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A Connection of Friends

**The Church's Relationship
With Young Adults**

Philip Nigel Drake

Degree of Master of Arts

**University of Durham
Department of Theology**

1999

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A Connection of Friends: The Church's Relationship With Young Adults **Philip Nigel Drake.**

Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts, June 1999.

There are a group of young adults whose relationship with the church can best be regarded as *apart and yet a part*, that is to say, who associate themselves with the church but do not want to be wholly committed to it. This personal impression of the 25-40 year old age group is explored in Part One of this thesis through a look at the empirical evidence and through psychological and sociological interpretations of young adulthood. From a sociological perspective, this tension of apart and yet a part is considered in terms of *believing and belonging*, and asking what young adults may have to offer to a modern world where the choice seems more and more to be between an endless variety of believing and a single belonging. Psychologically, there is a comparison to be made with the developmental tasks of *identity and intimacy*; here, the emphasis is placed on the interdependence of these tasks especially as they appear in a relationship of friendship.

In Part Two, there is a focus on the work of James Fowler as a means of understanding the relationship of young adults and the church, not only through the *theory of faith development* for which Fowler is best known, but also through his more recent work on a *public church*. Close attention is paid to Stages 3, 4 and 5 of faith development theory, and to a full critique of Fowler's work. If Fowler highlights the importance of a sense of *vocation* for individual lives, the argument presented in this thesis is that an understanding of *friendship* can encourage and sustain that sense of vocation in young adults as they relate to the church.

Part Three is given over to setting this argument on a sound footing, drawing on the resources of Methodism along the way. Following a dialogue between the work of Fowler and John Wesley centring on faith development theory, the conversation moves to a consideration of vocation and friendship as forms of *covenant*, seen in the light of the Methodist covenant service and Fowler's own writing on a covenant theme. This is followed by a third and final move which sets out a Methodist understanding of a public church with regard to its own tradition of living in *connexion*. By way of conclusion, the suggestion is made that the church's relationship with young adults is best initiated and supported by understanding that relationship as a *connection of friends*.

Acknowledgements.

This thesis began in 1996 as part of the final year of training for the Methodist (presbyteral) ministry at Durham. The second and third years of the project took the form of probationary studies during a first appointment in Liverpool. During these three years I have been grateful for the cooperation of a number of people. Professor Ann Loades at the Department of Theology in Durham and Professor Jeff Astley at the North of England Institute for Christian Education (NEICE) have guided me through the stages of planning, reading and writing. Their different insights and contrasting tutorial styles have stimulated varying lines of interest and thought. The library staff at the University, St. John's College and the NEICE resources room have been helpful when required. Assistance has also been given by the postgraduate staff (especially Margaret Parkinson) at the Department of Theology in advising me on the technicalities of MA study.

I am also in the debt of staff and students at the Wesley Study Centre in Durham: to the former Director, Rev. Philip Luscombe, for agreeing to MA studies as a part of the ministerial training programme; to tutorial staff, Helen Thorp and Jos Bryan, for providing encouragement and keeping my feet firmly on the ground; and to my student colleagues who listened to and commented upon the arguments being made. In Liverpool, mention must be made of the probationers' group who took the subject in hand as seminar material on two occasions.

If the formal work began in 1996, the whole area of young adult relationships with the church had been a personal concern for some time prior to this date. For this, the congregation at Carver Street Wesley Methodist Church (now at Broomhill) in Sheffield must take their share of the credit (or blame!). Equally, the role of colleagues and congregations in the Liverpool North Central Methodist Circuit has been significant in helping me to reflect upon my proposals and to root my thinking in a setting other than academia. Last, and certainly not least, I would like to thank Ruth, my wife, for her part in the whole project. We have travelled our young adulthood together from Sheffield to Durham and then on to Liverpool. Without her friendship along the way I am sure that none of this would have been possible.

Phil Drake, Liverpool, 1999.

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Introduction

Looking at Young Adulthood

The work presented in this thesis centres upon young adults of 25–40 years of age. In setting these age limits I am aware that the choices made do not necessarily reflect other chronological boundaries commonly placed by developmentalists on the period of life referred to as young adulthood. It is the lower limit in particular which may be of some surprise. As regards the upper limit, the age range 35–40 is considered by many theorists to mark the transition from young to middle adulthood.¹ However, the choice of the lower limit needs more careful justification. Of course, there is no universally set definition of when someone becomes an adult. A commonly perceived understanding of adulthood is that it begins at the age of eighteen. This would be perhaps the most obvious choice. As to the choice of twenty-five as the lower age limit, the clue is that I want to investigate the relationship between young adults and the church.

Within my own denomination of Methodism, the usual upper limit stated with regard to its work with young people (and a limit which is often reflected in local authority youth work) is twenty-five years of age. In a sense this is no bad thing. It would be harsh to think that at the age of eighteen one becomes fully an adult in a developmental sense. It is reasonable to assume that the movement into adulthood is marked by some kind of transitional period. The increase of an age limit for youth work from eighteen to twenty-five is in itself a generous one, recognising as it does this transition. But part of my concern is the suspicion that for many young adults the period following the age of twenty-five is an equally critical one in the formation of adult lives. It is this process which I envisage as continuing into the late twenties and into the early thirties.

I do not intend to suggest that the church does not care for those over twenty-five, nor that it fails to provide educational opportunities and pastoral support for adults. However, there would appear to be space for some kind of ongoing work to

¹ See, for example, the introduction to H. Atkinson, ed., *Handbook of Young Adult Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, 1995), p.3.



help adjust to a new situation. In effect, there remains the sense of a 'cut-off point' from below. One side of this coin is about how individuals learn and change and grow—and how this is affected by this cut off point of twenty-five. The other side is about provision of resources and support—and how this affects the lives of those who find themselves on the 'wrong' side of twenty-five.

In some respects the Methodist Church has already begun to grasp the implications of this process. Generally it has started to abandon the oversimplified relation between education and youth (as if we only learn whilst we are young!) as new and different understandings of continuing and adult education are accepted and incorporated into church programmes. One particular example would be a new found emphasis on work with families alongside and beyond the work with young people. But there needs to be a wider acknowledgement of the changes and possibilities within the whole period of young adulthood. Certainly parents (and their children) have particular needs, but there are other issues to be addressed. The areas of work, being single, or newly married are good examples of the wider brief which needs to be embraced. These areas of concern are not solely for young adults, of course, though they are of particular relevance to them.

My second assertion is that it is the 25–40 age group which is the one so often noted by its absence from many churches, more notable (I would suggest) than other age groups (especially teenagers) whose absence is so often mourned by church folk. I would argue that the church should not dwell overmuch on those who leave at a younger age, often because they are disillusioned with, bored by or simply have no time for the church. In some ways it is understandable that young people choose to explore the world in new and different ways outside of the church. By contrast, the late twenties and thirties would seem to offer a new possibility of a return and a reintegration into the life of the church. In this sense my concern is not so much with why people leave the church, so much as why they do not come back to it. We can suggest possible reasons for this absence on the level of individual commitment, personal circumstances, or the structure of the church. Any church which addresses the concerns and interests of young adults will become more attractive to them. But it must

make sure that it addresses all the issues, including the ones which require that church to look at its own life and structures.

Finally, it might be asked as to why a focus should be placed on this group rather than any other group of adults. Is it not in itself divisive (it might be argued) to take such an approach? I do not claim that the needs of this age group are any greater (or less) than any other, but this is no reason not to look at the needs of specific age groups. Indeed, it is quite possible to propose that if we are to learn from one another as representatives of different generations, and to foster intergenerational links in a fruitful way, it is surely advantageous to explore the characteristics and features of any given age group. What I would argue is that the exploration of young adulthood is not solely (or perhaps even especially) for young adults' own benefit, but that a fuller consideration of this age group raises questions and possibilities for the life of the whole church. However, that is a claim which remains to be validated.

Part One

Picturing Young Adulthood

Prologue

Apart and a part: a personal impression

The following picture of young adulthood is one taken from my own personal experience. The setting is a church, the openness of which was appreciated by many. It was the sort of church where you could 'come and go'; the kind of church where it was all right to question your faith and have doubts; a church where you were in the main free to set up your own self-help, self-led group for friendship or to meet a pastoral need. The young adults in the congregation were individuals exercising a large degree of independence in their lives, critically questioning and reflecting, perhaps collapsing the tension between individual and community on the side of the former rather than the latter, but remaining within the church because of the church's tolerance.

And yet, if an issue was at stake which impinged on an aspect central to the life of the church itself, on the need to be vulnerable, or the need to change, there was a certain in-built resistance. So it was quite acceptable for an individual to have doubts, but to be questioning as a church body was difficult. It was all right to raise issues of concern from within individuals' own lives, for example as a parent of young children or as a single person; but if these issues were aired as problems arising from tensions within the life of the church itself, the church was seemingly no longer so sympathetic. Thus, the presence and tolerance of young children in worship, or the question of a church which was equally welcoming to all, could quickly become touchy subjects all around. Indeed, the very issue of looking at the needs of this particular age group was viewed as special treatment at the expense of the whole community; any expression of dissatisfaction as an unwarranted criticism of the church.

The result was a tension between on the one hand a hesitation in making a commitment and the taking on of responsibility, and on the other hand a question mark

over how the church involved people and gave them a say in the decision-making process. It was characterised on the one side by those who felt uncertain as to what, if anything, they had to offer, and on the other side by those who claimed that there was less power to wield and less information to hold onto than might be thought to be the case.

Central to this piece of research is the presentation of a dilemma, and the possibility of its resolution. Essentially it is a dilemma of young adults in their twenties and thirties. In our example, that balance of church and young adults in relationship with one another well illustrates the dilemma of being *apart* and yet *a part*, a dilemma which raises problems and lessons for churches and young adults alike. It is that dilemma which forms the core of the exploration presented in this work. The approach is one which takes different ways of looking at the issues involved. Borrowing language from developmental psychology we might re-express the dilemma of being *apart* and yet *a part* as one of *identity* and *intimacy*. Drawing on sociological understanding it becomes possible to talk in terms of *believing* and *belonging*.

The social sciences help broaden the picture of young adulthood in different ways. A psychological approach can, for instance, place young adults in the perspective of the life-cycle. In this instance, young adulthood is to be understood in terms of the tasks of young adulthood, as opposed to the tasks of childhood and adolescence, or middle- and old-age. Alternatively, through the discipline of sociology it is possible to see young adults as a generation of their time. In a sociological understanding a particular generation of young adults will be shaped in their attitude and behaviour in a way which is distinctive from any other generation of young adults. The due influence of generational and life-cycle factors on religious attitudes and behaviour remains an area of academic dispute.² Nevertheless, both psychology and

² This is apparent in the interpretation of empirical evidence. See for example M. Abrams, D. Gerard, and N. Timms, eds., *Values and Social Change in Britain* (Macmillan Press, London, 1985), p.64, on the relationship of age and belief in God. Also see G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), pp.121-2, where Davie discusses the changing behaviour of teenagers. She asks the question, 'Are we, in the late twentieth century, experiencing a marked generational shift with respect to religious behaviour, or are the variations so far indicated simply in accordance with the normal manifestations of the life-cycle?' Longitudinal data, that is comparative information collected from the same group of individuals at different points over a period of time, can help in this respect.

sociology are helpful in understanding young adulthood. We begin, however, with some empirical research upon which the social sciences build. The impressionistic view of young adults is one of uncertain beliefs and as the age group most obviously absent from the churches. What is suggested by the empirical evidence?

Chapter 1

Believing and belonging

1.1. A statistical profile

1.1.1. An example of young adult research

In this section we take a look at young adult beliefs and values, and their relationship with the church and wider society, through two pieces of empirical research. The first set of data is taken from a study carried out by Francis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which focuses specifically on the 26–39 age group, with a further parallel study on 18–25 year olds undertaken in the same period providing a source of comparison with a different age group.³ The research presented in *Experience of Adulthood* is the result of a study commissioned by London Central YMCA into the ‘attitudes, values, and needs’ of the 26-39 age group. Of course there remains a question mark as to the representative nature of results from those who are members of a Christian association. Nevertheless, for our purposes it is a key piece of research because it matches almost precisely the years which form the focus for this study, an age which Francis acknowledges ‘is often comparatively inaccessible to the research psychologist because of the difficulty involved in gaining access to a substantial sample of this age group.’⁴

Two thousand and seventy four people (representing a high return of nearly 62% of London YMCA members in the 26–39 age group) returned their questionnaires. The forms included a series of statements with which respondents were required to agree strongly (AS), to agree (A), to indicate that they were not certain (NC), to disagree (D), or to disagree strongly (DS). This is how the responses are indicated in the accompanying Tables One and Two. However, in his written assessment of the statistics, Francis combines the first two options into a category of

³ L. J. Francis, *Experience of Adulthood: A Profile of 26-39 Year Olds* (Gower Publishing Company, Aldershot, 1982). His study on 18-25 year olds is entitled *Youth in Transit* (Gower Publishing Company, Aldershot, 1982). This latter book is not used in this paper, other than where Francis himself refers to its results in *Experience of Adulthood*.

⁴ Francis, *Experience*, p. 1.

agreement, whilst the final two he places under the general heading of disagreement. Responses which differ by 5% or more, he regarded as significant in statistical terms. The compiled information related to twelve areas of psychological development: well-being, worry, values, self image, beliefs, morals, law, politics, society, work, leisure, and counselling. Here we will concentrate on just two of these areas, which describe something of an individual's 'response to life,' namely, values (economic, personal, and social) and beliefs.

London Central YMCA is open to people of both sexes over the age of sixteen, of any religious faith or none.⁵ The approach taken here will be to draw on Francis' results for three particular divisions of the 26–39 age group.⁶ Firstly there is the division of the group into age sub-categories, 26–29 year olds and 30–39 year olds. Of the 7000 members of London Central YMCA, 40% were in the 16–25 age group, 48% in our target group of 26–39 year olds, and 12% aged forty and above. Within the 26–39 group, 44% were in their late twenties, and 56% in their thirties.⁷ In this section Francis also provides a comparison with the results from the parallel study on 16–25 year olds.

Secondly, there are differences in religion, for which Francis concentrates on three categories of Anglican, Roman Catholic, and no religion. Amongst the membership, however, there were representatives from other faiths and churches. Almost 67% claimed no religious allegiance, and of the 33% who did, just over 6% claimed allegiance to a world religion other than Christianity. It is the contrast between 'churched' and 'unchurched' which really concerns us here.

Thirdly, there is a comparison to be made between men and women, although it needs to be noted that only just over a quarter of 26–39 year old members were female. This forms part of an additional section on the statistics. In addition to these three sets of divisions we shall refer to Francis' commentary on the overall results on values and

⁵ Francis, *Experience*, p.2.

⁶ Francis makes ten such sets of divisions in presenting his results.

⁷ For the statistical tables relating to these three categories of division see Francis, *Experience*, pp.8 - 9.

beliefs which cover the age group as a single entity.

1.1.2. Patterns of believing

Francis' table for the 26-39 age group as a whole (see Table One) is reproduced below.⁸ The economic values covered money, work and home ownership; personal values included statements about self, friends and family; finally, religion, morality and politics formed a set of social values. Amongst the economic values, the issue of house ownership was more important than those about money. Saving and making money were more important than spending money. Work was the most important of the economic values. As it was markedly more so than the importance placed on making money, Francis concludes, 'Obviously the young adults do not work simply for the money. There is much more for them in work than merely the financial reward.'⁹ Friendship was placed highest of the personal values, with home and family and personal appearance ranking equally second. What other people thought of them was not regarded as important as other personal values, although almost three quarters of the sample still regarded it as being of importance to them.

Table One: Young adult values

	AS%	A%	NC%	D%	DS%
Saving money is important to me	11.3	50.3	16.2	19.6	2.6
Making money is important to me	11.4	51.5	17.3	17.7	2.0
Spending money is important to me	8.1	45.3	19.2	25.1	2.3
It is important for me to own my own house	29.8	46.6	9.6	12.4	1.5
My appearance is important to me	24.8	63.4	6.6	4.2	0.9
What people think of me is important to me	15.4	58.0	12.8	11.7	2.2
Friends are important to me	62.3	33.2	2.9	1.1	0.6
My home and family are important to me	42.4	46.1	6.6	4.5	0.9
My work is important to me	35.8	54.9	5.3	3.5	0.4
Religion is important to me	10.4	22.5	26.1	28.8	12.2
Moral values are important to me	28.4	58.1	9.4	3.2	0.9
Having a good time is more important than anything else	4.2	14.8	18.2	50.0	12.8
Politics is important to me	16.6	42.0	17.6	19.1	4.8

⁸ Francis, *Experience*, p.21. For this whole section on values see pp. 20-2, 40, 51-2, and 154-5.

⁹ Francis, *Experience*, p.21.

On the issue of social values, morality was regarded as most important, and the fact that less than 20% decided that having a good time was more important than anything else suggests a sense of moral responsibility. Of the three social values, politics was ranked second and religion third. Interestingly, more young adults were undecided about religion as a value in their lives (26.1%) than any other social (and indeed, any other) value. Young adults have made most progress in sorting out the importance of moral values in their lives, and least progress with regard to religious values. Francis suggests that this 'confirms the peripheral nature of religion for these young adults.'¹⁰

Looking at values in the context of sub-groups within the 26–39 age group, Francis discovered that there is little change made in economic and personal values during the late twenties and thirties. Significant changes are apparent in social values, however. For example, politics is of growing importance as a value from teenage and early twenties, through the late twenties and into the thirties. A similar growing trend can be detected with respect to moral values, which is matched by a declining importance with age of the value attached to having a good time. Religion as a value is harder to interpret. Those who regard religion as an important value declines from the 35% of teenagers to 28% of those in their early twenties. However, the period of the later twenties and early thirties shows a growing value placed upon religion (30% of those in their late twenties rising to 34% of those in their thirties).¹¹

The value placed on religion is further obscured by a look at the responses of those affiliated and unaffiliated to religious groups. Of those who claim no religious affiliation, 16% still say religion is important to them: 'Clearly, both among youth in transit and young adults, organised religion has no monopoly on the religious interest of the population as a whole.' Finally, although the Christians ranked morality and religion higher than the unchurched, Francis notes that 'a surprisingly high proportion' of Anglicans (39%) and Catholics (27%) do not regard religion as an important

¹⁰ Francis, *Experience*, p.22.

¹¹ Francis, *Experience*, pp.51-2.

value.¹²

This general uncertainty about religion as a value, as compared with other values, is illuminated in interesting ways by consideration of the sections on belief. This category of belief forms a second area of study in Francis' work.¹³ Table Two, below, shows that significant numbers expressed traditional religious beliefs: 53.9% believed in God; 39.9% believed that Jesus is the Son of God; 37.5% believed in life after death. A comparison of sub-groups within the age group shows that belief in God remains a constant throughout the 26–39 period. However, an increasing proportion of those in their thirties regarded themselves as atheists; presumably this reduces the proportion in the agnostic 'not certain' category. In contrast to belief in God, acceptance of other traditional beliefs (Jesus is the Son of God; life after death) continues to decline in the thirties. However, a significant proportion of responses fall into the not certain category: more remain undecided or open-minded about issues of belief than are hostile to it.

Table Two: Young adult beliefs

	AS%	A%	NC%	D%	DS%
I believe in God	22.5	31.4	26.2	11.5	8.4
I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God	17.8	22.1	37.0	10.7	12.5
I believe in life after death	14.6	22.9	39.8	12.8	9.9
I believe in reincarnation	7.2	13.1	39.0	18.0	22.6
The bible seems irrelevant for life today	5.7	17.7	34.4	32.0	10.2
The church seems irrelevant for life today	7.1	23.4	32.7	31.0	5.9
I take an active part in church	1.8	5.0	5.7	49.2	38.3
I think religious education should be taught in schools	8.9	50.3	20.6	14.4	5.8
I believe there is intelligent life on other planets	13.1	33.5	42.3	6.8	4.3
I believe in my horoscope	2.0	11.3	28.2	34.2	24.2
I believe that luck plays an important part in my life	9.1	44.7	21.7	20.8	3.7

Clearly large numbers of people outside the institutionalised church, or with only minimal links with it, continue to express religious beliefs. This is confirmed by Francis' figures on the unchurched, for whom traditional religious belief retains some

¹² Francis, *Experience*, p.155.

¹³ For this section see Francis, *Experience*, pp. 23-4, 41-2, 52-4, and 156-8.

hold: 38% believe in God, 26% claim Jesus as the Son of God, whilst 27% believe in life after death. Only a quarter of the unchurched rejected these views, whilst the largest group remained undecided.

The evidence about attitudes towards the churches remains ambiguous. Those claiming to be practising members of a religious group accounted for 33.1% of the sample, whilst 46.5% had attended some form of worship other than a wedding or a funeral within the past year. Of particular interest to Francis are the three-fifths of unchurched young adults who do not see the church as irrelevant. Francis concludes, 'Although not actively in receipt of their support, the churches by no means lack the interest or the goodwill of the unchurched young adults, many of whom seem to be keeping an open mind on religious matters.'¹⁴

During the thirties there is some further sorting out of uncertainty in attitudes towards the church. Whereas 36% of those in their late twenties were uncertain about the relevance of the church, only 30% of those in their thirties remained undecided. Similarly, whilst 37% of those in their late twenties were unsure about the relevance of the Bible, this had become 32% of those in their thirties. However, whereas the statistics reveal a more positive attitude towards the Bible among those in their thirties (the proportion of those reading the Bible actually increases in this period), they also show a less positive attitude towards the church within that same age group.

Interestingly, and significantly for this period of young adulthood, the one aspect of religious uncertainty which seems to have been resolved is that relating to active participation in the church. 'I take an active part in church' is clearly a more tightly defined term than Francis' more general point about religious affiliation. According to Francis' results, 87.5% do not take an active part, leaving 6.8% who do. Only 5.7% remain undecided about whether they can describe themselves as taking an active part in the church. This is a substantially smaller category of 'uncertains' than is apparent in the more general categories of beliefs. In some ways this marks a curious response, perhaps representing uncertainty as to what the statement 'I take an active part in a church' means. However, it is possible that it is a genuine reflection of a

¹⁴ Francis, *Experience*, p.157.

position held on the fringes of church life, where an individual does not feel fully a part of the church, and yet does not remain aloof from it. As a proportion it remains small when compared to the number who claim no active participation in a church; and yet as a percentage it gains considerable significance when placed alongside those who do claim to be active in the churches. The group which declares its active participation in the churches (6.8%) is not much larger than the one which declares its uncertainty in this matter (5.8%).

Hence from Francis work on young adults it is possible to draw two general conclusions. First, we can remind ourselves of those who are 'undecided' as to the value of religion and about particular religious beliefs. In matters of religion at least, young adulthood is a time of uncertainty, with the exception of whether or not to participate actively in the life of the church. Secondly, we can comment on that very disparity between the holding of religious beliefs and taking a more active role within the church. While levels of belief remain reasonably high, the level of active participation is relatively low. It is to this question of more active participation to which we turn in a second source of empirical evidence.

1.1.3. An example of churchgoing research

This second set of data is taken from the English Churches Survey of 1989 as compiled and presented by Brierley.¹⁵ It offers comparative data on churchgoing with respect to age groups, gender, denominations, and the churches *vis-a-vis* the general population, and further comparisons with data collated in 1979. It is the most useful piece of research on recent churchgoing available to us, particularly as it breaks down the information into age groups. The tables presented in '*Christian*' England were drawn up from some 27000 responses, representing a return of 70%. However, while the returns of the URC, Methodist, Anglican and Baptist churches were over 70%, some of the other groupings were below this figure. The lower returns from the Independent and Pentecostal churches places question marks as to how representative

¹⁵ P. Brierley, '*Christian*' England: *What the 1989 English Churches Census Reveals* (MARC Europe, London, 1991). The information presented in this paper is supplemented by Brierley's own extended commentary on the census results, *Prospect for the Nineties. All England: Trends and Tables from the English Churches Census* (MARC Europe, London, 1991).

they are of their respective groupings as a whole. For Gill this is a moot point in the light of what he regards as Brierley's over-positive comments on the growth of these churches.¹⁶

Brierley's data are not ideal for our purposes: for one thing, the age groups 20–29 years and 30–44 years do not wholly match the age range under consideration in this piece of research, covering as they do four or five years either side of the upper and lower limits of the 25–40 age group. Nevertheless, as a source of information representing returns from some two thirds of English churches it is very useful. Gill describes it as an 'invaluable resource,' for the data if not for the commentary that goes with it. He also approves of the use of statistics for churchgoing rather than any measure of church 'membership' (such as Brierley uses elsewhere, for example in MARC Europe's *UK Christian Handbook*) which raises problems of making comparisons between the denominations.¹⁷

However, Brierley's use of 'churchgoer' and 'non-churchgoer', for example as used in Table Three below, does have its limitations. They do not, for example, allow for an 'uncertain' category along the lines of that offered by Francis in answering the statement 'I take an active part in a church.' Although 'churchgoer' and 'non-churchgoer' fulfil the criteria of the research for which they were designed, in other ways the rather stark division they present is less than helpful.

1.1.4. Patterns of belonging

One of the major advantages of Brierley's statistics is that they allow for comparison of the behaviour of different age groups. A look at the statistics for churchgoers and non-churchgoers (Table Three)¹⁸ reveals that the age groups containing the largest percentage of non-churchgoers since 1979 have been the 20–29 and 30–44 age categories. Indeed in 1989 the percentage of non-churchgoers in the 20–29 age group had grown from 91% to 94% in the space of a decade. What larger picture of young adulthood can be drawn from Brierley's results?

¹⁶ R. Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (SPCK, London, 1993), p.17.

¹⁷ Gill, *Myth*, pp.17-18,20-22.

¹⁸ Taken from Brierley, *'Christian' England*, p.95.

Table Three: Percentage of churchgoers and non-churchgoers in the population by age 1989

	Churchgoers 1989			Non-churchgoers 1989			Non-churchgoers 1979
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Total
Under 15	13	15	14	87	85	86	86
15-19	8	10	9	92	90	91	88
20-29	5	8	6	95	92	94	91
30-44	7	10	9	93	90	91	91
45-64	8	12	10	92	88	90	90
65 & over	12	14	13	88	86	87	87
Overall	9	12	10	91	88	90	89

Brierley's figures allow us to place young adults in the context of other age groups in other ways, for example as a comparison with the general population figures. Figures from Table Four¹⁹ show that the biggest discrepancies amongst all age categories between churchgoers and the general population lay with the 20-29 and 30-44 age groups. Whereas in 1989 the 20-29 age group formed 16% of the general population, they only formed 10% of the churchgoers. Similarly with the 30-44 group, a general population figure of 20% in this age group can be contrasted with a figure of 17% amongst churchgoers of that age. A comparison with the 1979 figures shows that, whereas the percentage difference within the 30-44 age group (between the proportion of that age group as a percentage of the general population and the proportion of that age group as a percentage of churchgoers) has remained the same at 3%, within the 20-29 age group it has grown markedly more, from a difference of 3% in 1979 to 6% in 1989.

Within Methodism (Table Five²⁰) the figures for churchgoers are skewed heavily towards the 45 plus age group, even more so to the 65 and over category. A comparison with Table Four shows that all other age categories in Methodism form a smaller proportion of churchgoers compared with percentages from English churches as a whole. This is especially true of the 20-29 age group (3% fewer than English.

¹⁹ Taken from Brierley, *Prospect*, p.21.

²⁰ Taken from Brierley, *Prospect*, p.27. It is worth noting that, although the Methodist Church does keep a record of church attendance through its annual 'October count', the statistics do not take account of specific age groups other than a 'twenty-five and under' age category.

churches as a whole), and most pronounced amongst the 30–44 category, where the proportion of Methodist churchgoers in this group is some 5% lower than the equivalent figure in Table Four. Hence it can be seen from Table Five that, although 16% of the population as a whole and 10% of the churchgoing population is aged 20–29 years, the same age group accounts for only 7% of the Methodist population ; and within the 30–44 age group the 20% of the national population and the 17% of the churchgoing population made up by that age group can be compared with 12% of the Methodist population aged 30–44 years.

Table Four: Age and sex of churchgoers 1979 and 1989 (all churches)

Age-Group	Population 1979			Churchgoers in 1979			Churchgoers in 1989 ¹			Population 1989		
	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %
Under 15	11	10	21	13	13	26	12	13	25	10	9	19
15-19	4	4	8	4	5	9	3	4	7	4	4	8
20-29	7	7	14	5	6	11	4	6	10	8	8	16
30-44	10	9	19	7	9	16	7	10	17	10	10	20
45-64	11	12	23	9	11	20	9	13	22	11	11	22
65 and over	6	9	15	7	11	18	7	12	19	6	9	15
All ages	49	51	100	45	55	100	42	58	100	49	51	100

¹ This table is based on responses from 68% of all churches in England

Table Five: Age and sex of churchgoers 1979 and 1989 (Methodist Church)

Age-Group	Population 1979			Churchgoers in 1979			Churchgoers in 1989 ¹			Population 1989		
	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %	Men %	Women %	Total %
Under 15	11	10	21	14	14	28	9	14	23	10	9	19
15-19	4	4	8	2	3	5	2	3	5	4	4	8
20-29	7	7	14	2	3	5	3	4	7	8	8	16
30-44	10	9	19	5	7	12	5	7	12	10	10	20
45-64	11	12	23	8	17	25	8	15	23	11	11	22
65 and over	6	9	15	9	16	25	10	20	30	6	9	15
All ages	49	51	100	40	60	100	37	63	100	49	51	100

¹ This table is based on responses from 64% of all Methodist churches in England

A further factor is demographic change across England as a whole. Table Six²¹ shows the net change amongst churchgoers 1979–89. In this table it can be seen that the greatest losses in absolute terms have been in the under 15 and 15–19 categories. Losses from the next two categories, 20–29 and 30–44 were fewer in number, but when these figures are shown against wider population changes (see Table Seven²²) the significance of these changes becomes apparent. Whereas children and teenagers

²¹ Table 31 in Brierley, *'Christian' England*, p.82.

