Transforming Self-Concept

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Date November 9, 2023

Professor

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Assignment

### *Developmental Readings*

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

**Source One:** Beaumont, S. (2019). *How to lead when you don’t know where you’re going: Leading in a liminal season*. Rowman & Littlefield.

**Comment 1:**

Quote/Paraphrase: The Church stands at the threshold between the past and the future in a rapidly changing world requiring effective leadership.  Susan Beaumont’s “How to lead when you don’t know where you’re going:  Leading in a liminal season” provides insight into leader development.  She emphasizes the Church is currently passing through a liminal epoch. This is resulting in the ongoing destruction of traditional Church models and processes, and the emergence of new paradigms while accompanied by uncertainty surrounding future forms of institutional religion. (Beaumont, 2019, p. 8) Leadership within this context takes on a particular flavor.  Liminal seasons are moments of heightened spiritual presence and encourage faith communities to deepen their collective discernment during these times. (p. 16) In this context, she emphasizes the importance of presence over functionality for leaders. A ministry of presence and openness helps to propel congregations forward amid uncertainty and chaos toward a faithful and effective identity.  (p. 134) The goal is to navigate the uncertainty and chaos rather than seek to eradicate them. The challenge for leaders during liminal seasons is to embrace the inherent ambiguity and chaos, standing with people amidst their confusion. (p. 134) Rather than eradicate the liminal to preserve a status quo, she advocates for the leader to encourage the group to remain in and engage the liminality. (p. 19) Throughout the book, Beaumont introduces the concept of "Presence" as a leadership approach rooted in authenticity, free from ego, and guided by a divine connection. (p. 23) Leadership in liminal times needs both adaptive and spiritually grounded approaches within the changing times that are the landscape for the Church. (p. 134) Leaders also need to be on the lookout for the “trickster”, or those who appear to be charismatic leaders but thrive on sowing discord, as liminal times are already times of high anxiety. (p. 16) By attuning to the liminal time and being open to being led by Christ, a new way of thriving that is not yet clear, may become clearer. (p. 58)

**Essential Element:** This comment applies to the essential elements of leader development and formation science as the latter has a focus on tailoring leadership to fit the needs of the organization.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leadership within an organization. It highlights the importance of watching for and utilizing such liminal times to facilitate learning and productive decision-making of those within the organization. It also stresses that organizations in such liminal times require leaders who are open to such liminal times and can help the members navigate them to new fertile waters.

**Contextualization:**  This insight is especially helpful to my professional work consulting with Christian congregations undergoing conflict or transitions. Almost always there is some liminality to the context of the congregation in crisis, even in stuck congregations who are focused on defensively preserving past structures and processes. What Beaumont calls “Presence” was often termed non-anxious presence within my time in military chaplaincy. Chaplaincy training both in the military and in clinical environments shared the theme of the importance of the chaplain being a non-anxious presence amid the chaos of combat or illness. The same principle is operative here in congregations dealing with liminal times. Beaumont’s key value here is pointing out that the leader/minister/chaplain not only provides a calming influence but one with a purpose: to encourage the people in the organization to embrace the possibilities in the unknown future and not just react to the potential losses in the unknown future.

**Source Two:** Fowler, J. W. (1987). *Faith development and pastoral care*. Fortress Press.

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** Fowler, influenced by Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson sought to explain a developmental approach to faith development. He offers a process of seven stages.

Stage 0: Primal or Undifferentiated Faith (Infancy to 2 years) At this stage, there is no real faith development, and it is mostly characterized by a sense of trust in caregivers. Infants and very young children rely on their caregivers to meet their basic needs, and their faith is based on the care and consistency provided by their primary caregivers.  Young tend to have a welcoming and accepting view of the other.

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith (Ages 3-7) In this stage, young children begin to develop their imagination and symbolic thinking. They may engage in magical thinking and may not differentiate between reality and fantasy. Their faith is often shaped by the stories and symbols they encounter, such as religious stories and rituals.

Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith (Ages 7-12) This stage is characterized by a literal understanding of religious stories and symbols. Children in this stage see these stories as factual and may be deeply influenced by the beliefs and teachings of their family and religious community. Moral and ethical values are also learned from external sources, such as religious authorities and family members.

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Adolescence to Early Adulthood) Here individuals begin to develop a more personalized faith integrating various beliefs and values. They conform to the expectations and norms of their religious or cultural community and seek acceptance within their social group. This stage often involves conforming to the beliefs of others. Critical thinking about faith is usually limited.

Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith (Adulthood) In this stage, individuals begin to critically examine their beliefs and faith. They move beyond conformity to a more personal and reflective faith. They question and explore their religious or spiritual beliefs, seeking to understand and evaluate them independently. This stage can be marked by a sense of internal conflict and doubt which may lead to a deeper and more authentic faith.

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith (Adulthood) "Conjunctive Faith," is a pivotal and intricate stage of faith development, signifying a shift towards a more inclusive and reflective form of faith. In this stage, individuals embrace paradox, recognizing the complexity of life and the interconnectedness of all things, thereby fostering empathy and compassion for others. They exhibit humility and openness, acknowledging the limitations of their understanding and welcoming opportunities for personal growth through encounters with different belief systems and experiences. While remaining engaged with their religious or spiritual tradition, individuals in this stage explore the depths of their spirituality through contemplative and mystical practices. They also seek to reconcile unresolved conflicts from earlier stages and grapple with the mysteries of faith, ultimately achieving a greater sense of emotional and psychological maturity, inner peace, and a more profound understanding of the transcendent.

