

TO TEACH THE FAITH OR TO TEACH THEOLOGY: DILEMMA FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Some months back Richard McBrien brought to the fore an issue that has in recent years put religious educators between the horns of a dilemma: to teach the faith or teach theology. He cites Catholics "who should know better" (among them an unnamed cardinal or two), who try to assuage the fears of parents and clergy by insisting that the task of religious educators is not to teach the views of modern theologians but to teach the faith. While McBrien acknowledges that faith is not theology, he allows that in practice they are inseparable:

When all is said and done, religious educators, bishops, preachers, and the Church at large do not transmit 'the faith.' They transmit particular interpretations or understandings of faith. In direct words: they transmit theologies.

It is entirely beside the point to warn religious educators against teaching theology instead of handing on the faith. The faith exists always and only in some theological form.¹

McBrien identifies—correctly, I believe—the nature of the dilemma in arguing that it represents a mis-statement of the problem. The real issue is rooted in the inability or unwillingness of some who should know better to distinguish between faith and theology. For them the abandoning of the theological system that provided the language and categories for Vatican I in favor of new theological frameworks is tantamount to renouncing the faith or at least compromising it. The question, says McBrien, "is not *whether* the faith shall be transmitted according to some theological interpretations, but rather *which* theological interpretation is best suited to the task at a particular moment in time."

My purpose in this paper is to pick up where McBrien left off. Just as it is evident that McBrien's notion of faith differs from that of his anonymous adversaries—or at least he emphasizes a different aspect—it is clear that the way he and they conceive faith determines their views of the catechetical task. Similarly, other definitions of faith and emphasis on different aspects of it, give rise to divergent, even opposing ways of approaching religious education. Before proceeding with these and other apparent dilemmas, however, it may be well to acknowledge an ambiguity that was deliberately built into the title of this paper.

¹Cf. "Faith, Theology and Belief," *Commonweal*, Nov. 15, 1974.

The use in the title of "religious education" rather than some other term is intended to reflect the ambiguity that haunts the field in the English-speaking world, blurring its task, creating conflicting expectations and at times confusing its practitioners. Religious education can be and is in fact understood in a variety of ways. Two of the most common are: (1) religious education defined as nonconfessional teaching about religion; and (2) religious education accepted as synonymous with "catechesis," or education in the faith.

It is relatively easy to describe the relationship of theology and religious education when the latter is understood as mere teaching about religion or religions. Theological schools and systems become one phenomena among many to be explicated. Theology, seen from the outside, comes to be regarded as hardly more than a means whereby a particular faith community gives systematic expression to its beliefs. Theology is used for expository purposes and no attempt is made to critique or validate it.

A problem arises, however, when religious education is accepted, as it is by most Catholics today, as a synonym for catechesis. Since the days of the kerygmatic movement, catechesis has been seen as a pastoral function in the service of faith and is even defined as "education in the faith." European authors frequently speak of "the pedagogy of faith."² The General Catechetical Directory says that the aim of catechesis is "maturity of faith" (cf. Nos. 17, 21-30). Thus the basic question becomes, how does one conceive faith? If, for example, faith is understood simply as an attitude of trust or a kind of enthusiasm without some basis in reason, one could justify a religious education program that neglects communicating information and intellectual inquiry. On the other hand, if faith is presented as a noetic system made up primarily of doctrines and official church teachings, then catechesis is reduced to little more than religious instruction.

In these pages I sketch various ways of considering faith, giving just enough detail to show how each in its own way challenges religious educators who are expected to explicitate the specific objectives of catechesis and are called upon to design programs. For the sake of comparison and contrast, I present the first three sketches as dilemmas as if they offered either/or

²Cf. E. Alberich, *Natura e compiti di una catechesi moderna* (Torino-Leumann: Elle Di Ci, 1972), pp. 89-109; F. Coudreau, *Basic Catechetical Perspectives* (New York: Deus Books, 1970), pp. 73-93. J. M. Kijm, *Geloofsopvoeding* (Nijmegen: Hoger Katechetisch Instituut, 1968), *passim*.

