

**THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS  
IN THE FORMULATION OF ADVENTIST DOCTRINE**

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## I. THESIS

Though a world-view is rooted in a reality which far transcends the human mind, that view can be understood and expressed only by cognitive and linguistic elements which make sense to one's mind. When seeking to understand the world, one brings to the task meaning-structures which are shaped by several factors. In addition to the influence of one's immediate culture, meaning-structures are also influenced by one's individual stages of cognitive, moral, and psycho-social development. These developmentally-shaped perceptions strongly influence one's pre-conscious assumptions about God, sin, redemption, the law and obedience. This paper will consider how moral development influences preferred formulations of key Adventist doctrines. It proposes that doctrinal variations may be based, not so much upon the selection and interpretation of Bible passages, but upon one's developmentally-influenced perceptual paradigm.

## II. THE CONSTRUCTEDNESS OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH CLAIMS

"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." (Matt. 9:17, RSV)

In the communication interplay between the mind of God and the mind of humans, God supplies the wine, and we bring the wineskins! From his infinite storehouse, he supplies appropriate measures of truth into our finite containers. But because his truth is living, dynamic, "fermenting," we are warned not to try to place it in old,

brittle, too-small modes of understanding. Unless we bring meaning-making structures that are fresh and supple, the resulting encounter will be destructive, and the wine of understanding will be wasted. Though the Bible is rich with "the taste of new wine," it does not present truth in the form of refined doctrinal statements. Though the cross, for example, is its central event, the Bible does not offer a systematic doctrinal-theological explanation of why the cross was necessary. Though the writers were uniformly against sin, we find a diversity of descriptions of sin, but no foundational definition.<sup>1</sup> To the surprise of many Adventists, the Bible does not contain a doctrinal explanation of the sanctuary. Far from being a tragic oversight, we will find that this pattern could have significant advantages.

The Bible is the narrative telling of God's active interaction with the human race.<sup>2</sup> It is a story, not a doctrinal textbook.<sup>3</sup> God's truths are revealed by what he does with real people in actual circumstances in specific historical moments. They are not packaged in systematic formulas, thoroughly checked for internal coherence and consistency. There is an important difference between truth-as-it-is, and our descriptions of it. God reveals himself in the vital, turbulent drama of human history, not through a theologian's

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1. Compare, for example, I John 3:4, Rom, 14:23, and John 16:9, and note their entirely different frames of reference.

2. For the development of the theme of the Bible as narrative of salvation history, see G. Ernest Wright, God Who Acts: Biblical Theology As Recital (London: SCM Press, 1952).

3. For a more complete discussion of the nature of doctrine, and of its relationship to Scripture, see George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 116-120.

typewriter.

This leads us to an important assertion: Doctrine is a human construct. It is a post-revelatory activity of the Christian community in which we seek to give orderly, systematized expression to key elements of Christian faith and experience. Doctrine is a human artifact, not to be equated with revelation itself. (We are nourished by the wine, not by the wineskins!) Though the truths which doctrines seek to express are of supra-human origin, all the building blocks of that expression are drawn from the available catalogue of meaningful human expressions. This premise does not ignore the teaching role of the Holy Spirit among serious Christians; rather it recognizes that even the Holy Spirit must employ those elements of meaning which have currency among humans lest he speak nonsense among us.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has long ago disassociated itself from the ranks of the verbal inspirationists. We hold that even inspired authors are free to choose from the forms of expression those words which will have greatest meaning to themselves and their intended audience. Indeed, this is the thrust of the Incarnation: God's thought "packaged" for human understanding. So, when a church desires to give formal expression to the beliefs which define its boundaries, the members do not wait for God to compose a finished product. With much prayer, the church must still craft its own wineskins.

