

CHAPTER II

THE LEGACY AND LIMITATIONS OF JAMES W. FOWLER'S *FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY (FDT)*

For over three decades after James W. Fowler (1940 –) presented his first paper on faith development, entitled, “Agenda Toward a Developmental Perspective on Faith”¹ in 1974, and his publication of *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and The Quest For Meaning* in 1981, Fowler’s FDT has been widely used by many scholars in various fields such as religious education, psychology of religion, theology, and developmental psychology in the United States.

FDT has also been accepted and used as a good source of faith development in Korea during the last two decades for five major reasons: 1) similar social and cultural changes and process between the U.S. and Korea with three decades of time difference; 2) lack of any major works on Korean faith development as a response to social and cultural changes and challenges; 3) significant changes in the theological perspectives of Korean Protestantism – more emphasis on human potential for growth and the process of sanctification; 4) individual, communal, social, and cultural hunger for spiritual and psychological growth of the self and identity; 5) the FDT’s stages of religious cognition and moral development are naturally attractive to Korean Protestants and Catholics; and 6) a wide recognition of the Emory School and Fowler in Korean churches and seminaries.

¹ James W. Fowler, “Agenda Toward a Developmental Perspective on Faith,” *Religious Education* LXIX (March-April 1974): 209-219.

First, the social and cultural contexts of the 1960s and 1970 in the U.S. are similar to those of the 1990s and 2000s in Korea with three decades of time difference between the two societies. In the U.S., the 1960s and 1970s was a time of rapid social change and cultural shifts. During that time, society experienced polarizations and conflicts among diverse groups of people over issues such as Civil Rights and the Vietnam War. The society and culture also experienced significant changes in family dynamics and the communal and cultural process of identity formation. Narcissism was a widespread phenomenon during that time. It was closely related to the lack of a strong, cohesive self structure, the problems in identity formation, and the loss of familial and communal support.

Given the social and cultural situation, the growing psychological issues among people, and the need for concrete developmental models, it is not a coincidence that psychologists focused on the formation of self, identity, and moral and psychological growth in the U.S. society. During that time, psychoanalysts, developmental psychologists, and theologians all responded to these social changes from their own perspectives. Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut and culture critic Christopher Lasch pointed out the widespread presence and growth of narcissism among the younger generations in the U.S. Kohut worked on the issue of narcissism further and published his major response to the problem of narcissism, *The Analysis of the Self* (1971) and *The Restoration of the Self* (1977), during this time. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson and developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg responded to the social and cultural problems by providing appealing and useful developmental models. Fowler joined this group of developmental psychologists by providing his major work on faith development.

The Korean society during the 1990s and 2000s has been a time of rapid social change – rapid process of democratization, Westernization, globalization, and individualization.

Psychological issues and mental problems have dramatically increased. People have experienced significant changes in interpersonal interactions in family, local community, religious institutions, and wider society. Polarization in political and cultural perspectives has caused struggles, conflicts, and debates among different groups of people including intergenerational struggles over the issue of cultural ideals and values. In the midst of these conflicts, many people seek for deeper spirituality, quietness, and meditation that can support their daily lives.

Second, there is no major work on Korean spiritual and psychological development in Korea. In the context of emerging challenges of narcissism and identity formation, as well as growing interests in spiritual development, it is natural to seek the meaning of the self and the firm identity formation process by employing appealing and concrete models of psychological and spiritual developments. In searching for a good resource, people realized that there are not many resources within Protestantism, though there are good resources in Catholicism. Protestantism has always been careful of employing Catholic sources because of the wide gap in between Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea. FDT has appealed in Korean culture and society partly due to its claim on universal – formal or content-free – validity of the meaning of faith and the stages of faith in any culture and religion, but it cannot effectively deal with particular cultural and social challenges in Korean culture and society.

Third, as the history of Protestantism in Korea (1885-2008) has already entered into its second century, there are also significant shifts in theological perspectives and emphases in Korean Protestantism generally and Korean Methodism specifically: 1) from a more negative, darker understanding of human nature to a more positive, brighter understanding of human nature and potential for growth; 2) from the primacy of justification to an emphasis on sanctification. The conservative theological stance of early American missionaries to Korea had

an impact on theologies and perspectives of Korean churches and pastors. During the first century of Korean Protestantism, the concepts of the fallen human nature, sin and justification were strongly emphasized in order to facilitate confession of sin, conversion, and salvation. These were important theological concepts during that time because there were few Christians and most Koreans did not know the Christian faith and the way of salvation.

However, as the history of Korean Protestantism went on and the number of Christians grew, it was necessary to concentrate on the religious identity formation of Korean Christians. During the 1980s and 1990s in Korea, there was the rise of a strong formation movement for the spiritual growth of laity in Korean Protestantism through the long-term, ongoing process of religious identity formation such as *Discipleship Training*. The movement has emphasized the process of sanctification, and was accepted and adopted by many Protestant denominations as an effective religious education program regardless of their theological backgrounds. In Korean Methodism, there also has been a movement for rediscovering the root of the tradition, the theology of John Wesley, especially his emphasis on the life-long journey of sanctification.

Fowler points out the mixed evaluation of FDT in diverse Protestant denominations according to their different theological stances.² He explains that denominations that show stronger interests in the theory and implications of FDT emphasize “the rational potential of human persons and communities” if “they were rightly socialized” and “their capacities for moral reasoning were nurtured by precept and example.”³ The traditions drawn to theory and research of FDT are Unitarian Universalists, United Methodists, Episcopalians, Disciples of Christ, as well as Reformed Jews. They often recognize that the sequential stages of faith are a

² James W. Fowler, “Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millenium,” *Religious Education* 99, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 411.

³ *Ibid.*, 411.

useful, effective model for faith development in faith communities. Thus, it is not strange that there is an affinity between Methodists and faith development model and the widespread use of FDT in church or group settings. However, they are also cautious that human nature is fallen and “prone to self-deception and moral complacency,” thus they recognize the continuous need for repentance, reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and ongoing redemption.⁴ Interestingly, Fowler points out that Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Orthodox Jews were “least likely to entertain hopes of moral improvement or responsible selfhood associated with development in faith.”⁵

Fourth, there exists individual, communal, social, and cultural hunger for spiritual and psychological growth of the self and identity in contemporary Korean society and culture. I suspect that this reason may impact the recent rapid growth and popularity of the Catholic Church in Korea. Recent converts to Catholicism in Korea mentioned the major attractions to the tradition: deeper spirituality – the process of spiritual growth and identity formation, meditation, quietness, richness of rituals and symbols, holiness of clergy, etc. These are the areas many people often believe that the Catholic tradition can provide abundant resources and guidance.

Fifth, there is a natural attraction to stages of religious cognition and moral development among Korean Protestants, Catholics, and faith communities influenced by Confucian ideals and teachings. Among diverse religions in Korea, Confucianism is not only a religion but also the norm of social, cultural, and political system and the way and meaning of life. For Korean Christians, Christianity is a language and Confucianism is a grammar. In Confucianism, the process of becoming a sage through self-knowledge, self-cultivation, and the unity of knowing and acting are highly valued. FDT’s background in Kohlberg’s theory that emphasizes the

⁴ Ibid., 411.

⁵ Ibid., 412.

development of moral reasoning and the stages of moral development, which are sequential and hierarchical, is not strange to Korean Christians with Confucian background.

Sixth, the widespread recognition of the Emory School and James W. Fowler as a well-known Methodist theologian and developmental psychological theorist also helped with an uncritical and unhesitant acceptance and the use of FDT in the field of practical theology in Korea, especially religious education and pastoral counseling. For contemporary Korean Christians who grew up in Confucian culture, which highly value the importance of religious growth, FDT with distinct developmental stages throughout lifetime is quite appealing. They have an expectation and hope that FDT can provide a map that gives a clue and foundation for Korean faith development of children, youth, and adults.

In this chapter, I will explore Fowler's life experiences and then examine the major claims and issues in FDT, including its theological and psychological foundations, stages, revisions, and problems. This chapter will conclude by looking at the considerable contributions and limitations of FDT for understanding Korean faith development.

The Birth and Growth of Faith Development Theory

In his recent article, "Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium" (2004) celebrating the first presentation of the earlier version of FDT in 1974, Fowler describes important factors that had shaped his life and faith, and the birth and growth of FDT for the last thirty years (1974-2004).⁶ In order to better grasp Fowler's use of various theories, motivations, and goals of FDT, it is helpful to carefully examine Fowler's background and the birth and emergence of FDT.

⁶ Fowler, "Faith Development at 30," 405-421.

Fowler was born the son of a Methodist pastor in North Carolina and was influenced by his father's preaching from an early age. He also had a Quaker background on his mother's side. He remembers that his family was neither evangelical nor fundamentalist. They were typical Methodists in John Wesley's tradition, which emphasized sacrament, scripture, music, and intellectual teaching and preaching.

Fowler experienced an "emotional awakening" that led him to dedicate his life to God in Christ at the unusually early age of five, thanks to his father's ministry.⁷ He had similar experiences fostered by other preachers, at ages eleven and sixteen. His family moved every four years as Methodist ministers' families did during the 1940s and 1950s, and moved to Lake Junaluska, North Carolina in 1953 when he was thirteen. In that town, there was a summer conference center of the Methodist Church in the southeast, and he had opportunities to interact with well-known religious leaders there.

During his undergraduate education at Duke University, Fowler began taking Old and New Testament courses, as well as theological courses. Through the Methodist Student Center at Duke, he also learned social ethics and realized his passion and commitment to racial justice during the emerging period of the Civil Rights Movements. After his graduation from Duke, he and his wife, Lurline, moved to Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, for their theological education from 1962 to 1965. Along with his theological studies with the strong theology faculty at Drew, his practices in Christian education at Madison Methodist Church as Youth Pastor were a great learning experience for him and a precursor for his later development of FDT.

Fowler began his doctoral studies at Harvard in 1965 in the area of Religion and Society, which was the area in which he studied both theological ethics and sociology of religion. His

⁷ Ibid., 406.

background in ethics and sociology of religion helped him to understand issues in society and culture, and to provide an accurate analysis on those issues. During his graduate studies, he was influenced by two prominent theologians of the twentieth century, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965). Niebuhr was the younger brother of well-known theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. He was born in Missouri, the son of a pastor, and became one of the most important Christian ethicists of the twentieth century in the U.S. His book, *Christ and Culture* (1951), had an impact in the field of ethics and theology and became a classic. He had a long tenure as a professor of theology and Christian ethics at Yale Divinity School from 1931 to 1962. He was concerned with God's sovereignty and historical relativism. He believed that God commands human beings and the history is under God's control. For him, God is transcendent and absolute. Further, human beings are always in relationship with God, each other, communities and the world. He understood human beings as responding agents.

Tillich was a German-American theologian, and is considered by many to be one of the four most important Protestant theologians in the twentieth century, along with Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Tillich, like Niebuhr and Fowler, was also the son of a pastor. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Breslau in 1911, and was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1912. He was a military chaplain during the World War I. After teaching at several universities in Germany, he was invited by Reinhold Niebuhr in 1933 and escaped from the Nazi regime. He moved to the U.S. with his family at his age of 47, learned English, and taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York (1933-1955), Harvard (1955-1962), and Chicago (1962-1965) until he died of a heart attack. His major works, three volumes of *Systematic Theology* (1951, 1957, 1963), *The Courage to Be* (1952), and *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), greatly influenced the field of theology and ethics throughout the world.

