

Conclusion

The first thing that perhaps sharply comes to mind when someone gets to the end of a piece of writing like this is that only the text needs to be closed, but by no means the subject itself – as it has still got some loose ends, aspects to think about which in a positive sense, forces the researcher to reflect further on. In my point of view in almost every respect, this is also the case with Fowler's theory of faith development. There are hardly any segments that would not require further research.

In the first part of my work, I tried to provide an overview of the birth of Fowler's theory, the concept of faith, and the actual stages. As I mentioned, my main point at this stage was to let the theorist himself speak and to build up the space for presentation by using the thoughts expressed and described by him. The second major chapter was followed by reflections that made valuable critiques of virtually every distinct segment of the Fowler paradigm. Critiques concerned the concept of faith used in the theory, the methodology of research, and the structural arrangements and sequence of the development of faith. I think, after reviewing Fowler and his critics, we can make some statements that are as follows:

- (1) Fowler's concept of faith is quite diverse, which there is an acceptable explanation for, as it can be stated that the theorist made some effort to create a general paradigm of faith development, so it was necessary that faith would not be interpreted in accordance by a single religious tradition. However, if we understand *the saving Christian faith* as the initial concept of faith, it can change our view of the general concept of faith at one point: faith in this case will be a divine gift and not a natural, innate ability of man. This Christian certitude, however, does not preclude the development of faith, which is based on the knowledge of God, the appearance, and the growth of trust. The Christian faith is portrayed in Scripture as a dynamic and growing entity, and its gift nature does not, therefore, exclude man's responsibility to ensure the development of this faith through the use of human potential with God's help.
- (2) The cross-sectional analysis of sampling for Fowler's research is quite narrow. Concerning the concept of faith and the conduct of research on the development of faith, it is perhaps not too bold to say that it requires both *rethinking* and the completion of carrying out some possible *new research* at the same time. Let us remember that Fowler's work and the surveys that underlie the background of it, took place in America many decades ago, and as we have seen, mostly Catholic-Protestant Christians formed

the basis of sampling. I am convinced that if we want to use Fowler's theory in the future, it will be increasingly inevitable to work with a recent approach, a rethought concept of critical reflection, and a much more comprehensive research program that is not limited to addressing people with a Christian background, but rather has a much greater immersion in a religious sense. Such imaginary research would be both enlightening in terms of the validity of Fowler's views so far and, in addition to a universal perspective, it could give room to new questions about the characteristics of certain religious conceptions in terms of faith development or the question of how a given social background affects individuals' preferences for faith development. I don't really think it is enough nowadays to respond to the critiques of Fowler just by philosophizing – but rather much of the response should come from conducting some new research.

- (3) In the light of critiques about the structure and sequence of the theory of faith development, it has become quite clear that Fowler's approach is capable of moving between two poles: at some point, he makes normative statements that the later faith stages are better than the earlier ones, however, at some point he withdraws from making statements as before and makes no distinction as to the individual stages. In my opinion, this ambivalence is definitely a sensitive point to which the theorist did not want to react in depth. This recognition caused me tension as well and I thought even if I am careful, I have to react somehow. I dealt with this concept partly in the fifth chapter of my work.

In the fourth chapter, I also tried to give the floor to other theorists who approach the issue of faith development with their own specific perspectives. These viewpoints — like the theories of Sam Keen, Heinz Streib, or James Loder — describe a similar trajectory as Fowler's theory but do not address the emerging issue of normativeness either. Of course, it is important to see that the problem of normativeness is primarily driven by strict sequencing at Fowler, while this is precisely what opposing approaches (such as Streib's belief styles) seek to avoid. Nevertheless, I think the issue remains on the surface. After all, every theory of faith development follows a similar curve, describing an entire life process, so the question naturally arises as to whether one should strive to move forward in this process or not?

In the last chapter of my work, I proceeded from the perhaps seemingly bold assumption that the theory of faith development can be somehow linked to normativeness: if we accept the Osmer hermeneutic circle as an adaptable approach in the practical theological context, normativeness results as one of its tasks. However, the question arose, how we should

understand normativeness: as an outside expectation, including the ethical nature, according to which one makes the right decision if one wants to develop in one's faith, or as a descriptive norm, on the basis of which the development of faith is progressing according to the path of its own process, therefore progress can be expected. Looking at Fowler, I think the following can be said:

(1) The development of faith is one of the structuralist perspectives that interpret the processes of development in the interaction of an active subject and a changing environment. So there is no question that the development would be merely an internally driven, automatic process.

(2) Above all, it is good to make cautious statements about faith that the later stages are better than the previous ones.

(3) The goal is not to reach the highest level of development, but rather to strive to work in synergy with God. The potential of collaboration can be a strong motivator and stimulus for the development of faith.

Based on the above points, it is difficult to come to a different conclusion than that although we cannot explicitly call higher levels of faith development “better faith”, cooperation with God is a desirable goal that ultimately moves one toward advancing faith.

After clarifying the above, placed in the framework thus constructed, I tried to outline a three-pronged approach to the field of perspectives at the level of attitudes, where Fowler's theory can be implemented naturally and promotes progress, normativeness, and development. Of the three, I think my poimenic suggestions are the ones that need much more detailed reflection and thought. If the concept of *developmental pastoral care* hypothetically formulated here proves to be a viable effect, it may not only show the direction in the development of faith but may even be a usable set of tools for pastoral care. Of course, thinking about, developing, and applying what developer pastoral care should be part of another piece of research and work that I haven't had the opportunity to do here now. However, the suggestions and ideas in the last chapter were also good for raising the idea cautiously: it can be a good thing for one's faith to develop, and while it is not our job to qualify each other's faith, measure each phase of faith and judge the others' structure of faith – in fact, this should be avoided – this does not necessarily preclude putting faith development into perspective and seeing it as a desirable fruit with the help of Fowler.

So caution is absolutely justified, and I personally think the same. At the same time, it is only sufficient to some extent: excessive caution can be a barrier to researcher innovation and

broadening perspectives, as well as to opportunities that would need to be further matured. If we view our Christian life as a constant formation in the image of Christ, and our divinity based on it is not only a condition but also a task for us, the development of faith will be an almost inevitable process of life in the light of the teachings of the Scripture. For what reason do we preach the Word of God, teach seekers the way of Christ, or train pastors, teachers of the faith, if not to stimulate the process of maturing and growing in faith? Almost every part of our faith is pervaded with the potential for development and further unfolding, which, in my opinion, is not some kind of unbearable burden, but also a real adventure and a sweet yoke.