

"Faith Development: Implications for Campus Ministry"

By Ronald G. Brown

We human beings seem to develop and grow through a systematic and predictable process from the time of birth until the time of death. At least this has been the assumption of psychologists and psychosocial scientists like Evelyn Duvall, Robert J. Havighurst, and Erik Erikson. These and other persons have sought to describe the stages of development through which human beings progress from infancy through old age. The whole concept of developmental tasks has grown out of the observation, study, and writing of Havighurst and Duvall. Erikson has attempted to validate his eight stages of psychosocial development by looking at the lives of Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi, seeing in those lives his eight stages of development acted out. More recently Kohlberg has described the moral and ethical development of humans from birth to death in six progressive stages. Piaget has also been involved in this search. His contribution is understanding the cognitive development of human beings. In the late sixties William Perry, Jr., wrote **The Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development During the College Years** in which he attempted to describe the intellectual and ethical development through which persons seem to move in the college years, Mary Wilcox's recent book, **Developmental Journey**, describes "the lifelong process of trying to make sense out of, and finding meaning in, our total environment. This environment includes things, people, and moral issues: the objects of our logical thinking, our social perspective, and our moral reasoning. It also includes ways in which we try to put all of this together."¹

I

Newest on the scene in this search for a pattern, a process of growth and development that is predictable, has come from the area of theology. James Fowler and John Westerhoff have sought to describe the faith development of human beings from birth until death. Fowler has done this in six stages, whereas Westerhoff has simplified it to four styles or dimen-

sions. Our primary concern in this article is to look at the development of the adolescent and young adult. To designate persons between the ages from 13 to mid 20's, we use the term adolescence which was first used around the turn of the century in a book by G. Stanley Hall entitled, **Adolescence**. Prior to that time, it was considered that there were only three categories through which persons developed: 0-12 years was childhood; the period from 12-36 was considered to be youth; adulthood began at 36.

Havighurst and Duvall have more closely graded the developmental process. In their systems, adolescence usually is considered to be the teen years and the early twenties with young adulthood overlapping from the late teens through the mid-thirties. For a number of years, most Christian educators have used the developmental tasks of Erikson, Duvall, and others as a basis for creating programs and writing Sunday school literature that seek to meet the developmental needs that arise during the various stages of human development. The assumption is that if we understand the needs, the problems, and the challenges of a certain age, then we will be able to program, write literature, and develop experiences through which a person can meet those tasks, solve those problems, and meet those challenges. When these needs are satisfied, a person is to grow into the next progressive stage of development. We are told that if these developmental tasks, problems, or challenges are not met adequately, the person will be held back or arrested in his/her development or will not move naturally into the next stage of growth. When this occurs, the person will return years later to that earlier stage and meet the developmental need(s) that was not met in earlier life.

Faith development as understood and described in Fowler's book, **Stages of Faith**, builds on the psychology of human development. He describes faith development as "a way of knowing, of construing, or of interpreting experience. It is the way one relates to the ultimate conditions and depths of existence."² One of Fowler's assumptions is that faith is a human universal. "It is so fundamental that none of us can live well or very long without it. So universal that when we move beneath the symbols, rituals, and ethical patterns that express faith, it is recognizably the same phenomenon for Christians, Marxists, Hindus, and others. Yet it is so indefi-

nately varied that each person's faith is unique."³ Fowler believes that we are endowed at birth with innate capacities for faith but makes a distinction between faith, religion, and belief. Religion is the expression of a person or a group of persons' faith, whereas "faith is deeper and more personal than religion. It is a person's way or a group's way of responding to transcendent value and power, as perceived and grasped through the forms of cumulative tradition. Faith and religion therefore are reciprocal."⁴ Religion, therefore, rises out of and is a result of faith experiences, and faith is necessary for religion. Belief is the effort to put experiences of faith into concepts or propositions.