choices. In actual fact, they are more complementary than contradictory. First, I contrast an institutional and a personal approach to faith. Second, I examine *fides quae* and *fides qua* in relationship to each other and to catechesis. Third, in what is meant to be the principal part of the paper, I distinguish in the contemporary manner faith and beliefs. In each of these three sections the question of the relationship of faith and theology, though not explicitly discussed, is close to the surface. And, finally, in the fourth section I give a brief introduction to the work of James Fowler whose attempt to situate faith in a structuralist-developmental framework has important implications for theologians and spiritual directors as well as religious educators. (Fowler's research, moreover, suggests another "dilemma": are the structural paradigms he has observed descriptive or prescriptive of the life of faith?)

INSTITUTIONAL/PERSONAL APPROACHES TO FAITH

It comes as no surprise that members of the hierarchy and even many laity do not distinguish faith from allegiance to the Church. They expect religious education to socialize members into traditional thought patterns and modes of behavior and to secure their unfailing loyalty for the institutional Church. An unquestioning confessional commitment on the part of both the teacher and learner is expected. Instruction about the community's history, doctrines, moral code and ritual is accepted as a legitimate and desired means of formation. Only rarely it is recognized that in this frame of reference "education in the faith" risks appearing as indoctrination and mere proselytism undertaken more for the well being of the institution than its members.

When, on the other hand, one takes the description of faith in classic theology as the starting point, other problems arise. Since faith is considered an infused virtue there is the temptation to exclude *a priori* every human method designed to effect faith. Faith is at once a gift of grace and the free response of the person to God's call. Because it is a grace, no human expedient can pretend to instill and increase faith, and even less to program its growth and development from the outside. Because faith is a free response, any effort to manipulate an individual in such a way as to provoke it seems rash and doomed to failure.

The brevity of the above descriptions risks caricature. They represent extreme positions which, if they exist in the real world,

have few adherents who would not want to qualify and nuance their stand. They approach faith from quite different starting points: the one takes an institutional, the other, a personalist point of view. Although they would express their theoretical expectations of catechesis in strikingly different terms, like most extremists they would probably find themselves doing much the same thing in practice. Those who take the institutional approach to faith are likely to emphasize doctrines and ethics because, for them, the noetic system is indistinguishable from faith. On the other side, the personalists who insist on pushing the theological definition of faith to its logical consequences, concentrate on the creed, code and cult because little or nothing can be done with human means to instill grace and foster a person's free choice. On the advanced levels at least, both positions end up teaching theology; the first group because they think nothing more is needed; the second, because they think nothing more is possible.

FIDES QUAE/FIDES QUA

A more nuanced analysis of faith yields a similarly nuanced catechesis.

According to the standard definition found in traditional manuals of theology, faith is an act of the intellect assenting to truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.³ In this manner of speaking faith and knowledge (*scientia*) are clearly distinguished. The object of knowledge is something seen; the object of faith is the unseen. Knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive. In knowing, the intellect is moved to assent by the object itself; in faith, however, the intellect is moved to assent through choice under the influence of divine grace. *Scientia testimonialis* is essential to faith: the believer accepts a given matter as real and true on the testimony of someone else.⁴ If, for example, one believes the doctrines of Christianity because he or she is impressed by their internal coherence or because they dovetail with one's own speculations regarding the mystery of human existence, and not because they are witnessed by God revealing, the individual cannot be said to have faith in the strict sense.⁵ Faith

³J. Alfaro, *Fides, Spes, Caritas, Adnotationes in tractatum de virtutibus theologicis* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1963), Pars prima, p. 204; J. Pieper, *Faith and Belief* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965).

