

Faith as a universal, dynamic quality of human meaning making can be defined in terms of each individual's center of values, images of power, and master stories. Faith develops in stages toward a point of maximal individuation of the self and corresponding minimization of the personal ego as the standpoint from which evaluations are made.

Stages in Faith Consciousness

James W. Fowler

Close to the heart of what it means to be human lies the dynamic process of finding and making meaning in our lives. Ernest Becker (1968, p. 210) once called us *homo poeta*, the creature whose distinctive feature consists in inveterate meaning making. This chapter paints in broad strokes the results of a decade and a half of research and theory building that have focused on the processes by which we shape our worldviews and form the convictions and values that anchor them. The stage theory of faith development stands in the tradition of constructive developmental genetic epistemology articulated by J. Mark Baldwin (1897), John Dewey ([1916] 1944), Jean Piaget (1976), and Lawrence Kohlberg (1981). The theory also owes debts to the revisionist psychoanalytic ego psychology of Erik Erikson (1963). The influences of theological and comparative religion can be traced to Paul Tillich (1957), H. Richard Niebuhr (1960), and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963). The following three vignettes, which give us windows into three lives in motion, together serve to introduce the stages of faith development examined here. (All of the names given in these vignettes are fictitious, and the details of the person's life situations have been changed to prevent identification.)

Faith in Motion: Three Vignettes

Roger's Story. A young man named Roger is speaking. He tells us about his adolescent years and a family in turmoil. There was a divorce in

The author acknowledges gratefully the significant roles of more than 500 persons who have generously given access to their meaning making in interviews by the author, his research associates, and his students across a number of years. Parts of this chapter have been previously published in the author's *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991).

a northern city, resulting in a move to a southern state. Division tore apart the extended family, bringing anger and alienation. There seemed to be times of recovery: His mother remarried and the new relation lasted for a time. But then that broke up as well, and there were more moves. His Catholic faith was under stress. He said God was not supposed to let things like this happen to good people. He felt that his young life was in crisis. His way of describing his feelings about God in this period is interesting. He said, "God became lofty, distant, unavailable. The ceiling blocked my prayers. Faith seemed like it was static. There was nothing personal in my relationship with God, and yet I seemed hungry for it." Then he said that at age seventeen something happened to change things for the better. "I was invited by a girlfriend to a new church. In this community they talked a lot about a personal relationship to God, and I felt that God became a friend. I felt that life mattered; I formed new relationships in that community, and I felt like I was beginning to walk with God."

Marie's Story. From her vantage point of being twenty years old, Marie starts by describing an experience in summer camp when she was thirteen. She says,

On the last night of camp there was a campfire, as there always is in youth camp. The dark night sky was beautiful; the sparks rose from the big campfire against the velvet sky; there was music. Different people told about what God meant to them and had done in their lives. We felt close to each other after an intensive week together. There came over me a feeling of unexplainable, universal love. I felt like nothing human was alien to me. I thought at that time I could even love Hitler if he were there. Out of that experience of closeness to God, I developed a kind of peace and love that I carried with me for the next five years. I seemed to know just what to say to help my friends. They turned to me as a kind of confidant and adviser. It was like God was in me, a part of me. But then, in the second year of college, I began to see the injustices of our world. I began to be aware of people starving in Bangladesh. I began to be aware of the brutality in Ethiopia. I began to be aware of homeless people in the streets, in the richest nation in the world. And for a year I dated a boyfriend who was an atheist. I could see that he was a very ethical person, a good person, yet he did not believe in any God.

Then speaking about her own present faith, Marie says, "Now God is more remote for me. I no longer automatically know what God would have me say to people. I am committed to Christ and his way. His principles and teachings are the truth about how we should live. But now it's like God expects me to be responsible. I'm studying psychology, so that I can understand people, and their personalities, and their needs, so that I can help them and help to make this world a better place. I'm involved in politics

and nuclear disarmament and feeding the homeless and the hungry. For me, following Christ's ways means doing these things."

Carl, Jean, and Their Sons. We are seated at a table in a northern state with a husband and wife, Carl and Jean. Carl is a seemingly bluff and hearty man, a Texan by birth. In his middle-to-late forties, his face is flushed, he seems tense and keyed-up. His apparent buoyancy seems just a bit overdone.

As we get acquainted he tells us that he grew up in an evangelical Protestant denomination. He mentions the name of his pastor during high school, and we get a sense that he had been significantly involved in church activities while growing up. When he went off to college, and then to the Marine Corps, he says he left the Church behind. After he and Jean married and two sons came along, they joined a traditional mainline church, where they have been members for about eight years. Carl was a highly successful entrepreneur and recently had sold the computer-oriented company he had developed for multiple tens of millions of dollars.