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith: Fowler considered this stage to be rare and described it as the pinnacle of faith development. At this stage, individuals have a profound, selfless, and transcendent faith that extends beyond personal concerns. They have a deep commitment to justice and compassion, often working to make a positive impact on the world. (pp 53-78)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element of Developmental Stage Theory specifically addressing spiritual development in the seminal theory of J. W. Fowler. It will also apply to the essential element of self-concept as I apply it in my contextualization.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is both additive and variant to my understanding of spiritual development. After thirty years of ministry in parish, military, and clinical contexts it is apparent that people do progress through various stages in their spiritual lives and indeed get stuck or settle down into a comfort zone. The earlier stages, as explained by Fowler, are most helpful. Stage five would probably be more accurate and encompassing if he had accentuated people explore their spirituality with self-examination rather than situating it in contemplative and mystical practices. His final stage seems to be more a projection of his personal theological bias as it has a universalizing aspect and would suggest an equivocation of all faith paths, something orthodox Christianity would and should reject as Jesus revealed Himself as the way the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except by Him. That said, Fowler is still onto something here in the sense of real spiritual growth and the production of what is traditionally termed the fruits of the spirit. In Lutheran circles, we would describe this as the fruit of sanctification over time as the Holy Spirit works within our lives to overcome our old sinful nature and mold us into the image of Christ.

**Contextualization:** As I am near my sixth decade of life and my third decade in ministry, revisiting Fowler is insightful both on a personal level and for constructive reflection on my pastoral engagement and leadership of congregants. I am going to reflect on both aspects of these by taking a trip down memory lane through the stages.

Like most, I have no conscious memory of my early years. I know that I was raised in a Christian home with two parents and an older brother with the support of my paternal grandmother nearby. I suspect this caring environment helped to build the capacity for trust within my spirit. In my pastoral tradition I would encourage parents to baptize their children and bring them to church so that as they develop, lifelong memories of positive experiences of the faith will shape their learning and development. I was not baptized as a child, but I suspect we were frequently in church.

In my ministry, I have worked with individuals whose lives were stunted by an inability to trust, often leading to conflictual relationships and a general sense of anxiety toward others and the world. Usually, this can be traced to early memories of abuse or contexts where the child did not feel safe.

During the point of my life that Fowler would call Stage 1, I recall my father frequently reading Bible stories to me. As Fowler would suggest, it never occurred to me to question the veracity of such. The creation of the world by God, the garden of Eden, and Jesus walking on the water, just all made sense. This gave me a profound respect for Scripture that has endured to this day.

In the congregation, I highlight the importance of such teaching and exposure for children and grandchildren. We are increasingly seeing the fruits of an unchurched generation that hungers for spiritual care and direction but isn’t quite clear on where to find it, who even have a critical view of organized religion. Here Fowler’s insight on the powerful impact of the exposure to Biblical story and church ritual is vital.

During the period of my life that would correspond to stage 2, I recall teaching in Sunday school and VBS shaping my early worldviews. In addition, my fourth-grade teacher would read to us from the Bible every day. This was a time when outsiders could come into the classroom and do a Bible study with the children. This networked social reinforcement not only refined and added to my early beliefs but solidified their value in my life.

Reflection upon this process suggests something, while not entirely new, has not been a huge agenda item for me, that has value for the discipleship of the church. The importance of training children is a key theme within the Lutheran faith. But here Fowler suggests the importance of mutually reinforcing influencers, not just parents and church but also school and other authority figures. As the focus is on conforming to the beliefs of others, if the messages a child is receiving are incongruent, we could expect perhaps a disruptive influence not just in the sustainment of the Christian faith but also for the emotional and spiritual well-being of the child. Contemporary critical activists seek to employ public education to counter traditional beliefs, even if they come from parents, seeking to create a more inclusive environment. This leaves one to wonder considering Fowler’s insight here if this is as empowering as critical theorists might suppose or if we are instilling a sense of skepticism, anxiety, and conflict within these formative memories of the child.

Stage 3 for me was pretty much static. For some reason at this time, my family stopped attending church on such a regular basis, I think my father had a falling out with the pastor or elders of the church, possibly over his membership in the Masonic Lodge. I do recall though that when my peers would seek to include me in, let's call them, shenanigans, I would often decline as it did not fit the norms I had learned at church. I was not sexually active in high school, nor did it appeal to me to be so. I broke up with one girl who initiated such. So, faith did become more personal to me as it was certainly a key shaping aspect of both my worldview and behavior. But I don’t recall experiencing much critical reflection at this point.

From a pastoral standpoint, this tendency to want to reinforce what is known and believed could have value for guiding youth programs for young adults. Is it too early to try to work on what Fowler relegates to stage 4? I’ve seen a few professional youth workers tend to try stage 4 processing with youth in this age group. Perhaps a better focus is on community building and socialization for this period. This is the typical approach of most youth programs and leaders I have observed in my years of ministry for high school youth.

Stage 4 as Fowler describes was experienced by me around the age of 18 in the summer after graduation from high school. In response to a stressful life event, I turned to reading Scripture more deliberately and certain things I read challenged my personal preferences. This led to me question my spiritual beliefs. It was at this time I departed the faith tradition of my family (Church of God Anderson) for the Lutheran church as I found within its teaching and preaching a clearer Gospel more congruent with the Scripture. My faith did indeed become more personal and reflective. This conscious reflective engagement with my faith stayed with me as I journeyed through college studying philosophy and the humanities.

