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Conjunctive Faith: A Critique and Analysis
from an Evangelical Perspective
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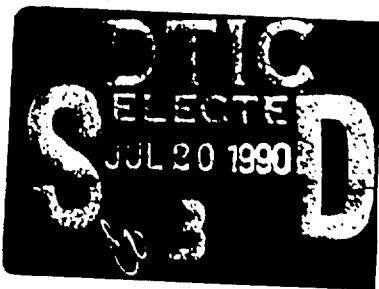
CONJUNCTIVE FAITH: A CRITIQUE AND ANALYSIS
FROM AN EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

Can evangelical Christian faith *content* fit into *Conjunctive Faith* structure? This question is prompted by James W. Fowler's book <u>Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning</u> which proposes six stages of faith development, *Conjunctive Faith* being faith Stage 5. Fowler suggests that faith is a human endeavor and deals with *how* a person believes (structure) rather than *what* a person believes (content), and that this faith develops in six invariant, sequential, and universal stages.

Evangelicals do not take issue with Fowler until faith Stage 5, *Conjunctive Faith*, which suggests that the person at this stage of development will hold doctrinal truth claims (content) to be relative. Taken at face value then, faith Stage 5 would exclude evangelical participation in the higher faith stages since the *absolute* nature of cardinal doctrines would, by definition, be called into question. Yet, many other features of *Conjunctive Faith* commend themselves to the evangelical. Summary rejection of faith Stage 5 would therefore be inappropriate.

In order to test the acceptability of *Conjunctive Faith* to evangelicals it was decided to compare evangelical

content to faith Stage 5 *structure*. This was accomplished first by examining the literature upon which Stages of Faith is based. Fowler builds his theory primarily on the work of six individuals. Philosophical moorings for Stages of Faith are found in the writings of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich. Fowler derived his methodological foundations from the psycho-social development theory of Erik Erikson, and the structural-developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg.

Once the *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith* had been defined, then an evangelical *content* was described using the writings of four leading evangelical theologians: L. S. Chafer, Millard Erickson, J. Oliver Buswell, and Louis Berkhof. From these writings, two doctrines were chosen as representative, the inspiration of scripture, and the literal resurrection of Christ.

In the actual section of comparison, phrases from Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith* were utilized, first to highlight areas of agreement, then to determine the points of dissonance. It was concluded that Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith* in fact exc'uded evangelicals because of its indiscriminate use of the word "myths" (to describe faith *content*), and its general view of the relativity of truth. However, as an attempt to utilize the vast majority of the *Conjunctive Faith* description that did not cause "offense," a rewording of the *Conjunctive Faith*

description was proposed.

The concluding section makes several applications of the "evangelically defined" faith Stage 5, asking "What would this person look like?" Special emphasis is placed upon the ministry of the U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps which presently exhibits qualities consistent with the proposed rewording of *Conjunctive Faith*. This ministry practices a form of pluralism that emphasizes cooperation, but does not require relativizing of *content* nor the relinquishing of exclusivistic truth claims.

To my wife, Patty

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH TOPIC

Can evangelical doctrinal *content* fit into the
structure of James Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith*?
Fowler's book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human
Development and the Quest for Meaning*, presents arguments
for six "faith stages," of which *Conjunctive Faith* is faith
Stage 5. The research question is prompted by Fowler's
discussion of faith Stage 5 which suggests that a person's
own *experience* of the truth, rather than *truth* itself, is
the final authority.[1] The relativism of *Conjunctive Faith*
appears to exclude evangelicals and others who have a final
truth claim other than their own experience. Evangelicals
who find many aspects of *Conjunctive Faith* attractive might
ask, "Does this relativism *truly* exclude those with firm
doctrinal content or can faith Stage 5 be reconciled with
the evangelical position?" Answers are sought by examining
the structure of *Conjunctive Faith* and determining if there
are bona fide barriers to evangelical doctrinal content.

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[1]James W. Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith: The Psychology of
Human Development and the Quest for Meaning</u>, (San Francisco:
Harper and Row, 1981), 187.

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Subsidiary Research Questions

In answering the primary research question, the following subsidiary research questions are raised and answered:

1. *What is Fowler's definition of faith and faith stages?* The answer to this question, dealt with later in the introduction, puts Fowler's overall concepts into perspective and provides necessary background information.

2. *What exactly is faith Stage 5?* Though initially described later in this chapter, *Conjunctive Faith* receives further treatment in Chapter 2 where its development and refinement in Fowler's own literature and verbal presentations is highlighted. Fowler's concept of the meaning of faith Stage 5 is accepted as normative, but requires some clarification.

3. *What are Fowler's ideological roots, presuppositions, and foundations?* Fowler, himself, is very open when it comes to acknowledging his sources of inspiration and his dependence on prior scholarship. Chapter 2 summarizes this treasure of prior research, and analyzes some implicit presuppositions, including Fowler's understanding of "relativity," a critical precept of *Conjunctive Faith*.

4. *What evangelical "norms" should be applied and how?* In Chapter 3, the Systematic Theologies of Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. Oliver Buswell, Louis Berkhof, and Millard J. Erickson are consulted to provide the essence of

evangelical thought.

5. *Which issues cause philosophical and/or theological dissonance?* The answer to this question, found in Chapter 4, demonstrates the points at which *Conjunctive Faith structure* disallows evangelical participation.

Background

Fowler claims to have, in part, uncovered the human side of *how* persons grow in believing, the same way that Piaget uncovered *how* persons grow in cognition. Perry Downs reveals the potential usefulness of the theory: "If predictable stages of faith do exist, pastors and religious educators could understand levels at which their people are functioning and help them develop to higher levels."[2] Why, then, should Stage 5 be singled out for study?

Conjunctive Faith appeals to the concept that truth is "multi-dimensional." Fowler conceives that "The person of Stage 5 makes her or his own experience of truth the principle by which other claims to truth are tested."[3] At first glance, Fowler's statement limits evangelicals to faith Stage 4, because of their explicit submission to Biblical revelation. Apart from the Apostle Paul, whom

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[2]Perry G. Downs, "Is Faith Staged?" Christianity Today 30 (October 17, 1986), 29.

[3]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 52.

Fowler states is at "Stage 4" when he is converted and "grew" to Stage 6 in his more mature years,[4] the evangelical of greatest stature mentioned is C. S. Lewis. Lewis is relegated to Stage 4 ranking in terms of his writing "aim."[5]

Conjunctive Faith has further aspects which are considered. For example, faith Stage 5 ". . . involves a critical recognition of one's social unconscious--the myths, ideal images, and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like."[6] The Stage 5 individual recognizes these hidden limitations, and, to some extent, transcends them. However, in order for evangelicals to *emerge* into Fowler's fifth stage, must they (or any group, for that matter) jettison their theological content? Can Fowler's faith Stage 5 be modified to allow evangelicals to "transcend their prejudices" without abandoning objectivity? These and other questions are addressed in the thesis.

Fowler's concepts of faith development are calling the cadences to which many are marching. Marion J. Snapper, in a 1982 Calvin Theological Journal review of Fowler's book Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning stated:

It seems likely that with the publication of *Stages*

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[4]Ibid., 298. [5]Ibid., 301. [6]Ibid., 198.

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>*of Faith* anyone who wishes to discuss faith devel-
opment will have to reckon with James Fowler for
some years to come.[7]

It does not appear to be, however, a unified drill team of

scholastic opinion marching lock-step with Fowler's faith

stages. The dissenters range from overtly hostile naysayers

to friendly colleagues offering helpful correctives to their

esteemed associate.

Among the apparently unconvinced, a reviewer in *Crux*

concludes that <u>Stages of Faith</u> is ". . . a pedestrian

restatement of antisupernaturalism."[8] Downs, rather than

dismissing Fowler's thoughts as de facto heresy,

distinguishes the helpful research from the neo-orthodox and

psychoanalytic presuppositions.[9] What then are these six

"Stages of Faith?"

Faith Development theory purports that there is a

human side of faith, present in all people from birth, which

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[7]Marion J. Snapper, review of <u>Stages of Faith: The
Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning</u>,
by James W. Fowler, in Calvin Theological Journal 17 (April
1982): 105-7.

[8]Douglas H. Kiesewetter, Jr., review of <u>Stages of
Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for
Meaning</u>, by James W. Fowler, in <u>Crux</u> 19, no. 1 (July 1983):
31-32.

[9]Perry G. Downs, review of <u>Essays on Moral Develop-
ment. Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral
Stages and the Idea of Justice</u>, by Lawrence Kohlberg; <u>Stages
of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest
for Meaning</u>, by James A. Fowler, in <u>Trinity Journal</u>, n.s. 3,
no. 2 (Fall 1982): 248-53.

progresses through six invariant, sequential, empirically definable stages. These stages are genetically potentiated and build on similar developmental schemes presented by Piaget and Kohlberg. Additionally, the Fowler draws parallels to the epigenetic stages of psycho-social development proposed by Erikson. Fowler claims to have identified six stages of human personality growth which describe *how* people believe rather than *what* they believe. The basics of each faith stage are noted in the following summary.

<div align="center">

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith
(early childhood)

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A fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults. A strength of this stage is, what Fowler calls, ". . . the birth of imagination, the ability to unify and grasp the experience world in powerful images . . ."[10]

<div align="center">

Stage 2: Mythical-Literal Faith
(ages 6-12)

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Primarily found in school age children, though sometimes also in adults, this stage is marked by a "literal" understanding of faith community narratives. The person begins to appropriate these stories and make them his or her own. The rise of concrete operations helps the person place

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[10]Ibid., 133-134.

logical limits on their imagination, helping them sort out reality from make-believe. This stage is also marked by an over dependence on the principle of "reciprocity" leading to a uni-dimensional concept of goodness or badness.[11]

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith
(ages 12 and beyond)

Having its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, "Synthetic-Conventional" faith sometimes becomes the permanent place of equilibrium for some adults. Conformity with or to the expectations of "significant others" is important because the individual does not yet have a fully developed sense of self-identity needed for independent perspective. Fowler states: "Authority is located in the incumbents of traditional authority roles (if perceived as personally worthy) or in the consensus of a valued, face-to-face group."[12] The qualities found in personal relationships become the terms of reference for the ultimate environment as, for example, God might be viewed as a "personal friend."[13]

Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith
(early adulthood and beyond)

Young adulthood, though sometimes later, is the time when this faith stage forms. It is characterized by a

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[11]Ibid., 149-150.   [12]Ibid., 173.   [13]Ibid., 173-74.

capacity of the individual to critically reflect on his or
her own views, identify those views as a "world view," and
see both their "identity" and "world view" as different from
others. A demythologizing of religious rituals occurs as
the person begins to recognize the concepts and meanings
that are beyond the symbols.[14]

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith
(midlife and beyond)

As a deeper awareness of one's own unconscious
develops, the person becomes alive to paradox and open to
other religions and people. If it develops at all, *Conjunctive Faith* is rare before middle adulthood since it inevitably requires what Fowler terms the "sacrament of defeat."
Truth is perceived as multi-dimensional, and the person
seeks significant encounters with others. Symbols, myths,
and rituals take on new meaning since the reality to which
they refer has been, in part, grasped by the individual.[15]

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith
(midlife and beyond)

Issues of love and justice become all important as a
person is grounded in oneness with the power of being. As
people are drawn to this stage by God, they learn to radically live the kingdom of God as a means of overcoming

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[14]Ibid., 182-183.   [15]Ibid., 197-198.

division, oppression, and brutality.[16] Fowler comments on

faith Stage 6:

> Stage 6 is exceedingly rare. The persons best
> described by it have generated faith compositions
> in which their felt sense of an ultimate environ-
> ment is inclusive of all being. They have become
> incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an
> inclusive and fulfilled human community.[17]

Fowler includes both Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as

examples of those who represent this faith stage.[18]

It is not until the "multi-dimensionality" of truth

in faith Stage 5 is asserted, that evangelicals become aware

of potential problems with Stage 5, and possibly Stage 6 as

well.

Methodology

The evidence for this thesis is assembled by induc-

tion. In Chapter 2, Fowler's faith Stage 5 is analyzed on

its own terms of reference as a "structure" within a devel-

opmental process. The writings of the previously named

evangelical theologians are combed in Chapter 3, in order to

define a representative "content". The "structure" of

Fowler and the "content" of evangelicals is then compared

and contrasted in Chapter 4, with the latter serving as a

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[16]Perry G. Downs, "Is Faith Staged?" Christianity
Today 30 (October 17, 1986), 29.

[17]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 200.

[18]Ibid., 201.

philosophical and theological basis to critique the former. Areas of consonance and dissonance are revealed in the process and, in Chapter 5, evaluated for application in evangelical Christian ministry and the U. S. Navy Chaplaincy.

Delimitations

The primary delimitation of this thesis is restriction of the focus of inquiry to faith Stage 5. The following additional delimitations are also observed:

1.   Research is restricted to English language sources only.

2.   No "field" research is utilized. Only standard resources found in libraries are used.

3.   Discussion revolves around Fowler's research. While familiarity is demonstrated with Fowler's sources, including Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, H. Richard Niebuhr, W. C. Smith, and others, their respective theories are not examined except as they directly impinge upon Fowler's theories or findings.

4.   Discussion is limited to answering the specific research question and its subsidiary questions.

Contribution

The following contributions have been made by answering the research question:

1.   The importance of Faith Development Theory is

highlighted. Genuine contributions to human understanding by Dr. Fowler have been made and are being both appreciated and evaluated by a growing circle of scholarship.

2. Faith Stage 5 is evaluated critically, investigating philosophical and theological legitimacy from an evangelical position.

3. Practical information is drawn out from faith stage hypothesis along with implications for spiritual growth and program planning.

4. Awareness of the human side of spirituality and growth is highlighted by contrast, promoting meaningful dialogue in a pluralistic setting of differing theological viewpoints.

Summary

Can evangelical doctrinal *content* fit into the *structure* of James Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith*? This primary research question and five subsidiary questions define the substance of this thesis. Faith Stage 5 of Fowler's six "Stages of Faith" contains statements problematic to evangelicals. The *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith* suggests that, to the Stage 5 individual, truth is relative and multi-dimensional. In order to put stage 5 in context, Fowler's entire faith stage theory is introduced. The method stated to answer the primary and subsidiary research questions is to:

1. Describe *Conjunctive Faith* fully in terms of its history of formation, its presuppositions and foundations, and its latest incarnation in Fowler's writings and those of others. (Chapter 2)

2. Define a representative evangelical *content* using the Systematic Theologies of Chafer, Buswell, Berkhof, and Erickson. (Chapter 3)

3. Juxtapose the *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith* and the *content* of the defined evangelical Theology and discover the exact points of dissonance. (Chapter 4)

The limits of the study, namely restriction of the discussion to faith Stage 5 and the Theologies of four evangelical Theologians are also discussed, as well as the contributions made by the thesis.