²² Table 32 in Brierley, *'Christian' England*, p.84.

dropped out in large numbers from church attendance between 1979 and 1989, their numbers across the whole country also declined by a large amount. However, if attention is paid to the corresponding figures for young adults it will be seen that numbers were lost in both the 20–29 and 30–44 categories from the church, although in the population as a whole numbers have been rising in these age groups. Brierley comments, ‘It is the twenties and thirties age groups that the churches seem to be missing out most. In the population these groups are in the ascendancy but not in the church.’²³ Currently the churches are missing out on the increased potential of this age group resource. Perhaps one positive sign for the Methodist church is that, between 1979 and 1989, it successfully attracted those in the 20–29 age group, despite continued losses across English churches as a whole.²⁴

Table Six: Net change in churchgoers 1979-1989 by age and gender

	Under 15	15-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65 & over	All ages
Men	-124,000	-64,000	-52,000	-56,000	-29,000	-35,000	-360,000
Women	-70,000	-91,000	-43,000	-19,000	+43,000	+27,000	-153,000
Total	-194,000	-155,000	-95,000	-75,000	+14,000	-8,000	-513,000

Table Seven: Net change in population numbers 1979-1989 by age and gender

	Under 15	15-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65 & over	All ages
Men	-198,000	-435,000	+504,000	+464,000	+34,000	+260,000	+629,000
Women	-206,000	-426,000	+448,000	+497,000	-92,000	+226,000	+447,000
Total	-404,000	-861,000	+952,000	+961,000	-58,000	+486,000	+1,076,000

This general picture of young adults and the church suggests that there is work to be done by the churches in understanding and working with young adults. If Brierley’s results make clear the basic facts about the absence of young adults in the church this needs to be seen in the light of Francis’ data. If young adults are not actively participating in the church, nor are they wholly closed off from it. Furthermore, absence from the churches does not imply absence of belief. Alongside those who claim to hold religious beliefs, there are also significant numbers of young

²³ Brierley, ‘*Christian’ England*, p.85.

²⁴ See Tables 35 and 36, in Brierley, ‘*Christian’ England*, pp.88 and 89.

adults who are as yet uncertain as to their religious beliefs, and are still to decide about what they believe.

These broad conclusions can be generally confirmed from other statistical sources. For example, in 1987, the Church of Scotland produced the results of its own survey into beliefs and patterns of behaviour, not only of Church of Scotland members but also of those of other and no denomination.²⁵ In a chapter focussed upon age groups in the range 18–44 years, 45–64 years and 65 years and over, the table representing ‘degree of commitment to the church’ showed that the ‘young’ group represented a smaller proportion of their number in the categories of ‘highly committed’ and ‘fairly committed’ than their counterparts in the ‘middle-aged’ and ‘elderly’ groups. By contrast, the young group showed higher percentage figures as compared to the other two groups in two further categories of ‘not very committed’ and ‘not at all committed.’²⁶ On the question of beliefs, the 18–44 year olds showed a greater percentage in the ‘don’t believe and ‘don’t know’ categories than those in the other two groups. The one exception was in the table showing the relationship between age and belief in eternal life, where the ‘don’t know’ category was greater as a proportion in both the middle-aged and elderly groups than in their younger counterparts.²⁷

1.1.5. The effect of variables: the example of gender

The interpretation of statistics is further complicated by the introduction of other variables, which will create differences within any given age group. Tables Three to Seven, for example, highlight the differences set by gender. Brierley’s assessment of future trends is that the difference in percentage terms between numbers of men and women in the church will continue to grow in all age groups apart from the under-15s.²⁸ Interestingly, and in contradiction to figures for the churches as a whole, statistics for the Methodist church show a greater degree of success in attracting or maintaining numbers of *men* than of women in both the 20–29 and 30–44 age groups.

²⁵ *Lifestyle Survey* (Church of Scotland Board of Social Responsibility, Edinburgh, 1987).

²⁶ *Lifestyle Survey*, p.48 (Table 3.2).

²⁷ *Lifestyle Survey*, p.52 (Tables 3.8, 3.10 and 3.11).

²⁸ See Table headed ‘Age and Sex of churchgoers 1989 and 2000’ in Brierley, *Prospect*, p.24.

Between 1979 and 1989 Methodism made a net gain of 3000 men but only 2000 women in the 20–29 age group, and a net loss of only 5300 men compared with 7500 women in the 30–44 group.²⁹

Francis' study of 26–39 year olds shows no significant differences between the sexes with regard to economic and personal values. The same may be said of the value attached to religion (about a third in each case). Women, however, place greater emphasis on moral values (and attach less value to having a good time), whilst men regard politics as being of greater importance.³⁰

It has been shown that equal numbers of men and women in the 26–39 age group regard religion as an important value. However, Francis sees his results as clearly demonstrating that 'the women are considerably more religious than the men in terms of their beliefs, attitudes and practices.'³¹ In virtually all categories, women show stronger beliefs than men. The one significant exception is that this tendency does not result in women playing a more active part in the church (between 6 and 7% are active amongst both men and women). Almost two-thirds (65% of women and 66% of men) claimed no religious affiliation. The similarities in statistics for active participation, affiliation and the value placed on religion for both women and men may well be a reflection of the kind of women who choose to join YMCA. For example, Francis' statistics do not show how many of his sample are women at home with children, a group identified elsewhere (see paragraph below) as being especially lacking in any sense of religious conviction.

It is often stated that there are, and always have been, more women than men involved in the life of the church. From a sociological point of view Davie favours

²⁹ See Tables 35 and 36, in P. Brierley, *'Christian' England*, pp.88 and 89.

³⁰ Francis, *Experience*, p.40.

³¹ Francis, *Experience*, p.41. More recently Francis has indicated his approval of gender orientation theories as offering a helpful understanding of why women are more religious than men. Acknowledging that not all psychologists of religion are happy with these general assertions about the religiosity of women and men, Francis suggests that the advantage of gender orientation theories is that they try to make adequate account of a feminine orientation in men as well as in women. See L.J. Francis, 'The Psychology of Gender Differences in Religion: a Review of Empirical Research,' in *Religion* vol. 27 (1997), pp.81-96.

explanations 'which underline the proximity of women to birth and death.'³² But if the statistics show a significant grouping of older women within the churches, she also recognises the striking absence among those of child-bearing age. As Davie comments, 'There are, quite clearly, no easy answers.'³³

Gerard offers one possible explanation. He notes that the least religious group amongst a sample of all ages was a group of young women (aged under 25 years) at home, usually with children. He suggests that it is the remoteness of young women from church and society in this situation, and an associated negative effect on psychological well-being, which gives the result of low levels of religious conviction.³⁴ It may be that a lack of contact within the community leads to an increasing sense of isolation. This may help to explain why women in their thirties are more likely to show religious commitment, perhaps because these kind of contacts have been restored as, for example, they return to work. However, offering a reason as to why working women are more likely to have a stronger religious affiliation than non-working women does not help us to answer the question as to why working men are more likely to be absent from churches.

Gender issues affect the interpretations of our choice in whatever area of study. In the field of human development for example, the description of young adulthood as a period of growing independence, and establishing oneself in a career and creating and supporting a family, is typical of the scheme proposed by Levinson. But one need only note the title of his book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, to question how well this schema might help to interpret women's lives. But it is not only the difference between men and women's lives that needs to be noted. As we have seen, there may be equally significant differences between different groups of women.

³² G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, p.120.

³³ Davie, *Religion*, p.121.

³⁴ See Abrams *et al*, *Values*, p68-9 and Table 3.6 on p.71.

1.2. A sociological sketch

1.2.1. Believing without belonging: a sociological perspective

The terms 'believing' and 'belonging' are useful ones in an attempt to summarise the statistical findings as presented by Brierley and Francis. While young adults continue to a large extent to hold religious beliefs (or at least not to have dismissed such beliefs out of hand), they have not continued to belong to religious institutions. On the whole they show little interest in the churches in any way other than an ambivalent one, that is remaining open to the church, rather than be actively hostile to it. The phrase 'believing without belonging', borrowed here from sociologists, is a shorthand way of expressing the 'mismatch' in British society between relatively high levels of nominal religious belief and low levels of religious practice.³⁵ In 'believing without belonging', then, the religious attitudes and behaviour of young adults are, in broad terms, no different to those shown in society as a whole. In this sense, patterns of young adulthood become a reflection of general trends in religion as described by sociologists.

How have these general trends shaped the current generation of 25-40 year olds? Born between 1957 and 1972, these young adults came into a period of hope and progress. Building on the successes of the post-war world—the construction of a new political order, the establishment of a welfare state, the founding of a new Elizabethan age—the 1960s embraced a spirit of hope and optimism. This was the era of the swinging sixties, confident and brash. But it also marked a change from the past. The notion of progress, which gave a sense that there was no social problem which could not be solved through government leadership and planning, also led to a liberalising of morals and attitudes, and to a period of counter-culture with its demonstrative ideals of peace and love. The greater availability of divorce, abortion and contraception, the increasing accessibility to institutions of higher education, and changing patterns of work, brought changes to women's lives, and had implications for men's lives as traditional family organisation became disrupted. For young people too, changes were at hand, as greater numbers moved away to study as a result of the expansion of higher

³⁵ See, for example Davie, *Religion*, pp.4-5.

education and the establishment of new universities and polytechnics.

This period also marked changes in attitudes to churches and religious values, as many broke institutional attachments and turned their back on traditional Christian values. Young children were no longer sent to, or expected to attend, Sunday school. This generation became increasingly ignorant of traditional Christian teaching and language. Again, these developments were continuations of a post-war trend, but it was in the 1960s that the churches, by now no longer able to ignore the significance of the changes taking place around them, began to look for more appropriate ways to live in the increasingly secular Western culture. The search for 'relevance' became their order of the day: in theological thinking; in worship and church architecture; in language and translations of scripture. The most far-reaching changes came from the Roman Catholic Church and the modernising programme set by the Second Vatican Council.

But if they were born into a 'new world' dominated by the secular agenda, this generation of young adults reached the age of majority in a very different setting. In the 1970s economic realities hit home, especially through the oil crisis and the inflationary spiral set in place in the middle of that decade. The sense of confidence and ground-breaking activity which had characterised the previous decade gave way to the different realities of mass unemployment and industrial decline. Radical change came in the 1980s. The Thatcher years marked a revolution in social attitudes, a new enterprise culture of self-help and self-achievement, encouraged by a programme of privatisation, and reform of the welfare state. The growing division of rich and poor was apparent in young adults between those who flourished as 'yuppies' and those who settled into long periods of unemployment or time spent on training schemes.

The most notable change in religious terms came with the new religious movements which appeared on the scene in the 1970s; house churches and evangelical congregations within the main denominations became particularly attractive to teenagers and young adults. In the 1980s Independent and Pentecostal churches grew markedly in terms of both numbers of congregations and numbers of individuals. In the face of continuing economic difficulties, the house churches offered a different kind of security, expressed through their authoritative theology and teaching. More positively,

and in a society where an ethos of individualism and self-achievement were becoming the norm, it is possible that the continuing success of house churches amongst young adults reflects the opportunities for leadership and responsibility offered to this age group.

It was these kind of developments that led to criticism of the secularisation model by some sociologists. Secularisation is the means by which the church's role is undermined, 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.'³⁶ But the prospering of some churches in the 1980s, like the growth of the Christian right in America and the rise of fundamentalism in the Islamic world, counted against this secularising process. Also, whether it be regarded as 'popular' or 'folk' religion or otherwise,³⁷ there was a persistence of religious belief in the lives of the vast majority of people outside of the churches.³⁸

1.2.2. Believing as belonging: an alternative proposal

An attempt to understand this phenomenon of 'believing without belonging' raises the issue of which element is most fundamental to the whole process—believing or belonging? Using the terms 'meaning' and 'belonging' to indicate that 'Christianity provides both an integrated belief system and a means of expressing commitment through ritual participation,' Gerard wishes to indicate the primacy of 'meaning' over 'belonging': 'whilst it can be argued that some people may join worshipping communities for reasons which are not primarily religious—and yet eventually become committed—the direction of causation is primarily from 'meaning' to 'belonging'.' Furthermore, 'it is to be expected that the higher the level of individual commitment, the greater the degree of institutional involvement.'³⁹ Belief creates the commitment to play a full role in the institution. Hence the ordering of the process for Gerard is that as

³⁶ B.R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: a Sociological Comment* (C.A. Watts and Co., London, 1966), p.xiv.

³⁷ It has been argued that Christianity has never been anything more than a veneer over the beliefs and practices of the people over the centuries. See, for example, K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Penguin Books, London, 1971), on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

³⁸ Princess Diana's funeral was a case in point. Of course, Diana herself was a young adult at the time of her death, and this may have had an impact on the way other young adults were affected by this event.

³⁹ Gerard, 'Religious Attitudes and Values,' in Abrams *et al*, eds., *Values*, p.52.

religious faith is regarded as less and less a priority so far as passing on values to children is concerned, so there will be fewer committed Christians to participate in the life of the churches.⁴⁰

In such a scheme beliefs attached to traditional religion become weaker with each generation until they are no longer identifiably Christian at all. To use Davie's description, a 'rich seedbed' of Christian nominalism gives rise to a whole variety of new religious forms, as seen in the New Age movement, itself displaying a great diversity.⁴¹ Christian belief becomes simply one choice among many different beliefs. For Davie this is neither a process of secularisation, nor the emergence of a deliberately chosen post-modern future, but only 'the fall-back position acquired by British people when they simply do nothing.'⁴²

One possibility is that religion itself is ripe for redefinition in the light of holistic ideals of younger generations, for example about the environment, personal health and well-being, and other issues which can take on religious overtones. On the other hand it is possible to describe the situation in terms of the up and coming generation of children and teenagers who, according to some preliminary research, will have few religious beliefs of any kind. For the first time, it is suggested, numbers of teenagers believing in God have fallen below those who do not.⁴³ Perhaps 'believing without belonging' is ultimately no more than secularism delayed; a process which allows secularism in through the back-door.

Robin Gill has echoed some of the criticism of the secularisation model, as presented in the 'believing without belonging' theme. But he also questions some of the assumptions of these more recent trends in sociological thinking. It is an argument which extends from his insistence that belonging takes precedence over believing. 'People believe and then they belong, so it is assumed...in that order. In contrast, I am convinced that the order is mostly the other way around. We belong—and *then* we

⁴⁰ Gerard, 'Religious Attitudes and Values,' in Abrams *et al*, eds., *Values*, p.88.

⁴¹ Davie, *Religion*, p.43.

⁴² Davie, *Religion*, p.199.

⁴³ R. Gill, *A Vision for Growth* (SPCK, London, 1994), p.32.

believe.' Indeed he suggests that it may take many years of belonging before an individual might feel 'fully comfortable' with their beliefs.⁴⁴ Belief is not usually the starting-point for the Christian life, nor is loss of belief usually the reason for leaving the church. Hence those people who continue to hold religious beliefs long after they have left the church.

Gill presents a theological argument to support his position. His concern is with corporate worship, within which 'belief becomes commitment, words become Word, actions become sacraments, singing becomes hymnody, and hopes become prayers.'⁴⁵ Hence his agenda is primarily addressed to those things which will encourage belonging, an activity centred around worship rather than social action or evangelism. 'Belief needs to be nurtured and shaped by worshipping communities. The priority of mission in Britain at the moment is to foster growth in these communities.'⁴⁶ In placing nurture and spiritual growth firmly within the context of worship, Gill has fallen into line with a general trend within the programme of many churches.⁴⁷

His argument is also empirical and sociological. He suggests that more attention should be paid to the idea that Christian belonging started to decline long before Christian belief. Furthermore, he contends that the mass of statistics in his *The Myth of the Empty Church* also shows that this decline in belonging has not so much been due to a process of secularisation, as to a failure inherent within the churches themselves: that 'competing convictions' between churches (seen especially in the construction of new church buildings) as well as displaying all kinds of messages about success and increasing numbers, also contained the seeds of their own destruction. Built at a time in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this century, when church membership had just levelled off, these new buildings were never full. It is the half

⁴⁴ Gill, *A Vision*, p.34.

⁴⁵ R. Gill, *Competing Convictions* (SCM Press, London, 1989), p.78.

⁴⁶ Gill, *A vision*, p.36.

⁴⁷ See J. Astley, 'The role of worship in Christian learning,' in J. Astley, L. Francis and C. Crowder, eds., *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation* (Gracewing, Leominster, 1996), p.244ff. The basis of his argument is for a reintegration of the cognitive and affective elements of learning, through what he calls the explicit (hearing the scriptures and their exposition) and implicit (in the ritual and ceremonial) catechesis of liturgy: 'The teaching of Christian doctrine and the formation of Christian attitude must take place together...Christian worship is the paradigm situation for that joint activity' (p.250).

empty churches that were never full (the myth of the empty church) which led to the decline of morale amongst churches, and led them into a spiral of decline. It is this mentality of decline which has dominated the main denominations throughout the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Gill therefore differs from other sociological critics of secularisation in looking for reasons for decline within the church itself rather than adapting a more general sociological understanding such as the decline in membership of voluntary associations, secular as well as religious.⁴⁹

1.2.3. Believing and belonging: a further possibility

How does all this argument about believing and belonging relate to the believing and belonging of young adults? It is possible that we can make little more of young adulthood than that which its sociological context shows. The evidence is that young adults are indeed believers without belonging, in much the same way as the society in which they live, set on a course of increasingly pluralistic forms of belief, or forms so weak that it is difficult to describe them as religious beliefs at all (at least not without redefining terms). The other picture which we have presented is the one which shows the presence of young adults in churches more rigidly defined by the choice to belong, and where belief is defined by the boundaries of belonging.

Neither of these pictures should go unchallenged. The first gave us a picture of disintegrating belief. It is twenty years since Jean Bouteiller argued that those whom the church called 'defective believers' (because they were 'too frivolous or too demanding') would be better regarded as 'threshold Christians', that is on the threshold or in the doorway of the church. 'The threshold,' commented Bouteiller, 'is an integral part of the building; it is neither an accessory, nor an appendage.'⁵⁰ Patterns of belief had not changed so much that these individuals had ceased to belong. Indeed, in Bouteiller's argument, to be on the threshold is just as much to belong as being inside. The second picture, of an all-embracing belonging, has received equal scrutiny from

⁴⁸ See Gill, *Myth*; also *Competing Convictions* by the same author.

⁴⁹ See for example Davie, *Religion*, pp.18-9.

⁵⁰ See J. Bouteiller, 'Threshold Christians: A challenge for the church,' in W. J. Reedy, ed., *Becoming a Catholic Christian* (W. H. Sadler, New York, 1979), p.66-7. He also writes, '...many encamped at the Church's doors are willing to be recognized as being of the Church and to be linked to it, but they are very hesitant about being recognized as being integrally *within the Church*' (p.68).

Peter Selby. In his book *BeLonging*, Selby has called for an understanding of belonging which is not based on the rigid exclusiveness of human kinships. Rather there should be a sense to belonging which builds on the call to 'be longing' for the wholeness of God's promise and grace. A belief which longs for completeness in God redefines what it means to belong in a more inclusive way.⁵¹

Thus we are presented with a third possibility, a picture of both believing *and* belonging, where each is not wholly identified with the other, and yet where their interdependence is recognised. The description with which we started was of a later young adulthood lived in the tension of both believing and belonging. Does the image of a believing and a belonging lived in tension during the young adult years have something to offer a world where the choices are between an endless variety of believing or a single belonging? Hence my concern to investigate the relationship of 25–40 year olds and the church: not simply because the church might be more creative in its work with this group, but because of the possibility that these later young adults have something distinctive to contribute toward the life of the church in a very different future. This is one of the key issues which will be tackled in Part Two. However, given the difficulties of authentically living out such a position of tension, it is a possibility which is unlikely to flourish without affirmation and support. How might this contribution best be shaped? To help answer this question we turn to areas of human and religious development as processes suited to the understanding and formation of young adult lives.

⁵¹ P. Selby, *BeLonging: Challenge to a Tribal Church* (SPCK, London, 1991).

Chapter 2

Identity and intimacy

2.1. A psychological portrait

2.1.1. Identity, intimacy and young adult development

One tool available to help investigate the relationship of young adults and the church is the psychosocial model of human behaviour, which draws on both psychological and social observations. Life-cycle theories, such as the ones proposed by Erikson and Levinson (which will be the main basis for the work presented here), offer an overview of the human life in terms of 'stages' or 'seasons' of development. In Erikson's model human development is described in terms of a set of issues forming a series of stages, with each stage building upon the successful resolution of the issue characterising the previous stage. In Erikson's theory the issues are present at all stages of life, but each has its own particular 'time' when it emerges into ascendancy, as the dominant issue which needs to be resolved. Failure to resolve the issue successfully will inhibit further development. So, for example, the issue of identity, which reaches its ascendancy in adolescence, requires the successful resolution of the crisis between identity and identity confusion; that is to say, a sure sense of one's own identity rather than that overidentification with one's role models which leads to the loss of one's own identity.⁵²

If identity is the issue of adolescence, the issue for the young adult is that of intimacy, seen for example in a loving relationship with another, 'the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships, and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises.'⁵³ The issue to be resolved is that of intimacy versus isolation, the 'readiness to isolate, and if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own.'⁵⁴ However, according to Steele, the

⁵² E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (Penguin Books, England, 1965), p.255.

⁵³ Erikson, *Childhood*, p.255.

⁵⁴ Erikson, *Childhood*, p.255.

self should be seen not only as *assertive* in this way but also as being *vulnerable* because of a fear of rejection or of 'disappearing as a self.'⁵⁵ This contrasts to some extent with Erikson's picture of a confident self:

The strength acquired at any stage is tested by the necessity to transcend it in such a way that the individual can take chances in the next stage with what was most vulnerably precious in the previous one. Thus, the young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others.⁵⁶

In Erikson's scheme, the resolution of this crisis is the emergence of a sure sense of identity. Hence Erikson's statement that 'the condition of a true twoness is that one must first become oneself.'⁵⁷

Feminist criticism has indicated that a more adequate understanding might be to see identity and intimacy as interrelated rather than the separate issues presented by Erikson.⁵⁸ Gabriel Moran, researching into religious implications of notions of human development, has found common ground with feminist points of view. He is not sure that Erikson has grasped the implications of this criticism. He notes comments made by Erikson in an interview, that there may be a different pattern of development in women, in which the issue of intimacy may proceed that of identity.⁵⁹ Moran thinks that Erikson has missed the point that identity and intimacy are interrelated rather than separate activities.

⁵⁵ L. Steele, 'Psychological Characteristics of Young Adults,' in Atkinson, ed., *Handbook*, p.101.

⁵⁶ Erikson, *Childhood*, p.255.

⁵⁷ E. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (International Universities Press, New York, 1959), p.95.

⁵⁸ Carol Gilligan is clear that Erikson was aware of these different patterns of development, although he at no stage presented a structure to reflect these different understandings of men and women's lives. See C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982), p.12. For Gilligan's own comments on the fusion of identity and intimacy see for example p.159. For an account of Gilligan's work in this thesis, see section 4.2.

⁵⁹ As reported by Gabriel Moran, in *Religious Education Development* (Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1983), p.39, Erikson commented in the interview, "It has been said that my life-cycle theory does not fit women, that in men identity comes first and then intimacy, but in women intimacy comes first and then identity. There is, of course, a lot to be said for that, especially in the light of a traditional system in which the woman's name is going to depend on the man she is going to marry."

Moran has set himself the task of providing a more adequate view of development to take into account his two major criticisms. First, he wants to challenge the view that human development is the domain solely of psychologists. Positively, psychosocial theories, by incorporating a social as well as a psychological perspective, themselves undermine this notion. However, psychosocial theories are inadequate to take account of, for example, the political or the religious aspects of human development. Hence Moran's own concern with a theory of religious development.⁶⁰ Secondly, comparing understandings of human development with theories of economic development, Moran suggests that the very term 'development' is restricted to a single view of development, namely one which is associated with progress or improvement.⁶¹

Elsewhere, Moran has followed these lines of thought with respect to definitions of adulthood. According to Moran, such definitions (other than chronological ones) have centred upon understandings of adults as rational, objective individuals.⁶² Noting how often this relates to work and production as the mark of an adult, not only does this create difficulties when considering those without work, but it throws up particular problems in relation to old age. Whereas old age is often seen as a reversion to the dependence known in childhood (and one of Moran's criticisms of the term 'life-cycle' as used by psychologists is that it encourages this understanding), Moran suggests that an adequate understanding of old age needs to include all stages of life, including childhood.⁶³ He therefore concludes that any definition of adulthood should be one based upon maturity and wholeness, and the integration of nonrationality and rationality, and dependence and independence.⁶⁴ This stands in contrast to Erikson's scheme for the 'eight ages of man'. Although the positive contribution of psychosocial theories is that they allow for an interpersonal dimension in all issues,

⁶⁰ G. Moran, *Religious Education*, pp.24 and 36 for Moran's points about how human development needs to be an interdisciplinary study.

⁶¹ Moran, *Religious Education*, p. 17.

⁶² G. Moran, *Education Toward Adulthood*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1979), pp.24-5.

⁶³ Moran, *Education Toward*, p.22.

⁶⁴ Moran, *Education Toward*, p.28.

including that of identity,⁶⁵ it is still dominated by the impression of a series of defined stages along which one progresses toward a growing autonomy as each stage is achieved. In effect, Erikson remains tied to development as a process of independence rather than one of interdependence.

2.1.2. Conversion, commitment and young adult religious development

Given these criticisms of Erikson, the relationship of identity and intimacy needs to be rethought. If intimacy remains a task of young adulthood, the role of identity in young adulthood has been seen to be less clear. A closer look is required at identity formation as an unresolved issue in young adult lives, especially with regard to religious development. For this I intend to look at Westerhoff's ideas about personal identity, which, despite the tentative nature of his argument, offer important pointers as to identity formation in young adults. But we begin with a piece of research into religious development which largely embraces Erikson's notion of an identity crisis to be resolved in adolescence. This is V. Bailey Gillespie's work on religious conversion.

Gillespie has written at length about the relationship of personal identity and religious conversion.⁶⁶ The sudden or gradual change associated with religious conversion is the new direction and change in behaviour which results from a recentring of the individual in terms of the self and other relationships. The outcome is an intensity of commitment to an ideology, in this case the beliefs composed within the Christian tradition.⁶⁷ Gillespie's main concern is religious conversion in the period of adolescence and its relationship to the identity crisis as pictured by Erikson. He describes religious conversion as having a 'unique relationship' with personal identity: 'All religious conversions have as a chief component identity concerns. Not all identity experiences are obviously religious in nature, however, but religious conversion is an

⁶⁵ A psychosocial understanding of human development is based on both psychological and social observations of human behaviour. Definitions of the terms identity and intimacy, then, have both personal and interpersonal dimensions to them. See Erikson, *Identity*, pp.23 and 95 for these definitions.

⁶⁶ His original book *Religious Conversion and Personal Identity* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, 1979) has been expanded and revised in *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, 1991).

⁶⁷ See Gillespie, *Dynamics*, p.64. The chart on this page is expanded upon in pp.65-74.

identity experience.⁶⁸

Gillespie's work is clear on the links between conversion and identity with regard to the resolution of the identity crisis as rooted in the conflicts of adolescence and the associated experimentation with roles and ideology. But his focus on the period of adolescence limits the way in which he presents and tackles identity as a continuing process of formation. Here the reference is not only to the post-conversion period as the time immediately following resolution of the identity crisis, but to the longer term implications of conversion experience. Gillespie acknowledges that those who leave churches after conversion (perhaps as a result of the 'down' period which follows the uplifting sense of conversion) are unlikely to return for several years. Therefore we can make the suggestion that adolescence often provides premature answers to the identity forming questions which adolescents ask. In the same way, the resulting commitments, although deeply felt, can also be immature. In other words there needs to be a 'filling out' of the picture which Gillespie offers. The theme of commitment is a crucial one in this area and one which is helpfully informed by Levinson's scheme of seasons of human development.

Following the time of adolescence, Levinson suggests a scheme of developmental periods for the season of life which he calls 'early adulthood.' This consists of two structure-building periods from approximately ages 22-28 and 33-40, and two structure-changing (transitional) periods, from 17 to 22 years, and 28 to 33 years.⁶⁹ The early adult transition (17-22 years) is marked by a moving out from adolescence and taking the first tentative steps into early adulthood. There then follows a period of 'entering the adult world,' (22-28 years) in which the young adult has to tackle two opposing tasks: to explore the possibilities of adult living, part of which is to avoid making strong commitments; and to build a stable life structure, which involves becoming more responsible.

This 'provisional' quality of young adulthood is challenged at around the age of

⁶⁸ Gillespie, *Dynamics*, p.183.

⁶⁹ For this overview as presented here see D. Levinson *et al*, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (Ballantine Books, New York, 1978), pp.56-60.

28 with the need to become 'more serious.' During the ensuing 'Age Thirty Transition', then, the man 'finds his present life structure intolerable, yet seems unable to form a better one.' The 'novice' phase of early adulthood ends, and there begins a period of 'settling down'. Again, there are two (not necessarily complementary) tasks, the first being to 'establish a niche' for oneself in society, and the second aimed at achieving success. Both tasks, however, require a greater sense of responsibility and commitment than in the novice phase. This time ends with a further reassessment around the age of forty called by Levinson the 'Mid-life Transition.'

The relationship between commitment and conversion, then, is complicated by Levinson's suggestion of commitments which continue to mature throughout the early adult period. Gillespie allows for the possibilities of conversion at later stages in life, particularly 'crisis' times. He points to the mid-life crisis as a time ripe for conversion. But it is also possible that the Age-Thirty transition as described by Levinson, may be a similarly ripe time for conversion. An experience of conversion at this age might therefore be better sustained by the more mature sense of commitment as identified in Levinson's pattern of development.

Westerhoff draws together these themes of conversion and commitment.⁷⁰ His first concern is with the rediscovery of conversion within mainline Protestant denominations, which in Westerhoff's argument have relied for too long on a process of nurture alone. According to Westerhoff, formation (nurture) and transformation (conversion) properly belong together within the life of the church.⁷¹ Catechesis provides ongoing nurture and specific preparation aimed at conversion. However, Protestant churches also need to rediscover a heightened sense of ritual, because it is ritual that provides the necessary context for conversion.⁷²

Secondly, Westerhoff sees conversion in terms of the expression of mature adult Christian commitment. Such a commitment requires conversion. 'However, since

⁷⁰ G. K. Neville and J. H. Westerhoff III, *Learning Through Liturgy* (The Seabury Press, New York, 1978), Ch.7, 'Christian initiation: nurture and conversion,' pp.136-59.

⁷¹ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, pp.145 and 148.

⁷² Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p.153.

Christian maturity and conversion never exist apart from human maturity, we ought not to impose the demands of adult faith and conversion on those who lack the prerequisites of human maturity.⁷³ Hence Levinson's description of firm commitments made during the thirties bears an affinity with Westerhoff's suggestions regarding human maturity, and an appropriate time for conversion to mature Christian commitment. Westerhoff speaks of the 'need to celebrate significant turning points in our lives, especially in our thirties and forties.'⁷⁴

He describes this process of conversion and commitment in terms of styles of faith. He offers a pattern of styles which moves from an 'affiliative', conforming style, to a 'searching', critical style (usually found in adolescents and young adults), and a 'mature', integrated faith, 'open to others, but clear and secure in [one's] own faith identity.'⁷⁵ He points to two turning points in faith, one which results in a searching faith, emerging from the need to establish one's own identity rather than living with the identity given in childhood; the second which comes at the end of the period of searching and results in the faith of a mature commitment. Westerhoff does not deny the changes associated with the adolescent years, only that they cannot be regarded as the basis for mature adult commitment.⁷⁶

Two points of warning need to be raised. As a parallel with psychosocial theories of identity, and applications of that theory to religious conversion (such as that carried out by Gillespie), Westerhoff's work has its limitations. Whereas Gillespie talks of conversion as a process engaging those outside of the institutional church, Westerhoff is interested in conversion as an ongoing process set within the nurture and life of the church. For example, he describes conversions as turning points in styles of

⁷³ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p. 147.