Carl is speaking, "The last year has brought dramatic changes in our faith life. The Bible has just become very important for us. It has become the central thing in our lives. We have become a Bible-centered family." His father, Carl tells us, had been a very strict parent, "He did everything strictly by the book. But it is different with me." Carl said, "I have two fine sons, godly sons," he said. "They set me straight. They tell me when I'm wrong. They make me toe the line." (That Carl chose this direction in his talk was initially puzzling to me.) "We are finding that our old church is just not Bible-centered enough. We come there for Sunday School and services and spend most of the day there on Sundays, and it's like we work all day. Of course, we hear a good sermon, but it just doesn't give me any uplift. It's more like another day at work." Then he says with enthusiasm, "But recently the Lord has put us in touch with some of the most dynamic Christians you could ever hope to meet. They are Bible-grounded, Christ-centered Christians. We are just growing in our faith in unbelievable ways. Actually it was Jean who began our move in this direction. Hon [turning to his wife], just break in here at any point and explain," he says, without any pause in his talk.

Carl continues, more excitedly, "When all this began I was in McDonalds one day and some lines from an old hymn I hadn't heard since my boyhood in church in Texas came back to me: 'Thou are the potter . . . I am the clay,' and I said to myself, 'That's the Lord telling me, "I'm not through with you; I'm going to make something of you yet." ' But it was Jean who got me into this new relationship with the Bible. Tell them, Honey."

Jean, an attractive woman in her late thirties, has seemed withdrawn from the conversation until now. Responding to Carl's urging, she indicates, without elaboration, that she has been involved in a women's Bible study group. She indicates that it has meant a lot to her and has awakened her to

the Bible. She shows a little more animation when she declares that their old church and its pastor were all right; she even expresses appreciation for that pastor's good sermons. "But," she says, "there is nothing solid there that you can really stand on."

Someone requests, "Tell me about the Bible study group you have been attending." Jean takes center stage at this point. "It is a group of women. We gather each week to study the word of God. I believe the Bible is the word of God. We do not rely on commentaries or interpreters who put their intellects into the Word and say, 'Well it says that, but it doesn't really mean that,' and then dilute the absolute word of God."

Upon further questioning, Jean becomes quite animated. She tells about how her group's reading of the Book of Romans took eighteen months. "We read the whole book. Then we took it chapter by chapter, sentence by sentence, and line by line. We have tape-recorded lessons from a leader who guides each of these steps. She stresses the importance of believing that the Bible is the *inerrant* word of God. For example, Jonah and the whale." Jean asks us, "Do you believe that story is true? Do you believe it really happened just as the Bible says? I do. If I didn't, if I thought it was just a story someone made up, I would be giving up my faith that the Bible is God's word to us just as he intended it, and that we can *stand* on that word without *any* doubt." Jean then pointed to the account of the feeding of the five thousand as reported in the synoptic Gospels. "I see this as a genuine miracle by Jesus. You can't explain it away as Jesus getting people to distribute and share the lunches that they had prepared but were not willing to share. I believe that Jesus took those five loaves and two fishes and, by praying over them, produced all the food and more that it took to feed that multitude of people. Jesus really can and does bring miracles in our lives. I believe that; I stand on that as my absolute foundation."

At this point Carl breaks in, turning the conversation back to their sons: "Their mother is really helping them grow up as godly men—godly boys. They straighten me out. Let me tell you: My ten-year-old was having trouble with a bully in his class who was picking on him. I just told him [expressed with surprising anger], 'If he does that again [muttered oath] you just knock his block off and fix his clock!' But then the eight-year-old said, 'But Daddy, Jesus wouldn't want him to do that!' "

Jean, eyes shining, then says, "My father was an army officer. We moved a lot. I just went to church when my friends did. As a young adult I went to the Catholic Church. But I just never got a foundation. Now for the first time in my life I really feel that my life is based on the word of God. It is the absolute guide for our lives, and I just want to share this truth with everyone!"

Faith as Construction and Commitment

How shall we make sense of these three vignettes? How shall we understand Roger's move at seventeen toward a relationship with God very much

like the one that Marie gave up at twenty? What shall we make of the interaction between Carl and Jean and their sons? What will become of them as they look for and align themselves with a community of faith more compatible with Jean's commitment to the Bible as the inerrant word of God? Can Carl adapt to Jean's insistence on the Bible as the absolute guide for their lives? Can he continue to accept the "straightening out" that his "godly sons" administer to him? Will Carl find a vocation, now that he has sold his company, that will satisfy his deep need to have God "make something out of him yet"? As we work our way here through a description of stages of faith, we will refer back to our encounters with Roger, Marie, Carl, and Jean.

Let us begin by considering faith as a dynamic and generic human experience. Faith understood generically as a human universal includes, but is not limited to or identical with, religion. One can have faith that is not religious faith. Common examples include communism and what some fundamentalists call "secular humanism." A religion, as a cumulative tradition, is made up of the expressions of the faith of people in the past. It can include scriptures and theology, ethical teachings and prayers, architecture, music, and art, and patterns of teaching and preaching. Religion, in this sense, gives forms and patterns for the shaping of the faith of present and future persons. Religions are the cumulative traditions that we inherit in all of their varieties of forms. Religious faith, on the other hand, is the personal appropriation of a relationship to God through and by means of a religious tradition (these formulations are based on Smith, 1963; also see Fowler, 1981, pp. x-36).

Just as we can distinguish faith from religion, it is also important to clarify the relation between faith and belief. Belief is one of the important ways of expressing and communicating faith. But belief and faith are not the same, particularly in the historical period in which we live. Since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, many people have come to understand belief as intellectual assent to propositions of dubious verifiability. Or as the television character Archie Bunker once put it, spicing up a quote from Mark Twain (Paine, 1935, p. 237), "Faith is believing what any damn fool knows ain't so."

