

FAITH AS KNOWING: A STUDY OF THE EPISTEMOLOGY IN FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY

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The general purpose of this discussion lies in the examination of the epistemological ground for the theory of faith development found in the writings of Dr. James W. Fowler, Emory University. Beginning with a discussion of Fowler's definition of faith, I will trace the concept of faith as knowing and valuing in Fowler's earlier works from 1973-75 and then analyze his more recent writings, 1977-79, in which faith-knowing finds root in Fowler's extension of cognitive-structuralist theory. It is my contention that Fowler's understanding of faith as knowing presents us with the promise of an ontology of self and an epistemology of knowing which avoids the problems of both traditional intellectualist and fiducial theories of faith.

I. The Early Writings

When we look to Fowler's definition of faith, we must distinguish between the earliest formulations of his thought from 1973-75 which rely heavily upon the writings of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Tillich and especially H. Richard Niebuhr and his more recent expressions. In these early writings faith is seen as a "dynamic set of operations, more or less integrated, by which a person construes his/her ultimate environment."¹ Faith "is that knowing or construing by which persons or communities recognize themselves as related to the ultimate conditions of their existence."² From these and other early descriptions flow the characteristics of faith as active, knowing, valuing, relational, communal.

In developing the idea of faith as an activity of knowing Fowler employed the "interactional epistemology" he derived from the cognitive-structural model of Piaget and Kohlberg. In their view knowing begins with a doing, "an acting upon, and interaction with objects and persons."³ Out of this interaction with objects or persons operations emerge which form the cognitive struc-

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¹James W. Fowler, "Faith Development and the Aims of Religious Socialization," in Gloria Durka and Joan-Marie Smith, eds., *Emerging Issues in Religious Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 6. Fowler's other early works include: James W. Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life-Maps* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1978); Fowler, "Faith, Liberation, and Human Development," in *Foundations* (Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary), Vol. LXIX (March-April, 1974); Fowler, "Stages in Faith: The Structural Developmental Approach," in Thomas Hennessey, ed., *Values and Moral Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

²Fowler, "Faith, Liberation and Human Development," 3.

³Fowler, "Faith Development and Religious Socialization," 8.

tures or patterned processes underlying knowing and committing. In this analysis Fowler emphasizes the constructing role of the knower but has yet to ask in what ways the act of knowing shapes the self of the individual. Knowledge remains that of objects (Piaget) and moral thinking (Kohlberg) rather than of persons.

Fowler does disagree with the approach Piaget and Kohlberg employ in relating to cognition and affection in the act of knowing. As Fowler notes: "Both claim that cognitive structures tend to dominate over the affective dynamics and that only the cognitive structures can serve as the basis for describing the sequence of developmental transformations which they call stages."⁴ In Fowler's view of faith as knowing "cognition (the 'rational') is inextricably intertwined with affectivity or valuing (the 'passional')," a relationship borrowed from the work of H. Richard Niebuhr, a seminal theorist in Fowler's thinking, and the subject of Fowler's dissertation.⁵

In addition to the knowing and valuing characteristics of faith, faith involves that mode of knowing and valuing which *relates* the individual to other realities. From Niebuhr Fowler also borrows the notion of the bi-polar and tri-polar dimensions of faith, what I would call Niebuhr's ontology of the relational structure of the universe. The bi-polar nature of faith refers to the interpersonal dimensions of relationships which involve mutual regard and fidelity. Without this basic level of faith, "human beings cannot become and maintain themselves as 'selves'."⁶ Community too is based upon relationships of trust, "covenants" among groups, between groups and government.

Yet this bi-polar dimension of human experience is itself rooted in the tri-polar nature of all relationships. We are related to one another in terms of our, often implicit, relationship to the ground of the relationship. Commitment to each other in a marriage relationship rests upon a commitment to an ideal or covenant of marriage. For Fowler, as for Niebuhr, this covenantal or "fiduciary" nature of relationships is rooted in our ultimate relationships to the Transcendent as the center of value.⁷

The triadic, fiduciary structure of reality which rests in a relationship to transcendent being and ultimate value center provides the key to the ontological basis of Fowler's thought. For "human beings are ontically shaped for participation and realization in their lives of this transcendent being, value, and power." This source and center in turn exerts "an attraction, a valence, a drawing into itself of our hunger for excellence of being."⁸ Although the wording is vague at this point, Fowler, through the scheme of Niebuhr's value theory, grounds his theory of faith as knowing in an ontology of the self. Faith in one sense denotes a state of being-in-relation.

