

FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN
IN THE MALAYSIAN BAPTIST ENGLISH-SPEAKING
CONGREGATIONS: A VYGOTSKIAN APPROACH

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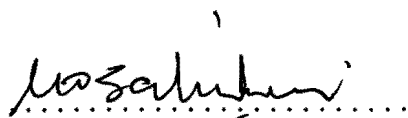
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**Faith formation of children
in the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking
congregations: A Vygotskian approach**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rosalind', followed by a dotted line for a signature line.

Rosalind Yeet-Wah Lim

ABSTRACT

Historically the goal of childhood faith formation in the early Baptist congregations is to nurture children to become regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. The fact that Malaysian Baptist English-speaking (MBE) congregations have upheld the name “Baptist” shows the congregations’ desire to express their faith in some forms that characterise Baptist confessions. As such, it is presumed that the goal of childhood faith formation from the early days still holds for the present MBE congregations.

However empirical observation and field survey showed that MBE congregations are not aware of the faith formation goal for their children. The existing formation practices revealed inconsistencies in approaches and styles. Some approaches are purely pragmatic with little consideration to the biblical content while there are other approaches which are contextually inappropriate with little consideration to the Baptist confessions. The field survey further revealed that most members in MBE congregations view faith formation of children more of a parental responsibility than a co-nurturing process with parents and congregation working together. Hence MBE congregations need a comprehensive faith formation approach that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confessions to help form faith in their children.

This dissertation proposes that the Vygotskian sociocultural approach can be a heuristic device for MBE congregations to recover its original goal for faith formation of their children. The approach assumes that children can become regenerate believers, contributors to the faith community, and persons in ministry and witness because formation of attitudes, beliefs, and personality is influenced by knowledge, sociocultural variables, and personal meaning making. The approach also provides the instructional settings whereby children can be helped to achieve the three characteristics mentioned above.

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NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

- The Bible Version used in this dissertation is the *New International Version* (1984), Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- The following abbreviations have been used in this dissertation:

MBE	Malaysia Baptist English-speaking
MBC	Malaysia Baptist Convention
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
- Abbreviations of Bible Books

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis
Exo.	Exodus
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Isa.	Isaiah
Pro.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
1 Sam.	1 Samuel
Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew
Mk.	Mark
Lk.	Luke
Jn.	John
Acts	Acts of Apostle
Rom.	Romans
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Eph.	Ephesians
Gal.	Galatians
Heb.	Hebrew
Jas.	James
1Jn.	1 John
2 Tim.	2 Timothy

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CHAPTER ONE

A. SCOPE AND AIM OF THE STUDY

Children are the “most embracing evidence of the continuing work of a creative God” (Aleshire, 1988a, 91). Sofia Cavalletti wrote that in her forty five years of observing children, she came to the conclusion that the children’s responses to God “transcend socio-economic factors, as well as geographical or cultural differences” (Cavalletti, 2000, viii). The children’s responses are constant and these “constants ... are not sporadic or circumstantial; rather, they are indicative of deep, vital needs in the child ... to the Christian message” (Ibid.). Hence childhood faith formation is to facilitate children to further discover the richness of their spiritual inheritance and to deepen their understanding of the responses they make to God. As Perry Downs said, formation for Christian faith maturity is “a matter of holding to correct beliefs, loving God more deeply, and living in growing obedience to God” (Downs, 1994, 59). Formation of children begins at conception and in its broadest sense is inevitable because human development itself is a process of growth, assimilation, and adaptation to new experiences. The question then to faith formation of children is not why or when should we form faith, for this is rhetorical, but rather, how do we form faith?

The question on how to form childhood faith has lead most Malaysian Baptist English-speaking (MBE) congregations to search for approaches that can help their children know God and grow in relationship with him. Since there are no denominational guidelines to assess the appropriateness of each approach various formation practices have been introduced into the Baptist congregations, of which, some practices are found to be inconsistent with the denomination stance. The

empirical data in this research show that the most common approaches to faith formation of children utilized (intentionally or unintentionally) by MBE congregations are based on either a developmental, pietistic, consumerist, or pragmatic paradigm and none of the congregations have taken their Baptist roots as basis for thinking about how children should be formed in their faith. Therefore, this research is an attempt to help MBE congregations understand the faith formation process for children by looking at Scriptures and original denomination convictions and to propose a frame of thinking to help the members recover the denomination faith formation goals and purpose as they should be.

B. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The central problem for this research is that MBE congregations need an approach that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confessions that can help them understand the faith formation process of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life. The research question can be stated as:

What is an approach that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confessions that can guide MBE congregations to recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life?

Underlying the research problem are four major sub-problems.

First, there are no denominational guidelines to help MBE congregations understand development or formation of their children's faith. MBE congregations are autonomous. Autonomy means that each congregation is able to discern God's will in the way the church is governed. Each congregation is free to choose whatever strategies deemed appropriate to help their members grow in faith as long as there is majority consent among the members. Some MBE congregations hold to formational strategies inherited from the Southern Baptist missionaries from America who established the first Malaysian Baptist congregation in the early 1950s. A number of

MBE congregations adopted formation methods promoted by contemporary pastors and Christian educators (e.g. *Purpose Driven Life: Children's Version*, Bill Gothard's *Basic Life Institute*). There are other congregations who have designed their own childhood faith formation approaches suited to their congregational preferences. In the absence of denomination guidelines, differences have risen in forms, styles, and theology of inculcating childhood faith and as such, guidelines are needed to help the congregations understand best practices within Baptist confessions for their children.

Second, existing formation approaches in MBE congregations may not support the stated Baptist confession of faith. Empirical observations show that the approaches utilised by some MBE congregations are inconsistent with Baptist ecclesiology in practice. These approaches tend to be either, 1) pragmatic, with limited consideration to the theological implications; 2) pietistic, with concentration on spiritual disciplines while neglecting areas of child development; 3) developmental, with focus on human theories as sole measure of faith maturity; or 4) consumerist, spending large amount of finances on current programs and moving from one program to the next. Empirical observations also revealed that some of these approaches are not grounded in a biblical perspective of children and childhood, and inconsistent with the original Baptist understanding of holistic faith formation of children. There are also occasions where the theology in practice does not correlate to the confessed theology.

Third, MBE congregations have limited awareness of their roles as co-nurturers of children's faith along with the parents or caregivers. Survey findings in Chapter Five show that the respondents in the survey either assigned the role of faith nurturer of children to personal family responsibility or relegated the job to the pastor or the Sunday school teachers. There is limited interactive communication between the families and the congregations to support and affirm the values and beliefs being imbued in the children. But, the biblical teachings on childhood faith formation show otherwise. Biblical formation stresses the faith community as an important and essential environment to support parents in their endeavour to form faith in children. Faith communities are the active co-nurturers of childhood faith because congregational life and corporate religious observances are deliberate practices to mediate the message.

Fourth, a majority of the formation approaches in MBE congregations are not culturally rooted. Religious piety is generally evident among the different Malaysian communities. From young, children are normally taught their inherited family religions with Christianity as a minor consideration.¹ A colloquial saying among the Chinese and Indian communities is “to give your children to Christianity is to lose your children to western gods.” This thinking derives from the way Malaysian Christian converts worship and organize their congregational life; mainly from western Christendom. The concern most parents have of the Christian faith is that children who are converted may eventually abandon family roots in favour of “foreign” values. As such, MBE congregations need to develop a faith formation approach that is meaningful to their cultural context.

C. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research context is the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking (MBE) congregations.

The first Baptist congregation in Malaysia was started in 1938 in Alor Star, Kedah by Chinese Baptist immigrants from Swatow, China and subsequently English language congregations were started by local converts with help from Southern Baptist missionaries from America. These missionaries are still active in some form of ministry today among the denomination. The *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* adopted by members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention at its 1979 Annual Messenger Conference (edited in 2005) affirms each Malaysian Baptist congregation as an autonomous body of self governing Christians (Appendix A). A Malaysian Baptist congregation’s particular identity is determined by its members and yet united with the rest of MBE congregations in vision and commitment (Articles 6 and 14). The *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* is not prescriptive; rather, it describes an approach to the religion Malaysian Baptists practice. Thus, to be a Baptist in Malaysia is to be identified with a particular ecclesiology.

¹In 2008, the *Network for Interfaith Concerns* proposed that 9.1% of Malaysians are Christians. See <http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/work/perspectives/malaysia.cfm>

The *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith*, Article 6 describes a Baptist congregation as ...

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ ... a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teaching, exercising scripturally the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. The church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members have equal rights and privileges. According to the Scriptures the two major officers of the church are pastors (i.e. elders and bishops) and deacons. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages (Baptist Handbook, 2005).

The mandate for MBE congregations is evangelism and mission. The ministry, as practiced in congregational life is accomplished through participation in Christian education, proper stewardship, cooperation with other Baptist associations, and improvement of social order (see the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith*). These tasks aid the congregations to fulfil their calling as God's people and to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20) "by personal witness and all other methods harmonious with the gospel of Christ" (Article 11). MBE congregations adhere to a set of values distinguishing them from other social organizations as well as Christian denominations. Although the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* is a recommended guide for expressing its ecclesiology; each MBE congregation still has the liberty to derive their own set of values from their understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. Thus, even as members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention, MBE congregations may differ in practices and church governance.

The MBE congregations are mostly family orientated. Primary age children constitute an active part of congregational life and make up the greater percentage of the formal education programs (Sunday schools, Children's church, Vacation Bible schools, Saturday Children's club, etc). Dialogue with Malaysian Baptist pastors and congregational leaders informs the researcher that it has become more and more difficult to engage the members to be volunteer teachers in these programs. So, the pastors and congregational leaders welcome help whether in terms of resources,

curriculum, or ideas to enhance these programs. The main concern of the pastors and congregational leaders is to have good programs to “keep the children coming”; hopefully in the process the children will “receive Jesus into their hearts”. While most MBE congregations have discipleship programs to help adults and youth mature in the faith, most MBE congregations do not have similar programs for the children.

D. THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There are different theories of faith formation of children and a holistic perspective includes a biblical understanding of children and childhood, children’s relationship with God, factors in child development, and sociocultural variables which influence formation. Underlying this research is the belief that formation as an integral part of human development is embedded in the particular socio-culture and language of individuals (Rosenthal, 1984). In fact, all social and cultural aspects of life are formative. To overlook these aspects is to misconstrue “formation as a kind of structure of manipulative control which brings about compliance without full awareness or consent” (Warren, 1987, 515-528). The importance of sociocultural variables in formation has often been understated by educators and caregivers in most MBE congregations. Childhood faith formation strategies utilized by MBE congregations have often been limited to cognitive processes of understanding the relationship with God. Children are often viewed as passive participants of the Christian faith. Hence the cognitive and rote approaches to inculcate faith, as most adults do not expect children to be able to contribute to the faith development process.

This research concerns childhood faith formation in MBE congregational context, addresses the issues mentioned in the research problem and proposes a hypothesis that:

Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach can be posited as a heuristic device to guide MBE congregations recover the original intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life.

E. THE RESEARCH THESES

Five these investigated in the research are:

1. A biblical perspective of children and childhood faith provides the foundation for thinking about the place of children and faith formation in MBE congregations. Reflections from the Old and New Testaments facilitate understanding of the faith development process and role of the faith communities in helping children grow in knowledge and relationship with God.
2. Developmental theories may inform MBE congregations of the manner by which children acquire beliefs and attitudes that shape childhood behaviour and personality. Faith acquisition through cognitive, psychosocial, and behavioural development helps children grow in their understanding of God and the theories act as grids to explain an otherwise numinous spiritual experience in children.
3. The *Baptist Confession of Faith* states the agenda for faith formation of Baptists. The mission purpose of the Baptist denomination is to lead people (adults and children) to be regenerate believers in Christ, active in the faith community, and growing in ministry and witness of their faith. Baptist ecclesiology or practices in congregational life aim to facilitate the congregations to demonstrate the characteristics mentioned.
4. The present MBE congregational environment (as evident by existing formation strategies and practices) may not support the Baptist agenda of mission to nurture children to be regenerate persons in Christ, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness of their faith.
5. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach indicates that children have the potential to be regenerate persons in Christ, active in the faith community, and growing in ministry and witness of their faith because formation of attitudes, beliefs, and personality is influenced by knowledge, sociocultural variables, and personal meaning making and the MBE congregations can set the environment for mediation of the faith.

F. SIGNIFICANT TERMS

This section gives the working definitions of significant terms that are employed in relation to the dissertation.

Children

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989 defines children as persons of either sex below the age of eighteen years unless the laws of a country redefined it. The child developmental stage is referred to as childhood and the term will be used in this research to describe the developmental stage of primary age children between 7-12 years. Article 1 of the UNCRC states that the singular term for children is child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, Article 1).

Cultural Mediation

Cultural mediation is the process where values of prior generations are transmitted from an active environment to an equally active recipient through transaction. Vygotsky proposed that cultural artefacts mediate knowledge for human development. Cultural artefacts include communal practices and traditions, inherited beliefs, signs and symbols, and the language(s) used in the local context.

Christian Faith Communities

Christian faith communities refer to congregations where believers in Jesus Christ intentionally gather for worship, mutual encouragement in the faith, and expression of their mission and ministry. These groups of people are identified by a shared history, culture, and vision for ministry and witness. This research uses the term faith communities or congregations synonymously to mean the gathered believers and the term 'church' to denote structural organization.

Faithing Process

“Faithing process” is a noun which describes the individual’s continuous search for meaning and development of trust and relationship with God.

Family

A standard definition of family, as a universal human institution, is “a small kinship-structured group with the key function of nurturant and socialization of the newborn (Reiss, cited in Stark, 2004, 367). The kinship structure determines who belongs to a family and what a family does. Kinship need not be biological in nature and can be an affiliation of individuals who voluntary come together to form the group.

Malaysian Baptist English-speaking Congregations (MBE congregations)

Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations are intentional gatherings of people who subscribe to the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith*. These individuals are mostly of English-educated ethnic Chinese and a minority of Indians, Eurasians, and expatriates. Not all MBE congregations are members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention because membership is voluntary.

G. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Three tasks have been employed in the research methodology: 1) literature research, 2) field survey, and 3) application of the findings to the research problem.

The literature research studied the Old and New Testaments for a biblical understanding of the manner by which the faith communities at that period of time formed beliefs in children; investigated child developmental theories for a sociological and psychological perspective of how children acquire faith; and examined Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach as a possible heuristic device to help MBE congregations to understand and recover the original intentions for faith formation of the children. The literature research utilized textual materials from the libraries at Malaysia Baptist

Theological Seminary, Penang; Yale Divinity School and the Social Sciences School in New Haven, Connecticut; the researcher's personal library, Questia Media library, and other electronic resources.

A field survey was designed to identify the current faith formation approaches in MBE congregations and to provide data on the question,

“What are the current approaches utilized by the MBE congregations to form faith in primary aged children in their congregations?”

Methods for data collection in the field survey included questionnaires, personal observations, telephone conversations, and emails. Four different sets of questionnaire were designed with open and closed ended questions (see Appendices B-E) and distributed to the selected respondents. In two sections of each questionnaire, the respondents' attitudes to various statements concerning childhood faith were measured by the Likert scale. Data were also collected through telephone interviews and personal visits to several children's ministry leaders to further clarify the MBE congregations' responses to the survey. These procedures enabled the researcher to better understand, translate and construct narratives to explain MBE congregational preferences of particular approaches and methodologies used to form childhood faith in different congregations. The survey produced 2 types of data:

1. Quantitative data from the General Secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention (denomination sociological data) and secretaries of participating churches
2. Attitudinal or qualitative data from the pastors/persons in charge and four other representatives from each participating congregations.

The summarized data represent the present MBE congregational view of children, childhood faith, and their convictions of the formation process.

H. THE RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There is a vast amount of research material on the subjects of childhood faith formation, Baptist ecclesiology, and Vygotsky's sociocultural approach but none researched as an interdisciplinary study. This research is probably the first of its kind in the MBE congregational context and limitations have been set to the research process to make the dissertation research outcomes relevant and useful for the MBE congregations.

First, this research is limited to a faith formation approach for primary age children in the MBE congregations. The primary age children (7-12 years) already have some level of church attendance because they have parents or relatives in the congregation, or they have been brought to the church regularly for one or other of the meetings. These children are literate, mostly tri-lingual (speaking English, *Bahasa Malaysia*, and Mandarin or a Chinese dialect) and have access to modern technology such as computers and multi media communication. Most of the children in the congregations are from upper and middle income families, indicative that their basic needs and comforts are met.

Second, this research is limited to the English language translations of Vygotsky's works (which were originally in Russian) and also secondary sources. Although Vygotsky's approach is currently very popular in the fields of education and psychology, this approach is considered rather new in the research field as compared to other approaches in education and psychology. Vygotsky's approach addresses several issues of child development which mostly relate to the learning process. While the entire approach is considered in the implementation of the theory, this research focused on Vygotsky's principles that contribute to childhood formation, acquisition of beliefs, and development of convictions.

Third, this research is applicable to a normative MBE congregation in West Malaysia. A normative MBE congregation holds membership in the Malaysia Baptist Convention and subscribes to the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith*. MBE congregations differ from other Malaysian Baptist congregations (i.e. Chinese and *Bahasa Malaysia* language groups) in demographic characteristics of their

members, language use, culture, and worship styles. Since Baptist congregations are autonomous, there can even be differences in the manner of church governance and congregational life.

I. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter Two: Biblical Perspectives of Childhood Faith and Formation.

The chapter investigates a biblical perspective of children, defines childhood faith, and identifies formation approaches from a study of the Scriptures. The discussion is divided into two sections: Section One explains faith formation of children in the Old Testament Israelite communities where childhood faith formation was covenantal and experiential. Children were “covered” by the community covenant to keep faith in Yahweh and by corporate solidarity in community living. The children grew in their relationship with God through nurture in the home, community religious experiences, and faith development was directed by the teachers and prophets. Section Two focuses on childhood faith and formation in the New Testament post Pentecost period and defines childhood faith from Jesus’ teachings and his welcome of children into God’s kingdom. Children in the New Testament were formed in their faith through participation in congregational life (*ecclesia*). The avenues for childhood faith formation in the *ecclesia* include *koinonia* (love in community life); *leitourgia* (prayer); *didache* (teaching); *keryma* (proclamation / faith); *diakonia* (love expressed in service), and *prophetia* (advocacy) (Harris, 1989, 63). In the Old and New Testaments, home and community life play a major role in the formation of childhood faith. The conclusion summarizes the discussion of the sections.

Chapter Three: Human Development and Faith Formation

This chapter studies human developmental theories and faith acquisition – the way children think about God, the expressions of childhood faith, and the task of formation from normative child development processes and sociocultural settings. The discussion is divided into five sections and each section studies an aspect of childhood development and its relations to faith acquisition. Section One focuses on biological development and the faithing process and four questions are raised as to whether childhood faith development is continuous or discontinuous, and a product of

nature or nurture, whether childhood faith experiences are universal or context specific, and whether children are active or passive participants in the faithing process. Section Two explains cognition and knowledge of God. Discussion centres mostly on Jean Piaget's proposal of the cognitive schema, Margaret Donaldson's argument for a wider scope of thinking, and comments from several Christian educators. Section Three examines emotions and development of Christ-like attitudes and discusses faith development from Eric Erikson's psycho-emotional development theory (also known as the *Eight Stages of Man*) and Anna Marie Rizzuto's research on "god representation" and how children create images of God. Section Four reviews childhood behaviour and volitional faith and Albert Bandura's social-cognitive learning theory guided thinking on this subject. Section Five investigates faith development from a sociocultural discourse and highlights the role of structural frames, discursive frames, and situated interactions in facilitating faith development in children. A summary concludes the chapter.

Chapter Four: Baptist Ecclesiology and Faith Formation of Children

This chapter traces the history of MBE congregations to identify the Baptist distinctive and ecclesiology in three sections. Section One presents Baptist ecclesiology, its origin and confessions. Section Two investigates the formation of members in Baptist congregations, and Section Three analyses Baptist ecclesiology and faith formation of children. The assumption of this chapter is that an understanding of Baptist history, the *Baptist Confession of Faith*, and Baptist ecclesiology can inform the contemporary MBE congregations of the purpose of their existence as a denomination, the original goals and objectives in faith formation of their members, and provide guidelines for the formation of children. The summary in Chapter Four shows that members of the early Baptist congregations were shaped by the way Baptists organized their congregational life. Their uniqueness derives from the five Baptist distinct beliefs of: 1) the Bible as the infallible Word of God, 2) believers' baptism, 3) priesthood of believers, 4) autonomy of the local congregation, and 5) separation of church and state. These five beliefs are also the formative elements that shape a Baptist's expression of the faith. By Baptist definition, a Christian is a regenerate person, a person in the faith community, and a person in ministry and witness.

Chapter Five: Faith Formation of Children in the Malaysia Baptist English-speaking Congregations: A Descriptive Report

This chapter describes a field survey of MBE congregations. The aim of the survey was to gather sufficient data to describe the *sitz im leben* of MBE congregations and the way the members approach children and the formation of childhood faith. This chapter has eight sections: Section One explains the survey process, Section Two describes the respondents, Section Three presents the quantitative survey results, Section Four shows the place of children in MBE congregations, Section Five looks at evangelism, discipleship and teaching of children in MBE congregations, Section Six clarifies congregational culture and practices that affect faith development in children, Section Seven analyses the environmental factors that transmit faith to children in MBE congregations, and Section Eight summarises the survey findings. The respondents in the survey provided sufficient data on the place of children in MBE congregations, the manner in which MBE congregations evangelize, disciple, and teach their children, the Baptist congregational cultures and practices that affected faith development of children, and the environmental factors that transmit faith to children in MBE congregations. The conclusions to the survey findings become the representative sample for MBE congregations.

Chapter Six: The Vygotskian Sociocultural Approach

This chapter discusses Vygotsky's sociocultural approach and his view of child development, the role of adults and more competent peers (significant others) in collaborating for cognitive development, and the sociocultural influences that shape thinking. The chapter is divided into three sections: Section One reviews the origins of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, Section Two examines Vygotsky's assumptions of child development and functioning, and Section Three sets forth the instructional settings for formation of thinking. Vygotsky's assumptions of child development and functioning explain how children grow in their cognitive understanding and acquire beliefs that influence behaviour and personality. The section also investigates sociocultural variables that affect thinking. The instructional settings are strategies or teaching environments MBE congregations can use to facilitate faith in the children. The objective of this chapter is to present the Vygotskian principles as heuristic devices to help MBE congregations understand and to recover the original intentions of faith formation of children in the Baptist

denomination and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within MBE congregational life.

Chapter Seven: Applying the Vygotskian Sociocultural Approach to Faith Formation of Children in the MBE Congregations

This chapter designs the faith formation frame that can be utilized by MBE congregations to nurture their children into faith and to grow in maturity towards the three characteristics of what it means to be a Baptist. The chapter highlights in Section One the MBE congregations as sociocultural contexts for faith mediation, Baptist ecclesiology as instructional settings for child functioning in Section Two, and Baptist confessions as guidelines for faith assessment in Section Three. The discussion implements Vygotsky's principles to explain spiritual development in children and explores Baptist ecclesiology as a possible mode for the instructional settings to help the children become regenerate persons in the faith, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. The theoretical propositions for formation suggest there are tools and signs in MBE congregations which can mediate faith and which the children can use as tools for expression of their faith. The chapter concludes with a three point process in monitoring childhood faith development.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes and concludes the dissertation research and makes recommendations for further studies. The chapter reiterates that MBE congregations need to recover the original Baptist intention of faith formation for children. The process for recovery must utilize an approach that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confession of faith; and Vygotsky's sociocultural approach is, in the opinion of this research, a relevant theory that can be implemented in MBE congregations to explain the childhood faith process, community collaboration for faith development, and also to guide the members on best nurturing practices for faith formation of their children in context of Baptist congregational life.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDHOOD FAITH AND FORMATION

Approaches to faith formation of children have traditionally been, as Yeatts has said of Christian education, "... focused on the pragmatic and practical with little attention to its theological bases" (Yeatts, 1995, 38). One possible reason could be that children as a people group in the faith communities have been generally subsumed with other groups such as family and women ministries or categorized under welfare, education or social concerns. As such, there was no need for any additional age-group consideration. A second reason could be that bringing up children, whether meeting physical or spiritual needs, was based on "logical" and tried and tested methods. There has been no necessity to dwell theologically on the issue. A third reason could be that the faith communities, although aware of the presence of children, have chosen not to highlight them because of other pressing congregational issues.¹ A fourth reason could simply be blissful ignorance or naïveté on the part of church leaders to recognize any need to do so.

The goal of Christian formation is that persons formed in faith may mature and deepen their relationship with God, be more and more "Christ-like" in living everyday and manifest that knowledge in witness (Matthaei, 2004, 57; Stonehouse, 1998, 21). Maturity and deepening faith in God is "formed through practices that help to open the person to God and break down barriers that hinder his or her perception of God"

¹An example is the Medieval period when the faith communities emphasized monasticism as the highest Christian calling and children became secondary.

(Stonehouse, 21). Although the MBE congregations (and Christian faith communities in general) have sustained reflection in other areas of community life, teachings on children's faith and formation have been limited. "The absence of well developed and historically (researched) and biblically informed teachings about children in contemporary theology helps explain why many churches often struggle to create and to sustain strong programs in religious education and in child advocacy ministry" (Bunge, 2001, 4). Faith formation approaches address the question, "How do people (both children and adults) become connected with the Christian community and become Christians?" (Andersen, 1998, 32).² Without a well defined frame of thinking, distorted perceptions of faith may arise and lead to inappropriate formation practices.

This chapter investigates Old and New Testament perspectives of childhood faith and formation. The chapter provides understanding to the Israelite and Jewish communities' perspectives of childhood faith, faith formation practices, and the environmental variables that affected faith development. The chapter will first discuss childhood faith and formation in the Old Testament and then move on to childhood faith and formation in the New Testament post Pentecostal period. Findings from this chapter form the bases for further dialogue in the research.

A. CHILDHOOD FAITH AND FORMATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Through the different periods in Old Testament history various religious, social, and political variables affected Ancient Israel's community life and indirectly affected the way the people practiced their faith. Perspectives of childhood faith and the formation process from Old Testament accounts can be traced along the nation's

²Several Bible passages offer answers to this question. First, the Holy Spirit draws people to the faith (John 20:21-23; 1 Cor. 12:3). Second, individuals identify with Christians through baptism (John 3:1-8; Acts 2:37-42; Romans 6:1-4). Third, faith and identity with Christians is a gift of God (2 Cor. 5:17-18; Eph. 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Fourth, gleanings from the Old and New Testaments suggest that faith and identity are planned efforts which incorporate both the work of the Holy Spirit and works of the faith community. Thomas Groome said that "...while faith is God's gift, and it is the Spirit who gives the increase, this does not obviate or make superfluous the preaching and educational responsibility of the Christian community" (Groome, 1980, 56).

history. This investigation follows the Israelites' faith experiences from the time of deliverance from Egypt through the reign of the kings, the destruction of the temple, and the return of the exiles from Babylon. Two questions guide this portion of research: 1) How did the Old Testament communities define childhood faith? and 2) How did the Old Testament communities form faith in their children?

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDHOOD FAITH

Faith in Yahweh and the formation processes in the Old Testament era are closely linked to the Hebraic history of slavery in Egypt and liberation in Canaan.³ In the calling-forth of Ancient Israel from Egypt, the people were led to faith in Yahweh by countless signs, miracles and a spectacular deliverance from the Pharaoh's rule (Exo. 4:29-31, 7:15-1, 34:10). These signs and miracles reminded the people of Yahweh's commitment to be their God. The journey from Egypt to Canaan was an education process in faith and purposed to transform the sojourners, teaching them the character of this God whom they had chosen to trust. Religious observations and personal and corporate conduct were products of deep reverence of Yahweh's presence in the Israelite community. This frame of thinking about God influenced the way childhood faith was defined, and the frame of thinking can be understood by unpacking two major principles that held the Old Testament faith communities together: a) faith and the Covenant, and b) faith and corporate solidarity.

a. Faith and the Covenant

The Old Testament concept of covenant (*berith*) has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures and there were several versions of it. *Berith* was typically an agreement between two or more parties with God as witness (Gen. 31:50; 1 Sam. 20:8). There were also

³In the pre-Mosaic period, God revealed himself to selected persons who became channels of His purpose. Some examples are: 1) Noah, to whom God spoke concerning the Great Flood and instructed to build the ark cf. Gen. 6:13; 2) Abraham, who God called a friend cf. Gen. 15:1-20; 17: 1-27; and 3) Joseph, who God sent ahead of his brothers to make provision for Jacob's household, cf. Gen. 45: 5-8. These individuals developed personal relationships with God through divine revelations and communion. As their God, Yahweh provided for and protected them. Faith formation as a nation (the people group of Israel) began during the Mosaic era.

specific “royal” covenants made between God and humankind (de Dietrich, 1958, 3).⁴ Examples of royal covenants were the Noachian Covenant which God made after the Great Flood with Noah and his family (Gen. 9:12); the Abrahamic Covenant between Abraham and God (Gen. 15: 18); and the Sinaitic Covenant between God and Ancient Israel (Exo. 19:5-6). While the pre-Mosaic covenant emphasized the individual’s relationship with God, Mosaic and post- Mosaic covenants were communal, focused on community commitment to monotheism and high moral values. Yahweh’s invitation to Israel rested on his promise, “I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods before me” (Exo. 20:1-2). On Israel’s part, the people were to be separated from the pagan nations and to assume a new identity as God’s people.

The covenant embraced all of life and all Israelites came under covenanted faith -- men, women, and children (Deut. 5:1-33). The covenant principle framed the nation’s lifestyle, structuring the community to live out particular values which attested to Yahweh’s presence among the people. The covenant relationship was communal, renewed by group commitment and not by individuals. God’s covenant was with “a people united by a common obedience to him. There is no such thing ... as a purely individual relationship with God, and those who would enter into covenant with the Lord must do so as part of his community” (Achte-meier and Achte-meier, 1994, 42). “Every generation inherited the religious traditions and blessings the covenantal claims imposed on it ... Israel were under solemn moral obligation to renew the covenant. Not to renew (it) would be apostasy” (Ingle, 1970, 203). The identity of a faith community did not rest on human efforts but on the transcendent will of God. The people were constantly reminded of their heritage as God’s people by the deliverance narratives told over and over again. These “folk tales” became part of the “experienced” and “associated” faith (Exo. 13:8-10).⁵

⁴God made several covenants in the Bible: 1) Edenic, God's promise of redemption (Gen. 3:15); 2) Noachian, for the preservation of the race (Gen. 9:9); 3) Abrahamic, granting blessings through Abram's family (Gen. 15:18); 4) Sinaitic, designating Israel as God's chosen people (Exod. 19:5,6); 5) Levitical, making reconciliation through priestly atonement (Num. 25:12,13); and 6) Davidic, Messianic salvation promised through David's dynasty (2 Sam. 23:5). See <http://mb-soft.com/believe/text/covenant.htm>

⁵The terms “experienced faith” and “associative faith” are connoted by John Westerhoff III to identify the faith of young children. Westerhoff argues that children are not in the position to be “converted” into the Kingdom. Instead, their faith grows through different levels from inherited faith to owned faith (Westerhoff, 1976, 36). He posits that children do not become converted as in the traditional terminology of turning from evil to the light, from sin to righteousness in God. Childhood

From the time Ancient Israel was called out from Egypt (Gen. 12:37) and across Old Testament history God continually reminded his people that it is he who took the initiative to establish the covenant. Covenanted faith meant that the relationship between the Israelites and Yahweh was sealed by the latter's promise of "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Lev. 26:12). As a sign of covenant keeping, male Israelite children were circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Parents dedicated their male children to God (Exo. 22: 29b-30; 34:19-20) as a mark of belonging to God's family (Gen.17: 9ff; 34:14-16). Another practice of inclusion was the customary redemption act of offering five shekels in the temple for the firstborn son (Num. 18:15-16).

Although female children were not directly addressed as covenant keepers, nevertheless they had their status defined by covenant relationship in the faith community. The social structure of the Israelite community incorporated female children into the covenant promise through corporate solidarity. When female children were born into the faith community, their covenantal rights were secured by being daughters of covenant keepers. While female children were exempted from multiple public religious obligations, they were instructed in the things of the home and their rights and protection came from the family's covering. Through association with the believing community and covering by corporate solidarity (see discussion on the following page), female children embarked on a pilgrimage along with others in the faith.

Covenanted faith was significant to the children because their status locates them in the faith community as God's people by virtue of Yahweh's invitation to be their God. The covenant also gave them personal and group identity through a lifestyle of worship, rituals, and common life which speak of their allegiance to God (Ng and Thomas, 1981, 34). Catholic theologian Sofia Cavalletti said that covenanted faith, as in God's redemptive grace, is like a golden thread that runs and holds the history of his people from the time of creation to his coming again. This sacred story of God's

faith is a process of association, understanding and becoming. Westerhoff's theory is further discussed in Chapter Three.

grace and redemption beckons children to a “mysterious journey” of belief and trust in the Transcendent (Cavalletti, 2002, 37).

b. Faith and Corporate Solidarity

Individuals in the Old Testament normally identified with the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” when speaking of their faith (Gen. 26:24; Exo. 3:5; Matt. 22:32; Mk. 12:26; Lk. 20:37). These individuals found identity in their spiritual roots and saw their personal worth in connection with their families and community (Isaac, son of Abraham; Jacob, son of Isaac; David, son of Jesse; etc.). While the individuals still encountered God on a personal level, relationship with God was *tribal*, that is, Yahweh related to the whole people group, the nation of Israel. Family history brings with it the richness of experiences, assurance of providence, and deliverance. The patriarchs’ faith stood as testimony and assurance of God’s continual faithfulness and deliverance for the present generation. Association of one’s faith with the forefathers indicates participation in God’s plan for his people from the beginning of history.

The practice of corporate solidarity grew out of the covenant relationship. Corporate solidarity in the Old Testament meant that the Israelites did not find their identity simply as individuals but more as a community professing faith in Yahweh. A child born into the believing family came under corporate solidarity and enjoyed all the benefits and blessings of God upon that community (Conrad, 1980, 24-36). Corporate solidarity associated the children with the deliverance from slavery and included them as the called out people of God. Children were part of the faith family based on assurance of God’s promise and presence upon the households and the believing community, and not in a full knowledge of the revealed revelation.⁶ Children who were not yet able to fully comprehend cognitively the works of God in the deliverance from Egypt and the intricacies of the divine-human faith relationship depended on their family members and faith community to undergird them in their faith journey and search for meaning in their relationship with God.

⁶Anthony Hoekema in his explanation of the faithing process acknowledged this view. He said, “when we call faith ‘knowledge’ we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception ... He (Paul), when he talks about the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge means that what our minds embrace by faith is in every way infinite, and that this kind of knowledge is far more lofty than all understanding (Hoekema, 1989, 141).

Although Israelite males were the representative recipients of the Sinai Covenant, corporate solidarity qualified the women and children as partakers of faith (Conrad, 1980, 24-36). In corporate solidarity, there was no “age of accountability” for children to make public declarations of faith or benchmarks to evaluate their faith level. Children were members of the believing community through identification with the fathers and grew in relationship with God as they shared in the nurture of a god-fearing home and community life (Ibid.). Corporate solidarity provided the children with a sense of belonging to a particular people group. The identity and belonging initiated the children into the fellowship of believers and supported them with a nurturing environment which facilitated expressions of their faith. And, the community of faith became the authoritative platform where formative values took shape.

2. CHILDHOOD FAITH FORMATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

When we think of Ancient Israel’s history, we become aware that religion, society, and politics were significant variables that shaped the way children think about God and life. The Exodus experience and the lessons of faith that grew out of the deliverance journey became the frame of thinking for the Israelites about God and the way he relates to his people. Under the leadership of Yahweh, Ancient Israel as a tribe continually experienced the protection and providence that came with covenant-keeping. Regardless of their situation, Ancient Israel was reminded to keep faith, whether it was at times of theocratic governance, human monarchy, dispersion or exile into Babylon.⁷ The people were encouraged to build their faith on God’s faithfulness rather than on human efforts. As Blackburn said,

The Jewish people were profoundly convinced that God has delivered them from the enemies in the past, but they were fearful lest a generation might arise which did not know these things. Hence, the almost monotonous repetition in the *Pentateuch* of the words “lest ye forget,” and the numerous commands for adults to teach their children so that they in turn could pass on the story of redemption to succeeding generations. (Blackburn, 1966, 48)

⁷With the reign of the kings, Israel’s focus was redirected from theocratic to monarchic rule (1Sam. 8: 6-9). In favour of a human king, Israel chose to pay allegiance to human rather than divine leadership. Due to the decline of godliness in kingship, the leaders and priests in Israel became more and more unfaithful, following all detestable practices and defiling the temple (2 Chr. 36:14). For example, Manasseh and Anon, kings of Judah (2 Chr. 33: 22), did evil in God’s sight, but Josiah (2 Chr. 34:3) sought God’s leadership during his reign.

Faith formation in the Old Testament was a command given by Yahweh to Ancient Israel and upheld throughout Israel's history (Deut. 6: 4-5). In their relationship with Yahweh the Israelites were called foremost to observe the *Shema*. The *Shema* has two parts: First, a declaration (Deut. 6:4) which established Yahweh's status; and second, a response from the people (Deut. 6:5).

a. The Declaration (Deut. 6: 4)

God introduced himself to Israel as “Yahweh – the Lord God Almighty” (*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one!* cf. Deut. 6:4) and proclaimed that there is none equal (Ps. 96: 5; 115: 4-7; 135: 15-18). Yahweh demonstrated signs and wonders as evidences of his sovereign protection, providence, and continual blessings to those who chose to follow Him. This declaration meant that Israel should have no other forms of worship or god representations. Neither should Yahweh be included as one of the many gods to be worshipped as was the pagan culture of the time. The declaration was given before Moses' death and the entry into the promise land. Despite their disobedience, apostasy and sin, the declaration affirmed Israel as God's people. (Achteimeier and Achteimeier, 1994, 55).

The *Shema* called Israel to hear intelligently, obey, perceive, proclaim, understand, and bear witness to God's revelation, (... *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*). The call to love God in the *Shema* is foundational to Israel's faith and indicated by Jesus to be the greatest of all commandments (Matt. 22: 37; Mk. 12: 30; Lk. 10: 27). The implications are both spiritual and practical, involving serious cognitive confessions and active participation. Blessings of obedience were closely tied to this command – “that your days may be prolonged,” “it may be well with you,” and “you may multiply greatly.” The *Shema* reflected the intimate and transformational relationship with Yahweh and urged the Israelites to be deliberate in the formation of their children. Yahweh's deliverance and the sacred traditions were to be taught to the children. “... each new generation is to be brought so vividly into remembrance of the past that the covenant ... at Sinai becomes a covenant made with them in the present” (Achteimeier and Achteimeier, 58).

b. The Response (Deut. 6:5)

Faith formation for Ancient Israel was a process to remember God and to grow in the remembrance by sharing the story of God's faithfulness. The responsibility to mediate the story is directed to adults who have seen and experienced God's miracles firsthand (Deut. 11:2). The *Shema* in Deut. 6: 4-5, "Hear, O Israel ..." bore meaning to the adults who have sojourned the land as children and witnessed their deliverance from natural disasters and enemies. The *Shema* brought to mind the worship significance of Yahweh, the One True God. The adults were impacted much more than the children who were born in "the land of plenty." Since the adults of the nation experienced God's working, they were to transmit this truth to the children. Yahweh's instructions to his people in Deut. 6:20-25, "... when your sons ask you, tell him ..." and Josh.4:21-22, "... when your descendants ask their fathers ... tell them ..." are reminders to speak of God's deliverance and faithfulness.

As an expression of love for Yahweh and to facilitate the *Shema* the adults were to set a faith environment where children (and adults alike) live in constant knowledge of their commitment to God (Deut. 8:1-20). "In Hebrew thought, the chief spiritual malady was forgetfulness and one of the chief goals of Hebrew education was to make sure the people would never forget and would therefore always fear God and do His commandments" (Wilhoit, 2000, 111). In addition to the elaborate details of the Tabernacle and the Ark of Covenant, the Israelites also built altars as reminders of God's presence and their deliverance from their enemies (Exo. 25-30). Community observances, artefacts, systems and organization of life were reminders to the Israelites of their calling as God's people. The call to remembrance was also the call to keep the covenant promise between God and His people. For Israelites in the Old Testament, keeping the covenant promise amounted to faithful keeping of the Torah.

The *Shema* was the guiding principle by which the Israelites organized every part of their lives. Faith formation was a call to remember God and to allow him to direct one's life. Every Hebrew child in the Israelite community grew up with a worldview based on the *Shema*. Within this context, several strategies were developed to aid the formation of children. The strategies were also part of the nation's social structure and culture found in the homes, affirmed by community collaboration, expressed

through religious and cultural celebrations, and directed by teachers and prophets thus making these practices relevant and meaningful for the Israelites. The discussion below further clarifies these strategies:

(i) Faith formed in the households

Israel's faith formation system was focused on preparing the nation to consecrate itself to God. The household was the primary location for forming childhood faith and parents were the child's first teachers (Pro.1:8-9). In Ancient Israel the household was an extended family unit and the hub to demonstrate godly living. The household provided a model for reflecting the relationship between God and humankind.

Parents aimed to train their children so that when they grow up, the children would not turn from godly ways (Pro. 22:6). The principal concern of parents was to educate their children to observe the Laws of Yahweh for living. "From their earliest consciousness (the children) had learned the laws, so as to have them ... engraved in their souls" (Strong, 1980, 7). Even before the male children were able to participate in formal learning that was conducted in the temple, they were taught in the home alongside their sisters. At a young age, the Israelite children recognized Yahweh as God and Sovereign and they learned to give due allegiance to Him.

Children in the Ancient Israelite homes were taught the Laws, oral traditions, rituals and participated in feasts and festivals. Although corporate solidarity covered the children as members of the faith, several rites of passage were used to symbolize their belonging to the community. Other than circumcision for young boys, children were dedicated or consecrated into a systematic education process. During the initiation ceremony for formal Torah studies, the male child was offered honey and sweet cakes to symbolize the sweetness of God's Word (Ps. 119:103; Ezek. 3:3). In the households, the children were taught to recount past experiences of God's relationship with their forefathers, not to repeat the same mistakes, but to put their trust in Him (Edge, 1971, 38). Parents and other adults in the households taught through modelling in everyday life, in situations when they "sit at home, walk along the road, lie down, and get up" (Deut. 6:7). A right relationship with God was important for it guaranteed providence and protection.

The objective of conscious training for the children was to hear, perceive, obey, and demonstrate the *Shema* in their lives. The families structured their household environment in such manner that objects, practices, events, and traditions revealed God's presence and served as reminders of their vows to remain faithful in their relationship with Yahweh. In every household, there was a *mezuzah* (a sermon in parchment) that reminded the children of God's presence (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-20). Males above thirteen years of age wore phylacteries round their arms and attached them to their foreheads during worship (Deut. 6:8).⁸ A prayer shawl with tassels served as a reminder to the household to observe and faithfully keep the Laws (Deut. 22:12). Articles of clothing such as the *zizit* and *simlah* (Num. 15:38-41) served as reminders of the commitment to keep faith. Even before they could speak, the children were unconsciously receiving lesson in reverence and love for the Law (Blackburn, 1966, 50).

An important ritual in the households, and the touchstone of Israel's faith, was the Sabbath (Exo. 16:23; 20:8). The Sabbath was a permanent sign of God's presence with the people (Exo. 31:17). Each family and the faith community upheld the Sabbath as sacred to commemorate God as creator (Gen. 2:3). The weekly Sabbath day was celebrated on the seventh day of the week by rest from work and involvement in religious worship (Exo. 20:11). Preparation for meals and family needs were completed the day before. Violation of the Sabbath led to death by stoning (Exo. 31: 12-17). Children in Ancient Israelite households knew the importance of the Sabbath because it was strictly observed. The Sabbath as a faith experience held the family together in commitment to God and affirmed them as God's people (Lev. 23:1-4).

The home continued to be the primary centre of religious education for children throughout Israel's history, especially during the exile. When the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C) ended the reign of the kings, the remnant scattered throughout the land while the captives exiled into Babylon. In situations where they were the

⁸A mezuzah is a small container of wood or metal that has the inscription of Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-20. The mezuzah was placed at the doorway of the house. As the individual leaves the house, the person will recite a prayer "May God keep my going out and my coming in from now on and ever more." A phylactery, sometimes known as "*tefillin*," is a small metal or leather container with one of the verses inside (Exo. 13:1-10, 13: 13-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21).

minority, the exiled and remnant took responsibility of their children's education in religious and moral conduct. Mothers educated their children in the homes until age thirteen, after which, the fathers took over the responsibility for the male children. This period also saw the development of the rabbis and the organization of the synagogue. The synagogue became the place for prayer, study of the Torah, and religious instruction. Religious education for the Israelite children always began and was continually supported in the homes although the rabbi read, interpreted, and explained the Torah to the people (Trepp, 1982, 5).

(ii) Faith affirmed by community collaboration

The objective of faith formation for Israel as a nation (and that would include the children) was to become a "people called out," properly instructed with correct teachings to live as God's people (Pazmiño, 1988, 18). Walter Brueggemann posits that,

... education in the Bible is nurture into a distinct community that knows itself to be at odds with dominant assumptions. Torah education is an insistence on being fully covenanted Israel ... it is (this) nurture in particularity... that produces adults who know so well who they are and what is commanded that they value and celebrate their oddity in the face of every seductive and powerful imperial alternative. (Brueggemann, 1996, 71-9)

Community collaboration for faith formation of children in Ancient Israelite society was a planned effort that showed the community respected children as valid participants in the faith. Collaborative effort to form faith is

... to invite people out of themselves into participation, partnership, and interdependence, into a community of inclusiveness and mutuality.... to teach people that and as if they have a transcendent destiny that they are to begin to realize now through their relationships, and that their lives have ultimate meaning, value, and significance. (Groome, 1991, 431)

In the Old Testament, collaborative efforts to form faith in children in the Israelite faith community included openly speaking about God, his works among the people and the faith stories of those who have gone ahead in time. Collaboration for faith formation begun in the households and moved outwards to the community.

Deuteronomy 6 lists various methods for parents and adults in the households and communities to dialogue on faith with their children. The list includes making an impression, talking about the commandments, direct teaching of the laws and decrees, use of visual aids and written forms, and dialogue with the children (Deut. 6:20). Adults were responsible for communicating faith in God to the children by telling them the nation's stories of faith.⁹ Through these communicative channels children were brought to increasing critical awareness of God's existence and his working among the people.

Community collaboration in building faith allowed the children to be present when public events of Scripture reading were held and acted upon, e.g. the reading and renewal of the Covenant (Deut.31:12; Joshua 8:35); the reading of the Law (Neh.7:2); and the dedication of the temple. Community collaboration provided the frame for expressions of the faith and platform to make meaning of daily experiences. With reference to community collaboration of faith, Seymour and Wehrheim suggested that an individual (here we have children in mind) never shapes meaning in a vacuum because the person's experiences are constructed by personal and environmental variables in the surroundings (Seymour and Wehrheim, 1982, 127). As such, Israelite society as a collaborative community provided the Israelite children with an environment for shared reflection.

Through community collaboration children in Ancient Israel had opportunities to experience the richness of their faith through traditions, feasts, religious and cultural celebrations. These faith experiences which were signs of life in the faith communities deepened the children's appreciation for the nation's history as each event enacted a particular confession of belief (Brueggemann, cited in Yust, 2004, 32). Community collaboration for faith development in Ancient Israel also

⁹Thomas Groome, when he spoke of praxis (reflective faith), said that it takes collaboration in a faith community to make it happen. A collaborative faith community is a faith environment where "Christians share in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith" (Groome, 184). The objective of collaboration is to be united in the effort to commemorate Christ and to participate in sacred events as evidences of united confession. Collaboration in the faith community provides space "where the historical tradition, contemporary experience, and future hope co-exist and exercise their influence" (Moore, 1993, 68). Within the faith community, every believer is facilitated to consciously or subconsciously reflect on the faith experience and its significance for living.

communicated to the children that faith in God and common life were not two separate entities but is integrated. Celebrating faith in this context connected the children to the bigger story of God's working in the nation and in a sense invites the children to make the story their own (Johnson, 1989, 90). The process helped the children become aware that there is a purpose to their existence in the faith communities and this purpose is enacted through the functions, religious and cultural celebrations.

(iii) Faith expressed through religious and cultural celebrations

Ancient Israel was a tribal community united by the Covenant to be "a people of God." The name *Israel*, given to the delivered nation means "God perseveres," "God contends," or "one who struggles with God" (Gen. 32:28). The name itself is an indication of the relationship intended between Yahweh and the Jewish nation. In this new identity,

children were considered as full participants in the corporate entity of the Israelite nation, sharing the community experiences and ... were assumed to be capable of spiritual understanding, and thus it was normative for them to participate meaningfully in the religious activities and rituals of the society. (Castle, 1961, 185)

The reality of a relationship with the Almighty God was daily emphasized and taught through sensory learning methods. Children were aware of the Tabernacle as God's dwelling among His people and also the place where Yahweh met his people in worship (Exo. 25:8). There were religious celebrations rich in symbols with their different significances which prompted children to remember their identity as God's people. "The festivals, prayers, benedictions, the meticulous study of the Law and of the Psalms were regarded as necessary to (a child's) religious life so that he could play a youthful part in his own community" (Ibid.). As the children grew, formal education in faith subsequently included the Prophets, Wisdom literature and the *Hagiographa* (Writings). Children were taught God's justice, mercy, judgment, holiness, repentance, faith and obedience. Knowledge of spiritual matters was expressed through worship, religious feasts and festivals (Passover, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and Sabbaths).

Ancient Israel as a community collaborated to celebrate the faith. The four major celebrations of Passover, Day of Atonement, Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles were observed in connection to the work-life of the people and the harvest seasons. Each religious celebration was in recognition of God's protection and his bountiful providence. The Passover was the most significant feast observed by the Israelite community. The evening meal at the start of the Passover was a solemn affair and a teaching moment for faith development as the elder of the family led in commemorating the deliverance experience (Exo. 12: 24-27). Each food item and dinner ritual is an object lesson in itself. The Passover feast was a splendid illustration of God's work among his people. Likewise, the celebration of the Day of Atonement vividly inspired the children's imagination of God's purpose in calling Israel:

Imagine the sense of drama built up on the Day of Atonement. In the valley is a colourful tented structure visible to all the tribes stationed in orderly array on the hill-slopes. The high priest is performing special rites in front of a massive furnace, before disappearing into the tent. Children's voices whisper, "What's he doing there?" and parents reply by describing the enacted concept of atonement (Lev. 16). (Hill, 1985, 23)

The Ancient Israelite community also celebrated Pentecost with thanksgiving for the wheat harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles in completion of the harvest. During the Feast of Tabernacles, families would live in makeshift tents of leaves and tree boughs (Neh. 8:15-16) to relive the wilderness experience. Other than the four celebrations mentioned above the Israelites also celebrated many lesser feasts like the feast of Purim (Esther 9:20-32); sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1-7); the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-24); and feast of the unleavened bread which was later combined with the Passover feast (Lev. 23:4-8).

During the time of exile in Babylon, the Israelites were restricted in the public declaration and celebration of their faith until Cyrus, King of Persia facilitated their return to Jerusalem. Upon their return, the people once again reorganized their community structure to accommodate avenues for expression of their belief in God. They burnt offerings to Yahweh and celebrated the feasts (Ezra 3:1-6). Later, the temple was rebuilt as the symbol of God's presence (Ezra 3:8-13). Signs and symbols of holiness were restored to their original functions. The Israelites also kept the purity

of faith by separating themselves from the Gentiles and those who had intermarried pagan wives (foreign wives) disassociated from them (Ezra 10). During the post-exilic period, there was renewed urgency to communicate the faith to the new generation, and as such, a more structured faith education curriculum was developed for the children. However, it must also be noted that due to fervent preservation of their faith the post-exilic Jews were in danger of forming their children with the kind of faith that later led to Jewish legalism or pharisaic religion (de Dietrich, 1958, 129).

(iv) Faith directed by the teachers, prophets, sages, and priests

The Israelite faith community (which was not without its weaknesses) was kept together by commitment to the Covenant. Fear of the Lord prompted the people to keep faith, to live morally upright lives that indicated Yahweh's presence, and to mediate this faith to their children. Old Testament history shows that the nation of Israel on numerous occasions intermingled with the pagan faith and exhibited diminished reverence for Yahweh. The faith community on these occasions were not able to sustain an environment which testified to theocratic governance. Sacred artefacts became profaned and no longer pointed to holiness (1 Sam. 2:12-17; 1 Kings 11:6-13; 2 Chr. 21: 4-6; 2 Chr. 24: 17-19; Ezra 9:2). The community of faith that preceded the exile lost its voice to become a transformative society. But during the exile, the Jewish people were urged by the prophets to turn back to God. The call for repentance resulted in three things: "a change of heart on the part of many of the people, a renewed study of, and a greater reverence for *Torah* or Law, and the rise of a new institution, the synagogue" (Blackburn, 1966, 54).

The prophets' role was to raise awareness of God's righteousness by speaking against evil. The prophets were most prominent between the coronation of Saul as king and the exiles' return from Babylon. While the priests functioned mostly within worship and presided over ceremonies, it was the prophets who redirected the people to repentance and holiness. When the moral life of Israel failed and the people became irresponsible for their commitment to the faith, it was the prophets whom God raised to call for a return to him. "Probably, no nation has ever produced a group of religious and moral teachers comparable to the prophets of ancient Israel. They were at hand to denounce, to encourage, to comfort, and always to instruct" in the faith

(Eavey, 1964, 59). The prophets raised consciousness of the demands for holy living but were also eschatological in their pronouncement, reminding the listeners of the "Day of the Lord." "While priests spoke to God for the people, the prophets spoke to the people for God" (Ibid.). The prophetic voices which stood against religious and moral decay reminded the people to return to their Maker.

In summary, the Old Testament perspective of childhood faith indicates that the initial step of a faith relationship between Yahweh and children is not a turning away from sin or a public declaration of trust in him. Yahweh took the initiative to establish relationship by calling forth the Israelite community from Egypt, made a covenant with them at Sinai and instructed them on how to live as God's people. The issue of conversion for children in the Old Testament did not arise because there were no individual faith identities. The covenant relationship made by their elders at Sinai included the children as God's people. The male child was circumcised as an indication of covenant keeping while the female child was granted covenant status by virtue as a daughter of a covenant keeper.

Corporate solidarity as a nation of Israel and a community of faith gave the children security and coverage needed to grow in understanding and practice of their belief in Yahweh. The *Shema* was the guiding principle for living. Children's faith formation began in the households and was affirmed by the faith community at large. The faith environment provided the avenues for expressions in religious observations and celebrations of the feast and festivals. There were also structural symbols that reminded the children of God's presence in their midst. Israel's faith was directed by the teachers and prophets who played an important role in reminding the people to return to God. Despite the political and environmental upheavals that could have hindered faith development (such as the wars and the exile), the Israelites kept faith in Yahweh.

B. CHILDHOOD FAITH FORMATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This section defines childhood faith and identifies the formation approaches in the New Testament by tracing the emergence of the post Pentecost faith communities, their functions, and expressions of belief in the resurrected Lord. The outcome of this study will lend understanding to how children during the post Pentecost period in the New Testament were formed in the faith and the means that were available for expression of this belief. Two issues are addressed here: 1) How did the New Testament post Pentecost faith communities define children and childhood faith? and, 2) What were the structures used by the faith communities to form the children's faith?