⁷⁴ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p. 158. Elsewhere he redefines this period to cover the years between twenty-five and forty-five. See J. H. Westerhoff III and W. Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life-Cycle* (The Seabury Press, New York, 1982), p. 78.

⁷⁵ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p. 168. For fuller descriptions of these 'styles' see pp. 162-9, and also the summary contained in Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, pp. 77-8.

⁷⁶ He does state, however, that the crisis of these years would be better helped by a ritual marking the passage from childhood to adulthood, rather than a concept of a prolonged period of adolescence. See Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, pp. 78-9.

faith.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, however, in his description of these styles, reference to conversion has disappeared.⁷⁸ There must be some discussion as to the extent to which conversion as a term can apply to the kind of changes Westerhoff describes about styles of faith, as compared with the kind of change which Gillespie associates with that term.

Furthermore, there is the question of the nature of 'identity.' Westerhoff is concerned not so much with psychological definitions of identity, as with an understanding of Christian identity. In this latter understanding identity relates to the matter of 'whose' as well as 'who' we are.⁷⁹ Baptism marks our identity as God's people. Just as the origin of Christian identity lies in the baptismal rite, so further growth in that identity is also expressed through appropriate rituals of the church in the mature commitment of adult faith. As we have seen, however, Westerhoff argues that the mature commitment of faith cannot be wholly separated from maturity in human development, a development which continues to reach significant turning points beyond adolescence and into young adulthood, especially in the 'Age Thirty transition' described by Levinson. The work of Levinson and Westerhoff present the issue of identity as an ongoing issue for young adult lives. Identity continues to be shaped and formed during the period of young adulthood.

2.1.3. Young adult development and the church

Westerhoff's work relates the issue of identity more closely to the life of the church. Indeed, in the same way that it is possible to name baptism as the origin of Christian identity, it would also be possible to relate Christian marriage to the issue of intimacy. Both of these matters, baptism of infants and adults, and marriage within the church, are pertinent to the young adult years. But here will be considered issues of identity and intimacy alongside the two most commonly named tasks of young adulthood.

Levinson found that the most frequently presented tasks in the lives of his all

⁷⁷ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p.148.

⁷⁸ Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, pp.77-8.

⁷⁹ Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, p.74, 'Throughout our lives, as we grow in our understanding..we need to remind ourselves who and whose we are as a baptized people. We need to grow in our identity.'

male sample to be in the areas of work and family—the marking out of a career and the setting up of a home.⁸⁰ By highlighting the tasks relating to work and family, Levinson quite clearly echoes Erikson's thinking. Erikson related choice of occupation to a successful resolution of the identity crisis, and choice of marriage partner to the issue of intimacy.⁸¹ Levinson's choice of work and family can therefore be similarly taken as his own exploration of the issues of identity and intimacy.

It is clearly important to give due consideration to the components of work and family when exploring the theme of young adult relationships with the church. It can be argued that the priority given to the tackling of these tasks is one of the primary reasons why young adults stay away from church. Work and family take precedence over other commitments. The setting up of one's own home, and a sense of growing independence, might take that individual outside of the influence of the church. Again, if weekdays are for working, weekends (including Sundays) become family time, spent on leisure pursuits, shopping or time at home. Alternatively, it can be argued that this period of young adulthood is a time when many make a return to the church, especially those who are parents of young children, perhaps seeking to give their own children the same kind of upbringing which they themselves had as children. Or perhaps church comes to be seen as a retreat from work, an opportunity to escape from the pressures of everyday life. These are practical matters for churches to address, and any church which chooses to directly address the needs and concerns of young adults will probably show greater success in attracting this age group.

However, it is also possible to consider the tasks of work and family in a different way, one which will express in a more fundamental way the tension in young adulthood between identity and intimacy. What is required by this approach is a translation of the terms *work* and *family* into two different headings of *vocation* and *community*. The proposal made here is that any church which explores the relationship between young adults and the church in terms of vocation and community, and allows young adults to do the same, will be better placed to understand the tension in young adulthood between identity and intimacy. It will also be better placed to acknowledge

⁸⁰ Levinson *et al*, *Seasons*, pp.45-6.

⁸¹ See Erikson, *Childhood*, p.253, and *Identity*, p.95

and affirm young adults in this position of tension. Furthermore it will allow young adults to hold as a tension these issues of identity and intimacy in a more mature way, more likely of future resolution. Here we take the pairings of work and vocation, and family and community in turn.

Westerhoff's suggestions about vocation centre on redefining confirmation as a rite of Christian maturity and a commitment to Christian ministry, which is described as a uniting of faith and life during the thirties and forties, 'crisis years in our identity quest.'⁸² 'Confirmation could acknowledge a call to vocation, mark a personal decision for mission, signify an ordination to ministry, and celebrate a strengthening for Christian service in the world.'⁸³ Westerhoff's idea remains only partially developed, but he does describe it as an 'ordination' of the laity to ministry, which would require a period of prolonged preparation.⁸⁴ As he envisages confirmation, '[i]deally it would occur during early adulthood, but could be celebrated any time a person is ready. More than likely this would occur when a person was between thirty and forty.'⁸⁵

Westerhoff's suggestion is echoed by other work recognising the need for (and the power of) ritual at different stages of human development. Browning and Reed regard confirmation and consecration for ministry as repeatable sacraments,⁸⁶ 'rites of intensification' marking new levels of commitment, or consecration to a specific area of ministry. One criticism they hold against Westerhoff is the possibility that he has placed the starting point for 'searching' and 'mature' faith at too young an age.⁸⁷ They are in agreement, however, that such a confirmation or consecration to Christian ministry

⁸² Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, pp.80-1.

⁸³ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p.158. He argues that the adolescent years are too young for the kind of commitment suggested by confirmation, and that this younger period of life would be better served by a rite of initiation into the adolescent pilgrimage of searching faith. Westerhoff calls this a 'covenant of discipleship' (a 'puberty rite of responsibility') which would encourage the serious exploration of doubts and alternatives, but within the bounds of the church. See Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, pp.178-9, and Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, p.79.

⁸⁴ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p.159.

⁸⁵ Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning*, p.180.

⁸⁶ R. Browning and R. Reed, *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, 1985). They wish to retain confirmation at adolescence; what Westerhoff calls confirmation, they entitle consecration for ministry.

⁸⁷ Browning and Reed, *The Sacraments*, pp.197-8.

should be about ministry outside of the church as well as within. Browning and Reed state, 'we believe that the consecration of the laity should include commitment within the church, but especially commitment to ministries in the world through clarity about vocation and occupation.'⁸⁸ Westerhoff and Willimon comment in similar fashion that vocation and ministry relates to 'everything we do at work and play, in church and in the world, at home and outside the home.' In this way they affirm parenthood and voluntary service in and out of the church as both occupation and ministry.⁸⁹

It is this affirmation of vocation—in terms of home and family, as well as work and occupation—in both church and world that seems to be particularly relevant to our description of young adults tackling these tasks at the point in their lives when they are also on the edge of church life. Young adults will benefit from the affirmation of vocation both in and out of the church. The church affirms them in their own ministry outside of the church; yet it also encourages them to take up a more distinct role within it. A rite of vocation goes some way to resolving the tension young adults feel in their relationship with the church.⁹⁰

Family and community form a second set of terms to be explored. Moran names the family as one of the four main forms of education alongside school, work, and leisure.⁹¹ According to Moran's scheme each of these four forms embody a universal value, a value that 'leads us on' rather than an object to be achieved. The value towards which the educational form of family moves is that of community.⁹² The four forms and their associated values are interrelated, yet distinct in that each form has its own time, as 'one of the four comes to the center and then moves to the background.'⁹³

Although the four forms and their values are not to be taken in isolation from the other three, the particular form of the family and the value of community bear a

⁸⁸ Browning and Reed, *The Sacraments*, p.222.

⁸⁹ Westerhoff and Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning*, pp.81 and 85.

⁹⁰ For a fuller discussion of a rite of vocation refer to sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2.

⁹¹ Moran, *Religious Education*, p.165.

⁹² See Moran, *Religious Education*, p.166. The values associated with schooling, job, and leisure are knowledge, work, and wisdom, respectively.

⁹³ Moran, *Religious Education*, p.167.

special relationship to our own discussion. The first is that community takes on particular significance in relationship to the church in its work of education. As has already been indicated, for Moran one of the main defining points of adulthood is its sense of interdependence and mutuality. Adulthood is achieved in community. One of the main implications arising from Moran is that it is the 'experience of community [that] educates religiously.'⁹⁴ But more specifically relating to young adulthood is that the family 'reemerges strongly' in this period as the main form of education.⁹⁵

Moran discusses the family in greater detail in *Education toward Adulthood*. His argument is not that the family is disintegrating in modern society, rather that it has been marginalised from a position of influence. The argument often made about the nuclear family is that it is responsible for the demise of the extended family. Moran believes that this argument is a misplaced one. The key issue should be the one which the term 'nuclear' ought to imply, namely that the family has become dislodged from the centre of society. Thus it is essentially a matter of the isolation of the family in modern society. But if Moran argues for a restoration of the family to the centre of society, it is a centre which it can no longer dominate as was the case in pre-modern society. It has to learn to share that centre.⁹⁶ His observation is that if for '98 percent of children the family remains *the* center of life..for contemporary adults the family is only *one* of the ways of centering life.'⁹⁷

The nub of his argument is that the 'embodiment in each case is partial; family, school, job, and leisure need to be complemented by other embodiments. No family exhausts the meaning of community; a family needs other families and also non-familial forms of community life.'⁹⁸ In this sense Moran does not think only, nor indeed primarily, in terms of communes, but also of married couples who have no intention of having children, homosexual couples, and single people who may or may not desire to

⁹⁴ This point is made by P. Devitt in *How Adult is Adult Religious Education? Gabriel Moran's Contribution to Adult Religious Education* (Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1991), pp.132-3 and 168.

⁹⁵ Moran, *Religious Education*, p.167.

⁹⁶ See Moran, *Education Toward*, pp.90/1 for this argument.

⁹⁷ Moran, *Education Toward*, p.91.

⁹⁸ Moran, *Religious Education*, p.165.

be a part of one of the preceding alternatives. He also wishes to encourage cooperation between families through family groups or networks, perhaps centring on the need for childcare for example.⁹⁹

The church's role is not to be a community but to foster a sense of community in people's lives. As such it could be a meeting place for familial and non-familial forms.¹⁰⁰ Within this setting the church contributes to family life, not by prescribing its ideal form, but by affirming the family, 'while at the same time reminding the family that it is not the final community.'¹⁰¹ In this way the church can acknowledge the creation of a family as a key task for many young adults, whilst challenging young adults themselves that the family is not the only possible form of community life. Equally, it raises the possibility that young adults who are not part of a family will thereby be able to find a place and a role within the church.

Moran's argument is helpful in diffusing the argument between those who insist upon the family as the most significant form of educational community, and those who present the church as some kind of replacement for the family.¹⁰² An example of the former is Astley's view that 'the family remains our first and society's primary expression of community.' He argues that the church community can be supportive of this, although he is surely right to point out that the reality of the church is that it is not immune from being destructive of family life 'from authoritarian house churches robbing parents of their proper role in religious and moral nurture, to those polite congregations that destroy the family life of their clergy with or without their connivance.'¹⁰³ The irony is that many such churches model themselves as a family. But I cannot but help feel that this model of the church has arisen because of the

⁹⁹ See Moran, *Education Toward*, pp.96-100 for a description of these patterns.

¹⁰⁰ See Moran, *Education Toward*, pp.100-1

¹⁰¹ Moran, *Religious Education*, p.192.

¹⁰² An example of this latter point of view is to be found in J. Westerhoff III, 'The Christian Family,' the Twelfth Lecture of the Robinson T Orr Fellowship given at Huron College, London, Ontario in January 1982 (unpublished). Here, Westerhoff makes a call for a 'faith family' to mediate between family and society. 'I am recommending that religious communities (the church) become the central most important unit of societal life, that they become the fundamental social unit in our modern culture.'

¹⁰³ J. Astley, 'The Role of the Family in the Formation and Criticism of Faith,' in S. Barton, ed., *The Family in Theological Perspective* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991), pp.200-1.

concentration on family life as the heart of society and the educational process. Just as Moran challenges the family to live alongside and learn from non-familial forms of living, so also the model of the church as a family needs to be questioned.

2.1.4. Young adults and the church in a model of friendship

Moran's work is important to us because it expresses the limitations as well as the opportunities of intimacy as a key issue of young adulthood. This is especially true where the young adult is a part of a church which models itself on the family, most obviously perhaps centring its worship on family services. It is a model which suggests that the church is itself marked by the same sense of closeness and warmth in relationships that are seen to typify life within the family. If the creation of a family is an important task in the life of young adults then they will be influenced in particular ways by a church which styles itself as a family. Above all it will reinforce young adults perceptions of 'family life.' But it is a model which also presents further implications to those who do not regard themselves as fitting into that same pattern of 'family life' or whose experience of family has damaged their own lives.

Peter Selby argues that the image of the church as a family should not go unchallenged.¹⁰⁴ He approaches the question, 'Is the church a family?' with the same theological perspective he employed in his book *BeLonging*, namely that our call in Christ is to the boundless family of God's grace with an inclusiveness and an openness which transcends our human kinships. The promotion of the church as a family can obscure its wider purposes and missionary task. He writes of those who would place an emphasis within the churches on 'fellowship' and 'getting to know one another better', 'that the virtues of intimacy...have taken too high a place in the hierarchy of virtues for human well-being.'¹⁰⁵

Positively, Selby offers an alternative image: the church as public company. He does so, not in order to dismiss the picture of the church as a family, but to show up its limitations, arguing that there are many pastoral situations best dealt with in a less personalised way. Selby juxtaposes the images of family and public company as

¹⁰⁴ See P. Selby, 'Is the Church a Family?' in Barton, ed., *The Family*, pp.151ff.

¹⁰⁵ Selby, 'Is the Church a Family?' in Barton, *The Family*, p.155.

offering insights into the positive and negative aspects of each. He uses the image of public company in the sense of a business, and how some concerns of the church may be dealt with in a more professional manner.

There are shortcomings to Selby's image of the church as public company. For one thing, there is the tendency for the term public company, with its professional overtones, to restrict a sense of vocation solely to 'work to be done.' In what ways is a sense of vocation more than work? The term 'public company' could be pushed beyond its given meaning in Selby's article of a business-like approach to a more fundamental concern of how we conduct our relationships (that is to say, keep our *company*) in public. What aspects of living, other than those drawn from the world of work, shape our public lives? I ask these questions, because it seems apparent that Selby too easily accepts the twin concepts of work and family as providing the fullest perspective on what it means to be the church in its private and public forms. The rich potential of Selby's argument is restricted by the parameters of 'work' and 'family' in which it operates. Is there a different, third perspective which would more adequately integrate the two?

Indeed this problem is apparent in our own approach of basing notions of vocation and community on those same young adult concerns of work and family. These concerns have been lifted straight out of Levinson's analysis of men's lives. The justification for this choice of work and family as typical concerns of young adult lives might be questioned, not only by arguments from a feminist perspective, but also from the statistics we have at our disposal. It might be recalled that Francis' figures revealed *friendship* to be valued more highly by young adults than either work or family. The same cannot be drawn from Levinson's research. Certainly, Levinson lists 'forming mutual friendships' as one of the components of an individual's life structure alongside work and family, but it is not echoed by his findings from men's lives: 'In our interviews, friendship was largely noticeable by its absence. As a tentative generalisation we would say that close friendship with a man or a woman is rarely experienced by American men.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Levinson, *Seasons*, p.335.

It may be that more recent trends have been towards a revaluing of friendship in modern society. Andrew Sullivan believes that an important contribution has been made to this revival by homosexual men, whose friendships have formed a network of survival in the face of HIV/AIDS and social isolation.¹⁰⁷ He cites 'friendship-friendly' e-mail and television programmes such as *Friends* as examples of the revival of friendship as a social institution. Another television programme, this time documentary rather than fiction, highlighted the continuing friendships of a group of young adults from their twenties into their thirties. At the end of the film, one of them concluded that if their friendships had continued throughout this period, they had not gone unchanged. In any case, there are changes in the world outside as well as within the friendship group, as divorce rates rise, people marry later in life, and the option to remain single is a route taken by more people.

Our sight of friendship as a concern of young adults has become at least partially lost behind the more dominant concerns of work and family as presented in prevailing psychological theory. What we see in Levinson's choice of work and family as key young adult tasks, then, is one of the ways in which human development is presented as a pattern of growing independence, rather than as one of continuing interdependence, as might be represented more clearly, for example, by the task of friendship. A focus on friendship would more fully interrelate tasks of work and family, and help us to see friendship as central to both. Or, to express the point the other way around, an absence of friendship within work and family relationships will have destructive consequences with regard to the functioning and quality of those relationships.

We can also consider the role of friendship in the mission and life of the church. Within the community of the church there have been signs of a renewal of friendship and an assessment of its implications for its life and mission. David Shields writing about the role of friendship in education has noted that '[f]riendship has received little attention from theorists of religious education.'¹⁰⁸ In his concern for friendship

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Sullivan in an article entitled 'A Forgotten Kind of Loving' in *The Guardian*, 28th November 1998: an extract from his book, *Love Undetectable* (Chatto and Windus, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ D. Shields, 'Friendship: Context and Content of Christian Religious Education,' in *Religious Education*, Vol.91, Winter 1996.

renewal in the life of the church, he believes that '[e]ducation for a community of friends needs to move on to become education for a befriending community. The church's mission is to work towards a friendlier world.'¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Philip Wickeri notes that friendship 'provides an important, though neglected, perspective on Christian mission.'¹¹⁰ A report published by the Bible Society in 1992 noted friendship as one of the key factors in becoming Christian.¹¹¹ It was the most important factor for women (24% of women highlighted friendship as a factor), and the third most important for men after spouse/partner and the minister (15% of men highlighted friendship as a factor). It is perhaps especially noteworthy that 44% of members of the New Churches were brought to faith by friends. An emphasis on friendship may be one of the reasons why independent and charismatic churches have seemingly attracted so many young adults.¹¹²

In choosing friendship as a way of understanding young adult lives I am aware of the limitations of employing such a term, namely that friendship is often identified exclusively with the growing intimacy between close friends. To suggest that friendship is anything other is not to deny the potential for deepening relationship which lies within all friendships, but there needs to be an acknowledgement that friendship can exist on many different levels, from the closest and most familiar of friends, to those who are (merely!) acquaintances or associates, but whom we might number as friends nevertheless.¹¹³ In a seminar addressing some of these issues, some of those present wished to make a distinction between friendship and *friendliness*. Whereas those we call friends may be relatively few in number, a disposition of *friendliness* is something that we should be required to show in all our relationships. This raises two further points. First, a full understanding of friendship needs not only

¹⁰⁹ Shields, 'Friendship,' in *Religious Education*, Vol.91, p.112.

¹¹⁰ P.L. Wickeri, 'Friends Along the Way: Spirituality, Human Relationships and Christian Mission,' in *Theology*, Vol.XCIII, March/April 1990.

¹¹¹ J. Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does it Happen?* (British and Foreign Bible Society, Swindon, 1992), pp.36-7.

¹¹² See Brierley, '*Christian*' *England*, pp.88-9 for empirical evidence of young adult church attendance by denomination.

¹¹³ The church of Scotland statistics give some indication that this is especially true of young adults. In the 18-44 age group, 58.8% disagreed with the statement, 'I restrict my friends to a few,' compared with 45.7% in the 45-64 age group, and 48.7% of those aged 65 and over. See *Lifestyle Survey*, p.65, statement xxviii.

to consider the maintaining and deepening of existing friendships but also be open to the possibility of making new friendships with the people we meet as strangers. Secondly, there is the recognition that friendliness is itself a diverse term, which can be used to describe not only a basic attitude towards people we meet, but also as expressive of deeper and closer relationships. For example, friendliness is recognised in this way by Donald Evans.¹¹⁴

Our argument up to this point has been that tasks of work and family in the Christian context of vocation and community say something important about issues of identity and intimacy as ongoing processes in the formation of young adult lives and their relationship with the church. But it is essential to bear in mind that there might be other young adult tasks, especially the task of making and maintaining friendships, which interpret more adequately the interrelationship of identity and intimacy in the period of young adulthood. Thus we may explore identity and intimacy and the relationship between them in new and varied ways. In the following section we see how identity and intimacy are to be seen in the life of Jesus and an expression of their interrelationship is laid out in Jesus' friendship with his disciples.

2.2. The face of friendship

2.2.1. The issue of identity in the life of Jesus

Thus far identity and intimacy have been explored as issues of human and religious development with regard to young adults and the church. This final consideration of identity and intimacy is made with regard to the life of Jesus and the gospels. The aim is to consider tasks of work, family and friendship as they arise from within the gospels. Our starting point is John Miller's recent book, *Jesus at Thirty*.¹¹⁵ This psychological portrait makes particular use of Erikson and Levinson's theories of human development. In terms of Erikson's schema, Miller focuses on a part of Jesus'

¹¹⁴ See D. Evans, *Struggle and Fulfilment: the Inner Dynamics of Religion and Morality* (Collins, New York, 1979), pp.129-139. In his introduction on p.7, Evans writes, 'Some of the elements in friendliness are only appropriate towards friends, but others are also appropriate towards anyone I encounter.'

¹¹⁵ J. D. Miller, *Jesus at thirty: a Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997).

life which he regards as an example of an extended identity crisis and finally resolved as a result of his baptism. Noting the words from Luke's Gospel, that 'Jesus was about thirty when he began his work' (Luke 3.23), Miller presses his main point by interpreting this decisive episode as an example of Levinson's 'Age-Thirty transition.'

Miller regards Jesus' baptism as a conversion experience, marking a dramatic break with his life up to that time. The episode was primarily a psychological and personal experience of sonship, rooted in the need for repentance as called for by John the Baptist, rather than the claiming of any title of messiahship or Old Testament concept of sonship.¹¹⁶ The nature of this sonship was then confirmed by his time in the wilderness, which Miller understands as a rejection of messianic grandiosity: 'it is not, as traditionally thought, the Messiah who is here being tempted, but Jesus, fresh from an experience of repentance, forgiveness, and "sonship," who is being tempted by messianism.'¹¹⁷

The decisiveness of Jesus' experience of baptism was shaped by the 'mighty summons' of John the Baptist, which took him away from home and set him on a different way. Its effect on Jesus' life is clearly marked by his own family's response when they saw Jesus again. 'He has gone out of his mind' (Mark 3.21), they said. Jesus' attitude seemed to be to set his relationship with his family at odds with his new found relationship with his heavenly Father: 'Who are my mother and my brothers?...Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mark 3.33,5). Later, when Jesus returned to his home town, the inhabitants could not believe the change they saw in him: 'Where did this man get all this...is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' (Mark 6.2,3). Miller dwells on this estrangement from his family as indicative of the importance of familial dynamics in understanding human development in general and the identity crisis in particular.¹¹⁸

First of all, Miller examines Jesus' relationship with his earthly father, as

¹¹⁶ Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, pp.23-4 and 28.

¹¹⁷ Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, p.60.

¹¹⁸ For use of this material by Miller, see *Jesus at Thirty*, pp.11-17.

casting light onto his experience of God as a gracious father. Analysing the sayings and stories of Jesus, Miller finds a positive use of images of fathers and fatherhood, which rule out such suggestions as Jesus' illegitimacy or Joseph as an ineffectual father. Instead he speculates that the key to the relationship was most likely to have been the premature death of his father when Jesus was still in his teens. The suggestion is that Joseph's death would have two main effects on the life of Jesus. Firstly, in Jewish culture, it was the father's role to find a wife for each of his sons. With his father's death, this task remained unaccomplished. With no reason to leave the family home, Jesus' stay there would have been extended indefinitely. Secondly, Jesus was the eldest son, with a number of younger brothers and sisters. Again, with his father's death, the role of the eldest son took on a changed significance. Increased responsibilities in terms of supporting the family economically, taking on a role of leadership, the indefinite postponement of marriage and setting up his own home, and new kinds of sibling rivalry would all have been probable outcomes in the aftermath of Joseph's death.¹¹⁹

Most significant of all in psychological terms would be Jesus' relationship with his mother. Taking an approach typical of most modern psychologists, Miller describes the process of growing up for a son in terms of bonding with his mother in the early years, but increasingly relating to his father, in a more autonomous relationship that will eventually lead to his leaving home.¹²⁰ Miller believes that it was Jesus' redefined relationship with his mother and the new expectations placed upon him which led him into a prolonged period of crisis in identity. It was a crisis which could only be resolved by a clear choice 'to be made between mother and God.' In John's call and Jesus' own baptism, 'Jesus had found God and his father again. Simultaneously he found himself as well. The claim of his mother upon him had been broken by renewed contact with his "Father in heaven."'¹²¹ The experience of knowing his father, which Jesus had lost in his teens, he rediscovered at the age of thirty in his new relationship with God.

¹¹⁹ See Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, pp.35-6 and 52-3. For the wider argument about fathers, refer to the whole chapter on 'Jesus and his father,' pp.31-45.

¹²⁰ See Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, pp.50-1.

¹²¹ Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, p.54.

2.2.2. Identity and generativity in the mission of Jesus

Miller's final task is to relate Jesus' psychological experience to his mission. He poses the possibility that the loss of Jesus' own father would have given him an empathy with the 'lost' of Israel: 'Having had to wrestle with the pride, guilt, confusion, alienation and doubt engendered by life in a "fatherless" world, did he feel even more deeply than John [the Baptist] the predicament of his spiritually fatherless contemporaries?'¹²² The impetus, Miller suggests, was for Jesus not to wait for the 'lost' to come to him, as John did, but to actively search them out. In effect, he had found his true vocation and a resolution of his identity crisis.

With the experience of 'finding himself,' Jesus was released to be able to offer himself to the care of others in what Erikson calls a stage of generativity.¹²³ Typically, this generativity is rooted in an experience of parenthood and caring for children, though it usually extends to a caring for others beyond one's immediate family. In his sense of sonship, Jesus discovered 'an identity not unlike that of the Father he now served...Just such an *Imitatio Dei* — the embodiment of God's generative care and graciousness in the nitty-gritty of daily life—was, it seems, the reality that more than anything else engaged him at this climactic stage of his life.'¹²⁴

Miller's treatment of Jesus' moratorium and the extended period of identity crisis is astute and thought provoking. But in making the link between the Jesus who 'found himself' and the generative, caring man of mission there is little made of the issue of intimacy. Certainly, there is a chapter on Jesus' sexuality included in the book. Rejecting the views that Jesus was either homosexual or married, Miller considers Jesus' relationships with women who seemed to respond particularly to his caring manner. But for Miller, any underlying sexual desire was subsumed under the larger mission. If anything, Miller seems to prefer an emphasis on Jesus' fatherly qualities in his relationships with women. Here, as in other aspects of his mission, Jesus is indeed (according to Miller) the generative man. In summary, Miller regards the issue of

¹²² Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, p.65.

¹²³ See Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, p.86.

¹²⁴ Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, p.95.

intimacy as 'eluding' Jesus, outmoded by his call to a wider mission.¹²⁵

There is room to question Miller's conclusions about Jesus' intimacy with others. In particular there might be recalled the episode recorded in John's Gospel when Jesus is said to have loved Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus (John 11.5). Furthermore, in relating Jesus self-identity to his generative caring mission, there is a set of relationships in the gospels which could be more adequately explored, since it is central to all of the gospels: this is Jesus' relationship with his disciples. At one level it is understandable why Miller does not dwell on this topic. He is concerned with the turning point of Jesus' baptism and piecing together Jesus 'hidden years' in the time leading up to that event. The disciples are not called until after this time. In terms of Jesus' mission, however (and in terms of what Miller describes as Jesus' transition from identity crisis to generative man), the disciples are called at its very outset, and the presence of disciples is significant in the gospel accounts of that mission. The disciples' role is worth a more detailed consideration. The focus here will be on the role played by disciples in John's Gospel.¹²⁶ It is a consideration of identity and intimacy which will lead us to an understanding of the interrelationship of identity and intimacy though seeing the disciples as *friends* of Jesus.

2.2.3. Identity and intimacy in the Gospel of John

It is difficult to discuss the role of Jesus' disciples in the gospels without commenting upon the nature of the gospels themselves, that they are, first and foremost, material for disciples, set down for the benefit of believers and the Christian community. In his commentary on John's Gospel, Thomas Brodie, far from seeking to piece together the human development of *Jesus*, makes the intriguing proposition that the fourth Gospel reflects upon stages of human development of those who themselves

¹²⁵ For Miller's argument about this subject, see the chapter about 'Sexuality' in Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, pp.65-75.

¹²⁶ This will be in contrast to Miller, who makes rather less use of John's Gospel than he does of the other three. This may well be because the three synoptic gospels are often regarded as being more reliable in an historical sense. But a part of the argument here is that any exploration of intimacy as a theme in the gospels, itself calls for the personal engagement of the reader with the text rather than trying to establish a purely objective and historical point of view.

read or hear the Gospel.¹²⁷ This is, of course, a vastly different approach to that employed by John Miller. One need only look at the sub-titles given to their respective volumes to confirm that this is the case. Miller presents his work as 'a psychological and historical portrait.' It is an objective account, using a 'scientific' and 'historical' method to recreate the context behind the text and construct a psychology of Jesus. By way of contrast, Brodie's book is 'a literary and theological commentary,' examining the text as text and its impact upon the reader.

Brodie's hypothesis is that 'the essential design of the fourth gospel reflects the journey of a human life,' as a series of stages of living and believing.¹²⁸ It is still the story of Jesus; but it is also a story of human living. His main contention is that John adapts the one year of Jesus' ministry, as presented in the synoptic gospels, and presents three years, with each portion accounting for a different period of human life—youth, midlife, and old age. The first year reflects the optimistic outlook of youth, with the eager response of the disciples (even the reluctant Nathaniel ultimately shows an enthusiasm), and the joyous wedding occasion at Cana. The second year echoes the problems of position and responsibilities of midlife: 'the prestigious leader (Nicodemus), the jaded lover (the woman of Samaria), and the worried parent (the royal official).' It is the same for the disciples: Philip wonders how the people will be provided for when there is no food available; the disciples take offence at Jesus' message ('These words are hard; who can hear it?'). In the third year there is a recognition of the reality of death and the close of life in the story of Lazarus and the mourning of Martha and Mary, thus tackling a key concern of old age. Throughout each of the three years there is an emphasis on the development and growth of believing.¹²⁹

Furthermore, according to Brodie, the account of each of the three years is constructed to contain the major elements of Jesus' life (disciples, Galilee, journey to Jerusalem, conflict and other indications of Jesus' death). In other words, the gospel is

¹²⁷ T. L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: a Literary and Theological Commentary*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, paperback edition 1997).

