

> Somehow, one would hope, people would emerge who would manifest an evolution of self-concept that could serve to help define for society a new notion of equilibrium, one based on change; provide tolerance for healthy conflict among equally useful alternative lifestyles; protect the society from 'falling' by developing flexibilities in social structure where rigidities now exist; accommodate and enhance the experience of the four self-concept modes without limiting or unduly exaggerating them as part of the fullness of living and the wholeness of personality.[408]

For Zurcher, a mode of identity for the post-modern world, which is healthy, must be flexible and dynamic. It should also facilitate commitment to and investment in human communities. The problem underlying Zurcher's reflective and oceanic modes is that they prevent such commitment. They inhibit self-investment in any world view, or social circle, and if adopted permanently they run the risk of isolation and alienation from the social world. By contrast, what Zurcher believes his concept of the mutable self to provide, is an example of how those who are self-aware - those who have realised the contingent nature of their social world, their cosmological framework and their social identity - can then choose to locate themselves within a particular tradition or organisation, knowing that human fulfilment must be found in community.

Although Zurcher's study is illuminating, its usefulness for our current purposes is limited in two ways: first, because he does not offer a clear account of the criteria he is using to assess the modes of identity he describes, and second, because he does not explicitly discuss religious identities. For a specific understanding of what might be considered healthy, or *psychologically adaptive* when it comes to religious identities, we turn to Batson & Ventis' social psychological study, *The Religious Experience*.[409]

In *The Religious Experience*, Batson & Ventis describe three types of religious approach found in contemporary western society. After reviewing a number of different ways of

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[408]Zurcher Jr., L.A., 1977, *The Mutable Self: A Self-Concept for Social Change*, Sage Publications, 183.
[409]Batson, C.D. & Ventis, W.L., 1982, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective*, OUP.

constructing a social psychological typology of religious manifestations, such as George Allport's distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic religion[410] and Bernard Spilka's distinction between consensual and committed religion,[411] Batson & Ventis present a three dimensional analysis of ways of being religious in contemporary western society. They are, first, means-oriented religion which is characterised as consensual and self-serving, and a way of gaining approval or achieving other goals;[412] end-oriented religion, which is associated with devout orthodoxy, certainty and existential commitment;[413] and *quest-oriented religion* which proceeds tentatively, allows room for doubt and is able to reflect the complexities of life.

The criteria which Batson & Ventis use to assess these different ways of being religious arise from their social psychological perspective, attempting through reviewing the evidence of field research to establish which of the three orientations might be more psychologically adaptive.[414] Attempting to establish which religious orientation might be 'on our side', they seek to establish in each case whether a religious orientation would lead to personal freedom; promote mental health, and engender brotherly love [*sic.*] or *prosocial* behaviour.

From their review of the relevant published evidence, Batson & Ventis conclude that regarding personal freedom, means-oriented believers score negatively because religious observance is experienced as a series of chores and demands;[415] end-oriented believers, however have an ambivalent experience of personal freedom: on the one hand, they may feel released from guilt or self-loathing, but on the other hand this freedom is only sustainable within strict limits. There is no freedom, for example, for free critical thought; data which challenges the particular beliefs of such a group must be denied or distorted in order to be

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[410] Allport, G., 1966, "The Religious Context of Prejudice", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1966:5, 447-457

[411] Spilka, B., 1967, "Committed and consensual religion: A specification of religion-prejudice relationships", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1967:6, 191-206

[412] *Ibid.*, 143-4

[413] *Ibid.*, 144.

[414] *Ibid.*, 170.

[415] *Ibid.*, 205.

accommodated. Such freedom as there is, therefore, is only achieved at the price of bondage to religious beliefs and the communities which reinforce them.[416] Quest-oriented believers, in contrast, are free to examine critical questions and are not enslaved to any particular beliefs or the regulations of particular religious groups. However, they do not derive the kind of freedom which end-oriented believers experience from religious myths.

Batson & Ventis' second criterion for evaluating the different ways of being religious, is mental health. Judging how various forms of religion affect mental health is a complex exercise because there are so many conceptions within psychology of what mental health is. These include the absence of mental illness; manifesting appropriate social behaviour; freedom from the anxiety and guilt which results from the internalisation of an ideal self which one cannot attain; personal competence and control; self acceptance or self-actualisation: the freedom to express one's own nature; the integration of the personality; open-mindedness and flexibility.