⁴*Ibid.*, 8.

⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

⁶Fowler and Keen, *Life-Maps*, 18-19.

⁷*Ibid.*, 31.

⁸Fowler, "Faith, Liberation and Human Development," 10.

The dialectic between faith as knowing and valuing and faith as a mode of being-in-relation lies in the shaping, construing, imaging which faith undertakes in actual relationships to self, others and the Transcendent. "It is our operational images . . . of the character, power, and disposition of that ultimate environment toward us and our causes which give direction and reason to our daily commitments."⁹ Faith as knowing (meaning-making) brings us up against a reality, against Being, to which we *relate* through valuing (committing) which shapes the imaging of that Being. The imaging in turn shapes the valuing and committing. In the image of a "helical spiral" the knowing in faith presupposes being, and being to which the knower is related presupposes knowing, construing. Yet not as a circle, for faithing as process involves an enriched knowing of the field of the something-given, the Transcendent, while every expansion of field in valuing and committing gives impetus to another knowing.¹⁰

One final point relates to the development of the concept of "self" in these early writings. Certainly in faith knowing "the total self is involved." It is "a primary motivating power in the journey of the self," "a core element in one's character or personality."¹¹ However, it seems that the "self" referred to here is the psychological self; faith then takes on functional dimensions in establishing meaning and identity. The discussion has moved from the ontic self hinted at in the discussion of the triadic, fiduciary structure of reality (Niebuhr) to the self of developmental, and particularly structuralist, psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg. I believe this explains the frequent reference to faith functions in Fowler's writings. While I want to underscore the integration of ontic and psychological self Fowler has undertaken here, we need to note the differences and continue to look for the full ontology of self upon which faith knowing rests.

The reliance upon the cognitive-structuralist account of knowing also prevents Fowler at this point from an examination, later developed, of the ways in which faith as knowing shapes the knower. The Piagetian model, even in Kohlberg, develops a knowing of objects.¹² The focus rests upon the *acts* of knowing and valuing rather than the knower as subject, as ontic self.

A second and related conceptual problem emerges in the relationship between faith as knowing and valuing on the one hand and faith as being-in-relation on the other. Precisely what is the link here between being and knowing? That there is a dynamic interaction, a "helical spiral" involved Fowler has shown with great insight. But what precisely is the unifying principle? The answer to both these problems lies in Fowler's later explorations into the role of the imagination in faith-knowing.

⁹Fowler and Keen, *Life-Maps*, 21.

¹⁰My apologies to Ray Hart in *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 61-63, for borrowing his phrase and then welding it to my purposes. Yet the image aptly conveys what I believe Fowler is attempting to formulate.

¹¹Fowler, *Life-Maps*, 8, 25.

¹²Fowler, "Faith Development and Religious Socialization," 9.

II. Imagination: Ontology and Epistemology Linked

Three as yet unpublished articles serve as sources for the more extensive development of an ontology of self and epistemology of faith in Fowler's theory. The articles are "Faith and the Structure of Meaning," 1977, "Future Christians and Church Education," 1978, and "Moral Stages and the Development of Faith," 1979.¹³ What is central to all three studies is the dominant position imagination assumes in the faithing process.

In his definition of faith and the description of faith development theory, Fowler's language has shifted slightly from the Niebuhrian concepts of knowing and valuing. Thus faith is now "knowing and being," "dynamic, an ongoing process, an activity, a mode of leaning into and organizing the force field of life intuited as a whole."¹⁴ Thus the primary characteristics of faith are now two, faith as relational (ontology of self as being) and faith as epistemological. Looking at faith as relational, Fowler acknowledges the psychological contribution of Erik Erikson and others but rests the analysis upon the philosophical/theological analyses of Josiah Royce and H. Richard Niebuhr, himself influenced greatly by George Herbert Mead. Fowler rephrases his earlier analysis of the relational dynamic with greater emphasis upon the self and its self-apprehension in faith. Faith is then "an activity of knowing and being in which the self makes a bid for relationship to a center of value and power which is adequate to ground, unify and order the force field of life taken as a totality."¹⁵ The self becomes self in relation. The ontological ground of faith begins to emerge.