Belief may be one way faith expresses itself, but one does not have faith in a proposition or a concept. Rather, faith is a relationship of trust and loyalty to the transcendent about which these propositions and concepts and beliefs are fashioned. Therefore to have faith "is to set one's heart upon someone or something that requires that one has 'seen' or 'sees the point of' that to which one is loyal. Faith, therefore, involves vision."⁵ It is a way of knowing, of committing oneself to that which is known, and it involves committing one's life to being shaped by that vision and that knowledge. To ask the question of faith is to ask on what or whom do you set your heart? To what vision of right relatedness between humans, nature, and God are you loyal? What hope and what ground of hope give meaning and shape to your life and cause you to commit yourself?⁶

Faith then is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relationship to God. Faith is generic, the universal feature of human life, recognizable everywhere despite the remarkable variety of the form and the content of religious practices and beliefs. Faith is not a separate dimension of life; it is an orientation of the total person giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings through thoughts and actions.

For John Westerhoff, faith is similarly described. It is a verb. It is a way of behaving which involves knowing, being, and willing. The context of faith is best described in terms of our world view and our value system. But faith itself is something we do, it is an action. Faith is not static, rather it changes and expands through our actions with others and it expresses

itself daily in our actions with others.⁷ Westerhoff chooses to use the term "styles or dimensions" of faith rather than Fowler's "stages" of faith. As we are able to see the pattern or the process and stages through which persons naturally seek to grow, then we are beginning to see the way in which God has created us. We are seeing the image or the process of God in mankind. These styles or dimensions are not pre-fabricated, but they arise naturally as faith expands and is awakened in us. They are generic to mankind.

While faith development is a natural process of growth, it can be blocked, detoured, or arrested. The work of Fowler and Westerhoff has provided us with an understanding of how we grow as beings created for relationships with God. Such an understanding can help us in our work with students and in our ministry on the campus and can provide a new perspective and context for that ministry. To ignore the faith development process is to deny God's gift of faith within persons to whom we have been called to minister.

There are dangers in using any developmental stage approach whether it be based on faith, social, or moral development. The danger is that persons will be labeled according to their behavior or according to their theological position. The real danger is equating styles of development with a person's particular interest or position. Such labeling can often result in unfair stereotyping of a person's intellectual position, social position, or theological point of view.⁸

II

We will now look briefly at Westerhoff's four styles or dimensions of faith development, and then draw some implications for discipleship training and ministry on the college campus. Westerhoff feels that it is important to describe the relationship between the four styles of development and uses the analogy of a tree. A tree that is one year old is just as much a tree as a tree that is four or five years old. A tree that has completed its first year is as complete and whole as that tree can possibly become. The difference between a one year old tree and a five year old tree is that the five year old tree is an expansion of the one year old tree. In a similar way, one style of faith is not better or greater than another, it is simply a more expanded faith. Experienced faith, the first style that

Westerhoff describes, is complete and whole in itself. One is able to move to the second style of faith if there is proper nurture and support. But a tree does its own growing. Growth in a tree cannot be provided externally. External conditions can only encourage or retard a tree's growth. Similarly, Westerhoff says, we expand from one style of faith to another only if proper environment, experiences, and interactions are provided. If they are not present, then the expansion of faith is arrested.

A tree acquires one year of growth, one ring at a time, in a slow gradual process. That process cannot be seen, but it comes year after year. The same is true with faith; we expand from one style of faith slowly and gradually, adding one style at a time in an orderly process. As a tree grows it does not eliminate the preceding rings. It always maintains its previous growth, only expanding it; so with faith. As we expand in faith we do not leave one style of faith behind to acquire another or a new style. On the contrary, each style is added to the previous ones. We do not outgrow an earlier style of faith and its need but continually expand by adding new elements. If the needs of the earlier style of faith are not continually met, then persons will have a tendency to return to that earlier style of faith until those needs are met. Often a life crisis will cause a person to return to an earlier style of faith and draw upon the resources and strengths of that earlier style of faith.⁹

Westerhoff and Fowler both see faith development in itself as an adequate and complete way of looking at human development. "For faith is an action which includes thinking, feeling, and willing. It is transmitted, sustained, and expanded through our interactions with other faithing persons in a community of faith."¹⁰ Westerhoff is suggesting that a person moves from one style of faith to another best if they are in a community of faithing persons. The community itself can arrest and retard or nurture and support one's faith development, but the natural process of faith development occurs best when it happens in community, within the context of other faithing persons. This community may be a church, a campus religious group such as BSU, or a Christian family.