From their survey of published studies which relate to this theme, Batson & Ventis conclude that those who are means-oriented score negatively on almost all counts with the exception of appropriate social behaviour. There is a self-centredness and closed attention to one's own point of view which lead to a lack of self acceptance, lack of competence, an only partly integrated personality, and a lack of flexibility.[417] Those who are end-oriented exhibit increased appropriate social behaviour (as defined by their religious tradition), and increased freedom from worry and guilt, unless there is a heavy theological emphasis upon the sinfulness of human nature which is not met by a sufficient doctrine of grace; personal competence and control are increased by a sense that God is on their side, and this is a view around which the personality tends to organise. However, there is increased resistance to change and it is unclear whether or not many such believers accept themselves, or are able to

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[416] *Ibid.*, 176-196.
[417] *Ibid.*, 234-5.

actualise themselves within strict religious communities.[418] In the case of quest-oriented religion, there is more worry and guilt and less integration, and however, there is a greatly increased self-acceptance and self-actualisation and an increased competence which is based an appropriate self-confidence. [419]

Regarding prosocial behaviour, those who are means-oriented score quite well, although motivations are inevitably influenced by how they want to appear. Those who are end-oriented contribute most effort and money to church organisations and religious charities which reflect the theologies of their group, they tend to be prejudiced, however, and unmoved by those who do not share their perspectives. Those who are quest orientated score best in terms of their response to all human beings on the basis of need without concern to categorise people in terms of their own religious system.[420]

If we now bring Batson & Ventis' criteria for the identification of a healthy religious outlook into dialogue with the research into identity discussed in Chapter Five, social psychological criteria begin to emerge for the assessment of the effects of faith development theory when it is used as a theory of identity because, from the perspective of the social psychology of identity which we have discussed, a religious outlook which promotes the genuine personal freedom which Batson & Ventis describe, is dependent upon the development of the kind of identity which enables the individual to act within a variety of social contexts without undue external regulation or anxiety; we have suggested that such an identity within contemporary society must be flexible and dynamic enough to be able to cope with the complex juggling of roles and changing social circumstances which are part of the contemporary western world.

In similar vein, from the perspective of the social psychological work on identity on which we have drawn, Batson & Ventis' notion of mental health implies the maintenance of a

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[418] *Ibid.*, 235-6.
[419] *Ibid.*, 236-7.
[420] *Ibid.*, 298.

consistent sense of self which is not easily threatened or plunged into anxiety or rage, but which is stable, and confident of its ability to confront the complexities of contemporary society; and that health is also bound up with the need for real human contact which can only come about through self-investment in particular communities and relationships. Likewise, genuine altruism is only possible when there has emerged a concept of the self which locates the individual in relation to others within their social world; only such an identity can enable the commitment to and investment in a particular human community which is necessary for the realisation of altruistic concern.

The issue of finding psychologically adaptive Christian identities is one issue of obvious importance to the churches which arises from this discussion. If personal freedom and mental health are to be fully experienced and if there is to be a genuine response to the needs of others, we have argued that a flexible and dynamic type of identity is needed and one which enables investment in a particular human community.

In the discussion above, then, we have identified some social psychological criteria upon the basis of which the effects of faith development theory as a theory of identity might be evaluated Some suggestions have already been made concerning the likely outcome of such an evaluation. In Chapter Five, we have already associated Fowler's Stage V & VI faith with Zurcher's mutable self and commented upon the way in which his explicit and dynamic presentation of faith development offers a plausible structure for the maintenance of a durable and healthy Christian identity within the contemporary British churches. We have also noted that the trajectories of faith development do not lead towards a thorough-going relativism which might inhibit self-investment in a particular community of faith, (thus losing the benefits associated with end-oriented religion) but rather commend the need to limit oneself by choice to a particular identity in order to be fully human and fully Christian. The preliminary indications are, therefore, that, from a social psychological perspective, faith development theory when used as a theory of identity in the way we have described, is psychologically adaptive.

The importance of this social psychological assessment of faith development theory as a strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity in the post-modern world is that it contributes an account of the experience of those who find faith development theory helpful which draws upon generations of reasoning about human identity. As such, within our theological method, outlined above, this social psychological assessment of the social effects of faith development theory when used as a strategy for the maintenance of identity, makes an important contribution to a theological assessment of faith development theory.