Fowler now explicitly addresses the epistemological dimension of faith. Faith "involves the composition (constitution) and interpretation of the persons, values, communities and images of ultimate environments to which they are related in trust (or mistrust) and loyalty (or disloyalty) in faith."¹⁶ While the structuralist sense of knowing views all knowing as a composing or re-inventing, a construction, its reliance upon Kantian analyses of theoretical and practical reason has not had to address the question of the knower as subject. Fowler has referred to this bias as "Cartesian rationalism and Kantian formalism."¹⁷

Fowler now addresses the question with new insight. Fowler first notes that Piaget and Kohlberg have failed to distinguish between a constitutive-knowing in which the identity or worth of the person is not directly at stake and that knowing in which it is. Thus in Kohlberg little attention is paid to the fact "that we build ourselves through choices and moral (self-defining) commitments."¹⁸

¹³Only "Faith and the Structure of Meaning" is not in private circulation at the present time. Cf. Fowler, "Faith and the Structure of Meaning," in Christiane Brusselmans, ed., *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Morristown, N.F.: Silver Burdett, 1980).

¹⁴Fowler, "Faith and the Structure of Meaning," 2.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷Fowler, "Faith Development and Religious Socialization," 8.

¹⁸Fowler, "Faith and the Structure of Meaning," 10.

Fowler then describes the shaping faith-knowing (and moral-knowing) involves for the knowing subject as subject. In faith-knowing "the constitution or modification of the self is always an issue." Thus not only is the known being constructed as in Piaget and Kohlberg "but there is also going on simultaneously an extension, modification or re-constitution of the *knower in relation to the known*." In contrast to what he calls the "logic of rational certainty" Fowler calls this related constitutive dimension a "logic of conviction."¹⁹ The logic of conviction qualifies the logic of rational certainty, re-contextualizes it.

Through the concept of "logic of conviction" Fowler is able to elaborate on the relationship between knowing and valuing. In faith-knowing the self "knows" itself and the neighbor in relation to an ultimate reality. Faith now is "that part of the total constitutive-knowing of selves in which they compose a wholistic sense or image of an ultimate environment." Those compositions then "derive unity and coherence by virtue of our attachments, our convictional investments, in power(s) and value(s) or superordinate significance."²⁰

Using the distinction between a "logic of rational certainty" and a "logic of conviction," Fowler describes the "aspects" of faith which are used in analyzing the "whole" of a person's faith. Although the concept of "aspects" was used in the earlier writings, it now becomes clear what the differences are between the three aspects borrowed from Piaget, Selman and Kohlberg,²¹ and Fowler's own contributions. Briefly, the "form of logic" (Piaget), "role-taking" (Selman), and "form of moral judgment" (Kohlberg) reflect the constitutive-knowing of objects, while Fowler's "bounds of social awareness," "locus of authority," "form of world coherence," and "symbolic functioning" all involve the constitutive dimensions of the knowing self as subject. The seven aspects as a whole, then, involve the integration of the logic of rational certainty and the logic of conviction.

Throughout this article Fowler refers to the psychological support and referents in relation to what he has described as the "epistemology of faith" and what I see as his ontology of self. This movement from the ontological/epistemological to the psychological is often confusing, although the interplay between the disciplines is at the heart of Fowler's work. From one point of view the ontology of the self and the epistemology of faith serve as ground for a psychological theory of ego development. Thus faith becomes an "aspect" of ego, and faith development is identified as ego development.²² With reference to ego, as in the earlier writings, faith serves important functions in ego development. Faith provides "orientation, hope and courage." Faith

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13-14.

²¹Robert Selman, Kohlberg's colleague, has developed the concept of social perspective-taking as a necessary but not sufficient, condition for moral development. Cf. Robert Selman, "Social-Cognitive Understanding," in *Moral Development and Behavior*, ed. Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), ch. 17.

²²Fowler, "Faith and the Structure of Meaning," 11.

“grounds sustaining strength, purpose, and experiences of shared commitment which bind the self and others in the community.”²³ While it is important to underscore this relationship between psychology and theology, the interplay distracts at times from the meaning of “self” upon which the theory rests.

In his earlier writings, Fowler relied upon the maturationist paradigm of Erik Erikson to work out the modifications of self in faith-knowing. This is especially apparent in “Stages of Faith” where the Ericksonian stages are utilized as one of the five categories, along with certain of the aspects described above, to analyze a faith “whole” or totality. This incorporation of a different development understanding never digested well. The “logic of conviction” now seems to provide a more adequate base for involving the passionate, affective domain of knowing in which the self is shaped, re-imaged in the act of faith-knowing. The incorporation of a “logic of conviction” within a structuralist view also allows for the full play of “regressive” movements of the psyche, transformation in consciousness, dramatic conversion as well as incremental growth in faith. These developments, essential to faith life, fall outside the logic of rational certainty.