Where did Fowler's notions of relativity and the multi-dimensionality of truth in *Conjunctive Faith* originate? What are the theological, philosophical, psychological and sociological foundations used to construct faith Stage 5? Who agrees and who disagrees with Fowler? A discussion of these questions follows in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY IN LITERATURE

What is *Conjunctive Faith* and what are its histori-

cal,[1] philosophical, psychological and theological roots? A

partial answer to these questions is found by examining

Fowler's faith Stage 5 as he himself reveals it in his own

works. Another piece of the same puzzle is identified in

the writings of several authors upon whom Fowler is explic-

itly dependent. Yet another clue to the nature of *Conjunc-*

tive Faith is derived from Fowler's critics. Taken togeth-

er, the words of Fowler, his mentors and critics, the *struc-*

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[1]Jonathan Edwards, in his writings on the Great
Awakening and Religious Affections made an early attempt to
classify religious experiences. Edwards develops a "mor-
phology of conversion" that describes several stages that an
individual experiences before, during and after conversion.
He further elaborated upon 12 signs or "passions" exhibited
by a truly converted person. Among Edward's goals was to
provide a voice of reason and standard of doctrine to be
followed in the wake of the emotional and spiritual excite-
ment surrounding the revival. Though bearing a superficial
resemblance to Fowler's Stages of Faith, Edward's analysis
provides little more than a snapshot view of an individual's
faith *content*, not a long term analysis of faith *structure*
in the manner of Fowler. See, Perry Miller, ed., The Works
of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2, Religious Affections, edited by
John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), and
John E. Smith, ed., The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4,
The Great Awakening, edited by C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1972).

ture of this crucial faith stage is given perspective and definition.

Conjunctive Faith According to Fowler: A Description and History of Faith Development Theory.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of trying to come to grips with *Conjunctive Faith* or any other faith stage is understanding what Fowler himself means by *faith* and *faith development*. To set the stage for the actual descriptions of the different faith stages, Fowler lays a generous foundation of definitions and sources that he feels are vital to understanding his theory in its proper context.

Fowler's Understanding of *Faith*.

To Fowler, *faith* is not just concerned with *content*, but also includes the concept of a *relationship*. Faith *content* asks the question "*What* do you believe?" Whereas *relationship* asks: "On what or on whom do you set your heart?"[2] He explains:

> If faith is reduced to belief in credal statements
> and doctrinal formulations, then sensitive and
> responsible persons are likely to judge that they
> must live "without faith." But if faith is under-
> stood as trust in another and as loyalty to a
> transcendent center of value and power, then the
> issue of faith--and the possibility of religious
> faith--becomes lively and open again.[3]

As Fowler understands this emphasis, he sees it not as an innovation, but a return to original meanings.

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[2]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 14.   [3]Ibid.

Faith, according to Fowler, is also *universal.* He proposes that faith is not limited to any particular group or religion:

> Whether we become nonbelievers, agnostics or athe-
> ists, we are concerned with how to put our lives
> together and with what will make life worth living.
> Moreover, we look for something to love and that
> loves us, something to value that gives us value,
> something to honor and respect that has the power
> to sustain our being.[4]

It is this concept of universality that Fowler uses to promote the idea that faith is a *human* phenomenon. If faith is a universal human phenomenon, then it is observable and quantifiable. Yet, understanding Fowler's ideas of faith is not complete without consideration of the aspect of *rela-tionship.*

Fowler insists that there is always *another* in faith. Illustrating this, he sees a typical faith relation-ship as involving self, others, and a "shared center of value and power."[5] Fowler notes that persons do not commit themselves to a "center of value and power" because they feel that they ought. Fowler describes the alternative reason:

> We invest or devote ourselves because the other to
> which we commit has, for us, an intrinsic excel-
> lence or worth and because it promises to confer
> value *on* us. We value that which seems of tran-
> scendent worth and in relation to which our lives
> have worth. . . . The centers of value and power
> that have god value for us, therefore, are those

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[4]Ibid., 5.   [5]Ibid., 17.

that confer meaning and worth on us and promise to sustain us in a dangerous world of power.[6]

Fowler uses the terms *henotheism* and *monotheism* to describe the relative worth of the faith relationship with the "center of value and power" described above. If the center is "inappropriate, false, or not something of ultimate concern," then the relationship is termed *henotheistic*:

> The henotheistic god is finally an idol. It represents the elevation to central, life-defining value and power of a limited and finite good. It means the attribution of ultimate concern to that which is of less than ultimate worth.[7]

The opposite of this Fowler calls "radical monotheism." As he defines it:

> In radical monotheistic faith persons are bound to each other in trust and loyalty--to each other and to an inclusive center of value and power--in relation to which our tribal gods and finite goods must be seen for what they are. . . . Our limited, parochial communities cannot be revered and served as though they have ultimate value.[8]

Fowler regards those who practice radical monotheism as valuers of an inclusive, global community, practicing a type of universal faith that eclipses more parochial faith orientations. This concept, in particular, is echoed in *Conjunctive Faith*.

For each of the previously mentioned aspects of faith, Fowler acknowledges the shaping influence of several significant mentors. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich each made a significant contribu-

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[6]Ibid., 18.   [7]Ibid., 20.   [8]Ibid., 23.

tion to Fowler's understanding of faith. A discussion of their individual influence follows.

The Influence of Wilfred Cantwell Smith

Smith's writings had several effects on Fowler's ideas of faith. Smith, who when he authored _The Meaning and End of Religion_ was Professor of World Religions and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, makes a distinction between _faith_ and _belief_, or "religion." For Smith,

> [Faith is] not a fixed something, but the throbbing actuality of a myriad of someones. There is no such thing, I have argued, as religion or a religion; and when one divides what has been called that into two parts, an overt tangible tradition on the one hand and a vital personal faith on the other, neither of the resultant parts is a thing either, definite, stable, static, complete, definable, metaphysically given. To see faith truly is to see it actually, not ideally.[9]

In other words, Smith understands faith to be personal and human, not propositional. Fowler, agreeing with Smith's appraisal, understands belief to be "the holding of certain ideas," as opposed to faith, which is ". . . the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or propositions--beliefs--are fashioned."[10]

Fowler credits Smith in Chapter 2 of _Stages of Faith_

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[9]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, _The Meaning and End of Religion_ (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 170-171.

[10]Fowler, _Stages of Faith_, 11.

as being:

> one of the very few students of the history of
> religion who has the linguistic competence to study
> most of the major religious traditions in the
> languages of their primary sources.[11]

As such it is not surprising that Fowler looks to Smith's

linguistic analysis of the words *faith* and *belief* to make

his point. Originally, the word *believe* ". . . began its

career in early Modern English meaning 'to belove', 'to

regard as lief', to hold dear, to cherish."[12] Fowler notes

this to highlight the linguistic shift that has distanced

the meanings of the terms *faith* and *belief* from each other.

Additionally, Smith proposes several other features

of faith that are embraced by Fowler. The universalizing

features of faith stages 5 and 6 are conceptually found in

Smith's writings. Smith states:

> If we do not attain a universal theory as to the
> relation between truth itself and truth articulated
> in the midst of the relativity of human life and
> history, we may at this stage at least achieve a
> greater sympathy for the articulations of other
> ages and civilizations, and also for their faith,
> their more personalized apprehension of truth,
> whatever its conceptualized articulation. We may
> also gain some understanding of, even sympathy for,
> their conviction or instantiation that, of these
> two, faith is both logically and axiologically
> prior.[13]

This concept of "religious relativity" in the face of uni-

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[11]Ibid., 9.

[12]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, <u>Faith and Belief</u> (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 106.

[13]Ibid., 208.

versal truth is endorsed by Fowler and represents a transition point from Faith stages 4 to 5. "Religious relativity" is at the philosophic heart of faith Stage 5. Smith's views, reincarnated in Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith*, also dovetail with the writings of both Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr.

"Religious relativity" and other foundational themes used by Fowler can be found in the writings of Paul Tillich. These themes receive treatment in the next section.

The Influence of Paul Tillich

Fowler draws from Tillich notions of faith expressed as *ultimate concern*. According to Fowler,

> [Faith understood this way] is very serious business. It involves how we make our life wagers. It shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties.[14]

A corresponding thought both illustrates Fowler's use of Tillich as a source and describes the urgency of faith felt by the two men:

> If [faith] claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name.[15]

Tillich, with others, reinforces Fowler's desire to conceive

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[14]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 5.

[15]Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper and Bros., 1957), 1.

of faith as a human endeavor, as indicated in the human
centered wording. Even the use of the term *ultimate concern*
reveals Tillich's preference for considering faith as origi-
nating in humans.

Fowler calls upon Tillich, particularly when de-
scribing faith Stage 4, to talk about the demythologizing of
religious symbolism. Fowler understands that those who have
begun to recognize the symbols of their faith as symbols,
experience both a sense of gain and loss. In this arena,
Tillich speaks forcefully since he considers the "literal-
ism" that many conservative Christians take for granted to
be "idolatrous." Tillich warns his readers:

> The presupposition of . . . literalism is that god
> is a being, acting in time and space, dwelling in a
> special place, affecting the course of events and
> being affected by them like any other being in the
> universe. Literalism deprives God of his ultimacy
> and, religiously speaking, of his majesty. It draws
> him down to the level of that which is not ulti-
> mate, the finite and conditional. . . . Faith, if
> it takes its symbols literally, becomes idolatrous!
> It calls something ultimate which is less than
> ultimate.[16]

Understanding the resurrection and ascension of Christ in
literal and physical terms, according to Tillich, would
constitute idolatry.[17] Though enamored with Tillich's ideas
of symbolism within faith, it is unclear to what extent
Fowler would agree with Tillich's assertion of idolatry. If
Fowler were but sympathetic to the idea, it would explain

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[16]Ibid., 52.   [17]Ibid.

some of *Conjunctive Faith's* acceptance of the "relativity" of all religious expression; i.e., the "multi-dimensionality" of truth.

H. Richard Niebuhr also led Fowler in developing his concepts of faith, not only with the idea that faith was a universal, but with notions of "pluralism" and "radical monotheism."

The Influence of H. Richard Niebuhr

Because Fowler wrote his doctoral dissertation on Niebuhr's "theological vision," it emphasizes the great influence wielded by the mentor on the student. Building on the concept that faith is placed in a "center of value," Niebuhr introduced Fowler to "pluralism" and three relational ways to describe faith: (1) polytheism, (2) henotheism, and (3) monotheism.

From Niebuhr, Fowler appreciates the pitfalls of pure relativism. Parks and Dykstra make the following observation:

> Fowler's basic clues to a way of resolving the
> tensions inherent here came most decisively from
> the work of H. Richard Niebuhr. In an unpublished
> lecture given in 1984 at Harvard Divinity School,
> Fowler, speaking of his rereading of Niebuhr during
> his graduate studies, said: ". . . Niebuhr had
> seen everything I had seen in terms of the vertigo
> of relativity, and yet had emerged from that with
> an astonishing capacity to affirm the sovereignty
> of God and to see that relativity need not lead to
> relativism . . ."[18]

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[18]Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, ed., "Introduction," Faith Development and Fowler (Birmingham, Ala.:

Niebuhr reckons that the solution to the dilemma of relativity comes by positing an *absolute, transcendent Reality,* compared to which, *all else is relative.* By doing this, Niebuhr avoids what Parks and Dykstra call sheer relativism, ". . . the view that one way of living and believing is just as good as any other."[19] Fowler adopts Niebuhr's solution. Yet, Christianity's propositional assertions of doctrine are downgraded from objective truth to subjective experience in the process.[20] Fowler's attempts to resist relativism *and* preserve the particularity of different groups, though satisfying to some, abridges Christianity's right to make propositional truth claims. The necessity of these truth claims to the heart of evangelical Christianity is discussed in Chapter 3.

"Radical monotheism" is another of Niebuhr's concepts that Fowler incorporates into *Conjunctive Faith.* Understanding "radical monotheism" also involves an understanding of how Niebuhr defines "polytheism, henotheism and monotheism." A polytheistic individual, rather than being described in traditional terms of having "many gods" is

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Religious Education Press, 1986), 4.

[19]Ibid., 3.

[20]James W. Fowler, <u>To See the Kingdom; The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr</u>, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 229.

referred to as having many "centers of value." Niebuhr

contends that polytheism is the result of disappointments

encountered when henotheism embitters an individual through

false claims and broken promises:

> Historically and in the contemporary scene such
> pluralism seems most frequently to follow on the
> dissolution of social faith [henotheism]. When
> confidence in nation or other closed society is
> broken, men who must live by faith take resources
> to multiple centers of value and scatter their
> loyalties among many causes. When the half-gods go
> the minimal gods arrive.[21]

This breakdown translates into a state of shifting or par-

tial commitments. Fowler illustrates polytheism using

Robert J. Lifton's *protean* man:

> Proteus was a minor sea god in the court of Posei-
> don who could readily adopt any form or guise he
> desired, but who found it impossible to maintain
> any particular identity or commitments. Protean
> people make a series of relatively intense or total
> identity and faith, but their commitments prove to
> be transient and shifting. They thus move from one
> faith-relational triad to another, often with sharp
> discontinuities and abrupt changes of direction.[22]

Another idea of polytheism that Fowler describes is one with

a *diffuse* pattern of faith. Here, the issue is a "cool

provisionality" regarding commitment or trust; the individu-

al not willing to get fully involved. Fowler laments that

"Most of us are more polytheistic than we would like to

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[21]H. Richard Niebuhr, <u>Radical Monotheism and Western Culture</u> (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 28.

[22]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 20.

think."[23]

Niebuhr's second type of faith relationship, which Fowler endorses, is *henotheism*. Niebuhr clothes henotheism primarily in the robes of culture:

> When men's ultimate orientation is in their society, when it is their value-center and cause, then the social mores can make anything right and anything wrong; then indeed conscience is the internalized voice of society or of its representatives.[24]

Fowler expands on Niebuhr's idea of henotheism. Fowler posits both noble and ignoble forms without endorsing either. At best, a henotheistic dependence on finite institutions such as nation, church, or ideologies can bring disappointment, because they are loved far more than they are worth. Fowler also places worship of self in the henotheistic camp. The most extreme form is fetishism, which "focuses on an extremely narrow and exclusive center of value and power."[25] This includes, interestingly, "Religions that make cardinal virtues of certain avoidances . . . ," and extreme cases of workaholism and careerism.[26]

Radical monotheism, to both Niebuhr and Fowler, is the only legitimate and lasting path of faith. Fowler latched on to the idea stating,

> Since I began systematically to work on a theory of

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Niebuhr, <u>Radical Monotheism</u>, 26.   [25]Ibid., 21.