⁴Pieper, *Faith and Belief*, p. 17.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

engenders a kind of certainty, though it is rooted, not in the first hand experience of the believer, but in the trust the individual places in the witness and in witness' competence (*auctoritas*). The formal motive for the assent of Christian faith is the divine witness known in revelation.⁶

In this classic approach the act of faith is considered both under the heading of that which is believed—*fides quae creditur*—and from the standpoint of the subject who believes. Concomitant with and inseparable from the act of faith is the confidence and trust the believer has in the one revealing—*fides qua creditur*. "This distinction," writes Paul Tillich, "is very important, but not ultimately so, for the one side cannot be without the other. There is no faith without a content toward which it is directed. There is always something meant in the act of faith."⁷ And there is always something or someone valued, even loved, in the act of faith. On the one hand, faith is that knowing by which persons, individually or communally, recognize their relationship to the ultimate conditions of their existence. On the other hand, faith is that disposition of trust and confidence, itself a grace, which prompts individuals and communities to commit themselves to the Transcendent. The cognitive and the affective are inextricably interwoven in the act of faith.

Fides qua / *fides quae* is the classic distinction used by theologians to analyze the different aspects of the act of faith. It discloses the complexity while at the same time asserting the intrinsic unity of the faith act. Critical theology can and must emphasize the distinction but the catechist in the field does so at the risk of undermining his or her own efforts. For example, one of the negative criticisms, leveled against the General Catechetical Directory, was for separating the content of the Christian message—*fides quae*—from its treatment of love, trust, fidelity and the other affective qualities which are concomitant with the cognitive aspects of faith.⁸ Effective catechesis is always concerned about both aspects of faith, the affective and the cognitive, even though in particular programs one or the other may receive greater emphasis. It was characteristic of many older religious education programs built around the classic catechisms to stress the cognitive, the didactic.

⁶Cf. J. Alfaro in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:313-7.

⁷*Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 10.

⁸H. Holstein, "Le message de la révélation chrétienne aux hommes de notre temps," *Catéchèse*. Supplement No. 45 (Oct., 1971), pp. 135-7, 144-5.

One who took a different tack was Horace Bushnell, the author of the important nineteenth century work, *Christian Nurture*. He recognized that there were considerations more important than formal instruction, namely, the kind of social conditions and wholesome environment required for religious growth and moral development. The home and family are more important than the school and church. In recognizing different psychological needs and intellectual abilities at different age levels, Bushnell anticipated some of the insights of developmental psychology. The mistake many make according to Bushnell is to think that a child "can be born of God only in the same way as an adult can be."⁹ He recognized that an adult community must be fed on the meat of sound doctrine but when dealing with children parents "should rather seek to teach a feeling than a doctrine." It is hard to say whether Bushnell's insights were born of careful observation of how a child grows and learns or whether they are rooted in an ecclesiology based on personal experience. Certainly he opposed the revivalist movement which allowed no place in the Church for such as are only children. Bushnell constructs a syllogism in a series of rhetorical questions: Is not the Church to be composed of such as really believe? Is intelligence necessary for belief? Are children who have not yet arrived at the level of personal maturity necessary for making judgments to be excluded from the Christian Church?

Although Roman Catholics have not incorporated the language of Christian nurture into their vocabulary they have come to show greater concern for religious experience and the affective qualities of faith. This trend in the modern catechetical movement represents a reaction and a corrective against too exclusive an emphasis on *fides quae*. The General Catechetical Directory has tried to keep a happy balance. In one paragraph it says that the aim of catechesis is to dispose individuals and communities to be open to "the action of the Holy Spirit and to deepen their conversion" (No. 22), adding a short time later the caution that it is not enough "merely to stimulate a religious experience, even a true one" (No. 24). The *fides qualis*/*fides quae* distinction helps explain how, in the words of a colleague, one can have "good faith and bad theology." In distinguishing the "experience" of faith from "what" one believes, allowance is made for the possibility that a person or a

⁹5th printing (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 59.

community which has not yet achieved maturity of faith can nonetheless be deeply committed and Christian.

