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All-age learning: implications for faith development, education and nurture in a changing church

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All-Age Learning: Implications for Faith

Development, Education and Nurture in a Changing Church

Since the late 1980's all-age learning has become a significant feature of education and worship within the Church of England. This thesis relates Christian education to the faith development theory of James Fowler. Recognising both the value and limitations of Fowler's theory, there is an appreciation of how the debate arising from his research enriches the sphere of Christian education.

Churches need to take responsibility for carefully defining Christian education, establishing precise aims and identifying worthwhile outcomes. The particular aim presented in this thesis is regarded as one which is achieved by effective all-age learning (sometimes abbreviated in the thesis to "all-age"). An associated worthwhile outcome is the promotion of faith development. It is argued that the success of this developmental process becomes apparent in unpredictable as well as predictable outcomes.

Claims are made for a holistic view of learning which takes into account a full range of identifiable human operations, represented by what are broadly referred to as the cognitive and affective domains. Part of the intentional process of learning within formative all-age Christian education should include the development of critical skills. This highlights the issue of evaluation and brings with it a challenge to the Church in its present form. A positive response to the possibility and reality of challenge may bring change. Where all-age features in Christian education and worship, it is hoped that such change will affect the entire Church community rather than isolated individuals.

It soon becomes clear that all-age might serve as a pragmatic and effective tool within Christian education. However, the corporate nature of the Church of England is as important as its individual membership. Thus there are further conclusions which centre on one in particular; that all-age is a necessary component of a changing and developing corporate Church, where there exists a desire to respond to what is perceived to be the continuing creative power of God.

ALL-AGE LEARNING:
IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH DEVELOPMENT,
EDUCATION AND NURTURE IN A CHANGING CHURCH

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1994

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DECLARATION

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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LEARNING TOGETHER: AN INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the Church of England General Synod's report *Children in the Way* in January 1988, many deanery synods and parochial church councils have, like their nationally representative General Synod, warmly received and endorsed its recommendations.[1] It seems that at all levels of Anglican Church decision making in England there is a desire to encourage the work done with children. As far as translating this positive endorsement into action is concerned, there are many enthusiasts who are prepared to "actively explore and implement ways of creating joint learning experiences for children and adults" thus fulfilling at least one of the Report's recommendations.[2] Thus diocesan events, deanery festivals, parish groups and services are often publicised as "all-age", with the emphasis in preparation meetings being upon the provision of opportunities for people of different ages to learn with and from one another. There is a relatively high response when people of varying age groups are invited together to a day event or a particular act of worship.

This interest and enthusiasm has made demands upon me as a Children's Work Adviser. The need for ideas and resources, my own experience of all-age learning (and worship) within a small Church community, and involvement in planning large scale diocesan events raise particular questions. This thesis attempts to address some of them.[3] Does the all-age experience affect faith development? Is all-age an effective educational approach? What sort of learning takes place? What do adults learn within an all-age environment? Does all-age affect attitudes and decision-making processes in the Church?

There is little question about the popularity of all-age in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. For example, the annual world development days are organised from the outset as all-age. On each occasion provision has been made for all ages to learn together, and the worship has been designed with every age group in mind. Evaluations of these events have been based on "soft" data, e.g.

invitations to write comments graffiti-style, on enormous wall posters. These evaluations, whilst often being challenging in terms of the organisation of such events, have generally endorsed the all-age style as positive and helpful.

This enthusiastic response is not restricted to the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle.[4] Why has there been such a positive response to the idea of all-age? Perhaps it offers one solution to those who are troubled by the often well-intentioned and unquestioned habit of regularly removing children from Sunday worship in order for them to do their learning. Discomfort is also sometimes expressed when people come together for worship, but are segregated on grounds of age. Clergy, parents, Sunday School teachers and children themselves are amongst those who believe this practice to not only exclude children but to deny to the rest of the congregation the contribution of the children to the faith development of all Church members. In addition it is often felt that young people are only tolerated within Church life, rather than invited to be involved on their own terms. Yet, despite this marginalising behaviour, Church communities often express a deep concern about the absence of children and young people from their Churches.[5]

The evidence provided here is mostly from those people who have been willing to face the challenge of all-age. Not everyone is always comfortable or confident about organising or participating in learning and worship events specifically designed for all ages. Few people would want to see all-age replace age-specific learning programmes altogether. However, most people interviewed recognise all-age as an exciting ingredient within the learning and worshipping life of the Church.

Questions concerning the consequences of an integration of all ages within the life of Church communities touch upon other interests. Programmes of learning which encourage attitudes of mutual respect between generations might lead to shifts of power and authority, changing teaching styles and different ways of operating as a Church. Children and young people may come to be regarded as contributing to the teaching and learning processes. This may lead to their being heard, and they may then come to have some influence upon policy and decision-making processes. An exploration of these

possibilities will indicate why all-age learning has implications for educationalists, faith developmentalists, politicians and theologians within the Church.[6]

REFERENCES

1. General Synod Board of Education, *Children In The Way,* National Society/Church House Publishing, London, 1988.

2. *Children In The Way*, p. 37.

3. It seems that all-age (or intergenerational) Christian education is an undeveloped area of study. A computer search has picked out only one relevant title (in English) from 4,000 journal articles, theses and books.

4. It is evident that during the last decade the idea of all-age learning and worship has become increasingly popular in the Anglican Church. In New Zealand the interest is such that the New Zealand prayer book provides supplementary material relating to all-age worship. In the Diocese of New South Wales, Australia, children have been invited to make a contribution at Synods. In addition, an increasing quantity of material for use in all-age learning and worship situations is becoming available in church bookshops: e.g. Peter Privett, *Signposts*, National Society, London, 1993; Sharon Swain, *The Sermon Slot*, SPCK, London, 1992; Susan Sayers, *Come and See*, Kevin Mayhew, Suffolk, 1990.

5. Responses from a diocesan survey of all the parishes in the Diocese of Newcastle indicate a wide concern for the fall in Church attendance by young people and children.

6. Uniting Church of Victoria, *Children at New South Wales Synod from 1993*, Victoria, Australia, October, 1992.

CHAPTER ONE

FAITH AND FAITHING

What is the understanding of faith within this thesis, and what claims are made about its relationship to Christian education?

1. Faith is understood as both a noun (cf. the faith) and a verb. What is believed (cf. the content of faith) might be regarded as the noun; the way that the content is believed (the form of faith) is the verb.

2. The way a person values and is in relationship with what she regards to be ultimate (the form of faith) develops.

3. The faithing process involves all aspects of human being and occurs throughout life.

4. Faithing is interactive on a variety of levels: it is not a solitary activity. Relationships and participation in the life of the faith community are highly significant features of faith development.

5. All-age learning offers opportunities for stimulating the development of faith as well as effective Christian education.

1. <u>Faith as both a verb and a noun</u>

For faith developmentalists faithing is something people *do*.[1] Faithing involves everything within the human person which occurs as we make meaning of the world around us. The primary concern of the faith developmentalists is the *form* of faith. This involves the processes of thinking, valuing, interpreting, experiencing, feeling, understanding and making connections within ourselves and between ourselves and the rest of the world. Essentially it is about how we are in relation to what we believe to be ultimate. For Christians faithing is the activity of being in relation to God. God is what Christians believe in: in other words God is ultimate, valued, central to life. It is God to whom Christians commit themselves and it is

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God whom they worship. God is the *content* of their faith. The content of faith holds for the human being, centres of value and images of power. They evoke from us reverence, fear, awe and commitment: they give us worth and meaning as we make sense of life's experience.

The work of James W. Fowler and other faith developmentalists has broadened perceptions of faith considerably. Since Fowler considers faithing to be a universal characteristic of human beings his research has revolved around how people know the ultimate concern of their lives, be it God, Marxism, Earth, Nirvana, Wealth, or whatever a person's heart is set upon. Apart from highlighting the universal characteristic of faithing his work also seeks to answer questions concerning what processes are occurring as people make meaning of their existence. Questions have been raised about the primacy of cognition and its place amongst other aspects of human faithing.

2.   Faithing as a Developmental Phenomenon

Faith development theory is itself a relatively recent phenomenon, expressed in work which emerged in the wake of the research of structural psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. The work of Piaget and Kohlberg, in their structural developmentalist approaches to cognitive and moral development respectively, are highly significant for James Fowler. Firstly, their focus upon *how* people know reality influences Fowler's perception of faith as a way of knowing and interpreting or structuring life's experiences. (It is in this sense that he recognises faithing as a universal human characteristic.) This carries with it that distinction between how people know, and what they know i.e. the structuring and the contents of knowledge, which allows Fowler to distinguish between what we have already labelled the "form" and "content" of faith. As has been noted the latter comprises "centres of value", "images of power" and "master stories". These vary from person to person, group to group, culture to culture. The way they are known, i.e. the form of faith, is shared by people who are at the same faith stage. According to Fowler this form develops, and the way it changes is not necessarily related to

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the content. Two people may believe in different contents, but the way they believe may be similar. On the other hand they may believe in the same things, but believe in them ("faith" them) differently. Clearly Fowler extends the use of the word faith beyond that of a noun which labels a finite set of beliefs. The set of beliefs are only part of the content of faithing. His premise is to consider faith as a verb; this universal response to life's experiences is a human strategy for structuring those experiences: "We live by forming and being formed in images and dispositions toward the ultimate conditions of our existence".[2]

Another major contribution from the structural developmentalists is the concept of stages. For Fowler, faith stages provide "generalizable, formal descriptions of integrated sets of operations of knowing and valuing".[3] They develop in an invariant and hierarchical fashion, as individuals move into new stages. Fowler describes faithing as an interactive process between an individual and his or her environment. New patterns of knowing, or ways of faithing, are constantly having to be constructed as individuals attempt to make sense of experiences which challenge former ways of faithing. Fowler cautiously acknowledges that the movement is to be welcomed: whilst he would value each stage in its own right, he is realistic about development through the stages being desirable, and he recognises that this theory suggests a normative pattern for faith development.[4]

Fowler, who is a Christian, gives the impression of being delighted and enlightened by his introduction to structural psychology. It is as though this new and exciting insight into how human beings make meaning brings enrichment to the content of his own faith. This enthusiasm causes him to emphasise the importance of form, but it leaves him and his colleagues open to the criticism that their emphasis upon form is at the expense of content. He acknowledged this apparent neglect in some of his earliest writings and has been sensitively protective of his stance.[5] Since his work is concerned primarily with developmental characteristics of faith it is perhaps inevitable that he concentrates on form rather than content. Development

is a characteristic of form which, it seems, occurs in a systematic and describable way according to identifiable stages. Content, on the other hand, might be re-worked and changed according to the structuring operations of new stages, but it does not develop systematically. The stories, images, and centres of value which we learn may be held differently as faithing develops but they do not in themselves "develop". It should also be noted that the development of faithing does not necessarily correspond to chronological age or maturity.

3. A Wider Perspective

Faith as a term need not be restricted to the religious dimension of life. Whilst faith might be regarded as a matter of cognition which has social, moral and affective consequences, Fowler and his colleagues would argue that such aspects are not simply consequential, but part of the faithing process itself.[6] Faithing encompasses all that a person is and how a person responds to the myriad of experiences that touch his or her life. Despite Fowler's claim that other aspects feature significantly in faithing, he is still criticised for over-emphasising the cognitive dimension of faith.[7] Such criticism has raised the profile of other aspects which may be regarded as essential components in the structuring of life's experiences. Fowler himself has identified six other dimensions, or aspects: perspective taking, moral judging, social awareness, locating of authority, world coherence and symbolic functioning. In addition commentators upon Fowler's work have also identified trust, will, volition, perception, humour, fear and awe.[8] This recognition and valuing of all aspects of faith opens up new opportunities and reveals new resources for learning within faith communities. This is because as the definition of faith is widened, its aspects become recognisable in a wider variety of people, including children.

4. Interaction, Participation and the Extent of Human Knowing

For Fowler, a key word is "knowing": whilst he claims that human beings "know" through ways other than the cognition of 'rational

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certainty', some of his critics are yet to be convinced that he regards such cognition as anything other than the primary operation within the process.[9]   In his own defence Fowler could refer his critics back to 1974 when he described faith as "a kind of knowing in which *cognition* and *affection* are interwoven. Faith is a knowing which includes loving, caring and valuing, as well as awe, dread and fear".[10]   This stimulates a useful discussion concerning not only the variety of aspects of human faithing, but also the way in which they all operate together in that dynamic interaction of meaning-making between a person and his or her environment.

In earlier writings Fowler was challenged by Sam Keen, who said that Fowler's notion of faith was "largely masculine and ...... biased toward an intellectual way of being in the world." In his lively and somewhat irreverent critique of Fowler's theory, Keen went on to say how such a view of faith made "little room for other types of persons, for what Jung referred to as sensation, intuitive, or feeling types."[11]   Fowler's response to Keen indicated that he took the affective dimensions of faithing as seriously as he did cognition.   There is a sense in which he seemed to feel misunderstood, yet despite his claim about faith that "knowing and valuing, fearing and trusting are all bundled up together in this enterprise," and that "cognitive operations ......are *necessary* but not *sufficient*"....... he went on to say "that this theory has a cognitive developmental focus at its core".[12]   In a more recent essay Fowler does not supplement his original list of seven aspects.   Neither does he elaborate on the significance of interaction, beyond commenting that "experiences arising from interaction in life all affect the rate and extent of a person's ongoing development through the stages".[13]   This is insufficient for Parks who, within the same collection of essays from which this quotation is taken, wonders if Fowler continuing pre-occupation with cognition arises from "the split in most Protestant theology between head and heart, mind and body".[14]

The debate continues: Derek Webster's critique is not simply to do with the *primacy* of cognition, it concerns *dependency* upon cognition.   "Certainly some overlapping is to be expected, but

is there not a sense in which moral reasoning and symbolic understanding are dependent on, not just broadly related to, a prior development of logical "thinking".[15] From another perspective Webster agrees with Parks in his conviction that distinctions cannot be so sharply made between all the aspects. For example he suggests, role-taking and social awareness cannot be regarded as entirely separate from each other and one cannot develop without the other.

David Heywood's criticism is much more fundamental and challenges the whole basis of Fowler's faith development theory. He disputes Fowler's own assertion that his work is based upon Piaget's research into cognitive development, when he suggests that in reality Fowler has relied upon Lawrence Kohlberg's *interpretation* of Piaget. This is at the root of what Heywood regards as a confused and unclear theory. The confusion goes right back to Piaget's own inadequate experimentation. Heywood argues that this led to errors concerning what he perceived to be ability and inability of children to think in particular ways, and a blindness to the philosophical assumptions underlying his psychological theory. It also meant that insufficient attention was being given to the significance of the personal interest and aptitude of an individual, as well as his or her interest in the content of a particular body of knowledge, as significant factors affecting cognitive development. Heywood reminds his readers that Piaget is not alone in offering theories of cognitive development: the "activity of 'structuring' by no means presupposes Piagetian structures".[16]

Like Heywood, Webster voices criticism of Fowler's reliance on the work of Kohlberg, Selman and Piaget. How can Fowler use their theories without applying much more stringent social scientific criteria? What happens if their theories are defective? How can he claim to extend their ideas "without some prior replication of their experiments which properly establishes the nature of these modifications and indicates their legitimacy"?[17]

Webster's positive remarks concern the impetus which Fowler's

work has given for thinking about faith and how human beings make meaning. With these criticisms in mind he concludes that the value of Fowler's work is in terms of *practical theology* rather than in terms of *social scientific* theory. Fowler has stimulated people to think about faith and meaning-making and his work has raised the profile of a broader picture of faith and faithing. Furthermore, Webster's commendation of the research to schools and churches indicates the significance of the relationship between Christian education and Christian meaning making

Sharon Parks' contribution to this debate is based upon an appreciation of Fowler's work and a desire to place it in the context of a particular theology in which she perceives the Holy Spirit to be at work in meaning-making. She sees this creative work occurring in an interaction between the self and the environment in a way which involves every aspect of human being. However, Park's argument is not simply to do with extending the lists of aspects, it is also to do with the interactive wholeness, and creative dynamism of meaning-making. She would not separate the various aspects so rigidly as is apparent in Fowler's work, and she believes that their dynamic interaction with each other is what gives rise to the stages of development.

Parks argues that there is a developmental characteristic associated with the interaction between the contents of faithing and its structure. She particularly emphasises the "imaginal", i.e. the contents associated with the symbolic functioning aspect of faith. When the relationship between the stages, their aspects, and their contents is acknowledged as dynamic and progressive, Parks argues, we may recognise this relationship as where the transforming work of the Holy Spirit is located.

There are wider implications for the faith community. Once cognition is not regarded as the core of meaning making there can be a fuller appreciation that individuals identify themselves through every aspect and therefore within every part of their experience, be it mundane or otherwise. Such a transformed view of the individual's wide-ranging and varied

capacity for meaning-making can be transferred to the community as a whole. Every member, each with his or her own wide variety of attributes, has a part to play in a corporate meaning-making process. This means that the profile is raised of each of those people who constitute the environment within which any individual exists. The environment is as 'ultimate' as it is perceived to be by the individual who is (constantly) making meaning within it. As well as valuing otherwise neglected aspects such as affection, therefore, Parks work more readily takes account of the enormous significance of the social dimension of meaning making. The individual's capacity for making meaning is restricted considerably if it occurs in isolation. Fowler's apparent preoccupation with individual development can have a detrimental effect if insufficient attention is given to the significance of social interaction (the faith community) to faithing.

5. <u>The relationship between the theory of faith development and Christian education</u>

As Fowler's work has become more widely known, its implications have been explored by moral developmentalists, educationalists, sociologists, psychologists and theologians.[18] Joan Cronin, writing about general education, enthused about the stimulating effect of faith development theory in bringing about "shifts of consciousness" from content-centred to process-centred approaches.[19] The emphasis might now be less upon achievement and more upon movement, less upon new knowledge and more upon dissonance, less upon just the cognitive domain and more upon the whole person. The dissonance which Cronin refers to is associated with that characteristic of faith development which strives to accommodate new experiences into an established pattern of meaning-making. The pattern of meaning-making may have to change because of the new experience: this is part of the process of development.

For Cronin the effects of this are highly significant because the learners must now trust their own experiences as much as, if not more than, those of the traditionally acknowledged authorities. Knowledge is simply one tool in the process of

growth and development, it is not an end in itself. "Fowler's approach would suggest a personal challenge for growth, a focussing on faith itself rather than on just a list of things to believe, on an environment wherein adults can honestly speak about what they believe, and on a change in attitude between the roles of teacher and learner".[20]

More recently Craig Dykstra has described faith development theory as a helpful "partner" to education.[21] Whilst the theory does not provide aims it suggests necessary competences and their qualitative characteristics against which aims might be measured. In addition faith development theory indicates what processes are going on within people as they carry out their faithing, as well as the types of experience which may promote development.

Gary Chamberlain emphasises the importance of relationships as he explores the implications of faith development theory for his own work in a Christian American high school.[22] In his essay, which is particularly concerned about adolescents in a Christian institution, he describes the need to experience models of faithing represented by people at different stages, to hear other people's faith stories, to share visions, to rebel, to strive for independence, to express faith. He then defines the Church as a "web of relationships which confirm the individual in his or her 'faithing'".[23]

Like Dykstra and Cronin, Chamberlain believes that faith development theory has a very significant part to play in Christian education. He echoes Cronin's views on dissonance and the value of emphasising process as well as content. Like Dykstra he believes that the theory of faith development offers evaluative criteria against which aims might be measured. With this in mind he considers that an awareness of faith development enables educators to make the most of all that a faith community offers in terms of "a variety of models in faith, role-taking opportunities, re-interpretations of symbols, cognitive challenges".[24] Chamberlain thus reinforces the argument concerning the importance of the community, and how both experience and participation within a faith community have the

potential to stimulate faith development.

Whilst Chamberlain concentrates upon the value of understanding faith development in the context of the whole community to adolescents and their development, John Westerhoff extends its value to everyone, even small children. Westerhoff begins from the premise that intuition, emotion, imagination, intellect, logic and analysis are amongst the myriad of aspects of human beings' ways of knowing God. He believes that such knowing begins from the moment of birth. Thus, long before humans need to argue or interpret symbols, long before they even understand our words they can begin to interpret "the tone of our voice, a smile, or a touch".[25] It is in this simple experience of others that they begin to make meaning and embark upon the development of their faithing.
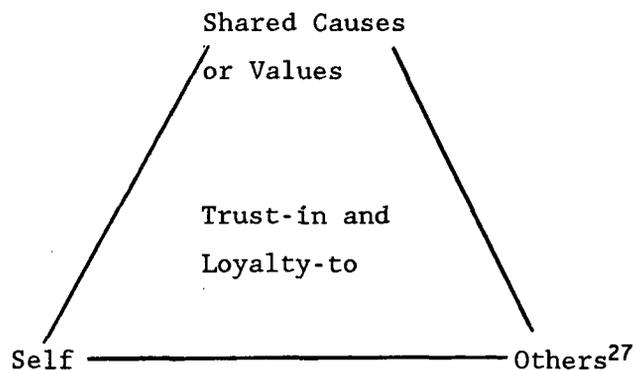
In an early response to Fowler's theory Jerome Berryman expressed the need to distinguish between its different areas of interest in order to manage what he regarded as a "crowded model".[26] He identified three areas of particular interest: language, developmental structures and personality theory. As he worked through them he realised that they provide a context within which it is possible to study the relationship people have with God. The emphasis upon relationship runs right through his paradigm, for he believes that reality is experienced in relationships, a claim that may be taken to endorse all-age interaction. The process of faith which Berryman describes involves living with conflict, 'scanning for a solution', intuitively (rather than consciously) recognising that there is a solution, consciously working out the solution, and testing the outcome to establish whether it coheres and is relevant. It might be argued from an all-age perspective that this process relies upon features which are represented throughout the whole community, and that the hard work involved in the process of faithing would be enhanced if those features are recognised and exploited. Berryman's interpretation of Fowler might be understood in simple and practical terms such as, for example, taking comfort from the child's unswerving trust in God, taking seriously the protest and questions of the adolescent or adult who continues to work out his or her own

faith, and enjoying the serenity of someone who has tested out the outcomes to their satisfaction.

The work of those practitioners not only provides suggestions as to how faith development theory informs educators, it also begins to indicate how an all-age context for learning may be useful. With this in mind it seems appropriate to be more precise about what Fowler and his colleagues have identified as aspects and stages of faith, and to indicate their relevance to all-age education.

Aspects of Faith

Fowler's concern has been to discover *how* people faith, i.e. how they construct images of themselves, other people and the world; how they relate to each other and how they relate to what they regard as ultimately powerful and valuable; how the perceived character of that source of power shapes their values, purposes and meaning, and commands their trust and loyalty. This three-way, ongoing process, originally referred to as the "dynamic triad of faith", is illustrated by a triangular diagram, partly to indicate the equal significance of self, others, and the shared causes or values; and partly to emphasise the ongoing relationship amongst the three:

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              Shared Causes
             /or Values    \
            /                \
           /                  \
          /    Trust-in and    \
         /     Loyalty-to       \
        /                        \
       /                          \
   Self ———————————————————— Others[27]
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Christians engage in this dynamic triad of faith as individuals in relationship with each other, the wider world, and the God they image who so influences the way they make meaning of life. The life which they know is known through that God, and the values that God encompasses are the values which they come to understand and to which they commit themselves. All this knowing, valuing, committing and understanding is expressed in several aspects, or dimensions of

human being.

