Faith construct and relevance in the life of Christians: The case of the Christ gospel church of Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the importance of faith in the lives of Christians, with a particular focus on the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria. It focused on the concept of faith and its relevance in the lives of Christians. The scope of the paper is limited to local churches of the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria in Idjerhe clan of Delta State. Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development provided the theoretical underpinning for this paper. The research included a review and analysis of this theory, as well as a description of the literature around it. To attain its goal, the research used both historical and critical evaluative methodologies. It revealed that faith is not synonymous with naive optimism. The research concluded by recommending that church leaders and pastors should preach the message of faith in their everyday lives in order to instill the habit of strong faith in God in their congregations. In addition, Christians should devote more time in studying the Bible in order to strengthen their faith, which is the foundation of Christian growth and development.

Keywords: Faith Construct, Relevance, Christians, Christ Gospel Church, Nigeria

Introduction

Faith and reason have traditionally been regarded as sources of justification for religious beliefs. Because they both perform the same epistemic role, philosophers and theologians have been fascinated by how the two are related and how the rational actor should interpret statements drawn from either source. Those who hold the latter viewpoint argue on whether faith or reason should take precedence when the two are at odds. For example, Kierkegaard values faith to the point of being affirmatively irrational, whereas Locke (cited in Jolley, 2007)[1] emphasized the rationality of faith to the point where a

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[1] N. Jolley. "Locke on Faith and Reason". In *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, edited by* Lex Newman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 436-455.

doctrine's irrationally-conflict with itself or with known facts is an indication that it is unsound. Others have proposed that faith and reason can each control their respective areas.

There has been a great deal written and spoken about faith and how it functions in Christian life. Faith is defined and explained in a variety of ways, each elucidating the essence of its meaning. Christians always resort to the Bible book of Hebrews for a detailed explanation of faith. Although the authorship of the book of Hebrews is still debated, its status as a canonical book grants it the same authority as the other books of the Bible. Faith is an important aspect of life in general, not only in Christianity. When one sits down on a chair, for example, one has faith that the chair will support him or her. Faith, in this sense, is being certain of what one hopes for and certain of what one has not yet seen or experienced; hence, the Bible describes faith as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). There are several problems that plague human life, and human beings frequently seek the truth that lies beneath these problems.

As a result, the purpose of this article is to investigate the relevance of faith in the lives of Christians, with a particular focus on members of the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria. Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development provided the theoretical underpinning for this paper. As a result, it included a review and critique of the idea, as well as a description of the literature around it. To acquire a better understanding of the subject, the study also argued from numerous related perspectives of researchers in the fields of religion and philosophy. The article also looked at Christians' ability to reason with their senses in order to discover how it relates to religion. This paper assists 21st-century Christians in their faith walk with God while also encouraging them to utilize their senses to reason rationally.

In Overview of the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria (CGC)

The Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria is said not to have been created by a specific individual or group of people, but God himself. The church was founded during the evangelical crusades staged in March and April 1954 in Warri, Sapele, and a few villages in Nigeria's then Bendel State. The "1954 Revival" is widely regarded as the catalyst for the "Alleluia Movement" ("Origin of the Christ Gospel Church", 2019)[2]. Following up on the Lord's call for missionaries to be sent to Africa, specifically Nigeria, during a missionary convention held in Canada in early 1953, the following missionaries were appointed to visit Nigeria: Rev. Alcok, the delegation's leader, Rev. Nail, an elderly pastor, Rev. Zigilar, and Rev. Paul Kanon. These delegates made contact with the late Rev. Pa Elton, who was already serving as a missionary in Nigeria's Western Region at the time and was waiting to greet the team in Lagos, where they held their first miracle crusade.

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[2] "Origin of the Christ Gospel Church", 2019. https://christgospelchurchofficial.org/our-history (Accessed November 30, 2021).

The Warri crusade was conducted at the current location of the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria (CGC) branch at Ajamimogha-Warri, which was once a huge rubber plantation but was cleared and prepped for the week-long crusade. The late federal minister of finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, invited the team to Sapele for another crusade as a result of the crusades, which gave so much spiritual rebirth to the land. The Sapele crusade drew a large number of people from the riverine villages such as Jesse (Idjerhe), Oghara, Sakponba, Okpe, Koko and Ajagbodudu. The Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria Inc. was born as a result of these crusades in Warri and Sapele in March and April 1954, and was duly registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in early 1972, and officially inaugurated in October of that year at the temporary site along Macpherson Road in Sapele.

Following that, Rev. James Beal of the then Missionary Temple Detroit Michigan dispatched a group of missionaries from the United States to work specifically with the fledgling Church. Rev. and Mrs. Stallwood, the leaders, Rev. and Mrs. Stern, Rev. and Mrs. Lewis Mudrak, and Rev. Jean Wheat, a lady, were among the missionaries. The civil war between Nigeria and Biafra, which lasted from 1966 to 1970, was the catalyst for their final departure from Nigeria. Since then, the church has steadily developed to around 56 different local churches in Nigeria's southern region ("Origin of the Christ Gospel Church", 2019)[3]. Sapele currently serves as the Church's headquarters. The church's entire strength is based on faith in Christ.