This leads me to ponder within our formal process for faith formation within my Lutheran tradition if we are missing an opportunity. It is observed that often we lose youth during this time. In my tradition, the focus on formal faith formation is placed earlier, in stage 2, in the confirmation process. This is usually a two-year formal educational process covering in-depth the essentials of the Christian faith. It is usually done at the onset of puberty, a tradition going back generations, because at this time the brain develops an early capacity for abstract thinking and operates like a sponge soaking in information. While after confirmation most congregations have some form of youth program, it seems to be more focused on support and reinforcement. It occurs that perhaps a formal revisiting of one’s faith inclined toward this personal reflective look at one’s beliefs could be instrumental in retaining youth into adulthood and helping youth transition from stage 3 to 4.

With Fowler’s stage 5, as I lived through my middle period of life, I did indeed experience diverse people, beliefs, and a vast array of experiences. There is not sufficient time to catalog it all. I have lived in the Far East, the Middle East, Europe, and several places in the U.S. I have cared for Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, skeptics, atheists, and “nones”, young and old, combat wounded, people with all sorts of grieving, sexual assault victims and child abuse victims, the dying, those celebrating new life, people with twisted ideas of God and reality, people with deep spiritual and emotional resources, and those with practically none. Ministry is in the well of paradox complex diverse experiences. Developing empathy and care for others does not necessitate abandoning core beliefs informed by Scripture. But I suspect that more is involved than just the experience, but that God is working through the presence of His Spirit to help us grow during such situations. Perhaps this is what Fowler acknowledges in his focus on an increasing awareness of the transcendent. Much could be said but for the sake of brevity, I am going to stop here.

Within congregations, some don’t arrive at this stage. Difference creates anxiety and is instinctively resisted to defend one’s existing beliefs and worldviews. I especially observe this within my faith tradition with young pastors who do not like to be questioned nor do they consider the wisdom and experience of older pastors that valuable. I recall one of my teachers when I began formal training for transitional ministry tell me that they only admit pastors into the program after “they get a few arrows in the butt.” I think perhaps a key element of this stage is having to experience the imperfections of the world in a personal way. This sounds a bit like the previous entry on liminal times, as this stage seems to be an openness to authentically engaging the liminality of a fallen world. Things are not as solid, nor as given, as they may seem. Life doesn’t come in neat little packages that fit perfectly with our preferences. But life isn’t all that different for people despite our talk of diversity and difference. In the end, life has a great deal of disappointment, challenge, failure, and suffering which when faced maturely does generate empathy for others.

Stage 6 is rare. Perhaps this is why I don’t resonate with Fowler here. But I think it is more likely Fowler is biased and off-base here to a degree. Now I certainly agree that compassion for others, working for justice (as God defines it), and trying to make the world a better place is a noble life ambition. But Fowler seems to suggest that these are dependent on the development of a universalizing faith, akin to universalism. As noted before, this does not resonate with me in the sense that the most mature faith would see core Christian teachings as only one manifestation of a broader truth that other religions might express differently. While many religions have valuable themes, Christ crucified for the salvation of people through the forgiveness of sins offered as a gift of grace received through faith, is the essential element of the Christian faith and my faith. It is not one I will abandon. Even though it is exclusive, such faith does not prevent empathy, care, and compassion for others, or working for a better world. But life is short and terminal and there is another world, a more important world, the new world called the new heaven and the new earth that is coming soon with Christ’s return.

**Source Three:** Allen, S., & Fry, L. W. (2023). A Framework for leader, spiritual, and moral development. *Journal of Business Ethics: JBE*, *184*(3), 649–663. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05116-y>

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Rest’s (1986) well-known four-step model of moral deliberation (awareness, judgment, intent, behavior) suggests that moral action begins with awareness of actions’ consequences including their effects on others.” The four-step model of moral deliberation is a framework for making ethical decisions and addressing moral dilemmas. The model involves the following steps: (1) Identification of the moral issue, where the ethical question or problem is clearly defined; (2) Analysis of the situation, which involves gathering relevant information and considering various perspectives and potential consequences; (3) Evaluation of the available options, weighing the ethical principles and values at stake to determine the best course of action; and (4) Implementation and reflection, where the chosen action is put into practice, and the individual assesses the outcomes and reflects on the moral reasoning and decision-making process. This model provides a structured approach to navigate complex ethical situations, encouraging individuals to think critically and consider the ethical implications of their choices.” (pp. 653)

**Essential Element:** This is related to the essential element of Developmental Stage Theory with a focus on moral development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of adult development. I was previously unaware of Rest’s theory. While the process is rather straightforward and common sense, an informed conscious appreciation of the process is valuable not only for self-reflection on previous decisions and moral failures but for helping to lead others in the consideration of a problem with ethical implications.

**Contextualization:** One congregation I currently advise has a church cemetery. In the past year, there has been confusion and disagreement over who holds “burial rights” in the cemetery. This question was raised by the desire of a family who is not affiliated with the church and does not live within the community, desiring to bury an adult child, a known non-Christian with relatives who are buried in the cemetery. The initial decision of the leaders was negative, but this changed when the family went to the local press. Over the past year, attempts to formalize a burial policy by the membership have been confounded by contradictory principles, sometimes held by the same individual. For instance, some leaders vacillate between allowing family members to be buried as an act of compassion and wrestling with the limited space of the cemetery being filled by extended family members using it as a family cemetery. Each time I think we have come up with a policy that they are comfortable with and is somewhat ethical, someone will object that it would allow for instance a non-Christian to be buried there.