As we have already seen, Fowler has identified seven such aspects beginning, inevitably it seems, with the *form of logic*. This first aspect, Fowler asserts, is based upon Piaget's research on cognitive development. These patterns of thinking about the objective world go through a stage by stage development alongside, and interwoven with, six other "windows on specific content domains for which the meaning-constituitive operations may be different".[28] Fowler includes further adult stages of faith development that develop Piaget's final cognitive stage of formal operations.[29] Despite occasional indications to the contrary, he continues to emphasise the dominance of cognition and never waivers in his view that it is fundamental to each of the remaining six aspects which are described as "complex clusters of cognitive skills that are structurally related".[30]

The second aspect is that of *moral judgement*. A key figure in this research is Lawrence Kohlberg who, fired by personal struggle during his adolescence and early adulthood, asked the question, "was there a universal morality or was all moral choice relative, dependent on culture or on one's own personal and emotional choice"?[31] His concerns were essentially related to social justice and education; they led him in the late 50's to research the relatively unknown area of moral development. To suggest that people have a capacity to develop moral judgement, rather than simply to receive, accept or reject moral attitudes, assumptions, values, customs and norms has been liberating and constructive for psychologists, sociologists and educationalists.

Basically, the empirical research of those involved in this area of development indicates that the way in which people make moral judgements changes. At one stage, for example, a child will do what others perceive to be wrong simply because there is a desire to avoid punishment. At the most developed stage, however, morality becomes detached even from the notion of fairness or social order, and becomes associated with allowing human beings to "be themselves". The cognitive dimension is essential to this process since the emphasis is upon reasoning. Mary Wilcox and others have noted that, whilst moral judgement is an "integral part" of faith

development, there is a sense in which it "follows some of the other aspects, because it makes use of them".[32]   For example, moral reasoning which requires an empathy with some other person demands the particular skill of being able to take another's perspective.

To be able to look at the world through other people's eyes relates to the aspect of *perspective taking*. Clearly this involves thinking. To be able to take another person's perspective is not simply for the benefit of the other person, or for society as a whole; it is essential for a balanced view of self.   Robert Selman describes stages of the development of perspective taking.   Early in life children are entirely egocentric and incapable of regarding the world from any other perspective than their own.   Gradually this might change: the perspective widens, there is an appreciation of other views and sometimes an empathy within them.   Selman labels these stages in terms of "role-taking" and links them very closely with cognitive development.[33]

Not unrelated to the aspect of perspective-taking is that of *social awareness*. This aspect of, or window into faith reveals the way in which individuals identify themselves with others in their perceived faith community.   It begins with egocentricity during infancy and early childhood.   Then there is an extension as children identify themselves with their own immediate carers and families.   In time there may be an awareness of self identity in the context of other families, classes, ethnic groups and races.   Ultimately individuals appreciate their places within humanity as a whole, recognising their solidarity with other human beings regardless of family, class, ethnic group, or race.   The implications of these stages for churches are profound, not solely in terms of, for example, how children and adults might be included within an education programme, but also in terms of how they view the bounds of their faith community, and how they relate to other faith communities.[34]

Fowler regards the *locus of authority* as an aspect which interprets and relies upon "sources of authoritative insight or 'truth' regarding the nature of the ultimate environment".[35]   For small children, authority is perceived as resting first with the primary carer.   The way in which this authority is exerted affects the individual's entire life, not least in the way it prepares them to

regard other sources of authority, assume authority themselves, share and abdicate authority. Eventually it seems, there is a widening of the boundaries of social awareness and perspective taking, along with more objective reasoning and less egocentric moral judging. No longer is there a need to look to those who are bigger or more influential: the rare person who arrives at Fowler's final stage of faith development has no undue concern for his or her own worth, and has abdicated all authority to that which is deemed ultimate, because therein is found assurance of identity and value. Authority now rests in a vision of a coherent ultimate environment and submission to its authority.

Inter-related with the locus of authority is the aspect of *world coherence*. This is the process linking up experiences: the holding together of all that occurs, in the framework of the perceived ultimate environment. Young children, incapable of structured reflection, experience life episodically, unable to hold experiences together coherently. Gradually a more mature awareness develops, albeit tacit, of some kind of consistency in the experience of themselves and others. This becomes more explicit and eventually there develops a view of the world as one interrelated mass of complex, interlinked relationships, concepts, experiences, etc. "An ultimate coherence informs one's outlook. This coherence - a complex and plural unity - centres on a oneness beyond but inclusive of the manyness of Being".[36]

Finally Fowler identifies *symbolic function* as an aspect of faith. Potentially a person's symbolic functioning goes through many changes. An example is that of how the term "God's hand" is used. Many small children simply regard it as a five-fingered physical reality - probably of giant-size. Adolescents and young adults may talk of it, on the other hand, in terms of a transcendent consciousness motivating all that is good in the world. The way in which a person uses or responds to symbols, rituals, myths and metaphors is an indication of how they relate to that which is perceived to be ultimate. For very young children the symbol and the reality are virtually inseparable; then comes a stage of literal interpretation; this may later be replaced by a discarding of the literal understanding. From there, says Fowler, there is a move to separate the symbol from its meaning, to analyse, interpret and, in

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a sense, control its effect upon the person. As the need to "explain everything" becomes less necessary, however, some individuals may come to enjoy symbols more, and appreciate the relationship between the symbol, that which is symbolised and their joint effect upon the individual. It is as though the person recognises the vision behind the original choice of the symbol, and chooses to acknowledge the subsequent potency of the symbol itself. Thus the receiving of communion at the eucharist, the presentation of a candle at baptism, the signing of the cross, etc can all become interwoven, in a new way, with what they represent. Symbols, therefore, become "transparent to the depth of the actuality they represent."[37]

The relevance of the aspects to all-age

It is clear from the earlier reference to some of the criticisms of Fowler's work that the seven aspects listed above may well inadequately describe the full extent of how people have faith in God. Interaction with one another and with their perceived ultimate environment is also regarded by some as an undeniable characteristic of meaning-making. The acknowledgement of these extra aspects and their interaction is significant as far as all-age is concerned. First the faith community is part, or the whole of the ultimate environment for many and therefore provides a context for interaction. In addition, the wider range of aspects emphasises the fact that people of all ages have experiences (to share) of fear, dread, awe, suffering, humour, etc as well as cognition, morality, locating authority, perspective taking and so on. This assists in shifting the emphasis from cognition: Fowler's aspects are often regarded as consequences of cognition; those referred to above are more obviously aspects which are not so readily associated with cognition (they relate more to affection.) For some, we may note "there is no such thing as reasoning without feeling".[38] It also challenges the apparent primacy of cognition by rendering it one of a multitude of aspects rather than the first of seven.

The following description of all-age learning in the context of all-age worship may illustrate how Fowler's aspects relate to individuals as they make meaning and celebrate together in a

Christian faith community.

The service took place on Sunday morning in early 1992 at St Andrew's, Glen Eden, in Auckland, New Zealand. All-age worship was a regular feature in this church where the furniture was arranged informally, with chairs moved around to form a circle of a single row and scatter cushions dispersed around the carpeted floor. The walls were covered with posters, the result of the previous few weeks' learning activities. The altar, across one corner, was adorned with a beautiful home-made frontal: a sunrise painted by the youth group on the previous Friday evening.

In the other corner was an electronic organ and an overhead projector. The church was filled with people of all ages. It was clear that all were accustomed to this seating arrangement, with the exception of the Boys Brigade who appeared (in uniform) for Parade Sunday.

The priest commanded everyone's attention throughout, and put a lot of energy into keeping the service going at a rate which would prevent boredom. There was little time for quietness and a cheerful sense of celebration. Apart from lots of singing, the majority of time was devoted to a learning exercise which concentrated upon the Transfiguration, and celebrated the presence of God around us. Before the teaching time began, children under the age of six were invited to leave church and join "Enid" in the porch for a variety of activities.

The teaching session took a familiar line. It had attractive aspects, such as background music providing a context for the reading about the Transfiguration. Members of the congregation were asked to share a "mountain top" experience before being asked to move outside in order to discover items which made them "think of God". These were brought back into church where descriptions and reflections upon the items were briefly shared.

The congregation now moved into groups in order to write prayers of praise on pre-prepared paper clouds. One group seemed to have an enormous struggle with this task: it comprised several rather embarrassed Boys' Brigade members and all three of their adult

leaders. The senior leader immediately took charge. She clearly felt a great sense of responsibility for her charges and was anxious that they would behave appropriately. For her this was not a comfortable experience. Whether it was the fact that the context was all-age, or whether it was simply because the leader was unfamiliar with the Church is hard to tell. She moved to her group, ready to begin. "Well, let's think of a prayer ...... words of praise about God ......?" Obviously responding to something of what had been said about the trip outside, one boy of about 14 said, in a very self-conscious manner about God being "like a tree with spreading roots". Another adult made a half-hearted attempt to endorse the suggestion, but this was clearly an event with which the Boys Brigade were not familiar and there followed an embarrassed silence. Perhaps if they had been integrated more fully into the other groups they would have found it easier, even shared the enjoyment. These other groups responded readily and easily to the request, so that lots of prayers were read aloud, each linked to the other with a chorus. (The contrast between the responses from the Boys Brigade and those from the other groups indicates how important it is to be comfortable with the process adopted in all-age learning and worship.) Then came the communion, with everyone receiving the bread, regardless of age. The children were given chocolate fish instead of wine, and then the service finished.

What would have been the impact upon people first entering the church with its light, warm, welcoming atmosphere; informal furnishings, friendly faces and a general sense of expectation? Surely the cheerfully decorated walls and the splash of colour on the altar frontal would have added to some very positive first impressions. It was clear that the visual and auditory senses would have been positively stimulated. For a small child, as well as an older person, the colours, sounds, even smells were welcome. The tactile senses were catered for too, with comfortable chairs and soft scatter cushions. Whether the impact of these impressions would have engendered dread or awe, wonder or fear, trust or suspicion requires more than casual observation. But for those people nurtured so far in a loving and secure environment, the chances are that here was fertile faithing ground of a positive and supportive kind.

Experience of worship and learning within the church takes place in a much wider context of meaning-making. For all churchgoers the foundations for faithing are established long before they ever enter a church building. Earliest experiences of trust and security affect responses to the variety of environments and circumstances within which people discover themselves throughout later life. Meaning-making is made more or less of a challenge according to whether or not damage was done to the individuals concerned in infancy. Degrees of hope, despair, mistrust, trust, etc. affect all people, but some have to cope with much greater degrees of the negative extremes of these dimensions. An awareness of these factors requires sensitivity to the unknown depths of those people who come through the church door.

It is also important to bear in mind that some of the adults may be making meaning in just the same way as some of the children who are present. According to Fowler the different faith operations, be they those of moral judging, world coherence, symbolic function or whatever, are not necessarily going to develop further as people grow older. While describing faith development as invariant and normally inevitable, Fowler reminds us that "structural stages are by no means stages of maturation, for the ageing process does not provide an automatic advance to a higher stage".[39]

Fowler's aspects provide helpful perspectives upon what was going on during this service. For example, there was a child there who wanted to stay in the Church with his family when others of his age were invited to go out. He was a stranger to the Church: his bounds of social awareness were probably familial. He would feel safest with those he knew, his family. Other 6-year-olds present, knowing their church community, may have been able to extend their boundaries to people with whom they associated. For very much smaller children this would have been much harder, which probably accounts for some infants' distress when left in a creche.

When people were invited to form groups, the Boys' Brigade leaders stayed together, as did the boys themselves: it would be no more than speculation to suggest that their unfamiliarity with the church caused temporary insecurity, so that they remained within the social bounds they knew well. For the boys, possibly in stage 3 of

Fowler's faith stages, their membership of the Brigade would be significant since much of their sense of identity is derived from their peer group and other people who are important to them. Perhaps the same might be said of their leaders?

The priest who welcomed everyone, strangers and regulars alike, displayed a wider boundary of social awareness. Using beautiful pebbles gathered during a time of crisis in his own life as an example, he invited everyone to bring a symbol of God's presence into the church. It was evident that the symbolic functioning operating within him involved more than a literal interpretation: it was as though those pebbles incorporated in themselves his vision of God's presence. He would probably have been able to explain why if asked, and may have responded in terms of their colour, strength, beauty, smoothness, or permanence. It seemed, however, that this was not necessary for him, (although it might have helped other members of the congregation who were at other faith stages).

Other people brought in flowers, branches, etc and were encouraged to talk about these symbols, a faith-stimulating exercise as people at later stages shared their experiences with those at earlier stages and vice versa. The meanings generated in this way would have ranged from confused images of God as an actual tree branch amongst small children, the older children associating the qualities of a branch with qualities characteristic of the God they image. Some adults might operate in such a way that seeing a branch presented in this context triggers off for them a response to God, there no longer being a need to analyse or interpret its meaning. Jeremiah's account of seeing the 'almond tree' and the 'boiling pot' serve as an example of such a response. (Jeremiah 1: 11 ff). Jeremiah had no need to analyse or de-mythologise these symbols: they spoke to him clearly of God's anger against Judah, and his promise of deliverance. This latter type of symbolic function is associated with later stages of faith development and precedes, in Fowler's terms, a stage where symbols are "transparent to the depth of actuality" because of the person's "participation in transcendent actuality."[40]

This service was carefully designed for the benefit of each age group, so that everyone might learn not simply from what was said by the priest but by the intergenerational experience and activities. Here was an opportunity to know God and others better through for

example, aspects of symbolic functioning (the pebbles), locating of authority (the group work), bounds of social awareness (the congregational activities), awe (the colourful, worshipful atmosphere), dread (the separation, or not, of small children from parents), trust (the degrees of openness and preparedness to participate in the suggested activities) and cognition (the opportunity to think through the story of the Transfiguration and the meaning of the account of the pebbles). The experience of each of the participants would not necessarily be consistently comfortable. The Boy's Brigade leader, the Boy's Brigade member and the small child who did not want to leave his parents are amongst those who may well have been disturbed by some of the expectations and activities. They may have experienced a degree of fear in their insecurity. This is not necessarily negative within the whole process of meaning-making, particularly if there are sound foundations of underlying trust. "It is precisely the experience of fear which provides a basis for trust, and that trust in an Ultimate Being grows in the course of coping with anxiety".[41] Everyone present had the opportunity to engage in what was going on at St Andrews, in terms of both learning and worship. It is possible that for some a change was taking place in the way they knew, valued and committed themselves to God, whom they regarded as ultimate. For Fowler such change constitutes a new stage of faith development.

Faith Developing

It has already been established that for Fowler and his colleagues the part of faithing which develops is its form. Insight into how the form of faith develops can be gained from analysing the way in which a person deals with the contents of their faith. Various operations, already identified as aspects, work with the centres of value, images of power and master stories in which they believe. Centres of value and images of power are those which bring meaning, worth, and sustenance to the individual or community. Whatever the heart is set upon is that which brings value upon the person. "We value that which seems of transcendent worth and in relation to which our lives have worth."[42]

For Christian communities the dominant centre of value is Jesus, of

whom stories are told which express values and images of power. These stories are master stories, i.e. "epic tales, homely wisdom and analogies for our lives, poetic images and mythologies that we tell ourselves and through which we interpret our own lives and our own stories".[43] Interpretations of the stories and perceptions of value and power differ according to the personalities who hold them and are moulded by their experience and development. The Church congregation, with its wide cross section of members, holds together a variety of images of Jesus which, whilst unique to the experience, personality and developmental stage of each person, have sufficient characteristics in common to bind the group together in worship of that which is deemed ultimate to them.

The values and images of power expressed through Jesus (the Christian Centre of Value) include justice, compassion, order, equality, safety and purpose. Imagine the complex mixture of operations as each member thinks about, appreciates her own and other's views of, and values the authority of, for example, justice as represented by Jesus. These operations also relate to how justice is extended to others and how moral judgements are made, processes which in turn are associated with symbols of justice and which are themselves integrated with other operations. Personal experiences of justice and associated feelings must also be taken into account in this dynamic and complex activity.

In development, as each window into faith plays its part in the provision of a more holistic and integrated picture of what is believed about the centres of value, images of power and master stories, a kind of equilibrium is achieved and a new faith stage is entered. In between each faith stage are periods of time when the pace of development amongst the different aspects vary. These periods are times of transition; when everything balances into a new "structural whole" the transition is over, and yet another faith stage is reached.[44]

As has already been noted, much criticism of Fowler's work relates to Piaget's research into child development, which has itself come under scrutiny and criticism.[45] Margaret Donaldson claims that it is the nature of the experiment, as much as a child's ability, which indicates whether or not a child is capable of particular cognitive

operations. She recognised that children were capable of a far wider range of cognitive operations than Piaget's experiments ever revealed. This constitutes a challenge to Fowler's model of development, but for those who would endorse all-age, the criticism may contribute to the argument that generations should learn together. Adherents of the fundamentally Piagetian model recognise that movement to new stages is not wholly dependent upon chronological age. Therefore there may be people of different ages who are operating within the same cognitive stage and possibly within a similar faith stage. But even if this stages model is questioned, the provision of all-age may be said to take into account the fact that individuals at the same age might be capable of a wider variety of operations than previously recognised. From both perspectives, therefore, all-age may be a positive contribution to Christian education and worship, and the challenge to all-age is to design activities which meet a variety of needs.

What are these faith stages which, whilst criticised, are still regarded by many as a reliable tool for the understanding of how people develop in the ways they make meaning? I shall attempt a description in the context of the all-age service at St Andrew's. Every possible faith stage as described by Fowler might have been represented there; and the different members of the congregation might have received the story in a variety of ways partly as a consequence of this fact. Westerhoff, writing about bringing up children within the Christian faith, interprets Fowler's theory of faith development within that context and suggests how the majority of members of a faith community look "to the community as its tradition and its tradition as its source for authority. We depend on significant others for the stories that explain our lives and how our people live".[46] The way in which the master story is told also influences those other two components of faith content: centres of value and images of power.

At St Andrew's the story of the Transfiguration was carefully read, with dramatic background music. The surroundings were bright and light and there was a stillness amongst the congregation. How would the infants present have responded according to their *undifferentiated* faith stage? For the very young what would have been most important would have been their sense of well-being. This

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stage (or pre-stage), which Fowler has also labelled that of "primal faith", encompasses those for whom the primary carer is the ultimate environment. As time goes by the other immediate relatives or carers become part of the ultimate environment as the boundaries of social awareness extend. Fowler believes that in these earliest years the foundations of trust and trusting are laid, so that the experience with those immediately around them is important. The Church community is part of that environment, and becomes more significant as the child widens her boundaries. Perhaps the most important contribution to be made by the faith community at this stage is to the parent or carer, for it is within that primary relationship that the seeds of trust are being sown and nurtured. The smallest infant will be affected by her carer's contentment or tension. The atmosphere of the Church must be appropriate for the mother, in this way the good cheer, warmth, brightness, colour, stillness, and music, play a part in preparing the very young for their lives of faith. This pre-stage can last up to the age of 4.

Older infants respond to this atmosphere as much as do tiny children. In addition they might have recognised some of the words, symbolic of the beginnings of shared understanding. These words include "Jesus", "God", "bread", "wine", "peace", etc. If all goes well for the young child, she will begin to think beyond herself and will be open to love, trust, hope and courage. If, however, she is born into an unstable environment, there is the danger of fear and suspicion developing together with an inability to think or care beyond herself. Fritz Oser, the European structural developmentalist places a heavy emphasis upon the significance of dependence in his description of the earliest stage of faith. For the very young, whatever is deemed to be ultimate is that which "protects you or sends you something hurtful. At a particular moment there is total hope; at another there is downright despair ".[47] A church community who takes this research seriously may well provide the type of positive atmosphere in which the children found themselves at St Andrew's.

For the children below the age of six who received separate teaching during the service much that has been said so far still pertains. They were largely in the *intuitive-projective* faith stage associated with children aged anywhere between 2 and 7 years (Fowler calls this

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stage 1). The atmosphere would remain all-important, but of more specific significance for these children might be a magical fantastical quality about the story in which people "sparkled", appeared, disappeared, etc, and in which voices were heard coming from the heavens. "Whilst appreciative of stories and capable of becoming deeply engrossed in them, they are seldom able to reconstruct very adequately the narrative pattern and detail of a story. The reconstructions they make take on an episodic quality, and in them fantasy and make-believe are not distinguished from factuality".[48] It is unlikely that these children would have been bored by the telling of the story: the atmosphere was such that if the text was beyond comprehension, the music, the voice, and the physical environment remained compelling. For those intuitive-projective children it is likely that there would be no questioning of the factual or fictional status of the story: it was told and therefore it had happened. God would have carried all this out just like a good wizard in a fairy tale.

Educationalists and parents value the contribution made to a child's development by stories, actions, music and symbols. This is particularly because those in the intuitive-projective stage think episodically, rather than in narrative. Stories are collections of symbols and enrich their development considerably. Usually children enjoy stories too: this is evident when they are observed at pantomimes, listening to stories, taking part in seasonal and traditional family activities and singing nursery rhymes. With this in mind it is a cause for regret that many faith communities deliberately remove children from their symbol-rich rituals and liturgy because these are regarded as being beyond a child's comprehension.[49] Faith communities which make the most of their rituals and symbols have much to offer those in the intuitive-projective faith stage.

Those children and young people who were aged between 6 - 7 years and 11 - 12 years, together with some adults in the congregation were probably in the *mythic literal* stage, otherwise known as Stage 2. They would also accept this story - or reject it - as literal and historical fact. Some of them might wonder how it all happened: how did those characters appear, disappear and glow? There would be a great struggle with the priest's question, "Have

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you ever had a mountain top experience?", for at this stage
"children can only tell stories in life, not about life".[50]   The
priest would presumably not have been content to receive answers
concerning stories of sledging or hill-walking!   Oser considers
this to be a time when there is a greater sense of mutuality between
the believer and God: not only might the child regard God as subject
to influence by prayer, but also as a friend who relies upon our
deeds too.[51]   This is because the person at this stage can begin to
take another's perspective although there is little ability to
reflect.

What have people in other stages of development to gain from those
in the mythic-literal stage?   The emerging ability to bring
previously episodic experiences into an order and unity, along with
the beginnings of an appreciation of other people's perspectives,
presents a challenge to others to express themselves with care and
clarity, perhaps through media other than the written word.   Well
told stories are important because other perspectives have to be
presented clearly and in concrete terms.   The need to belong
expressed by those in this early stage may add a new sense of
motivation and commitment to the rest of the congregation.   A
combination of trust, openness and the need to ask questions is a
generous gift to any community.