An integrated theological response to faith development theory, however, would involve a dialogue between this assessment made here on the basis of a reasoned account of the function of theories of identity and the experience of those who have found faith development theory helpful, and the canons of scripture and tradition.[421] A detailed consideration of the social effects of faith development theory in the light of scripture and tradition is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, we do make the suggestion, that, judged on its social effects as a theory of identity by the social psychological criteria we have outlined, faith development theory does contribute to the maintenance of an appropriately Christian identity in the groups we have studied on the grounds that it promotes genuine 'personal freedom, mental health and brotherly love'. Each of these, we contend, are not only necessary to psychological adaptation, but are an integral part of the kingdom of God, as proclaimed in scripture and mediated through the Christian tradition.

There is considerable support for a view of salvation which includes notions of personal freedom, mental health and community to be found both within scripture and the Christian tradition. The gospels provide numerous accounts of healing stories which relate to people's physical and mental well-being, and stories of release from fear and guilt;[422] whilst in the

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[421] It would also, of course, involve evaluations of other social effects of faith development theory, including, for example, the effects on congregations whose ministers are using faith development theory as an interpretive model. Such a wide ranging assessment, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

[422] See for example the first few chapters of Mark's gospel: Mark 1:32-34; Mark 2:1-12; Mark 4:35-41; Mark 5:1-13.

writings of St Paul there is a clear understanding of salvation, as a hope which concerns not only the individual believer, nor the Christian community, but the whole of creation.[423]

According to John Macquarrie in *Christian Hope*, despite some early examples of a cosmic Christian hope for salvation in the work of Origen[424] and Irenaeus,[425] the difficulties caused by the apparent delay of the parousia meant that concepts of salvation were increasingly driven towards Platonic notions of the immortality of the soul and immediate judgement upon personal death. These difficulties with the temporal element of eschatology may have also been the reason for the collapsing into one of the concepts of justification and salvation, thus denuding salvation of its any broader meaning than personal vindication in the face of the judgement of God.

However, a proper separation of these two concepts, allows for, what Macquarrie calls, a total salvation. A total salvation which includes personal integration, and also the integration of communities and the whole cosmos: "My goal will be to commend a full Christian hope - a total hope. Only some such comprehensive hope, I believe, would gather up all the promises of the biblical revelation and all the insights of generations of Christian theologians."[426]

Such a total salvation, we suggest, would include psychic health and wholeness for individuals such as that described above, which, although it is a theme sometimes neglected in the Christian tradition has been highlighted by Andrew Sung Park in *The Wounded Heart of God* where he contends that any total doctrine of salvation must deal adequately not only with sinners, but with the pervasive reality of the shame and fear and isolation of the victims of sin.[427]

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[423]Romans 8:19-22
[424]Origen, *De Principiis* I:V, trans. G.W. Butterworth, Harper & Row, 1966.
[425]Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V:35, trans. D.J., Unger, Paulist Press, 1992.
[426]Macquarrie, J., 1978, *Christian Hope*, Mowbrays, 106.
[427]Park, A.S., 1992, *The Wounded Heart of God*, Abingdon.

One recent systematic theology which embraces this area of concern, is Ninian Smart and Steve Konstantine's, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context.* They recognise that salvation involves both an immediate relief from psychic guilt, and a process of ultimate transformation, being recreated in the likeness of Christ. In their opinion, there can be no progress in spiritual development without progress in achieving an emotional maturity and stability, which leads to self-knowledge, an ability to establish and maintain productive, loving relationships and an acceptance of the responsibility for becoming an effective human being.[428]

Such a total salvation, we suggest, must also be concerned with human community, for as human beings, made in the image of God, we are social beings, whose health and personal freedom, depend on the quality of our relationships. Smart & Konstantine comment that "Christian spiritual growth and salvation is communitarian, in which personal integration takes place in a specific liturgical and sacramental context; it is not an individual path to salvation..."[429] Other theologians who have taken seriously the social nature of the self, and thus the importance of community include Paul Tillich, H R Niebuhr, and liberation theologians like Gutierrez who points to the importance of the Exodus, as the birth of a new community, for defining what salvation means in the Biblical narrative.[430]

Clearly there is a considerable amount of work still to be done in order to demonstrate that the concepts of personal freedom, mental health and genuine community which faith development theory promotes amongst the *ideal type* we have described are an integral part of the total salvation to which scripture and tradition bear witness. However, we are suggesting, that following the outlines indicated above, there is a case for considering faith development theory to be a legitimate tool for building up the body of Christ amongst those who adopt it as a theory of identity.

