Christian Ministers’ Perceptions Of Adult Maturity And Their Impact On Parish Education.

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ABSTRACT:

This research sought to determine whether the parish education provided by a selection of Christian ministers promoted maturation.

It began with a review of previous descriptions of maturation from both Christian authors and psychologists. It isolated the key elements of human development and set out a vocabulary to describe them. It selected James Fowler’s description of faith development as the most useful theory for understanding maturation and critiqued this. This research also reviewed secular and religious educational theories to ascertain the needs of today’s adult learners. It concluded that an open Christian curriculum represented the most effective approach for stimulating maturation within the parish setting.

Using a phenomenological approach the research undertook two phases of semi-structured interviews to ascertain the respondents’ vision of maturity, the adult education they provided for their parishioners, and the way in which this was thought to aid adult development. The respondents were selected from Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Reformed, Methodist, Baptist and Independent Evangelical churches.

The results of the research showed that the ministers’ had not received much educational training. They had poorly explored understandings of maturation and education and had adopted traditional denominational teaching approaches that focused on preaching and prayer groups. The data indicated that the ministers’ ability to promote maturation in parishioners was hindered by their perceptions of human development and the effect that these had on the content of the parish education they provided. Evidence was found that the ministers’ own levels of maturity could be influencing their understandings of the educational needs of adults. As a result the parish education appeared unlikely to stimulate critical reflection on important areas of tacit knowledge and socialised behaviour. It also ignored the importance of interfaith dialogue. Consequently, the parish education they set up failed to acknowledge important aspects of maturation. The research concluded that the reality of parish based adult education did not reach the standard that Christian educationalists indicate it should.
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I would also like to thank the many Christian ministers who were willing to take part in this research. Especial thanks are given to those who participated even when they felt they were not adequate to the task of discussing maturity and education.
Therefore, go forth, companion: where you may find
No highway more, no track, all being blind,
The way to go shall glimmer in the mind.

Though you have conquered Earth and charted Sea
And planned the courses of all the stars that be,
Adventure on, more wonders are in Thee.

Adventure on, for from the littlest clue
Has come whatever worth man ever knew;
The next to lighten all men may be you...

John Masefield
CHAPTER 1

Research Question and Introduction to Field of Study

1 The Research Question

The question that this research seeks to answer is:

“What are Christian ministers' perceptions of adult maturity, and how do these affect the parish education provided?”

2 The Background to the Research Question

This research was initiated because of a concern that the needs of adult learners are being neglected in the provision of Religious Education within the Christian Church. Such education only appears to be considered essential for children. Much time and energy is spent on setting up curricula for individuals under seventeen because it is said to play a key role in the development of children. Strong lobbying exists to include Christian elements in school curricula and churches set up Sunday schools to ensure children encounter religious education. The reasons for providing such programmes are usually clearly set out and the educational methods discussed.

Much less time is spent on providing religious education for those who are older. Adult Religious Education (A.R.E.) exists in most parishes but remains of secondary importance. The programmes provided depend on the location of the parish and can vary greatly. The education given is usually non-formal and general observation suggests that the reasons for A.R.E.'s existence are often unexplored. As a consequence its aims remain unfocused.

It appears reasonable to assume that the constructs of maturity held by educators are the key to the type of education that they provide. If this is true then it could be said that the churches are endorsing a Piagetian model of development - where all important development finishes by the age of 16. This prompts the question: do adults need A.R.E. if they are to be mature members of the faith community?

Secular educationalists believe that adults require access to education throughout life. Further and Higher Education courses exist for mature students and continuing education is a strongly supported activity today. Most Local Education Authorities have Adult Education Institutes, and educational activities exist for adults in most universities.

These developments highlight the lack of provision of formal adult education in Christian parishes. There is an obvious possibility that parish education is not doing justice to its adult members. The question needs to be asked whether the constructs of maturity that determine the current state of A.R.E. are denying parishioners the chance to learn and develop.

2.1 The nature of today's society - has the church responded to the emerging needs of adults?

The needs of adult learners in today's society are commonly discussed in educational circles. Liberal education is sensitive to the modernist nature of society and the postmodernist critique that is now being applied to methods of teaching.
Yet, whilst secular education has changed significantly over the last century, religious education in the churches has remained far more static. This raises a question as to whether the churches are ignoring the impact of important aspects of living in the modern world. If this is true then the Christian churches have not realised that the needs of adults have evolved.

Two significant changes in modern society have had especially large repercussions on the aims of secular education. These are technological development and multiculturalism.

Technological development has brought about changes in lifestyle. Dewey commented in 1915 that the human mind cannot hope to contain all the knowledge that there is. In 1928 Max Scheler wrote that technological knowledge changes constantly, evolving at a rate that is difficult to follow. To compound the problem, Knowles (1983) and Cupitt (1976a) have pointed out how the rate of change in our lifestyle has also continued to increase. This has exacerbated the difference between what knowledge there is and that which humans can hope to learn and retain. The logical conclusion of such a situation is that changes in society will require the acquisition of new skills. This means that individuals in society will have to increase the speed at which they learn new skills to cope in a rapidly changing society.

Modern day society has also become increasingly multicultural. Towns and cities often contain a high mix of different races and cultures. At the same time, increased access to telecommunications and an ability to easily travel large distances have effectively made the world a smaller place. It is now much easier to be confronted with different cultures and worldviews. Because of this our understandings of many things are challenged, including our definitions of maturity.

Secular education has responded to both the rate of technological progress and increasing multiculturalism. Liberal education has reacted pragmatically, choosing to promote the idea of the reflective learner - an individual who has learnt how to learn (Lawson, 1979). It has also chosen to accept that education must respect the variety of worldviews that learners hold. Because of this liberal education is student centred. The interests of the students form the curriculum and the educator seeks to create learners who question the enculturation they have received. In this way liberal education rejects 'pedagogical' methods of teaching — which involve the simple transmission of facts and the inculcation of 'desirable' behaviour and values — replacing them with more liberal or 'andragogical' ones — whereby learners are stimulated to reflect critically on what they are learning (Knowles, 1970, 1983, 1984). Lawson's model of liberal education (1979) is one example of a theory that has moved far beyond 'pedagogical' boundaries. Importantly, these developments in educational theory have been deeply influenced by the evolution of developmental psychology. This particular field of study has explored human development and tried to set out those elements of human development that are involved in maturity.

When A.R.E. is provided in Christian churches it does not often share the characteristics of liberal education just described. Because of this there is a need to ascertain whether A.R.E. is failing to react to important societal changes or whether it disagrees with liberal education's assessment of the educational needs of learners.

The discussion so far indicates that there is a need to study the concept of maturity held by clergy in England, the actual education that exists in parishes, and to assess
the way in which the two are related. As yet there has been little research into these topics, however, this thesis begins to rectify the situation. It documents the perceptions of maturity held by a selection of 26 ministers. It identifies the aims of the parish education they provided for adults and explores how these aims were influenced by the constructs of maturation held by the ministers. Finally, it assesses the validity of these findings in the light of educational and psychological theory. This leads to recommendations for the future provision of A.R.E. and a strategy to accomplish this.

3 Refining the Overall Research Question

A successful research project involves setting specific, manageable boundaries and selecting an approach likely to provide the most useful data. The following discussion describes the scope of this research in terms of the approach used and the selection of respondents:

- This research concentrated on studying perceptions of adult maturity and education held by ministers from a variety of denominations within the Christian Church. The respondents selected for this research came from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Independent Evangelical, United Reformed, Baptist and Methodist churches. This was deemed to provide the possibility of a range of different opinions that could be usefully contrasted in the data analysis.
- The 26 respondents used were selected from parishes within East and West Sussex on the South coast of England.
- The ministers of the churches were targeted because they were nearly always the key educators of the parish. Their position in the parish invariably gave them a significant amount of influence over the parish education, often demanding that they act as the main educators themselves.
- Psychology was accepted as being of great importance to the discussion of maturity. The discussion drew heavily upon the findings of developmental psychologists.
- A liberal form of religious education was taken as the main educational theory with which the ministers’ opinions were contrasted. This research argues that the aims of an open Christian curriculum are based on a view of maturation largely consistent with that described by Fowler’s theory. An analysis of current trends in religious educational theory is undertaken as well to provide evidence of any discrepancies between the literature on the subject of A.R.E. and the actual programmes set up in parishes.

These choices allow a manageable research project and were not chosen because they were the only possible approach. They can therefore be seen to be somewhat arbitrary. For instance, whilst the use of psychology to study Christian ministers’ perceptions of maturity may appear consistent with a scientific study, care needs to be taken. Watts and Williams (1994) have commented that psychology can indeed be legitimately used to study religious understandings. They argue that everybody explains behaviour in psychological terms to some degree. However, they also point out that there may be elements of religious understanding that are impervious to psychological exploration. It is clear that religious faith has been seen as a consequence of meeting the ineffable through prayer (Schleiermacher, 1958; Otto, 1958).
If such a situation is true then psychology may be powerless to understand a key formative influence on human development. However, the Bible does not offer a coherent developmental model for use in studying maturation or creating adult education curricula. On the other hand, psychology does through the use of empirical study. The discussion in Chapter 4 will reveal how some religious authors have overcome this tension by arguing that the impact of God’s revelation is mediated through other human developmental factors rather than imposing itself on the individual regardless. In light of this, the thesis assumes that ministers are not influenced by ‘ineffable’ factors such as divine revelation to such an extent that their human development differs significantly from any non-Christian’s. This research is therefore based on a belief that ministers’ constructs of maturity are still open to some degree of critical analysis using psychological theory.

Another reason why care must be taken when using psychology to study maturity is made clear by postmodernist philosophy. Whilst “the premise that we are in or entering a postmodern era is... a hotly debated issue” (Moran, 1992), postmodern critiques of the nature of knowledge and learning cannot be ignored. These issues have certainly been considered important in recent debates about Christian education (e.g. Moran, Ibid.; Melchert, 1995). The postmodernists claim that we have lived in a modernist society with a fixation on ‘scientism’ (Usher and Edwards (1994), Moore (1995a) and Stainton Rogers (1996). They reject the legitimacy of this ‘over-reliance’ on scientific analysis by calling into question scientists’ claims to provide objective knowledge. If this criticism is true then psychology is certainly limited in its ability to provide a universal description of maturation. In the following chapters these postmodernist arguments will be further explored and the problems they raise addressed. It will be shown how, perhaps paradoxically, some key aspects of postmodernist understanding are even consonant with the descriptions of higher levels of maturity set out by psychologists such as James Fowler (1981, 1984).

Fowler is used as a key author in this debate because he is an influential religious psychologist who has studied numerous American Christians. He set out a developmental theory that described the different ways in which humans tend to rationalise the world. He coped with the concept of tacit knowledge, the ineffable dimension of being and also - perhaps unintentionally - came close to a defence of some aspects of postmodernist theory. His work indicated that the developmental theories from psychology are indeed relevant to discussing the maturity of Christians. Whilst his work is not above criticism – as will be shown in Chapter 5 - it still proves to be a useful tool with which to study human maturation.

It is important to note that this research addresses an area of study that Fowler believed to be of great importance - research into normative images of adult men and women in religious traditions (Stokes, 1983).

4 Summary

This research studies the degree to which A.R.E exists in the parish and the forms it takes. It explores the perceptions of maturity that the key educators in the parish have and shows how the wide variety of opinions can be classified and deconstructed. From these observations the (often tacit) aims of parish based adult education are extracted. The study provides information about Christian ministers’ own levels of maturity and how these may influence their understandings of what educational goals are of importance. In doing this the research sets out important
views that should be taken into account in future A.R.E. debates. It provides an important critique of parish education today, pointing out significant weaknesses that must be addressed if meaningful learning is to occur in the parishes.

The following chapters discuss the main foci of this research that issue from the above overview. The following is a brief introduction to their content:

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<td>Exploration of influential psychological theories of human development. These theories have been selected due to their influence on the development of religious definitions of maturity and the evolution of the aims of adult education. This chapter explores the problems of defining maturation given the wide variety of aspects of human development that are identified.</td>
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<td>Exploration of definitions of religious maturity and their relationship with the theories presented in Chapter 3. The debate introduces the works of James Fowler and discusses the impact that his faith development theory has had on the study of religious maturity. The chapter describes each of the six stages of faith.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Chapter 11:</td>
<td>Conclusions, implications and recommendations. This chapter summarises the findings of Chapters 9 and 10. It highlights the most important implications of the data collected. It also reassesses the Research Question and the methods used to study the topic. In doing this it offers a critique of the findings and possible ways in which the study could be improved. This leads to a set of recommendations for further explorations of Christian ministers' understandings of maturity and their impact on the parish education provided.</td>
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CHAPTER 2

Adulthood, Development, Maturity and Autonomy:
Defining Important Terms

1 Introduction

A vital, but often overlooked, aspect of exploring maturity is to begin with a discussion of the terminology to be used. Any discussion can be hampered by ambiguities in vocabulary and the debates about maturity are prone to such problems. The nature of the English language means that words used in this context often have diffuse or imprecise meanings. In order to overcome this situation the following discussion sets out definitions of the terms 'adulthood', 'development', 'maturity' and 'autonomy'.

This chapter also introduces an important theme that runs through the following chapters. This is the manner in which definitions of maturity are fundamentally based upon value judgements. The discussion explores the influence of tacit knowledge on constructs of maturation through its effect on perceptions of reality. It shows how differences in the construal of reality require that the relativity of views about maturity are discussed.

2 Adulthood

This term can be used to connote several different human states, some of which may be mutually exclusive. In different texts 'adulthood' may imply a period of stability and completion or a continuing period of change. It can indicate that an individual has reached a particular age, has gained a particular ability or characteristic, or has shown a wish to take one particular course of action. The following discussion will discard most of these meanings, showing them to be unhelpful to the debate.

2.1 Adulthood - a period of completion or a period of change?

Adulthood is commonly used to infer a completion of one or more aspects of development. A common definition of adulthood is “fully grown” or “mature” (e.g. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995). This is misleading because it implies that adulthood is a cessation of physiological growth and a period without further change. Whilst it is true that the human body is “physically and sexually mature” after adolescence (Simpkins and Williams, 1987) this does not mean that further development will not occur. Therefore, in physiological terms, adulthood is most accurately defined as that point when secondary sexual characteristics have finished manifesting. This heralds a period of relative stability where such significant changes will not occur again - with the exception perhaps of the female menopause.

Most psychological and educational literature uses the term adulthood in a significantly different way. Instead of denoting completion adulthood is used to describe a period of life that can contain many significant changes. Whitehead and Whitehead remind us that: “adulthood takes us by surprise... we can recall approaching our own adulthood with expectations of stability and maturity. Our images were of ‘settling down’ as ‘grown-ups’, of being - somehow - finished products...
[The] realization that adulthood is a time of continuing change and challenge is news" (1979, p.xi).

For Whitehead and Whitehead, as well as Erikson (1959a, 1978, 1982), Fowler (1981), Kohlberg (1969, 1976) and the educationalist Mezirow (1990), significant changes in any individual's perceptions of reality continue throughout adulthood. The theories of these authors expand on earlier developmental theories such as Piaget's (1929, 1950, 1968 et al.) which dealt with development only up until adolescence. Today's psychological discussions have developed beyond the understanding of adulthood as a static period of maturity. Instead, young adults are seen to have many significant changes ahead of them that they may or may not cope with effectively. Much of the discussion in the following chapters describes and assesses these changes.

2.2 The problems inherent in linking adulthood to a particular level of maturity

A number of authors decide that someone can be classed as an adult when they reach a particular point along a scale of development. Erikson's belief is that intimacy - his sixth structural stage - is a criterion of having attained the psychosocial state of adulthood (1959a). He sees the period from 18 to 25 years of age as heralding the ability of the individual to share with, and care about, others openly, and to accept the risks inherent in relating to these people. He argues that it is through the ability to share that our identity reaches a mature enough stage to be termed adult - though this is not to say that more change does not occur later. Similarly, Daniel Levinson's work decides that adulthood is reached between the ages of 22 to 28. He considers this to be when individuals are concerned primarily with building a home, becoming intimate with a partner and bringing up children (1978). He believes that the skills learnt in undertaking these actions denote adulthood.

The choice of intimacy as an indication of adulthood seems to be unnecessarily arbitrary. A question arises as to what happens if someone never acquires this, or related characteristics. Seventy-five year olds cannot be called children or adolescents simply because they lack such abilities. It is possible that these individuals are children in terms of their ability to be 'intimate' but there is no reason to assume that they cannot be extremely intelligent or responsible in other ways. Because Levinson has linked adulthood more closely with socio-cultural factors his definition is even more problematic than Erikson's. It is unacceptable that individuals are prevented from being called adults simply because they have not participated in a long term relationship or brought up a family.

Other reasons exist to avoid linking adulthood with particular developmental characteristics. Moran (1992) points out that the findings of studies such as Erikson's are limited to the culture of those studied. Alternatively, the works of Gould (Bee and Mitchell, 1980) and Sangiuliano (cited in Gross, 1987) have shown how the emphasis on male development by Erikson and others has ignored the fact that women may move through stages of development in a different order to men. They argue that women may gain the ability to be intimate before men. At the same time women might not have fully created their individual identity as men would have done by that point. They could therefore be considered adult before men with regard to their 'intimacy' skills yet, at the same time, less than adult with regard to their lack of a fully formed, separate identity. Tannen's (1990) work suggests that men and women have naturally divergent approaches to things such as social interaction which are maintained throughout their lives. Together, these points illustrate why
any definite linkage of 'adulthood' to particular developmental characteristic is problematic and should be avoided.

At least two solutions to this problem exist. Adulthood may either be defined as the period that begins when puberty ends, or simply by chronological age. The first option means that adulthood will be reached at different times for different people and is the definition used in this study. Adulthood as a term will not, therefore, infer anything about the level of psychological development or maturity of an individual. When this approach is taken 'maturity' becomes the desired goal of adulthood. This is an understanding that authors such as Fowler (1981, 1984) and George Kelly (1955) hold. Neither of these authors is willing to claim that any one point on a developmental scale can be a signifier of 'adulthood'. They understand that people may be adult in age and body but they may not be very mature. Such individuals may even remain in those stages of maturation normally associated with childhood or adolescence (Fowler, 1981). However, it is worth noting that Fowler can also fall into ambiguous usage of the term 'adult' in his writings. This is especially true in "Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian" (1984) where there are hints that adulthood and maturity may be linked.

Fowler's occasional misuse of the term reflects a trend in religious debates about adulthood and maturity. There is a noticeable tendency to assume adulthood is a state that is reached only by gaining certain characteristics or beliefs. Even Gabriel Moran, an influential religious educationalist of over twenty years standing, is not exempt. He complains about the contradictory uses of the term 'adult', pointing out the problems of theories that deem adulthood to come about with different abilities. Yet, he is also found to suggest that adulthood is the ideal of maturity (1979). Taken literally, such a comment suggests that, no matter how old individuals are, they may not be eligible to be called adults. If it is true that Moran dislikes the linking of developmental characteristics to age brackets termed 'adult' then he probably means to say 'maturity is the ideal of adulthood'.

2.3 Life experiences - how age may be related to maturity in adults

Whilst Erikson and Kohlberg believe age to be closely linked with development, giving definite age bands in which specified developmental stages should be encountered, others such as Fowler and Mezirow do not. Fowler (1981) admits that there are similarities between different theories with regard to certain characteristics being gained at particular ages and therefore there may be some evidence of a correlation. However, he declines to follow the tradition of providing strict age brackets for the six stages of 'faith development' that he set out. He describes human development as a passage through each of these stages in turn. The first two stages are said to be passed through at a very early age but passage through the remaining ones is not automatic. Therefore, he does not give any binding age ranges for the stages after the second. In this way he does not limit the attainment of the highest levels of maturity until old age, though he does state that very few people reach them.

Educationalists often have similar understandings. Mezirow informs his readers that adulthood is a dynamic period of development, but only if they make it so:

"Adulthood is the time for reassessing the assumptions of our formative years that have often resulted in distorted views of reality" (1990, p.8).
He views adulthood as a key opportunity to subject our lives to some form of re-evaluation. To not do so is to lose the opportunity of gaining freedom from inculcated values and systems of thought.

If this is true then age may be linked to maturation because increasing age means an increasing store of experience from which to draw upon. Mezirow's work makes it clear that humans need to have experiences that challenge them in order to stimulate questioning of their assumptions. Experience is also seen to be necessary for maturation in Fowler's theory of development. Life experiences are the key to instigating periods of development or 'transition' (1981).

Relevant life experiences do not, however, always occur. Nor do they guarantee maturation. There is a suggestion in these authors' works that the experiences which can initiate a re-evaluation may not be as frequent as they would wish. There is also an understanding that, though we may be challenged by our experiences, it is never certain that the challenge will be accepted.

3 Human Development and the Different Forms of Change

Now that it has been shown that adulthood can be a period of significant change the discussion can begin to separate out the different forms of development that constitute this.

The physiological changes that occur during our passage through adulthood are easily identifiable, yet of little importance to this research. The peak physical performance of the human body is reached relatively early on in life. Thereafter, the increasing senescence of our bodies causes a gradual degradation of physiological functioning. Multiple biological factors impede the successful maintenance of tissues. Mistakes in protein synthesis, degeneration of cells, inefficient homeostasis and auto-immunity all increase with age (Roberts, 1986). Exercise and healthy diet may delay some of these changes, or mask their effects temporarily, but nothing can stop them.

Of much greater interest to this research are the changes that occur in the minds of adults. Whilst bodies may reach their peak of health relatively early, minds can continue to develop and mature throughout the lifecycle. Wisdom is gained from different life experiences. This knowledge can counteract many of the limits that physiology places on us. It has allowed humanity to gain an important edge in evolutionary terms (Simpkins and Williams, 1987) and to create the societies that exist today.

Unfortunately, it is not as easy to study the psychological development of humans. Mental processes are less easily accessed and the way in which each individual construes the world is very complex. Because of this a great variety of theories have been put forward to explain the process of human maturation, and significant debate continues about the subject.

Previous discussion has mentioned some of the important authors in the field of developmental psychology but many others exist. Important authors for this study are Levinson (1978), Sheehy (1976, 1995), Kohlberg (1969, 1976) and Kelly (1955). The theories put forward by these individuals will be explored in the next chapter.
Before studying these theories it is necessary to set out a vocabulary with which to tease out the aspects of maturation described and the value judgements that are inherent in them. The next section does this by defining the terms ‘change’ and ‘development’. This allows the creation of a set of categories that will prove vital to understanding the subjectivity of many definitions of maturity.

3.1 Change and the three different forms of development

Change need not be the same as maturation. Maturation, if described as a movement towards a more advanced, integrated or ‘desirable’ state, describes only one possible form of change. To describe the different categories of change the term development will be used. Three types of human development are identifiable in the human lifecycle. These are:

- degeneration.
- variation.
- progression.

Degeneration is the most straightforward process to understand though the least significant to the discussion of later chapters. Degenerative changes render the individual less able to function in some way. They are all those processes that cause individuals to lose some, or all, of their mental or physical abilities.

Progression refers to any change that allows individuals to be more integrated or to understand themselves and their reality more fully – though later discussion will introduce the postmodernist belief that reality is ultimately unknowable. This development gives individuals a more comprehensive grasp of the world. In doing this it gives them more power to act usefully in it. Fowler described a movement that he called:

“a cumulative enriching of the self... Like a musical group that continues to expand the range and diversity of its instruments while steadily working to master the new music that their new range allows” (1984, p.138-9).

Progression therefore reflects an increasing flexibility and repertoire of abilities. For the purposes of this research progression will be considered the only type of development that denotes maturation.

Variation describes a change when skills or characteristics are gained but the change results in no increase in maturity. Any new perspectives gained on the nature of reality remain ‘different’ rather than more inclusive. Any knowledge or understanding that is gained by the process of variation is balanced out by that which is lost.

3.2 Degeneration and maturity

Degeneration can now be defined as any process that reduces the maturity of an individual. This assumes that human maturation is a reversible process. If maturity is taken to include physiological factors then this definition is not problematic. Ageing is an obvious and universal degenerative change. Humans can ‘develop’ arthritis and high blood pressure, find their bones weakening and can suffer more acutely from shock. Senescence limits the effectiveness and efficiency of the human body and thus lessens the ‘maturity’ of the body. Simpkins and Williams (1987) provide a concise and detailed account of which degenerative physiological processes occur at what time and why.
However, not all definitions of maturity include physiological elements. Fowler and Kohlberg offer definitions of maturity that relate only to psychological processes. These challenge the assumption that maturation can be reversed by stating that once a developmental stage has been passed through it can never be returned to.

Such assertions would seem to overlook the effects that both senescence and illness can have on the psychological functioning of the human mind. The breakdown of brain tissue from injury, disease, and ageing may significantly affect the higher order brain functions. At the same time social factors can cause mental illnesses that affect these processes - nervous breakdowns due to periods of tension and post-traumatic stress are accepted possibilities in human life. Reasoning is affected by all of these. As reasoning is a key aspect of both Fowler's and Kohlberg's definitions of maturity it is inconceivable that 'faith' or 'moral reasoning' are immune to degenerative development.

3.3 Progression and Variation

The distinction between progression and variation is subtle and is not commonly noted in developmental psychology texts. To explore it more thoroughly Fowler's descriptions of conversion and stage transition are useful. Discussing this pre-empts some of Chapter 4's description of Fowler's stages of faith.

3.3.1 Faith stages, stage transition and conversion

Fowler sets out six developmental stages that depict maturation as movement through stages of faith. Faith:

"encompasses and focuses on that dynamic element of the individuals total being which involves issues of ultimate concern" (Stokes, 1983, p.10).

Faith is a universal trait because everyone has such concerns. Each faith stage represents a characteristic set of "formal structuring operations" (Fowler, 1981, p.285) that describe the way in which these issues of ultimate concern shape and determine human understanding of the world. Passage through the stages represents:

- an increasing ability to structure reality in a 'mature' way - Stage 6 being the most mature state possible.
- a greater autonomy of action and thought and a breaking away from enculturation. This occurs through the acknowledgement and identification of subconscious drives that are created by tacit knowledge. This latter form of knowledge is the part of our knowing that plays a role in guiding and shaping choices, but of which we can give no account (Sofer, 1972; Polanyi, 1975).
- an increased need to establish, and act within, a set of self-imposed rules or morals.

The characteristics of each faith stage are set out in Chapter 4.

Fowler would describe variation and progression as conversion and stage transition respectively (1981). Conversion refers to any change in an individual's professed beliefs that did not come about from a transition to a new faith stage. It is therefore not such a significantly different view of reality that it alters the most basic ways in which ultimate concerns - such as those for security and justice - shape the worldview. It is possible for a communist to 'convert' to being a capitalist (or vice versa) without achieving a greater level of maturity. The professed views of such a
person would appear to be very different but Fowler is keen to point out that at a fundamental level they can have remained exactly the same. Within the new beliefs there could be exactly the same attitude to accepting the relativity of this particular worldview, the same comprehension of the tacit knowledge held, and the same ability - or inability - for autonomous action. Therefore, instead of progression, variation has occurred.

In terms of Fowler’s work, a stage transition is much more important. This is an integral part of maturation. One particular stage transition is seen when individuals reach a point where they realise how many of their actions are driven by tacitly held beliefs and emotions. Realising this they understand how strongly their arguments about politics, religion and other subjects may have been biased by unacknowledged and unhelpful impulses. They realise the significant effect enculturation and socialisation have had on them. These individuals may then move to a new level where they become much more analytical of what they are saying and why. This is a characteristic of a progression to Stage 4 faith and represents a much deeper level of change than merely changing one’s professed creed. The ‘ultimate concerns’ of an individual have changed. It is important to note that stage transitions will have implications on every aspect of a person’s life. A very large amount of time will be spent re-analysing previously trusted opinions.

Before continuing to explore the different forms of development it is briefly worth noting the similarities between Fowler’s work and others’ with regard to the description of Stage 4 faith – especially in regard to the importance of exploring tacit knowledge. The transition to Stage 4 faith reflects an important element of learning in Mezirow’s description of education. His transformative education aims to allow learners to realise how much their actions are prescribed by unacknowledged presumptions about the world and their positions in it. In realising that they have had a hidden motivation for acting in a particular way they can then increase their autonomy. They are freer to act in society as independent and mature individuals.

Both Carl Rogers (1961, 1967) and Lawson (1979) view maturation in similar terms.

4 Maturity as a Goal

Only one more important aspect of defining maturity needs to be explored. This relates to the question about whether maturity is an achievable state or an unattainable goal. The following discussion indicates the variety of views on this topic. However, it will be shown that, for educational theory at least, it is important to avoid viewing maturity as an attainable state.

Nearly all developmental psychologists believe that there are limiting factors that can prevent individuals reaching their fullest maturity. However, the reasons for such a belief can be significantly different for each author. For instance, Fowler and Erikson both assume that as people pass through their stages of development they become more mature, having successfully dealt with previous psychological conflicts. Erikson sees the limiting factor as being age. This is because he believes that certain ego crises cannot occur before certain ages. However, Fowler’s view is that an individual’s reluctance to confront developmental crises might delay development indefinitely.

This difference of opinion means that Erikson could conceivably argue that humans can be mature for their age. However, in eschewing age brackets for his developmental stages Fowler makes it impossible to say this. Erikson believes that
ultimate maturity is not attainable till old age but it is likely that many people will reach this stage. For Fowler, full maturity (Stage 6) is theoretically attainable at any age of adulthood but is very rarely reached. So, in Erikson's and Piaget's views individuals can be mature but not have finished their progress through maturation. For Fowler the situation is more ambiguous - his writings indicate that it is not possible to say that someone can be considered mature for their age once they have passed through adolescence. Full maturity is only reached when a well-balanced Stage 6 faithing style is present.

Religious educators often think in significantly different ways to either of these approaches. They tend to describe maturity as an unobtainable state. Bouwsma (in Erikson, 1978) is typical in his assertion that Christians must strive for 'total conformity' with Christ even though they will never reach that level of maturity.

Non-religious adult educationalists can also view complete maturity as an unobtainable goal. This is clear in Dewey's writings. In his influential book 'Democracy and Education' (1915) he discussed the importance that definitions of maturity have for education. He concluded that we must never consider maturity a state that we can reach. In his opinion humanity can always change for the better and so it is always immature with regard to the endpoint of progression. This appears to be a valid point and one that must be taken into account when studying psychological theories of maturation. It is possible that such theories may describe maturity in terms of what is humanly achievable because their definitions are based upon empirical evidence only. Such studies would appear to overlook the importance of viewing human maturation as a never-ending process.

Postmodernists can also make a valuable contribution to understanding the need for caution in defining maturity. They too believe that, with regard to education, maturity should be considered an unobtainable state. However, they do this for a significantly different reason. Usher and Edwards (1994) argue that to consider any form of maturity an attainable goal is to promote a tyranny in education. Any individual who does not show development in terms of the definition of maturation enshrined in the educational approach is seen to be either a failure, or deficient in some way. It is assumed that they either will not, or cannot, mature. Either way, negative value judgements are made about their worth as members of society. Usher and Edwards question whether there is any validity in actually assuming all individuals are capable of reaching the same level of maturity. They also argue that it is unhelpful to assume that one description of maturation can be applied to all learners.

It is possible to argue that a definition of maturation can be found that avoids such problems. There may be a form of maturity that, when used in education, is able to foster in its learners a postmodernist view of reality. If it led its learners to question the validity of the education they were receiving then it would automatically interrogate its own agenda. It is a well-known paradox of postmodernists that they assume any attempt to convert someone to another opinion is a modernist failing. Yet they themselves offer their own postmodernist critique as an important theory. Either they are being hypocritical or they are suggesting that an educational approach must be possible that does not succumb to the pitfalls of the modernist mindset. If the latter is true the educational theory must be based on a postmodernist approach. Yet again the importance of studying Fowler's theory of maturation is stressed. If, as is argued in Chapter 5, his theory reflects a view of maturation that accepts the postmodernist understandings of the relativity of knowledge then it could be used as a basis for postmodernist educational aims.
5 Progression - a Tentative Definition of Maturation

Given the concerns discussed at the beginning of the last section, it appears sensible that debates about human development should differentiate between maturity and maturation. Maturity can be used to describe either the present state of an individual's development (their present maturity) or the end point of this development (their ideal maturity). Maturation is a description of the journey towards an ideal state of development.

As yet, only the basic conceptual outlines of maturation have been set out. Few specific human characteristics have been mentioned that may be involved. In order to set out a more complete description of maturation for use in the analysis of the data gained in the research interviews, the next chapters explore the characteristics of humans that have been considered aspects of maturation by previous theorists. Chapter 3 sets out some of the most important psychological descriptions of maturation and compares their particular approaches. Chapter 4 explores religious definitions of maturation and their relationship to the theories discussed in the Chapter 3. Once this has been done the discussion will set out a tentative definition of religious maturation for use in the analysis of the interview data.

6 Several Important Issues About Defining Maturation

This concludes the discussion about the definitions of adulthood, development and maturation. However, several important areas of debate remain about the use of these terms when studying the psychological theories of human development set out in the next chapter.

6.1 The possible components of progression and their order

The first issue arises from the increasing acceptance that definitions of maturation involve multiple aspects of human development. If progression is composed of changes in a number of different human characteristics then these will probably be organised in a hierarchy of importance. For instance, Fowler views maturation as multidimensional but argues that the most important aspect of it is to conceive of what it is to be someone else (1981). Another example comes from Kohlberg's work (1969) where he describes moral development as depending on cognitive development. He argues that without the latter the former cannot occur.

If maturation does involve multiple aspects of change - smaller component 'maturations' - then it is possible that an individual can mature in one aspect of development whilst not in others. This could lead to a variety of different paths for reaching the ultimate goal of maturation. However, if there is an order in which the elements of development must occur (such as cognitive development being necessary before moral development is possible) then there is only one road for maturation to follow. These are important points that many theories such as Fowler's do not fully explore.

6.2 The problems of assigning changes to the categories of development

A more important issue stems from the conflicting ideologies of the authors who set out theories of maturation. This situation has meant that it is not always clear which theories (or aspects of theories) can be assigned to progression or variation.
Whilst authors may accept each other’s descriptions of development as identifiable changes in humans they will often disagree as to whether they represent progression or variation. One example of authors viewing developmental changes differently can be seen when studying Moran (1983a) and Bernice Neugarten’s (1975) criticism of Erikson. Erikson viewed maturation as being intimately connected to ego development. To him, reconciling the different ego-conflicts that occur through life allows an individual to successfully move on to the next stage. In other words, someone who has successfully gone through more ego crises than another has a better understanding of the world and is a more capable individual. Ego development could therefore be classified as progression. Moran and Neugarten hold a different opinion. They would assign ego-development to the category of variation instead of “growth” (Moran, Ibid.). In Moran’s case this is because his definition of maturation is determined by his Christian vision. He believes progression is almost solely about becoming a better Christian. He does not believe that ego development describes this most important aspect of human change.

Because of this it is important to note that, in trying to synthesise a definition of maturation from many theories, an author may be making significantly different value judgements about their role in human development than the original authors.

6.3 Value judgements, tacit knowledge, and maturity as an ideological construct

The reason for these differences in opinion can sometimes arise from a priori understandings of maturation. The authors can appear to try to fit developmental schemes around intrinsic - and often concealed or half-identified - belief systems. One example of this may be the way that religious authors appear to be drawn towards descriptions of human development that deal with moral reasoning or human involvement in justice issues. They can often defend the use of these for defining maturation simply by arguing that they are consonant with God’s wishes for humanity as portrayed in the Bible. It is therefore possible that they may take for granted the effects that Christian faith has had on their worldviews.

At the same time those who have worked in a field of study such as cognitive psychology for a long time can show similar oversight. It may become ‘obvious’ to them that the more empirically accessible developmental areas are the key to defining maturation. Due to their concentration on empirically measurable changes in humans they may tend to overlook the possible need for incorporating more intangible elements of change into their definitions of maturation. This will be illustrated in the next chapter where the humanistic school of psychology is described.

Fowler’s own description of maturation illuminates the reasons why this can occur. He believes that most of society exists at a level of maturity where tacit knowledge has a very great strength over our decisions (1981). This happens because the system of ‘informing images and values’ which most individuals are committed to remain principally unexamined. If this is true it is possible to assume that many authors also have the characteristics of this type of mental organisation. They could therefore have some significant tacit motivations in valuing one theory over another. According to Fowler’s theory, even when humans progress further along the path of progression they can never fully free themselves from tacit knowledge and instinctual behaviour.
These conclusions necessitate a discussion of the relativity of most psychological theories. Unless it is possible for the authors or readers to 'get behind' their constructs of reality the effect of the value judgements made in developmental theories cannot be countered. However, many theories such as George Kelly's work on personal construct theory - which is discussed more fully in the next chapter - suggest that it is impossible to ever truly interact with 'reality' (1955). Kelly believes that any worldview is simply a lens through which to view our surroundings. It is therefore impossible for us to access reality itself and we must be content to realise that we can only ever see it through a filter.

This leads to the conclusion that definitions of maturity are probably ideological constructs. Each description of human maturation may be based on a different and perhaps arbitrary view of reality. Each ideology will have a different set of valued human characteristics to define maturity and will strive to be internally consistent but, due to the relativity of human viewpoint, no one theory can be raised above another. To pick one theory as superior is ultimately to show one's own ideology and tacit systems of valuing.

This is a criticism that postmodernists use when studying modern debates in psychology, politics and philosophy. As previously mentioned, they criticise the characteristics of society that they call modernist -- the prevailing belief in rationality and the use of 'scientific' paradigms. Postmodernists claim that modernism is flawed due to its belief that we can know what is superior thinking, or what is 'more' correct. They question the belief that objectivity is possible. Usher and Edwards (1994) offer such a critique of education, claiming it is fundamentally orientated around trying make people believe that concrete claims can be made about the suitability of one vision of maturity over another. However, not all theorists are convinced that postmodernism's argument against the possibility of objective knowledge is correct. Christian commentators can often be found to defend their particular ideology due to their belief in divine revelation.

6.4 Christian faith and objective truths

The belief in divine revelation is an important factor when analysing maturity because it could be argued to be a source of objectivity. Unfortunately, it is not open to empirical research or testing. In both Schleiermacher's (1958) and Otto's (1958) works (from the early 19th and 20th centuries respectively) it is argued that the interaction with the divine is solely through feeling. Otto argued that contact with the divine could be seen as a separate "category of apprehension" to all others (Bid, p.5). This is the "deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses" (Ibid., p.117). Actions or morals may derive from this yet they do not embody it. The rational element of the 'holy' is describable as it is conceivable, but there is also this non-rational element that cannot be described. This means that an essential factor on the understanding of the world is not accessible to reason. This introduces a limit to the degree in which Christian descriptions of maturation can be critiqued by psychological study.

It can also lead to apparently modernist views by religious authors. Thatcher argues that:

"the claim that Christianity contains final truths is often thought imperious merely because in a cultural climate saturated with relativism, non-relativistic claims tend to be vetoed out of hand" (Francis and Thatcher, 1990, p.279).
Religious authors can often indicate their belief that God reveals 'objective' truths to His believers.

Yet, at the same time, many other religious educationalists accept key points of the postmodern critique of modernism. One example of this is Moore's discussion about the 'myth' of objectivity (1995a). In fact, postmodernist arguments appear to have given religious authors a powerful weapon with which to combat the scientism that weakened religion's involvement in education when it devalued its contribution to academic discussion by labelling it 'unscientific'. Postmodernism has offered a way of proving that a religious viewpoint is no less valid that any other. Some religious authors see it as a way of proving to non-religious individuals that a religious standpoint is acceptable as a basis for education.

6.5 The reasons for choosing to promote Fowler's stage theory in the light of postmodernist criticism

These concerns highlight some limitations of this present research. Firstly, in choosing to study Christian ministers’ constructs of maturity using psychological theories the validity of the study may appear questionable to many of those with a Christian faith. However, Chapter 4 will offer arguments against this.

The second limitation is that, in choosing one particular approach and arguing for its suitability, the work could be seen as conforming to a modernist agenda. However, whilst this work offers Fowler's stages of faith as a suitable start for a description of maturation, it can be argued that it still avoids the main failings of a modernist viewpoint. This is because an ideology can be considered a legitimate starting point for an analysis if it strives to be:
   a) self-consistent.
   b) allows a two-way dialogue.

Some postmodernists argue that the only criticism of a theory that can be made is through deconstruction. This is the search for internal inconsistencies. Contradictions or premises that are not supported by the surrounding argument are identified and highlighted. The less a text can be criticised by deconstruction the more coherent it must be.

It must also be open to the criticisms made of it. An ability to accept the relativity of ones own position is consistent with postmodernist thinking - though its effects on validating such an approach as legitimate is not specifically dealt with. It is also an important aspect of any dialogue. Krister Stendahl (cited in Fowler, 1981) notes how true dialogue can only occur when both parties are open enough to be converted to the other person's opinion if it proves more consistent. Fowler offers this particular belief as a sign of maturity. He endorses the view that other worldviews will always have understandings from which we can gain insight. This is one way in which his higher stages can be seen as a rationale of postmodernist thinking - a subject that will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 5. If Fowler's work stimulates the reader to look at the benefits of postmodernist understandings then it could be said to be putting forward a postmodernist agenda. It sets out a basis for understanding maturity in ways that actively inhibit the modernist views.

A further argument for using Fowler's theory is that it has been formed within a similar culture to the one that it is being applied to in this research. There is a significant homogeneity in the Western culture, especially between America and
Britain – what Kelly (1955) would call ‘commonality (c.f. Section 3.1.1 in the next chapter). In attempting to use the Stages of Faith as a tool for this research the problems of cross-cultural application are overcome. As long as the findings of this research are not taken to be universal, and the definition of maturation is not seen as being applicable to all others, this approach is legitimate.

7 Autonomy and Authenticity

The previous discussion indicated that Christians’ faith provides them with a unique perception of the nature of reality. In the following chapters it will be shown that one way in which this influences their views of maturation and educational goals relates to their understanding of autonomy. The nature of autonomy proves to be one of the central elements of theorists’ attempts to describe human development. Educationalists also view this as one of the most important human characteristics for education to stimulate. Unfortunately, like discussions about maturity or adulthood the actual term ‘autonomy’ can be used without enough care. Tacit assumptions are often made about its nature. In order to facilitate later discussion on this important aspect of maturation it is therefore necessary to explore the different meanings that this word can have.

Autonomy can refer to several different aspects of human reasoning and acting. When theorists attempt to describe maturation confusion often arises because of a failure to differentiate between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ forms of autonomy.

7.1 External Autonomy and Freedom of Action

‘External’ autonomy relates to our ability to act as we choose in society. This is often thought of as a vital component of autonomy because, as Walker points out:

“We live in an age in which the importance of freedom, and the right to be autonomous in determining one’s life is given paramount importance” (1993, p.171).

However, whilst the right to autonomy of action is highly valued it is ultimately unhelpful to associate maturation with the ability of an individual to act as they choose.

One reason for this is that full autonomy of action is impossible because society constricts our freedoms with laws and either implicitly understood or explicitly stated codes of behaviour (Jarvis, 1992). It would appear unlikely that anyone would consider someone less mature simply because they exist in a society with laws and abide by them even when they disagree with some of them. Consequently, discussion of external autonomy has more to do with exploring our rights as human citizens than it has with identifying our maturation.

This is easily illustrated when considering individuals who break the Law. In acting in a particular way, in spite of the regulations that prohibit it, they could be making an autonomous decision. However, they could act this way for both moral and immoral reasons. For instance, a man may become a thief specialising in the stealing of fine art. Alternatively, a doctor may feel it necessary to grant a terminally ill patient’s request to be given an overdose. In the case of the thief, he may have chosen to flout the Law but it would appear unlikely that he has done so out of a mature conviction of the legitimacy of his actions. In the case of the doctor, the conviction that assisting someone to die is preferable to letting them continue to be in pain could be considered a result of mature deliberation on the ethics of the situation. Because of such situations, autonomy as freedom of action is a concept that can have little to do with describing maturation.
Another reason why external autonomy cannot be linked too closely to maturation is due to the fact that it can also be limited by physical factors. For instance, incarceration or disability will reduce an individual's ability to act autonomously. Someone cannot be deemed less mature simply because they are physically prevented from acting as freely as others are.

However, these situations have not prevented some commentators from confusing the debate by declaring that autonomy is impossible due to the need for society to be structured by Law and other rules and regulations. For instance, Elmer argues that autonomy is a fallacy of Western culture (Quoted in Petrovitch, 1986). The previous argument hopes to prove that it would probably be more accurate to say that the fallacy is a belief that anyone can act in a totally free manner.

7.2 Internal Autonomy and Authenticity

Because of these factors it seems sensible to assume that actions which appear autonomous are not necessarily indicators of any given level of maturity. However, another form of autonomy can be seen to be intimately related to maturation as defined in Section 3.1 of this chapter. This is 'internal' autonomy. Hull describes this when he states:

"The autonomous person, to put it rather simply, is able to think for herself [sic]"
(1985, p.16)

Sealey holds a similar view and talks of "autonomous decision makers" (1985, p.21). Internal autonomy therefore refers to freedom of decision making. Earlier, it was shown how Mezirow spoke of a freedom from inculcated values (section 2.3). By describing internal autonomy in this way it is possible to see how we can describe someone as having autonomy even when they are unable to act in the manner that they would choose to in a totally free society. For instance, a doctor may decide that euthanasia is a valid option for terminally ill patients without actually assisting in any of his or her patients' deaths. The result of this distinction is that reasoning is stressed as the indicator of autonomy rather than whether an individual can, or will, act in a certain way or not.

Jung called the process of gaining internal autonomy 'individuation' (1975). However, a more commonly encountered term is authenticity. Allport (1950) describes authenticity as the state ultimately reached by the growing sense of self. He also sees it as involving an understanding of how this self relates to the community. Authenticity is therefore gained with an increasing understanding of our personal abilities and limitations as well as our ability to perceive the social setting in which we live. Strunk indicates that, as our horizons widen beyond our family and peer group to incorporate national or international perspectives, our ability to live authentically also evolves.

There are obviously some limits to how much authenticity we may achieve. For instance our abilities for mental organisation and perception are ultimately limited by the structure of our brains. There are also factors that depend on the individual involved. For instance, mental ability may be limited due to brain damage or the natural variation of ability that occurs within society. However, the theories of maturation explored in this research indicate that most people, if not all, can reach a level of development where they become free from socialised behaviour and begin to understand that there are other ways to view a given situation. In terms of Fowler's work this is when the locus of control moves from being external to being internal. This is further elaborated on in later chapters.
8 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the groundwork for understanding how different psychological and educational theories define maturity or maturation. It has described a vocabulary that will allow a less ambiguous understanding of key themes. The discussion has pointed out the shortcomings of several approaches to defining maturity. It has also indicated that constructs of maturation may revolve around changes in one or more attributes and how it is important to study the relative importance of each of the aspects of human development that have been studied. The discussion has highlighted some of the difficulties of defining maturation and issues of concern for the following exploration of maturation.
CHAPTER 3

Important Descriptions of Human Development by Cognitive and Developmental Psychologists

1. Introduction

The previous chapter differentiated between maturation and other forms of human development. However, it did not fully explore the way that maturation may actually occur (i.e. as a gradual transition or a series of steps), nor the actual human characteristics that have been used to describe progression. This chapter begins to rectify this situation. It explores the most influential descriptions of human development that have been put forward since the 1940's. It discusses the different ways in which maturation is seen to occur and the wide variety of observed and conjectured changes in human characteristics that have been considered part of it. This allows the discussion to begin to formulate a description of both the likely mechanism of maturation as well as the human characteristics that may be involved.

It is significant that the works of the authors discussed in this chapter have often had an effect on the debates about religious maturation that are described in the next chapter. For instance, the theories of authors such as Piaget (1929, 1950, 1968, et al.), Erikson (1959a, 1978, 1982), Kohlberg (1969, 1976) and Levinson (1978) are easily identifiable in Fowler's work. In studying these theories, and the underlying differences in their approaches, the discussion can therefore explore the implications for works such as Fowler's, that seek to synthesise definitions of religious maturation from them. The theories discussed in this chapter have also influenced the debates about adult education as well. For instance, the works of Carl Rogers (1961, 1967) have been influential in Lawson's theory of liberal education (Chapter 6). Because of this the discussion can explore some of the concerns common to both religious and educational debates about maturation.

Each author's works will be studied individually. The discussion will give an overview of their work and the particular school of thought from which they originated. It will highlight those aspects of the theories that are of relevance to the discussion of maturation in later chapters. These elements include ego crises (Erikson), moral reasoning (Kohlberg), freedom from biological imperatives and socialised values (Maslow and Rogers respectively), and self-actualisation (Maslow, Allport and Rogers). Where applicable, the discussion also sets out the ways in which the authors believed their theories illuminated the nature of religious maturation.

1.1 Cognitive and Developmental Theories

The theorists mentioned in this chapter come from two broad schools of thought. These are the cognitive and developmental schools. Whilst these are not identical there is a large amount of overlap between them. Of the two, the developmental school will be shown to be of most use in describing maturation.

Cognitive psychology originated in the 1950's and 60's when many psychologists chose to compare the human mind to a computer. In their investigations they chose to concentrate on studying purely cognitive processes. These involve:
"all the ways in which we come to know the world around us, particularly memory, perceptions, language, thinking, problem-solving, reasoning and concept-attainment" (Gross, 1987, p.3).

The school attempted to understand these through rigorous clinical testing of its subjects.

Contemporary theorists have moved away from purely cognitive descriptions of maturity. This has led to other schools of psychological theory. Developmental psychology is one of these. This field is still interested in cognitive processes and monitors their changes over time. However, it realised that studying maturation requires an exploration of a wider range of human characteristics, all of which can also develop over time. It is therefore interested in the physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes that occur throughout the human lifecycle. The school was initially concerned with childhood and adolescence. However, with the growing awareness that adulthood contains equally significant changes, developmental studies began to monitor maturation through the whole lifecycle. This approach has proved popular and, consequently, interest in developmental psychology has grown rapidly over the last 20-30 years.

Although some theories are designated cognitive and others developmental they may still be considered similar in structure. For instance, the first theorists to be studied in this chapter are all stage theorists even though they cover a broad spectrum of the cognitive and developmental schools. Jean Piaget resides mainly within the cognitive school of psychology. Erik Erikson can be classified as part of the psychoanalytical school existing at the boundary between cognitive and developmental fields. Daniel Levinson is from the humanist school of developmental psychology.

The order in which these last theorists were mentioned reflects the general progression of thinking in the field of stage theory. Piaget described the stages of development through which children and adolescents went. Erikson followed this with his 'Identity and the Lifecycle' (1980) which was the first major study of the lifelong changes in humans. Authors such as Levinson (1978) and Lawrence Kohlberg were influenced by Erikson and further elaborated on the nature of adult development.

2 Stages of Development

Piaget, Erikson, Levinson and Kohlberg all worked from similar standpoints. They shared a view that humans need to construct new models of the world to meet new challenges. Their descriptions of maturation share a rigid stage format and emphasise the irreversible changes that occur during human development.

2.1 Jean Piaget and the intellectual development of children

The origins of stage theory can be seen when studying Piaget's work. He was born in 1896 and his work held a prime position during the sixties until Erikson's took over in popularity. Piaget's most influential work was his description of four developmental stages that explain the intellectual development from birth to 16 years of age. The four stages of cognitive development were designated:

I. Sensorimotor (0 to 2 years) - Infancy.
II. Pre-operational (2 to 7 years) - Early Childhood.
III. Concrete-operational (7 to 12 years) - Late Childhood.
IV. Formal-operational (12 to 16 years) - Adolescence.
Piaget did not seek to monitor any changes beyond this age believing that:

"mental life can be conceived as evolving towards a final form of
equilibrium represented by the adult mind" (1964, p.3).

Descriptions of the individual stages are not necessary to this discussion as they do not relate to adult development. However, two general points about Piaget’s work are of interest. Both of these relate to his assumptions about the nature of stage development and have proved to be highly influential. They have been incorporated into many later theories such as Fowler’s.

Firstly, Piaget believed that the stages are passed through in an invariant order. There is evidence to suggest that the sequence of stages is indeed invariant and perhaps universal (Flavell, 1977). However, there is also evidence that Piaget’s stages can be straddled (Flavell, cited in Gross, 1987). The concept of progressive stages still remains at the heart of stage theory.

Secondly, each new stage is seen to reconstruct the last to produce a qualitatively different outlook or understanding of the world. Piaget saw three things happen as children progress through these stages. They gain an increasing ability to see something from another person’s perspective, to maintain individual identity and to think hypothetically.

2.1.1 Piaget and religious understanding

Piaget was a prolific writer but spent little time discussing religion or spirituality in his work except in his 1929 work entitled ‘The Child’s Conception of the World’. In this he discussed the way in which children’s conceptions of the world are affected by their religious upbringing.

He pointed out that children’s cognitive mechanisms invariably distort religious teaching to fit into their worldview. This is done in several ways:

Firstly, children simplify religious messages:

“The child’s real religion is anything but the over-élaborated religion with which he [sic] is plied” (p.272).

For instance, God is seen as a man rather than an abstract concept.

Secondly:

“religious instruction is not received passively by the child but is disfigured and assimilated in conformity with three tendencies existing prior to this instruction. These latter are, precisely, the tendency to invent participations, the tendency towards artificialism and the tendency towards animism” (ibid.).

Of these three tendencies the most significant to this discussion is artificialism. This is the tendency to conceive of things as resulting from a transcendent act of creation. Piaget discovered that it is not a product of religious upbringing. However, artificialism is only a characteristic of Piaget’s first stage. It is gradually lost during the passage to Stage 3, where the child explains the origins of his surroundings in terms of natural processes. His conclusion was that children use God to explain their surroundings only when they do not have knowledge to explain a phenomenon in rational terms.
2.1.2 Piaget and morality

Whilst Piaget did not spend much time discussing the development of religious understandings, he did write about morality. Moral development is usually depicted as an extremely important element of religious maturation (e.g. Berridge, 1969; Fowler, 1981, 1987) and it is because of this that Christian authors have remained interested in his writings.

The intimation in his works is that moral thinking is directly related to cognitive ability (1932). This is an understanding that was later confirmed by Kohlberg (c.f.) and as such has proved vital in illustrating the need to incorporate psychological theories into the discussion of religious maturation. Unfortunately, Piaget's work tended to deal with the morality of childhood and any moral development through adolescence or beyond is not covered. Nevertheless, some of the concepts he described remain useful to later discussion of adult development. For instance, his description of moral development involved two major stages:

I. From 5 to 9 years of age he described children as having heteronomous morality. This means that parents and teachers control it. Morality is seen by children to be about obeying the rules of those who have power over them.

II. From the age of 10 onwards Piaget believed that children develop autonomous morality. This means they are capable of creating, and abiding by, their own rules. The increasing awareness that peers are important to self-esteem means that morals are created to strengthen the smooth running of the peer group (1932).

Many authors have confirmed that this movement from one type of morality to another does occur (e.g. Lickona, 1973) even though they have found little evidence to back up Piaget's reasoning about why it occurs. In spite of this, the description of autonomous morality has proved enduring and, whilst requiring further elaboration, is of importance to the later discussion of autonomy and authenticity.

2.1.3 Problems with Piaget's findings

Piaget's work has been increasingly discredited in recent years. His methodology has been shown to be somewhat unscientific at times (Gross, 1987) and is not acceptable given today's scientific standards. Especial criticism has arisen over Piaget's respondent groups. These were sometimes extremely small and some aspects of his theory could even have been based purely on his observations of his own children and their friends.

In spite of such criticisms, Piaget's work still has influence today and his name remains familiar in discussions of human development. It is also clear that his work was incorporated into many of the later stage theories that remain influential. Good examples of such theories are those produced by Erikson and Kohlberg.

2.2 Erik Erikson and the discomfort of ego development in adults

It is clear that the basics of stage theory set out by Piaget are central to Erikson's works. He states that:

"After birth, the maturing organism continues to unfold, by growing planfully and by developing a prescribed sequence of physical, cognitive, and social capacities... [and] in the sequence of significant experiences the healthy
child, if properly guided, can be trusted to conform to the epigenetic laws of development" (1982, p.28).

However, the period over which development was seen to occur went beyond adolescence until old age. In studying the whole of the lifecycle Erikson revolutionised developmental stage theory and began to explore the changes that occur during adulthood. This allows the discussion to further explore the cognitive characteristics that may be involved in the maturation of adults.

The central element of Erikson's developmental theory was ego development. The ego is the planning and decision making part of the brain. It is rational and logical, and embodies the cognitive processes. Erikson described how tensions can arise within the ego. He argued that these 'ego conflicts' occurred in a predictable manner, at different times in the lifecycle. He identified eight stages of 'man' and set them out in his books "Identity and the Lifecycle" (1959a) and "The Lifecycle Completed" (1982). Each individual stage of ego development was described as having characteristic strengths, weaknesses, and an increasing radius of significant relations (See Fig. 1). Each ego crisis is named from the two extreme positions that could result. However, individuals usually remain somewhere in between these two positions, never fully succeeding or failing to cope with the tension.

Erikson's work is important because it introduces an understanding that failure to successfully develop in one aspect of maturation can have important aspects for later development. To those who follow psychoanalytical theory, ego development reflects a key element of mental health. It is believed that when an ego crisis is not successfully dealt with mental growth is stunted. This means that later stages cannot always be passed through properly. Whilst an individual can confront an 'old' ego crisis later in life in order to rectify it, this becomes progressively harder the longer it is left. In this respect Erikson's work contrasts with Piaget's whose stages were almost always passed through successfully.

Another important aspect of Erikson's work for understanding maturation is that periods of stress and disorientation are a normal part of adult maturation. The term 'ego conflict' itself indicates this as do the commonly used terms 'crisis' and 'tension'. Piaget had previously described stage transition in terms of a disequilibrium leading to accommodation (1950) but it is argued that he underplayed the importance of these periods and problems that can be caused by them (Brainerd, 1978). The concept of periods of disorientation or discomfort as a natural consequence of maturation will be further explored when studying Fowler's work in Chapter 4.

2.2.1 Socialisation as an important source of ego conflict

Erikson's work clearly points out that maturation can involve the interaction of several different processes. He argues that the origins of an ego conflict are diverse. He describes them as being brought about by the interaction of three different processes (or 'organisations') of maturation. Firstly, there is a biological process or "hierarchic organisation of organ systems constituting a body" (1978). This is called the soma. Then there is the psychic process that organises the individual's experience. This is called the psyche. Lastly there is the "communal process of cultural organisation" or ethos. Erikson believed that all of these interrelate and if one area encounters a breakdown it can affect all the others. Conversely, as one area grows there can be implications for the others. An example of this is when a child's body (the somatic element) goes through different stages as it develops, ultimately passing through
Figure 1.  
*Characteristics of Erikson’s Eight Stages of Man.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Psychosexual Stages</th>
<th>Psychosexual Crises</th>
<th>Radius Of Significant Relations</th>
<th>Core Pathology</th>
<th>Ritualism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3) Play Age (3-6 years)</td>
<td>Infantile-Genital/Locomotor</td>
<td>Initiative vs Guilt</td>
<td>Basic Family.</td>
<td>Inhibition.</td>
<td>Moralism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) School Age (7-12 years)</td>
<td>&quot;latency&quot;</td>
<td>Industry vs Inferiority.</td>
<td>&quot;Neighbourhood&quot; School</td>
<td>Inertia.</td>
<td>Formalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Young Adulthood (20s)</td>
<td>Genitality</td>
<td>Intimacy vs Isolation</td>
<td>Partners in Friend/ship, sex, competition etc</td>
<td>Exclusivity.</td>
<td>Elitism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Old Age (50s and beyond)</td>
<td>(Generalization of sensual modes)</td>
<td>Integrity vs Despair.</td>
<td>&quot;Mankind&quot; &quot;My Kind&quot;.</td>
<td>Disdain.</td>
<td>Dogmatism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Taken from Erikson, 1980, p32-33)
adolescence. During these transitions his or her ability for organisation in the psyche and ethos regions will develop too.

One of the most important elements of Erikson's theory is the suggestion that ego conflicts can be brought about by socialisation. Erikson broke away from Freud's vision of humans as victims of the id, where conflicts occur because of instincts such as hunger and sexual gratification. In emphasising the role of the ego Erikson emphasised the importance of social and cultural factors in human development. This was an important shift that reflected the growth of social psychology at the time. Jungian theory had made it clear that psychology had to be more than a study of internal pressures (Levinson, 1978). This attitude exists today and modern theories of maturation usually understand that:

"a person's life at any given time incorporates both external and internal aspects" (Sheehy, 1976, p.24-5).

This shift of emphasis in Erikson's work allowed the social pressures that affect human maturation to begin to be identified. Further elaboration on the nature of the social factors in maturation can be seen in the developmental theories of Levinson, Kohlberg, Sheehy and Fowler.

2.2.2 Religion in Erikson's work

The incorporation of religious factors into the discussion of maturation is more noticeable in Erikson's work than in Piaget's. He has been interested in the impact of religion on the individual. Two of his earlier works were about important religious leaders - "Young Man Luther (1959b) and "Gandhi's Truth" (1969). Authors such as Moran (1983) have seen these works as indicating that there is a strong potential for religion to lead to maturation. However Erikson does not deal with religious faith to any great degree in his psychological theory. He concentrates instead on the role of organised religion in the ego crises of adulthood and old age. His findings provide an important indication that a return to Church attendance can be stimulated by the ageing process and may be an attempt to cope with a particular developmental crisis.

Erikson attributes the importance of religion in adulthood and old age to the specific nature of the concerns that are related to these periods. The approach of old age brings with it the knowledge that more years have passed than are ahead - a view supported by several studies such as Sheehy's (1976). This is described as creating a characteristic ego crisis. Erikson describes it as integrity versus despair. This is intimately bound up with the first ego crisis of all - trust versus mistrust. As old age is reached the crisis of integrity versus despair reiterates this fundamental tension making it the central concern again but in a modified form:

"The tension between basic trust and mistrust reaches back to the very beginning of life... Throughout life, this tension involves issues of commitment to established religion and, with increasing age, of quasi-religious, philosophical considerations. Early concern with the predictability of the day-to-day world and immediate experience expand into concern with understanding the infinite universe in which all personal, practical knowledge is set" (1986, p.218).

This concern is seen to create a desire in older individuals to maintain a close involvement with a church. It is seen as a natural reaction to the increased awareness of the mystery of life. In their search for answers these individuals often feel drawn to organised religion because:
"religion and art are the institutions with the strongest traditional claim on the cultivation of numinosity" (1982, p.45).

This is also the case for those who have never before been churchgoers. Attendance is seen to be prompted by a simple need to participate and to affirm a basic faith rather than by theological commitment to the church. Unfortunately, those individuals who are drawn towards religion at this point may not have developed their religious sensibilities since childhood or early adulthood. Thus, "in the face of inevitable despair" they may have to return to old methods of religious expression as a source of current religious strength and integration (1986, p.69).

This attraction to religion is obviously a symptom of the concerns of old age. Erikson does not appear to see religion as an essential force on human maturation. He points out that political ideologies have largely taken over the numinous function of the churches (1982).

2.2.3 Problems with Erikson's work

Although acknowledged as a great improvement on Piaget's theory, Erikson's work also has its shortcomings. For instance, Erikson's description of the key social factors involved in maturation is problematic. In real life, the overall pattern of a lifecycle can be very varied. The situation that individuals find themselves can vary, as can the points in life when they are experienced. Unfortunately, Erikson depicts life as involving early marriage, the raising of children and the movement of offspring away from the home as they get older. As each phase of life has related ego crises the times for significant ego development are therefore firmly delineated. There is little room to apply the theory to people who choose to remain celibate, unmarried or are without children.

The way in which Erikson's theory involved many more elements of development than Piaget's has also caused problems. Rapaport (1959) argues that the theory is weakened because of this. He believes that the theory:

"ranges over phenomenological, specifically clinical psychoanalytic-psychological propositions without systematically differentiating among them" (p. 58).

However, many - including Fowler - argue that it is impossible to delineate neatly between all of the factors that affect maturation. Because of this it must be realised that describing maturation may involve a compromise between being able to clearly isolate the development of particular characteristic and the need to describe maturation more holistically. To discuss the problems of studying maturation scientifically through narrowly defined elements of cognition it is useful to study the humanist school of thought. One important theorist from this school is Daniel Levinson.