Greater exposure to the characteristics of earlier faithing stages,
such as this mythic-literal stage, may provide a refreshing
re-awakening amongst those who are at later stages.   Fowler regards
new stages as being built upon previous ones, "without negating or
supplanting them".   With reference to stages 5 and 6 he suggests
that "the movement doubles back .... toward the participation
and oneness of earlier stages, though at quite different levels of
complexity, differentiation and inclusiveness".[51]

Adults who remain at this mythic-literal stage may never have had
the opportunity to ask questions.   To use the story of the
Transfiguration in an all-age learning situation not only allows
them to hear the questions referred to above, it also gives them the
opportunity to *ask* the questions - even if only vicariously.   The
potential here for asking questions and engaging in responses is
great, and such a process might have far reaching consequences in

terms of stimulating faith development to Stage 3, the *synthetic-conventional* stage. Whether church leaders have a desire for people to ask questions is another matter.

Those people who are in the synthetic-conventional stage may well be wondering what everyone else is thinking, particularly members of their own peer groups and, more specifically, those respected individuals upon whom they wish to model themselves. There may well be a barrier to understanding in the form of a growing scepticism about the credibility of these types of story. This scepticism, which is characteristic of emerging abstract thinking, needs to be expressed and addressed. Otherwise there is a danger that it will be either repressed, or lead to a rejection of the entire master story along with the centres of value and images of power.[53] Either of these processes is a stumbling block to faith development and effective Christian living. The age group most likely to be represented in this stage are those between 11 or 12 and 17 or 18 years, as well as many adults. This stage can be quite exciting because there is an increased capacity for reasoning and the potential for helpful discussion.

"Serious study of the story, and engagement with historical, theological, and moral thinking about life become important at this stage".[54] During this time of potential doubt, criticism, protest and experimentation a person is struggling to decide where trust, loyalty and commitment should be placed. A new type of self consciousness has emerged in which identity is closely associated with values, commitments and relationships. These are often embodied in others within the peer group, as well as amongst significant authorities, who themselves might range from teachers to film stars, clergy to sporting heroes. It is very important within this stage to work out appropriate beliefs and values in order to identify where trust and loyalty are required.[55] It is unusual to stand out from the crowd at this stage, and the "crowd" is usually those within the peer group with whom a person has chosen to conform. Discussion is particularly important with the development of abstract thinking, for it is important to be prepared for the time when it becomes possible not only to reason more fully, but to stand aside cognitively and reflect upon what is believed. A lot of people remain at this stage, however, and never move into the

stage which enables them to see themselves more objectively: their meaning-making occurs, but they know not how.

Others within the congregation may not have been over-concerned about whether or not Jesus was literally sparkling, or whether various characters were appearing and disappearing on the mountainside. More important to people within Stage 4 which is described as an *individuative-reflective* style of faithing, would be the meaning behind the story. Whether or not it really happened may be irrelevant: what is important is that, in the context of a mythical narrative, here is a profound set of truths which are more easily heard and understood in the context of a story than within a theological treatise of abstract concepts. This is all part of the attempt of an adult, often from 17 or 18 onwards or (for another group) middle age onwards, working out her *own* faith on the basis of her abstract, critical and reflective way of thinking. It is associated with the de-mythologising of symbols into doctrines. This move is highly dependent on cognitive development and may occur at a time of fundamental change, such as leaving home or starting work.[56] Fowler regards the move to this stage to be crucial, as individuals are evaluating what they believe and their relationships with others in the community of faith in order to take responsibility for their own faith. He encourages church leaders to be sensitive and patient at this traumatic time.

Yet he also encourages them to promote movement on from the individuative-reflective stage, which involves discarding the tendency at this stage to "an arid over intellectualism, an unrealistic sense of independence, an over-eagerness to 'close' or resolve untidy issues, and a lack of attention to - or awareness of - the unconscious dynamics of the self".[57] There was a senior citizen at St Andrew's who seemed thoroughly to enjoy the entire experience of all-age learning and worship. For her the friends with whom she was staying were symbolic of God's presence. Perhaps she was within the stage of *conjunctive* faithing. "Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience. It generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of those who are 'other'".[58] She may not have been over-concerned about the literal truth or the tidiness of the story of the Transfiguration, but she would probably

not want to dismiss the possibility of it having happened. Its symbolism would have been powerful in terms of what it meant to her about God's relationship to Creation. Like the four-year-olds she may have been wide-eyed with wonder, but not at the apparently magical quality of the story. Her awe may have been a response to a perception of God working in the world in a variety of amazing and sometimes paradoxical ways, including that illustrated by the story of the Transfiguration. The appeal of this stage is the apparent ability to "sit light" to what has been taken - perhaps too seriously - before. What is taken seriously now is a sense of one's interdependence, an acceptance of imperfection, and an openness to the views of others. Whilst he does not regard movement from stage to stage as the primary aim of the Church for its members, Fowler is of the opinion that "the conjunctive stage provides an informing way of appropriating and entering into the Christian memory and hope" because it is open-ended and there is a willingness to re-work all that has been experienced in the past.[59]

Fowler also describes a sixth and final stage of *universalizing* faith, which is not generally regarded as verifiable because of an apparent shift in methodology and insufficient empirical evidence.[60] Fowler would suggest that for anyone within the stage of universalizing faith, a story's truth would be held within the whole event. It would lie within the history of the story, the telling and hearing of it through the ages; and it would be regarded as something integrated into the lives of all people, past and present. Thus its telling in the service would be profound and powerful.

Some Implications for Faith Development within the Whole Church Community

On reflection, so much more could have been learned in our example if careful work had been carried out after the telling of the story to discover what it meant to different people. Perhaps if more time had been spent on the story outside the worship context the participants would have known what they wanted to do with it. As it was the priest seemed to have worked through what it meant for him and proceeded to carry the congregation through with him: some readily, some uncomprehendingly, some reluctantly, some grasping his

drift, others simply responding to his authority, this exploration
of how a master story might be received by people at different faith
stages indicates the richness of faithing going on within any
all-age church congregation. It does not, however, reflect the
enormous lengths of transition periods between stages which may last
for longer than the faith stage itself, and can be most
uncomfortable. "We often speak of stages as if they are plateaus of
happiness and feelings of peace. This is not the case. Movement
from stage to stage involves pain, struggle, despair, and perhaps
finally new insight. Development is risky".[61] Perhaps the above
exploration does reflect the lack of precision which is inevitable
when describing a group of people. The application of faith
development theory cannot be too tidy, particularly without proper
research techniques.

Within the Christian story God is believed to be ultimate. God is
understood in terms of the master stories, centres of value, and
images of power portrayed in the life of the Christian Church. The
way in which these contents are presented must have an effect upon
the way in which God is imaged, related to, valued and known. In
other words the transmission of the content has an influence upon
the form, just as the form influences the receiving of the content.
Whilst Fowler emphasises its form in his research, he does not
underestimate the significance of the content of faith. He
recognises form and content as discrete, but also acknowledges their
inter-relatedness. Indeed he believes that the content of faith
can influence the form to the extent of bringing about a stage
change, just as a new way of faithing can cause people to re-think
the content and come to image their ultimate environment in
re-defined terms.[62] Presumably ineffective transmission of faith
content may prevent proper development of form, and inhibited
development of form can limit the richness of the content. This
would be to the detriment of both the individual and the faith
community. Effective faithing can only occur hand in hand with
valued positive content. By the same token, valued and balanced
content must promote positive faith development.

In a recent essay, Fowler pointed out that we should not expect to
find "structural features apart from their integration with the
'structuring power' or the normative 'contents' - the symbols,

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beliefs, rituals, stories and ethics - of particular religious or philosophical traditions".[63]   Originally Fowler made it quite clear that his work so far had "neglected..... any effort at a *theoretical* account of the interplay of structure and content in the life of faith".[64]   Subsequently he seems to have begun to address this in his attempts to discover more about how faith development is connected to a "conversion" in the content of faith.   Risking criticism of compromising the social science element of his research, he has explored how the development of faithing operations relates to how faith is lived out - in practical terms - in the community.   "Conversion means a realignment of our affections, the re-structuring of our virtues, and the growth in lucidity and power of our partnership with God's work in the world".[65]

V. Bailey Gillespie believes that the contents of faith and the dynamic relationship between both content and structure are both essential components of conversion, which he defines as "an event that searches out unifying qualities of existence that give meaning of ultimate value to life".[66]   It thus becomes clearer why Parks has commented, in her own critique of Fowler's work, that "the consequences of the relationships between a given faith content and the differing stage structures has not yet been explicated.[67]   In this context it is sufficient to say that form and content are discrete yet inter-active and that research should be pursued in order to discover more about how they inter-relate.   All of this inevitably has implications for education, because it is primarily through education that the contents of faith are transmitted, understood, owned and allowed effectively to interact with the form.

Further Implications

It is important to indicate some of the implications of faith development theory for Church education and, in particular all-age learning.   For example, bearing in mind that being of a particular age does not necessarily presuppose a particular faith stage, perhaps more inter-generational events, effectively processed, might tap the richness of the different experiences and understandings of people at different stages, to the benefit of everyone.

Later in this thesis a description of an all-age confirmation group

indicates how such enrichment might take place in practice. It has been noted more than once that the cognitive dimension of faith is a major feature within Fowler's work. Piaget's research shows that cognitive development does not necessarily correspond to age or physical maturation. Criticisms of Piaget, referred to earlier, indicate that assumptions made about children at different Piagetian stages may be unfounded and inaccurate. Both positions have implications for those Church educators who have unrealistic perceptions of what is being learned based on the assumption, for example, that a learning programme designed for abstract-thinking adults is appropriate for all adults and inappropriate for all children. Some barriers to learning may be broken down when all ages are brought together and learning is designed for individuals within a group who, it may be assumed, are at varied stages of cognitive development. The important questions for planners would be, how realistic is it to set about planning an event for people with a wide range of cognitive development? If it is realistic, how best can it be done? Within this thesis the argument is that all-age learning is one effective means of catering for people of a wide range of cognitive development.

Gabriel Moran, in emphasising the value of long-term education, suggests that an inter-generational approach allows for the mutual enrichment of people at different faith stages.[68] He considers that the idea of development assists in clarifying the meaning of education which he says is, by definition, a lifelong process. Not only should people be encouraged to move into new patterns of dealing with experience (such as children being helped to abstract, to deduce, etc.), they should also be encouraged to appreciate characteristics of those in other stages. For example, Moran believes that play has been underestimated in its positive contribution to development: "I am not being romantic about childhood, just emphasizing that adults have to rediscover some of the mystery, play, and vulnerability that come easily with childhood".[69] He is also confident that adults and children can help each other deal with death, on account of their different ways of dealing with and responding to suffering. He hopes that older adults might be encouraged by youth to value apparently naive ideals, and in turn to encourage young people to continue in their own searches for meaning. A particularly helpful point from Moran

is his emphasis on the concept of time: that there is always the opportunity for further development, no matter how old you are. There is also always the possibility of failure, no matter how well developed a person appears to be.

Jerome W. Berryman, has argued that Fowler's research highlights the importance of relationships in the faithing process.[70] His work on "Godly play" bears this out; it also affirms Moran's interest in the value of play to all generations. "Godly play is growth enhancing because it is a place where one can be not only with the true self but also with the true self of others".[71] According to Berryman godly play is a way of knowing God: it offers opportunities of communicating in a variety of ways not necessarily dependent upon the spoken word.

Berryman believes that children are much more in touch with major life issues such as death, suffering, awe: they need religious language to make sense of these encounters with the "existential boundaries of life."[72] Their experience of Godly play provides such religious language, and it can take a variety of forms: such as games, art and storytelling. Godly play stimulates the imagination, the activity which Berryman believes to be the creative work of God, because it is an attempt to make order out of experience. Laughter is a characteristic of Godly play, as is confidence and doubt. But, this can be dangerous because both confidence and doubt may lead to challenge and change. Berryman encourages adults to care for, support, and be honest with children as the latter use their imaginations and face existential questions which relate to ultimate questions. He would also, however, encourage adults to participate in Godly play for the sake of their own faith journeys. In yet another sense, therefore, we are being encouraged to "change and become like children", so as to "enter the Kingdom of Heaven".[73]

The case is strengthened for all-age work. Age becomes the less significant criterion and the emphasis becomes more and more upon those characteristics of different stages which are associated with Christian centres of value and images of power. Christian learning is concerned with shared understandings, beliefs and values, so that the purpose of the all-age educator is to identify the pertinent

characteristics, and work out imaginative ways in which people can learn these from each other. Someone who is asking questions needs someone else to hear them; those who wish to hear the faith stories told need others to tell them; someone who wishes to protest and argue, analyze and criticise needs others with whom to disagree and "search"; those who simply wish to enjoy the faith community need their friends. Adults need to be protected from complacency and encouraged by younger members to move on, those who do not or cannot ask questions need to hear others ask them; and young people need somewhere safe to rebel. Everyone needs to feel that there is a community in which they truly belong, which they can leave, to which they can return - a place to be safe and at home, regardless of stage or age.

Within this chapter it has been evident that there is a case in favour of the argument that faith development might be stimulated by effective Christian education. I have argued that all-age learning might be one component of such effective Christian education. The following chapter looks more closely at what constitutes Christian education, and how all-age might fit into programmes of learning in Churches.

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CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND ALL-AGE LEARNING

Faith development may well be enhanced by effective Christian education. What is the value of education, particularly Christian education? How is it perceived, and how best might it be implemented? Is Christian education exclusively cognitive, or does it involve the whole person? What is meant by instruction, conditioning, indoctrination or learning by discovery? How do the formative and critical dimensions of the educational process relate to one another? This second chapter addresses these questions as they relate to Church education, particularly within an all-age context.

The Value of Education

The Christian Church has a long history of involvement in general educational provision in England.[1] Owing to sociological and educational developments within this country an ongoing feature of educational debate is the relationship between school, religious education, nurture and the Church (or any faith community). On the whole it seems that many people would agree that a primary place for nurture is within the home or faith community.[2] The Church therefore has to be clear about the relationship of education to the process of Christian nurture. Clearly education, in general, is a term with positive connotations. It is considered to be a good thing, a basic right of all people and of benefit not only to those for whom it is accessible, but also to the wider society of which they are part. To label an activity 'educational' implies that it is approved of and has value.[3] Why is it so valued?

Extrinsically the benefits are evident for all to see: whilst there are exceptions, on the whole those in society who are regarded as being educated are materially better off, able to make choices, involved in worthwhile tasks, appreciative of literature and the arts, articulate and numerate. The extrinsic value of education is measured, not just by an individual or group possessing knowledge, but by how that knowledge is used. The extrinsic value of

education in the Church might be measured by example, changed behaviour or lifestyle, its "success" depends upon what is considered by those responsible for Church education to be worthwhile.

Education implies possession of knowledge, understanding and an appreciation of issues and ideas. For many educators the educational process is of value in itself, their aims are *intrinsic* to the discipline and any other outcomes are of secondary importance, perhaps even incidental. No matter how desirable are certain types of change, development or religious commitment, some educators within this sphere would concern themselves primarily with the specific educational process and its outcomes, and attach less significance to the further outcomes that may be approved and desirable, but not in themselves educational.[4] It is much easier to justify education when the extrinsic value is evident in commonly acknowledged worthwhile outcomes. Lengthy debates might take place about who has the authority to decide what is worthwhile within a system of education, whether it be State education, community education, or Church education. However, according to R.S. Peters the people who need to work that out are "the members of the society whose system it is".[5] (Later we will see how the all-age learning dimension of Christian education widens the scope for this debate because all-age widens the source of authority for decisions concerning what are worthwhile outcomes of Christian learning.) Within the Church the extrinsic aims are usually associated with nurture and commitment. Education in Church communities, it is normally assumed, will lead to long term membership and is valued accordingly.

This means that there has to be clarity about the aims of an educational process. Kenneth Lawson, emphasising the need for such clarity about our extrinsic and intrinsic aims, recognises that there may well have to be instrumental (extrinsic) aims, but reminds educators that their concern is "firstly with the logic of (educational) concepts and secondly with the practical implications".[6] He refers to secular education but exactly the same might be said of Christian education in Church communities where the primary aim of educators might be to help people to know more, to question, argue or deduce. In other words they aim to

help people to get to grips with the knowledge and issues associated with Christianity. What their students do with these new skills depends on other factors, including what may be the extrinsic aims of the course. For example it may be an extrinsic aim to bring about commitment: outcomes associated with increasing knowledge and understanding of Christianity are therefore a priority. Whilst they may also aspire to extrinsic aims such as a transformation of outlooks, and behaviour which is considered worthwhile, they may not want to predict this as a certainty. This is because they acknowledge that other factors (such as individual experience and circumstance), as well as the freedom of the learner to make choices on the basis of new knowledge and understanding, have just as important a part to play in their future actions.

It is not unusual to have extrinsic aims; neither is it unusual to be unclear about the specific nature of each, and the distinction between them. Yvonne Craig's very broad definition of education in the context of the Church of England shows how both the distinction and link are held together when she writes that education "means spending a lifetime learning how to gain knowledge and use it wisely".[7] Learning how to gain knowledge might be regarded as an intrinsic aim; actually gaining it and using it wisely, extrinsic aims. It also reminds us of the debate concerning who decides what is meant by using knowledge "wisely".

Craig also reminds us of the link between education and faith development because she associates the process of education (which she describes as lifelong) with growing in faith. In the previous chapter it became clear that for Fowler, when different aspects of faith operate in new ways in order to make meaning of experience, outlooks are transformed. Christian education has its part to play in stimulating such changes, and all-age learning has a particular contribution to make here.

What is Christian Education?

Like any education, Christian education is an intentional process of learning.[8] The process may take different forms such as instruction, schooling, learning by discovery, conditioning, and indoctrination. There may be varying emphases upon the formative

and critical elements. The activity itself may be lifelong and wide-ranging, but what are its aims, how does all-age help to bring them about, and what might be some of the predictable or unpredictable outcomes?

In this thesis Christian education has been defined in fairly broad terms as an intentional process that increases knowledge and understanding of what it means to have faith in the context of the Christian community. The psychological and philosophical understandings of the processes by which this takes place may correspond entirely with those associated with secular learning. Within the Church however, the aims and associated (worthwhile) outcomes are explicitly concerned with the formation of particular knowledge, attitudes, values and beliefs. Jeff Astley has described this understanding of Christian education ('Christian Religious Education'), as a process by which *Christian learning* takes place.[9] The process usually involves "teaching", which is the "intentional facilitation (promotion, enabling, aiding) of *Christian learning*".[10] This account of the matter distinguishes between a nurturing process within a community of faith ('teaching religion') and the more detached and objective approach of school Religious Education ('teaching about religion').

My definition of Christian education assumes some kind of commitment to Christianity. It also acknowledges that during or following the process of education within the faith community, choices may be made by an individual which signal a rejection of Christianity. Paradoxically this may be an outcome of effective Christian education because the person has sought knowledge, applied reasoning and taken action in the light of new understandings. Those outcomes might not correspond with the Church's desired extrinsic aims, but the educational process would have been carried out with integrity and with sound intrinsic aims.

Such a rejection relates to Fowler's understanding of faith development. According to his description of the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 there is a struggle as people strive to take responsibility for their own beliefs.[11] A rejection of faith contents may be temporary and a normal characteristic of the ongoing developmental process of faithing. However, if the Church fails to

appreciate this and does not take it seriously, perhaps the rejection will be permanent.

It could be argued that a Church which is clear and honest about the intrinsic and extrinsic aims of Christian education as presented here - in particular the understanding of Christianity (intrinsic aim) and commitment to it (extrinsic aim) - should acknowledge that to fulfil the first may jeopardise the second. At the very least it should appreciate the unpredictability of some extrinsic aims. The transmission of new knowledge, new skills and the ability to reflect upon them is a potentially powerful, risky and creative activity. Educators have a moral responsibility to be clear about the intentions, aspirations and intended outcomes of any programme of learning. The structuring of learning experiences depends upon those who initiate them; the effect depends upon how those being educated deal cognitively, emotionally, and socially with the experiences. This, in turn depends upon age, ability and aptitude. Such a systematic, ongoing and sustained process is education. An educator will look to changed understandings, skills, attitudes and behaviour in order to measure the effectiveness of learning processes. Society in general, and institutions in particular, have a high investment in these and in the further (extrinsic) outcomes of education. In bestowing authority upon certain individuals or groups to provide learning, they also bestow upon them a high degree of responsibility. That responsibility is to engender attitudes and behaviour which are approved and affirmed by those who have bestowed authority in the first place, for example, the State, or the Church of England.

Other Perspectives on Christian Education

Kevin Nichols has expressed some anxiety about the tendency to vagueness about the purpose and process of education, particularly in the light of the changed relationships between Church (in his case, the Roman Catholic Church) and State .[12] Nichols believes education represents "liberation". His theory draws on concepts of education which have emerged during the last thirty years and yet have roots within ideas spanning the whole history of Western Civilisation. Nichols adopts a fairly broad definition of education as a process of initiation "into forms of knowledge set in

a rational tradition which encourage personal autonomy" and which helps people "to think for themselves, to assess evidence and to learn the skills involved in making decisions, forming commitment and loyalties".[13]   He cautiously yet emphatically indicates the importance of cognitive processes because he believes that their development through education liberates people to reflect. Likewise, whilst he acknowledges that the emphasis on forms of knowledge might be a means of oppression by those who identify such forms, he is convinced that thought should be given structure, and that civilisation should not be deprived of its heritage of the past.   He acknowledges therefore, that education is part of a process of initiation: this need not be oppressive if the process is characterised by an increasing ability to reflect, leading to increased maturity and autonomy.   An implication of this is that proper education entails risks because maturity and autonomy, along with transformed outlooks may well lead to change.

For James Michael Lee the aim of Christian education is to achieve Christian commitment.   If this does not happen the education has failed.   Lee thus defines Christian education in terms of teaching the Christian religion.   His analysis is very structured, drawing out very particular objectives based upon scientific principles of teaching and learning.   Everything which can be learned can be taught, says Lee, and this includes religious outcomes.   This teaching takes place through a variety of processes and contexts; and note must be taken of pedagogical styles, the attitude of the teacher to the students, the atmosphere in which the learning takes place, etc.   The teaching of Christianity is here broken down into cognitive, affective and lifestyle outcomes: held together in a holistic approach which has, at its centre "the core virtues of faith, hope and love".[14]   Trust, love, joy, self-esteem, hope, and religious experience, along with Christian beliefs and dispositions to act, can all be taught in a programme of learning which is designed to "build up the body of Christ in the learners".[15]

For many educators in the Church the required outcomes are associated with adopting and living out the Christian faith: for "those practitioners and scholars who take 'education' in its broad sense as the intentional facilitation of learning, or even more broadly simply to mark any process that leads to learning, Christian

education covers any and every (structured) learning experience that gives rise to the adoption or deepening of a person's Christian beliefs, attitudes, values, or dispositions to act and experience 'in a Christian way'".[16]

Charles Foster perceives the aims of Christian education to be:

(i) the building up of the Church;

(ii) the passing on of an understanding of the Christian faith in a way which is not only meaningful to the current generation, but can be appropriated within the experience of younger members who seek a new direction;

(iii) the shaping of attitudes and behaviour;

(iv) the constant re-interpretation of the Gospel within present day circumstances and experience.[17]

Foster argues that effective learning in Church should be totally integrated with its lifestyle. He envisages a community in which there is dialogue and self-resourcing. Teachers are those who integrate new members into this community, ensuring that a link is made between those who know and invest in the past and those who must look to the future. All are learners who must engage in the life of the community, rather than be taught *about* it. Participation in the community is the effective medium for learning ritual, tradition, values, heritage, thinking and lifestyle. Interaction is vital, and during that time of interaction stories should be told and teaching shared. There must be time for exploration and reflection upon the Bible, creeds, stories, hymns, prayers, liturgies, art, theology, structures, traditions and relationships. These must be understood and appreciated in order to recognise their relevance in contemporary culture. It is the contention of this thesis that such interaction, exploration, reflection and understanding should sometimes take place in an all-age context in order to be most effective.