Fowler’s 1979 article, “Moral Stages and the Development of Faith,” continues his analysis of the “logic of conviction” or “logic of faith” as he names it. In the first place Fowler insists and demonstrates in the article that the “logic of faith is more comprehensive than the logic of rational certainty.” Without a “logic of faith” a logic of rational certainty “alone cannot resolve ontological and axiological questions.”²⁴ More particularly for our later analysis, Fowler lists the tools of faith; faith employs “images and ontological intuitions,” relies on “historical and present experiences of disclosure and ‘revelation.’ ” Faith utilizes “the culture of myths, symbols and ritual.” Faith then “interrogates” these elements with “rational operations testing for sense and consistency.”²⁵

In the course of his discussion and in his analysis of the “logic of faith” the place of the imagination in faith-knowing receives a new emphasis. Thus faith is concerned with the “task of forming tacit or explicit coherent images of our action-worlds.” The imaging process begins in primitive images or “pre-images of felt ‘sense’ prior to words” and develops in a context of shared, social, constructed images. We rely upon or trust in “interpretative images” formed in concert with our reliance upon and trust in “the significant others who are companions or mediators in our acts of meaning construction.” If these “interpretative images” serve as the cognitive dimension of faith-knowing, then our “acts of interpretative commitment” which incorporate those imagings involve the valuing-affective dimension. Finally, as we have seen earlier, faith works in “wholes,” and the images “by which we

²³*Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴Fowler, “Moral Stages and the Development of Faith,” 23.

²⁵*Ibid.*

holistically grasp the conditions of our existence" Fowler calls "images of the ultimate environment."²⁶

The composing-knowing and valuing-committing which lie at the heart of Fowler's analysis of faith as activity are integrated in the imaging process. Moreover the definition of faith now sees faith as a "disposition of the total self" in which the self as knower is constructed, re-shaped, re-imaged as well as the other, the known.²⁷ The modification of the "object" does not occur without the simultaneous modification of the "subject."

In this article Fowler has not examined the role of the imagination. Rather in an article written a year earlier, "Future Christians and Church Education," we find his important understanding of the role of the imagination. Thus in his analysis of Jesus' proclamation, Fowler sees the gospel as a "gift to the imagination" because it "awakens our capacity to imagine the coming Kingdom of God." It gives us "images and heart" (knowing and commitment) "to compose a transcendent reality." The message was received only by those "with the openness to imagine." For Fowler "in a very real sense the power of the coming Kingdom of God . . . was and is a function of his hearer's imagination."²⁸

Borrowing from Ray Hart's analysis Fowler sees imagination as "the principal human organ for knowing and responding to the disclosures of transcendent Truth." In this capacity imagination is composed of three movements: 1) the break-up of old images; 2) the composition of new images; and 3) an acting in accordance with the new images of the whole. "Only when the risk is taken of committing one's life in response to a total new vision, can the imagination complete its work of *knowing*."²⁹ The article is an important link in Fowler's epistemology of faith-knowing, for it underscores the priority of images over concepts in faith-knowing and "locates" imagination as the "organ" of knowing in faith.

Summary

In this analysis I have attempted to show the development in Fowler's analysis of faith as knowing from a more descriptive and functional account of faith in the earlier writings to a more analytical ground of faith in the imagination. In the early writings Fowler relied upon Niebuhr's insight into faith as knowing *and* valuing and upon cognitive-structuralist analysis for an understanding of knowing as interactionist. In one sense the question at that time was how could the relational structuralism of Niebuhr serve as ground for the structuralist analysis of faith as developmental Fowler wanted to make? At one point, in much the same way as Kohlberg had "borrowed" Erikson to

²⁶*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁸Fowler, "Future Christians and Church Education," 14-16.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 19.

answer a problem in moral development, Fowler "borrowed" Erikson to incorporate the valuing, committing, passionate, unconscious dimensions of faith.