Faith as a Concept

Faith is a difficult concept to define. It has a different meaning for each person. Faith is widely seen as a deeply personal experience that should be kept private. Faith has a wide range of meanings, ranging from a general religious attitude to personal acceptance of a specific set of beliefs (Hellwig, 1990)[4]. Despite this, Christians' lives are still dominated by their beliefs (Newman, 1998)[5]. Faith is an extremely significant construct, even if it is most typically seen in religious terms (Lee, 1990)[6]. Faith, which is defined as a general religious attitude or an accepted set of particular beliefs, was not present in the ancient Greek and Roman empires. Rather, the Hebrew Scriptures are the sole and direct source of the concept of faith (Hellwig, 1990)[7]. Hellwig follows the development of faith from the New Testament to the Church Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Modern Era.

Faith has always been a part of religion, and it has been studied by scholars from a variety of fields (Hellwig, 1990)[8]. Fowler (1981)[9], on the other hand,

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[3] "Origin of the Christ Gospel Church".

[4] M.K. Hellwig. "A History of the Concept of Faith". In *Handbook of Faith,* edited by M. Lee (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990), 3-23.

[5] I. Newman. "Faith and Freshmen: A Qualitative Study of the Faith Development of Traditional First-Year Students at a Baptist Institution" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation) (Louisville, KY: University of Louisville, 1998), 117.

[6] M. Lee (ed.). *Handbook of Faith* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990), 111.

[7] Hellwig 14

[8] Hellwig 23

departs from these traditional concepts of religion and links faith with individual meaning systems, as Hiebert (1993)[10] points out. Faith, according to Fowler, is the most universal and profound aspect of being human, the process of producing meaning. As a result, faith, in his opinion, is often but not always religious. Faith encompasses both seeing and knowing. Knowing happens when an active knower interacts with an active world of people and things, bringing the knower's mind's ordering and organizing ability to bear on the world's unshaped or unstructured stimuli (Fowler, 1986b)[11]. Another crucial element to grasp in order to comprehend faith and imagination is the ultimate setting (Fowler, 1986b)[12]. The ultimate environment is how people discover order and form their activities depending on what they perceive around them. Faith, like imagination, creates a full unit of what people see in their organized reality and invests it with value and power in terms of self, others, and the world. Symbols and metaphors can be used to represent the common images of an ideal environment. The final environment has a huge impact on a person's approach to life, and it is sometimes unconscious or implicit within a society. Faith, rather than being a problem, has the qualities of a mystery.

Faith is a process of constitutive-knowing that underpins a person's creation and maintenance of a comprehensive frame (or frames) of meaning. It is derived from a person's attachments or commitments to supra-ordinate value centres that have the power to unify his or her experiences of the world, thereby endowing the relationships, contexts, and patterns of everyday life, past and future, with meaning. Faith, to put it succinctly, is concerned with the creation, maintenance, and change of human meaning (Nipkow, Schweitzer, & Fowler, 1991)[13]. The issue of faith development logically follows this notion of faith.

Faith development, according to Nipkow, Schwietzer, and Fowler (1991)[14], refers to the developmental process of seeking and generating meaning as a human activity, rather than a specific sort of faith or religion. Furthermore, faith formation is a psychological term that is unrelated to any specific belief. Simultaneously, faith growth can be viewed in such a way that it can be theologically interpreted and filled with substantial beliefs. Faith is a personal interpretation of one's life experiences. The essence of human thoughts, acts, and emotions is this interpretation, which is based on all of our life's influences. Faith is more of a means of knowing the unknowable than something we believe that can be compiled, taught, and tested.

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[9]J.W. Fowler. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 211.

[10] D.W. Hiebert. "Schools of Faith: The Effect of Liberal Arts, Professional, and Religious Education on Faith Development"(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) (Canada: University of Manitoba, 1993), 107.

[11] J.W. Fowler. Faith and the Structuring of Meaning. In *Faith Development and Fowler,* edited by C. Dykstra & S. Parks (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986b), 15-42.

[12] Fowler 40

[13] K. E. Nipkow, F. Schweitzer & J. Fowler. Introduction. In *Stages of Faith and Religious Development: Implications for Church, Education, and Society,* edited by W. Fowler, K. E. Nipkow & F. Schweitzer (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 1-15.