Christian Education as Schooling

An all-age approach requires us to resist the tendency to blind ourselves to the possibility that learning can take place with people of other ages. It is understandable that we base our expectations upon experiences of school where there is usually strict segregation according to age. Schooling is an institutionalised school-based educational experience; the life of a school is predominantly geared to bringing about learning, in particular *cognitive* learning. Church schools include Christian learning as part of their programme and many churches use a 'Sunday school model' to teach children Christianity. In such Christian education cognition constitutes a significant dimension. How faith communities and their individual members perceive, remember, conceptualise, understand language, make use of symbol, problem-solve, reason and learn are crucial to the way in which they believe and express the contents of their faith. But there is more to schooling than this. Johanna Turner regards "schooling" as a process which addresses social and emotional development, in addition to cognition.[18] Lee, in the context of describing *Christian* education, defines schooling as specifically planned learning experiences and would hope to see each of these dimensions receiving equal emphasis: cognition should not be stressed at the expense of social, emotional, and other identified inner processes.[19]

Within Lee's holistic approach schooling would take place in order, for example, to consciously facilitate socialization. Members of the community need to be 'schooled' in cultural beliefs, lifestyle and social roles. He recognises the paradox that effective socialization into the Church may mean challenge and change. This is because a greater awareness of what is perceived to be the reality of God may throw into question much of what is proclaimed by the institution. "A major focus of religious instruction is to consciously facilitate the socialization of the individual .... Socialization is both a shaping and a creative process, with the built-in tensions inherent in any growth-oriented social structure".[20] In relation to this, later in this chapter we will consider 'formative' and 'critical' education and the way in which effective Christian education might well include both elements.

John Westerhoff's scepticism about the schooling paradigm highlights the significance of language within this debate. Whilst Lee sees

schooling simply as planned learning experiences within the wider context of 'religious instruction', (teaching religion) Westerhoff observes that, in reality, it unfortunately tends to be an activity separated from the ongoing life of the community. For Westerhoff the life of the community is vital for effective Christian education. In this sense, socialization becomes a context for education, rather than the other way round as suggested by Lee. Westerhoff therefore defines education as "an aspect of socialization involving all deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts to transmit or evolve knowledge, attitudes, values, behaviours, or sensibilities".[21] Everything about the community which is significant (its history, literature, ethos, lifestyle, etc) is held and expressed in every aspect of its social, political and worshipping life. This life affects all its members in terms of Christian role models, expectations, assumptions, opinions and so on. Such a potent "hidden-curriculum" will be ignored for as long as what Westerhoff calls the "school-instructional" paradigm is maintained. A system needs to be established in which the Church's hidden curriculum and its influence upon learning is recognised, acknowledged, and exploited so that members can be properly equipped to live up to their calling of Christian mission.

Understanding and Expression of Learning

The Christian Church, along with other educational institutions, has tended to place the highest value upon cognition and linguistic skills as a measure of effective understanding. This has been at the expense of other less obvious means of understanding and expression.

Charles F. Melchert identifies several ways in which we talk about "understanding" and associates them with four "modes" of understanding characteristic of human being:

(i)   sensori-motor understanding is that in which cognitive structures are expressed by actions, whether or not they are consciously thought about.

(ii)   emotional understanding is that which becomes more effective as a person grows and begins to differentiate between the self

and people around us, displaying characteristics of empathy.

(iii) analytic understanding is that which occurs when it becomes possible "to take things apart and re-label them."

(iv) synthetic understanding is the process by which those things "taken apart" are brought back together again in various combinations to make a cohesive whole.

Melchert warns against over-emphasising any one mode of understanding at the expense of the others: learners can only benefit from an appreciation of the variety of modes. "Learners can dance an understanding or can do a verbal structural analysis and both can be modes of coming to and expressing understanding".[22] In my experience of all-age it is often younger people who teach dance: older people have responded to their enthusiasm, tentatively joined in and shown delight at the experience.

In the Church we need to attribute greater value to those modes which involve action rather than just cognitive processes and linguistic expression, in order to redress what has essentially been an imbalance in the past. All-age learning affords many opportunities to develop and express understanding through a variety of modes. Remaining with the example of dance, the requirement there has usually been to interpret and express an understanding of a Biblical passage.

To take another example in an all-age context, a choice may be offered to study the theme of Jesus the Servant through reading, art-work, dance, discussion, the playing of co-operative games and drama. The outcomes of each of these processes are expressed through language, visual media and general behaviour. These behavioural outcomes are indicators of their effectiveness, particularly as species of Christian education. The way we are indicates what we have learned and how we have understood the learning; and the way we are is not simply reflected in our words, but in our whole being.

Overt behaviour, particularly actions and behaviour towards others,

is therefore one indicator of understanding. It is not only underestimated, but often undervalued against cognitive and verbal skills. Awareness of and sensitivity to this is crucial in education. "Not until people get very secure in their knowledge and very skilful in talking about it - which rules out almost all young children - is there much point in asking them to talk about what they know, and how they know they know it. The closest we can come to finding out what children really know - and it's not very close - is to watch what they *do*...".[23]

John Holt suggests that most children in schools fail in the narrower confines of modes of understanding associated with cognitive and linguistic skills. Many of the same children become adults who, because they are insufficiently secure to talk about what they know and understand, display their knowledge and understanding more often in the things which they *do* than in what they say.

This point is not only about, for example, the competent cake-baker or electrician who may have difficulty in describing what he or she does verbally or in writing. Neither is it simply to do with the undervaluing of craft skills against cognitive skills, even though there are those who would say that they share characteristics "which make them both of educational importance".[24] It is also about those people who have no recognised or apparently successful traditional educational background and who might never be found discussing faith issues in Church, but who display attitudes, values and general behaviour which correspond to Christian beliefs and Christian living. Christian learners should not be "reduced to, or judged in terms of, their cognitive abilities alone". There is indeed much more to Christianity and to Christian religious education than that".[25]

Educators (who are normally very confident about talking) need to be sensitive to the things people do as much as to what they say. All-age activities, because they often involve practical and interactive Christian learning, may provide opportunities for people to benefit from models of behaviour as much as from what is imparted by word of mouth or by the written word. This has to be the case for adults as much as for children, since models of Christian

behaviour can be provided by people of all ages.

Owing to the more practical and interactive emphasis of all-age it usually evinces an informality which may add to the welcome which such an environment might offer to the cake-baker or electrician. It adds value to craft skills and can widen the experience of those who are restricted to cognitive-based activity. The craftpersons may find themselves sharing the teaching role: this may promote confidence in them as well as stimulating new learning amongst those whom they teach.

Anecdotal evidence from events in which I have been involved bears this out.[26] I have seen a great variety of people enjoy modes of expression such as dance, music, graffiti work, games, cooking, clay-work, story-telling. For some, familiar pastimes have been valued as meaningful modes of learning and expression in Christian education. For others a whole new dimension of learning and self expression has been opened up.

Adult educationalists often argue that adults benefit as much as children from the use of visual aids, participatory exercises and active involvement in their learning. Jennifer Rogers believes that "such basic principles of good teaching apply as much to adults as to children".[27] This does not mean that children and adults necessarily learn in the same way: whilst they may respond to the same visual or participatory learning experience adults make meaning of it in the context of wider experience and a more complex conceptual framework. Nevertheless, all ages benefit from the experience.

One reason why Rogers values these less familiar modes of education is that she has a particular interest in the fact that short-term memory becomes vulnerable to disruption from the late twenties onwards. The capacity itself does not deteriorate: information received by the brain (through reading, listening and observation) is scanned, stored and de-coded perfectly well in adulthood. However, with increasing age, an intervening activity can more easily disrupt and confuse these processes. (Rogers uses the example of attempting to memorise a telephone number, where the number is forgotten, while looking up the S.T.D. code.) She

believes that visual aids and practical activity can help to overcome the problems caused by the disruption to short-term memory.

Rogers also points out that older people learn better if the pace of their learning is not pressured, if the material presented to them is relevant, if their experience is valued and if there is a variety of opportunities for using different media. Whilst all of these principles might be readily adopted by "adult" education groups within the Church, they are already implemented in all-age learning experiences.

Adults working alongside children have opportunities to re-capture action-related modes of understanding; children and less confident adults are challenged, within a positive atmosphere, to develop understanding, including what Melchert calls the analytic and synthetic modes. The whole community may find exciting new ways, through such co-operation, of understanding, expressing and communicating significant dimensions of their shared faith.

Christian Education as Instruction

James Michael Lee, having defined education as a process with outcomes measurable in terms of modified behaviour, focuses on instruction as the appropriate means by which the Church achieves its purpose of enabling people to live a Christian life. Inner changes and deeper understandings have observable outcomes defined clearly and taught within the discrete discipline of "religious instruction". This he regards as synonymous with teaching, and defines as "the process of facilitating behaviour modification in learners along religious lines", the emphasis being upon identifiable religious outcomes.[28]

In Lee's view the key to the success of religious instruction is an appreciation of the significance of both the teaching act and the content of the subject being taught (religion). Lee identifies key dimensions of this 'substantive content' in terms of a variety of dimensions: product and process; cognitive and affective; verbal and non-verbal; conscious and unconscious; and especially lifestyle contents. Collectively these constitute the "religious" activity of a person and are all measurable.[29]

Religious outcomes are measured and assessed first as particular behaviour patterns apparent in the person's life style and social interaction. The inner dimensions of cognition, emotion, etc are not themselves visible, but are equally significant. They affect, and are known through but are not the same as, external behaviour. An acknowledgement of these inner dimensions is important in order to avoid the danger of restricting any measurement of achievement to a behaviourist model, which "limits its enquiry to the investigation of overt behaviour; thus ruling out the study of internal processes".[30]

Lee defines instruction very broadly. Those who define instruction in a much narrower sense, however, restrict it to the imparting of knowledge or information. The methods by which instruction in this narrow sense might be carried out within school and Church include the use of story, demonstration, visual aids, artefacts, discussion, and "telling".[31] Normally such a variety of methods would be restricted to the education of younger children of primary school age. Increasingly, however, the value of a more varied style of instruction is recognised as being fruitful in the education of older children and adults. All-age education frequently involves story-telling, visual presentation and "hands-on" experience. Whilst initially this might have been because planners felt obliged to meet the needs of the youngest participants, it has become clear that here is an effective style for almost everyone present.

Christian Education as a Process of Learning by Discovery

Instruction may be practised in a variety of ways. Learning programmes that incorporate these methods can appropriate a variety of opportunities for involvement and participation on the part of learners, as well as utilising a wide range of media for the expression of what is learned. The initiative and imagination of the educators in these instances may well unleash potential qualities and skills within the learners. This raises a question about the extent to which the learner is dependent upon what is provided by the educator, and whether it is the passivity or the active participation of the learner that leads to the more effective learning.

Learning by discovery is an approach which demands an active response from learners, who thus share a greater responsibility for their own learning. This style of education demands carefully prepared experiences through which the learner discovers new knowledge and understanding. It is often associated with the term "child-centred", and its methods are based on the assumption that learning is natural to the learner and is enhanced by positive experiences and an appropriate environment. Full participation on the part of the learner is encouraged, rather than a passive reception of facts and figures, arguments and conclusions presented didactically by a teacher who is assumed to have sole access and total control over the vast resources of knowledge and understanding.

However some unease has been expressed about learning by discovery. R.S. Peters agrees that the achievement of learning has to be that of the learner, that a teacher's success "can only be defined in terms of that of the learner" and that "in the end, education is something that only the learner can achieve himself".[32] He appreciates that, in this sense, learning by discovery is meaningful. Similarly he values a person-centred philosophy of respect for the learner, including non-interference, freedom for individual development, freedom of choice and learning from experience. But he fears the neglect of worthwhile content, careful reasoning, evaluation and criticism. Freedom to choose, freedom to develop and self-realization he argues may be at the expense of the transmission of knowledge, increased understanding and worthwhile outcomes.

But R.F. Dearden argues that learning by discovery need not be haphazard: whilst the actual learning is placed in the hands of the learner, the experiences might be designed with very specific aims on the part of the educator. Thus, whilst the outcomes are not entirely predictable, "it is not by chance that these discoveries are made but as a result of the teacher's deliberate contrivance".[33] Thus Dearden concludes that the process can be an effective means of passing on knowledge if the methods of discovery are appropriate and the discoveries themselves can be shown to make sense.

Children and adults alike must be well-prepared for the making of

such discoveries in terms of learning how to inquire, gain knowledge, reason, and make explicit what has been learned. They need assistance in reflecting upon experience, and clear guidance - in the form of questions and information - towards solutions. Such an approach must allow for flexibility and provide opportunities for learners to exploit their own ability to its full potential.

The advantages of bringing together different generations in the sharing of a learning experience include the wealth of enthusiasm for learning new facts from the younger element (which can be 'caught' by older members), and the different ways of making explicit that which has been learned (which can allow everyone to express their learning). In response to the varying needs paces have to change, questions have to be heard, conclusions must be clearly accounted for. This is enormously demanding, yet there is the potential for many people to benefit from a carefully designed and flexible approach. Faith communities, with their gatherings of people from various age ranges and social groups, are in a unique position to explore the possibilities of learning-by-discovery, an approach which lends itself appropriately to all-age Christian education.

Christian Education as Conditioning

Christian educational programmes, whether entirely didactic or wholly learner-centred, are often oriented towards perpetuating the beliefs, understandings, attitudes and behaviour of the particular faith communities which they represent. Whilst most Christian educators would acknowledge that their primary aim is Christian nurture, many would hesitate to associate their work with the notion of "conditioning." The term conditioning carries negative connotations; whereas "education" suggests privilege and choice, "conditioning" suggests oppression and manipulation. "Education" is perceived as requiring awareness and individual willingness to behave in a particular manner; "conditioning" is perceived as implying passivity and a lack of self-awareness.

Conditioning has been defined in different ways. "Classical" conditioning is a process in which a reflex comes to be associated with a new stimulus".[34] "Operant" conditioning, on the other hand,

involves a response which is not simply a reflex reaction: it involves behaviour which is initiated by the will of the individual in response to some 'reward' or 'punishment' of the outcome of this behaviour. Once the subject of conditioning recognises the "why" or the "how" behind his or her voluntary or involuntary act it could be said that "more is involved than simply its being conditioned".[35] If learning is intentional and assumes a knowledge of why and how something occurs then, according to Godfrey Vesey conditioning has nothing to do with learning or education.

However, all human beings are subject to degrees of conditioning simply by virtue of being human. Whilst the process is often unconscious it should be taken into account when considering the context of Christian education. Many people grow up in a home atmosphere where there may or may not be the intention to develop particular attitudes and principles (such as considering the needs of others, denying the rights of particular racial groups, appreciating the importance of football, rejecting socialism, etc.) Whether or not the intention is there, the atmosphere and lifestyle of those "significant others" in the small world of the growing person - whatever stage of life she is at - tends to imbue her with those attitudes. Similarly the ethos of any educational institution will affect its members, particularly those who are younger.

Time, wider experiences and maturity may bring about the acceptance or rejection of such attitudes, but the conditioning which occurs at impressionable stages of life will affect most people permanently. An awareness of the inevitability of conditioning on the part of both the educators and the educated is important in order to promote self-awareness and realistic independence. Bearing this in mind it seems that all-age might provide an ideal opportunity for younger Christians to experience appropriate attitudes and values as they interact with more mature Christian people. In their turn, more mature Christians have a responsibility to provide whatever are regarded as proper models of Christian behaviour and lifestyle. In addition, perhaps there are elements of child-like behaviour which serve as a model to adults.

Christian Education as Indoctrination

How then is conditioning distinct from indoctrination? First, it seems that conditioning is usually associated with behaviour and attitudes, whilst indoctrination is more commonly to do with beliefs. Secondly, the two are distinguished in terms of intentionality. It has already been observed that there is a sense in which conditioning occurs despite the will of the conditioner as well as regardless of the will of the conditioned. Simply by living within society and growing up within specific social groups individuals imbibe attitudes and opinions which have a long term effect upon them. Indoctrination, however, is usually regarded as intentional: here it is understood in negative terms and is regarded as occurring in contexts where the indoctrinated person is discouraged from using his or her powers of reason. "Indoctrination is marked by a person coming to hold a belief unintelligently, that is, without evidence".[36] The special human characteristic of reason is here being denied. Whilst there are some contexts in which a form of indoctrination might be regarded as appropriate (for example, ensuring that a very young child does not attempt to cross a busy road), on the whole it is a process which is deplored by educationalists on these grounds alone.

In an essay concerning the nature of citizenship as "personal independence" in the context of "communal obligation", Garth Allen describes one type of indoctrination as a process which is "characterized by teaching from images of virtuous people and the good life as if these were the only images available while simultaneously ensuring, through controlling the agenda of the lesson, the progression of the course and the salient features of the hidden curriculum, so that no counter-visions emerged".[37] Allen, still in the context of political education, suggests that teachers need to be taught to suppress within themselves and others the tendency to indoctrinate: " sensitive teachers can enable people to give equal consideration to a range of Utopias, including their own, while leaving the student free".[38]

Faith communities must easily fall prey to the temptation of indoctrinating, rather than educating. Education cannot be regarded as value-free. As has already been noted, the term itself is usually loaded with positive connotations: it is associated with drawing on human potential, so that the person develops as a whole

in order to live a rich and valued life which benefits not only the person but the community of which he or she is a part. Education is concerned with freedom and independence: its aim is to liberate people, promoting knowledge in order that decisions and choices can be made in the context of a greater awareness and sense of responsibility. Indoctrination, however, is usually associated with outcomes that are narrow, monochrome, inaccurate and restricting. Hence indoctrination is often defined in terms of "closed learning outcomes", i.e. people learning beliefs that are difficult to change.

Elmer J. Thiessen has attempted to re-define the traditional liberal definition of indoctrination. He argues that criticisms of formation, as it is perceived by liberals, are largely unfounded, and would propose that "liberal education be reconstructed so as to include both initiation and liberation".[39] Traditionally much formative education is disapproved of as 'indoctrinating' because it is thought of in terms of initiating individuals into beliefs that cannot be proved to be true or false, in a manner which refuses to acknowledge the importance of presenting evidence and arguments. In addition it assumed that the intention is to inculcate people into these beliefs irrespective of evidence and with a view to their adopting the beliefs without thought or criticism.

Thiessen challenges these assumptions. He believes that people bring to any beliefs and propositions their own tendency to interpret according to the huge variety of sociological and psychological influences which are as significant within the process as the epistemological considerations. In his "reconstruction" of liberal education Thiessen wants to emphasise more than the cognitive dimension of human being, suggesting the need to recognise "that our rational nature is intimately bound up with the emotional, physical, moral and spiritual dimensions".[40] He recognises too the complex interrelationship of personal, social, historical and material factors which affect any theories and truths, so that it is almost impossible to label anything as a totally objective fact. Thus the contents of Christian education are no more questionable than any other body of knowledge and may be accepted as worthwhile to those for whom they are meaningful. Finally he recognises that all education needs some foundations upon which to work: there must

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be some traditions and assumptions from which people begin their exploration and development. Only in this way can authentic autonomy occur. It is therefore quite justifiable for the education of young Christians to involve non-rational operations; and it is likely that their inclination to imitate others, for example, will be encouraged. It becomes appropriate for the critical reflections to be encouraged later.

Thiessen therefore believes that Christians should unashamedly initiate children into their belief system, be it through family, school or Church. It is important to point out that for this process to take place there should be sufficient contact between initiators and those to be initiated, so that the belief system is most effectively learned and understood. Neither should the modern Church overlook the fact that those to be initiated are not exclusively children. There are many adults who are new to Christianity, and there are many children and young people who might contribute to their initiation by providing models of valuing and behaviour, as well as some knowledge of beliefs. Thiessen says of Christians that their aims should be commitment coupled with autonomy, for which a requirement is the promotion of cognitive development. Thiessen is concerned that thinking about beliefs is often overlooked in favour of affective development. By redressing this balance more people would be enabled to raise questions and tackle issues relating to faith and beliefs. This in turn would broaden people's horizons within a safe and secure environment.

Other contemporary Christian educators would agree with Thiessen that religious doctrines are "no more susceptible to indoctrination than other areas of knowledge and belief".[41] Some argue for a more positive view of the normally negative concept of indoctrination. Astley suggests that there is spectrum along which any teaching is *more or less* indoctrination.[42] After all who is to say which facts are totally objective and irrefutable?

Michael Leahy describes how indoctrination and critical education can operate side by side in a situation where educators assume a belief in God on the part of learners, but allow the faith to be subject to critical scrutiny.[43] This view corresponds with my assumption that those who participate in education in the Christian

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Church have some belief in God and Jesus. This situation may change as a result or during the process, in the light of criticism and evaluation, but learners can only subject the content of their faith to this scrutiny if the content is there to be scrutinised in the first place.