FAITH AND BELIEFS

There is still a third approach to catechesis. It is based on the distinction that many scholars make today between faith and religious beliefs. Though not new to the field, as far as I know, the distinction and its implications have received little critical attention from religious educators. It is, as Bernard Lonergan acknowledges, a departure in manner of speech from "the older and more authoritative tradition" in which the faith and belief are identified.¹⁰ Wilfred Cantwell Smith is another who makes the distinction. In an early work he speaks of religion as faith which he defines as "a personal piety" or pervasive disposition that permeates and gives coherence to all a person's strivings and responses. This is distinguished from religion as "an overt system" made up of beliefs, practices and values that constitute a particular people's piety.¹¹

This third approach regards faith as the interpretive element in religious experience. It represents the confluence of insights and theories of many fields and different schools of thought in cultural anthropology, sociology of knowledge, linguistic analysis, and related areas. For purposes of this presentation, I have made my own synthesis of the main premises of this approach.¹²

1. We are born and grow into a world that is structured both spatially and temporally. The world in which we find ourselves is largely a product of human ingenuity and effort, shaped by our ancestors and contemporaries to meet certain needs and satisfy particular desires. While this world is more or less a construction of human consciousness and physical activity, it is external to everyone born into it. It shapes each generation of its inhabitants and, in turn, is shaped by them.

2. Our understandings rest not only on our own individual experiences, but also on the experience of others. Judgments by

¹⁰*Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 123. For a different approach to this distinction, D. Evans, "Faith and Belief," *Religious Studies* 10 (1974), 1-19, 199-212.

¹¹*The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: New American Library), pp. 47-9.

¹²For an introduction to this line of thought, cf. P. Berger and Thos. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967); Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

which we assent to truths of fact and value are seldom, if ever, made independently of the human community in which we find ourselves. Community assumes expression and communication. The world in which we find ourselves is constituted of objects and ideas, patterns of behavior and social structures, verbal and non-verbal language. In the best of times, this objective reality is expressed in a coherent symbol system which yields meaning and purpose. The meaning is not always self-evident, at least to succeeding generations, and therefore needs to be mediated by stories (myths), art, ritual and philosophy. In less than optimum circumstances, the symbol system within a culture or the symbol systems of several cultures, conflict with one another. In the worst of times, chaos and confusion is such that everything seems to lose meaning, nothing appears to have purpose and all communication is lost.

3. Whether the best of times or the worst of times prevails, we find ourselves in a limit situation—hemmed in by our own horizons, frustrated by our own finitude—which robs life of much of its meaning. Even when there is a certain satisfaction in day-to-day living, many are like the Hemingway character in *To Have and Have Not* who continues to play the slot machine without verve or vibrancy because the jackpot is empty. Many continue to play after all hope of winning is gone simply because it is the only game in town. Some drop out, but others look beyond appearances to find meaning at a deeper level. It is a question of interpreting one's experience, as did those first Christians who were party to the events of Easter, in a way different from the other peoples.

John Hick, one of those who regard faith as the interpretive element in religious experience, says moreover, that it is faith which constitutes an experience as *religious* "in distinction from any non-religious experiencing of the same field of data."¹³ Interpretation does not mean, for him, intellectual interpretation or theory construction, but something more akin to the interpretive processes which take place in sense perception." It is the ordering of the whole person to the Transcendent. Faith is a kind of knowing, a way of apprehending existence and experiencing reality. The object of faith is, in Tillich's phrase, "ultimate concern." Its horizon transcends the finite, the conditioned, the relative; faith looks at the universe in the light of the infinite, the unconditioned, the absolute. Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the

¹³Cf. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3:168.

total person; it engages one's whole being, conscious and unconscious.

Thus, faith has come to be identified with a basic orientation, a fundamental attitude, "primal and often non-conceptual" as David Tracy notes.¹⁴ In this line of thought beliefs represent thematic explicitations of particular historical, moral or cognitive claims implicit in a particular faith stance. Beliefs are expressed in doctrines, moral codes, rituals, prayer formulas and countless other religious symbols. They interpret the way individuals and communities apprehend the Transcendent, and the sources and meaning of life and death. Beliefs grounded as they are in faith provide symbols for interpreting values, of judging good or confronting evil. Faith is the primal orientation of individuals and communities in their living and feeling, in expression; specific beliefs mediate its meaning. To be socialized into a particular religious tradition, therefore, is more a matter of belief than faith.