¹²⁸ Brodie, *John*, p.32. For a fuller introduction to Brodie's proposal see the whole of Chapter 5, 'The Design 2. The Central Focus: Stages of Living and Believing,' pp.31-50.

¹²⁹ See Brodie, *John*, pp.35-36.

presented in such a way as to suggest that the entire story of Jesus is there to be known in every age of life. In support of this argument he makes use of Peter's commissioning at the close of the Gospel (21.15-19). Peter is 'to care for people through the three main stages of their lives—when they are young ('Feed my lambs'), when they are grown and strong ('Shepherd my sheep'), and when, though grown, they are no longer strong [that is, diminished with old age] ('Feed my little sheep').' This is also the pattern of Peter's own life—a past time, 'when you were young'; a future time, 'But when you grow old'; and a present time (presumably midlife) as Peter is given these responsibilities to bear.¹³⁰

The focus here will be on the first year, the time of youth (1.1-2.22) in order to look for the emergence of identity and intimacy from Brodie's text. In regarding this year as reflecting a time of youth and young adulthood, there are features that might be recognised from our earlier look at this stage of life—the searching disciples (1.38), a certain cynicism on the part of Nathaniel (1.46), a man with a dream to live out (1.51)¹³¹, a wedding (2.1-11), and a time of crisis to be successfully tackled and resolved (2.12-22). There is a sense of intimacy throughout this section. Indeed, according to Brodie, the theological starting point for the whole gospel is 'an ideal of abiding restful union.'¹³² This is apparent in the prologue: 'the Word was with God,' and the Son 'is on the Father's bosom.'¹³³(1.1,17)

In Brodie's thesis, the theme of abiding is an important one. In John's witness, the Spirit rests upon Jesus and abides with him (1.32,3). The first two disciples seek out Jesus, wanting to know where he abides. At Jesus invitation they went and 'saw where he abode.'^{138,9} The sense we are given is not of a definite place, but an abiding in a relationship, that between Jesus and the Spirit, and between the disciples

¹³⁰ Brodie, *John*, p.35.

¹³¹ It is almost irresistible not to make the link between Jesus' image of the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (1.51), and Jacob's dream at Bethel of the ladder reaching up to heaven, with the angels ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28.12).

¹³² Brodie, *John*, p.55.

¹³³ In this part, I use Brodie's own translation of John's Gospel, see Brodie, *John*, pp.76-126. This sense of intimacy is later related in Jesus' relationship with the beloved disciple. See John 13.23; in Brodie's translation, 'Reclining there next to Jesus' bosom was one of his disciples, one whom Jesus loved.' In verse 25, this disciple is 'laying down on Jesus' breast.'

and Jesus. The story of the wedding at Cana also gives that same sense of union, and the setting up of a new home (2.1-11). By way of contrast, the account of Jesus in the Temple is about a home (the Temple: 'my Father's house') facing destruction. It is to be replaced by the temple of Jesus' body. The implication is that the new home for disciples is a sharing in his body, presumably as the community of believers (2.12-22).

The issue of identity is also addressed. The first words to John form a question about identity. 'Who are you?' the priests and Levites ask (1.19). Twice he replies in the negative, first of all answering, 'I am not the Anointed,' then to the question, 'Are you Elijah?' he responds, 'I am not.' Next, when asked, 'Are you the prophet?' John simply answers, 'No' (1.20,1). For Brodie, this pattern of consecutively diminishing answers represents a process of emptying oneself of false identities. When his questioners finally demand a positive response from John, he gives them the identity that 'I am the voice of one crying in the desert make straight the way of the Lord.' The implication is that there is an identity in the emptiness of the desert waiting to be filled.¹³⁴ It is the disciples who take up that way, as they follow Jesus. A sense of identity is to be discovered as they go to Jesus and learn to abide with him.

In John's Gospel there is a frequent use of the words 'I am.' It is used the most by Jesus, evoking a sense of the divine 'I am.' But it is also a phrase used by the man who was blind, in the context of the story as confirmation of his identity ('I am he' 9.9) Yet it also is a reminder that humanity is made in the image of God, the divine 'I am.' 'As such it is in God alone that he will find complete fulfilment and rest.'¹³⁵ The pattern, then, is one of a growing sense of identity as the journey is made towards an increasingly intimate relationship with Jesus. Furthermore it is this pattern of growing identity through a closer relationship which gives shape to the mission of Jesus. The disciples are not simply co-workers, joining in Jesus' work, but people called into relationship with him for the sake of the world. It is the quality of that relationship (as it reflects the divine image) which gives witness to the world.

¹³⁴ Brodie, *John*, p.150.

¹³⁵ Brodie, *John*, p.55.

2.2.4. Identity and intimacy: the face of friendship

The interrelationship between identity and intimacy is most thoroughly explored in the extended discourse of Chapters 13–17 of John’s Gospel. At the centre of this section is the parable of the vine (15.1–10). The parable is a clear example of the relationship between identity and intimacy. First, there is the relationship between Jesus and his Father: ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser’ (15.1). Secondly, there is the relationship between Jesus and the disciples (‘I am the vine, you are the branches,’ 15.5). There are clear statements of identity (‘I am,’ ‘my Father is,’ and ‘you are’), but they are identities which are expressed in terms of a relationship, between the vine and the the vinedresser, and the vine and the branches. It suggests that our relationships are integral to our identities: we come to know ourselves as we are known, and our sense of identity is shaped by our intimacy with others.

The outworking of this relationship, in everyday terms, is friendship that knows love (15.11–17, following the parable of the vine). Again it is an identity which is given, ‘You are my friends...’ (15.14). But it is also an identity that is set in terms of the relationship of the love we have received and our love for one another: ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.’ (15.12). Friendship is an intimacy which we hold with one another as well as with God. Hence the full expression of the interrelationship of identity and intimacy: ‘You are my friends if you do what I command you [that you love one another as I have loved you]’ (15.14).¹³⁶

The contrast is between friends and servants. ‘I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing. But I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from the Father, I have made known to you’ (15.15). Friendship gives a special knowledge which servants do not have. ‘But this knowledge is not any kind of arrogant private domain. It is related first and last to love...Thus the essence of friendship is not in a dominating knowledge but in a self-giving love.’¹³⁷ Friendship does not do away with service; it preserves the element of servanthood and takes it to a new depth and quality of giving, willingly giving of ourselves for the sake

¹³⁶ Further reflection on friendship as a theme in the gospels, in addition to the remainder of this section, is also made in section 5.2.3.

¹³⁷ Brodie, *John*, p.484.

of others. Our friendship incorporates our sense of servanthood; it is never anything less.

Brodie presents the discourse of chapters 13-17 as a portrayal of three stages of spiritual development, with a movement from cleansing (the foot-washing of chapter 13), to purifying (the parable of the vine in chapter 15), and union (Jesus' prayer for his disciples in chapter 17). It is equally possible, however, to regard the whole discourse as a tension, centring on the parable of the vine. One side of the tension is a sense of identity, presented in the example of servanthood given by Jesus in chapter 13. The other side is the sense of intimacy which is the subject of Jesus' prayer for the disciples. This sense of identity and intimacy is heightened by Jesus' own role in each side of the tension. In the account of the foot-washing (chapter 13), it is Jesus who clearly stands out by his *difference* from the disciples, set apart from them by the example he gives; his is an identity shaped by contrast. In chapter 17, Jesus is no longer a part of the scene set by his prayer; in this scene Jesus is taken away from the disciples, who nevertheless know his presence by their unity. Their sense of intimacy with Jesus is to be expressed, even in Jesus' physical absence, through their love for one another.

Finally, there is the role of Jesus as servant. The position of a servant in a household is a peculiar one: the servant occupies a place within the household, yet is not fully a member of it. In the role of servant, the Christian is placed in the household of disciples, yet the implication is that in the role of servant, the one who serves can never fully be a part of it. It is worth contrasting this image with one of the commonly asserted claims about the writing of John, namely that it presents the disciples as 'being in the world, but not of it' (an image strongly shaped by words in chapter 17.)¹³⁸ But the picture of chapter 13 is a different (and complementary) one, something akin to 'being in the *community of believers*, but not of it.' Apart and yet a part, indeed!

It must be recognised that this will be an uncomfortable conclusion for many, who desire that disciples be seen as full members of the household of the church. But it is a picture to make us pause and reflect, not least about the nature of John's Gospel

¹³⁸ See especially 17.11,14-16.

itself; that the fourth gospel is not the product of a closed, sect-like community, but is rather a piece of writing which has a broader understanding of what it means to be the community of believers. And yet it is an image which does not require us to remain solely as servants; rather it is one which calls us, through a concept of friendship, to live creatively within a tension. This is the tension, on the one hand, of claiming an identity of servanthood, but (on the other hand) longing for that deeper relationship which the intimacy of discipleship can bring. Such is the interrelationship of identity and intimacy.

Conclusion to Part One

The main argument thus far has been that the picture of young adults living in relation to the church as 'apart and yet a part' can be helpfully and positively explored as 'believing and belonging' and 'identity and intimacy.' These basic images, drawn from the social scientific disciplines of sociology and psychology, have been tested and critiqued by voices from within and outside of the church, from a range of empirical, theological and other sources.

Towards the end of that discussion I tried to draw out the theme of friendship, important as it is to the establishment of both sound working relationships and solid family life, and supported as a theme by a consideration of the interrelationship of identity and intimacy as presented in the gospels. As a theme it raises difficulties because it is no more prominent in the gospels and the New Testament as a whole than it is within prevailing theories of human development. Nevertheless, friendship will remain a key part of this research because it seems to me to offer a way of working imaginatively and yet realistically with young adults.

As a result of the studies made in Part One, we have explored young adulthood in two broadly different ways with their respective starting points in the fields of psychology and sociology. In Part Two we turn to the work of James Fowler, who has brought both psychological and sociological insight to bear on his theology. Fowler is best known for his psychological work on the faith development of individuals, but has since moved on to argue a theology of the church, inspired largely by sociological insights into public life and a model of the church as a public church. If Fowler is indispensable to our understanding of young adult religious development because of his work on faith development, then it also occurs to me that in a consideration of young adults relationships with the church, it is the whole range of Fowler's writing, from the psychology of individuals to the sociology of communities, that will best serve our own purposes. Although much of the criticism of Fowler has centred upon his theory of faith development, criticism made here will take into account the whole of Fowler's work. This consideration and critique, then, will form the substance of Part Two.

Furthermore, Fowler's investigation of vocation and community in a context of covenant relationships bears analogy to our own postulation of the importance of vocation and community for the forming of young adult lives. However, if Fowler dwells upon the significance of vocation and community, he does not draw out the theme of friendship in the way that has been suggested here as a fruitful interaction of those two subjects. Therefore, it is worthwhile testing Fowler's work against our own understanding of friendship. How well might Fowler's construct incorporate such a dynamic of friendship? This is the major question addressed in Part Three.

Part Two

Young Adulthood and the Life of Faith

Chapter 3

From faith development to public church: an overview of James Fowler's work

3.1. Aspects of Fowler's work

3.1.1. An introduction to Fowler

James Fowler is an American academic and an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. Following completion of a doctorate on the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, Fowler has gone on to establish his name in the field of faith development. As early as 1974, Fowler and a group of associates were embarking upon the compilation of a set of biographies which explored five figures from history with the help of a stage theory of faith development.¹³⁹ Fowler himself contributed the story of Malcolm X, whose young adult life was transformed at the age of 27 with his conversion to Islam and who was dead by the age of 40. The writing of these biographies not only gave Fowler's group insight into individual lives but also helped them to refine the theory they had proposed.¹⁴⁰ It paved the way for Fowler's comprehensive statement of the theory in his 1981 publication, *Stages of Faith*.

The summary of Fowler's field of study presented here will lay out the major themes of his work as embodied in four of his main writings. The broad sweep of his writing marks, I think, a movement in his concern from the faith of individuals to the faith of communities, from a psychology of human development to a theology of the church. But if this movement marks a change of emphasis, it is not a change of direction. Fowler's thought has been an evolving project, and a process which can be

¹³⁹ J. W. Fowler *et al*, *Trajectories in Faith: Five Life-Studies* (Abingdon, Nashville, Tennessee, 1979).

¹⁴⁰ See Fowler *et al*, *Trajectories*, p.186.

clearly followed in an examination of his publications. If the result of his work to date has been to arrive at and explore a notion of 'public church', it has not been without considerable reference to his faith development theory. Furthermore, if that theory is no longer the sole dominating feature of his writing, it is still a central pillar of it.

Stages of Faith (1981) is the foundation of Fowler's proposals and the basis of our discussion. As we shall see, if Fowler justifies his recourse to universalist principles for the purposes of his project, he is not unaware of their shortcomings. Subsequently Fowler has nurtured two main themes which he has sought to interweave. One has been a continuation and development of his ideas relating to the faith of individuals; the second has been to draw out a theme only hinted at in *Stages of Faith*, but made increasingly prominent in writing published since that time, namely the nature and role of the church. In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (1984), Fowler develops his work on the structures of individual faith by relating them to a notion of 'vocation' as the proper Christian response to God's call, which he sets within the context of the Christian story. In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (1987), he takes up the theme which remained relatively undeveloped in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, namely the role of the church in sponsoring and supporting individuals in their vocation. Finally, in *Weaving the New Creation* (1991), Fowler expands the idea of a 'public church,' a concept which he introduced in *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, as the type of church most appropriate for that role of sponsorship.

Given, on the one hand, the current trend amongst certain theologians in returning to 'community' as the locus of understanding,¹⁴¹ and on the other hand the starting point of *Stages of Faith* as an investigation of individual lives, it is possible to see in Fowler's later writing an attempt to bridge the gap between the two. Whereas criticism of Fowler has focussed by and large on his theory of faith development, we have suggested that it is helpful to consider his work as a whole for a fuller understanding of his thought. It is important, I feel, to retain a balanced view of Fowler's work. Firstly we must acknowledge where he has come from, and that his

¹⁴¹ Such analysis seeks to acknowledge that all interpretations arise from within particular traditions and cultures. Perhaps the best known expression of this line of thought is to be found in G.A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (SPCK, London, 1984). This post-liberal approach is examined in this thesis through the work of Stanley Hauerwas; see section 4.3.

understanding of community and the faith of the community is strongly mediated through his analysis of individuals and the faith of those individuals. Secondly in assessing where he is going we must accept Fowler's approach positively, as an attempt to carry forward and fully integrate his faith development work into his more recent thinking, and not see it simply as an attempt to disguise or lose his academic roots.

3.1.2. The structure of faith: towards a theory of faith development

The character of Fowler's work on faith is made apparent in three main areas of his study: in the definition he sets out with (faith as a human universal); in the approach he takes (to study faith as development); and in the implications of his chosen method (the relationship of faith's structure to its content). First, Fowler defines faith in universal terms: 'I believe faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith.'¹⁴² For Fowler, faith is essentially a way of making meaning which gives our lives unity. Therefore, faith is not necessarily religious faith, but rather 'a universal human concern.'¹⁴³ In asserting this claim, Fowler makes recourse to both theology and the field of comparative religion. From the study of comparative religions, Fowler draws on Wilfred Cantwell Smith's understanding of faith in relation to belief. For Smith, modernist understanding of 'belief' as the holding of a certain set of propositions stands in contrast to faith: 'Faith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is an orientation of the personality [and] a total response. Faith, then, is a quality of human living.'¹⁴⁴ Amidst the great diversity of religious belief and practice it is possible to identify faith in universal terms.¹⁴⁵

In theology, Tillich's idea of 'ultimate concern' and Niebuhr's work on faith as that which 'centres' our lives have both proved influential on Fowler. If faith by definition is universal, then by description it is dynamic and relational (Fowler wants to use faith as a verb; 'faithing' is the term he resorts to). Fowler suggests that at its

¹⁴² J. W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (Harper and Row, New York, 1981), p.xiii.

¹⁴³ Fowler, *Stages*, p.5.

¹⁴⁴ W. C. Smith, *Faith and Belief* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1977), p.12. Quoted in Fowler, *Stages*, p.11.

¹⁴⁵ See Fowler, *Stages*, p.10.

simplest, faith is a relationship between self, another, and a shared centre of value or power; that is faith is 'triadic' in nature. At a more complex level, life is made up of many 'triads' which have to be related and ordered in terms of one another.¹⁴⁶

Although Fowler wants to keep the discussion in very general terms, in Niebuhr's ideas we are given hints of the way in which Fowler will go on to develop his work in specifically Christian ways in subsequent publications. Fowler employs Niebuhr's category of 'radical monotheism' as implying loyalty to 'the source and center of all power. Radical monotheistic faith calls people to an identification with a universal community.' In the following chapter Fowler uses the example of the Kingdom of God as a way in which faith 'images' our 'ultimate environment' and relates that 'big picture' to our everyday lives.¹⁴⁷

Fowler recognises that his concept of faith as a universal principle has given ammunition to his critics. As Harvey Cox said to Fowler, 'There is something to offend everyone in this way of talking about faith.' There are those who would rather see a closer identification of faith with religion and belief, either because they are favourably or unfavourably disposed towards religion. There are those, arguing on either Christian or psychological grounds, that Fowler's definition of faith is 'too broad and inclusive.'¹⁴⁸ In particular, from within the Church, there are those who regard Fowler's work as being too much about the human side of faith, and not enough about theology and grace.¹⁴⁹

Cox's criticism has been borne out to a certain extent by Fowler's approach of drawing upon psychological theories of human development. Fowler has been particularly influenced by the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Eric Erikson, and Daniel Levinson. The first two belong to 'the structural-

¹⁴⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.9 and 17. For a further discussion of H. R. Niebuhr's influence on this and other aspects of Fowler's understanding of faith see section 4.2.2.

¹⁴⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.23, 24 and 29.

¹⁴⁸ For Fowler's own reporting of these criticisms see Fowler, *Stages*, pp.91-2.

¹⁴⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.32 and 302-3. For an example of these criticisms see R. Osmer, 'James W. Fowler and the Reformed Tradition,' in J. Astley and L. Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (Gracewing, Leominster, 1992), especially pp.142-4.

developmental school', and have focussed their work on structures of knowing, Piaget in terms of operational thinking and the development of cognition in children, and Kohlberg in the area of moral reasoning. By contrast, the psychosocial approach of Erikson and Levinson is more concerned with the whole personality, for Erikson through concentrating on ego development, and for Levinson through his 'life-cycle' theory. Levinson and Erikson's work, in contrast to the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg, are more closely related to biological maturation and chronological age.¹⁵⁰ Erikson's work formed Fowler's first major contact with developmental psychology.¹⁵¹ Fowler comments upon Erikson's influence on his own work: 'it has touched me at convictional depths that the structural developmentalists have not addressed'.¹⁵² Fowler finds it easier to be more precise about the influence of Piaget and Kohlberg, largely because of their epistemological focus. This, combined with the theological understandings of Niebuhr and Tillich of faith as 'a way of seeing the world,' leads Fowler to assert faith as a kind of knowing.

The result of Fowler's early work on faith development was the seven-stage theory which he placed at the heart of it. Fowler's evidence to corroborate the theory has been collected empirically. Fowler and his associates conducted 359 interviews with people of both religious and non-religious convictions (although there is later recognition of the limitation of the data, in that it can only be representative of North America, and has been subjected to only minimal cross-cultural verification.)¹⁵³ They modelled their interviews to some degree on Piaget and Kohlberg's research, and following completion of interviews, assessed and assigned them to stages or stage transitions of faith development.

Influenced by Erikson's 'eight ages' of development, and originally wanting to mirror that proposal, Fowler later refined his work in the light of the more rigidly

¹⁵⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, p.50. For further consideration of these psychologists and references to original sources see sections 2.1.1 (on Erikson), 2.1.2 (on Levinson), and 4.2.1 (on Kohlberg).

¹⁵¹ Fowler, *Stages*, p.38.

¹⁵² Fowler, *Stages*, p.99.

¹⁵³ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.296-7. Although see R.Y. Furushima, 'Faith Development in a Cross-Cultural Perspective,' in Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives*, pp.215-20.

defined structures of Piaget and Kohlberg.¹⁵⁴ The stage structure is sequential and integrated in that each stage 'carries forward the operations of all the previous stages.' Structural development occurs 'when, in the interaction of subject and environment, the subject must construct new modes of knowing and acting in order to meet new challenges of the environment. Development results from efforts to restore balance between subject and environment when some factor of maturation or of environmental change has disturbed a previous equilibrium.'¹⁵⁵

Subsequently, Fowler has sought to clarify some of the confusion surrounding the sequential ordering of the stages. He explains that there has been a certain ambiguity in the final 'Universalizing stage' of his theory when pictured as constituting 'the normative image for *all* human becoming.' For Fowler, 'The crucial point to be grasped is that the image of human completion or wholeness offered by faith development theory is not an estate to be attained or a stage to be realised. Rather, it is a way of being and moving, a way of being on pilgrimage.'¹⁵⁶

3.1.3. The structure and content of faith: towards an understanding of vocation

The effect of Fowler's approach has been to consider the structure of faith as distinct from the content of faith. This is because of the universal definition he gives to faith, and particularly because of the social scientific perspective he brings to bear on faith.

As we focus here on the developmental dynamics of faith we must keep in mind that the story of 'stages' of faith and human development can give us only half of a much larger and richer picture...they present to us the characteristic patterns of knowing, reasoning, and adapting in ways that describe general features of human growth, applicable to all of us, despite the vast differences we recognize in our temperaments, our unique experiences and the contents and

¹⁵⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, p.106.

¹⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, p.100.

¹⁵⁶ J. W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (Harper and Row, New York, 1984), pp.72 and 74.

details of our particular life stories. Developmental theories necessarily depict 'every persons' stories. Therefore the categories of description are necessarily formal and without specific content, general and not particular.¹⁵⁷

Fowler claims that, despite his commitment to 'a project of searching for a developmental sequence of structural "styles" of faith which might be shown to underlie persons' ways of appropriating the great variety of different "contents" of faith', at no point did he forget that faith 'involves both rationality and passionality.'¹⁵⁸

Most prominently, Fowler acknowledges a 'neglect' on his own part of 'any effort at a theoretical account of the interplay of structure and content in the life of faith.'¹⁵⁹ He has in mind the example of the relationship between stage change (that is, a change in the *structure* of an individual's faith) and conversion (as the change in the *content* of faith). Yet the impression we get from Fowler's preliminary sketch of this relationship is that this interaction is not so much integration as interweaving. Indeed his brief investigation in *Stages of Faith* seemingly confirms the distinction to be made between conversion and stage change, content and form: 'After several years' reflection I am finding it most useful to reserve the term conversion for those sudden or gradual processes that lead to significant changes in the contents of faith. Structural stage change separate from or as part of a conversion process should be identified in terms of stage change.'¹⁶⁰

Of greater help in this matter is Fowler's recourse to the definition of knowing. Taking a lead from Kohlberg's moral theory which presented the importance of knowing as valuing as well as cognition, Fowler recognises that Piaget's logical structures of knowing are too narrow for his own work on faith. He contrasts what he calls Piaget's *logic of rational certainty* with his own *logic of conviction*, a mode of knowing which 'proceeds in a manner in which the knowing self is continually being confirmed or modified in the knowing.' He goes on to say that, 'Reasoning in faith [is

¹⁵⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, p.91.

¹⁵⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.272-3.

¹⁵⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, p.273.

¹⁶⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, p.285.

best seen] as a balanced interaction between the more limited and specialized and the more comprehensive and holistic logics we have described.' In 'faith considerations' there is a need for an understanding of knowing which 'broadens' and 'deepens' both Piaget and Kohlberg's definitions.¹⁶¹

Following publication of *Stages of Faith*, Fowler attempted to redress the problem of keeping too closely to Piaget and Kohlberg's narrower definition of knowing, and emphasised instead those who presented more philosophical and psychosocial theories relating to the development of the whole personality. Thus in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* there is a return to the work of Erikson, which formed his first 'home' in development psychology, and further exposition of Levinson's life-cycle theory. He supplemented the work of these two men with a section on Carol Gilligan's ideas, which drew upon Kohlberg's work on moral development along 'relational' and personality development lines.

The result of Fowler's considerations in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* is an attempt by Fowler to say something about his own faith tradition in relation to the 'universal' definition he gives to faith. He makes the definite attempt to explore the 'contents' of faith, drawing on his own Christian story and tradition. Fowler's main aim in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* is to explore the interplay between structure and content through a notion of vocation which affirms development and conversion alike. Theologically, Fowler's presentation of a Christian understanding of vocation uses as a starting point Walter Brueggemann's depiction of covenantal living, which 'transposes all identity questions into vocational questions' ('Who am I?')

¹⁶¹ See Fowler, *Stages*, p.102-3. David Heywood suggests that 'structural developmentalism is not the model of cognitive functioning best suited to the explanation of the structuring of meaning.' He argues that Fowler has built on Piaget's developmentalism as mediated to him through the work of Kohlberg. A 'logic of conviction' is not derivable from a direct understanding of Piaget. One possibility is Moseley's suggestion that stages of development cannot be tied solely to the structural-developmental understanding of a *stage already attained*. Instead there also needs to be a sense not only of 'yet' but also of 'not yet.' This is an understanding which Moseley arrives at through a consideration of dialectical psychology which 'points to the ongoing relationship between the changing self and the changing world' as opposed to Piaget's position of assimilation and accommodation. See D. Heywood, 'Piaget and Faith Development: a true marriage of minds?' and R. M. Moseley, 'Forms of Logic in Faith Development Theory,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives* pp.158-61, 167 and 170-1.

becomes 'Whose am I?').¹⁶² Yet he also continues to be influenced by the developmental psychologists. It seems quite clear, for example, that his concept of vocation mirrors to some extent at least the 'dream' which shapes the individual's life-cycle in Levinson's theory. Fowler has always been insistent that what he offers is not the *Christian* vocation as such, rather the Christian perspective on the *human* vocation.¹⁶³ Fowler's own suggestion is that vocation 'is the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership.'¹⁶⁴ Vocation, then, is to share in the work of God. Fowler illustrates the outworkings of this call with reference to Niebuhr's categories of God as creator, governor and redeemer.¹⁶⁵

3.1.4. Human vocation and a covenant community: towards the creation of a public church

A crucial point in Fowler's understanding of vocation is that a vocation can only be fulfilled when it is in accordance with the vocation of others.¹⁶⁶ The proper setting for vocation is the community as an 'ecology of vocations', subjecting the personal sense of vocation to 'corporate discernment'. As such vocation is *negotiated* rather than 'found'.¹⁶⁷ Fowler's calling upon an 'ecology of vocations' leads him to a shift in emphasis toward a study of community as the focus for his faith development work. It is this theme which he pursues and strengthens in *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, presenting the Christian community not only as an 'ecology of vocations', but also as an 'ecology of care' supporting individual vocations.

The main thrust of Fowler's work in *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* lies

¹⁶² Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, pp.93-4. For a further discussion of Breuggemann's influence on Fowler's understanding of vocation see section 5.2.3.

¹⁶³ See Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.131.

¹⁶⁴ Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, pp.94-5. His understanding of human vocation as 'partnership' with God raises some interesting questions about the role of grace and the meaning of covenant. See sections 5.1.3 and 5.2.2. for further discussion of these matters in a Methodist context.

¹⁶⁵ See J. W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987), pp.37ff.

¹⁶⁶ Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.103.

¹⁶⁷ See Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.126 on this point.

with the Christian community as a corporate body. First, he parallels the vocation of individuals with the calling of the community, a 'covenant' community, responsive to the call to partnership with God, made up of individuals bound to one another in a mutual recognition of interdependence. Thus in contrast to 'organic' and 'contractual' communities, in a covenant community 'membership comes neither as a fate nor a choice but as a being-chosen.'¹⁶⁸

Secondly, the Christian community is 'an ecology of care.' This has particular implications for pastoral leadership, for the congregation as a 'sponsoring' community, and a congregation which expects development in faith. An ecology of care, then, both maintains and transforms the life of that community. In a chapter on 'The Congregation: Varieties of Presence in Selfhood and Faith,' Fowler introduces the theory of stages into the life of the congregation. One main question is how congregations cope with individuals at different stages of faith. In answering this question he introduces a second main point, that is an understanding of congregations themselves in terms of modal developmental levels of faith.¹⁶⁹

The congregation which is best suited to make allowance for the varieties of presence in faith stages is most likely to bear the marks of a 'public church,' a term Fowler borrows from Martin Marty. This idea of 'public church' forms Fowler's third main characterisation of the Christian community, a term which has arisen in response to the perceived division of private and public lives, and the diminishment of the latter 'as an arena for the playing of meaningful roles.'¹⁷⁰ In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, Fowler offers four main characteristics of a public church: a public church is one which takes seriously its Christian commitment in its faithfulness to Jesus Christ; it shares its witness, but is also prepared to join others to work for the common good; there is care for one another within the community, but it is matched by a concern for public life; finally, it is an open church, willing to engage the thought and ideologies of

¹⁶⁸ Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.34.

¹⁶⁹ See Fowler, *Faith Development*, pp.21, 97 and 114-5.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Sennet, quoted in Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.23. See M. Marty, *Public church* (Crossroads, New York, 1981), and P. Palmer, *Company of Strangers* (Crossroads, New York, 1983). For further discussions on a public church see sections 4.3 and 5.3.

a pluralistic world.¹⁷¹

Fowler presents faith development theory a way of understanding change (and continuity) in the lives of individuals and communities. In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler says that the profound changes in modern life have resulted in a crisis of vocation, one which the 'narrative structure' of theories of human development could help address.¹⁷² In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, he offers an understanding of the 'dynamics of change' in individuals' lives and vocation, which can be addressed by the Christian community as 'ecologies of care and vocation.'¹⁷³ In *Weaving the New Creation* Fowler returns in a major way to the matter of change, especially the development of what he calls a 'public church'. The question he wants to address in this book is what kind of church are we being called towards in response to the changes he identifies.

The radical changes he describes are those in human consciousness and in geopolitical relationships, in what he describes as 'a paradigm shift in cultural consciousness,'¹⁷⁴ essentially a movement from a modern towards a post-modern world. The faith stage theory which arose in research on individuals, and which Fowler has already applied to congregations, he now applies to culture. Fowler believes that a faith development theory which can address and help to order our understanding about these cultural changes can also help to shape and form an appropriate public church. These are important matters for our overall understanding of Fowler, and to which we shall return in due course. But in order to do so, we need to know more detail about the individual stages themselves.

¹⁷¹ Fowler, *Faith Development*, pp.24-5 and 119.

¹⁷² See Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.15.

¹⁷³ See Fowler, *Faith Development*, pp.99-111.

¹⁷⁴ See J. W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (Harper and Row, New York, 1991), pp.xi and 19.