Basil Mitchell endorses this view, drawing support from Peters' assertion that critical thinking cannot be free-floating, but has to be applied to something concrete such as a traditional body of knowledge and doctrine. In other words there needs to be something which is taken for granted in order that it can be reasoned about, evaluated and perhaps later changed.[44]

Formation and Criticism

Thiessen, Leahy and Mitchell would agree that Christian education should encourage people to think critically about what they learn. Formation need not exclude criticism: criticism cannot be effectively carried out if there is no sense of identity or assumed viewpoint brought about by some kind of formative experience. Drawing on the work of Leon McKenzie, Astley has defined the purpose of formative education as "the adoption and deepening of Christian beliefs, values, world view and lifestyle (a Christian 'culture')". He defines critical education as that which stresses "the development in the learner of a critical analysis and evaluation of the Church's claims in the light of her own experience and understanding".[45]

The critical approach demands a certain affective attitude and disposition. Critical education is usually only associated with the cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. These skills can then be applied to the knowledge that has been transmitted by the educator and understood by the learner. Astley argues that the critical process is not confined to the aspect of cognition. He refers to a critical attitude, outlook, disposition, stance, orientation or disposition that can be developed in an individual personality or character, and which is associated with the affective as well as the cognitive domain. Thus a proper part of educational formation may be the development of a critical dimension of attitudes and values in the learner. "It would appear

therefore that there are certain attitudes, virtues, values, and dispositions that are formed by critical (in the sense of nonformative) education ".[46]

Normally the characteristics associated with a critical approach would begin to be identifiable during the synthetic-conventional, and would become particularly marked in the transition to the individuative-reflective stages of faith. "The rise of Individuative Reflective faith is occasioned by a variety of experiences that make it necessary for persons to objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith".[47] Earlier discussion has noted the riskiness of encouraging challenge and questioning.[48] Having gone through the entire process of increasing knowledge and understanding, the individual may decide that the Christian way of making meaning is not appropriate, and choose to depart from the community within which the open intention had been his or her initiation. However, it might still be said that the process was worthwhile because the person now knows about and has some real understanding of what it means to have faith in the context of the Christian community, as well as having developed an openness to other perspectives. The ability to choose whether to remain or depart is an indication of the openness and autonomy which so many educationalists intend as an outcome of their programmes of learning. An appreciation of faith development theory also shows that decisions concerning commitment may take place in different ways at different stages and that, in any case, faithing like education is a lifelong process. Thus a decision to remain or leave cannot be regarded as the end of the story. For those young people who may be struggling with decisions concerning acceptance or rejection of faith, continued and trusting relationships with adults who have had similar experiences might, if sensitively handed through constructive all-age activity, be helped to make constructive moves forward.

Educational processes which achieve the autonomy and independence associated with maturity bring with them another risk, that of change from the received tradition itself. Thomas Groome's emphasis on praxis allows reflective action to be viewed as a characteristic of Christian education.[49] The critical reflection

involved here is applied also to the Christian story and vision. This may result in changing traditions, re-interpreting beliefs, redefining shared values, developing the master story, and other changes. There is clearly a tension between formative and critical education, but both are necessary elements of Christian education if it is not to degenerate into the narrow, unchallenged and closed process, frequently rejected as indoctrination.

Critical thinking is usually associated with abstract thinking. As we have already noted, the widely accepted assumption that younger children are incapable of thinking critically has been challenged. Formative education in the Christian community inevitably includes stories and conversation. From the outset people, including children, should be encouraged to reflect on what is presented to them in terms of ideas about God, stories about Jesus etc. John Hull regrets that so little is expected of children. He reminds his readers that whilst young children (and some adults) still think concretely, and therefore require an actual person or situation or object to think about, this does not mean that they cannot think imaginatively about the object of their thought.[50] It is possible to have a concrete theology. Hull describes concrete thinkers as imaginative, spontaneous and varied, and notes how adults have gradually removed God from the concrete perspective. This has been detrimental to everyone, concrete thinkers and abstract thinkers alike, especially since to describe God in such terms is part of the Christian heritage, as for example in the Old Testament. Bringing people together to hear faith stories in all-age worship is one way of ensuring that the stories are known. It is an opportunity to develop imagination in concrete thinkers as they are presented with pictures of God through both the Old and New Testaments. Parables, and accounts such as that of the Transfiguration referred to earlier, need to be heard and reflected upon if people are to learn more of what it means to be Christian in community.

Hull describes how children ask questions and, if encouraged, enjoy talking about the idea of God, just as they may enjoy speaking of unseen relatives. Presumably encouragement to enter into such conversation must play its part in the development of proper critical formation.

All-age education might play a significant part in enabling proper critical formation to take place. Astley argues that formative education, without too much emphasis on the critical element, is all that is required by some within the community.[51] There are those who cannot cope with the application of a critical approach (and some who may not want to deal with the consequences). These may include very young children or those people still within early faith stages for whom a safe and reassuring environment, in which they feel they belong, is essential to their faithing processes.

Autonomy, which educators aspire to on behalf of those going through their educational programmes, appears to correspond to Westerhoff's idea of "owning" one's faith, a characteristic of the individuative-reflective stage.[52] Whilst this may not apply to all Church members, it is many educator's hope that people might come to take responsibility for their own faith, rather than relying on others, such as families and peer groups, to make meaning for them.

The increased autonomy and openness to other people's viewpoints associated with the preferred educational outcomes of critical/formative education may lead to an awareness of the interdependence of human beings. This awareness is a characteristic of the conjunctive stage of faith. At the same time however, children and adults in the earlier intuitive-projective and mythic-literal stages often evince a need to "belong". This unconsciously felt need, is apparent in their behaviour and their attitudes towards the rest of the community: it is a living-out of an interdependence which they may not even know they value.

If Christian education is about formation and criticism, those within the intuitive-projective and mythic-literal stages need to be involved in the life of the community. This is firstly because they need to feel secure and, secondly, to prepare them for when they are ready to grapple with a more critical approach which is so essential to a healthy faith community. Their presence may also remind the people who are in the process of struggling with questions, of the sure foundation upon which the community is built. This reassurance is the gift that is sometimes referred to as "simple faith".

Those who are challenging, protesting, and questioning, need to be heard and responded to. Those who are not within the sythentic-conventional or individuative-reflective stages need to be challenged by the questioners and idealists. Taking note of those who want to re-define its beliefs can lead a community forwards; such a move forward relies on the sharing and supporting of the process of re-definition. The work should be done together. It might well be regarded as co-operating in God's creativity.

Adults often fear the risk of learning because it is something which they have long since left behind and may bring insecurity and change.[53] To learn and worship with children can be encouraging and reassuring, partly because children often relish new learning. Their lack of fear, their openness and confidence serve as a reminder to others of the fundamental safety of a process that has honourable aims, i.e. education, within the context of a faith which is based upon trust and hope.

Increasingly evident is the greater variety and richness of learning and faithing made possible by harnessing the potential contributions of all members of the Christian community. Clarity of aims is a noted requirement: in addition there is a need for an awareness of the way in which the qualities that characterise different stages of faithing might be appropriated for the benefit of everyone who wants to grow. The nearer we can get to effective all-age, the greater our appreciation will be of its importance to individual members and the faith community as a whole.

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CHAPTER THREE

'COMMUNITY CATECHESIS' AND THE

EFFECTIVENESS OF ALL-AGE

Faithing has been described as a developmental and interactive process. Relationships have been highlighted as a significant factor in the lifelong process of meaning-making. An attempt has been made to define Christian education which, it seems, is intricately intertwined with the life and hopes of the faith community. This theme is now pursued through an exploration of how all-age education plays its part in the formation of the Church and its members. All-age learning might be an effective method of enculturation: the intentional aspects therefore need to be spelt out, and potential learning outcomes need to be identified. This chapter will also look at the relationship between all-age and "family".

Community Catechesis

Catechesis has been described simply as "education in the faith".[1] Wim Saris recognises catechesis taking place where people are introduced to the faith of (Roman Catholic) Christians and educated through the life of the Church and the witness of its members. Such an active participatory process is of primary importance, and it is within this context that the Christian story is heard. Saris considers the responsibility for catechesis to be shared by the whole church. Education, he says, takes place through the whole life of the Church, and each member has a responsibility to take part in a mutual process of learning and growth. It is a process which begins with the family and continues as a partnership between the family, church, school, and amongst the children themselves. In this context he makes a point which is significant to all-age, suggesting that catechesis is a mutual activity: "Young people are not only the object of religious education, but they are really partners in it, they have their own contribution to make, and their own responsibility towards others".[2]

James Michael Lee, regards catechesis as an aspect of *religious*

instruction which is the term he prefers when he refers to teaching in the Church.[3] For Lee this is about living and experiencing Christianity, and he believes that ideally the Church should structure its life of learning and worship in the light of an understanding of how people learn faith most effectively.[4]

For John Westerhoff, who suggests that his earlier definition of catechesis ("the whole process of Christian becoming") came under criticism largely because it was perceived to be too vague, now defines the term more precisely. He uses the word catechesis "to indicate all intentional learning within a community of Christian faith and life". Having been made a Christian at baptism we become involved in a lifelong process which makes us "more Christian". "That lifelong process is one of catechesis".[5] It is a process which involves formation, education and instruction. He defines formation as a 'shaping' which occurs intentionally through activities in a "story-formed" community. Education involves critical reflection upon these experiences and should bring about 're-shaping'. Instruction is the transmission, acquisition and comprehension of the knowledge and skills relevant to the life of the community.[6]

In the same collection of essays Kieran Scott defines catechesis as "unabashedly confessional. Its constitutive interest is to awaken, nourish and develop one's religious identity and build up the ecclesial body".[7] Scott goes on to describe the catechetical process in greater detail as the process by which the Church transmits its tradition. The process is lifelong and relates to the whole community: it involves, amongst other things, initiation, enculturation and nurture. The Church community is maintained and evangelisation takes place as its members mature in faith and commitment. We may note that, for Scott, the major educational task within this process "is to provide people with experience of belonging to a community".[8] The key catechetical tasks are those of proclaiming the Gospel, taking responsibility for maintaining the Christian community, leading worship and encouraging Christian service to others. Catechesis is a means of passing on a valued religious tradition in the form of its stories, language, symbols, culture etc.

Michael Leahy distinguishes between catechesis and evangelisation. Although each is a form of teaching, evangelisation is the attempt to convert to Christianity people who are not Christians, whereas Catechesis is "the dialogue - usually instructional - voluntarily engaged in by believers for the specific purpose of nourishing the faith they share".[9] The balance between formative and critical education as an important aspect of catechesis must be maintained, say both of these educationalists. Otherwise there will be a tendency towards exclusiveness.

Community And Learning

Faith communities are probably unique in bringing together different generations on a regular basis. Church worship on Sundays may involve the full range of age groups in a way that is reflected in no other organised gathering, other than extended families. This is particularly the case within the context of a wider society where cross-generational lifestyles are becoming less of a reality.[10] It is even more unusual to bring together a group in order to reflect upon and relate their experience to the variety of themes associated with Christian faith and Church membership.

Ambrose Binz of the University of Strasbourg regards the purpose of Christian learning to be that of learning to believe within community. He argues that this involves becoming "adult in faith" and *requires* an all-age approach. Intergenerational catechesis is not merely convenient, therefore, it makes a unique contribution to learning to believe within community. Children know very clearly what it is to "want to belong". According to Binz, wanting to belong implies a genuine process of learning, which adults must recapture if their faith is to mature.[11] He also makes the point that a community with an appropriate and mature sense of identity is more resistant to self-destructive and inward-looking 'fanaticism'. All communities are susceptible as their members, particularly the young adults seek a sense of security and comfort. Young people, moving through stages of faith which tend to be characterised by dogmatic, 'black and white' attitudes need the support and challenge of those in other stages for whom boundaries are less precise and for whom different views attract rather than repel. A mature faith does not confuse strong identity with the rejection of different

views.

Binz points out that studies indicate (i) the greater attraction of groups that are not necessarily homogeneous, (ii) that unity is "constructed by starting from differences", (iii) that each individual is a "guide in faith", (iv) that "any content presented on a higher level of complexity than that habitually used by the person incites them to shift their position (i.e. brings about a process of learning)".[12] He reminds his readers that adults may be jolted from complacency by the challenges of radical views from younger people.

Binz and James W. White agree that intentional intergenerational approaches to learning bring about specific Christian outcomes most effectively. White's practical programme has covered a range of subjects approached through a carefully created curriculum, with very specific objectives, and a variety of means of measuring outcomes. Subjects have included Old Testament personalities, significant historical characters, the character of Jesus, and other religions. White recognises four realistic goals associated with cognitive development, social development, promoting positive attitudes and developing an appropriate lifestyle. He sets these goals out in detail form with general objectives and specific attainment targets. For example, a general objective associated with social development would be to *know* older or younger people; a specific target would be to *greet* those other people. Another general objective for White might be to "feel adoration of God". The specific target would be to "meditate with Holy Name for 20 minutes." A general objective of cognitive learning would be to be familiar with the Bible; a specific target would be to find a passage in a set time. Other examples are found on tables in White's book, *Intergeneration Religious Education*.[13] He believes that these specified outcomes are more likely to be achieved if the education programme of the church community includes specifically intergenerational learning activities.

For James White, the key contribution from Westerhoff is his emphasis on interaction within the process of what Westerhoff calls "enculturation".[14] Enculturation consists of "deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts" designed to ensure that "the

tradition is faithfully transmitted through ritual and life, where persons ..... are nurtured and converted to radical faith ..... and motivated for individual and corporate action".[15]   This education-in-community is expressed in the actions of its members towards each other and to the wider society.   V. Bailey Gillespie, writing about conversion as a fundamental process involving every possible aspect of a person's life, describes Westerhoff's intergenerational, interactive catechesis as providing "a unique model for religious learning and growth within the body of faith".[16]   Like White but unlike Westerhoff, Gillespie offers a systematic approach.   He recommends five principles for effective intergenerational education: openness for questioning, focussing on God, avoidance of imposing perceived truths on others, listening to other views, and imaginative teaching methods.

Such care and attention given to the aims and implementation of all-age activity is a challenge to the cursory dismissal of all-age education in a book edited by Donald Ratcliff.   Ratcliff himself describes all-age as unrealistically designed "to reach everyone simultaneously for an entire hour" and almost inevitably leading to "boredom".[17]   I hope to show in this study that such a criticism is superficial and misleading.   But it may serve as a timely warning to the over-enthusiastic that all-age educational programmes should be subject to as rigorous educational criteria as any other type of programme.   Clear aims, imaginative teaching ideas and systematic evaluation are essential to an effective learning process. Otherwise they can degenerate into arbitrary, chaotic, unstructured events which at best are simply fun and, at worst, hinder the attempts aimed at bringing about what Westerhoff and others intend: that is "helping us to live, individually and corporately, under the judgement and inspiration of the Gospel to the end that God's will be done and God's community (Kingdom) comes".[18]

Intentional All-Age Christian Learning

In what follows I shall attempt to illustrate various aspects of all age Christian education from my own experience of all-age groups in Newcastle.   Effective all-age learning begins from a premise that authority for knowledge of God, Jesus and the Church is shared among everyone within the faithing community.   To learn from and

with each other is to gain a proper knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Christian in community.

White defines I.G.R.E. (Inter-generational Religious Education) as taking place on those occasions when more than one generation intentionally meet for worship, fellowship, study, decision making, mission, etc.[19] Light Fantastic met that first criterion of intentionality:it was an all-age group which was initiated in 1990.[20] Initially without a name (the group named itself within the first year), its remit was concerned with the preparation of some of its members for confirmation. The membership to begin with were aged from 11 years to 13 years: in order to mix the ages of the group as a whole, an invitation was extended to some other people from the Church who had demonstrated a positive attitude towards learning alongside other age groups. All who were invited agreed to participate, so the group came to comprise an eleven-year-old boy, three young teenage girls, a seventeen-year-old girl, one woman in her mid-twenties, two women and a man in their mid-thirties, and a woman in her late sixties.

The Components of All-Age Christian Learning

White has described four components of inter-generational learning. The first is one which many church groups initiate, with or without the intention of it being a particular learning opportunity. It is the *"in-common experience."* Here different generations share a concrete experience such as a walk, a film, a game, a story, a craft activity or a song. Many one-off all-age days or acts of worship such as those at the Newcastle World Development events, are specifically planned to begin with an in-common experience as a means of introducing the theme. The intention is to share a particular activity which engages most participants; it is hoped that the shared experience will stimulate a response in everyone according to their varying developmental stages as well as their past experiences, personality factors, confidence, response to the learning exercise, and so on. In-common experiences are, therefore, familiar and recognisable activities which are often readily associated with the life of any church.

The follow-up to in-common experiences may take place in what White describes as *"parallel-learning" situations*. Here activities are designed according to modes of thinking generally associated with different age groups. Thus having heard the story of the Good Samaritan, for example, children might be encouraged to engage in a dramatic interpretation, while adults would move into discussion groups or listen to a sermon. The children become acquainted with the content of the story of the Good Samaritan story through the drama, while adults have an opportunity to deal with the abstract issues through the discussion or the sermon. White is concerned that if "such a separation of ages does not occur instruction will often be below some peoples' ability to reason, thus insulting them. Likewise instruction could be above other's ability, thus frustrating them".[21] Experience of diocesan all-age days and the Light Fantastic group suggests that parallel-learning is sometimes appropriate, particularly if there is sufficient flexibility to cater for different abilities and preferred learning styles, in addition to differences of age.

Taking up the example above however, we should recognise that there will be adults who would prefer to be part of the drama group because they are not fully familiar with the content of the story, or because of some lack of ability or confidence they are not inclined to discuss abstract issues. On the other hand, there may well be a twelve-year-old who would much prefer to join the discussion, or listen to the sermon. A flexible approach to parallel learning would make these opportunities available across the age groups and at the same time allow people access to different learning experiences according to their preferences, rather than their age band. As all-age becomes increasingly familiar it is likely that more participants will be comfortable about joining groups where their age group may be in the minority. Interest and preference will then be the common bond, rather than age.

From another perspective, some individuals might more effectively engage in the abstract issues associated with the story through media other than the spoken word, e.g. drama or craft. The oldest member of Light Fantastic was disabled: she enjoyed participating in drama as a spectator and was thus introduced to the content of stories in new ways. As a consequence of her lack of confidence

she avoided discussion. However, her confidence in her own needlework skills was sufficient to allow her to facilitate discussion amongst the group when helping its members design their own symbols for a stole. She too participated in the discussion, partly because it was necessary for her to work out what people wanted to do and partly because her confidence had considerably increased in this context. Whilst such an activity is not exclusive to an all-age situation it seems that groups like Light Fantastic can very readily provide a context in which confidence grows and progress is made.

Sometimes members find all-age groups less restrictive than peer groups. In the service at St Andrew's Church in Auckland, referred to in the second chapter, a teenage boy attempted to respond to a question about why God might be likened to a tree. He demonstrated his ability to think abstractly by suggesting that God might be likened to a tree which has spreading roots. Unfortunately he got no further because his friends giggled and he was overcome with embarrassment. Unfamiliar with all-age experiences, he had remained with his peers. If his particular group had been more mixed he would most likely have been spared such embarrassment. A seventeen-year-old member of Light Fantastic once admitted that she felt more relaxed and confident about saying what she really thought when in a group that was not exclusively teenage. "You can speak more openly if you have a mixed group rather than having someone of your own age judging you".[22] Developmental theory shows that peer groups, particularly those made up of teenagers, display characteristics of conformity. Fowler refers to the stage of synthetic conventional faith as "conformist", because "it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgements of significant others".[23] All-age groups represent a wider variety of degrees of conformity allowing greater freedom for people to risk thinking differently - and to express their thoughts.

Such liberation may be expressed in *"contributive occasions"* and *"interactive sharing"*, the two final components of White's pattern of inter-generational religious education. *Contributive occasions* are those times when people share what has been learned previously: they often take place during worship, thus providing an opportunity to celebrate new understandings with the rest of the faith

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community. Examples of how Light Fantastic made contributions in this way included occasions when the group as a whole planned worship for itself, and at other times wider community. Other contributions were in the form of art work, dance, drama and music. (A more long-term outcome has been the ongoing regular involvement in the planning of music for worship.)

Interactive sharing, according to White, is distinct from the first three components. Here attempts are made to understand the perspectives of others. This requires an ability to empathize, a fairly sophisticated skill in developmental terms. It is a mistake, however to assume that all adults are fully capable, and all children are totally incapable, of empathy. Some adults do not achieve that state of maturity; some children may be capable of surprising degrees of empathy and reflection from a relatively early age.[24] Roger Straughan, writing about moral development in secular education, suggests that it is possible to stimulate the development of empathetic skills and commends to schools the designing of curricula in order that empathy is encouraged.[25] Empathy can be prepared for and encouraged through imaginative exercises in the form of drama, poetry, music, story, art, movement, symbol, etc, experiences which help to promote a deeper awareness of other people's needs, hopes and aspirations. Empathy is regarded as a crucial element within secular religious education as taught in schools. Empathetic skills give insight and that makes a significant contribution towards understanding another person's experience of faith.[26] All-age learning is an ideal context for exercises that develop empathy which, whilst referred to here in the context of children's education, need not exclude adults. White would say of this interactive process: "its enactment serves almost as a goal as much as a realized practice. Interactive sharing is I.G.R.E. at its best".[27]

The Context of All-Age Christian Learning

In what context do these components most effectively take place? White recognises the following types of location for I.G.R.E.: the family, the weekly class, one-off workshops, worship, worship-education programmes and residential week-ends.

Light Fantastic moved through each of these contexts, apart from the family (for White the family paradigm is that of a number of nuclear families meeting together over several weeks.). The group met on a weekly basis for a year before reviewing and deciding whether or not to continue. Occasionally there were one-off events such as a quiet day, visits to the theatre, etc. Worship took place on a regular basis and specific worship-education events took place once a month with other members of the congregation. After 3½ years a residential week-end took place during which decisions were made concerning whether or not the weekly meetings should continue and how, in that case, the life of the group would carry on.

The Challenge of Evaluation

Evaluation of the experience of the Light Fantastic group took place in discussions and through questionnaires. One questionnaire reflects evaluation concerning the process rather than the content, the other evaluates content too.[28] The responses reveal how participants felt that "relating experience to traditions and doctrine are meaningful ways of learning about the Church and its Gospel".[29] They enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere, songs, stories, discussion, games, friendships, having fun, expressing thoughts and feelings, outings, practical work, thinking through issues, prayer, visits, discussion, drama, and new songs. More detailed open-ended questioning of some individuals revealed that members believed that they learned "about things to do with our own faith, expressing faith, Bible studies different techniques of celebrating and worshipping".[30]

How might such an evaluation indicate whether or not the principal aim of Christian education was fulfilled? Do the members of Light Fantastic now have more knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Christian in community? The evidence available and referred to above suggests that the participants appreciated the different media used during in-common experiences: there was a variety of preferred learning styles, and a positive attitude to engaging with issues. Contributive occasions were welcomed, and members of the group were always prepared to take part whenever possible in planning worship. An ever increasing tolerance of different learning styles and non-conforming perceptions of God, Jesus, the

Church and morality became evident in the repeated requests for discussion. This suggests a developing empathy and a high degree of interactive sharing. However, it does not clearly indicate how much the participants came to know and understand what it means to be Christian in community. There needs to be reflection upon the establishment of criteria for the measurement of such knowledge and understanding, as well as the practical implications of implementing proper programmes of evaluation in Churches.