[14] Nipkow, Schweitzer & Fowler 12

Faith can be defined as confidence or trust in a certain system of religious belief in the context of religion. Faith is typically thought of as confidence based on perceived degree of warrant by religious people, whereas faith is often thought of as simple belief without evidence by non-religious people (Wolterstoff, 1998)[15]. Elwell (2001)[16] defines faith as "belief, trust, and commitment to a person or object". Christians find stability and hope in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and affirm that unique relationship with God in the Holy Spirit via love and obedience as manifested in discipleship and service. Fowler (2004)[17] provides a set of phases for faith development over the course of a person's life. Regarding characteristics of psychological development in children and adults, his stages are strongly related to the work of Piaget, Erikson, and Kohberg (citted in Meinhold, 1993; Love, 2002)[18]. He described faith as the act of trusting, committing, and relating to the world based on a set of assumptions about one's relationship to people and the environment. The following are the stages of faith:

1. Intuitive-projective (pre-school period): This is a stage of bewilderment and strong impressionability, which is characterized by stories and rituals.
2. Mythic-literal (school going period): A stage in which given information is accepted in order to adhere to societal norms.
3. Synthetic-Conventional (early-late adolescence): At this level, the faith gained is solidified in the belief system by the removal of personification and the replacement of authority in individuals or groups who represent one's view with authority.
4. Individualistic-reflective (early adulthood): At this stage, the individual critically examines, embraces, and accepts faith within the existing religious structure. In this stage, disillusionment or faith strengthening occurs as a result of needs, experiences, and paradoxes.
5. Conjunctive religion (mid-life): At this stage, people recognize the limits of logic and confront life's paradoxes or transcendence, acknowledges the "mystery of life," and frequently return to the sacred stories and symbols of the religious system they previously acquired or re-adopted. In life, this stage is referred as negotiated setting.
6. Universalizing faith (middle late adulthood 45-60 years old and plus): This is the level of enlightenment when an individual transcends all existing religious systems and lives life based on universal principles of compassion and love, in service to others for the greater good, without fear or doubt.

[15] N. Wolterstoff. "Faith". *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 3), edited by E. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 1200.
[16] W.A. Elwell. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Baker/ Paternoster, 2001), 231.
[17] J.W. Fowler. Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium. *Religious Education,* 99 (2004): 405-421.
[18] P. Meinhold. *Child Psychology: Development and Behavior Analysis* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1993), 88; P. Love. "Comparing Spiritual Development and Cognitive Development". *Journal of College Student Development,* 43, no. 3 (2002): 357-373.

Christianity's faith

Christianity, which arose from Judaism, imposed on its followers a set of revealed beliefs and customs. Many of these beliefs and practices were diametrically opposed to those of Greek religions and Judaism. Christians, for example, believe that God created the universe out of nothing, that God is three persons, and that Jesus Christ is God's greatest revelation. Nonetheless, Christians have clung to a large degree of compatibility between faith and reason since the beginning of time. Contrary to popular opinion, Christian faith is a deep confidence in God that is undeniably founded on the infallible, unparalleled richness of God's living Word, which is the Holy Bible. Faith is a result of hearing the message, which is delivered through the words of Christ (Romans 10:17). On the one hand, faith is defined in the secular world as a firm confidence in something for which there is no evidence (Plantinga, 1998)[19]. Faith is the act of believing in something about which one is unsure since there is no evidence to support the belief. Faith, as it is most commonly characterized in the Bible, is having the things hoped for come to pass, the evidence of things we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1).

Christian faith is, by definition, an expression of trust in the unknown. There is no need for faith if there is clarity and everything can be explained and comprehended in human terms. Faith is a method of understanding that God exists, that Jesus is my personal redeemer and Lord, and that the Holy Spirit is God's immediate presence in my life, empowering the church, and calling all humanity to a redemptive relationship. Faith comes in various levels of comprehension and conviction. People used to believe that you either had faith or you didn't. But then it occurred to me that everyone has beliefs, and those beliefs drive one's actions. It is the content and nature of one's faith, not whether one has faith or not, that is ultimately a part of each individual.

Many people in the Bible have seen God's hands through faith, and anybody can be motivated by it. The followings are few examples:

1. The great flood and Noah
When there was no sign that it would rain, Noah was told to build a massive ship in preparation for the great flood. Noah, on the other hand, believed God and put his trust in Him, and as a result, he and his family, as well as all other animals, were spared from the floods.
2. God's promises to Abraham
He was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, trusting that God would resurrect him from the dead (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3), because God had previously told him that via Isaac, he would become the father of many countries (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3).
3. Sarah has a child as a result of her faith
Sarah remained steadfast in her confidence in God's promise of an heir. She and her husband Abraham waited for 25 years, and she gave birth to a son in the most terrible situation anyone could imagine: being old and barren.

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[19] A. Plantinga. "Religion and Epistemology". *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 8), edited by E. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 168.

4. The Centurion's (Matthew 8:8-13)
Jesus Himself defined this as the kind of faith he had never seen in all of Israel. Jesus' words were the entire centurion needed to believe that his servant had been healed.
5. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea by faith (Exodus 14:15-16; 21-22)

The passengers were being pursued by Egyptian soldiers from behind as they approached the Red Sea, a vast body of water. God told Moses that with his leadership and God's blessings, they would be able to escape the Egyptians' clutches, and they did so by faith, crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

Christianity comprises a wide range of viewpoints on the nature of faith. Some people define faith as being convinced or persuaded that something is true. A person believes something when they are supplied with sufficient evidence that it is true, according to this viewpoint. Saint Thomas Aquinas, a theologian, did not believe that faith is merely a matter of opinion. He claimed, on the contrary, that it provides a middle ground between over-reliance on science (i.e. demonstration) and over-reliance on opinion. The effects of faith are discussed from a variety of perspectives. Some people feel that true faith leads to good deeds, whereas others believe that while trust in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life, it does not always lead to good deeds.