3.2. Stages 3, 4 and 5 and the faith of young adults

3.2.1. An introduction to the faith stages

Having summarised Fowler's main writing, we are now in a position to examine more closely Fowler's work in relation to young adult lives. Fowler's theory of faith development is essentially a description of styles and ways of being in faith. As such it relates to the structure rather than the content of faith. Fowler highlights faith as meaning-making, with its dimensions of knowing, valuing, committing and acting. Empirical research and theoretical reflection have led Fowler to present his seven stage structure of faith development, which he labels in *Stages of Faith* as a pre-stage followed by stages numbered 1 to 6.¹⁷⁵ Appendix B of *Stages of Faith* lays out the method and results of the 359 interviews which formed the empirical basis of faith development research.¹⁷⁶ The table below (showing the distribution of faith stages by age) is reproduced from that appendix.¹⁷⁷ From the numbers in brackets at the bottom of the table it can be seen that the sample contained a reasonable distribution of ages, with representatives from every age group. By far the biggest age group was formed by the 21-30 year olds (90 interviews), with only around half as many (48) in the 31-40 age category.

Table Eight: Distribution of stages of faith by age

Stages of Faith	Age Groups								Percentage of Total Sample in Each Stage %
	0-6 %	7-12 %	13-20 %	21-30 %	31-40 %	41-50 %	51-60 %	61+ %	
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.6	0.3
5-6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0
5	—	—	—	—	14.6	12.5	23.5	16.1	7.0
4-5	—	—	—	3.3	18.8	21.9	5.9	14.5	8.1
4	—	—	5.4	40.0	20.8	56.2	29.4	27.4	24.8
3-4	—	—	28.6	33.3	8.3	—	—	14.5	16.4
3	—	—	50.0	17.8	37.5	9.4	35.3	24.2	24.0
2-3	—	17.2	12.5	4.4	—	—	—	1.6	4.7
2	—	72.4	3.6	1.1	—	—	5.9	—	7.0
1-2	12.0	6.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.4
1	88.0	3.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	6.4
	100.0% (25)	100.0% (29)	100.0% (56)	100.0% (90)	100.0% (48)	100.0% (32)	100.0% (17)	100.0% (62)	100.0%* (359)

*Totals may not equal 100.0% due to rounding errors.

¹⁷⁵ Elsewhere Fowler labels the stages from 0-6.

¹⁷⁶ The results were compiled from interviews forming part of a number of different studies. Fowler notes that there is a particular bias towards white and Christian populations. There were equal numbers of men and women interviewed (180 men and 179 women). See Fowler, *Stages*, pp.315-317. The issue of gender bias in the scoring of the interviews is dealt with in section 3.2.3.

¹⁷⁷ Reproduced from Fowler, *Stages*, p.318.

There are two main ways to comment upon the results. One is to consider the presence of the various faith stages within the different age categories. The 21–30 group was typically characterised by Stage 3–4 transitionals (33.3%) and those at Stage 4 (40%). Stage 3 faith accounted for 17.8% of this age group, whilst there were rather fewer examples of Stage 2 and Stage 2–3 transitionals. In this age group a small number (3.3%) were scored at the Stage 4–5 transition. Within the older 31–40 age group there were representatives of Stage 5 faith (14.6%) and significantly more showing signs of the Stage 4–5 transition (18.8%). There were markedly fewer within the Stage 4 category and Stage 3–4 transition. Fowler makes particular comment upon the presence of the larger percentage shown for Stage 3 faith, a concern which he indicates would benefit from further research, although he suggests that it may be to do with generational differences.¹⁷⁸

The second way of looking at the data is to comment upon the faith stages across the age categories. Whereas Stages 1 and 2 remain particular to childhood years, Stages 3 and 4 are apparent in every age group from 13–20 upwards. Stage 5 faith does not fully emerge until the 31–40 age group, but then persists into later years. The results from Fowler's research suggest a focus on three particular stages and two transitional periods as the basis for a discussion of young adult lives. Our concern with an age group that is usually included within the developmental period of 'young adulthood' leads us to consider Stages 3, 4, and 5 and the transitions between them.

3.2.2. Fowler's description of Stages 3 and 4

In Fowler's scheme Stage 3 typically originates in adolescence and marks that period of development. Fowler points out, however, that for many this becomes the stage of equilibrium for many well into later life.¹⁷⁹ Although the end of adolescence often marks a readiness for a move from Stage 3 to Stage 4, many do not make this transition until mid or later life, or indeed make that transition at all.

The background to this stage in adolescence is twofold. On the one hand there

¹⁷⁸ See Fowler, *Stages*, p.317. For Fowler's comments on the statistics, read Fowler, *Stages*, pp.317-323.

¹⁷⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, p.172.

is a widening social awareness, extending beyond immediate family. On the other hand, there is a growing use of formal operations in logic, marking the beginnings of abstract thought. Thus Stage 3 is characterised by mutual interpersonal perspective taking, a process of mirroring the self in what Fowler terms 'Synthetic-Conventional' faith. It is synthetic because it is the drawing together into a coherent view of many different perspectives on the self. Fowler presents this as the 'story of our stories.' Although this story is unique to the individual, it is largely the product of what has been given to the individual through others' views. In this way faith at this stage is also conventional, as it is shaped by the expectations of those significant others who are our mirrors.¹⁸⁰

The danger of this stage is too great a dependence on these significant others, in what Sharon Parks has called a 'tyranny of the They.'¹⁸¹ Only when what is assumed tacitly and accepted uncritically is questioned and tested in a more explicit form of knowing can the individual shake loose from the possibility of this 'tyranny.' When contradictions in accepted authority or different experiences (of the kind which come about especially as the result of leaving home) give fresh perspectives then the time of transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 is probably at hand.

In his basic statement of faith development theory, *Stages of Faith*, Fowler presents Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective faith) through the story of Jack, whose transition from Stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional) to Stage 4 faith is marked by a movement from the influences of family, school and neighbourhood to a period in the army and (in his hours off-duty) contact with the politics of black power.¹⁸² Coming home Jack saw, felt and was drawn to act in his old community in a new and different way. Fowler sees in Jack's experience two key features of the transition to Stage 4.

The first is a 'critical distancing from one's previous assumptive value system'.¹⁸³ The *distancing* can be the emotional and physical distancing of joining the

¹⁸⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, pp. 152 and 154.

¹⁸¹ Fowler, *Stages*, p. 154. See S. Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live by* (Harper and Row, New York, 1986), p. 79.

¹⁸² Fowler, *Stages*, pp. 174-183.

¹⁸³ Fowler, *Stages*, p. 179.

army, going away to college, getting married and setting up your own home, although Fowler recognises that any of these things might simply be recreations of that assumed value system. Therefore a genuine move towards Stage 4 must not simply be marked by extensions of interpersonal relationships, but also by a *critical* distancing, with its recognition of systems and how people are shaped by their group histories and socioeconomic conditions.¹⁸⁴

Secondly, there is the emergence of what Fowler calls the *executive ego*. This is marked by a breaking of the 'tyranny of the They' (those whom one relies upon as sources of external authority), and their replacement by the formation of an identity shaped by the ideology of groups of which one chooses to be a part. Although 'significant others' retain something of their significance, authority is transferred from that external source to within the self. Fowler states that both halves of this 'double movement' need to be completed to make possible a full transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4. When someone completes only one half of this double movement 'we see an interesting and potentially longlasting equilibrium in a transitional position between Stages 3 and 4.'¹⁸⁵

3.2.3. Gender issues relating to Stages 3 and 4

The pattern of growing individuation and autonomy which emerges in Stage 4 has drawn criticism from feminist and other sources. In her book on the young adult years, Sharon Parks takes note of Carol Gilligan's ideas on context and experience as integral to moral decision making as a basis of insight and critique into faith development theory.¹⁸⁶ Thus Parks looks to relate more strongly the content of faith to its structure, and sets out to explore the role of the imagination in adult faith.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore she identifies the tendency to interpret the process of individuation as individualism. Parks looks to redefine autonomy not as independence but as inner-

¹⁸⁴ Elsewhere Fowler refers to this as 'third-person perspective taking.' See for example, Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.69.

¹⁸⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, p.179.

¹⁸⁶ See section 4.2.1. for more on Gilligan's research.

¹⁸⁷ See Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp.101-6, and Chapter 6, 'Imagination: The Power of Adult Faith', pp.107-32.

dependence; not a 'standing all by oneself,' but the inclusion of self within the 'arena of authority.'¹⁸⁸ Inspired at least in part by Parks' work and her call for a separate and distinct stage of faith development to be placed between Stages 3 and 4 (an argument examined in the following section), other researchers have called for a reassessment of the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith to take account of a self which develops in the context of relationships.¹⁸⁹

Table Nine: Percentage distribution of stages of faith by sex

Percentage Distribution of Stages of Faith by Sex		
Stages	Male	Female
6	0.5	0.0
5-6	0.0	0.0
5	7.2	6.7
4-5	10.0	6.1
4	25.0	24.6
3-4	15.6	17.3
3	21.1	26.8
2-3	2.8	6.7
2	8.3	5.6
1-2	1.7	1.1
1	7.8	5.0
	100.0% [†] (180)	100.0% [*] (179)

[†]Total may not equal 100.0% due to rounding errors

Table Ten: Percentage distribution of the stages of faith development by age and sex

Stages	Age Groups																	
	0-6		7-12		13-20		21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61+			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.1	—
5-6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20.8	8.3	5.3	23.1	20.0	28.6	—	—	15.6	16.7
4-5	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.3	1.9	20.8	16.7	26.3	15.4	—	14.3	—	—	18.8	10.0
4	—	—	—	—	3.8	6.7	44.7	36.5	31.6	34.6	25.0	16.7	57.9	53.8	40.0	14.3	18.8	36.7
3-4	—	—	—	—	26.9	30.0	31.6	34.6	—	16.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	28.1	—
3	—	—	—	—	53.8	46.7	15.8	19.2	33.3	41.7	10.5	7.7	40.0	28.6	—	—	12.5	36.7
2-3	—	—	6.2	30.8	7.7	16.7	2.6	5.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.1	—
2	—	—	81.2	61.5	7.7	—	—	1.9	—	—	—	—	—	14.3	—	—	—	—
1-2	7.0	20.0	12.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1	93.0	80.0	—	7.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%*
	(15)	(10)	(16)	(13)	(26)	(30)	(38)	(52)	(24)	(24)	(19)	(13)	(10)	(7)	(32)	(30)	(359)	

*Totals may not equal 100.0% due to rounding errors

¹⁸⁸ See Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.57. Park's thought again echo Gilligan, whose construct seeks to include the self within a circle of care. See section 4.2.1.

¹⁸⁹ See Nicola Slee's comments on the research of Leary into women carers and Devor on women ministers in N. Slee, 'Further on from Fowler: Post-Fowler Faith Development Research' in L.J. Francis, W.K. Kay and W.S. Campbell, eds., *Research in Religious Education* (Gracewing, Leominster, 1996), p.90.

It is a controversy which has been fuelled, at least in part, by the results from Fowler's own research as presented in *Stages of Faith*. In a table showing 'percentage distribution of stages of faith by sex' (Table Nine, above), it can be seen that whereas a greater proportion of women than men were scored at Stage 3, the opposite was true of the higher Stages 4 and 5. A look at the accompanying Table Ten reveals a similar pattern in the case of the specific age groups, 21–30 and 31–40.¹⁹⁰

The main conclusion drawn by these critics is that there is an in-built gender bias within faith development theory which places women more readily in Stage 3 rather than Stage 4, and men in Stage 4 rather than Stage 3. More recently, these criticisms have been scrutinised from within the faith development school by Karen Boyd de Nicola in the light of Mary Belenky's collaborative work on *Women's Ways of Knowing*.¹⁹¹ Because Fowler's defines faith as a form of knowing, Belenky's focus on knowing forms a helpful parallel frame of reference. Although Belenky's categories for knowing are not presented as a developmental sequence, de Nicola believes that it is possible to compare them with stages of faith. Two principal forms of knowing form the basis of Belenky's discussion: subjective knowing and procedural knowing. Subjective knowing is intuitive and personal, the sphere of gut feelings and opinion. By contrast, procedural knowing requires that you must 'really look' and 'listen hard' through careful observation and analysis. Procedural knowers 'are interested not just in *what* people think but in *how* people go about forming their opinions, feelings and ideas.'¹⁹² De Nicola makes the comparison between subjective knowing and Stage 3 faith, and procedural knowing and Stage 4 faith.¹⁹³

Belenky also indicates that there are two forms of procedural knowing, the connected and the separated. The difference is that between understanding and knowledge: 'Understanding involves intimacy and equality between self and object,

¹⁹⁰ These tables can be found in Fowler, *Stages*, pp.321 and 322.

¹⁹¹ K. Boyd de Nicola, 'Formal Operational Thinking, Stage 4 and Practical Knowing,' an unpublished paper presented to the Association of Practical Theology Conference. M. Belenky *et al.* *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Basic Books, a division of Harper Collins, New York, 1986)

¹⁹² Belenky, *Women's Ways*, pp.93, 94 and 97.

¹⁹³ Fowler has also made this comparison. See his foreword to Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p.xiii.

while knowledge implies separation from the object and mastery over it.’¹⁹⁴ Separated knowing is characterised by critical thinking, and connected knowing by empathy. Whereas the latter confirms the self in relationship with others, many women interviewed by Belenky and her team found that the use of a separated form of knowing left them feeling not autonomous but with a sense of alienation.¹⁹⁵ Fowler believes that in describing the movement from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith, his team have emphasised the ‘separative’ pattern of reflection at the expense of the ‘connective’ form. He comments, ‘In not fully developing the latter, I believe we have underscored some of our female subjects, and likely overscored some of our male subjects as well.’¹⁹⁶

De Nicola’s results showed that those scored at Stage 4 used both separated and connected forms of knowing. This led her to conclude that Stage 4 faith is characterised by a further form of procedural knowing (which she terms ‘a practical procedure’) whereby an individual ‘did not grant exclusive authority to either a connected or a separated procedure.’ It is that very capacity to choose the most appropriate procedure (separative or connective) which is the mark of formal operational thinking and the basis of Stage 4 faith. Those who used only one of the two procedures were beyond a Stage 3 position, but not yet at Stage 4. Thus in those circumstances, de Nicola allocated a level of Stage 3.5. She suggests that the reason for the bias in the results between men and women at Stages 3 and 4 can be best explained in terms of procedure rather than gender: ‘we should ask whether separated knowers have been scored as Stage 4 because of their ideological orientation, and connected knowers have been scored as Stage 3 because of their orientation to feeling.’

De Nicola’s defensiveness against the accusation of gender bias is in some ways misplaced. Belenky for one does not believe that separate and connected knowing are gender-specific. She comments, ‘The two modes may be gender-related: It is possible that more women than men tip toward connected knowing and more men than women toward separate knowing. Some people, certainly, would argue that this is so,

¹⁹⁴ Belenky, *Women’s Ways*, p.101.

¹⁹⁵ Belenky, *Women’s Ways*, p.124.

¹⁹⁶ Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p.xiii.

but we know of no hard data bearing directly on the issue...'¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless it remains true that in a discipline dominated for so long by men that it has taken women researchers interviewing other women to highlight the revisions required within developmental theories.

3.2.4. Parks' 'stage of young adulthood'

It is the awkwardness of explanations about the extended transitional period between Stages 3 and 4—broadly speaking, adolescence and adulthood—that has led Sharon Parks to suggest a separate but distinct stage of 'young adulthood.' In *The Critical Years* she writes from within the context of higher education and draws on her observation of college students. Taking Perry's work on the development of college students as her basic model, and Keniston's suggestion of a distinct 'postadolescent' developmental stage, Parks proposes the insertion of a new stage between Stages 3 and 4 of Fowler's Faith Development theory: 'we can begin to hypothesize that within Fowler's fourth stage, "Individuative-Reflective" faith, there are actually two separate, identifiable stages.'¹⁹⁸

It is the first part of Stage 4 faith, then, to which Parks assigns the title 'young adulthood.' The characteristic of young adulthood is that it occupies a place in the developmental process previously seen as a part of an extended adolescence, the period usually described by developmentalists as the formation of an identity both in terms of self-awareness and awareness of one's role in society. Parks takes up Keniston's idea that in the modern world the newly self-aware self, separated from family, is better described as 'over-against' society rather than having achieved a role in it. 'The postadolescent period is marked by a critical awareness of self and world; its task is to discern a fitting relationship between self and society.'¹⁹⁹

Parks follows Keniston in believing that this distinct stage has been confused with a time of extended transition by its very nature of (and here she uses Keniston's

¹⁹⁷ Belenky, *Women's Ways*, p.102-3.

¹⁹⁸ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.79.

¹⁹⁹ Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp.80-1.

words) 'pervasive ambivalence toward both self and society.'²⁰⁰ As regards role in society, the young adult critically examines the world, but is prepared to make only probing commitments.²⁰¹ The 'critical distancing' characteristic of Fowler's Stage 4 becomes in Parks' reassessment of young adulthood a *tentative* exploration. As regards the self, the pattern of self-authorisation is a fragile one, confirming for oneself what is known from a source of authority outside the self. When contrasted to the control exerted by the 'executive ego' in Fowler's description of Stage 4 faith, that sense of self-authorisation retains, in Parks' period of young adulthood, a certain vulnerability.

Parks' work relates mainly to the time spent in college and the years subsequent to college. But her work is also helpful in firming up our understanding of the post-young adult years, which broadly speaking relates to the 25–40 age group. Parks calls this later period 'adulthood,'²⁰² and relates it to the second part of Fowler's Stage 4, as bearing the full-blown characteristics of that stage. In adulthood the probing commitment of young adulthood takes on a *tested* quality, and is marked by a centredness of self and world rather than an ambivalence towards both. 'Sometimes through a crisis of experimentation, and sometimes more gently over time, a point comes at which one can no longer be described as so divided, nor as simply exploring one's worldview, marriage, career commitment, life-style or faith.'²⁰³ Furthermore self-authorisation now has a quality of inner *confidence* rather than the fragility of young adulthood. 'The fragile young adult must stand over-against the world to observe it, critique it, to test it, and to save it. The tested adult has the confidence to stand within the world to engage it, to contribute to it, and (if one's faith requires it) to transform it.'²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.82.

²⁰¹ See Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp.82-3.

²⁰² Parks' work involves some rejigging of terminology, most notably the narrowing of the definition of 'young adulthood' which Parks restricts to persons in their twenties. The following period she calls adulthood (the part of Fowler Stage 4 which is beyond young adulthood), and goes on to offer the title of 'mature adulthood' synonymous with Fowler Stage 5. Note that the period Parks refers to as 'adulthood' (or 'tested adulthood') is the period entitled 'young adulthood' in this thesis.

²⁰³ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.84.

²⁰⁴ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.94.

By presenting Stage 4 faith as two distinct stages, Parks believes that she has helped to explain some of the discrepancies within Fowler's description of Stage 4 faith. Fowler has recognised the 'certain unavoidable tensions' which arise in the transition to and remain during Stage 4 faith, but Parks points to the discrepancy in Fowler's contradictory assertions that sometimes tensions are collapsed and at other times maintained.²⁰⁵ She suggests the discrepancies are reflective of two separate stages. In young adulthood the tendency is to seek a certainty which leads to the collapsing of tensions one way or the other. The adult on the other hand has learned not only to respect but also not to be so threatened by other points of view, and so is able to hold tensions as tensions. Thus the distinction between Parks' periods of young adulthood and adulthood is nowhere more clear than in the handling of those tensions which arise from the relationship of self and world. In *Stages of Faith*, however, Fowler refers to the collapsing of such tensions as a characteristic of Stage 4 faith, but not to their holding.²⁰⁶ In our consideration of the 25-40 age group we will need to note the maintaining of tensions as a characteristic of adult faith.

In assessing Parks' contribution to faith development theory and an understanding of what she entitles young adult faith, it is necessary to note that the context for her writing is higher education and its institutions. Her proposal is for these institutions to be regarded as mentoring communities, on which the young adult self can depend upon as a 'home' of new knowing, and in which mentors serve to draw the fragile inner-dependent self into a 'greater strength.'²⁰⁷ She also points out the need for religious communities to be mentors of young adults in a process of religious formation.²⁰⁸ This point begs the question of appropriate forms of education and religious formation for the more tested adult. Parks makes the point that in adult faith 'the mentor becomes peer.'²⁰⁹ Those of adult faith will look for a full role and an equal say in real and significant issues in the life of the community and at all levels of decision making. Confident in their commitment they will engage the church on matters

²⁰⁵ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.91.

²⁰⁶ See Fowler, *Stages*, p.182

²⁰⁷ See Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp.89 and 170-2.

²⁰⁸ Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp.200-4.

²⁰⁹ Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.88.

they regard as important, and certain in their own knowing they will be prepared to critique the church community. Respectful of other points of view they will nevertheless seek to change the church wherever they see fit, both as a community and in its relationship to the wider world. Struggling to hold the tensions they will regard conflict as creative in the new possibilities it raises.

3.2.5. Stage 5 and the formation of a public church

Parks' critical refinement and elaboration of Fowler's theory is important because it relates features which are a part of the broad sweep of faith development theory to the detail of the stage structure itself. For example, we have already noted Parks' emphasis on interrelationship within Stage 4 contrasts with Fowler's own description of Individuative-Reflective faith. For Fowler the important point is the *growing awareness* of interrelationship which emerges as a key feature of Stage 5 faith.

Fowler describes this stage as 'Conjunctive faith' in which there is recognition of the interrelatedness of all things. 'Stage 5, as a way of seeing, of knowing, of committing, moves beyond the dichotomising logic of Stage 4's "either / or." It sees both (or the many) sides of an issue simultaneously.'²¹⁰ The tensions which in Stage 4 were either collapsed or held as tensions become integrated within the Stage 5 structure: 'Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience.'²¹¹ In a pluralistic world, there is a need for dialogue. This dialogue is marked by a confidence in the validity of one's own tradition, but also an awareness that the truth cannot be contained by it. There remains the need to engage with traditions other than one's own.

In *Stages of Faith*, Fowler uses the story of Miss T. to illustrate this stage. He relates the transition from Stage 4 to stage 5 to a mid-life crisis in her late forties—a breakdown following a time of suffering and loss, and her recognition that she would be unlikely to achieve that for which she had hoped. Fowler suggests that Stage 5 faith

²¹⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, p. 185.

²¹¹ Fowler, *Stages*, p. 198.

is unlikely to occur before mid-life. This term is hard to pin down precisely, although Sharon Parks suggests that it is marked both by physical changes, and by a change in consciousness, 'determined by one's own inner sense that one has probably lived half of one's life.'²¹²

In Fowler's view, and according to his research results, mid-life and Stage 5 faith can originate from the mid-thirties onwards.²¹³ Indeed, he recounts an experience of his own, indicative of the emergence of Stage 5 faith, from when he was himself in his thirties.²¹⁴ The difficulty with Fowler's interpretation of this experience is that it is very much based on a learning exercise within a theological seminary. In a piece of research with college students Green and Hoffman identified several students as scoring a Stage 5 level of faith.²¹⁵ Possibly it is indicative that 'Stage 5 does occur earlier for more people than has been believed.' However, they go on to warn that 'there may be some college students who are attracted by Stage 5 sentiments, and therefore say they agree with them, who are not actually living by Stage 5 ideals.'²¹⁶

We heed the warning, but in the absence of stronger evidence we will assume Fowler's proposal that Stage 5 can occur from the mid thirties onwards. This being the case it then coincides with the upper end of the age group which is the concern of this investigation. In this way we can present the following broad picture of the 25-40 age group with reference to faith development theory. In the late twenties there are a group of people either emerging from Parks' suggested period of young adulthood, or already bearing the characteristics of 'full-blown' Stage 4 faith as described by Fowler. As they move into the mid- to late thirties there arises a possibility of further development in faith in the beginnings of the transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5.

This description of the 25-40 age group becomes particularly significant when

²¹² Parks, *The Critical Years*, p.59.

²¹³ See for example Fowler, *Becoming Adult* (p.64), which suggests age 35 and onwards.

²¹⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.185-6.

²¹⁵ C. Green and C. Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, pp.256-65.

²¹⁶ Green and Hoffman, 'Stages of Faith and Perceptions,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p.264.

we place it in the context of Fowler's work on 'public church.' We may recall that Fowler presented an image of the church as a sponsoring community, mentoring individuals in their vocation. A church in the best position to fulfil this role would be a 'public church' bearing the characteristics of a Stage 5 congregation. Such a congregation will be able to support and sponsor people at all different levels of development, and has the educational aim of forming 'public Christians' at a postconventional (ie. Stage 4 and Stage 5) level. As he writes in *Weaving the New Creation*, 'Congregations of public church aim not for internal homogeneity but for a corporate unity that can include a robust pluralism within. It is not called, at least initially, for warm compatibility and harmony. Rather, members are called into honest struggle with each other, and in dialogue with Scripture and tradition, to be formed into persons and a community that God can use for partnership in their vocations and covenant faithfulness in the world.'²¹⁷ A careful consideration of Fowler's comments reveals the following point: a public church congregation will, according to Fowler, display the characteristics of Stage 5 faith; but the *formation* of a public church will reflect the transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5.

It would seem reasonable to assume, then, that the formation of a public church should be significantly influenced not only by those of Stage 5 faith, but equally, and perhaps more so by those of Stage 4 faith and those who are entering the Stage 4–5 transition; that is to say, those stages of faith development typical of the 25–40 age group. Presumably this is why Fowler adds his belief that this can only be achieved by the presence of 'a substantial number of adults who appropriate the tradition in the Individuative-Reflective and Conjunctive stages of faith.'²¹⁸ It takes people of both Stage 4 and 5, and the transition in between, to create, shape, and sustain a public church.

²¹⁷ Fowler, *Weaving*, pp.189-90.

²¹⁸ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.191.

Chapter 4

Faith development theory and a public church revisited: a critique of Fowler's work

4.1. Introduction

The many and far-flung criticisms of 'faith development theory' since its early formulations and first full-blown emergence in *Stages of Faith* have attested to the controversial nature of James Fowler's proposals. Thus far, there has only been reference to criticisms and revisions of the theory from within the faith development school itself. In this section, however, we introduce the work of two academics from outside of the field of faith development theory in order to bring fresh perspectives on Fowler's work.

The previous section traced a line of development in Fowler's thinking through his four main publications on faith development theory. The argument it contained was for a coherent progression in Fowler's thought rather than a wholesale change in direction. Particular attention was paid to his inclusion of theological and sociological arguments about the church alongside his original emphasis on the psychological development of individuals. The crossover point of the two themes was Fowler's notion of vocation, its development in individual lives, and the presence of the church as an 'ecology of vocations', and as an 'ecology of care' which sponsored individuals in their vocation. Finally we noted Fowler's attention turning to the vocation of the church in the face of 'a paradigm shift in cultural consciousness.' The faith stage theory, which arose through research on individuals and which had already been applied to congregations, Fowler now applied to culture.

It is at this point that I want to introduce the work of Carol Gilligan and Stanley Hauerwas as giving a feminist and a post-liberal window (respectively) onto Fowler's theory. There are two main reasons why I call upon the work of these two academics. Firstly, we deploy Gilligan's work as a means of evaluating Fowler's work *vis-a-vis* Gilligan as a *theory of human development*. This is the common link between the two which makes Gilligan's work on moral development of interest to us. On the other

hand we see in Hauerwas' work an exploration of the relationship between faith and ethics in an argument which highlights the difficulty (and indeed the undesirability) of separating Christian believing from Christian living. Here, the important point is Hauerwas' understanding of *faith* and his criticism of understanding faith as development. Secondly, the arguments presented below will help to press our understanding of Fowler's work further. The conversation between Fowler and Gilligan provides opportunity to incorporate some of Fowler's earliest thinking about faith and his thesis on Niebuhr. Along a different line, the dialogue with Hauerwas leads us to some of Fowler's most recent writing about the subject of religious and moral education. If Gilligan allows us to look more closely at the detail of the faith stages, it is Hauerwas who leads us to a fresh perspective on the formation of public churches

4.2. A feminist critique.

4.2.1. Gilligan's 'different voice'

By listening to women talk about themselves and about morality, Carol Gilligan has identified a 'different voice' in the understanding of oneself in relation to others.²¹⁹ Although insistent that this 'different voice' is 'characterized not by gender but theme,'²²⁰ it is a theme she has come to recognise through the voices of women, and as being particularly characteristic of women. This 'different voice', which shaped the title and thesis of her first book, was investigated by Gilligan through two main studies, one based on a group of college students interviewed periodically over time and the other based on a group of women deciding whether to continue or abort a pregnancy, interviewed at the time of pregnancy and a year later. Her conclusion suggested a construct of morality as an ethic of care based on a notion of responsibility. It is her understanding of *responsibility* which will be our main focus in offering a critique of Fowler's work.

Gilligan came into the field of moral psychology as a student and associate of

²¹⁹ See especially C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982).

²²⁰ Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.2.

Lawrence Kohlberg, who had developed a stage theory of moral reasoning. His theory of moral development is based upon a series of six invariant and sequential stages. Kohlberg presented this six-stage structure in three levels (each containing two stages): the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels.²²¹ At the preconventional level individuals moral action to do right or wrong, good or bad, is determined by its consequences of punishment, reward, or exchange of favours. This is the level most commonly identified with the behaviour of young children. At a conventional level, decisions are shaped not by consequences so much as fulfilling expectations of the family or group. It is a level marked by conformity and loyalty. The post-conventional level is based upon principles of law (Stage 5) and universality (Stage 6). Kohlberg's alternative heading of 'autonomous' for this level, shows that it is a moral standpoint reached by the individual apart from the authority of the group. At Stage 6 the universal principles are justice, reciprocity, equality and a respect for human dignity. He assumed that individuals would reach moral conclusions through a notion of justice arising from principles of fairness and equality. For Kohlberg, moral maturity was reached at a postconventional level as an impartial judgement on competing rights from the standpoint of universal human rights. Gilligan's concern was that women rarely progressed beyond Stage 3 and the conventional level in Kohlberg's theory.

Gilligan developed and challenged Kohlberg's argument by replacing his use of hypothetical dilemmas with the opportunity for the subjects of study to identify and talk about moral dilemmas of their own choosing.²²² In this way experience and context, rather than any notion of universal principles, underpinned the dilemmas. From the results of the study, Gilligan discerned that, whereas in Kohlberg's studies moral development was marked by a process of individuation and growing autonomy, the pattern detected in the experience of many women was interrelatedness in a web of connection. The relationship, rather than the individual, formed the key to understanding moral problems. Gilligan's conclusion was to place alongside Kohlberg's 'ethic of justice' and a concern that no-one should be treated unfairly, an

²²¹ Kohlberg has presented his definitions of moral stages and levels in a number of different sources. See, for example, L. Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Harper and Row, New York, 1981), pp.16-9.

²²² Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.3.

'ethic of care' with its concern that no-one should be hurt.²²³

Gilligan was therefore able to suggest that women's constructs of moral dilemmas were not so much about competing rights as conflicting responsibilities. In this way she was able to reinterpret Kohlberg's theory, with reference to its three levels, emphasising the movement from selfishness to responsibility.²²⁴ In the abortion study, the individual (preconventional) perspective of the selfish need to survive gave way to the goodness of responsibility for others as demanded by society (the conventional level). Finally there arose the possibility of a circle of care to include both self and others, thereby maintaining the interrelationship of connectedness in a redefined notion of responsibility which did not preclude the self.