[26]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 21.

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.[27]

Fowler relates radical monotheism not only to Niebuhr's

writings, but to Smith's view of religious relativity.

Religions, according to Smith, should be compared with the

divine, not with each other.

For his part, Niebuhr sees radical monotheism as

combining a principle of being and a principle of value.

Illustrating by contrast, Niebuhr declares:

It is not a relation to any finite, natural or
supernatural, value center that confers value on
self and some of its companions in being, but it is
value relation to the One to whom all being is
related. Monotheism is less than radical if it
makes a distinction between the principle of being
and the principle of value; so that while all being
is acknowledged as absolutely dependent for exist-
ence on the One, only some beings are valued as
having worth for it; or if, speaking in religious
language, the Creator and the God of grace are not
identified.[28]

Even here the direction toward a universalizing faith shows.

The idea that God could have a *special* relationship with

some of His creation seems repugnant to Niebuhr. Radical

Monotheism, like his view on pluralism, is a universal faith

in one absolute, transcendent center of value and power that

confers equal worth to all. Any attempts to particularize

would be regarded as parochialism, and therefore a relativ-

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[27]Ibid., 204.

[28]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, 32.

izing or distortion of the Truth. Fowler adopts the essence of this view in both Stages 5 and 6 of his faith development scheme.

Smith, Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr represent the many individuals who helped to shape Fowler's concepts of faith. Several key ideas of faith emerge from this review:

1. Faith is a human endeavor.

2. Faith and belief, as currently defined, are different; faith being relationship oriented, belief being content oriented.

3. All religions are composed of myth and symbol and are only relative, not to other religions, but to the supreme center of value and power.

4. Faith is a universal quality found in all humans, whether it is *monotheistic* or not.

5. There is a universal aspect of faith that unites all persons in global community because of the One who gives worth to all.

Fowler's theory is dependent not only upon the "theologians," but also on the "developmentalists." He uses their insights to shape his concepts of *faith* into *faith development.*

Fowler's Understanding of Developmentalism and Faith

Faith development research had its beginning, according to Fowler's own account, while he was associate

director of Interpreter's House in 1968-69. While there he

began to discover:

> With receptive, active listening . . . people will
> tell their stories in sufficient depth and richness
> that both they and their listeners can begin to see
> patterns and connections which neither had seen before.[29]

Building on this involvement he began to teach a class that

incorporated his new insights, that involved the students in

analyzing their experiences using the theories of "Erikson,

Freud, Jung, and eventually, Piaget and Kohlberg."[30]   In

one of more celebrated sections of his book, Stages of

Faith, Fowler makes special use of Piaget, Erikson, and

Kohlberg by engaging them in a fictional conversation in

which they discuss the development of infants, children,

adolescents, and adults. He began with Erikson.

The Influence of Erik Erikson

Erikson proposed eight psycho-social stages of

development. Fowler draws upon all of them to show paral-

lels to faith development theory. However, since faith

Stage 5 is "unusual before mid-life," Fowler links *Conjunc-

tive Faith* to Erikson's psycho-social stage described as

"Generativity vs. Stagnation."

Age "seven" (of eight "ages of man,"), entitled

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[29]James W. Fowler, "Dialogue Toward a Future," in Faith Development and Fowler, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986), 276.

[30]Ibid.

generativity vs. stagnation describes the options open to the person at this point in life. Erikson states that "Generativity . . . is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation."[31] He explains:

> The fashionable insistence on dramatizing the dependence of children on adults often blinds us to the dependence of the older generation on the younger one. Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of.[32]

Though Fowler does not explicitly draw on Erikson for his description of faith Stage 5, the role reversal and movement away from individuation toward community is in keeping with the spirit of *Conjunctive Faith*.[33]

Failure to achieve generativity will, according to Erikson result in "a regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy . . . often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment." Achievement of generativity is not a guarantor that an individual will surely arrive at faith Stage 5. Unlike faith development theory, psycho-social stages are posited as stages through which all

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[31]Erik Erikson, <u>Childhood and Society</u>, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1963), 267.

[32]Ibid., 266-267.

[33]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 274. Fowler writes: "Overall, there is a movement outward toward individuation, culminating in Stage 4. Then the movement doubles back, in Stages 5 and 6, toward the participation and oneness of earlier stages, though at quite different levels of complexity, differentiation, and inclusiveness."

will pass at appropriate times in their lives, either with success (i.e., *generativity*), or failure (i.e., *stagnation*).

Erikson's entire psycho-social emphasis on *relationships* also fits well into Fowler's understanding of faith as *relationship*. Yet, though Fowler acknowledges early dependence on Erikson, he began, under Kohlberg's influence to see value in structural description of stages.[34] This meant, "taking more seriously the distinctions between *content* and *faith*."[35] Piaget's work, which predated Kohlberg's, provided some important thoughts for faith development research.

The Influence of Jean Piaget

The genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides faith development theory with yet another foundation and parallel. Though the bulk of the theory describes the development of human cognition, normally complete by the end of adolescence, its stages and structures are important to Fowler.

When comparing Piaget's final stage of cognitive development to his faith development stages, Fowler places it alongside of Stage 4. However, this is because formal-

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[34]Ibid., 272. Fowler adds: "My earliest preliminary sketch of stages of faith owed a great deal to Erik Erikson's theory. Shortly, however, under Kohlberg's influence I and my students began to try to become more rigorous in the structural description of stages."

[35]Ibid.

operational should have already developed. Ginsberg and

Opper summarize Piaget's theory of formal thought:

> In the stage of formal thought, the adolescent
> develops the ability to imagine the possibilities
> inherent in a situation. Before acting on a prob-
> lem which confronts him, the adolescent analyzes it
> and attempts to develop hypothesis concerning what
> *might* occur. These hypotheses are numerous and
> complex because the adolescent takes into account
> all possible combinations of eventualities in an
> exhaustive way. As he proceeds to test his ideas,
> he designs experiments which are quite efficient in
> terms of supporting some hypotheses and disproving
> others. He accurately observes the results of the
> experiments, and from them he draws the proper
> conclusions. Moreover, given some conclusion, he
> can reason about it and thereby derive new inter-
> pretations. The adolescent's thought is now so
> flexible and powerful that it has reached a high
> degree of equilibrium.[36]

In other words, at this stage the adolescent is neurologi-

cally and physiologically capable of thinking like an adult,

an obvious prerequisite for *Conjunctive Faith*.

Even more important than Piaget's cognitive develop-

ment theory, is description and use of structure, shared by

Kohlberg. This is discussed following the section on Kohl-

berg and *Moral Development*.

The Influence of Lawrence Kohlberg

Faith development bears a striking similarity to

Moral Development, Kohlberg's theory gleaned from the fruits

of Piaget's structuralist harvest. As there are six moral

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[36]Herbert Ginsberg and Sylvia Opper, <u>Piaget's Theory
of Intellectual Development: An Introduction</u>, The Prentice-
Hall Series in Developmental Psychology, ed. John C. Wright
(Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 206.

development stages (in three levels), so there are six faith development stages. Yet, this is only a superficial comparison. The similarity between moral development stage 5 and faith Stage 5 is evident.

Kohlberg's moral development stage 5, called "The Stage of Prior Rights and Social Contract or Utility," occurs in level three, *Post Conventional and Principled Level*. As part of the *content* of stage 5, Kohlberg writes:

> What is right is being aware of the fact that
> people hold a variety of opinions, that most values
> and rules are relative to one's group. These
> "relative" rules should usually be upheld, however,
> in the interest of impartiality and because they
> are the social contract.[37]

He additionally describes the content of stage 5 in terms of "the greatest good for the greatest number."[38] Emphasis on relativity in the face of universality is contained here.

Kohlberg's description of the "social perspective" of stage 5 is also revealing:

> This stage takes a prior-to-society perspective--
> that of a rational individual aware of values and
> rights prior to social attachments and contracts.
> The person integrates perspectives by formal mecha-
> nisms of agreement, contract, objective impartiali-
> ty, and due process. He or she considers the moral
> point of view and the legal point of view, recog-
> nizes they conflict, and finds it difficult to

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[37]Lawrence Kohlberg, Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 411-412.

[38]Ibid., 412.

integrate them.[39]

Traces of Fowler's faith Stage 5 "paradoxes" and multi-
dimensionality of truth are found in the above descriptions.

Fowler's dependence on Kohlberg is not limited to
similarities, real or apparent, in moral stages and faith
stages. It is Kohlberg's use, with Piaget, of the structur-
alist paradigm, that also makes an impact on Fowler.

Contributions of the Piaget-Kohlberg School

Faith development research benefits from the struc-
tural developmental school in five different ways noted by
Fowler. First, he cites *epistemological focus* in that it
has to do with the study of *how* we know.[40] Drawing addi-
tionally from Tillich and Niebuhr, Fowler states:

> The broad epistemological emphasis in the structur-
> al-developmental theories serves us well as a model
> for understanding faith as a way of knowing and
> interpreting.[41]

As important as this concept is, Fowler is not just con-
cerned with the cognitive variety of knowing as are Piaget
and Kohlberg. To make it serve the purpose of faith devel-
opment, Fowler wants to broaden the scope of "knowing."

The second contribution, in Fowler's estimation, is
". . . its focus on the structuring of knowing as it gives

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[39]Kohlberg, Moral Development, Vol. 1, 412.

[40]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 98.   [41]Ibid.

form to the contents of knowledge."[42]   He elaborates on this

point:

> The structural approach suggested a way of focusing
> on some features of faith that may be universal
> despite the great variety of particular symbolic,
> thematic and imaginal contents. . . . The structur-
> al approach has enabled us to find and describe
> structural features of faith that make comparisons
> possible across a wide range of "content" differ-
> ences.[43]

To adapt this aspect of structural developmentalism to his

purposes, Fowler sought to widen the scope (as mentioned

above) by including affective, valuational, and imaginal

modes of knowing avoided by Kohlberg and Piaget.   In this,

Fowler has made faith development somewhat unique.

The "rigorous concept of structural stages" combined

with "actual descriptions of cognitive and moral reasoning

stages" worked out by Kohlberg and Piaget constitute the

third contribution.   Fowler insists that faith stages are

not identical with those theories of Piaget and Kohlberg,

nor can faith stages be reduced to some "mixture" of the

other two.   Again, the reason given is that faith stages

integrate modes of knowing and valuing avoided by the oth-

ers.   Yet, Fowler finds the correlations between Piaget,

Kohlberg, also Robert Selman (on social perspective taking),

with the "forms of knowing and valuing that make up faith

stage" important.[44]   From this, Fowler asserts that the

stages are *invariant*.

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[42]Ibid., 99.   [43]Ibid.   [44]Ibid.

Development is an *interactional* process. Fowler

perceives this approach of Piaget and Kohlberg as their

fourth contribution. As Fowler summarizes it,

> The structural-developmental interactional approach
> calls us to view development as resulting from the
> interchange between an active, innovative subject
> and a dynamic, changing environment.[45]

He welcomes this approach against Behaviorism's passive

individual/active environment emphasis, o. he Maturation-

ist's determinisms. Faith, as has been previously stated by

Fowler, is an *interactional* process. Growth occurs, result-

ing from ". . . efforts to restore balance between subject

and environment when some factor of maturation or of envi-

ronmental change has disturbed a previous equilibrium."[46]

Life crises, challenges, and "the kind of disruptions that

theologians call revelation," also cause the kind of dise-

quilibrium that engenders development. Fowler considers

this interactional aspect of Piaget and Kohlberg to be not

only helpful, but crucial.

The final influence or contribution Fowler credits

to Piaget and Kohlberg is the *normative* directions and

implications of their work. Simply put, Fowler appreciates

that, despite the axiological dangers of doing so, both

Piaget and Kohlberg claim a progressive nature to their

stages, i.e., a "higher, more developed" stage is more

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[45]Ibid., 100.   [46]Ibid.

adequate than a "lower, less developed" stage.[47] Though he thinks the dangers of *normative* implications even more present in terms of faith development, Fowler is emboldened to follow in his mentors' steps.

Fowler's debt to Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson in terms of developmentalism is enormous, but readily acknowledged. This does not imply that Fowler has slavishly *followed*, but, that he has carefully *adapted*. From Erikson, Fowler not only found parallels to faith stages in the "eight stages of man" but also saw eight stages of "relationships" occurring at specified times in a person's life. From Piaget, Fowler drew not only from parallels of cognitive development to faith development, but, with what he learned from Kohlberg, the five great contributions of the structural-development method: (1) Epistemological focus, (2) the structuring of knowing, (3) the rigorous concept of structural stages combined with the descriptions of cognitive and moral development (leading to the thought that stages are *invariant*), (4) the *interaction* quotient of structural-development, and (5) the *normative* aspect of stages. Finally from Kohlberg, whose moral stages most closely match Fowler's faith stages, basic principles of faith Stage 5 are found.

Once all the "raw" materials for faith development

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[47]Ibid., 101.

theory have been gathered, Fowler presents them in his own

unique way. This is reflected in his various presentations

of *Conjunctive Faith.*

Fowler's Understanding of *Conjunctive Faith*

Until now, the normative definition of *Conjunctive*

Faith has been taken from Fowler's seminal book <u>Stages of</u>

<u>Faith</u>. Descriptions of faith Stage 5 have changed relative-

ly little from the time it first appeared in published form.

The primary places where Fowler has described *Con-*

junctive Faith are found in the following books:

(1) <u>Life Maps</u>[48]

(2) <u>Stages of Faith</u>[49]

(3) <u>Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle</u>[50]

(4) <u>Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian</u>[51]

(5) <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>[52].

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[48]James W. Fowler and Sam Keen, <u>Life Maps: Conversa-</u><u>tions on the Journey of Faith</u> (Waco, Tex.: Word
Books, 1978).

[49]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>.

[50]James W. Fowler, "Stages of Faith and Adults' Life
Cycles," in <u>Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle</u>, ed.
Kenneth Stokes (New York: W. H. Sadlier, 1982), 178-207.

[51]James W. Fowler, <u>Becoming Adult, Becoming Chris-</u><u>tian: Adult Development and Christian Faith</u> (San Francisco:
Harper and Row, 1984).

[52]James W. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of
Meaning," in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, ed. Craig Dykstra
and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education
Press, 1986), 15-42.