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[428]Smart, N., & Konstantine, S.,1991, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context*, Harper Collins, 332-4.
[429]*Ibid.*, 335.
[430]Gutierrez, G., 1971 *A Theology of Liberation*, SCM, 1988, 89.

Although this judgement is necessarily tentative, if it is accepted, a number of consequences follow: first, there are consequences for the future uses of faith development theory; second there are consequences for the theological debate about the nature of Christian identities appropriate to the post-modern context.

Future uses of faith development theory

First, if the social effects of faith development theory as a theory of identity amongst the category of persons we have established are to be viewed in a positive light, the use of faith development theory in theological education for example, would seem not only justified but highly beneficial amongst the highly educated and self aware because it is able to assist in the tasks of conceptualising faith and maintaining a Christian identity in the face of diversity in ways which promote personal freedom, mental health and genuine community.

However, this seeming vindication of faith development theory does not imply that Fowler's image of 'mature' faith is appropriate to societies other than the post-modern, nor that his justification of his theory on structural-developmental grounds should be accepted. We have already maintained, in Chapter Two, that faith development theory does not provide a structural and therefore normative stage theory of development, rather it was suggested that it is only likely to reflect the experience of white western Christians. It was also noted in Chapter Two that even within this group of people faith development theory might seriously distort the experience of some people, particularly women, and those whose image of faith does not conform to Niebuhr's radical monotheism which we have identified with Fowler's Stage VI faith. There is no suggestion here, then, that Fowler's theory will be useful to all religious professionals, nor that its use should be encouraged to the exclusion of other models which offer formulaic knowledge about congregations. However, what is being suggested is that faith development does offer a strategy which may contribute to the building up and maintenance of a durable Christian identity for those who recognise their development described by Fowler's scheme.

The Theology of Identity in the post-modern world

This observation brings us to the second area in which faith development theory is able to offer a fruitful way forward: the discussion of the social effects of Fowler's work undertaken here has raised questions about the nature of appropriate Christian identities in the contemporary British context. This is a question with which contemporary theology is evidently concerned. We have already mentioned Lindbeck's work, other studies which are relevant here include, Smart & Konstantine's *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context*, and Anthony Thiselton's, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* for they are both seeking to establish appropriate ways of being Christian in the post-modern world; particularly, ways which are open to those who have been exposed to the full complexities of the contemporary western cultural situation.

As such, our study of the social effects of faith development theory is able to contribute to the current debate upon the kind of faith appropriate to post-modern society. None of those who have sought to address this question, whether from a social psychological or theological perspective, have made any use of Fowler's work, but through this study it is possible to see a concrete example of theory of identity which is psychologically adaptive, and which, we have suggested, offers access to the personal freedom, mental health and genuine community which are proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

What this thesis has demonstrated is that, whatever theologians have previously made of Fowler's stages of faith, in practice, his theory has been adopted by leaders within the mainstream churches as a means of allowing them to find themselves a role and thus remain within the Church. If, our judgement were to be accepted that faith development theory constitutes one appropriate, if limited, strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity in the post-modern context because it enables those faced with the complexities of the contemporary world to invest themselves appropriately within the Christian community for the sake of freedom, health and community, this study of faith development theory might point to a way forward in the debate about appropriate Christian identities.

We have already noted that the success of faith development theory as a theory of identity is that it is explicit and dynamic. As such, it offers a strategy for the maintenance of Christian identity to those most acutely exposed to the complexities of the post-modern world; a strategy which within this context, facilitates the personal freedom, mental health and genuine community which are part of the kingdom of God because it enables the highly educated and self aware to invest themselves within the institutional Church.