Defined as a socialization process catechesis has a twofold task: it is a matter of "world maintenance," the holding together of a shared vision of reality which gives both the community as a whole and the persons who constitute it a sense of identity. (This use of "sense" is adapted from Erikson. The patterns of identity which he describes are not able to be objectified by the subject as "knowledge." Rather, he/she comes to a "sense" of who he/she is and tests it in the social and cultural context to see if it is valid.) In biblical terms, "world maintenance," is a matter of adhering to the covenant, with all that it implies for the institutional religion of the people of God as well as the religious individuals who make it up. Education in the faith implies, therefore, an effort to sustain the framework of meaning and value which aids communities and their members to interpret human existence and pattern their behavior.

The second task of catechesis thus becomes one of interpretation. When one is born or initiated in a religious community faith is assumed to be present. Educating someone in faith is seen, in the words of Karl Rahner, as "the endeavor to develop this already existing faith into its full christological and ecclesiastical, explicit, social, consciously professed form."¹⁵ In terms of the categories sketched out above, catechesis communicates and explains the symbol system which is the carrier of Christian beliefs. The General Catechetical Directory paraphrasing *Gaudium et spes* says

¹⁴*Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 16, n. 13.

¹⁵Cf. *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:310.

that catechesis "not only recalls the revelation of God's wonders which was made in time and brought to perfection in Christ, but at the same time, in the light of this revelation, interprets human life in our age, the signs of the times, and the things of this world, for the plan of God works in these for the salvation of men" (No. 11; cf. No. 26; *GS*, No. 62).

Without denigrating their natural significance, events interpreted in the light of faith transform, transcend and magnify their ordinary significance. The events which the Old Testament prophets apprehended as mediating divine presence and providence can also be seen as having proximate natural or human causes (e.g., Ex 14:1-18; Dt 32:1-18; 1 Sm 2:1-10; Heb 3:2-19). Faith gave them greater significance. Jesus is the ultimate symbol in Christianity for he is not only the revealer but the revealed. Seen by Christian faith as of divine origin, he is depicted in the New Testament as being at the same time genuinely human. Jesus is the touchstone whereby individuals, singly and in community, test whether they are interpreting their own concrete experience accurately and honestly. He confronts them in his very being with the question of what it means to be human, grounding the question in his own unique relationship to God.

"Faith," says Rahner, "is never awakened by someone having something communicated to him purely from the outside, addressed solely to his naked understanding as such. . . ." Education in the faith, therefore means "to assist understanding of what has already been experienced in the depths of human reality as grace (i.e., as in absolutely direct relation to God)."¹⁶ Beliefs are the means whereby the meaning of this experience is mediated. They are embodied in the symbols which explicitate faith and bring it to consciousness.

Catechesis begins, therefore, as an exercise in hermeneutics.¹⁷ In one way or another it must be an introduction to reading signs—"signs of the times"—biblical signs, ecclesial signs (creedal symbols and life styles), and liturgical signs. Education in the faith becomes a lesson in interpreting one's personal

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 2:311.

¹⁷Cf. B. L. Marthaler, "The New Hermeneutic, Language and Religious Education," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 166 (Feb., 1972), 73-83. R. Marlé, "The Concentration on Hermeneutics in Catechesis," *Lumen Vitae* 25 (1970), 545-50; "Translating the Faith," *Lumen Vitae* 26 (1971), 553-64. H. E. Everding, Jr., "A Hermeneutical Approach to Educational Theory," in M. J. Taylor, ed., *Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 41-53.

experiences, as well as historical events in the light of faith—*lumen fidei*. The master symbols of Christianity (e.g., Israel, Christ and Church), are the keys for deciphering the meaning of existence. Simply to reflect on one's own experience, to narrate historical incidents or even to discuss current events in which the Church is involved, is not enough. Education in the faith is a matter of consciousness-raising, of uncovering the mysteries hidden beneath the surface of everyday life. A catechesis which attempts to short circuit the process by-passing signs and symbols in favor of verbal formulas, abstract definitions and theological synthesis, will inevitably fail to correlate religion with life, beliefs with faith.

