

NBTS
M. DIV
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231.042

**STAGES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT:
A NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**A DEGREE ESSAY PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OGBOMOSO**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY**

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OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA**

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JUNE, 1998

ABSTRACT

James W. Fowler indicates in his faith development theory "that resistance to growth in faith happens often with many people remaining at stages 2 or 3 during their entire lifetime."¹ This study is concerned primarily with the dilation of this assertion, with a view to spotting the stage at which most Nigerians operate, why they cluster there, and how their faith on earth can further develop.

Chapter one is made up of preliminary materials such as what motivates the study, its significance, delimitation, methodology and definition of key terminologies. Chapter two ventures into the structure and important dynamics in Fowler's proposition, in order to fully appreciate his perception of faith on earth. This include an evaluation of the components of his definition of "faith", the basis for his faith classification, the nature of faith development, and the six stages of faith development he postulates. Chapter three attempts to unearth some vital factors limiting the growing and developing of faith in Nigeria, especially among the Yorubas. Such key factors include colonial remnants and reminiscences, communal booby trap, cultural fetters and tacit religious indoctrination.

Chapter four spots the preponderant nature of Christianity as a domain for faith development. It contains a synopsis of the development of Christianity and its shortfalls from the first century to the modern times. Chapter five is an attempt to create a kind of synergy, packaging an hybridized condition for faith on earth to become mobile among most Nigerians.

Chapter six draws the curtain on the discussion by making the recommendation that provides opportunity for faith to develop even beyond the identifiable cosmos.

¹Thomas A. Droege, Faith Passages and Patterns, ed. by Allan Hart Jahsmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p.49.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Recommending Christianity as a domain in which faith can develop is speaking from the point of view of the evangelicals. They promote, not only corporate worship, but personal encounter with God. This is not a water-tight or blanket assurance for a rapid movement to Fowler's universalizing faith stage. However, evidences abound of biblical characters who operated beyond the synthetic-conventional stage.

Certainly, many first century christians fell far short of universalizing characteristics. For example, it is debatable whether or not St. Peter reached that apogee of faith development, even as the prelate of the apostles. Paul once rebuked him for discriminating against the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-12). At another occasion, Peter needed divine intervention to honour Cornelius' invitation which led to the conversion of a large number of Gentiles, in one swoop, at Caesarea (Acts 10). Paul, on the other hand, is a candidate of stage six of Fowler's proposition. He became "all things to all men" (I Cor.9:19-22). Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," also exhibited universal traits. He commended Paul (as a new convert) to the apostles (Acts 9:27), fished him out again from Tarsus (Acts 11:25-26), and re-integrated the deserter, John Mark into the mission field (Acts 15:37-39). Some others are Dorcas, who found meaning in always doing good and helping the poor (Acts 9:36b), and Priscilla and Acquilla, who "risked their lives" for Paul (Rom.16:4), and presented Apollos with wholistic knowing (Acts 18:24-28).

Christianity after the first Century also produced people

who operated beyond the synthetic - conventional stage, such as Augustine of Hippo, Clement of Alexandria, Mother Thereza of Calcutta and the Southern Baptist missionary trail-blazers, Jeffersen and Laurena Bowen of the Baptist Mission of Nigeria. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Emmanuel Ajayi Dahunsi and Samuel Aikore Lawoyin also went beyond conventionality, giving all at their disposal for the realization of their anticipated ultimate environment.

Panoramic as the overview of the activities of the Yorubas of the Southwestern Nigeria may seem, three major elements have emerged. Firstly, the people have not jettisoned Fowler's claim, as many of them have remained perpetually in either stage two or three of his theory. Secondly, it has been discovered that their socio-economic and religio-cultural milieu is responsible for this apathy to developing of their latent faith. Finally, Christianity has surfaced as a potential rescue, because faith on earth is ultimately faith in God and His entire creation, which He continues to give meaning and sustenance.

The conclusion of the matter is, Fowler's theory has re-opened human responsibility towards one another, which God enacted from the beginning of human creation on earth (Gen. 1:28). The peak of God's relationship with the world is the offer of life (both on earth and at Parousia), through His only Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

The final recommendation therefore is, to package Christianity in the context of the people, so as to give them a better framework for developing their faith, both at temporal and spiritual levels.

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