



The Role of Faith
in the Lives of Canadian Reformed Young People
in the Fraser Valley

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

John and Hugh grew up together. Their families were very similar, they went to the same school and the same church. During their teenage years they drifted apart. John got into playing music with a small band, Hugh studied to become a teacher. John just couldn't get along with the adults in his life, Hugh developed relationships that generally were mutually fulfilling. John lost interest in the Christian faith but Hugh became more and more committed to applying his Christian faith in every part of his life.

Hugh still wonders what happened. Why was it that he embraced, in his own way, the things his parents believed while John discarded them? Was it something that their parents did? The adults in their lives were largely the same. Did the pastor and teachers approach the two boys differently? Was there a reason why those adults appeared less credible to John than to Hugh? What is it that gets people to believe some things and not other things? Do leaders understand what has all happened when people decide to follow, or not follow, their leadership?

Background and Context

Over the years it has become apparent to me that adults play an important role in the development of a child's moral framework. Children adopt their parents' view of life for a while, but over time, they choose their own framework of what they believe to be good principles to guide their own lives. It is important for adults to realize which factors play a role in this development.

Within ethnic and religious communities there is a strong emphasis on raising the children in the ways of the parents. Through ceremonies, celebrations, special activities, special use of time and resources, modeling, and instruction children are integrated as members of a special community. But, at some point in time these children must decide whether or not to take on that community identity. Their decision is a concern of others. Their families and community are keenly interested to know what is involved in this decision.

Much has been written about cognitive development, physical development, and emotional development. In comparison, the fields of moral development and faith development have received little attention. This is surprising because values and beliefs form the framework within which all other development takes place. The development of this framework has an impact on the development of the whole person. Children continually observe and assess the values held by the adults around them. They develop basic beliefs based on which they either embrace or reject those values.

This study researched the role adults play in the faith development of children. It focused on the effectiveness of the methods and approaches which are commonly followed by parents, pastors, and teachers. It tried to give account for the personal influences these adults may have in the process of faith development. I highlighted some of the discussion in the literature of the stages of faith development. I briefly tried

to cross reference them with the various teaching methods.

Research Focus

The purpose of this research project was to describe the major influences associated with the development of a faith system in children. It sought to develop understanding of the role of adults and it attempted to discover the significance of the various methods they use.

The central question for the respondents was what role adults had played in their faith development. What do they site was the influence of parents, pastors, and teachers like? What obstacles do they report they encountered on their journey to faith commitment?

The analyses and practical suggestions in this study may be an important help to individual leaders. They were written with the intent to help in reflection, self assessment and adjustment of goals. The benefit of this study for the community, in this case especially the church community, lies largely in the evaluation of common methods and the suggestion of new ones that are consistent with and appropriate for the children's developmental stages.

The questions which this research tried to answer were arranged from the general to the specific. Initially, the respondents were asked how they perceive their faith commitment has come about. They were then asked to focus on people who played a role for them and on what the influence of those people was.

The subsequent questions asked, more specifically, about the involvement of parents, pastors and teachers. At the end, the respondents were asked to reflect on things they believed were obstacles to development of a committed faith.