Among their many works, Niebuhr's unpublished manuscript titled *Faith on Earth* (1957) and Tillich's book, *Dynamics of Faith* (1957) had an impact and provided the foundation for Fowler's understanding and definition of faith and the construction of his faith development theory. In the 1950s, Tillich deeply explored the meaning of faith and provided a fresh perspective on it in his small book, *Dynamics of Faith*. In this book, he challenged the traditional definition of faith in direct relation to belief or religion, and asked what values are the 'centering power' and 'ultimate concern' in our lives that provided energy, passion, and direction in human lives.⁸ The ultimate concern may be work, power, wealth, recognition, influence, as well as family, church, nation, love, and sex. The ultimate concern of human beings is much stronger than stated beliefs or propositions in creeds or doctrines. Faith shapes "the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties."⁹

During the same decade, Niebuhr had a similar understanding of faith, which was well described in his unpublished manuscript with seven chapters, *Faith on Earth* (1957).¹⁰ Niebuhr understood faith in unique ways: 1) faith is shaped in our earliest relationships with primary caregivers in infancy; 2) faith grows through our experience of fidelity and trust, as well as betrayal and mistrust, through our interactions with close relations; and 3) faith provides shared values and visions and holds groups or communities together. Overall, faith gives overarching and integrating trust, meaning, and unity in our lives.

Influenced by Tillich and Niebuhr, Fowler believes that faith "is a universal human condition," and human beings are "already engaged with issues of faith" prior to "our being

⁸ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and The Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. Please note that this sentence is not a direct quote from Tillich's book but Fowler's interpretation of Tillich's notion of faith.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5. Fowler explained, "I suspect because publishers in 1957 really found that portion of the book too far ahead of its time." The work later became *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) and *Faith on Earth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

religious or irreligious” or being “Catholics, Protestants, Jews or Muslims.”¹¹ Regardless of being atheists or nonbelievers, human beings are concerned with “how to put our lives together and with what will make life worth living” and look for “something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being.”¹² Faith for Fowler is closely related to meaning, passion, and direction of human life.

During his studies at Harvard, in 1968, another important incident occurred that led him to the study of faith and faith development theory. He was invited to come back to his hometown of his teen years, Lake Junaluska, by his mentor and an influential pastor and church historian, Carlyle Marney. Marney began a new ministry called *Interpreters’ House* for deepening both clergy and lay people in their faith and vocation. The program was a three-week-long, intensive small-group process of deepening and transforming their spiritual, vocational, and personal lives. Fowler participated in this program seven times during the half a year period.

Through his experience as a group leader/facilitator for about fifteen to twenty people, Fowler learned to listen carefully to their stories of vocational and faith journeys. In the process, group members also deeply listened to others’ expression of their sense of calling and their sharing of experiences of wounding and blessing. Through this sharing, group members created a safe environment in which they could experience the process of transformation and renewal in their vocation and faith. He used Erik Erikson’s eight stages of the life cycle as a framework and stimulus for the participation of group members.

In the middle of the year in 1968, however, Fowler received an invitation from Harvard Divinity School to teach and research. It was a tough decision for him because of his unfinished

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid., 5.

contribution and participation in the new ministry and program at the *Interpreters' House*, but he decided to go back to Harvard in order to complete his dissertation and begin his career as a life-long teacher and researcher. He remembered that he came back to school with “commitment to experiential learning,” “some weight, some authority in practical theological leadership,” and “some significant skills and understanding” that would inform his academic and practical works with students, clergy, and lay people at Harvard Divinity School.¹³ Moreover, “unexpectedly, it would give rise to faith development research and theory.”¹⁴

At the beginning of his teaching in 1968, Fowler experienced a diverse intellectual community where polarizations and conflicts over the issues of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movements exist. Against those two issues, he offered a course on human growth and faith out of his new interest in practical theology and his experiences at *Interpreters' House*. It is interesting to note that he did not offer ethics courses that seemed to fit more to the social and cultural contexts. Rather, he focused on identity formation, the meaning of the self, human growth, and faith development. In the course, he also offered four separate discussion groups of ten students, and the small group dynamics were similar to those of *Interpreters' House*. His students had deeper moral struggles on the social justice issues.

During his course, through his students, Fowler encountered the works of Lawrence Kohlberg, who just moved to Harvard from Chicago as a professor of education and social psychology, and was developing the Center for Moral Development in 1968. Coincidentally, it was the same year that Fowler went back to Harvard. Fowler read Kohlberg's unpublished works, met him, and learned his use of Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory that complemented Fowler's own use of Erikson's theory. In meeting with Kohlberg and having passionate students

¹³ Fowler, “Faith Development at 30,” 408.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 408.

around him, Fowler began conducting faith development interviews using a questionnaire, and guidelines for interpretation and analysis. Through the information from interviews, he began collecting data that would construct and validate his theory on faith development.

Through another crucial encounter with three Jesuits in the early 1970s, Fowler realized that his faith had too much emphasis on cognition. They introduced him to the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius which led him to experience deeper prayer and spirituality. During the time, he continued to work closely with Kohlberg's circle such as Carol Gilligan, Robert Kegan, and Sharon Parks to name a few, and continuously developed his theory on faith development in a rich academic environment. He received a fund from the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation for his research, formed a research team composed of both students in theology and developmental psychology, and conducted, interpreted, and analyzed 359 interviews over the following three years.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a growing interest, acceptance, and popularity of Kohlberg's moral development theory among Catholic religious educators who considered its implications for Catholic religious education. After studying and using Kohlberg's moral development theory for a while, Catholic religious educators became interested in a faith development theory and its implication for religious education because "it seemed a logical next step for institutions that had been influenced by Kohlberg's work."¹⁵ As a result, Fowler had an opportunity to teach at the Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministries at Boston College in his later years of developing his faith development theory. As Fowler mentioned, "the refinement, adoption, and dissemination of the emerging faith development theory greatly

¹⁵ Ibid., 411.

expanded through these Boston College connections.”¹⁶ In 1977, he was invited to teach and do research at Emory University Candler School of Theology, where he had received strong support for faith development research. Then, in 1979, he was invited to write a book, using his data and analysis of faith development interviews, and he completed *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* in 1981.

Fowler mentions in many places the formation process of his theory and the diverse but closely interrelated theoretical backgrounds he employs and integrates into a penetrating, coherent theory of faith development. He claims that FDT has its origins in “the context of praxis” out of his experience of leading workshops on faith and listening to the life stories and histories of the participants, and is a result of the “empirical research with in-depth interviews with children and adults.”¹⁷

According to Fowler, FDT is the “theory of the development of the self,” and stands at “the convergence of developmental psychologies” of Erik Erikson and a “tradition of liberal theology” of H. Richard Niebuhr.¹⁸ Those two traditions are the two pillars of FDT. In FDT, we can find a clear linkage between Erikson’s psychosocial understanding of the self and Niebuhr’s dynamic understanding of faith as a human universal, and the self as a relational and social being. Fowler later added Lawrence Kohlberg’s development of moral reasoning and Jean Piaget’s constructive-developmental approach and stage-like process of the formation and transformation of human cognition and moral reasoning.

Three major figures, Erik Erikson (1902-1994), Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987), and Jean Piaget (1896-1980), were crucial for the formation of Fowler’s thought and the emergence

¹⁶ Ibid., 410.

¹⁷ James W. Fowler, “Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, No. 3 (2001): 159.

¹⁸ Ibid., 159.

of his FDT. In his book, *Stages of Faith*, Fowler proposes “an experiment in imagination” and provides “a fictional discussion” among these three figures.¹⁹ Fowler worked closely with Kohlberg, and met and heard Erikson’s lectures, and did extensive readings of Piaget’s theoretical work and autobiography. Erikson and Piaget had a close relationship and worked together, while Erikson and Kohlberg knew each other and shared their ideas. Piaget and Kohlberg did not have a chance to meet each other. In this imaginary conversation, Fowler introduces their backgrounds and unique perspectives on human development and life cycle.

Erikson was born a Jew in Frankfurt by Danish parents, lived in Vienna, and later became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Identity has been his lifelong interest partly due to his own life experience of struggle and confusion of his own identity. He was born as a result of his mother’s extramarital affair, and his family name was changed by his two step fathers. He was raised in the Jewish community, school, and temple, but he was tall, blond, and had blue eyes, different from other Jewish children.

He began his career in his mid-twenties during the 1920s as an art and social studies teacher for young children who were the children of American and Canadian patients of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna. In his early career and work with Anna Freud, he received a Montessori teacher certificate and psychoanalytic training under the supervision of Anna Freud in the newly emerging field of child psychoanalysis. He graduated from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute in 1933. Soon after, his family immigrated to Boston because of the rise of anti-Semitism and the regime of Adolf Hitler and became the first child psychoanalyst in Boston. He worked at Massachusetts General Hospital and taught at Harvard

¹⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 41-55. In describing the historical contexts and theories of these three important figures in the following pages, I used Fowler’s description, as well as brief biographical information from their major works, though there is no direct quotation from their books.

Medical School. Later, he also worked as an anthropological researcher for the study of childhood and human development in various cultures such as Sioux and Yurok tribes in South Dakota. He taught at Yale and U.C. Berkley, returned to Harvard during the 1960s as a professor of human development, and retired in 1970.

Erikson had a lifelong interest in the psychology of identity. His theory was firmly based upon Freud's work on psychosexual growth, but he extended and expanded Freud's theory in two directions: 1) "the interplay of psychic and somatic development"²⁰ in close interaction with cultural and social surroundings; 2) the extension of the scope of psychosocial development beyond puberty up to adulthood in various phases. Freud discovered infantile sexuality and the infant's focus of life-energy, *libido*, on different zones of the body in different physical and mental developmental stages – oral (newborn – age one), anal (eighteen months – age two), Oedipal (age three – age five or six), latency (age six – twelve), and puberty. Erikson found Freud's psychosexual stages appealing, but he expanded Freud's emphasis on the nuclear family and included the individual's and the family's interactions with cultural symbols and institutions of the particular culture and society. As a result, Erikson's stages²¹ are psychosocial stages, which include the developments of bodily changes, cognitive and emotional growth, relational interactions, and, as a result, the development of the sense of self. Erikson emphasized that crisis initiates the beginning of a new stage.

As a reaction to the tendency of classic psychoanalysis to emphasize pathology, Erikson focused on human potential, health, and strength. As a result, his theory was often criticized as

²⁰ Ibid., 43.

²¹ There are eight stages in Erikson's development theory: Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (Hope), Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Will), Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose), Industry vs. Inferiority (Competence), Identity vs. Role Confusion (Fidelity), Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love), Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care), and Integrity vs. Despair (Wisdom). Providing detailed explanations on these eight stages is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

being too optimistic. Among his new concepts, the notion of identity was fruitful in understanding the identity of the children of immigrants and pioneers in the U.S. society. In addition, Erikson had interests in the role of religion and faith for the ongoing, intergenerational process of human development.

Piaget was a Swiss developmental psychologist, philosopher, and natural scientist. He was well-known for his work on children's cognitive development, and was educated in the traditions of genetic epistemology, the intersection of philosophy and biology, and rigorous scientific method and theory in psychology. He received a Ph.D. in natural science from the University of Neuchatel, and had interests in psychoanalysis. His central concern throughout his career had been the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, especially his interest in the *a priori* forms that are the foundation of the human reasoning: "What operations of mind can be scientifically demonstrated to underlie the achievement of rationally certain knowledge?" and "How do those operations take form in human beings?"²²

Piaget had a metaphor in his early career, "structures of the whole," in which all organisms showed particular patterns of interactions among them and characterize the reasoning of people in various ages.²³ The formation and transformation of the operational "structures of the whole" in individuals were the research focus of Piaget. As a result, he developed four different developmentally related "stages" or "logics" of the "structures of the whole."²⁴

Piaget referred to the notion of stage in a narrower and stricter manner than Freud and Erikson. He emphasized cognition, the operational structures in human thought, and rigorous research for investigating and clarifying the mechanisms of changes in cognitive development. A

²² Ibid., 44.