What are the building blocks which we employ as we construct our own statements of belief? Essentially, these meaning-elements come in three "sizes," ranging from specific to broad. The first, most

basic element is words. Stating the obvious, there is no special vocabulary which we use for talking only about God. We employ the same ordinary words that we use for speaking of human experiences. And the more extensive our experiences, the more readily we can grasp divine realities.<sup>4</sup>

Because the words that we employ to speak about God are limited in their meaning-carrying by the finiteness of human experience, these words, no matter how carefully selected, cannot equal divine, infinite realities. Even the finest of theological statements cannot exhaust the full meaning of the larger realities of which they speak. At best, they can only "hint at" ultimate truth. Thus it is always appropriate for us to phrase our truth claims with much humility and tentativeness. We will be less likely to speak of religious statements as being absolutely "true" or "false" in themselves. Using Ellen White's image of "present truth," we will see them as increasingly adequate statements.

Our words have meaning as they are deployed within the second level of meaning-making units. Words are like brush-strokes on a painter's canvass. Each stroke of itself is of little value in itself; but when placed in creative relationship with other strokes, the result is a visual image which the mind registers as familiar. In a similar manner, when our words are placed in a creative pattern with other words, they call forth larger patterns of recognition within the hearer. These second-order constructive elements are often called metaphors. They evoke a network of associative meanings

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4. Thus, as in I John 4:12, it is genuine expression of human love which makes believable the assertions about God's love.

that go beyond the key word itself.

For example, the Bible employs many metaphors to express the great realities of sin and salvation. The medical metaphor views sin as though it were a disease or illness. Salvation is viewed as God's work in making one well, or of healing. Thus we speak of Jesus as the Great Physician. The financial metaphor envisions our sin problem as an impossible indebtedness, and as Jesus cancels that debt, we understand more of the meaning of forgiveness. The courtroom metaphor expresses sin in terms of the breaking of a law or legal code, with resulting sentence of condemnation and impending punishment. When Jesus bears that punishment as a substitute, it makes the pronouncement of acquittal legally defensible. There are many more such metaphors in Scripture, that by every possible means, we might understand.

Every metaphor can have its value, some more for some people or at certain times in history. But no single metaphor can tell the whole truth. The history of Christianity is filled with painful stories of what happens when people build their whole theology on a single, reified metaphor. Even a Spirit-selected metaphor, used by an inspired author, is still only that: a metaphor.

Which brings us to the third and most difficult component of this construction process. This is called a paradigm, which is a broad, over-arching metaphor which speaks to the larger nature of reality. Some refer to it as a root-metaphor.<sup>5</sup> It seeks to make

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5. See Earl R. McCormac, Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), pp. xii, xiii, for a discussion of the way in which scientists and theologians employ metaphors in a similar manner.

sense, not out of a single idea, but out of the larger framework of existence within which all lesser meanings find their place. An excellent development of the use of paradigm in seeking for broad understandings is Thomas Kuhn's description of how scientists think.<sup>6</sup> He argues (among other things) that it is impossible to think aparadigmatically, and that scientific research has moved forward in all fields, not so much by adding new data within an existing paradigm, but at the times when an entirely new paradigm provides a broader frame of reference which can encompass new research that the old paradigm could not explain. An illuminating example of such a paradigmatic shift is the familiar account of the endeavors of Copernicus and Galileo to move beyond the geocentric view of the universe to the heliocentric cosmology. In spite of opposition from the Church and from many Aristotelian scientists, the new paradigm finally was accepted, because it made better sense out of the new data, and solved more problems.

To a very large extent, paradigms are held pre-consciously. Within any given discipline, it is simply the assumed framework of the textbooks and key thinkers. And because it has been so helpful in solving the problems which the community of scholars is addressing at the time, it often goes unchallenged; indeed, it can almost appear to be sacred.

Paradigms are alive and well, though largely unacknowledged, in the realms of religious thought. They are the fundamental frames of

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6. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

reference and mind-sets which we employ (pre-consciously) as we seek meaning in the vast realm of religious conversation and insights. Many seemingly unsolvable doctrinal conflicts could be seen as the attempt to resolve anomalies within a paradigm that is too small.<sup>7</sup> Understanding can move forward significantly when a community becomes aware that it is employing paradigms, and seeks more adequate ultimate frames of reference.