Faith is deeper than belief. Ideally, our beliefs are congruent with and expressive of our faith. But faith is deeper and involves unconscious motivations as well as those that we are conscious of in our beliefs and in our actions.

In speaking of faith as a generic feature of human lives—as a universal quality of human meaning making—I make the assumption that as human beings we have evolved with the capacity and the need for faith. Whether or not we are explicitly nurtured in faith within the traditions of a particular religion, we are engaged in forming relations of trust and loyalty to others. We shape commitments to causes and *centers of value*. We form

allegiances and alliances with *images and realities of power*. And we form and shape our lives in relation to *master stories*. In these ways we join with others in the finding and making of meaning. Let us look at these three dimensions of living faith in more detail.

First, faith is a dynamic pattern of personal trust in and loyalty to a center or centers of value. What do I mean by this term "center of value"? We rest our hearts, we focus our lives in persons, causes, ideals, or institutions that have great worth to us. We attach our affections to those persons, causes, ideals, or institutions that promise to give worth and meaning to our lives. A center of value in our lives is something that calls forth our love and devotion and therefore exerts ordering power on the rest of our lives and our attachments. One's family can be one such profound center of value. Success and one's career can be important centers of value. One's nation or ideological creed can be of life-centering importance. Money, power, influence, and sexuality can all be centers of value in our lives. For some persons and groups religious institutions constitute dominant centers of value. All of these and much more can attract our devotion and focus our energies as centers of value. From the standpoint of virtually all major religious traditions, God or transcendent reality is meant to be the supreme center of value in our lives.

Second, faith is trust in and loyalty to images and realities of power. We are finite creatures who live in a dangerous world. We and those persons and causes we love are vulnerable to arbitrary power and destruction in this world. How in such a world do we align ourselves so as to feel sustained in life and in death? "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." That is a statement about alignment with power and the placement of our reliance on security. One could also say, "my stock portfolio is my shepherd, I shall not want." Or we could say, speaking as a nation, "The Star Wars missile defense system is our shepherd, we shall not want." Ernest Becker (1973) said that in the face of death, we all try to build *causa sui* projects, projects of self-vindication, projects that help us have the sense that we will continue on even after we die. When I held my first published book in my hand, I looked at it and said to my wife, "Dear, it's slender immortality, but it is immortality. It will live after I am gone." With what centers or images of power do we align ourselves in order to feel secure in life? The question of how we align ourselves with power to sustain us in life and death is an important question of faith.

Third, faith is trust in and loyalty to a shared master story or core story. In the 1960s Eric Berne offered his neo-Freudian theory of personality growth and change called transactional analysis. One of the key ideas in transactional analysis is the notion that each of us in early childhood forms a script, a kind of unconscious story that takes form in each of us before we are five years of age. This script, like a fate in a sense, shapes and guides unconsciously the choices and decisions that we make as we

move along in our lives. A mastery story is a little like that. It often begins unconsciously, and gradually we make it more conscious and explicit as something to which we are committed. An acquaintance of mine studied prisoners in a federal prison some years ago and found that among those who had tattoos, 60 percent of them had tattooed into their skin some variant of the phrase "born to lose" as a kind of master story engraved onto their bodies.

Unlike the unconscious scripts of Berne and the fated label on the felons, however, a faith master story gives direction, courage, and hope to our lives. It provides life-guiding images of the goodness—and the Godness—for which we are made. A master story shapes our consciousness regarding the character of the ultimate power and reality with which we contend, and how we should shape our lives with our neighbors in light of that relation. A faith master story gives us horizons of meaning and guiding images of what it means to be a good man or woman and a part of a worthy community.

Faith is covenantal in structure. We are not alone or solitary in our faith. Faith involves trust in and loyalty to other persons. But that trust and loyalty with others is confirmed and deepened by our shared trust and loyalties to centers of value, images of power, and stories that transcend us as individuals and bind us together with others. This is what we mean by covenant. Covenant is trust and loyalty, a commitment between persons and within groups that is ratified and deepened by our shared trust in and loyalty to something, someone, reality, God, or some set of values that transcends us. Faith always has this triadic, covenantal structure.

Faith, then, is the dynamic process of construal and commitment by which we focus our trust and loyalty, our dependence and confidence, in a center or centers of value, and on images and realities of power. In faith we find coherence for our lives through allegiance to an emerging, conscious master story or stories. Faith is an existential orientation formed in our relations with others that links us, in shared trusts and loyalties, to each other, to shared values, and to a transcendent framework of meaning and power.

Stages of Faith Consciousness

For nearly eighteen years my associates in Boston and Atlanta and I have been asking people to talk with us in depth about their centers of value, their images of power, and the guiding stories of their lives. We have been asking people to tell us something of their lives and pilgrimages, their journeys, to give us access to how they have formed and are forming their particular ways of making meaning. Out of that work we have analyzed transcriptions of over five hundred interviews. These interviews average about two hours each. In the course of an interview the respondent and interviewer, often strangers to each other, experience as unusual kind of

intimacy and depth of dialogue. The interviews that constitute our cross-sectional data include an approximately equal number of males and females. There are representatives of every age cohort from four to eighty-four. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, in numbers proportional to the American population, are represented. African-Americans are underrepresented, constituting about 3 percent of the respondents. Here, for purposes of continuity and comparison, I have chosen to illustrate the stages with examples from persons raised in the Christian tradition. Jewish or secularist examples could have been offered instead.