²³ Ibid., 44.

²⁴ Ibid., 44. Piaget's four stages are: Sensorimotor, Preoperational or Intuitive, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational.

stage is “an integrated set of operational structures that constitutes the thought processes of a person at a given time.”²⁵ A stage represents the balance between a knowing subject and her environment. In this balance, a person “assimilates what is to be known in the environment” into her existing structures of the whole, while the person “accommodates” or “generates new structures of knowing” when assimilation is impossible because of the emergence of a novelty or challenge.²⁶ Piaget also believed that stages are also logically invariant, sequential, and universal in their content-free or formal descriptions.

Kohlberg was a psychologist born in Bronxville, New York in 1927, and taught at Yale University, and the University of Chicago. He became a professor of education and social psychology at Harvard in 1968 when he was forty years old. He was a close follower of Piaget’s cognitive development theory, but he extended his research by emphasizing moral development. He was born into a wealthy family and attended prestigious Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. He entered into the area of moral development through his earlier experience as a recent high school graduate. During World War II, he enlisted as an engineer on a freighter that helped Jewish refugees who attempted to escape from Europe to Israel, which was illegal by the regulations of the United Nations. During his service, he encountered so many moral dilemmas and realized that he was totally unprepared to deal with so many moral issues in any rational or consistent manner.

After his service was over, Kohlberg studied at the University of Chicago in 1948, where he was influenced by the thoughts of Plato and John Dewey, and began studying about moral reasoning and ethics. He later enrolled in the Ph.D. program in clinical psychology, employed Piaget’s early work on moral judgement of children, and began developing his theory of moral

²⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶ Ibid., 49.

reasoning and development. He completed his Ph.D. in 1958. In his doctoral dissertation, Kohlberg did a study of moral reasoning of seventy-five boys, ages from early childhood to teenagers, and developed six stages of moral reasoning and development. In this study, he stretched the range of the ages of children whom he studied, which was beyond the scope of Piaget's studies.

The development of Kohlberg's stages²⁷ of moral reasoning was inspired by Piaget's work, and he was also fascinated by children's particular reactions to moral dilemmas. He believed that moral reasoning was the basis for ethical behaviors, and had six developmental constructive stages. The moral development process was fundamentally concerned with justice, and the process continued not only in childhood but also throughout a lifetime. In the following years, he and his researchers at both Chicago and Harvard extended their studies through long-term and cross-cultural researches. Later, he was known as the intellectual father of so-called the Cambridge family of structural developmental and moral developmental theorists.

Kohlberg had studied "how persons structure their experiences of and judgments about the social world,"²⁸ and asserted that the process of cognitive and moral development occurs through the interactions of people with the social and cultural atmosphere of their lives. In his studies, he was interested in how people justified their behaviors when faced with a moral dilemma. He argued three important points: 1) moral reasoning develops through successive stages; 2) the sequence of those stages is "invariant" and "universal;" and 3) "higher" stages are

²⁷ Kohlberg's six stages are: *Preconventional Level* (1. Heteronomous Morality and 2. Instrumental Exchange); *Conventional Level* (3. Mutual Interpersonal Relations and 4. Social System and Conscience), and *Postconventional Principled Level* (5. Social Contract, Individual Rights and 6. Universal Ethical Principles).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

“more adequate” or “more true” than the earlier stages. These relatively strong claims continually incited a wide range of critiques and debates.²⁹

Fowler’s confidence in his FDT comes from the strength and validity of the developmental psychological theories that he employs. Erikson’s psychosocial framework is firmly based on three important aspects of human development: biological development, ego development, and socio-cultural matrix.³⁰ Erikson did extensive anthropological research about the child-rearing and developmental process of American Indians such as the Yurok and the Sioux with a special attention to the dynamics of human relationships and the process of cultural, religious, and ethnic identity. He also studied children of parents with diverse geographical, racial, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds including African Americans and minority populations in the U.S. and other races in different countries of the world.

Fowler understands Erikson’s theory as a comprehensive, well-structured theory of the development of the self and of identity with a universal validity that includes “body, psyche, ideology, developmental challenges, and society.”³¹ Fowler does not directly employ Erikson’s frame of stages, though he highly values the importance of Erikson’s account of virtues – hope (infancy), will (early childhood), purpose (kindergarten age), competence (elementary years), faith (adolescence), love (young adulthood), generativity (middle adulthood), and integrity (older adulthood) – in each stage and his attention to the crises and transition of each development stage.

Fowler is also confident in using Jean Piaget’s cognitive-developmental approach in interpreting and analyzing his interview data of children and adults, and in developing the theory on the dynamics of faith in the lives of young children. Fowler studies both the theories of

²⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁰ Fowler, “Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges,” 168.

³¹ Ibid., 168.

Kohlberg and Piaget during the formation of his FDT. However, Fowler argues that Kohlberg's theory lacks attention to "the emotions," and he turned away from "study of the broader development of the self" and focused primarily on a cognitive-developmental approach.³² Thus, Fowler uses Piaget's approach as another major psychological source. Piaget's approach is particularly strong in the area of infancy and early childhood development. Fowler later expands the theory by complementing it with the works of object relations theorists and the psychoanalytic theory of the development of "God representations" by Ana-Maria Rizzuto, though he does not use Rizzuto in his original stage theory.

In chapter thirteen of *Stages of Faith*, Fowler describes the effectiveness of structural-developmental theories in constructing his model of faith development. In stressing the importance of the epistemological dimension of faith, Fowler quotes Niebuhr's claim that "we shape our actions and responses in life in accordance with our interpretations of the larger patterns of actions that impinge upon us," and "communities of faith are communities of shared interpretations."³³

With this theological viewpoint, Fowler employs the cognitive-developmental tradition because of its contribution for FDT in three ways³⁴: 1) its epistemological focus serves his project well "as a model for understanding faith as a way of knowing and interpreting"; 2) it enables his theory to figure out and explain "structural features of faith" not only in comparing people's stages of faith in different religious traditions but also in contrasting different styles of faith among individuals within a same tradition; and 3) it helps him construct his theory by

³² Ibid., 168.

³³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 98.

³⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

providing both “rigorous concept of structural stages” and “the actual descriptions of cognitive and moral reasoning stages.”

A prominent contribution of Fowler’s work is its universal applicability in explaining motivational ideals and values of diverse people and their stages of faith development regardless of ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions and backgrounds. By using a more personal and deeper term, faith, rather than belief or religion, Fowler stresses the characteristic of faith as a universal human phenomenon. Fowler claims that “faith is recognizably the same phenomenon in Christians, Marxists, Hindus, and Dinka, yet it is so infinitely varied that each person’s faith is unique.”³⁵ Along with the effectiveness of his developmental-stage-like model of human development from “infancy and undifferentiated faith” to “universalizing faith,” the popularity of Fowler’s work in clinical settings and classrooms in various disciplines is in its rich, interesting narratives of ordinary people, which provides deep insight for the audiences in different groups.

Stages of Faith in Fowler’s FDT

Stages of Faith (1981) is the result of in-depth, semi-clinical interviews and extensive analysis of faith stories and histories of people in different ages, genders, and with diverse religious, cultural, and secular backgrounds and orientations. The interviews and analysis have been conducted by Fowler himself and his associates for over thirty years. Their premise is that “faith is a human universal” because human beings share “uniform features” and “dimensions of struggle and awareness” such as “the universal awareness of death” and the burden of making “life-defining choices under conditions of uncertainty and risk.”³⁶ He believes that, in the context

³⁵ Fowler, introduction to *Stages of Faith*, xiii.

³⁶ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 38-39.

of uncertainty and challenges of our times, human beings live lives with the ongoing process of becoming selves with hope, vision, and the sense of calling and vocation through relationships of love, loyalty, and trust with others in communities. We human beings live by faith – “forming and being formed in images and dispositions toward the ultimate conditions of our existence.”³⁷

Fowler can claim that faith is a human universal because he does not limit “faith” to religious belief. Faith “has been a religious faith” in the past, but modernity, scientism, secularization, relativity, pluralism, and postmodernism “have all cracked the mosaics of meaning by which whole cultures have been formed and sustained.”³⁸ There exist secular objects and forms of faith and secular faith communities as well. Persons or subcultures struggle to form shared values and ideals for the direction, meaning, and protection of their lives.

In the life stories and histories of contemporary ordinary people, Fowler and his associates found certain predictable, stage-like patterns of faith development along with psychosocial, cognitive, and moral growth. Fowler’s stages of faith are not “primarily matters of the contents of faith” but “the structural features of faith as a way of construing, interpreting, and responding to the factors of contingency, finitude, and ultimacy in our lives.”³⁹ This is the statement that has been a target of misunderstandings and criticism by scholars in different disciplines.

In interpreting and analyzing the story and history of faith of ordinary people that they have interviewed, Fowler and his associates propose seven stages of faith: primal (added later), intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, universalizing faith. The first four stages including primal faith are the developmental process of

³⁷ Ibid., 39.

³⁸ Ibid., 39.

³⁹ Ibid., 40.

young childhood, and the following four stages are related to the development of early adolescence to adulthood.

In explaining the characteristics of each stage and movement and transition toward the next stage, Fowler makes it clear that thinking of the transition as “climbing stairs or ascending a ladder” is wrong for two reasons. First, Fowler does not want to “unnecessarily lock” people into “a kind of higher – lower mentality” in understanding the stages because he believes that a genuine issue is “a successive progression of more complex, differentiated, and comprehensive modes of knowing and valuing.”⁴⁰ Second, this analogy may lead us to understand the transition “as a matter of the self clambering from one level or rung to another, essentially unchanged.”⁴¹ Fowler further claims that the transitions in faith stages “represent significant alterations” in “the structures of one’s knowing and valuing” and in “the basic orientation and responses of the self.”⁴²

During the first two years of life, children form undifferentiated faith (pre-stage.) It is named undifferentiated faith because “the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations in an infant’s environment.”⁴³ In this stage, a strong sense of trust and mutuality take form. Children trust their caregivers and environment, and the pre-images of God, which are formed prior to language, are also based upon trust. It is impossible to access empirical research for this period, strong trust, mutuality, autonomy, courage, and hope that were developed in this phase “underlie” or “threaten to undermine all that comes later in faith development.”⁴⁴ There is

⁴⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Ibid., 45.

⁴³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 121.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 121.

also a possibility of danger or deficiency in this phase, which is a failure of mutuality that may cause two results: 1) the emergence of an “excessive narcissism in which the experience of being ‘central’ continues to dominate;” or 2) “experiences of neglect or inconsistencies may lock the infant in patterns of isolation and failed mutuality.”⁴⁵

From about ages from two to six or seven, children are entering into the stage of intuitive-projective faith (Stage 1). Fowler defines that intuitive-projective faith is “the 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 primarily related adults.”⁴⁶ Children in this stage gather pieces of images and stories in their own culture, and create their own conceptions that can deal with the sacred and God. They vividly experience joys and fears in their everyday lives and begin to have perception, emotions, and imagination, which are three “principle ways of knowing and transforming” their life experiences.⁴⁷ At this period of time, children are constantly stimulated by life experiences, symbols, stories, and examples, and they are slowly forming deeper and enduring images that interpret the meaning of experience and reality. Children in the intuitive-projective stage realize the mystery and reality of death, and are influenced by rich religious rituals and symbols of a religious tradition.

