

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research regarding faith development has a number of sensitivities and risks that can jeopardize the credibility of the work. The appropriateness of 'teaching' a faith and the validity of a faith development taxonomy are not matters of general agreement. A brief discussion of the literature is beneficial in establishing the bias and basis of this research project.

Taxonomies

The theory of hierarchical development through subsequent stages assumes that development always must progress through certain stages, from very basic to very complex. The first taxonomy of educational goals was published by Bloom in 1956. In subsequent years a great deal of study was done regarding hierarchical stages of cognitive development and affective development. The taxonomies gained prominence in the educational field and many subsequent approaches to teaching have been based on them. Kohlberg (1969) developed a hierarchy of stages of moral thought and action. He believed that people respond to moral questions based on patterns of reason. He organized these patterns of moral reasoning into three main groups. From the very lowest level of operating based on punishment and obedience, to the highest level of principled orientation he maintains a mechanistic framework that is exclusively concerned with the form of a person's moral reasoning, not the content.

Stages of faith development

A hierarchy of stages of faith development goes further than Kohlberg's taxonomy. It not only deals with the form of moral reasoning but it also accounts for life

experiences and influences other than one's own motives and desires to bring about a moral decision. Important work in this area has been done by Fowler and Westerhoff. Fowler's publication in 1986 is by many considered the standard work about faith development. He identifies seven stages of faith through which persons progress during their life. The first stages are a process of finding self and establishing one's own identity. The latter stages describe the situations in which the person learns to give from himself and serve. Fowler distinguish seven stages which he calls primal faith, intuitive - projective faith, mythic - literal faith, synthetic - conventional faith, individuative - reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith.

Primal faith is a prelanguage disposition of trust and loyalty toward the environment of those who provide food, warmth, and security.

Intuitive - projective faith, the second stage, is a style of meaning-making which starts with the onset of language use. It is an emotional and perceptual ordering of experiences during which the child looks at events from the perspectives of her own security. It is characterized by a great appreciation for stories that represent the powers of good and evil unambiguously. At this stage a child tries to link symbols and images of representation of deity with, either, feeling of terror and guilt or, love, ecstasy and unity with God.

Fowler describes faith at the third stage as mythic - literal because it is strongly oriented to narratives and stories as the principal means of constructing and sharing meaning. This stage roughly spans the ages six through eight when a child has begun to understand cause and effect relations. Learning the stories of the groups and communities to which the child belongs provide her central way of establishing identity. She focuses on justice, equality and fairness and sees God as a stern, powerful but just parent or ruler who rewards people that do right and punishes people that do wrong.

A child enters the stage of synthetic - conventional faith when he begins to construct his environment in terms of the personal relationships (age 11 - 13). His central yearning is for inclusion. He will think of God as a friend and companion who knows him better than he knows himself. He experiences ambivalence between his growing independence and his dependence on others to sustain his identity and faith.

Individuative - reflective faith spans roughly the ages 14 - 20. The young person begins to critically examine the previous stages' tacit system of beliefs, values, and commitments. She takes a third person perspective by which she critically reflects on self and significant adults in order to help her develop newer, more independent relationships. She takes distance from the community of shared values, beliefs and life patterns to the extent that it will allow her to claim a new authority over her own life. All creeds, symbols and stories from her religious tradition are subject to analysis in order to give her some control of their meaning for her personally. Relinquishing the reliance on the authority of others is a difficult emotional process. It involves risk-taking and conflict. It causes feelings of guilt over "breaking faith" with her betters. She experiences the conflict between overconfident self and the desire for inspiration and guidance from others. At the same time she struggles with the awareness of her own dependence of things beyond her control.

The conjunctive faith stage follows at midlife. The adult is learning to have peace with "coincidences of opposites". There are apparent paradoxes in the faith which cannot be brought together eg: God's immanence and His transcendence, God's sovereignty over history and His incarnation and crucifixion. The young adult has no longer a confident clarity about the boundaries of faith and self but instead is adopting greater epistemological humility. This stage of faith is characterized by a willingness to learn more and understand better. The adult's faith is more receptive; it can balance

initiative and control with waiting and seeking. It has a strength that allows for open minded examinations and does not fear mutual dialogue. The adult is confident that dialogue can strengthen the faith, not erode it. He desires to become part of a larger movement of spirit of being.