Regardless of how a Christian approaches faith, all agree that the Christian faith is based on the ideals and example of Jesus' life. The Christian recognizes God's mystery and grace, and wants to understand and obey him. Faith, for a Christian, is not stagnant; it motivates one to learn more about God and to grow. God is the source of Christian faith. Faith leads to change in Christianity as it seeks a deeper understanding of God. Faith is more than just fideism or following a set of laws or claims. Christians must first understand in whom and what they have faith before they may have faith. True faith cannot exist without understanding, and that understanding is based on the community of believers, the scriptures and traditions, and the believers' own experiences.

Aquinas, Locke, Kant, and others on Faith

The act of faith, according to Aquinas (1920)[20], consists primarily of knowledge. Faith is an intellectual act with the goal of discovering the truth. As a result, it has a subjective as well as an objective aspect. It is the mind's assent to what is not seen from the subject's perspective: faith is the proof of things that do not appear (Hebrews 11:1). Furthermore, as an act of volition, this assent can be meritorious for the believer, even if it always needs God's grace. Furthermore, faith can be a virtue because it is a good habit that leads to good deeds. When one assents to truth in faith, however, he or she does so based on the evidence of another. From the standpoint of what is believed, Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, distinguished between "preambles of faith," which are based on intellectual principles, and "articles of faith," which are based only on divine evidence.

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[20] *Thomas Aquinas. The Summa Theologiæ (*second and revised edition), 1920.

A prologue of faith is an example of a proof of God's existence. On the other hand, only faith can grasp the article of faith that the world was formed in time (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 2). Aquinas maintained that the universe as seen in it provides no evidence that it was once entirely new. Definitions are always at the centre of demonstrations, because universal definitions abstract from "the here and now." As a result, a temporal beginning is ruled out outright. Of fact, any argument about the origination of the first of any species in a sequence of efficient causes would fall under this category. In his antinomies, Thomas sounds a lot like Kant (2007)[21]. One thinks, however, that the world had a beginning because of faith. However, one rational consideration that suggests, but does not prove, a beginning to the world is that the transition from one term to the next involves only a small number of intermediate points.

Locke (cited in Jolley, 2007)[22] lived during a period when the old mediaeval concept of a coherent body of intelligible wisdom looked implausible. Nonetheless, he adhered to the underlying mediaeval concept of faith as acceptance of specific propositions based on God's authority. Unlike Aquinas, however, he claimed that faith is a type of opinion rather than a state between knowledge and opinion (*doxa*). But he devised a form of Christian apologia: an appeal to revelation rather than excitement or inspiration. His goal was to show that Christianity is "logical." Despite the fact that faith and reason have "strict" separate provinces, faith must be consistent with reason. Faith cannot persuade us of something that opposes or contradicts our knowledge. If a revealed notion contradicts our plain intuitive understanding, we cannot assent to it. Faith propositions, on the other hand, are regarded to be "above reason."

Locke distinguishes between two types of revelation for matters of faith: "original revelation" and "traditional revelation." The former is exemplified by Moses receiving the Decalogue, while the latter is exemplified by his delivery of its laws to the Israelites. Original revelation's truth cannot be in conflict with reason. Traditional revelation, on the other hand, is even more reliant on reason, because an original revelation cannot be understood unless those who receive it have already received a correlate idea through sensation or reflection and have comprehended the empirical signs through which it is communicated. Reason, according to Locke, validates beliefs and gives varied degrees of likelihood to them based on the strength of the evidence. Locke (cited in Jolley, 2007)[23], like Aquinas, believed in the evidence of not only logical/mathematical and certain self-affirming existential statements, but also that which is visible to the senses. For their justification, none of these veridical beliefs rely on other beliefs. Faith, on the other hand, necessitates the even less certain evidence of other people's testimony. In the end, faith's consent is based on the proposer's credit that it came from God in some unique method of communication, rather than a conclusion from reason. As a result, Locke views faith as a possible consent.

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[21] I. Kant. *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (3rd ed.) (London: Routledge, 2007), 173.
[22] Jolley 441
[23] Jolley 445

Locke also constructed a version of natural theology (Jolley, 2007)[24]. He asserts in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding that the complex thoughts we have about God are made up of reflection notions. People, for example, take the concepts of existence, duration, pleasure, happiness, knowledge, and power and enlarge each of these with their sense of infinity; and thus, combining them, form their complicated idea of God. However, people cannot know God's actual essence.