2.3 Daniel Levinson and humanistic psychology

According to Stokes (1983), Levinson is probably the most highly regarded writer on the topic of adult development. This is interesting because, until relatively recently, he studied only male development. His best known book is "The Seasons of a Man's Life" (1978). This work clearly shows him to be a developmental and stage theorist of the humanist school. Because of this he writes from a different viewpoint from the previous theorists.

Humanism was an umbrella term first used in 1955. It diverges from the more cognitive developmental psychology of the previous authors in two main ways:
Firstly, psychologists working from the humanist perspective:
"reject both the Psychoanalytic and the Behaviourist (or Stimulus-Response) approaches. They emphasise the individual's uniqueness and freedom to choose a particular course of action in contrast to the rather deterministic nature of both psychoanalysis and behaviourism - behaviour is not a response to unconscious forces (Freud) or to external stimuli (S-R theory) but to the individual's perception, interpretation and comprehension of external stimuli." (Gross, 1987, p.224).

This indicates a move from depth to height psychology (Strunk, 1965). Depth psychology is interested in the unconscious influences on behaviour. However, height psychology chooses to stress the more conscious aspects of it.

Secondly, humanistic theory refers to a group of theories which:
"share the belief that scientific attempts to study human beings are misplaced and inappropriate, since, to see man at second hand through his behaviour as against his experience is ultimately to see ourselves at second hand and never be ourselves" (Evans, 1975).

The humanistic-existential field believes that human maturation is made up of many elements of which ego development and moral development are but a few. Thus the criteria for maturity are wider and the theories more ambitious in their descriptions of development. As a humanist theorist Levinson therefore aimed to describe human development in a more holistic manner than Piaget and Erikson. He saw this aim as a natural progression from Erikson's own approach to social psychology.

Levinson believes Erikson's work to be essential for understanding human development. Because of this his conclusions are similar. He suggests that men evolve through an orderly sequence of stable and transitional phases. He calls these 'structure building' and 'structure changing' phases. The former is characterised by firm choices and attempts to enhance life within the fixed structure. The latter is the time to question the existing structure and to make plans for a new stable period. However, Levinson did not set out as many stages as Erikson. He described only four stages of development and he used the metaphor of seasons to describe them. Each of these is described as having its own intrinsic value.

Levinson's work provides an important argument against the uncritical use of a stage format for describing maturation. He chose not to use the term 'stage' because he felt it was too constricting and clear-cut. The boundaries between his seasons are noticeably less clear than those between Erikson's stages. These stages could not be straddled because they only dealt with one particular facet of ego development at a time. However, the seasons concern several elements of human development and can therefore be seen to overlap. Because of this, not every strand of development will necessarily go through a dramatic change at the same time.

In spite of this, Levinson's seasons are still given definite age brackets. Each individual's life is divided into four periods of roughly twenty years. Figure 2 shows the seasons and the age ranges with which they are typically associated. Levinson is confident that the age brackets do not vary beyond 5 or 6 years and he believes that stage transitions typically take "not less than 3 [years] and rarely more than 6" (1978, p.18).
2.3.1 A brief description of each season

These descriptions give an overview of each season. For the sake of simplicity many of the less significant themes have been omitted. There is no mention of religious or spiritual matters in any of these seasons because Levinson does not describe them as important dimensions in understanding human development. The descriptions of the different seasons prove to be significant because they offer a further exploration of the way in which the different processes involved in maturation (i.e. biological, cognitive, affective etc.) impact on each other.

Pre-adulthood is the first season of a man’s life. It includes childhood and adolescence. It is a period of great development. The transition into early adulthood is set off by the bodily changes that lead to sexual maturity. The influence of Piaget’s and Erikson’s work on the description of this season is obvious.

Early Adulthood is the next season and it covers the ages of 17 to 45. This season encompasses the period of peak physical performance. It is also the period when instinctual drives are at their height. This causes contradictions in a man’s life, leading to a fundamental level of stress. One instinctual drive is for immediate personal gratification. Unfortunately, man must learn to defer immediate gratification to fulfil the increasing responsibilities that he has placed on him. Yet the fulfilling of these responsibilities can also give a feeling of satisfaction. The individual is therefore ‘torn’ between two forms of fulfilment. Because of this Levinson describes early adulthood as “satisfying and stressful” (1978, p.22).
This stress is not necessarily welcome. At this point the individual is supposed to crave stability in life. He will attempt to accommodate much in order to avoid reorganising his perceptions of the world to any great extent. Some of this need for stability leads to the individual seeking to move from being an apprentice to being a master of a chosen profession. Such advancement leads to more wealth and thus material stability as well as the appearance of being an important member of society. However, the need to prove oneself is also tied up with a great need for independence. Again stress may be caused as the desire to express independence conflicts with the need to fit in and be seen as a reliable and conforming member of society for the sake of professional success.

Middle adulthood is the third season and covers the age bracket of 40 to 65. Levinson admits his description of middle adulthood is controversial. He argues that a change in men is universally understood to occur during this period and is traditionally called a mid-life crisis. However, he cannot isolate any one universal event that heralds the transition to this stage. Instead he offers 3 inter-related changes that may be involved. These are (i) biological and psychological changes, (ii) shifts in perceived generation and (iii) evolving careers and enterprises.

The biological and psychological changes involved with a transition to middle adulthood are said to bring about two significant changes. Firstly there is a decrease in energy and, secondly, there is a loss of the youthful desires that carried the individual through the previous season. Consequently, the individual suffers less from their 'tyranny'. He is able to free himself from such 'petty' drives and to enrich his life.

Striving for such freedom is the ideal for middle adulthood but several factors can prevent this state from being achieved. One problem is that a man's self image may have been supported by his previous attitudes to career and success. The loss of 'youthful drives' causes a significant re-examination to occur. Each man is described as asking questions such as "what have I achieved?", "do I want what I have achieved?" and "have I wasted my time?". What the younger man might have striven for may not now appear such an important goal. The older individual may even consider his previous achievements a failure due to the change in his values.

Another inhibiting factor is the way that each individual may feel his mortality more. Like Erikson, Levinson feels men will become aware of the fact that there may be fewer years ahead than there are behind. Levinson describes most men's reactions to these changes in terms of an unconscious, or tacit, fear response. It is his hope that this response will trigger a self-analysis that leads the individual to a new stable state.

At the same time as losing certain drives, each man will have to cope with a change in his perceived generation. He realises that other members of society see him in a significantly different light. His role and character are perceived to be different from what they were previously in his youth. The individual's place in society, as determined by other's opinion, has changed. With this comes the need for the individual to re-evaluate his role, asking whether it should change to fit in with the new image that has been projected onto him.

Late adulthood is the last season described - though with our increasing longevity Levinson suggests that there is room to consider a late late adulthood. The description of late adulthood is even more speculative than that of the last season. Levinson did not actually interview anyone of this age before writing 'Seasons of a Man's Life'. Because of this it can only be considered a provisional view of old age.
Levinson offers little in the way of description for this season. He feels that, like the previous season, no single universal event triggers it. He suggests that it could be initiated by another shift in perceived generation - at this point an individual is now seen as an old age pensioner or grandparent. At the same time he feels that the act of retirement means a significant re-evaluation of life is necessary. As a man no longer plays a part in society through his career he must either accept this loss or find an alternative to allow him to continue interacting usefully with society.

2.3.2 Problems with Levinson's theory

In spite of its influence Levinson's work is not without fault. Firstly, it has already been mentioned that until recently it has had limited applicability due to its concentration on male development only. DeBoy's work (Stokes, 1983) was an early attempt to remedy this situation. She studied a number of women using Levinson's framework. Her findings suggested that the seasons could not necessarily be seen to apply to women in the same way. The average age spans of the seasons and transitions were significantly different for each gender.

Secondly, it would appear that Levinson overemphasised the importance of specific social factors in men's lives. He states that "a man's work is the primary base for his life in society" (1978, p.9) and is convinced that "in all societies a man is expected to marry and to take certain responsibilities with a familial system" (p.45). However, Bee and Mitchell (1980) point out that occupation and 'traditional' family settings are not all-important.

Levinson's work is also problematic because of its reliance on rigid age boundaries for each season. His work describes a society where the nature of family responsibility changes in a uniform and predictable manner. This makes such a theory very specific to the particular culture in which the research was done. This problem has been exacerbated because Levinson used only 40 people, all of whom were employed. Most of these subjects could be considered successful workers. He does not say how development is affected if no success in work is possible or if there is no desire to gain promotion or compete in the work place.

Similar problems affect the validity of all of the previous theorists. Each of them has been seen to need larger or more representative samples of subjects. This has prompted many other authors to try and study the universality of these theories. For instance, Sheehy studied 155 respondents finding many similar situations to Levinson in men's development. Levin studied female development through Erikson's paradigm (1959a) and Gilligan (1982) studied it through Kohlberg's. Fowler has studied even more respondents of both sexes in an attempt to create a universally applicable developmental theory - and possibly has one of the largest numbers of interviewees for any such study.

Fowler remains one of the best corroborators of Levinson's theory. His work has many similarities with it. However, it does not back up the rigid age boundaries or the necessity of many of the social triggers that are stressed in the seasons. Nevertheless, later chapters will show that Levinson's seasons come closest to reflecting the views of maturation elicited from ministers in the research interviews.
2.3.3 Levinson and maturity

Levinson's work provides a clear warning about the problems of making value judgements about the worth of a developmental stage in some theories. Whilst Levinson was heavily influenced by Erikson, his understanding of maturation is significantly different. Erikson considered his ego development to be of prime importance and seems to view it as progression. However, it is clear from Levinson's work that the 'seasonal' changes he describes are considered to be variation. He saw them solely as a development to cope with changing needs due to age. The seasons describe the particular tasks with which the person must grapple. This is the reason why he chooses the word 'season' rather than 'stage'. In his opinion the latter term indicates a hierarchy of importance that is not warranted. By avoiding using the term 'stage' he attempts to avoid value judgements about maturity based solely on the season in which people reside. Instead, he defines maturation as the successful reassessment of life during each season - the successful completion of the tasks that arise. Maturation is therefore seen to involve coming to terms with one's role in society and the ability to reassess one's aims.

Whilst Levinson's work begins to study the kind of influences that affect a man's reasoning it does not differentiate clearly between cognitive processes and moral reasoning. This latter subject is vital to discussion of maturation. To understand the differences between these two processes Lawrence Kohlberg's work needs to be studied.

2.4 Lawrence Kohlberg and the study of moral development

Kohlberg's work (1969, 1976) clarified the development of moral reasoning during the human lifecycle. Although Piaget had started to work in this area he had concentrated on studying children. Kohlberg expanded the study of the subject up to middle age. His work is important because moral reasoning is shown to be one of the more important aspects of maturation. Most people intuitively understand that an individual cannot be considered to have matured unless he or she shows an increased ability to relate to the rest of society in a positive or committed way. However, as will be shown, moral development is more than just upholding laws or obeying rules.

Kohlberg proved moral reasoning to be different from cognitive reasoning. Because of this his work eschewed determining the strictly intellectual for a chance to study the reasoning that involved wider issues of a social kind. He wanted to understand what the thinking processes were that created the moralities he observed. Because he made a distinction between moral and cognitive thinking his preferred method of study was to confront people with moral dilemmas rather than subjecting people to tests of intellectualism.

Using different moral dilemmas Kohlberg found that moral development comprised three levels, each made up of two stages (see figure 3). Stage 1 can be seen to reflect Piaget's heteronomous morality whilst the concept of autonomous morality has been expanded and is not wholly encapsulated in any of the stages.
Level 1: Pre-conventional.

Stage 1 - Punishment and Obedience orientation
What is right and wrong is determined by what is punishable and what is not. Avoidance of punishment is the key - things are not right or wrong in themselves.

Stage 2 - Instrumental-Relativist orientation
What is right and wrong is determined by what brings rewards and what people want. The individual follows rules because it serves his or her own needs. This often creates the "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" syndrome.

Level 2: Conventional.

Stage 3 - Interpersonal Concordance orientation
Good behaviour is whatever pleases others. Being moral is to be seen to be a good person in one's own eyes as well as others. In this state the individual tries to live up to what is expected of them with the majority consensus being taken as determining what is right or wrong.

Stage 4 - Law and Order orientation
Being good now comes to mean doing one's duty - which entails showing respect for authority and maintaining the social order for its own sake. Society protects the individual therefore society should be protected. Laws are unquestioningly and automatically obeyed in the effort to fulfil one's duty to society.

Level 3: Post-conventional.

Stage 5 - Social Contract-Legalistic orientation
Apart from the law of the land what is right or wrong is a matter for personal decision. The law is for the good of the people but it can be changed as it is a democratic process. Sometimes the rights of the individual can supersede these laws but only when the (uncommon) universal laws are being transgressed (such as denial of basic human rites). A sense of obligation to the law is present. This is due to one's social contract with the world for the good of all humanity.

Stage 6 - Universal-Ethical Principle orientation
Moral action is determined by our inner conscience and may or may not accord with public opinion. Individual reflection rather than society will determine our ethical code. Principles are universal and mostly about respecting human dignity and the sacredness of life. People are seen as ends in themselves.

(Taken from Kohlberg, 1976 and Gross, 1987)

In this theory two people can be at the same stage but give two different or even opposing answers to a dilemma. The study did not concentrate on what the answer was but the way at which it had been arrived. To explain why this is the case it is useful to study an example of the moral dilemmas used. A commonly used one was called the 'Heinz' dilemma. The individual being studied was asked whether an imaginary husband was right or wrong to steal overpriced medicine for his dying wife when he could not afford to buy it legally. There are two different answers that the respondent can give - "yes" he was right or "no" he was wrong to do it. However, Kohlberg argued that they could both be arrived at by very similar processes of moral reasoning. A distinction is thus made between analysis of the specific ethics of a response and the type of thinking that brought it about.

Kohlberg's work confirmed the possibility of one aspect of maturation being entirely dependent on another. He argued that the moral development of the individual was limited by his or her cognitive development. At the same time he felt that moral development was not automatically brought about by development in the cognitive aspect of an individual. His conclusion was that moral reasoning usually lagged behind. Some studies conclude that only 50% of adults are seen to reach the post-conventional
stages of maturity (Stages 5 and 6), with only 20% reaching the highest level (Stage 6). At any one time, most adults probably reside within Stages 3 or 4 (Shaver and Strong, 1976, cited in Gross, 1987).

2.4.1 Religion and autonomy

Kohlberg’s original work did not make much reference to religious factors with regard to moral development. He did argue that access to social interaction is essential for moral development (Modgil, 1980) and so it is perhaps possible to argue that institutions that stress the importance of morality may accelerate moral development.

Kohlberg later modified his stages to include a seventh stage. Many religious authors have taken this as an indication that he was trying to incorporate religious aspects of maturation into his framework of moral development.

Stage 7 is described as an ‘ultimate faith’ which

“integrates stage 6 universal justice principles with ‘a perspective on life’s ultimate meaning’ and as such supports these principles” (Modgil, 1980, p.323).

However, its outlook is characterised by:

“the sense of being a part of the whole of life and adoption of a cosmic, as opposed to a universal humanistic (stage 6) perspective” (Ibid., p.326).

Jacobs (1988) explains that:

“Stage 7” arises out of the despair that comes from the realization of one’s finiteness, and of the meaninglessness of the finite compared to the infinite… ‘Stage 7’ comes out of the resolution of despair. It represents a state of mind in which there is a sense of being part of the whole of life, identified with the cosmic, infinite perspective itself” (p.43).

Religious authors have been especially interested in Stage 7 due to its apparent importance for definitions of religious maturation. Jacobs (1988) believes that it is the first moral stage in which religious thought is the determining factor. Until this point he argues maturation was determined by moral development – an element of maturation that he did not feel was directly influenced by religious faith or beliefs.

However, the description of Stage 7 is not always clear and for this reason many authors have voiced doubts about its usefulness. Locke (1986) finds Kohlberg’s writings on this subject confusing and inconsistent. He compares the description of this stage to the Bible. He argues that it is written in such a way that it includes something to back up almost any point of view.

2.4.2 The conflict between individual autonomy and religious faith

Another problem that exists for religious authors is connected with Kohlberg’s description of maturation as involving increasing autonomy of action. The structure of the stages of moral reasoning appears to suggest that religious faith can justify a stage of moral reasoning that is far below Stage 7.
The passage through moral stages reflects a development from conformity to autonomy. Progression towards autonomy can be summarised in the following description of how individuals relate to their community's rules:

Stage 1: Conforms to avoid punishment
Stage 2: Conforms to obtain rewards
Stage 3: Conforms to avoid disapproval
Stage 4: Conforms to avoid censure by legitimate authorities
Stage 5: Conforms to maintain respect of the impartial spectator
Stage 6: Conforms to a personal ethic to avoid self-condemnation.

(Modgil, 1980; Modgil and Modgil, 1986)

Until Stage 5 others have power to influence the behaviour of an individual. Their perception of the individual controls his or her moral strength or ability to uphold a set of rules or regulations. At Stage six things change dramatically - one's own reasoned ethic of behaviour becomes the key, the only condemnation feared is that from oneself. It is not clear how this stage relates to a Christian faith where God is an all-powerful 'other' who is the final judge of our actions. It is He that must be pleased by humanity's actions. This is not an approach that is reflected in any of Kohlberg's stage descriptions. However, it appears closest to Stages 4 or 5. Whilst Stage 6 may be a higher level of maturity - for Kohlberg certainly sees moral reasoning as the key to progression - it seems to discard the need for a divine judge.

Oser and Reich (1990) argue that moral reasoning and religious reasoning are not necessarily the same. However, their descriptions of the stages of religious reasoning only correspond to the first five of Kohlberg's stages. At the same time, the religious reasoning at Stage 5 is depicted as a universal. It is no longer a specifically Christian worldview. All religious experience is seen to issue from a divine power that transcends denominational and religious boundaries. This contradicts Jacob's view that the moral reasoning of Stage 7 was the first to be influenced solely by religious thought.

To conclude, Kohlberg's exploration of moral development is revealing but also problematic with regard to defining maturation. Further exploration of the topic will occur in the next chapter when Fowler's use of this theory is explored.


Not all developmental theories require the description of individual stages of development. Those described by Kelly, Maslow and Rogers depict progression as a far less structured process. Each of their theories is outlined below with special attention given to the themes of resistance to maturation (Kelly) and the role of autonomy in progression (Maslow and Rogers). In this way the discussion attempts to shown alternative possibilities for defining maturation that can be of use to this discussion.

3.1 George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory

Kelly published his Personal Construct Theory (P.C.T.) due to his dissatisfaction with both psychoanalytic and behaviourist explanations of cognition. He remained interested in studying the cognitive processes yet he broke away from the traditional framework of sequential stages. He also strove to discuss cognition in a less clinical way. In his book 'The Psychology Of Personal Constructs; Vol. 1' (1955) he deliberately set out his theory in abstract terms in an attempt to avoid the limitation of a particular time and culture. Due to this it has sometimes been classified as a philosophical description of maturity rather than a psychological one. Although the more 'clinical' psychologists are less
disposed to accept his work as meaningful, personal construct theory has still been very influential. With regard to this research, its detailed description of the way in which the qualitative shifts in understanding occur proves important in exploring the stage transitions involved in Fowler’s Stages of Faith.

3.1.1 Constructs, maturity and relativity of viewpoint

Kelly’s theory states that people construct tentative models of the world in order to understand themselves and the surroundings in which they “live, work and play”. They also do this in order to anticipate future events. They then evaluate these models by reference to their own personal criteria. These criteria are the hypotheses or constructs which individuals build up as they test their models of reality against each new situation.

Kelly suggests that maturity is dependent on the quality of a person’s constructs. He describes maturity as functioning. A person who is functioning is able to construe the world in such a way that predictions are usually confirmed, but who can also change their constructs when they are disproved. There are no developmental stages present in this gradual maturation, though there are times when major changes in their perception of reality occur. Kelly finds the world a far too varied place for there to be any universal pattern of forces that could shape human development into a universal set of stages.

This reveals the previously mentioned postmodernist nature of Kelly’s vision of reality (Chapter 2). Kelly explains that:

“man [sic] looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always very good. Yet without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated homogeneity that man is unable to make any sense of it” (1955, p.8-9).

He argues that we are obliged to create ‘glasses’ or templates through which to view the world. Our perceptions of our surroundings are therefore not true representations of objective reality. In fact, there is no way of getting behind our interpretation of the world to check if it matches what the world is really like. This is the same realisation that illuminates the postmodernists’ approach. Kelly’s theory clearly supports their arguments that everyone’s viewpoint is different and provides a unique ‘texture’ to an observation of reality (Brookner, 1992).

Yet not all human viewpoints will be totally dissimilar. Kelly shows how language can create enough of a similarity between a social group for common constructs to exist. It binds a group into certain ways of thinking. When two individuals view or construe a situation in a similar way (use similar constructs) then commonality is said to exist. Kelly also accepts that it is sometimes possible to see the world through someone-else’s construct system without holding the same constructs oneself. This is called sociality.

3.1.2 Unease and resistance to changes in worldview

Kelly, like Erikson, noted how dramatic changes in our structuring of the world can be very uncomfortable. However, his theory proves useful because it further elaborates on the reasons for this.

To begin to explore this subject the organisation of constructs needs to be described. According to Kelly’s theory each person’s construct system is organised in a hierarchical way. He felt it was:
convenient and useful to see personal construct systems as being made up of hierarchically linked sets of bipolar constructs" (Fransella and Bannister, 1977, p.2)

Within this structure there are some broad *(superordinate)* constructs subsuming other, narrow *(subordinate)* constructs (Kelly, 1955).

Kelly felt that anxiety issues from peoples' awareness that what they are confronted with is not within the framework of their existing construct system. In other words, they do not know how to construe it. They face a challenge because the validity of their construct is brought into question. Because a construct embodies both emotional and intellectual aspects the more integral the construct to the whole worldview of the individual the more emotion will be elicited if that construct is challenged or threatened. Like scaffolding, taking some off the outside is of little importance but removing some of the main supporting components threatens the whole structure with collapse. Challenging a superordinate construct therefore brings the possibility of changing an individual's perception of the world much more dramatically than challenging a subordinate one.

Although Kelly had little confidence in rigid stage theories his description of superordinate collapse helps our understanding of the reason for the anxiety and insecurity during stage transitions. Stage theorists set out specific concerns as being of central importance to an individual exhibiting the characteristics of a particular stage of development. If this is true then these concerns must be superordinate constructs. A stage transition may therefore occur when the challenge to these constructs has caused them to collapse. In this way Kelly's description of construct collapse mirrors that of many stage theorists.

3.2 Fluctuating human potential - Abraham Maslow's challenge to invariant stages

Maslow is another author who has challenged stage theory. His theory of maturation was first published in 1954. It is important to this discussion because it challenged the notion put forward by some stage theorists that it is impossible to return to a lower state of maturation. Maslow set out a ladder of maturity that individuals could freely pass up and down during the lifecycle. The theory implied that stage changes exist but are of secondary importance. He thus suggested that cognitive and ego-development were descriptions of variation rather than progression.

In Maslow's opinion the true measure of progression is the degree of *self-actualisation* (c.f.) shown by an individual. This state can be reached at any age. However, self-actualisation is only possible when certain needs of the individual have been met. These needs act as limiting factors with regard to progression. They are nearly always external factors and so changes in an individual's situation can cause his or her maturity to fluctuate considerably.

Maslow postulated that these needs are arranged in a *hierarchy of importance*. They are usually depicted as a pyramid, indicating the reduced numbers of needs that exist as the hierarchy is ascended. Each level's deficiencies must be satisfied before the next level of the hierarchy can be addressed. Progress up the hierarchy is made as each level's needs are met.
Figure 4: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

The levels of the pyramid are:

- **Physiological needs**: food, liquid, oxygen, constant blood temperature.
- **Safety needs**: physical and psychological security, protection.
- **Love and belonging needs**: affiliation, affection.
- **Self-esteem needs**: competence, mastery, recognition and reputation.
- **Self-actualisation**: need for self-fulfilment.

(Based on Maslow, 1970).

Maslow’s theory states that all the levels describe deficiency needs except the topmost one. This means that something must be supplied before movement up to the next level is possible. For instance, when the lowest organic needs are satisfied - hunger alleviated and homeostasis maintained in the body - higher needs emerge to be satisfied. However, the lower needs may re-emerge later:

“The physiological needs, along with their partial goals, when chronically gratified cease to exist as active determinants or organisers of behaviour. They now exist only in a potential fashion in the sense that they may emerge again to dominate the organism if they are thwarted” (Maslow, 1970, p.84).

These lower needs remain limiting factors because they are stronger - the lower the level the greater the needs are.

In this theory the factor limiting human maturation is an individual’s ability to satisfy each level’s needs. A deficiency in supplying the needs of the lower hierarchical levels means that an individual is forced to deal with them before anything else. Survival needs thus overtake all other needs and do not respect the possible ego or cognitive development that could usefully go on at any one time.

In concentrating on wider issues of maturation such as love needs and self-actualisation Maslow’s theory is considered to have been instrumental in establishing humanistic psychological theory.

### 3.2.1 Maslow’s description of self-actualisation

It is the top level of Maslow’s hierarchy that is of greatest interest to the discussion in later chapters. Maslow posited that after all the criteria of the lower levels have been met the individual reaches a state of self-actualisation. The lowest levels’ needs were instinctual and promoted the survival of the organism. However, as an individual moves up the hierarchy the needs become less biological. Self-actualisation is the point at which the physical demands of the body are completely transcended. It is a fundamental self-realisation that illuminates living. This state is thought to manifest itself
in a variety of ways including music, art and research. Self-actualisation thus deals with creating methods of expression and exploration that do not aid simple survival.

Maslow listed a set of characteristics that are found in individuals that have become self-actualised:

i) they perceive reality efficiently and can tolerate uncertainty;
ii) they are able to look at life objectively;
iii) they are resistant to 'enculturation', but not purposefully unconventional;
iv) they are concerned for the welfare of humanity;
v) they accept themselves and others for what they are;
vi) they are spontaneous in thought and action;
vii) they are problem-centred rather than self-centred;
viii) they have a good sense of humour;
ix) they are highly creative;
x) they establish deep, satisfying interpersonal relationships with a few people;
xi) they are capable of deep appreciation of basic life-experiences;
xii) they have 'peak' experiences - moments of ecstatic happiness when they feel most 'real' and alive.

(Maslow, 1970)

Maslow implicates religion with man's peak experiences at this level but he does not see it as essential for reaching self-actualisation (Elias, 1983a). In moving up the hierarchy Maslow assumes that later and later evolutionary adaptations are being studied. Because of this, self-actualisation is not portrayed as a divinely created trait. Instead, religious nature is a subset of a wider interest in meaning.

Later theorists have found the concept of self-actualisation to be important. Theorists such as Fowler have utilised it in various ways. Their interest lies in its implications for internal autonomy. The movement towards self-actualisation is:

"a development toward autonomy and away from heteronomy, or control by external forces" (Koch, 1959, p.196).

There are echoes of Kohlberg's highest moral stage in this. Yet autonomy through self-actualisation appears more easily attained through Maslow's hierarchy of needs than through Kohlberg's moral stages.

3.2.2 Weaknesses in Maslow's work

Maslow's work is not without its problems. Whilst Child claims that those who have applied Maslow's theory to educational settings "find it to have face validity" (1986, p.43) it seems most suitable in observing children's development. They seem to be more susceptible to the needs of lower levels in the hierarchy. If applied to adults then other problems occur. For instance, the theory does not appear to explain how prisoners of conscience exist in situations where their lower survival needs are not met. Nor does it explain religious asceticism. Individuals participating in such activity expect to exhibit certain characteristics of self-actualisation during periods of fasting and abstinence.

3.3 Allport - self-actualisation as transcendence

This last criticism can be overcome using Allport's work on personal development. It bears many similarities with Maslow's self-actualisation but includes the concept of an expanding self. This attribute means that self-actualised individuals never slip into
parochialism and are able to transcend the struggle for the basics of life. Therefore, once self-actualisation is achieved it is difficult for the lower needs to overwhelm an individual's interests in learning about themselves and the world (Elias, 1983a).

Allport describes two other attributes of self-actualisation that are of interest. These are self-objectification and self-unification.

Self-objectification describes peoples' abilities to be reflective and insightful about their own lives. They come to understand their limitations. Allport singles out the development of a sense of humour about oneself as a sign of this. He considers mature people to have a certain detachment from themselves.

Self-unification or integration is a sign that people possess a unifying philosophy of life. This does not have to be complete or even articulated in words but it supplies a coherent direction for their life. It stops life being fragmentary and undirected. Both self-objectification and self-unification are key aspects of Fowler's description of maturity.

Both Maslow and Allport view self-actualisation as progression rather than variation. However, this approach has been criticised by the postmodernists for promoting a modernist educational vision (Usher and Edward, 1994). Their criticism is based on the fact that both authors suggest everyone is able to become self-actualising. Such a view has been influential in educational debates and Postmodernists such as Usher and Edward believe that it has led to a dominant form of education that expects all learners to be able to become self-actualised. They argue that this is unrealistic and promotes elitism. This debate will be explored further in the discussion on educational theory in Chapter 6.

3.3.1 Allport and Religion:

In 1950 Allport produced a work entitled 'The Individual and His Religion'. In this he explored the possible definitions of religious maturity. Like Strunk (1965) he suggested that this state was an important aspect of life because it deals with issues of greatest importance such as the questions about the meaning of life. However, his description of religious maturity was not significantly different to the universal definition of maturity he described in his other works. It incorporated all of those aspects of self-actualisation that were mentioned previously. He defined religious maturity as being:

1) Well differentiated. The religious individual must have a rich and complex understanding of faith. The construction of which must be regularly examined and reorganised.
2) Heuristic. The religious individual's faith must be held as a tentative hypothesis and not be considered to be static and unchanging.
3) Accepting of doubt.
4) Dynamic. The religious individual must not base his or her beliefs on basic instincts such as fear.
5) Comprehensive. Religious individuals must relate their religious understanding to all problems in life
6) Integral. Religious understanding must be central to a person's life and therefore not be separated from other aspects of living.

3.4 Carl R. Rogers (1961, 1967) - a further study of self-actualisation

Carl Rogers is one of the leading humanistic psychologists. He is another author who sees self-actualisation as the core attribute of maturation. His works concentrate on
describing the reasons why certain individuals may not achieve this state. His conclusions are slightly different to Maslow's because they are based on a different view of human development. Unlike Freud and those influenced by him - the psychoanalytic school - Rogers does not see humans as being fundamentally destructive towards their mental development. He emphasises the positive nature of humans and gives a more optimistic portrait of human development. He believes that self-actualisation is something which humans are naturally drawn to unless social conditions block their journey. Because of this, his work on self-actualisation is a useful counterbalance to that of Maslow's.

It is also useful for revealing the importance of internal autonomy with regard to reaching a self-actualised state. Rogers views socialisation as a very significant blockage to healthy maturation. He suggests that it can be difficult to break away from the commonality of vision that it creates. Because of the people surrounding us our developing selves learn to attach values to certain experiences. For instance, from an early age love and praise are withheld until we conform to parental and societal standards of conduct. Because of this:

"the child (and later the adult) learns to act and feel in ways that earn approval from others, rather than in ways which may be more intrinsically satisfying and more "real"" (Gross, 1987, p.225).

The result of this is a tendency for individuals to accept only those experiences that are consonant with the self-concept imposed by society. Some experiences are assimilated whilst others are ignored or even given distorted meanings.

Rogers sees maturity in terms of mental health. Experiences that are not assimilated threaten us. Tensions are then produced. These result in an inability to adapt psychologically and the journey towards self-actualisation is halted. Individuals who are to continue on this journey must come to terms with feelings and responses which conflict with familiar socialised value systems. The individual:

"must become open to his [sic] experiences... be willing to be a process that is ever changing and developing, and while in process be willing to experience ambiguity" (Elias, 1983a, p.86).

In doing this the systems themselves are subverted and the patient gains autonomy from them.

In his book "Person to Person" (1967) Rogers speaks about how psychotherapy can help clients to achieve this. He believes humans are the best experts on themselves so he recommends client centred therapy as a way to confront the tensions that hold people back from self-actualisation. He writes:

"In the relationship with an effective therapist... the client moves gradually toward a new type of realization, a dawning recognition that in some sense he chooses himself [sic]... The client begins to realise 'I am not compelled to be simply the creation of others, moulded by their expectancies, shaped by their demands. I am not compelled to be a victim of unknown forces in myself... influences in myself which operate beyond my ken in the realms of the unconscious'" (p.47).

To summarise this brief description of Roger's theory; maturity is attained when individuals can:

- acknowledge their feelings even when they are not necessarily socially acceptable,
- can accept ambiguity,
- break free from enculturation.
When this occurs true autonomy is possible. The unknown motivations of the mind are confronted, as are the expectations of others and the reasons why they are affecting us.

3.4.1 Carl Rogers and religion

For a while Rogers was a committed Christian but his experience ultimately led him to question the role of religion as a useful feature in maturation. His biographers show how his own lifelong development led him from a belief in the institutional church to a repudiation of it (Kirschenbaum and Valerie, 1990). Because of this he does not acknowledged religion as having a role in attaining self-actualisation.

Rogers was heavily influenced by religion from childhood until early adulthood. He was committed enough to attend a theological seminary for two years. Even then Roger's had a strong conviction about the need for freedom of enquiry. He and his associates questioned the authority of the church in determining the education they received. Rogers remembers:

"a group of us felt that ideas were being fed to us, whereas we wished primarily to explore our own questions and doubts, and find out where they led" (Ibid., p.10).

As he progressed through life Rogers relied less on religion to define adult maturity and more on psychology. He was especially drawn to the field of counselling. During this transition his writings described organised religion as less and less useful in human maturation. In his later works he portrayed it as simply another pressure on the individual to conform.

His description of how clients can often feel anger at an institution that has pressured them in such a way is very revealing. It could describe why he himself may have come to view religion so unfavourably:

"I find that when clients are free to be any way they wish, they tend to resent and to question the tendency of organization, the college or the culture to mould them to any given form. One of my clients says with considerable heat: 'I've been so long trying to live according to what was meaningful to other people, and what made no sense at all to me, really. I somehow felt so much more than that, at some level" (Rogers, 1961, p.169-170).

Such a description of autonomy underlines the need to question everything that influences one to act in a way that is socially acceptable. Rogers' work infers that increasing autonomy must eventually come into conflict with Christian constructs of obedience or faithfulness. In his opinion the church asks that personal autonomy be subjugated, and the authority of the church be accepted. Given such a situation an important question is raised which this research must address - if the church stresses obedience can it ever create autonomy in its members? It is possible to argue that the logical conclusion of Rogers' views is that religious belief is so inherently opposed to personal autonomy that it is inhibiting maturation. The tension between obedience and autonomy in religious definitions of maturation is an important area of debate that will be returned to in the next chapter. It will be suggested that the nature of authenticity is such that there is less difference between religious and secular views of the subject than Rogers leads us to believe.
4 The Implications of Psychological Descriptions of Human Development on Defining Maturation.

Now that the key psychological definitions of human development have been explored it is time to study the implications these have for defining maturation.

The first issue that arises is the fact that, in spite of the large number of theories, it is still difficult to define maturation. In fact, the works explored in this chapter can raise as many questions as they answer:

For instance, even though there is empirical evidence of human development, there is little consensus of opinion about how maturation occurs. Whilst many authors subscribe to established schools of thought on the subject questions remain as to whether maturation is a gradual process or if it is characterised by periods of dramatic change followed by periods of relative non-development. Questions also remain about whether progression is through sequential and invariant stages (e.g. Erikson) or through a more random path dependent on the particular social experience of the individual (e.g. Kelly).

The belief that maturation occurs in a fixed and logical pattern has been very popular in the past. However, because some of the most influential of the early researchers used data collection methods that are questionable by today's scientific standards there has been increasing distrust of the basic assumptions they lent to developmental psychology. This has led some to ask whether it is now necessary to re-evaluate the whole field of study. Even the findings of later theories that are based on more rigorously scientific methods are still constantly being critiqued (Siegal, 1986).

The lack of consensus about the type of path that progression takes is not the only source of problems when attempting to define maturation using the psychological theory described. The actual human characteristics that can be assigned to progression still remain difficult to assess. As the more humanistic approaches have increased in popularity, fewer theorists feel able to describe maturation in terms of mere cognitive ability or ego development. It is generally accepted that these factors are important, but that they are only part of a 'wider picture'.

In turn, this has caused more problems when trying to formulate a comprehensive definition of maturation. If, as appears likely, multiple characteristics such as cognition, ego, moral thinking etc. are involved in progression, then defining maturation can require more than a simple attempt to synthesise the findings of previous studies. Theories discussing biological, social and existential factors as the cause of development cannot necessarily be amalgamated. This is clearly seen when studying the findings of both depth and height psychology. These two fields can have significantly different value judgements about whether conscious or unconscious aspects of the mind are the major determinants of human behaviour. Attempting to merge the findings from these, or other groups, in an attempt to synthesise a definition of maturation can therefore be of dubious validity. Careful consideration is required about whether the underlying assumptions of each theory are compatible.

The acceptance of multiple characteristics being involved in a definition of maturity also indicates a need for a degree of knowledge about how they interact. For instance, Kohlberg's work stressed the importance of moral development but pointed out that this ultimately depended on the development of other factors such as cognition. Anyone attempting to define maturation is faced with the problem that the more aspects of human development that are assigned to maturation, the harder it becomes to
comprehensively describe the interaction of its constituent parts and the hierarchy of their importance. Questions also arise as to whether maturation can occur with regard to one aspect of someone's development if there is no change in others.

This problem is exacerbated by the humanistic theorists such as Levinson (1978), who have suggested that understanding maturation requires more than a simple description of the individual elements of human development accessible to empirical research. If there are aspects of human knowing and change that are too nebulous and or intangible for them to be assessed by empirical research then empirically based study of human maturation can have only limited use in defining progression.

4.1 Philosophical dimensions to defining maturation

It appears that most psychologists have tacitly accepted the fact that definitions of maturation may require more than mere descriptions of those aspects of development accessible to empirical study. This is indicated by the significant amount of philosophical conjecture that has been used to 'round out' many of the theories discussed in this chapter. For instance, both Sheehy and Levinson conjectured about the topmost stages of development without having much evidence for them.

Critiques of Kohlberg's work also reveal the impact of philosophical debate on his definition of maturation. Modgil and Modgil (1986) point out that philosophy forms a large part of his work (see also Boyd, 1986, and Siegal, 1986). Unfortunately, Locke (1986) argues that Kohlberg's grasp of philosophy is not always sound. He is not convinced that he has fully taken into account important aspects of previous philosophical debate on morality and ethics.

This leads to an important criticism that can be levelled at many psychological theorists. Siegal (1986) argues that the omission of philosophical debates about human development is a key reason why definitions of maturation based solely on empirical research will always be incomplete. He points out that empirical study cannot necessarily illuminate the discussion about universal ethics. By studying particular forms of development in different cultures Locke (1986) argues that psychology is limited to a discussion of socially constructed ethics. He argues that this is not necessarily going to create a proper definition of maturation and points out, moral relativism due to cultural relativity does not prove the necessity of ethical relativism. For instance, polygamy may be practised in some countries where it is considered ethical. Those who are perceived to be mature in those situations may be seen to be those who uphold such practice – but that does not necessarily make such a practice ethical. These points indicate that an author who seeks to define maturation must therefore turn to more philosophical debate to discuss the universality of ethics and morals.

4.2 Value judgements in defining maturation

Yet again, the discussion is brought back to consider the postmodernist scepticism about psychology's ability to set out objective definitions of maturation. With an acceptance of the importance of philosophical discourse comes the possibility of being criticised for producing definitions of maturation based on questionable value judgements. A philosophical discussion about development will always lead to the incorporation of value judgements and it can be argued that these will be influenced by the culture or social group from which they originate. The postmodernist debate has already been shown to question the ability of one culture to derive definitions of maturation or education that can be universally applicable (Chapter 2). The discussion
of Kelly's work found in this chapter has backed up their claim that no single individual can ever fully apprehend 'reality'.

4.3 Defining the likely components and mechanisms of maturation in the light of development theory and the criticisms about its applicability

In spite of these problems it is still important to explore the nature of maturation. Developmental psychology does not exist purely for the sake of exploring human development. The theories that arise are assumed to be of use. For instance, Erikson's work is concerned not just with describing ego development, but understanding the consequences to humans if this does not occur properly. Similarly, C. Rogers' work is based upon a belief that is important to assess mental 'health' and to understand how such a state can be promoted. At the same time, educational theorists have often turned to psychological theories to determine what human development should be stimulated by an educational approach.

From observations like these it can be seen that psychological definitions of maturation are considered to be important factors for understanding how individuals can be helped to function in society, and as a result, how society can be helped to function better. It has already been indicated that the postmodernists and others believe that cultural 'bias' will mean that value judgements are part of any description of maturation and therefore limit its applicability. However, it is arguable that most of the psychological theories explored in this chapter come from a common culture – that of the 'West'. Because this research is concerned with the application of psychological theory within Western culture it seems reasonable to assume that those who are 'maturing' share many, if not all, of these values as well. Therefore, it is possible for that this research can legitimately propose a framework for describing maturation from the previously discussed theories.

It is also possible to argue that there are some concerns that are universally found in humans. Grimmitt (1987) suggests that that:

"we can say that certain values – core-values – are implicit within the 'givens' of the human situation and act as kinds of 'value-imperatives'" (p.121).

He has attempted to describe some of these shared concerns. He suggests that humans have universal concerns about:

(a) The value of order, purpose and meaning;
(b) The value of human life and of human beings;
(c) The value of a just society;
(d) The value of the individual's right to self-fulfilment;
(e) The value of ethical endeavour and the necessity of exercising moral responsibility;
(f) The value of commitment to interpersonal relationships and to the notions of 'family' and 'community';

This description of core-values echoes the findings of authors such as Fowler (1981, 1984) and Smith (1977, 1979). The following chapter shows how they describe such universal concerns in terms of religious concerns.

The fact that the core-values described by authors such as Grimmitt and Fowler describe a concern about the structure and organisation of society allows this discussion to begin to describe some of the likely components and mechanisms of maturation. This is because, whether Grimmitt's work describes universal human concerns or simply Western interpretation of them, a variety of the human
characteristics described by psychologists are involved in the ability of someone to react to these.

As a result of this approach it is possible to describe maturation as a process that involves changes in a number of human characteristics. Many of the aspects of human development that have been shown to change during the lifecycle, fall into categories that can be seen to be connected with the development of an understanding for the need of social order and the way in which issues about subjects such as justice are valued. These categories are:

i) Biological development.
ii) Cognitive development.
iii) Moral development.

The stages of moral development described by Kohlberg (1969, 1976) clearly indicated the importance that humans place on attempting to understand the structure of the society in which they live. The stages showed the development of thinking about issues of justice, the necessity of exercising moral responsibility and the reasons for showing commitment to the community. Moral development would therefore appear to be an important elements of maturation.

This means that cognitive development is also implicated in maturation. Kohlberg argued that moral development depended on this. This in turn implicated biological development in the process of maturation. The physical development of the brain through childhood limits the degree of cognition that is possible.

The fact that these characteristics can be dependent upon the development of others leads to the conclusion that there is an order in which the constituent changes involved in maturation can occur. However, this is not to say that a change in one component of maturation will necessarily cause a change in another. In the case of moral development Kohlberg suggested that this could lag behind cognitive development.

At the same time, the theories that describe self-actualisation appear to be useful. These are also descriptions of how individuals commit themselves to others in a community and the ability of an individual to gain self-fulfilment through internal autonomy.

This discussion has attempted to show that, given the core-values described by Grimmitt, most of the theories described in this chapter become implicated in any definition of maturation. In this chapter no further attempt will be made to synthesise such a definition because part of the next chapter explores Fowler's theory of faith development. This theory has already synthesised a description of maturation from the theories put forward by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and others. Its conclusions are similar to those already set out above and the theory copes with many of the problems inherent in describing maturation that were set out above in sections 4 - 4.2. For instance, Fowler's theory indicates that maturation involves the development of multiple characteristics; that these are set out in a hierarchy of importance; that adults' ages have little to do with their level of maturity; that authenticity is important and that maturation involves disequilibrium and periods of discomfort. Therefore, the discussion in the next chapter will more clearly indicate a possible method for drawing together the findings of diverse psychological theories into a coherent pattern.
The next chapter will also discuss the issues about defining maturation that are of importance to Christian authors. It has been shown that secular theories have often ignored, or been hostile to, the idea of religious dimensions within a description of progression. The Christian response to this situation is therefore set out and its impact on the usage of secular psychological theory explored.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored many different psychological theories of human development and shown the wide variety of human traits that develop through the lifecycle. In doing so it has indicated the wide variety of different approaches that can exist to describing maturation and which may be of use when attempting to understand ministers’ views on the subject. The discussion has also shown there are a few themes that are common to most psychological theories of human development such as the importance of internal autonomy.

This chapter has also explored the implications of using various psychological theories to synthesise a description of the nature of maturation. It has pointed out some of the difficulties that exist and one possible way of getting over these. It has indicated that developmental psychologists rarely discuss religion when setting out their theories, and can often view institutional religion as an unhelpful influence on maturation (e.g. Rogers) or religious faith as a sign of immaturity (e.g. Freud).

The discussion has attempted to synthesise a basic framework for understanding the process of maturation. This sought to explain the essential mechanism of maturation as well as the type of human characteristics it could be expected to contain.
CHAPTER 4

Descriptions of Religious Maturation

1 Introduction

Stokes informs us that:

"theologians have pondered the meaning of 'faith' for centuries, but historically it has been seen as something given, constant, unchanging. Only recently have scholars begun to probe the developmental nature of the faith experience" (1983, p.11).

This change has come from an increasing acceptance that psychology may have something important to say about the human state. As more authors have become aware of this there has been increased study of the developmental theories of people such as Erikson, Kohlberg and Rogers. However, the descriptions of human development discussed in the previous chapter were shown to have generally been written without an interest in supporting or defending religious faith as an aspect of human development. This has not gone unnoticed by Christian commentators. They take issue with the psychologists' apparent assumption that religion has nothing unique to contribute to the process of maturation. Whilst some religious authors have chosen to view this 'oversight' as proof that psychology is of little use to the debate, others have remained interested in this field of study. Their aim has been to try and find possible foundations for a theory of religious maturation that incorporates psychological findings and which also values Christian faith. This chapter explores the works of some of these authors. It briefly studies the theories of Strunk (1965), Berridge (1969), Kao (1975), and Marstin (1979) before exploring the works of Fowler (1981, 1984, 1991 et al.) in more depth. Whilst doing this it explores important issues raised by these authors with regard to defining religious maturation.

2 Religious Authors and Psychological Descriptions of Maturation

It is noticeable that these authors, in attempting to formulate descriptions of religious maturation, tend to overlook some of the issues set out at the end of the previous chapter. For instance, whilst authors such as Strunk (1965) and Fowler (1981) acknowledge the fact that different fields of psychology may be based on different, or even incompatible, assumptions, other religious authors have shown a tacit belief that from the many different theories can be synthesised a basis for understanding religious maturation. Later discussion will also show that Christian authors have been far less reticent in setting out what they believe to be the universal ethical dimensions of maturation.

Religious authors have not generally been attracted to the depth psychologies of authors such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Erich Fromm. The strong emphasis on the unconscious as the determinant of behaviour has proved less attractive than the more humanistic theories and those that can be designated as part of height psychology. Strunk (1965) points out that, whilst height and depth psychologies may not be mutually exclusive and can "overlap a great deal in both methods and findings" (p.9), nearly all the earliest authors were depth theorists. He is sceptical of these authors' opinions about religion "working as they did with practically no empirical data and hardly a substantial bit of theory" (p.8). He therefore believes that little account needs to be taken of authors such as Freud who saw the phrase "religious maturity" as a contradiction in terms.
2.1 Orlo Strunk and religious maturation (1965)

Strunk is a good example of an author who strove to synthesise a theory of religious maturation from numerous other theories. In spite of his suspicions about psychological theory he set out to extract all information about religious maturity from the texts available to him. He found relevant material in the works of a number of authors such as Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, William James, Vikto Frankl and Gordon Allport. From these works he attempted to create a definition of religious maturation. His conclusions, like those of Kao (1975), are strongly reminiscent of Allport's description of self-actualisation (see Chapter 3). They can be summarised as follows:

1) Childhood religion should be purged by critical thought before it can be considered mature. Childhood faith is not necessarily 'wrong' but that it cannot fully understand the reality of the situation.

2) Religiously mature people are very much involved with life and necessarily hold beliefs about the meaning of life. A religiously mature person is characterised as being concerned with living and acting in the world. This concern is created by a feeling that one is part of all human life. There is a love for all others, and a corresponding feeling of responsibility for them. Religious maturity is therefore not possible if religious understandings are compartmentalised and divorced from other parts of living.

3) The degree of awareness of one's religion becomes an important ingredient for mature religion. Religious individuals who are mature know that understanding is not just theological dogma but a meeting with something deeply personal and difficult to apprehend. Strunk argues that religious maturation is therefore about the need to constantly strive for better understanding - often in the form of coping with, and exploring, unconscious motivations.

4) Strunk comments that "religious beliefs must themselves be comprehensive in nature, serve the search for meaning well, be critically arrived at, and articulated with some sophistication" (1965, p.129). Mature religious belief is open to truths in politics and other religions because all life is valued dearly. Therefore, whilst "the religion of maturity is characterised by an active commitment... such a commitment is saved from fanaticism and bigotry by critical tentativeness" (p.136).

5) Religious maturity is characterised by believing in a being greater than oneself.

Strunk summarises his understanding of religious maturity as follows:

"Mature religion is a dynamic organization of cognitive-affective-conative [thinking - feeling - behavioural] factors possessing certain characteristics of depth and height - including a highly conscious and articulate belief system purged, by critical processes, of childish wishes and intensely suited and comprehensive enough to find positive meaning in all of life's vicissitudes. Such a belief system, though tentative in spirit, will include a conviction of the existence of an Ideal Power to which the person can sense friendly continuity - a conviction grounded in authoritative and ineffable experiences. The dynamic relationship between this belief system and these experiential events will generate feelings of wonder and awe, a sense of oneness with the All, humility, elation, and freedom; and with great consistency will determine the individual's responsible behaviour in all areas of personal and interpersonal relationships, including such spheres as morality, love, work and so forth" (p.144-5).
Kao's (1975) definition of religious maturation is very similar. He describes internal integration and harmony as the basis of this process. He believes this to be indicated:

i. **affectively** by self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect.
ii. **volitionally** by autonomy, independence, self-determination, freedom, sincerity, spontaneity.
iii. **Cognitively** by a unified philosophy of life (identity, integrity).
iv. **Perceptually** by accurate perception of oneself, purposefulness, self-objectification and a sense of humour (p. 33).

2.2 The impact of Christian faith on defining maturation - the importance of the moral dimension

Strunk's work clearly indicates a characteristic of religious definitions of maturity that tend to set them apart from other 'purely' psychological descriptions. A good example of this is found in the previous quote from his work. When describing religious maturity he comments that, in spite of the need to hold tentative belief systems, there must still be a commitment to the belief in a divine being – "a conviction grounded in authoritative and ineffable experiences" (1965, p. 144). The recognition of such an 'Ideal Power' is central to all Christian authors' works. The importance of feeling, especially the "authoritative and ineffable" feeling of "mystical oneness" (Strunk, 1965 p. 130) leads to a common understanding that it is impossible to study religious maturation detachedly using the usual empirical forms of scientific research. In turn, this means that they often differentiate between religious and non-religious forms of development, depicting psychological theories as descriptions of a 'general' form of development that is superseded by their descriptions of 'religious' maturation. However, the integration of the first form of development into the second means that it too may be considered a form of maturation.

The belief that religion provides an authoritative and ineffable conviction of the presence of the divine leads to another significant difference between the definitions of maturation of religious authors and the psychological theories mentioned in the previous chapter. This relates to the role of value judgements when describing maturation. Strunk comments that:

"perhaps one of the most irritating traits the layman finds in reading the reports of psychologists is their obvious reluctance to take a stand. Part of this tendency results from the psychologist's belief that it is not his task to make value judgements. As a scientist, he reasons, he can only attempt to understand behaviour with the conviction that control and prediction will follow" (p. 48).

Strunk and other religious authors are drawn towards an understanding that definitions of religious maturation must involve value judgements that are based on the basic commitment to a religious worldview.

Berridge (1969) comes to a similar conclusion in her writings. She is another commentator keen to point out the usefulness of studying the works of authors from a variety of psychological schools when exploring the nature of maturation. However, she too finds the theorists' avoidance of value judgements a hindrance to useful debate. She argues that any definition of maturation must involve the discussion of morality. Because religion is so intimately connected with moral codes she believes it is essential for Christians to strive towards moral development if they are to mature. Like Strunk, she sees the previous psychological theories set out by
scientists as being incomplete due to the authors' lack of desire participate in discussions on "moral standards and codes of behaviour" (1969, p.13). In this way the religious authors echo the concerns of Locke (1986) who also indicated the weakness in many secular descriptions of maturation. In chapter 3 Locke was shown to have argued for the need to introduce philosophical – or, in this instance, theological – discourse into discussions about maturation. This interest in moral development explains why many religious authors are drawn to study Kohlberg's work. Of the psychologists described in the previous chapter he was the first to deal with the topic in any depth.

2.3 Ronald Marstin's definition of religious maturation (1979)

Ronald Marstin's exploration of religious maturation was not primarily aimed at exploring the need for moral development. Instead, he was interested in exploring the way in which religious maturity should relate to life in a multicultural and multifaith society. However, he too supports the argument that Christians need to develop a commitment to justice issues and believes that maturation involves a growing commitment to all other people on this planet. He bases his argument for this on both previous psychological theory and a belief that God is the guarantor of human rights, "those rights to protection and respect accruing equally to all people and solely on the basis of their humanity" (p.9).

He warns that the Church's attitude towards the multicultural setting has not always been very positive. He argues that:

"of special concern has been the part played by the local church in the tendency of people to identify 'their own' and to exclude the stranger. One early study of prejudice suggested that Christians find in the parish an 'island of safety' on which to gather in solidarity against outsiders" (p14).

He accepts that this particular tendency may be a natural level of development, but he firmly believes that it must be transcended. He accepts the view of previous psychologists that an individual's ability to relate to others starts with the mother and father and gradually extends outward to incorporate family, peers, and social groups such as the Church until it eventually embraces the whole of human society.

This reveals Marstin's belief that religious 'faith' can only mature if other elements of the human character have developed. As with Fowler, this leads him to support the study of psychological theories such as those set out in the previous chapter. He comments that:

"The social sciences... have something to teach us about faith - in other words, that, as a quality of human being, faith must be expected to develop according to the usual rules of human development. This may prove less troublesome to Catholics than to Protestants. Catholics are, after all, long familiar with the Thomistic axiom that grace builds on nature, whereas Protestants have traditionally emphasized the profound distinction between the 'works of God' and the 'works of man'. Without ignoring the distinction, the new faith research does rather stress the connection. What is assumed here is that while faith is God's gift, freely given, it is nevertheless given in a way that respects our humanity. We are graced in a way that does not override but takes up our human ways of responding. While faith signifies an altogether special area of human existence and cannot be reduced to personal qualities - mental skills, role-taking ability, emotional maturity, or the like - neither is growth in faith unrelated to growth in these areas. Whilst faith is frequently nourished by a religious tradition with its own claim to truth, its
own integrity and authority, the way that the traditional beliefs are incorporated and personalized by the individual believer depends on the believer’s maturity as a person” (p. 23-4).

This approach avoids the problem about objective knowledge that was mentioned in chapter 2. If knowledge gained from divine revelation is mediated by our level of maturity then, whilst it is a guide, it cannot necessarily be considered an objective truth that can be written down and applied to all others. Such an argument confirms the importance of studying psychological theories of development in any attempt to define religious maturation.

Marstin’s findings echo those of Strunk’s and Kao’s in areas other than the universality of a mature individual’s involvement with society. He also comes to the conclusion that a mature religious individual will have a developed set of beliefs that remain tentative. He portrays religious maturity or ‘faith’ in terms of how one deals with the world and a commitment to all those who inhabit it. He does not view it as being defined by holding a particular set of beliefs. In fact, he considers the identification of faith with creed as a characteristic peculiar to the Western culture. He comments:

“In essence, the prophetic message is that simply to maintain the groups’ [church’s] established way of life is not enough to guarantee God’s blessing.

It is not enough to just hang on to the traditional ways”(p.9).

He believes the problem of most traditional creeds is that God is seen as “our’ God” (Ibid.) rather than a God of all the world’s people.

2.4 The evolution of definitions of religious maturation

Due to the constant interest in studying human development religious commentators have had an increasing range of psychological theories from which to draw upon in their attempts to define religious maturation. At the same time different author’s works have come to the fore in the discussion of human development. For instance, whilst Strunk (1965) remained content with studying Freud, Jung, Allport, Frankl and Fromm, Jacobs (1988) refers mainly to Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Levinson, and Fowler.

In recent decades it has been the work of James Fowler that has had the biggest influence on attempts to define religious maturation. Parks (1992a) maintains that Fowler’s work has become the springboard from which theorists interested in faith development must move on. His theory is therefore vital to any debate about the definitions of maturity to be used in Christian parishes. It is significant to note that most of the descriptions of religious maturation described so far show great similarities with aspects of Fowlers’ theory.

3 James Fowler’s Stages of Faith

The following discussion continues the descriptions of his faith development theory that began in Chapter 2. It studies the background to his work and gives an abridged description of each stage of faith. After this the chapter compares the theory to those discussed in Chapter 3. However, a critical analysis of it is left until the next chapter.

3.1 The works of James Fowler

James Fowler is an American minister, a professor of theology and a highly respected author in the field of faith development. He first set out his popular stage theory in
3.2 Defining faith

The *faith* of Fowler's stage theory is very different from traditional concepts of faith. Due to the possible confusion that this causes the usage of this term must be clarified. For the rest of this research 'faith' will refer to the construct described by Fowler. This, of course, means that a new term must be used to describe that belief in religious doctrines that the word usually implies. This will instead be described as *religious faith*. Later discussion will concentrate on that element of religious faith that can be termed *Christian faith*. This describes the belief in Christian doctrine that makes someone consider him or herself to be a member of the Christian Church.

Whilst Fowler is a Christian minister who mostly studied fellow Christians, his theory did not set out to prove that a particular religious faith was necessary for maturation. He insists that "faith is not always religious in its content or its context" (1981, p. 12). This reveals the similarity between his definition and that of Smith's. Smith commented that when it is compared to religion

"faith is deeper, richer, more personal... it is a quality of the person not of the system" (1979, p. 12).

The only effect that a non-religious upbringing has on an individual's faith is that their sources of images and symbols may be more limited (Fowler, 1981). This may handicap the development of religious thinking to a degree but is unlikely to affect passage through the different stages.

Faith incorporates numerous elements of human development, many of which Fowler has become aware of through developmental and cognitive psychology. He often refers to the works of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg, and he claims that it is these authors' works that form the foundation of his faith stage theory (1981). Yet, whilst being deeply influenced by these he feels that previous psychological studies have focused too much on individual aspects of development. Because of this he argues that none of them:

"encompasses and focuses on that dynamic element of the individual's total being which involves issues of ultimate concern" (In Stokes, 1983, p. 10).

His work attempts to incorporate the best elements of previous studies into a wider description of human development. The stages of faith are therefore more than just an amalgamation of previous developmental theory. Fowler states:

"The broad epistemological emphasis in structural-developmental theories serves us well as a model for understanding faith as a way of knowing and interpreting. To make it serve adequately, however, we have to widen the scope of knowing involved and account for the interrelatedness of several modes of knowing in faith... [for] Stages of faith deal with different domains of knowing than the cognitive stages of Piaget or the moral stages of Kohlberg. Faith stages arise out of integration of modes of knowing and valuing that Piaget and Kohlberg's stage theories have intended to avoid. Faith stages are not identical with and cannot be reduced either to cognitive or moral stages or to some mixture of the two" (1981, p.98-9)
He has therefore attempted to widen the scope of his developmental theory to incorporate the more ineffable dimensions of knowing and valuing. To help with this he has turned to religious authors such as Paul Tillich (1957) and Richard Niebuhr (1960). Consequently, the stages of faith are an attempt to mix a psychological stage theory with more philosophical and theological issues as well. The result is a holistic and humanistic theory. It is not interested in meticulously charting each individual ego crises or cognitive characteristic as it changes through life. Instead, it seeks to describe the changes that are the most important to any individual at a certain stage. It charts the existential concerns that humans often encounter during their lifecycle and the characteristic responses that occur.

This ‘widening’ of the scope of developmental theory to incorporate the more ineffable dimensions of human knowing and development creates the usual tension found in humanistic theories. Because such areas of human experience cannot be clinically studied it is harder to provide empirical evidence for his conclusions about them. However, Fowler still believes these must be included because he supports Polanyi’s (1966) reasoning that humans know more than they can express. He argues that humans do not often make decisions purely by consciously and objectively argued reasoning – the Piagetian logic of rational certainty (1981). Instead, he believes that decisions are fundamentally influenced by a felt response – a logic of conviction.

Fowler describes these types of logic as two of the three fundamental elements of faith. The logic of rational certainty is involved in a patterned knowing which can be called belief. The logic of conviction creates a patterned valuing - which can be called commitment or devotion (1987). Fowler’s theory states that the cognitive aspects of our mind can try to understand our surroundings intellectually but the emotional dimension of our psyche causes us to value some ideas more than others - to instinctively commit ourselves to one worldview over another. The logic of conviction is therefore a key factor in shaping a faith stage.

Studying the effects of tacit knowledge is difficult and many cognitive psychologists would be suspicious of any developmental theory that tried to quantify its effects. The nature of tacit knowledge is such that individuals are unlikely to be able to fully explain the reasons for a decision. This renders them difficult to study. Yet Fowler argues that the affective side of humans must be part of any developmental theory that hopes to describe maturation effectively. Faith describes: “the structure of values, the patterns of love and action, the shape of fear and dread and the directions of hope and friendship in... life” (1981, p.1).

Faith therefore deals with the source of our actions and reasoning. Fowler is keen to point out that Kohlberg’s attempt to describe moral reasoning did not fully describe why people reacted differently to the question “Why be moral?” because it dwelt only on how these related to the logic or rational certainty (Fowler, 1980a). Fowler insists that the stages of moral reasoning must be seen as the results of different forms of faithing. It is the deepest concerns of each individual that drive them to embrace the different forms of moral reasoning. As their faithing develops, then so too will the form of moral development that they exhibit.

This makes it clear that any stage of faith is, at heart, an emotional response. Fowler explains that faith is primarily created by our fear of uncertainty: “Faith is a coat against nakedness. For most of us, most of the time, faith functions so as to screen off the abyss of mystery that surrounds us” (1981, p.xii).
There is a suggestion that Fowler, like Kelly, feels that 'reality' is unknowable. He believes that, in order to orientate themselves in the world, humans are forced to trust in the predictability of reality. They must try and formulate a worldview that can allow predictions about what will happen to them.

This explains the importance of the social setting in faith development. Fowler describes it as the creator of the third element of faith. He describes faith as:

"our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meanings and purpose" (1981, p.4).

Faith attempts to orientate itself within the world by using the traditions that surround it. The tradition of a social group becomes the medium through which the concerns of the individual can be expressed. It is also vital to the individual because it allows them to understand how they are to relate to the others in their group. Ultimately faith development for a Christian is a journey through which they:

"gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith" (1984, p.140).

In the discussion so far, three key components of faith structuring have been mentioned. These are the logic of rational certainty, the logic of conviction and the social environment or context. The way in which these interact to create the characteristic stages of faith is more fully revealed in the descriptions of each faith stage given later.

However, these concepts remain somewhat abstract and commentators may wonder how they relate to the more empirically observable aspects of human development, such as ego development, that have been mentioned in previous chapters. Fowler's work does not fully answer this question though it does reveal his belief that faith is affected by:

i. Biological maturation.
ii. Perceptual and cognitive development.
iii. Emotional and affective maturation.
iv. Development of moral and social responsibility.
v. Social environment.

There is an indication that (i) – (iv) of the above list contribute in different degrees to the patterned forms of Knowing (logic of rational certainty) and Valuing (the logic of conviction) whilst (v) creates a patterned construction of meaning. Fowler also speaks of the stages of faith being composed of “experience, intuition, feeling, imagination and judgement” (1986). The works of authors such as Piaget and Kohlberg, who he claims to have based his work on, are clearly important but only in exploring some of these areas – both of these authors concentrated on describing the cognitive side of development and avoided discussing the affective. Because of this, their works are of little use in determining exactly how the different components of faithing contribute to faith knowing, valuing and meaning construction. Unfortunately, Fowler's work does not offer a coherent explanation of this either.