At the universalizing faith stage the person himself is no longer the prime reference point from which the knowing and valuing of faith is carried out. There is a kind of identification with God's way of knowing and valuing other creatures. Whoever was first seen as enemy now come to be seen transformingly as God's children who must be loved radically and redemptively. This kind of valuing gives rise to non-violent opposition to injustices and outpouring of self to correct social conditions. The believer has developed a power of emptying self. In quiet and public ways he lives as if the Kingdom of God were already realized among us.

Westerhoff (1979) also identifies a number of stages but he prefers to think of them as distinctive styles. One style of faith is not better than another but rather they indicate a growth to maturity of faith. Westerhoff distinguishes four stages which he calls experienced faith, affiliative faith, searching faith and owned faith. His purpose for expanding on these stages is to make all who are in a position to teach and influence children become more responsive to the child's characteristics.

Experienced faith is the style of the child during preschool and early childhood. Experience is a foundation of faith: a person first learns Christ not as a theological affirmation but as an subjective experience. Experiences of trust, love, and acceptance are important to Christian faith.

Affiliative faith is typical during childhood and early adolescence. It is characterized by a need to belong, by a sense of authority and identity, and by the importance of the heart, the feeling aspect. The person with this style of faith seeks to

act with others within an accepting community that has a clear sense of identity.

Searching faith occurs usually during late adolescence. The adolescent with this style of faith feels a strong need to commit his life to persons and causes. He struggles with much doubt and critical judgment. In order to move from an understanding of faith that belongs to the community to an understanding of faith that is his own, he needs to doubt and question that faith. Experimentation is therefore very common.

It usually isn't until early adulthood that people move to owned faith. The movement from experienced faith and affiliative faith through searching faith to owned faith is what historically has been called 'conversion'. Conversion, gradual or dramatic, involves a major change in a person's thinking, feeling, and will: his behaviour and needs are obviously different. There is a desire to put faith into personal and social action. Typically, persons with owned faith want to witness to that faith in both word and deed. They struggle to eliminate any dissonance between their faith as stated in their beliefs and their actions in the world.

A number of authors have brought additional insights to this study of faith development. Vrijmoed (1993) emphasizes that faith is a matter of the whole person. It deals with the mind, the emotions and the will: head, heart and hands. Faith nurturing must pay attention to all of these parts of the person's being: the feelings of the child toward God and other people; the child's personality; his knowledge and insight in matters of the faith; his potential and his abilities. Experience is the most significant and fundamental form of learning. Later a child may 'image' that experience through the use of stories, and even later conceptualize it through the use of signs.

Up to age twelve, a child thinks in fairly concrete terms. He can only consider what he sees, hears, feels, tastes and smells. The meaning of words such as sin, grace, justification, etc. can only be explained by means of concrete examples. The child's

difficulty in thinking abstractly is the reason that most of a church service is beyond his grasp. Not only does he understand little of the Bible reading and sermon, also the words of the songs are generally too difficult.

The ability to think abstractly begins in early adolescence. Greater understanding of Biblical terms and concepts needs to be attained. Around age fifteen, reasoning skills are developed to such an extent that parts of sermons can be fairly well understood. The young adolescent learns to draw his own conclusions, and as a result he becomes able to form his own opinions and talk about them in discussions.

Stronks et al (1993) asserts that growth in faith itself is hard to explain. Understanding certain patterns of a life of faith will enhance the possibility of teaching in ways that broaden and deepen students' response of faith. She recognizes different characteristics of students' faith journeys through preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school age.

The preschoolers tends to think of God in literal terms. He needs affirmative experiences that help him to form positive attitudes about God, the Bible and worship.

The elementary school child has a great desire to learn about God and heaven. Rules are important to her and with it, conscience begins to mature. She appreciates rituals and participation in personal and specific prayers.

At the middle school level the student has a tendency to disregard anything that 'doesn't make sense'. It is therefore very important that he can see that his faith relates to the problems around him in the world. He wants his life to count, that is why it is important that schools plan and give him many opportunities to serve others. He is very idealistic but he often fails to connect what he believe to what he does. In his search for living according to his ideals he looks for models and heroes. It is important for him to have adults around them who live exemplary, healthy Christian lives.

The highschool and college aged student often goes through a long period of 'searching' faith. It is a time of doubt and critical judgment. The faith of her families now has to become her own. She realizes that she is in a personal struggle, that in a sense she stand before God alone. She critically examines the consistency of the walk and talk of the adults around her.