(6) Faith Development and Pastoral Care[53]

One additional source description of faith Stage 5,
of particular interest to evangelical Christian students of
Fowler, appears in cassette form as his recorded addresses
to the delegates attending the 1987 conference of the Na-
tional Association of Professors of Christian Education.[54]

Borrowing directly from Chapter 1, *Conjunctive Faith*
is summarized as follows:

> As a deeper awareness of one's own unconscious
> develops, the person becomes alive to paradox and
> open to other religions and people. If it develops
> at all, "Conjunctive Faith" is rare before middle
> adulthood since it inevitably requires what Fowler
> terms the "sacrament of defeat." Truth is per-
> ceived as multi-dimensional, and the person seeks
> significant encounters with others. Symbols,
> myths, and rituals take on new meaning since the
> reality to which they refer has been, in part,
> grasped by the individual.[55]

Apart from a shift in titles from *Paradoxical-Consolidative*
faith[56] to the more standardized *Conjunctive Faith*, not much
has changed. Still, several points suggest a need for
clarification.

One such point is "openness to others." Fowler

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[53]James W. Fowler, Faith Development and Pastoral
Care, Theology and Pastoral Care Series, ed. Don S. Browning
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

[54]James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith Development, Part
I #2 and Part II #3, N.A.P.C.E. Conference 1987, cassettes
C1924 and C1925, Sanders, 1987.

[55]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 197-198.

[56]Fowler and Keen, Life Maps, 79.

describes this openness:

> Conjunctive faith, therefore, ready for significant
> encounters with other traditions than its own,
> expecting that truth has disclosed and will dis-
> close itself in those traditions in ways that may
> complement or correct its own. Krister Stendahl is
> fond of saying that no interfaith conversation is
> genuinely ecumenical unless the quality of mutual
> sharing and receptivity is such that each party
> makes him- or herself vulnerable to conversion to
> the other's truth. This would be Stage 5 ecume-
> nism.[57]

Fowler, himself clarifies this statement somewhat by adding:

> This position implies no lack of commitment to
> one's own truth tradition. . . . Rather, Conjunc-
> tive faith's radical openness to the truth of the
> other stems precisely from its confidence in the
> reality mediated by its own tradition and in the
> awareness that reality overspills its mediation.[58]

Thus, Fowler sees contacts with others as providing a cor-

rective to one's perspective. Yet, he posits one's own

"experience of truth" the principle by which other claims to

truth are tested.[59]

Fowler, additionally, in terms similar to those

found in the works of Tillich, describes the faith Stage 5

individual as using "multiple names and metaphors for the

holy" to "avoid idolatry and honor paradox."[60] Similarly,

the faith Stage 5 individual has ". . . little use for the

tribalism of homogeneous groupings, and no use for ideologi-

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[57]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 186.

[58]Ibid., 186-187.   [59]Ibid., 187.

[60]Fowler, in Faith Development and Fowler, 31.

cal holy war."[61]

Regrettably, Fowler made no applications of these principles. One does not know if, to Fowler, "tribalism" is a reference to petty "denominationalism," or if all Christianity is included. Apart from their contexts, the issue of whether these statements, combined with Fowler's concepts of the "relativity" of religions, are compatible with evangelical Christianity is difficult to determine. They are, however, discussed at greater length later in the thesis (Chapter 4).

In October of 1987, Fowler addressed the largely evangelical National Association of Professors of Christian Education, giving illuminating insights into his background as a scholar, son of a Methodist minister, and significant (and diverse) Christian spiritual experiences. Fowler, proudly owned his Protestant "Liberal" heritage, citing, in particular, Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr. He also traced his lineage of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson to *their* philosophical forbears, Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

The "spiritual experiences" recounted were more "evangelical" than might have been expected, given the other part of Fowler's heritage. The experiences included answering an "altar call" at age 8, "rededication" under the preaching of Billy Graham, and spiritual re-awakening

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[61]Ibid.

because of 18 weeks of Jesuit spiritual direction.[62]

Fowler acknowledged the question of evangelicals in the "higher" faith stages, but with answers that were less than conclusive. First, Fowler appealed to the Apostle Paul, who, in Chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans, writes about the polarization he experienced between a willing spirit and weak flesh. Fowler proposed that Paul was experiencing the "polar tensions" of *Conjunctive Faith.* If Fowler is correct, then to the extent an evangelical Christian's faith is like the Apostle Paul's, the evangelical can enter faith Stage 5. The question remains whether Paul was "radically" open to "others" to the point of being "vulnerable to conversion" as Stendahl previously suggested.[63]

Conjunctive Faith is a multi-faceted faith stage with both possibilities and potential perils for the evangelical. From the side of possibility, faith Stage 5 offers an approach to God that is clearly trans-parochial. It acknowledges that "we see through a glass, darkly," and celebrates God as much for the pleasure as for the pain; it tries to comprehend a God who both reveals and conceals. Fowler sees individuals who are so rooted in their tradition that they can approach fearlessly individuals of other traditions and receive correction for their misapprehensions

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[62]Fowler, N.A.P.C.E. Conference, cassette, Pt. I #2.

[63]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 186.

of reality.

A potential dark side to *Conjunctive Faith* is its relativity. The question could be raised if "vulnerability to conversion by others" is a *bona fide* requirement of faith Stage 5 or merely an over-enthusiastic illustration. A further question might ask, "Does Fowler define 'idolatry' in the same way as Tillich?" If yes, then all Orthodox Christian doctrines are immediately relegated to mere "tribalism."[64] These issues are explored in Chapter 4.

Fowler's critics, also, have been anxious to have him clarify some points.

Critiques of Faith Development

Despite the wide, and generally favorable, acceptance of faith development theory and research, Fowler's critics have been manifold.[65] For the most part they have tried to dialogue with Fowler concerning perceived inadequacies in his definition of faith (specifically the analysis of *faith* with structuralism),[66] his importation of "theo-

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[64]Fowler, in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, 31.

[65]Two indispensable sources of critiques on faith development theory and research are, (1) Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, ed., <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u> (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986), and (2) Kenneth Stokes, ed., <u>Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle</u> (New York: W. H. Sadlier, 1982). These critiques did not, however, address directly the issues of *Conjunctive Faith* raised in this thesis.

[66]Among these are Craig Dykstra, "What is Faith?: An Experiment in the Hypothetical Mode," in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham,

logy" into the higher faith stages--especially Stage 6,[67]

and his research methodology--primarily focusing on either

the interview techniques or the lack of substantial longitu-

dinal data.[68]

Remarkably, few evangelicals have questioned *Con-*

junctive Faith. A Christianity Today interview with Fowler

concentrated only on his work with the lower faith stages,

omitting any notes of caution. Other evangelicals *have*

noted Fowler's tendency to see Christianity as merely one

option from among many[69] and his view of "conversion" as

merely a "change of content."[70] Downs also, alerted evan-

gelicals to the potential exclusion of orthodox Christians

from the higher faith stages--the key issue raised in this

Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986), 53. Also, James E. Loder, "Reflections on Fowler's Stages of Faith," Religious Education 77 (March-April 1982): 133-39, and Don Browning, review of Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Develop-ment and the Quest for Meaning, by James W. Fowler, in Anglican Theological Review 65, no. 1 (February 1983): 124-27.

[67]Snapper, review of Stages of Faith, 105-7. Also, Downs, review of Stages of Faith, 248-53.

[68]Notably, C. Ellis Nelson and Daniel Aleshire, "Research in Faith Development," in Faith Development and Fowler, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986).

[69]Kiesewetter, review of Stages of Faith, 31-32.

[70]Downs, "Is Faith Staged?", 30.

thesis.[71] This criticism of Fowler was, in fact, noted at

least two years prior by Sell.[72]

Providing an evangelical look at developmentalism,

particularly as it relates to predictable periods of crisis

in the human life cycle, Sell endorsed the ideas of faith

stages with the exception of *Conjunctive Faith*, concluding

that faith Stage 5 represented a departure from evangelical

Christianity. He cites Gabriel Moran's explanation[73] that a

person at this stage no longer has a religion (objective

emphasis), but is *religious* (subjective emphasis). Sell

registers his concern about *Conjunctive Faith* as follows:

> In summary, truth lies in a person's religious
> experience. At this stage, Scripture is only
> symbolic, somehow pointing to ultimate truth. It
> does not contain cognitive statements of truth. If
> evangelical faith accepts the Bible's statements as
> truth, then Fowler's stage five is a non-
> evangelical rung of the ladder.[74]

Sell's indictment of *Conjunctive Faith* focuses attention on

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[71]Perry G. Downs, <u>Developmental Stages: Contemporary
Applications</u>, N.A.P.C.E. Conference 1987, cassette, Sanders,
1987.

[72]Charles M. Sell, <u>Transition</u> (Chicago: Moody Press,
1985), 139-140.

[73]Gabriel Moran, <u>Religious Education Development</u>
(Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983), 153. Moran's comments,
however, are specifically explanatory of the *third* stage of
his own scheme of religious development in a section called
"A Proposed Theory for Religious Educators." Though in
harmony with Fowler's faith development theory, the phrase
"a person no longer has a religion" belongs to Moran, not
Fowler.

[74]Sell, <u>Transition</u>, 140.

at least one of the theological issues at stake--the evangelical view of Scripture. Further treatment of theological issues is found in Chapter 3.

What have these critiques contributed to the understanding of faith development and *Conjunctive Faith*? First, they remind Fowler and those who study (and apply) his theory that faith development research has not yet been engraved in stone. Considerable room for maneuvering still exists. Fowler's response to his critics is instructive in this area. For example, responding to a critique[75] of his faith stage analysis of a young female interviewee, Mary,[76] Fowler writes:

> Retrospectively, I can see that I may have bent the analysis in the direction of seeing Mary's *present* functioning as developmentally more advanced than my candid assessment of most of the previous period (ages twenty-two to twenty-seven) now could sustain. In doing so, I failed to take seriously enough certain indications, which faith development categories actually make quite clear, regarding the limited and distorting capacities for perspective taking which Mary manifested.[77]

This willingness to bend encourages others to direct responsible comments toward Fowler in hopes that praxis

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[75]Carl D. Schneider, "Faith Development and Pastoral Diagnosis" in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986), 221-250.

[76]See Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, chapter 22, "Mary's Pilgrimage."

[77]Fowler, "Dialogue," in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, 292.

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will occur.

Second, and of great relevance to evangelicals, questions pertaining to his view of conversion, and orthodox Christian participation in the higher faith stages remains largely unanswered. The issues of *Conjunctive Faith* are compelling: They receive further treatment in Chapter 4. What, then, has been learned about Fowler, faith, faith development, and faith stage critiques?

Summary

"Fowler" and "faith development" have become nearly synonymous. His faith stage research commands considerable respect in academic, psychological, sociological, structural-developmental, and theological circles. But, Fowler readily (and gratefully) admits his debt to many others.

Fowler's definitions of *faith* received shaping influences from Smith, Tillich, and H. Richard Niebuhr. From them Fowler adapted ideas that, (1) faith is a human endeavor, (2) faith is to be differentiated from *belief*, (3) the relativity of all religions to the *Transcendent*, (4) faith is a universal quality of all humans, and (5) faith points to a global community--all have worth because of the One who gives worth. A somewhat small step took Fowler from *faith* to *faith development*.

Fowler's faith development roots utilized the combined talents of Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg. Erikson's

theory of psycho-social development taught Fowler principles of *life ages.* Piaget and Kohlberg gave Fowler the foundations of *Cognitive Development* and *Moral Development*, respectively. Special emphasis was given to Piaget and Kohlberg in terms of their structuralist contributions.

Conjunctive Faith, faith Stage 5 of 6, grows naturally out of the thoughts of Fowler's teachers. Fowler's understanding of this crucial (to evangelicals) stage is tempered as well by his own spiritual heritage. Briefly, then, *Conjunctive Faith* emphasizes the relativity of all religious *expression*, understands the paradoxical nature of truth, and is radically open to the correction that other groups might offer. Further, this stage makes the final test of truth one's own *experience* of truth even while reclaiming and reworking images, myths and symbols brought into question in Stage 4.

Critics of faith development theory and research have brought Fowler to task for a variety of reasons. Evangelicals in particular, question Fowler's understanding of conversion, a possible anti-supernatural bias, and the accessibility of the higher faith stages to orthodox Christians.

If those who hold to orthodox Christianity, that is, having an *evangelical* faith *content*, are potentially excluded from the higher faith stages, then what does that *content* include? How can this *content* be compared with Fowler's

faith Stage 5 *structure?* These and other questions of methodology are addressed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPING AN EVANGELICAL
BASIS FOR CRITIQUE

Critiquing *Conjunctive Faith* presents a formidable
challenge. Evangelicals express concern because it *appears*
to them that Fowler has allowed his biases to exclude all
who hold traditional views of Christian orthodoxy from the
higher faith stages. Two questions of methodology arise
from this concern.

The first question pertains to the method of compar-
ing two disparate concepts, *structure* and *content*. Though
some of Fowler's critics accused him of importing *content*
into the higher faith stages, still he insists that the
primary feature of faith development is *structure*. Evangel-
icals see their *content*, however, excluded from Fowler's
supposedly universal *structure* of faith Stage 5. Can evan-
gelical *content* critique faith Stage 5 *structure*? If so,
how?

If content *can* critique structure, then the second
question of methodology asks "which content?" To answer
this question, the essentials of evangelical faith *content*
are extracted from the systematic theologies of four conser-
vative Christian theologians. Although evangelical faith

content is marked by a diversity of opinion, the "basic" theology of evangelicalism is remarkably uniform. The four conservative viewpoints establish a viable reference point for further interacting with *Conjunctive Faith*.

The Critique Process

Fowler, following the lead of his structuralist mentors, argues that *content* and *structure* differ as concepts. Yet evangelicals sense that a "grid," inherent to the *structure*, exists at the entrance to faith Stage 5. Only points of view in substantial agreement with the theologies of Tillich, Smith, and H. R. Niebuhr pass freely through this grid into the realms of *Conjunctive Faith* and beyond, assuming, of course, that all the other "non-offending" prerequisites, including the appropriate psycho-social age stage, cognitive, and moral development[1], have been satisfied. Is this grid of exclusion real or imagined? In Chapter 2, some possible answers were suggested, but only in terms of clarifying Fowler's position.

One test would be to formulate a *content* of evangelical theology and "strain" it through Fowler's *structural* grid. In other words, once a theology had been sufficiently defined to form a reliable point of reference, then "it" can

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[1]This is not to suggest that evangelicals would experience any less philosophical difficulty at the door to stage 3 (level 5 and beyond) of Kohlberg's moral development scheme.

enter into dialogue with this grid of exclusion and "ask" it questions. From the results of this dialogue, the grid can be analyzed. Is it rigid, or flexible? If flexible, then how much so?