Astley (1998) suggests that faith is holistic, with all of its constituent elements such as experiences, intuition, feeling, imagination and judgement contributing to the processes of faith knowing, valuing and meaning construction. This would appear logical. For instance, Fowler's description of the intuitive aspects of faith mean that they must affect both faith knowing and valuing. In fact, Fowler's theory makes the distinction between them rather ambiguous. This is because faith knowing involves more than simple cognition. Humans do not base their knowing purely on logical ability. Instead, the logic
of rational certainty is part of “a larger epistemological structuring activity” (1980, p.61.). Fowler indicates that:

“A logic of conviction does not negate a logic of rational certainty. But the former, being more inclusive, does contextualize, qualify, and anchor the latter” (Ibid., My italics)

Tacit commitments towards certain understandings of reality therefore guide knowing, indicating that it is guided by intuitive or felt beliefs about the nature of reality.

Another example of the holistic nature of faith is that faith valuing would appear to be influenced by emotional factors deriving from both personal and social environments. For instance, a desire for freedom of speech can be an instinctual reaction, born from the natural development of human physiology or psychology. It can also be a socially derived value and thus we may ‘import’ it into our understanding due to socialisation. However, no matter where the desire originates it can theoretically affect the faith valuing that occurs.

In Chapter 2 it was pointed out that if a definition of maturation involved multiple forms of human development then it was possible that they could be set out in a hierarchical format. The example given was of Kohlberg’s belief that moral development largely depended on the development of cognition. However, Fowler’s discussion on faith does not allow such a hierarchy of dependency to be identified. He gives indications that there might be one because he describes the most important element of maturation as being the ability to put oneself in another’s position (1981). Some of his work also intimates that many characteristics of a faith stage may depend on one particular characteristic being gained during a stage transition. For instance, formal operational thinking appears to be the basis of Stage 3 faithing. - this characteristic is supposed to have a vital impact on an individual’s social and interpersonal life (1981). However, the descriptions of the stages of faith require more detail if it is going to be possible to say whether people may be more mature than others when within a stage of faith. In real terms this is not a significant problem. However, to theorists wishing to study the basic mechanics of faith development the omission makes it very hard to critique the theory.

In the light of these comments, it could be argued that Fowler’s approach to describing maturation may be considered a logical consequence of humanistic approaches to the topic. It has already been mentioned that Fowler appears more concerned with discussing the observable characteristics of each faith stage than detailing the complex relationship between each constituent development involved. Nor does he feel compelled to follow the evolution of each individual component. This may be because he does not believe it to be important to do this. If a theory is to aid an understanding of how we can develop then there is no necessity for it to do more than explain how we can expect to change. However, such a theory does prove hard to critique without repeating the research and ascertaining whether identical faithing structures are found.

4 Fowler’s Stages of Faith

This section describes the individual stages of faith. These descriptions are intended to be summations of the most important aspects of the stages and therefore do not provide the rich detail that is present in Fowler’s own work.
Fowler identified six stages and one 'pre-stage'. He gave these the following titles:

- **Pre-stage** - Undifferentiated Faith.
- **Stage one** - Intuitive - Projective Faith.
- **Stage two** - Mythic - Literal Faith.
- **Stage three** - Synthetic - Conventional Faith.
- **Stage four** - Individuative - Reflective Faith.
- **Stage five** - Conjunctive Faith.
- **Stage six** - Universalizing Faith.

Each of these stages construes reality differently. Each has a different way of valuing and a different relationship with cognition, emotion and social pressures. These stages are passed through consecutively but individuals are not certain to pass through any of the stages after stage 2.

### 4.1 Pre-Stage

This is an initial state of being preceding Intuitive - Projective Faith. It is not strictly vital to the overall theory but is of general interest.

Both the pre-stage and the Intuitive-Projective stage are largely inaccessible to the form of empirical research used by Fowler. This is important because he has therefore had to rely heavily on previous research by authors such as Erikson and Kohlberg when describing these stages.

Fowler described the pre-stage as a time of undifferentiated faith. He saw this as an ordinary part of Infancy:

> "In this pre-stage... the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations in an infant's environment. Though really a pre-stage and largely inaccessible to empirical research of the kind we pursue, the quality of mutuality and the strength of the trust, autonomy, hope and courage (or their opposite) developed in this phase underlie (or threaten to undermine) all that comes later in faith development" (1981, p. 121).

Fowler emphasises the dangers of not progressing through a stage properly and passage through the pre-stage is not an exception to this. There is a danger that a failure of mutuality can occur in either of two directions. On one hand, an excessive narcissism may develop where the experience of being 'central' continues to dominate and distort mutuality. On the other, experiences of neglect can lock an infant into patterns of isolation and an inability to relate to others meaningfully.

Whether or not this occurs the transition to Stage 1 begins with “the convergence of thought and language, opening up to use of symbols in speech and ritual play” (Ibid.).

### 4.2 STAGE ONE: Intuitive - Projective Faith

Stage 1 is closely linked with two to seven year olds. At this point a child's reasoning:

> “involves sensorimotor knowing - the co-ordination of movements and the construction of practical schemata of space, object permanence and causal action” (1981, p. 122).

At the same time the production and repetition of vocal sounds are found to elicit responses from the parent. Mutual imitation between parents and child then allows the infant to become able to communicate with the parent through symbolic representation.
The shared meanings that develop allow the child to organise sensory experience into units of meaning.

At the start of this stage novelty is strongly felt. This is characterised by the incessant "what?" and "Why?" questions of two and three year-olds. Such questions are their natural responses to constantly encountering new things to be categorised.

At this point in human development thinking is not reversible. A ball of plasticine, if rolled into a cylinder, will be said to be bigger or smaller than the same ball immediately after it is then rolled into a sphere. In this particular case the constancy of volume during shape change is not understood.

Cause and effect are also poorly understood. An example of this can be seen when children are asked who has misbehaved more; a child who accidentally drops a full glass of milk or another child who pushes over their virtually empty glass of milk in a fit of temper. Children at this stage will typically say the first child has misbehaved more because he or she has made more of a mess. Only the obvious results of an action are perceived as being important. The motivations behind the acts are not understood as being relevant.

Children with Stage 1 faith exhibit cognitive egocentrism. This means that they are unable to compare or handle two perspectives on the same subject. They take it for granted that their views are the only ones. Consequently, children in this stage usually talk to each other in monologues, each one assuming the other knows what he or she knows. They do not co-ordinate their perspectives with their playmates to see if there is a discrepancy.

Children who are Intuitive-Projective lack the ability to properly use inductive and deductive logic. Instead, they rely on imaginative processes and their faith is a fantasy filled, imitative phase. The use of fairy-tale imagery and fantasy figures is strong and they dream about archetypal creatures such as lions, tigers, bears and monsters. They remain unconcerned that they may have never seen any of these because, for them, "reality and fantasy interpenetrate" (ibid., p. 129).

Fowler suggests that these fantasies may be powerful symbolisations of children's inner terrors. He draws these conclusions from Bruno Bettelheim's work on the importance of fairy stories in early development. By the age of three or four children have developed "an often preoccupying fear of death, particularly fear of death of a parent". At the same time they have begun to: "internalize - often with a harshness far greater than parental adults ever intend - the taboos and prohibitions that surround and make mysteriously attractive things sexual and religious" (Ibid.). Fairy tales allow the child to externalise these fears and create stories by which to begin to shape their lives. Fowler describes these fantasies as providing "conviction awakening" (Ibid., p. 130) experiences.

Fowler gives a stern warning to those educating children with Intuitive-Projective faith: "Our research convinces me that education at this age...has a tremendous responsibility for the quality of images and stories we provide as gifts and guides for our children's fertile imaginations. [but] Because the child's appropriation of and personal constructions of meaning with these symbolic elements is unpredictable and because insisting on conceptual orthodoxy at this age is both premature and dangerous, parents and teachers should
create an atmosphere in which the child can freely express, verbally and non-verbally, the images she or he is forming" (Ibid., p.133).

Where this is allowed "adults can provide appropriate help in dealing with crippling, distorted or destructive images the child has formed" (Ibid.).

To sum up Intuitive-Projective faith, it is most typical of children of two to seven years of age. It is a fantasy filled, imitative phase in which the child is powerfully (and sometimes permanently) influenced by examples of the visible faith of the parents and other 'primally' related adults. This stage is marked by a relative fluidity of thought patterns for the children are continually encountering novelties that need to be investigated. However, these investigations are based upon the unrestrained fantasy of the imaginative processes and uninhibited by logical thought. The deep indwelling in a fantasy life and a fluid logic leads the child with Stage 1 faith to a great degree of egocentricity.

The main factor precipitating transition to the next stage is the emergence of concrete operational thinking. The child grows increasingly concerned to know why things are the way they are. At the same time they seek to clarify the distinctions between what is real and what only seems to be.

4.3 STAGE TWO: Mythic - Literal Faith

The mind of a ten-year-old can prove to be amazingly organised in its retention of information and this is a characteristic of the second faith stage. The Mythic-Literal child now possesses the ability to reverse operations as well as constructing a "more orderly, linear and dependable world" through inductive and deductive reasoning (1981, p.135).

The child becomes a "young empiricist" who can think in terms of processes and analogies. Whilst the Intuitive-Projective child fuses fantasy, fact and feeling, the Mythic-Literal child works hard at sorting out the real from the make-believe. Consequently, when somebody makes a claim this child will usually request proof.

It is important to note that the imagination of the child is no less developed than it was during Stage 1. However, the products of imagination are now increasingly confined to the world of play and can be analysed as entities in themselves. At the same time the child gains the ability to perceive another's view or perspective. He or she can see that other people may have different opinions. This leads to an awareness that others actually view the child with feelings.

Stage 2 is a stage of 'concreteness' and literalism. The child does not simply parrot everything it is told and seeks to analyse propositions as his or her abilities allow. However, when the story is understood to be valid the accepted images will be strongly internalised. Because their faith in their abilities is incredibly strong Mythic-Literal children have little ability to conceive of being wrong.

Another key aspect of Stage 2's faithing is a fundamental trust in the need for reciprocal fairness. Whenever individuals are confronted with a moral dilemma to comment upon it is the fairness of the situation that is of paramount importance. However, many of the subtleties of the situation will usually remain unperceived and it will therefore be perceived in black and white terms.

An example of this, is found in an interview that Fowler documented. Mrs W commented:
“Everyday I say an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be to God. And then when I need it, it's in the bank. And now I have my children doing it, when they're walking to class and all, I say, 'Build up your bank account'. And when you sit in that dentist's chair, and it goes, Oooh! You just know that if you get in a mess, you have that bank and it will open up and it will help you through the mess” (ibid., p.146-147).

Although Mrs W is an adult she is shown by these and other comments to have a faith stage that most people leave early in life. Her understanding of religion is one based firmly around a simple form of reciprocal fairness.

The logic used by individuals with Stage 2 faith is prone to literalism. Those in Stage 2 are much more likely to anthropomorphise God than Stage 1 children. Symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning and even though the child is able to take other peoples' perspectives, he or she usually takes it for granted that God's perspective will be like a friend's or parent's. Because analogy is now possible God will usually be seen as a parental figure - the prospect of an ineffable God is beyond the child's understanding.

It is in the Mythic-Literal faith that the need for stories takes on even more importance: “The great gift to consciousness that emerges in this stage is the ability to narratize one's experience. As regards our primary interest in faith... [the] Mythic-Literal stage brings with it the ability to bind our experiences into meaning through the medium of stories. ...Concrete operational thinking brings new capacities. The convergence of the reversibility of thought with taking the perspective of another combined with an improved grasp of cause-effect relations means that the elements are in place for appropriating and retelling the rich stories one is told” (Ibid., p.136).

Now the youngsters can begin to tell self generated stories which they can use to communicate and compare their experiences and meanings.

Stories of lives and great adventures appeal to children in Stage 2 faith because of their desire to understand life. However, Stage 2 does not yet step back from its stories and reflect upon them. The child is within his or her story and cannot stand outside it. Meaning lies only in the stories, the truth cannot be distilled out of them yet.

4.4 STAGE THREE: Synthetic - Conventional Faith

One of the factors initiating transition to Stage 3 is: “the implicit clash or contradictions in stories that lead to reflection on meanings. The transition to formal operational thought makes such reflection possible and necessary, leading to disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings. Conflicts between authoritative stories (such as Genesis on creation versus evolutionary theory) must be faced” (1981, p.150).

This indicates how the analytical thought that began to form in Stage 2 is further strengthened in Stage 3. Stories are compared in a way that Mythic-Literal faith did not allow and consequently inconsistencies can be noticed.

Synthetic-Conventional faith also has access to a wider range of people to draw information from. This is because its experience of the world now extends beyond the family. A number of spheres now demand attention: family, school, work, peers, street society, media, and perhaps religion. This stage of faith attempts to provide an
individual with a coherent orientation in the midst of this more complex and diverse range of involvements.

Fowler explains that upon reaching Stage 3 an individual conforms to a new identity (1987). The relationship that an individual has with others is qualitatively different because Stage 3 witnesses the emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking. This can be described by the imaginary dialogue “I see you seeing me, I see me as you see me, I see you seeing me seeing you”. This “creates the need for a more personal relationship with the unifying power of the ultimate environment” (1981, p.150).

Whilst Stage 2 could conceive of “the me I think you see” it was not overly concerned about this. However, Stage 3 becomes much more self-conscious and what is seen is of vital importance to an individual. Given this tendency it is not surprising that Fowler and his associates mostly encountered Synthetic-Conventional faith in adolescents: “Puberty brings with it a revolution in physical and emotional life. The adolescent needs mirrors - mirrors to keep tabs on this week’s growth, to become accustomed to the new angularity of a face and to the new curves or reach of a body. But in a qualitatively new way the young person also looks for mirrors of another sort. He or she needs the eyes and ears of a few trusted others in which to see the image of personality emerging and to get a hearing for the new feeling, insights, anxieties and commitments that are forming and seeking expression” (Ibid., p.151).

Synthetic-Conventional faith moves on from the previous Mythic-Literal faith in other important areas. With formal operational thinking comes the ability to use abstract thinking. The individual can conceive of ideal features of persons, communities or the divine. The concept of God is now freed from Stage 2’s heavy handed use of analogies, and concepts such as infinite depth, compassion, etc. can now be articulated and worked with. Consequently, the previous simple anthropomorphism of God tends to be lost in Stage 3 and new, highly personal visions are created. Fowler suggests that: “Adolescent conversation can be illumined... by the recognition that the adolescent’s religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with it’s forming myth of personal identity and faith” (Ibid., p.153).

However, with its new-found concepts of ideals, Stage 3 can be: “idealistcally or harshly judgmental of actual people or institutions in light of these ideal conceptions” (Ibid., p.152).

With the development of ‘interpersonal perspective taking’ individuals can now compose hypothetical images of themselves as others may see them. Quite often these images are compared to “ideal others”. This leads to an almost inevitable dissatisfaction due to discrepancies between the two. This is the source of much unease and creates a deep need for reassurance and acceptance by the “best friend” or parent. Reassurance is needed that those aspects of the individual that are being seen are accepted.

In this stage individuals do not have a sure enough grasp of their own identity. Nor do they have the autonomous judgement to construct and maintain an independent perspective. The locus of authority for these people is located outside the self and remains in the realms of peers and significant others. Stage 3 is therefore described as a ‘conformist’ stage. It is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgements of significant others. A typical symptom of ill-adjustment at Stage 3 is linked to the power others have over the individual due to his or her need of their support and reassurance. Sharon Parks describes the problem in terms of the “tyranny of the They”. This situation occurs
when individuals can never break free of the need to be accepted by the significant
"others" in their lives. Someone suffering from this has a power locus so firmly placed
outside the self that passage to the next levels of faith (where authority is taken back
within the self) is severely hampered. Fowler notes that God, if present in the
adolescent's mindset, inevitably becomes the "Decisive Other" and the resulting
demand of total commitment to this ultimate other will inevitably exert powerful pressure
on the self image and outlook of the youth.

After Fowler and his associates had undertaken a sizeable number of interviews he
noted that:

"a considerable number of the adults we have interviewed - both men and
women - can be best described by the patterns of Stage 3 Synthetic -
Conventional faith" (Ibid., p.161).

He indicates that whole congregations can reside at this level of faith development.

The system of informing images and values that stage 3 individuals are committed to
remains principally a tacit system. It plays a role in guiding and shaping choices but
does so at a largely subconscious level (Polanyi, 1975). The result of this is that the
symbols which elicit the strongest loyalties are not separable from what they symbolise.
As meaning and symbol impinge on each other at this stage, the symbols used by an
individual or community have are made sacred, "They are the depths of meaning" (Ibid.,
p.163). Consequently, an individual with Synthetic-Conventional faith can articulate
beliefs and feel emotional investment in them, but cannot generally reflect upon the
system as a whole. A great emotional attachment to these beliefs is present because
they are central to the faith structure but if one of these constructs is called into question
it threatens to pull down the others as well. Therefore, any demythologisation threatens
the sanctity an individual's faith and is therefore open to being viewed as a threat on the
sacred itself. Individuals with Stage 3 faith can unconsciously realise that certain forms
of questioning will precipitate a significant change and can perceive it as an 'attack' on
the stability of their worldview. This means that an individual will tend to react
defensively, with strong emotions, without knowing why.

Eventually, Synthetic-Conventional individuals will identify areas of their worldview where
there is a lack of clarity, or even the possibility of contradiction. However, these can be
accommodated within the individual, especially now that concepts such as infinity and
mystery are understood. Church doctrine will tend to be accepted without too much
analysis because the adolescent will be secure in knowing he or she is approved of by
the group. Even those brought up to question all sorts of widely held belief will tend to
be over zealous in apportioning right and wrong and what is and is not to be done.

Factors contributing to the breakdown of Stage 3 faith and the readiness for transition to
Individuative - Reflective faith are numerous. One factor can be a marked change of
position of an officially sanctioned leader on policies or practices previously deemed
sacred and unbreachable. Examples of such situations are the replacement of the Latin
mass by the Roman Catholic Church and the ordination of women by the Church of
England. These, and other contributing factors, create experiences that lead to critical
reflection on how one's belief and values have formed and changed. The knowledge of
how relative these beliefs are to one's particular group or background may then become
apparent. Frequently the experience of "leaving home" either emotionally or physically
(or both) precipitates the kind of examination of self, background, and life-guiding values
that heralds the move to Individuative-Reflective faith.
4.5 STAGE FOUR: Individuative-Reflective Faith

The full transition to Stage 4 is a great upheaval and Fowler considers it possible for this movement to take five years or even longer. However, he believes it to be less severe for young adults when it usually occurs as a natural accompaniment to leaving home and being faced with the need to create an individual lifestyle.

The movement from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith is valuable because:

"it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes" (Ibid., p.182).

Genuine movement towards Individuative-Reflective faith requires individuals to face certain unavoidable tensions. One of these is the tension between the subjectivity and the power of their strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection.

A characteristic of Stage 4 faith is the realisation that all ideologies have particular histories. It becomes clear that individuals and groups have worldviews that grow out of their particular experiences and the conditions with which they have had to deal. A person is seen to have been affected by the history of their community as well as the economic conditions particular to that group. The tacit systems mentioned in Stage 3 are revealed and individuals can see how they have been given certain tacit expectations by their social setting. Because of this, Stage 4's faith allows the construction of a perspective genuinely aware of social systems and institutions surrounding the individual.

As a result of these changes Stage 4's critical reflection upon its system of meanings and use of symbols differs qualitatively from that of Stage 3. The symbols and rituals previously taken as sacred are now interrogated because Stage 4 regards meaning as separable from the symbolic media that expresses it. The central constructs that were felt to be so important as to elicit fear if they were threatened in Stage 3 are now viewed as also being prime targets for analysis. The Individuative-Reflective person repeatedly asks of the symbols around it "but what does it mean?". Such a person inherently believes mysterious or symbolic language can be translated into propositions, definitions and/or conceptual foundations.

However, this strategy of demythologisation brings losses as well as gains. When Paul Tillich, wrote about religious symbols he said that when a symbol is recognised to be a symbol by those who relate to the transcendent through it, it becomes a "broken symbol" (1957). When Stage 4 faith is reached Fowler tells us:

"a certain naive reliance upon and trust in the sacred power efficacy and inherent truth of the symbol as representation is interrupted. Instead of the symbol or symbolic act having the initiative and exerting its power on the participant, now the participant-questioner has the initiative over against the symbol. For those who have previously enjoyed an unquestioning relation to the transcendent and to their fellow worshippers through a set of religious symbols, stage four's translations of their meanings into conceptual prose can bring a sense of loss, dislocation, grief and even guilt" (1981, p.180).

Individuative - Reflective faith tends to 'flatten' previously rich symbols and denude them of much power. In spite of this there are definite gains as well. Those things previously felt and responded to without reflection can now be identified and perceived.
The ability to actively analyse the underpinning beliefs of one's existence shows that an individual has gained power to take charge of an important area of his or her life, with the result he or she is less controlled by peers and the expectations of the significant others. Others and their judgements will remain important to the Individuative-Reflective individual but their expectations, advice and counsel will be submitted to an internal panel of experts who reserve the right to ignore expectations and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices. Fowler refers to this as the development of an "executive ego" (Ibid., p.179).

From this description it can be seen that there are two main changes that bring about Individuative-Reflective faith, the distancing from previous value systems together with the emergence of the executive ego. However, Fowler points out that it is quite possible for someone to complete only one half of this double movement. For instance, it is possible to realise the relative nature of an inherited worldview yet never interrupt the external locus of power. The opposite case is also possible. Individuals can shape their own variant way of living from a shared value system but break their reliance on the consensual or conventional authorities. Fowler believes either of these positions can bring about a potentially long lasting equilibrium in a transitional state between Stages 3 and 4.

Though Stage 4's greatest strength is its capacity to reflect critically on the self and its surroundings it often has:

"an excessive confidence in the conscious mind and in critical thought... [leading to] a kind of second narcissism in which the now clearly bounded, reflective self over assimilates 'reality' and the perspectives of others into its own world view" (Ibid., p.182-3).

At the same time in spite of their confidence in their mental abilities, those with Stage 4 faith styles are often not secure in their understanding of the world:

"restless with the self-images and outlook maintained by Stage 4, the person ready for transition [to Stage 5] finds him or herself attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices. Elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one serves - any or all of these may signal readiness for something new. Stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may insist on breaking upon the neatness of the previous faith. Disillusionment with one's compromises and recognition that life is more complex than Stage 4's logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts can comprehend, press one toward a more dialectical and multileveled approach to life truth" (Ibid., p.183).

As Fowler suggests that this is unlikely to occur before middle age (1987) it appears that individuals may reside in Stage 4 for a long period.

4.6 STAGE FIVE: Conjunctive Faith

Fowler is quite open about the problems of defining this stage of faith and the anxiety this causes him. He nevertheless attempts to describe the transition to this stage by using a number of analogies. We are told the emergence of Stage 5 is like:

"Realizing that the behaviour of light requires that it be understood as a wave phenomenon and as particles of energy".
"Discovering that the rational solution or 'explanation' of a problem that seemed so elegant is but a painted canvas covering an intricate, endlessly intriguing cavern of surprising depth".

"Looking at a field of flowers simultaneously through a microscope and a wide angle lens".

"Discovering that a guest, if invited to do so, will generously reveal the treasured wisdom of a lifetime of experience".

"Discovering that someone who shares your identity also writes cheques, makes deposits and stops payments on your bank account".

"Discovering that one's parents are remarkable people not just because they are one's parents" (1981, p.185).

Stage 5 is a way of knowing that moves beyond Stage 4's dichotomising either/or logic - it sees both (or many) sides of an issue simultaneously. Conjunctive faith perceives that most things are 'organically' related to each other, and:

"attends to the pattern of interrelatedness in things, trying to avoid force-fitting to its own prior mind set" (Ibid.).

Fowler describes Conjunctive faith as a form of "dialogical knowing". He explains that the 'known' is invited to speak its own word in its own language:

"Knower and known converse in an I-Thou relationship. The knower seeks to accommodate her or his knowledge to the structure of that which is being known before imposing her or his own categories upon it" (Ibid.).

Such a situation represents a hermeneutical approach.

Stage 5 has a willingness to let reality speak, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower, thus showing a self-certainty that is open-minded yet firm. The knower realises they will not be swept away by revelations from another and to hear these revelations is vital to understanding life. Gandhi spoke of:

"opening the windows of his house to the winds from the outside world without being swept off his feet" (King in Felderhof, 1985, p.97).

Fowler describes a similar situation using his own experience:

"In theological seminary I learned methods of studying scripture that employed language study, source criticism, form criticism and text criticism. All of these methods involved things I could learn to do to texts in order, as Martin Luther once said, to 'crack them open like a nut'. Not until I was in my thirties, undergoing my first experience of spiritual direction in the tradition of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, did I begin to learn a method of working with scripture that breathed more of the spirit of Stage 5. The Ignatian approach did not require me to negate my critical skills, but it did teach me to supplement them with a method in which I learned to relinquish initiative to the text. Instead of my reading... I began to learn how to let the text read me and to let it bring my needs and the Spirit's movements within me to consciousness" (1981, p.185-186).

Stage 5 comes to terms with the fact that the conscious ego is not master in its own house - the unconscious personal, social and species or archetypal elements are partly
determinative of our actions as well. The unease caused by the dichotomising conscious logic of Stage 4 is therefore ameliorated by this new stage. Stage 5 accepts that theories are necessary but intuits that no theory is completely comprehensive.

Fowler believes Krister Stendahl reveals a Stage 5 faith with his statement that no interfaith conversation can be genuinely ecumenical unless the mutual sharing is such that each party makes themselves vulnerable to conversion to the other's truth. Fowler believes that this opinion shows:

"no lack of commitment to one's own truth tradition. Nor does it mean wishy-washy neutrality or mere fascination with the exotic features of alien culture... (but) stems precisely from it's confidence in the reality mediated by its own tradition and in the awareness that that reality overspills its mediation... He or she assumes that each genuine perspective will augment and correct aspects of the other, in a mutual movement toward the real and the true" (1981, p.186-7).

As has been noted previously conjunctive faith cannot live with the demythologising strategy of Stage 4 because it realises that this is a false premise if used too harshly. Stage 4 sought to question symbolic representation to force it to yield its meanings. But Stage 5 realises that this is never fully possible because there is still the dark sea of the unconscious. This refuses to divulge its secrets to such intellectual scrutiny. Therefore, Stage 5:

"acknowledges the powerlessness of anything it can control to transform and redeem its myopia. It discerns the powerful residues of meaning that escape our strategies of reductive interpretation" (Ibid.).

In doing this Stage 5 carries forward the critical capacities and methods of the previous stage. However, it no longer trusts them except as tools to avoid self-deception and to order truths encountered in other ways.

From these descriptions it can be seen that discussion of Stage 5 faith often ceases to be discussed in the more straightforward language of psychology and takes on a metaphysical tone. Consequently, trying to put over Fowler's conception of this stage becomes hazardous unless repeated verbatim.

4.7 STAGE SIX: Universalizing Faith

If Conjunctive faith was hard to describe then Universalizing faith is even more of a challenge. To define this sixth stage we first need to define the problems that are created within the previous stage:

Stage 5 sees the inter-relatedness of everything and the entailing injustice of most systems in one way or another. The individual therefore realises that, as part of the system, they are implicated in these injustices. Yet Stage 5 remains paradoxical or divided because the self is caught between its "universalizing apprehensions" and the imminent need to preserve its own wellbeing. In such a situation Stage 5 must act or it will become paralysed because its perceptions of justice "outreach its readiness to sacrifice the self and to risk the partial realization of love" (1981, p.200). The transition to Stage 6 occurs as the individual solves this paradox by overcoming his or her need for self-preservation. Instead, the individual comes to consider the self expendable in the journey to transform present reality. Fowler explains that:

"Persons best described by Stage 6 typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality
give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality. In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and prudence. Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species. And their leadership initiatives, often strategies of non-violent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance. It is little wonder that persons best described by stage 6 so frequently become martyrs for the visions they incarnate” (Ibid.).

From this description it is clear that someone with Universalizing faith the locus of power is fully within the individual.

Fowler considers this a rare stage to encounter. He reserves his descriptions of people who depict Universalizing faith to people such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. (at the end of his life), Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and Thomas Merton. Yet Fowler also points out that to say that someone exhibits the characteristics of Universalizing faith is not to say they are perfect or fully self-actualised:

“Greatness of commitment and vision often coexists with great blind spots and limitations” (Ibid., p.202).

This is certainly likely with regard to Gandhi. Erikson pointed out that at times he could be less than understanding with his wife and children (Erikson, 1969).

As a consequence of this situation Stage 6 faith can be seen to have failings but it is essentially a unified style of faith that has integrated most of the individuals' needs and desires into a coherent way of life. This description of Stage 6 faith is extremely short and by no means covers all Fowler's comments on this subject. The essential elements that make Stage 6 relevant to this research are mentioned and the others omitted for the sake of brevity.

5 The Stages of Faith in Relation to Previously Described Theories

It is useful to compare Fowler's theory to those discussed in Chapter 3. This allows its position within the psychological field to be clarified. It also means the strengths of the theory can start to be studied.

Fowler's work has already been seen to be set firmly within the humanist school. This was shown by the broad range of development that it describes and the value it places on accepting less tangible aspects of human knowing and reasoning. However, his belief in the need for a humanistic interpretation of development does not appear to originate from the authors that he describes as the main influences on his work. He is certain that the emphasis on cognition in Piaget and Erikson’s works are a limitation. Kohlberg’s work is less orientated around cognition but still describes moral reasoning as being dependent on it. Levison’s work is more humanistic but cannot be the source of the stages' humanistic character. Fowler did not come across “The Seasons of a Man's Life” until late in the writing of his 1981 work. The works of other humanistic theorists such as Maslow and Rogers appear to have been under-emphasised or overlooked completely. This seems to indicate that the religious faith of the author and writings of other religious individuals such as Tillich are the source of the humanistic character of the theory.

Fowler has also avoided the common pre-occupation of stage theorists to link stages to specific age brackets. He agrees that there is a relationship between physical
development and faith but does not believe it to be very strong after adolescence. He also accepts that experience will affect faith development and so age can be important. However, he is clear that many individuals never reach Stage 4 and so age is not a determining factor for human development.

Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg have still influenced the stages of faith to a large degree. They gave Fowler an understanding of how faith development could involve a passage through stages (1981). He sees their work as the reason why he views the stages as having an hierarchical ordering. Piaget and Kohlberg both saw later developmental stages as being better than the previous ones. This flows over into the stages of faith. Fowler feels this is acceptable because his descriptions of the stages shows them to be more inclusive than previous ones. This means that individuals at higher stages have a 'truer' view of the world and therefore gain greater authenticity (1981). As a result they can take greater responsibility for their life (1987). He is clear that with increasing maturation comes a greater commitment to acting only in accordance of a self-imposed morality.

He acknowledges that Piaget and Kohlberg influenced him in two other areas as well. Firstly, they gave him his epistemological focus. Through them he became interested in studying how we come to know what we do. Secondly, they emphasised the effect that both internal and external factors have on human development. This would also have been reinforced by his reading of Erikson and Sheehy.

It is apparent that the stages of faith incorporate and expand on many of the threads of development that Piaget set out. For instance, they embody an increasing ability to see things from someone else's perspective, to maintain an individual identity and to think hypothetically. Fowler's work also confirms Piaget's idea that the cognitive functioning of the brain will distort a religious worldview. He elaborates on this as well as on the autonomous morality and the nature of disequilibrium.

Whilst utilising Piaget's, Erikson's and Kohlberg's works Fowler also dwelt on the importance of fitting 'feeling' into his description of maturation – a subject that these authors had generally avoided. For Kohlberg, moral reasoning was seen to be a form of knowledge and reasoning rather than feeling (Modgil and Modgil, 1986). However, in Fowler's opinion, this underplayed the importance of more unconscious determinants of behaviour.

In Chapter 3 it was mentioned that the highest stages of Kohlberg's moral development did not necessarily appear to complement a religious worldview. It is interesting that Fowler does not comment on any apparent inconsistency of the author's work with his own. He simply says that Kohlberg's work has some limitations. Fowler met and corresponded with Kohlberg and has commented on the relationship between moral stages and faith development (Munsey, 1980). However, he does not comment on the topic to any degree during his later discussions about the stages of faith. This may have been due to the fact that Fowler was trying to set out a psychological theory that underplayed the relationship of religious faith to human development (Nipkow in Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992a). However, later theories have described the stages of faith in more religious terms and this problem has still not been discussed.

Fowler's work does not seem to have much in common with Maslow's. It does not take the hierarchy of needs into consideration and is critical of the concept of self-actualisation. It is in the discussion on the latter subject that Fowler makes his only reference to Carl Rogers. It is interesting that he takes issue with the definition of
self-actualisation because it so closely reflects the definitions of maturation set out by Strunk and other religious authors. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

Fowler does not mention Kelly but this author's work appears very useful in the study of stage transition. The description Kelly gives of construct collapse offers an insight into it even if the general theory disagrees with the concept of stages of development.

5.1 Fowler's Sample

One of the biggest improvements of Fowler's work over preceding theorists is the large number of respondents he used of both sexes. He and his colleagues interviewed 359 individuals for the 1981 book. He was well aware of the problem that previous theories have had when not applicable to one or other gender. For this reason his interview group consisted of equal numbers of males and females. He also took great care when using previous psychologists' work. He noted the work of Gilligan and others (Fowler, 1981, 1987) who pointed out the gender bias in many of these works. His work thus strove to describe the faith development that both sexes have in common.

Fowler's sample was not so representative of other groups in society and this limited the universality of his theory. This is especially true with regard to race and religious persuasion - a fact about which he is completely candid. His interviews usually involved whites (97.8%) from Protestant or Catholic backgrounds (45% and 36.5% respectively). However, Fowler and his associates continued to conduct interviews and from this later work it has been shown that the theory appears to be applicable to western populations in general. It is also appears to be applicable to those who do not come from a religious background and who do not consider themselves religious.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the work of several authors who discuss religious maturation. These authors have been shown to support the use of psychological theory in the discussion of progression because they do not view God's revelation of Himself as imposing a new form of development on humans. Instead, they believe divine inspiration or action works through, and respects, the restrictions of the 'natural' development of our minds and bodies.

The chapter has shown that these religious authors have used many different psychological theories as sources for their definitions of religious maturation. Their attempts to define progression have usually involved an attempt to synthesise useful concepts from these previous theories and to infuse them with a new perspective that derives from a commitment to a divine 'force' that acts as a guide. In this, the writers indicate how they see religious maturation as a more comprehensive description of progression than those of purely empirical studies. The selected writings have indicated religious authors' natural tendency to promote a humanistic approach to describing maturation, one that fully accepts the ineffable or numinous aspects of understanding. They therefore support the argument of Locke (1986) that philosophical issues about universal ethics must be involved in any attempt at defining maturation (see Chapter 3).

The chapter has indicated the strong support given to viewing religious maturation, not in terms of what particular religious creed is professed, but in terms of how the individual relates to and incorporates it into his or her life. There is a widely held belief that a lack of doubt about religious doctrine is an indication of fundamentalism that opposes progression. The discussion has revealed how religious authors have still argued that,
whilst holding a tentative view of reality is important so is a commitment to act in the world. It has shown how some religious authors have described the increase in multiculturalism as a useful force for making Christians come to understand that there is a commonality of vision between religions and to make them look beyond their own religious community.

This chapter has shown that, of all the theorists who discuss religious maturation, James Fowler’s work has been the most popular and influential in recent years. His work has been shown to incorporate most of the opinions of the religious authors mentioned as well as many of the findings of the most influential theorists discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 5

A Critique of James Fowler's Stages of Faith

1 Introduction

Of the theories of religious maturation explored in the previous chapter, Fowler's was shown to be the most promising for use in this research. However, the discussion concentrated on describing the Stages of Faith rather than critiquing it. Like any other developmental theory Fowler's work can be seen to have both strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, if his theory is to be used in analysing the data from interviews with ministers (Chapters 9 and 10) its limitations must be explored.

This chapter explores a number of important areas in which Fowler's work can be critiqued. The discussion begins by exploring the general critiques published by authors interested in Fowler's work. This includes both the reasons given for valuing the theory as well as the concerns that have been raised about different aspects of it. The discussion then moves on to explore more fully the tensions in faith stage theory that are of greatest significance for this research. Together these sections highlight the possible biases and contradictions that exist within the descriptions of faith stage theory and suggest how they can be rectified.

2 Published Critiques of Fowler's Stages of Faith

The previous chapter noted how Fowler's work has become a pivotal theory in the study of faith development. It has gone through over twenty reprints in North America and has been translated into several other languages. With its increasing popularity has come increasing debate about its merits and flaws. Astley and Francis now feel that this debate includes "informed evaluation, criticism and debate" (1992, p.vii) that must be taken into account.

The body of work that Astley and Francis refer to is still relatively small when compared to the analysis of the psychological theorists mentioned in Chapter 3. It can therefore be difficult to obtain these writings. British readers must often rely on authors such as Astley and Francis to collect and publish previously unobtainable material. One example of this is their "Christian Perspectives on Faith Development" (1992) which brings together many of the key texts on Fowler's work. The following discussion sets out the support and criticism of the Stages of Faith put forward by these and other authors.

However, before continuing it is worth noting that corroboration of Fowler's work is not limited to those authors commenting on his work. The next chapter will show that several educationalists' have observed changes in adults as they learn which echo some of the stage transitions.

2.1 Support for Fowler's work

Whilst there is a growing body of work taking issue with elements of Fowler's faith stage theory, most of the commentators involved accept its importance. In many of the writings there is a clear sense of gratitude towards Fowler for formulating such a successful theory. Astley indicates that he has publicised the theory in Britain - both on his own (1991) and with Francis (1992) - because of his belief in its importance.
Other authors also show a considerable support for it. The work of Stokes (1983), Nipkow and Schweitzer (in Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992) and the Report of the First International Conference on Moral and Religious Development (1980) are good examples of this. Fowler is depicted as the catalyst that brought the discussion of faith development to its present, much enlivened state. Parks (1992a) credits his work as revitalising theological debate, especially within the area of practical theology.

The impact of Fowler's work on practical theology is the main reason that his work is so popular with educators and those concerned with pastoral care. Astley and Francis are clear that his work is gaining "a secure following among those who are setting the theory to work in specific situations and contexts" (1992, p. vii). Practical theology deals with the reality of the human situation and is interested in promoting religious maturity. Unfortunately, it has often had to rely on debates that concentrate on the more insubstantial or ineffable concerns such as salvation. The strong psychological influence within the stages of faith deals with the immanent rather than transcendent theological concerns. This makes it more easily applicable. It has therefore been seen to offer educators and pastoral carers a much needed tool for enhancing their effectiveness (though this belief is questioned in Chapter 6). The keen interest in Fowler's work has shown the great need for such a developmental theory within the religious context. However, discussion in later chapters will show that this does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Christian ministers interviewed during this research.

2.2 Common criticisms of Fowler's Work

The following section details the most common criticisms of Fowler's work. It must be noted that it is very difficult to surpass the breadth of the literature review of critiques given by Parks (1992a). She has collected information from many sources, some of which are not easily available. In her article she separates the criticisms of Fowler into five categories. The following section concentrates on the most important elements, dividing them into seven areas of concern:

i) General methodology.

ii) The description of the earliest and latest stages.

iii) The definition of faith and its relation to maturation.

iv) The account of affective and unconscious components of development.

v) The degree to which religious faith is incorporated into the stages.

vi) The adequacy of the theory with regard to socio-political analysis - especially gender.

vii) Debate about historical antecedents.

2.2.1 General methodological concerns

A common concern is that there is not enough empirical evidence to warrant Fowler's descriptions of the faith stages. W. Rogers points out that Fowler's theory has been accused of being a hunch (1980). Webster (1984) finds the stages attractive but worries about the validity of the theory given the methodology used. He argues that the interviews used could be further modified to enhance their reliability. Several other authors such as Nelson and Aleshire (Dykstra and Parks, 1986) and Marion Smith (1986) also remain hesitant about some of Fowler's claims for similar reasons. Even
whilst she endorses Fowler's theory, Smith urges researchers to obtain more empirical data to support it.

Not all authors share these concerns about the general methodology. Parks is one such author (1992b). Nelson (1992) argues that Fowler's research methods are in keeping with a structuralist approach and therefore his findings are largely reliable. W. Rogers (1980) also feels that enough empirical evidence was found in Fowler's interviews to warrant the descriptions of faith stages. It was noted in the previous chapter that Fowler's respondent sample was larger than many of those used by other influential theorists. The description of faith development would therefore appear to be based on a large enough pool of empirical data for it to be considered along with these other popular psychological theories of development. At the same time, the fact that the faith stage theory incorporates the findings of authors such as Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg means that its validity is also affected by the validity of each of their theories. Given the enduring nature of the works of these latter theorists this would appear to further support Fowler's work.

2.2.2 Concerns about the descriptions of early and late stages

It has been noted that the interview format used by Fowler may not have been suitable for all of his respondents. Nor were all of the stages encountered in his sample. For this reason the earliest and latest stages are singled out for the most intense criticism.

Astley points out that social scientists are sceptical about the descriptions of the earliest stages because they do not see how the interview format can work with young children. The interviews that were used in the initial study were long and depended on an ability to verbalise responses to some challenging questions. It is not easy to imagine an infant giving useful information in such a situation. Commentators have therefore argued that the descriptions of the earliest stages can only be theoretical.

The last stage comes under criticism for different reasons. Fowler did not meet anyone with a faith that matched his description of Stage 6. He relied on biographies, autobiographies and the theoretical works of various authors to piece together this form of reasoning. His description is not, therefore, based on empirical data gained from his interviews. However, such an approach is not unusual. Authors such as Sheehy (1976) and Levinson (1978) have described stages of development that they did not encounter amongst their respondents. In the interests of providing a comprehensive theory they described what they thought would be a logical conclusion to their descriptions of development. In doing so they used their intuition and various written sources. The result of this is that care must be taken in using such theories because aspects of them must be considered theoretical and tentative. It would appear that Fowler could be criticised for not being candid about this limitation.

Given the criticisms in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 it would appear sensible to view the faith stages as a tentative model for discussion rather than a fixed and definitive description. This view is supported by the continuing evolution of Fowler's work. He has shown a constant willingness to develop his theory in light of new findings. W. Rogers (1980) highlights the way that Fowler's new interpretations of the stages show a fundamental openness to other theorists' work. He highlights the changes that have been made due to new empirical evidence regarding gender differences. At the same time Fowler has shown interest in European faith development studies. Oser (1992) and others have worked on similar areas and have produced detailed studies. They have been careful to avoid the charges laid against Fowler, taking care to make their studies empirically
sound (Brusselmans, 1980). Fowler takes these newer theories seriously and criticisms about lack of empirical evidence may diminish with the incorporation of these studies into his descriptions of the stages.

2.2.3 The adequacy of the faith stages with regard to gender issues

Eugene Schoenfeld (Swatos, 1993) suggests that gender may affect the stages in ways that Fowler did not notice. He uses Gilligan's (1982) work to support this view. His suggestion is that the empathy and care that she described as dominant forms of reasoning in women were underplayed in the stages. Astley (1991) notes that this also became a concern for Sam Keen after he co-authored "Lifemaps" with Fowler in 1978.

Fowler has shown himself to be aware of this area of criticism. He admitted it could be valid in both his 1981 and 1984 works. In these he admitted that he felt unable to comment on how much bias there might be. However, in later writings he accepted that a masculine bias probably did exist (1992). He came to this conclusion after reading research published by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Turule (1988).

Belenky et al. published "Women's Ways of Knowing" that set out stages of female development. These echoed Kohlberg's, Perry's and especially Fowler's works. The authors suggested that there are two ways of knowing in the synthetic-conventional stage. One is the Cartesian subject/object distinction where objective rationality is stressed. This is the dominant description found in many developmental theories. Belenky et al. suggested that it depicts a masculine way of thinking. The second way of knowing is more 'feminine'. It is a "connective" knowing:

"a knowing that proceeds toward self-awareness, critical reflection through and by way of participation, relation, and disciplining of subjectivity through dialogue and reflection" (Fowler, p. xiii, 1992).

Fowler conceded that his own theory was biased towards the first type of knowing and had muted the second. Now that the bias had been identified he felt he must undertake more research to study this phenomenon.

Gender is not the only socio-political issue that has been studied by commentators. Schoenfeld's article argues that moral reasoning can be significantly affected by class (Swatos, 1993). He argues that Fowler has not taken this sufficiently into account and suggests that the Stages of Faith may actually represent a class hierarchy. John Broughton (1986) argues that this is indeed the case. In his opinion travelling through stages is a passage through the class system. He argues that if knowledge is power then the ability to use knowledge will be associated with the ruling classes. As the higher stages of faith are able to control knowledge and utilise it more effectively, he therefore believes them to reflect the classes with the most power.

2.2.4 Lack of debate about historical antecedents of faith development

Nipkow and Schweitzer point out that Fowler does not compare his work to previous theories of faith development. They feel that "this is understandable in the cases of research guided by an empirical-analytical interest" but that "it remains unsatisfactory for those who work in (religious) education and theology" (Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992, p.5). They do not expand on this or explain the reasons why this may be a problem. Nor does Fowler offer an indication as to whether this will be rectified in his own work.
2.2.5 The possible overemphasis of the intellectual aspect of faith

One of the most widely encountered criticisms of the Stages of Faith is that they overemphasise the intellectual aspects of human development. David Heywood, Romney Moseley and Mary Ford-Grabowsky all view the Stages of Faith as being excessively reliant on the constructive developmental tradition (Astley and Francis, 1992). It is felt that this is detrimental to an understanding of the role of affective and unconscious elements in such a process. For several authors this means that they cannot accept Fowler's work (e.g. Elias, 1979, cited in Astley 1991).

Three reasons are given to explain this supposed bias:

Firstly, several authors believe that too much reliance has been placed on Piaget's work on cognition. Because of this they describe the Stages of Faith as a cognitive theory (e.g. Brusselmans, 1980).

Secondly, W. Rogers describes the problem as stemming from an avoidance of depth psychology (1980). He believes that Fowler's studies are:

"suspect on the grounds that they do not delve deeply enough into the fundamental dilemmas, strivings, unconscious yearning, authentic affirmations, ambiguities, and suffering that constitute the most profound and generic wrestling with ultimate issues of meaning, trust, devotion and worship" (Ibid., p.29).

Thirdly, Parks (1992a) suggests that the author's religious background might also explain an overemphasis of the intellectual elements of each stage of faith. She suggests that Protestant theology actively separates the 'head' from the 'heart', emphasising the former. Later chapters will discuss similar opinions expressed by the respondents during this research.

The result of this perceived bias toward the cognitive is summed up in an early criticism by Sam Keen (Fowler and Keen, 1978). In his opinion the end point of Fowler's stage theory portrays the individual as "professor" - intellectually skilled with a concrete conception of a personal reality.

Not all commentators on Fowler's work have agreed with these criticisms. Powers and Kohlberg praised Fowler for dealing with the affective and unconscious elements of development (1980). They believed that he focused on the way that human knowing, acting and relating are informed by prior, implicit confidence in the nature of reality. They felt that his work adequately attended to the depths of the human psyche and that the affective elements were properly valued.

Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer (1992) also take issue with the criticisms because they argue that they are levelled at earlier forms of the faith stage theory. They believe that the incorporation of Robert Keegan's work into it (e.g. Fowler, 1987) diffuses such arguments. Keegan's work is seen as a description of maturation that attends to the more affective levels of the human being. His theory is viewed as supporting and completing the Stages of Faith.

2.2.6 Disagreements with Fowler's definition of faith development as progression

One of the most significant debates about Fowler's faith development theory relates to the question of whether or not the stages describe progression. This dispute arises from
different understandings about whether religious reasoning depends on cognition and whether maturity can ever be described in secular terms.

2.2.6.1 The role of cognitive ability

The authors who argue that Fowler's theory overemphasises cognition (to the detriment of the affective dimensions of development) tend to argue that it only describes a form of variation. In their opinion religious experience is not mediated by cognitive ability but lies in the realms of emotion. Consequently, religious reasoning is considered to be intimately linked with levels of the human psyche other than cognition. As they view religious reasoning to be a key factor in progression they cannot accept Fowler's descriptions of faith stages as describing maturation.

Powers and Kohlberg (1980) disagree with this argument. They view religious understanding as a product of maturity. In their opinion, developing a mature understanding of God is intimately linked to developing in terms of Fowler's faith. They insist that religious reasoning depends on moral reasoning in the same way moral reasoning depends on cognitive ability. In their opinion:

"moral reasoning appears to provide the basic concepts of justice and care, out of which a theistic notion of God can be fashioned" (p.359).

Because they believe that Fowler's theory successfully incorporates Kohlberg's moral stages they consider any divine influence to reside in the realms of experiences offered:

"God is never known directly but is always mediated indirectly through human experience" (ibid.).

God is seen to influence humans through their psychological development by offering them experiences that are of use. It is assumed that God does not force maturation onto anyone. It is still the individual's responsibility to study and meditate on these experiences in order to mature. In this way, they offer a similar argument to that of Marstin (1979, see Chapter 4). He too supports the view that divine influence is apprehended through the limits of our human understanding, and therefore mediated by the developmental stage we are in. Given Fowler's view that human evolution has been divinely engineered (c.f. Section 3.1.3) it would appear the he holds a similar view.

Oser's view appears to fit in the middle of these two positions. Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer (1992) view his 1988 study as a suggestion that the mental structures controlling religious judgement are closely related to both cognition and emotion "prior to the separation into feeling and intellect", (p.3).

It remains difficult to assess the true relation of cognition and moral reasoning to faithing due to a lack of clear debate on the subject by Fowler. As previously noted, it appears that his work is conceptually different to that of Piaget and Kohlberg. Instead of describing the development of each individual component of human development, it describes human change in a more holistic way. The stages are depictions of forms of knowing, valuing and meaning construction with only a general description of how these interact (see Section 3.0, Chapter 4). Fowler appears far more interested in describing the overall faithing structure of each stage that results from the multitude of interactions between its component parts.

2.2.6.2 The role of religious faith

Many religious authors are uneasy with a definition of faith that is not explicitly concerned with a religious or Christian faith. Moran notes that, whilst they may be interested in Fowler's attempts to describe human development, they do not feel that 'faith' is the
correct term to use (1983a). They believe his faith development theory denies the importance of religious faith (W. Rogers, 1980) and is therefore simply a description of variation. They appear worried that Fowler's work shifts the emphasis of the study of human maturity away from religious belief. Huebner points out that many Christians define maturity as the gift of faith to individuals (1986). This leads to a concern that Fowler's stages detail how humans can control their own maturation and therefore ignores or denies God's role in creating it.

Nipkow has tried to offer a way round these conflicts of understanding (Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992). He argues that Fowler has produced two descriptions of human development. He believes that the stages set out in the 1981 work may be viewed as a psychological theory because it was written in a way that made it acceptable to secular theorists. He sees Fowler's later works as concentrating on explaining the theory within a religious tradition. He argues that these can be viewed as 'theological' descriptions of faith development - a view that Fowler has corroborated (ibid.). In making this distinction Nipkow argues that religious critics should concentrate on the theological form of the theory. This version is supposed to accept the need for divine agency in a description of faith development. It would appear that Nipkow tacitly accepts this latter form of the faith stage theory as being the most accurate description of maturation.

2.3 Faith development as neither progression nor variation - an unsolved tension

The fact that it took a number of years for a psychological and a theological form of the stages to be identified reveals the ambiguity in Fowler's earlier writings. He eventually responded to the criticisms of authors such as Moran and acknowledged that there was a lack of clarity about the role of faith development in the process of maturation (1984). However, his latest response to the problem is unusual. Rather than trying to 'solve' it he set out to justify the ambiguity.

Fowler now describes the tension in his work as the result of a paradox (Astley and Francis, 1992). He believes that progression through the faith stages is obviously desirable yet he refuses to acknowledge it as the sole movement towards maturation. He reiterates the need to study faith stages in similar terms to Levinson's seasons. He argues that in one sense no-one can be considered more mature solely because they reside in a higher stage of faith.

He believes that there must be another aspect of maturation that works in tandem with faith development - a religious faith. Fowler's description of the nature of such a faith echoes Niebuhr's:

"Christian faith is a process of ongoing conversion (metanoia) - a continuing process of relinquishing centering commitments to finite centers of value and power, and movement toward commitment in radical trust in God as the source and center of power" (Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992, p.20-1)

This situation raises several issues. Firstly, if maturation is not based solely on passage through the stages then they appear to be of far less importance. Levinson argued that the seasons of life were due to the need to change as one's social role and setting changed. New responsibilities were required as one married and had children. At the same time progressing in a job and then retiring had implications on how individuals had to think about their status in society and how they interacted meaningfully with it. As Fowler's stages are not linked nearly so closely to these events (there is no guarantee that anyone will pass through the stages after Stage 3) then there appears little point in understanding faith development. Such development has no particular use in helping us
cope with our responsibilities as students, parents, workers or grandparents. The question arises as to what use faith development is to the individual or society if it does not allow some value judgement about the adequacy of their apprehension of the world.

However, Fowler's faith stage theory would seem to indicate that his "paradox" is actually solvable. His description of faith development would not seem to allow "metanoia" to be a separate element of progression. His description of the latter intimates that it can occur at any faith stage but it has to be asked whether it is valid to expect people from every faith stage to be able to experience "metanoia" to the same degree. The question arises as to whether an individual with Stage 3 faith could undergo this process as easily as one with Stage 5 or 6 faith. Stage 3 relies on a largely tacit set of motivations. An individual with such an understanding would appear to be less able to relinquish commitments to 'finite centers' than someone else who had the characteristics of a Stage 5 faith. If this is true then the passage through the stages of faith are still the most important aspect of progression because they control the degree to which metanoia can occur.

Fowler's comments about Christian faith being an additional element of maturation are also surprising because his description of faith development clearly shows that commitment to a religious tradition is a natural outcome of faith development. He says: "Santayana is often quoted as saying that no person can be religious in general. As I pointed out in the discussion of Universalizing faith, the disclosure of absoluteness or of the genuinely transcendent or holy come to expression in particular memories, stories, images, ethical teachings and rituals of determinate religious traditions. I think it unlikely that persons will develop in faith beyond the Individuative-Reflective stage without committing themselves to some image or images of a faithful ultimate environment... Faith, at Stages 5 or 6, will take essentially religious forms. And while the Conjunctive or Universalizing stages appropriate their religious faith traditions in inclusive and nondichotomizing way, they nonetheless require a representation of the ultimate environment as objectively real and as the final and primal source of all being and value" (1981, p.293).

In the end, Fowler's views on metanoia do not further the debate or clarify matters to any great degree. Because of this the following discussion will assume that his stages represent the most important aspects of maturation.

2.4 Questioning the irreversibility of the passage through the stages

Before concluding this section, it can be pointed out that the discussion in Chapter 2, Section 3.2 has already questioned Fowler's assertion that once passed through, a faith stage could never be returned to. It was argued that the effects of stress, injury or ageing could all reverse the process of maturation to some degree. This criticism can now be seen to be strengthened by Maslow's description of maturation as set out in the Chapter 3. Even if Allport's idea of the expanding self (Chapter 2, Section 3.3) exists, it can be argued that it cannot withstand all effects of stress or ageing.

3 The Impact of Christian Faith on Fowler's Stages of Faith

Upon studying Fowler's works it becomes clear that Nipkow's description of the 1981 work as a 'psychologically acceptable theory is debatable. Several significant problems arise from the incorporation of religious themes into this work. Whilst Fowler would probably argue that these inclusions are descriptions of how the 'universally applicable'
faith stage theory can be applied to a religious context, this does not resolve the problems. In reading the *Stages of Faith* it is clear that Fowler often reverts from discussion about the development of faith to discussion about the development of religious, or even Christian, faith without warning. The lack of clarification about whether these latter fields are part of, or separate to, faith stages creates a significant ambiguity.

Nelson (1992) also identifies this problem in Fowler's work. He argues that an insoluble tension has been created by the author's insistence that the stages are universal. If they are, then the theory cannot incorporate religious faith into it. He then points out that Stage 6 faith is very much an ideal Christian faith. It appears to him that Fowler cannot claim to have created a psychological theory because the ideal faith depicted is very much a religious one. In his opinion psychological theories only deal with 'secular' faith and he states that "beliefs overwhelm human faith" (Ibid. p.73). Nelson therefore believes Fowler's own Christian faith overwhelmed his construct of maturation and undermined his attempts to create a theory that would be acceptable to secular psychological readers. In his opinion this is good because it results in a description of religious maturity. Nelson considers it more valuable because of this.

The rest of this chapter concentrates on how, and to what extent, Fowler's beliefs have "overwhelmed" his theory of human development. The discussion will support Nelson's opinion about the impact that Christian faith has had on it. It will show how Fowler's Christian faith has made him make particular assumptions. These will be shown to be so integral to his understanding of faith that all of his descriptions of faith stages must be considered 'theological'. The following discussion also points out that Fowler appears largely unaware of this situation or the effect of these assumptions with regard to his works validity as a psychological theory.

At the same time, the discussion will take issue with Nelson's belief that the religious 'bias' of the theory is a positive feature. In deconstructing Fowler's stage theory it will highlight the contradictions created by the assumptions that have issued from his Christian faith. The discussion will suggest that the stages are inconsistent, though not irredeemably so. It will then offer a possible solution by re-evaluating the theory in such a way that the inconsistencies are removed but which results in promoting the stages as a psychological theory rather than a theological one.

### 3.1 The effects of Christian faith on Fowler's description of his faith development theory

Fowler argues that a Christian worldview is integral to his understanding of the world and therefore his description of the stages. This is undoubtedly true, but he does not explore the implications sufficiently deeply. It appears that Fowler's Christian belief gives him an agenda of which he is not aware. It gives him a tacit guidance that can conflict with his consciously set out aims - the production of a psychological theory with a significant degree of universality. This idea is backed up by the fact that few of the writers who discuss Fowler notice these discrepancies. It would appear that their own religious faith has made also led them to overlook the problem.

This is most clearly shown in Nelson's comments. He declared that Fowler's theory was flawed by trying to offer itself as being acceptable to secular psychological debate. He did this by showing how the most advanced faith stage depicted a Christian ideal. He failed to ask whether this description of Stage 6 was in error. It is not apparent to him that another, less religiously orientated, interpretation of the theory is possible. Nor does he explore the possibility that such an approach is more logical given the psychological theories that the stages are based on.
One example of the way in which the faith stages can be reinterpreted involves a study of the sixth stage of faith.

### 3.1.1 Challenging the Christian nature of Stage 6

According to Parks, Stage 6 faith fascinates most readers of Fowler's stage theory (1992a). This is not surprising. The stage depicts a level of maturity displayed by those who have stood out from the background of human life due to a strong commitment to a cause. Those who are classified as representing Stage 6 faith have usually undergone much hardship in their attempts to further their utopian visions. They may have even put themselves in positions of danger to do this. Fowler describes Stage 6 faith as being:

> "heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order... Stage 6 becomes a disciplined activist" (1981, p.200).

The inference of Fowler's works is that all of us could reach such a state. This is reassuring for Christians as they strive to follow Jesus' example - a disregard for personal safety in their commitment to spread the 'good news'.

In the description of Stage 6 faith Fowler makes three questionable assumptions:

Firstly, previous discussion has already shown how he views passage to the highest stages of faith development as almost certainly involving a commitment to a particular faith tradition (Section 2.3). He describes radical monotheism as being inherent in Stage 6 faith (1981). It is also clear that the people who he believes to most obviously symbolise Stage 6 faith are those with religious - and often Christian - faith. In this way Fowler uses the stages of faith to emphasise the importance of theistic faith.

Secondly, Fowler makes it clear Stage 6 faith is inherently altruistic. It is the "incarnation... of the imperatives of absolute love and justice" (Ibid.). There is indeed a precedent for such an assumption in many other developmental theories from religious authors such as Marston (1979), Strunk (1965), and Kao (1975). They depict maturation in terms of an increasing commitment to the people around us. However, Fowler is not fully clear about the reason for incorporating such altruism and commitment into this faith stage theory.

Thirdly, it must be possible that some people will not take large risks for a cause simply because they do not consider them worth taking. Fowler would argue that such individuals refused to accept risk out of a fear for their own safety. He would portray them as being prey to one of the weaknesses inherent in Stage 5 faith and therefore argue that they were still in that stage. However, there seems to be no reason why fear must play a part in a decision against taking a risk. Valuing one's life to this degree does not have to be inherently linked to fear. It may be contrary to a cherished religious or philosophical principle. Perhaps it is thought better to live and run away than to fight and die. Someone living under a tyrannical regime may believe that, in the long run, a live or free activist with a lower profile may accomplish more than an imprisoned or condemned one with a higher profile.

The fact that Fowler does not explore these options could be for two reasons. The first reason is that his religious faith may have caused him to overlook the possibility. As Stage 6 is largely based on reading autobiographies he could have been unconsciously biased in his selection of appropriate texts. The second possibility is that alternative forms of Stage 6 faith would not always be noticeable. Individuals displaying the belief
system in the example given in the previous paragraph would not necessarily stand out from the rest of humanity. Fowler may not have been made aware of them because they are not the type of people about whom books are written. Even if such texts existed the question remains as to whether he would be drawn to look at them as depicting a faithing style suitable for use in describing the topmost stage.

Ultimately, any exploration of Fowler's description of Stage 6 faith founders on the same problems that afflict any attempt at describing or criticising high levels of maturation. Locke (1986) points out that it is not necessarily possible to understand or criticise the highest stages if they have not been reached by the commentators themselves. He also points out that for a description of the highest stage of maturation to be correct it would be logical to assume that the author must be at that level of development themselves. When any author attempts to discuss a level of maturation that is greater than his or her own there remains a question as to whether they will ever be able to truly apprehend it. This argument leads Locke to criticise Kohlberg's vision of maturity. He believes that "Stage 6 moral reasoning seems to become nothing more than the solutions favoured by Kohlberg himself" (1986, p.33). Assuming that Fowler does not have a Stage 6 faith, then Locke’s criticism of Kohlberg may be applicable to Fowler’s description of this stage. In this case the description could very well be based on little more than the author's personal vision of maturation.

3.1.2 Self-actualisation and self-groundedness versus decentration from self

Another example of a questionable assumption in Fowler's work is his refutation of self-actualisation as an important aspect of maturation.

In Stages of Faith Fowler did not deal with self-actualisation to any great degree. He simply mentioned that it did not represent Stage 6 faith. By 1984 he refers to self-actualisation as a powerful modern heresy. He dislikes it because he thinks it promotes a belief in self-groundedness. He argues that this an erroneous view because it assumes that humans have all the necessary resources within themselves for living as mature individuals. He considers this to be a denial of God.

Fowler offers the alternative of decentration from self. This is his ideal for maturation. He believes that it is only through this that anyone can reach the highest levels of maturity. Fowler argues that the increasing autonomy that occurs whilst travelling through the first four faith stages takes a radical turn. As our group of significant others broadens to encompass society at large we move beyond the question "who am I?" to "whose am I?" (Ibid., p.93). Once this question is asked we are assumed to be capable of understanding that the only meaningful questions relate to what we are to our creator. Once we have realised this, the self "is relinquished as epistemological and axiological centre" (Ibid., p.75) and we reach a covenantal relationship with the world. We realise that our vocation is to live according to God’s law. Fowler argues that self-groundedness can never bring this about and is therefore an inferior state. He cannot see how individuals can ever fulfill their vocation if they do not learn from God what they are meant to do in life. He argues that the result of this inability to understand one’s vocation leads people to remain self-absorbed and over-confident.

Problems arise when the concepts of decentration, covenant and vocation are related to the faith stages. Fowler does not make their relationship clear. He may see both decentered and self-grounded individuals as being able to reach stages below the sixth. This would effectively split each faith stage into more and less mature groups. Each stage would have two possible subgroups. Progression could then involve moving
toward a covenantal relationship with the divine as well as passing through the faith stages. Such an understanding would be consistent with the previously described value placed on metanoia.