Fowler included his own summary of Gilligan's work in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*,²²⁵ yet seemingly resisted any implications it had for the faith stage theory. In Sharon Parks words, 'Fowler is well aware of Gilligan's work which he has discussed at length both appreciatively and critically in his book *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*. Yet it must be observed that when he follows this discussion with a fresh description of the stages of faith development, the dynamics of the individuating self (in contrast to the connective self) continue to dominate the description, even when examples from women's lives are used.'²²⁶

4.2.2. An ethic of responsibility

This reluctance on Fowler's part to take full account of Gilligan's findings becomes somewhat curious when we consider that Gilligan has drawn, at least in part, on the work of H. Richard Niebuhr in *The Responsible Self* for her understanding of responsibility. Fowler notes the influence of Niebuhr on Gilligan in his review of Gilligan's work, and yet for someone who has himself drawn so heavily on the thought and inspiration of Niebuhr, it is perhaps a little odd that Fowler has seemed so reluctant

²²³ Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.62-3.

²²⁴ Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.105.

²²⁵ See Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, pp.37-46.

²²⁶ S. Parks, 'Faith development in a changing world,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p.103.

to incorporate these insights into the actual description of the faith stages.

Fowler is, of course, no stranger to Niebuhr's ethic of responsibility. The major part of his doctoral thesis on Niebuhr²²⁷ is given over to mapping out the conscious and unconscious development of Niebuhr's theological thought, a process which Fowler sees as finding its fullest expression in Niebuhr's later lecture course on Christian ethics.²²⁸ In analysing the thoughts and writings of Niebuhr, Fowler identifies three main metaphors for man: man the valuer, man the 'patient,' and man the fiduciary being. These are related to three further metaphors, expressing the sovereignty of God: God as Creator, Governor and Redeemer.

In the years following the second world war, these metaphors formed the basis for Niebuhr's lectures on the ethics of responsibility, which he gave under the title of 'The Principles of Response to Divine Action.'²²⁹ The major part of the lecture course was given under the headings 'Response to the Creative Action of God,' 'Response to the Governing Action of God' and 'Response to the Redemptive Action of God.' Fowler went on to explore Niebuhr's ethic through an address given at Cambridge University entitled 'On the Meaning of Responsibility,' although he acknowledges the major published source to be *The Responsible Self*.²³⁰ To this end, critics of Fowler who highlight his apparent oversight in failing to include an adequate understanding of responsibility within *Stages of Faith*, would do well to regard it in the light of his doctoral thesis.

It is significant that Fowler concludes the central part of his research with a chapter on faith.²³¹ The main source for this chapter is Niebuhr's manuscript entitled

²²⁷ His thesis was later published as *To See the Kingdom: the Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr* (University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1985).

²²⁸ See J. Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, p.152. Fowler comments on this lecture series, 'in the sweep of that extensive course the direction and pattern of Niebuhr's thought most fully found expression.'

²²⁹ For this and the following headings, see Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, p.149.

²³⁰ See Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, p.153, n.3. For further detail of Niebuhr's ethic of responsibility see Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, pp.152-5 and material on *The Responsible Self* included later in this section.

²³¹ Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, chapter 5, 'Faith on Earth.'

'Faith on Earth,' which awaited revision and remained unpublished at the time of Niebuhr's death. Niebuhr had intended that 'Faith on Earth' would form the second part of a work begun in *Radical Monotheism in Western Culture*,²³² in which Niebuhr had set out faith as a human universal. In one sense, a chapter on faith is no surprise. The theme of faith is very closely related to Niebuhr's ethic of responsibility: 'In order to respond thus to the action of God there must be discernment—eyes that see with the vision of faith. It is for the guidance of such discerning that Niebuhr develops his ethics of response.'²³³ But what stands out most clearly is that here is a chapter on the 'how' of faith, that is to say, faith as a process of development. Perhaps this additional chapter is to be seen not only as an end point for Fowler's research, but also as a new beginning which would lead Fowler to explore more fully the notion of faith as a process of development.

In Stages of Faith Fowler deploys Niebuhr's thinking in setting down his definition of faith as a human universal. Fowler describes what he calls Niebuhr's concept of 'human faith' in this way: '[Niebuhr] sees faith taking form in our earliest relationships with those who provide care for us in infancy. He sees faith growing through our experience of trust and fidelity—and of mistrust and betrayal—with those closest to us. He sees faith in the shared visions and values that hold human groups together. And he sees faith at all these levels, in the search for an overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a centre of value and power sufficient to give our lives unity and meaning.' For Fowler faith is always relational in what he calls a covenantal relationship, where self and other are known to one another in the trust that they share. Again, Fowler uses Niebuhr's ideas of a relational or social theory of value invested in a triadic pattern of relationships, between self, other and a shared centre of value.²³⁴

Fowler also employs Niebuhr's notion of a radical monotheistic faith as loyalty to the ultimate source of all value power, in a faith that 'calls people to an identification

²³² See Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, p.204.

²³³ Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, p.155.

²³⁴ See Fowler, *Stages*, pp.5 and 16-17.

with a universal community.’ For Fowler this kind of faith is an ideal which is only rarely comes to fruition in individuals and communities, but if ‘we regard the future of humankind as requiring our learning to live in an inclusive, global community, then in a sense, radical monotheistic faith depicts the form of our universal “coming faith”.’²³⁵ The important point about Fowler’s use of Niebuhr’s ideas in *Stages of Faith* is that he sees them chiefly in terms of the ‘coming faith’ represented by Stage 6 Universalizing faith.²³⁶

In identifying Niebuhr with what we might call the overarching theme of faith development theory, Fowler has, I think, overlooked (or possibly ignored) how Niebuhr might influence the detail of his stage structure. The disparity in Fowler’s thinking is apparent in his characterisation of Stage 6 faith. We can use Fowler’s citation of the life of Gandhi as an example. Both Fowler and Gilligan comment on a piece from Erikson’s biography of Gandhi, when Gandhi, who lived in public by a principle of nonviolence, caused psychological violence to his wife by insisting that she lived by that same principle in her own life and home. Fowler acknowledges that Gandhi was not ‘perfect’, but chooses to place him in the Stage 6 category as an example of someone who lived by a universal principle of justice. ‘In their devotion to universalizing compassion,’ Fowler writes of Stage 6 people, ‘they may offend our parochial sense of justice.’²³⁷ For Gilligan on the other hand, in an ethic of responsibility the moral problem is constructed precisely by the hurt which Gandhi caused his wife.²³⁸ In this way we might suggest that there is a certain discrepancy between Fowler’s use of Niebuhr in his overarching theology, and in his application (or lack of application) of Niebuhr’s thought in the description of individual stages. Niebuhr’s notion of responsibility, as seen through Gilligan’s understanding of Niebuhr, can give us a fresh perspective on the stages of development presented in Fowler’s theory.

²³⁵ Fowler, *Stages* p.23.

²³⁶ As Fowler states later in *Stages of Faith* (p.204), ‘[M]y normative images’ of Stage 6 have been strongly influenced by H. Richard Niebuhr’s descriptions of radical monotheistic faith.’ The points raised in this discussion of Fowler’s use of Niebuhr’s understanding of faith can also be found in Fowler, *To See the Kingdom*, pp.206-9.

²³⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, p.200-1.

²³⁸ See Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp.103-4 and 155.

4.2.3. Responsive relationships

Gilligan wrote about *The Responsible Self* in her essay on 'Justice and responsibility.'²³⁹ In this essay Gilligan sets out Niebuhr's ideas from *The Responsible Self* as the basis of her understanding of responsibility. *The Responsible Self* gave the reader the central image of 'man-as-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him' in a 'new symbolism of responsibility.' Niebuhr named four elements to his ethic of responsibility: *response* to action upon us; *interpretation* of the action to which the response is being given; *account* of the response which is anticipated of one's own response; and a *social solidarity* marking 'a continuing discourse or interaction among beings forming a continuing society.'²⁴⁰

Gilligan noted Niebuhr's distinction that whereas a deontological ethic emphasised the 'right' and a teleological ethic looked for the highest 'good', ethics of responsibility promoted the 'fitting' action, that is the action which fitted as a response into a total interaction. For Gilligan, Niebuhr's 'insistently contextual understanding...restores the narrative to moral discussion, locating accountability in the interchange of interpretation and response, placing moral inquiry in a context of historical time and place, and tying responsibility to the social solidarity of ongoing community.' Furthermore, 'in defining the moral life as the responsible life with the self as the responsive and responsible moral agent, Niebuhr establishes a fundamental link as well between the concepts of identity and morality.'²⁴¹

This contextual conception of self in relation to morality has been expressed more recently by Gilligan in a further article in which she explores Niebuhr's basic distinction between responsibility as commitment to obligations and responsibility as responsiveness in relationships. In the words of a high school student replying to the question, "What does responsibility mean to you?":

"Responsibility is when you are aware of others and you are

²³⁹ C. Gilligan, 'Justice and Responsibility: Thinking about Real Dilemmas of Moral Conflict and Choice,' in J. Fowler, A. Vergote, *et al*, *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Silver Burdett, Morristown, New Jersey, 1981).

²⁴⁰ See H.R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (Harper and Row, New York, 1963), pp.61-5.

²⁴¹ Gilligan, 'Justice and Responsibility,' in Fowler, Vergote, *et al*, pp.234-5.

aware of their feelings...Responsibility is taking charge of
yourself by looking at others around you and seeing what they
need and seeing what you need...and taking the initiative.”

Gilligan comments, ‘The premise of separation yields to the depiction of the self in connection, and the concept of autonomy is changed. The seeming paradox “taking charge of yourself by looking at others around you” conveys the relational dimension of this self-initiated action.’²⁴²

According to Gilligan, the responsibility seen in this example as a responsiveness in relationships is to be contrasted with responsibility as commitment to obligations in two ways.²⁴³ Firstly moral obligation expresses itself in a relationship of reciprocity, which for Gilligan becomes ultimately self-referential. Putting oneself in the place of another is like looking in the mirror, a process which leaves the self strangely the same. In Gilligan’s alternative account, it is the relationship, rather than the mirrored self which becomes the reference for judgement. Secondly, the ability to put oneself in the place of another is a matter of abstraction which requires an objective judgement. This understanding of the autonomous individual at the end of a process of individuation is typical of the picture given in Fowler’s Individuative-Reflective stage. In this Stage 4 faith, Fowler describes an authority taken increasingly into the self in a process he calls the development of an ‘executive ego.’²⁴⁴

As a process of detachment however, we can trace back to the previous Synthetic-Conventional stage and the development of mutual interpersonal perspective taking. In this stage the self gains an understanding of self through its understanding of how others see oneself, that is in a process of mirroring. As Fowler expresses in a pair of couplet:

I see you seeing me:
I see the me I think you see.

Fowler’s rider in this process of mirroring is that eventually the self recognises the process to be mutual:

²⁴² C. Gilligan, ‘Remapping the Moral Domain,’ in C. Gilligan, J. Ward, and J. Taylor, eds., *Mapping the Moral Domain* (Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988), p.7.

²⁴³ See Gilligan, ‘Remapping the Moral Domain,’ in Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor, eds., p.6

²⁴⁴ See for example, Fowler, *Stages*, p.179.

You see you according to me:
You see the you you think I see.²⁴⁵

However, Fowler has to some extent blurred the distinction between what is 'mutual' and what is 'relational'. So when Fowler writes for example in his description of the Synthetic-Conventional stage and the faith community: 'The important thing is to provide mutual support in times of trouble or difficulty, and to maintain a supportive web of interpersonal connectedness through the faith community,'²⁴⁶ we might suspect his lack of clarity in this matter. In this instance it remains ambiguous whether he is writing about the same 'web of connectedness' which Gilligan refers to as responsiveness in relationships; or whether it is more characteristic of the reciprocity of obligations and the mirroring process of mutual interpersonal perspective taking. On the whole, and despite the resonance of Gilligan's language in some of what he writes, Fowler has continued to resist the changes in description of the detail of his stage theory which Gilligan's insights suggest are required.

4.2.4. Two perceptions of the self

The path toward detachment and individuation is clearly apparent within the stages of Fowler's theory. Fowler's defence in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* is to call for further research that 'explicitly investigates sexual differences in moral development.' However, his concern with understandings of human wholeness and images of maturity leads him to echo Gilligan's own thoughts on restoring the tension between detachment and attachment: 'The implications of [Gilligan's] work are that the morally mature woman or man is one who has moved through either the route of developing an ethics of responsibility or through the route of the ethics of rights and duties, to the point where the strengths of each of these positions approach each other and can be integrated.'²⁴⁷

In this respect, Gilligan is engaged in a similar enterprise to Fowler. She

²⁴⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, p.153.

²⁴⁶ Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.88.

²⁴⁷ Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.45. Fowler has more recently found Belenky's work on ways of knowing to be more helpful in this respect, because Fowler himself regards faith as a form of knowing. Refer back to section 3.2.3 for a more detailed consideration of Belenky's work.

regards the different perspectives ('voices') which she describes as like the figure which can be either a vase or two faces, 'two ways of perceiving self in relation to others, both grounded in reality, but each imposing on that reality a different organisation.'²⁴⁸ The problem is that in seeing one perspective, the other disappears. Yet for Gilligan, the two perspectives are also to be seen as two axes for mapping the coordinates of the moral domain. She is insistent that '[in] contrast to the unitary moral vision [that is, of the justice perspective] and to the assumption that the opposite of the one is the many, these two dimensions of relationship provide coordinates for reimagining the self and remapping developments.'²⁴⁹

Gilligan has not been without critics of her own in this task. One accusation from those who argue that there is no understanding of reality that is not contextual is that, in studying samples of women limited largely to the white middle class, Gilligan is herself guilty of imposing a universal perspective on a diverse reality. In a similar way, Fowler can also be accused of trying to integrate the universal and the particular. One possible critique can be provided by the ethics of Stanley Hauerwas. For Hauerwas there is no understanding of Christian faith outside the context of the church, and no valid experience of Christianity outside of the Christian life. It is Hauerwas' work and the perspective he can bring to Fowler's theory of faith development to which we may now turn.

4.3. A post-liberal critique

4.3.1. Hauerwas and religious education: the Church as 'alternative polis'

Stanley Hauerwas is one of the names associated with a post-liberal approach to theology and ethics. If Hauerwas shares his Methodist inheritance with Fowler, there are major differences between them in other areas. Hauerwas seemingly has little time for a theory of faith development, and, indeed, is quite scathing in his criticism of it :

Lately it has become fashionable to speak of "faith

²⁴⁸ Gilligan, 'Remapping the Moral Domain,' in Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor, eds., p.8.

²⁴⁹ Gilligan, 'Remapping the Moral Domain,' in Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor, eds., p.5.

development” and “stages of faith,” as if faith were a natural human ability, an instinctual urge... Yet the Bible seems to have little interest in encouraging such behaviour or in analyzing its dynamics, except perhaps as our “faith development,” left to its own devices, is often an exercise of various forms of idolatry. The Bible’s concern is not *if* we shall believe but *what* we shall believe.²⁵⁰

If the progression of Fowler’s thinking is to be described as a movement from a psychology of individual human development toward the incorporation of a theology of the church, Hauerwas starts, as it were, at the other end, with a contention about the Christian community. His basic argument presents the church as a story-formed community, that is, a community formed by the narrative it claims to be true, namely the Christian story as seen in scripture. The community where the story is told is itself formed by the story it hears, and in such a way that it is able to hear that story. The focus here will be on one particular application of Hauerwas’ basic contention, one that will illustrate a comparison with Fowler’s ideas, and one that is of relevance to the research in hand: the issue of education and more specifically religious education.

In ‘The Gesture of a Truthful Story,’ Hauerwas spells out his understanding of religious education:

I worry about the idea that religious education is some special activity separated from the total life of the church. When that happens, it makes it appear that what the church does in its worship is something different from what it does in its education. I would contend that everything the church is and does is “religious education.” Put more strongly, the church does not “do” religious education at all. Rather, the church is a form of education that is religious.²⁵¹

If the church is the place where the story of God is ‘enacted, told, and heard,’²⁵² then the task of religious education ‘is not to teach us the meaning of the story but to teach us the story.’ The Christian call is to be faithful to the story which we claim to be true:

²⁵⁰ S. Hauerwas and W. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1989), pp.22-3.

²⁵¹ S. Hauerwas, ‘The Gesture of a Truthful Story’, in *Christian Existence Today* (The Labyrinth Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1990), p.101.

²⁵² Hauerwas, ‘Truthful Story,’ in *Christian Existence*, p.101.

'The primary task of being educated religiously—or better, Christianly—is not the achievement of better understanding but of faithfulness. Indeed we can only come to understand through faithfulness, as the story and the corresponding community which form our life ask nothing less from us than our life.'²⁵³ So discipleship is, for example, not learning intellectually to know forgiveness, but learning dependence upon God.

For Hauerwas, the story is self-involving. 'We become faithful just to the extent that we learn to participate in the activities of the people of God we call the church.' We learn participation through the 'gestures' of caring for one another in the fellowship of the church; and through the 'gestures' of the liturgy, for example, kneeling in prayer, the words of the creed, and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. Such 'gestures' are not the bottom line of religious education, but the heart of it. The gestures through which we learn dependence upon God, are the sign to the world of God's salvation. Theology, as an intellectual activity, 'can only be sustained by a community that has learned to wait patiently in a world of suffering and injustice.'²⁵⁴

In a wider perspective, religious education outside of the church has been reduced at best to a teaching of the 'facts', and incorporated into a rationally based educational system—ironically, one to which Christians have, by and large, given their support by identifying their own purpose with that of liberal society in creating a better world.²⁵⁵ Hauerwas' point is that the claims of a liberal society to be making a better world have in fact only been a means of cultural domination: the aim of better communication within a pluralistic culture has only succeeded in suppressing minority cultural voices.²⁵⁶

Christians, argues Hauerwas, would better serve the world, not (as Christians

²⁵³ Hauerwas, 'Truthful Story,' in *Christian Existence*, p.107-8.

²⁵⁴ Hauerwas, 'Truthful Story,' *Christian Existence*, pp.106ff.

²⁵⁵ For the argument in this and the following paragraph, see S. Hauerwas, 'On Witnessing our Story', in S. Hauerwas and J. Westerhoff, eds. *Schooling Christians* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992), p.214-234.

²⁵⁶ Hauerwas, 'Witnessing' in Hauerwas ed. *Schooling*, p.224.

generally have done) by underpinning the dominant story, but by being faithful to the story it claims to be true, the story which is expressed within the Christian community in its life of worship. Hauerwas' concern is for the church to witness its story in worship as an alternative to the prevailing 'story' of our culture, that story which says that there is a common good and a common story which show our essential unity.²⁵⁷

One of the main difficulties with Hauerwas' position is its implication that there is a single Christian story from which to criticise the story of liberal society. But is not the Church itself a very diverse community influenced by many outlooks and cultural variations? That is to say, there are only many Christian stories rather than simply a single story with which to work. From this perspective, Hauerwas' argument seems to lack an adequate account of the complexity of cultural engagement both within and without the church.

4.3.2. The education of the *polis*

Recently, Hauerwas has 'fleshed out' his concept of an alternative in his book *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*. As the subtitle to his book suggests, the church is an *alternative polis*, which by its own politics (embodied in its life and worship) interprets the politics of the world.²⁵⁸ This image of the *alternative polis* sets up well the perspective which we want to take on Fowler.

In Fowler's use of the term *polis*, we see the 'story' which Hauerwas wants to 'counter', the 'world' to which Hauerwas want to provide the *alternative* of 'church.' Furthermore, Fowler has occasion to deploys this term *polis* in relation to his thoughts on education, so the focus is even sharper on the discussion in hand. According to Fowler, the image of *polis* (Greek city-state) marks the possibility of transcending cultural differences through a practical process of education—*paideia*.²⁵⁹ For Fowler, *paedeia* is actually a broader concept than education, more akin to the German *Bildung*

²⁵⁷ Hauerwas, 'Witnessing' in Hauerwas ed. *Schooling*, pp.228-233.

²⁵⁸ S. Hauerwas, *In Good Company* (University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1995), p.6.

²⁵⁹ P. Palmer, B. Wheeler, and J. Fowler, eds., *Caring for the Commonwealth: Education for Religious and Public Life* (Mercer U.P., Macon, Georgia, 1990), p.64.

(formation).²⁶⁰ In Fowler's hands *paideia* for public life becomes a model of moral education for school curricula.

The main problem is to be identified in the basis for Fowler's model in its assumption there is already some kind of unity on which to base the model: 'In the Greek city-state...*paideia* was informed by a reasonably coherent worldview and shared consensus about the virtues and passions needed for citizenship.'²⁶¹ It is this inherent contradiction—of overcoming the differences through a unity that is already taken to be there—which raises the problem. Any unity which is perceived to exist can only do so precisely because it has suppressed cultural differences.

Secondly, in the structure of the model, Fowler builds on this base a 'relational' (as opposed to an 'individual') model of moral education. He names the model 'Responsible Selfhood' in a title that echoes H. Richard Niebuhr's book *The Responsible Self*. Morality is established through relationships and shared interpretations. Fowler develops his idea of a 'covenant' community, which seeks to replace the privatisation of moral reasoning with 'a more robust conception and practice of reason in public discourse,' a form of moral education which is 'from the outset...*civic* education.'²⁶² The real question is whether the church in subscribing to this covenanting community is too affirming of the prevailing culture, rather than being 'over-against' it in the sense of Hauerwas' *alternative polis*.

Thirdly (and in consequence of acknowledging that the church is contributing to a civic education), in the detail of the model, Fowler accepts the subordination of religious elements within the larger framework of moral education. Alongside headings of Stories, Developmental Abilities, Moral Attitudes, Information and Knowledge, and Virtues, he places Theological Virtues at the end in brackets. He has to 'hide away' the

²⁶⁰ Contrast this use of the term *paideia* as taken from a classical Greek form of education with, for example Bushnell's use of *paideia*, a term he drew from Ephesians 6.4, bring [your children] up in the discipline (*paideia*) and instruction of the Lord.' Here *paideia* is a non-verbal discipline of correction and chastisement. See E. Farley, 'The Strange History of Christian Paideia' in J Westerhoff, ed., *Who Are We? The Quest for Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, 1978).

²⁶¹ Palmer *et al*, *Caring*, p.64.

²⁶² Palmer *et al*, *Caring*, pp.75-6.

biblical understanding of 'faith, hope, and love': 'their inclusion cannot depend upon or be justified solely upon the basis of their formulation in the New Testament.' He does not spell out on what else they are based, arguing that 'this is not the place to demonstrate that these virtues do not depend, for their validity and imperativeness, upon their biblical roots.'²⁶³ In the light of comments such as this, Hauerwas' arguments are helpful in exposing and highlighting Fowler's use of universalist principles. Fowler remains a firm proponent of 'political theology' in his apologetic mediation of Christianity to the modern world. But it is not the politics of Hauerwas' *alternative polis*.

4.3.3. The *paedeia* of a public church

The key terms for Fowler in his fostering of *paedeia* are 'public life' and 'public church'. Fowler looks to address 'the dramatic shift in which public life has been emptied of much of its significance as an arena for participation for the general populace.'²⁶⁴ As we have already seen, the problem for Fowler is that religion in general, and the church in particular, have become very much of the private rather than the public domain. Just as *paideia* in the form of a model for moral education would contribute significantly in the long term to the restoration of public life, so a process of *paideia* within the church would enable Christians to be a part of a public church.²⁶⁵

Fowler identifies two main aspects of *paedeia* in the life of public churches: the first is instruction (which corresponds to *didache*, as formal teaching), and the second is participation which comes through the dimensions of *kerygma* (proclamation), *leitourgia* (liturgy), *koinonia* (fellowship), and *diakonia* (service). Through this process of *paedeia*, a public church not only has a contribution to make in educating the public, but also in the formation of its own people for vocation in the world: 'Public churches work at shaping a pattern of *paedeia* for children, youth, and adults that aims toward combining Christian commitment with vocation in public.'²⁶⁶ Life within the public church therefore relates to life outside it. Essentially the church is a "little public" that

²⁶³ Palmer *et al*, *Caring*, p.88

²⁶⁴ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.151.

²⁶⁵ In *Weaving of a New Creation*, Fowler lists seven characteristics of a public church, the final one of which is *paedeia*. See Fowler, *Weaving*, p.155-62.

²⁶⁶ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.162.

provides training for interaction within the larger sphere of pluralistic public life.’²⁶⁷ To use language from Fowler’s *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, the public church as an ‘ecology of care’ promotes and supports the public church as an ‘ecology of vocation.’ That is to say, the fellowship of the church balances its vocation in the world.

Any attempt to justify Fowler’s call for an education for public life and public church must face Hauerwas’ criticism that the public church / private church view of the Church is fundamentally flawed. According to Hauerwas, the typical public church has been one pursuing a social activist agenda, but in the United States they have now been joined in the tacit approval given to American liberal democracy by churches on the right (usually associated with the concept of a private church), who have also ‘gone public’ with their social agenda, in seeking to influence the politics of their day. Both have become ‘accommodationist’ in their stance towards society.²⁶⁸ In other words, the church has no sense of the cutting edge which would come from being an alternative *polis*.

Fowler, however, is working with something other than an ‘over-against’ view of the church. It is rooted, I think, in his acknowledgement of diversity. In his movement from a theory of individual faith development to a theology of the church, Fowler has taken seriously the post-liberal argument of a pluralistic world where meaning is mediated through culture and language. But, unlike the post-liberal position, which argues for an understanding held within the community of faith, Fowler has looked for engagement between different cultures and understandings. Whereas Hauerwas’ focus has been on a single community, Fowler has emphasised a different implication of a post-liberal position, namely, the recognition that there are many communities, each with a claim to the truth. In this sense, Fowler has moved away from a universalist position, although he has not taken up a post-liberal position in the way that Hauerwas has done.

Fowler’s approach, then, is one not only of acknowledgement of the diversity

²⁶⁷ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.157.

²⁶⁸ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, pp.31-2.

of culture, but to actively seek engagement between different cultural understandings. Fowler's criticism of post-liberalism in general (and Hauerwas in particular) is that it marks a retreat from such engagement. In *Weaving the New Creation*, Fowler singles out Hauerwas as an example of those who turn to a 'simpler, more sectarian view' of the church.²⁶⁹ Fowler, on the other hand, regards an essential feature of a public church as being that it is open to engaging a pluralistic world, in the recognition that 'God uses the truth of others to refine, reground, or correct our own.'²⁷⁰

The strength of Fowler's argument is that it recognises that a public church is itself a community of diversity. His model of community is a process whereby we learn 'to stand one another.' The capacity of the public church to engage in dialogue with a diverse world comes through all the wide variety of Christian living contained within its congregation. The problem with Hauerwas' model of education, as we saw earlier, is that it seemingly does not acknowledge such diversity. It must therefore be limited in its capacity to engage a pluralistic world.

²⁶⁹ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.25.

²⁷⁰ Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.25.

Conclusion to Part Two

Two main threads have been followed in our consideration of Fowler's work in Part Two. Each of these threads strikes a chord with one of the themes of 'believing and belonging' and 'identity and intimacy' as presented in Part One. We will follow each in turn.

In Part One, we asked the question whether the tension of believing and belonging experienced in young adulthood had anything to offer to the possibility of believing and belonging in a post-modern future. The debate between Fowler and Hauerwas has resonated in important ways with the theme of believing and belonging, and helps to highlight some of the important issues at stake. Hauerwas clearly belongs to the school of thought that places Christian believing within the boundaries of belonging to the Christian community. Fowler's work, on the other hand, has the potential to help us to understand what it might mean to live out a tension of believing and belonging in that very different future.

The flesh of our understanding hangs on the bones of Stages 4 and 5 of Fowler's theory and the transition between the two. In his writing, Fowler has applied faith development theory to the lives of individual, communal and cultural change. With respect to culture, Fowler has suggested that if a modern world with its rational autonomous consciousness resonates with the characteristics of a Stage 4 faith, then a post-modern world would bear resemblance to a Stage 5 Conjunctive faith with its capacity for dialectical knowledge. He therefore also indicates that the kind of cultural changes identified in *Weaving the New Creation* reflect the movement of a Stage 4-5 transition.²⁷¹ With regard to communities, Fowler's concern is that Christian congregations follow that same transitional pattern toward the establishment of 'public

²⁷¹ Fowler, *Weaving*, p.21. It is also possible to argue, as has Fowler himself, that faith development theory bears the characteristics of a Stage 4-5 transition. In his article on 'The Enlightenment and Faith Development Theory,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, pp.18, 26-7, Fowler argues that that if faith development theory is itself 'an expression of Enlightenment impulses,' and therefore reflects a Stage 4 faith, then in other ways his work also bears characteristics of the Stage 4-5 transition. I think that this argument is even more sustainable in the light of his more recent work on the content of faith and the Christian community.

churches' with a Stage 5 level of faith as being the kind of church best suited to address the changes he perceives. Our emphasis was on the formation of public churches, a process which would also show the characteristics of the Stage 4–5 transition.

Finally, in reference to the faith development of individuals, there has been an investigation of the 25–40 age group within the setting of faith development theory. Within this age group, typically identified by their emergence from what Parks defines as 'young adulthood' and by Stage 4 faith, can be detected the beginnings of the Stage 4–5 transition. We can thus discern a distinctive pattern emerging from a consideration of the Stage 4–5 transition. What is being suggested with reference to the 25–40 age group is twofold: one is a significant relationship of this age group to the perceived shift in cultural consciousness; the second is the important role to be played by this age group in the shaping and formation of public churches.

The second thread is one which has tackled the relational dimension of Fowler's work. It is a thread which we have followed through a detailed look at Stages 3 and 4 of faith development as they arise especially in young adult lives. The work of Parks and others within the faith development school were helpful in working our way through this matter. As a result of this discussion, Fowler's theory has been shown to have shortcomings, especially in the detail of the faith stage descriptions.

This 'relational' thread is akin to the theme of 'identity and intimacy.' Gilligan's work is important in establishing this link. We have used Gilligan's work here in a thorough look at faith development to help us assess how well Fowler has incorporated the relational aspect of human development into his theory. Gilligan has also been a key figure in pressing for a recognition of the interrelationship between identity and intimacy as psychological concerns: 'In young adulthood, when identity and intimacy converge in dilemmas of conflicting commitment, the relationship between self and other is exposed.'²⁷² If the dilemma leads male voices to speak of the role of separation, it leads women to speak of ongoing attachment. It is a matter which is raised for Gilligan, at least in part, by her reference to Levinson's comments on male

²⁷² Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.156.



lives and friendship, and their seemingly diminished capacity for such friendships.²⁷³ It is important to note that thus far in following this relational thread we have not yet had recourse to apply an understanding of friendship to Fowler's work.