One last point in connection with the faith/belief distinction. Lonergan says he distinguishes between faith and religious beliefs for two reasons: (1) it is a consequence of this view that there is a realm in which love precedes knowledge; and (2) because this manner of speech facilitates ecumenical discourse. This second reason is of particular interest to catechists. Beliefs differ because the symbols in which they are expressed cannot but be conditioned by historical context, cultural milieux and language patterns. But, as Lonergan says, behind these differences, there is a deeper unity grounded in faith, "the eye of religious love, an eye that can discern God's self-disclosures."¹⁸

Faith thus appears, as noted by such an expert on world religions as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, as "the fundamental religious category."¹⁹ The common experience of faith has the potential to unite peoples of different religious traditions. "Faith, divine faith," writes Gregory Baum in a similar vein, "is the one basis for humanization and reconciliation of man."²⁰ When communities have reflected upon and attempted to express faith—their basic stance vis-a-vis the Transcendent, the numinous or limit situations—in concrete terms, they have begotten an almost infinite variety of symbols (rituals, stories, doctrines, codes, etc.) which embody their beliefs. Because the cultural and provisional nature of the symbols which mediate faith has been ignored (and even denied) by theologians and religious educators of all stripes, they have unavoidably become carriers of division and misunderstanding. Granted the distinction between faith and beliefs, the former may be said to unite, whereas the latter divide. To recog-

¹⁸*Method in Theology*, p. 18.

¹⁹Quoted by J. Fowler, in "Faith, Liberation and Human Development," *The Thirkield-Jones Lectures*—Gammon Theological Seminary, 1974, p. 4.

²⁰*Faith and Doctrine* (New York: Deus Books, 1969), p. 30.

nize this, even with the qualifications necessary to reconcile it with the traditional teaching on the unique salvific work of Christ is a step forward in the reconciliation of peoples.

A STAGE/THEORY OF FAITH-KNOWING

Up to this point these reflections for the most part have been based on the way theologians analyze faith. James W. Fowler, III, late of Harvard, now of Boston College, has chosen to follow another path which he describes as a "structuralist-developmental" approach. It incorporates many of the insights of traditional Christian theology, but his basic framework is adapted from the cognitive developmental theories of Jean Piaget, the great Swiss psychologist, and Lawrence Kohlberg whose research in moral development is well-known. The approach is called structuralist because it says that the working of the human mind has innate formal properties determining the patterns—structures—within which cognition occurs. It is called developmental because it says that the evolution of cognitive structures takes place in more or less defined stages. Piaget and Kohlberg have been primarily concerned with the formal operation of thinking and judging—the structures or patterns observed in the development of cognition, feeling and valuing. Fowler has undertaken to study faith from a similar point of view. He begins by defining faith as "a dynamic set of operations, more or less integrated, by which a person construes his/her ultimate environment."²¹ Without denying that there is always a content to the faith-act, he purposely focuses on its underlying structure rather than its content.

A fundamental Piagetian insight accepted by Fowler is that the child's earliest knowing, before language and the symbolic functions have developed, derives from the youngster's handling of objects. "Knowing begins with doing." The child constructs cognitional structures or operations, which according to Piaget and his school, are internalized patterns of knowing based on the child's interaction with objects and persons. These patterns or

²¹"Faith Development Theory and the Aims of Religious Socialization," a paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association, Milwaukee, October 24-26, 1975, p. 6. Besides this paper and the Thirkield-Jones Lectures cited in note 19, other reports of Fowler's work have appeared: "Toward a Developmental Perspective on Faith," *Religious Education* 69 (March-April, 1974), 207-19; "Stages in Faith," a report submitted to a symposium at Fordham University, Sept., 1975, to appear in a forthcoming book edited by Thos. Hennessy.

schemas enable the youngster to organize and, in their more developed stages, reliably anticipate the future behavior of objects and persons.

Schemas develop as a result of a child's efforts to adapt to his or her environment. The child does this through accommodation and assimilation. Accommodation refers to the changes in one's schemas necessary in order to absorb and incorporate elements of his or her environment. Assimilation is the process whereby one modifies the elements of environment in order that they may be managed and ingested by the knowing subject into pre-existing mental schemas. The process of adaptation is a complex one. At various times accommodation may be dominant whereas in other operations, assimilation is more characteristic. In more developed stages, there appears a balanced interplay between accommodation and assimilation which amounts to a dynamic equilibrium between the knowing subject and its environment.