However, it appears more likely that Fowler believes that progression through the higher stages of faith involves moving beyond self-groundedness. This is strongly suggested in his 1984, 1987 and 1994 writings. For instance he comments that:

"at the heart of what it means to be a human being is the conviction that we are called into being by God for partnership with God. We have an ontological call - a call that constitutes our very being - to be part of the purposes of God" (1994, p.546)

This option would mean that Fowler is basing this aspect of his theory on his own rationalisation of the situation. It does not appear to be backed up by empirical evidence. Interview data are not offered in support of this covenantal reasoning. Because of this, self-groundedness may actually be little different to covenantal understanding in terms of its role in progression. There does not appear to be any reason why self-grounded individuals cannot display all the altruism of Stage 6. Some humanists and conservationists could be given as examples. These individuals would certainly feel the need to be 'disciplined activists', becoming involved in justice issues. However, they would not necessarily view God as the creator of their vocation, nor view him as giving them the power to carry it out.

The descriptions of the earlier faith stages would seem to indicate that self-groundedness is actually a more logical conclusion to faith development than covenantal understanding. The theory shows that the movement from the pre-stage to Stage 4 is a movement towards individualisation (1981). It is not clear why Fowler then suggests that Stages 5 and 6 are a reversal of this. He describes the movement through them as a reversal of individualisation and a return to the "participation and oneness" of the earlier stages (ibid., p.275). It is arguable that it is more logical to view faith development through the last two stages as a continuation of individualisation towards self-groundedness. The works of both Rogers and Kohlberg given in Chapter 3 would support such an idea.

It must be concluded that Fowler's work on Covenant and Vocation requires clarification. The lack of empirical evidence for the assertions means that it remains a tentative hypothesis.

3.1.3 Changing the highest form of human development from chance to design

The strongest proof that Fowler seeks - whether consciously or not - to integrate religious values into a definition of maturation lies in his unacknowledged reinterpretation of secular psychological theory.

The psychologists that Fowler has been most influenced by usually set out theories that were based upon a non-religious worldview. They usually see the highest levels of progression as an 'accident' of evolution. These topmost levels of maturity could quite easily have been different if evolution had followed a different course. If our lives were longer or if our methods of reproduction or basic social interactions had formed differently then our stages of development would be different.

Fowler's view is not consistent with this. Although he pictures the universe as still evolving (1994) he feels that humans have been "genetically potentiated for partnership
with God" (1987, p.54). The topmost stage of faith - the maturest state for humans - is seen as being designed by an outside force. Its nature and structure are pre-ordained. This is the opposite view to that of psychological understanding. It becomes obvious that Fowler does not view secular psychological theories as describing evolved human characteristics but as portraying a divine blueprint. Human evolution is seen as the tool by which God brings humanity to a point where it can have a meaningful relationship with Him.

This difference of view does not necessarily invalidate Fowler's usage of psychological theory. To a large degree his vision of God as moulding humans through the process of evolution is what confirms the importance of studying developmental psychology when trying to define maturation. His vision has no profound effect on the use of secular theory when he imports specific elements such as moral reasoning into his theory. In these cases they then remain largely as the original authors intended. A problem arises only when he tries to extrapolate from them. It is in the parts of faith stage theory that are uniquely Fowler's that such problems occur. In these he is using a very different premise about the origins of maturity and therefore his reasoning and value judgements are significantly different.

Those parts of faith stage theory that are uniquely Fowler’s tend to be found in the highest stages of faith. The stages below 5 mostly consist of an amalgamation of the work of Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg and others. Stages 5 and 6 involve much more of Fowler's own theorising. This is due to the lack of work on such areas of maturity and also the lack of empirical data in his own sample. As such the descriptions of these stages have been most influenced by his vision of divinely guided evolution. This could explain the refusal to accept self-groundedness and the promotion of covenantal reasoning. This further validates the call for re-evaluating the aspects of faith development covered in these stages.

3.1.4 Are stage transitions periods of isolation?

The final aspect of the faith stages that will be scrutinised is the description of stage transition. It appears that Fowler’s religious faith undermines his own emphasis on the depth of crisis that occurs.

In the first pages of Stages of Faith the reader is offered a description of a stage transition that shows it to be a distinctly lonely and unsettling experience. It is similar to the liminal state described by Kelly when superordinate constructs collapse. Fowler describes his own experience of such a time:

"Had you met me on the day before this [change] happened you would have come to know one who understood himself... as a man of faith... even a witness for his faith. But in the distancing of that strange awakening my faith, like my wife and children, seemed remote from me. I looked at it as one might look at an overcoat hanging on the far side of a room. During those moments I was not in my faith. I seemed to stand completely naked... A soul alone - with what? With whom?" (p.xi-xii, 1981).

Here Fowler uses ‘faith’ in a more traditional manner. He describes how he was not ‘in’ his Christian faith. Later in the same work it is indicated that neither was he within a fixed faith stage but undergoing a stage transition.

From this description it would appear that during this transition the author was free to gain important insights into his worldview on his own. In such a state there would a
complete autonomy of thought. This would be consonant with the descriptions of stage transition from theorists described in Chapter 3.

Fowler's descriptions show that this is not actually the case. He comments elsewhere that faith:

"undergirds us when our life space is punctured and collapses. When the felt reality of our ultimate environment proves to be less than ultimate" (Ibid.).

If Fowler is referring to faith in terms of his stages then this appears to be a contradiction. Either individuals are isolated from their previous faith structure, allowing time for important reorganisations, or there is still a faith structure present. If Fowler is instead referring to a Christian faith then he clearly thinks we only feel alone during a stage transition. He appears to be saying that God supports us through a stage transition. This explains his comment that a stage transition put us at the mercy of "the power of the Other in the darkness" (Ibid.) - a vague description that is never fully explored. In conclusion, the reader is led to believe that there is an outside force guiding our passage through stage transitions.

Now it can be seen that, not only is Stage 6 seen as a divinely created level to which we are to aspire, but God will also aid us in our passage towards it. This opens up areas of debate about how the divine can influence development and why only some Christians develop. Exploration of these topics is beyond the scope of the present discussion, which seeks to avoid entering too deeply into theological discourse. The concept of being led through stage transitions also leaves the reader unsure how Fowler can claim that passage through the stages does not fully describe maturation.

The result of Fowler's description of stage transition is that religious readers would understand themselves to be aided by God in such a situation. In that case the individuals are autonomous only in so far as they could choose to accept God's guidance or ignore it.

4 Re-interpreting the Stages of Faith

The criticisms of Fowler's work in sections 3.1.1 - 3.1.4 make it clear that his Christian faith has influenced his formulation of the Stages of Faith. Atheists would almost certainly take issue with some of the value judgements he has made, especially the essentially religious nature of Stages 5 and 6 - stages for which there is little empirical evidence. However, it seems reasonable to assume that these same individuals would consider the stages of faith be generally consistent with a structuralist approach to exploring maturation. Because of this many of Fowler's arguments for the description of the faith stages would remain convincing irrespective of the religiosity of a reader's worldview. For instance, the arguments for assuming that deeper forces control the cognitive development of Piaget and the moral development of Kohlberg are compelling without requiring the reader to have a religious faith.

Because of this it would appear that a version of Fowler's faith stage theory could be set out that would be acceptable to the 'secular' psychologist. This would incorporate most of the theory suggested by Fowler but would be different in several ways:

Firstly, the distinction between self-groundedness and decentration would be held more tentatively. It is possible that decentration is part of faith development. It is conceivable that a mature individual may come to realise that they do not have the resources to be fully mature without support. However, the support required may come from valued
friends or other members of the community. This would explain Allport's description of self-actualisation as being characterised by a person having several very close and valued friends. However, more empirical evidence is needed before this matter can be understood.

Secondly, the descriptions of Stage 5 and 6 faith would be understood to be tentative and largely unverifiable. Without recourse to divine revelation, the developmental theorist cannot be sure about the end point of maturation. When the highest level of development is not viewed in terms of being a divinely created state then it is clear that any ethical dimensions inherent in it are products of human ideology. This contrasts to Fowler's apparent view that certain moral imperatives are present because evolution was not a result of chance, but a divinely ordained process.

Lastly, the role of the Stages of Faith in describing progression would be different. Those without a Christian faith would find no apparent need for incorporating a concept of metanoia into a definition of maturation. The premise that maturation involves a movement "toward commitment in radical trust in God as the source and center of power" (Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1992, p.20-1) would appear to be unverifiable to someone without a religious faith.

Because of these factors, it appears sensible to suggest that two forms of the stages are describable, a theological one and a 'secularised' form. Both of these are psychological but the distinction has been made in order to indicate that there are elements of Fowler's theory that do not appear to fit with the spirit of the previous psychological theories upon which it was built. In this way the discussion has sought to deconstruct the theory, to show the internal inconsistencies that may be present. The distinction was not made in order to indicate that either of these forms is necessarily more valid than the other - this discussion can make no comment on the legitimacy of religious belief. The discussion in Chapter 2 has already identified the problems of studying the effect of the ineffable dimensions of experience on development. It also highlighted the need to avoid scientism. Just because one interpretation of the stages is more consistent with the assumptions of the psychological field this does not make it superior. However, in this instance one interpretation may appear more internally consistent.

It should be remembered that Fowler's faith development theory supports the view that maturation involves the ability to hold multiple possible worldviews. The stages depict part of maturation as being the ability to realise that two worldviews might need to be kept in tension because neither has the right to authoritatively disprove the other. Fowler comments that:

"reality overspills its mediation... each genuine perspective will augment and correct aspects of the other, in a mutual movement toward the real and the true" (Fowler, 1981, p.187).

In spite of this, there are some areas of Fowler's faith stage theory that need further clarification whether the person interested in them is religious or not. The following sections detail these.
Can a Personal Creed Affect the Rate of Stage Transition? - Fear of the 'Atheism' of Stage 4

Suggestions that Fowler's Christian faith was strong enough to create unconscious biases in his interpretations of psychological theory and his vision of the goal of maturity can lead to a study of the relationship between faith and ideology. A question is raised as to whether a belief system such as Christian faith could be strong enough to have an influence on someone's passage through any of the faith stages.

To explore this the discussion must return to the descriptions of conversion and stage transition that were introduced in Chapter 2. It will introduce the concepts of personal creed, stage foci and fundamental theologies to clarify what occurs in these situations.

5.1 'Stage foci', 'personal creeds' and 'fundamental theologies'

A personal creed is a set of explicit fundamental beliefs. It is the collection of 'truths' about the 'reality' of the world that individuals are able to consciously espouse. The Christian personal creed can be called a fundamental theology. According to Westerhoff (Felderhof, 1985) this is the basic theology that cannot be questioned if one is a Christian - though some theologians may question such an attitude. He attempted to describe this by setting out a list of vows that he believes someone must be willing to take if he or she is to be called a Christian. Examples of these are "to renounce evil, turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as Saviour" and "to put our whole trust in his grace and love and promise to follow and obey him as Lord" (ibid., p.72-74). The existence of such a Christian fundamental theology seems to be either explicitly or tacitly understood by most religious educators.

Fowler's 1981 description of the faith stages appears to suggest that concerns other than those enshrined in the personal creed are of more central importance to us, even without our realising it. These are the foci of each faith stage. These determine the way in which our personal creeds are expressed. For instance, the pre-eminence of analytical thinking and the desire to order the world into a coherent and fully understandable whole is the focus of Stage 4. On the other hand Stage 3 seeks to structure the ultimate environment in interpersonal terms. It also looks to the orientation of the self in the larger community to maintain feelings of personal worth.

With the movement through faith stages comes an increasing ability to scrutinise the origins and contradictions in a personal creed. Thus, personal creeds will be modified in the light of a stage transition. In fact, the quality of the personal creed appears to largely be dependent on the stage foci present. Fowler is clear that, the stage foci of the higher stages help people organise their interpretation of the world in more mature ways.

5.2 Christian faith and the 'atheism' of Stage 4 faith.

It is conceivable that a personal creed may be so important to an individual that they hold onto it without modifying it properly. Fowler has not addressed this specific point but he has admitted that a group's fundamental theology may retard an individual's progression (1981, p.178). He has also indicated that it is possible for someone to retain elements of an old faith stage, bringing them into the new one. Elements of an old stage are undesirable in the new one because they ultimately impede progress through it. It is possible to argue that the reason that some tenets of previous stages of faith may be retained could be because they are less threatening to a cherished personal creed. Incomplete transition to a new stage would therefore be an attempt to stave off the
inevitable reorganisation of our perceptions resulting from a full transition. An illustration of why this may occur can be found when studying the tensions confronted by a Christian who is ready to move from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith.

To explore this possibility the discussion must give a brief summary of some important characteristics of these faith stages. Stage 3 faith tacitly accepts mystery and does not purposefully try to resolve it. On the other hand, Stage 4 does not feel comfortable with mystery and has a tendency to try and resolve it through mental interrogation. There is an intuitive belief that all things will become explicable given time and effort. Only at Stage 5 is mystery again accepted as a fundamental reality. At that point an individual comes to understand that unknowable forces will forever exert influences on our opinions and actions. Stage 5 faith still tries to interrogate as much as it can using the techniques learnt in the previous stage, however it does not worry if such an analysis proves impossible.

It is arguable that any perception of what might be involved in a change from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith would cause uncertainty in a Christian. The stage foci of Stage 4 faith appear to be somewhat hostile to a Christian worldview. Anticipating (or encountering) the concerns of Stage 4 foci means that a Christian must confront what appears to be the antithesis of a religious worldview. This stage's foci create a need to interrogate the very great mysteries at the centre of the Christian personal creed - the will and actions of God, the nature of his presence, and so on. There is a strong tradition in religious literature that a logical analysis on its own is not enough to bring about Christian faith. Instead, it is seen as being based on a 'trust' or 'belief in the ineffable Godhead. The view that belief precedes reason is further backed up by the respondents in this study (see Chapter 9). This tension suggests that, to Christians who are still within Stage 3 faith, but being pushed towards a transition, the analytical nature of Stage 4 may well appear threatening to their faith. As Hull comments:

"The possibilities of demythologization, even when glimpsed briefly, will be instinctively rejected as forming a potential threat to meaning" (1985, p.189).

This particular problem appears to be almost unique to religious worldviews. It is feasible that passage to Stage 4 could be easier for someone without such a faith. An atheist might be far more willing to embrace a Stage 4 faith as it is unlikely that his personal creed will dictate that he should not. Scientific enquiry is popularly perceived as having an answer to most questions, and there is a common belief that research and study can successfully analyse most situations given time. This is completely in keeping with the concerns of the focus of Stage 4 faith. It could even be said to exemplify it. It is perhaps significant that Fowler chooses an apparently lapsed Christian to illustrate Stage 4. In avoiding using the testimony of practising Christians the readers of his work are not given any indication of how Christian faith copes with the tensions created by Stage 4 foci.

This situation raises a more general question about the tensions between a Christian fundamental theology and the relativisation of worldview that is thought to be essential for passage through the faith stages. It must be asked whether the "christian-ness" of God can every be fully questioned. The discussion in the next chapter will show that Christian educationalists tend to endorse only those forms of education that promote the Christian faith as the most suitable worldview.

To summarise this discussion, it is arguable that changes in personal creeds may be implicated in the ease with which progression occurs. If some worldviews reflect concerns consistent with the foci of particular faith stages they may aid movement into
them. Conversely, they may inhibit movement away from them. However, without additional research it does appear possible to determine the validity of this hypothesis. Further research is therefore needed on:

i) the changes of personal creed that attend stage transition, and;

ii) the rate at which people from religious and non-religious backgrounds progress through the faith stages.

6 Are Faith Stages Descriptive or Prescriptive?

In Chapter 2 it was pointed out that psychological theories were sometimes unclear about how the aspect of development they were describing related to those aspects explored by other theorists. The result of this is to create an ambiguity about whether the theory is a description of the only element of importance in maturation. The discussion will now turn its attention to another tendency in developmental theories that can create a similar problem. This is the tendency of authors to fail to fully assess how widely applicable their descriptions of maturation should be.

There is a fundamental difference between setting out a theory of human development as a description of how some people mature and of how these, or other, groups should mature. If theorists use only empirical evidence to describe the form of development that a respondent group exhibits then their theory will be solely descriptive. It cannot make any value judgements about the adequacy or inadequacy of the changes that it describes. At the same time, even if the findings could be proved to exist by other researchers, the development observed is not necessarily going to be the same as that occurring in another group composed of different ages, employment status, health status or culture. Given the impossibility of studying every member of the human race, it is obvious that it cannot be known for certain if any developmental theory is truly universal in applicability.

Unfortunately, discussion in the previous chapter indicated that it is almost impossible to formulate a theory of development on empirical analysis alone. There has been increasing recognition that any definition of maturation must include philosophical or theological discourse. As Siegal points out "no judgement of moral adequacy can be justified on the basis of empirical research" (1986, p.66). At the same time it has been shown that theorists such as Fowler often base their descriptions of the higher stages of development on what they consider to be logical outcomes of the process of development that they have detected through the more empirically testable lower stages.

These factors are significant because they can often change a description of human maturation from being descriptive to being prescriptive. Once theories start to incorporate value judgements and conclusions drawn from philosophical issues then these works start to discuss how humans ought to develop. This is not always understood by authors and there is a resultant danger that descriptions of maturation are taken to be more widely applicable than they should be.

It is possible to see such a problem in the descriptions of the Stages of Faith. If, as has been suggested, the sixth faith stage represents the ideal of Christian action in the world then it would appear that, to a Christian, Fowler’s faith development theory is more than descriptive. It personifies the development that Christians would wish everyone to undergo.
Such an attitude must be countered by acknowledging the fact that Fowler’s descriptions of the higher faith stages were not greatly influenced by the data he collected from his respondents. They are instead a projection of what he sees as being the next steps given his understanding of (i) the movements perceived to exist in the lower stages which he derived from more empirically based study, and (ii) the lives of various great and famous individuals who he believes to be highly mature. Because of this the highest stages of faith are only theoretical models, not empirically tested ones.

At the same time it must be remembered that Fowler’s theory has never been static. Since his 1981 work he has incorporated the findings of various other theorists into his own (e.g. Kegan). His stage theory cannot, therefore, be said to be a finished work. Its constant evolution requires that it be considered only his best description of development to date.

Unfortunately, Fowler is often found to portray his theory as a prescriptive definition of maturation. The descriptions of each of his faith stages usually include comments on the inadequacy of a stage. For instance, he discusses the “dangers of deficiencies” in stage 3 (1981, p.173). It does not appear that all his understandings of these dangers were derived from his interviews of respondents – though he occasionally uses transcripts to illustrate them. Instead he seems to derive an understanding of the “dangers” from his reading of other’s works such as Helfaer’s (Fowler, 1981, p.132ff). Fowler also makes value judgements about when some of the stages of faith ‘should’ manifest. For instance he comments that “Stage 4 most appropriately takes form in young adulthood” (1981, p.182). Most importantly, in summing up the value of his 1981 book, The Stages of Faith, he comments that:

“the stage theory provides a... descriptive and normative model in relation to which the adequacy of our particular way of being in faith can be assessed and faced” (p.293).

In this instance Fowler is asking the reader to see his theory as universally applicable, at least within the American culture.

This research assumes that Fowler’s stage theory is probably applicable to England as well. There is an increasing homogeneity of culture in the West allowing enough commonality for it to appear reasonable that most of the factors that influence maturation are similar between countries within this region. At the same time English authors have not noted any major differences between the faith development of people in this country and America. However, in setting forward the Stages of Faith as a suitable theory of human development, this research does not seek to endorse the theory as a universally applicable theory. Nor does it seek to suggest that it is anything other than a tentative description of maturation, with inherent value judgements. The use of it in analysing the interview data in Chapters 9 & 10 is therefore undertaken with this in mind.

7 Autonomy and Authenticity in Faith Development:

The final area of discussion in this chapter involves using Fowler’s work to help elaborate on the description of internal autonomy given in Chapter 2. This is important because it helps discuss the relationship of autonomy to morality, social order and authority.

Internal autonomy was described as the ability to apprehend the world more clearly and to be able to think autonomously. This was called authenticity but the following discussion will now argue that a distinction can usefully be made between this and internal autonomy.
If Fowler’s description of faith development is correct, it can now be seen that authenticity must include the ability to relate and care about the community as well. It is clear that authenticity is considered desirable because it leads to the possibility of reasoned action. But maturation is more than just learning how we can act autonomously. Autonomous action cannot, on its own, be a sign of maturation. For instance, Petrovitch points out “an autonomous Nazi is morally worse than the obedient or heteronomous Nazi” (1986, p.94) - A heteronomous individual is one who cannot make decisions for him or herself and therefore obeys orders without question.

The implication of this understanding is that authenticity is intimately involved with moral development. This appears to be backed up by Fowler’s work. It appears that the concept of an autonomous Nazi is difficult to describe within the faith stage paradigm. Whilst Fowler acknowledges that faith development involves an ability to make decisions that are not primarily affected by socialised norms, peer pressures or the laws, he also appears to link such autonomy to an increasing commitment to, and valuing of, others. Because of this the concept of an autonomous individual committing morally evil acts appears improbable. He therefore makes an important, but not explicitly stated, claim about authenticity. He assumes that it must incorporate a degree of social conscience. This means that a mature individual is able to act on autonomous decisions but only in a way that respects and values other people and their traditions.

Fowler is not the only author to have linked authenticity to a growing commitment to the welfare of others. Jarvis (1992) states that:

“Authentic action is to be found when individuals freely act in such a way that they try to foster the growth and development of each other’s being” (p.113).

However, it is not clear why the two characteristics must result together. Whilst it is obviously desirable that they do, it does not appear impossible that one could precede the other. For instance, Petrovitch (1985) has already been shown to conceive of this possibility in terms of an autonomous Nazi.

7.1 Authenticity and social order

The fact that the growth of authenticity incorporates a growth in commitment to and valuing of our fellow humans, may be Fowler’s way of solving an important problem that was raised in studying Kohlberg’s work. It explains how autonomous individuals can fit into, or create, a stable society. Fowler’s concept of authenticity shows that maturation cannot lead to a form of autonomous anarchy because the belief in the need to act in accordance to one’s conscience is held in balance with the understanding that this may impact on the welfare of others. Such descriptions of authenticity depict the possibility of a society that freely accepts a degree of constraint even when that society’s rules may not always be agreed with. This is done in an attempt to promote the greater good. However, it is clear from both Fowler’s and Kohlberg’s work that these individuals will, if residing in the higher stages of development, still seek to change the rules that they disagree with. Because of this free-expression of views is also highly valued by these individuals.

7.2 Authenticity and acknowledgement of authority

This situation indicates that a mature individual acknowledges that society should sometimes be allowed to have authority over his or her actions. It is therefore possible to argue that it may be legitimate for a Christian to allow a Church to have authority over some aspects of action. A Church has rules and regulations and it is
possible to see that a Christian, whilst not agreeing with some of them, may choose to abide by them in order to ensure the wellbeing of the Christian community. This indicates that the arguments of authors such as C. Rogers (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1) should not be taken to indicate that accepting the authority of the Christian Church to determine certain aspects of one's behaviour is always going to be detrimental to one's maturation.

However, this description of authenticity does not support the view that a Church has authority over what an individual believes. Those who accept the right of a church to determine this would appear to be unable to appreciate the importance of internal autonomy. Given the description of maturation found in the Stages of Faith, if a Church demanded such authority it could be accused of promoting indoctrination. This approach to religion is discussed further in the next chapter, which studies the forms of Christian education that are possible. It also discusses Christian arguments that the 'paradox of freedom' can legitimate demands for orthodoxy of belief.

8 Conclusion

The discussion so far has shown that James Fowler's faith stage theory is a useful and convenient theory of maturation. It is based on sound psychological methods (structuralist). It has been based on and incorporated the findings of important previous theories (e.g. Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg). It has modified these in reasonable ways (loosened age boundaries for stages, situated the descriptions of cognitive development and moral development - both of which avoided the affective realms of human development - within a wider and more general description of human development. The descriptions of the stages are also based on a large amount of empirical research and many other authors support the findings.

At the same time, this chapter has shown that criticisms can be made of Fowler's faith stage theory. It was shown that a large number of authors had voiced reservations about different aspects of it. Some of these have been countered by supporters of the Stages of Faith (e.g. the amount of empirical evidence for the stages) and others that had become less important as the theory has evolved (e.g. the adequacy of the theory with regard to gender issues; an overemphasis on cognition). A few of the criticism were found to still be important issues (e.g. the theological nature of a theory supposed to be acceptable to the field of psychology generally).

The discussion in this chapter has explored these last areas of concern and suggested that some relate to aspects of the theory irrespective of the religiosity of the reader (e.g. the effects of a personal creed on faith development; the relationship of autonomy to law and order; the prescriptive nature of faith stages). Others were shown to be dependent on this (e.g. the issues of self-groundedness versus decentration). The chapter explored the differences of opinion that could result from approaching the Stages of Faith from a non-religious viewpoint and the apparent contradictions this could reveal. It therefore questioned some of the assumptions and value judgements made by Fowler in the description of his stage theory. Because of this it was suggested that two forms of the stages were theoretically possible, both internally consistent depending on whether the reader was religious or not. The discussion concluded that the theory must be considered a useful, yet tentative, definition of maturation.

The next chapter discusses how, as a description of maturation, Fowler's theory can be of help to educational theory.
CHAPTER 6

Religious and Secular Adult Education - The Role of Education in Maturation

1 Introduction

The previous chapters discussed psychological understandings of maturation in order to set out a framework to explore the ministers' perceptions of this process. However, the initial research question also set out to study the effects of the respondents' constructs of maturity on their views of parish education. This chapter therefore discusses issues about formal education for adults that are important to such an analysis. It seeks to determine the most suitable form of adult education for use within a parish setting. It does this by exploring a variety of authors' views about the aims of religious and secular adult education and describes and contrasts the forms of human development that these attempt to promote. It also highlights the similarities between some of the descriptions of maturation in previous chapters to those that underpin particular approaches to both secular and religious adult education. Several key themes from previous chapters resurface in the following debate. These include the role of autonomy, relativisation of worldview and the specific needs of adults with regard to development.

2 The History of the Church and Education - The 'Secularisation' Of Educational Curricula

The Christian Church has played an important historical role in the implementation of formal education. Felderhof informs us that the existence of schools and the presence of universities "are the inheritance of a religious interest in education, and an educational interest in religion" (1985, p.1). Gaarder (1995) points to the church in the Middle Ages as the originator of the school system. In the early years of this period convent schools were established and in the twelfth century cathedral schools came into existence. Shortly afterwards, in the early thirteenth century, the church helped found the first universities. Gaarder argues that the Church was the saviour of knowledge and thinking through the dark ages, and part of the reason that the Renaissance could later occur.

Religious educationalists have also been important in the development of education in more recent times. Cross-Durrant (1987) discusses the significance of Basil Yeaxlee's work during the 1920's. She describes his deep commitment to religious education and explains that:

"Christianity was the spring from which he drank, the source of his interpretation of life, and the vehicle he used to convey his views about the meaning and purpose of education" (Ibid., p.40).

Yeaxlee is credited as being the first proponent of the concept of lifelong learning. Cross-Durrant describes his work as:

"the original English twentieth century publication which sought to establish a way of seeing education in toto" (Ibid., p.38).

He was also the first person to be awarded a PhD for studies in adult education. It was during the period of his writing that liberal education (c.f.) began to be accepted as an important aspect of adult education.

Jarvis (1987) points out that Yeaxlee is not the only religious educationalist to have had an impact on the development of adult education. Many of the important
authors in this field have come from religious backgrounds. He does not find this surprising given that adult education’s:

"outworkings are totally social; it is an element of the social gospel of Christianity, epitomised in a high doctrine of the human being" (Ibid., p.304).

In spite of this, the twentieth century has seen educational theory become increasingly secular in nature. Yeaxlee’s work was published after the First World War but this war had resulted in a significant disillusionment with the Anglican Church. The post war period witnessed Humanism becoming a popular alternative to religion. One result of this was that the Board of Education strengthened its control over Church Schools because it argued that religious dogma adversely influenced the standards in these institutions.

Other factors also contributed to the secularisation of education. There was an increased interest in empirically based theories of cognition and maturation. Consequently, psychological theory gained a strong influence on education. Bright (1989) argues that psychology still remains the main source of knowledge of human development used in educational debates. However, Usher and Bryant (1989) believe that notions about adult learners are based on both psychological and sociological findings. Sociological paradigms such as Marxism can certainly be seen to have strongly influenced educationalists such as Freire (1972, 1985), and the more general impact of sociological thought on education is discussed by Jarvis (1985) and Grimmitt (1987).

Another factor that has led to the secularisation of education has been the need to contend with the increasingly multi-cultural nature of society. Many educationalists have attempted to solve this problem by distancing education from its Christian heritage to allow a more inclusive or ‘neutral’ attitude. The effects of such an approach are explored later in this chapter.

2.1 The differences and similarities between the aims of religious and secular education

With the Christian faith no longer having such an influence on education the Christian and secular debates have diverged (Cox, 1982). However, whilst their educational aims can sometimes differ, there is evidence that their core concerns remain similar. Cox points out that, in differentiating between secular and Christian educational theory, the former group cannot automatically be assumed to be irreligious. He points out that religious concerns are still present:

"Our age is one that has found the ideas that the Church deals with not altogether relevant to the experiences of a scientific and technological age, and so has repudiated both those ideas and the authority of the Church leaders, while still retaining religious sensitivity in a changed form." (p.53).

This is not surprising given that Chapter 4 has shown how authors such as Fowler and Smith believe religious concerns to be a universal human trait.

In Chapter 3 it was shown that Grimmitt (1987) also supports this view. He argues that:

"we can say that certain values – core-values – are implicit within the ‘givens’ of the human situation and act as kinds of ‘value-imperatives’" (p.121).
He has attempted to describe some of these shared concerns that underlie educational theory. He suggests that humans have universal concerns about:

(a) The value of order, purpose and meaning.
(b) The value of human life and of human beings.
(c) The value of a just society.
(d) The value of the individual's right to self-fulfilment.
(e) The value of ethical endeavour and the necessity of exercising moral responsibility.
(f) The value of commitment to interpersonal relationships and to the notions of 'family' and 'community'.
(g) The value of human spirituality and the desirability of spiritual development.

Grimmitt's work helps us to understand that the differences between secular and Christian education appear, not from different 'core-value' concerns about education, but from different interpretations of how these concerns should be addressed. He points out that the concerns mentioned above demand to be interpreted. When Christian faith was more widely accepted as the basis for understanding morality then there was a great similarity in how these concerns were interpreted. However, with the fragmentation of society into its present multi-cultural character has come an increasing number of different "codes of belief and conduct" (1987, p.121). Each of these interpret core-values differently. In Cox's opinion, the rejection of the religious ideals of the established Church has created a vacuum in educational discourse:

"Having repudiated the existing religious formulations there are no generally agreed patterns of thought by which... religious sensitivity can be expressed" (1982, p.53).

As the following discussion will indicate, religious and secular educationalists can have significantly different views about whether this is beneficial or not to the educational process.

In summary, the discussion suggests that religious concerns remain at the heart of any educational approach. It also suggests that differences of interpretation exist that can create significant differences between educational approaches. It is these differences that are studied in the following sections. In each case the concepts of maturation that underlie the approaches are examined and compared to those of the authors described in previous chapters. In this way the value of these approaches is explored with regard to promoting maturation in adults. In identifying the approaches that appear to promote faith development, the discussion attempts to indicate the most suitable education for the parish setting. This, in turn, gives us a framework with which to critique the descriptions of parish education found in the research interviews.

3 The Aims of Adult Education

Before exploring the theories of Christian adult education (in Part 4) this chapter will study the understandings of maturation that have affected secular educational theory. This is important for several reasons.

Firstly, this approach allows some general points about the different forms of adult education to be made. It also facilitates the introduction of arguments for differentiating between the education of adults and children. This is important because these are subjects that are often overlooked in debates about Christian education.
Secondly, this approach allows an exploration of liberal education. This approach to adult education has proved to be a significant influence on the debates about Christian education and has originated from an interest in the psychological theories of authors discussed in Chapter 3. Its findings are therefore important to this discussion.

Thirdly, secular adult education has been concerned with the debate about what role education has in aiding the learner to survive in a late modern society - one with increasing technological change and multi-cultural mix (Jarvis, 1990). In Chapter 1 it was suggested that parish based education was not attending to such issues and therefore failing its learners. Therefore, in studying secular education’s reactions to modern society, it is possible for later discussion to explore how well adult religious education theory addresses the needs of adult learners in relation to the surviving in the modern world.

3.1 Three purposes of adult education

Adult education exists to allow people to change in some way. However, the reasons for this can vary. Alan Rogers (1986) identifies three possible functions for adult education. These are:

- gaining qualifications.
- vocational learning.
- personal growth.

Adults often require education to gain qualifications. This may be to allow them to continue into other educational courses (e.g. Access courses). Alternatively the qualifications may be for the jobs they wish to enter. This approach to education involves teachers following set curricula and tends to utilise a pedagogic approach. Pedagogy concerns itself mainly with the transmission of knowledge that ‘experts’ have deemed to be important (Knowles, 1970, 1983).

Adults can also require vocational training. This can involve short courses or conferences. The learning is related to the learners’ jobs but does not necessarily require formal examination. Vocational training can also rely on a pedagogic approach to teaching.

Rogers sees both of these forms of adult education existing to aid the learner survive better in society through helping them function in the modern workplace. He describes a third alternative that exists to help the learner survive better in the modern world generally. He calls this liberal education.

3.2 Defining liberal education

Liberal education is of most importance to the debate in this chapter. This is because it is the form of adult education most closely interested in stimulating forms of human development that are involved in maturation.

Rogers describes liberal education as formal, non-vocational teaching concerned with personal growth. As the philosophy of adult education has evolved through the twentieth century this has come to be thought of as the most important aspect of it (A. Rogers, 1992; Withnall, 1986). The education of adults has therefore come to concentrate on the educational development of learners rather than on the teaching of subjects (Harris, 1980). It is therefore significantly different to the pedagogic
teaching required for the other two forms of education mentioned above (Section 3.1). Before the concept of liberal education came into being it was commonly believed that pedagogy could also promote personal growth. This was because personal growth was viewed as something that occurs when relevant information has been given to the learner about suitable behaviour, morals etc. The successful transmission of the 'correct' knowledge to a learner was therefore thought to be the key to making them mature.

Defining liberal education as a form of non-vocational learning towards personal growth fits with Lawson's (1979) belief that it has traditionally been used to describe any form of adult education that 'liberates' or 'frees' the learner. However, other authors may use the term in a more specific sense. For instance, Elias and Merriam (1980) describe liberal education as a specific historical approach that emphasises intellectual growth. They describe a number of other approaches to adult education that seek to 'liberate' learners but which they choose to give different names to. The educationalists they study are thought to be members of progressive, humanist, radical or analytical schools of thought. These schools include important authors such as John Dewey (1915); Carl Rogers (1969) and Malcolm Knowles (1970, 1983, 1984); Paulo Freire (1972, 1985); and Kenneth Lawson (1979) respectively. It is interesting that many of these authors such as Rogers and Freire had a religious background. At the same time Knowles (1982) and Elias (1983b, 1993) have contributed to the debate about adult religious education.

Whilst these authors' theories may be seen to issue from different 'schools' of thought, an exploration of their works reveals that they have something in common with liberal education as Elias and Merriam have described it. To some degree they all believe that education should seek to produce:

"a person who is literate in the broadest sense - intellectually, morally, spiritually and aesthetically" (1980, p.26).

They also agree that adult education should be:

"orientated toward conceptual and theoretical understanding rather than mere transmission and absorption of factual knowledge or development of technical skills" (1980, p.29).

Whilst their theories may show differences of opinion about how adult education is to be implemented, or why it is important, there are significant similarities in their descriptions of human maturation. For the purposes of this research they will therefore all be taken to describe forms of adult education that can be described as liberal.

3.3 The elements of maturation common to liberal educational writings

The debate will now move on to study these educationalists' visions of maturation to discover the similarities between them and to compare them with the descriptions of maturity set out in earlier chapters. In doing this it will isolate the significant differences between the aims of liberal and pedagogic teaching.

There are four key elements of maturation described by liberal adult educationalists which they believe education should promote - all of which are lacking in the pedagogic form of education (Knowles, 1970, 1983). These are:

- liberating learners from uncritically acquired socialised behaviour.
- helping them to create an ability to relativise their worldview.
- helping them to gain autonomy in their decision making.
- helping them increase their ability to act on society in an informed manner.
These are discussed in the following sections.

Embedded in this discussion is one further strand of exploration. This concerns the reasons for setting up formal education of adults. This century has witnessed adult education evolving into a separate field of study from children’s education. However, the differences are rarely fully explored in Christian education texts. A look at the works of authors such as Grimmitt (1987) or the articles in journals such as the British Journal of Religious Education shows the emphasis of study is usually towards children’s learning. At the same time the more general discussions on religious education do not often differentiate properly between the needs of adults and those of children - a weakness that has also affected some secular discussions on education (Lawson, 1979). Hull (1985) and Moran (1979, 1983) are two of the few Christian authors who have written books specifically concerned with adult education in the church setting.

3.3.1 The need for formal education - maturation as liberation from enculturation

Alan Rogers’ (1986) description of liberal education involves a form of learning that is distinct from what Lovell (1979) terms incidental learning - that which occurs due to general life. Rogers describes it as a form of planned learning that requires a teacher. To explore the reasons for promoting formal adult education the discussion needs to explore the role of socialisation in human development.

The origins of liberal education lie in the early 1900's when there came into being an understanding that socialisation is not always helpful. Unfortunately, it was also realised that a degree of socialisation was unavoidable. Successfully addressing this dilemma remains one of basic concerns of adult liberal education today.

Educationalists understand that to live is to strive to develop through learning (e.g. Jarvis, 1995, 1998). Dewey tells us

“It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being. Since this continuance can be secured only by constant renewals, life is a self-renewing process” (1915, p.9).

Previous discussion in Chapters 2 to 5 has shown that developmental theorists typically depict the learning involved in this renewal as occurring due to general life experiences. Humans are thought to be immersed in a vital learning environment simply by their existence (Jarvis, 1992). Socialisation is depicted as the key vehicle for development and maturation is therefore stimulated through interactions with society.

Most educationalists do not consider this to be the complete story. Dewey (1915) warned that what society teaches through socialisation need not be beneficial. He warned that, without formal education, there is a significant limit to the maturation that can occur. Dewey argued that a key factor in progression was the need to learn about that which is outside our normal experiences in life. Whilst the world has become increasingly multicultural it is still apparent that social groups can remain largely unaffected by, or ignorant about, each other. Fowler’s findings have supported this opinion. His theory indicates that many individuals do not reach the higher stages due to the inadequacy of society to provide enough valuable learning situations. Because of this both authors view the key to people apprehending inaccuracies in, or the relativity of, their worldview as being confronted by ‘alien’ ways of thinking.
Such reasoning prompted Dewey to demand the provision of formal education for every child. He felt that schools offer everyone an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social groups in which they are born. He argued that it was through schools that the students come into living contact with a broader environment. Lawson (1979) and Mezirow (1975, 1990) are two educationalists with similar views on this subject. Mezirow’s transformative learning was introduced in Chapter 2. Lawson’s views are discussed below. Both authors agree that formal education is an important means to expand a person’s horizons beyond the limits created by normal socialisation. This should not obscure the fact that in other ways their visions of maturation differ markedly. For instance, Lawson views maturation as a more gradual process than Mezirow who views the development of individuals in terms of a more dramatic transition.

3.3.2 Different educational needs for adults and children

The previous discussion leads us to a point where it is possible to understand that education must treat children and adults differently. Children require a degree of socialisation in their education that adults do not. Lawson states that:

“there may be moral values which we apply to the education of adults that we do not apply in the case of young children. For example, it can be argued that a young child... is not a moral agent and his [sic] ability to make moral choices and perhaps also aesthetic choices, is non existent. It is therefore no infringement of his autonomy to teach him in a positive way what he ought to do” (1979, p.14).

However, the socialisation created by such an approach can be problematic later in life. Mezirow explains that:

“Meaning perspectives [mental constructs] are, for the most part, uncritically acquired in childhood through the process of socialization, often in the context of an emotionally charged relationship with parents, teachers, or other mentors” (1990, p.3).

This leads Lawson and Mezirow to view the process of confronting different worldviews as being of more importance for adults. Dewey’s paradigm is limited because the formal education that he promotes concentrates on children - a criticism that is still true of many religious educational debates. Lawson argues that under ideal situations a degree of socialisation is vital in children’s education.

From this discussion it becomes clear that these theorists view maturation in adults as a breaking away from enculturation. It is represented by a learner’s ability to critically reflect on his or her own perceptions of the world by comparing them to others’.

3.3.3 Maturation as an increased desire to study alternative worldviews

Alan Rogers (1992) points out that, in attempting to break encultured behaviour, it is not enough just to give learners alternative worldviews to study. They also require stimulation to interact meaningfully with them. They need to be encouraged to see the value of studying them. At the same time the learners require critical abilities to analyse these other worldviews. This reflects a view that maturation is not only about becoming aware of other points of view, but also of becoming interested in them and being able to study them critically.
3.3.4 Maturation as an increase in internal autonomy

In making learners aware of their socialised thinking and behaviour, liberal education seeks to create internal autonomy - a concept previously described in Chapter 2. Lawson (1979) sets out a theory of adult liberal education that aims to help learners free themselves from dependence on as many tacitly held understandings as possible. It offers individuals a chance to study the socialisation they have received and decide for themselves whether it is relevant. In this way it is hoped that they can become more authentic individuals. Such a description of autonomy is consistent with that described by Carl Rogers in both his psychological and educational discourses (1961, 1969). Liberal education, in promoting internal autonomy, attempts to create the ‘democracy’ of education which Dewey sought to promote.

3.3.5 The impact on adult education of valuing internal autonomy - the stimulation of self-directed learning

Both Knowles (1970, 1983) and Lawson (1979) realise that any attempt to create autonomy through education has an important impact on the way in which the teaching of adults must be undertaken. Knowles argues that an adult’s learning involves moving from a self-concept of being a dependent personality toward one of being a “self-directing human being” (1983, p.55). To be self-directing is to be a self-directed learner. Self-directed learning is one of the foundational concepts in adult education (Tennant, 1988). In this way it is hoped to lead learners to create and maintain an individual identity.

Knowles’ belief in self-directed learning issued from his distinction between the education of adults (andragogy) and children (pedagogy). His theory of andragogy became popular in the 1970’s and 80’s. Although Knowles’ theory is not now as influential as it was it still highlights the need for adult education that allows individuals to control their own learning (Jarvis, 1998). This is also the hallmark of both Lawson’s (1979) and Rogers’ (1986) vision of liberal education. All of these authors agree that ideally an adult educator must allow the learners to determine the direction in which their learning moves. He or she must therefore avoid trying to determine where the educational process should take them. Lawson argues that it is not within an educator’s remit to force any learning on others beyond trying to stimulate them into becoming reflective learners (Jarvis, 1987, 1992).

The desire to create self-directed learners means that liberal educationalists view adult education as facilitating learners’ maturation by attending to their immediate needs. The following section indicates the important implications this has for adult education due to the teacher having to deal with learners with differing needs.

3.3.6 Learner centred education and the variety of adult learners’ needs

Lawson (1979) and others indicate that liberal education is a situation where adults will seek to deal with the matters of most importance in their life at that particular moment. Lovell (1979) points out that this means adult learners’ needs will vary. Like many others, he believes that different stages in life affect peoples’ needs. In many texts adult education is seen as being necessary to help people to learn to cope with changes in role. Tennant (1988) describes the role of adult education as dealing with the concerns of adults about parenting, social interaction, community involvement, consumer issues and home ownership. At the same time issues also exist about problem solving and stress management.
Jarvis (1997) argues that it is now more important than ever to provide a form of education that responds to adult learners' existential needs. This is because of the rapid changes in a late modern society. He believes these changes have created an increased level of existential questioning. He describes the speed of technological revolution and spread of multi-culturalism as creating an increasing need for adults to explore their position in society. Leirman (1987) has also pointed out that global changes in the evolution of knowledge and communication have had a direct impact on the concerns of learners. He believes that few individuals remain isolated from interacting with other cultures and the rapid changes in society. Because of these concerns, both authors argue that existential concerns must be dealt with in formal educational settings if human growth is to be stimulated.

Knowles points out one consequence of an individuals' readiness to learn becoming increasingly orientated to the developmental tasks of their social roles. A learner's approach to education "shifts from one of subject-centredness to one of problem-centredness" (1983, p.55).

These factors have implications for adult education. The learning must become learner-centred. It must deal with the immediate concerns of adults (Knowles, 1983). Freire comments that:

"we must never merely provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own pre-occupations, doubts, hopes and fears" (1972, p.77).

Alan Rogers argues that, ideally, non-formal education must be:

"for immediate application in day to day life... not to prepare for some future purpose" (1992, p.26).

This again points to the different educational needs of adult and child learners. The curriculum for children is typically a front-end model (Jarvis, 1983). This means that the application of the knowledge given will be delayed until after leaving school.

The movement towards student centred teaching is an important theme in Carl Rogers' works (e.g. 1969). His writings indicate that if adult education is to attend to a learner’s existential concerns then the ideal situation is a one-to-one meeting between learner and teacher. His works indicate a blurring of role between teacher and counsellor. This indicates how far liberal education may need to go in its attempt to provide an education tailored to each individual.

### 3.3.7 Self-directed learning - destroying learners' reliance on formal education

The acceptance of self-directed learning as an educational aim requires a change in the way that adult education is promoted. With the increasing changes in knowledge and the need to interact with other groups and cultures the point of learning is now often thought to be learning how to learn (Jarvis, 1987; Elias and Merriam, 1980). It is to break away from outsider led education (Alan Rogers, 1992). The learner is therefore encouraged to learn how to attend to their immediate concerns on their own. The teacher attempts to equip them with all the skills necessary to become their own educators and to use educational resources by themselves. Because of this they become free from depending on formal education to develop in terms of personal growth.

This situation indicates how liberal educators can view maturation in terms of an autonomy based on being a self-directed learner.
3.3.8 Adult education to change society

The constructs of maturity in adult education have increasingly come to include a commitment to social revolution and an interest in justice issues relating to law and education. In this way they have increasingly stressed external autonomy as a desirable result of education.

Most discussions about liberal adult education focus on the development of the individual (Alan Rogers, 1992). However, some theorists pointed out the need for it to address the ideological nature of such approaches. There was a concern that concentrating on the individual learner overlooked the impact of adult education on society. Learners do not exist in a vacuum but within a social order that may require change to allow them to have freedom to learn. Because of this some authors have argued that social justice issues are an integral part of any discussion about adult education. Harris (1980) notes that there has been an increasing interest in seeing adult education in terms of a tool to affect communities and therefore the structure of society. Authors who stress these issues are classified as members of the radical school (Elias and Merriam, 1980). Typical examples are Freire (1972, 1985) and Horton (1983). Alan Rogers (1992) also argues that adult education should be revolutionary. By this he means that:

"it enables the learner to reflect critically on the reality around and to cooperate with others to change reality" (Ibid., p.33).

3.4 Can adult education affect maturation?

The discussion in Section 3.3 sought to tease out the constructs of maturation that underpin liberal adult education. In doing so it revealed some of the similarities that these have with the works of the theorists discussed in Chapters 3 to 5.

One similarity is the way both educationalists and psychologists can view adults as having different concerns at different points in their lifecycle. Liberal adult education has come to understand that different stages of life will affect the needs of learners. The descriptions of these concerns reflect those mentioned by Erikson (1959a), Sheehy (1976) and Kohlberg (1976). This is not surprising given the significant impact of psychology on the development of educational theory. However, Tennant (1988) points out that whilst, the stages in life are 'universally' accepted as having an affect on learning, they are not usually well studied by the educators themselves. It appears that educationalists tend to set out theories that relate to learners in general. They are not usually concerned with how education may have to adapt to individuals at each different point in their lifecycle.

Another point on which educationalists and psychologists agree is their belief that maturation is about more than gaining knowledge or technical skills. Both professions tend to see maturation in terms of changes in people's perceptions of reality and how they cope with existential concerns initiated by their role in society or other life experiences.

Yet another similarity is the way that secular adult education can view the process of maturation in terms of transitions to new states. The descriptions of learning by both Mezirow (1990) and Schutz (1974) show that learning can trigger very significant periods of mental reorganisation with regard to understanding reality. These seem similar to the core construct collapses described by Kelly and can even reflect
particular transitions between faith stages. It is significant that Mezirow’s description of transformative learning describes an attempt to stimulate learners to develop in a way that corresponds closely with a transition from faith Stages 3 to 4. This is not surprising given that Fowler describes Stage 3 faith as being the most commonly encountered one. Adult education would therefore be most likely to stimulate a transition to Stage 4 faith. This transition would be particularly noticeable because it is the point where the locus of power of the individual is finally internalised. The individual is able to make autonomous decisions much more easily. There is much less fear about censure from the community and much less need to conform to maintain self-esteem.

3.5 Liberal education and the Stages of Faith

The constructs of maturity underlying many adult educators’ approaches have similarities with the Stages of Faith. The key aims of liberal education that are described above reveal a desire to stimulate development in areas that are vital to faith development. These include making people aware of enculturation and their tacit, socialised behaviour; encouraging them to look at different worldviews meaningfully; helping them to relativise their worldview and through this stimulate them to gain a degree of autonomy of thought and action. This is significant because it indicates that a learner’s educational needs with regard to the stimulation of personal growth can be seen to be largely similar to his or her developmental needs.

This is interesting because most authors do not appear to have read or been influenced directly by faith development theory. Mezirow’s description of the key changes in learners in a successful adult education programme is based on observation rather than the reading of faith stage theory. He does not quote Fowler’s work in his own. Knowles is one of the few to have acknowledged the importance of Fowler’s work (Stokes, 1983). He argued that studying faith development allowed adult education to better understand how it could aid maturation.

However, in studying the works of the theorists mentioned in the previous discussion it becomes apparent that the form of maturation portrayed most closely resembles the ‘secularised’ stages of faith discussed in Chapter 5. This is for two main reasons:

Firstly, education is seen in terms of helping learners orientate themselves in a world that is without provable absolute values. Lawson (1979) provides a good example of this when he argues that absolutes are nothing more than commonly accepted beliefs within a community. They remain relative to that time and place.

Secondly, individuals are seen as the source of their own power and therefore liberal education appears to support the idea of self-groundedness.

3.6 Can faith development be taught?

At this point the discussion will turn to the question of whether faith development can be ‘taught’ or directly stimulated by adult education. Fowler discussed maturation without demanding the provision of formal education. However, adult education argues that formal education is a vital tool to stimulate a similar form of maturation.
The description of maturation that underlies liberal adult education appears to be so compatible to that of faith development that maturation cannot be said to inhibited by it. It would be reasonable to assume that any educational setting that allows individuals to interact with others from different backgrounds and to study different worldviews is creating the type of learning situation on which faith development relies. At the same time Mezirow's work indicates that education might stimulate faith development with regard to at least one stage transition. His observations of the changes in his learners reveal that at least some changes relating to faith development occur in adult education settings.

Without research it is impossible to state conclusively whether liberal adult education can create faith development. However, it can be seen to promote the forms of social interaction and study that supply the stimuli for such development. It also provides a setting that may diffuse some of the discomfort or fear caused by stage transitions by offering a supportive environment.

3.7 Implications of Fowler's work for adult education

Because the construct of maturity depicted by liberal education is very similar to that of faith development the latter theory can usefully be used to critique adult education. Doing this can illuminates some of the possible limitations of adult education theory. The following section describes some significant points brought to light by such an analysis.

3.7.1 The ability of learners to apprehend liberal education's aims

Fowler's description of the faith stages shows that learners at different stages will be able to apprehend and accept the goals of adult education to different degrees. The degree to which self-reflection is possible depends on the stage of faith that best describes an individual. For instance, individuals who show the characteristics of Stage 5 faith will have a way of structuring reality that is already similar to liberal education's ideal. They will be able to distance themselves from previous socialisation and critically explore other avenues of behaviour. Individuals with a 'faithing' style closer to Stage 3 will have more problems. They will have to contend with the largely tacit nature of their logic of conviction. They will therefore have to work harder to detect the socialisation which liberal education seeks to free them from. This situation obviously has implications for the usefulness and effectiveness of liberal education when used on learners at different stages of faith.

3.7.2 The impact of different stage foci on the learners' needs

Learners at different stages of faith have different fundamental concerns due to stage foci. As was previously noted, descriptions of liberal education can sometimes describe learners as an homogenous group. The educator must therefore take note of the different stage foci that will be present in any group of learners. By being aware of this situation liberal education could perhaps address more directly the concerns that each learner will have.

3.7.3 The impact of stimulating stage transitions

Any liberal educator aware of faith development will understand the significant impact that education can have on the emotional stability of a learner. To develop into a self-reflective individual is to move through stages of faith. If the descriptions
of self-reflective learners given by Jarvis and Mezirow are correct then one of the goals of education is closely linked to Stage 4 faith. It is the "fundamental disjuncture between individual biography and the socially constructed experience" that leads people to ask the most valuable questions (Jarvis, 1992, p.4). Stage 4 faith is the first stage where an individual's need for the community's support moves beyond being a debilitating influence. At Stage 4 an individual is much more able to make autonomous decisions without fear of the community's censure. This means that learning to be a self-reflective learner could require the individual to pass through a number of stage transitions to reach this point. Such restructuring involves emotional upheaval as well. It appears that this is unavoidable in any educational setting that seeks to promote progression rather than variation. However, this is neither noted nor understood in most adult education texts.

All of these points show that faith stage theory can clarify some of the limitations of liberal education whether secular or religious. It also indicates that liberal education may find its aims more difficult to implement than many educational texts indicate.

3.8 Does education promote a descriptive or prescriptive vision of maturation?

Before moving on to discuss Christian educationalists views on education it is worth returning to the previous chapters' discussions about descriptive and prescriptive definitions of maturation. Great care was taken in previous chapters to indicate that descriptions of maturation should not be assumed to be universally applicable. However, educationalists, in choosing a description of maturation as the basis of their educational theory, can turn it into a prescriptive account of development. This is because education can seek to actively change a learner. In seeking to change this individual it is assumed that what is developmentally beneficial or possible for one person will be beneficial for him or her too. The dangers of this have already been pointed out in the discussion of the postmodernists' comments on this subject.

Liberal education overcomes this problem to a degree, especially when informed by Fowler's work on human development. It is realised that change cannot necessarily be forced upon a learner. At the same time the personal creeds of those involved in the education are not being judged to be good or bad. Instead, the process of learning is left to a large extent in the learners' hands. It is hoped that they will know, or come to know, what learning they require. Because of this, even if the model of maturation that underlies liberal education is inaccurate it would appear the learners are not being forcefully inculcated into any form of belief system.

4 Adult Christian Education: Its Aims and Visions of Maturation

The discussion will now move on to study Christian theorists' visions of education. The first half of this chapter has suggested that secular liberal education and Christian education may address similar concerns. It also indicated that, even if formal education is unable to actively stimulate maturation, a liberal approach can still be of use. This is because it can set up a curriculum that will adapt to cater to the learning needs of adults, and will create a learning environment that is supportive of the changes that can occur during faith development. Because Fowler's stages were intended to describe the development of Christians as well as non-Christians, it would appear logical to assume that Christian teachers, if seeking to promote maturation, could approach education in a similar way.
However, there are a variety of different forms of Christian education and consequently a variety of aims. None of these appear to fully embody the ideals of secular liberal education. The rest of this chapter explores these different approaches to Christian education and the constructs of maturity that they embody. In doing this the discussion attempts to identify the most suitable form of Christian education for adults in a parish setting. At the same time, studying the range of approaches to Christian education proves useful for analysing the respondents' visions of parish education in Chapters 9 and 10.

4.1 The different forms of Christian education

There have been several attempts to identify all the possible approaches to Christian education. Astley and Day provide one of the most comprehensive (1992; see also Astley, 1994). They have elaborated on the three forms set out by Hull (1984) and distinguish between five different approaches. These are:

1. Christian education as curriculum Christianity. This is the process by which learners come to understand the Christian tradition. Belief is not necessary as the education is to impart information rather than religious faith. This approach has become the basis of teaching Christianity within religious education in most schools.

2. Christian education as Christian nurture or formation. This can include adults as well as children. It is about "making disciples" and is essentially inculcation.

3. Christian education as development of "critical..., evaluative and analytical skills". This is the creation of an ability to evaluate, or self-criticise oneself from within the standpoint of the Christian religion. In the following discussion this form of Christian education will be classed as a closed Christian Curriculum because it is not concerned with interacting meaningfully with non-Christian worldviews.

4. Christian education as creation of the "Christian Mind". This is the critique of education from Christian perspectives. These perspectives need not mean that the educational approach is about inculcation as is the case with Christian nurture (No. 2 above).

5. Christian education as the Christian Curriculum. The critique of education given by the approach in number 4 may lead to "a general education of a Christian kind". This includes general educational activity and not just the activity concerned overtly with the religion. This approach fosters a feeling for a need to search for the truth. It is not Christian per se but is influenced by Christian thinking. In the following discussion this will be classed as an open Christian curriculum because it is open to interacting meaningfully with other worldviews.

Astley and Day based their descriptions of these approaches on literature concerned mainly with educational needs of children. However, the forms of parish education that Christian educationalists have deemed to be suitable for adults can be shown to fit into at least three of these categories. Consequently, these descriptions are a useful starting point for the analysis of what parish education best serves the needs of Christian adults. The following discussion explores the differences of opinion between the most important of these five approaches but, in order to facilitate the discussion, they have sometimes been modified to better serve the exploration of adult education.
Before describing each of these approaches it is worth noting that the volume of literature dealing with adult Christian education is not great. Christian educationalists have often overlooked or undervalued the needs of Christian adults. There are several possible reasons for this. For instance, it is clear that the changes in school based religious education since the 1940's have been a cause of great concern to Christian educationalists. There is a widespread belief that the religious needs of children may not be met as fully as they could be. Because of this the vast majority of Christian educationalists' works remain focused on the nature of religious education curricula in British schools.

At the same time, authors such as Cox (1983) and Gibbs (1985) indicate that Christian educational practice has often lagged behind that of secular education. In the mid 1980's Gibbs commented that:

"Within the church in the United Kingdom we are still dominated by nineteenth-century views of education in our approach to... educational methods" (Ibid., p.77).

Such views indicate that it will have taken a while for many psychological studies of adult development to impinge on the Christian debates about education. This is the view supported by Withnall (1986) who believed that there has been little interest in the subject until relatively recently.

It is possible that the nature of Christian faith may contribute to the slowness of the churches' response to modern studies of adult development or their educational needs. For instance, God is often portrayed as a 'father' while Christians are considered to be His 'children'. Such images can be deeply rooted in Christian life and may influence Christians to believe that the educational needs of adults are similar to those of children. This attitude is not explicitly argued for in any Christian education texts but there is a noticeable ambiguity within many of them about how widely applicable an educational approach is with regard to the age of learners. Some Christian educationalists' works can be unclear about both the age of the learners being discussed, as well as situation that the Christian education being described is supposed to be applied.

In spite of these factors, discussion about the educational needs of adult Christians does exist. Over the last few decades there has been an increase in the number of works that are aware of the special needs of adult learners. The theories are commonly categorised as descriptions of adult religious education (A.R.E.). These usually concentrate on the promotion of Christian faith and because of this a more accurate categorisation of them would be as theories of adult Christian education.

The debates about adult Christian education have been more widespread in the United States of America than in Great Britain (e.g. Moran, 1980; Elias, 1993). However, British authors such as John Hull (1985) have provided important works on the subject. The findings of these and other educationalists will be discussed in the following sections where their opinions will be shown to reflect several different forms of Christian education. However, it is important to note that these authors' theories are often aimed at, or based upon studies of, educators in one particular denomination. For instance, Moran (Ibid.), Elias (1983b) and the Department of Education United States Catholic Conference (1983) studied adult education within the Roman Catholic faith. Consequently, authors can legitimise some of their views about education on Church writings or teachings that are specific to that denomination. Unfortunately, it is possible that different denominations may have such different understandings of the nature of both the Church and maturation that
the theories are not applicable to every Christian setting. This is not always explicitly noted and therefore the works of authors such as Elias (1983b) are important. He described how different Churches can often have different opinions about maturation because of their use of different models of Church.

Now that these issues have been raised the discussion will explore the different forms of Christian education and their relevance for parish based adult education.

4.1.1 Christian Education as Curriculum Christianity and Religious Phenomenology

Astley and Day (1992) describe curriculum Christianity as a process by which learners come to understand the Christian tradition without necessarily having a Christian faith. They explain that belief is not necessary for the success of this approach because the education is used to impart information rather than religious faith. However, it is clear that the concept of curriculum Christianity originates from the phenomenological approach to religious education (Cox, 1983). When this approach is studied it is seen that curriculum Christianity may be interested in more than simple transmission of facts.

Since the 1940's school based religious curricula have increasingly come to be based upon a phenomenological approach. Marvell describes religious phenomenology as being:

"a presuppositionless approach to that which is essential and unique to the essence and manifestation of religion" (1982, p.71).

This approach can be about more than simple transmission of facts because, ideally, it is hermeneutical. It is an attempt to help the learner understand religion by entering into the experiences of other people (Gadamer, 1976). However, it is not about promoting any one particular faith. Cox explains that:

"the essence of this methodology is that you look at religions as an external observer, try to understand what they mean to the believer, but do not raise the questions of whether he [sic] is wise so to believe, or whether his belief corresponds to truth" (1983, p.27).

This is the reason for its popularity amongst secular educationalists. Religious phenomenology allows a form of religious education which is aimed at stimulating an interest in a spiritual quest without making a priori assumptions about religion which may not be acceptable to any of the many religious faiths that the learners in schools may have.

Curriculum Christianity can now be seen to be that particular part of school based religious education which deals with imparting information about Christianity. It does this in the same way that religious phenomenology imparts information about any other religion (e.g. curriculum Buddhism). Because it is found within a school curriculum it is inevitably required to provide factual knowledge about the outward form of Christian faith. However, it can also attempt to stimulate the learner to try to apprehend, and relate to, the concerns of those who have such a faith. Nevertheless, it does not attempt to stimulate a form of religious faith in order to facilitate this.

It is because of this that Christian educationalists are dismissive of it. They argue that religious phenomenology's lack of interest in promoting religious faith undermines its own aim of promoting an interest in religion. For instance, Marvell (1982) asks how learners are supposed to understand the value of religious inquiry or to be stimulated to seek religious truths when the educational approach that their...
teachers use makes no attempt to show them the usefulness of the truth claims of
the religions being studied. This leads Taylor (1976) to argue that religious
phenomenology could even damage the spiritual growth of learners. He points out
that education which is based upon theological relativism can be accused of actively
promoting agnosticism. Because the teachers are forced to use an agnostic
strategy to teaching he believes the learners may, whether consciously or
unconsciously, adopt the same approach. Alternatively, Felderhof (1985) argues
that religious phenomenology fails because it leaves the learner 'rootless'. He
believes that positive affirmation of the religious quest is dependent on giving the
learners a positional identity — by stimulating them to gain a particular religious faith
from which to begin their journey. Only then does he believe that learners are able
to meaningfully study other religions and worldviews. He argues that having one's
own faith provides a yardstick for the exploration of other forms of religion. Such a
belief is echoed in the works of Westerhoff (1985), Cole (1978) and Moran (1983a).

It is clear from this discussion that religious phenomenology is irrelevant to adult
education in the parish setting. Firstly, parish based education will largely involve
learners who already have a Christian faith. It therefore does not have to take a
'neutral' stance in order to avoid offending the members of other faiths. Secondly, if
parish education is involved in initiating non-Christians into the faith then an
educational approach that avoids stimulating religious faith will be of no use. Thirdly,
although later discussion will show that learners can benefit from education that
helps them stand outside their faith in order to understand it more fully, curriculum
Christianity would appear to demand that the learners never engage in an
exploration of Christianity as believers. Lastly, the fact that curriculum Christianity is
a method of making learners more knowledgeable about their faith is irrelevant here.
The following discussion will show that several of the remaining approaches to
Christian education can also fulfil this function.

Given these observations, it is possible to suggest that it is misleading to describe
curriculum Christianity as a form of Christian education. The term 'Christian
education' appears to indicate that an approach has been influenced by a Christian
worldview. However, curriculum Christianity is based on a neutral stance. It has not
been influenced by any concerns about the teaching of religion that are specifically
Christian. Nor does it seek to promote Christian faith as an important aspect of
maturation. In these respects it fundamentally differs from the other forms of
Christian education. All of these believe it to be essential that Christian faith is
actively promoted in an educational setting. It is the different ways in which
educationalists believe this should be done that create the different forms of
Christian education described below.