Descartes' (cited in Gueroult, 1984)[25] anthropomorphism and Spinoza's (cited in Garver, 2012) and Jean Jacques Rousseau's (cited in Masson, 1970)[26] limiting of religion to ethical problems inspired Kant (1990)[27]. Furthermore, he desired a viewpoint that was consistent with Newton's discoveries of the natural laws that govern the empirical world. To achieve this, he completely shifted the scope of reason away from metaphysical, natural, and theological speculation. Kant's contention that theoretical reason was incapable of grasping truths about God effectively perpetuated the late mediaeval period's restriction of scientist authority in matters of religion. He rejected the Augustinian tradition's timeless and space less God of revelation as being beyond human comprehension. This is particularly clear in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1990)[28] where he criticizes the cosmological proof for God's existence. Kant was now immune to the prospect of unsolvable paradoxes as a result of this step. Nonetheless, he allowed the concept of God (together with the concepts of immortality and the soul) to become a regulative rather than a fundamental ideal of reason. God's existence is still a fundamental presupposition for the moral law.

God is the *summum bonum* (source of goodness). Only God can ensure ideal virtue and happiness conformance, which is essential to meet the concept of "ought to imply." This provided the foundation for what Kant referred to as a religion that was not based on knowledge or comprehension but was reasonable nonetheless. Rational faith is based on the acknowledgment of God as the source of how we subjectively carry out our responsibilities, rather than on God's word or the person of Christ. As rational beings in nature, God is the source of our moral goals. Faith, on the other hand, is "free belief" - it is the permanent principle of the mind to assume as true that which is required to presuppose as a prerequisite of the possibility of the highest moral goal. Kant, like Spinoza, considers all theology to be moral theology. Faith is neither dubious nor merely probable because it transcends the realm of experience. As a result, Kant's concept of religion is complicated: it lacks theoretical foundations, but it does have a rational foundation that gives believers with more or less stable conviction. He offered a religion that was not based on

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[24] Jolley 455

[25] M. Gueroult. *Descartes's Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons* (vol. 1.), trans. Roger Ariew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1884), 91.

[26] P.M. Masson. *La Religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Genéve: Slatkine, 1970), 42.

[27] I. Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan Education, 1990), 58.

[28] Kant 58

revelation or grace. In rational theories of belief, it brought in a new immanentism.

Faith, according to Dawkins (1989)[29], is blind trust in the lack of evidence, even in the face of evidence. Thomist (1999)[30], who states that faith is not blind, but intellectual and that it begins with the mind's conviction based on sufficient evidence, which McGrath (2008)[31] considers being a good and valid definition, integrating the fundamental features of the typical Christian concept of faith. According to Williams (2002)[32], the traditional Christian tradition has always respected logic, and faith does not entail the complete abandoning of reason when believing in the face of evidence. Faith is defined in this context as a belief in and dedication to something that individuals have reason to believe is true. Thomas' definition of faith, according to Allen (quoted in McInerny, 1997)[33] entails commitment to conceptual premises for the sake of personal knowledge. Plantinga (1998; Marsden, 1991)[34] maintains that faith might be the outcome of evidence attesting to the truth claim's source's credibility. Having faith, on the other hand, he sees as the outcome of hearing the truth of the gospel with internal persuasion by the Holy Spirit, accepting the teachings of scripture, which are divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. Faith is the consequence of the Holy Spirit's action.

The Faith Theory of Fowler

When it comes to spiritual development, it is practically hard to avoid mentioning James Fowler's work and the impact he had on the field. Fowler not only defined faith and distinguished it from religion, but he also developed a stage theory to describe how people grow into loyal people. As a result of his work's influence, many people have criticized, modified, and debated his theory's applicability to other groups. Despite the fact that Fowler's faith development model is not classified as a Christian theory, it is quite applicable to Christians and can be studied in the context of Christian theology of faith. Fowler (1981)[35] articulated his understanding of faith and laid out the elements of his faith development theory in his *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Here, faith is described as "a generic trait of the human quest to acquire and retain meaning," according to him, and should not be considered synonymous with religion (Fowler, 1981)[36].

However, according to Fowler, meaning does not have to be sought through religion. People's questions about faith include, among other things, what gives

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[29] R. Dawkins. *The Selfish Gene* (2nd ed.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114.
[30] B.D. Thomist. "The Nature of Biblical Faith". In *Studies in Hebrews*, edited by Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999), 472-483.
[31] A. McGrath (ed.). *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2008), 224.
[32] C. Williams. *The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 11.
[33] R. McInerny. *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Boston: Twayne, 1977),136.
[34] Plantinga 168; G. Marsden. "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia". *In Faith and Rationality, Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991), 98.
[35] Fowler 101
[36] Fowler 91

their lives meaning and purpose, as well as what their hopes are for themselves and their loved ones (Fowler, 1981)[37]. These concerns are answered through faith, and because Fowler defined religion as a human universal (Fowler, 1981)[38], he believed all people capable of thinking on them throughout their lives. It is worth noting that Fowler believed that faith enabled people to comprehend what he termed the "ultimate environment" (Fowler, 1981)[39] the imagined worlds that people create in their heads that impact how they understand and live in the real world. Differences in belief, faith, and religion, according to Fowler, are linked to the ultimate environment because people's beliefs allow them to communicate their ideas about it.