### III. DEVELOPMENTALLY INFLUENCED PARADIGMS

Whenever one seeks to find meaning in a vast and quite abstract body of data, the use of a paradigm is a virtual necessity. This is particularly so in the realm of religious understanding. A child growing up in a religiously-oriented home has an immense amount of non-concrete information--about sin, God, angels, heaven, salvation, repentance, judgment, etc.--to try to arrange into a meaningful whole.

The study of developmental psychology casts light on the perspectives and capacities of one's mind which one brings to these meaning-making activities at various stages of life. James Fowler, for example, in Stages of Faith, draws upon the work of several influential developmental theorists: Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg.<sup>8</sup> He synthesizes their research to show the

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7. For example, the on-going debate about whether Jesus took the pre-fall nature of Adam, or the post-fall nature, is rooted in a paradigm which sees nature as the root problem of sin. A relational paradigm appears to resolve such a conflict. See this author's If God Won the War ... (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1982), pp. 10-28.

8. In James Fowler, Stages of Faith (San Francisco: Harper and Row: 1981).



markedly different way in which religious faith functions at the different stages of one's life.




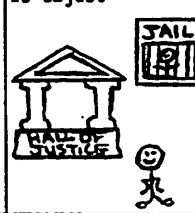


Given the brevity of this paper, we will focus on the developmental categories of one researcher, Lawrence Kohlberg, as they shed light on one aspect of religious faith--the formulation of religious doctrine. The assertion is that, as one progresses through succeeding stages of moral development, one will grasp any of several familiar Adventist doctrines from significantly different perspectives. These shifts in perspective will represent such fundamental re-orientations of root-metaphors that they can best be seen as paradigmatic shifts. We will conclude with several suggested benefits for incorporating the developmental perspective within the life of the church.

First, we should observe the sources from which a young child obtains her "religious" information. Unable to draw concrete conclusions about abstract realities, she invests meanings into such words as "God" and "love" as she derives them from what she can experience: relationships with primary authority figures and caregivers in her life. The fact that a child cannot read, or think abstractly (Piaget's formal operational), does not mean that she is devoid of the basic ingredients of a religious perceptual paradigm. Her "wineskin" is hidden at a deeply pre-conscious level, and not

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9. Kohlberg has been chosen principally because moral development, with its concerns for matters of right and wrong, very nearly approximates religious concerns. Further, his research has generated a rich body of illustrative and comparative studies from several Christian researchers. And finally, his categories are readily grasped by people who are somewhat new to the field of developmental psychology.

Diagram 1: Motivational Stages of Moral Development

PRE-CONVENTIONAL		CONVENTIONAL		POST-CONVENTIONAL	
<p>Stage 1: Acts out of fear of punishment--physical pain inflicted by authority figure</p> 	<p>Stage 2: Acts to obtain rewards, to meet one's own needs; instrumental relationships</p> 	<p>Stage 3: Acts to gain approval from others, especially what the peer group counts as helpful or pleasing</p> 	<p>Stage 4: Acts to conform to authority, to uphold law and order for its own sake; failure to punish for crime is unjust</p> 	<p>Stage 5: Acts out of respect for individual human rights, mutual personal obligations, critically examined standards</p> 	<p>Stage 6: Acts with reference to universal principles, internalized concepts that are consistent, broad, sensible</p> 