Children around the age of six or seven usually share the characteristics of mythic-literal faith (stage 2). Fowler defines that mythic-literal faith is the stage in which “the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observations that symbolize belonging to his or her community.”⁴⁸ They have the ability to recognize and accept the different perspectives of others, to better understand cause-effect relationships and consequences and to tell rich and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, 42.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 149.

accurate stories of others. This is made possible by their ability to evaluate and distinguish good and evil, right and wrong, award and punishment, and fairness and unfairness.

The faith of these children entails their becoming attuned to the rules, stories, and teachings of the family and the faith community. They know the stories of the people and faith community where they belong, and those stories are a powerful way of gathering, understanding and expressing the meanings and values of their family and community. The children at this stage, for example, can state their own understandings and explanations of the images and attributes of God, Jesus, and the Spirit, and of the rules and values of the family and faith community that they have to follow.

About the time of early adolescence, children form synthetic-conventional faith. Fowler believes that the key to understand the dynamics and structure of this stage is “appreciation of a revolution in cognitive development that adolescence typically brings.”⁴⁹ Adolescents begin to think and construct all kinds of “ideal possibilities” and “hypothetical considerations” in this stage.⁵⁰ It enables them to construct others’ perspectives of themselves, which means to see themselves as other people see them. It is called “mutual interpersonal perspective taking” through which adolescents also can aware thoughts, ideas, emotions, and experiences.⁵¹

Fowler calls this stage synthetic-conventional. It is synthetic because the process of development is the process of “drawing together into an original unity a selection of the values, beliefs, and orienting convictions” that is made possible by interpersonal, intimate interactions with significant others.⁵² It is the process of forming one’s identity. This stage is also conventional because the synthesis of values, beliefs and convictions are formed by significant

⁴⁹ Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

others, though each one's synthesis is somewhat unique. The synthesis is "supportive and sustaining," "deeply felt and strongly held," but it "has not yet become an object of critical self reflection and inquiry."⁵³

The rise of individuative-reflective faith often occurs in the life of persons in their twenties and thirties. This transition is important because it is needed to "objectify, examine, and make critical choices" about "the defining elements of their identity and faith."⁵⁴ For the transition to this stage, two movements are fundamental: 1) the necessity of shifting from faith derived from synthetic-conventional process and formed by significant others toward the self that is "to be and act from a new quality of self-authorization" of the "executive ego"; and 2) the necessity of an objectification and critical choice of one's values, convictions, beliefs, and commitments in a manner of "a systematic unity."⁵⁵ When these two fundamental movements occur, people in this stage can have an integrity which is based on "a clear sense of reflective identity," "a firm set of ego boundaries," and "a confident regard of one's conscious sense of self."⁵⁶

Some adults that Fowler and his colleagues have interviewed experience another transition to conjunctive faith at midlife (age thirty-five and beyond). A major characteristic of this stage is the ability of people to accept and reconcile contradictions, opposites, polarities, tensions, and paradoxes. In this stage, the firm boundaries of individuative-reflective faith begin to "become porous and permeable."⁵⁷ The transition to conjunctive faith exhibits these main characteristics: 1) emerging awareness of the necessity to face polarities in one's life; 2)

⁵³ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

acceptance of truth in multiple and complex ways – truth must be “approached from at least two or more angles” simultaneously; 3) “a genuine openness” to the truths of different religious traditions, cultures, and communities.⁵⁸ Conjunctive faith shows a deeper, passionate commitments and loyalty to one’s own tradition and community while open to the truths and teachings of different traditions.

Fowler’s last stage, called universalizing faith, has received many doubts, questions, and challenges in terms of the possibility of experiencing this stage in the lives of many ordinary people. In its view of ongoing development, his stage resembles John Wesley’s understanding of the final stage of Christian perfection in the ongoing life-long process of salvation. Just like Wesley means Christian perfection not as “perfected perfection” but as “perfecting perfection,” Fowler’s final stage, universalizing faith, is an ongoing, never-ending process of transformation in human lives.

The process toward universalizing faith is centered on the “decentration from self.”⁵⁹ It means becoming free from the attachment and commitment to values, possessions, persons, and institutions that people have kept. Universalizing faith is coming to a completion of the long process of expanding one’s own boundaries toward other groups, people, tradition, and culture in previous stages. In this stage, “the radical deccentration from the self” has begun to “manifest the fruits of a powerful kind of *kenosis*, or emptying of self” – the person’s fruit of “total and pervasive response in love and trust to the radical love of God.”⁶⁰ In mentioning Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi as examples, Fowler claims that universalizing faith can be found in any religious tradition and culture, though the examples are extremely rare.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

Mary's Searching for the Meaning, Self, and Identity

Fowler provides an extended case study of a woman named Mary in his book *Stages of Faith*, which occupies the last third of the book, and includes psychosocial analysis and reflections on her faith and identity. He used this case study based on a so-called faith interview as a validation of the effectiveness of his FDT. Mary's story is long, but it is rich and quite effective in understanding FDT. Her story has the issues of confusion and conflict, meaning, the self, identity, narcissism, depression, faith communities, etc., which are similar challenges that Korean Christians, faith communities, and the wider society are experiencing despite the notable differences in the two cultures and times.

Mary was born in 1950, was a twenty-eight-year-old young woman at the time of the interview, and shared her perspective on life, values, and other important factors such as crucial relationships and life experiences. Mary recalled the five years from seventeen to twenty-two and named them her "lost years" and "seeking years"⁶¹ before she became a Christian. During that time, she searched for the meaning of life, "the truth," through Eastern religions, the occult, pop psychology, as well as drugs and sex, but she could not find something that was really satisfying her life.⁶²

During the five lost years, from 1967 to 1972, Mary experienced many personal troubles such as dropping out of college, wrecking her car, shoplifting, and a suicide attempt. It was also a very confusing time for American culture and society; struggling with the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the counter-cultural revolution. College campuses were in serious confusion and conflict. She attended a private college in the Midwest for a year, and went to

⁶¹ Ibid., 218.

⁶² Ibid., 219.

California and enrolled in a large state university for a short time, but dropped out of school. She attempted suicide, and three weeks after the attempt, Mary had an exceptional spiritual experience through which she realized that “our only purpose on earth is to worship and glorify the Lord,” though she had “no concept of Jesus Christ as Lord.”⁶³

Eight months after this experience she tried to find God through Eastern religions and the occult because Christianity seemed too anti-intellectual to her. However, she became a Christian through the help of her younger brother. He wrote a letter to his family and included Bible verses. She felt that one of those verses that described the people’s character in the end times was a mirror that exactly pictured her. Through reading the verse, she was convinced of her sin mysteriously for the first time in her life.

Fowler asked Mary to share her experiences of early childhood and family. Mary had a mother who was isolated, lonely, and frustrated because of the sudden changes of her life after her marriage – moving from New York to a rural town. She was a faithful giver, but was negative and critical towards Mary, as well as depressive and narcissistic. She wanted to change Mary in her own image and projected her frustrations, unhappiness, and lack of fulfillment on to Mary, while not providing enough empathic responses to her. Mary gave up trying to please and satisfy her mother at an early age and became rebellious towards her parents. Her father was a good provider, but was a closed person who did not express his feelings, and was never close to her emotionally.

When Mary was two years old, the family moved back to New York and attended a United Church of Christ, but the family members were not serious Christians. The suburban town in which the family settled was heavily populated with elderly people and Mary was unable

⁶³ Ibid., 220.

to make friends. She had a lonely childhood, though her internal and intellectual life as a small child was lively and energetic. She never felt good about herself and was suicidal from an unusually early age as a reaction to the distorted relationship with her mother. She was mature mentally and physically at an early age. She had problems in her high school years in adjusting herself to new surrounding caused by sudden moving. She experienced culture shock due to changing high schools several times, was generally unhappy and became seriously withdrawn emotionally, physically, and socially.

When Mary was twenty-two, she became a Christian and was searching for truth that could guide the direction of her life. The one thing that she wanted from God was having a husband and being happily married. She was obsessed with that idea. On the other hand, however, she also wanted to follow God's will in her life. She experienced an inner conflict between her will and God's will. After the conversion experience, Mary got involved with several cult religions and neo-Christian groups such as house churches or small group gatherings. She wanted to have the truth. However, she also experienced distortions and deviations in interpersonal relationship and religious teachings within these faith communities, as well as the bitter feelings of being repeated rejected by people and even God. So many times she felt God's guidance in clear ways whenever she made relationships with others and crucial decisions in life, but she also felt confusion and conflicts in her spiritual life and identity.

During her journey for the five years when she was twenty-two to twenty-seven, Mary had both positive and negative moments with her significant others such as her younger brother Ron, her husband Harry, and the elders of faith communities. She reexperienced rebellious feelings from her early childhood in her unhealthy interactions with her parents, especially her

mother. She felt rebellious when she was forced to follow the teachings of the religious groups without question or doubt and this caused feelings of sadness, isolation, and helplessness.

Before leaving for a Bible Institute, her brother, Ron, introduced Mary to a new group of young Christians in Daytona. In that new community, she learned about the love of God and the grace of God. She visited her brother, stayed at the Bible Institute, and received real help from older Christians. After her return to Daytona, Mary received a call from one of the teachers of the Institute, Brother Calvin, who suggested that she join a new ministry in Wisconsin called the Bethel House. It was a special ministry program led by a special woman. It was a community where young people could have a communal spiritual life with others with daily Bible studies and meetings at night. The first three weeks of her participation there was one of the high points in Mary's life as a Christian.

A short time after her joining, her future husband, Harry, who was one of the original members of the community came back. Harry and Mary were attracted to each other because they had "such a history of rejection" and both of them felt that they had "such a need for a relationship."⁶⁴ They spent a lot of time together away from the larger community. An elder of the church to which the Bethel House belonged really pushed their relationship. He even provided a prophetic word that she would meet a future husband soon before Harry came back to the community. She had premarital sexual intercourse with Harry, and hurried to get married out of guilt. Soon after the marriage after just four months of dating, Harry started lusting after other women, and began using marijuana. Harry became abusive and showed repeated patterns relational immaturity, and increased problems of drug use, unfaithfulness, and violence. After the marriage and immediate pregnancy, Mary and Harry felt that they were "really isolated," "didn't

⁶⁴ Ibid., 231.

have much fellowship,” and the members of the community “didn’t really reach out” to them, though they still loved them.

After having a daughter and getting pregnant with a second daughter, and experiencing repeated inconsistencies in her relationship with Harry, Mary decided to get divorced, though the process was painful. With the support of her brother Ron with the Bible verse that he gave her, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more,” she made a final decision to divorce. During the last month of her pregnancy, Mary’s parents invited her and her two babies to return home to live together, but the church group was opposed to her consideration of returning to her family because her parents were not Christians. In making a decision to return, Mary was proud of herself for neither immediately relying on the advice of her group nor being rebellious against their advice. She made her own decision and went back to her home.

Fowler made clear the reasons that he chose Mary’s story as an example despite the fact that it was an incomplete interview: 1) her coming of age in “very troubled and troubling times;” 2) her pain and the patterns of repeated struggles, needs, expectations, and searching for meaning and faith; 3) the richness of her story as a religious conversion, and her religious experiences in cult religions and neo-Christian groups; and 4) “the interplay of psychosocial factors” in her development.⁶⁵ He then interpreted and analyzed Mary’s life story in two major ways: 1) employing his seven categories for the analysis of the stages of faith – locus of authority, form of world coherence, the bounds of social awareness, the symbolic function, the form of logic (Piaget), perspective taking (Selman), and form of moral judgment (Kohlberg) – with which he could analyze the structure’s of Mary’s faith; and 2) providing some psychosocial reflections on her faith and identity. Among the seven categories, the first four categories are Fowler’s own,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 239-240.

while the later three categories are borrowed from the developmental psychologists by whom he was influenced. In employing these interconnected seven categories, Fowler realized that Mary was in stage 3, synthetic-conventional faith, at the time of interview.