When transcribed, the interviews average twenty to thirty single-spaced, typed pages of text. From our analyses of these texts we have identified and continue to refine seven stagelike positions in the process of growth and transformation in faith. Here we look at the evolving patterns of constructive knowing that have come to be called *stages of faith*.

Primal Faith. We all start as infants, and much that is important for our lives of faith occurs in utero and in the very first months of life. We describe the form of faith that begins in infancy as Primal faith. This first stage is a prelanguage disposition (a total emotional orientation of trust offsetting mistrust), which takes form in the mutuality of one's relationship with parents and others. This rudimentary faith enables us to overcome or offset the anxiety resulting from separations that occur during infant development. Piaget has helped us understand infant development as a succession of cognitive and emotional separations in the process of differentiation from those who provide initial care. Earliest faith is what enables us to undergo these separations without undue experiences of anxiety or fear of the loss of self. Primal faith forms before there is language. It forms in the basic rituals of care and interchange and mutuality. And, while it does not determine the course of our later faith, it lays the foundation on which later faith is built. One can readily see how important the family is in the nurturing and incubation of this first stage of Primal faith. (For a detailed and nuanced account of the birth of faith and selfhood in this stage and the next, see Fowler, 1989, pp. 1-36.)

Intuitive-Projective Faith. This style of faith emerges in early childhood with the acquisition of language. Here, imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols but not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting faith images. These images represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one's life. This stage corresponds with the awakening of moral emotions and standards in the second year of life. It corresponds as well with the awareness of taboos and the sacred, and with the struggle for a balance of autonomy and will with shame and constriction in the child's forming self. Representations of God take conscious form in this period and draw, for good or ill, on children's experiences of their parents or other adults to whom they were emotionally attached in the first years of life (see Rizzuto, 1979).

Such representations express the emotional orientation of children toward their world and the leeway, dependability, and support—or their opposites—that it offers them. If we are able to remember this period of our lives, we have some sense of how important, both positively and negatively, it is in the formation of our lifelong orientations in faith. When experiences of change or conversion occur at later stages in our lives, the images formed in this stage have to be reworked in important ways.

Some of the dynamics of this stage can be highlighted in a crisis case involving Julie, a four-year-old whose mother had been recently killed in an automobile accident. The following is part of a longer conversation between the minister of her church, where her mother had sung in the choir, and Julie. The minister visited Julie and her father regularly after the accident. He and Julie would often sit on the floor in the family room and build things with small wooden blocks while they talked.

JULIE: Why did God take away my mommy to heaven?

MINISTER: That's a hard one to answer, Julie. When your mother was hurt so badly in her car accident she was in a lot of pain. Maybe God did not want her to hurt so much, so he took her to be with him in heaven.

JULIE: But why did God make that man run into my mommy's car?

MINISTER: I guess I don't think that God made that happen, Julie. Sometimes things happen that God doesn't do. I think he probably felt very sad when your mommy was hurt.

JULIE: When Tabby [the family cat] died, mommy said that God took her to heaven. Didn't he take mommy away too? I want her back. Why doesn't God bring her back?

For Julie, her mother both mediated cultural and religious understandings of God and was her God, in terms of emotional attachment. As yet, Julie's God representation is a fragile construction, resting on the support of a significant other who embodies, if only partially, the characterization of God that she is beginning to formulate. Will Julie's emotional and cognitive relationship with God die along with her mother? Or will God become a kind of maternal figure who represents the possibility of a continued relationship with her dead mother? That she is willing to use religious language, even at age four, is a strong indication that she will struggle to make sense of her mother's death in terms of how she understands God (this vignette is drawn from Osmer and Fowler, 1985, pp. 201-205).

Mythic-Literal Faith. The emergence of Mythic-Literal faith is during our elementary school years and beyond. Here, concrete-operational thinking, the developing ability to think logically, emerges to help us order the world with categories of causality, space, time, and number. This means we can sort out the real from the make-believe, the actual from the fantasy. It becomes a time when we can enter into the perspectives of others, and

when we become capable of capturing life and meanings in narrative and stories.

Some of the dynamics, and limits, of the Mythic-Literal stage of faith become visible when we look at the struggles of twelve-year-old Charlie, a boy from a religious family (see Osmer and Fowler, 1985, pp. 198–201). Charlie had asked his parents some questions about God but then had backed off, refusing to discuss the matter further with them. Since Charlie was moving toward the confirmation class in his church, his youth minister scheduled an interview with him as part of the usual way of coming to know the confirmands and their religious backgrounds. The parents mentioned their concern about Charlie's questions and withdrawal to the youth minister, who listened with special care to what Charlie shared about God.