With the development of his key concept of a "logic of faith" or "logic of conviction" Fowler was able to retain the integrity of his epistemology of faith within a structuralist perspective. At the same time the "logic of conviction" gave new insight and understanding to the relational, fiduciary nature of the universe. An ontology of knowing self-in-relation, of being-in-relation emerged as the foundation for the epistemology of faith as knowing and mode of being-in-relation.

At the same time the particular mode of knowing which involved the interplay between cognition and affect became clear as the place of images and the role of the imagination were examined. Thus faith involves "attachments," "convictional investments," "interpretative images," "acts of interpretative commitment." Faith in addition is no longer only a "kind" of knowing or a "mode" of being-in-relation. Faith is now in the genus or category of "disposition," a word which connotes the traditional ontological understanding of will.

III. Faith, Imagination, and Will

For Thomas Aquinas faith "has certitude of the sort that exists . . . in the genus of affection;" "the knowledge of faith proceeds from will."³⁰ Pascal says: "We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart . . . The heart has reasons which reason does not know." For Bergson faith is a "genius of the will." "All affective and conative experience has its own understanding," according to John Macquarrie. And theologian Daniel Maguire analyzes faith as "an interpretive, affective, knowing act."³¹ For William Lynch, faith is "a great primal and primitive force that precedes or even constructs knowledge itself."³²

This emphasis upon faith as proceeding from will, as primal force, as disposition was present in Fowler's earlier writings but not developed there. Following the analysis of Ray Hart in *Unfinished Man and the Imagination*, to which Fowler alludes, we can analyze the will as the clue to the ordering power of the self. It is through will that we grasp ourselves in our very activities, although ourselves are not exhausted in those activities. *Contra* Descartes, Hart responds that only in modifying reality through will and in being modified "do I grasp myself as an existent being."³³

³⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Commentum in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Dist. 23, q. 2, a. 3, quoted in Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Choice* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1978) 87.

³¹Maguire, *The Moral Choice*, 88.

³²William Lynch, *Images of Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 35.

³³Hart, *Unfinished Man* . . . , 132, 136.

In relation to an ontology of self, then, our knowing is not just of a thing as it presents itself in its structure, "but the self as modified by its appearance or the thing in our transactions with it." In knowing there is response, and "primal response is an affair of the will."³⁴ In Fowler's analysis faith is rooted in such primal response.

Hart quickly points out the relationship between intellect and will in relation to the knowing which gives order to or constitutes the self.

. . . in elaborating the ontological order of the self, we cannot attend to mere rationality or intellect: neither a pure theoretical reason . . . nor a pure practical reason . . . It is true that will is not a surrogate of intellectual process or something merely under the dominion of intellectual process. But the relation between will and intellect cannot be an absolutely external relation. The activity of will has some expression in intellectual process, else reason could not mark its [the will's] structural phases . . . , issue directives to it, or receive directives from it.³⁵

If will is the ordering principle of our active being, then to be a self is to be ordered by the will toward a certain direction, a certain "finishing." Yet our lived reality is that of being "unfinished." It is through will as reference point for intentionality that we project our being toward the future.³⁶ And will in and through those projections involves imagination.

As ontological power imagination "intends, and extends, the realm of 'coming to be.' " "Stated abstractly, the domain upon which imagination opens is ontological incompleteness, being adorning, unfinished dominions whose finishing is not a matter of rightly reading a blueprint of formality."³⁷ Imagination is the mental mode of the will, establishing a range of perception and delimiting what counts for real evidence. Later Hart writes that imagination "is not alone a mode of cognition but also and fundamentally a way of being human. Imaginative being is accelerated being-toward, the projection of oneself toward his ownmost potency."³⁸

Hart's important and dynamic understanding of will and its mental power and mode, imagination, offers an important ground for Fowler's analysis of faith-knowing. Faith is a form of knowing different from theoretical and practical reason and emerges as the constitutive ordering of the self through its imaging process. Thus faith is a "disposition," or an inclination of will operating through images which construe, constitute the self and the other in relationships of "wholes." Faith involves a continual modification of the self and the world in which will through imagination provides more extensive understand-

³⁴*Ibid.*, 132-134.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 133, 136, n.47.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 143-45.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 135.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 116, 184.

ings (cognition) which involve more intensive commitments (valuing). In this sense a theory of faith development is a theory of ego development in terms of self as ego. However, faith development rests upon an understanding of faith as an ontological and epistemological journey of self and world in constitutive relationships.