4.1.2 Christian education as Christian nurture

The discourses on Christian education often describe the attempt to promote
Christian faith as Christian nurture. However, whilst it is true that most forms of
Christian education seek to nurture a Christian faith, this discussion will use the term
'Christian nurture' to refer to one particular approach.

In terms of liberal education Christian nurture is limited in its efficacy as an
educational approach. This is because it is essentially pedagogical in nature,
seeking only to inculcate certain knowledge and behaviour. It places no value on
learners being liberated from uncritically acquired socialised behaviour or being able
to relativise their worldview. This approach is about Christians creating other
Christians in their own image. It does not involve itself with anything but convincing the learner of the validity of the Christian faith as the Church leaders understand it. Consequently Christian nurture is not interested in promoting critical reflection on aspects of Christian faith. Cognition and internal autonomy are not thought to be important elements of maturation. The most extreme form of Christian nurture can be classed as indoctrination.

A natural consequence of this approach is that faith becomes static. This is because faith is thought to be based upon unquestionable truths that are passed down from the Church leaders. Consequently, there is little opportunity for this faith to evolve or the community to change it views.

Studying the debates about Christian education reveals that there is now an almost universal dissatisfaction with Christian nurture as an educational approach for either adults or children. Hull (1982, 1984) and Cox (1983) argue against such forms of inculcation as does Wilson (1972). The British Council of Churches is also clear that this approach is flawed:

"When Christians seek to nurture their young into Christian faith, they literally do not fully know what they are nurturing them into... They know the resources but not the use which will be made of them. What we pass on to our children is not the painting but the paintbox" (The Child in the Church, 1978, p23-24).

Cox (1983), Westerhoff (1985) and Nichols (1985) offer similar views. They view Christianity as something that is recreated by each generation in response to its new context. They oppose Christian nurture because it is perceived as actively inhibiting the healthy evolution of religion.

Consequently, criticisms can been made about Christian nurture with regard to how well it prepares Christians to be apologists for their faith. It is argued that Christian nurture creates learners whose defence of their religious faith will inevitably be self-referential. An example of this form of argument is found in the work of Cupitt (1984):

"Many years ago I debated religious questions publicly with a Muslim. He gave firm and clear answers to every question that was raised, by citing the Qu’ran. I pointed out to him that if I were also a Muslim I would indeed share his dogmatic belief in the authority of the Qu’ran over all religious questions, and we might then join in an internal Islamic debate about his exegesis of the Qu’ran; but since I was not a Muslim it was surely unreasonable for him to expect me to be persuaded by a simple appeal to the Qu’ran’s dogmatic authority. At the very least he owed it to me as a non-Muslim to give me some reasons for taking the Qu’ran to be authoritative. His reply was simply to cite the Qu’ran in support of its own authority, just as some fundamentalist Christians cite biblical texts to prove the authority of the Bible" (p. 250).

It is clear from this description of Christian nurture that it is not suitable for promoting faith development. It seeks to socialise the learner into a particular view of Christian faith without attempting to help them explore the impact of this. It is therefore of little use for adult education.
4.1.3 Christian education as a closed Christian curriculum

This form of Christian education avoids the drawbacks of inculcation - though those who support an open Christian curriculum may argue that it only does so partially. This approach views probing questions about the Christian faith as being of value. At the same time differences of opinion about the nature of the Christian church are accepted because there is an understanding that the Church is not infallible. Aspects of Church organisation and Church teaching are therefore seen as legitimate targets for close scrutiny. However, any critical reflection on Christian faith is valued only when it derives from a Christian perspective. Discussions about parish based education such as Westerhoff's (1972, 1985) indicate that, as with Christian nurture, the success of a closed Christian curriculum is still viewed in terms of a learner moving towards a firm commitment to a traditionally acceptable Christian church. Therefore, whilst maturation is linked with an ability to critically analyse Christian matters it is also connected to a resolve to stay within the Christian faith.

This indicates that, in spite of their superficial differences, both Christian nurture and the closed Christian curriculum can view maturation in a similar way. It is believed to be inseparably linked with Christian faith and participation in the church. To further clarify this view the work of Yinger (1957) can be used. He describes the different levels of participation that individuals may show in a church setting. These can be depicted as rings of concentric circles. The innermost circle reflects those who have the most orthodox Christian faith. Moving outwards, the successive rings indicate individuals who have less and less 'traditional' views. Christian nurture and the closed Christian curriculum view the process of maturation as a movement from the outlying rings towards the centre. The closer to the centre an individual is the more mature they are considered to be. The only difference between them is that the closed Christian curriculum is less dogmatic about what beliefs constitute an 'orthodox' faith.

On the whole, writings about Christian education for adults in the parish setting tend to support the use of a closed Christian curriculum. However, some religious educators have challenged this concept of education, as have some other religious commentators. Several authors such as Smart (1986) and Cupitt (1984) consider it unsuitable because it fails to stimulate the learner to look outside the Christian worldview. They argue that it is important for Christians to question the paradigm within which they are being taught critical skills. They suggest that failure to do this severely limits the extent of any analytical skills provided. In terms of faith development this appears to be a valid criticism. The stimulation of critical reflection on one's own thinking is seen to be aided by being able to step outside one's own worldview.

These criticisms have led some authors to support a form of Christian education that can be called an open Christian curriculum.

4.1.4 Christian education as an open Christian curriculum

Support for the open Christian curriculum has come from a variety of Christian educationalists. Some believe it to be ideal for parish based education whilst others value it only as a possible approach for school based religious education. Because the reasons for supporting it can differ the following discussion will concentrate on the reasoning that has led authors such as Smart (1986) and Grimmitt (1994) to
support the use of an open Christian curriculum for adult education in the parish setting.

The open Christian curriculum is a form of education that primarily seeks to create 'religious' individuals. It still concentrates most of its time on Christian faith and it is hoped that learners will become Christian or deepen their Christian faith. However, unlike the closed Christian curriculum, it is felt that important development can occur by studying other religions or worldviews. The Christian faith is seen as one of many religious quests, all of which may have a role to play in aiding our understanding of the nature or the religious journey. The success of this approach is therefore not defined solely on how many learners become Christian. It is also dependent upon how open the learners become to interacting meaningfully with other, non-Christian worldviews and how willing they are to expend time and energy pursuing a spiritual journey and self-exploration.

Of all the approaches to Christian Education, this one comes closest to the description of liberal education that was set out in Section 3.2. It promotes an educational approach which values the liberation of learners from uncritically acquired socialised behaviour through their ability to relativise their worldview. The reason that the open Christian curriculum and liberal education share so many educational aims is because they appear to have reacted in a similar way to recent changes in society. Many of those who support an open Christian curriculum do so because they are concerned that adult education should deal with characteristics of a late modern society. It is these concerns that were raised in Chapter 1 and which led to this research.

One such issue relates to the role of reasoning in maturation. Hull comments that:

“one of the most important factors relevant to the religious learning of adults today is the social, cultural, technical and industrial movement known as modernity” (1985, p.3). Hull uses the term modernity in a similar way to Cupitt (1984). He refers to a belief that intellectual ability is valuable. He acknowledges that the power of human reasoning has made vast improvements in the quality of life for large numbers of humanity and is therefore implicated in maturation in as much as it improves the welfare of others. Consequently, his description of the open Christian curriculum emphasises the need for learners to acquire a degree of critical reflection. However, unlike those who support a closed Christian curriculum, this ability is valued for its use in relating to other cultures or religions and stepping outside the Christian faith that informs the learners' religious views.

The open Christian curriculum can also be seen as a response to the greater frequency with which we must interact with different cultures. Most religious educationalists appreciate that our society has become increasingly multicultural. Nipkow (1993) also points out that societies routinely interact with many others, even when they may be geographically distant. He describes this as a result of the new "global horizon". Jackson (1982) points out the impact this has had on the self-perception of religious groups:

“Whereas, at one time, religions had existed in isolation from one another and any minority grouping could be conveniently enclosed in a ghetto, the picture is now different” (p.111)

Because of this some, educationalists have come to understand the importance of increasing Christians' abilities for what Moran calls "reciprocal exchange" (1992). He argues that social groups must avoid becoming isolationist and resist the tendency
to demonise the ‘other’. Grimmitt describes this in terms of moving from “ideological enclosure” to “ideological exploration” (1994, p.133). He goes further than many, suggesting that we should move from a “multifaith exploration” to an “interfaith exploration”. Such a movement precludes an us/them division and dwells on the commonality of humanity and religious experience. As a result, the open Christian curriculum assumes that Christians should be explorers of the territory between Christianity and other religions.

The result of these arguments has been the creation of forms of open Christian curricula that are very similar to the liberal education described earlier. One of the most concise descriptions is given by Smart:

"First, religious education must transcend the informative. Second, it should do so not in the direction of evangelizing, but in the direction of initiation into understanding the meaning of, and into question about, the truth and worth of religion. Third, religious studies do not exclude a committed approach, provided that it is open, and so does not artificially restrict understanding and choice. Fourth, religious studies should provide a service in helping people to understand history and cultures other than their own. It can play a vital role in breaking the limits of European cultural tribalism. Fifth, religious studies should emphasize the descriptive, historical sides of religion, but need thereby to enter into dialogue with the parahistorical claims of religious and anti-religious outlooks" (1986, p.105).

Hull (1982,1984) offers a similar view. However, his description shows more clearly the difference between the open Christian curriculum and the closed Christian curriculum. When discussing the role of Christian education for adults he believes that it must aid learners to step outside their Christian faith. This is an important realisation that is not often fully appreciated in the debates on adult religious education. Hull explains:

"One does not logically, and psychologically cannot, both intercede and critically consider the concept of intercession simultaneously... Only at another time may [the learner] critically and systematically think about God as an object of adoration" (1984, p.252).

This indicates that Christian teaching situations should include some formal education that is divorced from worship.

It is clear from these descriptions of an open Christian curriculum that it equips Christians to be apologists for their religious beliefs. They are helped to defend their religious views with arguments that are coherent and based on a degree of critical reflection. This approach also frees them from having to rely on the self-referential arguments mentioned previously. Instead, they can make reference to general religious issues that members of other religious faiths can recognise and explore issues with them by determining common ground between the faiths.

The authors who discuss an open Christian curriculum do not often discuss the concepts of problem centred learning or discuss the stimulation of self-directed learners. However, given the other similarities between the concepts of maturation of this approach and liberal education there appears to be no reason that they should not form a part of such a curriculum.
4.2 The value of comparing Christian education to liberal education and the different assumptions underlying them

So far the discussion has clearly been orientated around comparing the different forms of Christian education to a model of liberal education. The value of such a comparison is based upon the belief that liberal education offers an educational approach which is (a) based upon a vision of maturation consonant with faith development and (b) suited to facilitating this same development. Consequently, in identifying the open Christian curriculum as having the most similarities with a liberal approach the discussion has suggested that it is a more suitable educational approach than the other forms of Christian education.

However, whilst this is intentional, this discussion does not suggest that adult Christian education in the parish setting can ever be identical to liberal education. Just because Christian educationalists may have been influenced by descriptions of liberal education, or have reached similar conclusions with regard to some of the needs of learners in modern society, this does not mean that their theories are based on identical perceptions of either the nature of reality or maturation. In fact, Christian authors clearly indicate that there are essential features of Christian education that mean it can never fully reflect a secular liberal approach. The following discussion explores some of these differences and where they originate from in order to assess the degree of freedom that a learner has within an open Christian curriculum.

4.3 The Importance of promoting religious faith

The most basic difference between the two approaches is summed up by Gibbs:

“Secular education is critical, open, person centred, and always committed to the spirit of enquiry. It cannot be neutral since it has to decide what is worthy of enquiry, but it demands objective, critical reflection. Christian [education] shares much with secular education but it is less open about the future. As the British Council of Churches said in an earlier report... ‘secular education fails if it produces a bigot but not if it produces an atheist. Christian [education] fails if it produces a bigot and an atheist’” (1985, p.76).

It has already been shown that the approaches to Christian education were all concerned with creating and supporting a Christian faith. However, the discussion has not fully explored the reasons why this is assumed to be a legitimate educational goal. So far, the only defence for this approach was set out in the discussion on curriculum Christianity. It was shown that Christian educationalists argued that teaching religion from a standpoint openly committed to Christian faith reinforced the message that the exploration of spiritual matters was a vital part of human life. However, it is clear from the discourses on Christian education that many other reasons are given to support the active promotion of Christian faith. Most of these result from basic assumptions about the nature of objective knowledge, salvation and autonomy, and which contrast sharply with the assumptions behind secular education.

4.3.1 Christian perceptions of objective knowledge

One of the most important assumptions relates to the nature of objective knowledge. For liberal educationalists objective knowledge is publicly accepted knowledge (Lawson, 1979, 1983). However, Christian educationalists can have a significantly different view. This subject was previously mentioned in Chapter 4 (Section 2.2). It
was shown that Strunk believed mature religious faith to include "a conviction grounded in authoritative... experiences" (1965, p.144). Marvell (1982) echoes this view when he argues that religious individuals can 'know' things that non-religious individuals cannot. No matter how much the works of authors such as Marstin (1979) accept that religious beliefs are interpreted and filtered by human perception, it is clear that the interaction of a Christian with God is thought to allow certain truths to be imparted. Westerhoff (1985) argues that mature Christian faith is dependent on Christians having identified a number of such undeniable truths.

The truths revealed by having a Christian faith may not be easily translated into everyday knowledge. Jacobs indicates that they are not necessarily arrived at by intellectual means. He argues that the 'heart' is as important as the 'head' in coming to understand Christian faith. He argues that a Christian's faith is not based on intellectual reasoning because that would mean they simply know about God rather than knowing Him by meeting him through prayer. Strunk (1965) points out that the conviction of God's existence is based on ineffable and mystical experience. Similarly, Moran (1983a) points out that religious teaching: "is rich in metaphor because the attempt to grasp the human relation to what is ultimate necessarily strains at the limits of knowledge" (p.138).

However, it is clear that Christian educationalists accept that there are fundamental truths that are not questionable and which are therefore important to transmit to others.

4.3.2 Christian perceptions of the issue of salvation and the role of evangelisation

Christian education is considered important for helping people understand these fundamental truths because this knowledge is assumed to make them realise that there are implications for their spiritual well being. The Christian gospels clearly state that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) and that salvation is through him. This means that Christian faith is based upon a perception of the learners' needs that is significantly different to that of secular liberal education. The latter approach to education does not view the result of a learner's failure to study religion to be a threat to the health of his or her immortal soul. Nor is it derived from texts which actively exhort its followers to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

4.3.3 The consequence of belief in objective knowledge – the identification of 'correct' thinking

Once it is accepted that some objective knowledge exists, then it follows that reasoning based upon this is more accurate than reasoning based upon other, 'erroneous' perceptions of reality. Consequently, Christian educationalists have often argued that Christian education has a duty to provide learners with the 'correct' knowledge because this is the basis for 'correct' thinking (Hulmes, 1988). Those who support an open Christian curriculum may accept that there are many aspects of religious faith that remain unclear and therefore are for the individual to make his or her mind up about. However, its primary concern is still to nurture a basic Christian faith. In doing this it assumes that the learner is shown just how important religious or Christian faith is for all future reasoning and critical reflection. Authors such as Felderhof (1985) argue that the danger of not doing this is that, in becoming open to other ways of thinking, a learner takes them too seriously. This is thought to result in:
"a form of paralysis of uncertainty and indecision in situation where life demands a commitment" (ibid., p.2).

The commitment to Christian faith as the most 'correct' worldview has implications for just how much relativisation of worldview is required in an open Christian curriculum. Hull's (1985) discussion reveals several significant limits that are placed on the degree of relativisation of worldview that can occur. This is clear when he concludes that:

"What matters educationally is multiplicity of vision. What matters is that partial and occasional suspension of belief should be possible without inducing in the believer feelings of guilt and of ideological collapse" (ibid., p.75, My italics).

4.3.4 The two phases of Christian education

This leads to a realisation that there may be two phases to Christian education that utilises an open Christian curriculum. It appears that the first priority of Christian education must be to give the learner enough knowledge about the Christian faith to provide the 'positional identity' described by Felderhof (1985). Only then is it desirable to try and stimulate the learner to become interested in reflecting on their faith in a more 'objective' manner. Moran comments that:

"The Christian way, to be more fully intelligible to an adult needs to be put in relation at least to Judaism and Islam, [But only] if such dialogue is preceded by solid grounding in one's own tradition" (1983a, p.190).

Cardinal Hume has also described a similar situation. He commented that the revealed truths of Christian faith:

"have first to be learned by us, accepted, and then we may proceed to explore the meaning and significance of what has been revealed"

This would explain the reason why parish education is often described as having a special pedagogical role (e.g. Westerhoff, 1985).

The implication of this is that parish education will have different functions at different times. This leads the discussion to point out that parish education is assumed to involve - and be involved in - Christian worship (e.g. Westerhoff, 1972 and 1985; Hull, 1985; Moran, 1980). This was what prompted Hull to urge parish educators to make room for some Christian education to be divorced from a worship environment (Section 4.1.4). This situation suggests that the liturgical aspect of parish life is assumed to be the main source of maintaining a faith in God whilst other, more structured educational encounters, occur outside this environment to help Christians reflect upon their faith from a less involved perspective.

4.3.4 Autonomy of the learner

These observations raise questions about the freedom of choice that a learner has within a Christian education setting. A liberal education ideally refrains from making value judgements about how a learner relates to religion or politics as they become able to critically reflect upon their worldview. This is because it assumes that:

"no single social situation on its own is able... to provide answers to everything" (Nipkow, 1985, p.24).

This acceptance of the relativity of knowledge means that:

"the attempt to find an integrated view of life as a whole is left much more than in former times to the individual: it becomes a matter of private freedom of choice" (ibid.)
This is a view supported by Luckmann (1983) and Berger (1966). They believe it important that the learner is clearly shown that no value judgements are being made about the personal creeds that they may adopt as a result of the education.

However, whilst an open Christian curriculum may uphold the right of learners to decide for themselves what they believe, it is made clear to the learner that value judgements will be made about some of their decisions. For instance, Hulmes appears to be offering Christians a form of education that is based upon free choice when he demands that Christian education should enable:

"individuals to decide for themselves whether they will believe or not, by exercising their capacity for reason as well as for faith" (1988, p.88).

However, this is seen to be a simple decision between a correct choice - to believe in Christ - and a wrong choice - to not believe. The learner will undoubtedly be fully aware that Christian educators will want them to make one choice and not the other.

The ability to critically reflect on matters of Christian faith will not always require Christians to make such a dramatic choice, especially if they are participating in parish education. But any decision that they do make will probably involve deciding whether or not they support the churches teaching on a particular subject. Unlike learners within a secular liberal education, Christians are made fully aware that they are part of a community that swears allegiance to a particular creed. They will therefore be likely, like Westerhoff, to believe that:

“Christians are not free to believe anything they like; Christian ministers and Christian churches are not free to preach or teach their private opinions. To be a mature Christian is to know and affirm the tradition once delivered to the Saints” (1985, p.68).

Christian learners are therefore in a situation where they risk being considered to be ‘beyond the pale’ if they choose not to believe certain things. They will also be fully aware that such decisions could mean that they are deemed by the community to have failed in their development. To make matters worse, they may be making a decision where there may be more at stake than simply losing the support of a community. There is also the issue of salvation to be considered. If the group understands salvation to be dependent on certain beliefs then questioning these will appear extremely unattractive.

Because of this it can be asked whether Christian learners are offered a chance for truly independent decision making. Christian authors have sometimes responded to such a question by arguing that secular thinking confuses autonomy of thought with freedom. Hulmes (1979) argues that there is an inherent paradox in Christianity. He believes that embracing Christianity is to gain freedom by abdicating one’s internal autonomy. Religious faith is depicted as demanding that believers give up the right to think and act as they choose. The origins of this tension have already been encountered in the study of Fowler’s work. Some of the debate in Chapter 5 revolved around his promotion of self-groundedness rather than self-actualisation. He considered it important that mature individuals realise that their power to act, or even exist, issues from God and is not intrinsic to humanity. At the same time, the discussion about authenticity has shown that maturation appears to indicate that internal autonomy is intimately connected with self-imposed limits to ones actions in order to maintain the welfare of others. Because of this the vision of autonomy promoted by Fowler, or other psychological theorists may not be so different to that of a Christian educationalists.
It is impossible for this debate to categorically state whether Christian faith denies people freedom of choice of whether the secular descriptions of internal autonomy are erroneous. However, it is an important area of debate in any discussion of the relative merits of secular and Christian education. The discussion also points out that an approach such as the open Christian curriculum appears to view maturation in terms that most closely reflect those of the faith development of Fowler. It describes the need for internal autonomy through gaining an ability for critical reflection and self-awareness, whilst still acknowledging the value of Christian tradition and divine guidance. It also assumes that humans are not created purely by accident and that maturation is coming to understand the most important question is not “who am I?” but “whose am I?” (see Chapter 4).

4.4 Faith development and Christian education

The discussion can now turn to an exploration of the impact of faith development theory for models of Christian education and how this can help understand the structure that an open Christian curriculum can have. In the first half of this chapter Fowler’s faith stage theory was used to critique a liberal education approach. Unsurprisingly, Christian authors, including Fowler (1987) himself, have discussed the theory’s importance for Christian education. Astley (1991) points out that the stages, whilst not being a theory of Christian education, provide educators with a deeper understanding of both the context of Christian education and of the nature of the Christian learners. He argues that

"Exploring the way in which people know, value and relate to what they believe to be ultimate can help the Christian educator decide how to facilitate the Christian learning of this particular person at this particular stage" (Ibid., p.70).

This immediately shows one effect of using faith development to understand the educational needs of learners. It can be seen that their needs are often going to be individualised depending on their faithing style. Moran (1980) had previously come to the conclusion that that Christian education should, as much as possible, concentrate on the individual problems of the learner. He therefore argued that Christian education could not be considered to be a matter of setting up one curriculum or using one educational tool to aid the learning of all parishioners. Astley agrees with this view. He points out that:

"We undoubtedly need a rich variety of Christian learning experiences in the Church to accommodate people at all faith stages, and to support and feed them as they move between stages" (1991, p.70).

Whilst Christian education can now be seen as requiring different approaches or learning situations to cater for a heterogeneous set of learning needs, Fowler’s stages also have implications for how maturation should be portrayed to Christian learners. He argues that we must signal the way forward for Christians. He believes this can be achieved by creating a structure for Christian education that functions “as an environment of developmental expectation and support” (1987, p.116). He suggests five ways of doing this:

i) Through preaching and teaching. Fowler believes that ministers should provide a vision of faith as a dynamic force and openly discuss the implications of faith development.

ii) Through liturgical celebrations of rites of passage and the lifecycle. Fowler argues that reminding Christians of the different stages that humans pass through during their lives can strengthen the concept of
faith development. In doing this it should be brought to a Christian's attention that concerns and needs change through life.

iii) Through the provision of faith "check ups". Fowler suggests that Christians should be encouraged to occasionally take part in meetings where they are stimulated to explore their present position within the spiritual journey. In this way they might be stimulated into apprehending some of the issues about which they are concerned at that moment.

iv) Through opportunities for healing. Fowler points out that there is a need to provide a situation where parishioners can study problems that they are finding difficult to cope with. As Jacobs points out it should be clearly shown to Christians that crises are important and that "breakdown can lead to breakthrough" (1988, p.5).

v) Through opportunities to learn about the "stranger within". Fowler argues that Christians must be given time to come to understand, and cope with, the fact that they are creatures with multiple desires and needs.

From this discussion it can now be seen how an open Christian curriculum may begin to be structured. There is a need for a variety of learning situations, sometimes involving ritual and worship, sometimes without. There is also a need for a variety of different approaches. There is room for a traditional style of teaching whereby the minister imparts knowledge, yet there is also room to cater for individual needs. The boundaries of Christian education may even have to be considered to embrace counselling.

It can also be seen that this form of Christian education requires a significant amount of time and resources. However, as the data analysis of later chapters will show, ministers are often busy and can have limited resources. This indicates the need to discuss the comments that have been made about the actual parish education that is likely to be found in the parishes of the ministers interviewed for this research.

4.5 The reality of Christian education in the parish setting

The debate so far has concentrated on the theoretical visions of Christian educationalists. However, some of the literature on Christian education suggests that the forms of teaching found in today's parishes may be very different to that of the open Christian curriculum. At the same time, there are indications that the concerns of the parish educators can also be different.

4.5.1 The present state of parish education

Many authors describe how the impact of modern society has left Christian education in the throes of an identity crisis (e.g. Astley and Day, 1992). According to Felderhof (1985) the crisis began with the end of Christianity's domination of education in the 1940's. This identity crisis therefore relates more to the discussion of educating children. However, authors such as Cox (1983) and Gibbs (1985) felt that there was no coherent approach to Christian education being promoted by the Churches even after 40 years of debate. Because of this Gibbs believed the church was still dominated by nineteenth-century views of education" (Ibid.). Unless this has changed dramatically, it would appear that modern approaches to adult education are not likely to be well represented in Christian parishes today.
Jacobs (1988) raises the question as to whether Christian educational theory promotes approaches that are difficult to implement in the parish. He believes that, at present, Christian education tends to cope only with ‘bits’ of people – the issues that ministers have time to cope with. Due to the busy nature of a minister’s life he believes that it tends to end up becoming ‘crisis intervention’. This is where a parishioner turns up with a particular problem and the minister or educator works with them on this. Jacobs therefore agrees with other Christian educationalists that ministers need to step back from the “imminent and fracturing pressures of the now to look back and forward” (Ibid., p.8).

4.5.2 The lack of training for parish educators

Ministers are usually the main educators in the parish, yet several authors identify a lack of interest in training them in educational matters. According to Astley and Day: “If Christian education is as significant and omni-relevant as activity as the authors.... often imply, it is perhaps surprising that it is not taken more seriously by the churches. Courses in the study of Christian education exist in seminaries and elsewhere in the United States, but much ministerial education in the UK still largely ignores the subject except where it can find hearing among the proponents of its apparently sexier sister ‘pastoral studies’... Even in the States... Christian education does not have the status it deserves either in the seminary or in the church. It is not often regarded as a ‘serious study’, as is doctrine or Biblical studies” (1992, p.21-22).

The situation for non-ministers is less clear, though the data collected in this research shed some light on the situation for these individuals (Chapter 10).

The lack of suitable training for parish educators obviously inhibits the evolution of parish education. Hull (1984) believes parish educators are often unaware of the distinctions between different approaches to Christian education. If these individuals are not initiated into the debate then they will not be able to critically analyse what they propagate. The untrained educators are left to try to promote a style of education that they think is suitable. The easiest way to do this is to use the one that they themselves underwent or to look at what is present in the parishes around them. This means that pedagogical techniques can remain entrenched in parish education.

5 Conclusions

This chapter has studied issues relating to educating adults in both secular and religious settings. In studying different theories it has argued that an open Christian curriculum is the most suitable approach for adult education in a parish setting. It has pointed out the similarities in understanding of maturation that underlie an open Christian curriculum, faith development and liberal education. The discussion also indicated how an open Christian curriculum could be structured.

The debate has dwelt on the characteristics of Christian education that differentiate it from secular education and has studied some of the implications of these for issues such as the autonomy of the learner. The chapter has also given a brief indication of the history of adult religious education and how church and secular education have evolved.
CHAPTER 7

The Research Strategy

1 Introduction

This chapter acknowledges and defends the research method chosen for this research. It is split into two sections. The first sets out the reasoning that led to the use of a qualitative method called heuristic inquiry. It also sets out the similarities between the underlying worldviews of this approach and those of the psychological theories discussed previously. The second section describes the actual structure of the research. It includes discussion on:

a) The multiphase nature of this study.
b) The sampling technique used to recruit respondents and its success.
c) The format of the interviews and the questions asked.

2 The Choice of a Phenomenological Method

Many different research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, are available to researchers. Of these only the qualitative methods were suitable for studying Christian ministers' perceptions of maturity. Quantitative methods were unsuitable for two reasons. Firstly, they require an initial hypothesis to be tested. Secondly, they require knowledge of all possible variables that affect what is being studied. This particular research study was an initial investigation and could therefore make no predictions about what would be found. Because of this the important aspects of the ministers' views and relevant variables would only be identified during the study.

Of the qualitative methods phenomenology offered itself as the approach most suited for use. In recent years phenomenological methods have become the most popular form of qualitative study. In some discourses the term phenomenology has even come to refer to any qualitative approach (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological analysis addresses all of the aspects of this research that made a quantitative approach unsuitable.

Firstly, it is naturalistic. This means that it allows theories to originate from the data collected. This is best typified by the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who are known for their promotion of a specific form of phenomenological study called Grounded theory.

Secondly, it is holistic (Patton, 1990). This is because phenomenologists believe that human interactions are too complex to allow research to be done clinically and distantly. When working with people the variables affecting the situation are seen to be too numerous and diverse. They therefore consider it impossible to isolate and remove all excess variables as a quantitative approach would try to do. Instead, researchers are urged to immerse themselves in the situation to be studied. In this way they aim to identify as many variables as possible and how they interact.

A number of data gathering techniques can be used in phenomenological studies. Patton (1990) believes that qualitative analysis is generally accepted as advocating the use of in-depth interviews, direct observation and written documents. This last source of data includes documents written by the respondents or organisations being studied and open-ended questionnaires. For this project in-depth interviews were chosen as the most suitable method for data collection due to a simple process of
elimination. Firstly, the ministers did not produce written documents that could be studied. Secondly, direct observation was unsuitable because the constructs of maturity held by the ministers were not going to be revealed to any great degree by analysing their activities or their interactions with others. Their understandings would be more readily accessed through direct questioning. Finally, questionnaires would be of limited help because they did not have room to adapt. Often, new questions are required as new areas of interest become apparent. Only interviews allow added questions to be asked, or clarifications to be given to a respondent if they have problems answering a question.

Interviews can be used in several ways. Using them in case studies is a popular form of conducting a qualitative study. This approach could have been used in this research but it tends to involve the study of only a few individuals or situations to a very great depth. It was decided that this project required a wider sample to be used. This would more easily show up any variations in understanding between individuals. Because of this a simple interview format was used.

3 Phenomenology and Data Interpretation

This section explores the basic philosophy behind a qualitative epistemology. It does this for two reasons. Firstly, this allows the next section to indicate the advantages for this research of a particular phenomenological method called *heuristic enquiry*. Secondly, it shows how closely the philosophy that underpins phenomenology is to some of the understandings of developmental theorists mentioned in previous chapters. Such a comparison further illuminates the justification for such a qualitative approach in this and other research projects.

3.1 Objectivity and relativity in phenomenological research

Phenomenologists point out that not only is human interaction complex but so is the way in which researchers interpret what they see. Like Kelly (Chapter 3), many of them question whether humans have the ability to actually perceive an objective reality:

"Like much of modern philosophy, the system known as phenomenology... asks us first to consider the possible assumptions and biases which have led us to our conclusion so that we may be more certain of its accuracy. As a result of such probing, representatives of scientific fields... have arrived at an intriguing, not to say, disturbing, conclusion. Stated simply, this conclusion argues that true reality is, and will forever remain, both unknown and unknowable to us. Instead, that which we term reality, that is, that which is experienced by us as being reality, is inextricably linked to our mental processes in general, and, in particular, to our inbuilt, innate capacity to construct meaning. This is the starting point to phenomenological inquiry" (Spinelli, 1989, p.1-2).

The result of such a belief is that phenomenologists accept that research will always be biased to some degree. They realise that any researchers' ability to ask "what is the respondent's experience of this phenomenon?" will be affected by their own personal perspective. This can 'distort' their understanding.
3.2 Reliability of data in phenomenological studies

The purpose of methodological paradigms is to offer strategies to obtain the most reliable data possible. In challenging the claims that we can observe an objective reality phenomenology can appear to call into question our ability to derive any reliable conclusions at all. Because of phenomenologists' understandings of the relationship of a researcher to that which is being studied they accept that it will not create such reliable data as a quantitative approach. However, they argue that meaningful data can still be collected. This is because it remains possible for a researcher to successfully access a respondent's worldview (Patton, 1990). It is accepted that any individual's experiences can be explained to another who can then share them. This echoes Kelly's description of sociality (see Chapter 4). Phenomenology does not, therefore, go as far as post-modernism in suggesting that any research is fundamentally flawed (Usher and Edwards, 1994). It simply warns the researcher of the problems involved in the act of interpretation.

Phenomenology uses a technique called *bracketing* to minimise the distortion that a researcher's worldview brings to data analyses. Bracketing was first described by Husserl (1913). Katz (1987), Ihde (1977) and Douglas and Moustakas (1984) note that this technique consists of two distinct processes. These are termed *Epoché* and *Reduction*. Epoché is a strategy to bring to the researcher's attention any preconceptions or assumptions that he or she has about the topic being studied. The process helps researchers to distance themselves from the subject being studied. Once this has been undertaken the data can then be studied through phenomenological reduction. The result is that:

"the researcher holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection... It is not interpreted in terms of the standard meanings given to it by the existing literature... In bracketing, the subject matter is confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms" (Denzin, 1985, p.55-56).

From this it can be seen that bracketing is ultimately dependent on the researchers' ability to be self-aware. This is one reason why a researcher's interest in a subject is seen as having a positive affect on the success of data analysis. It is thought that one method of ensuring that there is a high degree of self-awareness with regard to the research topic is to use researchers who are experienced in that subject. Phenomenologists argue that the strength of interest of the researcher and respondent will determine the amount of meaningful exchange of experiences that occurs. The greater the interest and involvement in an area of study then the greater the ability of the researcher to draw out worthwhile conclusions from the data collected. The interest of a researcher allows him or her to become:

"a sympathetic listener, seeking to understand through empathy and intuition the perspective or worldview of the person or group of people in whom he [sic] is interested" (Entwistle and Hounsell, 1979, p.360-361).

3.3 Heuristic inquiry

Heuristic inquiry was chosen for use in this research because it was the most suitable of the phenomenological methods. Heuristic inquiry lends itself to initial studies into a field of research. It does this by seeking out the important elements of the situation being studied in order to create a framework for later research to work on. Fowler (1981) himself recommended study into the area that this research covers (See Chapter 1). However, no such research has been undertaken and so
the role of this research is to begin to isolate factors that are important and the situations that exist. It should act as a springboard for later research that may seek to explore similar topics, or test the degree to which the findings of the research are applicable to other situations.

This leads to an understanding of the drawbacks in using heuristic enquiry as a method:

"Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity" (Douglas and Moustakas, 1984, p.42).

It exists to show that certain phenomena exist and to explore the implications of this in one context only. Other research must be undertaken to see if these factors are widespread or localised.

### 3.4 Data analyses in heuristic inquiry

Heuristics was created in a response to perceived inadequacies in the general phenomenological theory. One of the criticisms of those that favour heuristics is that phenomenologists do not fully understand the role of intuition in data analysis. They claim that its role is underplayed in the process of bracketing, especially during the process of Epochè. The earlier quote taken from Hounsell's and Entwistle's work made it clear that intuition is an accepted part of the process of phenomenological analysis. However, it has been argued that it neglects to fully integrate it in the process of bracketing. This results in an overemphasis on cognitive analysis.

Heuristic inquirers argue that if tacit knowledge always remains a factor in the analysis of research data then room must be set aside for it to make itself heard. The value placed on intuition is seen as:

"giving birth to the hunches and vague formless insights that characterise heuristic discovery" (Douglas and Moustakas, 1984, p.13).

Because of heuristic researchers' desires to use all aspects of human understanding - both cognitive and otherwise - the normal process of bracketing is modified. The Epochè/Reduction system is replaced with a set of phases. These are described as **immersion, incubation, illumination, explication** and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 1990).

- **Immersion** "is the stage of steeping oneself in all that is; of contacting the texture, tone, mood, range, and content of the experience". The researcher must be fully aware of his or her situation and subject. The researcher becomes totally immersed and involved with the experience being studied even to the point of encouraging daydreaming.

- **Incubation** is the period where the researcher contemplates the subject and waits for his or her mind to fully mull over what has occurred. This allows intuitive and tacit insights to appear. "In the incubation stage the researcher deliberately withdraws, permitting meaning and awareness to awaken in their own time". Any understanding that the researcher has of the experience being studied is not yet complete and remains a collection of thoughts that have not been fully tested against each other.
• Illumination is the phase when the previous disjointed understandings are formed into a whole. An actual understanding of the situation begins to be formed. It is at this point that the experience "takes on a vividness... the experience is known in all of its essential parameters". At this point the researcher is bringing to bear his or her cognitive functions to study the logic and consistency of this understanding.

• Explication happens when further illumination occurs through the use of the understanding gained in the illumination phase. It is describes as "a full unfolding of the experience". This is again a cognitive process though intuition would appear to still be a valuable asset in this.

• Creative Synthesis is the point where communication of what has been found in the study occurs. "The fundamental richness of the experience and the experiencing participants is captured and communicated in a personal and creative way".

(Taken from Patton, 1990, p.409-410).

It is apparent that these stages do not represent a template that will guarantee success for a researcher. This is because the stages do not explain how best to listen to, or utilise, intuition or tacit knowledge. Instead they represent a natural response from 'mature' or experienced researchers to the study being undertaken. The researchers are limited by their ability for self-reflection and so must rely on experience to be able to integrate intuition appropriately. Because of this the stages remain an ideal, existing to remind the researchers to attend to these aspects of data analyses as best they can.

It is also apparent from reading the texts on heuristic inquiry that the stages do not represent a significantly different phenomenological method but are instead a clearer and more honest description of such an approach. Simply because phenomenology may underemphasise intuition does not mean that this ability does not play a role in a researcher's attempts to understand a subject. Heuristic inquiry therefore acknowledges what is a normal aspect of phenomenological data analysis.

4 Similarities Between the Phenomenological Approaches and Perceptions of Reality in Psychological Theories

Several authors (e.g. Gross, 1987; Hammond et al. 1991) have recognised similarities between phenomenology and psychology. This has led to suggestions that phenomenology could be called a humanistic psychology. It is true that the descriptions of phenomenological and heuristic approaches reveal many similarities to that of the higher stages of faith and other 'mature' forms of understanding explored in previous chapters. This gives further validation of the suitability of these methods for the study as well as for the reliability of the data gained through them.

The main areas of similarity between the phenomenological/heuristic paradigm and the stages of faith are:

a) The view that human understanding relies on more than its logico-deductive or cognitive abilities.
b) The view that humans have tacitly held beliefs that distort their perceptions of a phenomenon.
c) The understanding that not all processes of mental analysis are open to scrutiny. Individuals must become fully able to accept the parts of their understanding that remain intuitive and inaccessible to logical study but which still have an important impact on their interpretation of their surroundings.

d) The view that in spite of this, individuals must try and comprehend the way in which both they and their respondents attempt to understand the world around them.

e) The view that we must be radically open to other peoples' points of view. This is crucial if we are to understand what they experience. The stages of faith emphasise the fact that if individuals are not open to being swayed by the internal logic of an argument then they are not truly able to understand it.

The phenomenological method could be said to enshrine the main characteristics of Stage 5 faith. This is a high stage with regard to maturation. It could therefore be argued that phenomenology or Heuristics, in reflecting a mature worldview, could promote maturity in those who use it. Its emphasis on self-reflection as the key to accurate data analysis promotes reflexivity in researchers. Reflexivity "exploits self-awareness as a source of insight and discovery" (Reinharz, 1988, p.171). This process is the key to human maturation in the faith stage theory discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Because of this phenomenology emphasises the process that is required to stimulate passage through the higher stages of faith.

5 The Structure of this Research

The following section details the specific characteristics of this study. It includes discussion about the following:

a) The multiphase nature of this study.

b) The format of the interviews used and the questions asked.

c) The sampling technique used to recruit respondents and its success.

A detailed description of the respondent sample is left till the next chapter.

5.1 The multi-phase nature of the research

The research question set out to investigate two distinct areas of interest. It was therefore decided that the project should have two phases. The first phase concentrated on the perceptions of maturity held by ministers of different parishes. The second phase concentrated on the adult education present in those parishes and the ministers' perceptions of the educational needs of parishioners. However, the interviews in each phase were set up to allow an overlap of data collection. Aspects of parish education were investigated in the Phase 1 interviews as were aspects of the ministers' perceptions of maturity in the second. Questioning the respondents about parish education in Phase 1 meant that a clearer understanding was gained of what questions would be of most use in Phase 2. Questioning the respondents in Phase 2 about their perceptions of maturity allowed two things to happen. The conclusions drawn from Phase 1 data could be tested and any areas of uncertainty could be clarified.

5.2 The interview format

Heuristic inquiry concentrates on using semi-structured or open interviews as its main source of data collection. Such interviews allow a topic to be covered without
unnecessarily restricting the data collected. They allow room for the researcher to explore subjects that are found to be significant but which had not been previously considered when the original interview questions were formulated. The interviews can therefore develop over time.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be more suitable than open ones for the purposes of this research. This was because the literature search indicated the need for the interviews to cover a number of topics when discussing maturity. This was due to the many different subjects involved in defining maturity, maturation and education. Semi-structured interviews allowed all of these to be dealt with.

Each interview was scheduled to last one hour. This was deemed a balance between the time required to explore the interview topics thoroughly and making the interviews short enough to be acceptable to the respondents. The interviews were taped when the respondent gave permission. Comments on how each of the interviews went and other relevant observations were written down immediately after each interview.

5.2.1 The Phase 1 interview questions

The initial Phase 1 interview questions are set out below with an explanation of why they were used and how they originated from the literature review.

Section 1: Faith and Maturity:

- What does the term ‘maturity’ mean to you?
- What does the term ‘faith’ mean to you?
- How does this relate to ‘belief’?
- How does faith relate to maturity?

The initial literature review revealed the importance of concepts of faith and belief in religious authors’ definitions of maturity. Because of this the first interview questions had to allow the concepts to be defined. Their relationship could then be explored.

- Does maturity continue to develop after a person has become a member of the church?

- (If yes,) What characterises this development?

The literature review indicated that there was often a confusion between the concepts of maturity and maturation. The first questions dealt with ‘maturity’ whilst these related to the overall process of maturation. This meant that the ministers’ first impressions of maturity could be captured but the process of development over time could also be described.

- Do you have a picture of an ideal state of adult faith?
- Do different periods of life after puberty affect people with regard to the development of their faith?
These questions were designed to further explore the relationship of maturity and Christian faith. They also explored whether ministers thought development was towards an achievable and final goal.

- Does unease or discomfort, a sense of loss or even fear, play a part in the development of one's faith?

Fowler's faith development theory showed the significant emotional upheaval that could occur during stage transitions. This was something that was previously lacking in religious descriptions of maturity. This interview question was designed to explore whether ministers accepted periods of disorientation or dislocation as part of maturation.

- How does faith in a church compare to faith in a political party or a pressure group for instance?

This was another question that arose from reading Fowler's work. The description of the stages made it clear that, at a fundamental level, the valuing processes used to consider politics and religions would be identical. This question aimed to see whether the ministers perceived this, and what value judgements were made about trusting secular and religious institutions or ideologies.

Section 2: Education in the Parish

The questions in this section were straightforward attempts to ascertain what adult education was present in the parish, what role the ministers had in it and of what use it was thought to be in relation to maturation. The last three questions allowed the research to explore whether the ministers were content with the adult education that they provided or whether they felt more could be done.

- What is the educational function of the Church?
- What is your role in education?
- What is your idea of a perfect adult education programme?
- What should it do in terms of the maturity of those attending?
- What programmes do you have here?

Section 3: Control Questions

- Do you have a feeling that there was anything that I wanted to hear?
- (If yes) Have you pandered to that whim? And why do you think I wanted to hear it?

These questions were used to ascertain how much the researcher and the interview format might have influenced the data collected. Any relevant information could then be used in the interpretation of the data.
• And finally (off the record) how did the interview go for you?
• Did anything come out of it that you found useful?
• Would you like to explore anything further?

The nature of phenomenological research means that interviews are considered a two way process. They should respect the interviewee, take note of any issues that might have arisen and offer further discussion or examination of any areas of interest that the respondent might have.

Another important consideration in undertaking interviews is the degree to which they might affect the respondent. It is acknowledged that interviews within a phenomenological study can disclose aspects of the respondents' experiences that they normally ignore or about which they refuse to talk. The discussion about Stage 3 faith revealed how probing tacit, but deeply valued, constructs can elicit strong reactions. The interviews in this project were not specifically aimed at addressing topics about which the ministers did not wish to talk. However, both the literature search and previous experience indicated that the subjects of perceptions of maturity and educational aims were not often consciously discussed in the parish. It was therefore possible that the interviews, if not correctly implemented, could challenge some respondents to the point of eliciting strong emotional responses. The questions in section 3 were created to allow any strong emotions or reactions to be addressed. The section could therefore act as a form of de-briefing when necessary.

5.2.2 The Phase 2 interview questions

The initial Phase 2 questions were set out as follows:

Section 1: Maturity.

The data collected from the Phase 1 interviews highlighted areas of interest in the ministers' understandings of maturity. They also highlighted areas that required clarification. The questions in this section of Phase 2 were designed with these in mind.

• Please could you think of a person, or a group of people, who you consider to be mature. Could you describe them to me?

This question indicates the modifications that occurred to allow meaningful data to be collected. The Phase 1 interviews showed that the ministers found it difficult to discuss subjects such as maturity. They found them too abstract. Questions were therefore developed that grounded the concepts of maturity in the ministers' everyday experience. This allowed them to answer the questions more easily.

• Is the maturity you have just described the same as being mature in faith?

• Do you have a picture of an ideal state of Christian maturity?

• After a person joins a church, or is converted, do they continue to develop/mature in any important ways?
• (if yes, then) How do they develop?

These questions arose in response to a lack of clarity in the respondents’ descriptions of how Christians develop.

• Can someone develop or mature to the point of leaving a church/denomination/Christianity?

• Is it possible to have a mature spirituality if you are not a member of the Christian church?

These questions arose from the need to explore the boundaries of the definitions of maturity and maturation that were given by the ministers. The ministers’ descriptions of the maturity and its relationship to faith had proved to be unclear in these areas.

• Is discomfort part of development and if so what role does it play?

• When was the last time that you felt a great upheaval in your understanding of the world?

• Was this accompanied by discomfort?

These last two questions were added to help the ministers ground the discussion about discomfort into their own experience. They were also intended to shed light on the formative influences on the ministers’ own development. The following question also explored this.

• How mature do you feel you are?

• What is the relationship between maturity in faith and intellectual maturity?

This question addressed a point that was sometimes unclear in the Phase 1 ministers’ interview responses.

Section 2: Education.

The initial questions in this section were similar to those in Phase 1. Some modifications were made to help the ministers relate what was being discussed to the adult members of their congregations.

• In your church education programme what opportunities exist to aid the development/maturation of the adult parishioners?

• Why are these important?

• What is your role in this?

• What role does the Holy Spirit have in this learning?

The Phase 1 interviews highlighted the need to ask the ministers about the role of the Holy Spirit. Their constructs of this were complex and its relation to learning was difficult to ascertain.
What would you consider to be the educational ideal of your church for its adult members?

Do you have a vision of a perfect adult education programme?

The responses from the ministers in Phase 1 emphasised the importance of learning about Christian faith. The following questions were used to explore how useful other faiths were seen to be in promoting maturation.

How important is it to learn about other denominations or religions?

Is it useful to meet people from these other groups?

Do the parishioners learn about other denominations of faith or meet members of them as part of the parish education programme?

The last questions focused more closely than those of Phase 1 on the ministers' opinions about the training required to run adult education programmes.

Is training required to lead a successful adult education programme?

What formal training have you had to take part in education?

What training is offered to you as a minister?

How much experience of running educational programmes have you had?

Section 3:

The questions in this section remained the same as for Phase 1.

5.3 Interview questions in a semi-structured interview - eliciting meaningful data

The order of these questions was not fixed. Any of them could be asked at any time if it was suitable given the flow of the conversation. Questions were also omitted if the subject had already been addressed sufficiently without prompting. The form of any question could change depending on the needs of the respondent. For instance some respondents had clear ideas about faith and its relation to belief and trust. Others required prompting to elicit the information about these terms.

The overall success of the interviews was examined after every three interviews. This meant that the interview format, the questions or the language used could be modified when necessary. It became clear within the first few interviews of Phase 1 that the language used could cause problems and this was countered by breaking the questions down into simpler forms. An example of this was the change from "What does the term maturity mean to you?" to two questions - "can you think of a person, or a group of people, who you consider to be mature?" and "could you
describe them to me?". The evolution of the questions asked in interviews is quite normal for Heuristic Inquiry. The initial questions should be used if possible but if some prove unhelpful they can be reworded or a different approach used to gain the data required.

Whilst the researcher attempted to elicit answers for each question he also tried to allow the respondents a degree of freedom in the direction of their discussion. Whenever possible they were allowed to talk freely. However, the discussion had to remain centred on maturity or educational matters. This technique allowed the respondents to reveal their particular concerns about, or interests in, the subjects under discussion. It also provided an opportunity for topics to be brought into the debate that had not been considered during the construction of the interview questions. In this way a naturalistic interplay between researcher and respondent was possible.

6 The Sample Selection

The sampling technique used in heuristic inquiry does not seek to gain representative samples of respondents. Instead the researcher seeks "excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest but not unusual cases" (Patton, 1990, p.171). This approach is referred to as intensity sampling. However, because this research was an initial study it was not known which ministers would prove to be the most useful for data gathering purposes. Because of this a wide selection of denominations were chosen from which to select the respondents (See Table 1).

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination of Minister Interviewed:</th>
<th>Number of Ministers Interviewed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHASE 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Evangelical:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Reformed:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 26 ministers were interviewed during the research, 13 ministers being used per phase. More Roman Catholic and Anglican ministers were selected than for the other denominations due to the researcher's greater familiarity with those churches. A selection of other denominations was chosen to offer the greatest chance of finding contrasting views.
The selection of the ministers from each denomination was random. This was achieved by using directories published by the diocese or other relevant church bodies. For the first phase a list was made of ministers who were stationed in parishes within the borders of West Sussex. For the second phase the list included ministers from East Sussex as well.

Eighty percent of the ministers contacted took part in the research. Of those who declined the excuses were lack of time, lack of experience in the parish or lack of necessary knowledge.

Most of the interviews occurred in the ministers' homes. Only 3 occurred in rooms at the actual churches or prayer halls.

A more detailed description of the sample is given in the next chapter together with general comments about the success of the interviews and some initial points with regard to the analysis of the data.

Respondents were asked whether they would allow the interview to be taped. The detailed description of the sample given in the next chapter notes which ministers declined to be taped. The reaction to being taped was mixed. Some ministers agreed to be recorded with no apparent qualms. Others found the idea off-putting or distracting. Of these, most asked not to be taped. Some ministers were happy to be recorded for most of the interview but asked for the tape recorder to be stopped when they made certain comments that they did not wish to have "on record".

7 Data Analysis of Interviews - Content Analysis

The discussion about the method of analysing the data from the interviews has, so far, remained at the level of general descriptions of the phases in heuristic inquiry. These indicated how the intuitive analysis of data could be harnessed. However, little was said about the suitability of more 'conscious' techniques of analysis.

In this research Content Analysis was chosen as a suitable technique for studying the interview data. This is one of the most commonly chosen types of data analysis in phenomenological studies. It is supposed to allow inferences to be made about a respondent's message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (Weber, 1985). The basis of this approach is to classify words of a text into content categories (Ibid.). The quality of the categorisation is the key to the success of this approach because "no content analysis is better than its categories" (Budd, et al., 1967, p.39). Categorisation (or coding):

"is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics" (Holsti, 1969, p.94).

Each category may consist of one, several, or many words. The creation of these categories is important. In doing this, those units of text that fit into the same category are presumed to have similar meanings (Weber, 1985).

The study of some subjects can mean that more care than usual must be used when undertaking Content Analysis. This is because some subjects are more abstract or symbolic in nature. This means that words can have a variety of meanings and as a consequence, all of the pieces of text placed into one category may not relate to the same thing. This is especially true when studying maturity or faith. Chapter 2 has
already noted the problems created by the vocabulary used in these subject areas. As a consequence of this the categorisation process in this research required flexibility. Such an approach was reinforced by the theory of heuristic inquiry that reminds researchers that data can always be looked at from numerous perspectives. Krippendorf reminds us that even when different researchers may have categorised a text in identical ways as a form of validation:

"the claim to have analyzed THE content of communication reflects an untenable position" (1980, p.22).

Another reason that care had to be taken was the fact that it is normal to study the frequency of word use. This means that Content Analysis is often used to give a form of quantitative analysis of the content of texts or transcripts. It assumes that the more frequently a theme or category is encountered the more important it is to study. Content Analysis can therefore involve rating the categories in order of the number of times they occur in texts (Carney, 1972). However, heuristics considers all data equal irrespective of how often they appear. The nature of open or semi-structured interviews means that only one respondent may have discussed a subject that is nevertheless of great importance or interest. In such a context Content Analysis can therefore make such areas of the discourse appear less important if the data is studied in terms of response frequency.

8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the research project to be based within a qualitative field of methodology. The discussion discussed the type of interviews selected and the multiple phases that were used. It set out the interview questions for both phases of the study. The discussion also indicated the methods used for data analysis.
CHAPTER 8

The Sample Group and Analysis of Interview Success

1 Introduction

This chapter describes the ministers who were interviewed during this research. It gives their age and situation as well as a brief description of notable personality traits. The chapter also explores the way in which the ministers reacted to the interviews. It discusses their initial impressions, the use that they made of the meetings and their reasons for participating. This allows some of the initial differences of opinion between the interviewees to be set out ready for the next chapter.

2 Composition of Phase 1 and 2 Samples

2.1 Denomination

The number of ministers that were selected from each denomination of the Christian Church was summarised in Figure 1 of Chapter 7.

2.2 The different types of parish

The ministers worked in a wide variety of parishes with regard to size, wealth and numbers attending. They ranged in size from small country parishes to much larger ones at the centre of major towns. The affluence of the parishes also varied. Some of the town parishes were situated in council estates and drew most of their parishioners from the immediate locality. Other parishes were situated in wealthier areas. These tended to draw in parishioners from a wider area.

2.3 The ministers' ages

There was a significant difference in age between the youngest and oldest ministers interviewed. The youngest was a 27-year-old Roman Catholic priest. The eldest was a semi-retired Anglican vicar of 75. The average age of the sample was approximately 40 to 45 years of age with most of the ministers spread evenly within an age bracket of 30 to 50 years.

2.4 Gender

Only one of the respondents was female. Because of this the study could not ascertain whether gender influenced attitudes towards maturity and adult religious education in the parish. The opinions of this respondent did not differ significantly from those of many of her male counterparts. Because of this her responses have been treated in the same way as all the others. A further study is required to test whether the predominantly male sample significantly altered the findings of this research.

2.5 Affiliations within the denominations

Before describing the individual situations of the respondents the terms used to describe Christian denominations needs to be studied. They can sometimes appear to indicate degrees of separation that are not actually present. A good example of
this is found in the Anglican ministers interviewed. When the data from Phase 1 was analysed it became apparent that one of the Anglican ministers held views very similar to those of the Roman Catholic ministers. At the same time another had very similar views to those of the Independent Evangelical ministers. These ministers referred to their affiliation within the Anglican Church as being to the High or Low Church respectively. They described these as the Catholic or Evangelical wings of the Anglican Church.

The Independent Evangelical ministers selected for this research came from evangelical churches that had no significant connections with the other denominations studied. However, a number of ministers, in addition to the Independent Evangelicals, described themselves as evangelical. For the purposes of this research these individuals were classified under their original denomination heading (e.g. Anglican).

3 Descriptions of Each Respondent

The following section briefly describes each individual minister. It gives details of age and a guide to their overall character. Details are also provided of the size and situation of their parish, together with other general information. The list is intended to introduce the reader to the variety of situations the ministers came from as well as the personalities of some of the more notable characters.

The list describes the ministers in order of denomination. Where possible it also indicates affiliations within a denomination. This is important when studying the Anglican Church where the ministers could come from different ends of the High/Low Church spectrum.

3.1 Phase 1:

1) Roman Catholic.
    Paul (age 27) ran a very large parish with the help of a fellow priest. His church was situated at the centre of a large and busy town and attracted a large number of worshippers from a wide area. Paul was ordained four years before the interview took place which made him the most recently ordained minister to take part in the research. His reactions in the interview showed that he still relied heavily on what he had been taught in the seminary. He showed a youthful exuberance towards his work and was eager to discuss maturity from the moment he was contacted. A few months after being interviewed he was moved to a new parish that he was to run on his own.

2) Roman Catholic.
    Anthony (age 57) was a priest working in a medium sized parish on the outskirts of town. He had worked as a missionary for many years and had only recently returned to this country. For the two years that he had resided here Anthony had been working as a parish priest. The interview revealed that he felt slightly ill-at-ease with running a parish in what he perceived to be a wealthy area. He would rather have continued with his missionary work. He did not expect to be left running the parish for very much longer and approximately six months after the interview he was replaced by a younger priest. Anthony was a quiet but amiable gentleman who made it clear that he felt he would be a poor source of data. Because of this he was a little reluctant to discuss his views.
3) **Roman Catholic.**

For a short time Allen (age 55) worked with Paul in running the parish described previously. He began working in the parish later than Paul and continued to run it after Paul was moved. He was self-assured and confident in his ability to run a successful parish. He did not appear worried if his views did not necessarily reflect accepted church teaching. His opinions showed a pronounced pragmatism towards what was best for his parishioners.

4) **Anglican (with professed Catholic/High Church leanings).**

Richard ran a small parish on the edge of a council estate. He was 42 years old and married with two young children. His church was growing in numbers - a situation that gave him much pleasure. He had an analytical mind and enjoyed the chance to explore his own thinking during the interview. Of all the respondents he enjoyed the interview the most.

5) **Anglican (with no professed affiliation within the church).**

Bill (age 75) was an active, semi-retired, priest living in the centre of a major town on the south coast. His parish employed one full time vicar and used a number of non-stipendary ministers of which he was one (he was the only non-stipendary Anglican minister interviewed). The parish was one of the largest visited. Bill was quiet and somewhat shy. He was the only minister to find the interview slightly upsetting. He revealed himself to have a deep and almost unquestioning trust of church teaching as he understood it.

6) **Anglican (with professed evangelical/Low Church leanings).**

Julian (age 36) was a vicar with a parish in the middle of a large university town. He was a warm and outgoing individual who was married with several young children. He was the only minister to have any involvement in education beyond his parish's boundaries. This was because he had formed a team with three colleagues in neighbouring parishes. Each member of this group took on responsibility for different areas of work for the four parishes. In Julian's case this involved being the educational co-ordinator. Whilst this meant that he was involved in education in four parishes he was no more qualified to do so than any of the others. Nor did he appear to view his role as any different to what it would have been if he was concerned only for his own parish.

7) **Independent Evangelical.**

Tim (age 34) was an earnest minister who worked for an evangelical church in the centre of a large town. His was a very large (500 member) church that had two full time ministers. The parish appeared popular and lively and attracted a large number of young Christians. Of the churches visited this one appeared to have made the biggest impact on the surrounding community. It strongly emphasised the need of its members to help in society. Amongst other activities it ran a single mothers' shelter and a Tradecraft shop selling products from third world countries. Of all the interviewees Tim relied most heavily on biblical references when setting out his views.

8) **Independent Evangelical (A member of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches).**

Eric was a young (age 28), single individual with a quick mind and a notable sense of humour. He worked for a small but growing church in a council estate. After extensive fund raising his church had just been upgraded from a set of Nissan huts to a properly built meeting hall. Eric was an enthusiastic minister with a strongly supportive set of elders. His interest in politics became obvious during the interviews. He was the only minister to reveal a great desire to keep up to date in a non-religious subject by serious and constant reading. His office exhibited an impressive array of books on a variety of subjects.
9) United Reformed Church.
Peter (age 48) worked in a medium sized church in the suburbs or a large town. He was a confident and outgoing character. His children had left home and he found that this had given him time to become deeply immersed in the work of his denomination. Peter gave the impression of being an influential individual and other ministers' references to him showed him to be very well respected. He was able to give an insight into how his views on maturity and education may have been influenced by the history of his denomination.

10) United Reformed Church.
Roy was a quiet, unambitious minister in late middle age. He was happy to work in a small, quiet parish on the outskirts of town. He made it clear that he felt his parish was very unimportant compared to many of the others in the area. He had no ambition to create a parish similar to the thriving communities of these other churches and indicated that he did not have the experience, nor did his parish have the financial or personnel resources, to do so.

11) Methodist.
Ian was a minister in his 40's with a small parish in the suburbs of a large town. He was a quiet individual who was deeply concerned that his views reflected a reasoned and sensible view. His belief that he was a model for others in the church made him wish to appear orthodox with regard to his faith.

12) Methodist.
Dominic was a quiet but determined minister in his late 40's. He worked in a medium sized parish near the centre of town. His parishioners were mostly retired or elderly and in this respect it represented many other parishes along that part of the south coast. He was acutely aware that this might have influenced his descriptions of maturity and educational goals in the parish. The parish was described as being quiet. Dominic declined to have his interview taped explaining that he would find it intrusive and disconcerting. He did not find the interview easy and realised that he was having to expend considerable time trying to understand what his opinions were.

13) Baptist.
Philip was a Baptist minister. He was wary of any details of himself or his parish being published. He declined to have the interview taped.

3.2 Phase 2:

1) Roman Catholic.
Tony worked in a small country parish. He was in his thirties and seemed content with his situation. He felt secure in his role as a minister and felt supported by the diocese. He appeared similar to Roy (URC1) in character.

2) Roman Catholic.
Robert (aged 34) worked in a major south coast university town. He looked after an extremely busy parish of moderate size (200 members). The parish used to be run by two priests. However, the previous year his colleague had resigned and left the ministry which meant Robert was left to run the parish on his own. In spite of feeling slightly overworked he appeared to enjoy his present situation. Because of his workload he found it difficult to instigate new ideas though he tried to maintain as many of the educational groups as he could.

3) Roman Catholic.
Michael was an elderly priest who had been ordained for 35 years. He worked in the busy suburbs of a very large town. The parish he worked in was sizeable and required several priests. Michael was one of the quietest ministers to be interviewed. He took his time in answering the interview questions and gave carefully reasoned responses. The overall impression given to the interviewer was that he had agreed
to the interview because he felt that it was his duty to answer the questions of interested parties. He appeared to find many of the interview questions rather obscure.

4) Anglican (with professed High Church leanings).
Andrew was a friendly individual in his forties. He worked on his own in a small but charming country parish. His teenage children still lived with him in a sprawling rectory. His duties appeared light as only a small number of individuals attended his church. He enjoyed the interview and the challenge of defining maturity but appeared to be a little preoccupied at times.

5) Anglican (no affiliation within the denomination given).
Jack was another minister wary of being described in this research. He also declined to be taped.

6) Anglican (no affiliation within the denomination given).
George worked in a moderate sized church (190 members) covering a newly built estate in a country village. He was in his late middle age but this parish was his first incumbency. He was quietly confident in his understanding of the Christian faith. He was willing to answer all of the interview questions but remained sceptical of the researcher's intentions. He remained polite but was the least welcoming of all the respondents.

7) Independent Evangelical.
John was a middle-aged minister working in a small parish (70-100 members) near the centre of town. He had finished his training in 1962, was married with children who had left home and was eager to participate in the research.

8) Independent Evangelical.
David was a young, single minister in his early thirties. He had recently finished 2 years of training at Bible college. He was working for a branch of a small but growing independent evangelical church (120 members). Whilst enthusiastic about his work he had reservations about some aspects of the church. His main worry was that they tended towards being "unhealthily isolationist". He was happy to take part in the interviews and but would only discuss the weaknesses of his church if the tape recorder was turned off.

9) United Reformed Church.
Graham (age 38) was a married minister with several young children. He worked for a small parish (85 members) in a small coastal town. Graham's predictions for the future of his church were extremely optimistic and he was certain he could make it prosper. He had strong opinions about most of the topics mentioned in the interview and showed no uncertainty in his description of how to promote maturity. Of all the ministers Graham was least disposed to accept the validity of other Christian denominations.

10) United Reformed Church.
Brian (50) was a friendly individual in charge of a congregation with 120 members, most of whom were elderly. He was married and his children had left home a long time ago. He spent much of his spare time reading and was proud of the learning that he gained from this. He enjoyed the interview because it allowed him to draw on, and use, the knowledge that he had gained. During the interview it was revealed that he had many links with one of the poorer South American countries and sought to promote an interest in it amongst his parishioners.