Reframing the discussion as a moral dilemma may prove helpful. In an upcoming town hall, I will attempt to have them identify the ethical problem related to the cemetery, what is the key overarching concern or group of concerns. They will likely list several which would produce contradictory outcomes as has happened in the past. I will then lead them to analyze these preferred principles from the perspective not just of members, but friends and family of members as well as our wider community. Then I will have them develop a list of possible options, the ethical principle underlying it, and the likely outcome, both good and bad, to help them determine what is the best course of action. And then I will encourage them to not only implement their policy but to establish a process for observing its implementation and impact so that the outcome is not ethical or desired, they can restructure their policy at a specified time, likely 1-2 years, in the future.

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** The author discusses the theory of “Being-Centered Leadership”. “Fry and Kriger’s (2009) TBCL describes five levels of being (ontological levels; nature of existence) and their subsequent ways of knowing (epistemology; how leaders come to know reality) as a spiritual journey that provides the context for effective leadership...At each level, the leader’s way of knowing the world aligns with their leadership approach and specific leadership theories.”

A diagram of a diagram of a leader

Description automatically generated with medium confidence(Allen and Fry, 2023, p. 651)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with the essential elements of formation science and leader development with implications for self-concept and Developmental Stage Theory.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leadership development. Over the years I have had leadership training and education from several perspectives including military, clinical, and congregational settings. The recognition that not only do one’s skills develop in an additive way, but they also change as spiritual growth occurs qualitatively. Also helpful is the insight that one’s “way of knowing the world” impacts leadership approaches and frameworks. Expanded worldviews open windows for the appropriation of new approaches.

**Contextualization:** This stimulates several potential applications with the organizations in which we lead, specifically in the congregations often in crisis and transition that I am called to consult with and provide leadership to. First, if the leader has a worldview that impacts his/her leadership style, it would seem reasonable to conclude that members, individually, and corporately as a system could also have a preferred or capable followership style (and their leadership style) informed by their dominant worldview. This raises the observation that these various worldviews and leadership styles might not just be stages or phases of development, but additive rather than replacing formerly held views and approaches. As such, adjusting one’s leadership style to meet the level at which the members are located would likely be more productive. Additionally understanding where the congregation is on such a scale, would inform not only possibilities for productive decision-making and self-leadership but also help to diagnose obstacles that hinder growth as well as suggest the dynamics of the next stage that could be fermented. For instance, a congregation or a leadership team might be stuck at the level of leadership based on a social construction of the world and would benefit from being encouraged to consider more conscious leadership based on increased awareness of where they are from a spiritual perspective based on cultivating the soul and the spiritual growth of the congregation which could set up a more successful transition to a ministry focused on leave and service of one another and the community.

**Source Four:** Hukkinen, E., Lütz, J. M., & Dowden, T. (2023). Assessing Research Trends in Spiritual Growth: The Case for Self-Determined Learning. *Religions*, *14*(6), 809. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060809>

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “The literature on spiritual growth can be categorized into two broad pathways psychologically derived and scripturally derived pathways. ‘Pathway’ refers to a roadmap to maturity. How one travels along the pathway is the ‘means.’ A pathway can have many means. For example, Bible reading is not so much a pathway but a means to progress along a pathway. An investigation of these two pathways reveals pertinent issues that warrant further research into spiritual growth. Evaluation of Fowler’s (1995) psychological pathway discloses inherent universalism and other theological considerations, which limit such models for purposes of Christian maturation…Fowler (1995) asserts that all faiths develop along a similar psychological pathway, passing through discrete levels toward maturity. He situates faith maturation with respect to Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, Piaget’s cognitive development theory, and Kohlberg’s moral development theory. Human and spiritual maturation obviously correlate (Radcliffe 1984). An older disciple can be reasonably expected to be more mature than a younger one. But the complexity of spiritual growth and the interplay between many subjective and objective factors relating to growth suggest that an increased knowledge of oneself and one’s faith does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth…The universalism that is inherent in psychological models restricts their ability to measure biblical faith and its growth. Universalism is fostered in psychological models because all people, not just Christians, probably fit into the model…Fowler (1995) failed to consider the exclusivity of biblical faith (John 14: 6b) even though Christians were included in his extensive study.” (p.6)

**Essential Element:** This comment is associated with the essential element Developmental Stage Theory with a focus on spiritual development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of Fowler’s theory of faith formation. The author here has identified a key problem with Fowler’s theory when evaluated from a Biblical Christian viewpoint, its dependency on psychological frameworks and hence a dependency on empirical or experience-based data. The scientific method operates on the principles of materialism and empiricism and thus is unable to testify to spiritual realities beyond their experiences. Given the Biblical insight of a fallen world and a sinfully corrupted human nature, it would be expected that experience would provide a cloudy and even contradictory understanding in some cases of spiritual processes operating in a person’s life.

**Contextualization:** This comment serves as a reminder to be humble regarding the use of human reason in the pursuit of learning and knowledge. Our method of study at Omega Graduate School is predicated on using sociological tools and qualitative and quantitative research methods for understanding the integration of religion and society. But it is also good to be reminded that human methods are fallible and the presence of bias and preference in the theoretician can create an imperfect theory, which may be congruent with how one prefers to experience the world or even with many people's experiences, it may not be congruent with Scripture which transcends and illuminates our experiences. Reason may serve as a valuable tool in the pursuit of wisdom and understanding, but it does not stand in judgment to plain and clear proclamations of the Holy Scripture. As we evaluate and add tools to our toolbox, it is good to be reminded that human-created tools, products of reflection on experience, biased by empirical and materialist practices, while having value, might miss important spiritual truths.