The necessity for the self-aware to be able to commit themselves to a Christian community is presented by Mary Douglas in the penultimate chapter of *Natural Symbols.*[431] This prescriptive passage marks a departure from the descriptive nature of the bulk of her text, but arises from her analysis of the social changes of the mid twentieth century in terms of grid and group. Douglas posited that the iconoclasm of the 1960s was a revolt against bureaucracy; a revolt against the treating of individuals as objects which is associated with modern industrial society.[432] Believing that ritual and myth are part of the means by which any society remains in existence, Douglas argued that any protest against society must express itself against the rituals and myths with which the status quo is associated, resulting in inarticulate and differentiated symbols of protest.[433]

Douglas observed that one common response of the clergy in the 1960's was to join the revolt out of compassion for the disaffected, marching in demonstrations and following the tide of anti-ritualism within and beyond the churches.[434] Then, adopting a prescriptive stance, Douglas suggested that the proper response of the clergy to the plight of the disaffected, should be to try to humanise the system. The only way to humanise the system, Douglas argued, is to 'cherish particular categories.... Instead of anti-ritualism it would be more practical to experiment with more flexible institutional forms and to seek to develop their

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[431] Douglas, M., 1970, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology,* Barrie & Jenkins, 1973, 173-201.
[432] *Ibid.*, 186.
[433] *Ibid.*, 182-3.
[434] *Ibid.*, 183.

ritual expression.'[435] She went on to suggest that the proper calling of theologians is not to follow the tide of anti-ritualism but to offer to society more precise and original categories of thought which return to notions of social involvement and society through the language of myth: 'the mystical body, the communion of saints, death, resurrection, immortality and speaking with tongues.'[436]

From Douglas' perspective, it was imperative in the 1960's for those clergy who were aware of the disaffection and social dislocation of many people which was happening as the result of rapid social change, to remain within the church and seek to make social institutions like the church accessible to a wider range of people. She suggested that this was possible, not through demythologisation, but through a revitalisation of the mythological language of the Christian tradition. In Douglas' argument, the necessity for the investment of the self-aware in social institutions like the church is not for their own salvation as individuals, but for the salvation of the whole society, preventing its dissolution into anarchy.

Indeed, such a suggestion is consonant with the directions which Fowler's own work have taken since the publication of *Stages of Faith* in 1981. In particular, in *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* published in 1991, Fowler suggests that the present context demands metaphors for God's praxis which capture the interdependence of all life and can serve a reintegrative function. He considers the progressive individualism of religion a dead end, and, based on the observations of Richard Sennett, in *The Fall of Public Man*, seeks to call the churches to become the *Public Church.*

According to Fowler, a *public church* fosters a clear sense of identity and commitment centred on Jesus Christ and is able to be open to a wide variety of people without fear of threat. A public church fosters vocation and witness in a plural society and evolves a pattern of governance which balances lay and clerical initiative and exhibits a clarity about the

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[435] *Ibid.*, 188.
[436] *Ibid.*, 201.

virtues and deep emotions it needs to form in members as they are shaped by the practice of the church. Such churches are able, Fowler claims, through their preaching, liturgy, fellowship, service and children's work to offer a distinctive reading of their culture. It is within such a context that faith development theory, in his opinion, is able to provide a dynamic image of the faith journey which will raise expectations within the faith community and enable them to tap into the power and energy for transformation which is offered to them in Jesus Christ.[437]

Fowler again sounds this note in his latest publication, *Faithful Change: The personal and public challenges of post-modern life*, 1996. Here he suggests that, 'postmodernity needs convictional images that mediate hope and courage. We need communities that model justice and engage in liberating praxis and understand it as part of the praxis of God.'[438]

The privatisation of religion and the consigning of Christianity to a leisure pursuit is a concern of some considerable importance to theology; it has to be acknowledged that in many ways the institutional church has lost its place of influence within society. Douglas suggested in the 1960's that the extent to which the Church was losing its influence corresponded to the extent to which it abandoned its myths and rituals and its proper role of developing and ritualising community. It is interesting that in the last decades of the twentieth century the appeal of demythologisation and historical criticism is diminishing whilst other forms of theology which concentrate on relating the experience of the present generation to the stories of the Christian tradition are in the ascendant - a trend reflected in Harvey Cox's two books, *The Secular City*, 1965, and *Religion in the Secular City*, 1984.

Evidence for such a trend within the churches is not hard to find. We have already noted the emerging popularity of narrative theology and narrative styles of preaching;[439] in addition,

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[437]Fowler, J.W., 1991, *Weaving the New Creation:Stages of Faith and the Public Church*, Harper & Row, 147-171.
[438]Fowler, J.W., *1996, Faithful Change:The personal and public challenges of post-modern life*, Abingdon, 180.
[439]see page 213.

congregations which hitherto have relied heavily upon the spoken word and cognitive styles of preaching, are now embracing the visual arts, poetry and a variety of musical ways of communicating the gospel.[440]

In this context, what this study provides, is access to a group of people, who, whilst not ignorant of the critical issues which surround Biblical faith, are able to locate themselves within the myths and traditions of the Christian tradition with the assistance of faith development theory.