1. DEFINING CHILDHOOD FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Biblical accounts give several indications of the childhood faith process. Findings in the Old Testament showed that children's status as God's people was based on the Sinaitic covenant between God and Israel and corporate solidarity with their families. In the New Testament, the issue of children's faith is not discussed apart from the households and faith communities. The absence of "conversion" rules in the Old and New Testament implies that children were accepted into the congregation of faith without further rituals or requirements (Ingle, 1970, 20). The terms "children's faith" or "childhood faith" are not New Testament concepts and are foreign ideas to the faith community of that time.

Pistis is the most common term for faith in the New Testament. The term denotes "assurance" in relation to one's salvation (Acts 17:31). In the Synoptics Gospels, the term is "synonymous with belief in God as almighty, self-revealing and as beneficent in his attitude towards mankind" (Buttrick, 1962, 222). The Gospel according to Matthew portrays faith as a dependence on God as the One who knows and provides for his children (see Matthew 6). In the Gospel of Mark we see that faith is a gift from God and a prerequisite for miracles (Mk. 6:1-6). The emphasis of faith in Luke's writings is a changed life that demonstrates the compassion of God in Jesus

Christ (Acts 10:34-43). The Johannine Gospel identifies faith as believing and knowing God (John 4:42; 6:69; 16:30; 17:3).

The Apostle Paul approached the concept of faith in a different manner from the gospel writers. Presumably influenced by his rabbinic background, Paul spoke of faith as a dependence on God (Rom. 4:16-20; Col. 2:12), response to the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:8; 1 Thes. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:2) and hearing the gospel (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 10:4). Paul also ascribed different levels of faith by saying that there is a “measure of faith which God has assigned” (Rom. 12:3). Examples of Paul’s levels are: growth in faith (2 Cor. 10:15), lack of faith (1 Thes. 3:10), weak in faith (Rom. 14:1) and obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5).¹⁰ In the book of Hebrews, faith is awareness of God and is translated into hope, patience and endurance that enable the believers to withstand tribulations (Heb. 3:6, 6:11-12, 10:35-11:1, 12:2-3). Faith takes God seriously and believers interpret the present situations from an eschatological perspective. Faith is not a goal of formation but its beginning; and individuals who profess to have faith in the Judeo-Christian God are in relationship with Him (Buttrick, 1962, 230).

The letter of James defines faith quite differently from the Apostle Paul. James wrote that faith (although it comes from God) must be evident by works, for works complete faith (Jas. 2:14-22). James was addressing antinomianism and he made clear that mere belief does not constitute faith, for even the demons believe in God (Jas. 1:19). Faith is also not divorced from truth for it is grounded on the God’s testimony (1 John 5:9). As Gillespie said,

We do not work to get faith. In this sense, faith is a gift from God to be used in establishing our relationship with him. The gift ... is a way of ‘being, arising out of a way of seeing and knowing.’ Faith points us in ... the right direction ... becomes a construct of a kind that provides ways of construing life itself. (Gillespie, 1988, 29)

As it was in the Old Testament period, children’s faith in New Testament post Pentecost times was not separated from the adults’ faith because they came under

¹⁰See Joseph A. Burgess’s “Faith New Testament Perspectives” in <http://www.crossalone.us/2006/HeavyLifting/UseOfScripture/BurgessNewTestamentPerspectives.pdf>

corporate solidarity with their believing families. Thus it is safe to assume that children's faith and the formation process during that era was not an issue that the New Testament writers deemed necessary to address. To understand how the New Testament faith communities defined children and faith in God, this section reflects on Jesus' encounters and his teachings on children as found in the Gospels. The descriptions of childhood faith in the Gospels are gleaned from: 1) Children and Jesus' invitation into the kingdom of God, and 2) Childhood characteristics as kingdom qualities.

a. Faith defined by Jesus' invitation into God's kingdom

From the Gospel accounts, we read that Jesus went beyond the norm of Judaism and gave "a special place to the child by asserting the individual dignity of every child and by insisting this dignity applied to all children" (Lorenzen, 1998, 15). Jesus taught that children, by their dependent attitude and responsiveness, are received into God's kingdom by virtue of God's invitation, grace, and mercies. Children come as sinful people (Ps. 51:5) with no status and as the weakest and most vulnerable in society. There was nothing in terms of sacrifices or vows which children could make to earn their righteousness in the Kingdom of God. The children's "littleness" (helplessness or in need of help) was the way for God to work (Kittel, 1967, 649). Reflecting on Jesus' encounter with the children in Luke's gospel, Van Aarde commented on Luke's perception of children and God's kingdom:

By citing children as a model of what people should be like if they are to enter the kingdom, Luke seems to imply that children are saved because they are children. He who receives a child receives God (cf. Lk. 9:48; Mk 9:37). Luke does not include the Matthean qualification 'who believe in me' (cf. Mt. 8:6) where children are concerned. If 9:48b (*for he who is least among you all is the one who is great*) is compared with Mark 9:35 (*if anyone would be first, he must be last*), it is clear that children feature prominently in Luke's scheme of the reversal of fortunes (cf. 1:51-53; 14:11; 18:14). (Van Aarde, 1994, 75)

The gospel writers, except for John, included Jesus' encounters with children (Matt.18: 1-10; 19: 13-15; 21: 15-16; Mk. 9: 35-37, 42; 10:13-16; Lk. 17:1-2, 18: 15-17; 22:24-26). Matthew and Mark recorded the incident of Jesus welcoming children between his teachings on marriage and divorce and the account of the rich young

ruler. Luke inserted the incident between the parable of the Pharisee and Publican and the account of the rich young ruler.¹¹ Two different terms were used by the Synoptic Gospel writers to identify the children in these encounters – Luke used *brephos* (indicating a very small baby) and Matthew and Mark used *paidia* (little children). Usage of the term *paidia* (Mt. 19:13-14; Mk. 10:13-15) “underlines their (the children) cultural lack of status, namely their vulnerability, marginality, powerlessness and source of threat to the adult world” (Carter, 2000, 385). Van Aarde (*Evangelium Infantium* in Mark 10:16) noted that unwanted children were ostracized and put out of their houses. In the ancient cultural settings, children were *the least of* society (Van Aarde, 1994, 265-66). Jesus’ actions demonstrated an alternative way of looking at children.

In the conventional, hierarchical and patriarchal structure (*paterfamilias*) of the Roman-Greek societies, children had no rights (Carter, 2000, 384). Children in the ancient cultures were “not valued for their present destabilizing and threatening presence, but were trained in their future role in sustaining a differentiated and adult (male) society” and those who were deemed unfit to fulfil the role were “put out” (Ibid., 385). Balthasar brought to our attention this particular concern when he wrote that:

The Jews along with the Greeks and Romans saw childhood as a stage on the way to full humanity. It occurred to no one to see the distinctive consciousness of children as a value in itself. And, because childhood was ranked as merely a “not yet” stage, no one was concerned with the form of human spirit, indeed the form of man’s total spiritual-corporeal existence that preceded free moral decision making. But, obviously for Jesus, the condition of early childhood is by no means a matter of moral indifference and insignificance. Rather, the way of the child, long since sealed off from adult, opens up an original dimension in which everything unfolds within the bounds of the right, the true, the good, in a zone of hidden containment. (Balthasar, 1991, 12)

¹¹Marshall (1978, 681); Nolland (1993; 880); Sellin (1976, 111-12) note similarity between the incident of the tax collector and Pharisee in Lk.18: 9-14 and the account of the children (Lk.18:15-17). Jesus told the parable of the tax collector to those who regarded others with contempt (Lk.18: 9). the remark in Luke 18: 9 (*regarded others with contempt*) is similar to the disciples’ attitude towards the children in Lk.18:15. The narratives continued with the rich young ruler. The question of faith cast by the listeners (Lk.18: 26) is, “Then, who can be saved?” To this question, Luke moves to the incident of Jesus and the children.

Jesus' response "Let the children come ..." (Matt. 19:14; Mk. 10:14; Lk.18:15-17) is affirmation of his acceptance and the worth of this people group. His welcome demonstrated an alternative way to treat children.¹² Despite children's lowly status, Jesus emphatically demonstrated that God loves them when he laid hands and bestowed his blessing on them (a cultural symbol of acceptance by the elders). The action also symbolized acceptance of the marginalized and *the least* in society and reinforced the Beatitudes Jesus taught to his followers (Matt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:20-23). Jesus welcomed children who shared the social status of those poor in spirit, gentle, hungry for righteousness, pure in heart and suffering.¹³ The blessings which Jesus bestowed on the children amounted to accepting them as opposed to putting them out of the house (Van Aarde, 1994, 268).¹⁴

In other passages, we also read that Jesus healed the children (Matt. 9:18-26; 15:21-28), fed them (Matt. 14:21), held them up as models for discipleship (Matt. 18:3; Mk. 10:15; Lk.18:17; 1 Cor. 14:20) and received their praises (Matt. 21:15) (Carter, 2000, 386). Jesus taught the disciples not to hinder (*koluete*) or prevent the little children from coming to him (Lk.18:16). In Luke's account (Lk. 9: 48), hospitality to Jesus was tied to receiving the little children. Jesus taught that whoever welcomes a child in his name, welcomes him and the one who sent him. Jesus showed that children can experience life and abundant living not based on merits or achievements but by his invitation. The welcome and blessings which Jesus pronounced on the children

¹²Preceding the Day of Atonement, it was Jewish cultural practice for parents to bring their children to the elders and scribes for prayers and blessings. The terms "were brought" and "were bringing" (*prosēnethēsan*) are also used in the context of bringing sick people and the elderly to Jesus for healing (Matt. 4:24; 8:16; 9:2; 12:22; 14:35). The three Synoptic Gospels use the passive verb *prosēnethēsan* to indicate the children's dependence on adults to bring them to Jesus. Similarly, the term (*prosēnethēsan*) describes gifts brought to God (Matt. 2:11; 5:23; 24; 8:4). The Gospel writers did not identify those who brought the children except that their intentions were noble. From a cultural reading of the passages, these individuals are presumably parents of the children. The parents were bringing their children to be blessed as one would bring gifts to God. On the children's part, they are dependent on adults to be brought to Jesus because on their own they are not able to do so.

¹³Gundry noted that in Mark's Gospel, the original text in Mk. 10:15 has the translation "... hugs them." Matthew and Luke dropped Mark's version to be consistent with the flow of narrative between the tax collector and the rich young ruler. See Gundry, 384.

¹⁴An example of this act is seen in Matt. 1:25 where Joseph named the infant Jesus. Bearing in mind the controversy that surrounded Jesus' birth, Joseph's act was an important public demonstration of acceptance of the child. The bestowed blessing meant that the child Jesus was legally and socially accepted as his own – Joseph welcomed Jesus into his own home. In like manner, Jesus' blessings meant that the children receive grace and blessings for themselves and are "accepted" into the household of believers.

demonstrated to his disciples and the audience that, “... what happens to a child, and to a child’s faith, is a matter of great consequence to those who are in the Kingdom of God.... The truth about children is ... in God’s sight their worth cannot be exaggerated” (Strange, 1996, 57-8).

From Jesus’ teachings, we see that the New Testament Jewish faith communities were to be different from that of the pagan Greco-Roman society in accepting children into the faith. The faith community is to welcome children into their midst, which is symbolic of welcoming God. From Jesus’ encounters, it can also be noted that Jesus established children’s status in God’s kingdom and their belonging to the faith community not based on “a conversion experience” but by the fact that they are children who have received an entry invitation of the highest order based on a covenant of grace in Jesus Christ (“Let the children come ...” cf. Matt.18:5, 18:14; Heb.7:22; 8:6-13; 2 Cor. 3:6-18).

b. Faith defined by Childhood Characteristics

The previous discussion has established Jesus’ perspectives on the status of children in God’s kingdom. In this discussion, the definition of children’s faith in God is explained by Jesus’ teachings on childhood characteristics as exemplary of kingdom values. In Matthew 18:2, Jesus taught that childhood characteristics are to be sought for kingdom living (“unless you change and become like little children ...”). And the consequence of not wanting to take on childlike characteristics in the faith is, “... you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 2). Although the lesson in Matthew 8:1-4 is in the context of teaching on greatness versus humility, and the disciples needed a paradigm change in the way they understood greatness, nevertheless Jesus pointed to the children as examples. He taught that to be great in God’s kingdom is to be a servant, void of status and power, and in service to others for “the least among you shall be the greatest” (cf. Lk. 9:46-48). While James and John disputed the positions they will hold once Jesus came into power, Jesus reminded them that “the

kings of the Gentiles lord over them; ... but it shall not be so with you” (Lk. 22:24-26).¹⁵ As Hagner said,

Humility is not a reference to innocence or purity of children but a social location of powerlessness. Children are without status in societal structure but central to God’s purpose.... The humble look to God to transform unjust situations and social relationships and to restore adequate resource ... the disciples must change and adopt this new lifestyle – a process of being socialized out of the dominant cultural patterns and into new practices and relationship appropriate to God’s kingdom. (Hagner, 1995, 553)

While children’s presence was noted during the Greco-Roman culture of Jesus’ days the disciples viewed ministry to children was not as important as ministry to adults and preparation for the coming kingdom. The disciples treated children as secondary, the same manner as the society did to the poor, infirm, and outcast.¹⁶ While these people were marginalized in Greco-Roman society, it should not be so in God’s kingdom and in the household of believers. Jesus taught that unless the disciples changed their perspective of God’s kingdom, they will not be able to experience the blessings that are released (never enter the kingdom of heaven). The kingdom of God is for the meek and poor (cf. Sermon on the Mount, cf. Matt.5:3-12). Those who choose to live the “kingdom life” live on the margins, “an alternative way of life which challenges the hierarchical and patriarchal order” (Carter, 2000, 386).

¹⁵Another teaching on humility is found in Mk. 10:15 and Lk. 9: 48; 18:17 where Jesus recounts that “whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” The three Gospels follow this account with the story of the rich young ruler. One interpretation is that the rich young ruler is an example of Jesus’ teaching of alternate values in God’s kingdom. Discipleship goes beyond the legalism of keeping the commandments. The rich young ruler knew the laws and fervently adhered to the Judaic lifestyle. He is confident and self sufficient in his effort to earn God’s kingdom. But Jesus pointed out that to enter God’s Kingdom demands more than legalism. The suggestion to “sell all and follow me” indicates an alternative lifestyle – one that does not rest on the world’s measure of greatness of wealth, status, birthrights, or education (Carter, 386).

¹⁶Although the Greco-Roman society loved their children, they had very low status along with the slaves and women. The children were property of *paterfamilias* and could be sold or abandoned (Maas, 2000, 598). But, in Matt. 18:2ff, Jesus gave value to children and childhood in God’s kingdom. In reply to the greatest in God’s kingdom, Jesus brought a child into the midst of the crowd and said. “... unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of God.” The concept of children and childhood as a kingdom value is not to be naive, innocent, or immature. Nor, are they as Nicodemus thought to be “born again in the mother’s womb” (John 3:4). Rather, it is to be humble, to come before God empty handed and to receive love, embrace, and blessings from Him (Maas, 600).

By citing childhood characteristics as kingdom requirements, Jesus showed that the kind of faith which is acceptable to God comes from childlike attitudes. Childhood as metaphor of God's kingdom is a paradox.¹⁷ The irony of lowliness as kingdom value, meekness reflecting majesty, and humanity to explain divinity is a paradigm shift to understand God's kingdom by looking at children. This paradox echoes Saint Augustine's (354-430 A.D) confession that childhood "embodies the perfect state of humility that characterized Christian discipleship," and at the same time "epitomizes human wretchedness" (Bunge, 2001, 87). Strange described Jesus' modelling of his perception of children by stating that

... Jesus repeatedly holds up the child as an example of kingdom values and responses. By doing so, Jesus revealed the great difference between the kingdom of the world and the Kingdom of God. The Greeks and Romans viewed children as raw materials to be formed, or unformed beings to be educated. Jesus believed children needed teaching and discipling. However, Jesus holds children as teachers for adults. Within the Kingdom of God, adults are challenged to be open and learn from children and others who are the least. (Strange, 1996, 49)

The paradox in Augustine's confession is supported by Karl Rahner's view when he said that the child

... is the man (sic): the one, therefore, who always lives in the spirit of fraternity, leads a life of infinite complexity, knows no law other than that of endlessly journeying on and of great love and of that adventure which he can only recognize that he has come to the end of when he stands before God in his absolute infinitude. This is how Christianity views man and it sees all this already present in the child. (Rahner, 1977, 38)

Childhood faith as exemplary of kingdom qualities means the "faith element" or the essence for relating to God is already present in children. Children's relationship with God as shown in the New Testament by Jesus' actions and teachings affirms that children have not only received an invitation of the highest order to enter God's kingdom but they are also equipped with the "tools" to fully participate in this

¹⁷Donald Kraybill, in his book *Upside Down Kingdom*, notes that the Kingdom of God is a place full of paradoxes where God chooses to reverse the way things are done:: where good turns out to be bad, the least becomes the greatest, the immoral receives blessings while the pious receive curses, and adults are to be childlike (Kraybill, 1978, 29). In the Gospel, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God that is at hand (Matt. 10:7-8; Lk. 10:8-9) and yet he taught His disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come..." an indication that the Kingdom is both now and not yet (Matt. 6:10).

experience. For these reasons, childhood faith is not a stage or a process of coming to know God. The encounters with Jesus and his teachings about children indicate that children's faith or childhood faith is descriptive of an established relationship between God and children by virtue of Jesus' invitation into God's kingdom.

2. THE ECCLESIA AS THE EMERGING COMMUNITY FOR FORMATION

New Testament history is set in a Greco-Roman world. While the Christian households (*oikos*) continued to be the primary location for building children's faith, as was the practice in the Old Testament, a new institution "emerged" that contributed to development of faith.¹⁸ In order to preserve the purity of faith, the Jews developed "an extensive network of regulations to protect their members against the encroachment of foreign influences or the relaxation of their religious obligations" (Banks, 1980, 16). This network solidified Judaism and promoted the synagogue as a centre for religious and communal life. While the new Temple in Jerusalem was the central location for Jewish worship and instructions, the synagogues were predominantly set up in and around the northern areas (Galilee) to be prayer-houses. "The term *sunagoge* at first referred to the gathering itself (Acts 13:43), then by association to the communities who assembled together, and finally, as mostly in the New Testament to the buildings which were provided especially for this purpose" (Banks, 18). The post-exilic Jews, having experienced the dangers of assimilation with other religions and threats of losing purity of the faith, were anxious "to preserve the integrity of the faith, [and thus], developed into an ingrown, self-contented community" with extreme forms of legalism (de Dietrich, 1958, 77-129).

When Jesus came onto the scene, his teachings directed the people to turn from self centeredness to God centeredness. For Jesus, purity of faith was not legalistic religious observations but dependence on God. Jesus spoke of child-like faith as a criterion to enter God's kingdom, and he exalted the marginalised as those who will "see God" (Matt.18: 1-6; 5:1-12). Being God's people became the model or paradigm

¹⁸The Jewish community in the New Testament was structured into families, groups, and houses (*oikos*). *Oikos* was the smallest unit or people group in the total structure of the congregation (TDNT, 1967, Vol. V., 130). Examples of the *oikos* ministry include the households of Stephanos (1Cor. 1:16); Philemon (Phlm. 2); Cornelius (Acts 11:4); Lydia (Acts 16:15); the governor of Philippi (Acts 16:31); and Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16).

of God's holiness "expressed in the social life of a redeemed community" (Wright, 1992, 43). As Banks commented, "The gospel is not a purely personal matter. It has a social dimension. It is a communal affair ... to embrace the gospel is to enter into community" (Banks, 33). The followers of Jesus became the new community of faith – the *ecclesia*, a people set free from the bondages of sin and imposition of the Pharisaic laws. The following section introduces the *ecclesia* and explains its role in faith formation of children.

Ecclesia was a common term in the Greek community which denotes regular assembly of the citizens. In the New Testament, Apostle Paul used the term *ecclesia* to mean the community of believers redeemed to bear witness to Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. Paul's definition of *ecclesia* differs from the gatherings of the Jewish assemblies and the Hellenistic cult gatherings of his time by the function of the term. For Paul, the *ecclesia* was not "merely a human association, a gathering of like minded individuals for a religious purpose, but a divinely created affair" and the gathering was "... in God the Father" or "... in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ibid., 36). Packer reinforces this view:

(*Ecclesia*) ... exists in, through, and because of Jesus Christ. Thus, it is a distinctive New Testament reality. Yet it is at the same time a continuation, through a new phase of redemptive history, of Israel, the seed of Abraham, God's covenant people of Old Testament times. The differences between the church and Israel are rooted in the newness of the covenant by which God and his people are bound to each other. The new covenant under which the church lives (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:7-13) is a new form of the relationship whereby God says to a chosen community, "I will be your God; you shall be my people" (Exo. 6:7; Jer. 31:33). Both the continuity and the discontinuity between Israel and the church reflect this change in the form of the covenant, which took place at Christ's coming. (Packer, 2007, 199).

Similar to Old Testament identity of the God's people, members of the *ecclesia* lived to reflect being "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... a people belonging to God" (1 Pet. 2: 9). In the New Testament, the *ecclesia* manifested its witness as God's people. God's presence became evident as the people showed willingness to be transformed. The people, inclusive of young children, adults, and the elderly were to remember the covenant. The process to recall the covenant was accomplished (by) "... observation of the laws... liturgical celebrations... and public reading of the Scrip-

tures ...” (Miller, 1987, 43). The *ecclesia* was usually located in households (Acts 18:18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19) where the *oikos* (which includes the believing households and extended families of relatives and slaves) came together to express their faith in the resurrected Christ. The emergence of the *ecclesia* meant that believers gathered in the *oikos* (households) and worshipped together as members of the spiritual family (Acts 2: 46).

The New Testament writers used different words to convey the functions of the *ecclesia*: e.g. *didasko* (teaching, cf. Acts 2:42), *paideuo* (to give guidance and training, cf. Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:16), *katecheo* (catechism, cf. Lk. 1:4; Rom. 2:18), *noutheteo* (to shape the mind, cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; Eph.6:4), *oikodomeo* (to edify, cf. 1 Cor. 3:9), *paratithemi* (to set before, cf. 1 Tim. 1:18), *ektithemi* (to explain facts in logical order cf. Acts 11:4), and *hodegeo* (to guide, cf. Acts 8:31). Several ministries developed out of these functions as expressions of the people’s faith. An example of these ministries in practice is seen in Acts 2:32, 42-47,

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (*didache*, *kerygma*) and fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers (*leitourgia*) ... And all who believe were together and had all things in common (*koinonia*); and they all sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need (*diakonia*). (Harris, 1989, 63)

As shown above, contemporary Christian educator, Maria Harris has identified these ministries as *koinonia*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma*, *didache* and *prophetia*. Harris proposes that *koinonia* (love in community life); *leitourgia* (prayer); *didache* (teaching); *kerygma* (proclamation / faith); and *diakonia* (love expressed in service) are avenues of faith formation for the New Testament church. In addition, Robert Pazmiño used E.V. Hill’s model of the tasks of the church and added *prophetia* as another ministry which helps form faith (Pazmiño, 1997, 44). The following discussion further explains how these ministries contribute to faith formation of children.

a. Forming faith through *koinonia*

Koinonia (from the Greek adjective *Koinos*) means “sharing of partnership in work” (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Cor. 6:14); “sharing in the nature received” (Heb, 2:14); and “fellowship” (Acts 2:42, 1 Cor. 1: 9) (Kittel, 1967, 804). The term comprises two dimensions in relation to God and people; and incorporates characteristics of “community, communion, participation, sharing, and fellowship” (Consultative Group on Ministry among Children, 1996, 805).¹⁹ *Koinonia* in the early faith community included “training, instruction, and nurture which enable persons to grow in their faith” and is an exclusive post-Pentecost relationship with God in Jesus Christ (Pazmiño, 46). In Acts 2:44-47, *koinonia* became the model of God’s holiness lived out in the social life of the faith community.²⁰

Koinonia depicted faith in the New Testament community and the life of faith was communal. God’s presence was evident in *koinonia* as believers allowed God to form them and in return they bore witness to the Risen Lord. Children (from the believing *oikos*) were part of the *koinonia*. They witnessed and participated in the community’s expressions of faith. The process of coming to know God and growing in the life of faith was fundamentally a process of corporate solidarity and participation. *Koinonia* was also a principal locus of education in holiness for children in the New Testament church and active participation was the mode of faith education. “Within the faith community, people discovered the meaning of which they are ... individually and corporately through ... relationships, worship, symbolism, celebration, and story. All these served to shape and to continue shaping their faith and life” (Pazmiño, 1997, 46).²¹ Children experienced togetherness in fellowship and the communal life of faith

¹⁹Three particular observations are evident in usage of the term (Ibid., 805): *Koinonia* expresses fellowship that arises from the Lord’s Supper, identification with Christ, his death and resurrection and the union that has taken place, cf. 1 John 1:3; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16. *Koinonia* expresses participation and identity with the community of believers, cf. 1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 3:10. *Koinonia* expresses contribution of the believers to community needs, cf. Rom.15: 26; Heb. 13; 16; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13.

²⁰*Koinonia* expresses fellowship that arises from the Lord’s Supper, identification with Christ, his death and resurrection and the union that has taken place, cf. 1 John 1:3; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16; *Koinonia* expresses participation and identity with the community of believers, cf. 1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 3:10; 3). *Koinonia* expresses contribution of the believers to community needs, cf. Rom.15: 26; Heb. 13; 16; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13.

²¹Reflecting John Westerhoff’s “Will our children have faith?” Westerhoff addresses parental and congregational neglect in helping children develop faith. However, Charles Foster insinuates that per-

impressed upon them the uniqueness of their Christian heritage and the importance of proper responses to God. Children experience fullness of the covenant relationship between God and his people by virtue of the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ and by corporate solidarity with the community of faith (Honeycutt, 1970, 23).²²

b. Forming faith through *leitourgia*

Leitourgia is an expression of the service and priestly ministry of the saints (Lk. 1:23; Heb. 9:21); ministry in general (Phil. 2:30); ministry of giving (2 Cor. 9:12); sacrifice for the gospel (Phil. 2:17); the fellowship of prayer (Acts 13:2); and the ministry of Christ (Heb. 8:6). During the New Testament period *leitourgia* denoted a special priestly ministry to God with great significance on the solemnity of ministry.

Leitourgia was ministry to God on behalf of the whole community (Kittel, 1964, 221-22). *Leitourgia* expressed church worship, both public and corporate. Forms of worship incorporate praises to God (Ps. 96:1; 98:1); singing to encourage (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:9); prayer (1 Tim 2:1-2); healing (Jas 5:14); spiritual growth (Phil. 1:9-11) and advancement of the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20). *Leitourgia as an expression of faith* “sustains and transmits the community’s understandings and ways ... (and) expresses the hidden meanings of our (faith) experiences in relationship to the world, to others, and to God” (Westerhoff, 1980, 54). The chief end of worship is that “all who have been touched ... join together as the household of God” in witness (and worship) of His love, acceptance and care (Ng and Thomas, 1981, 20).

haps Westerhoff asked the wrong question (Foster, 1982, 21). Foster suggests that the question of “Will our children have faith?” should instead be “What faith will our children have?” The concern is not whether the children will have faith but more important, the nature of their faith. Foster was concerned that Westerhoff’s idea of enculturation although ideal may not be applicable in the present faith congregations because “churches are no longer capable of building up communities of faith adequate to the contemporary challenge ... for transformation of the world” (Ibid.).

²²In his book *Christian Nurture*, Horace Bushnell defined childhood faith nurture as a process – “that the child is to grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise” (Bushnell, reprint 1979, 10). He further explained the childhood faith process and outlined parental and the church’s role in helping children grow in relationship to God. Bushnell spoke adamantly against his Episcopalian congregation which prohibited children full participation into church life. He asserted that children should be accorded the privileges of belonging to the Kingdom under a converting, grace-giving covenant and not subjected to a “half-covenant” which snuffs out spirituality (Ibid., 187). More than a century has passed (Bushnell wrote in the 1860s) and Bushnell’s concern is still wrestled with in the post modern churches: What is childhood faith, how do we nurture children into faith and to what extent should they be given “full rights” of the faith inheritance?

Since the ministry of *leitourgia* was held in the households (*oikos*), presumably the children were present and they learned (together with the adults) to worship God through singing praises, congregational prayer, reading and exposition of Scriptures, testimonies, and by observing the order of service. As a function, *leitourgia* sets the environment for children to express their faith through rituals and rites and to make meaning of their understanding and belief in God. *Leitourgia* is a tangible demonstration of the faith and the rituals and rites functioned as transitional representations of the children's faith when they are not yet able to comprehend or fully describe their encounters with the numinous divine presence (Stonehouse, 1998, 131). *Leitourgia* within the New Testament community of faith created a "place where children come to meet God and to know the deep realities of faith – a place, not for instruction, but for experiencing the religious life" (Ibid., 175).

c. Forming faith through *diakonia*

Diakonia is a cognate of *diakonos* which means "a waiter at a meal" (John 2:5, 9) or the "servant of a master" (Matt. 22:13; Mk. 9:35; Matt. 20:26; Phil. 1:1) (Kittel, 1964, 88).²³ In the post Pentecost New Testament church, *diakonia* is love expressed in service to God and to others in the community and there were different expressions that ranged from caring for materials needs to prayer (1 Pet. 4:11, Mk. 15:41; Acts 6:4; 11:29; 19:22; 2 Tim. 1:16-18; Rom. 15:25-26; Gal. 6:6). Sometimes the term connotes a personal ministry, as when the Apostle Paul spoke of different works of service for God's people (Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 16:15). Other times, it refers to serving tables as well as preaching the Word (Acts 6:2-4). The highest office of preaching the Word is described as ministry (Kittel, 1964, 87).

Jesus taught his followers that ministry to others is part of discipleship. He said, "Whoever serves (*diakoneo*) me must follow me; and where I am, my servant (*diakonos*) also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves (*diakoneo*) me" (John 12: 26). Jesus stressed that the idea of service is an indication of faith maturity

²³*Diakonia* is also the root word for the English equivalent "deacon" (1 Tim 3:8-13; Rom. 16:1). Among the more prominent tasks of *diakonia* found in the New Testament is to serve the Lord Supper and Agape meals. *Diakonia* stresses that each member of the body of Christ has a particular ministry for building the community of faith (Eph. 4:7-13). Through "service within the local church... through effort and actions ...Christians incarnate Christ" (Pazmiño, 47).

when Jesus taught His followers not to lord over others but to serve (*diakoneo*) those who are in need (Mk. 10:42-4). Jesus also consciously extended *diakonia* to the “less in society” which included the children. Everett Ferguson noted that Jesus was concerned about the way children were treated in society at that time. The Hellenistic society practiced infanticide by abandoning their babies when there were too many mouths to feed or they did not want another female child (Ferguson, 1993, 73-4). In this instance, *diakonia* by the faith community to children meant looking after the orphans (Jas. 1:27), receiving children in Jesus’ name, and including them into the fellowship of the faith community.

Besides being recipients of *diakonia*, children served together with the adults in the faith community. A present misconception of life in the New Testament early church is that it was adult orientated. Children are often thought to have been mere recipients of the “services” in the assemblies. But there are New Testament Scripture passages which show children were involved in the ministry of service and care. In Acts 21:5, children along with their families (Luke recorded the disciples, their wives and children were present) knelt at the beach to pray for Paul as he sailed to Caesarea. In the feeding of the five thousands, a little boy offered five barley loaves and two fishes to feed the crowd (Mk. 6: 35- 44; Lk. 9: 10-17; John 6:8). Since *diakonia* is an important function of the early church life and children were part of the community, it can be assumed that while children did not “serve at tables” (Acts 6), they had age-appropriate avenues of service within community life, or at least were taught to minister to others.

d. Forming faith through *kerygma*

Kerygma is the Greek noun of *kērvssō* and is the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him.²⁴ The term embodies the spirit and essence of the resurrected Christ who has come to preach the Good News to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recover the sight of the blind, to liberate those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the

²⁴The Apostle Peter used the *kerygma* in his preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-39). Romans 10:17 is a proclamation of the *kerygma* and “includes one’s personal response and efforts to share the Christian faith with others” (Pazmiño, 46).

year of the Lord (Lk. 4:16-19). *Kerygma* is also used to describe a commissioning, the action of a herald, “the act of shouting aloud or the report or edict that was proclaimed” (TDNT, 2000, 682). This proclamation is God incarnate, the Word made flesh and dwelling among his people. Encounter with the *kerygma* “is to come to know ourselves as personal participants in that word: as subjects who speak it, as mediators who reveal it, as listeners who hear it in the image of God who is Subject, Mediator, and Listener” (Harris, 1989, 128). The New Testament faith community is an example of a faith community which embraced and proclaimed the *kerygma* and demonstrated the living Christ in their midst.

There were several ways by which proclamation of the *kerygma* strengthened the faith of children in the New Testament community:

First, the *kerygma* as the content of the gospel provided knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of the salvation plan and the introduction of Jesus’ name directed the listeners to the source and place of their faith responses. The case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-35 is an example of the need to know the Good News that is in Jesus Christ. The *kerygma* is the main conviction of the New Testament writers as they communicated their message of the Christ incarnate and the Word made flesh (Harris, 127). Children in the early faith communities came to knowledge of their faith through hearing the Word preached.

Second, the *kerygma* provided a frame for thinking especially in the context of decision making where alternatives are present. Children in the faith community were taught to make appropriate responses that were consistent with their faith by reflecting on the life of Jesus. The male child interacted with other male figures in the believing households while the female child was taught by the mother. The *kerygma* built faith in God’s people for the Good News “... nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture ...” (Brueggemann, 1977, 13).

Third, the *kerygma* stood against the hegemony of its time and (among other functions) was prophetic in the society. The *kerygma* of Jesus Christ proclaimed liberty to the captives, forgiveness of sins, justice in an unjust world, and extolled the

virtues of peace, compassion, forgiveness, and love (Harris, 1989, 131). In the midst of a hostile and pluralistic society, the *kerygma* ensured that the faith community remained true to its identity as a people who follow Jesus Christ.

Fourth, proclamation of the *kerygma* systematically brings together the biblical themes of God's working in His creation. These biblical themes would include God's love and his redemption plan, institution of the *ecclesia*, and the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and instruct believers.

e. Forming faith through *didache*

Didache (from the Greek word *didasko*) means "to teach," or "to instruct." In the teaching process, "the community is drawn into a new enterprise of interpretation and of acting faithfully in constantly changing circumstance" (Miller, 1987, 46). The aim of teaching or instruction was to advance the learner to the "highest possible development of the talents of the pupils, but always in such a way that the personal aspect was both maintained and indeed strengthened" (Kittel, 1964, 135). The Synoptic gospels used *didache* to describe Jesus' teachings which related to the proclamation of God in form and content (cf. Matt. 7:28; 22:33; Mk. 1:22) (Ibid., 164). The Apostle Paul followed the same usage in Rom. 6:17; 16:17; 1 Cor. 14:6). Hebrews 6:2 and 13:9 relate *didache* to established and formulated doctrines (Ibid, 164). An example of this process is demonstrated by the Apostle Paul when he admonished Timothy to remain faithful to the Scriptures that he had learned from his mother and grandmother from his youth; for these Scriptures have the power to "straighten ... and teach ... what is right" (2 Tim. 3:15-16).

The early church engaged in different methods of teaching to form faith that were consistent with the Jewish customs (Pazmiño, 1997, 135). Teaching was located in both formal and informal gatherings. A *didache* teaching style in the New Testament church was *katēcheō* which means to "hand down what has been received" and includes oral instruction, to simplify, retell, or re-echo a message. In this teaching style the learners engaged in repetitious responses to questions asked by the teacher. However, Thomas Groome describes this process as giving milk instead of solid food to young children (Groome, 1980, 26).

f. Forming faith through *prophetia*

Prophetia means proclamation, divine revelation (Mt.7:22), pointing to the future (Mt.15:7) and giving exhortation, advising or encouraging (TDNT, 2000, 1110).

Prophetia as advocacy is an avenue for formation in the faith community (Pazmiño, 48). Other uses of *prophetia* are to speak forth, proclaim or preach. Examples are found in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35; 11:4-5 where women who were not allowed to teach could engage in *prophetia*. Women could actively proclaim hope and restoration of God's reign in the world. The most evident support for the statement that children can engage in *prophetia* is the announcement by the Apostle Peter in Acts 2: 17, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy (*prophateusousin*) ..." (cf. Joel 2:28-32).

Another example of *prophetia* as proclamation is found in Matthew 21:14-16. On this occasion in Jerusalem, the children received Jesus with shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David." The children's proclamation of hope indicated a Messianic pronouncement heralding the Kingdom of God. This proclamation was in accordance to Psalms 8:2, "... from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise". The scenario would be all too familiar to Jesus for he too as a child would have sung the Pilgrims' Psalms on his way up to Jerusalem.²⁵ *Prophetia* forms children who can hope in Jesus Christ for the world; and children can engage in *prophetia* by their presence in the faith community. Children are prophetic as "bearers of love, and hope and grace (of God) ... in a special way ... by embrace, by provocative questions, by laughter, by tears, and by simple deeds (Stonehouse, 1998, 61).

To summarise this section, faith formation of children in the New Testament post Pentecost communities incorporated a variety of strategies, all located within the functions of the *ecclesia*. The *ecclesia* sought to build personal belief in the children through preaching the Good News in Jesus Christ (*kerygma*), training the children in the proper handling of the inspired Word (*didache*), establishing harmonious households and a faith community where children can belong to (*koinonia*), providing avenues for faith expression in worship to God (*leitourgia*), proclaiming the Kingdom

²⁵Psalms 24:7a – "Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors." Traditionally, pilgrims sang this Psalm of praise as they headed into the city of Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem was on a hill, pilgrims lifted their heads to view the gates of entry.

of God (*prophetia*), and facilitating children to engage in ministries of service (*dia-konia*). Similar to the Old Testament practices of formation, the households (*oikos*) and the faith communities (*ecclesia*) were the main and important locations for formation of the children's faith. Functions of the *ecclesia* provided the community structures for children to be included as active participants in the faith. The children were recipients as well as contributors to the functions of the faith community. Formation strategies were integrated into the routines of community life and context. Faith was meaningful because God was real and could be seen working in the everyday lives of the people.

C. SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the perspectives of childhood faith formation in the Old and New Testaments.

Section A investigated the Old Testament perspective of childhood faith and the formation processes. The study traced the history of Ancient Israel to determine how the faith community viewed children, childhood faith and methodologies for formation. Children in the Old Testament covenant community were not converted into the faith but "covered" by the *berith*. As such, faith came by virtue of corporate solidarity and the *inherited faith* grew to become *owned faith*. Children became part of the faith community and participated in all the religious and cultural life. There were environmental variables which affected Israel's community life and indirectly affected the way the Israelite community expressed their belief in Yahweh. The *Shema* was the overall guiding principle for living and the children's faith was: 1) formed in the homes; 2) affirmed by community collaboration; 3) expressed through religious and cultural celebrations, and 4) directed by teachers, prophets, and sages.

Section B explained the New Testament perspective of childhood faith and formation from Jesus' teachings and encounters with the children. In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching and healing extended to the children. Jesus defined children's relationship to God not based on a "confession of faith" but by his invitation into God's kingdom and by the Kingdom characteristics present in children.

Children were intentionally brought into relationship with God because they were a constitutive part of Jesus' mission. From Jesus' action, it can be assumed that he expects the faith community to treat children likewise. While the households (*oikos*) still played a prominent role in childhood faith formation, the *ecclesia* was another avenue for formation in the New Testament post Pentecost period. The ecclesiastical functions of *koinonia*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma*, *didache*, and *prophetia* became the structures for children to experience and express their belief in God.

Having established a biblical perspective of childhood faith and formation, we will now look into another aspect of the faith formation of children. Since one of the aims of the research is to provide an understanding of holistic formation of children in the MBE congregations, Chapter Three will investigate and discuss the issue of child development and the acquisition and maturation of childhood faith from a human developmental perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAITH FORMATION

Traditionally, the Protestant Christian perspective of faith formation has largely been associated with piety and virtues. Church history shows that spiritual disciplines and mysticism have dominated thinking on faith and its development. This perspective was, and still is, one of the many accepted views that contribute to a growing relationship with God. Pietistic faith focuses on holiness and communion with the Triune God which, due to misconception of children and childhood competencies, was adult centred. However, with increased awareness of human development at the onset of the twentieth century, Christians became more aware of the role of human development in faith maturity and children's capabilities to grow in knowledge of and relationship with God.

In the study of human development, psychologists have found that there are age-related experiences from infancy to late adulthood which shape personality. Obvious normative changes have been developed into what are known as human developmental theories. These descriptive sets of theories or assumptions explain maturation across a broad range of human growth topics that include physical development, cognitive abilities, manipulative skills, socio-emotional responses, language acquisition, moral understanding, and identity formation (Santrock, 1997, 15).¹ These

¹While thinkers ranging from the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC), and St. Augustine (354-430) to William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) intuitively expounded on life changes and unique stages of human needs, it was only in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the theories were supported by empirical research (Bornstein and Lamb, 1984, 8).

descriptive sets of assumptions assume there are regular patterns of upward growth and directional maturity in behaviour applicable to all persons. As such, these theories are “an integral part of understanding the nature of children’s development” (36).

Developmental theories have much to offer in terms of scientific research to understand faith development and the formation process. Appropriate strategies and methodologies of forming faith in children can be developed from these studies. Also, a study of the acquisition and maturation of faith from developmental theories better explains the ecology of spiritual formation (Estep, 2002, 114-64).² Human developmental theories can facilitate an understanding of faith acquisition and maturation in at least three ways. First, faith development and developmental theories study similar components of human consciousness and behaviour. Second, developmental theories best explain the diverse and intricate characteristics of people. Third, developmental theories provide Christians with a position of development to explain human growth (Pazmiño, 1997, 189). Faith as a human-divine experience is ambiguous and developmental clarifications provide Christians with tangible tools to identify subjective human responses. Also, “human development is progressive and monolithic, developmental theories (which include the biological processes) offer a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the entire spectrum in development” (Moseley, 1990, 147).

The discussion in Chapter Two affirmed that family life, the faith community, and environmental structures influence the manner by which faith in God is formed in children. While these factors are contextual, the principles of formation are still applicable as we consider childhood faith formation in today’s society. In this chapter, we will look at developmental and sociological variables that affect development and formation of children; and how these variables inevitably affect their faith in God. Also, development of a holistic approach for formation needs clarification not only from a biblical perspective but also from child development research and the sociological systems that are actively at work in forming personality. Hence, the objective of this chapter is to study the ways children think about God, the

²The stress at this point is that there are sufficient scientific evidences to justify that children should be assessed on a different platform compared to adults in spiritual development.

expressions of childhood faith, and the task of formation from normative child development processes and socio-cultural settings.

Before we think further on the relation of developmental theories and faith maturity, there are some ‘ground rules’ that have to be established for this chapter’s discussion. From a purely developmental perspective, children have been studied from the different domains of growth (e.g. physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and spiritual). Maturity in each domain is evident and measured by the manner the child functions. Although the developmental perspective stresses that all the domains of functioning are interrelated, this trend in thinking actually compartmentalises child development and indirectly negates the child as created as holistic beings. This view encourages Christian educators to nurture the spiritual aspect while caregivers attend to the other developmental domains. Compartmentalizing child development fragments our understanding of child functioning. As such, we often see faith formation of children in forms of pietism with little consideration to the physiological needs of the child. Even as we look at the developmental domains and their contribution to faith maturity in children, this research takes the position that children are created wholly as spiritual beings with the developmental domains as expressions of child functioning and it is from this perspective that the following discussion will be made.

With the above statement as a basis for our thinking, we move on to the concerns in this chapter which include questions like: How does faith originate in children?; How does the moment of belief come about? or is it necessary that children should experience a specific moment in enlightenment?; What factors contribute to the ‘*ah-ha*’ experience? (if there indeed needs to be an “*ah-ha*” experience); Is childhood and adult faith synonymous? Are there patterns for a childhood faith process? And, what variables affect development of childhood faith? This discussion is divided into six sections:

Section A	Child development and the faithing process
Section B	Cognition and knowledge of God
Section C	Emotions and development of responses
Section D	Behaviour and volitional faith
Section E	Sociocultural interactions and meaning making
Section F	Summary

A. CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND THE FAITHING PROCESS

Studies in child development typically embrace the physical, cognitive, psycho-social, and behavioural domains which provide the frame for developmentally appropriate practices in nurturing children (Santrock, 1997, 16). These developmental domains are interrelated parts of the biological processes of growth. Best practices in caregiving and nurture of children should be guided by knowledge of child development in these domains. Two key questions in child development and the faithing process are: “How does development in the various domains affect the faithing process?” and “What has human development to do with childhood faith?” To answer the questions, three issues are raised as we consider childhood faith from a developmental perspective: 1) Is childhood faith development continuous or discontinuous?; 2) Is childhood faith a product of nature or nurture?; and 3) Are childhood faith experiences universal or context-specific? Answers to these questions will help the readers to further appreciate the role of developmental theories in faith formation and to see the connectedness between the physiological and the numinous.

1. IS CHILDHOOD FAITH DEVELOPMENT CONTINUOUS OR DISCONTINUOUS?

The view that childhood faith development is continuous assumes that faith experiences are cumulative from infancy to adulthood. The process is gradual maturation, a smooth progress in relationship to God, much like a seedling growing into a giant oak. Continuous faith development means that the individual treads the same path except with greater spiritual characteristic development. Thus the methodology of faith formation must incorporate quantitative skills (more of the same) to bring about maturity. On the other hand, the perspective of discontinuous childhood faith development perceives the development as like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly.³ The changes are observable and the process has unique qualitative changes which identify the new stage as “different.” The discontinuous development view approaches the child at a particular level of maturity, using specific critical moments for forming faith. Discontinuous faith developmental stages stress that each

³These examples are listed by Santrock in his illustration of child development. See Santrock, 18.

level has different characteristics in understanding and relating to God. Whichever view the caregiver chooses to take will affect the way a child is formed in faith. The question of continuous and discontinuous development in childhood faith is perhaps best answered by two prominent faith theorists who subscribe to the different *faith stages*; namely, James Fowler and John Westerhoff III.

James Fowler, a Methodist pastor and Christian psychologist developed a theory involving six stages (*Stages of Faith*) to explain faith and its development. Identified as “Fowler’s Six Stages of Faith Development,” the structure actually has seven stages ranging from primal faith to universal faith. Fowler defines “faith” as a disposition, a trust, or a belief that orders our lives. His intention in the stages of faith development is to provide a frame for, as William Yount said, “How a person believes, not what a person believes” (Yount, 1996, 122). For Fowler, faith is...

a disposition of the total self to the total environment in which a trust and loyalty are invested in a centre or centres of value and power which give order and coherence to the source of life, which support and sustain (or qualify and relativise) our mundane and everyday commitments and trusts, combining to give orientation, courage, meaning, and hope to our lives, and, to unite us into communities of shared interpretation, loyalty, and trust ... or ... the person’s or group’s way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through forms of the cumulative tradition. (James Fowler, 1980, 137)

The concept of faith stages is not new, but what is new is Fowler’s attempt to “apply the rigors of structural analysis to such a non empirical topic as faith” (Wilhoit and Dettoni, 1995, 75). Childhood faith stages in Fowler’s theory fall between Stage 0 (Primal faith) and Stage 2 (Mythic-Literal faith). The word “stages” implies different levels of maturity with “qualitative changes in thinking, feelings, and behaving” (Berk, 1999, 7). In Fowler’s theory, faith development is a process of maturation in thinking, imagining, grasping, and coming to terms with the reality and interpretation of experiences.⁴ In the Christian context, faith is coming to terms with experiences

⁴Fowler’s theory on the *stages of faith* is based on Piaget’s proposal of sequential growth and age graded cognitive development (in which each stage building on the previous, from simple to complex) and his conversation with Erikson. While Fowler’s stages synchronize with Piaget’s cognitive structures, his (Fowler) centre of value is borrowed from Richard Neibuhr’s concept of the “significant others.”

and the reality of God in Jesus Christ; where “God is the ultimate environment and relationship to him and others is transformed” (Wilhoit and Dettoni, 76).

From the Faith Stages 0-2, Fowler provided a perspective that faith development in children is not continuous or cumulative, as in adding more faith at different stages of growth. The process is characterised by sequentially six stages building toward (what Berk would describe for discontinuous development) “a more mature, reorganized way of functioning than the one that came before” (Berk, 7). Each stage of faith development has its own distinctive in relating to God. Discontinuous faith development implies that at each stage of development, the child’s thinking and relationship with God is qualitatively different.⁵ Fowler’s theory proposes that a conversion experience could be a single dramatic experience or multiple experiences. A conversion experience “does not refer so much to a sudden, dramatic experience as to a change in meaning by which we order our lives, whether they come from faith in Christ or some other creed or commitment” (Bridger, 2000, 150).

While Fowler’s stages of faith tend toward discontinuous development with unique qualitative differences at each level, John Westerhoff’s four distinctive “styles” of faith from infancy to adulthood tend to suggest greater continuity in faith development. Westerhoff explains that faith development is an “expansion” through the four distinct styles (Westerhoff, 1976, 88): 1) experienced faith, 2) affiliative faith, 3) searching faith, and 4) owned faith.⁶ Using the analogy of the rings in a tree trunk, Westerhoff affirms,

⁵However, it must also be noted that recent development in Piaget’s theory proposed that the phrase ‘qualitatively different’ does not mean totally discontinued abilities but rather ‘hierarchical integration’ where the abilities at a particular stage are not discarded but integrated into the next (Catherine Stonehouse, examiner’s comments on this dissertation, January 2009).

⁶Westerhoff’s four styles of faith:

1) Experienced faith (preschool and early childhood age). This style of faith is experiential and is the foundation to faith development. This faith is relational focused on positive interactions with other individuals.

2) Affiliative faith (childhood to early adolescence). The need for identity and belonging prompts the individual to identify and affiliate with other individuals in community living. Faith that is developed from this “style” is community sanctioned and gives meaning to the individual’s experiences.

3) Searching faith (late adolescence). Affiliative faith expands to searching faith when the individual begins to question the reality of his inherited belief. Three characteristics of searching faith are: critical

... a tree with one ring is as much a tree as a tree with four rings. A tree in its first year is a complete and whole tree, and a tree with three rings is not better tree but only an expanded tree. In a similar way, one style of faith is not a better or greater faith than another. Experienced faith, the first identifiable faith style, is complete and whole faith.... We expand from one style of faith to another only if the proper environment, experiences, and interactions are present.... We expand from one style of faith to another slowly and gradually adding one style at a time in an orderly process overtime. (Westerhoff, 1976, 88-89) ⁷

Westerhoff proposes that one style of faith is not left behind in order to acquire another style. In Westerhoff's opinion, faith development is a continuous and cumulative process, "adding new elements and new needs" (89). The expansion of faith does not depend on biological growth, cognitive, or socio-emotional maturity. Westerhoff's idea of faith development, as an expansion from experiential faith to owned faith, is prompted by interactive experiences in the faith community. Hence, Westerhoff recommends an 'enculturation' theory for faith development. Westerhoff's idea of "conversion" is "never an isolated event devoid of all elements of nurture" (Ibid.). The "conversion" experience is a gradual build up from years of nurture from experienced faith to owned faith.

Fowler's "discontinuous" faith developmental theory and Westerhoff's "continuous" theory present to us two different perspectives for thinking. Fowler's stages of faith that is "discontinuous" leans more to cognitive development in children to make meaning of their experiences. Each stage is qualitatively different as the child matures in cognition. Westerhoff's style of continuous faith *expands* from experienced faith to owned faith. His illustration of the rings in tree trunk emphasises that early faith and mature faith are of the same journey of faith development; with the latter as an expanded version. While Westerhoff stresses the faithing attitudes, Fowler stresses the contents (Bridger, 2000, 150). Both theories need to be

judgment, experimentation, and commitment. Through self searching the individual comes to own their faith, reject it, or remain in that state and not move on.

4) Owned faith (early adulthood). Owned faith is the point of "conversion." At this stage, the individual decides to make a commitment to the belief and express it through words and action. Owned faith is "lifestyle faith," where the individual becomes transformed by the Gospel.

⁷In the 2000 revised edition of *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Westerhoff changed his analogy of the styles of faith from tree rings to different paths.

considered as no one single theory can fully explain the dynamics of faith development in children.

2. IS CHILDHOOD FAITH A PRODUCT OF NATURE OR NURTURE?

“Nature” in child development refers to the inborn, genetic, or hereditary capacities of the individual. “Nurture” consists of sociological elements that contribute to shaping the personality. Both elements, nature and nurture, are interactive influences in child development. The claim that childhood faith is a product of nature must be substantiated by evidences that show faith (which in Fowler’s understanding is a “basic disposition to trust”) is present in infants even before they are introduced to the “God idea.” Fowler’s intuitive stage could be an explanation for faith as a product of nature. Fowler’s *intuitive faith* suggests that the belief is not an external force but is an active and growing process with an inner origin within the child. Fowler did not clarify the source of intuitive faith. He presumes that it is already present in the child. Despite limitations, Fowler has made an outstanding identification of the “primal-intuitive-mythical faith” of children which could correlate to the innate awareness of a spiritual world. Fowler’s first three stages of childhood faith (primal-mystical-literal) which describe the religiously pregnant minds of children with their dynamic imaginations and pre-images of God support the present researcher’s assumption that children are “wired” to God.

Anna Marie Rizzuto brings a fresh perspective on intuitive faith in children in her research on how god images develop in children. Influenced by Freud’s psychoanalysis, Rizzuto suggests that children have a capacity to create images that represent objects of importance and bestow on them meanings, feelings, and purpose. Rizzuto maintains that representations of God are found between the subconscious (nature) and parental or societal structures (nurture). These “god representations” become the temporal identity of the Transcendent until cognitive maturity leads the child to differ. Her thesis proposes that, “once formed, the representation of God is given to all the psychic potentials of a living person who is nonetheless experienced only in the privacy of conscious and unconscious processes” (Rizzuto, 1979, 87).

Image representation is not an entirely new concept in child development and has been investigated by both Piaget (object permanence) and Freud (Oedipal complex). Image representations are sensory impressions and important to childhood faith because they balance the child's inside and outside worlds, giving the equilibrium needed to approach the world objectively (Philibert, 1992, 14). Philibert said that

these images are not just imitations of sensory impressions; they include also reconstructions, reinterpretations and fragments of history, as well as symbols that stand for objects and for the way we feel about them. Our images are deeply connected with emotions, either as responses, as expressions or as evocations of feelings ... (12)

“Using whatever data available, children will construct images (understandings) of God, and they do so within developmental abilities and limitations and within their range of experience” (Gobbel and Gobbel, 1986, 57). Transitional objects like a teddy bear or a security blanket are symbolic representations of love and security. These objects fill the void of the transition between the numinous and concrete knowledge. Fowler has commented on Rizzuto,

Dr. Rizzuto finds that despite our secularization and religious fragmentation, religious symbols and language are so widely present in this society that virtually no child reaches school age without having constructed – with or without religious instruction, an image or images of God. (Fowler, 1981, 129)

Rizzuto's work is encouraging because she adds a dimension to childhood faith development that has been neglected. The assertion that the image of God is constructed twice in a child's religious pilgrimage is an important consideration for nurture in faith formation (Rizzuto, 1979, 8). The first God image is constructed within the social confines of family and church. Here, the child derives images of God from routines of life and the immediate relationships and interaction with people, participation in events, and impressions from the media, arts, and architecture. The second construct of God's image is the child's personal contribution to the relationship,

... the child brings his own God, the one he has himself put together.... Now the God of religion and the God of the child-hero face each other. Reshaping, re-thinking, and endless rumination, fantasies and defensive manoeuvres, will come to help the child in his difficult task. This second birth of God may

decide the conscious religious future of the child.... No child arrives at the “house of God” without his pet God under his arm. (Ibid., 8)

From a developmental perspective, Rizutto’s research supports faith and the faithing process as both a product of nature and nurture. Since the faith issue refers to the Judeo-Christian God, we have to go back to Chapter Two on the discussion of the Christian understanding of children made in God’s image with potential for relationship with the Divine (Gen 1:27) and also faith as a gift from God (Phil. 1:29; 1 Cor. 2:5). “When we think of children as somehow possessing faith ‘naturally’, we do not mean that they do so independently of God ... it is by his grace in creation that they (and we) are capable of trust and of response both to other human beings and to God himself” (Bridger, 2000, 46).