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS, CHURCH LIFE

<p>Some adults still at lower stages of reasoning and motivation:                      'If I didn't believe in God, I'd really have a ball! [fear-driven]</p> <p>God is not happy with you when you do that! [fear of God's disapproval used as coercion]</p> <p>Should emphasize to Stage 1, 2 children:                      'God is a provident Father.                      'God's laws aid happiness.                      'Jesus came to love you, to help you.</p> <p>Stage 2 child will grasp "I serve God because He loves me" as an instrumental exchange of favors.</p> <p>God is viewed as a very large, correct father-figure who responds to sin just as the child's parents do!</p> <p>The pre-conventional child cannot conceptualize "church" meaningfully.</p>	<p>Stage 3 (child):                      Church-related identity begins; it helps to define duties, morals, rules</p> <p>'Good boy/Nice girl' messages powerful in shaping self-identity.</p> <p>Stories of loyal heroes effective.</p> <p>Stage 3 (adults):                      'Good' defined by what the church has approved; distressed when group-identity rules are changed (e.g. wedding rings, campus regulations)</p> <p>Stage 4 (youth &amp; adults):                      Made secure by fixed authority for the rules, codes of society.</p> <p>God is primarily lawgiver; righteousness is in finding His objective will and "doing it or else!"</p> <p>Autonomy (Stages 5,6) viewed as form of rebellion, anti-nomianism.</p> <p>Co-dependent relationships between the church and member often developed</p> <p>Certainty, closure, finality prized.</p>	<p>Stage 5, 6 (adult only)                      Locus of authority moves from external to internal for first time!</p> <p>Principle images of God change from 'Lawgiver' to Teacher, Friend.</p> <p>First grasping of selfless (agape) love at these stages.</p> <p>Entered into after period of (often destabilizing) self-reflection and distancing from external authorities (church structure, parents, spouse [?], E.G. White, etc.).</p> <p>Welcomes the stimulus of ambiguity, openness, mental pilgrimage without pre-set destinations.</p> <p>Relates to church from a sense of community (no threat to self-identity), rather than from conformity (to <u>find</u> a sense of identity)</p>
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easily accessed for revision.

Diagram 1 (page 9) gives a brief overview of Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development. He refers to them as motivational stages because they identify the factors which influence a person's decisions about matters of right and wrong. Note that he is not dealing with the content of the choices, but with the factors that one takes into account in making the decision. The "Implications for Religious, Church Life" printed below the Stages help to illustrate the thinking processes which are typical at that stage. (The diagram should be studied before continuing.)

Three important observations should be made about Kohlberg's research at this point:

(1) Stage growth is invariant. One gets to the higher stages only by growing through the lower stages. Not even religious conversion allows one to jump over a stage. (We can conclude, however, that personal conversion is independent of one's stage.)

(2) One can understand the moral reasoning of one's own stage (and the lower stages), and some aspects of the next higher stage; but beyond that, it all seems nonsense. This means that, to reason with people about moral and religious matters, one must not employ reasons at a higher level than one can grasp. This has tremendous implications for understanding some of God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament.

(3) Kohlberg has found in cross-cultural research that more than 75% of the adult population never progresses beyond the 4th stage. This would imply that in a democratic, consensus-seeking church (such as the Seventh-day Adventists), we would formulate our

doctrines in keeping with Stage 4 paradigms.

Which brings us to the specific proposals of this paper. Based on my study and observations over a period of several years, I believe that levels of moral reasoning serve very much like pre-conscious paradigms by which one formulates an understanding of that ultimate moral issue: sin and salvation. One can draw quite direct parallels between one's stage of moral reasoning and one's preferred orientation doctrinally.

Before studying Diagram 2, please note the following:

(1) The beginning point for understanding each stage as a religious paradigm centers around the nature of a wrong act (sin), and the response of an authority figure (God) to that wrong act. Shifts in perspective in these two areas precipitate all that follows.

(2) It must be observed that moral development is not guaranteed. There are many adults who continue to reason at the lower stages.

(3) Because a basic religious paradigm is so deeply implanted in one's childhood, it is often held sacredly against any subsequent change. Yet many adults continue to enjoy moral development in the non-religious areas of life. When a wide dichotomy develops the results fall into two options: (a) rejection of religion as "outgrown," irrelevant; or (b) setting religion aside into the realm of ceremonies, ritual, emotional affect, or nostalgia.