There is one possible misunderstanding in Fowler's approach to faith-knowing which I would like to examine at this point. The emphasis upon faith as an activity, a doing, while an important counter to the view that knowing involves passive receptivity, could lead to the understanding that faith-knowing is something that we *do* as work. In the Kantian assumption that the knowing process cannot "intuit" anything, knowledge is concerned with comparing, examining, relating, distinguishing, abstracting, deducing, demonstrating—active, intellectual work.³⁹ However, there is also the knowing of contemplation, of receptivity, of intuition, of charged moments of understanding which emerge from the unconscious. By now in the analysis it should be obvious that Fowler's understanding of faith-knowing encompasses knowing as "acted upon" as well as "acting upon." This understanding emerges more completely in his discussion of the stages themselves, particularly of stages 5 and 6 in which the intuitive, a "second naivete," symbolic consciousness emerges to the fore.⁴⁰

IV. Perspectives on Faith

One final task remains—to situate Fowler's work in the general understandings of faith in Christian history. In his essay, "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relationship to Justice," Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J. analyzes the three main theologies of faith operating in contemporary Christian thought. He names these as the intellectualist, the fiducial, and the performative approaches.

Not surprisingly the intellectualist approach characterizes most of Roman Catholic understanding of faith as "illumination" or "assent." Faith is the inner light of the soul, the search for truth. From Dulles' perspective this approach to faith fails to develop an intense human concern since the primary focus is the "immediate relationship of the soul to God in a contemplative union that can best be achieved through detachment from the world."⁴¹

In the second or fiducial approach the accent is on the element of human trust. Here faith reaches in expectation of the future; faith verges upon hope. This view generally finds fertile ground in Reformation theology from Luther to Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Jürgen Moltmann.⁴²

³⁹Joseph Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 25ff.

⁴⁰Cf., Fowler, *Life-Maps*, and "Faith and the Structure of Meaning."

⁴¹Avery Dulles, S.J., "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relation to Justice," in *The Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 16.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 22-31.

While recognizing the important and positive points in these approaches, Dulles looks to the “performative approach” for a more adequate understanding of faith. The theoretical work in this understanding has emerged in various liberation theologies. Rather than elaborate upon Dulles’ analysis of this approach, I will point to the key concepts used here in relations to Fowler’s understanding of faith.

According to liberation theology:

. . . the activity of God in shaping the content of faith includes, rather than excludes, the faithfulness of believers, so that their activity on behalf of justice in the world feeds back into their perception of the word of God.⁴³

Although we have moved from a discussion of the structure of faith in Fowler to the content of faith in liberation theology, the discussion illustrates the richness of a concept of faith in which faith-knowing includes the faithfulness of persons, of selves. There is dialectical interplay between understanding (knowing) and practice (committing).

The strengths of this dynamic view of faith lie in its emphasis upon faith as active engagement and commitment, in the incorporation of the human person’s present historical situation in the process of faith, and in the place such an understanding gives to the sense of human responsibility for the future of the world.⁴⁴ While these are not identical with the strengths of Fowler’s approach, they overlap in significant ways. Thus in faith development theory faith involves knowing and commitment. There is emphasis in Fowler’s approach also on the incorporation of the individual’s own history, conscious and unconscious, and present relationships in the knowing of faith. And finally Fowler’s theory relies upon an understanding of the emerging self-in-relation as moving toward greater responsibility in the faith process as well as becoming more *responsive* to the Transcendent other beyond the limiting images we construct and rely upon.

In summary Fowler’s theory undoubtedly offers a major contribution to the area of ego development from a structuralist perspective. However, beyond that contribution the analysis of faith, when examined for its ontological and epistemological ground, provides an important framework for further theological reflections. If Christian apologetics involves “the study of the human ‘why’ of believing,”⁴⁵ then Fowler’s analysis of faith as a transformation, a re-imaging of self provides an important analytical tool. In examining the structure of faith, Fowler continues in many ways the enterprise H. Richard Niebuhr undertook in his final years. Niebuhr understood that “there is a structure of faith” and that

⁴³*Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁴⁵Gregory Baum, *Faith and Doctrine* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 59.

the stresses and strains in that structure might also be brought into view. On such an inquiry we embark, not in the hope of being able to map the world of faith but with the desire to understand, albeit roughly and in outline, the relations of its continents and seas.⁴⁶

Such is the work of faith development theory.

⁴⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, from "Faith on Earth," ch. 1., "Faith in Question," 4, quoted in Fowler, *To See the Kingdom: The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 212.

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