3. ARE CHILDHOOD FAITH EXPERIENCES UNIVERSAL OR CONTEXT-SPECIFIC?

Most theorists affirm that all human beings experience developmental sequences and accomplishments that are both universal and context specific. The founder of the child study movement Stanley Hall (1846-1924) and psychologist Arnold Gesell (1880-1961) proposed that heredity and maturity (products of nature) lead to universality in development. Yet, there are theorists who insist that childhood experiences are results of socio-cultural encounters in specific geographical locations and therefore are context specific. Childhood faith development that is considered to be universal implies there are faith processes and characteristics typical of all situations and locations when children encounter God. Context-specific faith experiences refer to situations and encounters that are results of a particular culture, experience, or geographical environment. A child’s development is a product of complex interaction with the environment and that interaction is not fundamentally the same in all environments. Each environment has its set of procedures that shape development of personality. Since faith development is affected by developmental and environmental forces, this discussion moves forward to identify formation elements that are both universal and context-specific.

In the Christian faith, there are experiences that are universal and context-specific. “Universal” faith experiences are events that are evident in every transformative encounter with God. One such experience is to hear the story of Jesus Christ and to put one’s trust in that story. Through hearing the story of Jesus Christ, children (or anyone else) can come to appreciate and appropriate the salvation story for themselves. The process of hearing and believing is a normative universal experience in the Christian faith because hearing of the salvation story is prerequisite to a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Another universal faith experience is the work of the Holy Spirit in the child’s life to bring transformation. The work of the Holy Spirit in a child’s life is a gift from God and transformation through the Holy Spirit happens regardless of where the child is geographically located.

Although the fundamental development of faith is the same for children everywhere, faith experiences and development of Christian maturity are context-specific in their expression of beliefs according to culture and language.⁸ Context-specific childhood faith experiences include the children’s expressions and responses to these faith encounters. These expressions and responses are people group and culturally rooted. These variables determine the manner by which the child’s faith is lived out in worship, fellowship, ministry, teaching and the mission of the church. Universality and context-specific experiences in development and formation are issues discussed at length by socio-cultural theorists Urie Bronfenbrenner and Semenovitch Vygotsky. The socio-cultural role in faith formation will be addressed later in this research.

Although it is generally accepted by modern child development specialists that while it is common practice to describe development of children through a series of consistencies within individual developmental domains, an integration of these developmental domains gives a more comprehensive explanation of child development. Therefore faith development and formation of children should be viewed from an integrative dynamic perspective because (as Berk says of child development) “the child is actively organizing and reorganizing his or her behaviour

⁸The universality and context-specific of faith development was an issue in the Jerusalem Council in the Apostle Paul’s time (Acts 15) when the Pharisees wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised. The Council sent a letter of notification with Paul and Barnabas. The letter specified that the Gentile converts were to abstain from “food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:24-29) for they were saved through the grace of Jesus Christ just as the Jews.

so (that) the various components of the systems work together ..., but in a more complex and effective way” (Ibid.). The dynamic systems perspective “regards the child’s mind, body, and physical and social worlds as a dynamic, integrated system. A change in any part of the system leads the child to reorganize his or her behaviour.” (Berk, 1999, 29).

B. COGNITION AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Cognition is the “internal mental processes” humans use to impose “order on a disorganized perceptual field in a predictable way” (Yount, 1996, 194). One pioneer cognitive theorist often quoted is Jean Piaget (1896-1980); and his theory applied to faith development is summed up as “a theory of evolution, which embraces a fully developed ontology and epistemology” (Ibid.). Piaget’s cognitive constructive theory asserts that there are stages of mental maturation that grow out of genetic epistemology and “... the rigid separation of form and content in structural developmentalism coincides exactly with the distinction between the inner structure and outer structure of faith (Heywood, 1992, 154). Piaget’s proposed four stages of cognitive development start at sensory motor stage (0-2 years) followed by pre-operations (2-7 years); concrete operations (7-11 years); and formal operations (11 years onwards through adulthood). As part of genetic inheritance, humankind possesses ability to think and children’s thinking is qualitatively different from the adults (cited in Krych, 1987, 65). This “thinking pattern” or *schema* which begins at infancy is a fixed sequential development and it is not possible to skip a stage of development. Individuals grow cognitively when they are able to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge; but, (according to the Piagetian rule) only within the confines of prescribed invariant and sequential stages of cognitive development. According to Piaget’s theory:

Cognitive content is the intellectual representation of a reality ... never the same as the reality itself. It is a mental abstraction ... subject to adjustment and revision. Affective content ... is ... a person’s actual, direct feeling-reaction to a reality which he encounters. Hence affective content is certain because it is its own reality. When a person intellectually explores his affective content, this affective content remains certain and non tentative. (197)

One relevant observation that has emerged in the discussion of cognitive development and the faithing process is that cognition is an important learning dimension in childhood faith development because it explains how children have capacity to actively construct knowledge for themselves.⁹ Piaget's theory asserts that growth in knowledge contributes to growth in perspective. The more mature children are, the more they are able to "appreciate a point of view from a greater number of perspectives, making it possible for empathetic and caring relationships with people of different perspectives" (Wilhoit and Dettoni, 1995, 54). Cognitive development in the faithing process describes how children use mental structures and frames to correlate their experiences to that which constitutes belief. By Piaget's understanding, cognitive development logically configures children's numinous experiences by placing them in concrete and measurable stages. Thus, cognitive assessment provides tangible guides to the acquisition and maturation level of the child's faith. Caregivers who adopt this view can actually arrange an environment and learning situations to facilitate faith maturity.

Cognitive development is also a guiding principle among most Christian educators in writing Sunday school and Bible teaching curriculum. These Bible teaching materials are tailored to suit each age group according to their perceived mental skills. The application of cognitive theories to teach the Christian faith helps educators disseminate knowledge to their listeners at a level that they (the listeners) can assimilate and accommodate of an otherwise numinous experience. One application

⁹Piaget's theory has been used by psychologist Ronald Goldman (1962) to explain bible teaching in faith acquisition. Goldman interviewed 200 children between the ages of 6 to 17 years on their responses to three different bible stories: the Burning Bush, the Crossing of the Red Sea, and the Temptations of Jesus. Based on survey data, Goldman suggested that most bible material cannot be understood by children before the onset of formal operations (11-16 years). Hence, the Bible should be taught as a thematic narrative and not expounded for theological truths. His rationale is that the cognitive can be statistically investigated and examined while all affective and lifestyle processes that allow for reflective change to occur are more difficult to explore." See Edwin Cox, "Honest to Goldman: An Assessment," *Religious Education* 63 (November-December 1968), p. 424. Another theorist who has contributed to the cognitive structure in child development is Jerome Bruner (1915-present). Bruner worked on the role of cognition in children's perception and learning abilities. Later, he became critical of the cognitive revolution in children's learning and propagated cultural psychology as a major variable in cognitive maturity. Bruner's concept of "scaffolding" is used to explain the task of mediation in Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach. Also, "Fowler's view on the role of narrative in the child's faith development and Berryman's understanding of the place of the biblical story in his layers of religious language support the importance of the biblical story for children (Catherine Stonehouse, examiner's comments on this dissertation, January, 2009).

of cognitive development to the instructional frame was developed by James Michael Lee. Lee emphasized the systematic instruction of the congregation of believers, for this was Jesus' task on earth – to redeem and to teach. "Everything he (Jesus) did can be subsumed under these two co-primary categories" (Lee, 1990, 247). Lee favoured the instructional paradigm of cognitive learning as most important in Christian transformation because he believed that imparting faith not only concerns learning theology but more importantly the sciences of instruction. Supporting Lee in the scientific bases for educating Christians in their faith is Leon Mckenzie. Mckenzie advocates that without a proper understanding of scientific principles in teaching, Christian education will just become a "transmission of authoritative content" (Heywood, 1992, 101).

While Piaget's theory helps us value the role of cognitive development in knowing God and in developing appropriate teaching and learning frames for Christian education, the theory also has its shortcomings. Margaret Donaldson, a developmental psychologist and former student of Piaget, questioned some of the characteristics in the cognitive developmental stages.¹⁰ Donaldson expressed her concern that Piaget's categories of cognitive abilities are too finite and that children are (by her findings) able to do more than what Piaget stated. In Donaldson's opinion variables such as culture, language, "disembedded thoughts" and social values affect individual thinking (Donaldson, 1978, 75). She stated that Piaget's theory showed what children can and cannot do but did not provide answers to help them advance in their thinking. For this purpose, Donaldson turned to Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Jerome Brunner (1966) for support and elaboration. In her research, Donaldson used Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development and Brunner's scaffolding (assisted learning) to help individuals, especially children, advance in mental abilities.

¹⁰Donaldson argued that Piaget underestimated the power of the mind especially in how children's thinking is formed. Piaget's deduction was a result of controlled experimentation of children and their ability to manipulate pre-designed sequential tasks. Given the natural setting, Donaldson proposed evidences that showed children are not as ego centric as Piaget described and that the children can actually go beyond the intellectual abilities stated by Piaget. See *Children's Minds*, New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978; and *A Study of Children's Thinking*, London, UK: Routledge, 2003.

From a Christian faith perspective, Piaget's theory seems to divide human experiences into two frames. First, there is a predetermined structure in human valuing beyond personal ability. This structure or the *cognitive developmental stages* is the result of epistemology and an unconscious process which sets the criteria for faith maturation. Second, there is the personal self and its experiences that contribute to personal valuing and meaning making. Piaget's theory sets these two frames as separate entities. His cognitive construction theory implies that knowledge and relationship with God are progressively governed by personal reasoning and logic; and failure to respond appropriately to a faith truth is a result of failure in thinking (immaturity). This conclusion places children as "not here" and "not yet" and negates children as active participants in God's working (which is a reason that Piaget's child is often dubbed the "lonely scientist"). A perspective of childhood faith seen from a purely Piagetian cognitive view also limits an understanding of God's grace and the Holy Spirit's role in regenerating lives. Although cognitive development facilitates development in knowledge of the Scriptures, yet faith which is a divine-human experience cannot solely rely on or be assessed from cognition alone.

Faith formation of children is a process of shaping and reshaping the god image in children until that image takes on the form of God in Jesus Christ (see Rizzuto's argument on pp. 59-60). One way of facilitating the faith formation process through cognitive development is by systematically teaching the Scriptures to children. As Ronald Goldman commented of Christian education for his context,

...in our culture even very young children accept the existence of 'the divine.' The young child also feels himself to have a relationship with this 'divine being', even if it is the curious merging of primitive animistic religion and a trusting, more mature relationship.... Christianity is not only a faith difficult for adult men and women to understand and accept, but it is also one of the world's most advanced religions, in the level of theological thought demanded....To teach the Christian faith 'pure and undefiled in an adult form to children is impossible because it is unrealistic If so, what aspects of Christianity are children ready to learn at certain stages in their development? (Goldman, 1970, reprint, 40)

Despite the debates in Piaget's theory, his research on cognitive development has contributed to an initial and better understanding of how children think about God,

their readiness for religion, and the church's role in developing appropriate teaching curriculum.

C. EMOTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESPONSES

While cognitive development addresses the intellect, affective development embraces all forms of emotional responses and attitudes, both conscious and subconscious. The affective domain moves the child from cognitive awareness to conviction and this domain is therefore considered to be the relational development of human personality. Social interaction between persons demands both cognitive abilities to understand communication and affective skills to relate. Erik Erikson (1902-1994) is a theorist recognised for his work on the socio-emotional development of children. Erikson's "eight stages of man" is based on a *Weltanschauung* (worldview) that includes personal and social experiences as variables for personality development. Erikson's theory proposes that emotional maturity increases with psychological competencies and human identity formed in early life decisively determine later life experiences (Erikson's Eight Stages of Man).

Erikson was well versed in Sigmund Freud's theory on psychosexual development. He was convinced that Freud had misjudged human development; that personality formation does not end with childhood psychosexual fixations but continues even to old age.¹¹ Erikson's epigenetic principle stresses that human development is predetermined and unfolds in quantitative and qualitative stages (nature as well as nurture). The ability to resolve each crisis contributes to a more emotionally stable identity and deepening of convictions; otherwise the person degenerates. His psychosocial theory suggests that child development is like a flower that is unfolding. Each petal opens at a designated time in accordance to epigenetic principles. Efforts

¹¹Freud's theory held that children develop through 5 stages of sexual fixations: Oral, Anal, Phallic, Latency, and Genital. The child's ability to resolve each stage in the sexual drive contributes to healthy adulthood. Failing that, the adult will experience symptoms of recurrences. There are however, traces of Freudian influence in the way Erikson designed his psychosocial stages of development and identified "crisis" situations (like Freud did).

to speed the growth process through premature intervention ruins the entire growth process (Asa, 1995, 103).

Based on the *Eight Stages of Man*, Christian faith development is the growing relationship between God and the individual through successful resolution of crisis situations. The eight stages indicate variations of psychological characteristics at different stages of life. The early stages of faith (Stages 1 & 2 of faith development in infants and Stage 3 of faith development in early childhood) are characterized by a loving and trusting relationship with significant others and is foundational to emotional wellbeing (Aden, Benner, and Ellen, 1992, 22). Erikson envisioned the primary age child in a faith community as industrious, eager, and active in religious activities. A trust relationship with initial caregivers paves a positive relationship with God while, negative experiences correlate to mistrust in God. Erikson's emphasis on sequential development maintains that by the time the child grows into adolescence, much of personality is already formed; and most decisions to commit or turn away from belief in God are usually made at this stage.

Drawing from Erikson's description of the psychosocial processes in human development, these "attitude-virtues" can be correlated to the religious attitudes of a person. Each stage presented by Erikson's theory becomes the "ought to be" stage in religious faith development. "The attitudes are 'pervasive' both internally and externally, in that they influence all of a person and all a person's situations. They are "unifying" in that they unify all a person's being and all of his/her experiences and environments" (Astley, Francis and Crowder, 1996, 247). Erikson's belief propagated in the *Eight Stages of Man* reminds us that "... our lives are integrated wholes; that our psychosocial development affects our growth in faith and ... our religious life affects our psychosocial development. This is ... essential ... as we attempt to strategize ministry to persons" (Steele, 1990, 99).

Each developmental stage in Erikson's theory serves as a reminder that faith is a continuous process of growth and adaptation, striking a balance between positive and negative dispositions. Failure to maintain balance between the dispositions brings crisis in relationship with God. Erikson's theory also maintains that personality traits in adulthood are results of adaptive strengths or weaknesses in childhood. From a

psychological perspective, Erikson proved a point, and that is, crisis in childhood affects the manner in which the person views life in later stages. While Erikson's theory significantly contributes to understanding faith development, it must also be argued that this thinking poses a theological problem as we consider humans in God's image and the working of the Holy Spirit to bring new beginnings.

Erikson's theory applied to the Christian faith process raises a concern. The theory contradicts Paul's argument in Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" While Paul argued that salvation is by grace alone and is solely the work of God through his Holy Spirit (Gal.4:4-7), Erikson's theory has no place to consider the role of the Holy Spirit in regenerating new life. Although it can be argued that "crisis resolution" promotes maturity, the theory does not provide space for the redemptive grace of Christ. An understanding of faith development based on Erikson's view may bind the person to a past which the individual perhaps have no control over. Erikson's view implies that even as a person becomes a "new creation" in Christ, the "old" does not pass away but actively lingers to influence the person's future. This form of thinking negates the power of the resurrected Christ to bring new beginnings (2 Cor. 5:17-18). Faith nurture based on Erikson's theory would then limit Christ's ministry of reconciliation, the offer of "new birth," being "born again," (John 3) and the power of regeneration from sin. And yet, we cannot downplay the power of the "old self" that is constantly at work even in the "new" person.¹²

Lest the emotional or affective dimension be construed as mere feelings, this domain is evident by function or behavioural change. The emotional dimension without consideration to other domains of growth is unbalance because the person's affective function is "existentially meaningful ... (only) when properly situated within the

¹²Stonehouse commented, "As Christian educators we need to wrestle with our theology of Christian formation and regeneration. What is our theology of creation? What is the relationship of each aspect of human development to spiritual development and regeneration? What does God do, and how does God work with healthy human development? ...the problem is not with Erikson's findings but in what we do with them. He is not talking about the healing and transforming work of God's spirit he is talking about the long term impact of lack of positive nurture in childhood. God's grace is a marvelous hope, but the damage done in negative responses to life crisis hinders the ability of persons to accept God's grace and to mature spiritually..." (Catherine Stonehouse, examiner's comments on this dissertation, January 2009).

overall matrix of ... human condition” (Lee, 1990, 208). Gobbel and Gobbel make the distinction that,

... while the shape of God images is determined by developmental dimensions, their content will be determined by the data used in the constructive process. That is, the biblical images of God do not determine the child’s constructive abilities, but they make determining contributions to the content of what is constructed. Thus, it is crucial that we provide children with the data of the faith that we judge important and vital. (Gobbel and Gobbel, 1986, 4)

D. BEHAVIOUR AND VOLITIONAL FAITH

Traditional child psychology has mainly been taught and executed from a behaviourist orientation. The behaviourist orientation argues that children’s behaviour is a result of conditioned reflexes (Stimuli-Response) influenced by external factors. “Behaviourist models focus on changes that occur in people due to conditioningThe focus here is on the conscious processes emphasizing stimuli and response” (Gillespie, 1988, 67). Examples of behaviourist theories are the works of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949), John Watson (1878 - 1958), and B.F Skinner (1904-1990).¹³ Childhood faith development according to the behaviourist model is desired Christian behaviour produced through conditioned stimuli (CS), unconditioned stimuli (UCS), and cause and effect (C-E bonds).

There are setbacks to this approach when applied to faith formation of children. First, behaviourist models are manipulative and reduce children to mere robots, denying that children have ability to reason and choose for themselves. Second, behaviourist models rely on external factors to influence behaviour. Although external factors

¹³Pavlov made popular the theory of “classical” conditioning where he suggested that an unconditioned stimuli will produce an unconditioned response, likewise a conditioned stimuli produces a conditioned response. In both cases, the subject does not operate on the environment; stimuli are placed to cause effect. Whereas, in Skinner’s operant conditioning, the subject operates on the environment and learns appropriate responses through cause and effect (also Thorndike’s Law of Effect). Watson is famous for his “Twelve Infants” quote, that given twelve infants and the application of behavioural techniques, he could create any personality “beggar man and thief.”

influence human responses (see section on “Child development and the faithing process”, p.70), behavioristic models cannot be used to totally describe individuals who live in a covenant relationship with God and are made in the *imago Dei*. Third, behaviouristic models limit individual freedom by its claim that it can shape the person to any desired personality (see John Watson’s theory on “Twelve Infants”). The theory does not view humankind as a free agent but solely bound to environment. For these reasons, a behaviouristic model is not recommended as an approach for Christian faith formation of children because children made in God’s image are active and freewill agents of change, both changing self and changing the world.

An alternative theory on behaviour acquisition is Albert Bandura’s *social-cognitive learning theory*. Social-cognitive learning is an approach to behaviour modification which focuses on modelling or observational learning. While the theory builds on the principles of conditioning and reinforcement, it also relies on cognitive processes as mediators of “environment-behaviour connections” (Santrock, 1997, 44). Bandura believes that much of children’s behaviour is due to observing actions of the parents and people whom they frequently associate with. The idea of social-cognitive learning is also evident by the toys and games in children’s play which replicate adults’ tools and functions (Downs, 1994, 156). Role play is another example of social-cognitive learning where behaviour acquisition (sometimes known as behaviour modification) is used to transform negative actions to positive dispositions.

Unlike Skinner’s behaviourism which assumes children are inactive participants or agents of change, Bandura’s social-cognitive learning advocates for active decision making in behaviour development (Yount, 1996, 179). The young learners can be selective in who they chose to imitate. An understanding of the role of social-cognitive learning can promote childhood behaviour that correlates to belief in God. “Because of the powerful informal forces of relationships and examples, much of human behaviour is learned through imitation. The power of modelling and imitation can also be effective for nurturing persons in the faith” (Downs, 1994, 18).

First, adult modelling is an effective tool for behaviour modification. Hence, it is important that Christian adults take the Apostle Paul’s exhortation seriously to live commended lives that the children can imitate (Phil. 4:9). Acceptable adult behaviour

vicariously reinforces the children's choice of actions. Second, social learning integrates cognitive processes into behaviour change (Yount, 180). The mental images imprinted on the children's minds are reproduced at a later time (see Konrad Lorenz's [1903-1989] theory on *ethology*). Third, behaviour is a reciprocal response, an interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and the environment. Promoting expressions of faith means that children must be taught and guided into acceptable behaviour that expresses faith in God. Children must be nurtured to make decisions that will promote their relationship with God.

One cannot ignore the role behaviour development (not behaviourism) plays in forming children's faith because cognitive and socio-emotional experiences are expressed and evident through this domain in functioning. Christian faith in the behavioural domain is *fiducia*, an active trust and a response to the grace of God evident by works of service and miracles done in Jesus' name. Scriptures tell us that this response is possible through an active and intimate relationship with God (2 Cor. 9:13, Rom. 15:18). Unlike the behaviouristic model where personal actions are results of stimuli response and cause and effect, *fiducia* takes the cognitive and affective components of the Christian faith a step further, making faith in Christ a reality by choice. The Apostle James deliberated, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" (James 2:14). Knowledge, feelings, and actions cannot be separated from one another because "faith and loving action exist together as matter and form" (Groome, 1980, 63). Christ-like behaviour is an outcome of cognitive and affective faith which sums up transformation.

Fiducia, an active response, or Perry Downs's term "volitional faith", is lifestyle faith that acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and is evident by a change in lifestyle (Downs, 1994, 19). Transformation in lifestyle incorporates "all the other substantive contents and leads to holistic living by *homo integer* – the integrated and total human being" (White, 1988, 184). Gianna Gobbi said that this perspective of active, responsive faith is the child's natural response to being made in God's image and is a

characteristic in normalization.¹⁴ Although, the behavioural dimension in faith acquisition facilitates the child to learn or act upon something, the impact is actually to facilitate the child to ‘become’ (Gobbi, 2000, 116). *Fiducia* is also the “gateway” to express one’s belief. “If cognition has to do with the mind and affect with the spirit, then behaviour has to do with the whole person; with all one’s psychic, cognitive, affective and psychomotor...” (Ibid.). Christlike behaviour is not a manipulation of human actions and the fruit of the Spirit manifested in Christian living cannot be produced by a stimuli-response modification (Foster, 1994, 25). Instead, *fiducia* is a decisive partnership between the child and God to work out God’s purpose in the world. The child’s behaviour is the *fiducia* or active expression of the transformation that is occurring in the inner person.

E. SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS AND MEANING MAKING

The previous discussions inform us of a normative child development process and aid us in developing appropriate nurture and care-giving strategies. Since childhood is a complex construction of developmental processes, a holistic approach to faith formation of children demands that children and their faith process must be understood, not from one, but a comprehensive paradigm of development. Other than the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains of development, there are also socio-cultural frames which affect childhood faith development. These socio-cultural frames have strong influences on the manner children are nurtured, affecting child development and faith formation. The socio-cultural frames in view are: 1) structural frames; 2) discursive frames; and 3) situated interactions (Jackson and Scott, 1999, 91). The following discussion clarifies these frames.

¹⁴Normalization is a Montessorian term for development “whereby the child learns to interact harmoniously with others in the community setting.” See Gianna Gobbi’s *Listening to God with Children*, 2000, 84.

1. STRUCTURAL FRAMES IN FORMATION

A structure is a definitive pattern that governs purpose and process. Timothy Lines asserted that “... to start with a particular structure, then, is to determine the process and the purpose of the system from the very first” (Lines, 1987, 46). In this discussion, structural frames refer to the institutional and organizational systems in society which govern purpose and function of child development and nurture. These frames may include family settings, neighbourhood, schools, welfare services, and faith communities where the child is located. Childhood is institutionalized through these organizational systems for “there is no free and autonomous realm of childhood outside the social relations in which childhood in general, and particular individual childhoods, are forged” (Jackson and Scott, 1999, 92). Formation seen from these structural frames suggests that childhood formation leans heavily on the environment; and that the environment is a major determinant of the child’s personality.

Sociologist Urie Bronfenbrenner offers further understanding to the role of structural frames in formation of children. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory consists of five environmental systems with its different sets of social agents which influence behaviour (see Fig. 1 on next page). The most immediate circle of influence is the micro-system. This is also the environment where most interactions with the child take place and where most formation studies are done. The micro-system consists of family, friends, school, immediate community, and the religious community where the child belongs. Events within the microsystem shape the child’s worldview. This is also the venue where the child is normally first introduced to issues of faith and where early foundations of belief (or disbelief) are laid. Discussion of the biblical perspective of formation in Chapter Two informs us that within this circle of influence, the home and the faith community play a major role in forming faith. The micro-system is context-specific in its nurture of the child’s faith.

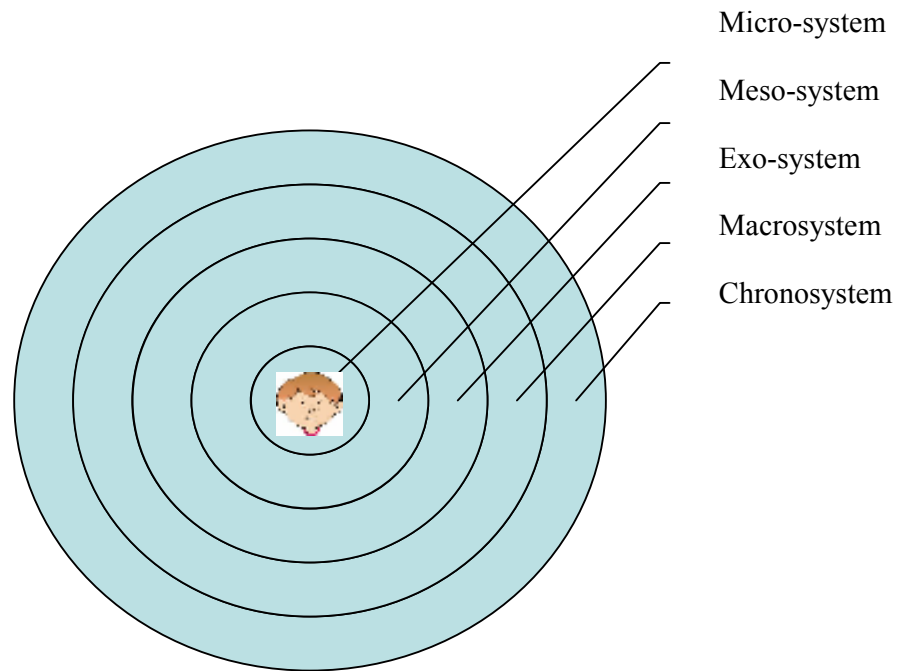


Fig. 1. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems with the five concentric circles of influence to child development

The second system of influence in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is the meso-system. The meso-system connects the micro-system and the third system of exo-system. Within this circle are the interrelationships between the family and the social settings (e.g. parents' involvement with the child's day-care). The exo-system is the social setting that dictates the child's experiences even when the individual does not have an active role in it (Santrock, 1997, 46). Examples of experiences in the exo-system are parents' work experiences which affect family life; social services such as daycares and kindergartens which determine the length of time the child is away from home; and social facilities like the libraries, play areas, and parks promote personal wellbeing. The fourth system is the macro-system of ideologies, worldviews, and attitudes of the people group studied. And lastly, the chrono-system is the socio-historical frame and explains the effects of experiences which have developed over time. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that the five environmental systems form an integrated structural frame that influences the view of life a child

holds. Timothy Lines supported Bronfenbrenner's theory when he said that "every child grows up with a world view whether it is theistic or atheistic" (Lines, 1987, 37). Lines continued to say that, "... the human mind abhors chaos, finding order even if there is none" (81). If a child is not given the Judeo-Christian story as a worldview another view will take its place.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, structural frames can influence faith formation of children in at least 3 ways: First, structural frames mediate knowledge to the children. Each social community has its own history, story; a cultural epoch that binds the people with shared beliefs, values, acceptable codes of behaviour, and language. The social-cultural history of a particular people group identifies its members as uniquely different from other people groups. Likewise, Christian faith communities have their own "cultural epoch;" a shared sacred story of God's work beginning with creation and leading to Christ's second coming. This sacred story is the structural frame which provides its members with origin, purpose, and future. The structure is laden with signs, symbols, and a particular language which points its members to God.

The Judeo-Christian assumption of the ultimate reality of existence is that the God who is present is also the God of the past and future. This God created the world, redeems it from sin and gives meaning to life. In this God, children find their place in the story of salvation. Bringing children in unison with God's working in creation liberates them to think critically of life's questions and develops boldness to apply their faith to daily living. Encounters within the structural frame are (as Cavalletti said of Christian experiences) "not merely speculative but experiential or more precisely, existential" (Cavalletti, 1999, 12). These structural frames communicate knowledge of the faith to the children. In her catechetical experiences with children, Cavalletti observes that the children who were brought to knowledge of the redemption story showed awe and wonder at the biblical events. She elaborated,

It wasn't so much what they said as their attitude of keen interest in the subject and a silence which emanated from them that led us to believe that a deep chord had struck within them. In such moments, it has been clear to us that the children were so engaged ... that they didn't want to be interrupted.... This desire does not seem to be an indication that they want more information, but that they want to savour and enjoy what they have seen and understood. (Cavalletti, 2002, 17)

Second, in Bronfenbrenner's theory, structural frames provide venues for faith expressions. For children to grow in faith, the faith communities must educate them in the congregations and move the congregations "... towards a reframed perspective as the faith community's apprenticing of children . . ." (Mercer, 2005, 207). The nurturers must "create contexts, point the way, share the stories and give directions that can help children express their spiritual experiences in ways that transform who they are in the very developmental stages in which they reside" (Yust, 2004, 164). As a structural frame, the faith community is the location where adults and children work alongside each other to serve God and to be involved in its church ministries. The children depend on adults in the congregations to actively and deliberately prepare the environment where God's presence becomes evident. In return, "... adults must willingly mentor and teach children who may or may not be their 'own,' children who may be well behaved and happy, but also may be sick, dirty, messy, and uncooperative; children whom Jesus calls, blesses, welcomes, and gave over into our care" (Ibid.). Children develop faith within "the full range of congregational practices and ... relationships with particular adults who demonstrate their gifts for mentoring the 'newcomers' into those practices" (Mercer, 2000).

Third, Bronfenbrenner structural frames present a broad spectrum of faith process. Brueggemann maintained that the nurturing task of the faith community is to "find ways of linking the big picture of the redemptive history with the immediate experiences of the child's daily life ... it is hoped that the child will, over time affirm that this is my story about me, and it is our story about us" (Brueggemann, 1979, 31). The Christian community with its shared story as structural frame for formation "facilitates actualization of the faith ..." (White, 1988, 93). Although children are "present beings" with little knowledge of the past and even less comprehension of the future, they still need to connect with their history for being and doing in this world. The faith community with its shared story enables children of the faith to connect with God's divine plan. Children come to a knowledge that there are other witnesses to the faith who have gone before them (Heb.12: 1) and the children are called to continue in that sacred journey.

By linking children to the broader faith story, the faith community invites its children to enter into reflection and dialogue with its inherited religious traditions and beliefs.

In other words, the children participate in community life and make meaning of the story passed on to them. Through reflection and dialogue, these children find a new identity and engage in the process of becoming (Mercer, 2005, 168). Knowledge of the faith not only guides the child to be concerned about his own faith and that of the community but also releases him to consider what God is doing in the wider community. Montessori asserted that educating children in the Christian story is “cosmic education” because children come to appreciate that humanity is “being drawn towards a unified whole ... a pre-existent reality ... and demands that human beings consciously adapt to the real state of things ...” (Montessori, 1991, 61).

2. DISCURSIVE FRAMES IN FORMATION

Discursive frames are dialogues, thoughts, or research primarily through psychology, sociology, education, and other expertise in monitoring, categorizing, and managing children and childhood (Jackson and Scott, 1999, 91). Related issues include the questions of, “What (or who) is a child?” “What constitutes an acceptable childhood?” or “What are normative characteristics of children and childhood?” These frames provide the bases for thinking about children and child development. Often, these discourses become socially sanctioned assumptions from which society argues for or against practices in child development and nurture. Jackson and Scott wrote that,

Traditionally, social sciences conceptualised childhood primarily within the socialization paradigm, in which children were seen as adults in waiting whose experiences were only worth investigating insofar as they shaped adult attributes or life chances ... but, developmental perspectives remain prominent in everyday thinking and professional and public discourse. It is still taken for granted that the process of maturing from child to adolescent to adult unfolds as a series of naturally occurring stages, that there is a ‘right age’ at which children should develop certain competencies and acquire particular freedom and responsibilities. These assumptions are so pervasive that it is difficult to think outside them, so widely accepted that they have become unquestioned ‘truths’.

(92)

For example, a discursive frame of the late 16th to early 17th centuries defined childhood as “a stage of immaturity, ignorance, and deficient reason; therefore ... education

practices (were) ... severe discipline, both verbal and physical” (Aries, 1962, 33).¹⁵ From Aries’s observation (and also De Mause, 1976, 5), it is obvious that due to misconceptions of children and ignorance in child development, children in history have been subjected to multiple inhumane child-rearing practices. Another example of a discursive frame related to child development took place when the United Nations launched the *International Year of the Child* in 1979. The launch raised awareness and profiled children of the world. A general preconceived thought was that children all over the world live as safely as their counterparts in the first world countries. However, the media depicted two categories of children: one group living in affluent societies and another group of sick and starving children ravaged by war and malnutrition. The media highlighted cultural differences and social and political manoeuvres that affect children’s lives. As a result of the launch, a debate arose to seek to define the quality of a child’s life and a child’s entitlement to basic provisions which hinge on the central question of: “what is a child?”

A contemporary definition of “childhood” includes issues of gender, social status, age, geographical location, and economic standing. The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC, United Nations), ratified by 192 countries in 1989, defines a child as a person of either gender below the age of eighteen years, unless the laws of a country set the legal age for adulthood.¹⁶ The CRC reflects a contemporary humane stand of children and childhood. “Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subjects of their

¹⁵Aries showed that prior to the 1500s, societies in the western hemisphere had problems defining children in their midst. “Medieval art until about the 12th century did not attempt to portray children because artists were unable to conceptualize a child except as a man on a smaller scale” (Aries, 1962, 33). There was at that time, literally no children and no babies except little adults. Paintings of children in the 12th century portrayed the male child as a muscular little man while the most prominent depiction of childhood in the later part of 14th and 15th centuries was that of the angelic Infant Jesus. Although Aries’ and De Mause’ works have been heavily criticised as one-sided, they have actually impacted the literary world by raising awareness of the mistreatment of children. A more recent history of childhood has been written by Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. (New York, NY: Longman, 1995).

¹⁶“The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as all human beings under the age of 18, unless the relevant national laws recognize an earlier age of majority (Article 1). The Convention emphasizes that States substituting an earlier age for specific purposes must do so in the context of the Convention’s guiding principles – of non-discrimination (Article 2), best interests of the child (Article 3), maximum survival and development (Article 6) and participation of children (Article 12). In reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, States Parties must indicate whether national legislation differs from the Convention with regard to the defining ages of childhood.” Accessed on the Internet, 3rd Sept. 2005. <http://www.unicef.org/crc/convention.htm>

own rights” (CRC, 1989). Children are also individuals and members of the family and community. They are responsible for their actions according to the development of childhood. Through these definitions the CRC established children and their worth in society. The extent of implementing the CRC in third world countries is debatable. The United Nations developed the definition of the child from an ideal universal context. This interpretation may have to be revisited especially when there are children placed in an economically and socially deprived culture and context.

The contemporary world brings with it a share of positive and negative discursive frames of child development. Neil Postman writes with deep concern that while there are those who advocate for children, childhood in contemporary society (here he assumes western society) is disappearing. He defines childhood as “a function of what a culture needs to communicate and the means it has to do so” (Postman, 1989, 123). But, modernity, new knowledge, and dying traditions have made childhood redundant. The young as a child is replaced by the young as an adult (125). Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore suggests that each historical era has its own distinct attitude towards children. But, “what is it then, about the Enlightenment, the Industrial revolution, and today’s continued technological and social innovations that has displaced children and raised distinct difficulties for families?” (Miller-McLemore, 2003, 3).

Ironically, the 21st century may be portraying the child in much the same way as Aries did of the child in the 12th century – as a miniature adult. Many children in contemporary society are as displaced as were their counterparts in the 12th century. Children today face a barrage of unfriendly conditions that seek to deny them their childhood. One example of a 21st century discursive frame that is robbing children of their childhood image is consumerism. Consumerism targets children to coax adult spending and children are made peddlers of commercial goods ranging from toothpaste to motor cars. “Child’s play” takes on new definitions as adults impose a competitive spirit on what would have been “just mere fun.” David Elkind’s phrase of the “hurried child” fits well into a 21st century definition of children along with other terms such as “marketed child,” “endangered child,” or “neglected child” (Elkind, 1970). Postman’s concern is justified for the 21st century has created a

category of “child-adult” where children from primary years onwards are subjected to the same exposure and information as the adults.¹⁷

The 21st century hegemonic definitions of children and childhoods have also crept into the contemporary faith communities. A majority of churches have, knowingly or unknowingly, incorporated questionable discursive frames to define children and childhood and have knowingly or unknowingly incorporated commercial styles and consumerist strategies to form children’s faith. Within the MBE congregations, it is not unusual to find children’s programs largely geared to consumerism. There are Christian formation programs for children that have taken a carnival approach, more like that of McDonald’s birthday parties, or a competitive atmosphere of rewards ranging from stickers to electronic gadgets. These models, while fun and exciting, may do more harm than good to children’s faith. Scottie May asserts that the way adults nurture children in faith largely depends on their (adults’) view of children and ideas on how children grow in relationship to God (May et.al, 2005, 3). Hence, it is imperative that the faith communities that seek to form faith in children do so from a biblical and theological frame of thinking.

3. SITUATED INTERACTIONS

Perception of life is formed as humans interpret experiences from a given context. Raymond Williams identifies this context as “culture” (Williams, 1961, 18). Culture is “the more or less integrated systems of beliefs, feelings and values, and their associated symbols, patterns of behaviour and products shared by a group of people” (Hiebert, 1995, 374). Culture is also a signifying system, through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored (Williams, 13). Cultures have rules of interpretation that give meaning to experiences. Any particular religious tradition is itself a culture. “Understanding how ‘formative’ all aspects of social and cultural life are, will lay groundwork for understanding the importance and even urgency of formation within religious groups” (Warren, 1987, 515).

¹⁷This thought is from Postman, and cited in Allan Harkness, *The Media: Help or hindrance for Christian faith formation? Church and Society*, 2001, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 67-80. The date of publication from Postman cannot be readily traced.

Situated interactions refer to the contextual relationships and cultural encounters between the child and environment. While the discursive frames provide the ideal definition of children and childhood, it is the situated interactions, the contextual relationships and encounters that form the daily normative life of a child and give meaning to the actual practice of formation. As Jackson and Scott said,

In everyday life, abstract ideas of ‘the child’ come up against the actuality of children of different ages and genders, with a range of attributes and capacities Children themselves enter into the picture here as active social agents. However, children’s participation in constructing their everyday world takes place within the constraints set by their subordinate location in relation to adults, where their own understanding of what it means to be a child has been shaped by their interaction with more powerful, adult, social actors with pre-existing, albeit re-negotiable, ideas about children and childhood. (Jackson and Scott, 1999, 91-92)

Based on how Jackson and Scott have described situated interactions and the practice of formation, there exist then, within the Christian faith communities, a dynamic element of influence that not only interprets faith for the child but also influences the way the children think about relationship with God.

First, symbols and images in the churches and the Christian homes effectively remind children of God’s presence. Symbols and images promote visual learning and serve as reminders to children of their inherited faith. Symbols and images point to the redemption and to purpose of the gathered people. Symbols and images, whether decorative, used as teaching or liturgical tools “concretize the religious realities ... help make these realities tangible and visible for the child bringing order and clarity...” (Gobbi, 2000, 14). The physical setup of the worship hall, the Cross, banners, Lord’s Supper table, images of doves, vines or symbol of the fish all represent some aspects of the Christian faith. Children in search of life meaning are led to appropriate the reality and make meaning of the sacredness of the faith story through these symbols and images.

Second, rituals and ceremonies (as in liturgies) concretize the mystery of God incarnate to remind children “God is with us.” Rituals and ceremonies are external conscious rites demonstrative of the change that has taken place inwardly. Two

examples of ritual are the ordinances of baptism (symbolical of new life) and the Lord's Supper (commemorating Christ's suffering and the Christian fellowship).

Through rituals and ceremonies, we ... make order out of chaos. In endless space, we create a fixed point, a sacred space. To timelessness, we impose rhythmic repetitions.... And to untamed and unbound matter, we give a shape, a name, a meaning. What is too vast and shapeless, we deal in small manageable pieces. We do this for practicality but we also do this for high purpose: to relate safely to the mysterious, to communicate with the Transcendent. (Nelson, 1987, 25)

Third, the use of faith language in its local context gives children a tool to communicate and label their experiences with God. Children use faith language not so much to discuss or discover doctrinal issues but to express the awe and wonder of the numinous reality present. The language of faith in children is “a great and glowing outcry to that sustaining Other, knowing and trusting full well that from that Faithful One will come a resonant sense of presence and action in reply” (Eugene, 1990, 23). Both Sofia Cavalletti and Jerome Berryman maintained that children need to learn faith language to communicate with and about God.¹⁸ Berryman says that the ability to speak and identify faith experiences brings children to a higher dimension of faith experience of knowing and theologizing of God (Berryman, 1991, 153). According to Berryman, faith language, which he calls a “reality gate” to learning, is a communication system for children to identify and express their thoughts (145).

Even while we consider faith formation of children with all its ideal approaches and strategies, we have to give serious consideration to the situated interactions that children faces in a non-Christian environment. There may be instances where planned approaches and strategies fail because the children are placed in a counter culture which they are not able to change. For example, while the Christian faith teaches Jesus Christ as God incarnate, the structural frame in a non faith community may counter this teaching. Counter culture situated interactions happen when children from non-Christian homes attending Sunday school or church programs are led to “conversion” and return to a non-Christian, antagonistic community. In this situation interaction, the children encounter two different “faith objects” – Jesus Christ and the pagan gods. If a child's family members are non-Christians, there will

¹⁸See Sofia Cavalletti's *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* and Jerome W. Berryman's *Godly Play*.

be constraints to reject Jesus Christ as God or to believe in him as one of the many gods. If a child accepts Jesus Christ as God, the child will have to go against family culture and values. Also, when there is no follow-up in community support, the new-found faith slackens.

In conclusion, three issues may be highlighted in this discussion on child development and faith formation of children.

1. Faith formation must address the whole child.

Perry Downs, in a series of lectures (5, April 2005) defined the Christian perspective of holistic child development as spiritual growth of the child expressed in the physical, cognitive, affective and behavioural domains.¹⁹ He noted that child development should not be dichotomized into “spiritual” and “non-spiritual” because this perspective negates biblical teaching that children are made in God’s image. In his lectures, Downs proposed that child development should be viewed with the spiritual domain as the “being” of the child and the other domains as “entry points” to form and express faith. Faith formation that is removed from other growth variables becomes disconnected and abstract.

Therefore, holistic formation must incorporate biological, cognitive, psychosocial, behavioural as well as sociological factors. A view of development and formation from one particular perspective limits the way children grow in relationship to God. “The presence or absence of certain experiences at particular times in the life span influences individuals well beyond the time they first occur ... most psychologists have underestimated ... the powerful roles ... biological foundations play in development” (Santrock, 1997, 45). Dynamics of the faith process and spiritual experiences with the Divine should be thought through the entire spectrum of child development. Connectedness in development means that faith simultaneously develops and permeates the head, heart, and hands; making an abstract process concrete and meaningful. Rather than focusing on stages of development which are linear, Sondra

¹⁹Unpublished notes from a lecture by Perry Downs on 5 April, 2005, at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, Penang.

Matthaei challenged her readers to rethink “the wholeness and intentionality of formation” by recovering the “interconnection of all the formative elements for a growing relationship with God ...” (Matthaei, 2004, 56-71). The opposite of connectedness is “compartmentalization.” Compartmentalization of childhood means that faith is viewed as separate from the other growth domains. For example, childhood faith becomes compartmentalized when faith development is seen as a purely spiritual task which does not affect the child’s cognitive or emotional health.

Sondra Higgins Matthaei spoke against compartmentalization and territoriality in the formation of faith, although not specifically childhood faith (Matthaei, 2004, 58). German theologian, Karl Rahner warned that compartmentalizing child development leads to “concupiscence” – a dissonance that arises due to the inability to integrate daily experiences because development is fragmented (Hinsdale, 2001, 424). Francis Bridger mentioned that compartmentalization leads children to live “as if life was divided into separate worlds in which it is appropriate to believe different things according to whichever world they happen to be moving in at any given moment” (Bridger, 2000, 85).

2. Faith maturity needs to be assessed in developmentally appropriate ways.

Sometimes there is tendency to view faith as purely “spiritual” and formation as a spiritual task that increases piety in the children through “spiritual disciplines.” The other end of the spectrum is to measure faith by rote learning. Children who demonstrate greater competency in Bible knowledge are perceived to be more mature in their faith than those who are not able to do so. There are also those who measure children’s faith maturity by their active involvement in the church programs. While, these outcomes may be signs of maturation in the faith, faith development is holistic and permeates every domain of the child’s development. A child mature in faith will demonstrate its outcome through cognitive and socio-emotional behaviour according to age appropriate actions.

“Faithing”, or the process of faith development is a dynamic changing quality that “indicates movement, activity, direction, and purpose” in one’s belief of God (Astley

et al., 1991, 5). Holistic formation defines and values faith at different chronological stages of life and clarifies possible levels of knowledge acquisition and behavioural outcomes in faith development. Clifford Ingle, in *Children and Conversion*, proposed that children, like adults, have to make a declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ to be considered believers (Ingle, 1970). Yet, a child's response to God should not be measured by the same yardstick as that of an adult's response to God. Children's declaration of faith is in keeping with their lifespan characteristics. Children are individuals still developing in their physical, mental, social, and emotion capacities. They do not have the mobility and resources to exercise their faith at the same level of adult believers.

3. Expressions of faith need to be contextual.

For faith to develop, children must be able to make meaning through their belief and faith expression. The ability of these children to bear witness to their faith shows that they can be active agents of change in their communities. Through active involvement, children come to appreciate themselves as participants in God's history. They are the ones who "... take initiative in speaking words and doing deeds which cause a redemptive kind of life to emerge in those around us" (Brueggemann, cited in Yust, 2004, 32). "The central purpose of educating children for faith is the formation of identity among learners to enable their full participation in the mission and practices of the faith community" (Mercer, 2005, 197). Including children into the life of the faith community is a "... strategy for the thriving and welcoming of children ... and forms them in Christian identity by teaching them the practices and beliefs of Christians" (211).

Stonehouse suggested that children raised in the faith communities "not only enjoy hearing stories, they can look back over the events of their lives and weave those events into a story or narrative and, in the process, discover meaning in those concrete experiences" (Stonehouse, 1998, 161). According to Fowler, these children possess a mystic-literal faith and can identify with Bible stories and stories of their faith community, taking these stories as their own (Fowler, 1981). May mentioned, "We want children to see that the Bible is about God's actions with real people.... This

content when adequately understood and interpreted in light of relevant insights into teachings and learning will engage children in formational, even transformation encounters” (May et. al. 2005, 278). Context specific faith expression mean that these experiences make meaning for the children as they are integrated and connected to daily life and embedded in familiar interactions.

In light of the support for incorporating developmental theories in faith formation of children, there are several concerns when faith maturity is viewed solely from the perspective of developmental theories. First, the approach may rob divine intervention and reduce God’s role in calling and shaping His people. There is concern among evangelical educators that application of these theories has developed to such extent that it has drowned out theology in an effort to understand human anthropology (Johnson, 1989, 105). Second, there is a “dark-side” to using developmental theories to evaluate faith. Although, human development theories serve as reminders that individuals have potential for further growth in grace and knowledge, total dependence on this perspective of assessing children may result in an “anti-child” response. Developmental theories become “anti-child” when they limit children’s performance and are used as blanket measures of abilities according to chronological age. Third, developmental theories hint that adults are “more” and children are “less.” “If these different statements are reasonably consistent with each other then a coherent stage theory may be detected. But it is the assumption of natural regularity that underpins the stage theory, not the reverse.”²⁰

F. SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed faith formation from a human developmental perspective. Several theories are used to clarify various stages in physiological development of the child and the ways these variables affect development and formation of the child’s belief in God. Five developmental perspectives related to the faith process were discussed:

²⁰The source of this quotation cannot be readily traced.

Section A discussed child development and the faithing process. Three issues that are normally referred in child development guided us in our thinking of the acquisition and maturation of childhood faith. The three issues are: 1) Is childhood faith continuous or discontinuous? 2) Is childhood faith a product of nature or nurture? and 3) Are childhood faith experiences universal or context specific? The conclusion to the first perspective is to regard the child's mind, body, and physical and social world as a dynamic, integrated system where the child is actively organizing and reorganizing his or her behaviour.

Section B explained cognition and knowledge of God. Since faith formation of children is a process of shaping and reshaping the God image in children, one way to facilitate the faithing process is by systematic education of children in the Scriptures. The cognitive domain constructs knowledge and understanding of God according to age group capabilities. Jean Piaget's cognitive construction theory contributed to an initial understanding of how children think about God, their readiness for religion, and the church's role in developing appropriate teaching curriculum. However, Donaldson and Vygotsky shared further thinking on this subject. Although cognition is an important aspect of faith development, by itself, cognitive faith does not move the individual beyond head knowledge; cognitive faith must be followed by affective experiences.²¹

Section C described emotions and development of responses. The affective dimension moves the child by feeling and emotions into conviction. Affective faith is the relational aspect of association between people and God. Eric Erikson's theory proposes that a healthy relationship with God is based on successful resolution of crisis situations. Erikson's theory cannot be the lone measure to value faith in children as there are concerns that limit the working of the Holy Spirit to bring regeneration and newness of life. In speaking of emotions and affective faith, this section also discussed Anna Marie Rizzuto's psychoanalytic research that "god representations" are found in children's emotions, feelings, attitudes, values, and trust in God. According to Rizzuto, God images are already formed in infants and faith

²¹More recent publications that speak on this topic include: Ivy Beckwith, *Post Modern Children's Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004 and Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, "The Story and the Spiritual Formation of Children" in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality*, Holly Catterton Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.

formation is the process of nurturing that image to take the form of God in Jesus Christ.

Section D clarified childhood behaviour and volitional faith. The behavioural dimension focuses on *fiducia*, deliberate acting on one's beliefs and a lifestyle of searching for God and expression of relationship with him. *Fiducia* is the "gateway" of faith expression. Foster said that Christlike behaviour is not a manipulation of human actions and the fruit of the Spirit manifested in Christian living cannot be produced by a stimuli-response modification (Foster, 1994, 25). *Fiducia* as volitional faith is behaviour based on the active decision of the child. As such, children must be taught and nurtured to respond in ways that are acceptable with the Christian faith.

Section E elaborated on sociocultural interactions and meaning making. There are three socio-cultural frames which affect childhood faith formation. First, structural frames, as in institutional and organizational systems provide the boundaries for child behaviour. Children function within the rules and regulations of these boundaries. Second, discursive frames define thinking about children and childhood. The discursive frames are lens from which societies view children. Lastly, situated interactions are experiences children have as they related to people and environment. Situated interactions are context-specific, forming childhood personality and at the same time giving meaning to the child's daily functioning.

This chapter has discussed the way children think about God, the expressions of childhood faith, and the task of formation from normative theories of child development. Formation from a developmental perspective welcomes the child as an active participant in the faith process, even as the individual is nurtured, formed and informed in the faith. The next chapter will trace early Baptist history, its confessions of faith, and ecclesiastical practices to assess whether the principles and practices of childhood faith formation from the biblical and developmental perspectives were present in the early Baptist congregations.

CHAPTER FOUR

BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY AND FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN

The third thesis investigated in this research relates to Baptist ecclesiology and faith formation of children in the MBE congregations. A study of Malaysian Baptist ecclesiology traces its roots from the modern Baptist movement of the 17th century and identifies the distinctives that have guided the congregations in their faith and practices as a “gathered people.”¹ The historical trail also provides insights for the nurture of children in the congregations. This chapter seeks to investigate faith formation of children within Baptist ecclesiology by: 1) tracing the origin and confessions of Baptist ecclesiology; 2) describing the formation of members in Baptist congregations; and 3) explaining faith formation of children through Baptist ecclesiology. This process should provide readers with an understanding of how children are formed in their faith within the Baptist ecclesiological context and a working frame for present ministry.

¹The MBE congregations are members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention, which in turn is part of the larger family of the Baptist World Alliance. The MBE congregations have inherited beliefs, values and practices that became the distinctive characteristics of a Baptist church. A broader understanding of the MBE congregations and the faith formation of children necessitates an account of their Baptist origins, doctrines and the way they “do church.” James Leo Garrett in his publication, *We Baptists*, advises its members to reflect on the “history and present experience” of the Baptist movement for self-understanding (Garrett, 1999, 20). “The historic confessions are of basic importance for us in our quest, but so too are contemporary statements by representative Baptists, such as those prepared by the ... Baptist World Alliance (BWA, 1989) or ... the European Baptist Federation, 1993” (Ibid.).

A. BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY: ORIGIN AND CONFESSIONS

The Modern Baptist Movement began in England in 1612 with John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, after the former started a church in Holland (1609). The church in Holland was started because Smyth upheld believer's baptism as opposed to the practice of infant baptism in the Church of England. Meanwhile, back on English soil (1612), Thomas Helwys founded the English Baptist Movement. Helwys taught believers' baptism and introduced autonomous church governance to his congregation. Smyth and Helwys' congregations were known as the "Separatists" because of the revolutionary change from infant baptism to believer's baptism (Leonard, 2003, 25). The designation as "Separatists" resulted as well from their position on autonomous church government when they separated themselves from the authority of the Church of England.

Baptist historians have noted that "the formation of early Baptist churches created numerous theological inquiries that generated discussion, debate, and schism. Many of these issues continued to haunt Baptists in the new centuries" (44). Some of the issues are related to children – infant baptism, baptised infants receiving communion, and the spiritual status of adults who were baptised as infants and desire to join the Baptist church.² Several debates on beliefs and ordinances took place within the denomination which culminated in the present definition of "Baptist" (Garrett, 1999, 3).