During the interview it became clear that Charlie was experiencing a crisis of sorts. His Mythic-Literal understanding of God's activity in the world was breaking down in the face of a newly emerging recognition of the seeming incompatibility of the findings of science and his own religious beliefs. Here is a part of the interview dialogue:

MINISTER: Suppose a person came from another planet and did not know anything about God. What would you tell that person?

CHARLIE: I'd tell them that he was the Creator and everything. He created the universe and all that. And I'd probably show them the Bible.

MINISTER: Do you think that everyone believes those sorts of things?

CHARLIE: No, not everybody believes that God created the world. Sometimes I wonder if I even believe it. We've been studying evolution in school, and I can't understand how what we're studying there and what my Sunday School teachers say to me about Adam and Eve can really be true.

MINISTER: Do you worry about that?

CHARLIE: Sometimes. I'm afraid if I don't believe then the spirit of the Lord won't be with me anymore.

At various points in the interview, Charlie gave indications of a predominantly Mythic-Literal faith stance. For example, after he spontaneously brought up the topic of heaven and was asked to describe it, he responded by saying, "I think it's way, way out in space . . . circling all the galaxies and all that." Likewise, hell was described as being "in the middle of the earth, and they say it's just fire." But now his Mythic-Literal faith was crumbling, with some deep emotional consequences. Earlier in the interview Charlie expressed his fear that the "spirit of the Lord" would no longer be with him. This proved to be a recurrent theme in the interview. When asked what sorts of things made him feel bad, Charlie replied, "When I've disappointed God. When I do things or say things or think things that I shouldn't." The interview continued:

MINISTER: What happens when we really disappoint him?

CHARLIE: He takes his spirit out of you.

MINISTER: Has that ever happened to you?

CHARLIE: Yeah.

MINISTER: When does it happen?

CHARLIE: Different times. There's this song that we're singing in choir. It's a beautiful song. It's weird. It makes me sort of, my eyes start watering and all . . . I feel really empty. It's called "Here Am I, Send Me," and it's just like asking God to send me into his hands or something.

MINISTER: I wonder why that makes you feel empty.

CHARLIE: It makes me feel like he's left me . . . like I'm not close to God as I used to be. I don't know if he's going to send me. I don't know what I think about him anymore.

Charlie is experiencing the beginning of a shift in the way he structures and relates to his centers of value and meaning. In his own way, Charlie is experiencing the void. We can see parallels between Charlie's experiences and those of Roger, who, in this same period of his life, experienced the breakup of his family and remembered that God "became lofty, distant, unavailable."

What may not be apparent, at first glance, is the way the structuring qualities of the Mythic-Literal stage also underlie Jean's deep attachment to the Bible as the inerrant word of God, and as the absolute foundation on which she can stand. In her total commitment to a literal dependence on the Bible she has found the foundation that her life never had before. This foundation fulfills both emotional and cognitive needs. The continuation of her marriage to Carl, in many ways, seems to depend on his willingness to join her in this commitment to a Bible-centered family life, and to the rearing of godly sons. What will happen when their boys begin to deal with the issues faced by Charlie and Roger? And how will Carl, so hungry for a sense of vocation and seemingly so devoted to her, adhere to the emotional and cognitive fixedness of her leadership in the family's life of faith?

Synthetic-Conventional Faith. This stage characteristically begins to take form in early adolescence. The emergence of formal operational thinking opens the way for reliance on abstract ideas and concepts for making sense of one's world. The person can now reflect on past experiences and examine them for meaning and pattern. At the same time, concerns about one's personal future, one's identity, one's work, career, or vocation, and one's personal relationships become important. These new cognitive abilities make possible mutual, interpersonal perspective taking. Here, in friendship or in the first intimacy of "puppy love," we begin to be aware of the mirroring of self provided by the responses of others whose feelings about us matter. "I see you seeing me: I see the me I think you see." As we begin

to have the burden and the possibility of seeing ourselves as others see us, and as we confront the task of integrating these multiple experiences of self brought by our relationships with different persons, we face in conscious ways the struggle for identity. At the same time we begin to construct an awareness of our interiority and that of others. We are newly and deeply interested in "personality." New steps toward interpersonal intimacy and relationship result.

These newly personal relations with significant others correlate with a hunger for a personal relationship to God in which we feel ourselves to be known and loved in deep and comprehensive ways. Roger's story reflects this hunger when at seventeen he found a church community that invited him to share in this kind of personal relationship to God, and he began to experience the "friendship" of God. In this respect Marie's account of her early adolescent relationship with God seems even more profound. Apparently, her experience of God at the campfire, and in other contexts during her adolescence, led to a deep integration of God into her personality, so that for years after she "seemed to know just what to say to help [her] friends." It was, she said, "like God was in me, a part of me."

Parallel with the task of integrating a set of images of the self into a sense of identity, the person forming Synthetic-Conventional faith must form a set of beliefs, values, and commitments that provides orientation and courage for living. This shaping of a worldview and its values proceeds as adolescents encounter persons and contexts that offer stories, ideals, belief systems, rituals, disciplines, and role models that can capture and fund their imaginations and hunger for adult truth. A culture is in deep jeopardy when it no longer can provide encounters for young people with persons and communities who can satisfy the need for role models committed to lives of truth. Synthetic-conventional faith, in such a culture, risks becoming a tacit amalgamation of values, commended subliminally by the advertising industry and coupled with an unthinking allegiance to the empty dogma that all values are individual choices and are therefore relative. Every adolescent deserves a viable and vital Synthetic-Conventional ethos for the formation of faith.