Religion is both a technique of faith and a way of thinking about the environment. Individuals' interactions and experiences in the different components that make up their lives culminate in faith, which connects these components so that they can feel their lives are "whole" (Fowler, 1981)[40]. Fowler was influenced by the work of many renowned theorists, including Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget, in developing his theory of faith development, which is divided into six stages that occur throughout a person's life (Fowler, 1986a). Fowler's perspective of how people grow religion was affected by the stage theories proposed by each theorist, as were his interviews with people of all ages about their faith ideas. The pre-stage, infancy, and undifferentiated faith, according to Fowler (1981), begins throughout infancy and is defined by babies' knowledge that they are independent entities from their parents and rely fully on them to supply their needs.

As a result, as humans begin to develop a sense of confidence in others, Fowler (1981) argued that the initial pre-images of God have their origins in this period[41]. Individuals aged seven to ten are capable of narrating stories that they understand in literal terms in stage two, mythic-literal religion. As a result, descriptions of God are based on the images of Him that they have seen. During this stage, Fowler (1981)[42] also explained that the concept of fairness is used to distinguish between right and incorrect activities. Puberty and teenagers' development of self-images based on how they think others see them impact stage three, synthetic-conventional faith. According to Fowler (1986a)[43] a person has an 'ideology,' a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified it for study and, in a sense, is unconscious of having it. People in this stage have formed faith beliefs based on a variety of factors, but they do not engage in active personal thought on what these beliefs entail.

Individuals can either stay in stage three or progress to individuative-reflective faith, which is the fourth stage of faith formation in which people might accept

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[37] Fowler

[38] Fowler xiii

[39] Fowler 24

[40] Fowler 29

[41] Fowler 46

[42] Fowler 28

[43] J.W. Fowler. Dialogue toward a Future in Faith Development Studies. In *Faith development and Fowler, edited by* C. Dykstra & S. Parks (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986a), 275-301.

new value systems as a result of exposure to diverse ways of living, according to Fowler (1981)[44]. As a result of these encounters, they begin to question the faith concepts that had previously been imposed on them. Though it is most common in people's twenties, a period marked by significant upheaval for many, it can also happen later in life. They are able to combine concepts that previously appeared to be at odds with one another without fear of jeopardizing their own belief systems, and this stage usually occurs throughout middle life.

Finally, individuals in stage six, universalizing faith, differ from those in stage five in that they are willing to sacrifice the self and risk the partial justice of the present order for the sake of a more inclusive justice and the realization of love (Fowler, 1981)[45], whereas those in stage five simply recognize justice without committing themselves to challenging the existing order to ensure it is a reality for all.

Fowler (1981)[46] cited Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi as examples of people who have progressed to the sixth stage of faith development, which only a few people achieve. Many scholars have also challenged Fowler's idea for being founded on Western Christian beliefs (Keeley, 2010)[47]. Indeed, according to Broughton (1986)[48], over 80% of the people Fowler examined and based his argument on were Christians. This is another cultural constraint of his thesis, in that it may not be appropriate for non-Christians or Christians who do not reside in Western countries. Taking these two cultural constraints into account, Fowler's theory most closely applies to Christians living in highly developed Western countries (Clore & Fitzgerald, 2002)[49]. However, it is important to note that, while Fowler initially claimed that his theory was universal, he eventually stopped doing so due to criticisms of this aspect of his theory.

Importance of Faith in Christian Life

It is clear that Christians want to grow in their faith and that they expect their pastors and churches to help them do so. Fowler's (1981)[50] faith development theory can be used in day-to-day believers' affairs to meet this expectation. Because Christians can be associated with different faith stages, they will have different religious experiences. Christians can identify which stages are associated with Fowler's theory and how individuals can differ in how they conceive and experience faith by understanding Fowler's theory and how individuals can vary in how they conceive and experience faith. Christians who understand Fowler's faith development theory will be better equipped to create and implement faith development programmes for their churches, as they will

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[44] Fowler 52

[45] Fowler 50

[46] Fowler 55

[47] R. Keeley. "Faith Development and Faith Formation: More than Just Ages and Stages". *Lifelong Faith*, 2 (2010): 20-27.

[48] J. Broughton. Political Psychology of Faith Development Theory. In *Faith Development and Fowler*, edited by C. Dykstra & S. Parks (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education, 1986), 90-114.

[49] V. Clore & J. Fitzgerald. Intentional Faith: An Alternative View of Faith Development. *Journal of Adult Development*, 9, no. 2 (2002): 97-107.

[50] Fowler 58

recognize that some programmes are better suited to believers in the early stages of Fowler's theory, while others are better suited to those in the middle or later stages. For example, church programmes and belief systems aimed toward people in the lower faith stages could be designed with the goal of exposing them to new ideas, beliefs, and ways of thinking so they do not continue to embrace those they were exposed to as children or from other religions.