The first aspect, locus of authority, asks the following questions: “To whom or to what did she look for decisive guidance as regards her decisions about actions or beliefs?” and “To whom or what did she look for approval and sanctions or beliefs?”⁶⁶ Mary’s locus of authority during the five years between twenty-two and twenty-seven “was located externally” to herself: God’s will and supernatural wisdom, and the selective verses in the scripture through her valued, trusted relations such as Ron, elders of several groups, group members, parents, and the consensus of groups. Fowler interpreted that Mary had “a certain pattern of passivity in relation to initiatives and decisions,” while making “unwise choices and decisions” when she acted according to her own intuitions.⁶⁷ According to Fowler’s Table 5.1 Faith Stages by Aspects, the description of stage three, synthetic-conventional faith, on the locus of authority, “consensus of valued groups and in personally worthy representatives of belief-value traditions,”⁶⁸ fits well in Mary’s case.

Form of world coherence, the second aspect, asks “What form or focus did that unifying grasp of things take?” and “To what degree was Mary reflective about her meanings and their integration?”⁶⁹ Mary’s life was filled with many moves, changes of communities and schools, a series of disappointments, and major personal crises and social and cultural confusion. After the conversion experience, however, a central theme, dominant motif, or images such as God, the Lord, and even Jesus Christ for providing guidance and sanction seemed to provide sustaining

⁶⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 243.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 244.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 246.

meaning and assurance at both good and bad moments in her life. God’s fidelity, authenticity, or goodness was never questioned or doubted. Mary’s case also fits well in the description of stage three: “tacit system, felt meanings symbolically mediated, globally held.”⁷⁰

The third aspect, the bounds of social awareness, asks questions as follows: “Who got included as she shaped and formed her meanings?,” “Who were the significant others in relation to whom Mary maintained her sense of identity and the vitality of her faith?,” and “Whose questions and criticisms – intellectually and/or social and existential – did her faith have to stand?”⁷¹ Fowler noticed the striking “absence of references” to any particular persons or social institutions other than close people whom Mary met face-to-face, and “the omissions of concern” about matters beyond the life in small communities.”⁷² In other words, it seemed that issues of race, ideology, ethnicity, and social class did not inform her faith, and that she did not experience ethical struggles in relation to social or political systems. Again, the characteristic of stage three, “composite of groups in which one has interpersonal relationships,” describes Mary’s bounds of social awareness quite accurately.

In interpreting and analyzing Mary’s story by these categories, Fowler wants to make clear that his model is content-free or formal, which focused on not on content but on the structure of her faith looking at the “how of Mary’s faith – at the ways she went about the business of shaping her outlook on life and her initiatives and responses to it.”⁷³ He claims that Mary’s “way” or “style” of being a Christian was “the structuring operations.”⁷⁴ He points out that there is a substantial number of stage three agnostics and atheists among young people, and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 244.

⁷¹ Ibid., 247-248.

⁷² Ibid., 248.

⁷³ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 249.

other Synthetic-Conventional followers of so-called “low civil religions” that involves “tacit trust in and loyalty to a composite of values such as material success, staying young, and getting the children out successfully on their own.”⁷⁵ Among them, there are people who are members of churches or synagogues, while others are committed members in their religious traditions and denominations.

Symbolic function, the fourth category of analyzing faith stages, asks a central question: “With what terms, images, or metaphors does the respondent refer to the transcendence?”⁷⁶ In dealing with this category, Fowler acknowledges an obvious lack of data that can make final evaluation in this category difficult in Mary’s case, though there are also some symbols for transcendence such as “the Lord” as well as “God,” and “Jesus Christ.” She also referred to “the Kingdom of God” and “the body of Christ” in her interview but very briefly and ambiguously. It seemed that Mary included all three persons of the trinity when Mary referred to “the Lord,” though she had diverse images of the Lord such as the guide, comforter, and rescuer. Fowler evaluates that in Mary’s account of her faith the Lord is a powerful, multidimensional symbol, filled with highly personal and subjective emotive content.”⁷⁷ Again, the category of symbolic functions for Mary’s case fits well with the description of stage three, “symbols multidimensional; evocative power inheres in symbol.”⁷⁸

The remaining three categories are borrowed and expanded from other developmental theorists. Overall, determining stages with these three categories are hard to clearly assess because of the lack of specific questions and tests exclusively designed to evaluate the structuring of relationships from the list of faith development interview questions. The first

⁷⁵ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 250.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 251.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 244.

category is the form of logic. It is about diverse qualities of critical self-reflection characteristic in different stages of cognitive development. Piaget's original theory had four stages: preoperational, concrete operational, early formal operations, and formal operations. Fowler expanded Piaget's last stage into three substages: dichotomizing, dialectical, and synthetic formal operations. Determining Mary's stage in this category is somewhat difficult because the interview emphasized narrative and lifestory rather than requiring critical reflections.

Fowler found that Mary had a dichotomizing style in stage four, formal operations. Mary's logic was focused on establishing boundaries and making either-or distinctions in dealing with beliefs, symbols, and propositions. Fowler pointed out that people who have not developed formal operational thinking usually experience difficulty in making distinctions and general statements about the self. Mary had a readiness to divide her life into chapters, and showed an ability of making distinctions and general statements in evaluating herself such as "searching for God as a gnostic," "a very difficult child," and "a really rebellious brat."⁷⁹ However, her ability for critical reflection on the operations and contents of her faith was somewhat limited.

The last two categories, perspective taking and form of moral judgment, are closely related to "social relations"⁸⁰ Perspective taking assess a person's ability of "constructing the point of view of others."⁸¹ Again, it is difficult to assess stages from these two categories because of the lack of specific questions in the faith development questions. Fowler found some clues for these two categories in Mary's sound construction of the viewpoints of her mother and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 253-254.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 244. Table 5.1 Faith Stages by Aspects. Perspective Taking: Rudimentary empathy (ecocentric; Stage 1) – Simple perspective taking (Stage 2) – Mutual interpersonal (Stage 3) – Mutual, with self-selected group or class (societal) (Stage 4) – Mutual with groups, classes and traditions other than one's own (Stage 5) – Mutual, with the commonwealth of being (Stage 6): Form of Moral Judgement (Kohlberg): Punishment-reward (Stage 1) – Instrumental hedonism (reciprocal fairness) (Stage 2) – Interpersonal expectations and concordance (Stage 3) – Societal perspective, reflective relativism or class-biased universalism (Stage 4) – Prior to society, principled higher law (universal and critical) (Stage 5) – Loyalty to being (Stage 6).

⁸¹ Ibid., 255.

father. In talking about her mother, Mary tried to “see things as her mother saw them” and showed an ability to “differentiate her mother’s perspective from her own.”⁸² However, she did not “take the standpoint of her mother” and “attempt to sense how her mother sees herself in their relationship.”⁸³ Mary showed very minimal ability to penetrate into her father’s perspective, but there is no information whether it was because of the lack of emotional interaction with her father or the pain of taking and telling her father’s perspective. Overall, she employed continuously only the mutual interpersonal form (stage 3).

Limitations in the ability to take on the perspectives of others often impact on the ability to form moral judgments. Mary’s limited ability of constructing others’ perspectives made her rely heavily on the evaluations and judgments of significant others, thus she evaluated her relationships with them either as an acceptance or rejection. That is why she desperately needed the supportive community for affirmation and survival, and felt emptiness and worthlessness apart from intimate relationships in intense groups. She had neither an ability to see from a third-person perspective her interactions with others nor had she developed a strong and enduring sense of the self.

In analyzing Mary’s faith in these seven categories, Fowler tried to provide the reader “a ‘feel for’ the integrity of a stage – for the way the structuring operations ‘hang together’ and overlap in an integrated set of operations.”⁸⁴ He also aimed at allowing the reader to experience “him- or herself inside the synthetic-conventional stage” and to understand “in a felt way the range and limits inherent in that style of faith structuring.”⁸⁵ In Mary’s story and Fowler’s interpretation and analysis, we could see the mutually penetrating and dynamic process in which

⁸² Ibid., 255.

⁸³ Ibid., 255.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 257.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 257.

the structuring of the self, significant others, and environment worked together. Moreover, Fowler claims that we can begin to see “how, in this perspective, faith and action – one’s ways of seeing and one’s ways of being – interpenetrate.”⁸⁶ Fowler’s claim is directly connected to his emphasis on the importance of doing psychosocial reflections on her life.

Fowler’s psychosocial reflections have two characteristics. On the one hand, he admits that the data “is too limited to do more than hypothesize” and that it is “sketchy” and cannot provide a comprehensive picture.⁸⁷ On the other hand, however, he does a good job of grasping Mary’s development in relation to her interpersonal relationships in family, significant others, and the social and cultural context of the particular time despite the obvious lack of information. Fowler developed his FDT with the foundation of the structural-developmental perspectives of Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as in relation to Erikson’s psychosocial framework.⁸⁸ For his psychosocial reflections, he uses Erikson’s stages.

Fowler points out Mary’s mother, who struggled with the sense of isolation, depression, and despondency, impacted Mary’s early formation in a destructive way. Mary commented that she knew her mother really wanted her, but the dynamics of her earliest relationship with her mother created the ground for doubt and mistrust from infancy. Mary’s repeated pattern of rebelliousness suggests that she might have had some relational disturbance in her second and/or third years that might be caused by the lack of empathic responses from her depressive mother, which made her autonomy problematic. It is closely related to her struggle with the crisis in Erikson’s second stage, autonomy vs. shame and doubt (2-3 years).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 259; 261.

⁸⁸ Erikson’s eight stages are: Trust vs. Mistrust (0-2 years), Autonom vs. Shame & Doubt (2-3), Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6), Industry vs. Inferiority (6-12), Identity vs. Role Confusion (13-20), Intimacy vs. Isolation (21-), Generativity vs. Stagnation (35-), Integrity vs. Despair (60-).

Mary also had an issue related to her loneliness throughout her childhood and accompanying difficulties of childhood depression, guilt, and aggression of suicidal impulse. During her elementary school to junior high school years, she went through Erikson's stages of initiative vs. guilt (3-6) and industry vs. inferiority (6-12). Mary mentioned that she spent lots of time alone in her room and was "suicidal from a very early age," which "was always a reaction" to her relationship with her mother.⁸⁹ Fowler interprets that Mary showed "a mixed emotional legacy" during her elementary school years.⁹⁰ She had "plenty of ability and seems to have exhibited competencies" at school on the one hand, while she was also "a continually lonely little girl" who carried "considerable private burdens of anxiety, guilt, and shame" on the other hand.⁹¹ Around the ages of ten and eleven, she had a meaningful, inseparable relationship with a girl who was the most popular girl at school, but the relationship lasted only two years because she felt abandoned and surpassed. When she was about fourteen, she began to have a group of good friends "whom she felt compatible" and experienced intimacy and support from them, while feeling some distance from her family.⁹²

Mary experienced two striking changes in her context of living: her family's move from New York to Birmingham and the confusion and conflict present in the larger social context of the 1960s. The move to the South was a culture shock for her, and she experienced isolation, loneliness, anger, and emotional withdrawal without being able to make any close friends there. It was the time of Erikson's fifth period of struggle, identity vs. role confusion (13-20), when she did not receive enough support in order to construct an integrated, coherent, positive image and worth of herself. The larger social context was also full of confusions, conflicts, controversies,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 224.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 259.