Development in Piagetian terms is understood as the sequential construction of new schemas or operations of knowing to accommodate novel experiences with objects and persons which the child cannot assimilate into the old patterns. This developmental process is largely unconscious, formal or non-content-specific, and generalizable. In this perspective the knower's cognitional patterns are not merely internal mental copies of something that is simply "there" in external reality. Thus knowledge is seen as the product, the construction of reality a person makes. Piagetian researchers have found that these structural patterns are uniform for certain age groups, regardless of the individual's educational and cultural background. Moreover, a careful taxonomy of structural patterns discloses typical sets of operations, employed by individuals to construct, maintain and orient themselves in their world. The taxonomy further reveals that everyone's cognitional patterns develop in a hierarchical sequence referred to as stages. The stages are invariant, irreversible and universal.

Beginning with the premise that faith is a kind of knowing, Fowler has undertaken to adapt the research techniques of Piaget and Kohlberg to the area of "faith-knowing." "Faith," he writes, "is a knowing which includes loving, caring and valuing, as well as awe, dread and fear. Faith-knowing relates a person or community to the limiting boundaries and depths of experience; to the source, center and standard of valuing or responsibility in life."²² In short,

²²*Religious Education, loc. cit.*, p. 211.

faith presents a set of operations in which cognition and affection are inextricably entwined. Just as Piaget had only a secondary interest in a child's knowledge of mathematics, physics and logic; and just as Kohlberg's primary interest is not in the outcomes of moral decisions for their own sake, so Fowler does not focus on the content of faith as such. In fact, he has found that "the same or similar content of faith may be appropriated in quite different ways by persons whose faith-knowing is structurally different at different stages." Fowler, however, acknowledges a special difficulty in his research "due to the fact that the dimension of experience we refer to as God or the Transcendent must be symbolically represented and mediated in ways which the parties to moral conflict need not necessarily be."²³

Taking the six stages of moral development identified by Kohlberg as a starting point, Fowler subsequently modified them in the light of his own research. On the basis of several hundred in-depth interviews conducted with persons of various ages and background, he developed a taxonomy of operations or structures in faith-knowing. Each of the six stages has its own particular wholeness, set of operations and particular competencies. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide anything more than outline of these stages. The reader must go directly to Fowler's own writings for a fuller and properly nuanced description.

Stage I: Intuitive-Projective Faith. The child is powerfully influenced by the examples, moods, actions and language of the visible faith of significant adults. The phase is characterized by imitation. There is little distinction between fact and fantasy.

Stage II: Mythic-Literal Faith. The person begins to appropriate the stories, beliefs and rituals which symbolize one's identity with a faith community. Concepts tend to be largely concrete in reference; symbols, one dimensional and literal. Mythic forms function in lieu of explanations. Appeal to trusted authority (parents rather than peers) serves as the basis for verification.

Stage III: Synthetic-Conventional Faith. Faith is required to help provide a coherent and meaningful synthesis of involvements that grow increasingly complex and diverse and extend beyond the family. The individual, however, does not yet have to make a personal synthesis of meaning. The conventional wisdom suffices.

Stage IV: Individuating-Reflexive Faith. This stage marks the collapse of the kind of synthesis adequate in previous stages.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 213.

The responsibility for a world synthesis and particular life style shifts more clearly to the individual. Faith is called upon to help reduce the tension between such unavoidable polarities as individuality vs. belonging to community; self-fulfillment vs. service to others; the relative vs. the absolute, etc. A person in Stage IV is likely "to see most institutional religion as 'conventional,' and to be drawn to the exotic or novel in traditions."²⁴

Stage V: Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith. Authority has been fully internalized. "Faith-knowing involves, at this stage, a moral or volitional affirmation of that which is somewhat paradoxical: it affirms the beliefs, symbols and rituals of a community while 'seeing through' them in a double sense. It sees the relativity, partiality, and time-boundness of the tradition—the scandal of its particularity. But it also sees and values it as a way to see through to the Universal it mediates. What Stage V sees in its own faith-knowing and its symbols, rituals and the like, it also acknowledges in the developed faith traditions of other persons and cultures. Stage V generally involves a reappropriation (and reinterpretation) of one's past, and of the significant persons and groups whose example and teachings influenced its growth in faith-knowing."²⁵

Stage VI: Universalizing Faith. Few reach this stage. It is characterized "by an integration of life in faith in which immediacy of participation in the Ultimate is the fruit of development, of discipline, and, likely, of genius."²⁶ The sense of the oneness of all persons becomes a permeative basis for decision and action. Particulars are cherished because they are vessels of the universal. Life is both loved and held loosely.