Someone might ask, "Why go the long way around--why not ask Fowler himself?" The opportunity existed to do this very thing on at least two occasions. On the first occasion, in connection with a 1986 Christianity Today interview, the question was never raised nor answered, at least in print. In the second instance, when the "question" was raised at the 1987 N.A.P.C.E. convention, Fowler's answers, though outwardly affirmative toward evangelical participation, were vague and raised more questions than were answered.[2] Fowler's *direct* responses to evangelicals, printed and verbal, are insufficient, prompting those who are interested to find alternative answers.

This would be a daunting task were the subject matter not limited to the doctrines where the *content* was "most likely" to interact with faith Stage 5 *structure*. For this purpose, drawing from the collective wisdom of theologians, Chafer, Berkhof, Buswell, and Erickson, evangelical *content* is described. Two key doctrines, the *inspiration of scripture* and the *literal, historical resurrection of Christ*

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[2]Fowler, N.A.P.C.E. Conference, Part II #3.

are established as representative of the evangelical posi-
tion. The doctrine of *inspiration* demonstrates that evan-
gelicals have an objective reference point outside of per-
sonal experience. The doctrine of the literal, historical
resurrection of Christ is the embodiment of orthodox Chris-
tianity and directly confronts Tillich's notion of
idolatry.[3]

Much has already been said of the "odd couple"
arrangement of *structure* and *content* and how they could
possibly critique each other; i.e., an apples and oranges
situation. One intriguing, but previously unexplored,
aspect of the critique process suggests, however, that the
two might not be so different after all. Fowler, responding
to critics, corrects them by saying, ". . . [They have]
failed to recognize my insistence on the "structuring power"
of the *contents* of faith."[4] If Fowler's *structure* of *Con-
junctive Faith* was "shared" by the *content* of Tillich,
Smith, and H. R. Niebuhr, then ultimately the discussion can
be reduced to comparisons of two differing *contents*, i.e.,
Fowler's and evangelicals. Though the terms *structure* and
content will continue to be used because of their consisten-
cy with Fowler's own terminology, it will be two sets of
contents that are compared in Chapter 4.

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[3]Tillich, <u>Dynamics of Faith</u>, 52.

[4]Fowler, in <u>Faith Development and Fowler</u>, 284.

In the following section, evangelical theology is distilled from representative theologians, focusing on the doctrines of *inspiration* and the *resurrection*, and presented as a reference point for dialogue with faith Stage 5.

Essentials of Evangelical Content

What constitutes evangelical *content*? In what ways does it differ from what has already been said concerning Smith, Tillich, H. R. Niebuhr, and, by extension, Fowler? Davis offers a definition of evangelical theology:

> Evangelical theology can be defined as *system-atic reflection on scripture and tradition and the mission of the church in mutual relation, with scripture as the norm.*[5]

Davis, in this short definition, identifies a key issue of evangelical theology. As opposed to other theological view points, for the evangelical, *scripture* is the *norm*. This definition is already in conflict with some stated tenets of *Conjunctive Faith* that were previously noted as positing a person's *experience* of the truth as the norm. The issue at stake, then, is the *objective* nature of truth. The doctrines of the *inspiration* of scripture and the *historical and literal* resurrection of Christ build expressly on a foundation of *objective truth*. Theologians Berkhof, Buswell, L. S. Chafer, and Erickson provide the standards of

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[5]John Jefferson Davis, <u>Foundations of Evangelical Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), 43.

reference for establishing an evangelical point of view.[6]

The Doctrine of Inspiration

The doctrine of the inspiration of scripture is, to many, the touchstone of orthodoxy. Evangelicals consider scripture to be a reliable and objective reference point. Fowler looks to a "transcendent reality," yet clings to the idea that claims of truth reside in the *experience* of the individual.[7] Evangelicals differ. *Inspiration* affirms that the Word of God tests the truth claims of the individual, not the other way around.

Buswell advocates the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible. He begins by focusing on the word "inspiration." Arguing that the word "spiration" better conveys the meaning of the idea that scriptures are "God breathed," Buswell provides the following definition:

> We define [inspiration], therefore, as the work of
> the Holy Spirit of God in causing the writers of
> the Scriptures to give forth the Word of God with-
> out error. The writers were inspired in the sense
> that the Holy Spirit worked through them. The
> writings are inspired in the sense that they are
> the product of the work of the Holy Spirit through

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[6]The "truth" of evangelical theology is *not* being tested in this chapter. The point is to establish *what* constitutes evangelical theological *content* as it might relate to *Conjunctive Faith*.

[7]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 187.

the writers.[8]

Buswell further refines the statement by adding the implications for "plenary, verbal" inspiration, which he asserts as the position "maintained" by orthodox theologians:

> This means that what the Bible says, when correctly understood grammatically and in its historical setting, is absolutely true in the sense that the meaning of every word is true.[9]

If this is indeed the evangelical position, then it represents a "non-negotiable" when *Conjunctive Faith* is being discussed. An inspired Bible gives the evangelical an objective referent to test truth claims *outside* of personal experience.

Chafer verifies the essential nature of *inspiration* to evangelical theology. He asserts that the authority of the Bible is to be assumed by the theologian. He writes:

> Though as an apologist the theologian may be called upon, as occasion may demand, to defend specific truths which belong to the domain of his distinctive science, and though among the doctrines which he defends is that of the authority and trustworthiness of the Sacred Writings, he is not primarily engaged with the critical task of proving the inspiration and divine character of the Scriptures, but rather in the arranging and exhibiting the positive truth the inspired Scriptures set forth.[10]

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[8]J. Oliver Buswell, <u>A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion</u>, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1962), 184.

[9]Ibid., 186.

[10]Lewis Sperry Chafer, <u>Systematic Theology</u>, vol. 1 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 7.

Thus, the *primary* task of the theologian is to build on a firm foundation of Bible truth. Chafer's observation is important because it emphasizes that *inspiration* is an evangelical "given." Berkhof, agreeing in principle with Chafer, though affirming the *inspiration* in several instances did not deem it necessary to devote a special section to the doctrine.[11]

Erickson, as no surprise, fully endorses the doctrine of inerrancy.[12] Concluding a section on inerrancy, he summarizes his findings:

> In a world in which there are so many erroneous conceptions and so many opinions, the Bible is a sure source of guidance. For when correctly interpreted, it can be fully relied upon in all that it

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[11]Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939, 1941), 98. An example of Berkhof's affirmation of *inspiration* is found in his section on the work of the Holy Spirit.

[12]Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1983-1985), 222-223. Erickson differentiates, however, between *absolute*, *full*, and *limited* inerrancy. He defines *absolute* inerrancy as the position where all discrepancies *must* be explained. See Harold Lindsell, Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 165-166. *Full* inerrancy, Erickson's position, is identical to the absolute *position except that* full *inerrancy regards historical and scientific discrepancies as* phenomenal. *In other words, the differences result from* appearances *to the human eye, not from precise measurement.* Limited *inerrancy draws the distinction between empirical and non-empirical matters, that is between* faith *and* science. *Matters of* faith *relating to* salvation *are considered infallible, while matters of* history *and* science *are subject to error.* Two additional positions, *inerrancy of purpose* and *accommodated revelation* drift even further from the position of orthodoxy.

teaches. It is a sure, dependable, and trustworthy authority.[13]

Erickson's description here relates directly to the issues of *Conjunctive Faith*, namely the nature of truth and authority. If the Bible is both authoritative and true, then it challenges the grid of faith Stage 5.

Thus, the locus of authority and final arbiter of truth for the evangelical is scripture, not one's "experience" of the truth. If what scripture asserts to be true is to be taken as true, then it follows that the resurrection of Christ must be interpreted in a literal and historical manner. The same theologians also verify evangelical "ownership" of the doctrine.

The Doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ

A recent article in U. S. News and World Report refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as ". . . Christianity's most irreducible tenet."[14] Yet, many still attempt to reduce the "irreducible." An example of this is found in an article by Paul Maier:

> [At] a conference held at Oxford in September
> 1989, . . . A. Roy Eckardt, emeritus professor at
> Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, suggested that
> Christians abandon the resurrection of Jesus, since
> it "remai s a primordial and unceasing source of

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[13]Ibid., 240.

[14]Jeffrey L. Sheler, "The Last Days of Jesus." U.S. News and World Report, 16 April 1990, 46.

the Christian world's anti-Judaism."[15]
Conjunctive Faith is not exempt from this tendency to
"reduce" the resurrection. Tillich, a theological "shaper"
of faith development theory, would "relativize" it. To be
sure, Tillich's method, i.e., neutering the doctrine by
calling it a myth, differs from Eckardt's utilitarian argu-
ment, but the net effect is the same. Fowler seems to adopt
Tillich's words of "myth"[16] and "idolatry."[17] Why does this
bother the evangelical?

For Berkhof, the historical nature of the resurrec-
tion of Christ is of supreme importance. He notes four
doctrinal implications:

1. To impugn the truthfulness of the resurrection
is to call into question the veracity of the writers of
Scripture, ". . . since they certainly represent it as a
fact."[18]

2. The resurrection has evidential value. It
proved that Christ was sent from God and attested to the
fact of immortality. More important, according to Berkhof,

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[15]Paul L. Maier, "Who Killed Jesus?," Christianity
Today, 9 April 1990, 17.

[16]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 198.

[17]Fowler, in Faith Development and Fowler, 31.

[18]Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 349. This
represents another example of Berkhof's implicit recognition
of the authority of scripture.

the resurrection enters as a constitutive element
into the very essence of the work of redemption,
and therefore of the gospel. It is one of the
great foundation stones of the Church of God.[19]

3. The resurrection was the Father's seal on the
finished work of Christ, ". . . the public declaration of
its acceptance."[20]

4. By the resurrection, Christ became the Head of
the Church and the universal Lord apart from which there
could be no redemption.[21]

Berkhof could not call the resurrection an option,
much less a "myth." Understood rightly, the historical and
physical resurrection occupies a pivotal place in evangeli-
cal theology. It carries implications for the truthfulness
of scripture, the deity of Christ, the effectiveness of the
atonement, and the application of the atonement. In short,
Berkhof would agree that without the physical, historical
resurrection, there is no point in talking about Christiani-
ty at all.

Buswell concurs. Revealing an interesting interplay
between the doctrines of *inspiration* and *resurrection*,
Buswell writes:

> The great tangible vindication of the Christian
> doctrine of the resurrection [of the body], and
> indeed of the entire system of doctrine taught in
> the Scriptures, is the Resurrection of Christ, "the

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[19]Ibid. [20]Ibid. [21]Ibid.

best attested fact in ancient history."[22]

Buswell uses Christ's resurrection as evidence of a bodily

resurrection, dispelling any notion that he might be enter-

taining the "mythical" view of Tillich. Further, he shows

how the resurrection both verifies and is verified by scrip-

ture, linking the truthfulness of all doctrines of the Bible

to the resurrection.

Erickson's approach to the doctrine of the resurrec-

tion parallels Berkhof's weaving of *inspiration* into the

very fabric of his Systematic Theology. As opposed to

limiting his discussion of the resurrection to one section,

Erickson uses it as a unifying theme to many other doctrines.

As an example of this, Erickson engages Bultmann's view of

Geshichte that relegates the resurrection to the realm of

the experiential while detaching it from historical and

literal moorings. Erickson notes the discrepancy in Bult-

mann's logic:

> If our experience of the resurrection is real and
> permanent, the resurrection of Christ must be
> factual, permanent, and universal. Replacing or
> changing this doctrine in any way will be accompa-
> nied by a similar change in the experience. If we
> regard this experience [of the resurrection] as
> essential, abandonment of what the Bible affirms to
> be the cause will require finding some other basis
> to explain the result. . . . Whenever . . . our
> experience proves to be real and permanent, we can
> be assured that the biblical doctrine on which it

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[22]Buswell, Systematic Theology, vol. 2, 324.

is dependent is permanent as well.[23]

Here Erickson acknowledges the essential nature of the resurrection by appealing to its thorough integration into Christian doctrine. One cannot have the *experience* of Christianity without the *reality* of the resurrection. Tampering with the essential historicity of the resurrection is analogous to removing a can of soup from the bottom row of a supermarket display. The results are predictable.

In keeping with the tenor of this chapter, Chafer does not *defend* the resurrection, but in unmistakable terms, *declares* it. As an exponent of "Dispensationalism," Chafer claimed more doctrinal reasons (as opposed to apologetic reasons) for the resurrection than Covenant theologians.[24] He lists seven reasons for the resurrection:

> (1) Christ arose because of who He is, (2) Christ arose that He might fulfill the Davidic covenant, (3) Christ arose that He might become the source of resurrection life, (4) Christ arose that He might become the source of resurrection power, (5) Christ arose to be Head over all things to the Church, (6) Christ arose on account of justification, (7) Christ arose to be the First-Fruits.[25]

It is debatable how distinctive Chafer's reasons are, as

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[23]Erickson, Christian Theology, 123.

[24]Chafer, Systematic Theology, vol. 5, 231. Chafer suggests that Covenant theology regards the resurrection as something necessary only ". . . for His [Christ's] own personal convenience." He adds: "In other words, as viewed by Covenant theologians, there is practically no *doctrinal* significance to Christ's resurrection." (italics mine)

[25]Ibid., 245.

opposed to "Covenant" theologians. There is no debate, however, that Chafer views the doctrine of the resurrection as being indispensable. The resurrection of Christ cannot be dismissed, discounted, "symbolized," or severed from history without destroying orthodox Christianity. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church corroborates the evangelical position when it categorically states that if Christ is not risen from the dead, ". . . your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."[26]

Four theologians of evangelical persuasion have thus given testimony of affirmation to the doctrines of the *inspiration* of scripture and the literal, historical *resurrection* of Christ. Since the *inspiration* of scripture is unquestionably a major tenet of evangelical faith content and epistemology, then truth claims are tested from a point outside *individual* experience. Similarly, since the *resurrection* of Christ represents the very heart of orthodoxy, then it cannot be "relativized" without relativizing all Christianity, destroying the doctrinal basis for salvation, and removing all reasons for Christianity's existence. These two doctrines, because Fowler or his teachers have mentioned them, become the points at which evangelical Christianity will dialogue with *Conjunctive Faith*. What has

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[26] 1 Cor. 15:17 NKJV (New King James Version).

been learned, therefore, about the methodology to be used in the critiquing of faith Stage 5?

Summary

The *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith* represents a direct challenge to evangelical Christianity because its philosophy implicitly excludes orthodox Christians, despite Fowler's comments[27] to the contrary. Like a grid placed over the opening, concepts of the *idolatry of literalism* and the limiting of truth claims to *individual experience*, if taken at face value, potentially block entrance to the higher faith stages by evangelicals.