In Part Three, therefore, we will continue critically to test and refine Fowler's work in two ways reflecting our main themes drawn from the period of young adulthood. First of all, we will follow further the theme of identity and intimacy through our understanding of friendship. In what ways might friendship shape faith development theory and the concept of a public church? Secondly, there is the theme of believing and belonging. In recognition that any adequate account of a pluralistic world and cultural diversity must take (at least as its starting point) a particular cultural perspective, we will question and assess Fowler from a Methodist (and especially a British Methodist) perspective in order to give our discussions a more concrete and contextual grounding. What might Methodist tradition in general, and a Methodist theology of friendship in particular, contribute to the shaping of the vocation of young adults and their relationship with the Church?

²⁷³ Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p.154.

Part Three

Young Adulthood and the Life of the Church

Chapter 5

Methodist perspectives on Fowler and friendship

5.1. A cooperation of grace: faith and vocation in the life of John Wesley

5.1.1. Wesley's young adult journey of faith.

Any attempt to set up a dialogue between Fowler and Methodism must utilise Fowler's own writing on the Methodist tradition. A helpful starting point for this task is a consideration of the life of Methodism's founder, John Wesley. Fowler is himself an American Methodist, who has applied faith development theory to the life of Wesley on a previous occasion. My own attempt draws some parallels between the work and thought of Wesley and Fowler, with particular reference to one of the most recent British biographies of Wesley.

Fowler has addressed the topic of the Methodist tradition and faith development theory in a paper given to the Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (1982).²⁷⁴ In his introduction he says,

To address the issue of spirituality and faith development in the Wesleyan tradition means to begin with the life and pilgrimage in faith of John Wesley ... Wesley's preaching, teaching, and spiritual direction arose out of his own struggles for and within faith. The distinctive emphasis and contours of the Methodist approach to faith and growth in grace have their origins directly in Wesley's own fiducial and vocational walk with God.²⁷⁵

Fowler's account of Wesley's development in faith includes a section on

²⁷⁴ Reproduced as 'John Wesley's Development in Faith' in M.D. Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1985), pp.172-92.

²⁷⁵ J. W. Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.172.

Wesley's young adult years between the ages of 22 and 35, when Wesley was making the extended transition from Synthetic-Conventional to Individuative-Reflective faith. This period of Wesley's life forms the core of our discussion here. The period began in 1725 whilst living in Oxford, at a time when Wesley was making his first attempts to shape a vocation, and engage in 'close conversations', that is those tasks of identity and intimacy which are the marks of young adulthood:

When I was about twenty-two, my father pressed me to enter into holy orders. At the same time, the providence of God directing me to Kempis's 'Christian Pattern,' I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as our words and actions ... and meeting likewise with a religious friend, which I never had till now, I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life ... I began to aim at, and pray for inward holiness.²⁷⁶

It is this intensification of the religious life and quest for holiness which marks the beginnings of Wesley's transition to Individuative-Reflective faith. In faith development terms, if the intellectual life of Oxford served him well in making this transition, he was held back by the lack of an 'executive ego', the taking of control of one's own life, and a sense of responsibility for the self. Fowler draws heavily on Robert Moore's psychoanalytical account of Wesley's young adulthood as a period in his life in which he was dominated by strong parental standards and expectations (that is to say by his superego). 'Psychologically, Wesley was doing his utmost to give himself to God, when in fact he had never taken possession of himself.'²⁷⁷

The turning point came with the failure of his American expedition to Georgia. 'Paradoxically, it is on the return ship to England, as Wesley begins to have some room to take responsibility for his life. It is further paradoxical that only with the breakdown of his scrupulous, overaccusing, and controlling superego, could Wesley really see himself as a finite-sinner, in deep need of the grace of God.'²⁷⁸ The full transition into

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, ed., *Methodist Theological Traditions*, p.180. For the source see, N. Courrock, ed., *Journal of John Wesley*, Volume I, reprinted Epworth Press 1938, p.466.

²⁷⁷ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, pp.181-4.

²⁷⁸ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.186.

Individuative-Reflective faith came with his Aldersgate experience of a 'warmed heart.' Under the influence of the Moravians, Wesley took heed to '[p]reach faith till you have it; and then because you have it you will preach faith.'²⁷⁹ For Fowler this readiness to preach only about faith is typical of a faith stage which sees things as sharp dichotomies.²⁸⁰ The following year he accepted the call to field preaching. Aldersgate had provided the release he needed to take up his true vocation.²⁸¹

Fowler's account of Wesley's young adulthood is framed by two experiences which have proved to be the main bone of contention amongst biographers of Wesley. Whereas those writing from a Catholic perspective have tended to emphasise the year 1725 as being key to Wesley's life, those of an evangelical persuasion have highlighted the Aldersgate experience of 1738. At the heart of the debate is the definition of 'conversion': whether it is the conversion to religious vocation and 'serious' religion often associated with the Catholic tradition, or the intense conversion of evangelical experience regarded as typically Protestant in character. Each side has sought to present Wesley as having an overwhelming concern for either growth in holiness and the process of sanctification, or for justification by faith.

Henry Rack, in one of the most recent biographies of Wesley, has argued that this emphasis on either sanctification or justification cannot be maintained if the focus of debate is placed on Wesley's later life. From this perspective, salvation 'is both instantaneous and gradual: it begins from the moment of justification, but grows until we are cleansed from all sin.' What the Moravians claimed for a single moment, Wesley made his own by insisting on a series of stages in a process of salvation, of justification, assurance, sanctification, and culminating in perfection. In Wesley's later life, then, his Aldersgate experience 'took its place within the long-term project of holiness as the mark of true Christianity: justification was ultimately the means to an end, not the end in itself.'²⁸²

²⁷⁹ See H. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (The Epworth Press, London, 1989), p.139. The source is, N. Courrock, ed., *Journal of John Wesley*, Volume I, reprinted Epworth Press 1938, p.442.

²⁸⁰ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.187.

²⁸¹ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.188.

²⁸² Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp.389-90.

As early as 1746 Wesley was writing, 'Our main doctrines ... are three: that of repentance, of faith and of holiness. The first of these we account as it were, the porch of religion; the next the door; the third, religion itself.'²⁸³ Both sanctification and justification were debated at the earliest Conferences from 1744 onwards, and continued to provoke argument and discussion in defining the relationship between the two. The fact that Wesley was worried by doubts as to the lack of evidence of assurance in the months following Aldersgate suggests that there was always a certain awkwardness for Wesley that would lead him to present distinct stages of a process of salvation. We must take seriously Rack's suggestion that Wesley never entirely lost the requirement to pursue holiness, even in his embrace of justification by faith in 1738.²⁸⁴

Recognising Fowler's own conclusion that a faith development theory applied to John Wesley 'becomes a tenuous and somewhat arbitrary effort,'²⁸⁵ it is possible, in the light of Rack's suggestions, to offer a reassessment of Fowler's picture of Wesley. The turn to 'serious religion' in 1725 may mark the beginning of that distinct stage which Parks calls young adulthood. The single mindedness of Wesley's pursuit of holiness is representative of a tension collapsed rather than maintained. His life takes on a tentative approach to commitment, in his flirtations with women and in his early exploration of vocation, which culminates in his disastrous adventure to Georgia. His conversion experience of 1738 marks his transition to a full-blown stage of Individuative-Reflective faith. The new emphasis which Wesley places upon justification by faith marks not so much the collapsed dichotomy described by Fowler, as the discovery and introduction of a proper tension between justification and sanctification. This tension is not yet the more fully worked out doctrine of Wesley's older years, but rather a tension marked by doubt at his lack of an experience of assurance; it is a tension which is held rather than collapsed. That it is a creative tension is marked by its fruit of a more adult commitment, that is to say, Wesley's looking beyond himself to a wider ministry beginning with the call to field preaching in 1739.

²⁸³ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.389.

²⁸⁴ See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.388.

²⁸⁵ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.190.

5.1.2. Justification and sanctification in a theory of faith development

Fowler does not expand any further on how he views the relationship between justification and sanctification with regard to his own theory or Wesley's theology, other than to comment on their integration by Wesley as an example of stage 5 conjunctive faith.²⁸⁶ Elsewhere Fowler has written: 'Theology and developmental research are needed which can clarify for us the permanent modifications of the path of human development that result from conversion or justification, and from the resulting synergy of divine and human love. This means a renewal of attention to the process of my theological forbear, John Wesley, called sanctification.'²⁸⁷ There are three main points arising from this comment by Fowler.

Firstly, Fowler acknowledges the failure of faith development theory in taking adequate account of conversion and justification. Neither of the pictures which have been offered here of Wesley's faith development make clear the precise relationship between change as conversion and the change which marks a faith stage transition. In *Stages of Faith* Fowler gives very little space to a consideration of conversion as a theological theme. For Fowler, conversion should be a term related to changes in the contents of faith. This change in the content of faith may or may not occur at the same time as a change in faith stage.²⁸⁸

It is this absence of a strong focus on conversion which has caused particular difficulties for Protestant denominations, highlighting as they do the doctrine of justification by faith. This is a point emphasised by both Avery and Osmer in two separate articles.²⁸⁹ However, in confronting Fowler's definition of faith, both find difficulties within their own traditions (Lutheran and Calvinist respectively) of a theology which has focused on justification at the expense of what it means to live and

²⁸⁶ Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.190.

²⁸⁷ Quoted from an unpublished Fowler lecture by T. Droege, 'Pastoral Counselling and Faith Development,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p.279.

²⁸⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, pp.285-6.

²⁸⁹ W.O. Avery, 'A Lutheran Examines James W. Fowler' and R.R. Osmer, 'James W. Fowler and the Reformed Tradition: an Exercise in Theological Reflection in Religious Education,' in Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives*, pp.135-50.

grow as a Christian. Avery and Osmer search their own traditions for ways of bridging the gap between those traditions and Fowler's theory. Avery believes that regarding the question of how one grows in faith as different ways of living in one's baptism would be a useful redesignation of Fowler's theory. Osmer, for his part, argues that the crisis pattern of conversion was understood by Calvin as being held within the broader pattern of living within the church and Christian community. Within the Methodist tradition this complementarity of justification and sanctification has usually been more prominent. Recognising, then, the difficulties Methodism (along with other Protestant denominations) has with faith development theory for its inadequate account of the impact of a doctrine of justification, it remains true that a theology which regards justification and sanctification as close companions ought to be a more helpful ally to a theory of faith development. However, the argument cannot be concluded at that point.

Secondly, then, there is the question of the relationship between a theory of human development and a process of sanctification. According to Osmer, Fowler views the process of sanctification as the 'permanent modifications' to human development resulting from conversion. Osmer's argument is that Fowler has confused the human faith given in creation with the sanctification resulting from justification: 'These two distinctive realities are placed together on a single reality.' The result is an amalgamation of the two, and a blurring of their differences. For Osmer this results in a 'partial, formalistic description of the process of sanctification that is not integrally related to justification.'²⁹⁰

The main problem is the relationship between a social scientific theory which offers a description of how human faith grows and a theological construct which prescribes stages on a path to salvation. Whilst Fowler claims that his stages of faith are not stages to push people through, Wesley clearly expected that Christians would show signs of an increasing holiness and progress along the path to perfection. Fowler, however, maintains that his theory, as well as being descriptive, is also theologically normative, providing a vision of human wholeness, and pointing to the fulfilment of human potential.

²⁹⁰Osmer, 'Fowler and the Reformed Tradition' in Astley and Francis, *Perspectives*, p.141.

Fowler's argument is that Wesley's aspiration to perfection lacks an adequate understanding of human development, especially with regard to the unconscious aspects of our selves. Hence Fowler's belief that his work is essentially a contribution to theological anthropology alongside the transformation worked through grace.²⁹¹ But does Fowler's argument take full account of sin in human lives? Wesley asserted the doctrine of original sin as a fundamental undermining of human beings in their ability to help themselves and to develop their own potential. Wesley's understanding of human development is perhaps best presented along the lines of his 'threefold state of man' as natural man (who knows neither law nor grace), legal man (who lives under the law), and evangelical man (living under grace).²⁹²

Thirdly there are the issues raised by Fowler's use of *synergy* as a theological term in relation to his understanding of Wesley's own theology of grace and transformation. In *Stages of Faith* Fowler distinguishes between the ordinary grace present in creation, from the extraordinary grace present in conversion. 'Faith development theory in its empirical descriptiveness aims to help us understand patterns of grace given in nature.'²⁹³ However, Fowler's understanding of grace remains undeveloped as a theme, appearing as it does at the very end of the book. Later, in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler expands this understanding of ordinary grace by calling upon what he refers to as the Orthodox tradition of *synergy*.

I believe that grace, as the presence and power of creative spirit working for human wholeness, is given and operative in creation from the beginning. In that sense, I agree with that theological tradition that argues that the 'natural' or a 'state of nature' are fictional concepts, corresponding to nothing in history or the present. Human development towards wholeness is, I believe, 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.²⁹⁴

Human development and potential, then, is given by grace and works towards

²⁹¹Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.191.

²⁹² *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons*, p.107.

²⁹³Fowler, *Stages*, pp.302-3.

²⁹⁴Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.74.

wholeness in cooperation with the Spirit. In this understanding, justification becomes a 'further unfolding' of that synergy in a process of sanctification as the grace given through faith cooperates with the grace given in creation with all its potential for human development. For Fowler growth in holiness is a product both of conversion and development, that is a synergy of divine and human love.

Wesley's Arminianism led him to adopt a theological position of prevenient grace. The implications of this doctrine were that God gives grace to human beings in order to prepare their wills for conversion and salvation. For Wesley, this prevenient grace was the necessary precursor to the 'converting grace' of repentance.²⁹⁵ Despite the lack of detail in *Stages of Faith*, Fowler's concept of ordinary grace stands in this Methodist tradition and echoes Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace. The issue is less clear when it comes to the matter of synergy, especially in the light of Wesley's understanding of sin and the Fall. What is clear from Wesley, is that the offer of grace requires a human response, which is itself made possible because of prevenient grace. As Fowler argues elsewhere, 'the doctrine of prevenient grace in Wesley contends that the idea of human beings in the natural or fallen state is really a theoretical construct. Already, by virtue of God's universal prevenient grace, conscience is awakened and reason is able, however dimly, to discriminate right from wrong.'²⁹⁶

Whether Wesley would have been happy about the term synergism being applied to his theology must remain a moot point. However, Fowler is not wholly isolated in his willingness to make that association. In his book on Wesley and early Methodism, Heitzenrater comments on one of Wesley's sermons, published towards the end of his life, on a text from Philippians 2, 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,' In this sermon, published in the Arminian magazine, 'Wesley makes it abundantly clear that synergism is not grounded in human effort but in divine grace, "preventing, accompanying, and following."²⁹⁷ According to Heitzenrater, Wesley

²⁹⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.389.

²⁹⁶ This argument was presented by Fowler to a working group on Wesleyan Spirituality and Faith Development. See Meeks, p.202.

²⁹⁷ R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995), p.295.

had 'his own brand of synergism,' rooted alike in justification and sanctification.²⁹⁸

5.1.3. Faith and reason in a theory of faith development

Recent philosophical research into Wesley has highlighted the rational side of his view of faith. He gave value to reason because 'religion was not designed to destroy any of our ordinary faculties, but to exalt and improve them, our reason in particular.'²⁹⁹ In Anglican fashion, Wesley gave priority to scripture, but as an eighteenth century man he employed reason to elucidate scripture, and increasingly appealed to experience. Frederick Dreyer has argued the philosophical case that Wesley drew significantly on Locke's empiricism of straightforward observation and self-analysis. In Henry Rack's words, 'Dreyer's argument is that Wesley's concern was not with the "what" but the "how" of Christian belief, his "doctrinal" controversies really being on points of psychology: whether belief is more than reasonable assent; whether faith can exist in different degrees ...'³⁰⁰ Wesley, however, went beyond Locke in the extent to which he accepted personal testimony as evidence, and in his postulating of 'spiritual senses' to explain spiritual experiences. Wesley 'therefore appeared a "reasonable enthusiast": rational in form but enthusiast in substance.'³⁰¹

Rex Matthews, in an unpublished article on 'Reason, Faith, and Experience in the thought of John Wesley,' also emphasises the rational side of Wesley, and his appeal to 'spiritual senses.' There is a certain continuity in Wesley's appeal to spiritual senses, which Wesley carries with him through his conversion experience. But it is also transformed by Wesley's experience of faith. Matthews argues that for Wesley, 'Reason can properly function in the religious realm only when it can gain access to the necessary experiential data; that experiential data is only available through the life of faith.' It is the change in Wesley's understanding of faith, rather than a change in his understanding of reason, which redefines the role which reason plays: reason cannot produce faith, but it can serve to regulate the life of faith.

²⁹⁸ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, p.319.

²⁹⁹ Quoted in Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.385.

³⁰⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.385.

³⁰¹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.388.

Matthew's basic contention, in challenging the view of those who have presented Wesley as an 'enthusiast' who made no appeal to reason, is that Wesley 'reasoned his way to his experience of faith.' For Matthews, Wesley speaks in different 'languages of faith.' His understanding of faith as rational assent is challenged by his mother in 1725. As a result he comes to her point of view, that 'saving faith ... is an assent to what God has revealed because he has revealed it, and not because the truth of it may be evinced by reason.' Perhaps most importantly, Matthews identifies a further turning point in his thinking, when in March 1738 he is 'clearly convinced' by the Moravian Bohler of his 'unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.' According to Matthews, 'Wesley now acknowledges the theory, but has not the reality, of saving faith; he is both intellectually convinced about the nature of saving faith and spiritually convicted of his own personal lack of it.'

Matthews has succeeded in taking seriously the influence of Enlightenment thinking in a way that sees the integration of faith and reason, rather than their opposition, in the life of John Wesley. However, Matthew's identification of the new priority of faith in Wesley's life stands in contrast to Fowler's conclusion about Wesley's spirituality as remaining essentially rational, despite his 'warmed heart.' 'Very much an Enlightenment man ... Wesley's was and is a reasoned and reasoning faith. It was revolutionary for its own time, with its daring description of and address to the emotions. But it still partakes deeply of the Enlightenment's overtrust in words and reason.'³⁰² Matthew's work on the way in which Wesley was able to integrate faith and reason suggests that there may be room for some reassessment of Fowler's conclusion.

In this section we have sought to compare and contrast Fowler and Wesley. Certainly there are some general comparisons to be made from their shared roots in Enlightenment thinking. Fowler has engaged in his own empirical research in the field of the social sciences through observation, and the collection and ordering of data, including the detailed carrying out and recording of interviews. We must acknowledge that the kind of eighteenth century empiricism we have referred to here does not wholly

³⁰²Fowler, 'Wesley's Development' in Meeks, p.190.

match with the way in which the term is used by modern social science; nevertheless Wesley drew significantly on observed experience. Hearing of the testimonies of others, he set about investigating many such accounts for himself, and believed many of them to be true. It was claims such as these, verified by Wesley to his own satisfaction, which led Wesley to expound upon his belief in (for example) Christian perfection.

We have also identified fruitful engagement between Wesley and Fowler in other ways. Elsewhere, Fowler has claimed that faith development theory presses beyond the Enlightenment frame of reference, especially in accepting the role of the emotions and the unconscious, and that 'the structural features of faith are at best half the picture.'³⁰³ However, our own examination of Wesley's experience and writing throws some of these matters back upon Fowler. If Fowler is insistent in making a contribution towards theological anthropology through a theory of human development, Wesley's theology continues to press Fowler to look for ways of more fully integrating justification and sanctification, and reason and faith.

As regards Wesley's experience of young adulthood, Fowler, in his analysis of faith development in John Wesley, has highlighted some of the dangers inherent in the transition to Individuative-Reflective faith. In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, Fowler writes, 'In a way that parallels the impact of the Enlightenment, persons [of Individuative-Reflective faith] can fall into a kind of self-deception based on the illusion of a more complete control of themselves and of the conditions of their existence than in fact will prove to be the case.'³⁰⁴ But we have also seen that as one who learnt to hold the tensions of later young adulthood, the example of John Wesley shows the promise of a more mature and integrated faith.

³⁰³ Fowler, 'The Enlightenment and Faith Development Theory,' in Astley and Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives*, p. 25.

³⁰⁴ Fowler, *Faith Development*, p. 70.

5.2. A community of calling: covenant and vocation in a Methodist context

5.2.1. A covenant community.

The example of Wesley's life has provided the opportunity for an exploration of the relationship between faith development theory and Methodist theology. Further points of contact can be opened up between Fowler's work and Methodism. The earlier overview of Fowler's work depicted a broad movement from a consideration of faith development towards an understanding of vocation within a Christian context. Central to this understanding was the presentation of the Christian community as a covenant community and the church as a public church. Offered here and in the following chapter, therefore, are Methodist perspectives on a covenant community and a public church, as ways of continuing the dialogue between Fowler and Methodism.

Fowler uses his understanding of covenant as the theological 'vehicle' to carry his concept of vocation. Although writing as a Methodist, Fowler's understanding of covenant has been influenced by a different strand of Protestantism, namely the Reformed tradition of H. Richard Niebuhr. There is also something characteristically American about an understanding of covenant which goes back to the Puritan colonists in a New World and their covenant relationship with God. Nevertheless, it strikes me that covenant takes on distinctively Methodist meaning when seen in terms of the Methodist covenant service. Is it possible that the Methodist covenant liturgy can offer some useful insights into the vocation and calling of young adults?

The covenant service is one of the most distinctive features of Methodism, and has attracted the attention and appreciation of other denominations. The service is based upon biblical precedent as it names the 'Old Covenant' made with Israel, and the 'New Covenant' made through Christ.³⁰⁵ As it is laid out in the current Methodist Service Book the recommended scripture readings are taken from Jeremiah 31 ('Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ...') and Hebrews 12 (with reference to 'Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant ...'). The Gospel reading is taken from John 15, a passage

³⁰⁵ *The Methodist Service Book* (MSB) 1975, p. 178.

which has already received our attention and to which we shall return in due course.³⁰⁶

The usual pattern is for the covenant service to be followed by communion.

As a feature of Methodist life, the covenant service goes back to the time of John Wesley himself. Wesley inherited his understanding of covenanting much as the Reformed tradition in America still does, from the Puritans, who from the seventeenth century used a covenant agreement as the foundation of congregational life. But if this formed the background for Wesley's understanding of covenant (which he probably inherited, at least in part, from his mother, who had been brought up among Puritans), he was influenced in the wording of the covenant by Joseph Alleine.

Alleine was one of the victims of the ejection from parishes following the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Interestingly, his influence on Wesley's covenant service can be traced back to Alleine's use of covenants with young adult converts: 'He felt that each convert ought to make his own personal covenant with Christ. The covenant he had recently taken with his wife in marriage coloured his interpretation of the convert's covenant. He called on them to take Christ for better, for worse.'³⁰⁷ Bearing in mind that the covenant service was based, at least in part, on the experience of young adulthood, it is worth looking at this dynamic the other way around and asking: in what ways might the Covenant Service influence and shape young adult lives?

5.2.2. A covenant of calling

Alleine's influence of calling individuals to take Christ for better, for worse is reflected in the current text of the covenant service:

Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves, in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.'³⁰⁸

Whether or not the services which Christ requires to be done fit in with our own

³⁰⁶ MSB, pp.176-7. The readings are Jeremiah 31.31-3; Hebrews 12.22-5; John 15.1-8.

³⁰⁷ Bishop, *Methodist Worship*, pp.95-6.

³⁰⁸ MSB, p.179.

plans, all that matters is that 'we are content that he appoint us our place and work.'³⁰⁹ Rupert Davies has identified in this a strict adherence to Lutheran doctrine of vocation; that we are justified by grace through faith, not by works of our own, and that we are sanctified by grace, 'by the fulfilment of our vocation in the place and work which [Christ] shall appoint.' According to Davies, 'the experience of the worshipper, his opinions and his programs, do not come into the picture; God's work, God's grace, God's covenant, are in the centre—it is our part only to respond and to yield ourselves.'³¹⁰

This interpretation of vocation and covenant throws up problems when placed alongside Fowler's understanding of these issues. Whenever Fowler writes of vocation and covenant, he uses the word 'partnership.' In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler identifies vocation as a covenant relationship. In these terms vocation becomes a partnership with God shaped through the alignment of the self with God's will and purposes.³¹¹ In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* Fowler offers his own understanding of Lutheran theology. Affirming that we cannot earn salvation through works, he goes on to say that, '[b]ecause we are justified by God's grace alone, any work, any office, if offered to God in faithfulness and gratitude, can be a fitting form of partnership with God ...' Furthermore, 'there is the conviction that our place, our office, our vocation, is not merely a destiny to which God assigns us but a place of creative partnership to which God calls us and in which God chooses to meet us and bring our work to some significant contribution to the purposes of God.'³¹²

This difference reflects our earlier discussion about sanctification, and on the relationship between the change which comes through conversion and justification, and a sense of continuity in a search for holiness before and after conversion. The implication of Fowler's ideas is that God purposefully uses and shapes the work which we bring with us. Whereas the emphasis in the covenant service is on our yielding our lives to God to use as he will, Fowler wants to stress that God will use whatever is

309 MSB, p.179.

310 R. Davies, 'The History and Theology of the Methodist Covenant Service,' in *Theology*, Feb.1961, Vol. LXIV, No. 488.

311 Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.95.

312 Fowler, *Faith Development*, pp.30-1.

offered in faithfulness and gratitude. Even though the accent is on what God chooses for us, his promise is that he will use what we already have creatively rather than laying it on one side. Nevertheless, it would be less than adequate to try to harmonise these different understandings of covenant and vocation.

If there are difficulties in any attempt to reconcile these different understandings of covenant and vocation, there is a greater possibility of finding common ground in the concept of a covenant community. Bishop points to two of the most recurrent criticisms of the covenant service, that it emphasises, firstly, individual religious zeal, and secondly, individual devotion and service.³¹³ Certainly, the words of the covenant renewal are in the first person singular:

I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.³¹⁴

Although the words of the covenant renewal as spoken by the congregation together are therefore intensely personal, the form of the covenant service as a whole is corporate, as John Wesley himself desired it should be, and as his brother Charles expressed in the covenant hymn:

Come, let us use the grace divine,
And all, with one accord,
In a perpetual covenant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord.³¹⁵

As one Methodist commentator has said, the genius of the service is its forming of 'this personal dedication into a congregational rite. The covenant service became a corporate

³¹³ Bishop, *Methodist Worship*, p.99.

³¹⁴ MSB, p.180.

³¹⁵ MSB, p.178.

renewal of individual discipleship.³¹⁶

It is a balance which Fowler is also at pains to keep in his own understanding of covenant and vocation. Fowler is aware of the dangers of an individual vocation pursued only in the context of a personal covenant. We serve God and love our neighbour, he argues *In commune, per vocatione* ('In community, through one's calling').³¹⁷ The proper setting for vocation is the community as an ecology of vocations, as people are bound to one another through their covenant with God. Vocation should be subjected to corporate discernment.³¹⁸ Nevertheless, the suspicion must remain that an 'ecology of vocations' (noting especially the plural) has reduced the covenant community to a supporting role of facilitating individual vocations.

Despite this, I want to suggest that the covenant service is suitable to be adapted for purposes other than those set down in the Methodist Service Book. The tradition within Methodism is that the covenant service is used once a year, usually at the beginning of January or in September (the start of the 'Methodist new year'), 'save for very special reasons.'³¹⁹ As an annual event, it represents the individual and corporate renewal of Methodists' covenant with God. My own suggestion is for a consideration of the covenant service as an acknowledgement of vocation in the lives of individuals at certain key times of their life, but especially during the years of young adulthood. In this way, the covenant service could form a framework of a rite of vocation for lay people. This is very much in line with the suggestions made by Westerhoff and others for a rite of vocation to be made available with specific reference to those in their thirties.

We have been exploring the covenant service, then, not only because it bears comparison with Fowler's understanding of covenant, but also because of the practical resources and possibilities it offers in the shaping of a rite of vocation. Such a rite of vocation for individuals based on the covenant service could serve to focus the meaning

³¹⁶ F. Baker, quoted in J. Bishop, *Methodist Worship in Relation to Free Church Worship* (Scholars Studies' Press Inc., 1975), pp.95-6.

³¹⁷ Fowler, *Faith Development*, p.30.

³¹⁸ See Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, p.126.

³¹⁹ MSB, p.171. 'General directions for the Covenant Service.'

of the annual covenant service. The additional use of the covenant service with individuals and small groups has the potential powerfully to enhance the meaning of the words spoken corporately on a different occasion in the annual service of covenant renewal.³²⁰ However, we have also been given reason to ponder the problem that too strong a centring on an individual act could detract from the corporate aspect of the covenant which the service presents. One of the main difficulties of the covenant service as a rite of vocation, therefore, is the loss of this balance between a personal and a corporate act. It is for this reason that I want to pursue an alternative tack, with an emphasis on friendship, rather than vocation.

It may be recalled from an earlier section that friendship was offered as a crucial task in more fully integrating a sense of vocation and an experience of community in young adult lives. I propose that an exploration of covenant in relation to friendship will help us to make that integration of vocation and community, in a way that dispels some of the difficulties in any possible use of the covenant service as a straightforward rite of vocation. Furthermore, I also believe that the Methodist covenant service offers a particular understanding of friendship and covenant which will help make that connection of vocation and community in the context of young adulthood.

5.2.3. Called to be friends

In the Bible, covenant and friendship are related in the Exodus account of the giving of the Law (Exodus 34). In the renewal of the covenant which Israel had agreed and already broken (Exodus 24 and 32 respectively), Moses takes the two tablets of stone up Mount Sinai, as required by the Lord, and stands in the Lord's presence. Then the Lord says, 'Here and now I am making a covenant.' But the scene prior to the giving of the Law is set at the foot of the mountain, at the Tent of Meeting. This is the tent set up by Moses away from the camp where Moses meets with the Lord. The people gather around the tent, and see Moses go inside. As he enters, the pillar of cloud (the sign of God's presence) descends, and remains at the entrance to the tent. In

³²⁰ It may be worth considering a comparison with the practice of many church congregations in making annual renewal of baptismal promises. How is this renewal enriched and made meaningful by witnessing the ongoing instances of new baptisms in the life of the church?

Exodus 34.11 we read, 'The Lord used to speak with Moses face to face, as one speaks with a friend.' Moses, then, in the prelude to the making of the covenant, meets God in a relationship of friendship (Ex.33.11).