11) Methodist.
Margaret (age not given) was the only female minister to be interviewed. She worked as one of several ministers in a very large parish. This was situated in the centre of a very large university town. She declined to be taped but was eager to help the research. Margaret found the interview interesting but was unsure that she had been of any help.
12) Methodist
Chris was a middle-aged minister in a moderate sized parish. He was a particularly forceful character. The interview revealed that his reasons for taking part in the research were possibly less honest that most of the others. During the interview he put a considerable amount of pressure on the researcher to visit the parish concerned. Chris was very interested in the nature of the researcher's own faith and whether he attended a church. In this he was unique. When finding the interviewer's religious inclinations to be different from his own, his agenda revealed itself to be the promotion of his church as a suitable home for the researcher's spiritual development. The interview provided plentiful data but proved to be challenging for both interviewer and interviewee.

13) Baptist
James was a timid, middle-aged minister in a small country village parish. He declined to be taped and explained that a reporter had previously caused him a lot of trouble by revealing what he had thought was a confidential conversation. James did not appear upset by the questions or the researcher's presence but his responses revealed him to be a nervous individual with surprisingly dogmatic views.

3.3 The notation used to identify the ministers during the following chapters

Codes will be used when referring to these ministers in the subsequent data analysis. Each minister will be referred to by name but a code will follow to indicate their denomination and the phase in which they were interviewed. An example of this could be a reference to Paul (RC1). This indicates that Paul is a Roman Catholic minister who was interviewed in the first phase. The abbreviation for each denomination is as follows:
- Roman Catholic (RC).
- Anglican (A).
- Independent Evangelical (IE).
- United Reformed Church (URC).
- Methodist (M).
- Baptist (B).

4 Analysis of Ministers' Responses to the Interviews

4.1 The ministers' expectations and their confidence about being useful to the research

Very few of the ministers who were contacted during this study were confident that they could provide useful information. Those who declined to participate often cited lack of knowledge on the subject as the reason. Most of the ministers who agreed to participate also felt that they were not 'qualified' to discuss either maturity or education. These individuals tended to offer the names of other ministers who "knew more about those subjects". Many of them agreed to participate once it was explained to them that this research sought to find out the opinions of typical parish ministers. Even whilst agreeing to take part they often made it clear that they felt they would be unable to provide much useful information.

The ministers' belief that they would be poor sources of data appears to have originated from two areas of concern:

Firstly, the interviews showed that ministers did not consider themselves to have a significant role in education. They were aware that the parishioners needed help to
learn to develop but because they had not studied education, and were not involved in what they considered to be formal education, the ministers felt that they did not have much to say on the subject. They did not relate learning in the parish to their construct of 'education'. These findings will be further explored in Chapter 10.

Secondly, the ministers often appeared to believe that participating in a doctoral research project might mean the interviews would be intellectually demanding. This meant that, during the initial contact, time often had to be spent reassuring the ministers that this was not the case. In most instances this strategy was effective though some respondents were still concerned when the interviews began. Most of these individuals became more relaxed as the interview proceeded and they realised that their views were being accepted. They soon felt able to explore subjects that they were asked about, apparently without feeling their opinions were being harshly criticised by a possible 'expert'. Because of this a number of the ministers enjoyed the chance to explore the subjects covered in the interview. Only in two cases did the reluctance to talk about maturity and education continue throughout the interviews (Bill, A1 and Anthony, RC1).

4.2 Taping interviews, confidentiality issues and the orthodoxy of ministers' responses

Most of the ministers did not mind having the interviews taped. Two of those who did object felt that being taped would inhibit them by making them feel self-conscious. The rest asked for the tape recorder not to be used due to confidentiality issues. One respondent did not wish to be taped because of a previous incident (see notes on James (B2) above).

A number of ministers asked for the tape recorder to be turned off when they wanted to give apparently controversial or 'unorthodox' opinions. One example of this occurred in the interview with David (IE2). He was happy to discuss the shortcomings of his church only when the tape recorder was turned off. Another example was Brian (URC2) who did not want to be recorded when discussing maturity. He believed that Christians in other denominations could mature as much as those within his own. This did not reflect the views of many of his parishioners and so he felt it to be a controversial statement.

This is significant because it revealed these ministers' willingness to discuss 'contentious' issues with a researcher. This indicated that the data gathered were not being distorted or withheld in these cases. It also showed how the ministers were willing to treat the researcher in a different way to most of their parishioners. The researcher was granted 'special' access to relevant data. At the same time, these occurrences showed how some ministers did not wish to be seen to hold certain views by their parishioners. This highlighted their need to avoid appearing controversial. This attitude will be studied further in the analysis of adult religious education in Chapter 10. However, not all the ministers who set out what they described as contentious opinions were uncomfortable with their parishioners hearing such views.

Not all ministers offered views or opinions that were significantly different to either the teaching of their denomination or the general consensus of their parishioners. The value placed on theirs and other's opinions depended on how closely they reflected orthodox or commonly accepted views.
These observations raise questions about how much the taping of the interviews may have prevented ministers from revealing personal opinions when they differed from the accepted ones. The data from the interviews suggest that this is probably not a significant problem. Those ministers who were keen to promote an orthodox view of maturity tended to be enthusiastic in their opinions. It has been assumed that this indicated their belief in the views they described.

4.3 Conflicts between the agendas of the researcher and the interviewees

In a couple of interviews a problem occurred when the respondent had an agenda that conflicted with the aims of the interview. The best example of such a situation was in the interview with Chris (M2). In this instance, it became clear that the minister's agenda had little to do with helping the researcher by discussing maturity or parish education. He used much of the interview time to try and explore issues such as the researchers religious beliefs. During the interview he revealed himself to be extremely concerned about the religious affiliation of the interviewer. This manifested itself in an intense questioning of the interviewer with regard to this topic. Once he had ascertained that the researcher was not a practising Christian he used much of the rest of the interview to set out Christianity as an answer to all of the problems in life that the interviewer might have. The pressure placed on the researcher to attend the respondent's church was considerable.

4.4 Issues about keeping the ministers' discussion focused on the interview questions

A commonly encountered problem was that, in stopping to think about their answers, the ministers could jump from topic to topic in a 'stream of consciousness'. This could result in a number of subjects being discussed in response to one interview question. The ministers often digressed when they realised that the topic of discussion might link up to a subject about which they felt strongly. It appears that they were often trying to illuminate their understanding of these subjects in the light of what they were discovering about their opinions on maturity. In many instances these diversions gave interesting data but the conversations then had to be steered back to the initial question. In a few cases the ministers' enthusiasm for these 'connected' topics made it very difficult for them to focus on the interview questions for any length of time.

4.5 Language in the interviews - problems with key words

One problem in the interviews related to the wording of the initial interview questions. It became clear that the ministers did not always think in terms of the key words used in the initial interview questions. Maturity was one such term. The ministers tended to use other words to describe progression, such as 'faith' and 'belief'. In order to gain useful data the interview questions often had to be repeated again using these more familiar terms - A description of the respondents' use of the terms faith, belief and trust is given in the Chapter 9, Section 4.

Another problem may have been the apparently abstract nature of some questions. It has already been mentioned that the ministers could have felt that they were under pressure to give 'academic' answers to the questions. Because of this the interview questions were altered in order to ground them in the ministers' everyday experiences. One example of this involved the most problematic question: "What does the word maturity mean to you?".
This was modified to become:

"Can you think of members of your church, family or friends who you feel are mature and can you describe what makes these people mature in your opinion?"

The ministers found it significantly easier to respond to such a question.

In spite of such changes meaningful data were often still hard to obtain. The inability to relate an apparently straightforward question to everyday experience is a phenomenon found in other studies as well (McGiveny, quoted in Jarvis, 1992). However, in this particular research the reasons for the difficulty in gaining the data seemed to be mostly attributable to the tacit nature of the constructs being addressed in the interview questions.

4.6 Ministers' attitudes after being interviewed

In most cases the ministers gave the impression that the interviews had been less demanding than they expected. The ministers were often surprised at how quickly the time had gone. Only a few explicitly stated that they had enjoyed the interview but a number of others appeared to have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss a topic at some depth. Richard (A1) explained that the interview had been pleasant because he did not often get the opportunity or time to explore topics in such a way. Given the busy schedule of many of the other ministers this would appear to be a problem for others as well. Richard considered the interview a learning experience.

Of the remaining ministers only Bill (A1) appeared to have found the interview an unsettling experience. The rest gave an impression that it was part of their parish duty to help. These individuals gave no indication whether the interview had been beneficial to them. Instead it was often apparent that agreeing to be interviewed was part of their role as an evangelist or spokesperson for their church.

5 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has introduced the setting in which the interviews took place and has given a brief description of the ministers encountered. The chapter also discussed issues about the participation rate and the issues involved in persuading the respondents to take part in this research.
CHAPTER 9

The Ministers' Constructs of Maturation.

1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of two that analyse the data gained from the interviews. The following discussion concentrates on examining the respondents' understandings of maturation. It compares these views with the theories set out in earlier chapters and explores the implications that arise from this. It also explores the problems that were encountered in trying to access the ministers' perceptions of maturation, as well as the possible effects of the respondents' maturity on their views.

2 Problems Encountered in Accessing and Describing the Ministers' Constructs of Maturation

The discussion will start by analysing the problems encountered in eliciting meaningful data from the respondents. These problems sometimes proved to be significant barriers to gaining a coherent picture of the ministers' constructs of maturation. Therefore, in discussing these issues the reader is made aware of some of the limitations of the data set out in Parts 3 to 5 of this chapter.

Sections 4.1 to 4.6 of the previous chapter have already described some of the factors that limited both the quality and amount of data collected from the interviews. These were general problems that could affect almost any semi-structured interviews. However, during the interviewing process it quickly became apparent that the attempt to discuss the topic of maturation was itself creating problems for the gathering of meaningful data.

Exploring the respondents' constructs of maturity was not straightforward for a number of reasons. These can be split into three areas for discussion.

i) Issues about the assumption that maturation can be described.

ii) Issues about the maturity of the respondents.

iii) Issues about the depth of critical reflection used by the ministers in their descriptions of maturation.

2.1 The validity of expecting ministers to be able to describe maturation

The discussion in Chapters 2 to 5 indicated that human development is not always an easy topic to explore. It was shown that, for a number of reasons, defining maturation has proved difficult for many of the authors mentioned. For instance, those theorists who argued for humanistic approaches to studying human development understood the large number of human characteristics that could be involved. Alternatively, authors such as Fowler pointed out that a comprehensive description of maturation would need to incorporate descriptions of some of the more ineffable elements of human development. This is especially true for Christian authors who have to deal with issues of Christian faith and the religious language that this entails. If these theorists have found it difficult to define religious maturation then it should not be surprising that the respondents who participated in this research should also encounter problems.
Unfortunately, the initial research plan underestimated the degree to which interpreting the respondents' use of religious language could affect the quality of the data collected. Within three or four interviews it became apparent that the ministers could use complex religious concepts in their attempts to describe human development. These were often intimately connected with realms of apprehension that Christian authors have described as ineffable or mystical (e.g. Otto, 1958; Schleiermacher, 1958; Strunk, 1965). The respondents' frequent usage of terms such as 'faith' and 'trust' (described in Sections 4 to 4.3.5) showed how important they believed it to be to describe maturation in terms of relating to God and being influenced by Him. Both of these topics proved difficult to understand from the ministers' responses. It became clear that the ministers could find it difficult to articulate their deeply felt impressions of such interaction with God. However, it is interesting to note that this did not cause the respondents to describe aspects of maturation in terms of being a 'mystery'.

The effect of religious language on the quality of collected data may have been overlooked during the initial planning of this research because of the nature of the religious discourses on maturation that had been previously studied. Most of these explored psychological theory and therefore often adopted much of the language used in such discourses. In this way the researcher may have overlooked the fact that other religious individuals might not wish to use such a 'scientific' discourse when describing maturation. Interestingly, some words that the ministers were expected to use, such as 'holiness', were not often found in their responses - yet these terms can be found in many Christian texts on faith and maturation.

Another problem that was encountered was the fact that, unlike the authors involved in discourses about maturity and education, the respondents did not necessarily feel that a coherent and clearly articulated understanding of maturation was important. It was commonly felt that the critical reflection involved in such an enterprise was not a particularly valuable characteristic. It was very rarely considered important to maturation. This subject is explored further in later sections where it is shown that factors such as the ministers' belief in divine guidance could often mean that critical reflection on the topics of Christian faith and human development were not valued.

2.2 The possible effects of the ministers' maturity on their ability to describe maturation

Another factor that may have affected the quality of the data relates to the maturity of the interviewees. It was clear from the literature mentioned in previous chapters that a respondent's own level of maturity would affect his or her perceptions of human development. Fowler (1981) clearly stated that most of the people he studied exhibited Stage 3 faith. It does not appear unreasonable to expect to encounter a similar situation in this country. Nor does it seem likely that the average level of the interviewed ministers' maturity would be significantly different from other Christians. Because of this it could be predicted that a large proportion of the ministers in the interview samples would exhibit Stage 3 faithing. This could mean that many of the ministers' opinions about maturation would probably be largely tacit. When asking someone to give a detailed description of such a tacit construct there is no guarantee that it will be coherent or have been explored in any critically reflective way.
Unfortunately, in attempting to study ministers' opinions about maturation the researcher may have overlooked the degree to which this could affect the viability of the whole study. The following sections detail many of the situations that made it difficult to fully determine the respondents' views due to their tacit understandings of maturation. However, an exploration of the degree to which this is due to their maturity will be left until the end of this chapter. By that point, their descriptions of maturation will have been set out and the way in which these may reflect different forms of faithing can be explored more fully.

2.3 Issues about the depth of critical reflection used by the ministers in their descriptions of maturity

Whether or not the ministers' level of faith development had affected their ability to describe maturation, the interviews provided plenty of evidence that only a limited amount of critical reflection had been brought to bear on their understandings of it.

2.3.1 The descriptions of maturation as first impressions

It was clear from the interviews that none of the ministers had previously spent much time exploring the topics of maturity and maturation. A number of them openly admitted that they had not been required to consider these subjects to any great degree. Others did not remember discussing the topics since undertaking their ministerial training.

It also became clear that the respondents were rarely challenged to explore any topic as deeply as they were in the interviews. They frequently indicated that the researcher's questions were more challenging than those presented to them by parishioners or others they usually encountered during their day to day work. They also indicated that their lives were often very busy and it became clear that they did not often have time to deeply reflect on subjects. Their descriptions of their duties as ministers indicated that their time was usually taken up with the myriad of practical matters that had to be dealt with if the parish was to run smoothly. The problems of organising time in which to study a topic was also made clear by the many interruptions that occurred during the interviews and the initial problems of finding times when they could be interviewed. However, only Richard (A1) indicated that he found the interview a valuable experience because of the opportunity that it gave him to take time to consider some of his views about maturation.

As a result of all these factors the ministers' descriptions of maturation were often their "first impressions". They frequently made comments such as "I think what I mean is..." (Paul, RC1) and "I suppose..." (Allen, RC1). Such comments can be seen to indicate the tentative nature of many of their descriptions. The interviews came to involve a large amount of time with the ministers 'thinking out loud' in their attempts to answer the questions.

2.3.2 Contradictory statements and the impact of asking question about previously unexplored topics

The fact that the ministers' descriptions of maturation were usually their first impressions of the subject may explain why they often made apparently contradictory statements. One example of this situation was found when a minister described maturation as being both entirely dependent on a religious faith and also being possible for non-religious individuals. The respondents did not indicate that
such contradictions were integral paradoxes that had to be addressed in any attempt to describe maturity. Because of this it was assumed that the contradictions were likely to be due to a lack of critical reflection.

In some instances there was evidence that the presence of these contradictions was due to the respondents re-evaluating their descriptions of maturity as the interview progressed. One minister initially stated that maturity depended on only one human characteristic but, after further exploration of the topic, later described four others as also being involved. This has implications for the quality of the data collected because it was often impossible to tell when such re-evaluations were occurring. Without knowledge of this it was impossible for the researcher to know when a comment about maturation had been superseded by a later one that was based on a more carefully reasoned argument.

It is also possible that the ministers' lack of previous engagement with the topic of maturation meant that their attempts to describe it were hindered by the vocabulary they chose. It was shown in Chapter 2 that the key words used in debates about human development can have multiple meanings and this was confirmed in the interviews. At the same time, the respondents' favoured terms, such as 'faith' and 'belief', could also have several meanings. Their tendency to use these words to refer to more than one thing sometimes prevented the researcher from gaining a clear understanding of their opinions.

It also appeared problematic for the respondents. Some of the interview data suggested that ministers realised that they had to begin to use these terms more critically as the discussion progressed. It appeared that these respondents were beginning to identify the problems involved with using certain terms and therefore took more care in how they were used. However, this happened in a minority of the interviews. Most of the ministers appeared to remain content to use the same terms to mean several things.

2.3.3 The lack of reflection behind some confidently espoused descriptions of maturity

A few of the ministers answered the interview questions about the nature of maturity in a very confident manner. The researcher's first impression was that these respondents had previously explored the topic. They often responded quickly to the initial questions and rarely used comments such as those mentioned in Section 2.3.1 that indicated a lack of certainty. However, under repeated questioning, these respondents were not always able to explain what they had meant by their initial answers.

A good example of this was found in the interview with Tim (IE1). When asked to describe maturity his answers involved numerous biblical references and quotations. He offered these with great confidence as the reasons for his views. However, the meanings of many of the quotes were not immediately clear. In order to understand his views he was therefore asked to explain what he meant in his own terms. At these points the respondent often had difficulty in doing so. This situation was found to occur in the interviews with other evangelical ministers as well. It was due to this that the interviews with these respondents often provided the least amount of data with regard to opinions about maturation. In this regard, the researcher appeared to be in a similar situation to that of Cupitt when he attempted a discussion with a
Muslim (See Chapter 6, Section 4.1.2). The respondents appeared to be either unwilling or unable to support their views by using any source of evidence other than the Bible for their arguments.

Of course, the fact that these evangelical ministers could not describe how they viewed maturation without quoting biblical passages does not necessarily mean that they were showing a lack of critical reflection on the subject. It is conceivable that some of their understandings involved concepts that could not be translated into less religious terms. Moran (1983) suggests that the language used in the Bible is richly metaphorical for this reason. Quoting scripture may therefore have been the most suitable way for the ministers to express certain of their deeply felt understandings. However, it was noticeable that other ministers, such as the Roman Catholics and Anglicans, did not require such biblical language to explain their views. Most of these had far less trouble translating religious concepts into more secular language for the purposes of the interview.

2.3.4 Resistance to probing questions about maturation

Because of the factors described above it was necessary to use many additional questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of both the ministers' visions of maturation and the key terms such as belief and trust which they used to explain it. However, these additional questions did not always succeed in eliciting further data. Whilst some of the respondents were content to continue exploring and clarifying their views until asked another question, others were not. There was often a level of reflection beyond which the respondents did not wish to go. The point at which this occurred varied from individual to individual, but once this point was reached one of two outcomes would generally occur.

Firstly, the ministers were occasionally forced to admit that they were not sure why they held certain views. The best example of this situation was found in the interview with Bill (Al). In this particular instance the minister's acknowledgement that he did not know the reason for some his opinions was accompanied by an obvious feeling of discomfort.

Secondly, and more frequently, the ministers, either consciously or subconsciously, resisted a deeper analysis of their opinions. They sometimes did this by simply repeating their previous answers when asked to further clarify these responses. Occasionally the ministers started asking the interviewer questions and sought to move the discussion on to a different subject. It is possible that the ministers found the interviewer's questions too intrusive. However, the ministers did not seem offended, and remained happy to continue the discussion, albeit on a new topic. Neither did they appear to notice that they were not actually clarifying the topic under scrutiny.

At this point in the discussion it is worth noting that, with the possible exceptions of Richard (A1), the ministers all appeared content with their understandings of maturation. They did not give any indication that the interviews had revealed any significant reasons why they might need to re-evaluate their opinions, or to engage more critically with the topics discussed.
Because of the factors described in Sections 2.1–2.3.4 it is clear that, whether due to the subject matter, the ministers' faith stage, their lack of previous exploration of the topic or the lack of time in the interviews, problems arose with regard to gaining meaningful data during the interviews.

3 The Interview Data - General Areas of Agreement About Maturity

In spite of the problems mentioned above enough data were collected to reveal the basis of the ministers' understandings of maturation. The ministers' descriptions of maturity showed that there were several points on which they all agreed:

Firstly, the ministers clearly stated that maturation was desirable. It was described as a form of development that was pleasing to God. There was evidence that the ministers shared Fowler’s view that He had designed humanity in such a way that individuals could, if they chose, move towards (or be led) to higher levels of maturity. However, the ministers had different opinions about how much maturation could occur without having a Christian faith (Section 5.2.2) and whether everyone could reach the same levels of maturation (Section 5.1).

Secondly, there was agreement amongst the ministers that maturation is not guaranteed. They believed it was possible that some individuals could remain relatively immature for the whole of their lives, whilst others could exhibit high levels of maturity early on in their early adulthood. Because of this the ministers believed that their congregations contained individuals from a wide spectrum of ages who could be designated as being relatively mature.

Lastly, the ministers believed that it was impossible to reach the highest levels of maturity without having a religious – or in most interviews, a Christian - faith. It was assumed that such a faith allowed a true understanding of the role of humanity in creation and underpinned a mature way of thinking (See Section 4.3.3). The ministers' arguments for this involved several different descriptions of how humans come to form a fundamental theology (described in Chapter 5, Section 5.1) and commit themselves to it. This proved to be an important topic for study as it revealed some of the most important value judgements that the respondents made about maturity. The following section explores these further.

4 Faith, Belief and Trust – The key concepts used to describe maturity

The following is a description of the ministers' visions of how humans come to form a fundamental theology and to commit themselves to it. It does this by defining three concepts - faith, belief and trust - and describing the interaction between them.

It is important to note that the following discussion does not necessarily use the terms faith, belief and trust in the same way as they were used in the interviews. Most ministers used these terms in the interviews because they favoured such theological or 'faith' terms. However, this did not mean that they were used in similar ways. The language with which the ministers described maturity was highly individualistic and although denominational influences were also apparent they did not create any conformity of language use. Because of this the following use or these words should not necessarily be considered to reflect the ministers' own usage of them.
4.1 Christian faith

The ministers' definitions of maturity were based around an understanding that maturity ultimately depended on having a religious faith. Some ministers felt that non-Christians could mature but it became clear that they believed that the fullest maturity was ultimately bound up with having a Christian faith. It was understood that the Christian churches were the only true vehicle through which God's message was made known to humanity. Apart from Anthony (RC1), none of the respondents accepted that other religious traditions could allow a believer to fully apprehend the will of God. In consequence, the respondents felt that converting to another world religion could not be considered maturation - and it was made clear that to embrace even some of the tenets of another world religion was to no longer be a Christian. Whilst Christians were described as having a fundamental right to leave the Christian faith it was considered a cause of great sadness when they chose to do so.

Anthony (RC1) was the only minister to begin to accept the validity of other religious traditions. This appeared to be due to his many years of work as a missionary. In his interview he described documents issued after the Vatican II council as a great move forward for the church because they emphasised the need to respect other religious traditions. He highly valued any Church teachings that he interpreted as accepting the possibility of salvation for non-Christian believers. Even so, he also felt that Christianity was the most suitable religion for humanity. He described how followers of other faiths were granted entrance to heaven through the generosity of a Christian God.

Because the respondents viewed the Christian tradition as the main vehicle through which God was made known to humanity they preferred to discuss maturation in terms of the development of a Christian faith. Faith was thought to be the essential starting point for Christian development. The interviews showed that the ministers usually considered faith to be composed of two elements - belief and trust.

4.2 Belief and Trust

The fact that the ministers described belief and trust as components of Christian faith is not surprising. These concepts have been discussed for many years and have been the focus of many discourses on the nature of Christian faith. However, it was noticeable that, apart from Peter (URC1), none of the ministers gave any indication that their views had been shaped by the writings of any particular authors. Instead, the impression was given that these concepts were often largely personal interpretations.

The importance of belief in defining maturity was stressed in all the interviews. Most of the ministers described belief as the knowledge of God's nature - and any related axioms - which made someone a Christian. It described what a Christian believed to be true and incontrovertible. It therefore consisted of a set of facts that functioned as a Christian fundamental theology (Chapter 5).

Trust was generally seen as the conviction that a Christian's belief was correct. Paul (RC1) explained that parishioners "need a kind of trust in what they believe in". Bill (A1) described trust as the required "leap in the dark". Richard (A1) saw this leap as being necessary because Christian faith is about "belief in things unseen". He argued that only by trusting in God can an individual know Him and be helped to mature.
Eric (IE1) gave a slightly different definition:

"My definition of faith would be a conscious trust in the work, power and person of God. In other words it is not merely a belief in God, because a lot of people have a belief in God in terms of his existence, but an actual conscious trust in who God is and specifically, with regards to Christianity, what we believe he did for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus". Here, the respondent pointed out that people can profess a Christian belief without acting on it in any way. In such cases he believed that their actions in the world would be little different to those of non-believers. He therefore saw trust as the way in which someone begins to exhibit a Christian lifestyle. The concept of trust was emphasised most strongly in the interviews with the evangelical ministers.

4.3 The role of cognitive ability in maturation

The ministers’ understanding of belief in terms of a basic knowledge that had to be ‘trusted’ led to questions about the role of reasoning in maturation. The interviews provided a lot of information about this because the respondents were themselves motivated to discuss the subject. Most of them mentioned some form of intellectual ability in order to try and define maturity. However, this was often to indicate how little relevance it had. Those who did view some aspect of it as part of maturation were careful to differentiate between three different forms of cognition. The following discussion explores these forms and, where applicable, their relationship to Christian faith, belief and trust.

4.3.1 Cognitive ability as the storage of knowledge

The interviews showed that the respondents could be seen to describe three different aspects of cognitive ability. Two of these were forms of reasoning and the other was the collection and storage of knowledge. The respondents made it clear that they did not consider this last form of cognitive ability to be important in terms of maturation. Whilst the evangelical ministers often thought it useful for their parishioners to have a broad knowledge of scripture, others such as the Roman Catholic ministers did not. None of them believed it was relevant for parishioners to have a detailed or wide-ranging knowledge of any aspects of Church doctrine, theology, church history or other similar subject. Such knowledge was thought to only be useful for the ministers themselves due to their role as leaders.

However, the interviews revealed that the ministers did not reject all knowledge per se. Their comments made it clear that maturation did depend on a retaining a small amount of knowledge. This was the fundamental theology upon which their Christian faith depended. They appeared to view such a theology as a relatively simple collection of facts that anyone could understand and they often described the important elements of the Christian fundamental theology in a couple of sentences. Due to the relative simplicity of the fundamental theology the possession of a large knowledge of theology, or any other subject, was considered irrelevant in terms of defining maturation. They did not believe that such additional knowledge would affect the basic Christian faith that was important for reaching high levels of maturity.
4.3.2 Cognitive ability as intellectualism

Of the two forms of reasoning that the ministers recognised, they considered only one to be of relevance to the process of maturation. They rejected the other one, describing it as a reason for the 'immaturity' of modern society. It was thought to involve only empirical and logical analyses, an approach they believed to enshrine the values of an atheistic worldview. The ministers often described this as 'intellectual' thinking and so, for the purposes of this debate, it will be named intellectualism. This form of cognition was portrayed as the only form of reasoning available to non-religious individuals.

The interview with Julian (A1) revealed his reasons for rejecting intellectualism as a legitimate tool to explore God or the nature of Christian faith. When asked if psychological theories might be important in understanding religious faith he replied:

"I wouldn't want to jettison them, I'd want to take them on board but I'd want to be cautious as I want to be cautious of any scientific enquiry and to realise that any branch of science is necessarily... what's the word I want?... temporary in a sense, as things move on. I mean the classical example is, several hundred years ago, people believed passionately - knew - that the world was flat and it has since been proved not to be. And any branch of science suffers from that contingency - I suppose the word is temporary, isn't it? There is always a chance it will be proved wrong".

Interviewer: "So the belief standpoint would be the central place where you look at psychology from, rather than the other way around?"

Julian: "Yes, that's right, because my belief is that God is the same. God is reliable, is the only one who is reliable in all this... and, you know, I think that is an important thing to say from my point of view, because if you don't say that you're jettisoning part of what belief and trust is about".

The ministers appeared Kantian in their understanding of the role of intellectualism in maturation. They argued that science and logic were powerless to bring about a personal relationship with God. Intellectualism was therefore considered irrelevant to maturation because it was unable to create or explicate faith. It was thought to deny the trust that was essential for Christian faith. It was perceived as a form of critical reflection that questioned all assumptions and value judgements made, whether religious or not. It was therefore not thought to apprehend the need for Christian faith.

4.3.3 Cognitive ability as wisdom

It is clear from the previous quote that Julian believed intellectualism to misapprehend the nature of reality. This was also the view of the other respondents. They described another form of reasoning that avoided this criticism. This form of reflection was not described as using logic or being logical, but it was thought to be coherent and internally consistent. The evangelical minister Eric (IE1) called it wisdom or "righteousness of knowledge". When asked to describe wisdom he replied:
"The Bible makes a distinction between merely being intelligent and being wise. There are very many people who are intelligent who I would say are very unwise in what they believe and in the way they live. And, inherently, wisdom is linked with faith in God and seeing God at work in the world... Not merely being intelligent in being informed about things but discerning and understanding what's happening in either an individual's life or in the world or whatever".

Interviewer: "In the context of God working in the world?"

Eric: "Yes, yes. That is a specifically Christian interpretation. I'm not thinking of the dictionary description of...(pauses). It's a specifically Christian way of thinking. In one of the letters in the Bible - First Corinthians - the apostle Paul makes this distinction between the intellectuals of the pagan culture, the philosophers - which he calls foolishness - and then what he calls the wisdom of God which is the way in which God was working which a lot of people had missed despite the great, undoubtedly the great, prowess of the philosophers".

This quote demonstrates the widely held view that the problems of intellectualism are overcome by basing reasoning on a Christian worldview. Like many of the Christian authors mentioned in Chapter 6, the ministers assumed that only when Christian faith has lain the correct foundations for reasoning can there be scope for a truly mature understanding of reality. This led Peter (URC1) to comment: "I think I believe in Augustine when he says that reason begins where faith ends, whereas most people put it the other way, where, you know, faith begins where reason ends. I mean, I think that's rubbish... you make your act of faith and that is what illuminates your reasoning. You don't come to faith logically, you develop from faith to the rational view". Such an attitude reveals the way that wisdom can, like intellectualism, lead to a critical reflection on assumptions made about many aspects of our interpretation of reality. However, it is not seen as being able to question the fundamental theology that informs it.

4.3.4 The role of intuition and divine guidance in Christian faith

The ministers also appeared to differentiate between intellectualism and wisdom with regard to the role of intuition. Intellectualism was perceived to be a form of cognition that involved the use of logic alone. It was assumed to be based on the need to require objective evidence for every decision made. However, as was noted above, the ministers did not describe wisdom as necessarily using logic or being logical and yet they still believed it to be able to create a coherent and internally consistent understanding of the world. This was possible because the ministers sometimes indicated that wisdom is intuitively guided by a Christian's faith. The result of this was that wisdom was often described as an unconscious form of reasoning. It was thought to allow a Christian to intuitively understand the nature of many, if not all, situations.

The intuitive nature of the reasoning involved in wisdom was indicated in two ways. Firstly, the interviewed ministers often described the reasoning involved in wisdom as being based on 'feelings'. They indicated that a Christian could not necessarily be expected to explain why he or she has a particular view or conviction. It was
assumed that those using intellectualism would seek to defend their reasoning by setting out a logical progression of thought. However, they believed that a Christian using wisdom was not necessarily seen to need to do this. Instead, the ministers indicated Christians could quite legitimately be expected to feel when something was correct. They believed that this felt response would still lead to a coherent and internally consistent view of the world – even if the Christian themselves might not be able to understand the ‘logic’ of it. This provided yet another reason why the ministers may not have spent much time considering the subject of maturation (Section 2.3).

Secondly, wisdom could also be described as being actively influenced by God. He was seen as providing a form of guidance that acted ‘behind the scenes’. This was usually described in terms of the action of the Holy Spirit, and was one of few times when ministers discussed this aspect of the trinity. The result of this view was that maturation was sometimes described as involving a degree of passivity, whereby Christians opened themselves up to God and relied, tacitly, on Him to guide their thoughts. This divine guidance of thought appeared to be another reason why they did not feel it necessary for Christians to be concerned if they could not consciously explain the reason for their religious faith or for their commitment to some views and not others.

It is important to note that ministers did not necessarily assume that wisdom could furnish all the answers to questions asked by a Christian. Later discussion will indicate that some ministers thought the issues about Church organisation were open to interpretation and not divinely ordained. In such cases, critical reflection was assumed to be required as intuitive guidance would not necessarily be present.

It proved difficult to elicit meaningful data on these views and the researcher was therefore unable to explore the topic further.

4.4 Interpreting the ministers’ descriptions of belief, trust, and wisdom in terms of historical descriptions of Christian faith

The above definitions of belief, trust and wisdom can prove to be problematic. For instance, given the ministers’ descriptions of these concepts it is not always possible to see how a Christian faith comes about. According to the ministers, non-religious individuals are dependent upon using logic yet this form of reasoning was not considered to be able to bring about faith. This problem was not mentioned by the respondents, but by studying historical descriptions of Christian faith it is possible to suggest a solution to this situation.

Some of the respondents described Christian faith as being a gift from God. This was not often mentioned in the interviews but it is an argument that is commonly found in theological discourses on the nature of Christian faith. The origins of this idea have been traced back to the works of St. Augustine (354-430). His opinions have proved to be highly influential in most of the subsequent discourses on faith. It would not, therefore, appear unusual for elements of an Augustinian view to underlie the interviewed minister’s responses.

Studying Augustine’s arguments about the topic of faith solves the problem of understanding how people can become Christians without having the ability to reason in a form that will reveal the truth of Christians faith claims. This is because
he understood Christian faith to be based upon an *a priori* 'grace' or innate disposition towards religious faith within the soul of each individual. This view is called 'illuminist' because this grace is seen as a source of illumination for human reasoning. Groome argues that illumination does not 'violate' the freedom of the individual but "disposes the will to assent to the truth of what is presented to the intellect" (1980, p.58). In light of this argument it may be the case that the interviewed ministers viewed non-religious individuals as those who are led to ignore the urgings of grace and instead rely on intellectualism — a 'secular' form of logic.

In fact, Augustine's theory upholds the ministers' claims that intellectualism and wisdom are separate and incompatible. As Peter (URC1) indicated above, Augustine's work is known for his assertion that one does not seek to understand in order to believe, but to believe in order to understand (Portalie, 1975). This is taken to mean that reasoning alone cannot bring about a true understanding of reality. However, once the grace imparted to each individual has been allowed to illuminate the way for a Christian to gain faith, that individual is assumed to have a 'true' and accurate form of reasoning.

Augustine's illuminist theory also provides a possible reason for the respondents' descriptions of trust. It is possible to see trust as that grace which is imparted to someone and which disposes him or her to move towards a religious faith.

However, whilst the use of Augustine's theory may illuminate the ministers' understandings of concepts such as trust and belief it does not mean that such understandings are necessarily held by the interviewed ministers. With the exceptions of Peter (URC1), none of the respondents mentioned reading texts such as these at any point in their careers. Neither did they provide such a comprehensive description of the relationship between belief, trust and wisdom.

At the same time, the data from the interviews revealed that the ministers often preferred not describe the origins of faith in terms of God imparting an inclination for the Christian to search for God. Instead, whilst describing conversion in terms of revealed truth (e.g. Paul, RC1), they tended to infer that it was an actual meeting with God which created faith. Rather than God promoting an urge to seek Him, the respondents instead described God as revealing himself to people more directly. The impression was given that, just as one cannot overlook someone who has made us aware of them on the street, we cannot ignore God when he chooses to communicate with us. Once someone is aware of God it was considered obvious he or she must believe that He exists and therefore will have gained a Christian faith. These revelatory experiences were not depicted in terms of experiencing apparitions of holy beings but instead in internal experiences which, never-the-less, left no doubt about the existence of God.

Unfortunately, this view led to a question about the role of trust in the Christian faith. If someone has undergone such a revelatory experience it is unclear why they should have to 'trust' in God's existence. None of the ministers mentioned a meeting with God through prayer or revelation to be ineffable or mystical. However, it would appear that such a meeting does lack the obvious characteristic of other meetings — the physical presence of the other person. For this reason it is possible that some of the ministers, when discussing trust as a required commitment to an unseen God,
meant that they had to trust in a relationship that was empirically impossible to demonstrate. Thus a line may have been drawn between conviction due to a divinely created disposition to accept, and knowing in a form that is demonstrable to others who may not be religious.

4.5 General comments about the ministers’ descriptions of belief, trust and wisdom

The results of analysing the ministers’ constructs of belief, trust and wisdom are revealing but also inconclusive. Maturation is shown to involve a belief and a trust, and the imparting of an intuitive form of reasoning that is based upon these. Unfortunately, the problems involved in interpreting the ministers’ views on these subjects make a full understanding of these difficult. Whether these concepts went beyond the respondents’ ability to describe them, or whether they could not describe them due to a lack of critical reflection of the subject, the problems in interpreting descriptions of the nature of Christian faith were not generally noted by the ministers themselves. They did not draw attention to them. Instead, they appeared content with their understandings.

In retrospect, the problems involved in interpreting the ministers’ views on this subject were not fully anticipated. A fuller exploration of definitions of Christian faith during the initial planning and literature review could therefore have been beneficial. Even so, a full analysis of the ministers’ views of Christian faith could quite easily become a study of its own. Given the necessity of studying the ministers’ views of maturation and education the interviews in this research could not study the subject in too much detail.

5 Constructs of Maturity and the Differences of Opinion

Most of the data gained about the ministers’ visions of maturation indicated that some significant differences of opinion could exist. The following discussion explores these and sets out a vocabulary with which to understand them.

5.1 The two most significantly contrasting views between respondents

The two most contrasting understandings of maturity were to be held by two Roman Catholic and two Independent Evangelical ministers. The differences of opinion between them are summarised in Figure 5 under the headings Paradigm 1 and Paradigm 2. Paradigm 1 describes the views of the Roman Catholic ministers Anthony (RC1) and Allen (RC1). Paradigm 2 describes the views of the Independent Evangelical ministers Tim (IE1) and Eric (IE1).

It is possible that these ‘paradigms’ may represent denominational characteristics with regard to constructs of maturity. However, this research cannot prove whether this is true or not. This is for two reasons. Firstly, although both phases of the research revealed similarities between the responses of these respondents and other Roman Catholic and Independent Evangelical ministers, enough variations of opinion existed to make it impossible to clearly delineate between ministers’ responses in terms of denomination. Secondly, the sample composition meant that there were too few ministers from these denominations (6 Roman Catholics and 4 Independent Evangelicals) for denominational differences to be proved. Because of
these factors the following descriptions of the respondents' views are intended to be understood as attributes of any particular denomination. A more detailed analysis of the relationship of denomination with the constructs of maturity would be a useful follow up to the research reported in this thesis.

**Figure 5:**

**Two Contrasting Views About Maturity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Paradigm 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>Paradigm 2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>Maturation occurs over a lifetime. Periods of maturation occur regularly during the life cycle due to significant life experiences such as being confirmed, getting married, raising children, coping with bereavement etc. Most of these experiences are celebrated in the Church due to its sacramental theology and are all considered important rites of passage.</td>
<td>Conversion is the key point of maturation in a person's life. It is the rite of passage. All other changes are secondary and of far less importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii)</td>
<td>Many aspects of maturity are not dependent on Christian belief. Maturity is connected with different life experiences and situations (e.g. marriage or bereavement). These offer chances for maturation in their own right. Periods of non-attendance at church can even be part of maturation if it involves the exploration of independence.</td>
<td>Maturity is defined as faith in God. Only conversion to Christianity allows full maturity. Faith is a gift from God so each person reaches maturity when they freely choose to be admitted to full membership of the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii)</td>
<td>Self-reliance is an important part of maturity. The motivation of the laity to take a greater responsibility in running parish groups creates this and counters an over-reliance on the minister.</td>
<td>Maturity is reliance on God. Self-reliance is only of partial use. Reliance on the minister is encouraged as he or she is considered especially fit to preach and teach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv)</td>
<td>Intellectual development is useful to maturation to clarify church teaching.</td>
<td>Intellectual development is of minimal use in maturation. God is the ultimate guide so intellectual understanding is not required. One must simply trust in the Church teaching or be tacitly guided by God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v)</td>
<td>Doubt about many things such as church doctrine accepted as natural and useful to maturation</td>
<td>Doubt about subjects such as church doctrine not easily accepted as an aspect of maturity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 A more detailed study of the differences of opinion in the descriptions of maturation

The differences of opinions depicted in figure 2 are not the only ones revealed in the interviews. Others also existed. Overall, the most common differences of opinion were about:

- the periods in the lifecycle when maturation occurs.
- the degree to which Christian faith is involved in maturation.
- the degree to which critical reflection is necessary to maturation.
- the degree to which action can be deemed an indicator of maturity.
- the degree to which obedience to the local parish or denomination is required in maturity and the role of doubt in this.
- the degree to which attendance in church indicates maturity.
- the degree to which discomfort plays a part in maturation.

In the following discussion each of these is described as an element of the ministers’ constructs of maturity. The conflicting views about each subject are referred to as poles. Where appropriate these poles have been given titles to facilitate later discussion.

5.2.1 The periods in life when maturation occurs - Continualism versus Conversionism

This particular tension was depicted in figure 5. Paradigm 1 saw maturity as something people gained gradually as they passed through life and encountered important life events or rites of passage. In contrast, Paradigm 2 considered maturation to begin when an individual chose to become a full member of the Christian church. In this case it was thought that there was negligible maturity before this event, whilst afterwards the essential maturity required for ‘salvation’ was present. These views of maturity are called continualist and conversionist respectively.

The continualist view was more commonly encountered of these views. It was also more complex. This was due to the need to identify the periods of maturation and the development associated with them. The following sections explore these factors. They discuss:

- the stages of maturation that were identified by the ministers.
- the possibility that people have different potentials to reach certain levels of maturity.
- The way in which age is linked to maturation.

5.2.1.1 The ability to mature: is it different for different people?

The ministers generally viewed maturity as a state that humans could never fully reach. The reason for this was not generally made clear but three ministers did describe Jesus as being fully mature. They therefore appeared to consider it impossible for anyone to reach such a state because that would effectively make someone divine too. However, the ministers did believe that a high level of maturity could be reached.

Several of the respondents with continualist views implied that not everyone would be able to reach such a high level. They argued that there were factors that limited some people’s potential. These limitations could be due to both internal and external
factors. Richard (A1) believed that different people had different innate capacities to use or develop their minds. They therefore had different abilities to develop in Christian faith. Other ministers saw time constraints as the main inhibiting factor on maturation. In their opinion different occupations allowed different amounts of time for personal development and it was presumed that the busier individuals were the less chance they had to mature.

Some ministers, such as Richard (A1) and Julian (A1) argued that 'breadwinners' and those rearing children may have such different roles that the actual definition of maturity for each would be different. They suggested that the actions depicting maturity for each person would be different even if their Christian faith was essentially the same. The respondents did not necessarily consider it easier or harder for members of either group to undergo maturation. The perceived differences in maturity due to occupation and household role were not elaborated on enough for further analysis.

Opinions such as these appeared most strongly in the interviews with Anglican ministers. This may have been due to the Anglican church supporting both a 'high' and 'low' church. Ministers such as Julian (A1) felt that these different approaches catered for two separate forms of maturity (Protestant and Catholic forms). Neither was to be considered superior to the other. Similar views were also found in the United Reformed Church. This denomination also had to cater for a broad set of worship styles. This was due to its creation through an amalgamation of two different congregations. These findings suggest that the history of a denomination, or the way in which it is organised, may affect its ministers' receptivity to the idea of 'alternative' maturities within a Christian setting.

5.2.1.2 Maturity, age and life experiences

When referring to children and adolescents those with continualist views closely linked maturity to age. Both groups were considered to dwell in periods when physical growth and 'hormonal changes' had a significant affect on maturation. When adulthood was reached the continualists believed that certain life events tended to occur in a predictable order but they did not link them very strongly with particular age brackets.

5.2.1.3 Specific periods of life and their impact on maturation

The continualists had a variety of opinions about the number of life events that were important to maturation. Bill (A1) proved to have the simplest scheme. He saw maturation as a three-stage process. Each stage was described as having a distinct character. These periods were:

a) Adolescence and young adulthood. This period was thought to be characterised by rebellion and a refusal to accept teachings without questioning them first.

b) Middle age. This period was thought to be characterised by a concern for life and a deep love of God that denoted happiness and balance.

c) Old age. This period was described as a time of more prayerful existence.

Bill also described life as a progression from a reliance on rules to a situation where the rules were far less important and "God's nearness becomes more exciting and compelling".
Paul (RC1), Anthony (RC1), Allen (RC1) and Dominic (M1) offered slightly more detailed visions of maturation. They described a number of life events that could influence a parishioner’s maturity. Like Bill, they described the first major change as the point when a childhood willingness to attend church changed to a withdrawal from formal religious celebrations during adolescence. Such a drop in church attendance was accepted as entirely natural. These ministers did not worry about this because they expected many of them to return later in life when they wished to get married or to have their children baptised. This view was identical to that of Strunk (1965).

These ministers gave various reasons why adolescents stopped attending a church. Julian (A1) explained that with the onset of puberty came a dissatisfaction with the church. He suggested that in childhood the trust aspect of faith was more important than belief. He reasoned that this was because a child’s cognitive abilities were not mature enough to deal with the questioning that belief entails. Upon reaching adolescence he felt that the belief aspect became more important. The questioning of what was previously trusted unquestioningly then came to be of prime importance due to the new-found capability of the mind to ask such questions. Julian described this emphasis as creating a tendency to overlook the emotional component of faith.

Dominic (M1) and Anthony (RC1) did not support Julian’s belief that adolescence led to a significant increase in questioning. Instead they described what happens during adolescence in similar terms to Bill (A1). They believed it was characterised by a growing period of rebellion and the need to stress individuality. Both of them saw this as resulting in a drop in church attendance. Anthony felt that church attendance dropped off sharply around the age of 14 or 15. Dominic saw attendance declining more gradually as the adolescents increasingly felt compelled to “hang loose”.

The act of leaving home to go to university - the most common course of action for the young of the parishes visited – was considered to be a very important period of development. The experience was thought to be a key opportunity to learn independence. However, the ministers felt that it was also very likely that church attendance would cease unless they became involved with a university chaplaincy. These organisation were considered vital for keeping the young adults in touch with religion whilst they were away from home.

After this, the next significant point in the religious journey was thought to be when a couple wanted a wedding service. This was seen as the first time many individuals would return to a church since university. Anthony (RC1), Allen (RC1) and Dominic (M1) also reported that the need to get a child baptised often brought people back to regular church attendance. Dominic believed that “90%” of people were open to the "spiritual side of things" at the birth of their first child. Anthony described the period after the baptism as one of changing values for the parents. In his opinion, having to look after a child initiated a period of significant development in Christians. Paul (RC1) thought parents were forced to develop their faith by being asked questions about it by their children. He believed that parents were often shocked to find that they were not always able to answer their offspring’s questions to their own satisfaction, especially with regard to religious matters. The interviews revealed that parents who wished to have their children baptised in the Catholic parishes were obliged to attend courses. According to Anthony (RC1) the parents often attended more regularly after this. The emphasis placed on marriage and the raising of children by the continualists meant that they were clearly considered an important factor in the maturation of parishioners.
5.2.1.4 Roman Catholic sacraments and perceptions of development

The continualist viewpoint was most commonly found in the interviews with the Roman Catholic ministers. It is possible that the sacramental theology of the Roman Catholic Church may have influenced them towards such an understanding. This Church appears to celebrate more rites of passage than many of the other denominations. Roman Catholics will usually undergo infant baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage, the baptism of their own children and so on. Therefore there are plenty of formal celebrations of rites of passage that the Catholic ministers are involved in and must prepare others for. This would perhaps lead them to consider the importance of such events more than ministers in other denominations. However, further research is needed to confirm whether any definite link is present or not.

5.2.1.5 Bereavement and illness as a factor in maturation

Ian (M1), Dominic (M1), Roy (URC1) and Allen (RC1) described bereavement as a time when people change dramatically. The last of these ministers also saw serious illness as having a similar effect. Both of these events were acknowledged as being unpredictable and therefore they could not be expected to happen at set points in the human lifecycle. However, the challenge of coping with the loss of someone was perceived to be one of the most important in a person's journey through life. It was also thought to be one of the most difficult to contend with.

This was an interesting area of study because of the absence of discussion about it in the works of the theorists mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. It is possible that they have overlooked the importance of these events. Because of this more study of the effects of bereavement and illness could provide a fuller understanding of influences on human maturation.

5.2.1.6 Weaknesses in the continualists' construct

The continualists were confident that both the different periods of growth, such as adolescence, and life events, such as marriage, stimulated development in parishioners. However, they often had trouble describing what the development was that accompanied these situations. It was also noticeable that they found it easier to describe what happened to children and adolescents than describing what happened to adults. In the case of the adults there was often little indication of what development occurred beyond a discussion of their receptivity to the Christian faith and the likelihood of once again attending Church.

5.2.2 The role of Christian faith in maturity - Inclusivity versus Exclusivity

The ministers had differing opinions about the role of Christian faith in maturity. Some believed that Christian faith was the only factor of importance when describing maturity. This view was termed exclusivist because maturity was seen to be exclusive to Christians. Such a view meant that humanity was split into two groups; mature Christians and immature 'others'. The exclusivist view was strongest in the responses of the Evangelical ministers.
Other ministers were willing to accept that non-Christians might be able to reach similar degrees of maturity to some Christians. This view was termed inclusivist. The inclusivist viewpoint was more strongly represented in the responses of the Roman Catholic ministers.

In studying the interview data the researcher designated a minister as showing inclusivist views for two possible reasons. The first reason was that the respondent clearly stated that some aspects of maturation were found in non-Christians. Some of the ministers spoke of these as elements of 'secular' maturation. Many examples of these were found in the interviews. Secular maturity was characterised as “accepting oneself” (George, A2) and “coping with oneself” (Michael and Robert, RC2). This was synonymous with “being stable” (Margaret, M2), not panicking and having a “balanced sense of self” (Andrew, A2).

In spite of the value of these, abilities a lack of Christian faith was seen to inhibit individuals from reaching the highest levels of maturity. Some ministers also indicated that Christian faith guaranteed a surer route for human development.

The second reason respondents were described as having an inclusivist view was they because they stressed that God worked through, and on, everyone. In several interviews the ministers indicated that they believed God stimulated learning and development in everyone. Because of this, a lack of Christian faith would not necessarily stop maturation, though it may hamper it. As with the other ministers, it was believed that the highest levels of maturation were still only possible for Christians. This was because only they could make themselves fully open to God’s power, guidance and teaching.

The inclusivist view was the opposite of the exclusivists’ who were not convinced that any development occurring in non-Christians could be termed maturation. Andrew (A2) commented that “we cannot find ourselves except in God”. Michael (RC2) stated “you can’t begin to live, let alone mature, unless you become a Christian. Without that there is nothing”.

The split between the continualist and the conversionist views of maturity tended to be echoed by the split between the inclusivist and exclusivist beliefs respectively. If Christian belief was thought to be essential for any level of maturity then baptism or the first formal profession of faith also tended to be seen as the key point of maturation. However, exceptions to this were present in the interviews. One minister revealed both continualist and exclusivist views. In his opinion Christian faith was the key to maturity but it was considered to be gained gradually. The initial acceptance of the truth of the Christian faith was seen to be only the beginning of maturation. The understanding of this faith was assumed to develop significantly over time.

### 5.2.3 The role of church attendance in defining maturity

The interviews revealed that the respondents had a difference of opinion about whether attendance at church services constituted an element of maturity or not. Some ministers believed that regular attendance at a Sunday service must indicate a degree of maturity. They argued that only relatively mature individuals would understand the benefit of going to church. Ian (M1) stated that “there is no kudos in coming to church... there are no perks coming here”.

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The contrasting view was that people often came to church for reasons that had little to do with being mature. Ministers with this view identified several reasons why people could attend services but which would reveal them to be immature. Parishioners were sometimes described as attending out of habit, in order to gain a social life, or to increase their status. As a consequence of this, these ministers felt it was impossible to ascribe a degree of maturity to an individual solely based on their attendance rate.

The opinions that ministers held about church attendance in relation to maturity appeared to be connected to whether their views were inclusivist or exclusivist. Ministers with inclusivist views tended to consider church attendance irrelevant as a criterion for judging maturity. Those with exclusivist views were attracted to the idea that attending a church as a baptised member more or less guaranteed that the person was mature and had a healthy Christian faith. This is not surprising. If the exclusivist view is correct, anyone who is a practising Christian will be considered mature, therefore the only people attending a service who may not be considered mature would be those converting to the faith. It seems logical that this latter group would be a relatively small number of the congregation.

5.2.4 The role of questioning church authority in maturity – Authority-Questioning versus Trusting-Obedience

Many of the ministers explained their understanding of maturity in terms of how their parishioners related to authority in the church. Two opposing opinions were noticeable in the interviews. These revolved around different attitudes to the value of questioning a church leader's opinion.

One group of respondents thought that maturity involved the ability to question what a denomination's leaders taught. It was argued that individuals must primarily be obedient and answerable to their consciences rather than the church leaders. This was termed an authority-questioning view.

Such a view was opposed by those ministers who felt that the first duty of the Christian was to obey the church leaders. Ministers with this view thought that parishioners should trust them to be suitable guides. The trusting-obedience of the churchgoers was described as an essential part of their maturity. To not accept the validity of the traditional church doctrine was seen as a significant act of doubt and therefore, of immaturity.

For those ministers with an authority-questioning view, doubt could be seen as a positive trait. It was thought of as a useful form of scepticism that could lead to a healthy degree of independence and autonomy of thought. However, they only accepted doubt conditionally. It became clear that, whilst not explicitly setting out a distinction, they differentiated between doubt in God and doubt in things such as the organisation of the Church or particular interpretations of the Bible. Doubt was not considered useful if it called into question a Christian's belief in God. That was one reason why the ministers did not value the study of religious belief from a secular standpoint. Such an approach was seen as a threat to Christian faith. It was an opportunity for loss of faith through damaging forms of questioning. In this their arguments closely resembled many Christian educationalists (See Chapter 6).
Unsurprisingly, when ministers revealed themselves to view maturation in terms of trusting-obedience they also tended to portray themselves as people to be trusted. This tendency was more noticeable within the interviews with Evangelical ministers and rarely present with the Roman Catholic or Anglican ministers. In the next chapter this will be seen to explain one reason why they often viewed themselves as being of more importance to the educational programmes set up in the parishes.

5.2.5 The role of critical reflection in maturity - Reflection-Valuing versus Reflection-Ambivalence

Many ministers were ambivalent about the value of critical reflection in maturation. Respondents with such a reflection-ambivalent view indicated that this ability was, at best, only interesting. The clearest example of this attitude was Bill (A1). He felt that faith was “simple” and anyone could “pick it up”. He even described his own faith in the church as “childish”. He saw no need for Christians to be deeply analytical in their spiritual life. Bill explained how he “caught” his faith off others rather than undergoing a distinct conversion or ever analysing how he came to believe.

A number of ministers were designated as being ambivalent about the importance of critical reflection because they appeared to believe that the presence of Christian faith meant an individual would be passively guided towards the level of understanding that they required. David (IE2) believed that the only mental ability that was required for this process to occur was a “good knowledge of God’s word and scripture”. Critical reflection was not considered necessary because he believed scripture to “give a balanced view”. Previous discussion has already mentioned the way in which some ministers felt that wisdom could be a passive form of reasoning, one that relied on intuition or the active influence of the Holy Spirit.

Several of the respondents whose views leaned towards this pole saw mental ability as useful only in understanding more abstract concepts of doctrine such as the Trinity (Eric, IE1) or the nature of the resurrection (Tim, IE1). These were areas of debate that were not considered important for normal parishioners to understand. Because of this, the ability to critically reflect was only seen to be important to ministers.

Other ministers held a different view to this. They indicated that critical reflection was an important ability to development. They believed it was valuable because it allowed people to identify inconsistencies in their understanding Christian faith. At the same time, those with this reflection-valuing view indicated that critical analysis was useful in clarifying church teachings that were not self evident from Christian faith or personal experience of God. These abilities were seen as integral aspects of the process of maturation for most Christians. The respondents assumed that doctrinal issues always came under scrutiny at some point in a parishioner’s life. Alternatively, ministers such as Julian (A1) believed that maturity involved an intellectual assent to one particular creed.

The reflection-valuing and reflection-ambivalent views occurred in a similar pattern to those of authority-questioning and trusting-obedience. This is not surprising because the beliefs that create an authority-questioning view seem to imply that intellectual questioning should be present. In the presence of doubt, questions are raised in an attempt to ascertain the ‘true’ situation. However, the ministers’ responses showed that they did not always follow such an argument. Whilst the respondents who were categorised as intellectualism-valuing also tended to be
authority-questioning, there was no automatic link between the other poles. Peter (URC1) was one example of a minister who described the need for an ability to critically reflect on aspects of the Christian faith and yet also described a need for unquestioning trust in the Church. In this case it was difficult to understand how the minister reconciled these views.

5.2.5.1 Ministers' perceptions of the value placed upon critical reflection by the different denominations

At this point in the discussion it is necessary to discuss the possible influence that the respondents' denominational background may have had on their understanding of the importance of critical reflection upon Christian faith. Earlier the discussion explored Augustine's view of Christian faith. Groome (1980) points out that the Christian church has split into two groups who have traditionally interpreted his work in different ways. He describes one group as stressing belief as the most important aspect of faith whilst the other stresses the importance of trust - though it must be noted that Groome uses the terms in a slightly different way to those described in Part 2 of this chapter. It is clear from many sources (e.g. Groome, Ibid.; Parks, 1992; James, 1985) that Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have usually been seen to be on opposing sides of this debate. This has been perceived as influencing their views about the value of critical reflection upon matters of faith.

With regard to the Catholic church Groome argues that:

"From the Counter Reformation until the present generation, Catholics have generally looked upon faith as a submission of the mind to the teaching of the Church" (1980, p.59).

This is supposed to have created an emphasis on trusting the Church hierarchy to have understood and correctly identified the form of faith required by a Christian. Because of this the Church authority has been perceived as under-emphasising the need of Christians to use reason to assess the legitimacy of the form of faith that is being propagated.

On the other hand, the Protestant tradition is seen to have promoted an approach that emphasises the cognitive aspects of Christian faith. It has therefore been seen to view Christian faith as a "rational conviction" (Ibid., p.59). This view of Protestantism led to one of the criticisms of Fowler's work in Chapter 4. It was noted there that Parks (1992) suggested that it could explain his emphasis on cognitive development in his theory of faith development.

The respondents themselves sometimes voiced similar opinions about the tendencies of these two wings of the Christian Church. Tim (IE1) and Julian (A1) believed that the evangelical church stressed the cognitive side of faith more than the affective. By this they meant faith required an intellectual assent to a Christian creed. Graham (URC2) believed his church had stressed this too much. He argued that there was a need to balance this out by remembering that there was also an emotional aspect of Christian faith. In contrast, a number of evangelical ministers believed that the opposite situation was true within the Roman Catholic and 'high' Anglican Churches. It was thought that these concentrated on the emotional realms of Christian faith by stressing the importance of ritual in worship. Several of the Roman Catholic ministers and one of the Anglicans with High Church leanings agreed that this was indeed the case. These depictions of the different emphasise of the different denominations are reminiscent of the findings of James (1985).
However, the interview data did not provide enough information to decide whether the ministers' attitudes towards reasoning were influenced by any denominational factors. In general the interview data appeared to indicate that the Roman Catholic ministers were actually more concerned with promoting faith in terms of cognitive development than the Protestant ministers. At the same time the Protestant ministers were more likely to hold views that implied the need for trusting obedience and underplayed the role of critical reflection. Whilst they argued that their denominations supported the cognitive analysis of the belief held by its members, their later descriptions of such intellectual analysis revealed little stress on critical reflection. Instead, they usually appeared to be describing the importance of biblical knowledge. It has already been noted that David (IE2) spoke of the need for a "good knowledge of God's word, scripture". In this case critical reflection was unnecessary because scripture was assumed to provide a Christian with a balanced view.

Before returning to discuss the different elements of maturation, it should be noted that many of the ministers who perceived denominational differences with regard to valuing the role of the 'head' and the 'heart' in Christian faith, did so because, like Groome (1980), they were concerned that a correct balance was struck between the two historical approaches.

5.2.6 The effect of pain and discomfort in maturation - Pain-denial versus Pain-acceptance

The ministers had varying views on the value of pain and discomfort in the process of maturation. They viewed physical pain and mental discomfort (stress or unease) as having different effects on it.

5.2.6.1 Physical Pain

When asked if pain or discomfort were involved in the process of maturity the ministers usually assumed that the question referred to physical pain. Most of them believed that such pain undermined maturation making people less capable of mature behaviour. The rest argued that although it was an unusual situation some people could gain strength of character from pain.

5.2.6.2 Mental discomfort

When the ministers were asked about mental discomfort they either accepted it as part of maturation - pain acceptance – or viewed it as a sign of immaturity or 'disorder' - pain denial.

The ministers who accepted discomfort as part of maturation only did so when it afforded parishioners the opportunity to change their way of life. It was assumed that when such discomfort was faced it led to development. As an example David (IE2) described the discomfort that might lead a parishioner to leave a job because it involved unethical behaviour. This individual was thought to encounter tension as his or her Christian ethic conflicted with the required behaviour in the job. However, the ministers assumed that all discomfort disappeared once the 'correct' decision had been made in response to such a dilemma. Several ministers were adamant that if discomfort remained then the affected individual had not fully reconciled the situation. The resultant discomfort was then considered to be guilt or regret which also needed to be overcome.
The other ministers did not accept this distinction. In their opinion someone suffering emotional discomfort was automatically showing immaturity. They believed that fully trusting in God alleviated all major discomfort or worry. Because of this, they often indicated that a person exhibiting discomfort was not a 'whole' person. Such an individual was thought to be in need of healing.

Ian (M1) strongly disagreed with this view. He considered the belief that all distress was alleviated by faith in God as a sign of immaturity. He called such a belief "sunshine faith". He explained that in his experience such a belief would eventually falter and collapse as the reality of life became apparent. He explained that he had witnessed many peoples' conversion to Christian faith. His experience told him that it was common for them to gain a 'sunshine faith' in their initial joy of becoming part of the community. He called this the "honeymoon period". He regarded this as a temporary state of affairs that would give way to a more mature attitude to pain and discomfort. As the pain-denial pole was identified from interviews with established ministers the "honeymoon" explanation could not seen as the reason why they held this view. Because of this a very clear difference of opinion between the ministers was identified.

5.2.6.3 The effect of different life events

The role of discomfort in maturation was sometimes referred to indirectly in the ministers' discussions of other elements of maturity. For instance, the continualists often saw a link between different stages of maturation and new challenges to the individual's way of living. The irrevocable changes connected with marriage, childbirth and bereavement were seen as instances when discomfort and uncertainty were re-introduced into people's lives. People who were trying to cope with such situations were considered to be more open to new ways of understanding. The ministers believed that it was at these points people often returned to church whether temporarily or permanently. They described their churches as offering these individuals the chance to come to terms with their new situations and therefore for the pain to be alleviated.

5.2.6.4 The benefit of being a Christian convert

The shock or discomfort of adapting to new situations was viewed as beneficial in other ways. A number of the ministers felt that 'cradle' Christians were at a disadvantage in terms of maturation when compared to converts. Eric (IE1) and Julian (A1) both strongly believed that 'cradle' Christians were less questioning due to their familiarity with the church in which they worshipped. In contrast they argued that converts, in being thrown into a completely new situation and worldview, looked more closely at their faith.