⁹¹ Ibid., 259.

⁹² Ibid., 260.

and divisions in relation to the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement, and a lot of “angry talk and hardened feelings” around the “notion of the generation gap.”⁹³ The struggle “in which Mary and her parents found themselves was – for that period – very representative.”⁹⁴

Another important themes in relation to the identity issue in Mary’s life is the coexistence of a disobedient, rebellious, irresponsible, and immoral life on the one hand and the desperate, ongoing search for the truth that “really seemed worth committing herself to” on the other hand.⁹⁵ Erikson named this hunger as the teenagers’ willingness and readiness for fidelity, which is “a readiness to test what one is becoming by pledging it to a movement, cause or group that will ratify one’s identity and give one place and purpose.”⁹⁶ Fowler evaluates this period as the time when Mary attempted to significantly change “the negative identity fragments” in her personality into “a positive identity.”⁹⁷

Mary realized that her crisis was fundamentally a spiritual issue, searched for the truth for eight months, and faced a genuine conversion experience. She left her ambiguous identity of the past behind and began a new chapter of her life. She had a new focus and fidelity on Jesus, but there was no immediate faith community that could shape her new identity as a Christian. Shepherding groups and several house churches with which she was involved for the next five years did not function well for Mary’s spiritual and psychological development. Rather, Mary continued to experience a psychological and spiritual violence through rejection and isolation in those communities, and could not grow either by strengthening her identity or in structuring her faith.

⁹³ Ibid., 261.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 261.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 262.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 262. This sentence is Fowler’s paraphrase of Erikson’s definition.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 262.

Faith communities after Mary's conversion asked her to negate, deny, or cancel the "willful self" of the past in borrowing Fowler's term,⁹⁸ which was the process of a complete separation or the obliteration of her past. In other words, she was losing her former identity without being replaced by a firm, cohesive new identity. Her conversion experience after eight months of searching for the truth was a crucial step, but she could not have continued the process of forming a new identity. Fowler points out:

After a time of radical discontinuity with her past, supported in the disciplines of group life of prayer, of scripture reading, of worship, of service, there should have begun a time when, in addition to these things, Mary could be led, through experiences of contemplative prayer and active imagination, combined with a correlated psychotherapy, into a healing recapitulation of the earlier stages of her life . . . I am beginning to see that conversion, to be complete, involves a revisiting, a revalencing and recomposing of the stages of one's past faith in light of the new relationship to God brought about in the redirecting phases of the conversion . . . Mary's particular combination of strengths and vulnerabilities . . . have a history that goes back at least to earliest infancy and possibly to prenatal life. Conversion, for Mary, will not be completed until, through recapitulative return to the places where that past lives in her, she can be met by a spirit that can re-ground the foundations of basic trust in her life. There needs to be a similar re-dwelling in the time of early childhood, where the primal images and intuitions of self-world and God took form.⁹⁹

Evaluations of FDT

Despite the usefulness and strength of Fowler's FDT, challenges and critiques from many disciplines, especially psychoanalytic thinkers, research-based developmental psychologists, psychologists of religion, and theologians have increased and become more systematic. For scholars who have dual citizenships in two distinct disciplines such as Fowler, it is not easy to stand firm and validate their claims with the languages and methods of both traditions. In general, challenges and critiques of FDT from different disciplines name the important aspects of human

⁹⁸ Ibid., 264.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 265.

faith development that Fowler either misses or does not explicitly express. It is interesting to note that Fowler's critiques have been offered from theoretically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

In August 1999, there was an international symposium held in Boston at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, and the theme of the symposium was "Religious Development Beyond the Modern Paradigm?" It was chaired by David Wulff, an American psychologist of religion at Wheaton College, and Heinz Streib, a German professor who studied FDT at Emory during the 1980s and is a professor of religious education and ecumenical theology at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. At the symposium with a focus on FDT, Fowler offered an opening statement, John McDargh and Heinz Streib presented their reflections on FDT, and Ana-Maria Rizzuto provided thoughtful responses to these presentations. Those presentations were published in *The International Journal for The Psychology of Religion* (2001) as a special issue for celebrating Fowler's 60th birthday in 2000 and of the continuous influence of FDT for the past three decades.

At the introduction to the symposium, Streib points out that psychological theories, as they are getting out of date, need reassessment for further development, update, and evaluation of limitations and problems.¹⁰⁰ FDT is not an exception, and the presentations at the symposium offered "a fresh and more sustained reevaluation" of FDT recognizing the strengths and "certain problematic features" of this theory.¹⁰¹ As a chair and facilitator of the symposium, Streib summarized the urgent and more systematic challenges to FDT in three particular areas: 1) "the

¹⁰⁰ Heinz Streib, "The Symposium on Faith Development Theory and the Modern Paradigm," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 141-142.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

role of emotion in faith,” 2) “the contributions of the psychodynamic unconscious,” and 3) “the factor of the interpersonal.”¹⁰²

In relation to Streib’s summary, McDargh and Rizzuto, along with Streib share their dissatisfaction with FDT around five major issues as follows: 1) his stress on the cognitive dimension and the relative absence of the role of emotion in faith development process; 2) less attention on interpersonal relationship; 3) relative ignorance of unconscious intrapsychic psychodynamics in understanding and explaining case stories; 4) FDT’s “content-empty” account of faith development without sufficient description of life story and history; and 5) the lack of explicit theory of faith and self development.

McDargh, a professor in the department of theology and a psychoanalyst at Boston College, thoroughly reviews critiques of FDT in his presentation.¹⁰³ McDargh recognizes that FDT has often been criticized by research-based developmental psychologists and psychologists of religion for its character as a mixed model, which is the amalgam of cognitive-developmental theories and psychodynamic theories. This mixed model characteristic of FDT has been seen as “the theory’s scientific vulnerability.”¹⁰⁴ Helmut Reich, a professor at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, performed an extensive survey of cognitive-developmental theories in the study of religion, and organized those theories as either hard or soft models in the entire spectrum, and located FDT at the soft end of the spectrum. Those theories were evaluated by a discriminator that evaluates whether “the scope of investigation has been sufficiently narrowed and logically specified to consider only empirically describable, invariant cognitive stages.”¹⁰⁵ With this

¹⁰² Ibid., 141.

¹⁰³ John McDargh, “Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Problem of Foundations,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 185-199.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 189.

discriminator, FDT is much too complex with so many theories mixed together, thus making it almost impossible to perform empirical research.

Other research-based psychologists such as Gary Leak, Anne Loucks, and Patricia Bowlin¹⁰⁶ point out a serious problem of FDT from different perspectives. They evaluate that FDT is a mixed model and thus not a strong scientific model. A problem for them is that FDT's "investigative method is cumbersome" and "its categories too labored and elaborated."¹⁰⁷ The goal of those psychologists is to develop a "brief objective measure" that would help them to use FDT without "time-consuming personal interview" with many restrictions and limitations. However, human faith is comprehensive in character and cannot be easily measured by objective measurement in many cases. A person's faith is often highly personal, peculiar, complex, deeper, and often hidden. Thus, research psychologists' hope of having a clear cut, brief, and object measurement methods are not often effective in understanding spiritual and psychological development.

Streib raises three major problems in FDT: 1) the cognitive-structural theory as the foundation of FDT in dealing with religious cognition; 2) FDT's universal claim of faith as formal or content-free; and 3) Fowler's claim of stages of faith as invariant, sequential, and hierarchical. First, he points out the foundational problem of FDT with its focus on religious cognition. The most fundamental problem of FDT is its "almost unquestioned adoption of the structural-developmental logic of development."¹⁰⁸ He asserts that the primacy of cognitive development as "motor" and "guideline" is fundamentally problematic because the cognition

¹⁰⁶ Gary Leak, Anne Loucks, and Patricia Bowlin, "Development and Initial Validation of An Objective Measure of Faith Development," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 9, no.2 (1999): 105-124.

¹⁰⁷ McDargh, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Problems of Foundations," 189. The direct quotation is McDargh's sentence.

¹⁰⁸ Heinz Streib, "Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 143-144.

cannot fully contain the “account for the rich and deep life-world- and life-history-related dimensions of religion.”¹⁰⁹ He emphasizes that FDT neglects emotional, psychodynamic, interpersonal dimensions in faith development, and thus, makes a quite strong claim that “the primacy of the cognitive structures as motor and guideline of religious development should be terminated.”¹¹⁰ His claim is asking FDT to give up its foundation and reliance on the cognitive-structural dimension in faith development.

Second, Streib values the role of tradition, social context, interpersonal interaction with the Divine in religious development and formation process, thus he does not agree with Fowler’s claim of faith as formal or content-free. Rather, he emphasizes the particularity and uniqueness of each person’s content of faith and faith development process in relation to life history, interpersonal dynamics, and social and cultural context. His emphasis is natural because of his specialty in both religious education and theology. He provides a detailed list of psychodynamic dimensions that FDT misses: 1) “the psychodynamic-interpersonal dimension (the psychodynamic of the self-self relationship)”; 2) “the relational-interpersonal dimension (the dynamic of the self-Other relationship)”; 3) “the interpretative-hermeneutic dimension (the dynamic of the self-tradition relationship)”; and 4) the life-world dimension (the dynamic of the self-social world relationship).¹¹¹

Third, Streib does not agree with Fowler’s statement that the stages of faith could still be “held to be invariant, sequential, and hierarchical.”¹¹² Rather than sequential and hierarchical stages of faith, Streib uses the concept of style, which suggests placing “more emphasis on the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 144.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 144-145.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 144.

¹¹² Ibid., 146.

factors of life history and life world for religious development.”¹¹³ He defines religious styles as follows:

Religious styles are distinct modi of practical-interactive (ritual), psychodynamic (symbolic), and cognitive (narrative) reconstruction and appropriation of religion, that originates in relation to life history and life world that, in accumulative deposition, constitute the variations and transformation of religion over a life time, corresponding to the styles of interpersonal relations.¹¹⁴

Streib recognizes and appreciates Fowler’s own revision and update of FDT in his 1996 book, *Faithful Change*, using psychoanalytic theories. However, he is not satisfied with Fowler’s own revision because he applied psychoanalytic theories only in earlier stages. He claims that Fowler should further expand and revise later stages of FDT by emphasizing emotional and psychodynamic aspects of faith development.

Rizzuto, who is an Argentine-born psychiatrist and psychoanalyst at the Psychoanalytic Institute of New England, East in Boston, criticizes FDT’s primary focus on the cognitive development of the self while not explicitly addressing the emotional aspect of human relatedness and the need for the resolution of psychic tensions, which are caused by both intrapsychic and external conflicts and defenses. In her article on Fowler’s FDT, Rizzuto makes three strong claims: 1) even cognitive development is not possible without the support of a primary caregiver’s communicative and emotional participation; 2) there is a need for further research in order to figure out psychic enzymes that condition and facilitate the transformational processes from one faith stage to another; 3) careful examination of intrapsychic conflicts is

¹¹³ Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 149.

crucial because observation of human relationship is not sufficient for understanding human beings.¹¹⁵ However, as Rizzuto points out, FDT misses these three aspects.