It is equally possible to recognise a relationship between friendship and the covenant made through Jesus. It is an argument which centres on Jesus' 'table fellowship.' In all three synoptic gospels, the account is given of Jesus eating at table in the house of Levi (Matthew in Matthew's gospel; Luke 5.29–32 and parallels) with 'tax collectors and others' ('other outcasts' in Matthew and Mark). Some ask of him, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Later, Jesus himself comments on those who would describe him as 'A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' because he eats and drinks with such people (Luke 7.34, Matthew 11.19). Jesus, then, is the 'friend of tax collectors and sinners', accused of this because he shares in their meals, eating and drinking with them in a 'table fellowship.' In the culture and society of Jesus' day table fellowship was 'a sign of acceptance and close friendship.'³²¹

In his book on the Eucharist, Tim Gorringer traces from Luke's gospel the way in which being at table becomes an experience of redemption. In addition to the episodes already noted, he adds the story of the woman who anoints Jesus whilst he is at the pharisee's house for a meal; the three parables from Luke 14 about invitations to a feast; Jesus going to stay at the house of Zaccheus; and the meal shared at the end of the journey along the Emmaus road, where Jesus is recognised in the 'breaking of bread.' Gorringer argues that a good understanding of the Last Supper comes through relating it to Jesus' table fellowship. 'What Jesus did at the 'last' supper was to repeat something he did all the time, namely, invest table fellowship with tremendous significance. My suggestion, then, is that Jesus acted as he did at his last meal with his disciples because from the beginning he had used table fellowship redemptively.'³²²

If this is the case, then it is surely also significant that it is at just such a meal

³²¹ T. Gorringer, *The Sign of Love: Reflections on the Eucharist* (SPCK, London, 1997), p. 18.

³²² Gorringer, *The Sign of Love*, p.18. Read chapter 2, 'The Open Table' for the case for relating 'table fellowship' to the Last Supper and the Eucharist.

that the cup is passed as a sign of the covenant sealed with Jesus blood. It is at this 'last supper' that the new covenant is laid down. As Jesus takes the cup, he says, 'this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many.' (Mark 14.24, Matthew 26.28, cf. 1 Corinthians 11.25, 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.') Furthermore, the synoptic gospels record the episode from earlier in Jesus' ministry, when Jesus is asked why he allows his disciples, in contrast to the disciples of John, to eat and drink. Jesus replies, 'Can you expect the bridegroom's friends to be sad while the bridegroom is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast' (Matthew 9.15 and parallels). The last supper is that final time for the bridegroom to share with his friends before his death. The last supper, then, is a meal shared with friends.

Most significantly, there is also a link to be made between covenant and friendship in the Methodist covenant service. The crux of the issue is the parable of the vine from John 15. This forms the set gospel reading for the covenant service. I am not wholly clear as to why this passage was chosen as the gospel reading in this service: it does not, for example, make straightforward mention of the term 'covenant,' as does the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah and the Epistle reading from Hebrews. Nevertheless, the link in Methodist tradition has been between the idea of covenant and the parable of the vine as an expression of that covenant. Any understanding of covenant in a Methodist context is shaped by an understanding of this gospel passage. But as we have already noted (in section 2.2.4.), the parable of the vine provides an image which is best understood with immediate regard to the verses which follow (15.9–17) about friendship. Thus it is possible to make the link between covenant and friendship in this context. As a point it is implicit rather than explicit, yet it is not one which has to be forced to be made apparent.

Furthermore, there are links to be made with other biblical aspects of covenant and friendship. Most obviously, the setting of the the parable of the vine and the words about friendship as the last supper suggests a relationship with the argument about table fellowship and covenant based upon the synoptic accounts. Secondly, Jesus' insistence on friendship being dependent upon obeying his command (John 15.14) resonates with the relationship between friendship and the commandments of the law which is

apparent in Exodus 33. As Brodie comments, 'at the heart of the O[ld] T[estament], understanding of the law is connected with a relationship of friendship.'³²³

This emphasis on the significance of John 15 leads us to reexamine Fowler's understanding of the relationship of covenant and vocation. The relationship of vocation and covenant in Fowler's thought has been strongly influenced by Walter Brueggemann's article on 'Covenanting as Human Vocation.'³²⁴ In this article Brueggemann looks to challenge the prevailing assumptions about the human personality (which have been drawn from psychological definitions) with an understanding of covenant as a metaphor for biblical faith. His basic contention about covenant is that it claims human persons to be grounded, not in self, but in Another.³²⁵ Human participation in that covenant comes through the response a person makes to God's call, that is, as we take up our calling (vocation, from the Latin *vocare*, to call). Here, in Brueggemann's words, is the key point as far as Fowler is concerned: 'such a [covenant] view of reality *transposes all identity questions into vocational questions*.'³²⁶ As persons, our identity is not centred within the self, but is rather 'given in the call of the other One.' The outcome is that in responding to God's call we align the purpose of our own lives to the greater purposes of God. 'Vocation means we are called by this One who in calling us to *be* calls us to *service*.'

An understanding of vocation as service (as Brueggemann presents it) would benefit from a consideration of vocation in its relationship to friendship. In John 15, Jesus distinguishes service from friendship by ascribing to his disciples a knowledge which servants do not have (v.15, 'I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing. But I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you.'). As Brodie comments:

The knowledge in question includes a genuine mutuality such as one finds among friends who know one another's hopes and

³²³ Brodie, p.483.

³²⁴ W. Brueggemann, 'Covenanting as Human Vocation: A Discussion of the Relation of Bible and Pastoral Care,' in *Interpretation* 33, April 1979, pp.115-29

³²⁵ Brueggemann, in *Interpretation*, pp.119-20.

³²⁶ Brueggemann, in *Interpretation*, p.125. Brueggemann's italics. As Fowler sums up (*Becoming Adult*, p.93), 'Who we are' becomes 'Whose we are.'

plans (v.15). And, as he goes on to speak of what may be called the divine plan (...“I chose you and appointed you so that...”), there is an implication that from now on the disciples have a sense of this plan, in other words, that as Jesus’ friends they have a certain knowledge of all that God has planned in Jesus.³²⁷

Following this argument through, we can therefore suggest that if, in Brueggemann’s terms, our *identities* are transposed into a vocation, ‘a purpose for being in the world which is related to the purposes of God,’³²⁸ then our *intimacies* are transposed into a *knowledge* of those purposes as we see them in Jesus. Adapting Brueggemann’s phrase in a small but significant way, here is a purpose for being in the *church* which is related to the purposes of God. To be called into service in the world is to be called into knowledge of that service in the church. In a word, *to be called* is *to be called friends*.

Finally, we may declare the relevance of this biblical discussion to young adulthood. It may be recalled that the earlier discussion of John’s Gospel came as a part of the more wide-ranging discussion about identity and intimacy as key issues in young adult development. John’s Gospel as a whole, and the extended discourse of chapter 13-17 were helpful in our exploration of those two issues. But the focus of the debate was the parable of the vine and Jesus’ words about friendship. I would therefore suggest that in a Methodist context, any congregation considering the role, presence or absence of young adults among its number may wish to focus on the following two aspects of the covenant service as it reflects the relationship of covenant and friendship.

First, the deployment of the covenant service as a rite of friendship, expressing both the call to service and the call to community. This adaptation could be as simple as providing a form of the covenant service which extends the gospel passage beyond the parable of the vine to include Jesus’ words about friendship. Other relevant passages about covenant and friendship, as identified above, could be incorporated in this way. It would also be possible to shape a communion liturgy about the importance of table fellowship and friendship in the ministry of Jesus as part of the sharing round the

³²⁷ Brodie, *John*, pp.483-4.

³²⁸ Brueggemann, in *Interpretation*, p.126.

Lord's Table.³²⁹ These liturgical celebrations would be an important acknowledgement of friendship in the context of worship.

Secondly, there could be a focus upon the form of church which use of the covenant service suggests; namely, that the church is a covenant community of friends. In John 15 the disciples are pictured as just such a community of friends, friends of Jesus who are characterised by their sense of unity and their service of others. It has also been an image apparent (though not always apparent) at different times of the Church's history. John Inge traces a theme of friendship in Christian writing through the mediaeval centuries, from Augustine to Anselm, and Aelred to Aquinas. He highlights the monastic communities of the middle ages as a lived example where 'friendship was seen to be central and essential to the Christian life.'³³⁰ How might an understanding of friendship relate to a vision for a public church? This is the issue to be dealt with in the following section.

5.3. A connection of friends: friendship and vocation in a public church

5.3.1. The renewal of public life

The preceding section addressed the possibility of a dialogue between Fowler's work and Methodism by utilising some of the resources available from the Methodist tradition relating to covenant. In this section we tackle the question of a vision for and the formation of a public church.

The 1990s has seen an attempt in Britain to reclaim the public life as a legitimate sphere of Christian concern and action. One ecumenical response to this challenge has come from the Christians in Public Life Programme (CIPL), which 'came into being in 1992 to counter, in new and positive ways, the growing trend towards the privatisation

³²⁹ See, for instance, the Church of Scotland's liturgy suitable for use when children are present for communion. This setting provides a powerful use of the theme of friendship as a focus for communion. See Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland (St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 2nd edition, 1996), p.167-74.

³³⁰ John Inge, 'Friendship: Friendship and Love, Human and Divine, unpublished dissertation, University of Durham, 1994.

of religion.'³³¹ Christians, according to the CIPL argument, should not only be working within the public life but actively shaping that life. One of the leading voices articulating the programme has been that of CIPL's director, Methodist minister David Clark.

Through Clark's eyes, this shaping of public life depends upon the rediscovery of the ministry of the whole people of God. A sense of vocation should not be restricted to the 'professional workers' (whether clergy or other), but should be the concern of all Christians in their engagement with the public sphere. Nor should the tendency to relate vocation to entry into paid work (as in 'national vocational qualifications') go unchallenged. 'Vocation in this sense is about achievement not commitment, about the status of the few not the potential of the many.'³³² The church's task is to encourage and equip individuals in this ministry. On an institutional level, the church must make sure that it does not follow the similar trend into a religious ghetto.³³³ The most recent initiative taken by the CIPL is to call for a 'National Christian Partnership in Public Life' with its proposal to transform itself into a focal point for a network 'to link more effectively a wide range of Christian organisations active in the mainstream life of society.'³³⁴

If Clark and his colleagues are vocal in their call for a renewed sense of vocation, they would be helped in their task by an understanding of the role friendship might play in meeting their goal. Indeed, any attempt by the Christian community to engage in a renewal of public life must take account of the role of friendship. In the classical world, friendship was seen as positively contributing to the public good and the well being of the *polis*. Aristotle, for example, regarded friendship in a much wider sense than is often the case in the modern world. John Inge's argument is that we have lost sight of Aristotle's understanding 'that friendship should be an essential ingredient of all good interpersonal relations and the well being of society as a whole.'³³⁵

³³¹ CIPL Information and Subscription sheet.

³³² CIPL Positional paper F10 Series Three, D. Clark, 'Lay Vocation - The Call to Becoming Persons'

³³³ CIPL Newsletter, June 1997.

³³⁴ CIPL Newsletter, November 1997.

³³⁵ Inge, 'Friendship.'

A strand of Christian tradition, emerging especially in the time of the Enlightenment has contributed to this undermining of friendship as a feature of Christian living. Friendship came to be regarded as selfishness, based on preference and attraction, rather than the self-denying and universal love identified as true Christian love. We have already noted Inge's highlighting of the monastic life, which valued friendship as a central to the Christian life. He comments, 'It may be what the monastic community was for some, the polis must be for others. There is here the raw material for re-integration of the life of the Church with that of the world, that of individual morality with the life of society as a whole.'³³⁶

Recognizing that Aristotle's understanding of friendship referred essentially to friendship between males, Inge finds an important resource in feminist writing. Feminists have helped in the rehabilitation of friendship in Christian thinking by emphasising the mutuality of friendship. Friendship is not the selfishness highlighted by Enlightenment ideals, but it does acknowledge the need to receive as well as to give. Friendships can transform relationships, including those skewed by an imbalance of power. He quotes Ann Loades as saying that the model of friendship would, perhaps, 'help to reintegrate public and private life, rather than have it disintegrated as it now so largely is, associating men/husbands with the public and women/wives with the private.' Friendship can help to heal the rift between public and private life.

It can also help bridge that gap in the life of the church, in the process of forming a public church. My impression is that Fowler underplays this role of friendship. In *Weaving the New Creation* Fowler makes reference to covenant friendship as presented in the writing of Sally McFague.³³⁷ In a further exploration of Niebuhr's metaphors of God as Creator, Governor, and Redeemer, Fowler makes a comparison with McFague's models of God as Mother, Lover and Friend. He notes the characteristics of covenant friendship as named by McFague: that friendship is a freely chosen relationship which places us in a bond; that it is a shared vision which holds

³³⁶ Inge, 'Friendship.'

³³⁷ S. McFague, *Models of God* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987). See Fowler, *Weaving*, pp.79-80 and 84 for fuller discussion of Fowler's argument.

diversity in a sense of unity; and that it is marked by a mutual interdependence. However, as a model of the third person of the Trinity, Fowler finds the model of God as Friend to be inadequate because it is 'too passive.' The role of the Spirit, Fowler argues, is an active, and indeed, pro-active one.

It is my contention that Fowler has too easily dismissed McFague's understanding of the role of friendship. In particular, he has not paid enough attention to the role of covenant friendship and the importance of relationships in the formation of public churches. In the remainder of this section, therefore, we look at two images of the church from a Methodist perspective. The first bears comparison with the concept of a public church, as we explore whether Methodism has the vision to sustain a public church; the second suggests how an understanding of the Church in a model of friendship may help in the formation of public churches.

5.3.2. 'A church of the common place'

Nigel Collinson is a former President of the British Methodist Conference (1996-7) and continues to be involved in national Methodist structures as the Secretary of the Conference. Recently, in a call for a 'critical, contemporary Christianity,' he has offered his own image of the church as 'a common place', a term which bears comparison with Fowler's public church. In furthering the comparison here, we draw upon Fowler's own main source for a concept of a public church, the writing of Martin Marty.

In *The Land of Unlikeness* Nigel Collinson sets out his understanding of what it means to live in an increasingly complex world of change and choice, that 'land of unlikeness' which forms the title of his book.³³⁸ His call for a 'critical, contemporary Christianity' is a way of discerning and responding to the complex world in which we live. This Christianity is 'critical in the sense that we make "discriminating use" of all the knowledge and ideas that are available to us; contemporary because, although we are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, our interest, concern, sympathy are yet in the diverse world of human experience and creativity.'³³⁹

³³⁸ Collinson borrows the phrase 'Land of Unlikeness' from W.H. Auden's *Flight into Egypt*.

³³⁹ N. Collinson, *The Land of Unlikeness* (Foundery Press, Peterborough, 1996) p.39.

In this way he looks for a conversation between 'the variety of human experience' and the tradition of our faith; a correlation between these two axes on a single graph, where 'we would pinpoint the questions and responses for our keeping faith in the land of unlikeness.'³⁴⁰ He offers two conversations within his own writing. The first is a dialogue with science about Christian understandings of creation; the second a consideration of redemption through the exploration of film, theatre, and literature. The mark of these conversations is a 'modest faithfulness' of testing our claims against those of others, in the recognition that we can only ever hold a part of the truth.

Collinson calls the church which might embody this critical, contemporary Christianity 'a church of the common place.' Using contributions from architecture, theology, information technology, and quantum physics, Collinson offers an image of a common place as an 'open-minded space.' The church of the common place is required not only to be ecumenical in its relationships amongst Christians but also in a wider sense looking for engagement and partnerships with the wider world. The claim I want to make is that Collinson's model for the church is in effect a call for a public church.

Collinson's ideas reflect the major themes of Martin Marty's work, which formed the basis of Fowler's writing on the subject of a public church. Marty names two major facets to the public church as he sees it. Firstly it is a 'communion of communions, each of which lives its life partly in response to its separate tradition and partly to the calls for a common Christian vocation.'³⁴¹ He believes that this outline for a public church is there to be discerned existing Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant churches. His model is taken from the early modern period and the concept of Dutch Calvinist humanist, Johannes Althusius of a political 'community of communities.' Marty points out that Althusius 'spoke as the components as symbiotes, who "pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreement, to mutual communication of whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of

³⁴⁰ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, p.48.

³⁴¹ Marty, *Public Church*, p.3.

social life,” or now, in this case, Christian life.’³⁴²

It is significant that Marty bases and builds a model of the church in this way, because his other main characteristic of a public church is about the way in which it relates to the world around it. For this point Marty takes the contention of the Pope John Paul II (then a Polish cardinal) made in 1975 that ‘[t]he church possesses a special interiority and a specific openness.’ This means a church which relates to a secular world in such ways that it does not lose its own identity, and yet does not remain aloof from the world. Within this church, ‘people would learn to combine religious commitment with civility, spiritual passion with a public sense.’³⁴³

The density of Marty’s writing contrasts with the brief description offered by Collinson. Yet what the latter may lack in detail is made up for in *The Land of Unlikeness* by the scope and breadth of its ideas and imagery. In the heart of his book, which is an exploration of the theological tension between creation and redemption, Collinson draws on a wide range of examples from the arts and from science in an engagement with the human and natural world. Collinson’s ecumenism is an ecumenism in the widest sense. But the ‘keeping faith’ which is a mark of critical, contemporary Christianity is ‘people-centred.’ The value and potential of humanity is gathered together in that ‘deep-laid sense of obligation to others’ which is within us.³⁴⁴

For Collinson, obedience can be redemptive. We can share in redemption because of Jesus’ obedience over-turning humanity’s disobedience. It is not the obedience of subservience, but ‘the sort of obedience which seeks to work with the grain of the wood rather than against it, to co-operate with the divine purpose rather than contest and frustrate it.’³⁴⁵ Redemption, he argues, cannot be separated from the nitty-gritty of life. He notes the ‘commonplace, seedy environment’³⁴⁶ with which the

³⁴² Marty, *Public Church*, p.14.

³⁴³ Marty, *Public Church*, p.8.

³⁴⁴ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, p.40.

³⁴⁵ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, p.75. In this notion of co-operation we can make the links with Fowler’s understanding of synergy.

³⁴⁶ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, p.69.

word has been connected in the past in the redemption of goods and slaves with money. Collinson points to the work of countless individuals and communities, however insignificant their achievements might appear: 'Their sense of obedience to a particular vision, their sheer commitment in terms of life and work, is redemptive.' But he also sees in obedience 'the willingness of individual people to regard their life's work as a vocation,'³⁴⁷ work offered in the service of God.

The strongest image in *The Land of Unlikeness* is that of the surfer. Collinson writes, 'We belong to a surfing generation ...' as he presents the image of the surfer as an appropriate one for the rapidly changing world in which we live. It is a powerfully descriptive image:

One type of surfer is using a fairly frail craft to catch the next wave in seas which are often rough and which must always be exhilarating. She is driven forward at breakneck speed by waters of immense power. Another, the wind-surfer, uses a sail to catch the wind. Whether the water is shallow or deep does not seem to matter. Direction is the important thing, the angle of the sail against the wind. For both, timing, balance, and nerve are essential. You could say that surfers are good at coping with change. They are also in an organic relationship with their world. In their best moments they must have a sense of being united with the elements.³⁴⁸

For Collinson the thrill and the threat of keeping one's balance and direction cannot be separated from the surfer's creativity. It is the hopefulness of the image which captures his imagination the most. He envisages those following their Christian calling as living as surfers in this rapidly changing world. As such the surfer becomes an embodiment of Collinson's call for a critical, contemporary Christianity, with a sense of vocation best supported by a church of the common place. The *Land of Unlikeness* witnesses to the reality of a vision within Methodism for a public church.

5.3.3. Making connections

If Collinson has set out a vision for a public church from a Methodist perspective, we can now move on to looking for a model which will take account of the

³⁴⁷ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, p.76.

³⁴⁸ Collinson, *Land of Unlikeness*, pp.83 and 85.

role of friendship in the formation of a public church. A useful starting point is Palmer's image of 'a company of strangers.' His book of that title forms a series of reflections on American public life, which have been noted by Fowler alongside Marty's writing on a public church.

Explaining that in America, public life has become almost exclusively associated with politics and government, Palmer suggests that a better definition of public life is one which rightly concerns us all.³⁴⁹ As such, the areas of engagement include the street, public spaces, public meetings, voluntary associations and the neighbourhood.³⁵⁰ In an age when the privatisation of American life has the upper hand, he wants to affirm the primacy of the public life. He points out that 'private' literally means 'to be deprived of a public life,³⁵¹ and that the proper relationship of public and private is that the 'public is the human environment in which the private exists.'³⁵² The church's role in this state of affairs is the one that the definition of religion implies: to 'bind up' that which is broken, fragmented by the privatisation of human living.³⁵³ The church's size and diversity make this task possible.³⁵⁴

Palmer sees the public life as a common space occupied by strangers. 'In such a life, strangers come in daily contact, grow accustomed to one another, learn to solve the problems which the common life poses, enrich and expand each other's lives.'³⁵⁵ The image he presents for the public life is 'the company of strangers,' a term which he rightly regards as saying much about the qualities of public life: a sense of common purpose, of hospitality and (relating to the specific ministry of the church) a breaking of bread (from the Latin *com* and *panis* meaning sharing bread together).³⁵⁶ But where Palmer contrasts the strangers who occupy the public domain with the family and

³⁴⁹ Palmer, *Company*, p.19.

³⁵⁰ Palmer, *Company*, pp.38-40.

³⁵¹ Palmer, *Company*, p.18.

³⁵² Palmer, *Company*, p.31.

³⁵³ Palmer, *Company*, p.22.

³⁵⁴ Palmer, *Company*, p.27.

³⁵⁵ Palmer, *Company*, p.20.

³⁵⁶ Palmer, *Company*, p.10.

friends of the private life,³⁵⁷ there is room to think again.

The problem is that he identifies friends with family rather than with strangers, and friendship with private more readily than public life. I would maintain that the counter to the term 'strangers' is not 'friends' at all. If we consider that which is *strange*, surely the opposite is that which is *familiar*. The difficulty arises because friendship is too easily associated with the intimacies of close friendship, a part of private lives rather than public life.

If 'the company of strangers' is an expressive depiction of public life, it is not wholly adequate as an image for the church. Certainly, it needs to be understood that Palmer is attempting to address and redress perceived imbalances between public and private life, but the church also needs to be acknowledged as a place where there is *both* the strange and the familiar. A healthy understanding of friendship will help us to make that link. Alongside the church as a 'family' and as 'company of strangers' I would therefore like to propose that the church is also 'a connection of friends.'

I borrow the term, at least in part, from Methodism. The word connection is strongly rooted in Methodist tradition (albeit in its peculiar eighteenth century form, 'connexion'), and has particular meaning relating to the structure of the national Methodist church. Davies and Rupp focus their attention upon connexion as an organisational principle, a means of linking societies together 'if they were to grow in spiritual strength and efficacy.'³⁵⁸ It was (and is) a tool of ecclesiastical polity, reflecting a form of *episcopate*.³⁵⁹ That this is the case is not to be denied. However, it is also worth going back further in the origins of Methodism to highlight a different aspect of connection.

We pick up the story shortly where we left it in the earlier section about Wesley's young adulthood, just after he had taken up the call to field preaching in

³⁵⁷ For example, p.35, 'In public we remember that the world consists of more than self and family and friends.'

³⁵⁸ R. Davies and G. Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1 (Epworth Press, London, 1965), p.230.

³⁵⁹ Davies and Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church*, p.198.

1739. In November of that year, according to Heitzenrater, 'a "connectional" pattern of organization began to appear in Wesley's activities, starting with a chance meeting of three Johns—Wesley, John Gambold, and John Robson, all part of Oxford Methodism.' They agreed to an annual gathering in London and 'as many as possible' would come to quarterly meetings. 'In the meantime, they would circulate monthly accounts of what each was doing in his own particular station.'³⁶⁰ So this is the first point about connection, that it was a means of communication, where each individual followed their own vocation but in reference to what the others were doing. When we consider the importance of conversation and correspondence to John Wesley, it is worth renewing our understanding of connection in the light of modern communication through fax, internet, e-mail, and video phone in addition to ongoing face-to-face encounters.

From this initial meeting, these men 'also developed a list of possible recruits [names are listed] and perhaps other "spiritual friends who are able and willing" to join with them.'³⁶¹ On his preaching tours, Wesley built up contacts with persons 'friendly to the Methodist movement,' including 'former associates,' 'clergy allies,' 'friends whom he had met in London and with whom he had kept in touch,' and 'new acquaintances.' In his pattern of itinerancy, Wesley 'began to consolidate a network of acquaintances into a "connection" of societies scattered in pockets across the land.'³⁶² Originally, then, the Methodist Connexion was a connection of friends. Only later did it develop in other ways, not only as a formal system of authority, but also as a means of mutual support, for example through the connectional fund, preachers' fund, and subscriptions towards the funding of Kingswood School.³⁶³

Using the word connection in a context of friendship is not without drawbacks. A 'connection' (when used in the sense of a friend or acquaintance) is usually descriptive a particular sort of friend, generally speaking one who has influence or the power to get things done. In this sense of the word, connection skews friendship in a

³⁶⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, p.108.

³⁶¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, p.108.

³⁶² Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, pp.139-40.

³⁶³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, pp.197 and 237.

certain way. To say 'I have connections' may be one way of getting the system to work for you; but it is not of much help to those who do not have those same sort of connections. More positively, I see three main strengths to the term 'a connection of friends.'

First, and especially within the church, a connection of friends suggests a particular quality of relationship. We may, for example, recall Gilligan's references to a 'web of connection' with its emphasis on interdependence rather than independence. In a similar way, a connection of Christians or churches speaks of many different individuals or communities linked together by threads of connection. Just as many organisations and individuals in today's world encourage a process of 'networking,' so diverse and distanced church communities can connect in helpful and mutually supportive ways. A connection of friends is a contribution from a Methodist perspective to an ecumenical future.

Secondly the term is suggestive of how relationships should be with groups and individuals more on the fringes or outside of the church. A connection of friends is a very necessary construct to complement a circle of friends. Despite David Shields call for a circle of friends 'to continue to extend the circle' and not to 'draw our ecclesial wagons into a circle around the gospel as if we needed to defend it from the world,'³⁶⁴ there is always a danger, and indeed a certain tendency, for a circle of friends to become an inward-looking group, existing only to further the well-being of its own. By contrast, a connection of friends suggests a very different life. In a connection, links may be held within the life of the society in which they are set. Threads of connection are open to the world outside, vulnerable to outside influences; but they also hold the possibility of making new connections, often with that which is other or different to itself. One analogy to be made is that with the process of travelling, in which connections are links made between two different means of transport. A connection of friends is ecumenical in the widest sense in that it reaches beyond the confines of the church to make connections with the world.

³⁶⁴ David Shields, 'Friendship: Context and Content of Christian Religious Education,' in *Religious Education*, vol.91 (Winter 1996), p.113.

Finally, then, a connection of friends has a key role to play in building up the kind of diversity which is the characteristic of a public church. In linking people across a wide range of relationships within and without the church, a connection of friends encourages friendships to be made across boundaries of age, race, gender and other differences. In these three main ways, a connection of friends has an important contribution to make in the formation of a public church.

Conclusion: Friendship and Formation

Much ground has been covered during the course of our exploration of young adulthood and the church's relationship with young adults. The final task is one not only of drawing different threads together but also of indicating where further research may be usefully undertaken.

It may be hoped that the project as a whole has been seen to contain a purposeful pattern; but it would be less than honest to say that it has not taken some unpredictable turns. In Part One, images of young adult relationships with the Church were explored, a process which culminated in a model of friendship as a way of understanding young adult lives and the the life of the church. Friendship has been perhaps the most surprising aspect of this thesis, in that it was nowhere to be seen in the initial outline of work. In this sense, the contribution which friendship has made as a theme has been both creative and refreshing in terms of the final outcome.

Part Two focussed on the ideas of James Fowler. If friendship was an unplanned accommodation, it should be more straightforward to say that the intention has always been to centre the study on Fowler's work. However, this is not strictly true, as the original idea was to use Fowler's theory of faith development. It soon became apparent, though, that Fowler had much more to offer this investigation than faith development theory alone. A study was therefore made of Fowler's writing as a whole, from Niebuhr to public church. I am not aware of any published sources which have sought to do the same, but it has proved to be a rich source of understanding for young adult relationships with the church.

Finally, in Part Three, Fowler and friendship have been viewed from Methodist perspectives. Not only has this opened up fresh perspectives on Fowler and friendship as separate concerns, but it has also allowed for a fruitful engagement of one with the other. As a result of this interaction, three main areas can be highlighted which hold the promise of bearing further fruit. These are the areas in which friendship relates

to the formation of faith, the formation of vocation, and the formation of a public church.

First, there is the area of friendship and the formation of faith. We have already made an assessment of how well Fowler has incorporated a relational dimension into his work, and concluded that if Fowler has taken account of this in his overarching theology, there are some discrepancies with the way that he has constructed the descriptions of individual faith stages. Friendship as a theme would seem to reinforce a relational dimension to the descriptions of those faith stages by emphasising the interdependence of human relationships.

More specifically, deeper awareness of friendship may help to interpret more adequately the description of Stage 4 faith, and to sort out the confusion over the allocation of individuals to Stage 3 or Stage 4 faith discussed earlier. In making presentations about this project to different church groups, the kind of comment often made in response to a picture of young adults in terms of the rational autonomy of Stage 4 faith is that it is a picture unrecognizable from experience. A faith stage description which incorporates a dimension of friendship and a clearer acknowledgement of a faith still lived in relationship may help to alleviate such a difficulty. Furthermore, a dynamic of friendship may be helpful in modifying the detail of the faith stages not only as descriptions of individual lives but also of congregational life.

Secondly, there is the matter of friendship and the formation of vocation. Fowler does not use the term friendship as such, but it may be that his description of vocation in terms of partnership comes close to our understanding of friendship. Friendship provides a practical resource for vocational formation, through worship, as well as through a process of formal adult religious education. Friendship should form an important component of church programmes relating to work, lifestyle, marriage, parenting and other issues.

If we have shown friendship to closely relate to a sense of vocation, it also relates to the life of community. Friendship has a positive role to play in the formation

of vocation in the context of a sponsoring community. Indeed, I would argue that friendship is itself a form of sponsorship. Parks identified a role for the church as mentor in its sponsorship of young adults in their early and mid twenties. But from Parks' work we also noted that the more tested adult (what we would call 'young adult') has reason to move beyond that role of being mentored to one in which they became more like a peer. The strength of friendship, in such a mentoring role with older young adults, is that it is a mutually supportive form of sponsorship. It is apparent, therefore, that friendship is a form of sponsorship particularly appropriate for young adults in their late twenties and thirties.

Thirdly, there is the relationship between friendship and the formation of a public church. If friendship has been seen to be significant in forming individual lives, we have also endeavoured to show its importance in the shaping of the common Christian life. In particular, friendship is of deep significance in the formation of a public church. Hence the endeavour to show that any attempt to create a public church will benefit from an understanding of the church as a connection of friends.

More especially, we have emphasised the significance of friendship for understanding young adult lives alongside and interwoven with the role friendship might play in the creation of public churches. Therefore, it is my final contention that the relationship of church and young adults is itself best understood as a connection of friends, with each playing a part in the shaping of the other. If the church wants to build up its relationship with young adults it needs to find ways of encouraging and supporting new and lasting friendships. Friendship both affirms young adult vocation and encourages greater participation in the life and mission of the church. Perhaps the most important fruit of the church's friendship with young adults is the contribution young adults have to make in actively forming a public church. Together, in a bond of friendship, church and young adults turn to face head on the challenge of believing and belonging in a changing world.

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