From the early days of the Baptist movement, ecclesiology was central to unity. Baptists united around a vision of the church as a community of believers, celebrating baptism and the Lord's Supper, preaching the gospel, and organizing congregational life. The authority for the church's mission and ministry came from Christ as mediated through the community of believers. (Leonard, 44)

The fundamental principle of the Baptists is their belief in the supreme authority and absolute sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures; and their separate

² "The Particular Baptist's emphasis on election poses the issue of whether God would create infants to be damned (the non-elect) while the General Baptist's emphasis on decision and belief excludes children lacking the cognitive and emotional ability to make such decisions. The Orthodox Creed's position as cited, which is adopted by other Baptists, provides a position more inclusive of children but raises issues around the relationship between salvation and faith." (Glenn Cupit, examiner's comments on this dissertation, January, 2009)

existence is the practical and logical result of their attempt to apply their principles in all matters of religion. (Dudley, 2003, 26)

As Leonard noted, Baptist ecclesiology is the hermeneutical principle that interprets the Christian faith and informs its members of the way they should “do church.” Hence, to understand formation of children in Baptist congregations is to first understand Baptist ecclesiology because it is within congregational life that the children come to understand the reality of their beliefs. Five distinct Baptist beliefs help clarify how Baptists practise their confessions as a believing community.

1. THE BIBLE AS THE INFALLIBLE WORD OF GOD

The *Standard Confession* (1660) formulated by the British General Baptists in England states that “the Holy Scriptures is (sic) the rule whereby Saints both in matters of faith and conversation are to be regulated” (Lumpkin, 1969, 232). Baptists believe that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and leads the reader to Jesus Christ. “The Bible is both the true record of God’s revelation to our world and the supreme written guide for our faith and practice” (Garrett, 1999, 23). Although there are different versions of the Bible, these versions are interpreted by able, mature Christians aware of the context, language, and culture of the recipients. Moreover, each believer has the ability to interpret, know the Scriptures and “no one can dogmatically interpret for another” (25).

The *Standard Confession* also maintains, “... that it is the will and the mind of God (in these gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own consciences in matters of religion, or worship, without the least oppression, or persecution” (Lumpkin, 232). Based on the liberty of conscience, biblical authority is mediated through personal and communal interpretation (Leonard, 2003, 6). Despite its good intentions, the concept of liberty of conscience brought debates and divisions on the different interpretations and practices that arose. Individuals who were carried away with freedom of conscience brought conflicting interpretations of the Bible. In this instance, liberty does not mean that each Baptist is to engage in any form of interpretation, but that, being a Baptist, a person is to be trusted with the interpretation of the Word of God as directed by the Holy Spirit and held accountable to the

congregation or membership.³ Since the final authority for decision making is by the Scriptures, Baptists are non-credal people. The Bible becomes the guide for religious response to God and for moral ethical living. A Baptist congregation looks into the Bible for instructions and then “organizes its life and witness on the basis of what is found, trying to take seriously the authority of the Scriptures” (Ellis, 2004, 126).

2. AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Baptist Church began with radical congregationalism “... and the idea that the authority of Christ was mediated not through pope, bishop, or king, but through the congregation of believers” (Leonard, 2003, 6). Each Baptist church is autonomous, governed and led by the lordship of Jesus Christ. This ecclesiological principle was inherited from the Anabaptist leader Menno Simons who quoted 1 Corinthians 3:11, “for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ” to support his case. The autonomy of the local church is a key feature of Baptist ecclesiology with each group adopting its confessions to clarify itself (Tan, 2002, 43). The local church is a “company of faithful people, separated from the world by the Word and Spirit of God, being knit unto the Lord and into one another, by baptism, upon their own confession of faith and (confessions of) sins” (*A Declaration of Faith of English People*, Article 10, 1611). By Baptist definition,

Autonomy means that each Baptist church, among other things, selects its pastoral leadership, determines its worship form, decides financial matters and directs other church-related affairs without outside control or supervision. Baptist denominational organizations such as associations of churches and state and national conventions have no authority over a Baptist church. For any one of these organizations to attempt to exercise control over an individual church is to violate a basic Baptist conviction about polity. Being autonomous, a Baptist church recognizes no governmental control over faith and religious practice. Although Baptist churches obey the laws of governments related to certain matters, they refuse to recognize the authority of governments in matters of doctrine, polity and ministry (Matthew 22:21).

³“During the later part of the twentieth century, some Baptists debated issues of biblical inerrancy with particular vehemence. The debate is evident in numerous volumes, including Bush and Nettles, *Baptist and the Bible*; Ralph H. Elliot, *The Genesis Controversy and Continuity in the Southern Baptist Chaos: A [sic] Eulogy for a Great Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992); Robinson B. James, ed. *The Unfettered Word: Southern Baptist Confronts the Authority-Inerrancy Question* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); Robinson D. James and David S. Dockery, eds. *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992)” (Leonard, 16).

Baptists have consistently rejected the efforts of any secular government entity to dictate to a church what to believe, how to worship or who should or should not be members. Such refusal to bow to the demands of governments has cost Baptists dearly. (*Bill of Inalienable Rights*, Article 1, Union Baptist Association, October 8, 1840)

Each local Baptist church is a *gathered church* of regenerated people of God responsible to discern the Lord's will for its mission and ministry. "This involves questions about worship, mission, appointment of leaders, reception of members, and sharing of vision. Leaders will undoubtedly need guidance, and in a Baptist church the congregation has the final authority, under Christ ..." (Garrett, 1999, 25). The governance of the Baptist church (polity) is the responsibility of its church members. Strictly speaking, "there is no such thing as 'Baptist polity' because Baptists by their own fundamental principle are committed to accepting the church polity of the New Testament, and no one can really say with positive certainty what that actually is" (Cook, cited in Stanley, 1992, 66).

3. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

Historically and theologically, "the belief that the church was composed of believers, converged with the conviction that believers should be baptised according to the New Testament" (Ellis, 2004, 204). Baptism was an expression of the conversion (death and resurrection) and also the mode of entry to the church. Baptist teaching on believer's baptism means that only individuals who confess their faith in Jesus Christ can be baptised. This practice is in accordance with the example set by Jesus when he was baptised in the Jordan; and the New Testament teaching where only believing households were baptised. Baptism is "both confession and dedication ... a moment for divine activity ... when God freely meets us anew with his gracious blessings" (Garrett, 27). Outside the realm of a conversion experience, baptism has no meaning for others. Through baptism, the individual becomes a member of the Baptist church. Through membership, the individual may participate in the Lord's Supper, an ordinance that identifies the person with the body of Christ and the fellowship of other believers.

Believer's baptism by immersion is a feature of Baptist practice. Also, the mode of immersion is seen to be consistent with the image of death to sin, burial, and resurrection to new life (Rom. 6:3-4). The *London Confession of Faith* (Article XL, 1644) states, "... the way and manner of dispensing this ordinance (baptism) the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water." Most Baptist congregations practice immersion, with the exception of baptism of the infirmed. However, baptism by immersion, although a key feature of Baptist beliefs, is not a central doctrine. The issue is believer's baptism, which in this case does not apply to young children because the perception was that children were not able to comprehend the seriousness of the decision. Baptists differ from some evangelicals in that they reject infant baptism. This rejection was the basis of separation of the English Baptists from the Church of England and remains a crucial contemporary characteristic of the Baptist identity (Ellis, 2004, 202). Helwys wrote (1611), "That baptism or washing with water, is the outward manifestation off dieing unto sinn, and walkeing in newness off life. Romans 6.2.3, 4, and therefore in no wise apperteyneth to infants" (as in original document, cited in Lumpkin, 1969, 120).

4. PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The 'priesthood of *all* believers' was a teaching propagated by Martin Luther in his reformation against the Roman Catholic Church stance of 'priesthood of *some* believers' (Tan, 2002, 56). The understanding among the early Baptist congregations was that

Every local church is ... to bear the whole witness of Christ to the whole world The church so conceived is a band of organized disciples of Christ. In the exercise of divinely inbred competency each individual has chosen Christ as Lord, with the consequent of regeneration of his own life Under Christ, each becomes his own priest in his own right; hence the tenet, "the priesthood of all believers. (McNutt, 1959, 26)

The Baptists understand the function of priest as one who intercedes to God on behalf of humankind and speaks to humankind on behalf of God. There is no hierarchy within a Baptist church, only functions according to gifting from God (Eph. 4:11-13). Every member of a Baptist church has direct access to the "Head" who is Jesus Christ and the ministry of worship and witness. "The priesthood of believers includes... 'the

prophethood of all believers'... to share in the telling forth or proclamation of the gospel All believers are to be involved ...” (McNutt, 26).

Although Baptists affirm the priesthood of individuals, they oppose individualism for the New Testament teaches that believers are connected to the “body of Christ.” Each believer who is a member of the body comes together with others of like faith to worship and witness through their particular ministerial gifts. “Any person of the church may be authorised by it, on any occasion, to exercise the function of ministry, in accordance with the principle of the priesthood of believers, to preach the Word, to administer baptism, to preside over the Lord’s table, to visit, and comfort or rebuke members of the fellowship” (Ellis, 2004, 148).

5. SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Thomas Helwy’s (1612) argument against intervention of the state in religious affairs is seen by many Baptist historians as the beginning of the call for separation of church and state. He wrote that the state should not punish anyone who committed offence in religious matters, “be it heretics, non Christians, or atheists” (Leonard, 2003, 9).

From the early Baptist days, the congregations have constantly risen to challenge the state for religious liberty. The motivation was not only for religious tolerance of other faith groups but also as an act of anti-establishment (Ibid.). “Baptists insist that the life and structures of the church should affirm the lordship of Christ. No form of church or state authority should be permitted to distort this truth” (Garrett, 1999, 23). The *Baptist Faith and Message Statement* (1963), Article 17, states that each Baptist congregation was to be governed by “Christocracy”. Christocracy as explained in the article affirms that,

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separated. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastic group or denomination should be favoured by the state more than others.... A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.

The concept of separation of church and state (or religious freedom) springs from an environment of Christendom. During the early 1600s in England and America,

Baptists resisted any attempt on the part of the government to interfere with their faith concerns. The *Crown Rights of the Redeemer* became an unofficial confession of the Baptist congregations as they sought to be submissive to the rule of Christ solely and to demonstrate his absolute authority over God's people. Religious freedom in the Baptist congregations did not imply the people were against the state. Members were taught to be civil citizens upholding the country with respect and performing civic duties. In fact, church discipline of wayward, irresponsible members was a prominent feature of the congregation in the early days and even among today's Baptist congregations (32). Religious freedom meant that in matters of religion, the state should not interfere with church decisions.

In summary, these five Baptist beliefs were foundations for “doing church” among the early Baptists. Every member in the Baptist congregation was to understand the importance of these five beliefs in setting them apart from other evangelicals. These five beliefs were also the formative elements that shaped a Baptist's understanding of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

B. FORMATION OF MEMBERS IN BAPTIST CONGREGATIONS

Baptists in the 17th century required a profession of faith before baptism and membership into church. Membership into a Baptist church was a serious matter that incurred a probational period. The probational period ensured that those who requested membership were truly genuine in their desire to be Baptists. Candidates were then to profess or declare their faith publicly before the congregation. This practice was inherited by the MBE congregations and is still practiced today. Baptismal candidates were to “answer to the altar call” by walking up to the front of the worship auditorium. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), an Armenian converted to Baptist beliefs and forefront propagator of the *Baptist Confession of Faith*, noted that congregations, upon hearing the confession must be satisfied that there is true conversion before admitting the individual to membership. Otherwise, the person was told to wait until a later period. The procedure for membership is described in this way:

The responsibility of members to each other was expressed in the first Baptist churches by the signing of a church covenant, through which members covenanted with God and with one another, to walk together in all his ways, known and to be made known to us. Even while formal signed covenants are not used today, the concept of a church as a covenant community remains in the practice of the congregation as members minister to one another throughout the journey of life.... The responsibility of the church member includes sharing in public worship, prayer, and church meetings and engaging in the evangelistic, educational, and caring life of the local church. Stewardship ... is a trust from God. (Garrett, 1999, 28)

A Baptist congregation is like any deliberate community, with its particular features shaping the members. The communal nature of Baptist congregations shapes their members through shared living and a particular kind of culture – a way of doing church which is unique and meaningful to its members. Like other ecclesiastic models which Donald Miller identified, the Baptist model of ‘being Christian’ has particular elements of interaction with members, normative practices, symbolised meanings, a shared environment and a Story (Miller, 1987, 18).

The unique Baptist ecclesiology developed the Baptist identity of: 1) a regenerate person, 2) a person in community, and 3) a person in ministry and witness. These three elements are addressed in the following discussion on the formation of members in the Baptist congregations.

1. A REGENERATE PERSON

Spiritual regeneration and commitment to the congregated fellowship of believers is the cornerstone of all Baptist distinctives. A Baptist congregation is comprised of true believers who are “born again” persons. Those who are admitted into membership should give evidence that they have “passed from death to life” (John 5:24). The term *regeneration*, although not used in the Bible, is taught as a concept in the Gospel of John (John 1: 13; 3:3-7) and Matthew 19:28 (*paliggenesia*) which literally means “born again”); also Titus 3:5). Baptists are regenerated believers who have repented of their sins and immersed “into the waters of baptism” to demonstrate their union with Christ. The teaching of regenerated membership was an important theme in the early Baptist congregations. The *Second London Confession of the Baptist Faith* (1677-1689) stated that “all persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the

gospel, and obedience unto ... may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted” (Chapter 26, Paragraph 2).

Regeneration is based on the work of God’s Spirit who makes believers into new creatures in Christ. “Salvific regeneration is required of all persons who claim Christian faith. In this sense, Baptists were, and generally remain conversionists in their understanding of the need for personal response to God’s love and grace” (Leonard, 2003, 3).⁴ The basis for this claim is Ephesians 2:8-10, where Paul stressed salvation by grace alone. “God’s initiate is his elective grace. Our response is personal faith, the means by which we accept his gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross” (Garrett, 1999, 64). Baptists teach that the process of salvation includes regeneration, sanctification, and glorification (George and George, 1996, 141).

First, regeneration concerns a spiritual birth and a regenerate person is a person “born again” (Garrett, 65). This new life in Christ is an experience justified by grace. Repentance and faith in Christ is the “commitment of the entire personality to him as Lord and Saviour” and justification is “God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness” (George and George, 1996, 141). A regenerate person is committed to righteous living and discipleship and as evidence of the decision, is baptised into the faith. “Baptists, by admitting only the regenerate into their membership, are the only people who even in theory stand for the pure spirituality of the churches” (Norman, 2005, 57). Faith precedes baptism and church membership; and membership is recognised as the desire to enter into covenant relationship with others to form the “gathered believers”.

Second, a regenerate person is sanctified, or set apart for God’s purpose. Sanctification is the process of daily renewal in moral and spiritual perfection made possible through the Holy Spirit of God. Baptist doctrine posits that baptism is a personal experience wherein God offers His salvation in Christ, and individuals responding by faith, receive the assurance of the Spirit that by grace they are children

⁴The *Second London Confession of the Baptist Faith* (Chapter 10, Paragraph 3; 1677/1689) also stated that “elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit; who works when, and where, and how He pleases; so also are all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” (John 3: 3, 5, 6).

of God. The regenerate believer is endowed with divine gifts and capacities that “make him competent to meet all the demands with which genuine religion confronts him. As such he has no need for a priest and can intercede on his own behalf” (McNutt, 1959, 21).

Third, a regenerate person will ultimately experience glorification, the “blessed and abiding state of the redeemed” (George and George, 1996, 142). God’s offer of salvation is present in that it is experienced daily through regeneration and sanctification. But salvation is also eschatological in that it is eternal life with the redeeming God. *The Standard Confession* (1660) asserted that those who are converted, “... assent to the truth of the Gospel, believing with all their hearts, that there is remission of sins, and eternal life to be had in Christ.”

2. A PERSON IN COMMUNITY

One theological tenet of the Baptist faith is regenerate membership in the body of Christ. A Baptist is a member of the body of “gathered believers” or God’s *ecclesia* which consists of individuals who have experienced renewed living. The contemporary Baptist church is recognised by its members as a church family highlighting the idea of *koinonia* (Shurden, 1996, 15). Baptists are members of the household of God. Each local *ecclesia* accepts persons who have made professions of faith and have been baptised by immersion. In a theology of personalised faith and personalised decision for Christ, parents cannot stand proxy even for their children.

God’s *ecclesia* is to be the community of true believers for all time and a fellowship which displays spiritual characteristics of their Saviour (Norman, 2005, 53). A Baptist congregation is “... a ‘community,’ a ‘family,’ in which ‘brothers and sisters’ are concerned for the others who share their faith and their calling” (Steely, 1968, 12 - 3). “The church as fellowship means a strong sense of participation by the people in the government and decisions of the church; it also means that worship is not a solitary experience All are expected to participate, which explains the enthusiastic hymn singing ...” (Norman, 109). Membership in a Baptist church requires interaction of life with people of the same faith, bearing one another’s burdens,

personal friendship, face to face encounters and meeting of people who contributed to daily living.

Baptist congregations are not institutions but rather, living organisms of people learning and growing together with Jesus Christ as teacher. The *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) affirms Baptist congregations are like a “true New Testament church” where believers are associated through a covenantal relationship and fellowship of the Gospel of Christ (115). Membership in a Baptist congregation unites a group of believers for “the purpose of serving together as the people of God under the lordship of Christ” (Ibid.). Hence, membership makes the individual “an ecclesial person” (Tan, 2002, 64):

A Baptist individual is essentially a church person. It is the act of water baptism that makes a Baptist Christian aware of being an individual-in-congregation. As a Baptist Christian, the individual works out his or her Christian faith with full awareness of being such a particular kind of person. The Baptist church is also structured to affirm the significance of both the individual and the community. Accordingly, the dialectic of individuality and community is an essential part of being a Baptist Christian. (Ibid.)

Congregational life forms the “ecclesial person” to faith maturity. In the faith congregation, members are nurtured to discover their roles as priests of God to the people. They are also inculcated into a particular way of doing *ecclesia* which helps them grow in relationship to God and to each other. Within the congregation, the gifts of individuals are recognised and used to serve each other for the benefit of the body. For the believers to be ‘in congregation’ also mean that the believers subject themselves to the discipline of the church.

Several unique formational elements can be identified in a Baptist congregation:

First, the Baptist member is formed by a specific shared story of two parts: the Gospel for salvation and the journey for truth. The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings redemption to every person who hears and receives the salvation that God offers to humankind. Then, the individual is encouraged to journey for truth in Christian practice. The Baptist Movement in history started during the time of political and religious unrest. Individuals and churches who found the existing religion “tainted” with human errors

sought a greater and purer revelation (Leonard, 2003, 5). “The desire to always remain ‘pure’ before God and to live lives worthy of God’s calling challenged individuals to abandon cherished beliefs that no longer made meaning and to search for deeper biblical truth” (5.). The two concerns are of utmost importance to Baptist congregational life.

Second, the Baptist member is formed by a specific style of worship. The Baptist understanding of the priesthood of believers supports each worshipper in personal and corporate worship. Baptist worship is congregational worship and is a planned effort of its members both towards God and for mutual encouragement. Thomas Helwys wrote (1611), “though in respect of Christ the Church be one, yet it consisteth of divers particular congregations, ... and therefore, may, and ought, when they come together; to pray, prophesy, break bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances” (cited in Garrett, 1999, 54). A characteristic of Baptist worship is orderliness even as worshippers seek to give room to the working of God’s Spirit in their midst. Baptist worship is also mostly didactic, where the pulpit acquaints the members with doctrines and the “glad news of salvation” (McNutt, 1959, 39).

Third, the Baptist member is formed by participation in specific Baptist ordinances. Besides stories of the Baptist faith, the confessions and doctrinal teachings discussed earlier in this chapter, the two ecclesiastical ordinances – the acts of Baptism and Lord’s Supper – convey Baptist “culture” for its members.⁵ Both ordinances are related to a demonstration of the trusting commitment (*fiducia*) that is within the believers. Although these two ordinances are often called *symbols of faith*, Stanley Fowler argues that they are in fact, more than symbols. Both ordinances are theological expressions of the Baptist faith; the “outward symbols of an inward grace” and as such mediate Baptist convictions (Leonard, 2003, 8; also see Stanley Fowler’s *More than a Symbol*, 2002).

In its understanding of regeneration, Baptists believe that baptism is a visible demonstration of faith or “the means by which faith becomes a conscious, tangible reality” (Fowler, 2002, 201). Baptism does not justify faith but is an expression of the faith

⁵Baptists have traditionally rejected “sacrament” as a term for baptism and the Lord’s Supper because of the connotations of this terms as used within Roman Catholicism.

that already exists in Jesus Christ. There were, as some Baptist sacramentalists note, different evidences of faith demonstrated in the New Testament. While other denominations may argue for supernatural phenomena (*glossolalia*), Baptists have adopted baptism as their ‘marker’ for regeneration. Practiced within the congregations, baptism held a significant place as an announcement of new life. Since children are exempted from baptism, it could be implied that the young ones are made aware that there is something “special” in this ordinance reserved for adults and older children. An example of the preparation for “regeneration” and baptism for children in early Baptist history can be found in *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (1892) by John A. Broadus. In Lesson 11 of the catechism, there are seven questions which particularly dealt with the significance of baptism for older children with advanced questions for more competent children (see Broadus in George and George, 1996, 257-82).

Believer’s baptism is the step a person takes after a confession of faith. Following baptism, the individual is invited to participate in the Lord’s Supper. While some contemporary Baptist congregations practice “open communion”, where non-members are invited to join in the Lord’s Supper, the original position of the early Baptist congregations was “closed communion,” where only regenerate baptised members of the local congregation could participate. Believer’s baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper are logical sequential responses to the Christian faith. “New life must be existent prior to administration of the ordinances Otherwise baptism proclaims that which does not exist, and the Supper offers food to that which is not yet born” (McNutt, 1959, 20).

The Lord’s Supper is a sign of one’s union with God and communion with other regenerated believers. Participation in the Lord’s Supper is always meant for regenerate baptised persons only. This decision was based on an understanding of the congregation as a spiritual family. The congregations also forbade members who had disciplinary problems to participate in this ordinance. Leonard says, “... after interviews with church leaders, a guilty verdict meant that offenders were officially excluded from ‘table of the Lord’ till they shall be satisfified (sic) of his ... hearty repentance ...” (Leonard, 2003, 56). In Benjamin Keach’s catechism *Instruction for Children and Youth* (1664), he included a section that not only taught children and

youth the significance of the Lord's Supper but also spoke against the traditional Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.⁶ In their catechism, children apparently had to distinguish between "real presence" and other doctrines concerning the Lord's Supper (63).

The early Baptist congregational practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper conveyed their convictions of how faith should be approached. Children in the congregations came to understand the significance of baptism through witness of the baptised individuals. Now, as before, the children sit in awe as the Lord's Supper elements are distributed. In Christ's words, "... do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" echo as demonstration of the faith of their parents, extended families, and the people they belong to. This is the witness of shared culture that forms faith in the children as they grow in knowledge of Scriptures and inherit the values of their people (see p.117 on shared culture).

Fourth, the Baptist member is formed by a specific covenant language. The practice of "covenanting" was popular in Baptist churches during the 17th century. Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) noted that intended members would sign their names at a public meeting to indicate their desire to be part of the congregation. Membership in the congregation was sealed by a covenant. The covenant was confessional, a declaration of one's faith to God and "mutual agreement and consent (to) give themselves up to the Lord and one another, according to the will of God" (Norman, 2005, 116). The covenant language varied from one congregation to another and was often shaped by the congregations' culture and context and the declarations were binding (Ibid.). [An example of the most recent Baptist covenant, known as the *New Baptist Covenant* was made in April 2006 in Atlanta, USA. The meeting convened by former USA president, Jimmy Carter, was to unite for witness and ministry by transcending racial, cultural, gender, and geographical differences.]

⁶ An example is:

Q: What think you then of that Popish Doctrine of transubstantiation?

A: I believe it is absurd, blasphemous, and an idolatrous doctrine, to be abandoned by any good Christians: For as it is against Scripture, so it is against reason; Christ's body cannot be but in one place at once. (Keach, *The Child's Delight*, 1664, 39, cited in Leonard, 63).

3. A PERSON IN MINISTRY AND WITNESS

Baptists are formed by a specific vocation and redeemed not to serve themselves but to do the work of God. During the 17th century, the Baptists were purposeful in explaining to the wider church and to the communities at large their faith convictions. The goal of Baptist congregations is to witness to the faith in Jesus Christ. Being evangelical and autonomous, Baptist congregations have the freedom to explore ways by which faith can be shared. Each member is encouraged to seek God for guidance and direction as to one's particular place of service in His kingdom. Consistent with the teaching in Ephesians 4:7-13; some early Baptist congregations recognised their members' gifts for ministry to the congregation and faith communities by "laying of hands" (Leonard, 2003, 7). "Laying of hands" was also practiced on newly baptised members as a commissioning act for witness.

Ministry and witness is the vocation of the Baptist *ecclesia* as a corporate body and the individual members. The regenerate believer in a Baptist congregation becomes a partner in the vocation of the *ecclesia*, ministering to God and to fellow Christians. Engagement in ministry and witness happens because the Christian is located in a worshipping congregation that teaches the priesthood of believers and instils the individual with a missional perspective of God's work in the world. A Baptist church is an example of such a worshipping congregation. The Baptist traditions help members appreciate God's work in their lives as well as in the world. God's call to bring the gospel to the nations (Matt. 28:18-20) demands Christian advocacy in the world and since the establishment of the denomination, Baptists have always been advocates of human rights. Garrett explains this statement in context of the Baptist faith,

When we as Baptists become convinced that our consciences, bound to and informed by the word of God, lead us in a certain direction, then we will try to set out on that pilgrimage, even when this brings us into conflict with the institutions of society, state, and church. (Garrett, 1999, 78)

Ministry and witness are two sides of the same coin. The Baptist faith requires its members to hold both elements in equal proportion. An illustration by Baptist theologian, Penrose St. Amant, clarifies this advice:

We are on a two-way street. If we start with the gospel for society, we run into the need for better people who alone can create and sustain a creative social order; and, therefore, we face the personal gospel. If we start with the personal gospel, we run into social structures which thwart personal creativity; and, therefore, we face the gospel for society. There is really only one gospel. This gospel promises forgiveness of sins, but also enjoins our responsibility for the welfare of the neighbours. (St. Amant, 1963, cited in Shurden, 2005, 126)

The Baptist understanding of Christian life and its ecclesiology cannot be understood apart from the ministry and witness of its members. Much expansion in the Baptist Movement was due to its practice of experientialism, a personal experience of the risen Lord and an active involvement in world challenges that arose from believing in Christ (Shurden, 128). Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that personal belief and social ministry are integrated into witness, and this belief has been practiced in Baptist history. “The Baptist conscience, political freedom, the plight of the common people, and the democratic process have all acted to drive Baptists, however reluctant into the world with their word of witness” (Ibid.). Members are formed in their faith when:

a. In ministry and witness, Baptists are rooted in the Word of God. Gathering around the Word “is not only a gathering in order to listen to Scripture, but it is a gathering around the living Word, Jesus Christ” (Ellis, 2004, 240). The gathering around the Word bears witness to Christ and creates devotion among the readers. The most obvious example of Baptists as the *Book People* is in the preaching of the Word in worship.

Properly understood, the sermon is the fundamental part of worship and even arguably one of its most sacred moments, since it is a time when God speaks directly to us.... Sermons ... poorly prepared or sloppily delivered, which lack depth of understanding of the biblical text, or are devoid of application to the life experience of the hearers are a violation of this high and holy moment in worship. But, prayerfully and responsibly handled, (it) can represent a moment of significance ... (Garrett, 1999, 57)

b. In ministry and witness, Baptists rally together in fellowship (*koinonia*) as an expression of their commitment to the faith. “It is gathering initiated by the hospitality of a God who calls and invites, and it is the fruit of the Spirit of unity who gathers people into life changing community” (Ellis, 243). As *koinonia*, the Baptist congregations live out the corporate life of the church. Members are formed in faith

as the congregation “goes on telling and listening to the story of Jesus so that it becomes deep within, shaping responses and guiding thoughts ...” (Garrett, 39). Baptist congregations in telling and retelling their experiences, become the *koinonia* of Christian character, “not by human achievement, but by grace (Ibid.).

c. In ministry and witness, Baptists announce the eschatological kingdom of Christ. Ministry and witness stem from the course of worship and prayer where Baptist believers are drawn into an eschatological frame of thinking. Gathered as an *ecclesia* for worship and witness, Baptists mediate through their testimonies God’s sovereign rule over the earth, guidance of the Holy Scriptures in daily living and the power of the Holy Spirit in regenerating lives. Every prayer and petition, “... as prayer in God’s Kingdom ... is a yearning for the Lordship of Jesus Christ become manifest in answered prayer and in new signs of the kingdom breaking into the present” (Ellis, 2004, 242). The desire to invest in God’s kingdom helps the congregation and the individual look beyond its own needs to prayer and mission (Ibid). The *Declaration of Principle* (1938), which is an expression of Baptist spirituality, implicitly bears witness to Matthew 28:18-20 that, as followers of Jesus Christ, members of the *ecclesia* are to offer themselves to God’s service that Christ’s Lordship will be over all authorities and powers.

As discussed, it is clearly evident that formation strategies and the structure of the early Baptist congregational life were focused on adults and older children perceived to be able to make sense of the teachings on regeneration and witness to the faith. The goals to form individuals to be regenerate persons, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness governed the way the congregations function. It is interesting to see how the early Baptist congregations coped with children’s presence and the need to nurture children into the Christian faith amidst an all adult focus. For this purpose, we move on to a discussion on faith formation of children in the Baptist ecclesiology.

C. BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY AND FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN

John Smyth's idea of a "church" was a covenanted group of believers who have professed their faith in Christ and gone through the sacrament of baptism. Smyth concluded that the ritual of baptism in the New Testament was related to conversion and admission into the early church. Smyth's position suggested that children who are perceived to be neither able to repent from sins nor confess their beliefs are excluded from church membership (Walker, 1966, 244). Since Baptist doctrines did not permit baptism of unregenerate persons, the presence of infants and children in the church raised issues related to children in the congregations. Below are some examples of how Baptist leaders in history related to children and the faith.

- *Infant mortality*

Historically, the General Baptist viewed mortality in two forms: a) physical death, which is a result of the Fall upon all humankind and b) spiritual death, which is punishment for failure to repent from sins. Henry Hagger, in his argument with the General Baptists (1653, *The Foundation of Font Discovered*), expressed that children were liable for the first death but not the second. Hagger said, "... although children must dye [sic] for Adam's sin, yet Christ is become their resurrection, and they have no actual sin to be judged for" (as in original document, cited in Walker, 1966, 247). Children of believers and unbelievers were "under the grace of God (and) heaven bound should they die in infancy" (Ibid.).

- *Salvation*

The *Orthodox Creed*, Article 44 (1679) states:

Infants who died were saved whether born of believing parents or unbelieving parents ... by the grace of God, and merit of Christ their Redeemer, and the work of the Holy Ghost, and in being made members of the invisible church, shall enjoy everlasting life.... Ergo, we conclude that the opinion is false which saith, that those little infants dying before baptism, are damned. (Lumpkin, 1969, 330-31)

Thomas Grantham, leader of the General Baptists (1634-1692) announced,

Christ's pre-grace sanctifies those (infants) in a manner known to us.... The Particular Baptists held that the salvific state of children is based on the doctrine of election. The new covenant of Christ did not recognise the 'fleshly seeds,' the new covenant knowing none and owning none to be the seed, but such as are Christ's. (Walker, 254)

- *Infant baptism*

The *London Confession* (1689) states that, "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit" and election and reprobation apply to both children and adults (Lumpkin, 65). Salvation was never meant for the non elect, whether infants or adults. To counter this problem, 17th century Baptists practised 'infant dedication.' Thomas Ewin, a pastor of the Broadmead Baptist Church, recommended 'dry baptism' to his church members. This was a compromise to the debates which were practised in his congregations, "... to all sober Christians who are dissatisfied with their judgements and consciences about infant baptism" (Leonard, 2003, 50).

- *Church membership*

John Toombs, a prominent leader of the Particular Baptists argued that the truly elect of God are not limited to baptised individuals or those who held church membership. Toombs suggested that infants born to believing parents were "... born in the bosom of the church, of godly parents, who by prayers, instruction, example, will undoubtedly educate them in the true faith of Christ ... (this applied to) the infants of believers, & unbelievers, of Turks & Indians" (as in original document, cited in Lumpkin, 1969, 256- 260).

In the practice of church membership, Leonard noted that the Southern Baptist denomination in America at the turn of the 20th century succumbed to 'populism,' Populism is:

... a theology written and proclaimed not in the seminaries or denominational publications but in revivals, pulpits, and Sunday school classes....

First, in the 20th century Southern Baptists (of America) modified their theology of a "believers' church" to permit the baptism not simply of children but of preschoolers. Statistical analysis of current SBC baptismal statistics would indicate that anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of that number, depending on the church and the region, is composed of persons six years of age or younger. Thus, the SBC has opened the door to semi-infant baptism. A believers' church that baptizes preschoolers is committing heresy against its theology of conversion and its ecclesiology.

How did this happen? To some extent it was the natural outgrowth of the churches nurturing impulse and sensitivity to children raised within the community of faith. It also developed alongside the emphasis on child evangelism and the notion of an age of accountability by which people, even children, become morally and spiritually responsible. No doubt it was linked to the desire for conversion of all people and the concern of Christian parents that their children be saved. It may also have been influenced by some congregations' desire for statistical growth. (Leonard, 2007)

- *Church ordinances*

Children in early Baptist congregations did not participate in the church ordinances nor were they active participants in the liturgical church life until their conversion. They were, however, part of Christian families and the adults had responsibility to nurture them into the faith. As soon as they were able to make a verbal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (age was never a measure), they were enrolled into catechesis classes to prepare for baptism and church membership. The practice of church membership was necessary because the societal structure of the earlier days in England and America required church membership as a prerequisite for community engagements such as voting rights and community services.

History shows that the presence of infants did not pose a problem for the early Baptist congregations and their inherited doctrine. Although the Baptists equated salvation with a public confession of faith in Christ, they also held to the belief that salvation for children was, nevertheless, guaranteed if any should die before a personal confession took place. According to the Baptist stance, infant baptism is non-scriptural, and Baptists take comfort in the doctrinal teachings that infants who have not made professions of faith before death are assured of salvation upon God's grace

and the merit of Christ, their Redeemer.⁷ One “exclusion” was the stance on church membership which affected children in their participation in the Lord’s Supper. Since only regenerate church members were allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper, children were excluded from the Lord’s Table but may still have been present in the church service during the ordinance.

But it cannot be said that the early Baptists did not actively and intentionally form faith in their children. Although Baptist ecclesiology was adult centred and the focus was salvation and transformation through ministry and witness, the congregations were aware of the presence of children and sought ways to rectify existing practices to be more inclusive. For example, historical archives show that Baptist congregations had specially prepared catechetical “programs” which helped build faith in their children. Baptist ecclesiology (then and now), while setting clear demarcations for regenerate membership sought (and still seeks) to be a strong mediator of the message of Christ and his salvation to children.

⁷ Baptists in their own searching concluded on a doctrine of infant salvation for their congregational organization. Infant salvation was also a problem faced by St. Augustine (354-430) and Martin Luther (1483-1546). In his Confessions (397 CE.), Augustine wrestled with issues of child baptism, sin, salvation, and the church’s response to children. The Pelagian controversy that arose from a debate between Augustine and British monk Pelagius led Augustine to motion that children are given by God (Confessions 1.6.10) but not innocent at birth. Sin is evident even in the manner infants desire to be fed (1.7.11). He supported this claim with Psalms 51, “... in sin my mother conceived me.” He concluded that the wages of sin is death even for infants who have not come into knowledge of God’s salvation. Although Augustine sought to be true to his confessions, he could not come to terms with the harsh punishment of a loving God upon children. Later in life, Augustine restated his convictions on infant salvation. He held to the conviction that children are sinful by birth and infants who are not baptized for remission of sins are eternally condemned. But in defence of children, Augustine proposed that although children are entrapped by Satan’s power due to original sin, the “little ones have committed no personal sin in their own lives” (1.20.22). Baptism at birth remedied these “damnable tendencies and should be conferred as early as possible” (Stortz, 2001, 79).

Martin Luther’s doctrine of *fides infantium* (faith of the infant) was the focus of theological debate during the Reformation in Europe when the church argued not to baptize babies and infants because they have no reasoning abilities. Luther claimed that young children do have faith. Luther taught that salvation comes by grace alone and children have faith for nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that they do not. He encouraged parents to baptize their children as early as possible and if the child dies before the ordinance can be administered, rest assure that the validity of baptism is still by the grace of God. “Luther argued that an infant’s need for the grace of the sacrament is just as urgent as any other person, for a child comes into the world already damnably infected with original sin – that is, the inherent ability to trust, fear and love God” (Ibid.). Infant baptism is the community’s commitment to God and “when faith comes, baptism is complete” (LW 4: 246). “Catechizing was important for all ages, but ... focused on children as being the most susceptible to formation. Luther was ... confident of the power of the gospel rightly preached to move hearts.... He saw the family as the natural locus for education: parents catechizing their children ... joining them in prayers, teaching them proper duties and administering discipline” (Strohl, 2001, 145).

D. CHILDREN IN BAPTIST CONGREGATIONS

Section B listed three characteristics of Baptists: that they are regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. These three characteristics were the goals of formation for children in the early Baptist congregations. Traditional Baptist ecclesiology provides a particular frame for theologizing and a style of living the Christian life which identifies a person as “Baptist”.⁸ By formation of attitudes and behaviour, children are brought into maturity of faith and confirmed as regenerate believers. As Conner explained,

That the church should be composed of the regenerated only, the New Testament makes clear.... Moreover, the nature and mission of the church carries with it the view that only regenerated people should belong to the church. Moreover, if regeneration is an absolute necessity to Christian character and regeneration depends on voluntary acceptance of the gospel, then for a child to be reared in the church ... without regeneration is a perilous thing. (Conner, cited in Norman, 2005, 55)

Although the salvific position of children who are not yet able to profess the faith was established by the *Orthodox Creed* (1679), General Baptists (1634-1692), and the *London Confession* (1689), this did not negate the Baptist congregations’ responsibility to nurture their children as soon as they were born. Precisely because the children were not able to confess their faith for regeneration, the role of every Baptist parent and every Baptist congregation was to nurture their children to the point of public confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

The task of educating children in the Scriptures and doctrines was influenced not only by a strong desire to inculcate faith in the children until they were able to make a response to become Christians, but presumably also by the child development theories of that era. In the 1690s, John Locke (1634-1704) ascribed the theory of *tabula rasa* (blank slates) to children and proposed that children at birth were void of intellectual capacities and have no reasoning powers. Locke’s theory suggested that children are born inactive participants of their environment. The onus is therefore upon parents and caregivers to fill those “blank slates” that their children may grow esteemed.

⁸“Traditional Baptist ecclesiology” means the original intended Baptist traditions of faith formation for children based on Baptist ecclesiology from its original roots in the 1600s.

Another theory, developed by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) viewed children as “born good.” Unlike Locke, Rousseau saw each child as a potential citizen.

Rousseau’s view is that children become “bad” because sin corrupts their original goodness.⁹ Hence, Christian parents are to teach the Word and raise their children in the fear of God.

The primary method of forming faith in traditional Baptist ecclesiology was to inculcate knowledge of the Scriptures and Christian doctrines that lead to faith awareness. For this reason, the Baptists are noted for their well planned education programs.¹⁰ Three findings from the research show how the early Baptist congregations nurtured their children to a moment of “regeneration”: 1) Children were educated in the Scriptures and Christian Doctrines, 2) Children were incorporated into congregational life, and 3) Children were formed by shared culture.

1. CHILDREN WERE EDUCATED IN THE SCRIPTURES AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

The task of education in the Scriptures and Christian doctrines is a command set by Jesus Christ in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 and the Apostles’ example in Acts 5:42; Acts 11:26; 1 Corinthians 4:17 (George and George, 1996, 55). Education of children in the Scripture and Christian doctrines is to provide knowledge for regeneration and growth. Education of children or what may be known as catechism was a common affair in the households of Baptist believers. An early Baptist forefather, William Cathcart in his *Baptist Encyclopaedia* (1881) encouraged parents to use the Catechism in their own homes because this neglected custom of the

⁹Glenn Cupit differs from this view. He stresses that “the appropriation of Rousseau to an essentially Christian worldview is inappropriate as his theory specifically denigrated parental and cultural socialization as being the source of bad behavior. Childhood innocence was premised on their being able to sustain a natural state unmarred by the normal community courses of socialization” (Cupit, examiner’s comments on this dissertation, January 2009).

¹⁰Confessions, covenants, and catechisms were written in the 17th century by Baptist congregations to instruct their members in the faith (see Timothy and Denise George and George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechism*, reprint 1999). Baptists started schools as early as the 18th century to train young men into the ministry. Among the students of that era was John Sutcliff (1752-1814) who later became a leader in the Baptist missionary movement. In the mid 1800s, women’s colleges were also started that both males and females could be trained in the knowledge and in the faith for ministry.

past should be revived in every Baptist family in the world. Families in the early Baptist congregations came together to read the Scriptures, worship, and pray. Catechetical instructions were written by congregational leaders to assist parents and other adults in teaching children in their understanding of the faith. The subjects for teaching ranged from doctrines to learning to say grace at the table. This catechetical program was purely cognitive formation of the faith, with the adults asking questions and the child repeating the desired answers. By this catechetical approach, each answer was to be committed to memory. The catechetical lessons for children were written in adult language and contained Latin and Greek phrases.

However, there were leaders who saw the need for age-appropriate catechism and made an effort to develop teaching materials that suited children's learning. Henry Jesse wrote a catechetical instruction entitled *A Catechism for Babes, or, Little Ones* (1625) because he desired "to see one so plain and easie [sic] in the expressions, as they the very Babes, that can speak but stammeringly [sic], and are of very weak capacities, might understand what they say" (Jesse, cited in George and George, 1996, 228-39). Jesse's catechism for parents, schoolmasters, and individuals who needed a manual to train young children in the faith was "child friendly".¹¹ Two other examples of planned teaching of the faith are *The Baptism Catechism*, also known as *Keach's Catechism* (1693) by Benjamin Keach which consisted of 114 questions of faith and *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (1892) by John A. Broadus which comprised

¹¹Some examples of the questions listed in Jesse's catechetical instructions are (George and George, 1996, 228-39):

Q: Who made you?

A: God made me (Ps. 100:3)

Q: When must you learn to know God?

A: I must learn to know God now, when I am but a child.

Q: What doth the Scripture say that God is?

A: The Scriptures say that God is spirit; a good God; a wise God; a holy God; a mighty God; a merciful God; a righteous Judge of all men.

Q: What is sin?

A: Sin is any naughtiness against any of God's ten commands.

Q: What do we deserve by sin or naughtiness?

A: By any sin or naughtiness, we deserve death, and God's curse.

Q: What will become of all naughty people at the Day of Judgment after death?

A: All must come to judgment; naughty men, naughty women, naughty children, must be in hell torment forever.

Q: What will then be done to all good men, and to good women and to good children?

A: Good men and good women and good children shall go to heaven and everlasting happiness.

of 15 lessons. Like Henry Jessy, John A. Broadus wrote his *Catechism of Bible Teaching* at a level which children can comprehend. Broadus said,

It is, of course, an extremely difficult task to make questions and answers about the existence and attributes of the Divine Being, that shall be intelligible to children, adequate as the foundation for future thinking and correct as far as they go. Those three guidelines should serve well to judge any catechism. (Broadus, cited in George and George, 228-39)

Sunday schools or what were commonly known as *Sabbath schools* began in England under the leadership of an Anglican layman named Robert Raikes (1735-1811). These Sabbath schools provided literacy and religious instruction for children in poverty. In the earlier days of the Sabbath schools, there were few teaching institutions for children. The Sabbath schools served not only the poor with literacy programs but also became schools for religious instruction. The idea of Sunday school was adopted by the Southern Baptist of America in the mid 1800s (Leonard, 2003, 173).¹² The Southern Baptist congregations adapted the concept of Sabbath school to Sunday school, the centre for teaching children who were mostly associated with the congregation.¹³ Children of non-believers in the neighbourhood were welcomed to join in the classes. Sunday schools were, and still are, the most visible and prominent education institution in Baptist congregations around the world. Besides the Sunday school, another program was the (then) popular “training unions”,

¹²“In 1863, when the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention was founded, one of its first publications was *A Catechism of Bible Doctrine*, by J.P. Boyce. Within a four-month period in 1864, thousands of these were printed and distributed. In 1879, Southern Baptists requested J.L. Dagg to write ‘a catechism containing the substance of the Christian religion, for the instruction of children and servants...’ Evidently this catechism was never completed. When the Southern Baptist Convention was considering the reestablishment of the Sunday School Board in 1891, the first new project it proposed was the publication of a catechism by John A. Broadus. This was printed and used widely and advantageously” (Nettles, 2007).

¹³A 1926 edition of *In Royal Service* quotes the remembrance a grandchild had of her grandmother’s experience, “We had no Sabbath school then, but we had the Baptist Catechism, with which we were as familiar as with the Lord’s Prayer. At our quarterly season, we children of the congregation repeated the Baptist Catechism We had to memorize the whole book, for none knew which question would fall to them.... This practice was of incalculable benefit, for when it pleased God to change our hearts, and when offering ourselves to the church for membership, we knew what the church doctrines meant and were quite familiar with answering questions before the whole congregation, and did not quake when pastor or deacon or anyone else asked what we understood by Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification.” (Nettles, 2007).

geared towards training the youth members to understand church organization and affairs.

The foremost reason for educating the children in Scriptures and doctrines is for the purpose of regeneration. While conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, maturity in faith is a process of education and formation aided by the Spirit and the Word. Also, the doctrine of the priesthood of believers necessitates that each member of the Baptist faith knows the Bible and its teachings. Baptists are encouraged to “search the Scriptures,” and if they fail to do so, they negate their identity as *People of the Book*.

2. CHILDREN WERE INCORPORATED INTO CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

A second way in which the Baptist congregations formed faith in their children was through their participation in the corporate life of the congregation. Corporate life in the congregation was an important witness of the Baptists; “every Baptist is responsible to know the Baptist confessional traditions that shape the nature and ministry of the church” (Norman, 2005, 8). As God’s people, they were to see themselves as an alien community, conspicuous in its purity and holiness, and steadfast in its confession. Corporate life in Baptist congregations was like Donald Miller says of any community of faith:

The common ethos is centred in the community’s love of God and of one another. The common commitment is ... loyalty to and experiences of God’s forgiving and directing providence in Jesus Christ. The common environment is whatever location within the world they find themselves as the particular locus of God’s forgiveness and love. (Miller, 1987, 21)

The corporate life of the Baptist congregation inculcated specific Christian values in the children. Spirituality of the congregation rested in its communal worship and shared proclamation of God’s sovereignty. Personal testimonies of God’s faithfulness which leads to personal transformation were also important elements in the life of the congregation. Garrett noted that,

We have learned much of what we come to practice in our behaviour from those who initially cared for us and from the overall context in which they gave that care. The values we affirm and the charter we develop owe a great deal to the communities which nurtured us and the teaching they gave us. (Garrett, 1999, 39)

The telling and retelling of the story of Jesus Christ became so much part of the listeners that it shaped their responses and guided their thoughts. “It is one way by which, in the Spirit, Jesus lives in (the community). The church, by ... telling and reflecting on the story ... becomes a community of Christian characters, not by human achievement but by grace. (39.)

The early Baptist congregations saw children as belonging to their immediate birth family and to the faith congregation. This view was highlighted by Thomas Elliff, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1963) in the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963 and revised in 1997, Article 18):¹⁴

The family is the natural setting for moulding and nurturing a child in the ways of the Lord (Prov. 22:6).

Parents are admonished to take seriously their responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children by introducing them to God (salvation) and teaching them His Word (discipleship). Fathers and mothers are responsible (1) to model biblical manhood and womanhood through incarnational living, in which their children are able to observe the sanctification process in the lifestyle of their parents (Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25; Josh. 4:6-7); (2) to teach their children moral values from the Scripture; and (3) to lead them to love and serve the Lord through consistent discipline (Ps. 78:4-8).

The boundaries of a young child are established by his parents (Prov. 3:12; 13:24; 22:6; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17; Eph. 6:4). However, the ultimate goal of parents is to move the child to personal accountability to God (Ps. 119:9-11). Childless couples, as well as single men and women, have the opportunity to pass on a godly legacy through involvement with the children within their extended family circles, in their churches, and in their respective communities. (*Baptist Faith and Message*, 1997)

¹⁴ Article 18 states, “Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honour and obey their parents.” (1963)

Baptist congregations, even as they were comprised of regenerate adult believers, also included older children who had proclaimed their faith in Christ and younger children who, as yet, were unable to do so. Initially, children's religious needs were catered to the family circles since the Baptist congregations were adult focused. Children were raised in family environments but went with their parents to corporate worship. As time progressed, the awareness of children's religious needs brought changes within the Baptist congregations. An example is given by Charles Booth, a prominent 20th century Baptist leader in England who noted in some Baptist congregations he visited that

Some churches include a 'sermonette' and hymn directed at the children in the congregation and the giving of Scripture verses to be committed to memory ... the family side of religious feeling is strong among the Baptists – intriguing for a denomination that does not baptise infants...perhaps the Evangelical concern for personal commitment leads to a concern for the nurture of children so that they might come to faith in due course, and acquire a sense of the church fellowship that leads to a family ethos. (Ellis, 2004, 57)

Although children (yet to be members) in the Baptist congregations did not participate in the ordinances of baptism and Lord's Supper, they were included in the catechism classes, worship, and fellowship of the congregation. The immediate family and the faith congregation were their teachers. Leonard stressed,

Amid conversion rhetoric, most Baptist communions insist on nurturing young people to faith. Many report that they were drawn to faith early in life through gentle guidance and instruction provided by ministers, teachers, and spiritual mentors. Their conversion came less by dramatic event than by gradual nurture into faith. While these two approaches may complement each other, they may also create differences concerning the nature of conversion, its proper process, and its authentic recipients. (Leonard, 2003, 7)

Within the congregation, children witnessed the daily living of the Baptist faith, both the members' positive and negative traits. There were celebrations, weddings, births, and observations of the liturgical year as well as funerals and church discipline.¹⁵ In

¹⁵An interesting observation is that, globally, Baptist congregations centre their calendar year more on ministry and mission than a liturgical following of the Lord's life, as do some denominations. In America, Baptists traditionally associate Christmas with the *Lottie Moon Christmas Offering* for

an environment of corporate living, children in the early Baptist congregations grew in understanding of the God who was central in their community. They were led to regeneration through personal effort of the parents and corporate effort of the congregation, baptised into the fellowship of the congregation, and formed to be persons in ministry and witness.

3. CHILDREN WERE FORMED BY SHARED CULTURE

We have emphasized that, traditionally Baptists practice congregationalism, sharing joint responsibility in the way faith is expressed in worship, ministry, organization of the physical church, and mission. “From the early days ...ecclesiology was central to unity. Baptists united ... as a community of believers, celebrating baptism and the Lord’s Supper, preaching the Gospel and organizing congregational life” (Leonard, 44). Children grew up in this environment and inherited a “culture” of the Baptist faith which embodies the gospel of Jesus Christ and historical stories of the Baptist faith journey of truth to the Scriptures. The “cultural” beliefs, traditions, and practices shape the children’s attitudes, values, and behaviour. The Baptist culture, which is comprised of the confessions of faith and its congregational practices, facilitated a worldview from which children interpret their experiences:

Families and larger communities, like congregations, are shaped by their memories. They tell stories and remember significant events, events that might not even have been noticed by others. But these stories make and keep the community what it is. If the story should be forgotten, then identity is lost, and something else forms the character.

Baptists gather, or are gathered by God, in congregations each Sunday to hear again the story. We are gathered around the Bible and listen carefully as it is read. We think, talk and pray together about how we are to live as God’s people or how we are to be genuinely a biblical people. We ask forgiveness and claim forgiveness for our sins.... We come to the Lord’s Table ... we read the Bible personally and seek to obey its message, but our belonging together in the church of Christ is the context in which Christian character goes on being shaped and developed.

world missions and the *Annie Armstrong Easter Offering* as an offering to support Baptist missions in North America. Among the MBE congregations, the calendar year is usually designed around preaching themes selected by the pastor and congregational leaders. Seldom do MBE congregations consider liturgical observations in their planning except for Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas.

For this reason, we are careful to tell our children the story of Jesus so that they should be shaped in the community that tries to live out the life in Christ. Later, the child will grow to make his/her own decision to be a disciple, but, because we love our children, we tell them the story of God's way in the context of Christian love and nurture. Christian character is shaped in the context of the church. It is a matter of growth for young and old, to be completed only in heaven (Phil 3:12–14). (Garrett, 1999, 40)

Since the goal of faith formation for children in Baptist congregations is that they may grow to be regenerate persons, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness, the early Baptists were deliberate in this task through ecclesiology. Working within their own confessions of faith and the confines of denominational practices, Baptists have, through the ages, been nurturing their children into faith through the education of Scriptures and doctrines, corporate life in the congregation, and mediation of shared culture. The goal and objectives of childhood faith formation as defined by the early Baptist ecclesiology should continue to be the childhood faith formation goal of present day Baptists worldwide including the MBE congregations in West Malaysia because this is the original intent of what it means to be Baptist.

E. SUMMARY

The discussion in this chapter has traced Baptist ecclesiology and its practice of congregational life and faith formation of children from historical and denominational perspectives.

Section A highlighted the origin and confessions of Baptist ecclesiology. The discussion may have shown that Baptist ecclesiology is “more complicated than we might first think” (Garrett, 1999, xvii). The Baptists do not have a central structural (as in a central administrative headquarters) or a particular person as symbol of “final reference”. Rather, their connections, belief statements, and practices basically identify them as who they are (Tan, 2002, 40). Five fundamental beliefs define Baptist ecclesiology and connect congregations together: 1) the Bible as the infallible Word of God, 2) The autonomy of the local church, 3) believers' baptism, 4) priesthood of believers, and 5) separation of church and state. These five beliefs are the

foundations to “doing church” for the past and present congregations and they are also the formative elements in shaping the members.

Section B described three characteristics of a Baptist: First, a Baptist is a regenerate person who is “born again,” or has repented and verbally confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Regeneration is a prerequisite to Baptist church membership. The process of regeneration includes sanctification (where daily the believer is changed by God’s working to be more and more like Christ) and glorification (the eternal bliss of being with God). Second, a Baptist is a person in community. A Baptist is an “ecclesial” person; one who is in relationship with God and his people. Together with the congregation of believers, the individual grows in maturity through worship and ministry and discovers his or her own “calling” for service in God’s kingdom. Third, a Baptist is a person in ministry and witness, actively engaged in serving God through service to others. In ministry and witness, Baptists are brought together in *koinonia* (Christian fellowship) to usher in God’s rule on earth.

Section C showed how children were formed in faith within historical Baptist traditions. Early Baptists were deliberate in their effort to teach children the Scriptures and Christian doctrines. Several leaders developed age-appropriate catechism for parents, congregational leaders, and teachers to teach the faith. Children were incorporated into congregational life through worship, fellowship, and commemoration of cultural events. The family was the natural setting for formation and parents were admonished to be serious in their effort of formation. Baptist congregations mediated faith to the children through two particular ordinances – Baptism and Lord’s Supper. Each of these ordinances expresses a specific theological belief of the congregation. However the children were not allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper until they had made a confession of their belief in Jesus Christ and baptised into the membership of the church, because baptism is the outward expression of belief in Jesus Christ and the Lord’s Supper is indication of one’s union with God and communion with other regenerate believers.

The three sections have given insights into perspectives of faith and strategies for faith formation of children. The goals and objectives of childhood faith formation in the historic Baptist congregations are still valid for contemporary Baptists (although

some congregations may not be aware of this). To be identified as a Baptist congregation is to claim inheritance of the faith practices by the forefathers of the denomination. Hence, it is expected that Baptist ecclesiology should frame the way contemporary Baptist congregations practice their faith as a gathered people.