The difficulty of critiquing *Conjunctive Faith* was exemplified by its form as *structure*, while the main evangelical issue was *content*. How then was *structure* to be evaluated by *content*? This was answered in two ways. First, evangelical Christian *content* would be defined to establish a reference point from which to dialogue with the *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith*. If the *structure* would not permit certain *content*, it would be so noted. Second, since according to Fowler, structure is shaped by content, then part of the process, at least, is *content* critiquing *content*.

Finally, representative evangelical *content* was

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[27]Fowler, <u>N.A.P.C.E. Conference, 1987</u>, Cassettes.

defined, based on the agenda set by Fowler's definition of faith Stage 5. Two doctrines implicitly attacked in Fowler's definition of *Conjunctive Faith* were the *inspiration* of scripture, and the literal, historical *resurrection* of Christ. The systematic theologies of four orthodox Christian theologians were combed, and the results of this inquiry established the two doctrines as non-negotiable elements of evangelical theology, and therefore usable in the critique of *Conjunctive Faith*.

Conjunctive Faith is critiqued by evangelical doctrinal *content*, specifically, the *inspiration* of scripture, and the literal, historical resurrection of Christ, in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

CONJUNCTIVE FAITH EXAMINED

Can evangelical doctrinal *content* fit into the *structure* of Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith*? Chapter 2 defined and analyzed Fowler's concept of the *structure* of faith Stage 5 while Chapter 3 presented both a methodology and a representative evangelical doctrinal *content*. This chapter juxtaposes the two.

The dialogue commences by emphasizing points of agreement, i.e., those areas of thought where evangelical *content* lacks discernible conflict with *Conjunctive Faith's* *structure*. This "agreement" section, therefore, clarifies the issues by enumerating items that are common denominator to both sides.

Equally important, the following section places a spotlight on the dissonances created when two apparently opposed systems collide. The conflict *implicit* in the definitions and analyses of Chapter's 2 and 3 are here made *explicit*.

In the last section of the chapter, the results of the agreement/disagreement sections are summarized and an evangelical reworking of Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith* is proposed, using Stages of Faith as a

guide.[1]   Allowing that there are several attractive features
found in *Conjunctive Faith*, this reworking of the definition
hearkens back to Fowler's original premise that faith devel-
opment theory represents the *structure* of faith, not its
contents, and is universal in character.   If there can be a
Stage 5 Buddhist or a Stage 5 atheist, however infrequent
Stage 5 individuals might be found at all, then why *not* a
Stage 5 evangelical Christian?   The reworded definition
suggests a way that evangelicals can enter the realm of the
higher faith stages without sacrificing the essential nature
of their faith *content*.

   Conjunctive Faith has much to commend itself to
evangelicals.   Despite the generally pessimistic outlook of
Chapter 3, faith Stage 5's attractiveness will be explored
in the next section.

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Areas of Evangelical Agreement
with *Conjunctive Faith*

</div>

   As evangelicals progress toward spiritual maturity,
using the Fowler paradigm as a measuring stick, several
Conjunctive Faith descriptions can be seen as common ground.
Among the phrases found in Fowler's summary of the central
structural features that permit evangelical participation
are:

   1.   ". . . *the integration into self and outlook of*

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[1]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 197-198.

much that was suppressed or unrecognized in the interest of Stage 4's self certainty and conscious cognitive and affective adaptation."

2. *". . . the critical recognition of one's social unconscious--the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like."*

3. *"What the previous stage struggled to clarify, in terms of the boundaries of self and outlook, this stage now makes porous and permeable."*

4. *". . . this stage is ready to spend and be spent for the cause of conserving and cultivating the possibility of others' generating identity and meaning."*

5. *"It . . . sees the divisions of the human family vividly because it has been apprehended by the possibility (and imperative) of an inclusive community of being."*[2]

Some of the phrases, as mentioned above, require qualification before total agreement is settled. Further, other evangelicals might add or subtract phrases, so the list is suggestive, not conclusive. Still, these five phrases commence the dialogue. For simplicity, they will be referred as "phrase One," etc.

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[2]Ibid. for the preceding five phrases.

Phrase One, for example, constitutes a statement of continuing individual growth. Unless an individual categorically rejects new personal insights gained from the experience of "life," this would be a difficult statement to fault. Applying the previously established criteria, phrase One requires neither the relativizing of truth (as regards the truth claims of scripture), nor the abandonment of any key doctrine. Conversely, phrase One describes the kind of growth possibly experienced by Job. Put in other terms, the individual knows both themselves and God better, resulting in a movement away from "self" and "sin" to God. If Stage 5 can accommodate this evangelical adaptation, then agreement exists.

Phrase Two requires more qualifiers than the previous phrase due to the presence of the word "myth." As long as "myth" does not refer to the essentials of orthodox Christian doctrine in the sense that Tillich[3] applied the word, then generous room for agreement is present. Like phrase One, a desirable style of growth is indicated. Evangelicals aware of the aims of Christian sociology will recognize the thrust of this phrase; the challenge to transcend one's culture. Rather than negating orthodoxy, phrase Two confirms bible verses such as, "Do not love the world or

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[3]Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, 51.

the things in the world."[4] For the evangelical, both this
verse and <u>phrase Two</u> would differentiate between *cultural*
Christianity and *biblical* Christianity.

Though outwardly suggesting the "relativity" of all
truth, <u>phrase Three</u> could just as well refer to the "rela-
tivity" of *some* truth. This is an important distinction,
since Christians are enjoined to remember the limited nature
of their knowledge as opposed to the unlimited nature of
God. Sell acknowledged this positive aspect of *Conjunctive*
Faith:

> Truth, even biblical truth, for the mid-lifer, may
> not seem so clear, so plain. He realizes that
> reality is not so easily bottled up in words. . . .
> Although the truth has been revealed, it is not
> understood in precisely the same dimensions as it
> will be known when "we shall see Him as He is."[5]

Sell cautions that "Fowler goes too far . . . ," in his
relativizing of truth.[6] If one's *knowledge* of God were the
only item considered *relative*, evangelicals would have fewer
arguments to *Conjunctive Faith*. As it is, objective propo-
sitional *truth* concerning God is relativized along with an
individual's ability to *know* God.

<u>Phrase Four</u>, if applied to evangelicals, would be a
restatement of the idea of *individual worth*. Donald Poster-
ski, in his book <u>Reinventing Evangelism</u>, catches this

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[4]1 John 2:15a.

[5]Sell, <u>Transition</u>, 141.   [6]Ibid.

thought as he describes ministry to international students.

Speaking of those who are the "ministers," he writes:

> They help find apartments, give city tours, stand
> in registration line, interpret what is meant by
> strange sayings and generally cultivate the art of
> helping people feel comfortable in a foreign land.
> Their acts of love and service are not a set-up for
> Bible study, retreats and prayer meetings. They
> are acts of unconditional love for the sake of
> lifting the level of life in the name of Christ for
> people who have specific needs.[7]

Posterski's summary represents a departure from other evan-

gelism books that generally view individuals as *prospects*,

not as human beings made in the image of God.

Erickson also supports as *evangelical* the assertions

that "the human is valuable" and that the image of God

". . . means that there is a dignity to being human."[8] It

might be argued that talk of human worth and dignity based

on the image of God has been less than abundant in some

conservative circles. However, the comments of Posterski

and Erickson are reassuring on the subject. With phrase

Four the nature of truth is not under attack, nor are the

touchstone doctrines of *inspiration* and *resurrection*.

Suggesting that the person who lives out *Conjunctive Faith*,

does so by enhancing the human identity and meaning of

others, Fowler has merely identified an item, admittedly

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[7]Donald C. Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism: New
Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today's World (Downers
Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 157.

[8]Erickson, Christian Theology, 516.

dusty, already on the evangelical agenda.

Evangelicals resonate with phrase Five not because
they agree with its implied assumption that all roads lead
ultimately to God, nor because they perceive of some cosmic
universal meta-religion, that supposedly transcends the
bounds of all other religions, but because they yearn for
and see the possibility of relating to all Christians beyond
the human limitations of denomination, race, culture, na-
tionality, and level of income. For the evangelical, the
scriptural meaning of an *inclusive community of being* is
captured in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor
Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither
male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[9]

Admittedly, Fowler does not erect any fences
whatsoever around the word "inclusive," an omission of
intentionality consistent with his "relativizing" of truth.
Still, the evangelical redefinition of the inclusiveness of
Conjunctive Faith is offered to highlight the acceptable
portion of the principle. The comparative rarity of truly
"trans-cultural" and "trans-denominational" Christians (as
opposed to simply "non-denominational" or "inter-
denominational") illustrates this point.

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[9]The "you" of Galatians 3:28 is contextually limit-
ed to those in a living, spiritually regenerate, relation-
ship with Jesus Christ.

The "inclusiveness" of Billy Graham, so criticized by ultra-conservative Christians, might be considered illustrative of *Conjunctive Faith*, "evangelical" style. Also, J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, adopted Chinese speech and dress (a unique approach for the mid-1800's) so that he might communicate the Christ of the Bible, not the *culture* of his native England.

Evangelical "inclusiveness" requires boundaries of faith *content*, but not at the expense of human dignity and worth, mentioned in <u>phrase Four</u>. Accordingly, Galatians 6:10 emphasizes the aspect of inclusiveness as it reminds Christians: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all . . ." The verse continues, however, with a reminder of *content*: ". . . especially to those who are of the household of faith," that is, in the process of helping others, Christians should not neglect the "Body." In order for *Conjunctive Faith* "inclusiveness" to be acceptable, evangelical *content* cannot be abandoned.

In the preceding paragraphs, five phrases taken directly from Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith* were quoted to show areas of evangelical agreement with faith Stage 5. Some phrases could not be taken aboard without qualification. Yet, all phrases expressed ideals common to orthodox Christianity and Fowler. Most importantly, *after* qualification, none violated doctrinal norms established in Chapter 3. This portion of the evangelical analysis and

critique of faith Stage 5 affirms that certain aspects of *Conjunctive Faith* are potentially useful to conservative Christianity.

Other aspects of *Conjunctive Faith*, though, are not as hospitable. A discussion follows concerning these aspects.

Areas of Evangelical Disagreement with *Conjunctive Faith*

Much of what is to be addressed in this section has already been discussed, in general terms, in both Chapters 2 and 3. Specifically, there are difficulties that surround certain statements in Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith*. The philosophical and theological *content* of these statements potentially shapes the *structure* of faith Stage 5. These statements, therefore, if taken at face value, might prevent evangelical participation in the higher faith stages. To determine if this condition actually exists, the evangelical *content* that was established as a norm in Chapter 3, will be compared with phrases from Fowler's faith Stage 5 definition. The following phrases[10] are the points of comparison:

1. "*Importantly, this involves a critical recognition of one's social unconscious--the myths . . .*"

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[10]All phrases taken from Fowler, Stages of Faith, 197-198.

2. *"Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions . . ."*

3. *"It generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of those who are the 'other.'"*

4. *"The new strength of this stage comes in the rise of the ironic imagination . . . a capacity to see and be in one's or one's group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality."*

5. *"Its danger lies in the direction of a paralyzing passivity or inaction, giving rise to complacency or cynical withdrawal, due to its paradoxical understanding of truth."*

6. *"Stage 5 can appreciate symbols, myths and rituals (its own and others') because it has been grasped, in some measure, by the depth of reality to which they refer."*

In a fashion similar to the "agreement" section, some of the above mentioned phrases require qualification prior to assessing the level of disagreement. Further, other evangelicals might add or subtract phrases, so again, the list is suggestive, not conclusive. For simplicity, the statements also will be called "phrase One," etc.

The issue of "myth" is raised by phrase One. Chap-

ter 3 established evangelical doctrinal criteria of the
resurrection of Christ and the inspiration of scriptures.
Neither criteria can remain valid if, when termed
"mythical," it means the content that they claim to be true
is, ir fact, empirically false. To hide behind supposed
non-verifiability, and assign Bultmann's designation of
"Geschichte" provides nc legitimate alternative, as Erickson
noted.[11] Though doctrines are inevitably partial explanations
of the truths to which they refer, nonetheless, evangelicals
hold that the truth expressed still constitutes objective
truth. Any attempt to suggest otherwise, specifically
referring to the word "myth," represents a point of disa-
greement.

When speaking of the truth in *apparent* contradic-
tions, as in phrase Two, evangelicals could accept, for
example, that some "errors" of scripture merely represent
apparent contradictions. Similarly, the Bible itself is
alive to paradox. Jesus indicated such things like living
by dying, leading by serving, and receiving by giving.
Proverbs 26:4-5 contain the paradox: *"Do not answer a fool
according to his folly* (lest you also be like him) . . .
Answer a fool according to his folly (lest he be wise in his
own eyes)" (italics and parenthesis mine). Yet each "para-

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[11]Erickson, Christian Theology, 123. See discussion
in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

dox" is explained by context. If Fowler means by "paradox" and "contradiction" that adequate explanations of all areas of life are not *yet* available, evangelicals would agree. They look to future revelations, in this life or the next, for future resolutions. However, if "truth" itself is suggested to be ultimately "contradictory," then another point of disagreement exists. At least phrase Two *does* contain the term "apparent."

Phrase Three's difficulty belongs both to Fowler's definition, and to Krister Stendahl's quotation used for illustration. If by "vulnerability to the strange truths of others" Fowler means establishing a dialogue that informs and, at times, corrects the *practices* (as opposed to *principles*) and traditions of one's own group, then some evangelicals, at least, would agree--assuming they were experiencing *Conjunctive Faith.* Content, as in the doctrines of the resurrection and the inspiration of scriptures, would not be at stake with such an understanding.

Stendahl's suggestion that true ecumenism is not complete unless an individual is vulnerable to ". . . conversion to the other's truth,"[12] exceeds the bounds of orthodoxy since conversion involves, in Fowler's words, ". . . changes in the *contents* of faith" (italics

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[12]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 186.

Fowler's).[13] Fowler, immediately after Stendahl's asser-

tion, calls it "Stage 5 ecumenism."[14]

"Paradoxically," Fowler attempts to clarify the

issue by asserting that the very ability to be open and

vulnerable comes from ". . . confidence in the reality

mediated by [a *Conjunctive Faith* individual's] own tradition

and the awareness that that reality overspills its media-

tion."[15] This preceding reference provides the surrounding

context for a previously mentioned quotation concerning

Stage 5 individuals making their experience of truth the

principle by which other claims to truth are tested. Fowler

concludes the paragraph by stating that the person of *Con-*

junctive Faith ". . . assumes that each genuine perspective

will augment and correct aspects of the other, in a mutual

movement toward the real and the true."[16] On the one hand,

Fowler would have the reader believe that all faith content

is relative. On the other, he would see "vulnerability"

moving individuals toward the "real and true." One might

ask Fowler, "If one is left adrift in relativity, how is one

expected to recognize the "real and true?" Also, "If it

were possible to recognize, and subsequently incorporate the

"real and true" into one's tradition, as Christianity claims

to have done, would not the new content be called *relative*

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[13]Ibid., 281.   [14]Ibid., 186.   [15]Ibid., 187.