The first style of faith for Westerhoff is that of **experienced faith** and occurs during early childhood. Faith is first

an experienced activity. The child explores, tests, imagines, creates, observes, and copies experiences and reacts to experiences. Experience is foundational to faith. "A person first learns of Christ, not as a theological affirmation, but as an affective experience."¹¹ It is not so much the words we hear that matter but the experiences that we have that connect those words. Language and experiences are interrelated for the child. Experiences of trust, love, and acceptance in a community of faithing persons are important to a person's awakening faith. Westerhoff is quick to point out that while this is the stage and the need of early childhood, it does not leave us. Regardless of one's age the need is always present for these kinds of experiences. For example, just as children need to be hugged and caressed, so do adults. There is still a skin hunger need among adults. If this basic and continuing need is denied to teen-agers or adults, it often causes persons to have real difficulty in their lives sexually and in their capacity to trust. Like the child, as adults we also need to act in ways that explore and test, that copy and imagine, that create, that experience in order for us to be able to support and continue our growth. For young adults experienced faith is just as important. Providing those kinds of experiences for students where there is touch, where there is acceptance and caring, where there is warmth and trust, is essential for their being able to continue their growth in faith. This experienced style of faith also involves the acquiring of role models. Such models provide the foundations for integrity, belief, and action that will emerge in later styles.

The second style of faith for Westerhoff is called **affiliative faith**. The needs of affiliative faith occur during later childhood and early adolescence. When the needs of the earlier experiential style are nurtured, new needs arise and demand primary attention. The need to feel that a person belongs to a self-conscious community and that he/she is actively participating and contributing to the life of that community is crucial in the affiliative style of faith development. It is important for persons to feel that they are wanted, needed, and accepted by a group and that they are important to that group or community. Another characteristic of this style is the dominance of feelings or affections. Westerhoff and others call this the style where "religion of the heart"

is emphasized, where the feelings about the biblical story are remembered, where acting out the stories and rituals of the faith in music and drama are popular, and where gospel messages that speak to the feelings get active response. There is a strong need for significant religious experiences, commitments, rededications, and professions of faith during the affiliative faith style. Another characteristic of this style is the need of finding a strong sense of certainty, of knowing who I am or what I believe. What are the stories that my community affirms that can give me a sense of meaning and purpose? There is a strong desire for establishing a firm set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that come from an external authority. "Because the Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it" is a typical affiliative response.

When needs of the affiliative faith have been met, usually sometime during late adolescence and young adulthood, persons expand into what Westerhoff terms **searching faith** which has three characteristics. The first is that of doubt and critical judgement. Sometimes painful and sometimes celebrative, those with searching faith need to act out over against (rebel) and be critical of another's understanding of faith. It is a time when doubt and questions become important. At this stage "religion of the head" becomes **equally** important with "religion of the heart". Acts of intellect, critical judgement, and inquiry that seek meaning and purposes in the stories of faith become important and essential to growth. Serious study of and moral thinking about the stories of the faith as found in scripture and our religious tradition become dominant. The despair and the doubts that come from this searching style of faith must **also** be affirmed by the worshipping community, the community of faith. "The Bible may say it, but it is not relevant for the 20th century and my life" is a searching response. Certainty must come from our internal source of knowing. Certainties of the affiliative style are now relative in the searching style.