Individuative-Reflective Faith. To reach this stage, two important movements of self have to occur. First, we have to question, examine, and reconstitute the values and beliefs that we have formed to that point in our lives. They become explicit commitments, rather than tacit commitments. "Tacit" means unconsidered, unexamined, uncritically approved. "Explicit" means consciously chosen and critically supported commitments.

This process of making our commitments explicit usually involves a "demythologization." In a way that parallels the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, we engage in critical analysis and reflection upon the symbols, rituals, myths, and beliefs that mediate and express our traditions of faith. Through such analysis we interrogate their meanings and try to

translate them into conceptual formulations. In doing so, we gain clarity about our faith; we gain precision in our understanding and its articulation. At the same time, however, we lose our availability to some of the power of symbol, myth, and ritual mediating our relations to the holy.

This critical and reflective examination of our faith heritages does not mean that one must give up being an Episcopal Christian, or an Orthodox Jew, or a Sunni Muslim. But it does mean that now one maintains that commitment and identity by choice and explicit assent rather than by fate or tacit commitment. In John Westerhoff's (1976) adaptation of faith development theory he names this dynamic of the Individuative-Reflective stage "owned faith."

Second, the Individuative-Reflective stage requires us to claim what I call an "executive ego." In the previous stage of Synthetic-Conventional faith, we can say that a person's identity is largely shaped by her or his roles and relationships. In that stage, "I am my roles and relationships." My "I" is defined by the composite of the roles I play and the relations in which I derive and maintain my identity. In moving to the Individuative-Reflective stage, I have to face and answer such questions as, Who am I when I am not defined by being my parents' son or daughter? Who am I when I am not defined by being so-and-so's spouse? Who am I when I am not defined by the work I do? Who is the "I" that has those roles and relations but is not fully expressed by any one of them?

The task of the Individuative-Reflective stage is to put in place an executive ego, the "I" who manages and "has" all these roles and relations, yet is not identical with any one of them. The task is thus to take charge of one's own life. It means claiming a new quality of autonomy and responsibility. This does not necessarily mean "individualism," though in this country it is often interpreted in individualistic ways. It does mean the exercise of responsibility and choice in regard to the communities to which we belong. In making choices, we also exclude other options. There is a dichotomizing, either/or quality to the commitments of this stage.

Marie's account of what she is experiencing at twenty gives us a window into the transition into the Individuative-Reflective stage. Testifying that God now seems more remote to her, she speaks from a perspective in which the world has lost much of its enchantment. She states her allegiance to Christ and his way in terms of the principles and teachings that lead her to political responsibility and preparation for vocational living in which she can help people and "make this world a better place." Her forming clarity about identity, beliefs, commitments, and vocation seems to have required that she experience a kind of exile from the intimate relationship with God that sustained her with such assurance during her teenage years.

My sense is that Carl, in his forties and just having sold the enterprise that absorbed most of his time, attention, and aspirations in the first half of his adulthood, is also poised to deal with the questions—and the call to

vocation—that are intrinsic to the Individuative-Reflective stage. Vocation, as understood here, is broader than occupation, profession, or career. It is the meaning we attribute to our lives and the significance we find in the totality of our roles and activities. It therefore involves the meaning of our work, our relationships, our private and public roles, and our use of leisure time. Both identity and individuation need to be understood in relation to vocation and to what our lives are *for*. While Carl has been an executive, it seems likely that he has not yet deeply faced the question of who he is apart from the roles of breadwinner, entrepreneur, husband, churchman, father, ex-marine, as understood in conventional ways. Therefore, he feels deep pulls as Jean recruits him so powerfully to join her in the Bible-centered family life to which she aspires on the strength of the directive teaching she gets from the tapes and her woman's group. His anger and frustration, concealed from himself perhaps, suggest that deeper urgings for integrity and the lure to present himself to God in vocation may make it hard for him to "submit" for long to his wife's type of church.

Conjunctive Faith. At midlife or beyond, frequently we see the emergence of the stage called Conjunctive faith. This stage involves the embrace and integration of opposites or polarities in our lives. Now what does this abstract language mean? It means realizing in our late thirties, forties, or beyond that each of us is both young and old, and that youngness and oldness are held together in the same life. It means recognizing that we are both masculine and feminine, with all of the meanings those characterizations have in the particular culture of which we are a part. It means a reintegration of our masculine and feminine modalities. It means coming to terms with the fact that we are both constructive people and, inadvertently or intentionally, destructive people. The apostle Paul captured this in Rom. 7:18–20: "The good I would do I do not do; the evil I would not do I find myself doing. Who will save me from this body of death?"