[16]Ibid.

again?" This represents and endless circle of reasoning for which Fowler does not offer any answers.

Assuming then, that Fowler quotes Stendahl with approval, then evangelicals would reject a Stendahl-defined Stage 5 ecumenism. Phrase Three is therefore an impediment to evangelical participation in *Conjunctive Faith.*

The implication that faith *conten+* is completely relative also finds itself embedded in phrase Four. Attempts to reconcile this statement with orthodox Christianity would strain credulity. If one were to translate the generalities of this phrase into Christian specifics the resulting definition of evangelical Christian faith would suggest that Christians (who are exercising *Conjunctive Faith*) should celebrate Easter (arguably Christianity's most powerful meaning), knowing all the while that the resurrection is *relative, partial* and inevitably *distorts* their apprehension of God. In short, the resurrection becomes a necessary "impediment" to an individual's view of God. Such a concept would require Christians on Easter to state with their lips "Christ is risen," while thinking in their minds, "what a distortion of the truth." If this situation represents the type of *paradox* that Fowler had in mind, then evangelicals cannot suppc¬t this aspect of *Conjunctive Faith.* Phrase Four does not pass the muster of orthodoxy.

At this juncture, the arguments against phrase Five

have already manifested themselves. The issue with <u>phrase</u>
<u>Five</u> does not lie in the "passivity" clause, but in the
words "paradoxical understanding of truth." Though repeti-
tive, evangelicals cannot accept <u>phrase Five</u> if *content* is
sacrificed on the altar of "paradoxy."

   <u>Phrase Six</u> presents a "paradox" similar to that of
<u>phrase Four</u> since Fowler argues for both relativity and
reality in the same phrase. Evangelicals, in their nascent
adaptation of sociological disciplines, are beginning to
understand the extent to which their organizations or denom-
inations use *symbols* or *rituals*. The word "myth," however,
emerges again as an obstacle. The argument against it
appears above in the discussion of <u>phrase One</u>. The state-
ment of paradox, though, occurs in the words, ". . . the
depth of reality to which they refer."[17] As in the discus-
sion of <u>phrase Four</u>, Fowler wants to posit reality from a
position of relativity, when, if the reality *were* apprehend-
ed, it would be termed *relative* as if its mere possession by
humans rendered it contaminated beyond remedy. Like the pot
of gold at the end of the rainbow, one is ever reaching for
reality, only to find it perpetually beyond the grasp. And,
since the definition *Conjunctive Faith* prohibits the posses-
sion of even a portion of truth, then evangelicals will find
faith Stage 5 not only unattainable, but undesirable as

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   [17]Ibid., 198.

well. Hence, the term "myth" does not find a home in the evangelical doctrinal lexicon, and phrase Six is found wanting.

Conjunctive Faith's dependence on the relativity of truth, particularly its insistence that the "deepest meanings" of faith groups distort their apprehension of reality, renders faith Stage 5 inaccessible and inappropriate for evangelicals. Evangelical disagreement is rooted in the inability to maintain necessary doctrinal *content*, such as defined in Chapter 3, while trying to fit into the *structure* of *Conjunctive Faith*. *Content* from Fowler and his "significant others" formed a grid of exclusion as exemplified in the above six phrases. Without substantial modification, the two *contents* cannot coexist. Since evangelicals reject attempts to have their *content* modified, despite charges that they are "idolizing the literal,"[18] then the definition of *Conjunctive Faith* would need to be modified were faith Stage 5 to include orthodox Christianity.

In the section to follow, a synthesis of *Conjunctive Faith* and evangelical doctrine is proposed as a partial solution to the dilemma.

Conjunctive Faith: An Evangelical Synthesis

The first section of this chapter noted extensive

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[18]See Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, 52-54.

areas of agreement with concepts presented in faith Stage 5.

Yet, presuppositions, importing relativizing *content*, have

narrowed the entrance to *Conjunctive Faith*. The acceptance

of one type of content has excluded another. Some might

question if this "exclusion" were absolutely necessary. Can

faith Stage 5 withstand a rewording that limits the impact

of the offending presuppositions?

The following paragraphs present an evangelical

attempt to define *Conjunctive Faith*. Fowler's own words are

used as much as possible. Changes to his original wording

are italicized, omissions are marked with s̶t̶r̶i̶k̶e̶o̶u̶t̶ type:

> Conjunctive Faith involves the integration into
> self and outlook of much that was suppressed or
> unrecognized in the interest of Stage 4's self-
> certainty and conscious cognitive and affective
> adaptation to reality. This stage develops a
> "second naïveté" (Ricoeur) in which symbolic power
> is reunited with conceptual meanings. Here there
> must also be a new reclaiming and reworking of
> one's past. There must be an opening to the voices
> of one's "deeper self." Importantly, this involves
> a critical recognition of one's social
> unconscious--the [m̶y̶t̶h̶s̶,] *ideal* images and preju-
> dices built deeply into the self-system by virtue
> of one's nurture within a particular, religious
> tradition, ethnic group or the like.
>
> Unusual before mid-life, Stage 5 knows the sacra-
> ment of defeat and the reality of irrevocable
> commitments and acts. What the previous stage
> struggled to clarify, in terms of the boundaries of
> self and outlook, this stage, *in terms of tradi-*
> *tions and practices*, makes porous and permeable.
> Alive to paradox and the truth in *apparent* contra-
> dictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in
> mind and experience. It generates and maintains
> vulnerability to the strange truths of those who
> are "other," *while remaining confidently rooted in*
> *the reality mediated by its own tradition.* Ready

for closeness to that which is different and
threatening to self and outlook (including new
depths of experience in spirituality and religious
revelation), this stage's commitment to justice is
freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious
community or nation. And with the seriousness that
can arise when life is more than half over, this
stage is ready to spend and be spent for the cause
of conserving and cultivating the possibility of
others' generating identity and meaning.

The new strength of this stage comes in the rise of
the ironic imagination--a capacity to see and be in
one's or one's group's most powerful meanings,
while simultaneously recognizing that *though the
meanings, the revelation and the transcendent
reality to which they refer are true, one's under-
standing of them is relative, partial, and some-
times distorting.* Its danger lies in the direction
of a paralyzing passivity or inaction, giving rise
to complacency or cynical withdrawal, due to its
relative paradoxical understanding of truth.

Stage 5 can appreciate symbols, [myths] and rituals
(its own and others') because it has been grasped,
in some measure, by the depth of reality to which
they refer. It also sees the divisions of the
human family vividly because it has been apprehend-
ed by the possibility (and imperative) of an inclu-
sive, *yet pluralistic*, community of being. But
this stage remains divided. It lives and acts
between an untransformed world and a transforming
vision and loyalties. In some few cases this
division yields to the call of the radical actuali-
zation that we call Stage 6 [italics, brackets and
strikeout type mine].[19]

Despite the relative paucity of changes, the italics

and ellipses amend Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith*

in a way that allows evangelical *content* to remain intact.

The revision excises the "word" myth and highlights the

difference between truth, which is absolute, and understand-

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[19]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 197-198.

ing of truth, which is relative. This allows evangelicals to retain critical doctrines and their understanding of truth established representatively by Chapter 3. Finally, the word "pluralistic" was added to the last paragraph because of the potential implications for a homogenized, universal religion. Pluralism allows all religions, including orthodox Christianity, to coexist without asking that they give up claims to exclusivity or requiring them to "homogenize" with traditions that are diametrically opposed in content. In other words, the dignity intrinsic to each group is preserved without prejudice.

Conjunctive Faith, as described by Fowler, though having many attractive features, cannot be appropriated for wholesale use by evangelicals. However, by carefully reviewing its tenets and the presuppositions that undergird faith Stage 5, an evangelical need make only a few necessary amendments and omissions to *Conjunctive Faith*'s description to render it acceptable, useful, *and* desirable.

Summary

Can evangelical *content* fit into the *structure* of Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith*? The answer, provided in this chapter, is "yes, with qualifications."

The first section contained an analysis of five phrases taken directly from Fowler's own words. Evangelical agreement, with only limited qualification, was shown, empha-

sizing the potential usefulness of faith Stage 5 and the immediate application of some of its precepts.

Disagreements fatal to evangelical participation in *Conjunctive Faith* were diagnosed in the second section. In a method similar to that adopted in the agreement section, six phrases were reviewed and determined to be largely incompatible with orthodox Christian *content* as defined by Chapter 3. Neither the doctrine of the inspiration of scriptures nor the resurrection of Christ would have been allowed to enter faith Stage 5 intact. Since the necessity of these doctrines to evangelical faith *content* was demonstrated in Chapter 3, removing them for the sake of entering faith Stage 5 is unacceptable.

Still, not wanting to dismiss all *Conjunctive Faith*, a harmonization of faith Stage 5 was proposed in the third section. Evangelical concerns were resolved by strategically placed changes and omissions in Fowler's description of *Conjunctive Faith*, resulting in a synthesis acceptable to evangelicals. The revised description allows evangelicals to retain necessary doctrinal *content* of their faith while now being allowed to enter the once forbidden realm of the higher faith stages.

Chapter 5 elaborates upon the conclusions and explores their implications. Special emphasis is placed upon application to the ministry of the U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The logical flow of this thesis has been, first, to
unwrap and analyze Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith*,
then establish a basis for evangelical critique, and final-
ly, engage faith Stage 5 in dialogue with the doctrines
established in Chapter 3. In this chapter of conclusion,
the findings of the previous chapter are, (1) expanded to
find implications for both Fowler and evangelicals, and (2)
applied to both evangelical ministry and pluralistic min-
istry.

The results of comparing *Conjunctive Faith's struc-
ture* with the evangelical *content*, though somewhat predict-
able, still clarifies the issue of "acceptability." If
faith Stage 5 must be accepted as an "all or nothing" propo-
sition, keeping intact not only Fowler's words, but the
meanings of those words carried over from their original
authors, then evangelicals do not find the welcome mat at
the door to *Conjunctive Faith*. Additionally, the entrance
fee, i.e., "reject the literal, bodily resurrection of
Christ and the inspiration of scripture" amounts to a virtu-
al renunciation of historical, orthodox Christianity. Not
only is the price too high, it renders faith Stage 5 unde-

sirable and unusable to the evangelical. This, however, is not the whole story.

Evangelicals who take the time to rummage through Fowler's descriptions, can find several significant and potentially useful points not requiring the forfeit of their doctrinal soul as the price of acceptance. The ability to consider one's *grasp* of the truth as *partial* and *relative* is both commendable and realistic. Simply, therefore, admitting that one does not have *all* the answers, represents a healthy corrective without requiring one to regard *all* answers in one's possession as relative. These are precepts endorsed by *Conjunctive Faith* and evangelicals.

Since evangelical *content*, like that established in Chapter 3, cannot be discarded, the situation remains a standoff--unless Fowler's description can be modified. An attempt to do this constituted the final section of Chapter 4. The resulting amendments and omissions were few, but critical. The final product allows orthodox Christians, without compromise, to experience the openness, paradoxy, irony, and new self-awareness contained in *Conjunctive Faith*. Acceptability to evangelicals, though, does not necessarily equate with acceptability to Fowler. Without the benefit of an immediate response from Fowler, this lingers as an open question.

If the conclusions of Chapter 4 have added a new and legitimate dimension to the discussion of *Conjunctive Faith*,

what implications can be drawn? The following section explores implications of a modified faith Stage 5 description for both evangelicals and Fowler.

Implications

Having proposed a modification of Fowler's faith Stage 5 description, this next step involves assessing the fallout of such a proposal. Beginning with evangelicals, the implications of acceptance or rejection are discussed.

For Evangelicals

Evangelical Christians, if they so desire, can completely reject or ignore the results of faith development research. The reasons given might include, as previously mentioned, Fowler's anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions,[1] or arguments similar to those given in Chapters 3 and 4. In fact, the general dearth of evangelical response to Fowler could indicate not only rejection or indifference, but that many are simply unaware of the *existence* of his research.

Yet, Fowler's scheme has attracted the attention of many prominent psychologists, structural-developmentalists, theologians, and religious educators. The effects of this are already being felt. For example, a survey (based largely on Fowler's research) by the Gallup organization, called

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[1]Kiesewetter, review of <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 31-32.

Faith Development and Your Ministry[2] was distributed to all active duty U. S. Navy Chaplains in preparation for a series of conferences on "spirituality." It contains survey responses to questions inspired by faith development research. Whether one agrees with faith development theory in general, or *Conjunctive Faith* in particular, is not the issue. However, ignorance, even by default, threatens the possibility of evangelical dialogue with a large segment of the religious population. Even if evangelicals were to reject Fowler completely, at least certain segments of the evangelical community, conversant with the theory, could offer a reasoned account of their position, to keep lines of communication open.

Unconditional acceptance of *Conjunctive Faith* by evangelicals is not a tenable position. Unfortunately, there are some who might espouse Fowler's concept of *Conjunctive Faith* without critical examination. The net effect of such an action could eventually undermine truth claims for evangelical doctrines. The key issue here is doctrinal and epistemological consistency.

The other option, acceptance of evangelically-modified *Conjunctive Faith*, provides an opportunity to enjoy

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[2]Faith Development and Your Ministry: Report based on a Gallup survey conducted for The Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada (Princeton: The Princeton Religion Research Center, n.d.).

the watermelon without having to swallow the seeds. This is
not to suggest that the proposal contained in Chapter 4 is
the only wording option. Others may wish to scrutinize
Fowler from different angles. Yet, this proposal enables
the orthodox Christian to maintain a dialogue with faith
development research and make use of that which is helpful.
As discussed in Chapter 4, there may be several areas worthy
of immediate application, or that might warrant further
study. Some applications to evangelical ministry are dis-
cussed later in this chapter.

Implications do not affect evangelicals exclusively.
Should Fowler continue to define *Conjunctive Faith* in a way
that excludes adherents of historic Christianity?