A second characteristic of the searching faith is that of experimentation. Searching faith requires a look at alternative beliefs, values, and lifestyles. This need must also be affirmed if a person is to adequately move through the searching style of faith. The third characteristic of the searching

style is the need to make commitments to persons and to causes. Students are typically bouncing from one group or one commitment to another. They are exploring. They are learning how to commit themselves. They are learning what it means to give their lives to a cause or to a person. Persons in the searching style must also be affirmed. They need to feel that they are accepted event in their searching, questioning, experimentation, rebellion, and critical judgments.

The fourth style is called by Westerhoff **owned or mature faith**. Coming at a time of early adulthood and continuing throughout life, owned faith is usually involved with a major change in one's thinking, feeling, willing; in short, in one's total behavior. It often appears as a great illumination or great enlightenment and for many becomes a time of new conversion or recommitment. People struggling for an owned faith want to put their faith into personal and social action so that they are becoming an integrated person, consistent in their behavior and in their beliefs. Typically persons who have moved to an owned style of faith strive to witness to what that faith means to them in their own lives by word and deed. They are attempting to eliminate all the differences between their faith as stated and their beliefs as actions. Principles of the Bible are embodied in actions, relationships, and the stands one takes.¹²

III

With this brief and incomplete look at the characteristics of the various styles of faith presented by Westerhoff, let us consider some of the implications of faith development for the work of campus ministers. We will look primarily at the affiliative and searching styles of faith for implication because these styles of faith are dominant in the older adolescent and young adult.

Several implications for the faith development process related to campus ministry are suggested by Robert Gribbon in the Alban Institute publication, **The Problem of Faith Development in Young Adults**. Gribbon indicates that "many young people in this generation of students will remain active in church groups or in campus religious organizations and those that do are likely to be more dependent and more insecure than their contemporaries who are questioning the

church and have entered into the searching independent state of faith."¹³ All of our students do not come from churches with the same faith style. Many Southern Baptist churches emphasize the importance of belonging, the affiliative nature of the faith, where religion of the heart dominates and one's feelings are prominent. In this style of church, asking questions, raising doubts, or looking for alternatives is unacceptable behavior and an unacceptable way of expressing faith. Many of our students coming from an affiliative style of church feel that it is wrong to be a part of a Bible study where there are questions raised or challenges made to basic religious assumptions. This approach is anti-religious, is seeking to cut down the faith, and is discouraging believers. If we only offer Bible studies which respond to searching faith needs, we may put a student from an affiliative church background into the more literalistic para-church campus religious groups.

The implication for Baptist campus ministry is that while we do provide a place of support where affiliative faith can be nurtured and encouraged and where there is a family of faith where students can belong, we need also help them to recognize that the searching style of faith is acceptable and normal in their faith development. They need the challenge and opportunity to grow and expand into searching faith while retaining much of the affiliative "religion of the heart". We should also offer Bible studies that challenge students to reason out their faith. A growing Christian can ask questions (such as, "How do you know about the resurrection?", "How do you know that Jesus is the Son of God?", "How do you know there is a Holy Spirit?", "How do you know that the Bible is authoritative?") and still be Christian. Remember we cannot force persons to expand from one faith dimension to another, but we can provide a healthy environment that encourages growth, that holds up growing in Christ-likeness and discipleship as an essential part of what it means to be a Christian. This suggests that we must offer a variety of styles of Bible studies, and a variety of ministries that enable students to affirm the affiliative needs as well as to affirm and explore their searching needs.

Another implication of the faith development model for campus ministry is that we should provide an environment

for growth by creating the opportunity for intergenerational experiences of worship, Bible study, and ministry. Students in BSU are primarily with other students. The few adults involved are faculty, campus ministers, or pastor advisors. This usually does not allow them the opportunity of an intentional intergenerational experience. Even in church their Sunday School class is made up of college students who have many of the same needs. BSU can offer new and exciting intergenerational experiences where church adults are invited to be involved in Bible studies on a regular basis or where students are sponsored by families so that the parent, the grandparent, and the child relationships are a possibility. The campus minister can plan for intergenerational learning experiences, creating an environment for different dimensions and styles of faith to be shared.