Study Diagram 2 (page 12), first vertically, then horizontally.

## Stages of Moral Development & Doctrinal Preferences: Are They Related?

<p>Moral Stages and key moral reference points:</p> <p>(As per L. Kohlberg)</p> <p>Some sample doctrines:</p>	Preconventional (Stages 1,2)	Conventional (Stages 3,4)	Postconventional (Stages 5,6)
	<p><i>Values:</i> external.</p> <p><i>Motives:</i> fear of punishment, desire for rewards.</p> <p><i>Indicators:</i> 1. Authority figures prominent. 2. Mutual manipulation. 3. Internally consistent system of theology not required.</p>	<p><i>Values:</i> external.</p> <p><i>Motives:</i> Conform to conventional norms; uphold abstract (partly arbitrary) "law and order"</p> <p><i>Indicators:</i> 1. Justice is punitive. 2. Personhood subordinated to social good. 3. Integrates theology largely through upholding justice.</p>	<p><i>Values:</i> internal.</p> <p><i>Motives:</i> harmony with universal principles; love.</p> <p><i>Indicators:</i> 1. Cause-and-effect principles. 2. Truth-oriented theology 3. Respect for personhood, individual rights.</p>
<p>1. The meaning of SIN</p>	<p>Affront, offense against the authority, dignity of a law-giver, eliciting anger toward the offender.</p> <p>Primarily a behavioral problem.</p>	<p>Behavior which violates a legal/moral code, resulting in a deficit of merit - a negative valence which must be rectified to uphold justice.</p>	<p>Alienation from God, and from the principles of His kingdom.</p> <p>Primarily a relational problem, resulting in destructive behaviors.</p>
<p>2. The purpose of the Cross: The ATONEMENT</p>	<p>Jesus died to appease the wrath of an offended Law-giver by suffering a punishment equal in magnitude to the terrible offense.</p>	<p>Jesus died to satisfy justice, to experience the just punishment of the law in our place. Once punitive justice has been upheld, forgiveness is possible.</p> <p>(The "forensic model" of the atonement.)</p>	<p>Jesus died:</p> <p>(a) as an expression of love to win us back into relationship with God. (b) as an essential revelation to the universe of the principle that separation from the Life-giver causes Second Death.</p>
<p>3. Prevailing perception of GOD'S CHARACTER</p>	<p>An offended Deity who is jealously intent on upholding His holy dignity and power.</p>	<p>A righteous Judge, dutifully obligated to uphold justice and exact full submission to law from all His subjects.</p>	<p>A loving Father, longing to <i>heal</i> us with His accepting love, and to <i>teach</i> us by His wisdom - bringing us into full personhood.</p>
<p>4. The believer's predominant MOTIVE</p>	<p>To avoid offense against a holy God who will inflict extrinsic punishment; and to win His favor and extrinsic blessings.</p>	<p>Gratitude for forgiveness "won" by Jesus on the cross; and duty, to obey the just requirements of the law.</p>	<p>Having been <i>healed</i> by the love relationship with God, one is motivated by the inner promptings of love; and one's mind has been thoughtfully aligned with principles of universal truth.</p>
<p>5. The purpose of the SABBATH</p>	<p>An essentially non-meaningful expression of God's arbitrary will, given as a test of our willingness to obey (i.e., submit).</p>	<p>A symbol of the "rest" of forgiveness won by Christ on the cross; and/or an assumed obligation upon all who worship a God of "law and order."</p>	<p>A celebration of relationship with God, preserved and enjoyed in sacred time; and a vital symbol of our purposeful origins, thus of our value as <i>persons</i>.</p>
<p>6. The purpose of the final JUDGMENT</p>	<p>God examines our performance to determine the proper reward or punishment. Jesus pleads to "soften" the righteous justice of the Holy Father. The performance of believers is the essential focus.</p>	<p>God determines who has claimed Christ's substitutionary righteousness. Thus salvation does not violate the upholding of justice. (Since this issue was dealt with on the cross, final judgment is minimized by some.)</p>	<p>God defends the redeemed as fully healed, restored to relationship, against the accusations of Satan. The truthfulness and effectiveness of God's methods (character) is the primary focus.</p>
<p>7. The final DESTRUCTION of the wicked</p>	<p>God's final act of righteous vengeance against the violators of His holy law; an act of punitive destruction.</p>	<p>"Law and order" requires that some suffer longer than others before they die; thus their punishment upholds this principle.</p>	<p>Respecting their freedom, God allows all who have chosen separation from Him to experience the consequences of their choice - the Second Death.</p>

