

Book Reflection on Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* by Christoph Lameter, January 12. 1992

1. ABSTRACT

This book deals with the necessity of adult formation. Its main focus is on the importance of Vocation and how Vocation can be understood.

It starts with the survey of existing concepts of developmental theories. First the Theory of Erik. H. Erikson who sees the maturation as a schedule of challenges and resulting capabilities. He stresses the importance of finding ways of employing one's abilities. The Theory of Daniel J. Levinson views maturation as occurring in distinctive phases of 20 years each, in which different aspects of life are important. Therefore he asserts the richness and fullness of these phases in life. Finally the Theory of Carol Gilligan who is focusing on the moral decision processes and their development. She is especially showing the difference in decision-making by males and females.

Fowler then tries to develop a faith development theory, integrating aspects of the three prior reviewed developmental theories. He views the developmental theories as "myths" as setting developmental targets for the individual comparable to a religion. He criticizes that they do not sufficiently address the issue of faith, and are not holistic. They merely show one piece of the pie and not the whole picture as necessary.

He develops seven stages in faith development, which are "ways" of being in faith.

Primal Faith First stage: Development of a trusting relationship usually with the parents.

Intuitive-Projective Faith Experience of the surrounding World. Language utilization. Sense making attempts.

Mythical-Literal-Faith Faith as a reliance on stories, rules and values of the surrounding community.

Synthetic Conventional Faith Breakdown of the rules, evolvement of interest in the feelings of others.

Individuative-Reflective Faith Development of individual authorization. Independence from authorities.

Conjunctive-Faith Acknowledgment of influences of unconscious/social. Sensing that truth is complex.

Universalizing-Faith Concentration away from the own self. Ability to understand others in their respective complex system of beliefs.

Finally the author develops a view of vocation in contrast to the modern approach to self-actualization. He contrasts destiny (as an expression for self-actualization) to vocation (as an expression for living to a God-given cause). He shows the common negative aspects implicated in the popular view of self-actualization.

2. CONCRETE

The author's stages of faith development are almost like my personal development as a Christian. First after my conversion I was fixed on rules and on the specific views of "my" Church which I propagated heavily, not noticing the inability of others understanding it. Like the Stage of Mythical-Literal Faith. This stage began as I said with my conversion when I was 20 years old. I did not experience something like that before since I had great trouble identifying with any community, even my family, since my parents got divorced in my early teens.

After around 2 to 3 years I had some experiences with the rules from my Church. I found that it was not senseful to apply them in any situation and I began to differentiate more and more. Stage of Synthetic Conventional Faith, I suppose. I began to experience people from various beliefs and thought about other views than of those propagated in my community.

Then after 4-5 years I developed my own belief (sounds ridiculous), that is somewhat different attitudes from my Church, and took my own position of thought within the community. I think that is somewhat like the stage of Individuative Reflexive Faith. I am still struggling with taking my own position and feel the difficulty of sticking to this position in view of other opinions in my community.

I began to acknowledge, through encounter with people from different beliefs, that the truth is often complex and difficult to communicate. And even my own opinion I found often difficult to understand completely by myself. Somehow I hold on to opinion just because there is not enough ground for changing them, neither seems to be sufficient ground to hold them. Truth is not black and white but often a struggle about the density of gray. I think these thoughts might be some elements of Conjunctive Faith.

I can remember that I became aware of myself at the age of 13-16 and tried to find the purpose and the why of my life, mainly triggered by the suffering through the divorce of my parents.

The book stimulated thought about vocation. I do not feel any vocation in my old sense. But I can identify with his perception of vocation. I still need time to think about this issue.

3. REFLECTION

The most important change came about in my thoughts about the process of developing a separate opinion from my community, where I grew up as a Christian. Often my having my own opinions, somewhat different from the rest, bothered me, since I was not in-line with the others. Often I had the feeling that I am a kind of heretic in their midst. The book motivated me to think about if it is not natural after all for being mature that one forms his own distinctive views about almost everything.

Also the aspects of vocations and the distinctiveness from destiny caused some thought. Especially I think a lot about my career as a Software-Developer that gave me material blessing and promised me even more. Why did I drop out of it? Largely I think it was the feeling of not being called for this, the senselessness and the lack of meaning in the life of my fellow shareholders and fellow businessmen. I felt sick and sometimes was sick, when I got to a computer-exhibition and saw all this senseless gossip, betrayal and manipulation going on. I had my church-life to balance that, but what had they? Somehow I felt very sad about them and wished very much I could help them understand and experience what fullness of life through Christ means. I think that is the main reason why I came to Fuller. I felt that I had abilities, which were not able to develop in that sphere of life. Even my church grew to narrow for me. There was a desire to know and experience more and to have people with whom I could communicate about these things.

What is my vocation? Somehow I have often wished to have that pop up in my mind. But the book speaks more about development into a vocation and lately I had some areas where I found I was especially useful as one who is able to communicate the truth of Christ through normal scientific language.

4. ACTION

What shall I do to keep faith in these discoveries?

First I think I can ease my mind and accept that my development out of the limits of my church is nothing unnatural. The main reason for the stagnation of my home church seems to be that people stay within the limits and do not allow themselves to grow further, or if they do it, they are afraid of sharing this with the community.

And I think I might have a kind of calling to share my growth with them, despite all the limits and all the rejection I will encounter when coming back and sharing my thoughts with them.

I will have to think further about that topic of vocation. And attempt to enlarge my ministry in the area I have found here I will be of use.