Faith development theory, we are suggesting, offers an example to pastoral theology of a strategy for the maintenance of an appropriate Christian identity because it draws together into a meaningful relationship, important strands of contemporary western self understanding with themes from the Christian tradition, shedding light upon dynamic personal biographies, providing an interpretative framework for understanding diversity within the churches, and facilitating the investment of highly educated and self-aware individuals within the institutional Church.

We suggest that analysis of other theories which are current in the churches will prove significant in the tasks, not only of understanding contemporary British congregations and clergy, but of preventing the churches from being reduced to the status of private clubs. As in the case of this study, they may reveal concrete examples of people who have been exposed, more than most, to elements of post-modern culture, and who are yet able to invest themselves in the institutional Church.

For those, like the author of this thesis, to whom the investment of well educated and thoughtful people within the institutional Church seems crucial if the Church is to play any public role in late modern society, theories of Christian identity which are explicit and

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[440]see for example the style of worship recommended by Susan Sayers, 1997, *Living Stones*, Kevin Mayhew.

dynamic and functional for post-modern people need urgently to be articulated. Faith development theory, as we have suggested, does not provide a generalisable or normative account of human development, but it does provide some indications of the kind of frameworks for Christian identity which are demanded by the social conditions of late modernity.

Clearly, in this final chapter we have moved a long way from the sociological perspective promised in the subtitle of the thesis. The position we have adopted here, clearly articulates the views of the author concerning what constitutes an appropriate theological response to the social developments of late modernity - a response which is able to dialogue with contemporary understandings of the human condition and engage with the pluralism that characterises the late modern western world. As such, this thesis reflects a particular theological standpoint, and is as open to a sociological critique as any other constructive response to contemporary society. Whilst aware that the sociology of knowledge is subject to an infinite regress in this way, we have attempted, in this thesis, to provide a critical account of Fowler's stages of faith which will enable a more reflexive use of faith development theory amongst religious professionals, and will contribute to the debate upon the types of faith identity which need to be encouraged if there is to be 'good faith' on earth in twenty-first century western society.

Appendix I: Correspondence Addressed to those attending the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course Conference in 1990

Wesley House
Jesus Lane
Cambridge

May 1995

Dear

I hope that you do not mind me approaching you like this, but I am currently engaged in research into the impact of the faith development theory of James Fowler upon the British churches, and wonder whether you might be able to help.

I am writing to you, having learned of your interest in Fowler's faith development theory from Dr. Susan Parsons who kindly gave me the names of those who had participated in the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course Conference held in Nottingham in 1990, which was addressed by James Fowler.

I write in the hope that you might be prepared to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided. As you see, the questionnaire is anonymous unless you wish to supply your name.

I will, of course, understand if you are unable to complete the questionnaire.

Many thanks

Yours sincerely

Jane Leach

Encs.

Appendix I: Questionnaire sent to those attending the East Midlands Ministerial Training Course Conference in 1990

FAITH & FOWLER'S FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY

1.1 Age ____

1.2 Gender M/F

1.3 Marital Status

single/married/resident with partner/divorced/widowed

1.4 Occupation

_____

2.1 Education since leaving school e.g. degrees, diplomas

Course name: _____ Date completed ____

_____ Date completed ____

_____ Date completed ____

2.2 Professional Training e.g. PGCE, Theological Training

Course name: _____ Date completed ____

_____ Date completed ____

_____ Date completed ____

3.1 Are you a practising member of a religious denomination? Y/N

Which?