H.W. Byrne has defined educational evaluation as discovering how "to find the value of, to determine the worth of, to appraise, to test and measure. Evaluation is concerned with the ascertaining and establishment of quality in education".[31] David Starks and Donald Ratcliff define evaluation as that process which "provides information about the effectiveness of programs, materials, and methods to enable you to monitor and improve the quality of your practice".[32]

The questionnaires and discussions used as means of evaluation for Light Fantastic make some first steps in this direction but they are insufficiently thorough and precise. Byrne expresses concern that the Church has been slow to implement appropriate evaluative techniques. He says that evaluation is necessary if we are to identify strengths and weaknesses, in order to improve and revise the education provided by the Church. His demands may appear excessive. For example, Byrne would evaluate whether worship is adequate by measuring participants' understanding of, and ensuring the presence of, ten elements, including adoration, sincerity, humility and praise.[33]

But Michael Grimmitt has pointed out the difficulties associated with the evaluation of education associated with religion.[34] It is reasonably straightforward to establish criteria associated with specific items of knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation. However, how is the understanding of ourselves in relation to others and to God, and the application of that understanding (both outcomes associated with Christian education) measured effectively? As far as parish-based education is concerned, those who do attempt some systematic form of evaluation of particular events or programmes would probably rely on what James

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White and others refer to as "soft" data. These consist of verbal comments of an affirming or negative nature from participants or leaders, and surveys taken at the end of particular programmes.[35] "Hard" data, on the other hand, consist of measurements attendance, specific cognitive outcomes (such as the ability to remember or recite a particular event in the life of Jesus), affective outcomes, lifestyle, and (in appropriate cases) the intergenerational nature of the Church community.

White attempted to evaluate his own work in a systematic fashion over a decade of inter-generational programmes, drawing on both soft and hard data. White consistently reminds his readers of the importance of relating such responses to the original aims and objectives of the programme. General impressions were important to him and he records many positive comments from people concerning individual sessions, entire programmes, and the perceived effect upon the faith community.[36] He invited 'education leaders' to identify positive and negative aspects of the educational programmes: the negative aspects were wholly concerned with failures of the implementation of aims; the positive aspects included involvement, imaginative approaches, increased understanding and better communication. Such soft data evaluation was also carried out by participants:

Hard data evaluation is more "substantive", according to White. For example, increased attendance. His book records worship and church attendance over a period of ten years. Attendance rose from 1,742 (over 9 weeks) in Year 1 to 2,332 in Year 9.[37] In an attempt to quantify the extent to which various aims and objectives were achieved, assessments of verbal, affective, lifestyle and inter-generational outcomes were made. They indicated that working inter-generationally is effective.

Further Findings

Bearing in mind the limitations of the Light Fantastic evaluation (one written questionnaire, followed by a discussion with its 12 members, structured interviews with 6 members, and a number of general discussions) I attempted to cast the evaluation wider by surveying a wider range of people whom I knew to have an interest in

all-age. To this end I sent a questionnaire to 100 purchasers of an all-age learning/worship resource pack published by the Diocese of Newcastle. 52 Replies were received and I present here some of the findings relating to learning outcomes.

Having requested the respondents briefly to describe an all-age event, I asked an opening question: what had in their view been learned by the various age groups involved with it? From their replies I identified a number of key outcomes. The number in brackets below relates to the number of respondents whose reply indicated that this is a specific outcome of particular all-age learning activities.

1. Adults learned to appreciate informal, enjoyable and simple approaches to learning. (16)

2. All ages, particularly adults, learned that mutual learning can take place between children and adults. (16)

3. All ages learned that they had a part to play in the life of the Church. (13)

4. All ages learned tolerance of others, of different expression of belief and of different ways of worship. (13)

5. Teenagers and children learned that they were valued and respected. (9)

6. Adults learned to be active, rather than passive, in learning and worship. (8)

7. All ages learned new and varied ways of worship. (5)

8. All ages learned to work co-operatively as clergy and lay members of the Church. (4)

9. All ages learned a new awareness of the needs of different age groups and a caring attitude to the more vulnerable. (4)

10. All ages learned intergenerational social skills. (4)

11. Adults learned to work co-operatively together as planners. (4)

12. All ages learned new ideas for learning and worship. (3)

13. All ages learned to draw on wider expertise and life experience. (3)

14. All ages learned that all are learners. (3)

15. Teenagers learned that activities with other age groups can be fun. (3)

16. All ages learned to listen better. (2)

17. All ages learned new story-telling techniques. (2)

18. All ages learned to use new media, e.g. dance. (2)

The above replies suggest that learning of attitudes, values, and even perhaps dispositions to experience and act in a Christian way, had taken place. New skills and new knowledge were also perceived to have been learned e.g. as listening, dance, story-telling techniques and social skills. In addition some particular outcomes relating to beliefs and deeper cognitive understanding were identified. No attempt was made to discover the respondent's own evaluation. The topics mentioned included:

The Last Supper, the Passion of Christ, the Healing Ministry of the Church, Prayer, the Holy Spirit/Gifts of the Spirit/Life in the Spirit, Obedience to God, God's care and purpose for individuals, the Eucharist, the story of Israel in exile.

Clearly much more work needs to be done in more systematic ways to properly evaluate all-age learning, - or indeed any Christian learning. However, the replies from these questionnaires suggest that many do appreciate the all-age style and that some learning seems to take place in all-age contexts.

Learning from Children

The interaction so valued by White, and regarded as essential by Westerhoff, implies the fairly radical view that adults can learn from children as much as children can learn from adults. There is a common misunderstanding that all-age is an approach with a particular bias towards children, often at the expense of effective adult education. This misunderstanding probably occurs because some of those who are attracted to the idea of all-age have, in the past, been frustrated by an apparent neglect of children in Church life generally. All-age is quite rightly, regarded as an approach which might address this issue.

But the issue of taking children more seriously is only one dimension of the all-age approach. Although few proponents of this style of learning and worship begin from a concern for adult learning in the Church, some recognise that a unique contribution can be made by children to the learning of adults. In fairly extended interviews of seven participants engaged in the Light Fantastic all-age learning and worship programme, the question "What can adults learn from children?" revealed that the four adults believed they were learning "new" attitudes, in terms of the value of "simplicity and trust", "innocence and their (the children's) picture of God", or "a different attitude", a "new freshness".[38]

James Michael Lee rates attitudes as learning outcomes very highly, arguing that "an attitude is far more potent than an objective fact because an individual tends to acquire facts which concur with his attitudes".[39] If the acquiring of new different attitudes is important to adult Christian learning, then the contribution of children might be regarded as crucial.

The question "What can adults learn from children?" was asked of the 11 to 13-year-old members of the group. Their answers about what adults might learn from them also reflected an emphasis upon attitudes: for example, adults show a positive attitude when they indicate that they "enjoy the different ways we worship." One teenager's answer indicated that knowledge of beliefs could be amongst the outcomes. He commented, "I think it was the last day of school term and Anant, Nadia and I were talking about our religions. So in other words we were expressing our faith to other people. If we do that with adults I suppose they will learn a lot

because if we say what we believe they will learn a lot from that".[40]

With this in mind it is worth re-considering R.S. Peters' understanding of education as initiation. Peters argues that whatever is to be learned or acquired must already be known by the educator and it is this which "makes the notion of 'initiation' an appropriate one to characterize an educational situation; for a learner is 'initiated' by another into something which he has to master, know, or remember".[41]

The challenge to promoters of the all-age process is whether or not children have knowledge unknown to some adults, i.e. whether or not they are in a position to be ranked amongst those who already know "whatever is to be learned or acquired." The respondents to the questionnaire referred to above clearly believe that children are in possession of some beliefs and attitudes which are of benefit to adults. What other sorts of knowledge might children teach? White reminds his readers that for early Christians the teaching came from those with more experience of faith, rather than from those of greater age.[42] Christian beliefs reflect a concept of God as a loving creator who relates to the created order and brings about its completeness. From whom are such hope-filled beliefs learned? White suggests that they are learned from all ages. Some might argue that they are most effectively learned from children, or those with a 'child-like' faith. Often their behaviour is an indication of what they believe. "Children do not fret about the past or fear the future unless they are taught to do so. They live in the joy of the present ... They find miracles believable and desirable. They can sense the presence of God ... They can imagine the Kingdom of God ...".[43] They may not even be conscious of their confidence in God, but their behaviour may cause an adult to have confidence in God and so cause his or her "belief-that" to become a "belief-in". The former is associated with cognition and is as near to knowledge as the believer can get. Since true knowledge is never a certainty, a belief backed up by evidence which convinces the believer is almost, if not, the same as, knowledge. Beliefs-in require a further step which engages the affective domain; they are the consequence of a positive attitude of trust.[44] To believe that God is trustworthy is a belief-that, and to trust in God is a belief-in. It could be said that children have a greater capacity

for beliefs-in, and that their example helps adults to move from a belief-that to a belief-in. There is room for much more research into methods of evaluation which might reveal the extent to which learning outcomes, such as those listed by the respondents to the all-age questionnaires are beliefs-that or beliefs-in.

Of course negative images of God may also be learned from children, who first "recognise what it is like to know a loving God through the attitudes and relationships of the caring parents - or not".[45] Despair experienced in infancy does not build an attitude of trust and hope in God; unforgiving and aggressive parenting provides a model of an unforgiving and aggressive God. Gillespie suggests that the integrity of a person's faith in a loving God might well be measured by his or her offspring's image of God. Not only do adults learn something from the way in which the intense experiences of children reflect their images of God, they also might gain insights about themselves and how the pattern of their own faithing was established.

Learning from Young People

Childhood is a brief period in the life of a human being. Quite dramatic changes normally begin to take place physically, cognitively and socially from about the age of twelve. Faithing changes. If we concentrate only upon cognitive changes, we note that teenagers have the potential to think in abstract terms and hypothesise. This is an exciting time of development: "These powerful, qualitative changes in cognitive capabilities result in an enhancement in scope and breadth of thinking, reasoning and problem solving".[46] Sadly it seems that many adults within society at worst dislike adolescents, and at best are mystified by them. David Day and Philip May interviewed sixty-seven teenagers, and came to the opinion that many of the negative attitudes to them which are conveyed throughout society - particularly by the media - are unjustified. "If adolescents could speak for themselves ... adults would begin to get a far different picture".[47] They might also resist the tendency of some older people to regard young adults as a homogeneous group rather than as individuals.

All-age experiences can promote a more positive attitude towards

young people.   An elderly woman who became quite involved in Light
Fantastic said of its younger members, "I have learned a great deal
... I found that I was able to talk and join in and be part of that
group and, by their example, I have learned a terrific amount."

Clearly this respondent gained a considerable degree of confidence
and believed that she had learned something within a group of people
who were not her peers. What was their "example"? Their example
was mainly activity, participation, discussion, a resistance to
passive learning, and a willingness to face challenge. The teenage
members made it quite clear through the evaluation interviews and
questionnaires that discussion was one of their favourite
activities. The opportunity to challenge each other's views and to
tentatively "take a stand" was how these discussions worked in
practice; it was as though they were experimenting with their new
cognitive, moral and social skills.

Such a critical approach might offer some useful learning for
adults. It seems to begin when people become aware of themselves in
relation to others; this is often accompanied by a new awareness of
the faith in which they have been raised. Some adults may not have
reached this stage, others show signs of having forgotten that they
ever did. John Hull considers that "part of the task of Christian
education is to bring faith to the level of consciousness".[48] He
looks to education to jolt adults into a curiosity about faith: this
is as much a theological imperative as an educational one, for it is
the responsibility of Christians to consider their faith carefully,
face challenges, and to stir themselves and others out of
complacency towards an imaginative response. Hull speaks of the
paradox: "Christians obediently follow a man who obediently followed
no one. They believe in a system at the centre of which is a man
who broke with the system which he inherited. Christians hold in
doctrine what Christ expressed in miracle. Christians become
followers of this imaginative and creative Jesus by carefully
suppressing innovation and creativity".[49]

Young people have the energy to consider the content of faith
critically, but being surrounded by non-reflective and sometimes
complacent adults minimises their opportunities to make an important
contribution to those adults' faithing activity. Resistance from

adults to the practice of criticism constitutes a neglect of the development of members who are capable of exercising critical skills of the faith community. As has already been observed in Chapter 2, criticism is vital to healthy Christian formation within Church communities.

Along with the critical, sceptical and reasoning skills associated with the cognitive aspect of the stage of faith development known as synthetic-conventional, there is a characteristic tendency to believe that what "I" come to believe in the light of my questions is absolute. It is not to the advantage of the faith community for Christian people to remain at this faith stage; neither is it necessarily healthy for the community if those who discard beliefs at this stage leave the Church.[50] There is a clear need for people who are evaluating and criticising to have a safe place to explore and be challenged. Their questions and scepticism should be welcomed and addressed so that both those who stay and those who leave do so positively, aware that they are proceeding on a journey of faith which is taking them along an exciting path. More people might then appreciate the sentiments expressed in the introduction to his *Handbook of Youth Ministry* where the editor, Donald Ratcliff, dedicates the work to his parents who, he says, turned his questions into quests and his doubts into development.[51]

Adults and teenagers who together face the discomfort of dissonance set up by questions of a personal, scientific or rational nature are less likely to resist the insecurity this brings. Rather than denying the questions, they are more likely to re-organise existing knowledge in order to integrate new and possibly conflicting information which has greater integrity, even if this means rejecting long-standing (childhood?) perceptions of truth. John Hull suggests that the resistance which is set up is essential to the readjustment, and that the whole process is what constitutes learning.[52]

John Passmore has described the critical person as one who possess "initiative, independence, courage, imagination".[53] He points out that to be critical can lead to unpopularity because it almost inevitably challenges the status quo. This provides another explanation for, on the one hand, resistance to the critical

attitudes that are associated with young people and, on the other, the importance of adults re-learning the critical approach which many have discarded.

Westerhoff is convinced that the contribution of people with an ability to reflect critically is essential to the life of the faith community. He places such people upon the "Reflective Way", one of three trails associated with the catechesis of the whole community, which is a pilgrimage through life: "a process of journeying with others ... sharing life together, acting and reflecting with others. It assumes searchers ......".[54] The notion of "trails" or "ways" and "pilgrimage" are not new to readers of Westerhoff. Inspired by James Fowler he originally wrote of four "distinctive styles of faith" in human development of which the third was named "searching faith": this style was characterised by doubt and critical judgement. "In order to move from an understanding of faith that belongs to the community to an understanding of faith that is our own, we need to doubt and question that faith".[55] Westerhoff believes that these characteristics develop mainly during adolescence. He also recognises commitment and experimentation as characteristics of this "searching" stage, both of importance within a community that sees itself as being upon a spiritual journey. Interestingly Westerhoff does not seem to entertain the idea of "searchers" seeking and finding an alternative faith stance on a permanent basis: he seems to assume that if each style of faith is taken seriously members of the community will finally return and make the Christian Church their permanent home.

Learning From Adults.

Asked what she wants to learn from adults, a thirteen-year-old member of Light Fantastic replied, "I think it is good if we learn about what happened in Jesus' time and if we think about what is going to happen in the future and what is happening now. There are a lot of adults who know about religion and about what happened in Jesus' time and so young people can learn from an awful lot of people." From the seventeen-year-old came the more sophisticated answer, "I think it's important that we don't forget tradition and that old past events are ... kept alive in some way." Meanwhile the adults felt that they might teach "patience and perseverance";

"experience of life, because most young people are willing to listen to stories"; "tolerance".

Westerhoff would welcome the desire and willingness of the above respondents to listen to and share each other's experience of faith as commitment to and ownership of a shared faith story.   He contends that life is a response to God: the community's past, present and future are all bound up in God's purpose, and the primary role of the church is to communicate faith rather than transmit doctrine.   Westerhoff endorses the value attributed to the older generation by the teenage respondents in the Light Fantastic survey when he says "the third generation is the generation of memory, and without its presence the other two generations are locked into the existential present".[56]

A Systematic Approach

It is the contention of this thesis that faith communities are better prepared for learning if opportunities are taken for generations to learn from and with each other.   Westerhoff describes Christian education in terms of "enculturation", which is a total experience of initiation into a particular culture with all its shared understanding and ways of life.   Christian enculturation includes catechesis, and anything else that helps a person identify with the faith community and beyond.   The process is mutual and interactive: all members initiate, and everyone reacts.

Westerhoff would be encouraged by the eleven year old respondent to the Light Fantastic questionnaire who remarked, "Lots of people think because adults are older they will know a lot more, which is true because they have been to school, but as we are talking about faith it is a bit different.   But a child's faith could be exactly the same as an adult's, a child's faith could be more than an adult's ..."   In other words, there is much to learn from each other regardless of our assumptions, prejudices and expectations.
In Westerhoff's view all generations are engaged in transmitting faith through the worshipping, learning, living, acting life of the Church and everyone is being initiated into the shared vision and hope.   In order to live out faith effectively skills, wisdom, knowledge must be shared.[57]

But Westerhoff admits that it is easier to discuss the context than the means of enculturation. He does, however, describe possible ways forward which would provide opportunities for experiencing faith, having an identity within the faith community, criticising and experimenting with faith, being committed to and owning of faith and ownership of a shared faith story.[58]

For Westerhoff worship is very closely related to the educational life of the Church. Enculturation as a whole experience would be meaningless without this central focal point which gives identity to the "community of faith" as, collectively, it becomes more and more the "Body of Christ".[59] The cultic life of symbol, myth and ritual encourages thinking and knowing, and influences the communal perceptions of the participants. It is through liturgies like the eucharist that the world views and values of the community are transmitted to new generations. The importance of ritual is that here are symbolic actions which both shape and express belief. They must be reflected upon and subjected to critical analysis, otherwise they become empty and meaningless. There must be some reflection before worship so that experiences of daily living might be brought before God. Reflection afterwards provides an opportunity to draw upon the insights and implications of worship for daily life. Thus there is "a direct relationship between worship and learning, between liturgies and catechetics in Christian faith and life".[60] Within the ongoing all-age work of Light Fantastic and other all-age groups it became an expected practice to take part in planning worship. This required the type of reflection regarded by Westerhoff as so important, yet so easily neglected. (Indeed it is this aspect of catechesis which Westerhoff believes is most neglected.)

Westerhoff insists that children need to take a full part in worship if their formation, and that of other faith community members, is to be as effective as possible. Their "intuitive knowing" is a gift to those whose cognitive patterns have developed to the abstract and analytic stages. Above all he sees them taking part, along with adults, in a "rhythm" of worship and daily life which keeps the two interrelated, each being informed and transformed by the other.[61]

Some practical ideas have been presented by Westerhoff along these

lines.   For example in *A Pilgrim People* he takes his readers through
liturgical seasons attempting systematically to apply his theory to
practical situations.[62]   He has been criticised however by Thomas
Groome for taking too much for granted.   Groome, whilst sympathetic
with Westerhoff's views, says that he is "perceptive in explaining
how the whole Christian community educates but (is) not nearly so
clear on how the community can be educated".[63]   Groome himself
regards the Christian community in terms of its past, present and
future.   Education involves reflection, analysis, criticism,
evaluation and action.   It is only a part of the nurturing process
of the Church, is carried out intentionally and has political
dimensions.   Like Moran, he defines catechesis as the instructional
dimension of religious education and believes that educators should
lead people to the Kingdom of God in response to God's loving
grace.   The community of faith is most significant and the
socializing element should be actively promoted in order that people
come to know God better.

Groome emphasises the sharing of relationships and wants to push
onwards "the critical dimension of reflection on experience".[64]   He
advocates this in the context of "shared praxis", which is only
valid if it liberates people to move on within the faith story and
allows the Holy Spirit to work through the process.

Groome's approach is not unlike that of David Heywood who would also
emphasise a critical dialectical approach by which the Church is
constantly being transformed towards the "Kingdom".[65]   For Groome
relationships are where learning is located; effective Christian
learning relates to the history of the community and to its hopes
for the future.   The inherited traditions are important: it is on
the basis of these that shared Christian praxis can take place.
Shared Christian praxis involves reflection upon present action in
the light of the past, and imaginative planning for the future.   It
requires the willingness to listen, to share and to risk having a
vision of the "Kingdom".   Such an activity is only valid if it
liberates and moves the Church forward: it cannot take place
effectively in isolation from the rest of the Church.

Heywood and Groome associate this critical approach mainly with
adults.   To apply praxis to all-age requires imagination and

flexibility. Children can tell their story too, they can ask questions, they can listen, they can talk about God, they can hope and dream. Patience, the use of different media and perhaps a change of pace may be part of the hard work of including them in such an important task for now, and as preparation for the future.

It seems that ongoing debate amongst these Christian educators can accommodate the idea that shared Christian praxis might be effectively carried out in an all age context. People of all ages might help one another to name salient dimensions of their current Christian action; the greater the variety of people involved in such an exercise, the wider will be the range of activities recognised as such. Critical reflection may not be within the capabilities of everyone, but involving children to a certain extent can help develop this dimension of their development. Talking together is important, although demanding and challenging and requiring imaginative method. Done properly it could eventually embrace people other than children who find dialogue difficult. Sharing stories and vision across the age range might well widen the scope of the Church's corporate vision. Ideals and dreams are usually associated with young people: adults should not be excluded from looking forward in hope.

Older generations also have a story to tell which, if shared creatively, younger generations want to hear, as was made clear in the responses to the questionnaires referred to earlier. Each generation lives the Christian life and needs to have its variety of Christian activity affirmed. There are those who want to reflect critically, and those who need to hear that criticism. All-age is one means by which such a reciprocation can occur effectively. By utilising the skills and characteristics of people at different stages of life and development perhaps Church communities may find that the transformation desired by Groome, Heywood, Westerhoff and others occurs more readily than if the responsibility for moving forward is left with a restricted minority.

All-Age learning In Worship

For Westerhoff all members of the Christian faith community need to sense that they belong. Whilst he associates this primarily with

children between infancy and adolescence, the period of what he describes as the "affiliative" style of faith, Westerhoff insists that everyone regardless of age needs to know they "belong". Thus worship becomes a priority for all members of the community, even those tiny children in a style of faith which was at first referred to as "experienced" faith and whose need to belong is often "known" only unconsciously. Tiny children need to experience first hand the warmth and awe of worship. All of this is part of their experience of enculturation which Westerhoff defines in terms of a process which assumes a shared understanding of belief, a faithful community, a common memory and vision, a consciousness of the community's roots, common authority, common rituals, repetitive symbolic actions, a familial rather than institutional relationship, and reflection upon experience.[66] Particular reference is made here to baptism and the eucharist and how these relate to everyday life. Baptism, eucharist and the ministry of the Church are crucial expressions of what is believed. Baptism is a liturgical symbol of Christian beliefs about Jesus, the Church, death and resurrection, and redemption through God's grace. The eucharist is a sacrament of the gift of life given to the people of God through Jesus. It is a celebration of the Kingdom of God. Ministry is the witness of the Church to the world: a proclamation of the liberating power of the Holy Spirit.[67] In these three elements we have expressed the central themes of the Christian faith story: the worship associated with them is rich in meaning. All people should be encouraged to take a full part in this worship as part of the process of enculturation.

As we have already seen, all-age learning approaches provide an opportunity for such reflection upon worship. The young people interviewed about all-age learning invariably referred to worship as an issue for discussion. They responded positively to the notion of a cycle of reflection upon worship experience in preparation for faithful daily life, and reflection on daily life in preparation for meaningful worship, particularly when it leads to greater flexibility.[68] While asserting that worship is an end in itself, Astley has argued that people learn through worship a range of "emotions, experience and attitudes that lie at the heart of Christian spirituality".[69] Drawing on the work of Donald Evans he refers to eight "attitude-virtues", including trust, humility,

self-acceptance, responsibility, self-commitment, friendliness, concern and contemplation, all of which are associated with worship and which acts of worship effectively nurture.   This emphasis on the effect of worship upon the affective dimension of human being has cognitive implications, for the affective and cognitive domains are closely connected.   The way a person feels affects how and what she learns cognitively.   Thus worship which primarily reaches the affective dimension, whether in terms of awe and wonder or frustration and boredom, constitutes a significant element within the formation of all aspects of a Christian.   And this must be true of Christians of all age groups.