Thus far in the research, three perspectives have been shown as fundamental to develop a holistic faith formation approach for children in the MBE congregations. The first perspective is a biblical perspective of children and faith formation. The second perspective is a consideration of how child development informs best practices in faith formation of children. The third perspective, as presented in this chapter, is the goals and objectives of faith formation of children in the Baptist congregations. Chapter Five continues the research with a descriptive report of the *sitz im leben* of the MBE congregations and the way members approach children and the formation of childhood faith.

CHAPTER FIVE

FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN IN THE MALAYSIAN BAPTIST ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONGREGATIONS: A DESCRIPTIVE REPORT

A viable faith formation approach for MBE congregations utilizes the Scriptures as guide for Christian practice, designs appropriate practices from developmental theories, and considers the Baptist heritage for expression and practice of faith within an acceptable denominational context. Thus far in the research, Chapter Two established a biblical perspective of children and childhood; Chapter Three clarified childhood faith development from human developmental theories; and Chapter Four researched beliefs and practices in Baptist history that have contributed to the development of children's faith in the congregations. These three chapters have provided the foundation for thinking about faith formation of children in MBE congregations. This chapter continues the dissertation research with a descriptive report of the current perspectives and faith formation practices found in MBE congregations.

As stated in the research problem, MBE congregations need an approach to childhood faith formation that is biblical, developmentally appropriate, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confessions that can guide them to recover the original intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life. Since MBE congregations are autonomous, and from the researcher's personal observation and discussion with the Malaysia Baptist Convention secretary, it was obvious that within MBE congregations there are different perspectives and practices regarding the faith

formation of children.¹ These perspectives and practices may or may not stem from an understanding of Baptist ecclesiology. For example, church autonomy has given rise to various choices in church governance, worship and discipleship which are not originally Baptist practices.² The adopted practices affected the way Baptists “do church” and ultimately influenced the way Baptist leaders planned for the formation of their children. The researcher also noted that a number of children’s ministry workers in the Baptist congregations are not aware of Baptist ecclesiology or the confessions of the Baptist faith with regard to children in the congregations.³ A field survey was carried out to ascertain the current situation in the MBE congregations.

This chapter has eight sections:

- A. The survey process
- B. The respondents
- C. The quantitative survey results
- D. Place of children in MBE congregations
- E. Evangelism, discipleship and teaching of children in MBE congregations
- F. MBE congregational culture and practices that affect faith development of children
- G. Environmental factors that transmit faith to children in the MBE congregations
- H. Summary of the survey findings

¹For the past 5 years (2002-2007), the researcher worked with various groups of caregivers and Baptist church leaders involved in children’s ministry. Since there is no central system that dictates church organization, each congregation has developed or adopted formation practices that suit the individual context.

²One concern in the late 1970s was the influence of the charismatic movement on worship. Another concern was the issue of congregational governance which is slowly being replaced by a single person leadership or a “selective group” leadership.

³In her interviews with the church leaders the researcher observed that the general perception within the MBE congregations is that there is no need for children to know their denominational confessions since the priority is to become Christians. This perception has risen either from ignorance or the post-modern understanding of belonging to the “church universal.”

A. THE SURVEY PROCESS

A survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data among 40 MBE congregations was conducted in 2006. Analysis of the data helped the researcher identify childhood faith formation practices and related beliefs in MBE congregations. The survey sought to collect data on the following concerns: 1) place of children in MBE congregations; 2) evangelism, discipleship and teaching of children in MBE congregations; 3) congregational cultures and practices that affected faith development of children in MBE congregations; and 4) environmental factors that transmitted faith to children in MBE congregations.

Parameters of Survey

There are limitations to the overall research survey.

1. Malaysian Baptists comprise congregations using various dialects of Chinese, English, *Bahasa Malaysia*, other languages of the indigenous people, and other foreign languages. All these congregations meet as independent groups in their own worship premises or in a “mother church.” This study researched only the English-speaking congregations of the Malaysia Baptist Convention (MBC). Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations (MBE congregations) are comprised mostly of educated middle class Chinese who are tri-lingual (English, Chinese dialects, and *Bahasa Malaysia*).
2. Location was also a concern in the research survey. MBE congregations are found in all the 13 states of Malaysia (East and West). There are social, political, and economic differences between East and West Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations. The research survey was limited to MBE congregations in West Malaysia, with similar social, political and economic variables.
3. The survey questionnaire was designed to gather data of primary aged children (7-12 years). Most of these children are of Chinese descent, have similar developmental characteristics and spiritual needs and make up the majority in MBE Sunday Schools. These children are mostly tri-lingual and have access to some form of primary education.

Sample Size

In 2003, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention of America conducted a survey and estimated there were 13,000 members in the Malaysian Baptist denomination.⁴ This figure comprised only the Baptist churches and their outreach points that are members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention in East and West Malaysia.⁵ The stated population excluded Baptist congregations that are not registered with the Malaysia Baptist Convention.⁶ “Population” here is defined as individuals baptized or “transferred” into membership of the Baptist congregations.

Since the current Baptist population in the MBE congregations is not known, the 2003 IMB report of 13,000 members was used as a representative population for this survey.⁷ John Curry’s “Rule of Thumb” was selected as a tool to calculate the sample size for the survey (Curry, 1982).⁸ Curry suggests that for a general population of 13,000 members, a one-percent sample size (130 survey participants) is an acceptable representative sample for any population. Forty West Malaysian MBE congregations which are active members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention became the pool from which the respondents were selected (see Appendix B).

There were three parameters in the selection of survey participants. First, the survey participants needed to be MBE congregation members who are “regenerate,” baptized

⁴ The researcher discussed the membership matter with Rev. Ronnie Chui, Secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention (2006) in a phone conversation dated 10th May 2006.

⁵The Malaysia Baptist Convention was established in 1953 to oversee the teaching, polity, and ministry of the Baptist congregations in Malaysia. The MBC is affiliated with the Baptist World Alliance and the Asian Baptist Federation.

⁶There are several Malaysian Baptist congregations which have chosen not to be members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention because of their public congregational practice of charismatic gifts which is not inline with normative Baptist ecclesiology.

⁷This information was conveyed to the researcher by Rev. Ronnie Chui, Secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention in a phone conversation on 10th May 2006. The IMB is presently updating the Malaysian Baptist membership and the current population of the MBE congregations (at time of this survey) is not known.

⁸ Curry’s Rule of Thumb:	Size of Population	Percent of Sample
	0 -100	100 %
	101 - 1000	10 %
	1001 - 5000	5 %
	5001 -10000	3 %
	10001 onwards	1 %

or “transferred” into a Baptist congregation.⁹ Second, the survey participants needed to have some links or affiliation with children. They can be parents, pastors, Sunday school teachers, children’s ministry staff or day-care and kindergarten workers. Third, the respondents were individuals recommended by the local church survey representative selected by the researcher.

Survey Methodologies

The research tools for this survey were four sets of questionnaires, telephone interviews, emails and group discussions with some survey subjects.

a. Questionnaires

Four different categories of people were identified for the survey. They were:

- i) Rev. Ronnie Chui, Secretary of the MBC (1)
- ii) Church secretaries from MBE congregations (40)
- iii) Pastors from MBE congregations (40)
- iv) Church leaders from MBE congregations (160)

Questionnaires were distributed to these individuals between 8-15 March, 2006. The initial returning date of 1 April, 2006 was extended to 15 April, 2006. On 5 May, 2006, the researcher emailed a “thank you” note to all the local church survey representatives who had responded to the survey. A reminder was also included in the email that if any individual wished to return his or her questionnaire after the date due, the person was welcome to do so. The survey closed on 10 May, 2006.

The first questionnaire (see Appendix C) was mailed to Rev. Ronnie Chiu, the Malaysia Baptist Convention secretary for 2005-2006. This quantitative questionnaire consisted of open and closed ended questions to survey the Malaysia

⁹The concept of regeneration as understood by Malaysian Baptists is “to be born again”. Article 4 of the Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith states that, “...in its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration and glorification. Regeneration, or the new birth, is work of God’s grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner respond in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Baptist Convention's interpretation of congregational polity and guidelines for children and faith development in MBE congregations.

The second questionnaire (see Appendix D) was each mailed to 40 MBE church secretaries. This quantitative questionnaire consisted mainly of closed ended questions and sought to glean demographic statistics of MBE congregations.

The third questionnaire (see Appendix E) was each mailed to 40 MBE pastors. This qualitative questionnaire investigated the pastoral perspective on children, childhood faith and sanctioned congregational practices.

The fourth questionnaire (also see Appendix E) was distributed by a survey representative to four lay leaders from each of the 40 MBE congregations. The qualitative questionnaire identified the leaders' perspective of children, childhood faith and sanctioned congregational practices.

b. Telephone interviews and emails

On several occasions, the researcher telephoned Rev. Chui to clarify data matters pertaining to the sociological data. Phone calls were also made to the offices of the 40 selected MBE congregations listed in the Malaysia Baptist Convention directory. Some telephone numbers were not in service while there were others which had no one to receive the call. In the phone conversation, the researcher requested a church representative to distribute the questionnaires. All contacts in the congregations were very obliging to help in the survey. The phone calls were followed up by emails.

c. Group discussion

The researcher had opportunities to discuss the research subject with two groups of MBE congregational leaders who work with children. The first discussion group was held on 6 May, 2006. This discussion was in the context of a teaching seminar, "Spiritual Formation of Children," held at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, Penang. There were 16 adults present at the seminar, of which ten adults were members of the MBE congregations. The second discussion group was held at the

First Baptist Church (Petaling Jaya, Selangor) Sunday school teachers' retreat on 25 - 27 July, 2006. There were 14 teachers at this retreat. The researcher led a workshop on children, faith and appropriate Sunday school teaching methods. All participants from these two groups had received the qualitative questionnaire. But it is not known how many of them responded to the survey because all questionnaires were returned anonymously.

Validity and Reliability of the Survey

Validity of the survey rested on three criteria in the preparation and distribution of the questionnaire to the participants. Stratified sampling provided additional reliability for the survey.

i) *Face validity* was established during a trial survey when the initial draft of the questionnaire was completed and tested in October 2005 on a group of kindergarten and Sunday school teachers. These participants were students of the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary Child Studies Program at the Kuala Lumpur Centre. The participants highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire and gave further suggestions to improve the draft.

ii) *Content validity* was measured during the trial survey. The initial format of the closed and open-ended questionnaire was inadequate. The trial survey did not produce data that met the research objectives. This draft was extensively revised following advice and recommendation from the dissertation supervisors. Two more drafts were developed and the fourth and final questionnaire was deemed suitable for the survey.

iii) *Construct validity* was considered during the development of the questionnaire. Each section in the questionnaire had a specific objective. The four sections of the questionnaire were correlated to support each other in data prediction. Reliability of the survey rested on the participants' integrity. The participants were presumably mature leaders of MBE congregations, able to comprehend questions written in the English language, and had some knowledge and experience in working with children. Appropriate statistical tools were used to translate personal and congregational

experiences and to construct narratives to explain particular beliefs and methodologies used in faith formation of children.

Survey Time Frame

The survey plan was divided into six phases with the time frame as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Survey Time Frame

No.	Task	Time Frame
1.	Initial preparation of the questionnaire and trial survey	September 2005
2.	Modification of the questionnaire and selection of participants	October 2005 - January 2006
3.	Selection and orientation of helpers to disseminate and collect data	February 2006
4.	Mailing of the questionnaires to helpers and distribution of questionnaire to participants	March 2006
5.	Data Collection	March - April 2006
6.	Data Analysis and Report Writing	July 2006 - May 2007

B. THE RESPONDENTS

Table 2. Description of the Respondent Sample

People Group	Questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires returned	Gender Ratio
Secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention	1	1 Quantitative data	Male
Secretaries from MBE congregations	40	14 Quantitative data	Not Available
Pastors from MBE congregations	40	18 Qualitative data	1 female 17 males
Church lay-leaders from MBE congregations	160	112 Qualitative data	64 females 48 males

Table 2 describes the survey respondents. The respondents, ranging from pastors to church lay-leaders represented a cross-section of MBE congregations. Rev. Ronnie Chui, the Secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention and 14 secretaries from the local congregations provided the data for quantitative results. Qualitative data came from the pastors and church leaders who responded to the survey. Of the 130 respondents in the survey, 18 were pastors and 112 church leaders.¹⁰ Three significant findings were noted in the description of the respondents.

- i) Only 14 of the 40 secretaries responded to the survey. The researcher phoned a number of church secretaries to follow up on the survey responses. The major reason for not responding to the survey was that no records have been kept that could answer the survey questions.
- ii) The pastors of the MBE congregations who participated in the survey were mostly males. They have some links with primary aged children either as a parent, Sunday school teacher, and children's ministry staff or as their pastor. None of the pastors in this group has any formal certified training in children's work. The almost

¹⁰The survey only needed 130 respondents (18 pastors plus 112 leaders) to form a representative sample. 116 church leaders responded to the survey and of these respondents, 112 were randomly selected.

exclusively male pastoral leadership in MBE congregations seems to be the main reason (as shown in later data analysis) that children's needs and ministry, although a concern, are subsumed under family, education, or welfare concerns, and not as an age group ministry.

iii) The lay leadership who completed this survey comprised of 64 females and 48 males. They were mostly above 30 years of age. Forty six respondents had some form of training or were in training (at the time of survey) to equip for children's ministry. Of the 112 respondents in this survey, 72 respondents were parents who have some links with children in their congregation other than solely their own children (Sunday school, children's ministry, crèche, etc). The other 40 respondents were singles who are either Sunday school teachers or serving in some form of children's ministry in the congregations. This group of 40 respondents formed the supportive leadership for the pastors in ministering to children in the church.

C. THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

There were 15 respondents who participated in the quantitative survey. The quantitative survey consisted of 12 questions and the survey results are as shown.

a. Survey results from Pastor Ronnie Chui, General Secretary of the MBC

- There is no fixed standard in the MBC concerning an acceptable age for a child to make a confession of faith, be baptised into an MBE congregation, participate in the Lord's Supper, or be admitted into the membership of a local Baptist church. However, Pastor Chui ticked 6-8 years as a personal recommendation for the above requirements.
- Children are not granted full rights of membership in MBE congregations because the legal age of membership into a society of which MBE congregations are registered, is 18 years of age.

- The MBC does not have a specific department to look into children's needs. Children's ministry comes under the education department of the Convention.
- MBC does not have a system, program, or model to help MBE congregations disciple their children in the Christian faith. The choice is left to the local church's preference.
- MBC did not facilitate any national level children's program in 2004 and 2005.
- Between 2005 and 2007, MBC did emphasize the need for children and Christian education in the local Baptist congregations.
- The MBC budget related to children's ministry from 2003 to 2006 was not available because children as a people group is not a separate category in the MBC agenda. Also, each congregational activity is self funded.

b. Survey results from church secretaries, representing 14 MBE congregations

- Children baptised into MBE congregations between 2003-2005:
 - 11 children in 2003
 - 10 children in 2004
 - 18 children in 2005
- Children's programs found in MBE congregations.

Sunday school	12
VBS	6
Crèche	5
Children Worship/ Church	5
Weekday Kindergarten	3
Children's Club	2
Before and after school care	2
Cell Groups	1
Others: Boy's and Girl's' Brigade; school holiday programs.	

- Twelve church secretaries said that their congregations have no stand on the acceptable age a child can make a confession of faith in Jesus and to be baptised. Two other church secretaries affirmed that children can confess their faith and be baptised at any age because the Holy Spirit can work in children as well as adults.
- Physical structure of the place for worship:

Purpose built (built as a church)	5
Converted shop house	5
Converted residential unit	3
Converted office space	1
Rented hall	0
- All 14 MBE congregations had new families join them in 2005 as worshippers.
- Five of the MBE congregations held parenting programs in 2005.
- Eight MBE congregations held some form of evangelistic programs for children in 2005. These programs included Christmas parties, picnics, and tuition classes.
- Four of the 14 MBE congregations had some form of training for their children's workers. The workshops were Sunday school related.
- Three MBE congregations have fulltime paid staff to supervise their children's ministries. These three staff also co-ordinate the church kindergarten or day-care. Eleven other congregations have volunteer workers.

The quantitative survey results affirmed the researcher's assumption that there is no uniformed organizational or program structure in MBE congregations. As each congregation is autonomous, the members are to govern the congregation according to their own convictions. Issues pertaining to children and faith are usually decided by the elected congregational leaders. The returned quantitative survey results did not

provide as much data as expected by the researcher because most respondents noted that they have limited documentation of children's ministry in the church.

D. PLACE OF CHILDREN IN MBE CONGREGATIONS

The survey questionnaire for this section (see Appendix E) investigated the place of children in MBE congregations. There were five open-ended and five and closed-ended questions in this section. The results are tabulated on the following pages.

Table 3 Level of attention given to children in the local congregations

Table 4 Importance of children's ministry in the local congregations

Table 5 Children's roles in the local congregations

Table 6 Strategies that nurture children's spiritual growth

Table 7 Age-group components in the local congregations

Table 3. Level of Attention Given to Children in the Congregation

Items of Description	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Children given some attention.	15	75	90
Children and adults have separate worship and teaching programs.	14	69	83
Children progress from "children church" to "adults' church".	9	50	59
Children's ministry mostly concentrates on education and social needs.	6	29	35
Children are given the main focus.	1	21	22
Children not present, congregation is adult orientated.	0	12	12
Children present but ignored.	1	8	9
Other responses: <i>(Respondents who ticked this column did not explain their preferences)</i>	1	3	4

In Table 3, the respondents ticked the statements which best reflected their opinion of the levels of attention given to primary aged children in their congregations. The tabulated scores are shown in Table 3 in the order of popularity of response of the items. Note that respondents could tick more than one item. The survey results suggested that although children are given some attention in MBE congregations, they are often not integrated into the main stream of congregational life. Cross reference to the data in Tables 20 and 21 shows that a high number of the pastors are generally not too keen to have children in the worship service, citing disruption and noise as the main reasons. A correlation with Table 4 shows that although the respondents maintained children are top priority or fairly important in congregational life, they are usually not included into the main worship service of the church. Instead most congregations opt for separate worship and teaching programs.

Table 4. Importance of Children's Ministry in the Local Congregation

Items of Description	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Top priority	4	16	20
Fairly important	9	37	46
Mediocre	0	9	9
Not very important	1	2	3
Equal attention as other ministries	3	22	25
Neglected	1	26	27

In Table 4, the respondents ticked the statement which best reflected their opinion of the importance of primary aged children in their congregations. Half of the pastors rated children's ministry as fairly important compared to one third of the lay-leaders. Only two of the pastors thought the children's ministry is not very important or neglected whereas 28 of the lay-leaders responded in similar manner. The standard deviation of the pastors' opinion is 3.28 and indicates that the pastors are generally in agreement that children's ministry in the church is important. The standard deviation

of the leaders' opinion is 12.48. This figure shows that there are greater differences in opinion among the lay-leaders concerning the importance of children's ministry in the congregations than that of the pastors.

Although the pastors are generally in agreement that children's ministry in the church is important; yet they strongly indicated that children should not be brought into the worship services because, in their opinion, the children are disruptive. However, the pastors have allowed their congregations to organize teaching, parenting and child evangelism workshops for their members. Factors that influenced the respondents' decision could have derived from their observation of the way children are treated in the congregations or a perceived theological understanding of the ideal.

Table 5. Roles Children Play in the Local Congregation

Respondents' Answers	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Children can study God's word, share gospel with friends.	0	35	35
Children are opportunities to evangelise non Christian parents.	8	14	22
"Don't know" / respondents did not answer the question.	4	16	20
Children can memorize Scriptures to recite at worship as encouragement to adults.	0	19	19
Children can be musicians, ushers, backup singers in worship.	0	18	18
Children are new blood /future of the church.	0	14	14
Children can bring unsaved friends to Sunday school.	0	12	12
Children can learn to serve God in childhood so that they will serve God as adults.	0	12	12
Children cannot do much in the church	0	11	11

Table 5 – *Continued over*

Children are the next generation.	0	8	8
Children can do housekeeping duties, community services.	0	8	8
Children have no role in the congregation.	2	6	8
Children can participate in Vacation Bible School, Bible club.	0	6	6
Children can present dance items, impact adults by their songs and drama.	0	5	5
Children can pray for the church.	0	5	5
Children are examples of faith.	1	2	3
Children are the life of the congregation.	2	0	2
Children can make Jesus Lord of their lives.	0	1	1
Children can demonstrate simple faith.	0	1	1
Children can help build the family life.	0	1	1
Older children can learn to care for younger kids.	0	1	1
Children determine time of worship.	1	0	1
Children can be trained to be God fearing.	0	1	1

Table 5 summarises the free responses of the respondents (both pastors and church leaders) to this category of open-ended question. They generally see children as passive participants in the faith, unable to contribute in significant ways to congregational life. The pastors largely view them as evangelistic opportunities to reach parents and friends. Children's roles in the church are confined to age-appropriate duties. Their roles in the church may include involvement as musicians, ushers, backup singers in worship, church presentations such as to encourage the adults through Scripture memory, drama and dance presentations, and general housekeeping.

Table 6. Strategies That Nurture Children's Spiritual Growth

Respondents Answers	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Attend Sunday School /children's club	5	52	57
Vacation Bible School	4	8	22
Teach God's word, faith, love and knowledge	1	19	20
Family altar, Bible reading, family devotions	0	19	19
Give presents/gifts for good attendance	0	16	16
<i>Purpose Driven Life</i> Children's Version	1	12	13
Reward the best Sunday School kids	0	11	11
Bible study, sing hymns, pray, serve God, witness, fellowship	2	8	10
Special programs for non believing children	1	8	9
<i>Superkids</i> church	0	8	8
Have children's church same time as worship	0	7	7
Use a good Bible Curriculum	0	7	7
Home-school the children	0	4	4
Use Bill Gothard's <i>Character First</i>	0	2	4
Church camps	1	2	3
Give them responsibility so they learn to lead	2	0	2
Boys' Brigade	2	0	2
Ask the pastor to preach sermons on "Family Altar"	0	1	1
Have different activities for children during worship	0	1	1
Hold parenting seminars	1	0	1
Mentor the children	0	1	1

Table 6 – *Continued over*

Plan follow-up activities	0	1	1
PRAISE – nurture children to be prayerful warrior, responsible worker, adoring worshipper, insightful believers, sanctified vessel, encouraging examples.	0	1	1
Child evangelism	1	0	1
Do art and craft related to stories of Jesus	1	0	1
Respondents did not answer the question	3	9	12
No Strategy	2	9	11

In Table 6, the results are tabulated from the participants' free responses to an open ended question that concerns strategies in the local congregation that nurture children's spiritual growth. Strategies for forming faith in children that garnered at least 10% of the total replies are:

1. Attend Sunday School
2. Vacation Bible school
3. Teach God's word, faith, love and knowledge
4. Family altar, Bible reading, family devotions
5. Give presents/gifts for good attendance
6. *Purpose Driven Life* Children's Version

Most respondents (both pastors and church leaders) assess childhood faith maturity by cognitive and behavioural outcomes. They often use cognitive and behavioural approaches in forming the children's faith. These approaches are usually more pragmatic than biblically base. An interesting observation is that, if we combine the number of respondents who give gifts for good attendance (16) and rewards for the best Sunday school children (11), the total (27) would rank second in the table.

Table 7. Perception of Age-Group Composition of the MBE Congregations

Items of Description	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Different age groups equally represented	8	50	58
Mainly families with young children	5	33	38
Mainly middle age adults with teenage children	2	19	21
Mainly working young adults	2	8	10
Mainly senior citizens	1	2	3
Mainly youths	0	0	0

In Table 7, the respondents ticked the statements which best reflect the age-group components in their local congregations. MBE congregations generally comprise of different age-groups of people. A high percentage of the congregations are families with young children and teenagers. Further, survey results from the section on personal information reveal that 65 respondents know of a primary-aged child in MBE congregations who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and 53 respondents have witnessed a primary-aged child being baptized as a believer. Data from the secretaries' responses show 19 children between ages 7 and 12 years who were baptized in 14 of MBE congregations between 2003 and 2005. This information indicates that some MBE congregations are open to the idea of baptizing children who can make a confession of faith satisfactory to the leaders in the individual congregations.

Summary

Survey results from this section describe the perceived place of children in MBE congregations. The data can be summarized as:

1. The present MBE congregations have differing views of the place of children in their congregations. A closer examination of the *Malaysia Baptist Convention*

Statement of Faith (see Appendix A) reveals that the terms “children” or “childhood faith” *per se* are not mentioned although Article 15 (Christian and Social Order) makes reference to “orphans.” The assumption is that either children are subsumed under the category of “Man” (Article 3), are not within the main agenda of the statement of faith, or are seen as unimportant persons. Given the presence of families and children in MBE congregations, it is most likely they are categorized under the subject “Man.” Otherwise, children (as well as women) are muted in the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith*.

2. The *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* is silent on the issue of children and conversion. But Article 3 states that “every man” (here we presume women and children are included) is important and worthy of respect and Christian love. The assumption is that children come to be Christians is by the same route as any adult, and that is repentance as ‘genuine turning’ away from sin, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and a commitment to the faith (Article 4).
3. The survey results show that the children are usually perceived as passive participants in the faith. They are largely viewed as evangelistic tools to reach parents and friends or to “inspire” adults through their ability to memorize and recite Scripture.
4. The survey results show that the children are generally well received in MBE congregations and strategies for faith nurture are mostly focused on educational needs. The research data show that the top four ministries to children in MBE congregations are the Sunday Schools, Vacation Bible schools, crèche and Children’s church.

Based on this summary, it is this researcher’s opinion that children in MBE congregations are “seen but not heard.” They are received into the congregations and educational programs are provided to help them in their religious growth. But, there is little scope within MBE congregations for children to be valued as equal partners in the faith.

E. EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP AND TEACHING OF CHILDREN IN MBE CONGREGATIONS

This section of the field survey investigated the evangelism, discipleship and teaching of children in MBE congregations and comprised 10 opened- and closed- ended questions. Since the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* do not recommend an acceptable age for children's conversion or baptism, the decision is left to the local congregation (autonomy of the local church). In the absence of a "standard" age for conversion and baptism there are different opinions as to the age of confession of faith, baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper and church membership.

Table 8. Acceptable Age for a Child to Confess Faith in Jesus

Age Groups	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Below 4 years	0	2	2
4 - 6 years	5	9	14
6 - 8 years	5	20	25
8 -10 years	1	15	16
10 -12 years	4	29	33
12-14 years	1	7	8
14 -16 years	1	8	9
Above 16 years	1	7	8
Others (other answers than the above)	0	15	15

The perceived most acceptable age for children to confess their faith in Jesus Christ is between 10-12 years of age. The second most acceptable age is 6-8 years. A majority of the respondents agreed that 4 years and below is not an acceptable age to confess faith in Jesus but the 15 respondents who ticked "Others" commented that age should not be a criterion to confess faith in Jesus. Children can come to faith at any age.

Table 9. Acceptable Age for a Child to be Baptised

Age Group	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Below 4 years	0	1	1
4 - 6 years	1	3	4
6 - 8 years	3	13	16
8 -10 years	2	8	10
10 - 12 years	2	22	24
12 -14 years	7	29	36
14 -16 years	1	13	14
Above 16 years	2	14	16
Others	0	9	9

Table 10. Acceptable Age for a Child to Participate in the Lord's Supper

Age Groups	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Below 4 years	1	1	2
4 - 6 years	1	1	2
6 -8 years	4	12	16
8 -10 years	2	8	10
10 -12 years	1	18	19
12 -14 years	5	23	28
14 -16 years	1	16	17
Above 16 years	1	17	18
Others	2	16	18

A correlation between Tables 9 and 10 shows that the most acceptable age for children to be baptised as believers is perceived to be 12-14 years followed by 10-12 years. After baptism, children can participate in the Lord's Supper (Article 7, *Malaysian Baptist Statement of Faith*). The same age-group preference applies to those who want to participate in the Lord's Supper. Survey results show there is general awareness that infant baptism is not acceptable among MBE congregations or the participation in the Lord's Supper by infants and young children. One respondent maintains that infants below four years can be baptised and two respondents agree that children below four years can participate in the Lord's Supper.

Table 11. Acceptable Age for a Child to become a Member of a Local Congregation

Age Groups	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Below 4 years	0	2	2
4 -6 years	0	0	0
6 -8 years	2	7	9
8-10 years	0	5	5
10 -12 years	0	10	10
12-14 years	4	18	22
14 -16 years	2	14	16
Above 16 years	8	40	48
Others	2	16	18

The survey results in Table 11 show that the preferred age for membership in a church is 16 years and above. Eighteen respondents chose "Others" in the age group category. A majority of these respondents did not explain their choice. But for those who did, the common answer is that a child can be admitted to membership of the local church at any age because the church is the body of Christ and as such do not need an age criterion. Regeneration and baptism are prerequisites for Baptist church

membership. These requirements however need to be understood in the context of Malaysian society where conversion and baptism of children from Christian families is an entirely religious matter while membership in the Baptist congregation is regulated by civil law.

Although the *Malaysia Baptist Convention Statement of Faith* confesses separation of church and state (Article 17), in reality this confession is not realized. The Laws of Malaysia state that in order to qualify for primary membership in a society, an individual must: a) be a citizen of Malaysia, b) have attained the age of eighteen years, or, in the case of a school cooperative society, has attained the age of twelve years, and c) be resident, or be employed, or be in ownership of the land within the areas of operation of that primary society, or in the case of a school cooperative society, be a registered student of a school (Acts 502, Co-operative Societies Acts, 1993, Part IV, Clause 26). Hence in the Malaysian context, children cannot legally be members of a Baptist congregation because the congregations are registered with the government as religious societies.

Table 12. Themes Mentioned in the Worship Services in 2005

Themes	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Children and Family	0	80	80
Children and their Relationship with God	0	55	55
Children and Mission / Evangelism	1	50	51
Children and Christian Education	1	50	51
Children and the Church	15	33	48
Children and Worship	0	37	37
Children and Faith Development	0	32	32
Children and Social Services	1	21	22
Other themes related to children	0	10	10

The quantitative survey results in Table 12 show new families with young children joined the congregations for worship each year, only five of the 14 congregations mentioned holding any form of parenting programs for the members. However, most respondents note that in 2005, the pulpit was used to promote discipleship of children. While the leaders opine the theme “Children and Family” is most mentioned during the worship services, most pastors opt for “Children and the Church”. One explanation could be that pastors are more church institution focused while the lay-leaders are more family orientated and see the children within family context.

Table 13. Criteria for Children to become Christians
(Multiple answers allowed)

Tasks	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Understand the salvation story	12	68	80
Confess Jesus as Lord	14	56	70
Say the “sinner’s prayer”	11	51	62
Be baptized	4	22	26
Children are Christians by virtue of “believing parents”	0	23	23
Others	0	0	0

In Table 13, the survey results show strongly the understanding that to become Christian, children need to understand the salvation story and confess Jesus as Lord. Most respondents opined that children are able to understand this concept (see Table 14). There is a high correlation between praying the “sinner’s prayer” and the children’s ability to understand the action (see Table 14). An interesting finding in this section is that 23 respondents maintain that children can be Christians by virtue of “believing parents.” This response indicates that within MBE congregations there are members who sanction “corporate solidarity” where children are “covered” by their believing parents until such time when they can make personal faith decisions.

Table 14. Concepts Children Between 7-9 years and 10-12 Years
Can Most Likely Understand (Multiple answers allowed)

Concepts / Phrases	Ages 7-9 years	Ages 10-12 years	Total (130)
Conversion	56	89	145
Lord's Supper	45	73	118
Condemnation	52	65	117
Worship God	46	56	112
Offering	39	63	112
Sacrifice	48	80	112
"Repent from sin" (Say the "sinner's prayer")	31	65	96
Salvation	37	55	92
Prayer	39	50	89
Everlasting Life	33	55	88
Tithing	32	53	85
Death	31	53	84
Heaven	34	48	82
Confession of sin	21	60	81
Saviour	27	52	79
"Invite Jesus into your Heart"	25	53	78
"Jesus is Lord"	26	44	70
Grace	40	68	68
Forgiveness	17	44	61
Hell	4	28	32

The scores in Table 14 generally indicate that adults are confident in the way children understand the Christian faith. The concepts or phrases listed were designed to measure the adult's perception of children's cognitive thinking concerning the Christian faith. The adults opined that children ages 10 -12 years are most likely to understand most of the concepts listed while children ages 7- 9 years may not be able to do so. In the respondents' opinions, the most understood concepts for children ages 7 to 9 years are conversion (56 votes) and condemnation (52 votes). For children ages 10 to 12 years, the concepts perceive to be most understood are conversion (89 votes) and sacrifice (80 votes). The latter age is considered to be an appropriate age to make a confession of faith and be baptised (see Tables 8 and 9). The collated results in Table 14 demonstrate personal opinions of the respondents and may not correlate significantly to the theoretical frame of cognitive development in children.

Table 15. Significant Ways to Nurture Children's Faith
(Multiple answers allowed)

Respondents' Answers	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Parental modelling/role modelling	3	19	22
Prayer/children are invited to pray along with adult.	1	14	15
Respondents did not answer question.	2	10	12
The church should systematically educate children.	6	6	12
Invest in suitable Bible programs.	1	9	10
Use Bible stories for faith building and story telling.	2	8	10
Children should be made to memorize God's word.	0	9	9
Worship, songs, message made suitable for children	2	7	9
Sunday school teachers should be caring.	3	6	9
Reward with gifts and praises when tasks are done.	1	7	8

Table 15 – *Continued* over

Sunday School (for non believing children)	6	1	7
Ushering in the church	2	5	7
Direct evangelism	6	1	7
Let the children lead worship.	0	6	6
Church can facilitate but it is still the parent's duty	1	5	6
Children should be brought up in Christian values.	2	4	6
Adults should be educated to bring up the children.	2	4	6
Pastors should preach sermons to children.	1	5	6
Singing and drama	1	5	6
The church should organize more social outings.	0	5	5
Community life	0	5	5
Church should organize camps, telly-matches, picnics.	0	5	5
Family worship	1	4	5
Have the children recite God's word.	0	5	5
Positive experiences of their (children) own lives	1	3	4
Discipline: scheduled prayer time, grace at meals, etc.	1	3	4
Godly marriages	2	2	4
Demonstrate joy in worship / be cheerful	1	3	4
Have Christian friends	0	3	3
Affirm children of their decisions for Christ	0	3	3
Intergenerational relationships	1	2	3
Testimonies from other children	1	2	3
Follow the Ten Commandments.	0	2	2

Table 15 – *Continued over*

Partake in the Lord's supper.	0	2	2
Visual aids	0	2	2
Parental teaching at home, while driving, etc.	0	1	1
Show films about Jesus.	0	1	1
Reports of miracles	0	1	1
Give offering in church.	0	1	1
Home visitations	1	0	1
Cleaning the church	0	1	1
"Don't know"	0	5	5

Table 15 summarizes the multiple ways the respondents perceived faith could be nurtured in children. The strategies are mostly intergenerational and integrative in approach. The normative congregational life among MBE congregations is separate worship and teaching for adults and children. This practice contradicts the respondents' suggestions for the "professed strategies" to nurture faith in children is different from the "strategies in practice." Since the respondents show eagerness to help children grow in faith (as indicated in Table 17), the "problem" could be resolved if the leadership aligned their "professed strategies" with their "strategies in practice".

Table 16. Ways Parents Can Help Their Children Learn to Worship

Respondents' answers	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Set good example of a worshipper, worship with joy.	0	32	32
Parents must be worshippers themselves and teach the children why we worship God.	4	12	16
Assimilation into adult church, corporate worship on Sunday	1	14	15
Church should encourage family worship; family should sit together.	0	11	11
Set up a children's church	2	8	10
Encourage the children to sing, sit through worship.	2	6	8
Explain quietly to children parts of the worship while sitting with them.	0	8	8
Let children participate at their own level.	0	5	5
Prepare the child before coming to church.	0	4	4
Be punctual.	0	2	2
Explain to children in a language they can understand.	0	1	1
Treat them equally like other worshippers.	0	1	1
Teach children to take notes during sermon. Parents must show how and go through sermon notes at home	1	0	1
Do not give toys or books to children during worship.	0	1	1
Adults and children clap hands when singing together.	0	1	1
Remind children of God's presence.	0	1	1
Let the Holy Spirit take over.	0	1	1
Be reverent and prayerful.	0	1	1

Table 15 shows that the 3 most significant ways parents can help their children learn to worship are based on parental role modelling, prayer, and Christian education. With regard to parental role modelling, responses in Table 16 indicate that children learn to worship when their parents become worshippers themselves. In fact, all the descriptions in Table 16 require children to be incorporated into the adult Sunday worship so that teaching and modelling can take place. But the normative MBE congregational worship structure encourages separate worship for adults and children (see Table 3). Similar to the data analysis in Table 16, this finding is important because it shows a conflict between the suggested significant strategies to help children learn to worship and the actual structure of MBE congregations.

Table 17. Attitude Towards 7-12 years Children in the Local Congregation

P= Pastor; L=Leaders; T=Total

A – Always S – Sometimes R – Rarely N – No NS – Not Sure

Items of Description	A	S	R	N	NS
My congregation encourages children to make public professions of their faith in Jesus.	<i>P6</i> <i>L20</i> T26	<i>P5</i> <i>L31</i> T36	<i>P2</i> <i>L28</i> T30	<i>P2</i> <i>L17</i> T19	<i>P2</i> <i>L17</i> T19
My congregation systematically discipless children in the Christian faith.	<i>P8</i> <i>L23</i> T31	<i>P6</i> <i>L32</i> T38	<i>P0</i> <i>L24</i> T24	<i>P2</i> <i>L23</i> T25	<i>P1</i> <i>L11</i> T12
My congregation trains their children to minister alongside the adults in various church ministries.	<i>P3</i> <i>L16</i> T19	<i>P4</i> <i>L31</i> T35	<i>P4</i> <i>L30</i> T34	<i>P5</i> <i>L24</i> T29	<i>P1</i> <i>L12</i> T13
My congregation encourages children to respond during the altar call for prayer needs.	<i>P3</i> <i>L25</i> T28	<i>P4</i> <i>L28</i> T32	<i>P1</i> <i>L32</i> T33	<i>P5</i> <i>L22</i> T27	<i>P1</i> <i>L9</i> T10
My congregation includes children as a main topic in the church's prayer list.	<i>P5</i> <i>L25</i> T30	<i>P8</i> <i>L45</i> T53	<i>P1</i> <i>L22</i> T23	<i>P1</i> <i>L12</i> T13	<i>P2</i> <i>L9</i> T11
My congregation takes into consideration children's needs when planning church activities.	<i>P10</i> <i>L39</i> T49	<i>P5</i> <i>L34</i> T39	<i>P1</i> <i>L29</i> T30	<i>P0</i> <i>L5</i> T5	<i>P1</i> <i>L6</i> T7
My congregation is enthusiastic about children's participation in the worship services.	<i>P6</i> <i>L42</i> T48	<i>P8</i> <i>L22</i> T30	<i>P1</i> <i>L25</i> T26	<i>P1</i> <i>L13</i> T14	<i>P1</i> <i>L11</i> T12

The above data indicate that children are not perceived as active participants (see analysis in Table 5). There were 49 respondents who indicated they always included children in planning of church activities and participation in worship while 39 respondents indicated they sometimes included children in these activities. Taking into account the other data in Tables 20 and 21, the “inclusion into church activities and participation in worship” meant children performing at special occasions, reciting Bible verses to encourage adults, sitting quietly during worship, not disturbing other worshippers and taking notes of pastor's sermon. The impression

derived from this scenario is that children are included as “back drop” and not perceived as major players who can contribute to a transformed congregation.

Summary

Data from this section described the evangelism, discipleship and teaching approaches of children in MBE congregations. The researcher’s analysis of the data indicates the following approaches with children.

1. Most respondents chose the 10-12 age group as the most preferred age for children to make a confession of their faith. The most preferred age group for baptism is 12-14 years. This choice is also the most preferred age group to participate in the Lord’s Supper. One perceived reason that the respondents chose to “withhold baptism” till the children are 12 years old could be influenced by the societal norms that children 12 years and older are presumably not be able to make a more mature response. .
2. Most respondents believe that primary-aged children understand the salvation story and concept of conversion. But data in Table 14 show that less than half of the respondents are confident that the children can understand terms like “Jesus is Lord,” “grace,” or “forgiveness.” As such, the researcher concludes that while the respondents believe primary-aged children can make confessions of faith; these confessions are more verbal in nature while deep convictions of sin and repentance are processes in faith development.
3. The data indicate that approximately half of the respondents (71) are involve in discipleship of the children. The rest of the respondents (59) are *rarely, not sure or not* involved in the task (see Table 17). Taking into account data from Tables 6, 15 and 17, the researcher opines that although the respondents are enthusiastic about discipleship of children, MBE congregations need to re-evaluate their congregational practices so that the suggested strategies for nurture can indeed take place.

In summary, the data from the field survey shows inconsistencies in the evangelism, discipleship, and teaching of children in MBE congregations; and therefore MBE congregations need to re-look at their understanding of the faith formation of children

– and this may involve examining Scripture, developmental theories, and Baptist ecclesiology in order to develop principles and practices that will contribute to faith formation of the children.

F. MBE CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICES THAT AFFECT FAITH DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

Table 18. Ministries Children Can Serve In (Multiple answers allowed)

Ministries	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Ushers	14	31	45
Worship Team	5	27	32
Fellowship	10	18	28
Mission Work	1	13	14
Prayer Ministry	4	10	14
Program Planning	0	1	1
Others	0	4	4
No answers from respondents	5	33	38

Section F surveyed the life of MBE congregations and how it affects children's perspective of faith and development. For the above items in the questionnaire, the respondents could tick more than one answer and Table 18 shows the collated results. Children in MBE congregations are involved in several age appropriate ministries in the church. The most obvious roles are ushering, worship team, fellowship, and prayer ministry. A number of respondents clarified that prayer ministry for children means the children are encouraged to pray for their families and friends during Sunday school or Children's church. Further cross reference to Table 5 data shows that children's involvement in MBE congregational worship team means children worship services and not the main worship service. Within the main worship services

and prayer life of the church, primary-aged children are viewed as not able to significantly contribute to the congregational life. Four respondents ticked the “Others” category and included tasks like helping in the crèche, collecting offering, general housekeeping, and gardening. There are also 38 respondents who did not answer this question. One possible reason could be that the children in their churches do not participate in any of the ministries listed.

Table 19. Persons Most Responsible for the Spiritual Welfare of Children in the Local Congregation

Persons	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total (130)
Pastor	7	39	46
Sunday School teachers	7	28	35
Children’s Church Director	5	23	28
Parents	4	12	16
Others	0	16	16

For this item, the respondents were to rank the persons most responsible for the spiritual welfare of children in their congregations. Most respondents opined that the pastor is the person most responsible for the spiritual welfare of children in the MBE congregations. The rank is followed by the Sunday school teachers, Children’s Church director, and parents. Presumably respondents ranked parents at the lowest level of responsibility because of the phrase *in the congregation* as opposed to *home*. Thus, it can be concluded that most respondents probably delineate formation responsibilities between home and congregation and therefore, it is logical that most respondents chose the pastor as the person responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the children in the congregations.

Table 20. Ways the Local Congregation Shows that Children are Welcomed
(Multiple Answers Allowed)

Items of Descriptions	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total
Encourage children to worship with adults.	1	83	84
Talk to them, show love by giving them gifts.	2	7	9
Applaud them when they do well in their performance.	1	8	9
Get them involved in church, e.g. children's choir.	4	4	8
Give attendance coupons to exchange gifts.	1	7	8
Conduct Sunday School and then hold children's church	3	5	8
Introduce them during the worship.	1	5	6
Have simple songs for worship during the first part.	2	4	6
Pray for them /pray for them every now and then.	2	4	6
Include children in worship once a month or on special occasions only.	1	5	6
Children are noisy and should have separate services.	3	2	5
Smile at them and remember their names.	2	3	5
Allow children's presentation, Scripture recitals.	1	4	5
Provide crèche, nursery.	1	4	5
Have children sermon before adult sermon.	1	3	4
They can be in the service as long as they are quiet.	3	1	4
Have separate services for adults and children.	3	0	3
Provide children worship the same time as adults.	0	3	3
Have children program on special occasions, e.g. Easter, Christmas, and Parents' Day.	1	2	3

Table 20 – *Continued over*

Know their names, show interest.	1	1	2
Leave it to the Sunday school teachers.	0	2	2
Shake their hands.	2	0	2
Children are not significant.	0	1	1
Show tolerance and be friendly.	0	1	1
Spent time with them.	0	1	1
Combine Sunday school program.	1	0	1
Include them in church activities.	1	0	1
Treat the children as one's own children.	0	1	1
Provide transport to church and feed them.	1	0	1
Provide a budget for the children's ministry.	1	0	1
Graciously bear with noisy children and crying babies.	0	1	1
Have special games/play with them.	0	1	1
Make them feel at home.	0	1	1
Dedicate the children to God.	0	1	1
Allow them to move about during service.	0	1	1
Be a child friendly environment.	0	1	1
"Nothing" /Unanswered	2	22	24
Not Sure	1	10	11

Data in Table 20 suggest that the general attitude of the pastors is that children and adults should have separate services. The pastors' responses imply that the worship services are adult oriented and children are noisy and thus not welcome. There are two pastors who responded that parents are not to bring their children to the main worship except for Easter, Christmas and Good Friday. One pastor suggests that parents are to bring their children to worship once a month only. Only two pastors

are in favour of children's presence in the main worship. On the other hand, four pastors encourage children to "get involved in the church." No clarification is given as to what the "involvement" means.

The leaders' responses show a higher degree of tolerance and welcome to children and also fewer restrictions to the worship service than the pastors. One reason could be that the leaders are parents of the children. The leaders suggest that children worship with adults and parents be encouraged to bring their children to the worship services (83 respondents). Like the pastors, the leaders also encourage children to get involve in the "church." "Church" in this instance mean Sunday school, children's programs, choir, and children's church.

Table 21. Practices Related To Children in the Local Congregation

P= Pastor

L=Leaders

T=Total

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
C4. Does your congregation identify, encourage, and train children to be potential leaders in the church?	<i>P12</i> <i>L43</i> T55	<i>P6</i> <i>L60</i> T66	<i>P0</i> <i>L9</i> T9
C5. Are parents encouraged to bring their children to the main worship service?	<i>P13</i> <i>L72</i> T85	<i>P5</i> <i>L28</i> T33	<i>P0</i> <i>L12</i> T12
C6. Are there opportunities in your church where children and adults spend leisure time together?	<i>P16</i> <i>L81</i> T97	<i>P2</i> <i>L28</i> T30	<i>P0</i> <i>L3</i> T3
C7. Are there opportunities in the congregation setting where children and adults study the Bible together?	<i>P0</i> <i>L29</i> T29	<i>P18</i> <i>L83</i> T101	<i>P0</i> <i>L0</i> T0
C8. Are there opportunities in the congregation setting where children and adults pray together?	<i>P8</i> <i>L55</i> T63	<i>P10</i> <i>L54</i> T64	<i>P0</i> <i>L3</i> T3
C9. During Sunday worship in your church, do ushers greet the children individually when they come for service?	<i>P10</i> <i>L42</i> T52	<i>P6</i> <i>L58</i> T64	<i>P2</i> <i>L12</i> T14

MBE congregations generally encourage and train their children to be potential leaders in the church. The affirmative 55 respondents and negative 66 respondents' replies are almost equally distributed. One strategy for leadership training is to learn through modelling and data show there are opportunities for children and adults to fellowship in MBE congregations (97 respondents) and to pray together (63 respondents). But 101 respondents note that there are few opportunities where adults and children studied the Bible together. This concern is an area that needs to be addressed in education of the children in the Christian faith.

The respondents indicate that MBE congregational life is adult orientated. While the respondents are aware of children in their midst, the respondents seldom have opportunities to specifically acknowledge the children's presence. Some reasons that they or the ushers on duty do not greet children are that the children "slip" into the church unnoticed, the children dash into the church too quickly, the ushers do not know the children's names, or there is no felt need to do so.

Summary

This section surveyed the congregational culture and practices that affected faith development in children. The tabulated results of the 9 questions show the following:

1. Almost a quarter of the respondents did not answer the question on the role of children in MBE congregations. The reason could be they did not consider there are any roles the children could be involved in. Another explanation could be that the respondents did not understand the question, but others are unlikely. The other respondents listed simple age-appropriate tasks which the children could perform.
2. The respondents identified the pastor of the local congregation as the person most responsible for the spiritual welfare of children. The ranking is followed by the Sunday school teachers, Children's church director, and parents. The respondents seem to have delineated the home and congregational, with parents responsible for the former and the pastor responsible for the latter. There is no indication of joint effort or an integrated flow of responsibility noted in the survey answers.

3. The respondents gave various suggestions for how the local congregations could welcome children. About a quarter of the respondents (35 persons) indicated they are not sure or do not know how to answer the question. One concern noted from the survey answers is the attitude of some pastors toward children in the worship service. Two pastors responded that except for Good Friday, Easter and Christmas, parents are not to bring their children to the main worship. One pastor suggest that parents bring their children to worship once a month only. This finding shows that not all pastoral leadership welcome children in the worship service and this attitude can eventually affect the faith development of the children in the congregation.

4. The researcher noted one particular practice that surfaced in the returned answers that focused on giving of gifts or presents to children to encourage church attendance (16 respondents), good performance (8 respondents), and as evidence of the adults' love for the children (9 respondents). Although the percentage is 10% and less of the total respondents, the data shows that there are leaders who equate "signs of faith development" with attitudes and practices which qualify for rewards. This concern is an area presumably taken for granted but not thoroughly investigated for its theoretical or theological implications.

In summary, the general congregational culture and practices of MBE congregations are adult focused; and although provisions may be made to cater to children's needs, these provisions have not created a faith community structure broad enough to include children as equal partners in congregational life especially in worship. Hence, MBE congregations need to understand the impact of this kind of structure on the faith development of children and deliberately explore greater ways to integrate the adults and children especially in the church worship.

**G. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS THAT TRANSMIT FAITH TO
CHILDREN IN MBE CONGREGATIONS**

Table 22. Children and “child-friendly” church building

Description of church building	No. of respondents
Church buildings are child friendly.	97
Church buildings are not child friendly.	27
Assessment is not possible because church structures are being renovated.	2
Church building is not handicap accessible.	1
Not sure how to gauge their church buildings.	3

Most respondents (97 persons) acknowledged their churches are structurally child friendly because measures were taken to ensure the children’s physical safety in and around the church premises. One reason for negative answers was that the buildings were not purpose-built for congregational meetings. The respondents (17 persons) who noted their church buildings as structurally not child-friendly met in converted “shop lots,” semi detached houses or office buildings for worship services. Facilities at these premises were adult orientated as the intention for the formation of the congregation was adult worship.

Table 23. Significant Traditions That Reminded the Children of the Art Of
Christian Heritage They Have As Part of the Congregation
(Multiple Answers Allowed)

Respondents' Answers	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total
Drama and dance presentations	8	72	80
Holy Communion	3	9	12
Question not answered	2	8	10
Christmas /Easter/Good Friday	8	1	9
Birthdays	0	8	8
Baptism	0	7	7
Church anniversary	3	3	6
Vacation Bible School	0	4	4
Tithing and offering	1	3	4
Mission/church planting	3	1	4
Prayer	1	3	4
Pulpit teaching/teaching in church	0	3	3
Children's choir	1	2	3
Ushers to be in their best attire	0	1	1
New Year Eve candle light service	0	1	1
Games night/family night	0	1	1
Get children baptized for holy communion.	0	1	1
Lantern night/Cultural festivals	0	1	1
"Leave it to them parents..."	0	1	1
Weddings	0	1	1

Table 23 – *Continued over*

Worship/sing hymn	1	0	1
Good behaviour, obedience to parents and teachers	0	1	1
Orderliness in worship	0	0	0
No church traditions to remind children of their Christian heritage	5	35	40
No significant ways the congregations communicate faith to the children	6	24	30

Traditions are important events which can promote faith experiences in children. Traditions mediate time honoured experiences which are part of the identity of MBE congregations. Ability to identify and engage in these experiences helps strengthen the Baptist heritage and promote the Baptist Confessions of faith. The survey data showed that only 1 respondent (a pastor) noted worship and hymn singing and 3 respondents suggested pulpit teaching as traditions that could mediate faith in children. There were 12 respondents who suggested the Holy Communion and 7 respondents wrote baptism. 40 respondents (pastors and leaders) maintained there are no traditions in their congregations to remind the children of their Christian heritage and 30 respondents indicated there are no significant ways by which their congregations communicated faith to the children.

Table 24. Significant Ways the Local Congregation Transmits
Christian Values to Children (Multiple Answers Allowed)

Respondents' Answers	Pastor (18)	Leaders (112)	Total
Teach from Bible	7	44	51
Lead by example	3	17	20
Visit to old folks home /community service	1	7	8
Pray with them	1	6	7
Family time/Good Parenting	1	6	7
Involve them in mission and outreach	3	3	6
Worship	0	4	4
Moral teachings	0	4	4
Fellowship	0	3	3
Casual conversation	0	3	3
Giving to missions	0	2	2
"God is with us all the time so no need for reminders"	0	1	1
Boys brigade	0	1	1
Child dedication	1	0	1
Charity drive	0	1	1
Blood donation	0	1	1
Children are disciplined from young to sit in the church.	0	1	1
Vacation Bible School	0	1	1
Social visits during cell group	0	1	1
Children's books in the library	0	1	1

Table 24 – *Continued over*

Children dedication	0	3	3
<i>40 Days Purpose</i> (Rick Warren)	1	1	2
Chinese New Year	0	2	2
Family camp	0	2	2
Participate in church activities.	1	1	2
Pentecost Sunday	0	1	1
Silence during the worship	0	1	1
“We talked only but have not done anything”	0	1	1
Children’s sermon during worship	0	1	1
Church camp	0	1	1
Loving one another	0	1	1
Reverence in God’s temple	0	1	1
Recite Bible verses	0	1	1
Do craft work during Sunday school	0	1	1
Father’s Day/Mother’s Day	0	1	1
Lord’s Supper	0	1	1
Sunday School	0	1	1
Good behaviour and attitudes	0	1	1
Sermons	0	1	1
No traditions	2	28	30

Data from Table 24 indicated the normative Baptist practices in MBE congregations where cognitive teaching of the Bible and Christian education have always been an important element in Christian discipleship. Most respondents agreed that teaching from the Bible is most important and should be enforced by the adults’ example.

There were however 30 respondents who wrote that MBE congregations have no traditions to transmit values to the children. Correlating this score to Table 23, the response is understandable in that MBE congregations in general do not follow a liturgical calendar year or use the terms “liturgies” and “sacraments” in their worship practices. Hence, most respondents found it difficult to pin point traditions in MBE congregations. Transmission of values was action orientated and focused on teaching, learning, and modelling.

Table 25. Visual Structures or Physical Arrangements in the Auditorium /
Sanctuary That Reminded Children of God’s Presence
(Multiple Answers Allowed)

Items of Description	Pastors (18)	Leaders (112)	Total
“No”	4	32	36
“Yes”	12	50	62
Motif of a praying child	0	5	5
The Cross	8	35	43
Banners	1	9	10
Special occasions when church is decorated	1	0	1
Scripture verses on the notice board	0	11	11
Verbal cues only	0	1	1
Sunday school room	0	1	1
Christian posters & pictures	1	7	8
Hymnals	0	1	1
The Bible	2	6	8
“Nothing” as to avoid idol worship	0	1	1

Table 25 – *Continued over*

Baptismal pool	1	15	16
Floral arrangement	1	0	1
Communion table	1	9	10
No answer	2	17	19

Although religious objects, liturgical symbols, and icons are artefacts and tools that maximize learning and can be used to mediate faith to children, these elements are generally not utilized in MBE congregations. For MBE congregations (and some evangelical congregations as well), religious symbols in worship and liturgical observances are often associated with Catholicism (a respondent associated symbols with idol worship). However, the respondents' answers showed there were some acceptable symbols and structures that mediated faith within MBE congregations. Some of the answers were: 1) symbol of a cross, 2) baptismal pool, 3) Scripture verse displays, 4) banners that promote Christian faith, and 5) Communion table.