**Source Five:** Gale, M., Hendricks, J. J., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2023). Perspectives on lifespan religious and spiritual development from scholars across the lifespan. *Religions*, *14*(3), 362. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030362>

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Our discussion is organized around Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological framework and the process-person-context-time model. Within this framework, the key factors we discuss that influence religious/spiritual development include (a) process (i.e., person-religion mismatch and family processes), (b) person (i.e., age, gender/sexual orientation, mental health, personal agency, and experience), (c) context (i.e., home environment, culture, and community), and (d) time (i.e., historical events and the duration of proximal processes).” (p.1)

Regarding “process” the authors note that if a person’s religion is not well integrated with “needs, beliefs, or behavior” they will likely change their religion or abandon it completely. They add that the parent’s role in the transmission of a religion to their children plays a formative role for later religious behavior. (p.7)

Regarding “person” the authors note that age plays a key role in a person’s affiliation with a religion with younger children more likely to willingly participate in the family’s religion with later affiliation or disaffiliation being an exercise of growing autonomy which is influenced by peer groups, personal preferences, positive or negative family processes, and their growing life experience. (pp. 9-11)

Regarding “context” the emphasis is on the powerful impact of culture and community including respected religious and secular leaders, mentors, and peer groups, all of which communicate distinct complimentary and contradictory viewpoints toward religion in general and the specific religion of the individual. (pp. 12-13)

Regarding “time” the authors here focus on the influence of external events including impactful onetime events such as 9/11 or the Covid pandemic or the cumulative influence of experienced factors not just from world and culture, but from within one’s religious environment such as repetitious attendance at annual church camps.

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential element Developmental Stage Theory with a focus on spiritual development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of spiritual development. One focus in the past twenty years since my first time at OGS has been on examining the impact of culture on the Christian church’s ability to be effective at mission and discipleship both of its existing members and potential members. This is closely correlated with the spiritual development of youth and adults both within the church and outside the church. The post-Christian secular and critical culture is having a strong impact on younger generations with numerous empirical studies showing a strong correlation with critical views toward organized religion. This comment helps unpeel the onion revealing that limiting consideration to culture and society limits understanding of many other forces that are in play in the spiritual formation of individuals.

**Contextualization:**  A goal for my research with OGS and my leadership with congregations is to help facilitate more productive and efficient processes for disciplining people both inside and outside the congregation. At the root of this is my hope that more people come to know the mercy of Christ. From a spiritual perspective, within my Lutheran tradition, we often talk of how our sinful nature, the world, and the devil (something I have yet to find mentioned in literature even flirting with this topic) throw up barriers to our faith and spiritual growth. This article helps provide a reminder and a framework for a more inclusive consideration of these barriers and potentialities. There are formative processes that take place in families, churches, and society that should be considered, such as the educational process. For example, how does the teaching function of the family, the church, and the secular community complement and confuse learning? There are a host of personal issues including personal development, personal experiences, preferences, needs, and more. There is certainly the impact of our contexts both local and cultural including the social groups we participate in. There is the impact of unanticipated historical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic that had a substantial impact on congregational health in most organized faith groups. This article opens us to a wider awareness of the complexity of the barriers to spiritual growth but also opens a wider array of possible places to effectively intervene.

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Most children, adolescents, and emerging adults are growing up in a significantly different religious and spiritual landscape from previous generations. Young people tend to be less religious and spiritual than their parents and grandparents and there has been a significant decline in how important or salient religion reportedly is to individuals (Pew Research Center 2015). The multi-faceted ecology in which children, adolescents, and emerging adults develop is ever changing; therefore, the context of their religious and spiritual development is shifting.” (p.1)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential element Developmental Stage Theory, specifically applied to spiritual development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of spiritual development. Presenting an important observation contrasting younger people with their parents and grandparents, and the recognition that “…the context of their religious and spiritual development is shifting”, suggests that previous models of spiritual development might not be capturing current dynamics. Since models, such as Fowler’s model, depend on empirical processes, it is reasoned they would mirror the times in which they were born. Rather than necessarily capturing a universal human phenomenon, they could be picking up on a contextual and cultural one. There may be emerging phenomena and processes impacting spiritual development that these models don’t capture.

**Contextualization:** This comment builds on comment 5. It suggests a certain skepticism may be healthy toward even well-established understandings of human behavior including spiritual development beyond their lack of internal congruence, incongruence with empirical data, or Scripture, but simply that they may be limited by a particular cultural environment that held religious practice to be of value. As this changes, the shape of spiritual development might look different and require different approaches to facilitate.