All-Age As "Family"

There is always a great deal of discussion in Church circles about the "family".   The ideal family is usually perceived in terms of mother, father and several children.   Other sorts of grouping are often regarded as inferior or unusual.   Indeed their existence is sometimes interpreted as a threat to the norm.   The Church is expected to promote family life; yet while few educators would want to undermine the popular notion of family, many would urge that the Church support all the varying types of domestic groupings.[70] Others would seek further clarification of the relationship between the wider Church community and the different family groupings associated with its life.

It cannot be denied that the "relation between religion and 'the family' is (and always has been) intimate and complex".[71]   The association of "Church" with "family" has highly significant theological, sociological and political implications.   Stephen Barton urges that religion should not be "reduced" to matters of the family and family life, that the family is not to be idolised, and that a variety of versions of family life should be approved as models, rather than simply one.   There are those who reject Barton's view that the family is a recent phenomenon, and see it rather as an ancient and universal gift from God, provided as a structure within which a moral order might be established.   Alan Billings takes such a line, but agrees with Barton that the family provides a safe haven and nourishing environment within which to grow.   He would argue that even though families fail, no other

domestic group provides "as satisfactory a sphere for most people to know and express love and for children to be nurtured".[72]

Westerhoff too has considered the term "family" carefully. He tends to think in terms of 'tribe' rather than family. He regards it as a word that conjures up particular perceptions which are sometimes misguided. He does not think that there is such a phenomenon as the normative family in the sense of mother, father and (approximately) two children. Society consists of families of all types: widows, single people, those who have been divorced, single parents living with children, homosexuals living together, households where two people bring together children of their previous relationships, and so on. However people live together families are inevitably all-age. Westerhoff believes that an imaginative response is needed to what are ongoing changes in, and varied styles of family life, so that the different types of family may flourish rather than be undermined. The nuclear family, rather than being overloaded with expectation, idolatorised and coming under pressure to promote individualism, may be supported in resisting privatism, so that as an institution it can become of service to the wider community.

Susan Parsons acknowledges that just as families change with time and circumstance so "does our language and understanding, and theology, of the family".[73] This charge provides people with the freedom to shape the family and allow God's love to be manifest through it. Parsons would encourage a clearer appreciation of the inter-relationship of the family's power structures, sexual relations and divisions of labour, and of the extent to which these influence and are influenced by wider society. Political implications emerge here once again, along with the realisation that people can influence, shape, even change circumstances, thus becoming potential agents of God's creative power in the world.

It seems that the Church should learn from the family, just as the Church should be the "first family of the Christian".[74] This is a radical view which resists the possessiveness which families can hold for themselves. It is in this way that the Church can be valued as a resource to families, providing a model of loving which enables them to resist the exclusiveness and individualism which are

common features of contemporary family life, thereby contradicting the Gospel. Such a model needs to be transformed to what Westerhoff describes as a "gathering of people called out to be something and do something together on behalf of everyone".[75] He associates this model of the family with the tribes of Israel who were in a covenant relationship with God and within which members were nurtured in faith. A key premise is that people cannot be Christian on their own: they need to be nurtured within a faith community of which the major characteristics are a common memory, a common vision, a common authority and common rituals. It is this experience which sustains Christians in their living and witness.

For Parsons, the Church, has the potential to "embody alternative community, and may itself be a non-traditional group for the encouragement of new possibilities of relationship. Theologically, this suggest the in-breaking of the Kingdom".[76] Her alternative, less traditional model of family, is reinforced by Heywood's perception of churches being more like peer groups than natural, stable kinship groups. They are more likely to be drawn together because of their shared perspective: "the tradition from which the community's shared values are derived has a life of its own, broader than its embodiment in a particular localised community".[77] This is what Heywood refers to as the "Kingdom" model. Thus the church community operates as an important reference group which influences its members as they participate in the life of the secular world.

Fowler regards the Christian family as an "ecology of Christian consciousness" thus potentially having both positive and negative effects upon Church community formation and transformation.[78] The family, as he views it, generates and maintains the shared images, values and lifestyles in all that it does. In the case of the Church these are centred on God and Jesus, and the actions of the Church "family" present, time and again, particular images which may at one time conform with one another, and another time, contradict one another. The Church "family", like the nuclear family, must also provide good models of openness and encouragement, sensitive to those at different faith stages. It is important that individuals are free to be themselves in a community where to be so depends on the degree of sensitivity and encouragement of its other members. Yet Fowler is reluctant to apply the model of family to the church

because it can be so readily identified with historical social organisation in which leaders, chiefs, kings, rulers, etc defined beliefs and values on behalf of everyone. The modern version of this is a comfortable passive, unquestioning, even submissive Church community, where there is little questioning or self reflection. But everyone is always changing, moving on. This must be encouraged and promoted otherwise the characteristics of mythic-literal and synthetic-conventional faith stages do not leave space for the autonomy of one's "owning" faith as an individual, which is so important to Fowler's faith development theory and to the formation and transformation of the whole community.

Other Christian educators have challenged the popular family model as it is sometimes perceived in its idealised nuclear sense. Gabriel Moran recognises as one important role of the Church, that of facilitating interaction amongst families and those who would normally feel excluded from the "family" because they live alone or within a family which is not perceived as normal. The value of the all-age nature of the Church is that there can be support for families (in their various forms) by, for example, providing models of parenthood and childhood to those without parents or children, as well as simply helping out practically where there is hardship.[79]

Whatever perceptions of family we hold, and whatever forms of family we experience, Westerhoff and others believe that they can only flourish in the context of the Christian community, the Church. Central to the life of any model of family is this wider network of loving relationships which supports and stimulates any individual or group as they live out their Christian faith. The intergenerational character of any family is mirrored in many Church congregations, so there is a great potential for meeting the variety of needs of people at different stages and ages.

Westerhoff and Moran are amongst those who would enthusiastically promote all-age as a means of good enculturation because of the models of discipleship provided at different faith stages. James Fowler's research indicates just how this might happen. For example, since children construct (their own) meaning on the basis of what they experience, an important question for the Church is what experiences are being provided for their enculturation? Do

they experience the richness of worship and the recounting of the community faith stories? Fowler reminds us that the way in which an adult believes is expressed in the behaviour shown towards others, including children. What experiences of faithing, therefore, are the children witnessing? Is their experience limited if, as Fowler suggests, most adults remain in Stage 3? If few adults move beyond Stage 3, Churches are bereft of the reflective self-criticism associated with Stage 4 (the individual-reflective stage). How often is there an opportunity for children to experience in the Church the behaviour of adults towards them anyway?

If the critical dimension is missing the Church community may repel isolated individuals within the later stages who decide not to worship with those who desire to maintain the safe and secure status quo. In such a context the young people, who are struggling to identify their own faithing, will be unable to find a place to express their doubts and fears. But when there are people in the *paradoxical-consolidative* stage (otherwise known as the conjunctive stage) present, there may be positive effects of their interaction with children, young people and those in other faith stages. Their ability to "sit light" to their own views and take seriously the views of others, together with their appreciation of the importance other peoples' faith experiences, are of enormous value to the faith community. They can support the doubters and enjoy the children's faithing experiences. They affirm, support and stimulate, they may therefore be the key people in the process of formation and transformation. Fowler would go so far as to urge Church congregations to aspire - as whole communities - to the conjunctive stage because it is within this stage that there is a much greater openness to change, and therefore to growth.[80]

One very particular contribution might be made by all-age. Fowler believes that negative experiences of the past can be transformed into more positive and hopeful experiences. In *Stages of Faith* he describes a person who had very unhelpful images of God established in early faith stages. But Fowler argues that these negative images, whilst not wholly discarded, can be re-worked in the light of more positive faithing experiences occurring in later life.[81] Whilst Fowler believes this process requires therapy, perhaps the

experience of simply being with, learning with and worshipping with those enjoying other faith stages can contribute, in part at least, to such a re-working.

The previous chapter looked at the nature of Christian education and formation with particular reference to all-age. This chapter has investigated more closely the way in which all-age might make a particular effective contribution to catechesis. It has strengthened the case even more for the need to take serious account of the effect of the corporate life of the communities upon the nurture of its members. All-age, if carefully implemented could play a major role in reinforcing those aspects of Church life which place equal value on its corporate identity, as much as its individual membership. Particular consideration should be given to opportunities for modelling lifestyle and behaviour, telling the master stories and reinforcing the centres of value through all-age situations. All-age enthusiasts should heed their own advice and make use of those critical thinkers within the Church in order to achieve more effective evaluation of all-age learning. In this way there should be likelihood of growth and development within individuals and the corporate community.

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CHAPTER FOUR

A CHANGING CHURCH?

Central to the work of Christian educators is the promotion of faith development. This occurs by encouraging the faithing community to work at, and move on in, the process of making meaning, in the context of all their experiences in a world with God at its centre. It is by this means that God's people can participate in the work of their Creator, their "ultimate environment"; realising their vocation "to be God's sacrament, God's presence and activity in human history".[1] This thesis recognises that a primary aim for Church communities is to stimulate faith development to such an extent that authority for faith and faithing comes to rest within individuals and within the community as a corporate body. This is as much to do with mutual responsibility as it is to do with individual freedom. Each person is at a stage of faithing which is of value to, and needs support from, the rest of the faithing community.

Widening the Circle

Those who might be regarded as having a prime responsibility for the beliefs and dogma of the women and children who make up the majority of worshippers within the Church of England are those people who constitute the Doctrine Commission.[2] Its functions are defined as "to consider and advise the House of Bishops of the General Synod upon doctrinal questions referred to it by the House of Bishops". The House of Bishops is entirely male and clerical.[3]

Meanwhile a Liturgical Commission prepares forms of service, advises on experimental worship and engages in conversations concerning liturgy with other churches. This Commission might be regarded as having a prime responsibility for how expression is given to what is believed: it is also predominantly male and clerical.[4] The impression is given, therefore, that authority for doctrine and

worship lies in a very particular arena of knowledge and experience, far removed from the experience and meaning-making of the majority of Anglican worshippers, not to mention those on the edge and outside Church life. This is not to say that male, academic clerics are only sensitive to the needs and views of similar groups within the Church, however, the message which the Church gives by appointing people only from such particular strands of society to these important commissions is clear: male, academic clerics are those most qualified to advise on belief and liturgy.

Some may take exception to this claim: but presumably not those members of the Church of England who regard theology as a body of knowledge articulated and passed down through the generations by recognised guardians of the faith, i.e. the priests and theologians within the Church, the body of knowledge being identified as that contained within the Bible and within the tradition of the Church. Some of these people, whilst they regard the revelation of God through Jesus to be crucial and the biblical texts as providing a vital insight into God's loving purpose for the world, also recognise that revelation to be ongoing, manifest in the unpredictable, and occurring throughout all creation.[5]

God's creation includes people who live and believe within the context of a huge variety of circumstances and whose ways of believing are authenticated, as far as the Church of England is concerned, by the extent to which they conform to "God's word written".[6] As well as occasionally appealing to its foundation documents, the Book of Common Prayer and articles of religion the Church requires the expertise of those who are regarded as being appropriately qualified to interpret scriptural texts and identify the criteria implicit within them.

All-age learning illustrates how God is revealed within a much wider range of people and throughout the whole of creation. Just as adults and children can genuinely learn together about God, so can others, who are not necessarily peers, nor of the same age, gender, and educational or social back-ground. The symbolism extends: just as children can become teachers of adults within the all-age experience, so might the older generations listen to the wisdom of the young in the rest of Church life. Adults are seen as

representing power and authority: all-age learning is symbolic of a shift in that power and authority. An appreciation of such a wider perspective on God brings with it a wider recognition of the range of meaning and value within the Church. The scope of theology may even become as wide and unpredictable as the range of people for whom God, revealed so clearly through Jesus, is of ultimate importance.

Recognising theology as the construction and articulation of a faith which is lived out by those who profess it, Samuel Amirtham insists that "everyone has a duty to theologize that is best done in community and while living together in faith. Theologizing is possible, nay a duty even, outside the elitist group of professional theologians".[7] In this way theology becomes not simply a body of knowledge but a dynamic, energising and creative process which is inextricably caught up with experience, personality, culture, age, class, gender, socialisation, education, expectations, and a host of other factors that contribute to the people we are and might become.

Theology may then be transferred into something which everyone "does" rather than simply being something which they learn about. Laurie Green, defining theology as "discourse" about God, rejects the view that such discourse is necessarily academic. Rather, it occurs when any person reflects "in her mind and her heart upon what God would have her do" and then attempts to "respond faithfully".[8] In Fowler's terms this would be a feature of that stage of faithing where personal authority is established for what is believed.

Margaret Kane has similarly described theology as "a process of thinking in which each person reflects on their experience of life and how this relates to God".[9] She suggests that participation in this process has to be available to all people: everyone should be encouraged to work out God's relationship with them and the world of their experience. If theology is restricted to a very specific group of people, who work it out on behalf of everyone else in the Church, it can easily become stagnant and deformed.[10] Liberation theology legitimises and affirms the kind of "local" or "contextualised" theology described here where primary value is given to *local* interpretation of Scripture, tradition, religious symbol and language. Liberation theology takes its starting point

even further away from the academics and beginning with those people on the "margins of society".[11] Presumably the "marginalised" people within given societies differ according to sociological and political circumstances. John Reader underscores liberation theology's prophetic role on issues of justice and power and recognises its authenticity when it goes beyond Church (and even Christian) structures for its resources. He argues that this is evidence of its beginning beyond the Church boundaries and closer to the margins.[12]

Children too, to varying degrees, are marginalised in Churches as much as in society as a whole. It has been argued, however, that children are also perfectly capable of doing theology.[13] Whilst *reflective* thinking is not regarded as a characteristic of childhood there is no reason to underestimate childlike concrete thinking processes. The point is that their theology exists in their *experiencing* and *imaging*, and is expressed in their behaviour. Careful observation would indicate that a tiny baby expresses, in her behaviour, degrees of trust and security according to her experience of nourishment, comfort, constancy, warmth and affection. The secure and assured infant therefore "teaches" a theology of security and assurance to those who are aware of what she offers them. Toddlers and infants are fascinated by what goes on around them, they seek to label God, they associate God with magical qualities and absolute power, they have many questions to ask of God. Their theology could be described as one of novelty, reassurance and confidence. Amongst older children there exists a need to find out what is true and right, to establish patterns and to make sense of what is presented to them. Their theology might be represented as one of energy, justice and discovery. In addition their questions, protests and challenges are all part of their meaning-making and the quest to relate their experiences to God.

Theology defined in terms of relating experience to God, and God to experience, requires the capacity to live with the tensions of wide-ranging interpretations of a God who is therefore understood through the experiences of *all* believing people. For some Christians this view brings with it a challenge that can lead to positive, creative and richer understandings of God. This

creativity, itself regarded as a manifestation of God, can give rise to the possibility of imaginative expression of belief and creative forms of service.

Why Does Children's Theology count ?

For those who have discovered helpful and enriching expressions of belief within an all-age context these possibilities have become a reality symbolic of wider and richer ways of knowing God. Adults appreciate the opportunity to learn about the theology of children and share in worship with them. In addition adults may learn from the theology of children: it might be argued that "maturity" is inhibited when people are pressured into growing out of, rather than encouraging their child-like characteristics of, for example, straight-forwardness, desire for knowledge, questioning attitudes and trust. This may be particularly the case when God is characterised by amongst other things, honesty and desire for truth, i.e. characteristics similar to those manifest in many children. With this in mind adults can benefit not only by learning about children's theology but also by having the opportunity to acknowledge, even to re-capture, some of these characteristics of child-like faith within themselves. In the meanwhile the children benefit by having such characteristics affirmed by the adults around them.

It has been pointed out that children express their theology primarily by way of their behaviour. Adults with relatively sophisticated means of articulating what they believe may well be resistant to this assertion, but it is crucial to any understanding of children's theology to appreciate that their understanding and questioning of God is not restricted in its expression to words alone. Although verbal questions are certainly one way in which young children reach out for understanding, such enquiries inevitably themselves spring from the child's predominant mode of discovery through action. This may be seen in simple behaviour involving sensory experience and physical movement in which, though questions may not be voiced, they are implicit.[14]

Just as children's relationships with, and attitudes towards, parents and families are expressed in non-verbal behaviour (as well

as in what they say), so is their relationships with whatever they know God to be. This is borne out in the following example of all-age learning and worship. The description indicates that both adults and children can benefit in their understanding of God by learning alongside one another and being receptive to the other's expression of faith. It is also making clear that the written or spoken word is not the only effective medium in the communication of what is believed or understood, and that opportunities to reflect upon the learning process are a most appropriate means not only of ascertaining what has been learned, but also of preparing for new learning.

The Buildabody Day

The Bedlington Deanery in the Newcastle Diocese responded to the recommendation in *Children in the Way* that a one-off event be held for people of all ages from different parishes. The aim of the day was to emphasise the importance of interdependence in the faith community. The event was entitled "Buildabody". The following is a description of activities within just one of the workshops, with some reflection upon how these might have been developed.

The workshop leader had adopted her own sub-theme of "Service". The aim here was to demonstrate how, regardless of age, status, gender, etc., everyone is able to give and receive from one another, and that such giving and receiving reinforces the sense of mutual value within a community of faith. In this context younger people were asked to partner older people: one partner was required to draw round, cut out and paint the other's hand. The "hands" were pasted onto a collage which was then suspended from the wall.

The evaluation of this specific workshop took place in the context of a wider evaluation of the whole day. It was clear to the leader that one significant outcome was that children learned very quickly how adults are capable of making mistakes, and that adults are ready to help with difficult tasks. Such learning has implications for a community of faith with shared values of honesty and mutual support.

As a reminder of service, the couples then assisted one another in making coloured footprints to cut out for further collage work.

Each person had to remove his or her footwear, stand in paint, step onto paper, and then have both feet both washed and dried by his or her partner. This latter activity constituted a re-enactment of the story in St John's account of Jesus' last meal with the disciples. From it adults learned how children quickly pick up instructions if they are clearly expressed, that they are eager to support their partners on slippery paint, that they will gently wash and dry their partners' feet, and that they have total trust in the older partner's ability to support them. Meanwhile the children learned that adults can be strong and supportive, that they can be shy about exposing their bare feet, and that they are very eager to have the paint removed!

Through this workshop members of the group experienced varying degrees of openness, encouragement, support, trust, humour, strength and bashfulness. Further reflection upon these activities by adults might well have led to the identification of some of the important elements of service that can be ascribed to the life and death of Jesus, and which might be recognisable in the lifestyles of Christians, for whom Jesus represents the ultimate concern of their lives. Examples of elements displayed in the workshop and illustrated in the New Testament include:

- being prepared to ask for help (cf. Mark 14:36)
- trusting intuition more and being open to new discoveries (cf. Luke 18:22)
- being prepared to trust and co-operate (cf. Luke 4: 1-13)
- accepting personal vulnerability and inhibitions being prepared to trust the self to someone else (cf. Luke 8:22-25)
- allowing oneself to be made clean by a caring other (cf. John 13: 3-12)

During the evaluation process the workshop leader expressed her confidence that these elements had been identified as being characteristic of service. No-one was *told* that following Christ is related to acknowledging ignorance, weakness, vulnerability and humility as strengths; or that placing trust in God, and submitting to God's love and care are signs of Christian discipleship. The learning was implicit in the activities: the extent to which it was

actually made explicit and articulated is not clear. What is clear is that for some people the learning did need to be made more explicit, and that more structured evaluative work needs to be done where all-age learning is taking place.

Younger children, whilst not able to reflect in any sophisticated style, could be encouraged to remember and describe some of their activities such as what they and the adults did well, what they were not so good at, the skills they practised, the help they gave and received, the new discoveries they made, and the occasions when they had to trust their neighbours. These experiences could then have been related to what they believed God to be like. Plenty of care and time need to be devoted to some kind of reflective process even if, as with the younger participants, the approach is very simple and is in the context of concrete experience.

It is likely that children in an all-age situation would not be alone in benefiting from a simple introduction to reflection. There must be many adults too for whom reflection is neither a familiar nor an easy process: perhaps an all-age situation could provide this important opportunity in a less threatening environment. It may even be the case that some adults avoid peer group learning because of what they perceive to be their own cognitive inadequacies: perhaps for them attendance at an all-age event may be desirable because such "inadequacies" might be less evident when the learning process is designed to accommodate a variety of age groups and therefore a variety of abilities.

Behaviour, as well as words, reveals something of how people know and understand God. One significant factor within the Buildabody day experience was that its value to the adults was largely due to there being no space for sentimentality or patronising gestures. In this situation where children and adults learned together each person's understanding of God was valued. Each person was recognised as making a contribution to the developing faith of others. The presence of different generations gave this sense of mutual value and inter-dependence a wider scope than if it had occurred in a peer group context.

How can we be sure that it is the intergenerational element which

provides the "unique" learning experience? Replies to questionnaires from people who have attempted to respond to the *Children in the Way* recommendations that all-age experiments should take place, indicate that all-age is a particularly helpful context for some types of learning. Feedback from one church suggests that this might be more to do with it being the only "arena for innovation" than its being inter-generational. The respondent in this case wrote that "there is a surprise-value in doing things differently, as people take notice of what is happening; partly because the determination to achieve clarity pays dividends the imagination is engaged familiar readings and themes come alive".[15]

Other respondents regard the all-age element as an important characteristic in its own right. Asked what people learned in particular all-age situations, various people replied in terms of attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviour. For example one person believed that the particular all-age event she had attended taught tolerance; another mentioned respect, love, understanding, and an awareness of the needs of others. One person believed that older people learned that the young people were the Church of the present, rather than only of the future. Meanwhile young members came to see how important the Church building and its history were to many of the adults. Another respondent commented that within an all-age situation some adults learned the value of children's teaching materials. Alternative views, varieties of prayer styles, music, and new crafts have been learned. Some young people have learned that they have a contribution to make to their faith community, rather than just participating as performers. One respondent replied that in an all-age situation people "surprised" one another; and yet another believed that, following a particular all-age event, the congregation were "almost tangibly praying more".

There is every likelihood that some of the learning listed above might take place just as well outside the inter-generational context. However, all-age does seem to be an effective context for learning. It is hard work, yet 100% of the respondents agreed that overall it provides a positive effect upon the life of the Church. While some cautions and qualifications were expressed, for example resistance from adults, the overall impression was that it is an enterprise worth pursuing. It is clear from the responses that further work needs to be done in order to improve what is provided

to make it truly all-age rather than child-centred. There is also a need to assist participants in becoming familiarised with what is quite the exception to many peoples' experience.