McDargh appreciates Fowler's rich description of Mary's life story, interpretation and analysis on it. However, he laments that it does not provide detailed information of the early childhood of both Mary and her parents and the marital life of Mary's parents, which had been a socio-cultural matrix for Mary's development. By overlooking foundational information that could be a clue for understanding and explaining Mary's inner struggles, such as Mary's lifelong conflicts with her "highly critical and likely lonely and depressed mother," we can misinterpret a person's faith development.¹¹⁶ Fowler simplifies the story according to his formal model of human development. There is also the lack of attention to the dynamic self-formation process in interpersonal relationships from birth to death, though Fowler later acknowledges the important aspects of human relatedness and updates his theory.¹¹⁷

In general, responses to FDT from the theological community are not friendly. These responses are basically based on Fowler's in-depth report and interpretation of the story of Mary. Theological critics such as Walter Conn, M. Ford-Gabrowsky, and John McDargh are often frustrated by Fowler's failure to explicitly recognize the crucial role of God's grace in transforming human beings in his case analysis and thus Fowler's analysis of Mary's life and faith development has seriously theological flaws. Their critiques are right to some degree because there is definitely the powerful activity of God's transforming power for faith

¹¹⁵ Rizzuto, Ana-Maria. "Religious Development Beyond the Modern Paradigm Discussion: The Psychoanalytic Point of View," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001), 204-206.

¹¹⁶ McDargh, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Problems of Foundations," 190.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

development. God's grace is a kind of enzyme that promotes spiritual and psychological development.

Theological critiques evaluate Fowler's FDT from their theological stand. Theologians often complain about Fowler's lack of explicit claim and attention to the dynamics of the transforming work of grace and the Spirit; a critique that is directly related to Fowler's first book. However, in his later books, Fowler explicitly claims the essential role of grace and the Spirit in human faith development. I assume that Fowler's first major work was a public theology with wider audiences in mind, while his later works are more related to the particular audiences in theology, religious education, pastoral care, and faith communities.

Another complication of the critiques on Fowler is the differences in theological backgrounds from which these critiques arise. Among them, there are neo-orthodox theologians who follow the theology of Karl Barth and his understanding of God and grace. Fowler has his own distinct theological perspective such as ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr, process theology, and Wesleyan theology, and FDT cannot be evaluated based on these differences in theological backgrounds and perspectives. As a Methodist, Fowler has a unique understanding of God, grace, creation, and the developmental process of salvation. Barthians emphasize the gracious initiative from God's side while Wesleyans emphasize both God's gracious initiative and human cooperation and partnership with God in the process of formation, transformation, and salvation. A serious problem of the Barthian perspective is that the activity of God's "transformative grace becomes so detached from the vicissitudes and necessary mess of individual psychological history."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ McDargh, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Problems of Foundations," 192.

Fowler defends this theory by pointing out that FDT has a “triadic structure” in which the self, “the primal and significant others in the self’s relational matrix,” and “the ultimate Other” have a dynamic interactions, like “the dance,” for the development of the self and faith.¹¹⁹ FDT values the ongoing process of dynamics in relational matrix and transformations over the life of the self. Fowler also mentions the inclusion of life story and history in his works, using the stories of Malcolm X, Mary, and John Wesley as examples. One of the reasons for the wide use of FDT in various fields is its emphasis on in-depth analysis of life narratives. Thus, Fowler claims that “the structuring operations underlying faith are at best only half of the story” and the other half is “the contents of faith and the emotional and imaginal responses to life conditions and experiences.”¹²⁰

I assume that the evaluations and critiques of Streib, McDargh, Rizzuto, and Conn are mainly based on Fowler’s original work on FDT published in *Stages of Faith* (1981). Fowler’s following works (1984 [2000], 1987, 1996) extensively revised his original version, especially in the areas that Fowler’s critiques pointed out. Overall, Fowler, as a young scholar, developed his original version of FDT with a wider public audience in mind, but becomes more explicit and confessional in talking about theological foundation, the role of grace, the emotions, and importance of faith communities in his later works. In the following section, I will review Fowler’s major updates and changes in his FDT on crucial issues such as God’s grace and salvation, the roles and dynamics of emotions, the importance of faith communities for formation and transformation, and the importance of early childhood for the formation of the image of God.

The Process of Updates and Revisions of FDT

¹¹⁹ Fowler, “Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges,” 164.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

In embracing and incorporating others' viewpoints and evaluations into his updated and revised version of FDT, Fowler himself has extended his discussion of the dynamics of faith in his series of works throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The discussions in his primary work, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (1981), have been continued in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (1984 & Revised in 2000), *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (1987), and *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (1996). In these works, Fowler made explicit claim on God's grace, the role of emotions, and his extensive study of the dynamics of shame in faith development.

In these major works, Fowler maintained his original framework, but he added the discussions about and reflections on the personal and social changes and challenges in contemporary context of individual and communal life. He also pays careful attention to early child development such as the earliest constructions of the representations of God, and to primary human emotions such as shame, guilt, and trust. Fowler traces the pains, forms, and meanings of human emotions and relates them to particular stages of faith.

In *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (1984 & 2000), Fowler developed his FDT in relation to the importance of selfhood and identity in a postmodern society. In the preface to the revised version, Fowler points out that "as we enter a new millennium, spirituality and various forms of religious practice are finding a vibrant place in the lives of growing numbers of people," and this book will "call you to a spirituality of vocation."¹²¹

¹²¹ Fowler, introduction to *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, vii.

In this revised version of his 1984 classic, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, Fowler emphasizes the role of faith communities as a place where people share beliefs, and nurture and support each other through the process of shaping them as well as being shaped by them. A center of this shaping process is having a strong sense of vocation as a Christian and as an adult, which provides persons a purpose and direction of one's life toward a mature, responsible Christian. Fowler defines that vocation is "larger than one's job or occupation" and much "deeper than a profession or life's work" and it means "finding a purpose of one's life that is part of the purposes of God."¹²²

Having received many responses and critiques, Fowler emphasizes the theological background of his work and the importance of a person's foundation in a specific religious tradition and its spiritual discipline, as a prerequisite for the openness to other ways. Fowler points out that "it may not be going too far to suggest that philosophical theorists of developmental psychology are offering, in formal and mainly secular terms, contemporary versions of an *ordo salutis* – the path or steps to salvation."¹²³ For Fowler, it makes sense when we remember that the Latin word, *salus*, which is the root of *salutis* (salvation) means "completion" or "wholeness."¹²⁴

In this process of development toward wholeness or completion, from intuitive-projective faith through mythic-lateral, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive faiths, toward universalizing faith, the last stage of Fowler's FDT particularly faces ongoing critiques. Some sympathetic commentators to FDT such as Gabriel Moran points out that there is no continuity between the earlier six stages and universalizing faith, and universalizing faith

¹²² Ibid., vii.

¹²³ Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, 10.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 10.

requires a religious orientation of a specific tradition, which is “less universal.”¹²⁵ Thus, they suggest for Fowler to regard conjunctive faith as “the normative end point of the faith development sequence.”

As a response to this question, Fowler clarifies the relationship between the developmental stages to conjunctive faith as a “natural process of development,” whereas the movement toward the universalizing faith is based on “the initiatives of the transcendence – of being, of God, or of spirit” and the transition “seems to be the work of something like grace.”¹²⁶ After this differentiation, Fowler continues to explain his theological position. He believes that grace “as the presence and power of creative spirit” is “given and operative in creation from the beginning,” and human development toward wholeness is “always the product of a certain synergy between human potentials, given in creation, and the presence and activity of Spirit as mediated through many channels.”¹²⁷ Thus, the most important factor for each person or group’s spiritual and psychological development is the “conscious and unconscious availability of that person or a group’s potentials for partnership – for synergy – with Spirit.”¹²⁸

In *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, Fowler claims more explicitly about the role of the Divine grace: the faith development theory depends on “the conviction that each person or community continually experiences the availability of Spirit and its power for transformation.” So, it seems that he becomes more confessional and more explicit in revealing his faith and identity as a Christian. The goal and direction of FDT is not all human beings’ accomplishments to the universalizing faith. Rather, it is for each person or group “to open themselves, as radically as possible – within the structures of their present stage or transition – to synergy with Spirit” so

¹²⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 59.

that the “saving Grace” powers the ongoing growth in cooperation with the Spirit toward the direction of universalizing faith.¹²⁹

A prominent characteristic of twentieth century thought, according to Fowler, is the importance of “process,” “dynamism,” and “relationship” in every discipline.¹³⁰ Christian faith believes that God the Creator is “involved in ongoing works of creation” and creation “is still happening.”¹³¹ Moreover, human partnership is needed for the work of God the Creator. Human beings often participate in the nurturing process of children, whether their own or others’, in order to develop the wholeness of the children and their common good.¹³² For Fowler, the meaning of vocation is “the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership.”¹³³

In this book, Fowler also emphasizes the role of community for the Christian adulthood and vocation. Fowler claims that “there is no selfhood part from community, no faith apart from community, no destiny and no vocation apart from the community . . . For the awakening, nurture, affirmation, and ongoing accountability of vocation, we must look to communities of faith.”¹³⁴ A faith community is different from secular society because it is formed around Jesus Christ, and has a unique identity under the influence of Jesus’ life, sacrifice, and love.¹³⁵ It seems again that he becomes more self-consciously Christian.

One of the most important factors of a faith community is its ability to form “the affections.”¹³⁶ These affections are “a person’s deep and guiding emotions,” “the wellsprings of

¹²⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹³¹ Ibid., 69.

¹³² Ibid., 72.

¹³³ Ibid., 77.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 92.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 92.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 93.

his or her motivation – in accordance with the community’s identification with its central passion,” “deep dispositions of the heart.”¹³⁷ They are by-products and results of the persons’ responsiveness to the grace, love, and action of God.

Fowler borrows an eighteenth century term, affections, which means emotions in the contemporary English language. Emotions are not merely feelings but “a deep-going, pervasive, and long-lasting set of fundamental dispositions of the heart.”¹³⁸ Christian affections are “the deep dispositions and emotional restings of the heart” that are formed by the person’s devotion to the center.¹³⁹ Christian affections are “the habits of the heart” formed by the response of human beings to grace and power of the Spirit” and “a deep *habitus*, a pervasive orientation to the divine initiative and universality in love, leading its bearers to an empowered love for all that God loves.”¹⁴⁰ The formation of Christian affections such as love of God and of neighbor, joyfulness and suffering, holy fear, gratitude is made possible through the sanctifying work of God’s grace and interpersonal relationships and dynamics in a faith community.

In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (1987), Fowler boldly extended the usefulness and relevance of his faith development theory to the area of pastoral care and practical theology. This book is both the continuation of his previous works (1981, 1984) and one step forward from the crucial discussions in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* in many ways. Fowler locates the field of pastoral care within the discipline of practical theology and defines pastoral care as the process and dynamic of “forming lives within the church for the purposes of Christian vocation

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 96.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 97-98. Here, Fowler does not use the notion of *habitus* in same way Pierre Bourdieu, a French anthropologist, does. In general, theologians and philosophers such as Edward Farley uses the notion of *habitus* as a normative term about idealistic hopes and visions, while social scientists such as Boudieu uses the term descriptively in order to describe particular patterns of behaviors they observe in field research.

in the world.”¹⁴¹ It is the broadening of the meaning and role of pastoral care as a comprehensive, ongoing process of formation and transformation of both individuals and faith communities.

In chapter one, Fowler explicitly claims that this work focuses on “a practical theology of pastoral care,” which emphasizes both action and reflection in two crucial dimensions of a faith community’s works: “the care and cure of souls” and “the formation and transformation of persons.”¹⁴² Fowler then defines a faith community as an “ecology of care,” “ecology of vocation,” “ecology of developmental presences,” and “interdependent community” in which the depth and richness of human dynamics such as friendship and interrelatedness exist through formal worships, small group gatherings, prayers, phone conversations, etc.¹⁴³ Thus, for Fowler, a faith community is a holding environment and a space where God’s grace and human participation work together for the formation and transformation of its members and neighbors.