**Comment 8:**

Quote/Paraphrase: “Despite the difficulty in reaching definitional or operational consensus, researchers have framed spiritual development as the change in or growth in a personal search for a connection to divine entities or supernatural phenomena; a private quest for enlightenment or virtues; and/or internal motivation to seek out meaning, purpose, and self-transcendence within or outside of the self or organized religion groups’ (Mahoney 2021, p. 5). As noted, spirituality does not necessarily need organized religion to develop, yet it is often coupled with religion. As Boyatzis (2012) explained, ‘Children are spiritual beings first then are acculturated (or not) in a religious tradition’ (p. 153). Religious development has also been defined as a change in religious affiliation, practice, or belief (Storm and Voas 2012). Child and adolescent religiosity and spirituality are both influenced by different social contexts, ranging from family to culture (Boyatzis 2012).” (pp 3-4)

**Essential Element:** This relates to the essential element Developmental Stage Theory as related to spiritual development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is variant to my understanding of spirituality and spiritual growth. This approach that spirituality may cover some of the same ground as faith or religion but not necessarily so, that is “spiritual but not religious” was a common framework within both military and clinical chaplaincy. This is a framework produced from a secular standpoint and does not marry well with a Christian understanding of spirituality. This suggests that empirical and secular-based views of spiritual development while potentially having value will likely also not be fully supportable or usable.

**Contextualization:** Serving as military chaplain I was often tasked with briefing the four pillars of resilience to our deploying Airmen: mental, physical, social, and spiritual. Of course, the chaplain was expected to focus on the spiritual, but not to accentuate that this meant “religious”. The subject often used for “spiritual” is usually associated with meaning-making. The Air Force understood spiritual resiliency to be akin to a well-developed system of personal belief and meanings including principles and values that could persevere in the face of adverse experiences such as combat. It didn’t matter so much what the system was, only that it would empower the airman to accomplish the military mission. On one hand, this is more akin to philosophy than to spirituality as philosophy is rather the study of how human beings interpret their world and make meaning, perhaps even more specifically the field of hermeneutics.

Orthodox Christianity would not countenance the idea that the content of the meaning system didn’t matter as long as it works in a practical way to empower a person to endure and perform when facing adversity. The idea of spiritual growth apart from faith in Christ is completely discounted within the Christian Scriptures. Now philosophy recognizes a role for “faith” or belief even in generic secular so-called “spiritual but not religious” meaning systems as we see in David Hume for example. But such practical faith as described by Hume (who argued you can never know for certain cause = effect, but we believe it so) is hardly the same concept as the saving faith in Jesus Christ of the New Testament. The idea that “children are spiritual beings first” suggests a latent potential for spiritual growth simply by being born human. This runs afoul of Ephesians 2:1 which declares that we are born spiritually dead. Apart from Christ, there is no potential for genuine spiritual growth. (Ephesians 2: 8-9) The process that is being confused for spirituality is simply meaning-making and some form of moral development that might demonstrate improvement toward “the good” (As Plato might describe) but falls far short of true spiritual rebirth and growth.

**Source Six:** Hsieh, C.C., Hui-Chieh, L., & Lin, S.H. (2022). Spirituality can make a difference: The impact of principals’ spiritual leadership on teachers’ psychological capital and organizational commitment in high-school environment. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, *19*(1). <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2765097397/abstract/A21BD190A4244B8APQ/4>

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** From the abstract: “This study explores the impact of principals’ spiritual leadership on teachers’ organizational commitment (OC) and psychological capital (PsyCap) in a high-school environment. We tested the conceptual model using structural equation modeling (SEM) of data collected from a sample of 803 high-school teachers in Taiwan.

The study produced the following results: “These results provide evidence for the positive and significant impact of principals’ spiritual leadership on teachers’ PsyCap (H1 supported), which echoed previous findings in the literature (Fehring et al., 1997). Principals’ care and concern, positive feedback, respect, and recognition towards teachers help cultivate their PsyCap, making them more efficient, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient. Moreover, leaders with spirituality contribute to enhancing hope and inner peace, thus ameliorating depression and increasing happiness.” (p. 37) “Taken together, the results reveal full mediation of teachers’ PsyCap in the relationship between principals’ spiritual leadership on OC. In other words, the influence of principals’ spiritual leadership on teachers’ OC is only realized under the full mediation of teachers’ PsyCap, highlighting its major and indispensable role in fostering teachers’ OC. The more spiritual the teachers perceived their principals’ behavior, the more likely their PsyCap can be enhanced, making them more committed to the school. In particular, adoption of spiritual leadership, promoting team spirit, inspiring devotion, and establishing good working relationships increases teachers’ resilience and psychological empowerment, further enhancing their sense of fidelity and adherence to the school they serve.” (p. 38)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential elements leader development and Developmental Stage Theory as it relates to spiritual development having an impact on leadership impacting the psychological development of others.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leader development. It highlights the positive correlation of a leader’s spirituality to the psychological well-being of the members of the community as well as enhancing commitment to the organization and enhancing interpersonal relationships among the organization.

**Contextualization:**  This study is useful in that it suggests a counter-narrative prevalent in the West that somehow a leader’s spirituality should be kept private and if expressed or incorporated into leadership styles in secular organizations would likely generate an oppressive environment. It is recognized that the study is conducted in the Far East in Taiwan. Hence, a factor to be considered is the general cultural view toward spirituality and whether this is a reinforcing cultural mechanism for the positive reception of such leadership. The study referenced previous studies that indicate that leadership is a key factor in organizational culture. “Morris et al. (2020) concluded that leadership style was the key factor behind changes in school culture.” (Hsieh et al., 2022, p. 28) This suggests that even in Western secular culture that is increasingly oppositional to organized religion, a place for personally manifest values and behaviors informed by one’s spiritual values can yet have a positive impact on the people in the organization. It might suggest a collateral effect that as workers and organizational members experience improved well-being and interpersonal interaction, a positive orientation toward spiritual matters and truth might be seeded.