A similar belief in the impact of a new situation underpinned the commonly held view that Christians could also benefit from moving to another church of the same denomination. Many ministers preferred their parishioners to have moved to a new church at least once. It was thought that the differences encountered would have challenged them into questioning their childhood faith. Whilst, such moves were usually considered to be due to a parishioner moving to a new area, it was also considered relatively common that people could attend another church in the same locality. The respondents were not generally concerned about their parishioners finding that they preferred to worship in another church of the same denomination. They were only apprehensive about such a movement if an individual never stayed
in a church for more than a few years. Margaret (M2) called such individuals "religious gypsies". However, she was the only minister who considered it possible that this was an acceptable state for some Christians.

Some ministers believed that maturation could sometimes be aided by a movement between mainstream Christian denominations. This opinion was held when the denominations were seen to cater for different needs. It was noted previously how several of the respondents characterised the Evangelical churches as catering for those needing a reasoned Christian faith, whilst the Roman Catholic or High Anglican churches were thought to cater for those seeking a more emotional response to God.

5.2.7 Action as an indicator of maturity

The last element of maturation to be described relates to the respondents' different views about the importance of behaviour in defining maturity. All of them agreed that maturation resulted in a Christian taking an active role in society. Andrew (A2) described this involvement as the "fruit" of development. However, there was a difference of opinion as to whether a Christian's actions necessarily denoted maturation.

Most of the respondents believed that certain forms of behaviour indicated that an individual was mature to some degree. However, a number of other ministers indicated that studying any individual's actions in isolation could not allow maturity to be assessed. Instead, they argued that the motivation that inspired these actions had to be studied. In their opinion, an action was only valid if motivated by a mature Christian faith. Allen (RC1) stated that actions that were not motivated from belief could outwardly appear to be Christian, but could actually be a product of the "heresy of Good Works". This meant that actions were either mimicked without thought, or were done in the attempt to gain rewards. In neither case were the actions believed to be of much merit.

This opinion was in sharp contrast to that of Bill (A1). He was the only interviewee to value action above any other aspect of maturity. His understanding of faith was that it was something that was "caught" from other people. His concept of maturation was that it occurred due to mimicking other Christians' behaviour. In behaving as a Christian it was thought one actually became a Christian. Because of this he felt that belief came from learning what actions were 'right' or 'good'.

5.3 Studying ministers with reference to the elements described

This section has set out a variety of opinions that were held by the interviewed ministers. However, it was not always possible to state categorically which of the poles of these elements were held by the ministers. For instance, the respondents did not necessarily reveal how they viewed the topics that each element addresses. The interview questions were not designed to elicit data about all of these – and some of them were identified only after the interviewing had been completed. At the same time, it would have been difficult to carefully analyse the respondents' views on all of these topics. This would have required the addition of many extra questions and, as has been note previously, time was often limited due to the busy lifestyle of the ministers.
Secondly, the discussion in Part 1 of this chapter has already mentioned the difficulties encountered in interpreting some of the respondents' views. Due to the complexity of their answers, or lack of clarity of some ministers' constructs of maturation, it proved hard to understand some of them. There could even be apparent contradictions in a minister's interview responses. This meant that a single minister could appear to have conflicting views with regard to the elements described above.

The richest sources of contradictions were the ministers' comments relating to the continualist/conversionist tension. The problems that this caused meant that some ministers who were designated conversionists may well have disagreed with such a categorisation. These respondents replied to questions with direct statements that people continued to mature after being accepted into a church. Yet, they did not give any evidence to back up this statement. When pressed to do so, their responses tended to avoid describing either the times when development occurred or what happened. Instead they often returned a description of the conversion process. The interview with Eric (IE1) offered a good example of such a situation. He spoke about the existence of very noticeable stages of development throughout the lifecycle. However, when asked to describe these he could only offer a description of the stages of development involved in the act of conversion. He described these as (i) interested unbelief, leading to (ii) a Damascus experience, which in turn leads to (iii) becoming a believer and results in (iv) making a confession of faith.

The opposite situation was also encountered in the interviews. Richard (A1) professed to believe that conversion clearly marked the point at which someone became mature. He stated that this was because belief was the sole criteria for maturity. Because he did not view belief as changing he did not see how maturity could change once this belief had been gained. However, during the interview he also named five different aspects of maturity that developed with age and were not dependent on conversion. This revealed him to have a construct of maturity more consistent with the continualist view.

6 Comparing the structure of the ministers' constructs of maturation with previously discussed theories

The previous discussion has set out the basic understandings of maturation that were held by the ministers. It is clear that there are some similarities between aspects of their constructs and those of the psychological theories set out in previous chapters. However, it is also clear that the respondents' views are less structured and less consistent. The superficial nature of the similarities can be shown in a variety of ways.

Firstly, the ministers' visions of maturation usually fall within the characteristics of psychological definitions of maturation that were summarised in Chapter 3. At that point in the discussion it was argued that a definition of maturation should ideally include references to changes in multiple human characteristics and that these should fall into the categories of biological, cognitive and moral development. It was also suggested that due to the interaction of these characteristics there would be a hierarchy of importance and often an order in which they appeared.

Broadly speaking, this was true of the ministers' descriptions of maturation. They usually described progression as involving changes in, or the adoption of, a number
of human characteristics. These often fell within the three categories mentioned. Biological changes were sometimes mentioned in reference to the development of children or young adolescents. Moral development was mentioned in terms of an increasing commitment towards the surrounding community and a desire to aid its welfare. There was also mention of cognitive development with regard to reasoning— even if the ministers were concerned that reasoning came to be based firmly on wisdom rather than intellectualism.

However, in spite of mentioning many of these factors the ministers were not always able to fully explain how these changes occurred or how they related to each other. There was also little mention how gaining one characteristic of maturity could, or should, impact on gaining others.

It became even more apparent how unstructured the ministers’ visions of maturation were when they were compared to specific psychological theories such as those set out in Chapter 3. An example of this can be given when the ministers’ descriptions are studied to see if they depict development in terms of stages.

Some of the ministers’ descriptions of maturation initially appeared to show similarities to the stage theories of Erikson (1959, 1980, and 1982) and Levinson (1978). This was true of many of the respondents with continualist views. They described a set of periods in a Christian’s life that were thought to be important for stimulating maturation. These echoed some of Erikson’s ‘stages of man’ and Levinson’s ‘seasons’. For instance, they believed that development was stimulated by occurrences such as leaving home, getting married, becoming a parent and raising children and, occasionally, settling into old age. However, whilst these descriptions showed similarities with the ‘stages of man’ the ministers did not describe maturation in terms of ego development. Nor did they describe the changes as being dependent upon successfully coping with a previous situation as Erikson does.

The ministers’ views proved to have a greater similarity with Levinson’s seasons. However, maturation was seen as more than simply being successful in coping with the demand of each ‘season’. The ministers’ responses indicated that they felt that maturation did include an element of learning to cope with one’s immediate situation as a breadwinner or parent but they also defined maturation in terms of more general characteristics. These did not appear to be linked to any particular phase of adult life. For instance, developing wisdom was deemed very important to maturation but the ministers thought it was possible to gain this before having experienced such things as getting married or raising children. In fact, in many of the interviews their descriptions of the actual changes in characteristics that comprised maturation were often based more upon topics such as getting a Christian faith than the effects of experiences such as getting married or bringing up children. Consequently, it was often unclear why the ministers insisted on valuing different periods of life as being important in the process of maturation. It has already been mentioned that the respondents were often better at detailing the periods when change occurred than the actual changes.

It was due to the importance the ministers placed on Christian faith that their views showed similarities with Maslow’s. Whilst the respondents did not describe maturation in terms of self-actualisation, or being dependent on different levels of needs being met, they did infer that maturation was reversible and could fluctuate within an individual’s life. For instance, physical pain was often described as a
factor that could cause a person to become immature. At the same time, all of the ministers believed Christian faith to be an integral aspect of maturation. They made it clear that this was something that could be lost if it was not constantly nurtured. The respondents believed that there was an ever-present danger of some Christians losing their belief in God if the Church did not properly guide them. Such loss of faith was always considered to represent a significant backward movement towards immaturity.

In summary, it is clear that although aspects of the ministers' constructs of maturation shared similarities with some psychological authors' theories, their views did not support any of them to any meaningful extent. In some cases, such as the ministers with exclusivist views, their understanding of maturation was very different from any of the theorists mentioned in previous chapters. At the same time the ministers appeared unable to synthesise a coherent picture of a mechanism of maturation.

7 An Analysis of the Ministers' Maturity

The discussion has already mentioned a possible cause for the confusion found in the ministers' constructs of maturation. It was noted that they had not generally discussed the topic of maturation since their ministerial training. Some had not even explored the topic then. However, now that the main foundations of their visions of maturation have been set out the discussion can turn to an assessment of how their own faith development may have influenced their opinions.

A full analysis of the respondents' level of faith development was beyond the scope of this research. The interviews were not set up to study this particular topic, and the interviews were significantly different to those used by Fowler et al. (1981). In spite of this the interview data did offer some indications of the faising styles being used by the ministers. These indications did not come from the ministers' comments on their own maturity — a subject which they avoided discussing. Instead, it was the presence of nebulous, unstructured constructs of maturation and education that first indicated that it might be possible to comment on the respondents' faith development. When the final data was studied with regard to Fowlers faith stages it became clear that much of it could be understood as resulting from the characteristics of Stage 3 faith.

The following discussion explores the ways in which using Fowler's faith stage theory may possibly allow a deeper insight into the mental organisation of the ministers and the reasons for their descriptions of maturity.

7.1 Stage 3 faith characteristics in the interviews

In previous chapters it has been explained that the ministers' opinions could be seen as ideological constructs. It was shown that within such a construct a distinction could be made between consciously professed views (personal creed) and unconscious or hidden motivations for holding these (stage foci). Fowler's theory showed that the different foci of the stages of faith had different observable characteristics. Three such characteristics of Stage 3 faith were observable in the ministers' responses.
7.1.1 The lack of internal consistency in constructs of maturity

According to Fowler, one characteristic of Stage 3 faith is that the personal creed is unlikely to be consistent. Whilst formal operational thinking is present (bringing with it an ability to reflect on thought processes themselves) the depth to which this analysis can go is severely limited. This means that constructs remain a "loosely aggregated set of beliefs" (Fowler, 1981, p.162). This could explain some of the inconsistencies in the ministers' responses and their tendency to under-evaluate the complexity of the constructs held. One example of this may be when Richard (A1) professed to believe that maturity was created by the act of becoming a committed Christian. Yet during the interview as a whole he named four other aspects of development which defined maturity and which he portrayed as developing with age.

Of course, the reasons for the inconsistencies in the ministers' descriptions of maturation could also be explained by their apparent lack of previous deliberation about the topic. Similarly, the religious nature of some of the aspects of maturation that they were described could simply have proved impossible to translate into easily communicable ideas.

7.1.2 The lack of interest in interrogating constructs of maturity

Another characteristic of Stage 3 is that individuals easily accept they can just 'know' things. They believe that some aspects of knowledge exist simply because they feel them to be correct. This was a characteristic found in a large number of the interviews. It has already been noted that the respondents could speak confidently about what they 'knew' to be true, remaining relatively unconcerned how they came to know these things. Ministers often indicated how a Christian's actions should be an automatic response to life issuing from such spontaneous knowledge. This spontaneous knowledge was seen as the basis for the distinction between wisdom and intellectualism made by the respondents. Ian (M1) was one example of a minister with such views. He did not accept that there was a need for critical analysis of faith. He argued that one should simply 'let it happen'. Previous quotes from the interview with Bill (A1) indicated he had a similar view.

These data lend support to the theory that the ministers often saw no reason to interrogate their constructs of maturation due to Stage 3 faithing. However, a lack of interest in interrogating one's understandings of a subject is only one aspect of Stage 3 faithing. There can also be a tendency to avoid being made to interrogate tacitly held views. The interviews themselves created a situation where the ministers' views about maturation were being interrogated to quite a deep level. It has already been mentioned that the ministers were usually only willing to explore their understandings of the topics to a certain degree – sometimes a relatively shallow one. It was pointed out that questions could be met with simple repetition of previous answers or the respondent could seek to move the discussion onto another topic. Such avoidance is also a characteristic of Stage 3 faith. Fowler explains that individuals are reluctant to delve into their constructs because they unconsciously feel that such interrogation threatens a status quo on which their self-esteem depends.

Yet, again it is possible that the tendencies identified above may not be due to the ministers' faith stage but other factors. It has already been pointed out that the level of questioning of the ministers might have been perceived as being too intrusive given the nature of the interview and their lack of previous knowledge about the
researcher. Because of this, the ministers may have preferred not to reveal too much of their understanding of the topic. However, it was also pointed out that there was no evidence to indicate that this was the case.

7.1.3 The adoption of the community’s vision

Fowler’s description of people with Stage 3 faith indicates that their views tend towards orthodoxy because it is important to them to maintain a static and secure community within which to reside. They therefore favour a mental organisation that ameliorates perceived threats to self-esteem. Self-image is vitally important to individuals at this point because the ‘locus of power’ is not yet in their hands. Instead it is controlled by significant others - peers or authority figures. Self-esteem is bound up in membership because “when a person has absented him or herself from the ritual celebrations... the sacred itself is emptied” (Fowler, 1981, p.163). Self-esteem can therefore become deeply threatened by challenges to the community.

This could explain why some of the ministers appear to find it important to know that their views accorded with those of their denomination. The way in which they described maturity showed that it was assumed any other member of the church would agree. The descriptions of the church’s view and the ministers were, either consciously or unconsciously, considered interchangeable. This was most pronounced in the interviews with the Independent Evangelicals.

The intimate link between self-esteem and the churches’ well being could also account for maturation often being linked with “strengthening the community” (Michael, RC2). To become more mature was seen to work to stabilise the community. This community was usually the Christian Church as the ministers seldom viewed their own denominations as the only ones to help faith develop. Instead, they believed that maturity could be gained in all mainstream Christian denominations. However, they identified organisations such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses as ‘fringe’ Christian groups that were not vehicles for Christian maturation.

7.1.4 The lack of receptivity to different ideologies

A natural consequence of the need to strengthen the community in order to preserve self-esteem is to ignore other worldviews or regard with them hostility. Feelings of hostility can arise if other worldviews are seen as jeopardising the stability of a community. Fowler suggested that for Christian groups the presence of a large secular society could cause “rampant anxiety” due to its apparent rejection of what the church stands for. At the same time Stage 3 faith tends to be myopic with regard to studying these other worldviews. It cannot relativise its own ideology. This renders it incapable of standing outside its own worldview in order to interrogate it. Without this ability individuals do not value other worldviews as useful comparisons with which to study their own ideology.

The interviews did not reveal a “rampant anxiety” but they did indicate how uninterested the ministers’ could be in other religions. A number of the ministers recognised that they lived in a multifaith society. However, few of them valued the study of those faith groups that had created this situation, and none of them believed that the process of maturation was aided by believing in them. There was no overt hostility towards other faiths but they were dismissed easily in the minds of many of the ministers. David (IE2) spoke for many when he stated “I obviously wouldn’t find
inspiration or insight from other religions. The same reservations were found with regard to scientific paradigms such as psychology or philosophy as well as political thought (with the exception of Richard (A1) and Eric (IE1) respectively). The interviews indicated that other world religions were considered no more effective in aiding human development than non-religious ideologies.

Only one minister felt it important to bring in a member of another religion to talk to the parishioners. He had invited an Imam from the local community to visit a group of his parishioners. However, it became apparent that this was not an attempt to set up a mutual dialogue between faiths. The minister indicated that the meeting would be useful because he felt it would bolster the parishioners' own faith. He described them as being committed enough to Christianity to not be in danger of being swayed towards valuing Muslim beliefs to any significant degree. The meeting therefore appeared to have been set up to aid the learners' ability to defend against the influence of other faiths rather than to become interested in them or forge closer links.

However, in spite of these findings, receptivity to other ideologies is a Stage 5 characteristic. Because of this the data just discussed cannot help distinguish whether the ministers could be exhibiting Stage 3 or Stage 4 faithing.

7.2 The elements of maturity as reflections of faith Stage 3 concerns

The examples above have shown that many of the ministers' descriptions of maturation showed characteristics of Stage 3 faithing. It is also possible to identify Stage 3 faith foci in the previous discussion of the elements of maturity (Part 5). Many of the poles of these elements are consonant with such organisational concerns.

Exclusivity, trusting-obedience, intellectual-ambivalence, doubt denial and the view that church attendance reflects maturity all reflect attitudes consonant with a Stage 3 faithing. Some reflect the need to strengthen the community in ways that would protect self-esteem of those within it. Some express the need to isolate the community so that it does not need to relate meaningfully with other perspectives. Some of them also indicate that individual responsibility is subordinate to faith in the Christian church. In total, these account for poles on 5 out the 7 elements identified.

7.3 The presence of Stage 4 concerns

Stage 3 characteristics were not the only ones to be found in the interviews. There were also a number of responses that were consonant with the Stage 4 faith concerns. These responses were not found as frequently but showed significant differences of attitude to those of other ministers with regard to the community, authority and the fundamental theology.

Chapter 4 showed that the foci of Stage 4 were significantly different to those of the previous one. The fundamental theology of Stage 3 tended to be a loosely aggregated collection of opinions and convictions, however, Stage 4's was much more concise. It was stripped down to a logically consistent framework of which the individual was more aware. The interview with Roy (URC1) revealed how such a change had occurred in his past. When asked to describe maturity he replied:

"I think I want to use the word maturity in terms of spirituality in a sense that says faith becomes narrower. When I was young I could have made
a list of lots of things that I would have said I would die for. As I get older, and this is in both years and faith, I think that list becomes smaller rather than larger... For example, once upon a time, if you had said to me 'What's important in your life?' I would have listed things which I would have seen as important in terms of my church life. I'd been brought up in a denomination which said that these things are important. Now I think a lot of those things are almost irrelevant - are totally irrelevant - but are a way of organising a church, or church function. Quite frankly, I think the church would get on quite nicely whether they were there or not... The essence of my faith says, as far as I'm concerned, 'Yes, Jesus died for me. Yes, I want to be able to go and share that with people, and that seems to me to be what I would still die for' Together with other comments this shows how Roy's fundamental theology developed, becoming more organised and narrower as tacit constructs came under interrogation.

Comments made by Michael (RC2) reflect Stage 4's desire to identify social indoctrination in an effort to identify a logical framework that exists beyond:

"When you are speaking about Christians, so much of it is a great mix of politics and nationalism and it is crucial now for us to unravel the religious, specifically religious, questions from our gut reactions".

He later applies such an approach to his assessment of the Pope's character:

"We have to understand our own backgrounds and its effect upon our views. I think that in the present Pope you see a man who was brought up, whose young life was spent in a country where his religion was identified with his nation and where strength - both political and religious - rested upon harking back to your origins... He was formed in a conservative mould"

In gaining an ability to identify the effect socialisation has had comes a freedom from the need to use the community to maintain self-esteem. Now the locus of power resides within the individual. He or she is therefore able to maintain and defend opinions that put them at odds with their colleagues in a community. Fowler described this as the emergence of the executive ego. An example of this is ability is revealed in the interview with Roy (URC1). The following is a continuation of the description of maturity given in a previous quote:

"Now I think that's maturity. Other people think that that's a retrograde step, because, in fact, they would say that as you grow in your faith, so you need to grow in a way that actually allows your faith to be expressed and contained. And they define that as being the Church. I do the opposite in a sense"

Interviewer: "Would you say that you are in a minority or a majority in by holding that view?"

Roy: "Oh, I think I'm in a very small minority. Within my own church I'm in minority of about five".

The interview with Michael (RC2) revealed a similar situation. He also realised that it is sometimes important to stand against authority figures. In his case he described the problems encountered with the church teaching on abortion. He saw the church spending much time condemning it but he argued that the correct attitude is to 'follow one's conscience'. In coming to this point he had found how difficult this can be:
"Of course you see, the discipline within the Roman Catholic church is fairly strict and to step out of line and to pursue your own view would take a considerable strength of mind"

It was interesting that the opinions which characterised Stage 4 concerns sometimes formed the opposing poles of the elements to those which described Stage 3 attitudes. This was most noticeable in the pole of authority-questioning. This appeared to reflect the existence of an executive ego. Other poles reflected a movement away from Stage 3 concerns rather than fully embodying those characteristics of stage 4 faith. Poles that fit in to this category were:

1. Reflection-Valuing. The examination of understanding through intellectual scrutiny is a characteristic of Stage 4 faith. However, the ministers only endorsed this to a degree. None of the ministers felt it was possible to intellectually study the fundamental belief in God.

2. Not valuing church attendance as an automatic sign of maturity. This meant that the individual did not show an excessive Stage 3 concern for stability through commitment to a church. However, it did not necessarily indicate Stage 4's freedom from needing the community to support self-esteem. In this case the fact that the ministers were leaders of the parish may have created a problem. They were responsible for its success. Their jobs depended on it and so their self-esteem would be more closely related to the parish's success.

7.4 The halfway position between faith Stages 3 and 4

Even though it was not possible to categorise the ministers with regard to faith stage it was still useful to study the interviews in relation to the halfway stages just mentioned. It offered a possible explanation of why the ministers' responses sometimes appeared to reflect both stages at once. The ministers rarely showed characteristics entirely consistent with Stage 3 or Stage 4 faith. The Stage 3 characteristics were most common, yet a majority of the ministers showed some characteristics of the poles that were more consistent with Stage 4.

Fowler stated that many people complete half of the movement from one stage to the other but this does not necessarily account for the situation with the ministers. It would appear that he was discussing the situation within a single church. The sample chosen for this research consisted of ministers from different denominations. However, the interviews provided possible explanations for a widespread occurrence of faithing styles representing the halfway stage.

To study this it is necessary to look at the two different forms of this 'inter-stage'. Fowler's description of this depends on individuals adapting to only one of the two movements required to reach Stage 4 faith. One possibility is that:

"By virtue of college experience, travel or of being moved from one community to another, many persons undergo the relativization of their inherited world views and value systems. They come face to face with the relativity of their perspective and those of others to their life experience. But they fail to interrupt their reliance on external sources of authority - and may even strengthen their reliance upon them - in order to cope with this relativity" (Fowler, 1981, p.179).

The other alternative is that reliance on external authority is broken whilst the individual has not "carried through a critical distancing from shared assumptive values systems" (Ibid.).
If either of these was to be encountered in the interviews it would most likely be the first. All but one of the respondents had been moved, often repeatedly, during their ministries. Some of them had moved large distances such as from Yorkshire to Sussex or even England to Africa and back. The interviews revealed that the ministers considered these moves to have caused them to encounter significant changes in lifestyle and confront different social settings.

At the same time the ministers' role meant that they encountered a large number of challenging situations. Their work involved them in many significant life events of their parishioners such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Ministers were called on to give support during illnesses, bereavement and other situations. Because of this the respondents had been required to consider the meanings of these occurrences more than many other individuals. They were offered important opportunities for their own development because they were frequently challenged to consider the nature of these events.

7.5 What stages of faith do the ministers' attitudes reflect?

Whilst it was possible to identify characteristics of certain faith stages it was not possible to state categorically which stage each minister exhibited. Nor was it suitable to try and do so. As has been mentioned, the interviews were not set up to look for faith stages. Those faith stage characteristics that became apparent were present because of the ministers' choice of answer. The interviews did not explore all of the characteristics of different faith stages that would be required to make a categorical statement on faith stage.

However, it appears significant that interviews which did not set out to study the ministers' levels of maturity may have succeeded in revealing certain aspects of their faithing. If the respondents' concerns are due to their present level of faith development then this indicates the strength of the stage concerns over their understandings maturation. Consequently, this may have implications for their acceptance of any of the findings and recommendations of research such as this. This subject will be returned to in the final chapter.

8 The implications of the ministers' visions of maturation

The discussion has now reached a point where it can explore the implications of the ministers' constructs of maturation for their own development and that of their parishioners.

It Chapter 6 it was argued that Christian education should strengthen the learners' understanding of maturation. Fowler was shown to argue that the Church should be "an environment of developmental expectation and support" (1987, p.116). However, if the ministers were to promote their own views of maturation or the support required, it would appear that they would not necessarily be helping the parishioners in terms of faith development. The discussion in this chapter has indicated that in some respects the respondents' descriptions of maturation are probably of limited value. It has been shown that their views are not created by a significant amount of critical reflection upon the subject. Consequently, their descriptions often tend towards the superficial. It has also been shown that these can also lack internal consistency. In Part 6 of this chapter it was shown that these characteristics provide enough evidence to suggest that the respondents' views are...
based upon a form of faithing that may hinder their ability to set out a coherent and more critically reasoned view of maturation.

To assess the consequences of promoting the ministers' views of maturation the following discussion compares them to the conclusions of Fowler (1981, 1984, and 1987) Strunk (1965), Marstin (1979) and others. The differences of opinion are set out and the implications of these for the faith development of those in the respondents' parishes will be explored.

8.1 The implications of the ministers' views about emotional pain and unease

A sense of unease and dislocation is an integral aspect of Fowler's stage transitions. He argues that it is impossible for someone to mature without passing through periods when he or she feels 'naked' and adrift (1981). He also provides evidence to suggest that some stage transitions may last for several years. However, a number of the ministers did not accept that such feelings could be an aspect of maturation. Those who had views that could be described as pain-denial (Section 5.2.6) thought of Christian faith as something that eased or removed all such 'negative' emotions. It was believed that a Christian could avoid worry by trusting in God. Several of the evangelical ministers felt that there was little opportunity for unease once a believer had discerned their vocation through prayer.

Even those ministers who accepted that unease could be part of the process of maturation did not see it in terms of prolonged periods of disequilibrium. They believed that once Christians had realised that a situation was causing unease they would soon act to rectify it. It was suggested that this could involve doing something personally, such as changing one's lifestyle to better follow the Christian life, or by asking for divine assistance through prayer.

This situation has immediate implications for the parishioners of these ministers. If the ministers are not made aware that the process of maturation may involve prolonged periods of emotional discomfort then it appears that they may decide that someone's unease is their own fault. Given the ministers' responses in the interviews it appears likely that a Christian may even be judged to be failing in their commitment to the Christian faith.

Even in a situation where such an emotion is seen as a natural result of having to come to terms with the requirements of living a Christian life, there are still problems. The period of unease is not perceived to be due to a deep restructuring of an individual's worldview. Nor is it seen to be something that will remain for a long period unless the Christian lets it. Assuming that the ministers vocalise their views about the value of emotional unease – and the interviews indicated that the ministers did feel that such matters were suitable topics for preaching on – it is clear that individuals going through a stage transition are not helped to feel that what is happening to them is a natural event. Nor are they shown how important it is or given proper encouragement. Consequently, a person undergoing a stage transition may be influenced to view his or her 'doubts' and 'questions' as being a product of a lack of Christian faith. In such a situation it is possible that they will become even less keen to actually deal with the situation. Ultimately, this could mean that a Christian's passage to a new faith stage may be further drawn out or even halted.
8.2 The implications of ministers' views about critical reflection and tacit knowledge

These problems may not be quite so likely if the community views critical reflection as a valuable characteristic. Fowler (1981) commented that communities with a large contingent of members with Stage 4 faithing — one that stresses the need for critical reflection — can ease the stage transitions of other members due to their acceptance of the need for occasional periods of significant re-evaluation. Unfortunately, it has already been shown that the ministers did not place much value on this ability.

The ministers' lack of interest in the use of critical reflection proves problematic in other ways. Fowler, Strunk and others view this ability as essential for maturation because it allows tacit beliefs and assumptions to be identified. It therefore allows an individual to be freed from a reliance on these and to gain a greater degree of internal autonomy. It is therefore unfortunate that the ministers often stressed the value of tacit knowledge and accepted that legitimate reasoning can issue from it. Earlier discussion described the respondents' frequent assumption that God created a degree of understanding and reasoning that was imparted to Christians and which functioned in spite of their ability to intellectually analyse a situation. Some ministers with a reflection-ambivalent view indicated that it was possible for Christians to be mature even when they had never been stimulated to question their views about topics such as the nature of Church organisation or the validity of other religious faiths. In other cases, the ministers openly admitted that promoting critical reflection would be dangerous for some members of the Church. The Roman Catholic ministers were often found to describe older parishioners — those who could remember the Church before the second Vatican council — as being unable to cope with the impact that this would have on their Christian faith. These ministers' understandings indicate the possibility that their parishioners are provided with little encouragement to critically analyse their Christian faith. If true, it is clear that these churchgoers will not be helped to understand the strong influence tacit knowledge may have on them.

This criticism may not be so true of the ministers who had a reflection-valuing view. If these individuals indicated to the parishioners that critical analysis was useful in clarifying church teachings that were not immediately self-evident from Christian faith or personal experience of God, then they provide a healthier environment for faith development. However, even these ministers did not appear to support critical reflection upon the basic Christian theology of the Church — something that is a natural part of maturation according to Fowler (1981) and Marstin (1979). Nor did the respondents appear to support Fowler's (1981) and Alport's view (Strunk, 1965) that mature Christian faith should be held as a tentative hypothesis. They clearly did not view mature faith as something that is constantly re-examined and reorganised as Alport indicates (Ibid.). Instead, the ministers gave the impression that once a certain amount of analysis had occurred on a topic such as the nature of church organisation there was often little need to re-evaluate this later.

Such an attitude towards critical reflection means that the ministers may not be helping their parishioners to explore some of the important tacit assumptions that underlie their Christian faith. The respondents' views also indicate that they would not be able to understand the value of Stage 4 faith. It was shown in Chapter 5 that Christians could instinctively reject the implications of this form of faithing (Section 5.2) and this could explain some of the ministers' comments in the interviews.
In refusing to accept that maturation may involve a period of such intense critical exploration there is a danger that the ministers will view those parishioners who do go through this as not developing normally. In fact, the questioning that is stimulated by a transition to Stage 4 faith may well be unwelcome to the respondents in this research. For instance, intense questioning of Bill (A1) about his understandings of maturation and Christian faith caused him discomfort. Consequently, if the parishioners try to explore certain questions through dialogue with such ministers they may well encounter problems. If the ministers are using a Stage 3 faithing style as the discussion has indicated they may, it can be seen that they may instinctively perceive a parishioner’s critical reflection on his or her faith as a threat to their own.

8.3 The implications of ministers’ views about socialisation and relativisation of worldview

The ministers’ frequent lack of interest in stimulating critical reflection raises a question as to whether they can perceive the problems created by socialisation. Without critical reflection there is limited opportunity for someone to perceive the degree of enculturation present in his or her worldview. It is therefore possible that the respondents’ views about critical reflection prevent them from apprehending the degree to which parishioners may need to be stimulated toward autonomous thinking by studying how their beliefs and behaviour have been shaped by their upbringing.

The ministers did not often indicate that they understood the effect of socialisation. In fact, it is possible that some thought it desirable because they could argue that Christians must be uncritically trusting of Church teaching. However, some respondents indicated that they understood that there were aspects of socialisation that existed in the Churches and which could be problematic. These respondents – who usually indicated that they valued a degree of critical reflection – were the ones who stated that it could be difficult to stimulate ‘cradle’ Christians to be aware of the need for a conscious affirmation of their faith. These respondents were earlier shown to believe that when such Christians transferred to another church they were often confronted with different forms of worship that stimulated a re-dedication of the individual. The value of this was thought to be that the Christian was more consciously aware of their faith and the commitments it brought with it.

A few of the ministers went further and suggested that it was important for parishioners to understand the nature of different wings of a Church (e.g. the High and Low Churches in Anglicanism) or even different denominations. It appeared that the respondents thought this could provide people with a better understanding of where their own spiritual needs might best be catered for. There was little indication that such knowledge was useful for the purposes of realising the degree to which their valued judgements might be relative.

However, even these ministers did not apprehend the need to move beyond comparing one approach to Christianity to another. Yet both Fowler and Hull (1984) describe a need for Christians to occasionally step outside their faith. They believe that comparing the Christian worldview to other non-Christian worldviews offers Christians the chance to perceive the degree to which their views have been the result of a more widespread form of enculturation. Unfortunately, the interview data shows that the respondents would be unlikely to offer their parishioners views of maturation that encouraged them to do this. In fact, many of the ministers clearly
indicated that there was little value in studying other religious faiths, and that such an approach could even be dangerous to a parishioner's faith.

7.4 The implications of the ministers' views about interacting meaningfully with non-Christian worldviews

This leads to a discussion of the impact of the respondents' views about the value of interacting with non-Christian ideologies. It is clear from the works of authors such as Smart (1968) that comparing one's Christian faith to other worldviews is not only important for exploring enculturation, but also to explore the common ground between them and to learn from them. Fowler clearly indicated that part of maturation is understanding that the Christian tradition does not have a monopoly on the religious truth (1981, 1984). This was the reason that Grimmitt (1994) argued for the promotion of 'interfaith' dialogue. This was perceived to overcome the 'them' and 'us' attitude that he believed to be creating an artificial restriction on spiritual exploration. Fowler (1981) has also described how meaningful interfaith dialogue requires that all participants should be open to the possibility of being swayed by the arguments of the others.

This kind of attitude was not found in the interviews. Most of the ministers made it clear that there was little value in studying other religions. All of them were certain that dialogue with non-Christian groups, whether religious or scientific, could never aid the development of a Christian faith. The respondents' views mostly reflected the opinion set out by Almond (1988). She argued that Christians should be encouraged to respect other religions but not to take them seriously. However, several of the ministers were not necessarily willing to even respect the rights of other religions. The next chapter will indicate how several of the ministers viewed Jehovah's witnesses as people who needed to be saved from erroneous beliefs. It was clear from the interview data that the teaching that occurred in the respondent's parishes could involve the portrayal of other worldviews as either unhelpful for maturation or even symbols of immaturity.

These opinions would again appear to have significant implications for the faith development of parishioners. The ministers' views can clearly oppose those that are likely to appear naturally during faith development. This again raises the possibility of the minister promoting a vision of maturation that is at odds with the basic feelings and understanding of individuals moving towards the higher faith stages. Because of this it is possible that faith development will be impeded. It is also possible that those parishioners who still progress to the higher stages may find they have less desire to participate in the parish setting because their views appear to be at odds with those of the leader of the community.

8.5 The implications of the ministers' views on autonomy and authenticity

Many of the previous findings suggest that the ministers' views about the nature of autonomy could be significantly different to those enshrined in the works of authors such as C. Rogers (1967, 1969) or Fowler (1981, 1984). This is not to say that some similarities do not exist. For instance, the ministers often agreed with Fowler that God is the source of all power. They therefore appeared to support the concept of decentralisation. However, they did not describe internal autonomy in terms of the ability of becoming free from socialised and encultured behaviour through critical reflection and relativisation of worldview. Instead, they stressed the importance of wisdom and sometimes the subordination of reasoning to that of the teaching of the Church.
Because of this it can be suggested that the ministers' views tended to reflect what Fromm (1949) would call an authoritarian religion. This view contrasts with that of a humanistic religion. Strunk explains the differences:

"In authoritarian religion God is a symbol of power and force, whereas in humanistic religion God is a symbol of man's [sic] own powers. The individual who is attracted to the first symbol and internalizes it may find a tentative kind of psychological security, but he will never be an individuated person [a person who is truly self-aware], a whole, mature adult. For genuine maturity he must embrace humanistic religion" (1965, p.55).

8.5.1 The ministers' descriptions of Jesus in the interviews

The fact that the ministers were drawn towards an authoritarian interpretation of religion is possibly backed up by their portrayal of Jesus. In the interviews there is a marked tendency for the ministers to stress his divinity rather than his humanity. There is also a marked reluctance to attribute human characteristics to him.

One example of this is the fact that the respondents often preferred to use the term 'Christ' rather than the name 'Jesus'. At the same time, whilst all but a few of the interviewees mentioned Jesus, only three of the ministers actually depicted him as displaying human characteristics that could be involved in maturation - and two of these respondents did not actually state what these were. In fact, some of the ministers appeared to view his divine nature as making him so different to humans that it was undesirable to try and compare humans to him.

Therefore, although Jesus was often mentioned it was usually for a different purpose than using him to illustrate the characteristics of maturation. Instead, the ministers could describe maturation in terms of coming to understand him or his role in the Christian life. For instance, Tim (IE1) saw him as a messenger ("you must believe his word"), Richard (A1) described him as guide ("You must tread with Christ") and John (IE2) viewed him as a ruler and means of salvation ("He is the gateway to God"). In most of these instances the respondents appeared to stress his role as being active. The emphasis was usually on what Jesus did for humanity rather than how humanity should emulate him. Jesus was also frequently mentioned when the ministers described what must be believed if one is to become a Christian. For instance Peter (URC1) stated that "Jesus died for me" and Roy (URC1) said it was important to realise that "Jesus loves me".

8.5.2 The ministers' descriptions of authenticity

In the discussion about religious descriptions of maturation it was shown that there was a common belief that maturation involved an increasing commitment to others in the world. Kao (1975) and Fowler (1981) indicated that this was intimately connected with an individual's ability to relate meaningfully with a larger and larger number of people. The journey began in childhood when only the parents were of importance and hopefully ends in a concern for all humanity. This was shown to create an increasing ability for authentic existence - an existence that was able to think autonomously, but which behaved only in ways that did not impact negatively on others due to its concern for them (see Chapter 5).
When studying the interview data it became clear that whilst the ministers' views about internal autonomy differed to those of the authors studied, they did generally support the concept of maturation as a growing concern for society. The ministers described the need for Christians to develop their faith in order for them to realise the need to become active in the community. The ministers were often concerned with very local issues but some parishes did interact with other countries – such as Brian (URC2) who had kept up links with several South American countries. Even so, it was clear that a number of the ministers, in describing their parish education and the important aspects of maturation, depicted an inward looking form of Christian faith. The discussion consisted mainly of an emphasis on Christians developing their own faith and interacting with God rather than relating to the outside community.

8.6 The importance of the ministers' descriptions of parish education for further exploring the importance of the ministers' descriptions of maturation

Chapter 6 indicated that the developmental needs of parishioners were vital components of their educational needs. Because of this, further exploration of the implications of the ministers’ views of maturation for the parishioners’ faith development will be continued in the next chapter. The discussion will then explore the ministers’ descriptions of parish education and their views on the educational needs of the Christians. Once that has been studied the implications of the ministers’ views on maturation can be more clearly understood.

9 Conclusion

The chapter has explored the respondents' constructs of maturity and maturation. It has shown the numerous difficulties involved in understanding these and the consequent limitations of this analysis. The ministers were shown to be unused to studying their perceptions of maturation so deeply and to not often have the opportunity to do so.

The discussion described the ministers' understandings of Christian faith, belief and trust and the relationship of these to maturation. The chapter also explored the ministers’ attitude to critical reflection, knowledge and revealed truths. The other elements of the ministers' perceptions of maturity were set out and the different attitudes they had to these were explored.

These findings were then used to study the possibility of ascertaining the respondents' faithing styles. The results of this were inconclusive but indicated that they could reveal characteristics of two different faith stages.

Finally the discussion set out the implications of the ministers' views. It was pointed out the ministers' descriptions of maturation were significantly different to Fowler's faith development in several areas. This was seen to have implications for their parishioners if the ministers offered their understandings of maturation as a model for others to follow.
CHAPTER 10

The Ministers' Perceptions of the Learning Opportunities for Adults in the Parishes

1 Introduction

This chapter explores the ministers' understandings of the role of adult education in the parish setting. It studies the structure of the programmes that existed in the respondents' parishes and their opinions about the effectiveness of these. In doing this the chapter explores the suitability of the learning opportunities provided. The discussion includes a study of the educational training that the ministers received and their opinions about the suitability of their own skills as educators.

2 Issues About the Collection of Data

The last chapter began with a description of the problems that were encountered when trying to elicit the respondents' views about maturation. Many of the same factors were experienced when collecting the data about education. For instance, the ministers' views about the educational needs of parishioners were frequently unclear and sometimes contradictory. This was also true of their descriptions of a minister's role in education. At the same time, it was clear that most of the respondents either did not choose to consider the subject very often or were not given the opportunity to do so.

However, unlike the discussion on maturation, the vocabulary used by the ministers proved less problematic. The respondents used similar terms to each other and there was less ambiguity in their use of these. They preferred not to use the term 'education' when discussing the learning that occurred in the parish setting. Instead, they used terms such as 'teaching' and 'preaching'. They also tended to describe the outcome of learning in terms of 'faith development'.

The reasons for the ministers' reluctance to describe parish based learning in terms of education proved significant. It affected the ease with which data were collected in the phase 1 interviews as well as revealing some important assumptions about the nature of parish education. The problem it caused for the collection of data was first indicated when it became clear that the ministers, although specifically asked about adult education, often focused on describing the education of children in primary and secondary schools.

This tendency appeared to have been caused by the use of the term 'education' in the original questions. The interview data provided evidence that this was creating problems for the ministers because they associated education with formal secular teaching situations rather than the teaching or learning that occurred in a parish. The respondents also appeared to assume that by asking about education the researcher was not interested in teaching or learning opportunities that were linked with worship. This was because they often viewed education as a neutral and 'objective' approach to teaching. Because they viewed the learning that occurred in the parishes as being intimately linked with a commitment to the Christian faith and involving worship it appeared to them to be different to education.

At the same time, the ministers frequently assumed education was an approach that required a trained teacher. Although a couple of the respondents had worked as
teachers the ministers were not generally trained teachers themselves and therefore
did not consider themselves to be able to perform that kind of educational function.
They often appeared to regard school teachers as having achieved an important
degree of academic achievement which they themselves had not.

This was one reason for the ministers' initial hesitancy in participating in the research.
They often felt that the research would be better served by discussing education with
those who specialised in the subject or who were known to have had previous
training. The ministers often referred to themselves as having only 'simple'
understandings.

Another reason for the ministers' tendency to mention children's education may have
been indicated in the way that they were usually more confident in discussing that
subject. The interviews revealed that the respondents were usually closely involved
with schools, often as members of the School board. This meant that they were
probably more familiar with the concept of learning in relation to children and were
likely to have been challenged to consider it in some depth.

The problems created by the respondents' assumptions about the nature of
education became apparent during the first phase of this research. The interview
questions were therefore modified before they were used in the second phase. The
modifications meant that the ministers were instead asked to discuss opportunities
for adult learning in the parish setting. This approach proved more successful.
Information about adult learning was more easily elicited although the ministers still
tended to discuss the opportunities for children to learn as well.

In spite of their disinclination to see parish based learning in terms of education, the
interviews revealed that the ministers all believed they had a duty to teach. They
considered it a fundamental aspect of their role as a minister. It was also clear that
they felt able to offer meaningful learning opportunities to both adults and children in
their churches. The learning that could occur was clearly identified as an aid to
maturation, although the ministers usually saw this only in terms of Christian faith
development. They did not see it as actively stimulating those aspects of
development that they sometimes described as 'secular' maturation.

3 The Structure of Parish Education - The Ministers' Descriptions of the
Opportunities for Learning in the Parish

This section of the chapter concentrates on describing the structure of the parish
education. This means that the following discussion indicates when and where
adults were thought to be provided with learning opportunities. The discussion also
includes some indications about the function or content of these situations - the way
in which the ministers taught and how they sought to influence parishioners – but it is
left to later sections to fully explore the respondents' views on this topic. As later
discussion will show, the distinction between structure and function proves important
for studying the implications of the research findings.

The ministers described two main opportunities for adults to learn in the parish.
These were the weekly Sunday service and the numerous forms of study group that
could meet during the week. Occasionally, one-off meetings or lectures were also
mentioned as being important.
3.1 The Sunday Service

All of the ministers considered the Sunday service to be the main point of learning for the entire congregation. Because of this they thought it essential for Christians to attend a religious service at least once per week. They believed this offered parishioners two significant opportunities of learning; by listening to the preaching and by worshipping or praying.

3.1.1 Preaching

Most ministers believed the preaching involved in the services to be the most important teaching opportunity they had. They considered preaching to be their main role as teachers. Tim (IE1) commented:

"I see preaching in a service as vitally important. I think it's a role God has given to ministers".

Preaching was seen as fulfilling several different functions. Tim summed up the general attitude to preaching when he stated that it is:

"designed, I guess, to impart knowledge - but not just to do that... its there to challenge people to actually put into practice what they believe... to build up people's faith and trust".

The great emphasis placed upon preaching was also found to issue from a belief that it provided "guidance from someone outside yourself". Tim argued that parishioners required guidance from the minister otherwise they were in danger of "going entirely up the wrong track".

Whilst most of the ministers saw sermons as energising and motivating, others saw their effects in different terms. Allen (RC1) explained "what we try and do is sort of, just.... keep going on and on and on like water over a stone". Alternatively, Bill (A1) saw its purpose as providing a Christian background that the learners would take in passively.

3.1.2 Worship

Most of the ministers stated that worship was also an integral part of learning. In most cases the respondents appeared to be describing worship in terms of an acknowledgement of God as King. Prayer in terms of personal or communal supplication was also mentioned. Michael (RC2) was one of a few ministers who described the penitence involved in the Roman Catholic mass as another essential aspect of learning.

The view that worship and prayer were learning experiences issued from a belief that communing with God was a transforming experience in itself. No Christian was expected to be left unchanged by such a meeting. In spite of this, only a quarter of the ministers described a personal relationship with God through prayer as an important opportunity for learning. Instead, learning from Church doctrine or church leaders - whether parish ministers or those in higher positions of authority - was stressed.

3.2 The study groups

The ministers thought study groups provided an important supplement to the learning involved in the Sunday Service. The groups were called many different names but...
the most common titles were Bible study groups, prayer groups and sacrament groups. Most of these were house groups although a number - usually those in the Roman Catholic churches - used the church buildings in which to meet.

These groups usually met once a week and some had been in existence for months or years at a time. All of the meetings involved prayer and most of them involved studying Bible scripture or church teaching. As such they involved similar topics to those included in the preaching of the ministers. The benefit of studying these subjects within a smaller group was thought to be the chance for interaction between learners. The meetings were seen as an opportunity for discussion and the sharing of experiences that was not possible in the services. The ministers were aware that the parishioners often had questions that needed to be addressed and which could not be aired during the services.

The Roman Catholic sacramental groups functioned in a slightly different way. They were used to prepare individuals for specific rites in the church such as confirmation, first Holy Communion or a wedding. Such courses tended to last only four or five weeks and were orientated about studying the church teaching on a sacrament.

The ministers often ran one or more of the study groups themselves. The only exceptions being the Roman Catholic groups which were usually run by the laity (c.f. Section 3.5).

3.3 One-off lectures and courses

Most of the respondents described the organised opportunities for learning in the parish solely in terms of participating in a religious service and one or more study groups. The others occasionally set up additional meetings or short courses in order to offer parishioners the opportunity to further explore a particular subject. These subjects varied considerably but were usually aimed at the parishioners (or sometimes Christians from neighbouring parishes of the same denomination) rather than a more general audience.

The ministers who appeared most interested in setting up additional lectures were the Roman Catholics. For instance, Anthony (RCII) had set up courses to explore catechetics, parenting, family life, divorce and remarriage. In his diocese such courses appeared to be fairly common. It also appeared to be a common situation for these groups to be run by people other than the ministers. Allen (RC1) saw this as being necessary because it gave the parishioners access to knowledge that the ministers themselves could not always provide. He commented that:

"We often get people in. Priests aren't experts in everything, although a lot of Catholics seem to think we are... We get experts in, philosophers, theologians, whatever. If it's a moral issue... a panel!"

None of the ministers in the other denominations showed such an inclination to use others to run these additional meetings. They usually organised and ran them themselves. Neither did they appear to set up as many additional courses or lecture as the Roman Catholics.

3.4 Counselling and teaching during one-to-one meetings between the ministers and parishioners

Other opportunities for learning occurred in the Church, although the respondents did not describe them as such. A majority of the interviews revealed that the ministers
spent time meeting parishioners individually when asked by them to do so. This was usually to respond to questions about Christian faith. The respondents described the type of conversations that could occur in these meetings as often being similar to those that existed in the study groups. The ministers therefore approached the meetings in a similar way to the study groups with regard to their role as a teacher. They believed it was legitimate for them to include a degree of teaching and they often either presented the parishioner with the reasoning behind church teaching on the topic under discussion or indicated relevant passages of scripture and suggested interpretations of these.

The interviews also indicated that the ministers were frequently required to act as counsellors. This role also led them to spend time in one-to-one meetings with parishioners. Those respondents who discussed this aspect of their duties did not believe it was always suitable to ‘teach’ in these situations. Instead, they indicated the need for good listening skills and would sometimes encourage the parishioners to see trained counsellors. The ministers did not describe counselling sessions in terms of learning opportunities, however, given Fowler’s description of the parish education required for healthy support of the parishioners’ faith development (see Chapter 6, Section 4.4) it is possible that these too could be considered aspects or parish education. They would appear to offer churchgoers the opportunity for ‘healing’ that he mentions.

3.5 The ministers’ reliance on a traditional parish education structure

When studying the descriptions of these learning situations it became clear that the parish education described by the ministers was usually quite static. The ministers all relied on the formats that were traditionally used in their denominations and did not often instigate any new forms of teaching. Some had even avoided changing the parish education present in a particular church when they began to work there. They indicated that they adapted their teaching style to fit the service and study group formats that were already present. In general, the only evidence of new learning opportunities for the respondents’ parishioners involved the stimulation of parishioners to attend the type of study groups already in existence, or the creation of occasional one-off courses.

The only exception to this situation was the parish education in the Roman Catholic parishes. All of the Catholic ministers indicated that their parish education had changed dramatically over the recent past. This was because their parishes had been required to implement diocesan imposed initiatives for renewal. These had been instigated by the Bishop in an attempt to promote relevant educational provision and practice. The laity had previously been consulted about what forms of learning they wanted. The responses had been studied and an educational programme to address these was being set up in each parish. However, it appeared that without outside influence the parish education would have followed traditional approaches. The ministers voiced support for the changes but their descriptions of the learning opportunities prior to them indicated that they were not extensive and the ministers had not sought to make such changes themselves.

Because of these factors, it appeared that the parish education set up by the ministers tended to be static. The respondents did not change the format of it to any large degree and they used the teaching techniques that were typically used in their denomination.
3.5.1 The reasons for the static nature of parish education

The interviews provided enough data to suggest a number of reasons why the overall structure of parish education remained static.

3.5.1.1 The effect of time pressures and lack of resources

Most ministers were relatively content with the parish education that was already present. However, at least a quarter of the respondents indicated that, in an ideal world, they would implement some changes. These changes usually involved running additional lectures or meetings to expand the range of subjects covered. Unfortunately, the ministers indicated that the reality of their situation prevented them from implementing these changes due to time pressures, lack of resources, or because of other priorities.

It was clear that the ministers were very busy individuals. The difficulties in arranging times to interview them was one indication of this, as was the constant interruption of the interviews by phone calls and visitors if the respondent had not taken steps to prevent this from happening. At the same time the ministers openly described the numerous claims on their time which they had to deal with.

The multiple roles of the minister also meant that modifications to the parish education could be considered a relatively low priority. The respondents were involved in maintaining the church buildings, financing its running, counselling, and many other things. A number of ministers indicated that, because they felt confident that the parishioners were already offered the most important learning opportunities, the implementation of new learning situations was not of immediate importance. They felt that their time could be better spent on other projects.

Some ministers also indicated that if extra courses were to be run more volunteers would be needed. Encouraging people to help was not always considered easy. This problem was very clear in the Roman Catholic parishes where the respondents had been obliged to set up the new courses demanded by the diocese. The respondents stated that at times it had been very difficult to get parishioners to take on such a responsibility.

The result of these factors was that the ministers could often be forced to simply keep the parish education more or less as it was. On becoming a minister of a parish they usually encountered a parish education system that was manageable and so they maintained it for pragmatic reasons.

3.4.1.2 The effect of the ministers' training

The interviews indicated that the static nature of parish education could be maintained by yet another factor. This was the training that the ministers had received. The interviews revealed that they had not had much educational training. Because of this it was possible that they had never been made aware of the multitude of approaches to adult education that exist. Without this knowledge the ministers may have simply accepted the 'denominational' approach to parish education without much reflection on its origins or strengths and weaknesses.

Because of the importance of this topic to present and later discussion the next section describes the ministerial and educational training that the respondents had
received. In doing this it highlights the lack of knowledge that they may have about educational matters with regard to adult education or modern debates about parish education.

4 The Respondents' Ministerial and Educational Training

In the phase 2 interviews the ministers were questioned about the training that existed to prepare parish educators. They were also asked to give their opinions about the usefulness of this. The following sections discuss the training that the respondents received and their views about the effectiveness of it. This discussion will concentrate on the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Independent Evangelical and United Reformed ministers. Little reference will be made to the Methodists and Baptists responses. This is due to one of the interviews with a Methodist being cut short and a Baptist minister refusing to give any information about his past training.

However, in the interests of giving a comprehensive picture of the educators involved in parish education the discussion will first explore the role of lay educators and the training that they may have received in order to fulfil their role.

4.1 The use of lay educators and their training

Except for the Roman Catholic parishes, there were few opportunities for lay members to act as parish educators. The ministers took control of most of the learning that went on. This was easily done because the Sunday service was seen as the main point of learning. When the study groups were seen as important educational situations the respondents also expected to play an important part in these. This meant that parishioners were only able to act as 'readers' in the services or the 'hosts' for the study groups. Neither of these roles was thought to require a large degree of training or preparation because they were not assumed to be key educational roles.

The Independent Evangelicals did not mention any formally structured programmes for parishioners. Bible study groups at conferences or revival meetings were the only sessions deemed relevant for such individuals.

The Anglican ministers concentrated on discussing the training of their Readers. Andrew (A2) commented:

"they get a certain amount of training from us from time to time and we send them on courses, or try to do that".

His comments indicated the optional nature of attending such education. They also highlighted the way in which the ministers themselves took a role in the training. However, for willing learners there were additional options. Most of the Anglican ministers mentioned the Bishop's Certificate. This course was conducted over six terms and was structured so as to require a number of essays to be submitted. A few parishioners were shown to undertake this course, not all of whom were involved in running an educational group. One minister commented that this course had been useful for readers and others:

"I think it has been [useful] for people who have felt they would like to know a bit more about the faith and the things surrounding it - the Bible and so on".

The ministers revealed that there were co-ordinators for diocesan education but revealed little about them or the work that they did.
The Roman Catholic ministers proved to be more concerned with the training of lay educators than any of the other denominations. This was not surprising given the prominent role the laity had come to play in the parishes. The recent changes in parish education had been specifically set up to encourage parishioners to become involved in the running of the Church. It was assumed that this empowered the laity as well as allowing the priest to spend more time on other aspects of running the parish.

Because of this, the ministers were aware of the existence of a diocesan body that trained lay educators as well as providing general educational programmes. The ministers were not sure about the type of programmes that it ran but they indicated the numbers could vary from year to year. Not all of the courses that were used to train the laity were run by this organisation. Some of them were set up in other dioceses and could be a considerable distance away (e.g. London). In spite of the presence of these courses and training programmes the interviews showed that lay educators were not required to attend any of them. Instruction from the parish minister was accepted as a legitimate alternative if necessary.

4.2 The training of the ministers and their views on its relevance

The ministers were asked what training they had undergone to become a minister and how much of this involved training in educational matters. They were also asked whether the amount they had been taught had been suitable. However, it soon became apparent that it was impossible to compare the ministers' training to any great degree. The respondents had trained at a variety of times over the last 40-50 years and they indicated that the training courses had changed during this period. Nevertheless, their comments remained informative.

4.2.1 The training of the Roman Catholic ministers

The Roman Catholic ministers had trained at different seminaries but their courses had usually lasted for 5 years. The amount of time that had passed since this training varied greatly. Robert (RC2) had trained just 5 years previously, whereas Michael (RC2) had trained over 30 years ago.

None of the Roman Catholic ministers interviewed during phase 2 felt entirely happy with the training they had received in relation to teaching and education. Robert thought that the seminary he had attended failed to address many 'practical' issues such as this. He felt that this had been a problem with the whole course:

"You come back with your head full of ideas and ways of doing things but you've not really looked at the issues at all, or why you are doing it, or why it is relevant to anybody. You get very good at doing exams."

Michael's views were similar. His training had also been highly academic and based solely on learning theology and ritual:

"It was before Vatican II and so we were almost like monks... we walked around with black cloaks and funny hats on, and obedience was a great virtue".

Evidence from Paul's interview in phase 1 showed that at least one seminary had included the study of Fowler's works in their curriculum. However there was no experience of educational texts such as those mentioned in Chapter 6. It was also evident that Paul had forgotten most of what had been learnt and that he had not read any more about these subjects since his ordination.
4.2.2 The training of the Anglican ministers

The Anglican ministers had trained at theological college. George (A2) had been ordained 7 years ago making him the most recently trained of the Anglicans in phase 2. He was the only minister interviewed who still worked in his original incumbency.

These ministers' views were similar to those of the Roman Catholics. Andrew (A2) felt that the courses had been too academic. Because of this he felt their usefulness was limited. He believed that "book learning" was unable to provide the skills that direct experience can give.

The training course that George (A2) had participated in had caused many of his colleagues to question the college's whole attitude to education. In the interview he remembered:

"There were a number of people there who had been teachers... all the teachers who went there disagreed with the educational methods".

He also commented:

"A lot more is needed than probably people get and so much emphasis in the time available in the theological college is given to Bible type information, theology type information,... possibly pastoral studies get a look-in in some theoretical core studies. I think teaching and education get left out".

Later on in George's training it became obvious to some individuals that educational matters were not going to be addressed:

"Towards the end, people started saying 'well, when we get out in the parishes we are going to have to deal with things like Sunday School and teaching and so on. Can't you teachers get together and tell us something about it?' And so a group of us who had been teaching did put together some sort of programme and a few session on this sort of thing".

Although the programme was set up the interest from other students was minimal. Because of his previous training in education and the lack of training given in the ministerial training, George personified his approach to parish education as being different to many others:

"I mean, having been in teaching I tend to think in terms of syllabuses and so on.... I have always been keen on detailed planning. Some people think I am too detailed but that is the way I work."

4.2.3 The training of the Independent Evangelical ministers

Of all the denominations the training given to the Independent Evangelicals lasted the shortest time. John (IE2) and David (IE2) trained at Bible colleges for 3 and 2 years respectively. Like George (A2), John had been a teacher before becoming a minister. For this reason he did not feel that the College had given him any new skills with regard to educating parishioners. David's comments were identical to Andrew (A2). He did not think that ministerial training could ever effectively teach about educational matters. He argued that experience was the only thing that could teach these skills.
4.2.4 The training of the United Reformed ministers

The situation of the United Reformed ministers in phase 2 was unusual because neither of them had been trained in the United Reformed colleges that existed in Cambridge and Manchester. Thirty years ago Brian (URC2) had spent 4 years in an Anglican theological college before moving to the United Reformed Church. On the other hand, Graham (URC2) had undertaken a four year theology degree course at University as well as a two year post graduate diploma course. The denomination had accepted these qualifications as sufficient for him to be accepted as a minister without most of the usual training.

Because of this neither minister felt able to make informed comments on the traditional United Reformed Church training courses. However, Graham admitted that he had received no education about teaching during his university studies. The closest he had got to the subject of education was in some of the practical theology sections of this degree course.

Brian’s views about his experience in the Anglican theological college echoed those already discussed. When asked if training was satisfactory with regard to educational matters he replied:

“No really, no. Our course was geared to examinations at the end of each term. All sorts of academic training with not too much on the practical side... except that we were out preaching roughly alternate Sundays. So you’re thrown in to the deep end of preparing sermon’s week in, week out”.

Brian explained how he had sometimes been asked to look after trainees from one of the Anglican colleges. He described their training course as “purely academic”. This resulted in the trainees being sent to him:

“to learn the practical side of how to chair meetings, how to visit people, which way to hold the baby for baptism... Learning things that weren’t taught in college”.

4.3 Opportunities for further training

After becoming ministers the respondents usually had further opportunities to take part in training. Each denomination had a variety of methods for helping the ministers continue to learn. Some of the programmes that were available related to education and learning in the parish.

According to Robert (RC2) the Roman Catholic diocese provided in-service training on educational issues once per year. This involved a study group lasting for two to three days. When asked if these were useful he replied:

“Actually they’re quite good. I get frustrated with other clergy who won’t engage. They are there in body but not in spirit. I suppose its because they are tired or they’re not academics - had the academic training that I have had - so they opt out. So they never actually think ‘this is an important time out to do a bit of study’. Its sad people are not using it ... I mean, their whole mindset is ‘I can’t cope with new things, I’m busy on the tram line’”.

Michael (RC2) believed that there was an ongoing push by the diocese to increase the emphasis on education. He considered this to be due to Bishop being “something of an intellectual organiser”.

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The Anglican Church arranged numerous courses for its ministers. George (A2) believed that these were generally considered vital for newly ordained ministers:

"During the first three years after you leave college there is continuing ministerial education or whatever they call it these days".

The actual structure of these courses depended on the diocese that was providing it and could also vary from year to year. However, the programmes tended to be on subjects such as time management, producing magazines, publicity etc. and were not often about educational matters.

The United Reformed church provided an allowance for its ministers to attend courses and conferences. It also had a well-established sabbatical system whereby a minister could normally expect 1 year off every 7 to 10 years. This was seen as a chance to attend long term full time courses. Several of the United Reformed church ministers had used their sabbatical years for just such purposes. However, none of them had participated in courses that dealt with educational matters.

The Independent Evangelicals were expected to attend prayer meetings and other large gatherings of evangelicals. The interviews indicated that these were often set up by the American churches that were gaining popularity in Britain. Such meetings were seen to offer occasional workshops on subjects such as education and teaching. However, it appeared that the interviewed ministers had not participated in any of these.

4.4 The ministers’ belief that all necessary educational expertise can be gained through experience

It was clear from many of the ministers’ descriptions of their ministerial training that they did not feel that they had been properly equipped to deal with educational matters in the parish setting. However, some respondents, such as Margaret, stated that academic study could never give a minister the skills necessary to create the best learning environment. Graham (URC2) even felt that formal educational training could be a handicap. He argued that it depersonalised the learner. David (IE2) thought that formal educational training tried to indoctrinate the teachers into overly prescriptive methods of teaching.

Whilst only a few ministers explicitly stated that formal educational training was irrelevant in the long run, it was clear that many other respondents held very similar opinions. None of them felt that the lack of training they received was more than a temporary set back. They had absolute confidence that they could learn all they needed to know through a few years of experience running a parish. Graham said “I think [the ability to teach] comes through hands on experience and it comes through listening to other ministers.”

Anthony (RC1) commented “the effects let you know what matters”.

4.5 The static nature of the parish education as an effect of the ministers’ lack of educational training

A consequence of the ministers’ training would appear to be a lack of knowledge about those issues involved in adult or parish education that were discussed in Chapter 6. The respondents were not made aware of the alternative forms of teacher/learner interaction that could be used in education and which might have been more suitable for addressing the parishioners’ educational needs. Consequently their courses could be said to have tacitly supported a view that the
traditional parish format of parish education — as experienced by them both prior to
the course and during it - was adequate. Considering that the ministers believed that
they could learn how to run a successful parish education programme by observing
their colleagues' approaches, it appears that they were unlikely to be stimulated to
introduce many changes. At the same time, their belief in their ability to learn how to
teach successfully from experience alone may explain why they undertook little
reading with regard to teaching in parish education.

4.6 Reflections on the initial research question in the light of the ministers’
descriptions of the structure of parish education

The findings in Sections 3.5 to 4.5 are significant because they allow the second part
of the research question to be partly answered. This research was set up to identify
how the ministers' perceptions of maturation influenced the parish education they set
up for adults. It can now be seen that, with regard to the structure of parish
education — the times and places in which learning occurs, and the use of preaching
and prayer — there appears to be little effect. Instead, the ministers use the
structures that have traditionally been used and with which they are familiar.

In retrospect this reveals an assumption that was made by the researcher when
formulating the research question. It was predicted that the ministers' perceptions of
maturation would have an observable impact on the structure of the parish
education. In fact, not only does the interview data suggest that the respondents'constructs of maturation had little affect on the structure of the parish education
provided, there is evidence that the opposite may even be true. It is possible that the
ritual in which parish education is often embedded may have actually influenced
some of the ministers' perceptions of maturation.

This can be illustrated by returning to the discussion about the continualist approach
to describing maturation (Chapter 9, Section 5.2.1). This viewpoint was shown to be
most commonly encountered in the interviews with the Roman Catholic ministers and
it was noted that the sacramental theology of this Church formally celebrates more
rites of passage the other denominations. Now that the respondents' views of
learning in the parish have been shown to be intimately linked to worship in Church
services and ritual celebrations it could be suggested that the Roman Catholic
ministers' vision of parish education, and the rituals that are integral to it, may have
influenced their vision of maturation. This would indicate that the interaction between
the ministers' constructs of maturation and education was more fluid and dynamic
that was first assumed.