Fowler believes that the role of a faith community is for the caring, nurturing, and forming of its people in order to faithfully respond to God’s invitation to partnership for the sake of the world. Concerned about the privatization of religion and church and the closed interpersonal relationship of people with others who are only similar to them, Fowler raises the importance of “a public church” along with Martin E. Marty and Parker J. Palmer.¹⁴⁴

By raising and defining the concept of a public church, Fowler colors his faith development theory with a particular religious belief and tradition, Christianity, and clarifies the religious identity of the faith community. Fowler defines that a public church is: 1) “deeply and particularly Christian” and a worshipping community centered around God’s self-revelation; 2) “committed to Jesus Christ,” prepared to pursue “its mission in the context of a pluralistic

¹⁴¹ James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 10.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

society”; 3) a place where people are encouraged to experience intimacy within the community and to have the concern and participation for the wider society and public life; and 4) one “unafraid of engagement with the complexities and ambiguities of thought and ideologies” in this time of pluralism.¹⁴⁵

In *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (1996), Fowler extended the discussions of his previous works even further. Fowler listens to the doubts and criticisms against his initial work *Stages of Faith* (1981) and incorporates those perspectives as a way of strengthening and revising his original FDT. In this book, Fowler emphasizes the importance of human emotions and early childhood and their relationships with faith development theory, which was originally based upon cognitive-structural stages. Using the works of psychoanalytic community, Fowler explores intrapsychic dynamics of young children as they experience the emerging self structure in dynamic relationships with significant others and the religious experiences of the representations of God.

Fowler acknowledges shame as an important human emotion in close relation to narcissism and spiritual development, and provides in-depth explorations and evaluations about the dynamics of shame within human beings and in relation with others in community. Fowler points out both positive and negative aspects of shame as a facilitator of spiritual growth and destroyer of human hearts. For Fowler, shame is a “gateway” toward a “recovery of spirit and spiritedness in our personal and collective lives.”¹⁴⁶ Without embracing the challenge of this painful human emotion and working through it in human relationships in a faith community, it is

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁴⁶ James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 96.

impossible to experience spiritual integrity, aliveness, and joy in life. For this work, Fowler explicitly claims the necessity of the transforming power of the Divine grace and Spirit.

Contributions and Limitations for Korean Spiritual and Psychological Development

The introduction of FDT to the Korean society and church during the 1990s came at the right time and into the right context. The major themes and issues that FDT dealt with such as the serious confusion and conflict in the U.S. society and culture during the 1960s, the problems of the self and identity formation, the presence of depression and narcissism, and the importance of faith development were relevant in the Korean society and church during the 1990s. FDT has been appealing for Korean Christians because it was emerged and developed as a response to similar social and cultural situation in the U.S, though there is a difference in time. Spiritual and psychological hunger has been widespread and desperate in Korean society and culture in the midst of rapid changes.

In this situation, Korean society and church have embraced FDT as a credible and useful source that can be used in facilitating and helping the process of spiritual and psychological development of contemporary Korean Christians. In using FDT in Korean context, there are several areas that need careful attention: cognition vs. emotion, universal vs. particular faith, singular vs. multiple religious and cultural identity formation, and the formation process of the self vs. identity within a faith group or community. In this section, in evaluating the influence and limitations of FDT, I will regard both Fowler's original and later works collectively as his FDT because his later works were an expansion and extension of his original FDT.

One of the strengths of FDT is Fowler's in-depth interpretation and analysis of Mary's faith development. Mary's story is a perfect example of a person, family, and various local faith

communities that reflect three major challenges of spiritual and psychological development of contemporary Koreans: narcissism, religious and cultural identity formation, and the embodiment. The story is a faith journey of an American woman during the late 1960s and 1970s, but it can also be a typical story of a young Korean woman or man during the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, careful reading and understanding of Mary's story and Fowler's interpretation and analysis can provide helpful insight and ideas for dealing with the major challenges of Korean spiritual and psychological development.

The challenge of narcissism is obviously present in Mary's life. Mary experienced problems in her family interactions with her parents in early childhood. Mary did not have a chance to form a cohesive self and firm identity in her early childhood, and she also struggled with loneliness, emptiness, depression, suicidal impulses, inferiority, though she was intellectual and performed quite well at school and got an earlier admission from a college. Mary showed many characteristics that could describe people who struggled with depression and narcissism in her time.

Mary also experienced challenges of religious and cultural identity formation and embodiment of religious teachings through interactions in faith communities. Mary's faith communities such as house churches and small group gatherings also did not function well in relation to her religious and cultural identity formation (i.e. cult religions and neo-Christian groups) as a newly converted Christian. Mary wanted to find faith, truth, meaning, and direction in Christian faith through the support of these communities, but instead she faced deviations and distortions in religious teachings and interpersonal relationships. She repeatedly experienced rejection, isolation, and helplessness from people in faith communities. The relationship between leaders and herself in faith communities was hierarchical and oppressive. Mary was forced by

elders in faith communities to follow their spiritual advices and religious teachings. There were problems in relational boundaries and power dynamics within faith communities.

Cognitive and moral reasoning process and unique definition of faith are major characteristics of FDT. FDT had originally defined faith in a broad sense, which is different from particular religious beliefs or faith that people usually use in their daily language. Faith is a human universal, religion-neutral, content-free, cognitive and moral reasoning that gives overarching meaning, direction, passion, trust, shared values and visions. These aspects show an affinity with neo-Confucian ideals of the formation process of religious cognition and morality, which has been the backbone of Korean culture and society for the last six hundred years. FDT's foundational definition of faith also matches well with the enlightenment, knowing, process in Korean Buddhist tradition. Fowler understands faith as a way of knowing and interpreting. Given the continuous presence and influence of neo-Confucianism in Korean society, culture, and church, FDT is helpful in understanding the neo-Confucian aspect of Korean mind and faith development. Thus, faith development in Fowler's original work is not really spiritual and psychological development.

Neo-Confucianism is a spiritual tradition within Confucianism, like the Zen tradition in Buddhism, and has valued the importance of the unity of knowing and acting. In Confucianism, in facing situations with tough moral dilemmas, and people's unique reactions to these dilemmas, it is important to develop higher level, more mature moral reasoning abilities and processes. From a Neo-Confucian perspective, the central task of studying Confucian classics is to become a sage whose self-knowledge and self-transformation are fully integrated.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Wei-Ming Tu, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 85.

In order to accomplish this formation process there are three important areas: establishing “the will,” “the unity of knowing and acting,” and perfection or actualization.¹⁴⁸ Neo-Confucians believe that “knowing is the beginning of acting; acting is the completion of knowing.”¹⁴⁹ The final goal of the teaching is to accomplish absolute sincerity in one’s thoughts and behaviors, which means completion, actualization, or perfection.¹⁵⁰ The formation process of religious cognition and morality in neo-Confucian tradition is through the network of human-relatedness. Thus, FDT is helpful in understanding Korean mind and faith development from a cognitive Confucian perspective.

On the other hand, however, FDT’s definition of faith and its universal claim are problematic for understanding Korean spiritual and psychological development from a Christian perspective, in relation to three major challenges that contemporary Korean Christians: narcissism, religious and cultural identity formation, and the embodiment of religious beliefs. These three areas require both cognitive and emotional experience and process in interpersonal, dynamic relationships within communities.

Fowler’s later additions to his original FDT deal with these major aspects, which are particularly helpful for Korean spiritual and psychological development in relation to three challenging areas: 1) emotions and early childhood: the importance of the role and dynamics of emotions in faith development and early childhood formation; 2) faith community: the importance of communal, dynamic process of formation and transformation of the self, identity, and faith; and 3) divine grace: the necessity of the Divine grace and divine-human dynamics within faith communities. These are three areas that will be further developed in the following

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 88, 95

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 95.

three chapters of this dissertation. Overall, Fowler raises these areas as major revisions of his FDT and does a quite good job. However, Fowler's later works on these areas need to be further expanded, embellished, and corrected with the help of psychoanalytic, anthropological and cultural, and theological perspectives.

First, Fowler emphasizes the importance of the role of powerful emotions in the faith development process. In his original work, Fowler emphasized religious cognition and moral reasoning in the faith development process. Later, however, he emphasizes the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics with significant others in early childhood for the formation of the self and identity, as well as early formation of God representations that becomes a foundation for spiritual and psychological development throughout the lifetime. Fowler, in relation to the role of a faith community, also emphasizes the necessity of emotion in the faith development process by borrowing Wesley's 18th century term, affections or Christian affections, which are people's enduring emotions, deep dispositions, and guiding motivations. Fowler points out that these affections are formed by human response to grace and the power of the Spirit. Fowler's later addition of emotions is a crucial aspect of Korean spiritual and psychological development in relation to narcissism, identity development, and embodiment, which are the result of the ongoing, cooperative work of both cognition and emotion.

Second, Fowler's later addition of the dynamic process of formation and transformation in faith communities is crucial for religious and cultural identity formation and the embodiment of religious beliefs. Fowler emphasizes the function of faith communities as a place where members of the community share beliefs, support and nurture each other through the shaping process. The shaping process occurs through the tradition and teaching of the community, and provides meaning, purpose, and direction of the life of the people within the community. Fowler

claims that there is no self, identity, and faith apart from the faith community. He defines a faith community as an “ecology of care” and “ecology of developmental presences” where members can experience human dynamics and friendships.¹⁵¹

In his later revisions of FDT, Fowler shifts his focus from universal structures of faith to particular contents of faith. In *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian* (2000), he colors his FDT with a particular religious faith, identity, and tradition, and makes a more explicit and confessional claim. When he refers to a faith community, it means a “deeply and particularly Christian” worshipping community, “committed to Jesus Christ,” and pursues its mission “unafraid of engagement.”¹⁵² Fowler’s addition of the importance of faith communities in his FDT is helpful in supporting the formation process of religious identity and the embodiment of religious teachings.

Third, in his later revisions, Fowler is also explicit and bold in claiming divine grace as the source and energy for human growth and transformation. This is important especially in relation to recent theological shifts of emphasis toward human potential for growth and the process of sanctification in Korean Protestantism and Methodism. He defines grace as the power of the creative spirit, and human faith development toward wholeness as the product of synergy or partnership between human potentials and the activity of the Spirit through particular channels. He further claims that the FDT depends on “the conviction that each person or community continually experiences the availability of Spirit and its power for transformation.”¹⁵³ According to Fowler, in his later work (2000), the goal of FDT is for individuals and communities to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁵² Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*, 24-25

¹⁵³ Ibid., 60.

radically open themselves within their current stage or transition to do the cooperative work with the Spirit so that saving grace can continuously power the process.

FDT's major limitations in relation to narcissism, religious identity formation, and the embodiment process are related to Fowler's three major additions in a later expansion of the FDT: emotions and early childhood, faith community, and divine grace. Fowler mentions the importance and necessity of these three aspects for faith development, but FDT cannot explain concrete dynamics, interactions, and processes for strengthening the self, forming religious and cultural identity, and spiritually growing through human-divine and human-human dynamics. In addition, FDT cannot properly deal with the particularity of Korean faith, multiple religious and cultural identity formation, and the emotion-cognition combination in Korean spiritual and psychological development. In other words, FDT cannot provide a clear answer about the specific process and particular way of spiritual and psychological development. Three major thinkers, Kohut, Bourdieu, and Wesley will respond to the major question about particular processes and ways of development, and explain these three areas in the following three chapters.