For Fowler

Faith development theory is marked by frustrating
inconsistencies, exemplified by Fowler's description of
faith Stage 5. Fowler asserts that faith development theo-
ry, because of its emphasis on universal *structures* of
faith, can make comparisons across a wide variety of *content*
differences.[3] However, evangelicals are excluded from
Conjunctive Faith because of *content*. Fowler, agreeing with
H. Richard Niebuhr, talks about "depth of reality" and
"transcendent reality," yet evangelical claims that certain

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[3]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 99.

manifestations or doctrines are accurate, though perhaps partial, are dismissed out of hand.[4] Fowler spoke kindly to evangelicals at the N.A.P.C.E conference, and outwardly welcomed them to the rarefied atmosphere of *Conjunctive Faith*. Nonetheless, he did little to explain what he meant when he said "Conjunctive Christian," effectively keeping the door to faith Stage 5 locked.[5]

Conjunctive Faith, among its many virtues, promotes a "controlled" pluralism, or so it seems. Fowler, not wanting to endorse unconditional "sheer" relativism, goes far to negate what some might take to be a homogenizing tendency in faith Stage 5, stating that it is *not* a "wishy-washy neutrality."[6] But the exclusion of evangelicals because of faith *content* and the "imperative of an inclusive community of being" suggests otherwise.[7] One cannot retain "confidence" in the reality mediated by one's own tradition, and remain open to "conversion" by others.[8] Not unless Fowler opts to call this dichotomy one of *Conjunctive Faith*'s paradoxes.

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[4]Ibid., 198. See discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[5]Fowler, <u>N.A.P.C.E. Conference</u>, cassettes C1924, 1925.

[6]Fowler, <u>Stages of Faith</u>, 186.

[7]Ibid., 198.   [8]Ibid., 186-187.

Pluralism, in the sense that all religions have the
right to exist and make virtually whatever claims they wish,
represents a Constitutionally guaranteed American fact of
life. Dykstra and Parks, in support of Fowler, observe:

> Finding a way to make sense of the meaning and
> dynamic of faith in the light of the fact of plu-
> ralism and the inadequacy of relativism is central
> to the point of faith development theory.[9]

Fowler's theory, in the name of pluralism, does not protect
evangelical faith *content*. Dykstra and Parks also comment:

> It is simply not possible in our world to be satis-
> fied with exclusivistic understandings of faith
> that are incapable of comprehending the power and
> richness of other religions and the maturity in
> faith whose beliefs and traditions differ from our
> own.[10]

Fowler, following Dykstra and Parks, apparently does not
believe that those who maintain an "exclusivistic" under-
standing of faith are "capable" of positively comprehending
the religions of others. In doing so, Fowler fails his
standards of *Conjunctive Faith* by not "comprehending" for
himself the power, richness and faith maturity of evangeli-
cal Christians, whose beliefs and traditions evidently
differ from his. Faith Stage 5, despite its claim to open-
ness, fosters its own "exclusivistic" understanding of
faith. Unless modified to incorporate the type of pragmatic

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[9]Parks and Dykstra, ed., Faith Development and
Fowler, 4.

[10]Ibid., 3.

"constitutional" pluralism that affirms the right of all faith groups to define their own *content*,[11] *Conjunctive Faith* defines itself out of existence.

The implications suggested by this section can be summarized by the words of *Conjunctive Faith*--readiness for "significant encounters with other traditions than its own."[12] Though not all evangelicals can or will accept even a modified version of faith Stage 5, they can still be conversant with its tenets, appreciating its strengths, offering helpful corrections to counter perceived deficiencies, when appropriate. Fowler, on the other hand, though perhaps unwilling to agree with evangelical doctrine, can open the door to *Conjunctive Faith* by allowing that "exclusivism" is not always accompanied by ignorance or "close-mindedness." In short, there is much to be learned from the "other."

The conclusions of this thesis, besides the above *implications*, have *applications* to ministry within the evangelical constituency, and in the larger context of "pragmatic" pluralism. These applications are discussed in the section that follows.

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[11]The Constitution, in theory, "protects" the *contents* of all groups without endorsing any. On the one hand, "Sheer" relativism "regards" all groups as equal; a value judgment. The Bill of Rights, on the other hand, "protects" all groups equally, making no value judgments.

[12]Fowler, Stages of Faith, 186.

Applications

Conjunctive Faith, if modified, promotes new levels
of cooperation and openness between faith groups without
requiring any to relinquish truth claims or doctrinal *con-
tent*. Applications of these findings are discussed in two
contexts, evangelical ministry and pluralistic ministry.

Evangelical Ministry

What would a *Conjunctive Faith* evangelical ministry
look like? This question naturally presupposes the accept-
ance of the faith development concept as a guide. Yet, if
an evangelical were to accept this, what difference would it
make? Two areas will be explored briefly, the preaching and
teaching ministry of the local church, and "cooperation"
with "others."

Even the mention of *Conjunctive Faith*, or faith
Stage 5 assumes that this stage is somehow more adequate
than previous stages. Pastors or church leaders probably
would desire to have the "median" faith stage of their
congregations to be as high as possible. Since, following
Erikson's path of psycho-social development, some of faith
development is age-dependent, these leaders would want the
various departments of their organizations to encourage age-
appropriate curriculum. This curriculum would reflect
cognitive, moral, psycho-social, and faith development

concerns. Further, the pastors or church leaders, might want to devise a measuring instrument to gauge faith development of the congregation; sermons and programs could then be structured accordingly.

Beyond the walls of the church, attempts to integrate faith development have already begun. Courses at evangelical seminaries are being taught incorporating much of Fowler's research.[13] Sell's previously referenced book, Transition, represents an evangelical restatement of several of Fowler's themes, in a way that suggests principles for ministry to all ages. His remarks concerning "mid-lifers" speak directly to the issues of *Conjunctive Faith*.[14]

Conjunctive Faith leaders would seek to break down artificial walls of prejudice and paranoia regarding the beliefs of "others." They would emphasize that real evangelism involves a display of authentic Christianity lived out in the world for others to see (and admire). Other humans would be viewed as "persons," not as evangelistic "targets." Evangelism would not be deemphasized, but *Conjunctive Faith* leaders would accentuate *demonstration* and *invitation* over *confrontation*. They also would help their people to recognize the difference between 20th century culture, and biblical Christianity, with special attention

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[13]Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, for one.

[14]Sell, Transition, 139-147.

to values and attitudes.

Conjunctive Faith also would have an effect in the area of "cooperation." At a minimum, "intra-Christian pluralism" could diffuse the argument that "cooperation" necessitates "agreement," particularly where issues involve practices, not principles. Many in the world see Christians as hopelessly divided and bickering amongst themselves. A *Conjunctive Faith* attitude could heal some of the unnecessary divisions.

In the arena of inter-faith dialogue, evangelicals are only beginning to reclaim ground lost in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies. An attitude inspired by faith Stage 5 could facilitate inter-faith conversations to promote mutual understanding rather than mutual suspicion. Dialogue does not guarantee nor require agreement. Topics of mutual understanding in the areas, for example, of family, drugs, poverty, racism, or social injustice might promote solutions of mutual benefit. A *Conjunctive Faith* attitude would understand that protecting the constitutional rights of other groups is tantamount to protecting one's own rights.

These descriptions have far from exhausted the potential differences that might be observed in an evangelical with *Conjunctive Faith.* Yet, they express a commitment to justice, love, openness, and mutual understanding, quali-

ties that are the hallmark of faith Stage 5, without requir-

ing evangelicals to alter the *contents* of their faith.

Applications for pluralistic ministry are equally important,

particularly as they relate to the ministry of the U. S.

Navy Chaplain Corps.

Pluralistic Ministry

The motto of the U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps is

"Cooperation Without Compromise." This motto reflects, in

an idealized form, the pragmatic pluralism guaranteed in the

"Bill of Rights" and the goal of modified *Conjunctive Faith*.

Again, the word *pragmatic* recognizes the existence of many

faith groups, some with truth claims or claims of exclusivi-

ty, diametrically opposed to other groups, without asking

these groups to drop faith *content* distinctives.[15]

The chaplain of *Conjunctive Faith* is ideally

"equipped" to meet the challenges of pluralistic ministry

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[15]Within the Navy, religious freedom is written into
regulations and instructions at all levels in the chain of
command. In the rare instances when the Navy finds it
necessary to abridge the right of an individual to practice
certain traditions, it is because the principle of "good
order and discipline" is violated. Practices such as the
use of "peyote" by native Americans, sacrifices, animal or
human, or various rites involving the use of sexual rela-
tions, are examples of what is excluded by "good order and
discipline." Conversely, special consideration is given to
those whose religions require special attire or diets. The
wearing of Yarmulkes in uniform is permitted. Likewise,
dietary needs of Muslims during Ramadan receive favorable
attention. For Christians, though active proselytizing is
discouraged, bible study groups and prayer meetings are
encouraged.

within the Armed Forces. Often called upon to minister to
those who are "other," the chaplain in faith Stage 5 sees
through the religious or non-religious language and recog-
nizes the individual behind the words. The chaplain, though
ready to share from a deeply felt faith tradition, respects
the desires of the individual and is ready to facilitate the
person's religious needs in a manner consistent with the
individual's religion. This usually involves directing the
person toward appropriate resources, or simply providing
words of counsel or encouragement as appropriate. If asked
concerning their beliefs, *Conjunctive Faith* chaplains are
not reticent to share, but recognize the difference between
sharing to help and proselytizing to "win."

Chaplains of *Conjunctive Faith* work well with each
other. While maintaining a firm grasp of the truth claims,
rituals, practices and traditions of their group, they
respect and learn from the faith *content* of other chaplains.
In an atmosphere of mutual respect, they are free to regard
fellow chaplains as colleagues in ministry, not
adversaries--even those with competing or equally exclusive
views of faith *content*. They understand that when one group
prays in Hebrew, or in Latin, or "in Jesus Name," it does
not mean that they are necessarily excluding others, but
fulfilling an important part of their faith tradition.
Conversely, groups who pray in the manner of their faith

tradition understand the impact of their prayers on other groups, and are sensitive to "inappropriate" times for sectarian prayers. Chaplains of *Conjunctive Faith* also recognize the point at which one group's notion of "inclusiveness" infringes upon the faith *content* of others. They understand that "unity" at the expense of faith *content* has fundamentally violated their motto of "Cooperation Without Compromise."

Chaplains of *Conjunctive Faith*, presumably familiar with the principles of faith development theory, are attuned to the faith stages represented in their various constituencies. At a base chapel, like *Conjunctive Faith* pastors, they will seek ways to enhance the faith development of those in attendance, from children of service members, to recruits, to senior officers, through to retirees. These chaplains are aware of the *structure* of faith presented in their messages, Sunday/Sabbath school curriculum, and mid-week gatherings. Also, shipboard or hospital chaplains with heavy counseling schedules, incorporate faith development into their pastoral skills, maintaining the balance between presenting a credible witness of their faith, and affirming the right of others to their *content*.

Actually, the "idyllic" picture of the U. S. Navy Chaplaincy is, with few exceptions, the model of ministry

officially endorsed.[16] Because of its similarity to "modi-
fied" *Conjunctive Faith*, it was presented as an actual
application of what faith Stage 5 could be--if evangelical
content were not under siege. The ideal does not necessari-
ly represent the reality. Chaplains are persons, themselves
in various stages of faith development. The extent to which
the functioning of the Chaplain Corps represents the ideal,
differs from chaplain to chaplain, from command to command.
Conscious attempts to incorporate and "reach" the ideal are,
however, ongoing. It therefore represents an organization
with a *Conjunctive Faith* structure; in some ways, a model
for others to observe.

Summary

The conclusions contained in this chapter centered
on the implications and applications of the findings of
Chapter 4. If Fowler should consider modifying the *content*
of *Conjunctive Faith*, it would not be solely for the sake of
evangelicals, whose doctrines stand in jeopardy of a faith
Stage 5 description left intact. Rather, if *Conjunctive
Faith*'s description were modified, it also would be for the
sake of internal self-consistency and for "pragmatic" plu-
ralism.

Implications from these findings were aired, first

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[16]The model is also presumed to represent accurately
the Army and Air Force Chaplaincies.

as they related to evangelicals, then to Fowler. Evangeli-
cals, though not free to accept unconditionally an unmodi-
fied *Conjunctive Faith*, could either accept or reject a
modified description as they saw fit. Either way, maintain-
ing lines of communication with faith development research
was seen as a beneficial option, considering the current
wide acceptance and application of Fowler's theory.

Implications, as they related to Fowler, centered on
the inconsistencies of faith Stage 5. Fowler's attempts to
promote a "modified" pluralism, devoid of "sheer" relativ-
ism, and consistent with the thoughts of H. Richard Niebuhr,
resulted in a reverse form of "exclusivism." While trying
to retain "vulnerability" to the strange truths of "others,"
Fowler remained remarkably closed to the "strange" truths of
evangelicals. This resulted in an affirmation of the
"relativism" he sought to avoid, and a denial of the open-
ness he sought to promote. Modifying *Conjunctive Faith* to
accommodate the "pragmatic" pluralism of the U. S. Constitu-
tion was thought to be a legitimate option.

The findings of Chapter 4 were then *applied* to
evangelical ministry and to pluralistic ministry. Essen-
tially based on the question "What difference would it
make?", a picture was drawn of the evangelical pastor or
leader exhibiting *Conjunctive Faith*. Emphasizing the open-
ness, justice, love, paradox, and other aspects contained in

faith Stage 5, the evangelical leader of *Conjunctive Faith* would have a distinctive personality and a distinctive program. Differences would be seen in evangelism, sermons, counseling, and services. Evangelism, for example, would not diminish, but would emphasize "authenticity." Attitudes toward those of other denominations and faith traditions would reflect respect and understanding, not suspicion and contempt. Cooperation, wherever possible without denial of doctrine, would be the new order of the day.

Applications in a pluralistic setting found a centering image in the ministry of the U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps, whose motto is "Cooperation Without Compromise." The ideal relationships between chaplains and their constituencies and between each other as chaplains illustrated the concept of "pragmatic" pluralism as might be defined in a modified description of *Conjunctive Faith*. It was noted that chaplains can practice a form of pluralism compatible with faith Stage 5, while having their right to an individual faith *content* protected. Though the image drawn was admittedly "ideal," the fact that it represented the present policies of the U. S. Navy Chaplain Corps indicated that *structure* for the ideal was already in existence, and workable.

Conjunctive Faith, a description of a universal aspect of faith *structure*, is part of Fowler's faith development legacy to the world. It represents a unique contribu-

tion to the study of human beings as they attempt to relate to transcendent realities as they perceive them. The con-clusions expressed in this thesis, in essence, bear witness to the *positive* impact of Fowler's research. These conclu-sions also suggest that evangelicals might have been unnec-essarily barred, philosophically, from access to the higher faith stages, as defined by Fowler. Yet, some conservative Christians, perhaps after mid-life, knowing the "sacrament of defeat," are living out, even now, the evangelical ver-sion of *Conjunctive Faith*. They didn't ask Fowler's permis-sion. No one bothered to tell them that they were "unable" to comprehend the power, richness, and faith maturity of "others," yet retain an "exclusive" view of faith. They just did it.

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