There are religious dimensions to the reintegration of polarities in our lives in Conjunctive faith. Here symbol and story, metaphor and myth, both from our own traditions and from others, seem to be newly appreciated, in what Paul Ricoeur (1969, p. 352) has called a second or a willed naiveté. Having looked critically at traditions and translated their meanings into conceptual understandings, we experience a hunger for a deeper relationship to the reality that symbols mediate. In that deeper relation we learn again to let the symbols have the initiative with us. The series of television interviews between Bill Moyers and Joseph Campbell called "The Power of Myth," on the Public Broadcasting System, touched this kind of resonant spot in many American viewers in 1988 and 1989. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius have been for many an important source of learning how to submit to the reality and mediated by Christian symbols and stories. Ignatius's method helps retreatants learn to let biblical narrative draw them into that reality and let it read their lives, reforming and shaping

them, rather than the retreatants simply reading and interpreting the meanings of the text. This process develops a second naiveté as a means of entering into those symbols.

Universalizing Faith. Beyond paradox and polarities, persons in this stage are grounded in a oneness with the power of being or God. Their visions and commitments seem to free them for a passionate, yet detached, spending of the self in love. Such persons are devoted to overcoming division, oppression, and violence, and they live in effective anticipatory response to the felt reality of an inbreaking commonwealth of love and justice.

As I understand it, the Universalizing stage of faith represents the completion of a process of decentration from self that begins with the emergence of simple perspective taking in the Mythic-Literal stage. Gradually, across the stages, there has been a widening of that process of taking the perspectives of others until, finally, those persons who can be described by the Universalizing stage have completed the process of decentration. In a real sense we could say that they have identified with or they participate in the perspective of God. They begin to see and value *through* God rather than from the self. This does not mean that the self is not valued: The self is included in God's loving and valuing of all creation. But the self is no longer the center from which one's valuing is done. It is done from an identification with the transcendent or with God. This decentration from self—a genuine participation in the quality of a divine being and love—leads to a transvaluation of a person's valuing and to a universalization of her or his capacity for care, for love, and for justice. Gandhi (Easwaran, 1978, p. 121) once wrote, "There comes a time when an individual becomes irresistible and his action becomes all-pervasive in its effect. This comes when he reduces himself to zero." And then, quoting from the last verses of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi said, "One is forever free who has broken out of the ego-cage of *I* and *mine* to be united with the Lord of Love. This is the supreme state. Attain thou this and pass from death to immortality" (Easwaran, 1978, p. 122).

The persons whom we identify as representing this stage demonstrate that quality of universalizing and inclusive commitment to love and justice in a sustained way. They live as though a commonwealth of love and justice were already reality among us. They create zones of liberation for the rest of us, and we experience them as both liberating and as threatening. Many of these persons do not die natural deaths because they engage in the dangerous occupation of confronting us with our involvement in and attachments to dehumanizing structures of opposition to the commonwealth of love and justice.

Faith and Its Operational Structures

While influenced by the psychosocial ego psychology of Erikson, the principal psychological tradition in which faith development theory stands is,

as earlier noted, the constructive developmental work of J. Mark Baldwin, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and their intellectual descendants. Piaget took the term "genetic epistemology" from Baldwin. The constructive developmental approach, as described here, focuses on the operations of knowing, valuing, and committing that underlie the dynamic pattern of interpretation and orientation that is faith. This psychological tradition is heir to Kant's ([1781] 1969) designation of the a priori categories of mind that provide the means to order and make coherent sense of the data provided by our senses. It is also heir to Hegel's ([1807] 1949) work on the evolution of consciousness and the stages of reflective selfhood. In contrast to the strict focus on the mathematical and logical models of intelligence that Piaget employed, however, faith development theory has tried to take account of the constructive involvement in faith of intuition, emotion, and imagination.

In order to operationalize the activity of meaning making that is faith, we have distinguished seven structural aspects that together constitute the dynamic characteristics of a developmental stage theory of faith. Analysis of faith development interviews to produce stage assignments proceeds by examining each structure-indicating passage in terms of one or another of these aspects. An overall stage assignment is reached by averaging the aspect scores. Recent statistical analyses of interviews with sixty kibbutz founders conducted by John Snarey (1990) provide strong affirmation of the construct validity of the system of structural aspects presented here, including reasons for confidence that the stages describe unitary and integrated structural ensembles. (For a full description of these aspects and the methods and criteria for interview analysis, see Moseley, Jarvis, and Fowler, 1986; Fowler, 1981.)

Table 1 depicts the structural aspects of faith development by stage. In reading the columns of the table, one can see the integrated set of structures that constitute each of the stages. In reading the rows, one can see the qualitative structural transformations that accompany and constitute stage change. Elsewhere I have spelled out the foci of each of these aspects and have provided an elaboration for each of the stages by aspects (see Fowler, 1986, pp. 31-36; Fowler and Keen, 1985, pp. 39-95). I include the chart here without further explanation due to space limitations.