**Source Seven:** Xue, Z. M., Yingjie, Y., Marius, van D., David, D. C., & Alain, V. H. (2020). The interactive effect of a leader’s sense of uniqueness and sense of belongingness on followers’ perceptions of leader authenticity. *Journal of Business Ethics: JBE*, *164*(3), 515–533. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4070-4>

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** From the abstract: “Researchers have emphasized the value of authenticity, but not much is known about what makes a person authentic in the eyes of others. Our research takes an interpersonal perspective to examine the determinants of followers’ perceptions of leader authenticity. Building on social identity theory, we propose that two fundamental self-identifications–a leader’s sense of uniqueness and sense of belongingness–interact to influence followers’ perceptions of a leader’s authenticity via perceptions of a leader’s self-concept consistency. In a field study conducted among leader–follower dyads and in a controlled laboratory experiment, we find that when a leader feels a low sense of belongingness, there is a positive relationship between a leader’s sense of uniqueness and perceptions of leader authenticity. When a leader feels a low sense of uniqueness, there is a positive relationship between a leader’s sense of belongingness and perceptions of leader authenticity. This is because followers perceive this leader as having high self-concept consistency.” (p. 515)

The authors start by discussing that leader authenticity correlates positively with people’s support for a leader, giving the example of Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential race in which the number one reason for her loss was her perceived “inauthenticity.” (p. 515)

The study’s key findings demonstrate how a “sense of uniqueness” and a “sense of belonging” shape how others view the leader’s authenticity. Their study indicated that a high sense of uniqueness, that is sense of being one’s own person and having a strong self-concept, inspired the perception of authenticity but only when the leader’s sense of belonging is low. (p. 529)

Additionally, the study found that a leader having a high sense of belonging also led to perceptions of authenticity, but only when the leader had a low sense of uniqueness. (p. 529)

The authors posit, “To convey to followers that they have a consistent self-concept, leaders need to have a high sense of belongingness and/or a high sense of uniqueness. (p. 529)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential elements of leadership development and self-concept.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leadership and self-concept and is a bit variant. It suggests application to the importance of adaptability and resilience in a leader as well as self-consistency and self-perception theory which recognizes that a self-concept is influenced by observing the impact of their behavior in various situations. It also suggests a dynamic to be considered when the leader is attempting to strategically align with the organization’s goals and priorities.

**Contextualization:**  All pastors exercise a position of leadership both from positional and personal influence within the congregation. This is more the case in interim and transitional ministry when congregations in crisis are looking to an expert in congregational systems to help them break out of their non-productive and sometimes even harmful systemic patterns. The study almost seems to defy common sense to some degree. That people will be more inspired to follow a leader who has a strong sense of self-concept and can tolerate criticism and resistance and respond in reasonable ways rather than out of anxiety is a common component in leadership theories and practice. Likewise, the idea that leaders who care about the people in the organization and the mission of the organization will be more trusted is also a key idea. But the idea that being strong in both areas could be counterproductive seems counterintuitive. But on further reflection considering my years of ministry experience, I can see some truth to these findings.

One reason that interim ministry is successful is that is specifically limited to a set period of time. Intentional interim ministers must have a strong sense of self-concept, a good well of experience to draw from, as well as an understanding of congregational system dynamics. The Intentional Interim Minister (IIM) enters a congregation of strangers to him for a set period of time with a designated purpose: to facilitate learning among the membership and empowerment of the members and its leaders toward more healthy functioning. The IIM can say the hard and critical things from the standpoint of an objective viewpoint out of a strong sense of self and conviction and be received usually because he is known to not be in it for himself and will only be there for a short period of time. This “interim” part of the process has been seen as just as important as the “intentional” part.

On the flip side, when congregations are healthy and their processes are operating well within a productive established church culture, it is not uncommon for tensions to develop between pastor and congregation when the settled pastor arrives if he does not take time to understand the culture of the congregation, but rather seeks to impose change outside of his own strong theological identity. The minister may be his own man and have a strong self-concept, but it works counterproductively to establishing trust for he has disregarded and disrespected the church culture and members. In these cases, a focus on high commitment and putting one’s preferences into the background can be helpful for the early days of establishing trust in a new congregation. It makes sense as the study suggests that followers would appreciate a pastor who appreciates them and exhibits a strong sense of belonging and appreciation of existing culture.

I suspect the study would benefit from incorporating an understanding of the level of functioning within the organization as well as this likely has an impact on the perception of “authenticity” of the leader. I still suspect that in a healthy environment where trust is built with the leader, eventually, the leader can begin to manifest a strong sense of personal identity (self-concept) while maintaining a strong sense of commitment to the church (love and empathy) as the relationship between pastor and congregation evolves.

The study does suggest the thought that reading the room, or in this case, the organization, and having a sense of what they need – a strong independent leader who is willing to risk his belonging (might not be able to stay long) for the sense of their long-term wellbeing, or a self-sacrificial leader who puts aside his personal preferences for the sake of facilitating an already productive congregational culture with productive processes, or I would add, is it time that the leader can more forward toward integrating both his sense of uniqueness and his sense of belonging to foster congregational growth.