Summary

This section investigated faith mediation in MBE congregations and sought to identify the active and passive modes in transmission of beliefs and values. The respondents appropriately answered most of the questions in the survey. Some significant findings from the survey data for this section are:

1. Most MBE congregations met in buildings that were deemed “child-friendly.” The term “child-friendly” meant that the buildings were structurally safe and accessible by children.
2. The respondents had difficulties in naming the Baptist traditions that mediated faith to children. These practices which could include symbolic observances, artefacts, use of language in rituals and liturgies such as hymn singing and solid

preaching are acceptable tools of communication in the Baptist denomination. The data received however showed that some respondents did not understand the question.

3. Christian values were mostly transmitted via cognitive tools such as teaching and learning the Bible because communicating faith through teaching is a strength in the Baptist denomination.

4. Other than the normatively-accepted symbols of the cross, banners, posters, hymnals, bibles, communion table, and baptismal pool, MBE congregations generally did not place emphasis on the environment as a teaching tool.

In summary, the researcher noted that faith transmission in MBE congregations was highly cognitive. Although there were attempts made to mediate faith through physical arrangements, these arrangements were usually for aesthetic purposes and not for communicating a religious way of life. Hence, the researcher concluded that the environment as a tool for learning had not been sufficiently explored in MBE congregations.

H. SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY FINDINGS

This chapter investigated the faith formation approaches of children in MBE congregations, analysed and reported the field survey data. The aim of the survey was to gather sufficient data to describe the *sitz im leben* of MBE congregations and the approaches to faith formation of children. Four areas of interest were investigated and each section of the questionnaire sought to explore one particular area related to the subject.

D. Place of children in MBE congregations

E. Evangelism, discipleship and teaching of children in MBE congregations

F. MBE congregational culture and practices that affect faith development of children

G. Environmental factors that transmit faith to children in MBE congregations

Data received from the survey were analysed and conclusions were made based on the data received. The conclusions answered the questions from Sections C to F (Tables 3 to 24).

First, MBE congregations comprised mainly of families with young and teenage children. The survey data indicated that the respondents were generally not too sure or were not in agreement with the place of children in their congregations. This finding suggested that the respondents representing MBE congregations were not aware of the original Baptist teachings on the place of children in the congregational life. Although there were limitations in church participation, Baptist history showed that children were intentionally included into the congregations (see Chapter Four on Baptist Ecclesiology and Faith Formation of Children). This uncertainty or disagreement on the place of children in congregational life affected the way MBE congregations nurtured their children into faith.

Second, the respondents in MBE congregations were not fully aware that faith formation of children is a “whole church affair.” Findings in the survey showed that while MBE congregations placed children as ‘fairly important’ and have utilized various methods of formation, they lacked togetherness in this task. Data from Table 5.52 indicated that the respondents held the pastor chiefly responsible for the faith development of children in the congregations. Members did not see themselves corporately as active participants in faith nurture. The respondents relegated the responsibilities of faith formation to parents in homes and officially designated persons in the church to fulfil the task. While there were evidences that adult members have taken efforts to encourage the children through rewards, praise, and special programs, the findings revealed an underlining attitude that children were best kept within the confines of Sunday school and Children’s church.

Third, MBE congregations generally did not see children in their congregations as active and equal participants in the faith. Most adults perceived children as *tabular rasa* while some adults saw them as intrusion into adult church (see responses from 5.48), both of which needed discipline and enforced teachings. Findings in the survey also implied that while children were generally welcomed to worship, conditions applied (as long as they did not disturb the adults). Time spent between adults and

children in MBE congregations was usually relegated to fellowship. Children were perceived to be too young to be trained in leadership and the ministries allocated to children were usually in Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, children's worship, etc. Overall, there was lack of an intergenerational environment for the children to learn faith as a community. The attempts of intentional religious socialization (Westerhoff, 1979, 80) were not clearly evident in MBE congregations.

Fourth, survey data reveal some of childhood faith formation strategies in MBE congregations are inconsistent with Baptist teachings. According to Baptist teachings, the goal in faith formation of children is to form them to be regenerate persons who can share their lives in a faith community, minister to others and bear witness to the Baptist confessions. Baptist ecclesiology and confessions form the context and are the 'culture' from which formation takes place. The ecclesiology and confessions have within them the beliefs, values and shared stories that make meaning for the children. Data implied that MBE congregations lacked understanding of how the task could be accomplished by "being themselves." If MBE congregations desire to help their children become the kind of person described in their confessions, the members have to be deliberate in structuring an environment that mediate the outcomes.

The survey results in this chapter also show that a majority of respondents in MBE congregations have no comprehensive approach to form faith in children. The respondents who affirmed that their congregations have a faith formation approach listed "*Character First*," "*Purpose Driven Life*," "*Super Kids*" church, and P.R.A.I.S.E as their answers (See Appendix F for description of the listed approaches). The strengths and weaknesses of the approaches mentioned are also discussed in Appendix F.

Chapter Four showed how the early Baptists were deliberate in faith formation of their children. Working within their confessions of faith and confines of denominational ecclesiology, Baptists have through the ages been scaffolding their children into faith through education of the Bible and Baptist doctrines, corporate life in the congregation and mediation of shared culture. The goal and objectives of childhood faith formation defined by early Baptist ecclesiology should also be the goal and objective of the present day MBE congregations. However, the survey findings

indicated MBE congregations do not have a comprehensive childhood faith formation approach that informs the congregation of the formation process and positively nurture their children to become such persons as the Baptist confessions desired.

The subsequent chapters in this dissertation seek to explain and posit an approach that can help MBE congregations recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith maturity within congregational life. The next chapter will discuss Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of child development and how children acquire convictions.

CHAPTER SIX

THE VYGOTSKIAN SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH ¹

This chapter sets the foundation for thinking about Lev Semenovich Vygotsky's sociocultural approach as a theoretical framework for faith formation of children in MBE congregations. The approach was developed in a Marxist setting during the early 1900s as a frame for educating children. Vygotsky is often referred to as a constructivist theorist and his proposal as an approach to children's cognitive developmental. Vygotsky has also been often compared to Jean Piaget; seemingly both psychologists were committed to the same concern of cognitive development in children. But Vygotsky's approach is not about cognitive development alone, for he moved beyond Piaget's traditional understanding of linear cognitive maturity through constructivism to cognitive maturity as a result of psychological development through sociocultural influences.

The chapter discusses Vygotsky's views of child development and the instructional settings which facilitate effective child functioning. The discussion is divided into three sections: 1) origins of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, 2) his assumptions of child development and functioning, and 3) the instructional settings for formation of thinking.

¹Although some authors have used the term 'theory' to describe Vygotsky's proposal, others have noted that Vygotsky did not develop a theory to cognitive development of children. Instead, he proposed an approach to promote cognitive development in children. This research uses the term "approach" in its description of Vygotsky's proposal

A. ORIGINS OF VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

There are many theories to help us understand the complexity of human development. A popular means to study human development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was through developmental sciences; and observable behaviours became the major measure of growth. When faced with complex human functioning, it is not unusual for theorists to dissect whole developmental theories into sub-divisions for clarity. An example of this practice is Gestalt psychology, which teaches “the whole is in the parts.” This approach opens the door for dualism and fragmentation in analysing human development and could pave the way for promoting disconnectedness in explaining human functioning. The concern for an alternative explanation was addressed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, a Russian social scientist. Vygotsky proposed that human functioning, although complex, must be studied as a whole. He argued that there is “no need to disregard the scientific, determinist, and causal explanation of the higher mental functioning” (Moll, 1992, 45). In Vygotsky’s opinion, human functioning and development is integrated and in essence a social product, hence the formulation of his sociocultural approach or the sociohistorical approach.²

Vygotsky’s childhood was grounded in traditional Jewish religion. He read the Hebrew Torah and delivered his speech at Bar Mitzvah. The frequent biblical references he made in his writings and his interest in Jewish culture and folklore are evidence that Vygotsky had understanding of the Jewish faith. Although Vygotsky’s philosophies of human development are heavily influenced by Marxism and his intellectual perspectives towards life and death, conclusions in *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1934; trans. Kozulin, 1986) give glimpses that he held “spirituality” to be an important essence to life. Vygotsky was not a rationalist who denied any meaning of spiritual existence. In fact, he was convinced that within each person is a creative struggle for an inner meaning called “life” (Van der Veer and

²Vygotsky refused to “search for explanations of higher mental processes in the depth of the brain or in the ethereal characteristics of a soul detached from the physical. To explain the spirit, it is necessary to go beyond the confines of the body” (Moll, 45).

Valsiner, 1991, 16). Hence Vygotsky posited that a study of human consciousness should include both scientific investigations and spiritual considerations.

In a letter to his student Levina, Vygotsky expressed his concern that Levina should not limit herself to science alone but must go beyond identifying life by external expressions and look deep into the inner person. He stated,

... you will find in yourself, outside yourself, in everything, so much that none of us can accommodate it. Of course, you cannot live without spirituality giving a meaning to life. Without your own philosophy (your own, personal life philosophy) there can be nihilism, cynicism, suicide, but not life.... Apparently, you have to grow it in yourself, to give it space inside yourself, because it sustains life in us... and then, there is the most important – life itself ... (Vygotsky's letter to Levina, cited in Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 16)

But Vygotsky consciously steered clear of any religious references in his writing for the Marxist social and political contexts. While Vygotsky's reflections on *Hamlet, Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, reprint 1986) and his letter to Levina showed his emotional and spiritual dimensions, another writing *Pedagogical Psychology: A Short Course* (Vygotsky, Vol. 1, reprint 1982, 222) portrayed him outrightly otherwise. In this latter writing, Vygotsky claimed that the fear of death and belief in an existence beyond the grave “obscures reason and nourishes stupid degrading phantasies [sic].” He also said that, “man [sic] will set himself the goal of mastering his own feelings, to raising the instincts to the height of awareness, to make them transparent,... to create a ‘higher’ societal biological type... a superman” (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 347-48). Van der Veer and Valsiner commented that Vygotsky was probably “carried away by the prevailing ideology and the revolutionary zeal of his time,” his passion with Hamlet's ghosts and Trotsky's utopia (56).³

Vygotsky developed his sociocultural approach after the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. Following the revolution, the Russian National Commissariat for Education assigned Vygotsky (who was then with the Marx-Engels Institute of Psychology) to

³Vygotsky studied Hamlet for his Masters thesis in 1916 and was intrigued by Hamlet's journey and struggle towards death. Hamlet's story was, to Vygotsky, the confession of the Russian soul and a reflection of his own inner quest for spirituality. Shakespeare's tragedy expressed Vygotsky's world and is reflected in his writings (Yaroshevsky, 1989, 45).

lead in rebuilding Russian society through education.⁴ As a staff scientist working to revamp the education system in Russia, Vygotsky had to address several political and social issues. One of Vygotsky's problems with the existing education program was that the education curriculum did not meet the needs of the learners. There was lack of interrelatedness between the projected educational outcomes, the daily learning experiences of the students and environmental factors which affected learning. Vygotsky's argument challenged the thinking on education of children when it was at its lowest ebb. There were educational and social concerns which affected the development and education of children and Vygotsky had to address these problems.

The four main challenges in the education of children that mooted the sociocultural approach were: 1) the absence of a scientific explanation of child development, 2) an irrelevant childhood education system, 3) the plight of the *defectologia*, and 4) inappropriate assessment of learning. These challenges prompted Vygotsky to seek solutions for the problems, and in the process he formulated a different approach to the psychology of child development and functioning.

1. A SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky defined the science of childhood development as paedology,

One can study children's diseases, the pathology of childhood and that would also to some extent be a science about the child. In paedagogics, the upbringing of children can be studied, and that too is to some extent science of the child. One can study the psychology of the child and that too will be to some extent the science of the child. Therefore, we must specify from the very beginning what exactly is the object of paedological investigation. That is why it is more exact to state that paedology is the science of development of the child. *The development of the child is the direct and immediate object of our science.* (Vygotsky, cited in Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 308)

⁴Vygotsky wanted to develop psychology into a scientific study. Although greatly influenced by Karl Marx (1818-1883), reforming psychological theories along Marxist lines but did not degenerate into Marxist psychology (Vygotsky, reprint 1986, xxiii). Vygotsky maintained, "I don't want to discover the nature of mind by patching together a lot of quotations. I want to find out how science has to be built. To approach the study of mind having learned the whole of Marx's method . . . in order to create an enabling theory..." (Vygotsky's unpublished notebooks, cited in Cole and Scribner, 1974, 8).

During Vygotsky's era child development was centred on single faceted theories such as Jean Piaget's cognitive construction, Ivan Pavlov's classical conditioning, or Edward Thorndike's stimuli-response bonds. However, Vygotsky believed that human growth should be viewed more from psychology than solely cognitive development because single faceted developmental theories cannot fully explain the intricacies of human development. He further asserted that there is a strong link between social institutional forces and personal consciousness. From his empirical research, Vygotsky noted that children who developed higher levels of psychological processes are transformed in thinking and behaviour patterns. In his approach, Vygotsky maintained that these higher levels of psychological processes are results of "enculturation into the practices of society; through acquisition of society's technology, its signs and tools; through education in all its forms" (Moll, 1992, 1).

Vygotsky opined that traditional theories of child development usually start from individual consciousness and are often inward looking, but since society is the "nucleus and foundation of all mental development and all human culture, a psychological perspective duly explains growth" (Vygotsky, cited in Ratner, 2003). From Vygotsky's observation, human cognitive development is not entirely based on schemas and stages of growth but also on the availability and provision of knowledge.

At first, paedology was also a symptomatic science. It studied external features of child development, of mental development, development of child speech; it claimed that on that or other year, these and other features emerge in the child. It was, like all symptomatic sciences, primarily descriptive, it could not explain why one or another feature emerges. (Vygotsky, cited in Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 311)

Vygotsky did not oppose a developmental approach to paedology but chose not to lean towards linear developmental stages, which to him were overly finite and restraining. He questioned the traditional definition of child development and postulated that in child development there is the "complex organization in time" and that the "passport age" does not often reflect the actual development of children (2). Life itself is full of "intensities" and these "intensities" differ from one child to another, affecting childhood maturity. He asserted that development is a process and not a product concept; beginning with the cyclical human process and then the reorganization of the child's personality through the "law of metamorphosis" (11).

[Instead of understanding child development as stage orientated, the concern should be addressed from a psychological perspective because “child development at the same time is also child education” (Bruner, 1992, v).] So Vygotsky concluded:

Therefore, paedology is interested not in ‘stable’ features (immutable genetically determined features, such as eye colour, that undoubtedly vary within a population), but rather in those hereditary features that are themselves open to modifications when exposed to experience. (Vygotsky, cited in Van der Veer and Valsiner, 312)

2. A CONTEXTUALIZED EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

By end of the October Revolution, literacy levels in Russia had dropped to almost zero, due to war and neglect of education. At that time, there was only one education system for the masses and Vygotsky found this system to be irrelevant and impractical. The fragmented people groups (with their different languages) in the Soviet nation needed a more contextual approach to the education of their children. Vygotsky developed a framework for education that had three unique characteristics:

- a. The proposed approach to education was communal, as an individualistic approach would be against the prevailing Marxist ideology. Although Vygotsky believed that societal changes must begin with the individual, the individual does not educate for himself but for benefit of his community (Gindis, 2003). He maintained that cognitive maturity is a social product achieved through community living. “This position reflects a model that attempts to integrate the various psychological disciplines... in which each (individual) fulfils a specific, meaningful explanatory function within the whole...” (Moll, 1992, 83). Education in community is formation of the person and the chief end is behaviour change contributive to individual growth as well as society.
- b. The proposed approach to education was practical and workable in a society with very few outside resources. By 1917, Russia had gone through one of the 20th century’s greatest social transformations. During this period, Lenin had called for a workers’ revolution and also played an integral part in the Bolsheviks’ rise to power. There were very few resources left to rebuild the war-torn country. Although the elite

and educated few had ambitious dreams of a new well-informed Russia, the public majority (peasants with little or no education) favoured practical solutions to solve their immediate needs. (Practicality to meet immediate needs later opened the door for dialectical materialism, otherwise known as communism).

c. The proposed approach to education was contextual and not based on obscure policies. This curriculum is an education system in which the local people from different provinces and languages could benefit. Vygotsky's assumptions were that learning takes place prior to actual developmental attainment if the learner is saturated in active, meaningful and applicable tasks (Moll, 1992, 1). He believed that learning as the most important aspect in cognitive development is only transformative when the learner identifies with its relevance. Thus, an education curriculum that makes meaning for personal and community living is a framework that utilizes the history, culture and the tools of the people.

3. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR THE *DEFECTOLOGIA*

Defectologia was a term traditionally used by Russian social scientists during Vygotsky's time to refer to children with mental and physical defects. For example, *defectologia* are deaf-mute, blind, physically deformed, and mentally retarded children. Working with researchers in the Kornilov Institute of Psychology, Vygotsky focused on the social education of these children. He reasoned that while a physical defect does not affect the child's personality, it is the social environment that highlights the differences (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 66). The social environment reflects and "... accentuates the child's handicap; everything fixes his attention on his handicap and traumatizes him for this reason" (Tudge, 1990, 158). As such, the social environment limits the *defectologia* by its perception of normality. Vygotsky was convinced that if the *defectologia*, with their special needs, were educated outside normal social settings, they would have no possibilities for improvement. Therefore, he recommended inclusive schooling for these children who were segregated from main stream education.

In Vygotsky's terms, inclusive education meant that the *defectologia* would be exposed to a broader perspective of social life and people interaction. An inclusive

education enables these special needs children to encounter real life problems, seek solutions, and acquire essential tools to cope and live successfully in the community. Vygotsky believed that given the right opportunities, the *defectologia* could be greatly helped to be more independent and competent; for “in changing nature, people change themselves” (Wertsch, 1985a, 65). From 1923 to 1925, Vygotsky helped the National Commissariat for Education implement an experimental education curriculum for Soviet Russia. The proposed curriculum integrated academics with daily living skills and stress-free learning in an authentic natural environment (69). This new education curriculum benefited both normal and special needs children by providing a wholesome and realistic learning environment and the *defectologia* were given opportunities to advance in new directions:

A new system of education was taking shape in Soviet Russia in opposition to those systems which, placing the emphasis on the defect, ignored the ‘tons of health’ innate in each child’s organism. What mankind has dreamt of as a religious miracle – that the blind should see and that the dumb should speak, is the task of social education emerging in the greatest epoch of mankind’s final reconstruction. (Vygotsky, Vol. 1, 1934/1987, 66)

4. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT FOR CHILDHOOD LEARNING

Vygotsky was concerned for standardized testing of children in the Russian schools because in his opinion the education system did not give a correct measure of the students’ cognitive abilities. Vygotsky strongly argued against the psychometric means of evaluating a child’s cognitive development because “the developmental process does not coincide with learning, rather, it follows learning” (Cole, 1984, 116). He asserted that child development, especially metacognition, should be assessed within “connected activities” where learners are able to associate with learning tasks and make personal meaning. Standardized testing measures cognitive development that has already taken place (‘fossilized’) but does not account for development still unfolding (Wells, 1999, 37). Standardized testing also does not fully gauge the individual’s intelligence because the tests are often too general and do not provide a true measure of the learner’s potentials.

In contrast to cognitive developmental theories that assess maturation by cognitive competencies, Vygotsky maintained that cognitive maturity is largely determined by

social cultural interaction and children are able to do far more than normally perceived if sufficient support is available. Again, unlike cognitive developmental theories which associate particular task achievements with linear sequential development, Vygotsky observed that cognitive development hinges more on psychological factors than physiological developmental stages (Cole and Scribner, 1974, 7; Kozulin, 1999, 48). He asserted that cognitive maturity of children cannot be viewed apart from the “instructional process that provides new forms of symbolic activity, eventually internalized as new cognitive formation (Kozulin, 80). The ideal assessment of a child’s intelligence is measured when the individual is presented with a problem or unfamiliar task. “Only when specific knowledge is absent may one hope to identify the ‘infantile’ way of reasoning unaffected by the imitation of adult logic” (40).

Vygotsky opined that in a traditional learning paradigm, there is no exact measure or correspondence between cognitive development and learning. He noted that,

Instruction has its own sequences and organization, it follows curriculum and a timetable, and its rules cannot be expected to coincide with the inner laws of the developmental process it calls to life.... For example, the different steps in learning arithmetic may be of unequal value for mental development. It often happens that three of four steps in instruction add little to the child’s understanding of arithmetic, and then, with the fifth step, something clicks; the child has grasped a general principle and his/her developmental curve rises markedly.... When the child learns some operation of arithmetic or some scientific concept, the development of that operation or concept has only begun; the curve of development does not coincide with the curve of school instruction, by and large, instruction precedes development.” (Vygotsky, trans. by Kozulin, 1986, 185)

In Vygotsky’s view, learning occurs when the child collaborates with more competent peers. “In the process, the natural psychological functions of the child change, their nature becoming culturally and socially informed and organized” and learning takes place (Kozulin, 1999, 40). This proposal prompted American educators in the mid 20th century to develop teaching methodologies of “mediated learning, dynamic assessment, and cognitive education” (Berk and Winsler, 1995, Vol.7).

From the four challenges to childhood learning and designing an effective education system for Russia, Vygotsky developed his frame for a sociocultural approach along

Marxist lines, but without degenerating into Marxist psychology (Kozulin, 1986, xxiii). He was convinced that while normative functions stemmed from organic development, higher cognitive intelligences result from active interaction in social cultural settings. Based on the premise that children are active participants intrinsically woven into community life, Vygotsky argued for an understanding of development within the historical and cultural contexts of the people. He proposed that “the behaviour of modern, cultural man is not only the product of biological evolution or the result of childhood development, but also the product of historical development” (Golod and Knox, 1993, 81).

B. VYGOTSKY’S ASSUMPTIONS RELATING TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTIONING

In Vygotsky’s approach, human development undergoes three lines of development: biological, historical-cultural, and psychological. These three stages of change (or “lines of development”) turn the “schoolchild into an adult cultural man” (iii). In their research, Vygotsky and Luria commented,

Our task was to portray three main lines in the development of behaviour – evolutionary, historical, and ontogenetic; and to show that the behaviour of a cultured man is the product of these three lines of development and may be understood and explained scientifically only by analysing the three different paths that make up the history of human behaviour. (Golod and Knox, 1993, 36)

These three stages of change or lines of development formed the assumptions of Vygotsky’s approach that, a) child development is *ontogenetic*, b) higher cognitive functions are *microgenetic*, and c) knowledge mediation is *phylogenetic*. These three assumptions also guided Vygotsky to formulate his education curriculum and the way he viewed child development and functioning. The following discussion explains each of these assumptions and also lays a foundation for thinking about faith formation of children.

1. CHILD DEVELOPMENT IS ONTOGENETIC

Unlike other theories that studied “the operation of a single set of explanatory principles apart from those that governs other genetic domains, ontogenesis necessarily involves the simultaneous operation of more than one development force” (Werstch, 1985a, 41). Vygotsky’s concept of ontogenesis in human development was his answer to the “nurture-nature” theory prevalent during his time. Using the *defectologia* as a case study, Vygotsky explained the “organism versus environment” problem. He proposed that it was not the “disease” that was the core problem of the *defectologia* but the person. Mental or physical defects in children do not limit their active participation in society. He believed that the organism (as in the physical being) can adapt to the environmental changes in body and behaviour. In his theory on human evolution, Vygotsky sought to demonstrate that human development from anthropoid apes (primitive man) to the present day human is a psychological process rooted in culture and shared history. Vygotsky and his research partner Luria worked on the assumption that human development from primitive time to 20th century civilization was due largely to evolution in human culture (see Golod and Knox’s translation on *Studies on the History of Behaviour: Ape, Primitive and Child*, 1993). Note the difference between Vygotsky’s explanation of human evolution and that of Charles Darwin. While Darwin’s idea of human evolution is based on biological development, Vygotsky’s idea of evolution is focused on the cultural development of the human race.

However, Vygotsky was quick to point out that “the biological evolution was finished long before the historical development of man started” (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 200). In his approach,

Vygotsky essentially presented a theory of man, his origin and coming into being, his present state amidst the other species, and a blueprint for his future. The image of man that derives from this theory is that of man as a rational being taking control of his own destiny and emancipating himself from nature’s restrictive bounds. It is an image of man that is partially on Marxist thinking and partially on the ideas of various philosophers, such as Bacon and Spinoza. But above all, of course this was the image of man Vygotsky believed in, a belief that was very common among the people of his time and in the country he lived. (189)

In the study of normative biological development, it is common practice to research human cognitive functions through developmental stages. The traditional understanding of cognitive maturity is growth from simple reflexes to complex multiple responses. At every age group development, children become more competent in cognitive reasoning coupled with physiological abilities. But Vygotsky theorized that while human cognitive progression is predictable according to organic development, there is in fact a stronger influence that propels higher cognition within individuals (Wertsch, 1985a, 41).⁵ This stronger influence is the historical-cultural element in human development. Vygotsky was concerned that the study of child development had taken place with little consideration of the historical and cultural influences in the child's life. This concern needed to be addressed because social-genetic origins and personal experiences (historical and present) contribute to a child's unique personality. Hence, the study of child development from an ontogenetic perspective provides a broader scope for understanding children.

An ontogenetic perspective of child development can provide insights into character differences in children. "Ontogeny also reveals the relation of psychology to biology, and the individual in society... comparing periods of a child's life offered a perfect complement to phylogenetic comparisons of species and historical comparisons of adults" (Ratner, 1991, 147). Further, "In the process of historical development (of human-kind), change and development occurred not only in the external relations between people and in man's relations with nature; man himself changed and developed" (Golod and Knox, 1993, 81). Vygotsky called this approach a new genetic psychology. The experiences he had working with the *defectologia* prompted Vygotsky to adopt "the principle of historicism and social determinism of behaviour not only as a philosophical imperative but also as a guiding principle in the transformation of man" (Yaroshevsky, 1989, trans. by Syrovatkin, 104).

Vygotsky claimed that before two years of age children's responses are instinctive, but after two years of age (see Fig. 2, p.187), children's learning abilities begin to develop from sensorial to preoperational and their cognitive functions and language

⁵Vygotsky used the term "elementary mental functions" to mean basic natural responses of normative biological development and "higher mental functions" to denote an advanced level of thinking that developed from social interaction.

skills become more competent. Although infants at two years have some limitations in social interaction, the social cultural influences are already beginning to be dominant in shaping them. After two years of age, the organic (biological) and

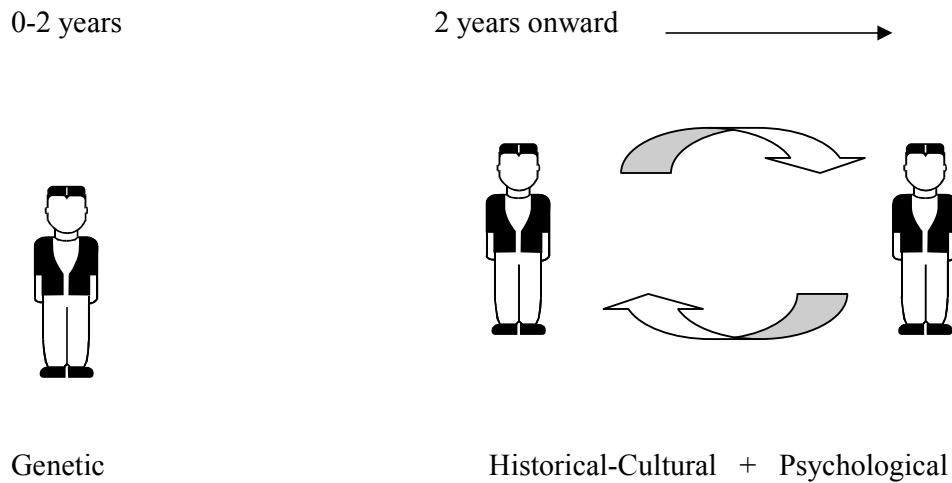


Fig. 2. Socio-Genetic Development of Children

historical-cultural lines of development which began as two separate entities at birth now “interpenetrate one another and essentially form a single line of socio-biological formation of the child’s personality” (van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 200). With language acquisition, these two lines begin to intersect and change the nature of both speech and intellect (Fig. 3). The consequence of this intermingling is that "the nature of the development itself changes, from biological to socio-historical;" evident that cultural development is superimposed on biological growth and cognitive maturation (Ibid., 94). This process explains the complexity of child behaviour which otherwise may not be understood from single-faceted theories.

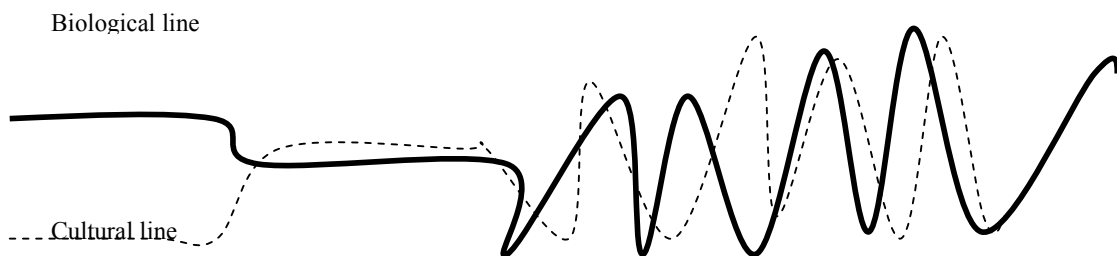


Fig. 3. Two lines of intersection to form the socio-biological personality of the child

Three reasons are attributed to Vygotsky's thought that the socio-cultural environment contributes to qualitative rather than quantitative development. First, abstract knowledge is concretized and made meaningful in a social context. Second, children are led to higher levels of understanding through social interaction. Third, elementary knowledge takes on new meaning in dialogue than what was previously ascribed. Vygotsky explained,

We need to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established.... To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is. (Cole and Scribner, 1978, 64)

Some investigators (proponents of the so called "biogenetic law") believe that we should not study analytically... courses of development. They assert that, in the process of its development, the child repeats the essential features of genus development, covering in the few years of its individual life the path that this genus covered in many thousands and tens of thousands of years.

We do not share this point of view. We believe that each of these evolutionary courses--the development from ape into human being, from primitive man into a representative of the cultural era, and from child into adult, follows its own individual path that is influenced by specific factors and passes through specific, often idiosyncratic forms and developmental stages. (Vygotsky and Luria, trans. Golod and Knox, 1993, 140)

Vygotsky's argument of ontogenesis in child development is that the characteristics of children in attitudes, beliefs, and personality are formed by social cultural influences from two years of age. Before two years of age, children act on intuition and natural reflexes.⁶ After two years of age, social cultural influences facilitate mental maturity from a lower to a higher level of functioning, enabling the children to move beyond the traditional predictions of age related abilities. Vygotsky maintained that

the cultural development of the child is characterized first by the fact that it transpires under conditions of dynamic organic changes. Cultural development is superimposed on the process of growth, maturation, and the organic development of the child. It forms a single whole with these processes. (Wertsch, 1985a, 41)

⁶Vygotsky's claim can be supported by Piaget's research on sensory motor skills (0-2 years) and Erikson's psychosocial theory on trust and mistrust (0-1 years).

2. HIGHER COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS ARE MICROGENETIC

Microgenesis is a concept in cognitive learning developed by the Wurzburg School of Psychology. Heinz Werner (1890-1964) derived the term “microgenesis” from the German word “aktualgenese,” which means “micro temporal unfolding of object representations, conceived as a more or less instantaneous recapitulation in cognition of patterns laid down in phylo-ontogeny”.⁷ Vygotsky and Luria further developed this concept, giving it an historical dimension. This approach hypothesized that mental representations have preludes that form the foundations for later concepts, reflexes and feelings. Cognitive awareness unfolds in “micro time, in seconds or in a fraction of a second, leading to an action or an idea” (Ibid.). Evidence of microgenesis in children is reflected either by visible signs of physical movements, verbal expressions, or as unseen mental images imprinted in their minds. In cognitive development, children will return to build on these initial impressions or images and successful resolution results in cognitive maturity.

In his interpretation of the dialectical nature of consciousness, Vygotsky said that a child’s consciousness of the environment is a result of gradual reorganization of thoughts. From a Vygotskian perspective, cultural development of the child begins from age two; first with development of behaviour and natural movements and then with the emergence of mediated processes in child behaviour (Golod and Knox, 1993, 175). He observed that much of a child’s behaviour and psychological functioning is connected to the child’s memory. The child makes meaning of personal experiences by connecting and discriminating the reservoir of acquired forms, values and meanings to organize thinking. The process of microgenesis in cognitive maturity can be said to be the hermeneutic principle in making meaning for the child with the seeds of thoughts planted in earlier stages of experience. Vygotsky believed that cognitive development is “a dialectical process in which the transition from one step to another is accomplished not by evolutionary, but by a revolutionary path” (Cole and Scribner, 1974, 121).

⁷See Heinz Werner’s work on microgenesis and child development in *Child Development*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jun., 1965), pp. 307-328.

One way to understand microgenesis in child development is to imagine cognitive development as a line. Cognitive maturity does not appear at the onset but in emerging “humps” (which Vygotsky identified as ‘aha experiences’), signify cognitive increment, though very quickly appearing and disappearing (see Fig. 4). Multiple increments emerging over a period of time concretize knowledge and present it at a later stage as cognitive maturity.

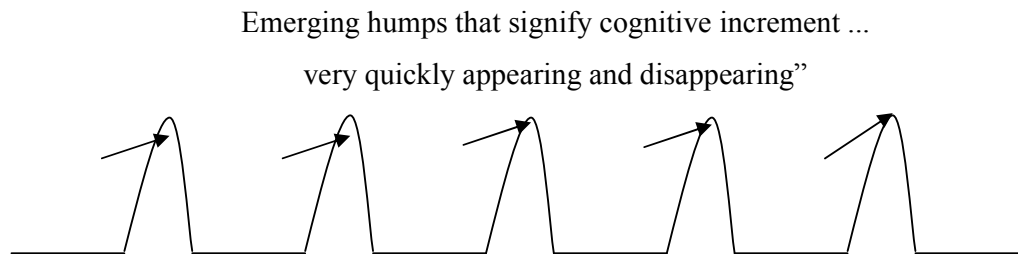


Fig. 4. Microgenesis and Cognitive Maturity

Vygotsky maintained that microgenesis contributes to cognitive development in three ways:

- a. Microgenesis promotes eidetic memory.⁸ Eidetic memory is when split second recall of an event triggers a word or an action. Psychologists identified eidetic memory as the initial phase of memory development. Children use eidetic memory for knowledge retention but outgrow it by puberty. Vygotsky’s research showed that eidetic memory in young children operates as optical images that help children retain knowledge. Eidetic memory is essential to learning because images merge with perception to transform scattered thoughts into meaningful knowledge. In adulthood, these images are transformed into childhood memories.

⁸The eidetic phenomenon was first described by Erich Jaensch and associates in 1907 at the Marburg Psychological School, Urbanchich. Jaensch et al. researched *eidetisim* among young children and concluded that this memory tool is especially common in children and used by mentally and culturally deprived children for memory retention (see Vygotsky and Luria, trans. Golod and Luria, 1993, 98). Vygotsky and Luria discussed this topic at length in *Apes, Primitive, and Child* (Vygotsky and Luria, trans. Golod and Knox, 1993).

b. Microgenesis informs inner self-identity. Children experience holistic growth when they can see a continuum from their history. Microgenesis provides the continuum by connecting the child's sporadic impressions to become integrated meaningful events. These integrated meaningful events frame the identity of the child and make meaning for early years experiences. The events also prepare the child to become what he conceives himself to be and what others perceive him to be (Penuel, 2000, 87). In the formation process, microgenesis contributes to the formation of identity by linking the child to the history, cultures, traditions and practices of the group where he belongs.

c. Microgenesis facilitates language development. Vygotsky argued that the functional stratification of language determines the contents to be explained and the explanation itself (Silverstein, 1985, 205-35). Verbal language does not develop in an instant. Eidetic memory facilitates the learning process by building a reservoir of vocabulary in the subconscious. The "pictorial function" of eidetic memory contributes to the child's optical and acoustic impressions. But "in the course of cultural development of thinking and language, the eidetic character fades into the background ..." (Golod and Knox, 1993, 117). As Vygotsky wrote,

If we compare the early development of speech and intellect – which we have seen develop along separate lines in animals and in very young children – with the development of inner speech and verbal thought, we must conclude that the later stage is not a simple continuation of the earlier. The nature of the development itself changes from biological to sociohistorical. (Vygotsky, trans. Kozulin, 1986, 51)

Vygotsky suggested that a distinct character of humans is their ability to teach and learn in a social cultural context and that all higher mental functions originate as actual relations between individuals. Paedology in the social cultural context further facilitates thinking on microgenesis. Vygotsky observed that in the education of children, adults often overlook short term unfolding of awareness in children in favour of more stable, uniform behaviour:

Uniformity was sought, so that it was never possible to grasp the process in flight; instead, researchers routinely discarded the critical time when a reaction appears and when its functional links are established and adjusted. Such

practices lead us to characterize the responses as ‘fossilized’. (Cole and Scribner, 1974, 122)

The presence of paedology in human affairs introduces a cognitive gap that is not found in other animals. “If the adult does not take the child in tow, the child will never become an adult in competence” (Premack Principle, 1984).

3. KNOWLEDGE MEDIATION IS PHYLOGENETIC

Phylogenesis describes the series of historical cultural events that shape human development. Vygotsky maintained that sequential development of higher cognitive functions is through culturally determined tools and signs. Looking beyond the morphological structure of humans, Vygotsky sought to answer the “how” rather than the “what” of human behavioural development. Therefore, as we encounter the concept of phylogenesis (as in historical-cultural human development) in the Vygotsky’s approach, we “need not be overly concerned with the inconclusive debates ... as to which lineage Lucy may fall into, ... our concern must focus on how we have developed and extended the communication process” (Vocate, 1994, 34).

Phylogenesis incorporates three main elements: a) mediation, b) culture, and c) signs and tools.

a. *Mediation (oposredovanie)* is the process of conveying or transmitting knowledge from one body to another. *Oposredovanie* is unique in Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach because “the central fact about our psychology (as in sociocultural psychology) is the fact of mediation” (Wertsch, 1985b, 15). “The special mental quality of human beings is their need and ability to mediate their actions through artefacts and to arrange for the discovery and appropriation of these forms of mediation by subsequent generations” (Cole and Wertsch, 2003).

b. *Culture* as an organized psychological function in human development is semiotic (sign) mediation (Valsiner, 2000, 49). As an artefact it facilitates, shapes and transforms thinking. As a cluster of conceptual structures accepted and understood by a particular group, it enables individuals to develop meaningful interpersonal as well

as intrapersonal relationships. Since development is dynamic and beliefs and values change with every new situation, mediated culture gives children psychological stability for living (also see continuum in microgenesis, pp.186).

c. *Signs and tools* are psychological instruments that create consciousness in persons and influence thinking and action. Tools are instruments or devices to make meaning whereas signs are indicators or pointers to particular meanings. Tools and signs develop from sociocultural circumstances and are appropriate and meaningful for a particular people group. In the absence of semiotic tools and signs for mediation, communication remains at best primitive and limited (Kozulin, 2003, 7).

These three main elements in phylogenesis frame a “teaching environment” for the children and aid child functioning in two basic ways:

First, phylogenesis facilitates development in children by providing the psychological environment for mental and emotional growth. At birth, children inherit natural mental abilities or elementary mental functions. Unless a greater stimulation occurs “as a result of social interaction, self awareness or use of signs and tools in a more complex way, the learner remains a slave to the situation, responding directly to the environment” (Wertsch, 1991, 18). This was the case of the *defectologia* who were dissociated from society. Unless the *defectologia* are moved to a greater stimulated environment which provides different models of functioning, they remain in their vicious circle. As Murray said,

The human infant cannot, even theoretically, live an isolated existence; he is not an independent individual. He lives a common life as one term in a personal relationship. Only in the process of development does he learn to achieve a relative independence and that only by appropriating the techniques of a rational social tradition. (McMurray, 1999, 57)

Second, phylogenesis creates a working system for children by providing an established reference from which they can construct and reconstruct data until it makes meaning. “The personal system of created meanings (culture) is then projected to the world through personal arrangements of things that are important for the given person” (55). While Vygotsky upheld the principle of phylogenesis in social cultural

development, he was also aware that higher cognitive functions do not always take place. He recognized there are other influences at work. By incorporating phylogenesis in child development, Vygotsky suggested that the development of children through semiotic and cultural mediation takes place in two stages – the social and the personal.⁹ Vygotsky proposed the social world as a tool for cognitive development because the community or society plays a very important role in facilitating cognitive development. The construction and internalization of values first happen in the social circle and second, internalized within the individual.

C. THE PREFERRED INSTRUCTIONAL SETTINGS FOR FORMATION OF THINKING

This section explains Vygotsky's instructional settings for formation of thinking in children. Based on the assertion that each child is different in development and thinking and problem solving skills vary from individuals, a fixed structural rote approach to teaching and standard assessment of children's abilities does not suffice. Since Vygotsky did not subscribe to the traditional form of assessment in testing children, he had to develop a scientific explanation for children's cognitive maturation and design an educational system that promotes learning. As part of his educational reforms, Vygotsky developed three instructional settings consistent with the sociocultural approach: 1) zone of proximal development, to understand children's potential, 2) community collaboration, to guide children's learning, and 3) language development, to facilitate higher cognitive processes.

⁹Bronfenbrenner, the ecological theorist supports Vygotsky in this proposal. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory supports that the child develops within a behaviour system. The systemic framework consists of micro, meso, exo, and macro systems. All these systems play a part in shaping the child's development. In fact more and more psychologists are moving away from solely biological determinants of development to incorporate other influences in child development (Thomas, 1999, 198).

1. ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT (ZPD)

In his educational reforms, Vygotsky opted for change in the manner by which children were assessed in their cognitive abilities. Vygotsky opined that cognitive abilities are not hereditary traits but social cultural outcomes. As such, cognitive maturation is an assisted process through utilizing cultural tools in one's own context (Kozulin, 1986). Vygotsky argued that assessment of cognition should not only measure mental abilities that are evident (already developed) but also abilities that are in the process of developing. The mental abilities that are already in place are “fossilized” and are not evidences of progression in thinking. He proposed that a child's potential to grow to cognitive maturity lies in the “zone of proximal development” commonly termed the ZPD.¹⁰

Vygotsky described the ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, cited in Cole and Scribner, 1974, 86).¹¹ He was interested in knowing how a child can become “what he not yet is” (Wertsch, 1985a, 67). The ZPD is the maturation period for developing ideas or concepts that are still “budding” within the learner and is a strategy for cognitive development. Vygotsky asserted that one of the reasons he constructed the concept was to assess the “functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the ‘buds’ or ‘flowers’ of development rather than the ‘fruits’ of development (Ibid.).

Unlike developmental stages where growth is sequential and linear, ZPD is “neither linear nor unidirectional” (Estep, 2002, 153). Learning in the ZPD occurs within a

¹⁰The term “zone of proximal development” is a 1978 translation of Vygotsky's original writings in 1934.

¹¹For example, two children at the mental age of eight years are given similar tasks and provided with assistance in the form of orientation and leading questions. If the first child can perform at the level of a twelve year old and the second child at nine years, then it is said that the first child's ZPD is “four years,” while the second is “one year.” “Experience has shown that the child with the larger ZPD development will do much better in school. This measure gives a more helpful clue than mental age does to the dynamics of intellectual processes” (see Vygotsky, 1986, 187).

“zone” where multiple forces are at work at the same time prompting growth in different directions (Fig. 5). ZPD is not a transfer of knowledge but the unhurried time and space for learning and discovery so that children can take their time to conceptualize and internalize knowledge. Through continuous interaction with the social environment and the effect of microgenesis in progress (multiple “aha” experiences), the child is moved to a higher level of awareness evident by behaviour.

Vygotsky’s proposal of the ZPD for cognitive maturity is also his rebuttal to Piaget’s explanation on cognitive development:

... there are only two possibilities for explaining the relationship... between the logic of action and the logic of thought, and the logic of practical thinking and the logic of verbal thinking. The first type of explanation relies on the *law of displacement*. Here it is assumed that the processes of development that have occurred at earlier stages are repeated or reproduced with the development of more advanced functions; the basic difficulties encountered in earlier processes of development are manifested once again at a higher level....The second type of explanation provides the basis of our hypothesis of the *zone of proximal development*. This form of explanation is based on the notion that analogous systems in higher and lower domains develop in contrasting directions. This is the law of interconnections between higher and lower systems in development. (Vygotsky, Vol. 1, 1934/1987, 222)

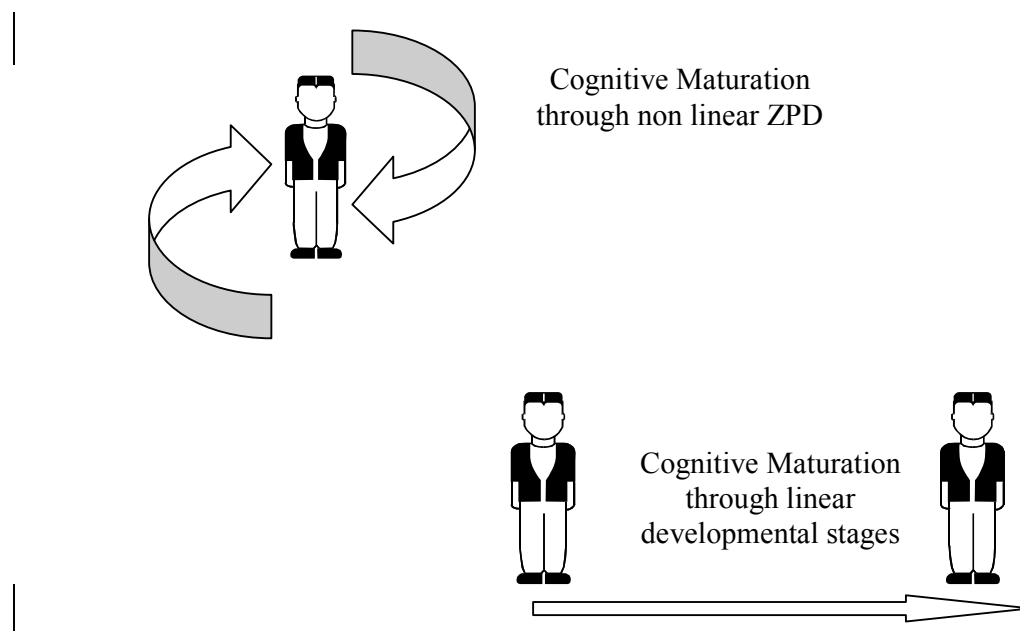


Fig. 5. A Comparison between the ZPD and Cognitive Developmental Stages

To further understand the role of ZPD in childhood formation, and its contribution to faith formation of children, we need to understand Vygotsky's perspective of the child in the ZPD.

First, the 'Vygotskian child' in the ZPD "develops itself for others and for oneself" (Wertsch, 1985a, 67). As such, child development "is a very complex process which cannot be fully defined in any of its stages solely on the basis of one characteristic" (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 329). Consideration of biological factors is essential in child studies for that is the foundation for scientific investigations. But the post-natal child is also subjected to multiple heredity influences and sociocultural variables and thus, "biological forces can no longer be viewed as the sole, or even the primary force of change" (Ibid.). Even as the child is an organic entity, there are multiple forces simultaneously shaping the child's personality. Child development and society are constituted as a "single, interacting system; cognitive development was treated as a process of acquiring culture" (Cole, 1984, 148).

Analysing child development by single faceted theories or by separating the childhood periods into segments reduces development to what it is not. Nature has its role in child development, but there is also the environment (nurture) that contributes to growth. Neither nature nor nurture is the domineering factor in child development, but nature and nurture develop in the context of the social. The cornerstone of the ZPD is that childhood growth and learning are interrelated the moment the child is born. The growth process unfolds under the influences, values, and practices of family, friends, community and society at large. Jerome Kagan, a noted psychologist, also attests that in addition to nature (heredity) and nurture (environment) that affect behaviour, society and culture (practices and values) at large affect growth and development (Mooney, 2000, ix).

Second, in the ZPD every child has the potential to progress cognitively. The ZPD is an approach of possibilities for it "calls to life in the child, awakens and puts in motion an entire series of internal processes of development" (Wertsch, 1985a, 71). The child in the ZPD is both a child "now and not yet is" (74). The ZPD acknowledges the child with all the present competencies but also emphasises the future potential through assisted performance. "The structure of the child's developing

personality changes at each new age period as different parts of the system of the personality take a dominant role in the developing person at different age” (11). Developmental assessment in the ZPD is both qualitative and quantitative because it shows the absence of cognitive functions in unaided learning; and such assessment also measures the differences between aided and unaided performance (Vygotsky, trans by Kozulin, 1986, 69). In the developmental process,

... the child not only grows, not only matures, but at the same time – and this is the most essential thing that we can note in our analysis of the evolution of the child’s mind – that the child acquires a number of new skills, a number of new forms of behaviour. In the process of development, the child not only matures, but also *becomes rearmed*. ‘Precisely this “rearmament” causes the greatest development and change that we observe in the child as he transforms into a cultural man.’ (Vygotsky and Luria, trans. Golod and Knox, 1930/1993, 168)

In a discussion with Urie Bronfenbrenner, Aleksei Leontiev, a follower of Vygotsky claimed that while “American researchers are constantly seeking to discover how the child came to be what he is; ... the USSR are striving to discover not how the child came to be what he is, but how he can become what he not yet is” (Werstch, 1985a, 70). The notion that the zone of proximal development is also a zone of possibilities opens up an entire arena of child development not limited by sequential stages of growth. Every child has potential for growth because development in thinking and maturity is socially rooted and not biologically determined.

2. COLLABORATED LEARNING

Joint collaborated learning is one of the dimensions of the concept of the ZPD. “Collaborated learning” explains the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student, or a child and a more competent peer. For knowledge advancement, collaborated learning must operate within and move beyond the cultural boundaries of the learner (Nicholls, 1998). Without the ability to move beyond one’s own boundaries, the child would have no means of moving forward in thinking or discovering new approaches to a given problem. Michael Cole claimed that collaborated learning is a practice already present in some cultures even though it may not be identified by that term. In his research on collaborated learning, Cole used an African example from anthropologist Meyer Fortes (1938-) to sustain his claim:

... in *Tale* society, the social sphere is differentiated only in terms of relative capacity. All participate in the same culture, the same round of life, but in varying degrees, corresponding to the stage of physical and mental development. Nothing in the universe of adult behaviour is hidden from children or barred to them. They are actively and responsibly part of the social structure, of the economic, the ritual and ideological system.... Education, it is clear, is regarded as a joint enterprise in which parents are as eager to lead as children to follow.... A child is never forced beyond his capacity. (Cole, 1978, 155)

Collaborated learning acknowledges children as active constructors of their environment and able to advance in cognition when guided through difficult tasks. Vygotsky did not promote childhood learning in isolation for “those tasks should be taught to the child, that he cannot perform independently, but can do in cooperation with others” (Vygotsky, trans. by Kozulin, 1934/1986, 222). “Cognition is always situated in activity and people learn best when they are working with others” (White, 1988, 130). Vygotsky’s definition differs from Piaget’s collaborated learning in that it is reciprocal learning and not cognitive disequilibrium. Michael Shayer, in his comments on *Piaget and Vygotsky: A Necessary Marriage*, noted that Piaget’s approach of dialectic assimilation and accommodation is confined to the child’s efforts alone. But for Vygotsky, there are the various mediating agents – “parents, siblings, other care-givers, (who) frame and organize the environment for the child, in such a way that the child not only learns more efficiently, but also comes to believe more in his own capacity to learn” (Shayer, 1997, 46).

Another way to explain collaborated learning is the process of scaffolding. As an instructional setting within the socio-cultural approach, “scaffolding” means guided participation, assisted interaction, peer collaboration, or collaborated learning (Tudge, 1990, 155). “Scaffolding” as an instructional setting in the sociocultural approach is not an original Vygotskian term but has been identified with the approach. Jerome Bruner coined the term when working on the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS).¹² But it was Vygotsky who provided a developmental schema that parallels

¹²In the 1970s, Jerome Bruner based his educational research on Vygotsky’s approach of collaborated learning and developed his concept of “scaffolding.” Scaffolds are temporary structures that provide support for construction workers to stand on until the foundations are strong enough to support the building. The scaffolds are gradually removed as the foundations become more stable. Ultimately, the old scaffolds become redundant as new ones are built for other purposes. Or, the scaffolds are removed totally and not replaced because the substantive foundations/reinforcing are in

the instructional approach of ‘scaffolding’ (Estep, 2002, 158). Bruner used Vygotsky’s ZPD to explain scaffolding and the need for social interaction between students and teachers in the process of guided participation (see Fig. 6). Bruner closely identified with Vygotsky’s thinking in using peer collaboration to lay foundations for learning that will eventually lead children to be independent learners. Like Vygotsky, Bruner asserted that people make sense of their environment by going beyond given information and that cognitive growth comes through environmental impact (culture) brought about by human activities.

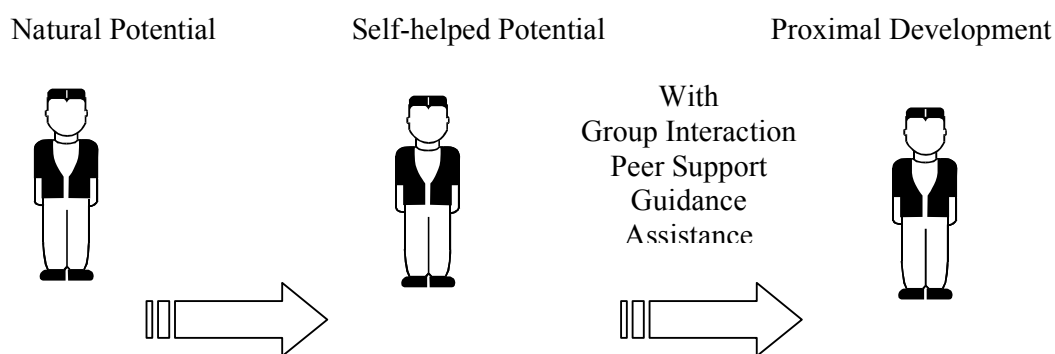


Fig. 6. Scaffolding / Collaborated Learning

For Vygotsky, learning is a social activity: “the capacity to teach and benefit from interaction is a fundamental attribute of human beings...” (Moll, 1992, 1). Scaffolding is a special role assigned to adults or more capable peers “in leading development by providing a kind of strategic assistance to young people in learning new tasks” until the individuals can be independent (Penuel, 2000, 88). “The role of the teacher in these social contexts is to provide necessary guidance and mediations so that children through their own efforts assume full control of diverse purposes and uses of oral and written language” (Ibid.). The sociocultural approach rests on the conviction that collaboration is imperative for meaningful learning as children become aware of the significance of their knowledge to effective functioning. Vygotsky claimed that “the levels of generalization (in learning) in a child correspond strictly to the levels in the

place. However, Bruner’s focus was more task-orientated while Vygotsky centred on social interaction for development.

development of social interaction. Any new level in the child's generalization signifies a new level in the possibility for social interaction" (Wertsch, 1985b, 26).

3. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky was especially interested in speech and writing as psychological tools for meaning making, formation of concepts and egocentric and inner speech. His assumption was that verbal language as a psychological tool assists children in structuring experiences until it culminates into the ultimate form of written thoughts. He saw verbal language as a mediating tool to identify, define and shape experiences for human construction of reality. "Speech is not only a tool of communication, but also a tool of thinking; consciousness develops mainly with the help of speech and originates in social experiences" (Vygotsky, trans. by Kozulin, 1986, 78). Vygotsky proposed that outside the social setting symbolical language bears little or no meaning to the hearers, for a good command of language expands one's consciousness while the lack of it limits one's frame of experiences.

In his sociocultural approach, Vygotsky explained the contribution of language to cognitive development:¹³

Children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as with their eyes and hands. This unity of perception, speech and action, which ultimately produces internalization of the visual field, constitutes the central subject matter for any analysis of the origin of uniquely human forms of behaviour. Language is a way of sorting out one's thoughts about things. (Cole and Scribner, 1978, 26)

He argued that language (as in verbal concepts) is not readily assimilated by children and has to undergo a process of development before it makes meaning. Vygotsky explained that language consists of formulated ideas from "the top down." For children to understand language construct, these verbal concepts must find a place in empirical forms in the children's daily experiences (from "the bottom up") (see

¹³In research by Kohler and Yerke, it was found that in human beings "progress in thought and progress in speech are not parallel. Their two growth curves cross and recross. They may straighten out and run side by side, even merge for a time, but they always diverge again" (Kozulin, 1986, 68-67). As such, humans are able to process thoughts and correlate their actions with words.

Vygotsky, trans. by Kozulin, 1986, 20). Vygotsky suggested that a significant change takes place when a child turns two years old and begins to express his thoughts in speech. From then on, “speech takes a commanding height: it becomes the most used cultural tool; it enriches and stimulates thinking, and through it, the child’s mind is restructured (and) reconstructed ... (and) thinking is able to adopt precise, clear forms ... ” (Golod and Knox, 1993, 205). Thus

All cultural instruments, signs and tools alike, are fundamentally societal or social means (Vygotsky, 1928ab, 116; cited in der Veer and Valsiner, 71). They originated in the history of mankind as the product of living together in groups and will have to be mastered again by each child in social interaction. In a way, Vygotsky reasoned, these techniques are directed at controlling our own behaviour, like tools are destined to control nature. The most important cultural tool is speech and, therefore, the fate of the child’s whole cultural development depends on whether he or she masters the word as the main psychological tool. (Cole and Scribner, 1978, 26)

In Vygotsky’s view, verbal language has two components: social speech and private speech. Verbal language is first social then private – moving from lower cognitive to higher cognitive abilities. Social (or external) speech is audible communication between persons and directed outwards for building relationships. Children employ social or external speech in dialogue with others. Private speech (endophasy) is inner speech that children (and adults) use for self-direction. Private speech serves as foundation for all higher cognitive processes such as “sustained attention, deliberate memorization and recall, categorization, planning, problem solving, and self reflection. Private speech is schematic: it is first spoken aloud and then progresses to inner speech (also known as verbal thought). Private speech is “an innate, natural form of behaviour” (Vygotsky, trans. by Kozulin, 1986, 94). Children on a higher level of cognitive function convert private speech to whispers or silent lip movements for self-direction and later for planning and regulating behaviour.

In Vygotsky’s opinion, the most significant moment of cognitive development occurs when children use speech not only for communication but for thought processing (White and Coleman, 2000, 133). A child’s competency to guide and regulate personal actions is advancement from scaffolding which is adult-directed. With inner speech, a child becomes more independent to follow a course of action through personal prompting. Inner speech that develops at childhood does not progress to any

higher forms in adulthood except for increase of knowledge and vocabulary. Once this skill is acquired, inner speech continues to perform the same function in adults where “self- talk” guides task achievements.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter has explained Vygotsky’s approach of sociocultural development in children.

Section A traced the challenges that led to the formulation of the approach. After the October Revolution (1917) Vygotsky was invited by the Soviet government to address four educational needs in the country. These needs were: 1) the absence of a scientific explanation of child development, 2) an irrelevant childhood education system, 3) the plight of the *defectologia*, and 4) inappropriate assessment of learning. Addressing these needs, Vygotsky developed an approach that suggested human consciousness is not inherited at birth (a product of nature) but a product of society (nurtured). He believed that higher mental functions in children are socially motivated and therefore learning should take place in an interactive and intergenerational environment where adults or more competent peers collaborate to promote cognitive maturity in children.

Section B explained Vygotsky’s assumptions relating to child development and functioning. Vygotsky’s concept of *ontogenesis*, *microgenesis* and *phylogenesis* in human development stemmed from his understanding of human evolution. Unlike Charles Darwin’s species evolution, Vygotsky maintained that human evolution is the development of humankind through advancement of culture. He pointed that biological evolution as indicated by Darwin was finished long before the historical development of man started. A sociocultural environment aids the evolution of humankind by facilitating higher mental functions through knowledge mediation.

Section C listed the three preferred instructional settings located in social relationships that turn the “school child into an adult cultural man” (Vygotsky and

Luria, trans. Golod and Knox, 168). This section highlights Vygotsky's assumption that children are able to do far more than most developmental theories presume. The instructional settings are: 1) zone of proximal development (ZPD) to understand children's potential, 2) collaboration to guide children's learning, and 3) language development to facilitate child functioning. ZPD portrays the child's actual level of development and the potential he can achieve through collaboration. Collaboration either by an adult or a more competent peer helps the child to get from where he presently is to a higher level of achievement for effective child functioning. Collaboration or scaffolding (Bruner's term) is a social activity, located in community life. There are artefacts, tools and signs which can be used to facilitate this process: one of which is the use of language which helps children express their thinking.

Vygotsky's concern for the formation of children's minds, his assumptions of the sociocultural approach, and the place and importance of the instructional settings provide an adequate frame for formation of children in their contextual environment. The formation of thoughts embedded in meaningful activities, the use of language as tool to concretize thinking and collaboration in community life *prima facie* appear appropriate concepts to apply to the faith formation of children in MBE congregations. The following chapter will further explore this option by posting the Vygotskian approach as a heuristic device to help MBE congregations recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

APPLYING THE VYGOTSKIAN APPROACH TO FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN IN MBE CONGREGATIONS

The previous chapters have defined faith formation of children from biblical and developmental perspectives, investigated the Baptist stance on formation of children as the *sitz in leben* of MBE congregations, and introduced Vygotsky's approach *prima facie* to be a possible theoretical frame for faith formation of children. Thus far, these conclusions may be drawn:

1. A biblical approach to faith formation of children emphasises the task in the context of family and faith community life. The faith communities in Bible times intentionally planned their environment to mediate godly values to their children. In the Old Testament, children were counted as part of the faith community by virtue of corporate solidarity and the inherited faith grew to become owned faith. In the New Testament, the ecclesiastical functions of *koinonia*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma*, *didache*, and *prophetia* provided the environmental framework for children to experience and express their faith in God.
2. A developmental approach to faith formation of children takes into consideration cognitive and affective factors in faith development. An approach is deemed developmentally appropriate when principles and practices of formation consider the child from an integrative perspective (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, moral and spiritual development). Formation from a developmental perspective welcomes

children as active participants in the faith process even as the individuals are formed and informed in the process.

3. According to the original Baptist confessions of faith, faith formation is to nurture children to become regenerate believers, persons in community and persons in ministry and witness. The context for formation is shared living and culture in the *ecclesia* with its particular elements of practices, symbolized meanings, tools of mediation, and a shared story. The historical goals and objectives of childhood faith formation in Baptist congregations are still valid for MBE congregations today.

4. The research field survey has shown that generally MBE congregations are not aware of the childhood faith formation goals and objectives as prescribed by the original Baptist confession of faith. The responses revealed a lack of understanding of Baptist teachings on the subject and the congregational role in formation. Hence, a new framework is needed to move the Baptist agenda forward in MBE congregations.

5. Vygotsky posited that a child's cognitive development and maturity in functioning is socially rooted in community life. Interaction between persons and the child can provide opportunities for mental stimulation and so does deliberate discipleship, tutorage, and planned nurture. In the process of scaffolding for development, the children move from lower to higher mental functions through community collaboration (see Fig. 5, p. 198).

Therefore, this chapter posits that Vygotsky's emphasis on sociocultural context for formation and the instructional settings can provide an adequate frame for thinking and practice for MBE congregations. The frame can also act as a heuristic device to help MBE congregations recover the original Baptist intentions of faith formation of children and construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life. The approach revisits Vygotsky's teaching on the sociocultural context as the locus for mediation and the instructional settings that promote cognitive development and facilitate effective child functioning in community life (see Fig. 1, p. 184). The chapter will discuss: A) MBE congregations as sociocultural contexts for faith mediation, B) Baptist congregational life as context for child functioning, and C) Baptist confessions as guidelines for faith assessment.

A. MBE CONGREGATIONS AS SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT FOR FAITH MEDIATION

Vygotsky's idea of ontogenesis asserts that there are sociocultural laws in every society that transform a child from a biological being to an active participant in community life. While the biological dimension of human development points to the physiological wellbeing of the child, it is the sociocultural laws that influence and direct child functioning. These sociocultural laws are chronologically ordered and are the first set of building blocks that form a child's personality (Werstch, 1985a, 121). The idea that MBE congregations are sociocultural contexts for faith mediation is based on the premise that these congregations – like any social groups of gathered people – have their particular stories, events, behaviour patterns, and symbols which direct socially sanctioned behaviour. These socially sanctioned behavioural patterns or sociocultural laws are organized activities, inherited systems, values, or practices with potentials to change human behaviour and are transmitted from one generation to another. Therefore, to understand the child fully, we need to begin not from biological development, but from the child's sociocultural, or socio-historical context.

An ontogenetic perspective of childhood faith development proposes that although there is intuitive faith in a child, this intuitive faith is expressed in accordance with local culture and socially sanctioned behaviour. Chapters One and Two discussed faith (as in trust) as an instinctive characteristic of the child. From a developmental perspective, Fowler's definition of faith could perhaps describe this stage of development when he said that faith is “a way of knowing, a way of construing, or interpreting one's experience” (Fowler, 1992). Faith (as in trust) is “a disposition of oneself to the environment in which a trust and loyalty are invested in a centre of values ... which give order and coherence ... support and sustain ... our mundane and everyday commitments...” (Fowler, 1980, 137). Fowler's idea of intuitive primal faith is faith in infants. The biblical perspective of childhood faith also acknowledges faith as a natural response of the child to his Creator. The response is a characteristic of a child made in God's image.

Childhood faith development as ontogenetic moves childhood faith beyond the discussion of the origins of faith to focus on faith expressions as the child functions in

a given context. Ontogenesis proposes that the child's expression of his beliefs, values, and functioning is directed by the distinct culture of his community with its teachings and practices. Therefore, if communal sociocultural influences play such a tremendous role in prompting children's faith and directing faith expressions, the faith communities should be more deliberate in their efforts to construct an environment which mediates the Christian life to children. Perhaps this is what the admonition in Deuteronomy 10:19-21 means when the author encouraged parents to teach their children in every situation and to provide an environment which "trains the children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Therefore, Christian educators like Lawrence Richards, Ellis Nelson, and particularly, John Westerhoff III have championed the congregational environment as a major contributor to the faith formation of children in congregations. A social impact on formation views the faith community as a social construct embodied by a particular people group with a distinct culture expressed by symbols that direct behaviour (Pazmiño, 1997, 163). Children within the faith community grow in knowledge of their faith through community sanctioned instructions, relationships, and cultural practices. Charles Foster identified such social elements as natural means of faith transmission in the Christian community (Foster, 1982, 53): "The task is not to learn about, but to engage in that life. The teaching contents are not abstract from the circumstances of daily experiences; it is rather the ongoing dialectics between that which has been received and that which is encountered from both the natural and social environments" (64). Westerhoff termed this process *enculturation*.

The concept of enculturation in faith development posits that development and commitment to the faith is not cultivated by mere instruction, but rather by relationship and interaction in a faith environment. However, Westerhoff's enculturation explanation is limited, as he does not explained how the process of change takes place in the child. Therefore, the researcher proposed a focus on Vygotsky's sociocultural approach. Vygotsky's approach on ontogenesis takes Westerhoff's idea a step further by providing a scientific explanation of the transformational process that takes place and which changes the natural child into an active participant in the faith community.

To understand the ontogenetic perspective of childhood faith in MBE congregational context requires us to identify the sociocultural influences in these congregations and to investigate their contributions to the child's cognitive understanding and the expression of faith in God. In this instance, it is the Baptist ecclesiastical confessions, worship practices, sanctioned behaviour, denominational tools and symbols that shape the way children think of their God and express their faith. These elements in MBE congregations which are encased in the congregations' macro and micro history contribute to development of faith and functioning.

1. MACRO HISTORY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The macro history of a faith congregation is the inherited patterns of community life in shared values, practices, symbolized meanings and an environment for worship, ministry, and mission. Macro history is an accumulation of events and practices that span a broad spectrum and which transcend any one individual in the community; and yet are formed by each individual in personal practice. Macro history helps children appreciate God's plan that creation is "being drawn towards a unified whole... a preexistent reality... and demands that human beings consciously adapt to the real state of things" (Montessori, 1991, 61). Although children are "present beings," with little knowledge of the past and even less comprehension of the future, they still need to connect with their history for being and doing in this world. In his writings on faith and children, Walter Brueggemann emphasized the importance of shared stories and experiences in community life that build faith and make meaning for children. Macro history links the redemptive story of Jesus Christ with the child's immediate experiences. "It is hoped that the child will, over time, affirm that this is my story about me, and it is our story about us" (Brueggemann, cited in Kelcourse, 2004, 13).

A major component of the macro history of any MBE congregation is its culture. Culture as a concrete historical activity generates different forms of human consciousness as people interact with their environment (Kozulin, 2003, 13). The interaction is never immediate; it is always mediated by meanings that originate "outside" the individuals – in the world of social relationships (62). These historical activities "direct human social life, the things each new generation must learn and to which they eventually may add" (Stark, 2004, 650). Apart from the community

where they originate these practices and values have no significant meanings. MBE congregational culture points to the Baptists as people “called by God and held together in his covenanted love, ... in this God given fellowship the church listens to Scriptures, prays and shares... and tries to discern together the leading of the Holy Spirit” (Garrett, 1999, 42).

When a Baptist speaks of “church,” the allusion is to a fellowship, a community, or a family in which its members as brothers and sisters express concern for each other (Shurden, 1996, 108). Within congregational life, members participate in corporate worship, observe particular liturgies and religious events, commemorate rites of passage, bring up their families, and hold similar beliefs, values, and attitudes towards life and mission – all using a common faith language that is familiar to its participants. Ideally, each member upholds the ideals of a Baptist faith community, the standards for living a Christian life, the measure for positive and negative practices, and desirable and undesirable actions. By their distinctive religious characteristics, members are formed in their identity as Baptists and are thoroughly “furnished unto all good works... and every peculiarity which characterises them is the practical outcome of these principles” (George and George, 1996, 27).

Macro history, as in the culture of MBE congregations, helps build identity in children by at least two important processes. First, Baptist congregational culture explains the larger context that contributes to the uniqueness of the child’s community life. The functions of culture enable the child to learn from preceding generations a series of habits or behavioural patterns similar to their elders (van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 234). The child realises his significance in the community and the role he is assigned to undertake as a faith participant. Inheriting the stories and events that have shaped the faith community and family life, that is, testimonies of how the faith community came into being, how his own family became Christians, and God’s working in the lives of his people give the child his identity as a member joined together by the faith of those who are present and who have gone before him. The stories of his forefathers become his own stories and the child no longer sees himself

as a lonely sojourner in the faith but a fellow sojourner with the community inheriting a common story and purpose.¹

Second, Baptist congregational culture provides the framework for the child to function in a manner acceptable to the community to which he belongs. Nurtured in a complex system of relationships, the child's personality and faith expressions are configured to fit into the intentions of the definition of a Christian who adheres to Baptist teachings.² The frame acts as "the resources of the culture" which enables the child to be an apprentice in learning how to live as a Baptist in the particular community. Gordon Wells has suggested three outcomes from this frame of apprenticeship (Wells, 1999, 138). First, the child is apprenticed into changing his attitudes about what are valuable activities in which to engage. Second, the child increases in knowledge and understanding of these activities and how they contribute to personal and communal functioning. Third, the child is guided to master these skills through cultural and ecclesiastical tools. In the process of apprenticeship, the child is led to autonomous participation in the faith community life as a member of a Baptist congregation. The process is not just a mastery of the knowledge or the use of tools but a change in thinking and acting that contributes to the formation of personal identity.

¹Donald Miller in *Story and Context: An Introduction to Christian Education* (1987) shared that the "process of committed individuals interacting within a community of faith inevitably leads to norms and meanings.... To interact within any community is to be shaped by it to some extent. To be engaged with a community over a longer period of time is to be even more deeply shaped by it... to be engaged ... is to be learning in relation to the community process, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally" (Miller, 22). John Westerhoff III supports Miller's idea that the faith communities are social constructs where faith development of children cannot be taught by methods of classroom instruction because faith is inspired by a community of faith. He said, "... we can only teach religion. We can know about religion but we can only expand in faith, act in faith, live in faith ... it cannot be given to one person by another. Faith is expressed, transformed, and made meaningful by persons sharing their faith in an historical, traditional-bearing community of faith..." (Westerhoff, 1976, 23).

²Vygotsky believed that human agency is non-individualistic because the cultural nature of the individual is an outcome of sociocultural interactions (Kozulin, 2003, 159). Luria's research affirmed Vygotsky's claim in that "consciousness is not given in advance, unchanging and passive, but shaped by activity and shaped by human beings to orient themselves to their environment, not only to adapt to conditions but in restructuring them" (Luria, 1976, 8).

2. MICRO HISTORY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Chapter Six discussed Vygotsky's proposal that children are "reacting apparatuses" with a level of consciousness which directs thoughts and actions (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, 234). Vygotsky believed that this consciousness, or ability to think at a higher function, occurs as a result of reciprocal relationship between the child and society. Vygotsky posited that although knowledge for higher functioning is socially rooted, development of thinking does not come by the innate societal structures but in what the child constructs as he uses these structures as tools to express his own ideas of representing and knowing (Wells, 1999, 73). The development of consciousness that results from personal experiences with the immediate environment are categorized as micro history and provide a foundation for learning, thereby raising competency in child functioning.

Consciousness which springs forth from micro history happens on two planes: the social and the psychological (Vygotsky, 1926/1978, 57). "This consciousness is not given in advance, unchanging and passive, but shaped by activity and shaped by human beings to orient themselves to their environment, not only to adapt to conditions but in restructuring them" (Luria, 1976, 8). In the context of childhood faith development, micro history facilitates consciousness or awareness of God and the desire to know Him. In Jerome Berryman's expression, it is a process from "ahh?" to "ahha!" and "haha!" where the child moves from doubt to understanding faith and experiences in a personal way (Berryman, 1991, 152). The "haha" moment is a result of the internalization of knowing by the child and the child takes responsibility and becomes one with the knowledge. In Christian faith expression, the consciousness of God in a personal way and the desire to seek him is the first step towards regeneration of the child. This first step towards a regeneration experience (or commonly know as conversion experience in Christian circles) is normally in a social setting facilitated by adults in the faith community or more competent peers. Vygotsky said that this awareness (from "ahh?" to "ahha!" and "haha!") can happen after the age of two years.

The "haha!" moment comes when inherited principles and practices become meaningful for functioning (psychological plane). Consciousness of God's presence

in children takes place when God moves from being an abstract entity to become a living entity who hears and answers prayers. The process towards consciousness of the faith is non-static because mediation of knowledge is active and progressive, constantly making meaning by correlating personal experiences to community sanctioned beliefs. The process towards consciousness is also adaptable, giving opportunities to create and recreate new meanings of thinking and doing. The Vygotskian approach in forming and transforming children allows them to be active and conscious participants in the faith journey. Rephrasing Vygotsky's words, in the process of [faith] development, the child not only grows as a person, not only matures [in faith], but at the same time acquires new skills, new forms of behaviour that indicate his transformation into a mature person [in the faith] (researcher's words in parenthesis).³

Based on the above explanation of the role and process of micro-history in faith development, three implications may be drawn for MBE congregations.

First, after the age of two children begin to show awareness of community values, practices, sanctioned behaviour and a growing understanding of the signs and symbols present in the church. The children also begin to notice and imitate the actions of people around them (as in Albert Bandura's theory on imitative learning). From this age onwards caregivers must begin to provide opportunities that will mediate faith to the child, create moments for faith expressions, and also model appropriate Christian practices in the family and congregation. This period is the first stage of the "ahh?" experience and although Vygotsky's approach does not provide the duration of the transition from the "ahh?" to "ahha!" and then "haha!" experience, nevertheless the approach suggests that the latter is a possible outcome if there is collaboration with the family and community. This interpretation of the Vygotskian concept is consistent with the early Baptist teachings on family and childhood faith and conversion as discussed in Chapter Four. We have seen that Baptist history reveals to us that while the early Baptist faith communities did not encourage infant

³Vygotsky posited that sociocultural development has potential to change the "primitive child" to an adult cultural man. "In the process of his (sic) development, the child not only grows, not only matures, but at the same time... acquires... new skills... new forms of behaviour... he transforms into a cultural adult" (Vygotsky, cited in Cole, 1978, 168).

conversion or infant baptism, the communities were deliberate in their attempt to nurture children into regeneration even from birth.

Second, MBE congregations can identify community-sanctioned tools to structure a learning frame for children to explore their faith. This learning frame with its boundaries can become the environment to mediate characteristics of the Baptist confessions and to teach child functioning within “the Baptist culture.” The learning frame also may become the curriculum for shaping children’s faith. Within this frame, children learn the confessions of their inherited faith through explicit means, that is, through teaching of the Scriptures and worship. Then, their faith is strengthened through implicit means by the various activities such as home fellowship, ministry, and mission that support faith development. Within MBE congregations, tools like the building structures, decorations, and attitudes of the adults towards children become the hidden curriculum that either support or negate the congregations’ confessions. A frame that positively contributes to the faith development of children consists of boundaries that are lived and appreciated by both children and adults in MBE congregations. This is the kind of frame that can mediate the confessions of the faith community and make these confessions real to the children.

Third, MBE congregations must provide space for children to experience and discover the validity of valued beliefs and practices. As Chapter Three suggests, the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains of growth affect faith maturity. Disconnected knowledge and experiences do not contribute to cognitive or affective maturity because the children are not able to relate to fragmented information or see their relevance to daily functioning. However, space for experience and discovery can turn disjointed abstract data into meaningful information and help children not only to understand their actions but also find their identity in their functions as creative intelligent creatures (Vygotsky, reprint 1978, 146). In other words, children in MBE congregations must be viewed, received, and facilitated to be active participants in the faith.

In general, children in the early Baptist congregations did not partake of the church ordinances nor were they active in liturgical life until conversion. This principle is still practiced in MBE congregations, as it is consistent with the Baptist doctrine of regeneration. However, there are some indications from the survey that this practice should be reconsidered and provisions made for children to be actively involved in congregational life without departing from the denomination's convictions. The goal of active participation is that the *inherited faith* from the social plane will move to the psychological plane to become *owned faith*.

B. BAPTIST CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AS CONTEXT FOR CHILD FUNCTIONING

The previous sections explained MBE congregations as social contexts where macro and micro history form the basis of the child's identity and value system. According to Vygotsky, the formation process is aided by three instructional settings – the ZPD, community collaboration, and the use of cultural tools (of which language is the chief tool). These three instructional settings can also be identified as components in a faith learning process. To state Baptist congregational life as context for child functioning in the faith is to understand that Vygotsky's ideas of the ZPD, collaboration for learning, and use of cultural tools can be expressed in the congregational functions to help children understand how to live as God's people and to build convictions according to the Baptist confessions. Three instructional settings are identified in the MBE congregational context: 1) regeneration as a concept in the ZPD, 2) faith development by community collaboration, and 3) ministry and mission through congregational life. These three instructional settings are elaborated below.

1. REGENERATION AS A CONCEPT IN THE ZPD

Unlike some theories which set age-appropriated boundaries for task achievements, Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD takes a more positive approach to children and their potential to function successfully in a given environment. Vygotsky acknowledged there is an "actual level" of competency in children of different ages but he also stressed the potential of the child "to become;" that is, to move beyond cognitive and

behavioural levels predicted by developmental theories. The field survey results clearly show that although the MBE congregations welcomed children into the congregations, the children are usually not included as active participants in the worship. Children are also viewed as unable to contribute significantly to the advancement of the congregation's mission. But the concept of ZPD applied to MBE congregational context establishes the place of the child in the faith community and the freedom and future the child has to become a regenerated believer. ZPD applied to faith development in children recognises that each child (regardless of age) can know God and to grow in relationship with Him. The expressions of faith, however, will take on different forms and interpretations. ZPD in faith development is not a task but a paradigm shift in the way adults view children and their potential for regeneration.⁴

To promote ZPD in their local contexts for faith formation of children, MBE congregations need a paradigm shift in the way they view children in their congregational life. Again the survey results showed that MBE congregations generally do not see children as active participants in the faith. The reasons given by respondents indicate there is lack of understanding of how children develop in their relationship with God and their ability to be involved in community building. A paradigm shift from the present perspective to a ZPD perspective of child and faith development can help the MBE congregations in their formation efforts. This paradigm shift by MBE congregations could be achieved in the following ways:

a. Recognizing children's potential to relate to God

In the zone of proximal faith development, there is the "actual faith level" and the "potential faith level" of the child. The "actual faith level" is the "given faith" which correlates to age appropriate development and beliefs the child inherited from parents and the faith community. This "given faith" is already with the child.⁵ The absence

⁴ In the examination of this research, Catherine Stonehouse further commented that the important issue to address in the ZPD is not how early children be moved toward a certain response. The gift of the ZPD concept allows children to participate together with the adults so that they (children) can model adult behaviours and the adults can be in touch with where the children are in the building of their capacity and know how to provide the scaffolding for the children to take the next step as they are ready.

⁵ The dissertation research focuses on children in Christian families and children who are not from Christian families but are actively involved in attending church programs.

in the children of traditionally accepted manifestations of conversion such as repeating “the sinners’ prayer,” “turning from sins,” and “accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour,” does not mean that the child has no faith in God. Neither does reciting the “sinner’s prayer” indicate the child fully understands his actions and thereby has moved into a state of eternal salvation. However, given time and proper guidance in knowledge of the Scriptures and understanding their contents, this “given faith” can blossom to become owned faith. An assumption based on a ZPD understanding of potentials is that God’s Holy Spirit is at work in and through the child to bring the process of belief to maturity.

As such, MBE congregations can provide space and resources, and thereby equip their members to continue in nurture of their children in the Christian faith. Children should not be rushed into “making a decision for Christ”. This attempt is more for the consolation of adults rather than for the children. Children should be given time to process the salvation story and the faith communities can scaffold this process by continual teaching of the Scriptures, affirming the workings of God in their midst, and providing avenues for expressions of beliefs. As Andersen and Johnson affirmed (1994),

If a church transforms its attitude toward children in order to be a sanctuary for childhood, it will deepen the sacred trust of its access to families. What the church has ordinarily done for children and families will take on a new significance. It will welcome children as full participants in the life of God’s people; it will support the vocation of being a parent throughout its ever changing roles; the formation of faithful children will have new direction and urgency; the church will continue to intervene when children or families experience extraordinary problems and needs as well as advocate for systemic changes where families are endangered by social conditions; and it will challenge individuals, families, and society to a deepening regard for childhood as the measure of God’s justice and mercy in the world. (113)

Recognizing children’s potential to relate to God is to welcome children to MBE congregations. This attitude is consistent with Jesus’ action of receiving children and a mark of hospitality to the “weak and marginalized”. In response to the survey report that MBE congregations are uncertain of the children’s ability to contribute to the faith, a paradigm shift based on the ZPD can facilitate MBE congregations to become,

as Andersen and Johnson predict, sanctuaries for children to become regenerated believers.

b. Building capacity in children as faith partners

Building capacity in children is a nurturing concept that differs significantly from the assumption of linear childhood faith development. In developmental theories, childhood nurture strategies are formulated in a linear fashion to explain human development. But capacity building from the ZPD perspective moves beyond linear thinking to provide a rich and dynamic environment for development. The ZPD concept sees the child as an able contributor to the faith, able to do far more than what the traditional developmental theories predict. For this reason, MBE congregations must facilitate faith development by building capacity in children. While the assumption of some survey respondents (including pastors) is that children are immature and not able to significantly contribute to the faith community, efforts can be made to enable children in the congregations to function at proximal capacity (ZPD) in their understanding and expression of the Christian faith. Montessori's appeal is timely when she spoke of the need for educators of children to build capacity in children: "We should help the child...no longer because we think of him puny and weak, but because he is endowed with great creative energy... [we need] to help the mind in the process of development, to aid its energy and strengthen its many powers" (Montessori, 1988, 26).

How is capacity built in the ZPD? Capacity building in children is consistent with the Baptist confession of forming children into regenerated believers, living in community, and engaged in ministry and mission. Capacity building of children in MBE congregations is also a process in Christian discipleship, and, in Vygotsky's approach, a form of collaboration in the ZPD for children. Capacity building as a process includes attention to the physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of children. Abraham Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs suggested that several basic needs must be fulfilled before a person can be "actualized" or attain highest value in ability (see Maslow's work on "Towards a psychology of being", 1968). Building capacity in children begins with meeting physiological needs of safety and belonging and culminates to spiritual needs. Although Maslow's theory seems

humanistic in approach, the fact is that actualization in a person demands that all dimensions of human need be met. When physiological needs are met, the child is free to embrace and focus on listening to the story of Jesus Christ that brings salvation and which builds capacity for agency in children. Capacity building for holistic development ensures children grow to maximum functioning, aware of their individual response to God's love and working towards an expression of their commitment and participation in God's global mission.

Capacity building also enables children to become decision makers in matters pertaining to their welfare and involvement in the faith community. Garland and Garland have suggested that congregational leadership resource the parents to raise their children, fulfil their parental obligations, and guide children to be reciprocal in their responses (Garland and Garland, 1990, 238). Applying the suggestions, MBE congregations can strengthen and uphold the importance of family life through the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. While this practice has been observed in the traditional paradigm of nurturing children's faith, the ZPD concept furthers the intention and engages children and adults in discussion and reflection of the teachings to family and personal life. Again, this is scaffolding which may or may not have been practiced in the congregation. The adults can also teach children the Scriptures and doctrines to equip them to think and speak from an authoritative position in view of hegemonic influences. MBE congregations could also provide the children with opportunities to minister and express their faith in God and belonging in the community. This process will enable children to develop into mature Christian young people. A congregation that builds capacity in its children demonstrates its desire to welcome God's working in its midst.

c. Raising spiritual consciousness in children

The ZPD as an instructional setting for faith formation of children opens up a different way of thinking about children's faith development. Faith formation from the ZPD perspective starts with the child and his God-given position in relation to his Creator God. Knowing God is not an external imposition on the child but "a pre-existent reality which is constantly unfolding" (Montessori, 1991, 61). The ZPD

applied to faith development suggests that a child's comprehension in spiritual matters and understanding of his faith relationship with God is not limited by "age appropriateness" (as developmentalists propose) or confined to a particular level of thinking. Assessing the faith maturity of a child based on the ZPD means that the child can actually understand deeper matters pertaining to his relationship with God when guided by more competent peers or nurtured in a faith community that actively engages in teaching for faith maturity.

Very little research has been done on this area of primary-aged children's religious potential. The most profound work so far has been developed by the Catholic theologian Sofia Cavelletti (*The Religious Potential of the Child*, 2000). When teaching parables to children, she noted that children have ability to think deeply about spiritual things and suggested that,

The depth and strength of the child's responses convince us that these parables offer a form of nourishment that corresponds to a child's particular need....The gospel tells us that the life force that compels the universe and ourselves always toward the "more" is the kingdom of God....The silent question of the child, "What is life?" leads us to several parables that answer in a form and a language suited to the child.

The child's response of deep satisfaction and joy occurs when the hunger to know the reality in which he or she is fed with the gospel message. The gospel message coincides with the need of the human being because the core of the reality we live is religious. This religious core, however, is not restricted to a particular religious faith. Rather, it pertains to the total disposition of the person who cannot be confined within his or her limitations but must reach for "the beyond." (Cavelletti, 2000, 3)

Jerome Berryman, in his catechetical program *Godly Play*, proposes that children go through stages of awareness in knowledge acquisition. The contemplation that leads the child from an "ahh?" to "ahha!" and "haha!" experience (the same process that Vygotsky used to identify the children's experiences) builds upon multiple layers of information received in micro size. The child concretizes his beliefs by working on a set of didactic materials and engaging in dialogue with the teacher. Through reflection (using the phrase "I wonder ..."), thinking is reorganized and new thoughts are formed that contribute to new meanings in expression. Catherine Stonehouse and Sofia Cavelletti have used this concept in their writings although they have not

acknowledged it by this term. Stonehouse quoted Berryman in her chapter “Setting the Stage for Knowing God” in which she emphasised the “layers of religious language” (a term taken from Berryman) in worship and practices that make meaning for children (Stonehouse, 1998, 169-192). At each layer of religious language used, the learners are lead into God’s story and guided to a greater depth of reflection (I wonder...).

Vygotsky posited that consciousness is a social outcome. Since the zone of proximal faith development is the distance between the actual faith level and the level of potential faith, children who are purposely engaged in faith-related activities such as Bible study, worship, ministry, and fellowship are facilitated to reach their potential faith level more than children who are not. From results of the field survey, we realised that children in MBE congregations are well instructed in the Scriptures. Most of the formation strategies are in fact cognitive processes (see Chapter 5, Table 6, p. 138). There are also multiple opportunities for fellowship and ministry. However, one thing lacking in MBE congregations is the concern to raise consciousness in children by incorporating them into the worship services.

The extent to which MBE congregations include children into their worship services is a measure of their welcome. Although the MBE congregations generally affirm that children are welcome in the worship services, the mode or style of worship, which is usually focused on youths and adults, is an implicit expression that children are not valued or regarded as equal worshippers. In guiding formation practices with the ZPD and raising spiritual consciousness in children in MBE congregations, Vygotsky’s approach suggests that children be included with the adults and youth in worship and ministry. But one fear among the leaders in embracing children as equal worshippers (which was also voiced by Joyce Mercer in her book *Welcoming children: A practical theology of childhood*, 2005) is that the “quality of worship” may decrease and the congregation may lose its worshippers to other more “dynamic and invigorative” congregations.

An ideal situation for raising spiritual consciousness in children through worship is the intergenerational approach. A faith community of adults and children with an intergenerational approach to worship provides a “gathering” and connecting of the

faith that evidences a worshipping community. Intergenerational worship symbolizes togetherness in the faith that is available to the young and elderly. While a full-scale intergenerational worship may not be possible, MBE congregations can adopt a partial intergenerational frame.⁶ A partial IG frame can mean that adult level worship need not be brought down to the children's level and at the same time, the children can be gradually introduced to the worship service. A partial frame can include a family time of singing, reading of Scriptures, confession of faith, offering, prayer, and a blessing before the children leave for their children's sermon.⁷ In this way, families stay together for most of the worship service except the main preaching. The partial IG frame is an option that can be easily integrated into MBE congregational practices.

One further issue relating to "consciousness raising" in the place of worship is children's participation in the Lord's Supper. Some MBE congregations practice a form of "open communion" where baptised believers from any Baptist congregation may participate in the Lord's Supper.⁸ Other MBE congregations have "closed communion," in which only baptised believers of that congregation may participate. But even MBE congregations that practice open communion do not encourage children to participate at the Lord's Table because the leadership are of the opinion that young children are not able to comprehend the meaning of the Lord's Supper. For this reason the congregation must educate the children in the meaning and importance of the sacraments. If a child confesses love for God and is baptised, the parents and leaders will have to explain the significance of the Lord's Supper and

⁶A partial IG frame is explained in James White's *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 1988.

⁷However, there is also disagreement with using children's sermon. Norma Everist in *The Church as Learning Community* voices her objections to children's sermon.⁷ She said, "...to invite children to come to the front and listen only during a children's sermon underestimate how much they hear throughout the service. David Ng, a strong proponent of inclusive worship objected to children's sermon because they "offend the dignity of older children and make them uncomfortable; they are manipulative of younger children; and they skew the Gospel message in an overly cognitive and moralistic direction making children (and adults) think that faith is merely about doing the right thing in order to gain the favour of God" (Ng and Thomas, 1981, 136). Ng suggested that children's sermon can become a form of "discrimination and deprivation" (cited in Mercer, 2002, 213). And yet, he realised that children's sermon are here to stay and gave he advice that worship that includes children should "... enable the entire congregation to worship God It then follows that children should be enabled to worship God ... and that the relationship of the worshippers with God be enhanced with opportunities to experience God's grace and encounter and respond to God's word, and to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and community in Christ (Ibid.).

⁸In recent years, MBE congregations have amended this rule to include all baptised believers regardless of denomination. Therefore if a baptised believer from another denomination happens to visit the Baptist congregation, the individual is welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper.

guide the child to the point of understanding and reverence for the sacrament. The parents could also be encouraged to bring their children for a blessing prior to the time they could participate in the Lord's Supper.

The three concerns listed above are examples of how MBE congregations could interpret Vygotsky's ZPD in faith formation of children. The concept of ZPD affirms children's faith is "here" (present intuitive faith) and "not yet" (potential aided faith) but it is not a yardstick to measure faith maturity in children; rather, it is a way to explain childhood faith potential. The ZPD permits us to estimate the child's "immediate future and his dynamic developmental state" and present the actual development level and the potential development level (Cole, Steiner, and Scribner, 1978, 90). The ZPD as a perspective for faith formation of children reminds MBE congregations of the need for a new paradigm of viewing children's spiritual potential, building capacity in children as faith partners, and raising spiritual consciousness through intergenerational congregational life. The concept also suggests the importance of adult's role – being present, doing faith and life together in tune with the child. Consistent with Vygotsky's approach, the three concerns mentioned above can be realized through community collaboration or scaffolding. To cite Thomas Conner's words in the context of recognizing potentials, building capacity, and raising consciousness of children in MBE congregations, "if regeneration is an absolute necessity to Christian character and regeneration depends on voluntary acceptance of the gospel, then for a child to be reared in the church...without regeneration is a perilous thing" (Conner, cited in Norman, 2005, 55).

2. FAITH DEVELOPMENT BY COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Andersen and Johnson have maintained that "underneath the public debate about family values or alarm about the plight of our families or the inability to establish a family-friendly society is a more troubling reality... (of) a culture of indifference towards children" (Andersen and Johnson, 1994, 2). Joyce Mercer expresses that most Christian congregations would view themselves as *child-friendly* but at the same time, "they do not want children to be present ... and express the ban ... through their adult's only style of worship and through disapproving words and glances they give to noisy children" (Mercer, 2005, 2). Such is the case in some MBE congregations in which children's ministry is tagged on because "it is the *right thing* to do". Therefore,

besides the paradigm shift in the way they view children in the congregations, MBE congregations must also collaborate actively to welcome children as an expression of an ecclesiology with a “child-affirming theology.”

Chapter Two maintained that children have a significant role in God’s kingdom and the potential to develop a faith relationship with him. The admonition in Deuteronomy 6:7-9 encourages parents to collaborate in the faith development of their children. Chapter Four stressed that faith formation of children in the original Baptist ecclesiology is threaded between congregational life and home life. The threaded approach to formation of children is also a concept found in the Old and New Testament approaches to the nurture of children in the faith. Both avenues (home and community life) create space for the child to explore and experience the reality of the faith. Collaboration for faith development from a Vygotskian perspective is based on a ZPD understanding of the zone of proximal faith development and the faith community’s effort to scaffold children to reach their proximal potential in understanding and expressing their relationship with God. The level of maturity which children can reach in their faith development with the assistance of more competent others in the congregation is indicative of the importance of congregational collaboration as an effective means for faith formation.

Collaboration posits that the child as a learner is “not child only, but child in society” (Moll, 1992, 12). Children are to grow and learn in a supportive environment. This claim is consistent with the biblical understanding of children in family and community context. Collaborating or scaffolding children to grow in their relationship with God requires that members in the faith community guide the children to: 1) know the Scriptures, 2) reflect and dialogue on their present experiences in the light of God’s working in the world, and 3) facilitate expressions of their faith through behavioural responses. Within the Christian context, collaboration in faith development can be described by terms such as mentoring, discipleship, internship, or apprenticeship. Another term which closely resembles Vygotsky’s collaborated learning or Bruner’s interpretation of scaffolding is Thomas Groome’s concept of “shared Christian praxis” in faith development (Groome, 1980).

In shared praxis, individuals in a faith community engage in reflection of the Scriptures and seek to make meaning of their spiritual experiences. As a community of faith, they collaborate to witness to the Risen Lord in words and deeds. Where would children position themselves in shared praxis? Left to themselves, children may be limited in their abilities to share in praxis. “Shared praxis” with children would suggest that there must be other more competent guides involved in the task to lead the children in reflection. Collaborating with children in their faith development is, to use Groome’s insights on shared praxis, to help children come to know and name their own stories and visions in the context of the redemption story. Groome’s terminology is consistent with Vygotsky’s notion of “meaning making,” a process where personal experiences become meaningful when connected to a broader interpretation of community life. Collaborating for faith development is an experience of the faith community where people of all ages commit themselves to an enriching spiritual journey of formation (Stonehouse, 1998, 195).

However, the survey results show that the present MBE congregations are not clear about their responsibilities in forming their children’s faith. Respondents did not see a “back and forth” threaded collaborative approach between the home and congregation. In fact, the survey results in Chapter Five, Table 19 (p. 156) indicate that parents tend to relegate their nurturing responsibilities to the pastor and church staff. The survey results also show lack of collaborative nurture between the home and congregation as the two entities function with their own agendas. But “the movement of faith from home to congregation... represents an integration of faith and life that is essential if church members are committed to being faithful, practicing Christians...” (Caldwell, 2000, 3). Some ideas to help MBE congregations organize their collaborative efforts in forming children in the faith may be suggested. Vygotsky’s idea of a collaborative approach to promote cognitive development and behavioural change can be located in three dominant structures in MBE congregations: 1) home, 2) congregation, and 3) home-congregation partnership.

a. Collaboration with the homes

Childhood faith begins in the home and Christian parents are responsible to ensure that the faith is passed on to their children. The mistaken notion of many Christians is

often that faith formation of children is primarily either the responsibility of the church or of the parents. The latter thinking is evident in the survey results in Chapter Five, Table 19 (p.156). Although the church supports families in nurturing faith in the children and is the wider avenue for faith expression, biblical teachings point to the home as the foundation for formation. Kathleen Chesto, a consultant on family spirituality said that religious faith isn't like a loaf of bread which parents send their kid to the corner church to pick up; it is handed down from the parents (Chesto, 1995). The Christian home should be an environment where children are immersed in a faith context and where attitudes, practices, language, and core values point to God. Chesto further reiterated that children's morality are formed by the time the children are 6- 7 years, and similarly faith formation of children needs to start early. Chesto affirmed, "If parents don't tell the story of their experiences through the eyes of faith, then children will not find God in their own experiences" (Ibid.). Chesto's concern is a reminder of Horace Bushnell's words concerning the parental role in nurturing faith:

Have it first in yourselves; then teach it as you live it; teach it by living it; for you can do it in no other manner. The children grow in faith, as it were, by a process of natural induction – only it will be intensely supernatural, because their faith is quickened and grown in the atmosphere of God's Spirit always filling the house. (Bushnell, 1876/1979, 402)

Faith collaboration in the Christian home is for parents, more mature siblings and family members to deliberately work together to promote awareness of God, his working in the world, and his plan for the child. Collaboration is working with the Holy Spirit to bring the child into relationship with God and to help him realise his potential as one created in God's image. The adults' role in faith formation of children cannot be understated because,

Adults, not children, are those who are called upon to give witness to faith in God. Adults are the ones with a memory of an experience with the living God that must be shared. ... faith is formed and passed on through personal relationship and often they are relationships within one's own household.... Parents play a role second only to that of the Holy Spirit in building the spiritual foundation of their children's lives....The Holy Spirit works through the children and to overlook the role of parents in formation is to overlook a fundamental gift of the Holy Spirit in children and youth. (Andersen, 1998, 37; 111).

The survey respondents barely touched on the subject of faith collaboration in the homes. While there were some suggestions on how to promote family life that encouraged faith development (see results in Chapter Five, Table 6, p. 138, and Table 24, p. 165), the respondents generally did not indicate any deep awareness that home collaboration is important for faith nurture. Some respondents noted parental modelling, family worship, enforced discipline, and prayer in the homes but there were also a number of unanswered questions because the respondents were not sure how to respond to these questions. Hence, to help children grow in their relationship with God, MBE congregations must purposefully strategize the home as a formation avenue because this is the place where children spend most of their formative years.

There are four strategies where collaboration can be effective in the home context:

First, MBE congregations must stress the importance of family and home life as a foundation in nurturing children in the faith. Human developmental theories inform us that childhood personalities, identities, values, and habits are formed in the home context. Hence, parents must be educated in their God-given role as nurturers. Unless parents know the scriptural mandate for parenthood and the biblical teachings on family and parents as nurturers of the children's faith and given the parental skills, the parents can at best perform according to their own limited understanding.

Collaboration for faith development of children begins by reflection of best child nurturing practices and how these practices can help children grow in their relationship with God. Educating the parents will help them understand the intricacies of childhood faith, and ways in which they can collaborate with their children to facilitate faith maturity. Hence, leaders in MBE congregations should help these parents become responsible nurturers.

Second, MBE congregations must support the families with resources to teach the Scriptures to their children. Often, formal instruction in the Scriptures for children is relegated to the Sunday school teachers and pastoral staff. Empirical observation shows that, in MBE congregational context, very few homes allocate time to formally teach Scriptures to the children. Instruction in the Scriptures is usually done in informal ways, such as, at the dining table and while driving (see survey results in Chapter Five, Table 15, p. 148). While there are many unintentional "teachable

moments” in family life, there is still need for parents to be intentional in planned instruction of the Scriptures in the home. The task of planned instruction in the homes ensures that children receive continuous and proper training in the Scriptures. The instructional process in the homes is presumably supported and continued in the congregational life.

Third, MBE congregations must train their parents to organize their home environment for meaning-making, where cognitive knowledge of the Scriptures becomes affective consciousness. Parents and family members must provide an environment which supports children’s religious experiences, a place where children can connect Scriptural knowledge and religious teachings with life events. For example, children who are familiar with family gatherings and family meal time can identify with the concept of a church family and the observation of the Eucharist. Marjorie Thompson has described the family as the “domestic church” where religious education begins and which converges with other domestic churches to be the communal church (Thompson, 1989, 24). Since celebrations and observances in MBE congregations are characteristics of a Baptist faith community, children who experience rituals and traditions in their family life are able to make meaning of experiences when carried over to the congregational life.

Fourth, MBE congregations must affirm the importance of the family and home as sacred places where the presence of God is acknowledged and celebrated. In Baptist history, the families of Baptist congregations made it a point to pray, read Scriptures, and worship. The homes were places where spiritual consciousness was raised and children were guided to be attuned to God’s presence. The homes were also places where children experienced affirmation and encouragement, forgiveness and reconciliation, and hospitality. God’s name was revered and time was deliberately set aside to commemorate His presence. An example of this practice is the observance of Sunday as a day of rest and worship. However, the concept of homes as sacred places to commemorate God is generally unfamiliar among MBE congregations. Hence, MBE leadership needs to raise among the members an awareness of the importance of establishing homes immersed with God’s presence so that within a “God saturated environment” the children can grown in faith.

b. Collaboration in the congregations

George Koehler has suggested that collaboration in context of Christian education is, “a planned opportunity for teaching-learning as a faith community in which a major purpose is to engage persons of two or more generations in shared experiences, interaction, caring, and mutual responsibility for learning” (cited in White , 1988, 19). From a Vygotskian perspective congregational collaboration means adults or more competent peers helping children to grow in their faith relationship with God and functioning within congregational life. The collaboration which Vygotsky talked about is not mere imitation or socialization. Using Joyce Mercer’s definition, community collaboration includes the development of critical reflective capacities and opportunities for immersion in the narratives and theoretical perspectives that inform contrast to the traditional understanding of children as empty vessels and not able to engage in meaningful interactions. But community collaboration for faith development means that children can be assisted to grow into faith maturity from where they presently are to “newer, more complex, and hopefully more adequate ways of understanding and acting that they can eventually appropriate for themselves” (Ibid.).

As reinforced in our earlier discussions, childhood faith development indicates the need for community life. The faith community is the place where children may travel together with the adults; stories are shared, cultural epoch birthed, life celebrated, and deaths commemorated. In *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, Catherine Stonehouse wrote, “The spiritual formation of children should begin with the spiritual formation of their parents.... The importance of the faith community to the family should be communicated by pastors in marriage counselling... “(Stonehouse, 1998, 66). The Apostle Paul reminded Christians that faith development is not an individual venture but a community effort. Although God gives the growth, the community of faith has its role to play in nurturing each other’s faith (1 Cor. 3: 6-9). Within the community of faith, children discover their identities as God’s people as they participate in and reflect on Christian practices which over time form them into people of faith (Mercer, 2005, 169). Faith communities are places where “a common memory... vision of goals, and means for life together; a common authority for resolving conflicts and a shared life that includes a common mission, relationships

and rituals” are found (Westerhoff, 1980, 302). “For children in the congregations,... Christian identity formation that takes place through participation in the congregations ... gives shape to particular ways of making meaning” (Mercer, 168). Within the faith community,

... [the] ritual moments communicate love and presence, meaning and hope. These rituals and traditions give our children something to count on, not once but again and again. We learn to celebrate the ordinary; we experience the extraordinary presence of God in our daily lives. Living with this perspective helps us to experience our children as blessings rather than burdens. (Walsh and Middleton, 1984, 91)

Collaboration to nurture children’s faith in MBE congregations is when adults and more mature peers help the children to develop understanding of their relationship with God and Baptist community life. The purpose of collaboration is effective child functioning and includes active participation of both adults and children. The field survey results (see Chapter Five, Table 15, p. 148) noted that there are some collaborative efforts in MBE congregations to nurture childhood faith. A majority of the respondents encouraged the children to make professions of their faith and disciple and train them in the Christian faith. The respondents also gave numerous ideas on how to collaborate for childhood faith development. But an obvious lack in the way MBE congregations collaborate for faith development is a coordinated effort for the task. The results do not show a well organized system to scaffold children into faith maturity. Acts of collaboration seem to be random and often thought of and carried out by individuals but not by groups of people.

A recommendation to MBE congregations is that their leaders must get together and execute a plan which will involve the entire congregation in collaboration of the children’s faith towards maturity. MBE congregations need to develop a more pastoral response for children. David Ng has said that the faith communities often make two common mistakes in their perspective of children’s participation in the church (Ng, 1993, xxi). First, children are seen as dormant, inactive participants. Second, the faith community often makes children performers rather than participants. The latter perspective is often mistaken as helping children grow in faith. As was said earlier, faith collaboration is not only about giving opportunities to serve but a reciprocal relationship between the old and young in MBE congregation,

whereby the older and more competent adults direct the younger to make sense of their faith. Community collaboration will help children come to appreciate a faith relation with God and to be regenerated persons.

c. Home and congregation collaboration

Vygotsky theorized that children grow in knowledge and understanding when cognitively challenged in a sociocultural setting. This proposition is also held by Urie Bronfenbrenner in his ecological theory on human development. Although the home is the micro system in which the child initially develops, this system overflows into the meso system where the faith community is situated. Thus, home and congregation collaboration is important because the beliefs, values, and habits taught in the homes are further affirmed in community life. “The character, integrity and spiritual vitality of the faith community will affect children profoundly. Those who care about spiritual growth of children will care about the spiritual vitality of the whole congregation” (May et al., 2005, 132) because the faith community is the second layer of influence in shaping children’s faith. However, Marjorie Thompson cautions that,

The church is usually viewed as the primary teacher of faith and the mediator of values. Theologically speaking, this is a proper perspective. The problem arises when the church is identified primarily with its structure, or with its professional leadership rather than its full membership. Specialized training is so esteemed in our culture that we have to come to trust only “professionals: to teach, heal or advise us. It is small wonder that parents often feel inadequately equipped for the demanding task of teaching their children whether about faith, sexuality, or even basic human values.” (Thompson, 1996, 26)

Therefore, it is vital to strike a balance in negotiating the roles of the home and faith community in nurturing the children into faith. Both human institutions have their strengths and weaknesses. While the home is the immediate vicinity that affirms faith through its micro relationships, the faith community in its macro relationships is the wider family where faith is practiced and nurtured by its “number of dynamic elements, which includes interacting individuals, normative practices, symbolized meanings, and a shared environment” (Miller, 1987, 18). Home and congregation collaboration means there are two collaborating partners in the task of formation. As Elsie Boulding puts it, “for the family to fulfil all its potentialities for nurturing open

loving persons free to carry out a mission in an aching society, some equivalent of an extended family is necessary. No family can do this alone” (Boulding, 1982, 2). Boulding’s statement is affirmed by Stanley Hauerwas who says, “parenting is an office of the whole community and not just of those who happen to have children ... for it is assumed that the whole community [presumably the church] is ready to support those who have children by relieving them of total and exclusive responsibility” (Hauerwas, 1985, 279).

Home and congregation collaboration for faith formation of children is evident in the early Baptist congregational contexts. Chapter Four concluded that the purpose of educating children according to the Baptist understanding of the Christian faith is to form them to be persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. Children were taught the Scriptures in the homes and congregational leaders wrote catechetical instructions to assist parents and other adults teach faith to the children. The congregation was the venue for practising and experiencing the reality of the faith. The children were imbued with a deep sense of belonging, and from that sense of belonging, the children developed the desire to appropriate the values and beliefs of the faith community (see Bridger, 2000, 163- 174). The scenario as described is a model set by the forefathers of the Baptist faith in nurturing children which is still valid today. Strategies may change but the principle remains that the home and congregation collaboration for faith formation of children is an inherited practice and should be evident in the present MBE congregations.

3. MINISTRY AND WITNESS THROUGH CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Phylogenesis is a central concept in Vygotsky’s approach and he proposed that this concept as a functional process should be evident in any social community. As a social construct, the cyclic life of the faith community with its particular people group, traditions, celebrations, liturgies, symbols, artefacts and confessions is an example of phylogenesis in progress. Various Christian educators have found the importance of culture, signs, and tools as mediating elements of the Christian faith. Maria Harris used the social construct of the faith community (with its cultures and tools) to develop a curriculum for the faith formation of its members (Harris, 1989). Westerhoff’s enculturation means that the child is integrated into a system of belief

where the environment enhances the child's faith. As a mediating process, phylogenesis incarnates Christ in community life by dictating the behaviour and the structure of the faith group. Although Karen Marie Yust did not use the term phylogenesis, she pointed out that the process of shared culture enables the faith community to "create contexts, point out the way, share the stories and give directions that can help children express their spiritual experiences and ways that transform who they are in the very developmental stages in which they reside" (Yust, 2004, 164).

In his sociocultural approach, Vygotsky developed the concept of "tools" for semiotic mediation. All tools "have a dual nature as artefacts: they are simultaneously both material and ideal, and so require of their users both physical and intellectual activity" (Wells, 1999, 6-7). By including tools in the process of behaviour modification, Vygotsky was confident that the tools will "alter the entire flow and structure of mental functions... just as a technical tool alters the process of a natural adaptation ..." (7). Other than signs and symbols there are also artefacts such as language which are used to mediate knowledge. Every community inherits its contextual tools in form of language, practices, and value systems from the preceding generation. The same may be said of MBE congregations with their ecclesiastical tools for mediating knowledge and building faith. These tools are both structural and psychological in nature, seeking to transform the individuals to be more Christ-like in attitude and behaviour.