In fact, when formulating the original research question it was not taken into account
that the respondents would have probably been taking part in parish education for a
long period before training as ministers. It therefore overlooked the need to ask
whether the ministers' views about maturation had been influenced by their previous
experience of teaching in the Christian Church or whether their views of how parish
education should be implemented had changed because of their training.

4.7 The implications of the respondents' use of traditional parish education
structures

The fact that the structure of the parish education usually followed a traditional format
may not have been particularly important for assessing the success with which the
parishioners' educational needs were being met. Given the definitions of the open

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Christian curriculum (Chapter 6) it is possible to argue that the learning opportunities provided (in terms of when and where they occurred) could still have been a suitable vehicle for valuable forms of teaching. For instance, the open Christian curriculum seeks to challenge tacit assumptions about Christian faith and to stimulate critical reflection. There is no reason to suppose that these could not be promoted through preaching. At the same time the study groups could provide the chance to interact meaningfully with others – especially if outside speakers from other denominations and religious faiths are brought in.

The description of the open Christian curriculum that was formulated in Chapter 6 also incorporated Fowler's views about the way in which faith development can best be facilitated. This meant that parish education was seen to also have a duty to provide parishioners with positive affirmation of the nature of maturation and to give them opportunities for healing. The previous discussion has shown that preaching and teaching opportunities were already available for the first purpose, as were opportunities for counselling for the second.

Unfortunately, whilst there were opportunities for meaningful learning in the parishes the respondents' description of the function of parish education frequently appeared to be at odds with that required of an open Christian curriculum. The ministers' descriptions of its aims, the subjects that should be involved, and the way in which teaching should occur all raised issues about how well the parish education they described could successfully address parishioners' educational needs and promote an environment which facilitated faith development.

The rest of this chapter discusses the reasons for this conclusion as well as the implications of it. In order to do this the discussion starts by setting out the ministers' descriptions of the main aims of parish education. Once this has been done they can begin to be compared to those of an open Christian curriculum in order to identify the areas where there is disagreement between them.

5 The Ministers' Descriptions of the Function of Parish Education

The ministers' perceptions of the aims of parish education were not always clear. However, the respondents appeared to view parish education as having three main functions. They thought it existed:

i) To strengthen and support the Christian faith of each parishioner.
ii) To strengthen the Christian community
iii) To spread the Christian faith.

These functions were a result of the ministers' belief that "the human species is actually created to worship something" (Andrew, A2). Their Christian faith informed them that the Church existed to propagate this worldview and to help people understand how to fulfil the demands placed upon them by this understanding.

5.1 Parish education existed to strengthen the Christian faith of the parishioners

The ministers' descriptions of parish education indicated that one of its roles was to strengthen the Christian faith of its parishioners. They believed that once Christians acknowledged the existence of God they required help to further develop an understanding of their relationship to Him. As was indicated in the previous chapter, the respondents saw this as a vital aspect of maturation.
The respondents indicated that there were two ways in which parish education was able to deepen a Christian’s faith. Firstly, it was assumed that the act of worship was important because it provided an opportunity for a Christian to actively show their commitment to God, and to request from him further assistance in living a Christian life. Secondly, the ministers were clear that parish education also existed to strengthen Christian faith through granting parishioners an opportunity to listen to some form of preaching.

The ministers’ descriptions of the importance of preaching appeared to be based upon a belief that, whilst God was the source of a Christian’s ability to develop and mature, this process had to be actively guided by the minister. The respondents often commented that parishioners could be misled in their understanding of Christian faith if they were not given clear indications of how they should understand it. Similarly, the ministers described the need to promote a vision of how a mature Christian faith developed.

The ministers’ opinions about the content of the teaching they provided were found to be split between two different views. On one hand, some respondents believed parish education should be based on teaching parishioners about the scriptures and helping them to interpret them ‘correctly’. This was because the Bible was seen as “infallible” (James, B2) and “a divine blueprint” (Graham, URC2). However, the other ministers thought that parish education should concentrate on familiarising Christians with Church teaching and doctrine. They believed that this was the best way of coming to understand Christian faith. Michael (RC2) portrayed his Church’s doctrine as “the wisdom of ages”.

This last opinion was especially common in the interviews with the Roman Catholic and Anglican ministers. These individuals believed the teaching of Church doctrine to be significantly more important that the study of the Bible. Allen (RC1) commented that “Catholics are not famous for their knowledge of scripture”. However, neither he nor the others saw this as a problem because they believed that Church doctrine enshrined scriptural teaching.

5.2 Parish education existed to strengthen the Christian community

The function of parish education was considered to be more than simply catering for the needs of individual Christian’s. Most said that it involved stimulating a parishioner to commit themselves to the Christian community. Bill (A1) commented:

“I don’t think faith is something isolated, that you have just on your own. I think its got to be started and you’ve got to be part of the [Christian] community and you’ve got to live out your faith in the community”.

In stimulating such a commitment to the Christian community, parish education was viewed as creating a more dependable, stable and close-knit group.

This state was often described as a natural consequence of aiding the parishioners to deepen their faith. David (IE2) felt that the deepening of Christian faith was a form of maturation that automatically led Christians to increase the internal stability of the church. Other ministers such as George (A2) indicated that parish education had to do more than deepen the parishioners’ faith to achieve this commitment to the community. It was suggested that there was also a need to stimulate Christians to put their faith into action.
A couple of ministers believed that a parishioner’s commitment was first and foremost to their individual church. Most of the respondents thought this was undesirable and argued that a Christian’s commitment should be to the denomination as a whole. Only a few ministers felt that a parishioner’s commitment should be primarily to the Christian faith. One of these was Andrew (A2). He argued that “the church is often the last thing that they [the parishioners] should commit themselves to”. Robert (RC2) agreed with this, admitting that churches and denominations could be “quite shoddy”. Both he and Michael (RC2) believed that commitment to the Christian faith was a commitment to the wider community.

5.3 Parish education existed to spread the Christian faith

The ministers also believed that parish education had a duty to bring others into the Christian faith. David (IE2) believed teaching in the parish was inseparable from leading people to God. John’s (IE2) view was that “the task of the church as the body of Christ is to reach others. We are saved to serve”. He stressed the need for non-believers to be ‘won’ for Christ.

The respondents gave a variety of reasons for Christian faith to be propagated. The evangelical ministers believed it was important that non-believers be ‘saved’. However, most of the respondents avoided discussing issues of salvation when explaining the need to propagate Christian faith. Instead, they often described it in terms of the Church having a duty to help humanity develop and mature in the way that they had previously described in the interview. This view appeared to be based upon an understanding that Christian faith provided a more reliable worldview with which to understand life. Because the respondents believed Christian faith was based upon certain objective truths it was thought that by becoming Christian individuals could be “brought to their senses” (James, B2).

All of the ministers described the importance of preaching in the liturgy for helping impart Christian faith to interested parties. However, many of the respondents also stressed the need for parish education to create evangelists out of the parishioners. The comments of David and John (both IE2) indicated the great emphasis that could be placed upon the role of parish education as a tool for preparing Christians to go out and teach, or preach to, non-believers.

This tendency was predominantly found in the views of evangelical ministers and those with conversionist views (see Chapter 9, Section 5.2.1). The Roman Catholic and Anglican ministers generally regarded parish education differently to these respondents. They emphasised its use for the parishioners’ own development. However, this did not mean they overlooked the need for parish education to act as a tool for creating people capable of spreading ‘the Good News’. Allen (RC1) argued that the role of the minister was:

“to try and make the baptised see that they are apostles in a sense. That the message of Christ is not just preached by the preacher. He has a role to play in it, a very important role, and a role that the church has specifically given to him,... a sacramental role. It is not just the minister, or the priest, whose vocation it is to bring the good news. It’s everyone’s. And we try and get the people to join in that”.

However, Michael (RC2) pointed out that the church asked people to perfect themselves before going out to spread the Christian faith.
The Roman Catholic and Anglican ministers' comments also revealed that they thought it relatively hard to get the parishioners to realise that they had a duty to promote the Christian faith. This opinion was in sharp contrast to that of the Evangelical ministers' who appeared to find it much easier to motivate their parishioners to become evangelists themselves.

It was also noticeable that respondents could have different views about the way in which parishioners should act as evangelists. For instance, the evangelical ministers supported a view that the parishioners could be prepared to actively spread the good news by preaching or actively bringing up the subject of Christian faith whenever possible. It was indicated that the parishioners were supposed to go to non-Christians and actively indicate the consequences of not having a Christian faith. Conversely, a majority of the ministers preferred to view their parishioners' role as evangelists in more passive terms. They argued that it was the laity's duty to simply be seen to act in a moral and dependable way and therefore act as symbols of a Christian life. This approach left it up to the non-believers to approach the parishioners who would direct them to the minister.

6 Do the ministers' descriptions of parish education fulfil the needs of adult learners?

The discussion will now move on to explore how well the ministers' descriptions of the function and content of parish education could satisfy the educational needs of adult learners with regard to personal growth. This is accomplished by comparing them to the description of the open Christian curriculum which was put forward as the ideal form of Christian education in Chapter 6.

Upon such a comparison, it becomes apparent that the ministers' descriptions of parish education may fail to suitably address parishioners' needs in several areas. These are:

i) The need to stimulate critical reflection.
ii) The need to stimulate self-directed learning.
iii) The need to accept periods of unease as an aspect of maturation.
iv) The need to stimulate an interest in engaging in meaningful dialogue with members of other religious faiths.

Several of these points serve to reiterate and build upon the concerns set out in the previous chapter which addressed the implications of the ministers' descriptions of maturation for parish education.

6.1 Issues about the stimulation of critical reflection

One important aspect of an open Christian curriculum was its attempt to stimulate parishioners to reflect on the tacit assumptions that their Christian faith may rest upon. Given the ministers' descriptions of the function of parish education it is questionable whether many of their parishioners were ever challenged to do this.

The ministers indicated the main function of parish education was to promote the development of Christian faith – a process which, for them, was synonymous with maturation. However, it was shown in the previous chapter that their constructs of maturation did not often rate critical reflection as a useful characteristic. It was pointed out that respondents could describe Christian faith as a tacit response to many issues and did not necessarily require Christians to be able to explain why they
held certain views. It was therefore suggested that the ministers were unlikely to portray critical reflection as being very important to maturation (see Section 7.2).

However, it was also suggested that those ministers who had a more positive regard for critical reflection might provide a form of teaching that promoted this characteristic. In this case it was assumed that the parish education they provided could start to offer parishioners a significant opportunity to explore some of their tacit assumptions about Christian faith – especially with regard to the different approaches of the various Christian denominations. Unfortunately, the respondents' descriptions of parish education reveal that, even if they value this characteristic they may not provide teaching which sets out to stimulate the parishioners' use of it. To understand their reasoning it is necessary to study some of the their opinions about the strength of some parishioners' faith.

6.1.1 The need to prevent some parishioners from being challenged to critically reflect upon their Christian faith

It became clear that a sizeable number of the respondents believed that, whilst reflection upon issues of Christian faith was essential to reach the higher levels of maturity, it was not always up to them to stimulate this. Examples of this view were often found in the interviews with the Roman Catholic ministers. For instance, Allen (RC1) indicated that reflection on Christian faith was important because:

"Faith is not saying 'I've been told to do this and not to do that', it's much... deeper than this. It's you thinking about your actions in the light of the gospels".

However, he immediately continues with a warning about the possible consequences of even this basic form of reflection:

"A lot of people are not quite used to that. So it can cause a lot of, not so much heartache, as a loss of anchor".

Rather than seeing this unease as a necessary first step in development, ministers such as Allen appeared to construe it as a sign of Christian faith being damaged in some way. Consequently, they were wary of causing unease in their parishioners. Robert (RC2) commented:

"I sometimes challenge [parishioners] but... quite a lot of the time you get scruples in the profession... Quite often, well, I have to be gentle, because I would do more damage if I kept challenging them".

This, and other comments, indicated that they believed some parishioners held forms of Christian faith that were 'fragile' and would be damaged if subjected to scrutiny. The Roman Catholic ministers often described the elderly members of the Church as being the most likely to be hurt by being challenged to reflect upon their faith – a situation which was blamed upon the way in which Catholics were brought up pre-Vatican II.

6.1.2 The implications of parishioners having a 'fragile' Christian faith for the ministers' approach to preaching

Richard's (A1) comments indicated that the identification of fragile forms of faith had an impact on the teaching given by ministers. He argued that:

"For some groups of people, you're going to say that a simple basic sort of story teaching is the right level. You are going to unsettle things if you try to go too deeply. Their worldview isn't wide enough for all sorts of reasons. That is why people like the [retired] Bishop of Durham are so
This view reveals a serious problem that the ministers must have encountered when determining what impact their preaching should have. It may have been possible to individualise the level of teaching in the study groups in order to suit the average maturity of the group's members - and some of the respondents' comments confirmed that they did do this. However, this was not possible when preaching in the services. The congregations attending these would be comprised of members with a wide range of levels of maturity. It would appear that the ministers who were worried about the impact of some forms of teaching on members of the congregation would feel obliged to adapt their teaching to a standard where it would not 'hurt' the faith of the more 'delicate' members. Unfortunately, in such a case it would not appear to then be suitable for other parishioners who would benefit from being challenged more directly.

This was a tension that was not openly commented upon by any of the respondents. However, it is important to address. The respondents were adamant that preaching was the most important of their teaching duties. Although some respondents valued it because of biblical precedents (e.g. Tim, IE1) others did so because it was the only time they could communicate with many of the parishioners (e.g. Jack, A2). This indicated that, by the ministers' own standards, the parishioners did not always receive teaching that addressed their educational needs. Unless the church members who were believed to be more mature chose to attend a study group with others of a similar level of development, or chose to meet with the ministers individually, they could not receive teaching that would be aimed more specifically at their educational needs. Consequently, without participating in the correct groups parishioners would not be helped to reflect more critically on their Christian faith.

6.2 Issues about the ministers' belief that preaching is the primary tool of teaching – parish education as a pedagogic approach

The ministers' belief that preaching was the most important aspect of parish education has other implications for the suitability of their teaching. When setting up courses aimed at promoting the personal growth of learners, modern liberal education has found didactic methods involving large groups to be one of the least useful approaches. The discussion in Chapter 6 showed that if parish education is to stimulate individuals to become self-directed learners or to address their individual problems then the best learning situation is one where there are not too many learners and where they can interact with each other and the teacher. In fact, many educational discourses describe the person who is in charge of the teaching as a facilitator. This is because the concept of a teacher is considered to have pedagogic overtones whereby the educator is signalled as being in charge of what is learnt. Given the nature of human maturation it appears more useful for learners to be helped to realise that they should guide the direction of their own learning.

Such an educational set up would only be possible in the study groups that existed in the parish. Unfortunately, the parishioners did not always go to these. They were not required to attend them and in many of the parishes the ministers indicated that a relatively small number of Christians participated in them. At the same time, whilst the ministers' descriptions of these groups indicated that there was a chance for learner/learner or learner/minister interaction, they could still appear to be based...
upon a pedagogic approach. A good example of this came from the interview with Graham (URC2). He explained

"I will lead for the first twenty minutes in terms of talk on the passage being studied and aspects of it with background and also implications for today"

None of his responses gave an indication that the parishioners' discussion in these groups had any impact on the learning that occurred in the study groups. Instead, he appeared to view his contribution as the most important element of this learning. It was possible that this was due to his commitment to preaching - a topic he returned to several times in the interview. He was also a minister whose views about maturation reflected the trusting-obedience viewpoint described in the previous chapter (Section 5.2.4).

Not all the ministers described the learning that occurred in the study groups in this way. Some of the other respondents indicated that the discussion was less structured and the input of parishioners was considered an important part of the learning that occurred. In these instances the study groups appeared to reflect an exploration of faith that was more mutual and could feature exploration of those issues of immediate concern to the participants.

6.3 Issues about the ministers' attitude to experiencing discomfort when reflecting upon Christian faith

The discussion in 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 confirmed some of the previous chapter's concerns about the ministers' attitudes to unease proving detrimental to the suitability of the teaching provided. The open Christian curriculum was seen to have a duty to promote an environment of developmental expectation. However, the respondents' descriptions of parish education indicated that it should not create situations where discomfort was created by challenges to Christian faith - at least with regard to some members of the congregation such as the elderly. With a few exceptions, the respondents gave no indication that they saw parish education as a tool to reassure people that a period or unease of discomfort during a reassessment of subjects such as Christian faith was normal. Instead, the indication was that it was there to allow parishioners to be healed of such feelings.

6.4 Issues about the provision of learning opportunities outside a worshipping environment

In Chapter 6 it was argued that Christian education must include learning opportunities that exist outside a worshipping environment. Hull's (1984) work was used to show the difficulty of stimulating parishioners to objectively study their Christian faith when actually worshipping. It was pointed out that it was difficult to study the content of Christian faith when in a situation that demanded affirmation of this very thing.

It would appear unlikely that such learning opportunities could exist during religious services and the ministers' descriptions of these indicated that preaching was not a point when they would ask Christians to temporarily 'step outside' their Christian faith. Consequently, it would have been up to the ministers to provide the relevant learning opportunities within the study groups or one-off meetings. However, many of the respondents' descriptions of these meetings indicated that they did not generally fulfil this function. Some of the study groups were described as prayer groups and these were seen to still be situations of worship. A similar situation was found with regard
to the sacrament groups, which were often described as times of prayerful preparation for participation in a particular Christian rite. Whilst some of the study groups were shown to function as opportunities for a more objective study of church teaching by looking at its origins, these opportunities were relatively rare.

6.5 Issues about the ministers' views on relativisation of worldview and learning about other religious faiths

It was in regard to the ministers' views about the value of studying other world religions that their descriptions of parish education proved to be most at odds with that of an open Christian curriculum. It was made clear in Chapter 6 that the challenge of interacting with other ideologies or religious faiths provided significant opportunities for development. The reasons for this are best summed up by Moran:

"What we need is a genuine conversation, eventually having many partners. Christians would have to know how a Christian is related to Jews and to Muslims, with Jews and Muslims speaking for themselves. If we had some understanding of how other people see themselves and how they see us, we might get a better perceptions of ourselves" (1983b, p.151).

Unfortunately, the chance of such a situation arising in the parishes of the interviewed ministers was very slim. Most of the respondents saw no use in offering parishioners the opportunity to learn about other religious faiths. John (IE2) asked "is there any use in studying other religions?". He thought that the Christian message was the only subject the parishioners needed to hear and he felt that it was difficult enough trying to put this over to them. Brian (URC2) commented:

"I think as a Christian I believe what we teach and what Christ offered is the truth. And therefore, if you know the truth, then - the reason why it is difficult to answer this is because it sounds bigoted and pompous - it doesn't really matter how much you know about other religions".

In all of these cases the ministers did not believe that understanding how others perceive Christians could be of any use. Nor did most of the ministers see any benefit in engaging other religious groups in dialogue to better understand them. Brian (URC2), like several others, even thought it could be dangerous for parishioners to interact with people from other faiths. He felt that such an approach would make it easy for them to become "distracted" from their (more important) involvement with Christian faith.

The few ministers who did see some merit in learning about other religions fell into two categories. The first group consisted of five respondents who thought it was useful for a more general understanding but had not set up any parish education to actually allow this learning to occur. Their reasons for this situation were usually that they did not feel they had the time or resources to set up additional teaching groups. At the same time it was indicated that the provision of such teaching was a relatively low priority compared to other aspects of parish education.

The other group saw the need to learn about different religions in terms of spiritual 'self-defence'. Roy (URC1) was the only respondent who had actually invited a member of another religion to talk to some of the parishioners. However, the minister's belief was that the meeting would help strengthen the learners' Christian faith against being swayed by other religious worldviews. He indicated that without proper 'preparation' parishioners could be in danger if they chose to interact with members of other religions. Consequently, the meeting between carefully selected
parishioners and a local Imam had clearly not been set up as an attempt to dialogue in a truly ecumenical way. John (IE2) showed a similar view when discussing the need to study other religions. He commented:

“If I was in parts of London, and there were lots of Muslims in the area, then I would say you do need to know a bit about what Muslims believe and teach because you need to know where you stand when they come. And you will need to be able to talk to these folk, not in an aggressive way, but to make a very clear statement of what you believe”.

Again, the reason for learning about this religion was seen in terms of helping parishioners resist any temptation to become involved in it.

In the interviews with John and David (both IE2) it was found that parishioners were offered knowledge about another religious groups’ beliefs not only to ‘protect’ their Christian faith but also to enable them to try and convert any individuals who might approach them. Both of these respondents commented on the large number of Jehovah’s Witnesses in their localities. This presence caused them a degree of apprehension. Parish education had therefore been set up to prepare parishioners to cope with meeting individuals from this group and to inform them how to try to “win” them for Christ. The need for Jehovah’s Witnesses to be saved from a ‘false’ understanding of religion was made perfectly clear in the interviews. One of John’s ministerial colleagues had originally been a Jehovah’s witness. John commented:

“he knows where they are in error and he knows why and he is a demon when they come to the door.”

It would appear unlikely that the parishioners of such ministers are led to respect other religious views. It would certainly be difficult to imagine how parishioners who are being taught how to actively undermine other individuals’ religious beliefs are going to consider other religions useful sources of understanding about how their own brand of faith is viewed. Even those ministers such as Anthony (RC1) who were less hostile to other religions still do not set out to stimulate an interest in learning about other religions in their parishioners. Overall, the impression given in the interviews was that Christian faith was something that had to be carefully nurtured and protected from other religious understandings till it was capable of withstanding being influenced by these. At no point was a Christian seen to be in need of interacting with other faiths to further understand their own faith. As such, the ministers’ descriptions of parish education fall short of the open Christian education ideals.

6.6 Issues about the ministers’ ability to perceive the multicultural nature of society

The interviews revealed that the ministers could perceive society as being far from multicultural. They often had a very different impression of the nature of modern society than the educationalists mentioned in previous chapters.

Chris’ (M2) comments indicated his belief that there was little likelihood of his parishioners having to interact with members of other religious faiths in the locality of his church. Similar views were held by a number of other ministers and were used by them to legitimise the lack of time spent educating parishioners about other religious faiths. Chris described his community as “ordinary”, which apparently meant that it was an almost exclusively white and Christian or non-religious community. Even the ministers in the most densely populated areas of the South coast could perceive their surroundings as being so predominantly white that members of other world religions would rarely be encountered.
In some cases this was a debatable assumption, for instance Margaret (M2) lived in an area which she described as reflecting an inner city. The researcher was familiar with this area and knew it to have a very high mix of ethnic and religious groups with a synagogue relatively close to the Church. Yet, the respondent described the area as if members of other religions were very rarely met. This may reflect the fact that the Christian community did not interact with the other religious communities in the area. However, evidence existed that some parishioners and ministers could 'overlook' the multicultural aspect of the area in which they resided.

One example of this was found in the interview with Brian (URC2). He believed that there was a significant mix of ethnic groups in his locality. However, he indicated that other members of his community disagreed with this view:

“We had a circular from our head office earlier this year saying that one Sunday this month was to be Racial Justice Sunday... My elders said ‘we will not hold this as it is irrelevant here’... Well, I didn't want to argue with them but I know there is quite a high number of ethnic minorities round here. But our lot seem to have blinkered eyes, you know. Everybody is seen as Anglo-Saxon”.

Even when the ministers perceived Christianity to be one of several strongly supported religions in an area this did not necessarily stimulate them to create learning opportunities for the parishioners to understand these. For instance, Robert (RC2) noted that a large number of Jews existed in his community. However, he did not feel that this necessitated study of Judaism beyond what was inherent in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

6.7 Issues about the isolation of the parishes from the surrounding culture

The discussion in the previous sections was based upon findings that appeared to indicate that the respondents viewed their parishes as havens from many pressures of modern society. At the same time, it appeared that they believed parish education played an important role in maintaining this aspect of the parish's function.

The evidence for this statement was found in the ministers' comments on many different subjects. For instance, when discussing the fragility of some parishioners' Christian faith the ministers indicated the role that the parish played in shielding them from being challenged to reflect upon it too deeply. There were indications that parish education was seen as a way of maintaining their faith whilst they remained in a society which relied upon intellectualism. This form of reasoning was considered to be logical, highly analytical and a severe threat to religious faith if a Christian was not supported with proper guidance by the minister (see Chapter 9). In fact, the ministers' explicit refusal to accept intellectualism and 'scientific' reasoning indicated a fundamental disassociation of their Christian community from secular society.

The ministers also indicated that the parish was viewed as a way of isolating Christians from the rest of society when discussing the perceived threat of other world faiths. They described the need for parishioners to be protected from interaction with other faiths until they were ready to be confronted by alternative faiths. Similarly, the ministers' denial that elements of a spiritual journey might be shared with other religious communities signalled their disassociation of the Christian church from all other faiths. God was portrayed as being a Christian deity rather
than a deity that other faiths could also lay claim to. In this way the interview data revealed similar findings to Marstin's (1979).

This situation could sometimes appear to be at odds with their descriptions of the need to stimulate Christians to move into society and act as evangelists. This topic was not explicitly discussed by any of the respondents and the interviews did not offer enough data to explore this topic to any meaningful depth. However, it was clear that when attempting to prepare Christians to move into society as envoys for the Christian faith the ministers often viewed the learning provided was to make their Christian faith as firm and unshakeable as possible. The overall impression was that parish education was designed to create Christians who did not approach the outside world in terms of dialogical knowing. This form of understanding reflected a characteristic of Stage 5 faith and was something that was required for truly ecumenical discussion. Fowler described it as that point when a Christian was able to be fundamentally interested in, and open to, the views of others. Because of the ministers' apparent lack of understanding about the need for such a characteristic their descriptions of parish education were again seen to possibly promote a vision of maturation that did not reflect faith development.

7 Studying the ministers' descriptions of parish education in terms of the different forms of Christian education

The previous discussion has indicated the way in which the ministers' visions of parish education appear to differ from that of an open Christian curriculum. When studying them in terms of the different forms of Christian education they actually showed similarities with the approaches of both Christian nurture and the closed Christian curriculum (described in Chapter 6). These two approaches are theoretically incompatible. However, the interviews revealed that the ministers could view different groups of parishioners as requiring different forms of parish education.

For instance, the ministers often wanted their parishioners to be helped to understand some of the variety of the approaches to Christian faith that existed and how different types of people might be attracted to these. In these cases the respondents' descriptions of parish education tended to reflect a closed Christian curriculum – although the amount of critical reflection that was deemed suitable for a parishioner could be quite small. On the other hand, the same ministers could describe the parish education required for those who they deemed to have a fragile Christian faith in terms of Christian nurture. This last approach was defined as a form of Christian education that existed to keep the learner convinced about the validity of the Christian faith without attempting to make them critically reflective on it.

This situation indicated that a reassessment of the concept of Christian education could be required. The descriptions of an open Christian curriculum was based upon a belief that all individuals could benefit from being challenged to critically reflect upon their faith and encountering other worldviews than their own. However, if parishioners do exist whose Christian faith can be derailed by such an approach then the theory might have to be modified. Parish education would presumably then include at least two different approaches with the parishioners being encouraged to participate only in those learning opportunities geared for people of their level of development.

At the same time, the ministers occasionally indicated that two or more approaches to teaching parishioners could coexist in the parish because parish education had
two phases. This was a concept put forward in Chapter 6 (Section 4.3.4). It was suggested that the teaching most suitable for a child or someone converting to Christianity was possibly a form of Christian nurture. This would be logical given the common arguments of Christian authors that Christian faith is the basis of an accurate understanding of the nature of reality and therefore has to be inculcated before a proper understanding of the world is possible. Only when this had occurred would it appear possible to aid the learner to become more analytical about their faith and begin to step outside it without losing it altogether.

Such an understanding was most clearly illustrated in the interview with Margaret (M2). She thought that Christians should ideally gain some ability to reflect on their faith and understand that a degree of relativity existed in how Christianity has been interpreted. However, she indicated that preaching could be legitimately used to influence parishioners to have a Christian faith without it involving their intellectual abilities at all. She described it as a very important tool for inculcating Christian faith in those without it.

8 The ministers’ visions of their parishes as communal congregations

Overall, the impression given by the ministers was that they placed a higher value on human characteristics that were thought of as promoting the strength of the community than those that lead to individuality. Hull (1985) observed that this is a common vision amongst Christians and has repercussions for the parish education provided. It appears significant that the characteristics of parish education and teaching which issue from such a view are many of those reflected in the interviews. For instance, Hull points out that the result of a ‘communal’ vision of a congregation is that parish life:

“may centre upon an emphasis on liturgy, authority, and tradition. Preaching may take the form of simple, moralistic homilies and there will seldom be any encouragement for the laity to ask fundamental questions”

(p.16).

At the same time:

“the education which takes place will tend to be of the instructional kind being mainly interested in transmission rather than creativity... There may be a strong tradition of lay passivity due partly to the reservation of sacramental functions to the priest”

It is clear by the use of the term priest that this description may have been influenced by observations of one or two particular denominations. However, Hull’s comments prove to be a good summation of the most common characteristics of the parish education as depicted in the interviews. Whilst these were not the only characteristics found – and some were more ‘positive’ than this – this indicates that to a large extent the research findings are not unusual. Whilst Hull understood there to be an alternative to the communal vision of the parish – one that stressed the importance of individuality – there was little evidence in the interviews to indicate that this was present in the parishes that had been visited.

These findings are also important because, in reflecting a ‘communal’ vision of parish education the ministers’ descriptions also reflected the vision of the church found in communities composed largely of individuals with Stage 3 faith. This could perhaps support the previous chapter’s suggestion that this form of faithing was the most commonly encountered in the interviews.
9 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has made it clear that the descriptions of parish education provided by the respondents did not match the approach to Christian education that was recommended in Chapter 6. Their concepts of how to stimulate development were such that it was questionable whether they adequately catered for the educational needs of the parishioners. The model of maturation they promoted underplayed several essential aspects of faith development such as the critical reflection on enculturated and socialised values or the need to enter into meaningful dialogue with views that are different to our own. At the same time, the ways in which they utilised preaching and other teaching opportunities did not appear to be likely to stimulate these aspects of maturation either. In consequence, the parishioners were not equipped to become apologists for their religion. They were not given the necessary skills to defend their faith through reasoned arguments that members of other religious faiths would be likely to find convincing. Whilst Groome argues that maturation comes “by the power of the intellect guided by revelation and the churches teaching” (1980, p.58) it would appear that the ministers only partially agree with regard to the intellect. This is an aspect that they do not cultivate to any great degree in terms of critical reflection or knowledge of theology etc.

The analysis has also indicated how the ministers’ comments on education revealed a vision of the parish as a separate entity within society. The interviews indicated that it was seen in terms of a haven for the parishioners. It was seen to function as a source of nourishment for their Christian faith in a society that was often thought of as inimical to it. The ministers’ strong sense of religious community also communicated itself through their depiction of the need for Christians to interact with the ‘outside’ community on their own terms. Christian faith was seen as a firm foundation for thought and understanding (whether tacit or not) that was fundamentally unyielding to non-Christian views. It did not leave itself open to being swayed by such understandings and parish education was seen as an important key to ensuring this.

This chapter has also indicated that the structure of parish education in the ministers’ churches was fairly static and that they had little desire to implement significant changes in it. In discussing this it was noted that time and resources pressures were an important limiting factor in the amount of growth and change that could occur in the parish education programmes.
CHAPTER 11

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research. The main findings are summarised and the implications of these explored. Recommendations are derived from this discussion, as are possible avenues for future research. The chapter ends with an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of this research.

2 Conclusions

This research set out to study Christian ministers' constructs of adult maturity and their impact on the parish education provided. To do this the initial research question had to be broken down into several component questions. These were:

- "What were the ministers' understandings of maturity?"
- "What were the ministers' understandings of the educational needs of adult parishioners?"
- "What was the actual impact of the ministers' constructs of maturity on the parish education they provided?"

At the same time the researcher used relevant available literature to discuss (i) what a suitable description of maturity and maturation might be, and (ii) how a suitable form of parish based adult education would function. In this way the ministers' opinions could be compared to those derived from a study of important psychological and educational theory. Such a comparison was intended to provide an understanding of the validity and relevance of the ministers' views. The conclusions of the discussion with regard to all of these aspects of the research are given below.

2.1 An assessment of the nature of human maturation from reading relevant literature

A review of available literature revealed the wide variety of religious and secular psychological theories that attempted to describe human development. In studying these it became apparent that defining maturation is problematic yet vitally important. Our judgements about how to create a just society and the value of autonomy are fundamentally influenced by our own levels of maturity as well as what we consider to be normal human development. Consequently, having an accurate understanding of maturation is extremely important. The aspects of human development that might be implicated in maturation have been shown to be numerous but attempting to attend to these in any definition of maturation is necessary.

The discussion of earlier chapters suggested that one of the most suitable theories for understanding maturation is that of James Fowler (1981, 1984, et al). His faith development theory proves to be wide enough to include most of the aspects of human development that appear to be implicated in maturation. At the same time it united into one theory the writings of some of the most influential psychologists.

However, it was also noted that, whilst Fowler's faith development theory was based upon both the findings of previously popular theories and the evidence from a large number of interviews, it was not without its drawbacks. One area of concern involves the influence of the author's Christian faith upon his judgements about the value of
some elements of maturation and the reason that humans develop as they do. It was also noted that Fowler's theory was not as detailed as it could be. The lack of a comprehensive analysis of the relationship of different aspects of faithing meant it was difficult to critique the validity of the theory. At the same time, in spite of the theory loosening some previous theories' linkages of maturation to age, it did not necessarily free itself enough from other limiting concepts of stage theory. Given the number of human characteristics linked to maturation it appeared unlikely that the stages would be quite so distinct or universally applicable and more discussion was needed on how the stages might interpenetrate.

2.2 A description of the ideal form of parish education for adults derived from reading relevant literature

This research has set out an argument for accepting an open Christian curriculum as the most suitable educational approach for adults within a parish setting. This approach to Christian education was similar to that described by Astley and Day (1992) but was modified and expanded in the light of the works of certain religious or liberal educationalists and Fowler's descriptions of how to promote faith development. The development that it seeks to promote closely echoes the description of maturation in Fowler's Stages of Faith. It seeks to empower the parishioner to live an authentic existence with a desire to interact meaningfully with other cultures and faiths.

2.3 The ministers' perceptions of maturation

When studying the respondents' views about maturation and parish education, the first thing that the research found was that exploring the respondents' understandings of these subjects was harder than expected. The ministers did not necessarily have an ability to discuss the topics being studied to the level required for a clear understanding of their views.

The ministers' understandings of the nature of maturity were not easily elicited and therefore difficult to fully document. This was for several reasons.

Firstly, the respondents had not previously been challenged to define their understandings of maturity or maturation. Ministers were usually able to give a brief description of maturity when asked. However, once their descriptions were interrogated more deeply it became apparent that they were being required to study a previously unexplored area of their understanding.

 Ministers did not appear to have been exposed to a common discussion about maturity. This meant that their vocabulary was highly individual. This was true even though the vocabulary was nearly always based on Christian 'faith' terms. This vocabulary often proved problematic for the respondents when they tried to describe the complex concepts behind important elements of maturity. Their description of trust was one such area. The ministers found that they had to think about how their vocabulary related to it.

Another reason for the difficulty in eliciting clear understandings of the respondents' constructs of maturity was that they were sometimes contradictory. Conflicting views could be found at different points in a single interview. At the same time the concepts that were described could appear to clash. One example of this was found in the discussions about how individuals came to be converted to a Christian faith.
The descriptions of the nature of Christian faith and the nature of divine revelation appeared difficult to reconcile logically.

In spite of these problems, some areas of agreement and disagreement about the nature of maturity were identified.

2.3.1 Similarities in understandings of maturity

It became apparent that progression was assumed to be a simple concept to describe. The ministers' initial reactions were that it had few component parts. However, statements to this effect were often undermined when later responses were studied. Their constructs could involve many different elements or depend on complex ideas.

The ministers all thought progression was intimately linked with having a Christian faith. A large minority of the ministers claimed that this faith was the only factor that defined maturity. Some ministers (inclusivists) described some general human characteristics as also being involved with it. However, these were considered less central to progression. These responses revealed a vision of maturation as a hierarchy of different elements.

Christian faith was thought to be integral to high levels of maturity. It was believed to comprise two closely linked elements. These were belief and trust. Belief was a uniquely Christian set of articles of faith - a Christian fundamental theology. This described the basic tenets of a Christian's faith. A few ministers associated maturation with a gradual honing of this theology to its core elements. This usually involved moving away from an initial belief that upholding aspects of a particular denomination's form of worship or organisation was an essential element of belief. Instead, the ministers described maturation as shedding them from the fundamental theology and concentrating on God rather than the church as an organisation. This was seen as a realisation that in many ways the churches rather than God chose how to organise themselves. This led to an acceptance of the relativity of many aspects of church organisation. The ministers usually viewed learning as the opportunity to understanding the Christian fundamental theology that they themselves held.

Trust was viewed as a decision to commit oneself to the Christian fundamental theology. This was a difficult concept to describe from the data gathered. The ministers themselves had problems explaining it. Their concept of trust depended on the need for a commitment to a God who was not visible.

The ministers were adamant that mature Christians did not rely on intellectualism. Instead, they urged parishioners to cultivate 'wisdom'. This involved relying on feelings and convictions that were believed to issue from, and embody, Christian faith. It was shown that an important aspect of Christian action - and therefore maturity - relied on instinctual reactions to situations. A purely rational exploration of a situation was not considered enough to create mature action. The ministers' fundamental distrust of both intellectualism and empiricism led them to doubt the validity of any non-theological field of study. Psychology and Sociology were therefore not valued to any great degree in relation to exploring maturity or Christian faith.
The ministers' concept of autonomy proved interesting. Their views were influenced by their understanding of trust. Autonomy was the movement towards a complete reliance on God as a guide. This resembled the decentration from self that was described by Fowler. The ministers' views were found to reflect the paradox set out by Hulmes (1979) whereby autonomy is gained by becoming subservient to God. However, ministers' opinions differed about how this reliance on God could manifest itself. One group (those in Paradigm 1; see Table 1, Chapter 9) argued that a total reliance on God was visible in an individual's compliance with the church's rules and upholding the need for these. Another group felt that those dependent on God could still choose to challenge certain aspects of the church organisation or its ministers' views. The differences of opinion therefore centred on whether reliance and trust in God were the same as reliance and trust in a church and its ministers. It was noticed that although ministers might argue that it was legitimate for Christians to sometimes move to other denominations, the ministers' descriptions of the general Christian church were very biased towards their own denominations' interpretations.

The ministers strongly believed that maturation could not be promoted by adherence to other world religions. Neither was it thought to be promoted by groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who were considered to be on the 'fringe' of the Christian church.

2.3.2 Differences of opinion about maturity

The data from the interviews indicated that the ministers could have significantly different opinions about a number of elements of their constructs of maturity:

Some ministers viewed maturation as a gradual, lifelong process that often involved several distinct stages. Others viewed maturity as being gained in one transition - baptism into the Christian faith.

Some ministers viewed maturation as something that could occur for non-Christians, even if they did not as easily gain it. Others argued that maturity was only possible for Christians.

Some ministers viewed church attendance as a good indicator of maturity. Others believed that church attendance could not be taken as indicating maturity. They argued that parishioners could attend church services for a number of reasons. People were seen to attend for the purposes of gaining friends, for status and even out of habit.

A number of ministers valued the act of questioning the decisions of church authorities. This was seen as a sign of using critical abilities to study the Christian faith. Other ministers saw this form of questioning as a sign of immaturity.

Some ministers valued intellectualism in parishioners because it indicated that they could critically analyse subjects. Other ministers were ambivalent to this and felt it was irrelevant to maturation.

Ministers had different opinions about the role of mental discomfort in maturation. Some felt that painful situations could stimulate people to change and adapt their lifestyles to better fulfill the Christian ideal. Other ministers argued that the presence of such distress was an indication of immaturity.
Finally, some of the ministers viewed action as a good indicator of the state of an individual's maturity - if they did 'good works' then they were assumed to be relatively mature. Other ministers argued that this was not the case. They thought that the motivation behind an act was the key to assessing the maturity of the person doing it.

2.3.3 The ministers' own levels of maturity

In studying the ministers' constructs of maturity evidence accumulated that their own levels of maturity could perhaps be commented on in terms of the Fowler's stages. Definite conclusions could not be drawn about the faithing styles present but the data suggested that the predominant one might be that of Stage 3. Several ministers also revealed reasoning that reflected the faithing style of Stage 4. Due to the mixture of these faithing styles in some interviews it was considered possible that a number of the ministers were exhibiting characteristics of the halfway stages that could exist between Stages 3 and 4. If the faithing styles present in the interview did reflect the ministers' stages of development then they would appear to reflect the average level described by Fowler (1981).

These findings allowed suggestions to be made about some of the unconscious motivations of the ministers' descriptions of maturity and education. It also partially explained the largely nebulous and unexamined understandings of maturity that were present.

2.4 The ministers' perceptions of parish education

The respondents' descriptions of parish education indicated that their constructs were loosely organised and sometimes contradictory, but at the same time they shared many similarities regardless of the denomination in which the parish education occurred. The ministers appeared to understand that adults required opportunities to learn throughout life, even if they did not necessarily conceive of their needs in similar terms to psychologists or educationalists. They therefore endeavoured to provide regular learning opportunities to the parishioners, some of which (e.g. the study groups or one-to-one meetings) involved discussion and attention to matters of immediate concern to the learners (problem centred learning). The exploration of Christian educationalists' visions of Christian education indicated that there was scope for both the preaching and study group meetings to offer valuable opportunities for the learners even if the breadth of learning opportunities provided should ideally be greater.

The ministers appeared to view parish education as having three main functions. They thought it existed:

i) To strengthen and support the Christian faith of each parishioner.

ii) To strengthen the Christian community

iii) To spread the Christian faith.

2.5 The suitability of the ministers' understandings of parish education

Enough evidence was found to support a claim that the respondents' descriptions of parish education were only partially able to fulfil the educational needs of the parishioners with regard to personal growth and maturation. This situation was found to be at least partially due to their understandings of the process of human maturation.
One important finding of the research was that the impact of the ministers' constructs of maturation was limited to the educational content of the parish education provided rather than the overall structure. It has been found that the time and place of the learning opportunities set up by the respondents was broadly similar across the denominations, with the respondents favouring a traditional structure (the one exception being the Roman Catholic ministers due to a diocesan imposed restructuring of the parish education). The discussion suggested that the ministers were never challenged to explore the possible need for implementing any new forms of educational setting such as one that studied Christian faith from a more objective angle or that involved interfaith discussions. It was also noted that there was little likelihood of the respondents building upon the structure already in existence because of time and resource constraints. At the same time, increasing the amount of education available for parishioners could be considered a relatively low priority.

As a result of this situation the research had to concentrate on determining how the ministers' constructs of maturation may have affected the content of the parish education. It had originally been assumed that by comparing the ministers' descriptions of maturation with their descriptions of what parish education should promote it would become clear where the one had influenced the other. However, this was not as easy to determine as expected due to the respondents' lack of clarity about either subject. However, the interviews did reveal that the ministers saw parish education as an opportunity to offer parishioners a vision of what it was to be mature in terms of their Christian faith. Because their understandings of maturation were intimately bound up with the development of Christian faith it could be seen that they were therefore attempting to provide parishioners with a model of maturity for them to emulate or aspire to. This was shown to be an important aspect of Christian education and meant that it was important to ascertain how suitable these ministers' constructs of maturation were for being used as models of human development in parish education.

The ministers' constructs of maturation were shown to have both similarities and dissimilarities with those of important Christian theorists such as Fowler. Consequently, the research concluded that the respondents' descriptions of human development proved to be of limited use as an instrument for addressing the educational needs of the parishioners. On one hand, their depiction of the ideal form of maturity did not include important aspects of human development that had been identified by Christian authors who had studied religious maturation. Because of this the message given to the parishioners about the nature of maturation was seen to be misleading. At the same time, the ministers' descriptions of human development meant that the value they placed on different teaching methods could differ from those recommended by secular or religious educationalists. For instance, with an understanding of Christian faith as being composed of a tacit or felt response to the world, the ministers could overlook the need for educational settings that stimulated critical reflection on it. At the same time the ministers could describe some parishioners as having a level of maturity that could be damaged by such reflection. This also led them to underplay the importance of stimulating critical reflection upon Christian faith when they were teaching these individuals.
It was concluded that the ministers' descriptions of how parish education achieved its aims meant that it appeared to fail to suitably address parishioners' needs in several areas. These were:

i) The need to stimulate critical reflection.
ii) The need to stimulate self-directed learning.
iii) The need to accept periods of unease as an aspect of maturation.
iv) The need to stimulate an interest in engaging in meaningful dialogue with members of other religious faiths.

3 Implications of Research Findings

It is clear that, in today's society, there is a great need to explore existential or religious questions. The literature explored in the earlier chapters indicates that such questioning lies at the very heart of human maturation. We appear to be structured in such a way that to develop we must ask difficult questions of ourselves, and court unease as we explore our relationship with reality and the society we inhabit.

One of the most logical places to turn for help in such an exploration should be the Christian Church. The author believes that, with the correct educational approach, the parishes would be an ideal setting for the stimulation of personal growth for both Christians and non-Christians alike. In terms of what liberal educationalists require from a teaching environment the parish would appear ideal. The Church is not involved in teaching people to pass exams and is therefore not hampered by the need to maintain and implement syllabi. Instead, the Church appears to offer the opportunity for lifelong, problem-based learning. At the same time, the parish could be a valuable forum for interfaith dialogue. All of these factors mean that given the correct understanding of the educational needs of parishioners each parish could offer society at large a valuable educational setting.

Unfortunately, such a vision would appear to almost impossible to implement given the reality of parish education as portrayed by the respondents in this research. For a start, the education they described appeared to be aimed almost solely at teaching Christians and those wishing to become Christians. Very little attempt was made to set up learning opportunities for others who were interested in a more general exploration of religious or spiritual matters. This observation led to a realisation that the respondents' visions of their churches' mission was somewhat limited. They could not see how they could help others develop unless these individuals were willing to become Christian. Nor were the respondents willing to dialogue with anyone from another religious faith in any meaningful way. This situation indicates the way in which the parishes visited in this study were missing the opportunity to have a significant impact on the society around them - even whilst many of them strove to create Christians who would be active evangelists within it. These parishes also missed out on the opportunity for learning from individuals who came from the rich mix of ethnic and religious groups that resided in close proximity to many of the churches.

The implication of this research is that the respondents understood learning to more-or-less be a one way movement - flowing from the minister or Church hierarchy, through the congregation and out into society. Consequently, the parish education was not set up to make the parishioners true apologists for their religion. By ignoring the importance of interacting with other religious faiths the parish education appears unable to help Christians dialogue with others in a way that is useful to either party. The parishioners appear likely to end up skilled only in quoting Church teachings of
the Bible. They are left to learn for themselves how to debate religious matters in a way that a member of another religion could find useful.

Given the state of the parish education in many of the ministers' parishes, it is possible to argue that one of the implications of this research is that attempts should be made to stimulate the respondents to re-evaluate the educational mission of their churches. However the data from the interviews also have implications for understanding the degree of success such an attempt might have.

The first question raised is how the ministers could be influenced to reflect upon the nature of the parish education. This research has shown that they did not believe that critical scrutiny was necessarily important. Therefore, they would need to be challenged to undertake such reflection. However, the opportunities to do this would appear to be few and far between. The respondents did not read much educational literature. Nor were there many chances for them to undertake educational training - an opportunity they would not necessarily take up anyway. It was also noticeable that the ministers did not know much about any of the regional or national organisations that existed for promoting Christian education and organising courses.

Even if it were possible to interest a minister in reflecting more deeply upon the parish education he or she promoted, it is unlikely they would want to modify it to any great extent. When prompted to study their views in the interviews the ministers remained content with the education they provided even if they had not reflected deeply on the subject of its suitability before. Even if the ministers became convinced that they should change aspects of the teaching with regard to structure or learning the evidence from the interview suggests that they might not be able to introduce them. A recurring theme throughout this research has been the presence of time and resource constraints that have to be taken into account.

This last point leads to the realisation that there is another implication of the research findings to be explored. This relates to the fact that the ministers' duties as the chief educators in the parishes contributed to the busyness of their lives. The research showed that most of them accepted this because they believed that they were the ones most suited to this role. Consequently, there was a general reluctance to delegate educational duties to other members of the parish.

The most prominent exceptions to this rule were the Roman Catholics. They made it clear that, by being asked by the Diocese to delegate nearly all of the non-preaching teaching duties to parishioners, they had discovered they had much more time to plan and implement other educational courses or study groups. It would appear that, if the other ministers could be persuaded to see parishioners' as having the capability to run aspects of parish education then they would have time to increase the number of learning opportunities available or attend to other matters. The stimulation of parishioners to take on positions of responsibility in education could certainly be of use in their own development. The Roman Catholics believed that becoming an educator is "empowering". Unfortunately, given the impressions gained in some of the interviews, the concept of parishioners controlling learning could appear threatening.

The concept of ministers feeling threatened by certain ideas leads the discussion to point out another very important implication of the research findings. When the ministers' descriptions of maturity differ from that given by Fowler (1981, 1984), Strunk (1965) and others, there is a possibility that natural human development may
alter parishioners in ways that the respondents do not value. Fowler (1981) and Hull (1985) argue that such a situation can be seen as a natural result of faith development. They both mention the problems encountered by someone who progresses to a stage of development above the group's average level. They believe that such an individual can find that his or her approach to the Christian faith stimulates a hostile reaction in the others. It was noted in the previous chapter that the respondents' descriptions of the parishes were consistent with a communal model. Hull (1985) comments that, in such an organisation a premium is placed upon conservation rather than innovation. Consequently, parishioners who attempt to think for themselves arouse suspicion. Unfortunately, for the parishioners in some of the parishes visited during this study, they may find that their own maturation could therefore bring them into conflict with their fellow Christians.

If this is true, then any attempt to stimulate the respondents to promote an open Christian curriculum is going to have to overcome any hostility a minister may have to the aspects of maturation that are supported by that educational approach. It is not easy to see how this can be done without a lot of effort on the part of other educators or Church leaders showing a marked interest in promoting this educational approach.

The research findings also appear to have implications for those in charge of training Christian ministers. Even the respondents who had recently undergone ministerial training were shown to have had very little educational training. Lawson (1979) argues that there is a great danger in leaving people to create educational theory on their own. He believes that it usually results in the teaching becoming a form of training rather than education. Education is seen as being that form of teaching which stimulates critical reflection in the hope that a learner can recognise encultured ways of thinking. Because of the fact that learners did not receive much educational training and the fact that their descriptions of parish education and maturation could sometimes play down the importance of critical reflection, it is possible to suggest that the ministerial training influenced the respondents to become 'trainers' rather than educators. Such a possibility means that it would be important to further study the impact of the ministerial courses with regard to this issue.

Before continuing it is worth noting that whilst the communal parish may have drawbacks, Hull (1985) indicates that stimulating the parishioners to gain greater autonomy of thought may also prove problematic. He describes the alternative model of parish function as individualistic. His description of this bears several of the hallmarks of a group of individuals with Stage 4 faith. The individualistic congregation's weakness is its emphasis on the individual's right to think for themselves. Hull warns that this can create a breakdown in commitment to the community and a tendency to be introspective. In the light of such descriptions it is obvious that, whilst stimulation of faith development is desirable, without a minister who understands the weaknesses of each stage, the congregation can become unbalanced.

4 Recommendations

This research was an initial study into the ministers' constructs of maturity and their impact on adult education in the parish setting. The sample chosen provided a rich source of data but due to the reasons set out in the chapter on methodology this research cannot set out recommendations for general parish education. It must limits itself to offering recommendations for the parishes in which the respondents
work. At the same time, care must be taken because the findings are based on the ministers' descriptions of the adult education present. This means that concrete recommendations about the way in which the parish structures its adult education cannot be made. Instead, the recommendations that issue from the findings involve:

- Strategies for influencing the ministers' concepts of maturity and parish education for adults.
- Useful areas of further study that can build on the data presented.

4.1 Strategies for influencing the ministers' concepts of maturity and parish education for adults

The findings of this research suggest several recommendations:

Firstly, the ministers interviewed should be further stimulated to consider their perceptions of maturity. This would allow them to clarify their opinions on the subject. They should also be offered a reason for doing this. It would appear that offering them the opportunity to explore their views within the context of a study of faith development theory would be useful. In this way it might be possible for the ministers to develop a model of maturation that better serves the congregation's needs.

The findings of this research also suggest that ministers should be stimulated to reconsider their opinions about the aims of parish education in relation to adult parishioners. The ministers have been shown to have little training in educational matters and a lack of knowledge about the issues that Christian educationalists believe to be basic to formulating successful education.

4.2 Directions for future research

It is clear from the previous discussion that the research findings have revealed a number of useful avenues for future research.

4.2.1 Future research to further establish the reliability of this study's findings

Some studies would prove useful in clarifying the findings of this research and exploring their reliability.

For instance, research could be undertaken to study the degree to which the respondents' views on maturation represented the opinions of other Christian ministers working in Britain. This could be done by studying the frequency with which the 'elements' and 'poles' of maturity described in Chapter 9 were encountered in a wider selection of ministers. The study could then begin to explore the universality of the concerns and beliefs about maturity that were described. It would be useful if the study could be designed in a way that revealed any regional or denominational variations of opinion that might exist.

Another avenue of future research could be a study of the level of faith development of those ministers whose perceptions of maturation are being studied. The discussion in previous chapters has indicated that it is possible that the respondents' style of faithing influences their perceptions of maturation with regard to several topics such as critical reflection and the value of interacting with other religious groups. Consequently, a study of their level of faith development would help clarify the factors that are influencing the ministers' opinions.
One of the previously mentioned drawbacks of this research was that it relied on the ministers' descriptions of what parish education consisted of. A useful follow up to this research could therefore be a study of parish education through participation in it. This would allow a much more accurate assessment of the learning opportunities that were available to parishioners and the forms of teaching that occurs in them. If such a study was conducted in the parishes of ministers whose visions of parish education had been obtained then the accuracy of their descriptions could be explored.

4.2.2 Research into new areas of study

The findings of this research also indicate several new areas in which useful study could be undertaken.

It would appear that the training of Christian ministers with regard to parish education could be useful. The nature of the initial ministerial training courses and the provision of subsequent training could be studied to analyse factors such as who teaches them, how parish education is portrayed and what a suitable content is thought to be. This would allow an assessment of the courses' efficiency in raising awareness of relevant educational issues as well as the suitability of the training provided.

Since the interviews in this research were completed there has been an increasing interest by many of the evangelical churches in running Alpha courses. This could offer a researcher a chance to study the impact that this course has on a minister's understanding of parish education. Interviewing a minister before they have implemented the course and again when it has been running for a while could prove informative in studying how the implementation of a prepared course impacts on the educator's understanding of parish education or maturation.

If the findings of this research were applicable to other ministers than those sampled then it would appear that ministers should be stimulated to modify their approach to parish education. However, it would be useful to study these individuals' receptivity to such prompting. The interviews have indicated that several factors could prevent the implementation of new forms of parish education. For instance, respondents often mentioned time and resource pressures as limiting their ability to do this. At the same time, some ministers were content with the parish education that was already provided. Because of these factors, ministers might not be receptive to being asked to re-evaluate their parish education and introduce changes. An analysis of their reasons for this would indicate the factors that need to be taken into account when attempting to interest ministers in improving the standard of parish education.

Another important area of future research could be an exploration of the understanding of maturity and adult education by the Christian denominations as a whole. This would only be possible where a central organisational body existed to discuss or organise educational matters within a denomination. However, a study of the attitudes of such a body would prove useful in assessing how well the parish education provided by Christian ministers fulfils denomination's criteria for successful education.

The present research concentrated on exploring the ministers' perceptions of maturation and education. However, another important area of future study could be to explore the parishioners' constructs of these same subjects. In doing this it could
be seen whether the ministers' views coincided with their parishioners. The study could begin to assess what the learners' perceptions of their own educational needs are and how well they believe these are being addressed.

5 **The Validity of the Research Findings - Strengths and Weaknesses of the Present Study**

The following is an assessment of the research's main strengths and weaknesses.

5.1 **Strengths of the research**

One of the primary strengths of this research is that it has initiated an investigation into an unexplored but important area of discussion. It has begun to explore the constructs of maturity, human development and parish education held by Christian ministers. At the same time it has begun to assess the way in which these may be linked. Whilst this study's findings cannot be shown to be generalisable (c.f. next Section) it has begun to identify relevant issues that future studies can now build upon.

Another strength of the research is that it has employed an approach to sampling that maximised the chances of significant contrasts of views. The respondents selected for the interviews came from a wide selection of Christian denominations. The benefit of this was that it was more likely for the research to gain a broad range of opinions with which to work. The usefulness of such an approach has already been indicated during the analysis of the contrasting views found in the interviews of the Roman Catholic, Independent Evangelical and Anglican ministers. These proved to be an especially rich source of data with regard to differences of opinion about maturation and education.

The response rate from the ministers was good (80%). This indicates that the data analysis does not have to concern itself too much with exploring whether any factors were creating an abnormal respondent selection.

At the same time the interviews could be said to have largely been successful in terms of making the respondents as comfortable as possible. Whilst one individual did not appear to have enjoyed the interview and a few others seemed to be participating in the research out of a sense of duty, most of the others were relaxed and open about their views. The degree of their openness was frequently indicated by the fact that they discussed subjects with the researcher that they would not necessarily discuss with their fellow parishioners. Such instances indicated the way in which the collected data would appear to be an accurate portrayal of their views.

The research proved to have been well planned with regard to using two separate phases of data analysis. The fact that questions that arose from the Phase 1 interviews could be addressed in Phase 2 proved highly useful. At the same time, the responses of the ministers to questions about education in Phase 1 proved valuable for approaching the data collection in Phase 2 in a more effective manner.

Given the complexity of the topics being studied and the difficulty in accessing many of the respondents' opinions, the decision to use semi-structured interviews was justified. The use of open interviews would have been unsuitable because the research has shown that a wide variety of subjects needed to be addressed to attempt to answer the initial research question. At the same time questionnaires
would also have been inappropriate. They are unlikely to have allowed the problems with language to have been rectified so quickly. This would have necessitated several more phases. Nor would they have allowed so many new areas of interest to be identified. The interviews allowed the researcher to immediately explore new topics as they came to light. Whilst the use of questionnaires may have meant that the views of many more respondents could have been gained – and the research findings would therefore be more generalisable - this would not appear to have made up for the lack of depth of the data. However, now that the initial research has indicated some of the most important factors involved in determining ministers' perceptions of maturation or parish education it might be possible to use questionnaires successfully as part of a new study.

The fact that the interviews were all conducted by the same researcher means that there should have been a consistency in the way that the data was collected. At the same time the use of one individual to analyse the data should also have provided a degree of consistency in the way that the data was handled.

5.2 Weaknesses of the research

Some of the weaknesses of this study have already been discussed. For instance, in Chapter 7 it was pointed out that this was a localised study with a biased sample. As a consequence, this research could not use the interview data to formulate generalisable conclusions. Because of this it must be left to other studies to determine how widely applicable these findings are. It also means that the recommendations set out above are only applicable to the parishes of the respondent sample. If they are to be used to inform research or parish education planning in other parish settings then they must be regarded as hypotheses that require confirmation by further study.

Unsurprisingly, other limitations and weaknesses became apparent after the research had begun over even during the final data analysis. The following discussion explores some of the most significant of these problems and the ways in which the study could be improved if it were to be repeated.

As with any research, once the data analysis had been completed it was possible to see where interviews should have been modified to collect more data on a particular subject. In this research it became clear that it would have been valuable to further explore the respondents' views about the role of parish education for those wishing to convert to Christianity. The data analysis would have also have benefited from more information about who the different aspects of parish education were aimed at – parishioners, Christians in general or interested others.

An important weakness of this research was the fact that it involved the assessment of the ministers' descriptions of parish education. It is not known how accurate their descriptions were. This was unavoidable because, given the practical limitations of undertaking this doctoral research, it proved too time consuming to attend all of the relevant study groups and services in the parishes visited. It is clear that an attempt to assess the content of the teaching directly would have been valuable and this could be a possible approach for future study.

Once the interviews were initiated it became clear that a significant problem existed with regard to the language being used in the interview questions. On one hand the ministers found it difficult to relate the questions about education to what happened in
the parish. On the other hand, the term ‘maturity’ did not play a very large part in any of the respondents' constructs of human development. Although changes were made to the interview questions to try and make them more easily understood, an issue still remains about the effects of the language used in the interviews and even the during initial contact process.

One of the hardest aspects of interpreting the respondents' views on maturity was understanding what they meant by faith, belief, trust and other related terms. Given this situation it would have been useful during the planning of this research to have studied these subjects more deeply. The fact that it took so much time to understand some ministers' language may have meant the research should have concentrated on interviewing respondents from fewer denominations. Although the respondents' vocabularies tended to be highly individualised there were also observable denominational influences. Therefore, by interviewing ministers from only two or three denominations it may have been possible to alleviate some of the problems created by the need to interpret different vocabularies. The researcher would have had more time to become familiar with the vocabulary used by denominations being studied.

This was not the only factor that made it difficult to collect meaningful data. Others also existed and together these meant that the collection of data proved to be far more problematic than was anticipated. This caused the researcher to reassess his expectations about the degree to which ministers would be able to describe maturity or human development. With hindsight, it is possible to see that the researcher's familiarity with psychology and educational theory may have led him to overlook the problems that others might have in discussing the topic if they have not been introduced to debates on the subject. A set of pilot interviews may have alerted the researcher to this, and would certainly have helped him formulate an approach that would have been proved more useful in the initial interviews of Phase I.

It is also possible that the researcher's previous involvement in the study of educational theory may have unconsciously led to him assume that the respondents would be more knowledgeable about educational matters than they were. Due to both of these situations it is possible that the initial research question was somewhat over-ambitious, with the researcher assuming more data would be forthcoming than was actually likely.

Now that the data have been analysed it is also clear that the initial research question was based upon some other debatable assumptions. It was assumed that an individual's understanding of maturation influenced his or her understanding of education, and therefore influenced how they would structure it. Previous discussion has shown that the ministers' perceptions of maturation did not impact of the structure of parish education in any noticeable way. This meant that research should have concentrated more on studying the way in which the respondents' models of maturation influenced the content of parish education. Unfortunately, this did not become fully apparent until well into the Phase 2 interviews. Consequently, less data were collected with which to explore how the ministers' perceptions of maturation had actually influenced the parish education.

A need for more detailed analysis of this same topic was also important because of the researcher's realisation that the relationship between perceptions of maturation and the perceptions of the aims of education appears to have been more fluid that expected. The original research question was based upon an assumption that
studying the respondents' perceptions of maturity would, to a large extent, inform the researcher of their understandings of the aims of parish education. Because most of the ministers' perceptions of maturation and education were often largely unstructured there was little confirmation of this belief. The interview data therefore raised a question as to how it was possible to prove that one view influenced the other. As a result of this situation the research could be said to have failed to fully address an aspect of the initial research question. If the research was to be undertaken again changes would have to be made to redress this. Alternatively, it could be argued that a more suitable research question should be formulated instead. Given the findings of the present research it is possible that, if the suitability of parish education is to be assessed, it is of more use to study the parish education offered and the ministers' views on this, than concentrating on identifying their perceptions of maturation separately.

The following points are not necessarily assumed to be weaknesses in this research but are mentioned because they could be relevant to the reader's assessment of the validity of the research analysis.

The first point relates to the fact that the researcher is not a practising Christian. This was indicated in Chapter 8 and it is possible that commentators on this research could therefore ask whether the researcher could fully enter into the ministers' understandings of maturation, or apprehend the numinous elements of faith that might have informed these. Whilst there might be some validity in this question, it must be noted the researcher was previously a committed member of the Roman Catholic Church and has therefore experienced the Christian life from a believer's standpoint. Whilst, choosing to no longer live as a practising Christian the research has remained interested in the field of Christian education and the potential for parish education to provide valuable opportunities for development.

The final point in this section relates to the fact that this research has stressed the impact that the ministers' levels of faith development may have on their perceptions of the topics being investigated. It seems only fair to acknowledge that the researcher's level of the faith development could also have influenced his analysis of the interview data. It is not possible to actually examine what this influence may be without an independent assessment of the researcher's level of faith development - although it would appear possible that the discussion in this research might offer the reader some clues.
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