#### IV. SOME THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The premise of this paper--that some doctrinal orientations are rooted in developmental paradigms--may have important implications for the life of the church beyond the religion classroom. Proposing some of those implications may illustrate and enrich the pedagogical concerns which follow.

(1) It seems evident to this author that the Seventh-day Adventist church has formulated its basic doctrinal positions in keeping with Stage 4 terms of justice-reasoning. This should not be surprising when one considers that: (a) more than 75% of the adult membership, especially during their formative years, are likely to be thinking at that stage in the non-religious aspects of their lives; and (b) almost without exception, the predominant modes of Christian expression in the denominations from which our founders came indicate Stage 4 reasoning or below!<sup>10</sup>

(2) When God prepares to speak meaningfully to his people, he demonstrates a commitment to "talk our language." He has moved upon inspired persons [in our particular setting, upon Ellen White] to express spiritual insights in terms which are predominantly appreciated and grasped by the hearers of the original message. Thus when Ellen White speaks of such matters as the cross, the atonement, and the final destruction of the wicked in Stage 4 terms, we need not regard these as inaccurate statements. Indeed they are entirely accurate within that paradigm. At the same time, it would be a

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10. Consider, for example, the strong appeal to the fear of hellfire which fueled much of the English Revival, thus setting the groundwork for the religious fervor of 18th century New England, and Millerism.

violation of her own wishes for us to view that statement as having exhausted for all time the full meaning of those issues.<sup>11</sup> I am personally satisfied that Ellen White herself experienced stage development throughout her 65-year span of ministry, and that her writings may reflect the resulting changes in orientation.<sup>12</sup>

(3) Personal salvation is independent of stage categories. A person who comes to Christ driven by fear will be loved and forgiven just as fully as the one who has discovered that "perfect love casts out all fear." In a relationship with Christ, however, we find the richest resources for moral/religious development; specifically: (a) unconditional love and acceptance--thus freeing one from the fear of another's rejection as a moral motivator; and (b) the wise teaching of a sensible, non-arbitrary God whose pathways are inherently blessed.

(4) If salvation is independent of stage growth, why then should one desire it for oneself or for others? May I propose three reasons? (a) The higher levels of understanding enable us to speak so much more eloquently and coherently about our God. Compare, for example, the God-images of one who obeys God out of fear of hell, with the God-images of one who obeys because of admiration for the sensibleness of all God's orderly, inherently rewarding laws.

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11. Compare Ellen White's treatment of the final destruction of the unrepentant as recorded in The Great Controversy, p 673, with that recorded in The Desire of Ages, pp.763, 764, for a clear portrayal of the same event described from two different paradigms. The description which people will quote as the "definitive treatment" may well reflect their primary stage of religious reasoning.

12. See Alden Thompson's series, "From Sinai to Golgotha" (ADVENTIST REVIEW: December 10-31, 1981), for an excellent treatment of the theme of Ellen White's growing understanding.

(b) The more comprehensive paradigms allow us to deal more adequately with more complex theological problems. I am personally persuaded that the reason Minneapolis 1888 and Glacier View 1978 leave so much lingering non-resolution is that they were both attempts to solve an anomaly within the same paradigm. And (c), doctrinal concepts appreciated at the higher levels of understanding leave the believer less vulnerable to personal discouragement as her ethical/intellectual life moves on to the higher levels of reasoning. I am convinced that Adventist theology shines the brightest in all its details at a post-conventional level of understanding; that every key doctrine of the church finds its richest, most enduring expression in the relational/revelational paradigm.