The Symbolism of All-Age

In what way then do events such as the intergenerational Buildabody day show how the scope of theology can be widened to include a greater variety of interpretations of how God is recognised at work in the world? Amongst other things it teaches us that there are other sources of theological understanding and expression than the traditional male, academic, clerical authorities. Children have a valid theology, as do lay people, including women, those who are not literate and the poor.

Respondents to the questionnaire referred to above give a clear impression that once the risk has been taken with all-age, adult participants appear to be pleased and surprised at what they learn from children about themselves and God. This raises questions about other identifiable groups which are not seen to be represented in Church decision-making associated with doctrine and liturgy, thus depriving the Church of worthwhile insights into the understanding of God.

Insights from women

Feminist theology is hardly a new phenomenon, but it too provides an example of how much richer the Church might be when it acknowledges a previously unnoticed perspective upon God. At a World Council of Churches Assembly in 1983, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel said of the Christian churches, "Almost all the leaders of these churches are male and depend mostly on males for their order and their ideas. The idea of God is conceived mainly in masculine terms: male leadership roles are used to describe what God does - God reigns, judges, governs; what God corresponds to is what men would like to be - judge, king, ruler, army commander. In the process women's experiences of Jesus have been forgotten......."[16] Following that, Jürgen Moltmann added "Leaving the monotheistic God of rulers and males behind us, we shall discover from the sources of Christianity the God who is in relationship, the God who can suffer,

the uniting God, the God of fellowship and community. This is the living God, the God of life, who was distorted through a patriarchal system with its idols of power and domination".[17]

Those who have grown up within a church where male metaphors predominate are likely to have become desensitised to their exclusiveness. Feminist theology brings with it new metaphors which, whilst enhancing the Church's imaging of God, would be inadequate if used in isolation from male metaphors:

> Theology itself is a gender-related term for our naming and talking about divine reality .... God is not anthropomorphically merely masculine (theology) and cannot be anthropomorphically merely feminine (thealogy) either. [18]

However, just as theology is enhanced by an appreciation of the ways in which different generations articulate and express how they believe in God, so the imaging of God is enriched by acknowledging both male and female interpretations of what is believed to be ultimate.

Sallie McFague, in writing about metaphorical theology, describes how traditional "triumphalist mythology" distorts and renders inaccessible the saving action of God through Jesus. Words like "Kingdom", "powerful", or "victorious", render God remote and encourage people "to think of God in triumphalist, royalist, highly individualistic" terms. Even the use of the word "servant" is challenged, simply because its meaning at the time of the writing of the Gospels was different to how servitude is understood today. McFague's thesis is that new metaphors need to be sought if God's salvation is to be understood in the contemporary world. She would discard many traditional and familiar models and would seek "other highly significant and very rich metaphors for their potential as expressions of the destabilizing, inclusive, non-hierarchical vision in an ecological, nuclear age".[19] She proceeds to explore the use of different metaphors, speaking of the world as God's Body rather than God's realm, thereby replacing images of triumphalism and remoteness with those of mutuality, responsiveness, caring and interdependence:

"I will suggest God as mother (father), lover, and friend.   If
the world is imagined as self-expressive of God .... how
would God respond to it and how should we?   Would not the
metaphors of parents, lovers, and friends be suggestive, with
their implications of creation, nurture, passionate concern,
attraction, respect, support, co-operation, mutuality".[20]

Feminist theologians express a desire to reclaim that vision of God,
repressed in women for centuries, which reflects the wholeness which
they perceive to be characteristic of women's spirituality.[21]
Their 'new' metaphors are only new because women have previously
been in 'silence' and 'darkness' while men have defined everything
including knowledge, vocabulary, educational processes, and
symbols.[22]   According to Gloria Durka this state of affairs is
associated with a dualism (the separation of mind from body, Creator
from created, reason from emotion etc) imposed on humankind by
men.   Now women need their own vocabulary to express the
reclamation of their vision.   Reflecting the connectedness between
all that is, thereby gaining self knowledge and self-esteem, their
contribution to a faith community, if heeded, might help to bring
about its transformation as it moves 'towards the Kingdom'.   This
could occur in all-age, not least because the provision of models
for children and older generations alike would be so much richer and
greater.

A.R. Peacocke has developed female metaphors to the extent of
adopting a "biological" model of a transcendent Creator God.
Peacocke attempts to correct the more male interpretations of
activity and power, so as to incorporate more passive, responsive
feminine interpretations.   He points out how much emphasis is
placed in the traditional picture upon the "externality of God's
creative acts": like a male fertilizing the womb of a female from
outside, God is perceived to create the world from outside.
Peacocke prefers the model of the female mammalian mother within
which the growing embryo is sustained: "God creates a world that is,
in principle and in origin, other than him/herself but creates it,
the world, within him/herself".[23]...

This indicates a major theological change.   The evocative power and
wider connotations of religious language should not be

underestimated: words bring to mind memories, feelings, hopes and other profound sensations. Throughout life, stories, parables, proverbs, metaphors etc are learned, and tested by experience. If they are regarded as accurate expressions of religious truth they may contribute towards an act of commitment.[24] New metaphors imply different perceptions of God and of how the love of God is expressed in the world. Familiarisation with these new metaphors would serve only to extend the knowledge and understanding of God within the faith community as a whole.

Insights from the poor

Feminist models of God are not new: most theological libraries would reveal their importance and popularity by the size of their collections of feminist theological texts. Is this true of other distinctive theological perspectives? For example, what is known of the theology of those people who are poor? Poverty brings with it vulnerability: many churches know little of the vulnerability of poverty. Raymond Fung speaks of his work in industrial mission in Asia: "a first-generation Christian with a middle-class background, a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, a desire to serve, but no experience of personal suffering and rejection".[25] The years spent working amongst the poor had a profound effect upon Fung who, whilst clearly perceiving his mission as a proclamation of the gospel to the people with whom he lived and worked, also "made discoveries about the poor, about the Christian faith", and about himself.[26] Not least amongst his discoveries was the importance of beginning any evangelism to the poor by listening to them. He refers to Psalms 5 and 17, reminding the reader that the characteristic of a listening God is not unfamiliar in the Old Testament. The Christian response, he suggests in the light of Matthew 16:24, is not one of comfort: Jesus offers nothing less than the discomfort of discipleship and selflessness. To fall into the loving hands of God is to take on the responsibility of living in the love of God, whether we are comfortably middle-class or desperately poor.

Just as all-age endorses the importance of the experience of children in understanding the experience of faith, so Fung's work commends the important experiences of the poor, whilst Sallie McFague looks to the experience of women. This might be extended

to all of those unheard "prophets" and "witnesses" who might teach so much about faith. The liberation which this brings involves the cost of discipleship. By valuing the faith and contribution of children, the Church also expects an appropriate response from them. There is no room for sentimentality. If a person has faith, whether they be adult or child, man or woman, rich or poor, they have a responsibility to live it out in integrity and honesty. This is the responsibility of participation within the Church. They must look to one another within the community, learn from one another, and share God's grace. "We are dealing with that process in which the individual experiences himself, not in isolation but in the solidarity of community, free in the presence of God".[27]

All-age therefore, is not a token gesture to children: it is not pandering to them. All-age is about expecting and encouraging them to take their place within the Church, along with the adults. There are powerful and exciting implications: a Church within which all members are encouraged to accept their individual responsibility as members in community must be one full of variety, richness, surprises and continuing opportunities for God to be revealed in the world. The idea of God continuing to be made manifest in this way allows for an ever-widening image of what Christians regard as ultimate. The possibilities are endless when God is sought in experiences of other people as well as our own. This relates very clearly to Fowler's description of faith aspects, particularly that of bounds of social awareness which widen as individuals grow in faith, recognising their solidarity with an ever increasing range of people regardless of race, gender, age, culture, and so on.

Alternative Media

People rendered vulnerable by poverty may be denied of the benefits of education and, more specifically, literacy. This makes it difficult for a Church that relies almost entirely on the literacy of its members to learn from those who are not literate. Consider all those books of worship, the educational materials, the Synodical documents, the doctrinal reports. The emphasis upon the written word at the expense of other media may well restrict learning about the work of God in the world, particularly in the case of those

people within faith communities who use media other than reading and writing in order to work out the relevance of what they understand to be God in their lives.

All-age events have the potential to make alternative media available to greater numbers of people. Learning can take place and beliefs can be expressed effectively in dance, drama, art, music, clay-modelling, games, etc. Prayer can take the shape of movement and can be expressed with light, shape, pictures, smell. Sight is crucial to the icon-painter and the flower-arranger; hearing is important to the musician; touch guides the clay-worker and the dancer. All of these activities rely upon the use of the senses and do not necessarily require an ability to read and write, but nor do they exclude those who rely more on their literacy skills to understand God and express their beliefs.

It is clear from the experience of all-age that to use other media is far from a concession to the less literate: rather, it provides the Church with new ways of expressing what is known of God. Further, those who are not literate are encouraged and affirmed as they accept the responsibility of taking their rightful place within the faith community and use the variety of opportunities provided to express their own commitment to knowing God.

The extent to which the symbolism of all-age can be drawn out depends upon who is deemed to be amongst the marginalised and less powerful, which in turn must depend upon the society within which we live, and how conscious we are of injustice. For all Christians there is a responsibility to take all people seriously; wherever faith communities are located, an open, listening, valuing attitude to beliefs and worship preferences is essential and enables effective communication. Richer people, whether or not they have known poverty, cannot fully identify with the poor; one gender cannot fully appreciate how it is to be the other; adults, whilst having been children, cannot know from the inside the experience of modern childhood; white people cannot really know what it is to be black. Those who are not marginalised need to learn from those who are: they need to discover ways of appreciating different perspectives on God, the Church and worship.

This has implications for those commissions who define belief and prepare liturgy. The extent to which they take note of the experience of the faith of children in the wake of the recommendations of *Children in the Way* report is symbolic of the consideration which they are prepared to give to the experiences of faith of any section of society whom they do not obviously represent.[28] To take seriously the faith experiences of all people allows more people to take on the full responsibility of their membership within the Church. This of course means change, for a church which learns more of God must constantly be moving, changing and growing. For some this sort of change is difficult and it is characteristic of people within the Church, particularly adults, to resist change.[29] Yet, as all-age events have shown, once the risk of change has been faced, there are new possibilities and new hopes for the community of the Church.

Political Outcomes

Decision-making, responsibility, change, new possibilities and new hopes associated with learning and worship in the Church are aspects of the political dimension of all age. For Paulo Freire the "teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the student's thinking". Those for whom education leads to liberation will only see such an aim fulfilled if they adopt a concept of people as "conscious beings" in the sense of people who reflect upon what they know. For Freire education is about honest and real communication amongst people, so that the realities of life can be known, and appropriate decisions can be taken. This process of liberation defies any suggestion that individuals are "abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world".[30] He reinforces our claim that all are learners and all are, in some way, authorities for knowledge on the grounds that new knowledge is constantly revealed through mutual dialogue.[31] This highly cognitive, but highly critical-reflective approach has made its impact upon the world of education. His revolutionary theory regards each individual as potentially capable of critical observation upon personal experience and the situation in which he or she finds him or herself. Freire argues that providing these tools for effective communication lead to increased self-awareness, personal dignity and growth.

Such self-awareness is also the concern of Johann Baptist Metz. He would strive for a mature Church which accepts its corporate responsibility for proclaiming the gospel. This means transformation from a "bourgeois" religion which is undemanding, paternalistic, and promotes dependence.[32] Treasuring the history and tradition of the Church and taking it seriously means, for Metz, bringing "into organic unity a productive critique of church and society, aiming towards a basic-community church as 'church of the people'".[33]

The life of Light Fantastic and its effect upon the rest of the Church community bears out the claim that all-age is a vehicle for such self-awareness, dialogue and potential liberation. Communication through media such as discussion, drama and art became an important feature within the programme. Dialogue was established: efforts were made to discover links between authentic experience and shared faith. This dialogue also flowed over into the life of the wider Church community in such a way that children as young as 10 were encouraged to take part in the decision-making process relating to the future of the congregations and their buildings.[34]

Evidence from Australia suggests that inter-generational activity challenges members of the Church to share insights and visions with one another, regardless of age.[35] In 1992 the New South Wales Synod invited children to take part, alongside adult policy makers, in debating issues concerned with reconciliation, in order to learn from them and allow them to influence the proposals and outcomes. "We can offer the Church our thoughts, ideas, opinions and liveliness" is a quote from one of the children present at this pioneering event.[36] The organiser of the event is reported as saying that the vision of children working in an inclusive environment, towards a "more complete church", had been fulfilled. Reports of the children's contributions, which described how it feels *not* to be reconciled because they are not heard, serve as a reminder of how children may symbolise all those who are so often marginalised by the Church. The contributions of the children at this Synod were clearly taken very seriously: "Many of them found their ideas and opinions were not only valued but sought. Some found the discussion a bit over their heads at times, however,

because the language was too complex .... The children said art was great because sometimes when you couldn't find the right words, you could say it through art".[37]

In 1993 the children returned and discussed social issues as well as listening to others speak of faith: "The children met significant persons. They listened to their personal faith journeys and their role in the Church which helped the children to be aware of the many people who serve the Church and the faith which motivates them to do so".[38] Clearly the organisers do not only value the contribution which is made by the children, they also regard their involvement as an introduction to the origins, nature and structure of their Church, and their relationship within it. Some careful evaluation of the experience appears to have taken place. Space was given in later Synod newsletters to those people who dissented from the majority view and considered the children's participation to be totally inappropriate. On the whole, however, the exercise was regarded as worth continuing, and hopes are currently being expressed that the practice will be extended to local churches.[39] In addition, those from the Joint Board of Christian Education in Australia, who organise the participants of children at synods and assemblies are introducing a new style of learning resource concerning mission and worship designed for inter-generational education.[40]

Meanwhile in Canada the United Church formally endorsed the principle of integrating all ages within the whole life of the Church at its General Council Meeting in 1988.[41] Debate had taken place over a decade and, in the five years since integration the response has been varied. In some instances "an effort has been made to involve children/youth not only in participation but in planning, decision making and leadership".[42] Positive attitudes do not necessarily lead to effective integration. The Churches in Canada, as in this country, are still struggling to discover imaginative ways of worshipping and learning together. Jean Olthius observes that all-age worship occurs more often than all-age education, but notes that children are now present at most annual Conference and General Council Meetings, thus bearing out the ninth proposal of A place for you, "that the needs and gifts of children be represented in the planning and the decision-making of the

Church".[43]

Children do not, however, have voting rights in Canada or Australia; although youth delegates who have been elected as representatives can take full part in the decision-making processes. Children and young people are invited to sit on boards and committees, with all the implications this has for structure and organisation. It is recognised that a new way of interaction and communication need to be framed so that authentic expression can be given to what is thought, believed and hoped for. Jean Olthius ends her report by saying, "New forms of worship as well as educational, pastoral care, administration and social justice structures and practices that affirm and respect children's spiritual experiences, tied to communal liturgy will need to be found."[44]

Closer to home, those who received the questionnaires concerning all-age initiatives in their Churches were invited to say whether the all-age dimension had led to a greater involvement on the part of all-ages in planning, worship, decision-making, initiative taking and educational activities in their Churches. As the table below shows, there is perceived to have been a positive shift in the extent to which children and young people share responsibility for, and participate in, these areas of the life of the faith community as a result of all-age initiatives. The shift may be small scale in some areas but it is a clear indication that intergenerational work gives greater access to more people to help work out what it means to be in relationship with God through learning and worship. Thus faith development may be stimulated, not only for individuals but for the Church as a corporate body.

Percentage of respondents answering the question.

How far has the all-age dimension led to a greater involvement in:

		Don't know	Not at all	To some extent	To a large extent
(a)	Planning Worship?			68%	18%
(b)	Involvement in Worship?			44%	50%
(c)	Planning Learning?	8%	18%	54%	4%
(d)	Educational Activities?	6%	14%	52%	12%
(e)	Organising Events?	8%	10%	52%	14%
(f)	Decision Making?	12%	20%	46%	6%
(g)	Initiative-taking?	10%	10%	58%	8%

In addition individual respondents noted that there was greater involvement in worship, greater co-ordination of work across the age groups, more involvement in the review of activities and other generations' interests.

Conclusion

It seems therefore that all-age might not only bring about increased knowledge and understanding, it may also lead the Church on in just the way hoped for by those who regard Christian education in terms of a critical reflective and dynamic process. Thomas Groome writes of "leading people out into the Kingdom of God" through shared praxis, i.e. "purposeful, intentional and reflectively chosen ethical action".[45] John Westerhoff endorses "the explicit affirmation and exploration of the God-Word implications of all human effort to understand and live our lives".[46] These Christian educators, with others referred to throughout the thesis, should rejoice wherever people of all ages are encouraged and enabled to participate in the

ongoing creativity of God. Within the context of communities where faith stories are treasured and values and images of power are constantly reflected upon, there is every hope that people will make more sense of what they believe and live their lives accordingly.

The content of this thesis demonstrates the aspirations, challenges, risks and potential outcomes of all-age learning and worship programmes. All-age has been examined here in its relationship to faith and faithing and Christian education, as well as being considered in symbolic terms as an indication of how the Church interacts with all its members, and with people on its margins. All-age has the potential to be radical: the radical nature of such an educational approach might be traced back to Jesus using the child as a metaphor for the Kingdom of God, when he urges his hearers to "become like a child".[47] It requires an enormous shift for most of us to look to those who symbolise the least significant members of society, as authorities for discipleship.

If all-age learning is effective in this way in bringing about a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and its implications, then the Church as a whole faces an uncomfortable journey. Perhaps this, explains in part the resistance to the process which on the one hand presents exciting opportunities, but on the other threatens longstanding traditions and expectations of authority and power. It is perhaps worth noting that the reference from Mark reinforces the notion that all-age must begin with the needs of *all* people, and not exclusively with the needs of children; for there is a child, it seems, within everyone - and it is those child-like qualities which all-age would aim to retain or re-capture. Such an approach, in which the faith story is lived out in the life of the whole community, should enable *all* its members to accept their responsibility to fulfil their own potential, and to play a full part in what is essentially a process of transformation within the world. Thus may the Church live out its role as the Body of Christ co-operating in God's creative purpose.

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1. John H. Westerhoff III, *Building God's People in a Materialistic Society*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1983, p.37.

2. P. Brierley, *Prospects for The Nineties: All England, London*, Marc Europe, 1991, p.39.

3. General Synod, *The Church of England Year Book*, Church House Publishing, London, 1991, p.38.

4. General Synod, *The Church of England Year Book*, p.42.

5. General Synod, *The Church of England Year Book*, middle sentences from p.117.

6. E. J. Bicknell, *The Thirty Nine Articles, Third Edition*, revised by H. J. Carpenter, Longmans, London, 1955, p.249.

7. Samuel Amirtham in eds., Samuel Amirtham and John S. Pobee, *Theology By The People Reflections on Doing Theology in Community*, eds., World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986, p.6.

8. Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology!*, Aston Training Scheme, 1988. (Published privately).

9. Margaret Kane, *What Kind of God?*, S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1986, p.81.

10. Kane, *What Kind of God?*, p.120.

11. John Reader, *Local Theology*, S.P.C.K., London, 1994, p.14.

12. Reader, *Local Theology*, p.14.

13. John Hull, *God-talk with Young Children*, Credar, Birmingham, 1991, p.11.

14. Violet Madge, in Johanna Klink, *Your Child and Religion*, S.C.M. Press Ltd., London, 1972, p.77.

15. A questionnaire was distributed to 100 people who were involved in all-age learning and worship 52 were returned, completed.

15. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, in Constance F. Parvey, ed., *The Community of Women in The Church*, W.C.C., Geneva, 1983, p.29.

17. Jürgen Moltmann, Parvey, *The Community of Women in the Church*, p.32.

18. Ann Loades, *Searching for Lost Coins. Explorations in Christianity and Feminism*, S.P.C.K., 1987, p.1.

19. Sally McFague, *Models of God. Theology For An Ecological, Nuclear Age*, S.C.M. Press, London, 1987, pp.55-56.

20. McFague, *Models of God. Theology For An Ecological, Nuclear Age*, p.61.

21. Gloria Durka, 'Feminist Spirituality: Restoration and Transformation', in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 12.1.1989, pp.38-44.

22. Nicola Slee, 'Women's Silence in Religious Education', in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 12.1.1989, pp.29-37.

23. A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, pp.141-142.

24. Peter Donovan, *Religious Language*, Sheldon Press, London, 1976 Chapters 2 and 3.

25. Raymond Fung in *Your Kingdom Come, Report on The World Conference on Mission and Evangelism*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1980, p.83.

26. Fung, *Your King Come, Report on The World Conference on Mission and Evangelism*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1980, p.84.

27. Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church, The Future of Christianity in a Post Bourgeois World*, SCM Press London, 1981, p.57.

28. General Synod Board of Education, *Children In The Way*, NS/CHP, 1988. The recommendations in Chapter 3 of the report are those particularly referred to in this instance i.e. "PCCs, wherever possible, should plan at least one venture for the coming year in which adults and children are involved together in learning and exploring what it means to be followers 'in the Way', and should develop a continuing pattern for learning together." p.37.

29. John Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults From Learning?*, S.C.M. Press, London, p.144ff.

30. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 1992, pp.63-69.

31. Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.67.

32. Metz, *The Emergent Church, The Future of Christianity in a Post Bourgeois World*, pp.82-83.

33. Metz, *The Emergent Church, The Future of Christianity in a Post Bourgeois World*, pp.86.

34. Discussion in the group led very naturally to their full participation at an all-day meeting on Advent Sunday in 1991.

35. Sue Drury, *Children at New South Wales Synod from 1993*, a statement produced in October 1992.

36. Andrew Geraghty, 'The kids move in, Synod turns on', in *Crosslight, Synod Extra*, Uniting Church in Victoria, October, 1992, p.1.

37. Geraghty, 'The kids move in, Synod turns on', p.2.

38. John Philippson, in an unpublished letter to Reverend S. Kaufman, explaining the rationale behind the choice of subjects

for discussion at Synod while children were present 16th November, 1993.

39. John Emmett and John Philippson, *Children at Assembly 1994.* (Unpublished) *Notes for Discussion Prior to a Proposal*, October 19th, 1992.

40. Joint Board of Christian Education, *Life Plus*, Melbourne, Australia, 1994.

41. Division of Mission, *A Place for you Toward the Integration of Children into the Life of the Church*, United Church of Canada, Toronto, 1989.

42. Extract from an unpublished letter by Jean Olthus, Childrens' Program Consultant, The United Church of Canada, April 6th, 1994, p.1.

43. Division of Mission, *A Place for You*, p.44.

44. Division of Mission, *A Place for You*, pp.2-3.

45. Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1980, p.153.

46. John H. Westerhoff III, *Building God's People,* Seabury Press, New York, 1983, p.6.

47. cf., Mark 10:15.

48. Hans Ruedi Weber, *Jesus and the Children*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1979, pp.22-29. Weber suggests that "Whilst this metaphor may refer to child-like characteristics of humility, obedience and dependence; as much significance should be given to a child's willingness to receive, indeed to claim what she thinks is hers. Such confidence is that of a person who knows that God's grace is given freely".

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