Parrott III (1993) writes about paths by which an adolescent looks for identity. He describes the significance of family relations, status symbols, 'grown-up' behaviour, rebellion, other opinions, idols, and cliquish exclusion. The adolescent is genuinely interested in religion. She questions religious concepts and beliefs not so much as a matter of doubt but rather as an honest investigation. The adolescent realizes that she needs to make her faith their own rather than that of her parents. She question because they wants to accept religion in a way that is meaningful to her. The adolescent struggle to move from childhood rules to her own moral principles as a condition of becoming an adult. Her moral thinking changes from concrete to abstract; from emotional to cognitive; from egoistic to altruistic, from concern with what is wrong to concern with what is right; from personal desires to respect for others.

Research projects dealing with faith development

A number of research projects have been undertaken to investigate faith development in young people. Blijdorp (1995) did some qualitative research with Middle School students. He comes to the conclusion that faith education emphasizes our limitations and dependence. The main limitation he sees is that we can teach head knowledge but we cannot instill faith; it is a gift of God. Adults are important in the process of faith development but God is the one who turns the heart. He points out that the experience of faith, the walk with God in the family must be credible and real, if the

child is to adopt it as a his own faith. The convictions of faith also have to permeate everything the adults do, or it will be seen as something separate from real life. The faith of the important adults in the life of a child must be obvious and joyful.

A study done by Moesker et al. (1997) focuses particularly on the youth of one church denomination. It combines elements of qualitative and the quantitative research in order to get a more complete insight in the thoughts and feelings of the young people. The study is intended as a tool for parents, church elders and teachers to help them in their communication with the young people in their trust. The authors conclude that young people feel that their parents' faith often lacks credibility, that many of the community's religious practices can not be validated in today's world. The young people want to feel that they belong in their community. They are strongly agitated by rules that are maintained legalistically without consideration for the situation of individual people. They can not validate a number of important liturgical aspects of worship. Personally they struggle much with the awareness of their own sin and the guilt of insufficient gratitude to God.

Stronks (1995) surveyed a large number of young people regarding the influence of their pastors. She suggests that churches focus on demonstrating that these young people are an important part of the church. She lists personal relationships, service activities, involvement in church life, developing sermons that address their level and needs, etc.

Research done by van der Ploeg & Wiersma (1984) among a group aged 15 - 25 indicates a period in the life of young church members in which they feel lost, removed from the church and the faith. This is largely because other things occupy their minds and nothing in the church attracts them. They speak of their aversion to things that don't seem to have any relevance, they express their disdain for adults who do not walk the

talk. At the same time they indicate that they often struggle with their faith and the practical implications of it in their lives. Pastors and elders seem to be too far removed from their world of experience to be of any influence to them.

The appropriateness of 'teaching' a faith

It is necessary to consider whether 'teaching' a faith is an appropriate thing to do. The values clarification movement of the seventies emphatically stressed the need to look at process only and to leave each person free to choose the content of her own faith. Gow (1996) not only disagrees with that, she attempts to prove that it is impossible. She emphasizes the difference between moral ideas and moral vision. Ideals are external concepts, objectives towards which one may strive. Vision indicates involvement and personal experience. An ideal can be dismissed as simply that. A vision cannot be dismissed because it is experienced, it is alive and personally compelling. Moral ideals can be taught, moral visions are 'caught'.

Thiesen (1993) observes that the charge of indoctrination is based on the assumption that religious nurture is opposed to the enlightenment ideal of liberal education. As such, it is always accompanied by a concern about a lack of students' autonomy and about the production of closed minds. Thiesen responds that it has not been proven at all that religious instruction per se produces closed minds. There is much evidence to the contrary. It has been proven that science is as irrational as religion, that both are based on values and beliefs that rest on unproven assumptions. Science instruction is as indoctrinating as religious instruction. Thiesen observes that all parents and teachers want to convince their children of a point of view, they all want them to adopt certain values. The Christian parent is not any different in this from the 'liberal' parent.

Thiesen cites studies that have proven that most charges of indoctrination are in the context of prejudice against the faith. Discussions of indoctrination are invariably coloured by strong anti-religious sentiments. As such, the deposition of the charge as well as the defense of it is often the fruit of indoctrination by those who oppose the religious nurture.