#### V. SOME PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

If the perspective proposed above is valid, then there are some practical implications for the classroom teacher that bear consideration.

(1) The teaching of religion cannot be limited to the imparting of data or information from Scripture, as vital as that is. We must recall that Jesus rebuked the most diligent Bible scholars in history for their copious study of the Work--but all from the wrong paradigm (John 5:39,40). We must participate with Jesus in urging that same paradigm shift: the purpose of being a spiritual person is not to learn a lot of Scripture that God might be pleased with us; but to become pleased with God through meeting him in Scripture.

(2) Stage growth, for a healthy person, is a life-long



adventure. James Fowler<sup>13</sup> has proposed a challenging description of the nature of truly adult faith. We should prepare our students to recognize that stage growth is normative for them for the remainder of their lives. The student who expects his religious formulations to be fully in place during the college years, with only minor refinements in details in the years to come, is in for a mid-faith crisis as his thinking matures on other fronts. Though we should teach with certainty and confidence, we should encourage our students to hold their truth claims with an agility in which their personal Christian self-identity is not tied directly to the precise formulations of a single paradigm.

(3) If stage growth is normative, then we have cause to be very patient, appreciative, and understanding of those who express their faith in terms less adequate than our own. When Paul wrote to churches that had a spread of moral stages in their ranks (Romans 14, I Cor. 8), he urged the more mature to bear patiently with the less mature--because the reverse is not possible!

(4) The Sermon On the Mount is a classic example of how one helps others to experience stage growth. Jesus acknowledges their former understanding, which was itself the product of divine instruction. "An eye for an eye" is Stage 4 justice reasoning. It makes sense to one who believes in distributive justice. But then Jesus implies its inadequacy, and proposes a distinctly higher frame of reference, the "universal principles" concept of loving even those whom one would define as an enemy. His audience did not uniformly

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13. See James Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), especially Chapter VI.

understand or appreciate his new teaching. But an important principle is illustrated in how Jesus went about advocating it. Stage growth happens when one begins to sense the inadequacy of one's present mode of thought, feels the cognitive dissonance of unresolved tension, and then finds the reasoning of the next higher stage to be more satisfying.

But a student does not always transition forward to the next higher stage at times of dissonance. Often, people will retrench and become defensive in their former, more familiar stage of understanding. It appears that the factor which makes the difference between growth and retrenchment is whether the dissonance is experienced in the presence of a warm, non-judgmental person or group. No wonder that Jesus, the Master Teacher, is described as one who came not to condemn, but to save (John 3:17).

Following Jesus' example, then, the teacher will focus on two important aspects of the valuing process: (1) asking questions which expose the inadequacy of one's present paradigm,<sup>14</sup> and (2) providing an emotionally supportive atmosphere in which students will feel tangible safety in bringing their present understandings up for review.

(5) Most of what young people hold to be true about God is not based on the content of Bible classes. Most of it comes from their encounters with authority figures, especially at the moments of

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14. For example, when a student suggests that Jesus "pleads with the Father for us" in the heavenly sanctuary, you might ask whether Jesus and his Father hold different attitudes toward us, or whether the Son is more merciful than the Father. When the "substitute merit" view of justification is being discussed, ask if the Father is impressed with merit. And if so, why?

infraction ("running afoul of the house rules," as Gaebelain describes it). Ideally, the teacher should model the highest motivational appeals when urging better behavior. Even if an immature student knows only the motivation of fear, that fear should be focused toward inherent or supplied consequences, not toward the teacher's personal rejection or anger. For it is the teacher's personal interaction with the student which carries the heaviest God-content.

And that, more than all else, underscores why we teachers should seek an ever clearer perception of who God is, in the context of his response to our running afoul of the cosmic "house rules!"

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