Christian programmes, on the other hand, may aim to present more sophisticated concepts that aid faith formation and empower Christians to actively confront repressive dogmas in their society (Lindholm, Millora, Schwartz & Spinosa, 2011)[51]. Because Fowler's (1981)[52] theory explicitly states that faith and religion are not synonymous, and that religion is merely one expression of faith, his theory can be applied to a specific group of Christians.

Atheists and agnostics may not have as much disagreement with modern-day Christians as one might expect. While Christians may arrive at a different conclusion about the value of faith than their secular counterparts, their perspective on the faith/reason dichotomy may not be entirely different. One could argue that the Christian tendency to point inward to support a privately held faith conviction isn't entirely unjustified. After all, a genuine Christian life is one that results in the believer's life being transformed. However, if the greatest evidence one can muster in favour of a statement is the claimant's own private experience, it is a considerably less than totally convincing case to the outside observer.

The modern-day molding of Christian intellectual heritage necessitates a robust recovery of the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. Everyone engaging in learning, teaching, and research should see the biblical narrative and its unfolding in the life of the church as the unwept environment in which their particular work and discipline is to be carried out (Dockery & George, 2012)[53]. Dockery and George argue that by providing the reader with a biblical framework for comprehending the world, the Christian intellectual heritage can be regained, at least in part. A true Christian perspective on the link between faith and reason in the Christian life lies at the heart of this knowledge. Those who hold this viewpoint believe that not only are thinking and learning ineffective in fostering faith and devotion, but that they are also likely to sabotage faith and devotion. Being a thinker, according to many Christians, is incompatible with being a Christian (Williams, 2002)[54]. To be fair, not all Christians think of faith in these terms, but those who do are less likely to value thinking, at least when it comes to faith itself, according to Williams.

The main elements of the sphere of consciousness and the foundation of Christian attitudes are faith and reason. The absence of an orientation to the

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[51] J. Lindholm, M. Millora, L. Schwartz & H. Spinoza. *A Guidebook of Promising Practices: Facilitating College Students' Spiritual Development* (Seattle, WA: Create Space, 2011), 159.
[52] Fowler 51
[53] S.D. Dockery & T. George. *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 57.
[54] Williams 11

most likely distinguishes a Christian's faith from that of an individual's faith in everyday life. Religious belief, according to Russian religious scholar S. Frank, is a belief in a transcendent subject. No direct empirical experience or scientific experiment can be used to test the belief. The existence of God is a more likely problem for logical reasoning than anything else (Frank, 2007)[55]. According to Frank and other Christian authors, religious faith emerges solely as a result of a single circumstance: it is founded on exposing God himself, that is, direct communication with the supernatural as its source. Of course, we can claim the existence of God based on more than just our immediate experience.

When the consequence is personal, non-religious experience or the effect of religious tradition in which an individual was nurtured, an individual can embrace some beliefs in God through a preacher's speech or by reading religious literature. In all of these circumstances, though, a person will double-check his beliefs and compare them to something else. Only a man's experience of thinking in agreement with his faith may serve as a strong foundation for his religious convictions. Derry (1999)[56] looked into the link between early parental interactions and children's believe in God. According to her research, those who have had positive experiences are more likely to see failures as setbacks and to have a "try again" attitude, as well as to see God as helpful, allowing them to have a more positive life experience. A less judgmental and more forgiving person would be one of the traits they would show in their portrayal of God. According to Loader (2007)[57], these persons are also less prone to struggle with emotions of unworthiness and low self-esteem.

The apostle Paul affirms that Christian confidence in God is intimately tied to Christian hope in God, at least in terms of its orientation toward goodness being realized in the future. For example, in (Romans 5:1), Paul begins with a discussion of confidence in God before moving on to a discussion of hope in God. His main point is that people's hope does not fail them since God's love has been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Paul would say the same thing about faith in God, and he is referring to something that is given to humans as a gift of grace rather than something that humans earn from God. Faith in God is a human's cooperative reaction to God's offer, and it includes self-entrustment to God (Barclay, 2015)[58]. The Christian world is pervaded by faith and reason, which serves as a moral and ethical compass for the vast majority of Christians. Faith is progressively expanding into the public sphere, according to evidence, and may have an impact on different sectors of economic and social life. As a sign of the important role of faith leaders and communities in bringing about social change, believers with faith are increasingly becoming key partners in organizations aimed at addressing a diverse set of global challenges. Thus, even if reason as an argument does not apply in a circumstance, a Christian's trust in God can be well-grounded in

[55] S.L. Frank. *God With Us* (Moscow: AST, 2007), 125.

[56] W.G. Derry. *What Science is and how it Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.

[57] W. Loader. *The New Testament with Imagination: A Fresh Approach to its Writings and Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 163

[58] J. Barclay. *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 126.

reason as proof. In an account of trust in God, it recognizes distinct roles for experience and defense.