Conclusion

Faith development theory and research have emerged as a part of the late twentieth-century effort to address and account for unifying patterns in the pluralism in persons' appropriations of religious and ideological traditions. This work seeks to take account of the relativity of construing and constructing life-orienting meanings while avoiding the trap of falling into the shallowness of dogmatic relativism. By incorporating both constructive and

Table 1. Structural Aspects of Faith Development by Stage

Structural Aspects	Primal	Intuitive-Projective	Mythic-Literal	Synthetic-Conventional	Individuative-Reflective	Conjunctive	Universalizing
Form of logic	Sensory-motor	Pre-operational	Concrete operational	Formal operational early	Formal operational full	Formal dialectic	Unitive
Symbolic function	Cross-modal	Archetype imagination	Narrative imagination	Associational	Conceptual	Mystic-critical	Participative
Moral reason	Intuition of standards	Punishment-reward	Fairness, reciprocity	Interpersonal expectations	Societal rules, roles, laws	Procedural justice	Universal care and justice
Perspective taking	Affect attunement	Rudimentary empathy	Construct other's interests	Mutual interpersonal	Third-person, systemic	Intersystemic multiple	Transcendental
Locus of authority	Bonding	Attachment, power	Authority roles, relations	Group consensus, charisma tradition	Self-judgment, selective norms	Balance self-judge and reconstituted tradition	Transcends ego-striving, principle of being
Bounds of social awareness	Primal others	Family, nurturing environment	"Those like us"	Composite of face-to-face groups	Beyond tribe, ideological construal	Extended identification in time and culture	Genuine cosmic solidarity
Form of world coherence	Presymbolic, proto-rituals	Episodic	Narrative dramatic	Tacit system, symbolic	Explicit system, conceptual	Multisystemic, symbolic, and conceptual	Unitive actuality, cosmological integration

evolutionary perspectives, the theory and research are consonant with the epistemological breakthroughs inaugurated by the Enlightenment and by the nineteenth century. With its account of the Conjunctive stage, faith development theory moves beyond Cartesian subject-objective dichotomization toward a hermeneutical perspective, such as articulated in many disciplines and in contemporary philosophy of science (for an elaboration on these themes, see Fowler, 1988).

A growing bibliography of international studies and research using faith development theory and research methods suggests that this hermeneutical paradigm is growing in influence and is being widely tested (DeNicola, 1991). Two volumes of critical essays focusing on this work are available in English (Dykstra and Parks, 1986; Fowler, Nipkow, and Schweitzer, 1991).

Religious educators and a growing number of counselors have come to rely on faith development theory for its provision of a set of lenses for understanding the patterns and dynamics of faith knowing and valuing. The theory has served in the shaping and testing of curricula and methods of education. It helps counselors, secular and pastoral, deals in nonreductive ways with the central human activity of forming and maintaining life-grounding meanings and of acknowledging relationships with all that has the value of the sacred in our lives. Thus, as research continues to refine and confirm the stage theory articulated here, there seems to be a strong, emerging practical affirmation of the validity and usefulness of this approach in the growing family of structural-developmental theory and research.

References

- Baldwin, J. M. *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*. New York: Macmillan, 1897.
- Becker, E. *The Structure of Evil*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
- Becker, E. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press, 1973.
- DeNicola, K. *Faith Development Bibliography*. Atlanta, Ga.: Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development, Emory University, 1991.
- Dewey, J. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1944. (Originally published 1916.)
- Dykstra, C., and Parks, S. (eds.). *Faith Development and Fowler*. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986.
- Easwaran, E. *Gandhi the Man*. (2nd ed.) Petaluma, Calif.: Nilgiri Press, 1978.
- Erikson, E. *Childhood and Society*. (2nd ed.) New York: Norton, 1963.
- Fowler, J. W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Fowler, J. W. "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning." In C. Dykstra and S. Parks (eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler*. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986.
- Fowler, J. W. "The Enlightenment and Faith Development Theory." *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 1988, 1 (1), 29-42.
- Fowler, J. W. "Strength for the Journey: Early Childhood and the Development of

- Selfhood and Faith." In D. Blazer (ed.), *Faith Development and Early Childhood*. Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1989.
- Fowler, J. W., and Keen, S. *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey to Faith*. (J. Berryman, ed.) Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985.
- Fowler, J. W., Nipkow, K. E., and Schweitzer, F. (eds.). *Stages of Faith and Religious Development: Implications for Church, Education, and Society*. New York: Crossroads, 1991.
- Hegel, G.F.W. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. (J. B. Baillie, trans.) New York: Macmillan, 1949. (Originally published 1807.)
- Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*. (N. K. Smith, trans.) New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969. (Originally published 1781.)
- Kohlberg, L. *Essays on Moral Development*. Vol. 1. *The Philosophy of Moral Development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Moseley, R., Jarvis, D., and Fowler, J. W. *Manual for Faith Development Research*. Atlanta, Ga.: Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development, Emory University, 1986.
- Niebuhr, H. R. *Radical Monotheism in Western Culture*. New York: Harper & Row, 1960.
- Osmer, R., and Fowler, J. W. "Childhood and Pastoral Care: A Faith Development Perspective." In R. J. Wicks, R. D. Parson, and D. E. Capps (eds.), *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Paine, A. B. (ed.). *Mark Twain's Notebook*. New York: Harper & Row, 1935.
- Piaget, J. *The Child and Reality*. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- Ricoeur, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Boston: Beacon, 1969.
- Rizzuto, A.-M. *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Smith, W. C. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Snarey, J. "Faith Development, Moral Development, and Nontheistic Judaism: A Construct Validity Study." In W. Kurtines and J. Gewirtz (eds.), *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*. Vol. 2. *Research*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1990.
- Tillich, P. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.
- Westerhoff, J. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* New York: Seabury, 1976.

James W. Fowler is Candler Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University.