Although Fowler continues to insist on the "provisional" nature of these descriptions, he argues that they have a normative value "by virtue of the comprehensiveness and balance built into the variables included in the description of each stage."²⁷ This contention raises a question far afield from the purpose of this paper (viz., at what point do the findings of the social sciences and empirical research evolve from being merely descriptive to become prescriptive?). It is not necessary, however, to discuss all the related issues to establish the usefulness of the stage-theory advanced by Fowler. Catechetics has long needed a paradigm like the stages of faith-knowing to help explain what it means when it

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Fordham symposium, p. 33.

says, as the General Catechetical Directory and other contemporary works repeatedly do, that the goal of catechesis is "maturity of faith."

Maturity of faith no longer appears as a static point which one may or may not reach in adult years. That faith is a dynamic element in the life of individuals and the community is not a new discovery. The New Testament uses a variety of images to make this point. One must struggle to preserve, cultivate and bring faith to maturity. Maturity of faith is experienced at each stage when individuals—children, adolescents, adults—harmoniously integrate faith-knowing with other operational structures in the overall patterns of psychological development, cognitional and affective. Each stage is characterized by a delicate equilibrium which has its own comprehensiveness and potential integrity. When this balance is achieved by a child according to his or her years or by an adult in a primitive culture, one can properly speak of maturity of faith. Even though Fowler's descriptions are said to be provisional, they can be most helpful in setting objectives and planning strategies for various groups who are being catechized. They bring the theology of grace and the psychology of human development, which too frequently move in different orbits, into dialogue with each other.

FAITH SEEN WHOLE

Fowler's research reinforces the conviction that one gains from reflecting on the considerations and distinctions sketched in these pages: In order to be properly understood faith must be seen whole and in the totality of its relationships. Whether or not his stages stand the scrutiny of time, Fowler has retrieved another insight of lasting importance for catechists when he notes that faith is "tri-polar." Theologians have traditionally spoken of faith in relational terms. In kerygmatic categories the relationship is presented as bi-polar: God speaks and the human subject responds. Though stated in more abstract terms Tillich, too, seems to consider faith as bi-polar: faith centers the self about one's ultimate concern. But Fowler adds a third term: Faith in its relatedness to the ultimate conditions of existence simultaneously informs and qualifies our relations and interactions with the mundane, the everyday, the world of other persons and things. While it can be distinguished from the concrete circumstances of human existence, faith is never separated from them.

A catechesis that fragments faith by dissecting it and looking at it *seriatim*, fails in its task. Like faith catechesis implies more than the teaching of a theological system or the communication of religious knowledge, more than training in making moral judgments, more than socializing a person into the institutional Church—more than all these tasks taken together. Catechesis is doing its job only when it takes people where they are and tries to bring them into a harmonious relationship with their universe, with God the source of their being and within themselves.

Catechists and theologians are of one mind in acknowledging that faith gives persons and communities a particular outlook on life, that it presumes a movement of grace and a free response on the part of the believer. These fundamental premises are important if Christian education is to meet its responsibility to itself as a discipline and to the community and members who make it up as its beneficiaries. Catechesis can never pretend to instill faith or to increase it through some classroom technique, audio-visual tools or educational gimmick. Even at its best catechesis is no more than an instrument in creating the proper dispositions for faith, a means of mediating God's salvific activity in the sacred precincts of a people's consciousness and freedom. If catechesis performs this task with unction and within the boundaries of its inherent limitations, it can itself become the grace through which persons grow and mature in faith.

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