Methodologies used to help faith development

The methods that have been proposed to nurture the development of faith in people fall into two categories; those that deal with what leaders are like and those that focus on what leaders do. Anderson(1997) suggests that young people's conflicts usually relate to spiritual powers; confusion over deceit and truth; struggles over bitterness and forgiveness; problems of rebellion and pride; bondage to compulsive behaviours; and problems brought on by genetics and environment. Consequently, he emphasizes solutions that deal with relationships and the credibility of adults' instruction.

In a book about living with adolescents Peterson (1994) describes the parent as a partner in growth, not simply the person who introduces a child to an adult territory. Parents have to realize that they excel when they plunge into the process of growth, just as their adolescent children do, be it at different level. Such parents are in a vigorous Christian growth of their own and permit their children to look over their shoulder. They do their growing openly so that the adolescent children can observe, imitate, and make mistakes in the context of care and faith. The parents' main job is not merely to be a parent but to be a person.

Hoeksema (1998) instructs pastors regarding the manner in which to use sermons that speak to the whole person, not only to the mind or the feelings. He raises

the question whether pastors' methods of preaching are responsive to the individual characteristics of the hearers. He analyses some sermons that seem well structured yet leave the hearer largely untouched and distinguishes three aspects that should be present in a sermon in order to touch hearts and change attitudes.

Content wise the sermon should instruct and teach. This aspect speaks to the mind. The discourse should also form, encourage, comfort and correct. This aspect speaks to the heart. Hoekzema argues that a combination of these two aspect, carefully considered as goals of the sermon, should enable the hearer to apply with his own will what he has learned. But Hoeksema sees a third aspect beyond instruction and formation. The whole person needs to be addressed. That is the combination of mind, heart and will. This level no longer deals with the separate aspects of an mind, heart, will, but it deals with integrated, whole person. This whole person is one who can relate with other people and with God and who can function independently as a Christian in church and larger community.

The level most often overlooked and undervalued is the second, the one that addresses the heart. At this level, attitudes are formed and interests, values and norms are developed. Attitudes and values have cognitive aspects but at the core they are formed by feelings. Feelings develop somewhat because of a cognitive instruction but mostly because of a meeting, an experience.

A pastor must aim to give his hearers an experience, not only cognitive instruction. The hearers will recognize certain aspects that speak to their own lives. If the experience is a positive one, that will then also determine the attitude that is born from it. Through the preaching the hearer has to meet God. Faith does not consist merely of knowledge but it is a relationship of love for God.

de Bruijne (1998) describes the manner in which young children learn in order to

suggest inclusive approaches to worship services, sermons and ceremonies. Churches face two options, either segregation according to age characteristics (youth services) or adaptation of general worship services in order to become accessible to all age groups. de Bruijne argues that the Bible gives little direction regarding the practices of worship but does strongly indicate that children are part of the worshipping community. He suggests that the current worship practices in most traditional church communities are mainly a fruit of 18th century customs. The development of our culture and the improved insight into the characteristics of the child require a change of the current practices in order to make the worship more inclusive and meaningful for all members of the community. de Bruijne does not favour separate youth services because 'they merely postpone or increase the connection problem'.

de Bruijne list numerous practices, rituals, instructional methodologies which can help a child find a place within the communal worship service. The guiding principle is that children need to experience that they belong and that they participate in the learning and celebrating.

Tromp (1995) writes that one of the important reasons why young people miss their connection to the faith of their parents is that language is losing its communicative power. He suggests that the use of metaphors in every day situations can revive the communication and give meaning where meaning was lost. Tromp blames the 'tyranny of functional thinking' for our inability to express adequately what we feel, believe and experience. Functional thinking limits people to what can be recorded with the senses. It considers every non-sensory experience nonsense. This is in direct conflict with the traditional place of literature which finds its value in the power of imagination. As such it has been the great literary works that have helped us to make sense out of the things we see and find meaning in the reality of the common matters. Metaphors offer a way to

use the power of imaginative language to suggest meaning behind ordinary things. A metaphor casts a new light on a known subject. There are many situations in which abstract language falls short, where 'words fail to express' but metaphors successfully convey deeper understanding.

Blijdorp, M. (1995) argues that the introduction of concepts and theological constructs should not be considered before age nine. He believes that prior to that age, children are best served with Biblical narratives only. Yet narration must continue throughout because it expresses the experience of faith, not only the dogmas. At the grade six level children begin to ask critical and crucial questions about churches and lifestyles and Biblical concepts. The experiences of a child before his 14th birthday usually determine the general attitude he adopts toward faith and church. Consequently family, parents, school, church and peers are agents of great influence.

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