The authors also declare, “When a leader feels a low sense of belongingness and a low sense of uniqueness, followers see him or her as having an inconsistent self-concept.” (p. 517) This makes sense as this would indicate a weak leader. They state, “A leader who feels that he or she is unique and different from others follows individual norms. As a result, this leader has consistency in their values, beliefs, and actions, and can resist external influences (Ryan and Deci 2002; Peus et al. 2012).” Followers should perceive that this leader has a strong consistent self-concept. With leaders who have both a high sense of uniqueness and a high sense of belonging in an organizational context where organizational processes are producing positive results and interactions, a leader’s sense of uniqueness might not stand out as a factor in his authenticity due to his alignment with the organizational culture.

**Source Eight:** Steinke, Peter. (2019). *Uproar: Calm leadership in anxious times*. National Book Network.

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “You are dealing with emotional forces. Nothing complex or controversial happens without confusion, resistance, or emotional reactivity. All tensions, traumas, and transitions leave a trail of anxiety. This is where you enter the story. Anxiety alone will not harm or endanger a system. How anxiety is addressed will determine the outcome more than anything else. Your responsible and enlightened behavior is the touchstone. (p. 13)

**Essential Element:** This comment applies to the concept of leader development.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leader development. Steinke focuses on congregations as emotional systems utilizing and modifying insights from family systems theory for application to leadership in the congregational setting. This comment adds a vital dimension to understanding leadership in any organization, in that it reminds us we are dealing with a system of interacting human beings who are also and always emotional beings.

**Contextualization:** Leaders in congregations will often talk about principles: theological truths, constitutional requirements, bylaw restrictions, goals, and outcomes. There is generally a stress placed upon the abstract and objective. Emotionality is always there. A valuable insight from cognitive science is that emotions are also a form of information flowing from our subconscious into our conscience as our brains (minds) evaluate the matter at hand as to whether it is a threat or friend, a potential loss, or something good. (There are four basic emotions: mad, sad, scared, glad). Congregational dysfunction is exacerbated by emotions such as anxiety which experiences the ongoing environment as a threat generating either a fight or flight response. In our interdependent relationships when we see anxiety in the system, we tend to adapt by becoming anxious ourselves. Others are exhibiting a threat exists, so we begin to feel threatened. Being aware of this dynamic coupled with Steinke’s stress that how a leader responds is crucial to the outcome is of vital importance to successful leadership in emotional systems, which is practically all human organizations at least to some degree.

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “How any one of them handled self in the emotional system was more determinate than anything else in terms of outcome. Critical to all situations was the degree of responsibility expressed in the system. You will observe how leaders impact a system by separating themselves from the surrounding anxiety making decisions based on principle, not instinct taking responsibility for their own emotional being regulating their own anxiety in the face of sabotage or resistance staying connected to others, even those who disagree with them choosing self-directed goals being a non-anxious presence supplying an immune response to pathogenic forces (invasiveness) focusing on emotional processes rather than the symptoms they produce not allowing the most dependent to be in control knowing that people naturally influence one another recognizing leader and follower as complements, parts of the whole realizing that insight, love, and reasonableness are not adequate for change in an anxious system accepting that mature leadership does not always work, that immaturity is too embedded in the system. The overall health and functioning of any organization depends primarily on one or several people at the top who can exercise the above characteristics well.” (p. 75)

“Early in my consulting work, I made the mistake of thinking that if I presented issues clearly, people would respond appropriately. What I discovered is that not all people in a given situation will find clarity comforting. Even if the information is quite clear, if it runs contrary to someone’s viewpoint, they will contest it. Their own emotionality overrides their thinking capacity.” (p. 43)

“If you are irresponsibly overinvolved in the lives of others, you may protect ineffective staff members. If you have strong rescue needs, you will spend an inordinate amount of time and effort to fix things. You will lose a sense of objectivity. You will listen to the loudest voices too often. If one is focused on one’s own functioning, how does this differ from narcissistic functioning? First, you need to remember that narcissistic functioning is automatic behavior. It’s like sneezing. Second, the person exhibiting this behavior needs the constant fueling of one’s grandiosity from outside sources. There’s a dependency on others. But becoming a responsible/responsive self is intentional work. It does not require the flattery or projection of greatness from others. Caring for self and caring for others flow in one stream, separately.” (p. 136)

**Essential Element:** This comment is related to the essential element of leadership development and self-concept.

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This comment is additive to my understanding of leadership and the importance of self-concept. Steinke teaches that a strong self-concept and the ability to keep a degree of separation from the system while being inside the system is vital to helping an anxious group of people move beyond their anxiety. Steinke points out that emotionality overrides rational thinking capacity, our lower limbic brain is generating most of our thinking rather than our higher cognitive brain. This is especially true when we are afraid and in anxious systems. Having a strong self-concept helps insulate the leader from the contagious effects of an anxious system.

**Contextualization:**  As we saw in source 7 can equate to a positive view of the authenticity of the leader enabling the leader to help them be led through and out of their anxiety. Interestingly, he points out that too much belonging, “irresponsibility overinvolved in the lives of others” can lead a leader without such objectivity to protect ineffective staff or church members who are causing conflict, because he cares for them, and has an emotional involvement with them. Hence the positive aspects of belonging in source 7 are likely mitigated by the type of belonging and suggests a stronger self-concept is necessary. Leader distance in an emotional system is supported by both source 7 and Steinke. This sounds cold within the confines of Christianity whose two chief commandments are to love God and to love others. Steinke makes an insightful point that having a strong self-concept is not necessarily selfish nor about being selfish, but a necessary ingredient of being a servant leader who can care for others and is not driven to anxiety either by fear of criticism or a dependency on external affirmation.

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