_____

3.2 Are you ordained? Y/N

3.3 Please give details of any responsibility held for religious or Christian education (child or adult)

_____

_____

_____

4.1 Using one or more of the categories below, which of them best describe the religious environments in which you currently feel most comfortable?

agnostic	atheist	catholic
conservative	charismatic	evangelical
fundamentalist	liberal	sacramentalist

5.1 Using the terms above, how would you describe the religious environment of your childhood?

_____

_____

5.2 If there have been changes in your attitude to religion since childhood, what is the nature of these changes and what events have triggered them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

6.1 Has the work of any of the following people influenced your outlook?

	very much	a little	not at all
Wilfred Cantwell Smith			
Erik Erikson			
James Fowler			
Sigmund Freud			
Ronald Goldman			
Karl Jung			
Jean Piaget			
Paul Tillich			
John Westerhoff III			

6.2 Please mention any other writers in these areas who have influenced you

_____

_____

_____

7.1 When did you first hear about the faith development theory of James Fowler?

1974-9 1980-87 1988-95

7.2 How did you first hear about the faith development theory of James Fowler?

By reading Fowler's work	
By reading a review of Fowler's work	
Through the Children in the Way report	
Through a taught course	

Other - please specify

_____

_____

7.3 How did you then pursue your interest in Fowler's work?

_____

_____

_____

7.4 Why were you interested in Fowler's work?

Own faith journey	
Children's work	
Adult education	
Pastoral work	
Developmental Theory	

Other reason - please specify

_____

_____

_____

7.5 Which of Fowler's own books and articles have you read yourself?

Stages of Faith. 1981.	
Becoming Adult, Becoming Human. 1984.	
Faith Development & Pastoral Care. 1987.	
Weaving the New Creation. 1991.	

Other - please specify

_____

_____

_____

7.6 Please give details of any other publications in this area which you have found helpful

_____

8.1 To what extent has Fowler's faith development theory helped you to...

	very much	a little	not at all
Explain the existence of different styles of faith within the church			
Understand how Christian nurture might take account of modern psychology			
Reflect upon the pastoral task			
Describe your own faith experience			
Justify encouraging people to move away from literal belief			
Communicate with others in the Church whose approach to faith is different from your own			
Arrive at criteria for characterising mature faith			
Justify a critical perspective on religion			
Justify your own religious doubt			
Understand how children think			
Plan all-age worship			
Confirm a belief that demythologisation is a necessary step towards Christian maturity			

8.2 To what extent does Fowler's faith development theory...

	very much	a little	not at all
Confirm what you already thought			
Give structure to your own experience			
Raise issues and questions you had not previously considered			
Make a practical difference to the way you work			
Stimulate a new way of thinking			

8.3 Does your own religious development fit broadly within Fowler's model?

Y/N

8.4 If yes, in as far as you are familiar with Fowler's terminology, how would you describe your faith, both when you first encountered his development theory, and now?

Faith Stage	Then	Now
Stage I: Intuitive-Projective Faith: Imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols, and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting images that represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one's life.		
Stage II: Mythic-Literal Faith: The developing ability to think logically helps one order the world with categories of causality, space and time, using narrative; one can enter into the perspectives of others; and to capture life meaning in stories; symbols are perceived literally and as one-dimensional.		
Stage III: Synthetic-Conventional Faith: A coherent identity is formed within a group, integrating diverse images of self into a coherent identity. A personal faith is formed from conventional elements, the meanings of symbols are implicit, rich and powerful, supporting identity and enabling one to unite in emotional solidarity with others.		
Stage IV: Individuative-Reflective Faith: Critical reflection upon one's beliefs and values and their meaning; an ability to see oneself with the eyes of another; understanding of the self and others as part of a social system; the internalisation of authority and the assumption of responsibility for making explicit choices of ideology and lifestyle open the way for critically self-aware commitments in relationships and vocation.		
Stage V: Conjunctive Faith: Polarities are embraced; there is alertness to paradox and the need for multiple interpretations of reality. Symbol and story, metaphor and myth are newly appreciated as irreducible vehicles for expressing truth. There is openness to the traditions of others and an interest in the unconscious processes of the self.		
Stage VI: Universalising Faith: Paradox and polarities dissolve in a oneness with the power of being; vision and commitment free one for a passionate, yet detached spending of the self in love. An ability to overcome division, oppression and violence and co-operation in God's commonwealth of love and justice.		

9.1 What did you hope to gain from attending the conference in Nottingham?

_____

_____

_____

9.2 What did you gain from attending the conference?

_____

_____

_____

9.3 Do, please, add any further comment or information which might be of interest.

Thank you very much for your help. Would you please send the questionnaire back to me as soon as possible before Friday 16 June, 1995 at the address below: **Jane Leach, Wesley House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge.**

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