The Christ Gospel Church: Contextualizing Faith

Christian life, according to the Christ Gospel Church, begins when a person accepts Jesus as his or her personal Lord and Saviour. This demonstrates that Christians are saved by God's grace via faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). While salvation is precisely a (free) gift from God through His mercy, faith is the channel through which salvation flows. Faith therefore, is the answer to God's invitation of salvation. When Jesus walked the earth, the Jewish people were persuaded they had to keep all the requirements of the law in order to be acceptable to God. When Jesus came, he redefined righteousness by saying that human beings are justified not by their works of the law, but by their faith in Jesus Christ, which they have already believed, and that they can be justified by faith in Christ rather than their deeds of the law (Galatians 2:16).

The members' great understanding, belief, and practice of faith is one factor that has aided the Christ Gospel Church's quick expansion. The church believes and adheres to the Bible's teaching that it is impossible to please God without faith, and that those who earnestly seek Him via faith are rewarded (Hebrews 11:6). The Church has faced hardships and temptations that are common to humans and secular commercial operations during its inception and current stages, but has triumphed through faith in God (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

The church believes that the closer it gets to God via faith, the more clearly God's image is imprinted in the church's heart. Members of the church who frequently receive miracles and have their issues answered by divine intervention have always testified to the importance of trust in God. As Christians, one frequently prays to God, asking Him to provide for our necessities, heal our health and relationships, and even gives them knowledge. A person cannot receive from God unless he or she asks with faith and without doubt (James 1:5-7). In this way, Christians demonstrate their faith in God by what they do and how they conduct their lives (Oral interview with Edafe Solomon, 2021)[59]. As the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works, according to James 2:26. Picture this: In a Christian row boat of life, faith and works are both oars (Garver, 2012)[60]. Both of them collaborate to help the Christian advance. In this sense, genuine faith is validated by subsequent actions; similarly, actions taken without faith are ineffective.

The existence of the Christ Gospel Church in Nigeria at a period when the country was ravaged by war can be traced to a steadfast dedication to unwavering faith. Unwavering faith is visible, and it can inspire others to be steadfast in their faith as well. "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ

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[59] Oral interview with Edafe Solomon, CGC, Jesse-Town, November 23, 2021.
[60] E. Garver. Spinoza's Ethics: Don't Imitate God: There is a Model of Human Nature for you. *Philosophy and Theology,* 24, no. 2 (2012): 155-190.

Jesus and of your love for all the saints," Paul wrote to the church in Colossae (Colossians 1:3-4)(Clifford, 2002)[61]. It is easier to maintain one's faith in God when one sees others do so.

Faith, according to the Christ Gospel Church, is a shield against the world's wickedness, as well as a sure victory and freedom from fear, worries, and the threat of sudden death and pain (Westphal, 2014)[62]. Members are taught to believe that faith can help them achieve their goals in this way. Thousands of people attend church that has no idea what they want to do with their lives, even when they are in their twenties and fifties (Oral interview with Akpaka Edwin, 2021)[63]. It is a proven reality that when people place their trust in someone, a task, or a business opportunity, those things become their goals (Marsden, 1991)[64]. When a person has faith in his or her business, for example, such faith motivates him or her to put in the effort necessary to develop the business to where she or he wants it to be. The Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria is dominated by this style of faith (Oral interview with Edeki Goddey, 2021)[65]. Faith development theory can be used in conjunction with full spiritual development theories because of its applicability to day-to-day Christian life, particularly for Christians living and working in today's hostile society, which is characterized by armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, hunger, pandemics, and strange illnesses.

Conclusion

Besides the diverse perspectives of scholars on the question of faith, it is stressed in this paper, that the Old and New Testaments provide a biblical framework for understanding the foundation and meaning of Christian faith. The teachings of Jesus and the Apostles offer abundant proof that faith and knowledge (or reason) is not two opposing ideologies; rather, knowledge (or reason) serves as the basis for the Christian religion. Knowledge (or reason) comes before faith, according to the Bible. As a result, there can be no Christian faith without understanding (or reason).

The paper also provided a thorough examination of the concept and practice of faith, particularly Christian faith. James Fowler's faith formation thesis profoundly inspired the work and thinking of numerous theorists and theologians, and he greatly contributed to the conversation on faith. While Fowler's theory isn't necessarily classified as a Christian theory of faith, it is nonetheless very valuable for Christians in general as they try to nurture faith development in their religious lives. Using the faith theory of development and contextualizing faith in the light of the Christ Gospel Church of Nigeria in this research, impetus is created for and understanding of Christian faith. Therefore, church leaders and pastors should endeavour to inculcate the habit of strong

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[61] W. Clifford. *The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 85.
[62] W. Westphal. *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (London: Eerdmans, 2014), 25, 27.
[63] Oral interview with Akpaka Edwin, CGC, Atiwor-Jesse, November 23, 2021).
[64] G. Marsden. "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia". *In Faith and Rationality, Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991), 98.
[65] Oral interview with Edeki Goddey, CGC, Okuodibo-Jesse, November 12, 2021

faith in God into their followers through preaching the word of faith that is evident in their daily lives. In addition, Christians should be encouraged to spend more time in studying the Bible in order to grow their faith which is the bedrock of Christian growth and development.