Here are some examples: In a Bible study discussion about abortion, having expectant parents or young married couples talk about this with students provides the possibility of a multi-dimensional faith approach where many sides to the issue, feelings, and Christ-like attitudes can be presented. In a study on death with dignity or euthanasia involving persons who are aging adds the intergenerational faith dimension and creates an environment for learning and growing in the context of faithing persons. Students studying the parable of the prodigal son along with a father of grown children creates a multi-dimensional faith situation where other faithing styles can be presented and serve as catalysts for growth.

One way of helping students be aware of different styles of faith is to pair students who are in two different styles of faith. A student who is beginning to move from the searching to the maturing style of faith can be paired with a student who is still at the affiliative style or just beginning to move into searching faith. They will relate to one another interdimensionally and can meet each other's needs as well as encourage each other in growth. We have a tradition of pairing students with one another for Christian growth (Bible study or prayer) or pairing seniors with freshmen to help them become a part of the campus and a part of the BSU program. With more intentionality we can create a good environment which can help our students expand their own faith.

It is important at all dimensions of faith, for persons to have good role models, but particularly for those in affiliative and searching styles of faith. In this regard, Gribbon quotes William Glasser (**The Identity Society**): "Involvement with at least one successful person is a requirement for growing up successfully, maintaining success or changing from failure to success."¹⁴ This is an important aspect of what it means to be a campus minister. We are guarantors for the faith development of our students. If campus ministers are to take seriously their responsibility as role models and spiritual guarantors, we will have to take seriously the calling that we have to be pastors and spiritual directors with our students. We cannot minister to all students in the same way with the same kind of direction. As their ministers we are called to provide the direction that we feel they need and/or provide the person, program, or referral to meet students' growth needs. The whole movement of spiritual direction in the Catholic church has much to offer us as Baptist campus ministers in our role as spiritual directors and spiritual guides. Campus ministers can provide a structure which guarantees a student's acceptance regardless of his/her dimension of faith.

We who are ministers also need others to minister to us. The faith development model reminds the campus minister that he/she is also working on his/her own faith development. We also must be growing. Being aware of our own faith development style and the needs of that style helps us to be with our students on their journey toward Christlikeness, toward wholeness. To be an effective and compassionate spiritual guide or guarantor for another person necessitates that each of us also have a spiritual guide and guarantor.

These are but a few of the positive implications of faith development for campus ministers. I am aware that this article has not looked at barriers that will inhibit or arrest our growth. Perhaps a close examination of barriers would be too painful and threatening or perhaps they are all too obvious.

The faith development model of growth or discipleship is but one of the many models. There are strengths and weaknesses in any model including faith development. Consciously

or unconsciously we all use some model of growth in determining student needs and in developing programs and structures to meet those needs. It is hoped that this article will cause us to examine the models out of which we function and then enter into a critical dialogue seeking to learn from and with each other.

Footnotes

1. Mary M. Wilcox, **Developmental Journey** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 224.
2. **Ibid.**, p. 224.
3. James W. Fowler, **Stages of Faith** (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. xiii.
4. **Ibid.**, p. 9.
5. **Ibid.**, p. 11.
6. **Ibid.**, p. 14.
7. John H. Westerhoff, III, **Will Our Children Have Faith?** (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).
8. Wilcox, p. 251.
9. Westerhoff, pp. 89-90.
10. **Ibid.**, p. 91.
11. **Ibid.**, p. 93.
12. **Ibid.**, pp. 91-99.
13. Robert T. Gribbon, **The Problem of Faith-Development in Young Adults** (Washington, D. C.: The Alban Institute, 1977), p. 7.
14. **Ibid.**, p. 10.