This section identifies three distinct tools which are potentially present in most MBE congregations and are denominationally sanctioned to contribute towards congregational life. These tools can also be used to facilitate children to become persons in ministry and witness. The tools are: a) the practice of covenanting, b) sanctioned spiritual patterns, and c) instruction in the Scriptures.

a. Covenant practice

The practice of covenanting (or, the act of covenanting) is a concept familiar to MBE congregations. This practice is especially used at the installation of pastors and church office bearers, where members of a congregation covenant together to support the elected personnel and together build congregational life. Covenants have also been used for the dedication of newborn children, engagements, and marriage

ceremonies. In these ceremonies, the parties involved pledge before the community to keep their vows or commitment as parents, husbands, or wives. Other than being biblically rooted, the practice of covenanting can be likened to Vygotsky's understanding of a community's commitment to collaborate in its efforts. In the context of this research, we will explore the idea of community collaboration as covenanting to form faith in the children. Covenanting as a tool for faith formation of children requires the faith community to take deliberate actions and publicly acknowledge their intent to guard their children and nurture them in the faith.

MBE congregations do not practise any form of covenant exercise related to faith formation of children.⁹ Apart from occasional baby dedication in which parents "covenant" to raise their newborns in the faith, prayer for children's programs and for children who are sick or who have excelled in their exams, there has been no congregational demonstration or pronouncement to commit united efforts to bring up children in the Christian faith. The absence of such a practice could mean that the congregations are ignorant that this act can be an opportunity to encourage commitment to raise the children in the faith that MBE congregations are indifferent to their responsibility as faith nurturers, or that they have limited the process to parenting, Sunday school teachers and children's workers. Since the survey results show that MBE congregations are not fully aware that all members can be involved in faith formation of their children, covenanting as an act of commitment to welcome children and help them grow in the faith can be used as a tool to help members realise this responsibility.

Covenanting as an act of commitment to form childhood faith in MBE congregations can be included as a congregational agenda item. Andersen and Johnson, in their affirmation of the church as sanctuary for children, suggested that the welcome of children into the congregation could be done through initiation rites. They suggested child baptism to establish the congregation as "a communion in which oneness leads to equality" (Andersen and Johnson, 1994, 114). Child baptism is not encouraged by the Baptist Statement of Faith nor taught as a Baptist understanding of regenerate

⁹Having worked with children (either directly or indirectly) for thirty years in the MBE congregations, I, the researcher, have not attended or heard of a covenant exercise related to faith formation of children.

believers, but an alternative is found in Garland and Garland's proposal that congregations can covenant a relationship of unconditioned love to the children through affirmation of the church's network of families (Garland and Garland, 1990, 238-39). Garland and Garland's suggestion includes the congregation's promise to create a network of families where all its members can find a place to be nurtured and to provide a context and resources where families can be empowered to fulfil their roles as parents, children, family, and covenant partners in the faith.

Covenanting to welcome children into MBE congregations and helping them grow in faith is a commitment of the adults to the children. The commitment means that the adults have to do away with their prevailing mentality that children can be used as bridges or channels to bring other people into the church (see survey results in Chapter Five, Table 5, p. 136). Although there is evidence that parents and household members are reached for Christ through children, children must first be respected and regarded as individuals worthy to receive the faith in their own right. The practice of covenanting to build childhood faith in the congregation highlights the pledge of the parents and congregation to help children grow in faith. The covenant ensures that faith is modelled at home and in the faith community and that childhood faith can find avenues for expression for ministry and mission.

b. Sanctioned spiritual patterns

In MBE congregations (as in every faith community) "spiritual patterns" exist which govern community life. Spiritual patterns are "the regular patterns of spiritual life (that) can sustain the whole community in its walk with God" (Moore, 1993, 42). The spiritual patterns in MBE congregations include the activities, observances and routines of congregational life which facilitate faith maturity and direct the congregations to live out their confessions as a Baptist community. A typical week for a congregation begins on a Sunday with Sunday school, corporate worship and tea or lunch fellowship. Then, there is the mid week prayer meeting (Wednesday), the cell group meeting (Fridays), and choir practice or children's club (Saturday). Within the cycle of a calendar year, there may also be events such as births, deaths, and sicknesses, rites of passage, weddings and celebrations.

Some spiritual patterns are explicit and consist of practices which are openly sanctioned by the community and advertised as structures that uphold the congregational life. Explicit MBE congregational spiritual patterns include the Baptist Confession of Faith and the congregations' practice of Baptist church polity. A covenant is also an explicit spiritual pattern, obvious and intentional. These explicit spiritual patterns in MBE congregations declare to the people that the congregation adheres to the Baptist interpretation of the Christian faith. Another form of spiritual pattern is the implicit or hidden pattern. Implicit spiritual patterns are not taught openly but affect the way members practice their faith. Implicit spiritual patterns include practices and values such as the environment, values, and attitudes of the people which are not planned but become evident during implementation. Implicit spiritual patterns in MBE congregations influence the children's response to the congregations, as well as impacting on the development of their faith in general. Children's responses are influenced by the church setting, attitude of the adults toward them, worship styles, intentional intergenerational or age segregated fellowships, and the planned instructional programs. These implicit spiritual patterns mediate congregational culture to the children and form their values, attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews.

Within the spiritual patterns, children experience life from a particular structure which gives them an understanding of how a faith congregation functions. The spiritual patterns set by MBE congregations mediate the "theology in practice" of the members. Hence it is important that both, the explicit and implicit patterns are consistently mediating the same message. In a case where the explicit spiritual patterns determine that the worship hall is to be located on the third floor of a walk-up building, the implicit spiritual patterns discourage the elderly and physically challenged persons to worship and mediate an attitude that the elderly and physically challenged worshippers are not welcome in the congregation. MBE congregations have a duty to plan and enforce spiritual patterns that can help their children grow in their understanding of the Baptist confessions and the way they practice their faith. The leaders need to be aware that both practices in congregational life intentionally or unintentionally influence the children's understanding of God and their response to others in the faith community.

c. Christian education

Christian education is a practice found in all MBE congregations and is a foremost characteristic of the Malaysian Baptist denomination. One way to mediate the beliefs and values to children is through Christian education. Daniel Aleshire has defined Christian education as,

... those tasks and expressions of ministry that enable people: 1) to learn the Christian story, both ancient and present, 2) to develop the skills they need to act out their faith, 3) to reflect on that story in order to live self aware to its truth; and 4) to nurture the sensitivities they need to live together as a covenant community. (Aleshire, 1988b, 700)

Aleshire's definition is echoed by Veverka's understanding that Christian education is to "equip the new generations of the faithful to abide in this creative, tension-filled relationship between identity and difference, continuity and change, commitment and criticism, memory and hope" (Verveka, 2004, 14). Both Aleshire and Veverka's definitions of Christian education imply that the task is a process of formation and transformation. "The central purpose of educating children... for faith is the formation of identity among learners to enable their full participation in the mission and practices of the faith community" (Mercer, 2005, 197). Mercer noted that this element is missing in most traditional modes of Sunday school learning where the focus is cognitive input (197). Teaching children about the faith without providing opportunities for real encounters of the lesson is what Paulo Freire called a "banking" system of education that deposits information but denies the learners an opportunity for response. Christian education that is transformative impacts the learners with a sense of urgency to be radical disciples of Christ in the world. For children in MBE congregations, Christian education contributes to informed practice of the faith.

The purpose of Christian education as a tool for formation is to facilitate knowledge and thinking in children so that they can be guided to Christian responses. In every MBE congregation there exists some form of Christian education like the weekly Sunday schools, children's clubs, annual Vacation Bible School, and more recently "children's cell groups." The aim of these programs is to teach the Scriptures to children, evangelise non-believing children, and provide fellowship among children in the church. However outside the scope of these "children's programs" there is

generally limited awareness among some MBE congregations that Christian education of children can include a larger dimension of congregational life: that congregational life is in fact an educational process. Christian education as a distinct feature of the MBE congregations is a viable tool to educate children for ministry and mission. Sometimes the adults' tendency is to think that children are too young to understand the implications of ministry and mission in their faith communities. But primary age children should not be underestimated in their abilities to be active participants in their faith responses. The ZPD perspective of educating children acknowledges that, although some children may not be able to fully understand the contents taught even at an age graded level, the learning process for these children is in fact an accumulation of the many "ahha!" experiences that ultimately contribute to understanding of the faith.

Christian education as a faith formation tool in MBE congregations affirms that there is already a process within MBE congregational life which members can use to form the children's faith. Other than input for cognitive maturity in the faith, Christian education contributes to the development of faith language in children. Faith language is an important element in children's religious development because it is one of the essential tools for functioning in the faith community. In the process of language development, the acquired vocabulary used in speech (for the purpose of social interactions) may be refined to become inner speech (silent prayers) and then private thoughts (reflection and contemplation). Consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, the "kind of language" the children will use is determined by the local community.¹⁰ It is expected that in a faith community the experiences, expressions, and dialogue testify to Christian living. Therefore, MBE congregations are encouraged to use Christian education as a purposeful tool to help their children develop a reservoir of "Christian vocabulary" for functioning.

Christian education may also lead children into informed practice of their faith. "The effectiveness of formal Christian education, a congregational climate which promotes thinking,... warmth... quality of worship... care from other members, and the degree to

¹⁰Also see Noam Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky proposed that all children are born with a language acquisition device. Although this device genetically helps children to communicate through use of language, the frame of thinking, words and concepts derive from community belonging (Cole and Cole, 298-299).

which the congregation engages its members in service to people in need” are variables that promote faith in its members (Benson and Elkind, 1990, 10). Christian education as a tool for faith formation is not limited to formal teaching but can also include informal teaching moments. With regards to the informal teachings of children (in the North American context), the Search Institute submits that, “we need to equip mothers and fathers to play a more active role in the religious education of their children, by means of conversation, family devotions, and family helping projects” (66). The process by which children are informed and hopefully transformed by Christian education argues that Christian education is a viable tool for formation in ministry and witness. Informed practice reinforces children with knowledge that “the God whom they have learned is already in that world in which they go... believing that God is at work in ways beyond (their) present reality, (children) can dare to envision missions of justice and be equipped to work towards them (Everist, 2002, 271).

C. BAPTIST CONFESSIONS AS GUIDELINES FOR FAITH ASSESSMENT

This section discusses a three point process in monitoring childhood faith development. In most categories of formal learning, some form of assessment and evaluation of the student’s knowledge and skill competencies is important. Outcomes of the evaluation should indicate, among other things, whether the student has learned and how much the student has learned. Christian educators have used assessment and evaluation procedures to guide them in their teaching and appraisal of learner’s performance. Assessment and evaluation processes in learning situations are not “limited to pointing out what is wrong and how we failed. They also help us see what is right and how we are succeeding. They can help us become better stewards...” (Tye, 2000, 107). While the phrase “assessment and evaluation” may be a positive activity in the learning process, this research do not intend to use the terms “assessment” and “evaluation” in reference to gauging the faith development of children for three reasons.

First, Brian Hill in his paper on *Assessment and Agape* (1989) mentioned that the use of assessment is to measure both the students' performance as well as the teacher's effectiveness. However, in the Malaysian context it is more to measure the student's performance rather than teacher's effectiveness. The process of assessment and evaluation in the Malaysian education context is often associated with a "pass" or "fail" grade. This form of assessment and evaluation has also influenced the Sunday schools and other teaching programs for children in MBE congregations where faith development is often measured by demonstration of knowledge of the Scriptures. A pass or a fail in assessment usually hinges on whether or not the child is unable to recite bible verses, engage in bible discussions, or demonstrate some form of competency in handling Scriptures. As such, it is preferred that another term be used to gauge the faith development of children in MBE congregational context.

Second, if faith development is solely based on cognitive increment, then a test would verify whether the child's faith has increased. This method to assess children's faith maturity is widely embraced by the Sunday school teachers in MBE congregations. The cognitive approach to measure faith development is also supported by the number of age-appropriate teaching materials used in the children churches and Sunday schools. MBE congregations mostly use *LifeWay*, a Southern Baptist publication, Scripture Union Sunday school materials, and other local and foreign publication as syllabus resources. Some of these materials aim more toward knowledge dispensation and the publishers presumably expect the users to support it with further activities that can bring about affective and behavioural changes.

If cognitive increment is the main indication of faith development, then a structured and systematic evaluation procedure is recommended. In this case, Bloom's taxonomy could be used to measure how much "faith" has developed in the child and this process of gauging faith development would have sufficed.¹¹ But this form of

¹¹In 1956, Benjamin Bloom designed the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* which addresses learning in the three developmental domains: 1) cognitive, 2) affective, and 3) psychomotor. A holistic approach to teaching and learning targets these three domains. Since the teaching focuses on knowledge increment which should lead to change of attitudes and behaviour, a student is said to have learned when she or he shows evidences of these competencies. Although Bloom considered the affective and behavioural domains of learning, his focus is still on the cognitive competencies which are evident by the 6 levels of learning (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation).

assessment would not correlate to Vygotsky's consideration of the child's potential in the ZPD. Even when the affective and behavioural domains are considered in the assessment and evaluation process, it only measures faith development that has already taken place (fossil) but does not point to potentials which are still developing in the child (potentials). Therefore, another method of gauging the child's faith development must be sought.

Third, there is concern as to whether a child's faith can be "assessed" and "evaluated." The concern lies in the type or kind of indicators which are used to determine faith maturity. On what basis can we qualify these indicators as the correct measure of a child's faith? For example, the survey results in Chapter Five, Table 5, (p.136) indicated that children are expected to memorize Scripture verses, give dance presentations in the church, lead in prayer, participate in church programs, and care for younger children (among other expectations) as evidences of their active role in the congregation. If a child is presently not able to show evidences of these roles or can only perform two of the five roles, traditional standards of assessment would say that the child has not fully achieved the level of competency expected. This is precisely the type of measurement in development that Vygotsky was challenging.

Vygotsky has proposed that while it is important to measure a child's actual level of development, it is equally important to measure the level of potential development in the child (Werstch, 1985a, 68); the reason for this is that learning is a developmental process, an unfolding of the child's potentials as he interacts with his environment. Any change in the child's performance is a result of the inter-mental and intra-mental interactions regulated by personal and social involvement. In normative development, the child is always maturing in some degree and maturation is further enhanced when collaborated by others. The traditional methods of assessing children's mental abilities by standardized testing give little room to accommodate the child's unique abilities in the learning continuum. So instead of assessment and evaluation for faith development, another term is preferred.

Hill has suggested that perhaps "profiling" could be an answer to the way we gauge or assess children in the learning process (Hill, 1989, 6-19). In the context of schooling,

profiling it seems, "... gives the child whose strengths lie in the direction of manual skills, or group leadership, or artistic creativity, a chance to be identified" instead of an exclusively literary academic skills (Ibid.). Similar to profiling is the process of monitoring. Webster dictionary defines "monitoring" as the process of watching, checking and observing for a special purpose. The goal of monitoring is to observe changes in the development process. In this case, it is to observe the qualitative and quantitative changes in the child's understanding of his faith and relationship with God. Since the traditional methods of assessing children's faith are considered inappropriate, limited in scope, and do not give an accurate measure of faith development, how can the process of monitoring be any better? And how does monitoring fit into the Vygotskian perspective of faith formation of children? The following discussion provides a three point process to answer the above questions.

1. MONITORING CHILDHOOD FAITH DEVELOPMENT IN AN MBE CONGREGATIONAL FRAME

Monitoring a child's faith development from an MBE congregational frame is to observe and check the whole process of faith development and formation from the Baptist agenda of formation. A Baptist is a regenerate person, a person in community, and a person in ministry and witness; and as such, all formation processes should lead the child to acquire these characteristics. Baptist congregations have historically been deliberate and focused in their efforts to form faith in their children. While children were not included in the membership of the church and were prevented from participating in the ordinances until their regeneration, the congregation nevertheless prepared catechetical programs to help the children in their faith process. For example, the amendment of the *Baptist Faith and Message* commissioned by Thomas Elliff (1963) stated that children should be first nurtured in their family context. The nurturing process included the parental teaching and modelling the faith. From the home environment, the child's faith environment extends to congregational life. As the child grows older, the congregation is expected to play its part in forming faith. One of the first examples to include children in congregational life during the early Baptist history was the inclusion of a sermonette and a hymn for children during the worship service. Through parental and corporate

congregational efforts, it was hope that the children would become people as the congregations envisioned – regenerate persons in community and in ministry and witness.

In the research survey, some respondents listed four specific approaches that are currently used in MBE congregations to form faith in the children (see Chapter Five, Table 6, p. 138). These faith formation approaches are selected based on their global popularity (Purpose Driven Life Children's Version), fun and entertaining way to faith development (*Superkids* program), instilled discipline (CLIP, Basic Life Institute), and local congregational preference (PRAISE, a faith formation strategy developed by a local congregation). The effectiveness of these approaches is measured based on task accomplishment, assumed child centred learning, and the number of children that these programs can individually attract and not on the goals and mission statement of a Baptist congregation. Through empirical observation and conversation with some Sunday school teachers, it is obvious that these programs propagated ideas such as: the more costly a program the more effective it will be, faith formation is moral discipline, formation strategies must be fun and entertaining to be good (since children are involved), or a successful faith formation program equals mega children's church.¹² While these programs may be popular and suited for other congregations, they may not meet the objectives of faith formation of children in MBE congregations.

So the first point in the monitoring process is to ensure that all forms of formation utilized by MBE congregations must work towards forming the child with the characteristics of a Baptist. There was no indication that the respondents in the survey were aware of this goal in faith formation. The general consensus in formation was that children must just become Christian and faithful church participants. While there are opportunities for ministry and witness, these opportunities are not drawn from the goals of the Baptist agenda. There is also limited understanding of the process of God's salvation in children (the experience of grace, sanctification and glorification) and the invitation and deliberate effort to incorporate children to be part of the "gathered people." Monitoring faith formation from a Baptist agenda warrants

¹²This information was collected from a Sunday school teachers' retreat with the First Baptist Church, Selangor on 25-27 July 2006.

that the methods and strategies will ultimately support MBE congregations in fulfilling their purpose as proclaimed in the *Malaysian Baptist Statement of Faith*.

2. MONITORING CHILDHOOD FAITH DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE ZPD

The application of the ZPD as a basis for monitoring children's faith development is based on the understanding that development of convictions, deepening relationship with God and fellow believers happen in a continuum of faith experiences. Although children in the early Baptist congregations did not fully participate in its congregational life, they were still seen as possibilities to be nurtured into regeneration. As such, the nurturing process in children was deliberate, moving from regeneration to participation in congregational life, and then to be involved in ministry and mission. Likewise, for children in MBE congregations, childhood faith should not be measured in a linear fashion using a sequential developmental checklist nor should children be viewed as "unsaved" if they have not shown any evidence of faith in God. Vygotsky's ZPD perspective applied to faith development of children views children as complete persons created by God and invested with capabilities to grow wholesome, to live lives that reflect God's goodness and salvation, and to become active participants in God's kingdom. The ZPD perspective acknowledges that every child has the potential to experience God's grace in salvation and that potential is revealed according to the child's personal maturation level and not standardized age appropriate expectations. Since childhood faith development is a continuum of experiences that lead to regeneration, participation in the faith community and involvement in ministry and witness, monitoring the child's progress by a ZPD perspective is consistent with the Baptist practice of faith nurture in children.

Stated earlier, childhood faith development is non- linear. The process is based on the belief in the potentials of the child "to become." Regeneration from a ZPD perspective is a process of potential development in experiencing grace, sanctification, and glorification. This ZPD perspective does not insist on the traditional understanding of children saying "the sinner's prayer" as accountability of faith. Instead, the nurturer utilizing the ZPD perspective looks for signs of faith

(budding faith) that indicate consciousness of God in the child's life. Signs of budding faith in children include the desire to pray to God, confession of love for Jesus, reading the Scriptures, or interest to know who God is. In the earlier section of this chapter it was mentioned that within the ZPD, MBE congregations should recognise that the child has potential to experience the grace of God and hence, MBE congregations must build capacity in the children to experience the sanctification process and raise spiritual consciousness so that they can be aware of their roles in the wider purpose of God's plan in the world. These statements are the bases for monitoring childhood faith development based on the ZPD.

In monitoring the child's progress from a ZPD perspective, educators and caregivers may have to depart from, or give away, their treasured stand of the *age of accountability*. As Francis Bridger said in the context of children making moral decisions, "we must begin to think of a series of points over time at which a child becomes increasingly responsible and therefore increasingly accountable" rather than a fixed point in time of accepting Christ (Bridger, 2000, 127). Educators and caregivers in MBE congregations can monitor the child's faith with the view that while some children who hear the gospel readily accept Jesus, other children may have reservations and may choose to "store away the truth for the time (until) when it becomes relevant" (144). But it does not mean that if a child rejects Christ, the child will be subjected to God's judgement (see Buckland's *Children and the King*, 1977). "Any attempt to pinpoint a moment in the life of a child as being the actual age of accountability will be met with disappointment" (Bridger, 126). Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD makes provision for children to go through multiple commitments (Buckland's term) before they reach the "haha!" stage. Therefore, the monitoring process looks into opportunities when the child faith experiences can continue to expand and faith that is "stored away" can be revisited to the point of commitment.

3. MONITORING CHILDHOOD FAITH DEVELOPMENT FROM LOWER TO HIGHER FUNCTIONS

Higher mental functioning does not only imply greater knowledge gain but a more superior mode of functioning (Wells, 1999, 324). This mode of functioning translated into the child's cultural context means that the child will be a more effective

participant in his community life. Wells calls this the *telos*: the end point of development (Ibid.). From the Baptist faith development perspective, the beginning of the faith journey is a relationship with God that leads to salvation or (in language adopted by Baptists), regeneration. This is followed by the continual experience of sanctification and, in time, glorification. In the faith journey, children who are collaborated in their faith development will mature in understanding their experiences and become more competent in their faith expression (moving from lower to higher functions). A major contributor to the maturation process is the ability of the child to make meaning of his experiences.

Meaning- making is one of the most basic functions in Christian faith formation. Chapter Three of this dissertation presented a developmental approach to how children make meaning of their faith. In addition to the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains of processing knowledge, there are also sociocultural factors that influence the interpretation of children's experiences. In their faith journey, children are pilgrims in search of meaning and vocation. In the effort to make meaning of their experiences, children utilized their personal interpretative skills to make connections with what they already know with new information received. Meaning making is a continuous process as long as the individual seeks purpose for existence and functioning. While children may bring their own interpretation to their experiences, it is the collaborators who will guide them into responses that contribute to the overall development of their faith. Working within a setting that covenants to build faith in children, the collaborators ensure that the children are taught the Scriptures and located in a community where the spiritual patterns mediate faith. While the journey may be a mutual journey of seeking God together, the collaborators are actually scaffolding the children's faith development.

Like the previous recommendation, instead of asking what children can do to demonstrate they have faith, MBE congregations should examine themselves and ask how they have made it possible for children to have faith. What encounters have they developed or designed to help the children "to become"? Instead of gauging whether the child has reached the expected norms that indicate faith maturity (e.g. pray, worship God, answer questions regarding the faith, etc.), monitoring faith development from the Baptist agenda requires MBE congregations to be self-

examining, and to consider what they have done to facilitate the child in faith development. They need to ask themselves, how and in what ways they have provided opportunities for the child to experience God's grace and sanctification. They also need to consider their roles in helping children experience partnership in the faith community and to prepare the children to minister and be witnesses of their own faith experiences.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to faith formation of children in the Baptist congregations. The chapter utilized Vygotsky's child developmental psychology to advocate a childhood faith formation approach that is suitable for MBE congregations and consistent with the Baptist confessions of faith. The discussion has centred on the sociocultural dynamics within Baptist congregations, investigated elements that contribute to formative structures for building faith in children and drawn on the insights from Chapters Two to Four as guide to this approach.

Section A concerned MBE congregations as sociocultural contexts for faith mediation. Two particular elements of mediation are the macro and micro history of the people. Within MBE congregations, there is the macro history of a particular social story, intentional gathering, and shared culture which make this people group unique from others. In macro history the congregations share a common thread that ties them to the divine plan of the Judeo Christian God in history, a common reason for meeting, and a particular way of congregational polity. Macro history provides a sociological perspective that explains the behaviour of its members and in turn helps the congregations to recognise their distinctive as Baptists. While the macro history provides a broad frame for functioning, it is the micro history that helps children to find their place in the congregation. Micro history is a collection of the children's personal experiences and interactions with their environment. These interactions pave the way for development of consciousness. Vygotsky suggested that consciousness occurs in sociality; and children are reacting apparatuses in reciprocal relationships which contribute to personal and corporate consciousness. Consciousness is an

important consideration in faith acquisition because regeneration of children in the faith is an awareness of God's love brought about by personal and social interactions.

Section B discussed Baptist ecclesiology as instructional settings for child functioning. Vygotsky's three instructional settings of the ZPD, collaboration, and use of tools to raise the level of child functioning can be used to facilitate children to develop characteristics that indicate Baptist identity. The discussion centred on: 1) regeneration as a concept in the ZPD, 2) children becoming persons in community through collaboration, and 3) children becoming persons in ministry and witness through use of ecclesiastical tools. The discussion proposes that MBE congregations should view children as persons with potentials for regeneration even when there are no immediate visible evidences of commitment. The concept of the ZPD encourages educators and caregivers to continue in the effort of collaboration and to build capacity in children as faith partners. Collaboration can take place in the home, congregation, and in a home-congregation partnership. Through collaboration, children are led to active participation in community life and in ministry and witness of their faith.

Section C proposed that instead of assessment and evaluation of childhood faith development, the preferred term to use for gauging the level of a child's faith maturity is monitoring.. The preference for monitoring is because, in the Malaysian society, the assessment and evaluation process usually has a more negative where a student being assessed would either pass or fail. The process of monitoring faith development includes checking and observing children for evidences that point to deepening awareness of their understanding of God. This section suggested three steps in the monitoring process: 1) monitoring childhood faith from an MBE congregational frame, 2) monitoring childhood faith development from a ZPD perspective, and 3) monitoring the child's faith progress from a lower to higher functioning.

The suggested steps may guide MBE congregations to be reflective in their approach to facilitate children in faith maturation. Differing from assessment and evaluation, monitoring children's faith development respects the possibilities of their potentials and moves the nurturers away from the rigid practice of assessing faith with a standardized checklist. Monitoring as a practice to gauge faith development also

supports the claim that that children's maturation in the Christian faith is a continuum of experiences. For these reasons, the monitoring process produces a more accurate report of a child's level of faith maturation than a fixed point in assessment and evaluation.

This chapter has used Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to explain the process of faith development in children and then as a heuristic device to help MBE congregations recover the original Baptist intention for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help these children grow in faith within congregational life. In a sense, this chapter is a theoretical prescription of Vygotsky's approach to the MBE congregational needs. The Vygotskian approach is relevant to faith formation of children in MBE congregations because it helps explain the social dynamics in the faith community; clarifies consciousness in the psychological process of faith acquisition; and identifies the communal practices which contribute to faith development in children. Using Vygotsky's sociocultural approach as guide to faith formation of children, MBE congregations can intentionally nurture their children to be regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and mission.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

A. REVISITING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The central problem focused on in this research is that MBE congregations need a faith formation approach for children that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and congruent with the Baptist confessions. The faith formation approach also needs to be developmentally appropriate so that it can contribute to a holistic approach in the way MBE congregations view children and childhood faith formation. Four issues contribute to the central problem:

1. The Malaysia Baptist Convention does not have denominational guidelines to help its members form faith in children. In the absence of guidelines, each MBE congregation is left to develop or adopt any approach that it deems appropriate. As such there are multiple forms, styles, and theology of inculcating childhood faith. Sometimes these approaches may be neither developmentally appropriate nor biblically based.
2. The intended goal for childhood faith formation in the early Baptist congregations was to nurture children to be regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and mission. However, faith formation approaches utilized in contemporary MBE congregations do not show evidences of Baptist distinctive as originally demonstrated. As such there is need to recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children in the MBE congregations.

3. There is only limited partnership between the home and congregation in the nurturing process among MBE congregations. Most MBE congregations have limited awareness of their roles as co-nurturers with parents to help children grow in faith. The survey results showed that the respondents relegated the responsibility of formation to pastors and children's ministry workers (Sunday school director, teachers, etc).
4. Most faith formation approaches utilized in MBE congregations are not culturally rooted in Malaysian society. The concepts and "styles" of nurturing are usually imported from, or developed from western expressions of Christian faith formation. As such, not only do children inherit Christian teachings from a western mindset, they also acquire particular attitudes and behaviour with that teaching and may not give adequate attention to how their faith might be expressed in their own culture, with its traditions and values.

The four issues to the central problem are summed up in this research question:

What is an approach that is biblical, contextually meaningful, and consistent with the Baptist confessions that can guide MBE congregations to recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life?

B. AFFIRMING THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The researcher's hypothesis was that Vygotsky's sociocultural approach can be implemented as a heuristic device to help MBE congregations to recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life. The implementation process explains child development and functioning from a psychological perspective while holding to a biblical understanding of children and childhood faith, and supporting the Baptist agenda for formation. But like all other developmental theories applied to the Christian context, Vygotsky's sociocultural approach for faith formation of children would need some degree of baptism before it can be fully utilized for Christian

childhood faith formation (Estep, 2002, 142). In the research process the hypothesis that Vygotsky's approach can be implemented to facilitate thinking on best practices in faith formation of children in MBE congregations has been further validated and found to be a useful approach in guiding MBE congregations to recover the original Baptist intentions for faith formation of children and to construct tangible ways to help children grow in faith within congregational life.

C. RECALLING THE STUDY THESES

This research investigated five theses. Each of these theses was studied and addressed in a chapter of the dissertation and together formed a sequential discussion on faith formation of children in MBE congregations. The extent to which these theses have been resolved may be summarized as follow:

1. A biblical perspective of children and childhood faith provides the foundation for thinking about the place of children and faith formation in MBE congregations. Reflections from the Old and New Testaments facilitate understanding of the faith development process and role of the faith communities in helping children grow in knowledge and relationship with God.

The biblical perspective of faith in Chapter Two shows that childhood faith is covenanted and experiential. Children in Bible times grew in their relationship with God mainly through instructions in the Scriptures and community living; and the community of faith was responsible for faith nurture. Within their community life, children were immersed in faith experiences and participated in religious observances, celebrations, and other forms of commemorating the faith. Biblical evidences affirmed that children in the Old Testament were "covered" by corporate solidarity and the New Testament strategy was to incorporate the children into the functions of the faith community. Children grew in faith as they received instructions from the Scriptures, heard stories of faith, celebrated the Eucharist, and shared in community life.

2. Developmental theories may inform MBE congregations of the manner by which children acquire beliefs and attitudes that shape childhood behaviour and personality. Faith acquisition through cognitive, psychosocial, and behavioural development helps children grow in their understanding of God and the theories act as grids to explain an otherwise numinous spiritual experience in children.

The research shows that faith in God is both a cognitive and affective experience. Developmental perspective can help explain how children acquire beliefs and attitudes which in turn affect their behaviour. A developmental approach to understand childhood faith experiences with God investigates faith development in the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. Developmental theories can act as grids to explain an otherwise numinous spiritual experience and to provide a broad spectrum for understanding human development. As such, MBE congregations can gain deeper insights into the childhood faith processes by studying developmental theories.

3. The *Baptist Confession of Faith* states the agenda for faith formation of Baptists. The mission purpose of the Baptist denomination is to lead people (adults and children) to be regenerate believers in Christ, active in the faith community, and growing in ministry and witness of their faith. Baptist ecclesiology or practices in congregational life aim to facilitate the congregations to demonstrate the characteristics mentioned.

The research affirms that regeneration is a term adopted by the Baptist denomination to explain the process of salvation, sanctification and glorification. The process from regeneration to ministry and witness frames the formation goals in the *Baptist Confessions of Faith* formulated by the Baptist World Alliance (1989) and was adapted for use by the Malaysia Baptist Convention. Based on this confession, faith formation of children in MBE congregations is to facilitate children to acquire the characteristics which identify who a Baptist is.

4. The present MBE congregational environment (as evident by existing formation strategies and practices) may not support the Baptist agenda of mission to nurture children to be regenerate persons in Christ, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness of their faith.

The research demonstrates that the present MBE congregations are not aware of the Baptist agenda in forming children in the faith. The way that faith formation is approached depends largely on the nurturer's perception of children, goal and objectives in formation, and the perceived role of the family and faith community in collaborating for faith development. The present formation strategies in the MBE congregations do not point to the original goal and objectives consistent with the Baptist agenda in faith formation of the believers. This lack of awareness is probably due to the absence of denominational guidelines for the task on national and local congregational levels.

5. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach affirms that children have the potential to be regenerate persons in Christ, active in the faith community, and growing in ministry and witness of their faith because formation of attitudes, beliefs, and personality is influenced by knowledge, sociocultural variables, and personal meaning making and the MBE congregations can set the environment for mediation of the faith.

The research argues that Vygotsky's sociocultural approach is consistent with the biblical view that children have potential to be regenerate persons in Christ, active in the faith community, and growing in ministry and witness of their faith. The approach clarifies the social dimensions of MBE congregations, the theoretical propositions for formation and process for faith acquisition. MBE congregations as social entities have societal variables that influence child development and thinking. These variables include a shared history of the Baptist confessions, intentional identity as a people group, and a particular way of doing ecclesiology. Vygotsky's principles in formation of children are guidelines to encourage MBE congregations towards a paradigm shift in the way they view children, collaborate for faith development, and to set up spiritual patterns in their congregational life which mediate faith.

D. ASSESSING THE APPROACH TO FORMATION

A question often asked of any new suggestions to improve congregational practices is, “How do I know that this approach will work?”

The survey results show that the MBE congregations are not aware of the original goal of childhood faith formation. There are no denominational guidelines to help MBE congregations understand their role as faith nurturers of children. Strategies are either not developmentally appropriate, are inconsistent with the Baptist confessions, or not contextually rooted. The survey results also show that most MBE congregations consider faith formation of children a “personal family affair” with the congregation as a secondary support, rather than as a whole congregation responsibility. The respondents equated effective formation of children with expensive curricular materials and have little awareness that formation is located within people relationship. Further probing revealed that most MBE congregations are unclear as to how they can form childhood faith as a collective Baptist gathering. The hypothesis demonstrated to be valid in the field survey is that MBE congregations are in need of an approach that can help them form faith in their children more appropriately.

To help MBE congregations recover their goals in formation of children’s faith, the Vygotskian sociocultural approach has been suggested as a heuristic device, applying Vygotsky’s assumptions and the instructional settings in MBE congregational context:

1. MBE congregations must view their children as people with potential to be regenerate in the faith and to be active contributors to congregational life. The ZPD perspective means that MBE congregations must change their outlook in the way they welcome children into their worship services and fellowship. The “ZPD attitude” of welcoming children is not only consistent with the original Baptist congregational practice but also inline with the biblical teachings on children and childhood faith.
2. ZPD in childhood development attitude of children, MBE congregations can collaborate for faith formation. Collaboration for faith development is the process where the adults or more competent peers help children grow in understanding of

their relationship with God. The avenues for faith collaboration include the home, congregation, and home-congregation partnership. Faith formation of children must be viewed from a paradigm that children made in God's image are not *tabula rasa* but creative beings with the potential to become regenerate and active participants in the faith community, contributing to ministry and witness.

3. Environment plays a very important part in facilitating faith development. Vygotsky posited that there are signs, tools and artefacts in each community which mediate the local culture, values, and beliefs. These environmental elements influence the worldview of the children. As such, MBE congregations need to design their congregational life and worship environment in a manner that will mediate faith to the children.

E. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This dissertation research is limited to faith formation of children in MBE congregations in West Malaysia. The research is targeted at MBE congregational ministry to primary age children who are relatively homogeneous in their developmental characteristics and needs. Further areas of research that arise from the study include:

1. There is still much in Vygotsky's approach to be explored in the context of Christian faith communities, e. g, how congregational life mediates the gospel for children, the Vygotskian model for teaching and learning in Sunday schools, and creating learning environments in Christian faith communities consistent with the Vygotsky's approach. While the Vygotskian approach has been utilized in secular academic settings to develop new and more innovative ways of teaching and forming children, this approach for facilitating childhood faith development is still new to many Christian educators.
2. Although Vygotsky's approach was developed in a Russian, Marxist context, yet the principles of formation and learning in community context are familiar to Asian cultures. Vygotsky's understanding of collaboration by adults and more competent

peers is consistent with the Asian belief of communal support to nurture children and practiced in most Asian homes. Further, Asian cultures are full of artefacts, signs and symbols that can be used to mediate beliefs and values. Research in this area would be most interesting and valuable for faith congregations in Asian settings.

3. Further studies can be undertaken to explore the correlation between the level of spiritual maturity and the development of the faith language in children. The maturity process from social verbal speech to inner private speech can be researched to develop a curriculum to help children be more confident in the way they approach God in prayer, learn to be quiet before God in prayer, and to engage in both public and silent prayers.

4. While this research implemented Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to primary age children, it is also applicable to other age groups of children. In Vygotsky's approach child development and cognitive maturity is not age graded or categorized according to levels of competencies. Each child is monitored according to individual competencies and all children have potential for growth, even the *defectologia*. Vygotsky's approach focused on principles of learning that can help children to mature in functioning. As such the approach is applicable to any age group of children in any cultural setting.

5. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach focuses on formation of children through scaffolding or collaboration between the child and an adult or a more competent peer. Similar models of collaboration are apprenticeship and internship, where the process enables the learner to become a more competent and independent participant. Therefore, Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding as a frame for Christian discipleship may be studied in greater details to see how it can be a frame for Christian discipleship.

F. ENDWORD

Unless members of MBE congregation are aware of current education and psychology theories, Vygotsky's sociocultural may sound like a foreign or even a threatening concept. Unlike secular education institutions that are more ready to adopt new teaching and learning approaches, MBE congregations (like most evangelical Christian congregations in Malaysia) are generally cautious of exploring secular theories to understand the dynamics of congregational life. Most Christian congregations are more comfortable using a "Christian approach" (however that is defined) to form faith in their children rather than "a scientific approach" which may be viewed as "un-Christian" or un-spiritual. Moreover, Vygotsky's Marxist association may be seen as controversial, especially when members of the congregations do not have a broad understanding of the contribution of developmental and sociological theories, or Vygotsky's background.

To reassure MBE congregations that the proposed approach is not a foreign developmental approach or a controversial neo-Christian approach for formation, this research recommends that it is perhaps best not to overly highlight the person of Vygotsky as the main theme or the Russian background from where the approach developed. Rather it will be better to emphasize the Vygotskian principles as sociological and psychological explanations to further support the biblical and theological intentions of formation; how the sociocultural approach and its teachings are consistent with Christian thinking; and how these principles can be practiced in MBE congregations as ways to raise children in the Baptist heritage. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach was studied for such a purpose: that in faith formation of children in MBE congregations no child will be left behind.

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APPENDIX A

MALAYSIA BAPTIST CONVENTION

STATEMENT OF FAITH

1. THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation as its purpose, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its content. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

Scripture passages regarding the Scriptures:

Isaiah 34:16; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Ex. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; Deut. 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Ps. 19:7-10; Ps. 119:11; Ps. 89; Ps. 105; Ps. 140; Isa. 40:8; Jer. 15:16; Jer. 36; Matt. 5:17-18; Matt. 22:29; Lk. 21:33; Lk. 24:44-46; Jn. 5:39; Jn. 16:13-15; Jn. 17:17; Acts 2:16ff; Acts 17:11; Rom. 15:4; Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Pet. 1:25.

2. GOD

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent spiritual and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the Universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. GOD THE FATHER

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purpose of His grace. He is all powerful, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitudes toward all men.

Scripture passages regarding God the Father:

Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:14; Psalms 19:1-3; Matthew 6:9; John 4:24; Gen. 2:7; Ex. 6:2-3; Ex. 15:11ff; Lev. 22:3; Deut. 6:4; Deut. 32:6; 1 Chr. 29:10; Isa. 43:3; Isa. 43:15; Isa. 64:8; Jer. 10:10; Jer. 17:13; Matt. 7:11; Matt. 23:9; Matt. 28:19; Mk. 1:9-11; Jn.

5:26; Jn. 14:6-13; Jn. 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Rom. 8:14-15; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:6; Heb. 12:9; 1 Pet. 1:17; 1 Jn. 5:7.

B. GOD THE SON

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself the demands and necessities of human nature and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, partaking of the nature of God and of man, and in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Scripture passages regarding God the Son:

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18, 21; John 10:30; John 14:9; Romans 5:3; Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 4:14; Ps. 2:7ff; Ps. 110:1ff; Isa. 53; Matt. 3:17; Matt. 8:29; Matt. 11:27; Matt. 14:33; Matt. 16:16, 27; Matt. 17:5; Matt. 28:1-6, 19; Mk. 1:2; Mk. 3:11; Lk. 1:35; Lk. 4:41; Lk. 22:70; Lk. 24:46; Jn. 1:1-18, 29; Jn. 10:38; Jn. 11:25-27; Jn. 12:44-50; Jn. 14:7-11; Jn. 16:15-16, 28; Jn. 17:1-5, 21-22; Jn. 20:1-20, 28; Acts 1:9; Acts 2:22-24; Acts 7:55-56; Acts 9:4-5, 20; Rom. 1:3-4; Rom. 3:23-26; Rom. 5:6-21; Rom. 8:1-3, 34; Rom. 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:1-8, 24-28; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Eph. 1:20; Eph. 3:11-12; Eph. 4:7-10; Col. 1:13-22; Col. 2:9; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Tim. 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Heb. 1:1-3; Heb. 7:14-28; Heb. 9:12-15, 24-28; Heb. 12:2; Heb. 13:8; 1 Pet. 2:21-25; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Jn. 1:7-9; 1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Jn. 4:14-15; 1 Jn. 5:9; 2 Jn. 7-9; Rev. 1:13-16; Rev. 5:9-14; Rev. 12:10-11; Rev. 13:8; Rev. 19:16.

C. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scripture. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ, He convicts of sins, of righteousness and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. At the time a person trusts Christ as Savior and Lord, he is baptized with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13) The Holy Spirit continues to dwell in the believer as he matures in his relationship with the Lord. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. These gifts are to be exercised humbly and discreetly for the strengthening of the church and should never be exercised in such a way as to be divisive or destructive. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer

into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship and equips them for evangelism and service.

Scripture passages regarding the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:1; Luke 4:18; John 4:24; Acts 1:8; Acts 4:31; Acts 10:44; Romans 8:9,11; Romans 8:26-27; Romans 12:6-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Ephesians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Gen. 1:2; Judg. 14:6; Ps. 51:11; Ps. 139:7ff; Isa. 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matt. 1:18; Matt. 4:1; Matt. 12:28-32; Matt. 28:19; Mk. 1:10,12; Lk. 1:35; Lk. 11:13; Lk. 12:12; Lk. 24:49; Jn. 14:16-17; Jn. 15:26; Jn. 16:7-14; Acts 2:1-4,38; Acts 5:3; Acts 6:3; Acts 7:55; Acts 8:17,39; Acts 13:2; Acts 15:28; Acts 16:6; Acts 19:1-6; Rom. 8:14-16; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb. 9:8,14; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Jn. 4:13; 1 Jn. 5:6-7; Rev. 1:10; Rev. 22:17.

3. MAN

Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is the crowning work of His creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence. Therefore all men inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. As soon as they are capable of moral action they become transgressors and are under the condemnation of God. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The value of man is evident in that God originally created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man. Therefore every man possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Scripture passages regarding Man:

Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7; Genesis 3:22-24; Matthew 16:26; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12,19; Gen. 2:18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 17:5; Acts 17:26-31; Rom. 1:19-32; Rom 3:10-18; Rom 5:6; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14- 18, 29; 1 Cor. 1:21-31; 15:19, 21-22; Eph. 2: 1-22; Col. 1:21-22; 3:9-11

4. SALVATION

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by his own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, and glorification. Regeneration, or the new birth, is work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. Justifica-

tion is God's gracious and full acquittal, based upon His righteousness, of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God. Sanctification begins in regeneration. This means the believer is purified and set apart to God's purposes and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

Scripture passages regarding Salvation:

John 1:11-14; John 1:29; John 3:14-18; John 3:36; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31-32; Romans 1:16-18; Romans 8:12-17; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 10:13; Colossians 1:11-14; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Gen. 3:15; Ex. 3:14-17; Ex. 6:2-8; Matt. 1:21; Matt. 4:17; Matt. 16:21-26; Matt. 27:22 to 28:6; Lk. 1:68-69; Lk. 2:28-32; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 10:9; Jn. 28-29; Jn. 15:1-16; Jn. 17:17; Acts 2:21; Acts 15:11; Acts 17:30-31; Acts 20:32; Rom. 2:4; Rom. 3:23-25; Rom. 4:3ff; Rom. 5:8-10; Rom. 6:1-23; Rom. 8:29-39; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 1:18, 30; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 2:20; Gal. 3:13; Gal. 5:22-25; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Eph. 2:8-22; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 3:1ff; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; Titus 2:14; Heb. 2:1-3; Heb. 5:8-9; Heb. 9:24-28; Heb. 11:1 to 12:8, 14; James 2:14-26; 1 Jn. 1:6 to 2:11; Rev. 3:20; Rev. 21:1 to 22:5.

5. GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE

Election in the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerate, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and God in His election is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. Election excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall preserve to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their grace and comforts, bring reproach on the cause of Christ, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Scripture passages regarding Salvation:

Genesis 12:1-3; Jeremiah 1:31; John 15:16; Romans 8:28-30 & 37-39; Ephesians 2:1-10; Ex. 19:5-8; Sam. 8:4-7; Sam. 19:22; Isa. 5:1-7; Matt. 16:18-19; Matt. 21:28-45; Matt. 24:22, 31; Matt. 25:34; Lk. 1:68-79; Lk. 2:29-32; Lk. 19:41-44; Lk. 24:44-48; Jn. 1:12-14; Jn. 3:16; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 6:44-45, 65; Jn. 10:27-29; Jn. 17:6, 12, 17-18; Acts 20:32; Rom. 5:9-10; Rom. 10:12-15; Rom. 11:5-7, 26-36; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 1:4-23; Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:12-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2:10; 19; Heb. 11:39 to 12:2; 1 Peter 1:2-5, 13; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 1 Jn. 1:7-9; 1 Jn. 2:19; 1 Jn. 3:2.

6. THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teaching, exercising scripturally the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation members are equal rights and privileges. According to the Scripture the two major officers of the church are pastors (i.e. elders and bishops) and deacons. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages.

Scripture passages regarding Church:

Matthew 16:15-19; Acts 2:41-47 ; Acts 6:3-6; Acts 15:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:22-24; Matt. 18: Matt. 15-20; Acts 5:11-14; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23, 27; Acts 16:5; Acts 20:28; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; Eph. 2:19-22; Eph.3:8-11, 21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:1-15; 1 Tim. 4:14; Rev. 2-3; Rev. 21:2-3.

7. ORDINANCES

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two ordinances of the church. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is administered upon the authority of the local congregation. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Baptism is a church ordinance and is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, remember and proclaim the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Scripture passages regarding Ordinances:

Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 26:26-30; Matthew 28:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; Acts 8:35-39 ; Acts 16:30-33; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Mk. 1:9-11; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 3:21-22; Lk. 22:19-20; Acts 20:7; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21; Col. 2:12.

8. THE LORD'S DAY

The first day of week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be observed by worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and in so far as

possible by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, work of necessity and mercy only being excepted.

Scripture passages regarding The Lord's Day:

Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1-3 ; John 20:19-22; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10; Ex. 20:8-11; Matt. 12:1-12; Mk. 2:27-28; Mk. 16:1-7; Lk. 24:33-36; Jn. 4:21-24; Jn. 20:1; Col. 2:16; Col. 3:16.

9. THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God includes both general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who will fully acknowledge Him as king. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Scripture passages regarding The Kingdom:

Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; Matthew 20:29; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3; John 18:36; Colossians 1:13; Gen. 1:1; Isa. 9:6-7; Matt. 4:8-10, 23; Matt. 12:25-28; Matt. 13:1-52; Matt. 25:31-46; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 4:43; Lk. 8:1; Lk. 9:2; Lk. 12:31-32; Lk. 23:42; Acts 1:6-7; Acts 17:22-31; Rom. 5:17; Rom. 8:19; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Heb. 11:10, 16; Heb. 12:28; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; 1 Pet. 4:13; Rev. 1:6, 9; Rev. 5:10; Rev. 11:15; 21-22.

10. LAST THINGS

God, in His own time and His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteous will be consigned to Hell, to place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrection and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will be with the Lord forever.

Scripture passages regarding Last Things:

Matthew 24:27, 30, 36, & 44; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 16:19-26; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 1 Corinthians 15:42-47; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; Hebrew 9:27-28; Isa. 2:4; Isa. 11:9; Matt. 16:27; Matt. 18:8-9; Matt. 19:28; Matt. 26:64; Mk. 8:38; Mk. 9:43-48; Lk. 12:40, 48; Lk. 17:22-37; Lk. 21:27-28; Jn. 14; Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 5:1ff; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff; 1 Jn. 2:28; 1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 1:18; Rev. 3:11; Rev. 20:1 to 22:13.

11. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to Endeavour to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rest thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teaching of Christ. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost for Christ by personal witness and by all other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Scripture passages regarding Evangelism and Missions:

Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 6:1-9a; Matthew 9:37-38; Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:21; Acts 1:3; Roman 10:13-15; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ex. 19:5-6; Matt. 10:5-15; Matt. 13:18-30, 37-43; Matt. 16:19; Matt. 22:9-10; Lk. 10:1-18; Lk. 24:46-53; Jn. 14:11-12; Jn. 15:7-8, 16; Jn. 17:15; Acts 2; 8:26-40; Acts 10:42-48; Acts 13:2-3; Eph. 3:1-11; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 2:1-3; Heb. 11:39 to 12:2; Rev. 22:17.

12. EDUCATION

The church itself is a school. The first followers of Jesus were called "disciples" which means "learners". Jesus told His followers to make disciples and to teach them all things He had commanded them. It is the responsibility of the church to provide systematic Christian education for the believers which would assist them in living exemplary Christian lives in the community. In addition, for a church to achieve its objective of Christian outreach, it must continually provide training for recognized Christian leaders both Christian leaders both independently and cooperatively.

Scripture passages regarding Education:

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5, 9, & 14; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 31:12-13; Proverbs 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 1:18-20; Colossians 2:3, 8; 2 Timothy 2:2 & 15; Neh. 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Ps. 19:7ff; Ps. 119:11; Prov. 3:13ff; Prov. 8:1-7, Prov. 11; Prov. 15:14; Eccl. 7:19; Matt. 5:2; Matt. 7:24ff; Matt. 28:19-20; Lk. 2:40; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; Heb. 5:12 to 6:3; James 1:5; James 3:17.

13. STEWARDSHIP

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debt to the whole world, a sacred responsibility to spread the gospel and a binding stewardship in all areas of life. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents and material possessions; and should recognize all there as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scripture, Christians should contribute of their means through tithes and offerings. This should be done cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Scripture passages regarding Stewardship:

Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 23:23; Acts 17:24-25; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9:7-10; Gen. 14:20; Matt. 6:1-4; Matt. 19:21; Matt. 25:14-29; Lk. 12:16-21, 42; Lk. 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; Acts 5:1-11; Rom. 6:6-22; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 8-9; 2 Cor. 12:15; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

14. COOPERATION

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries in the Spirit of Christ. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Scripture passages regarding Cooperation:

Acts 4:32-37; Acts 13:2-3 ; Acts 15:7-11; Ephesians 4:11-16; Ex. 17:12; Ex. 18:17ff; Judg. 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; Ezra2:68-69; Ezra5:14-15; Neh. 4; 8:1-5; Matt. 10:5-15; Matt. 20:1-16; Matt. 22:1-10; Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 2:3; Lk. 10:1ff; Acts 1:13-14; Acts 2:1ff; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 1 Cor. 3:5-15; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 1:6-10; Phil. 1:15-18.

15. CHRISTIAN AND SOCIAL ORDER

Every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in his own life and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement to society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are carried out by individuals who have been regenerated by the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian should oppose, in the spirit of Christ, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. He should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. Every Christian should seek to bring society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

Scripture passages regarding Christian and Social Order:

Exodus 20:3-7; Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 20:25; John 15:12; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; Colossians 3:12-17; Lev. 6:2-5; Ps. 101:5; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 8:16; Matt. 5:43-48; Matt. 22:36-40; Matt. 25:35; Mk. 1:29-34; Mk. 2:3ff; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 4:18-21; Lk. 10:27-37; Jn. 17:15; Rom. 12-14; 1 Cor. 6:1-7; 1 Cor. 7:20-24; 1 Cor. 10:23 to 11:1; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

16. WAR AND PEACE

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the Spirit and teaching of Christ they should do all in their power to promote peace. The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love.

Scripture passages regarding War and Peace:

Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 5:9; Matthew 26:52; Romans 12:18-19; Hebrew 12:14; James 4:1-4; Matt. 5:38-48; Matt. 6:33; Lk. 22:36,38; Rom. 13:1-7; Rom. 14:19.

17. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary of His Word or not contained in it. The church and the State should be separate. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christian to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men.

Scripture passages regarding Religious Liberty:

Genesis 1:27; Matthew 22:21; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 13:1-7; Galatians 5:13; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:12-17; Gen. 2:7; Matt. 6:6-7, 24; Matt. 16:26; Jn. 8:36; Rom. 6:1-2; Gal. 5:1; Phil. 3:20; Jam. 4:12; 1 Pet. 3:11-17; 1 Pet. 4:12-19.

APPENDIX B

40 SELECTED MBE CONGREGATIONS FOR FIELD SURVEY

1. Air Itam Baptist Church
2. Balai Baptist Damansara
3. Balai Baptist Kalvari
4. Bethel Baptist Church
5. Bukit Mertajam Baptist Church
6. Butterworth Baptist Church
7. Canaan Baptist Church
8. Canning Gardens Baptist Church
9. Cheras Baptist Church
10. Community Baptist Church
11. Cornerstone Baptist Church
12. Emmanuel Baptist Church
13. Excel Point
14. Faith Baptist Church
15. Fettes park Baptist Church
16. First Baptist Church
17. Georgetown Baptist Church
18. Hillside Baptist Church
19. Ipoh Baptist Church
20. Johor Baru Baptist Church
21. Johor Jaya Baptist Church
22. KL Baptist Ketumbar Center
23. Klang Baptist Church
24. Kota Baru Baptist Church
25. Kuala Lumpur Baptist Church
26. Kuantan Baptist Church
27. Malacca Baptist Church
28. Patani Baptist Church
29. People's Park Baptist Church

30. Perlis Baptist Church
31. Prai Baptist Church
32. Praise Community Baptist Church
33. Rasah Jaya Baptist Church
34. Reservoir Gardens Baptist Church
35. Sea Park Baptist Church
36. Straits Baptist Church
37. Subang Baptist Church
38. Trengganu Baptist Church
39. Trinity Baptist Church
40. Vineyard Baptist Church

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE TO MALAYSIA BAPTIST CONVENTION SECRETARY LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY

Date: 8th March 2006

The Secretary,
Malaysia Baptist Convention
Kuala Lumpur.

Dear Rev. Ronnie Chui,

Greetings!

This letter is a follow-up of my conversation with you in November 2005. As part of the requirements for Ph. D studies at the Asia Graduate School of Theology (Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand), I am working on a research project entitled “Developing a Childhood Faith Formation Model for the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking Congregations: A Vygotskian Approach.”

This research arises from a concern for spiritual nurture of children and the need for Malaysian Baptists to address the issue within the denomination. For your information, I will survey 40 English-speaking churches which are members of the Malaysia Baptist Convention. Survey participants from each church include the church secretary (sociological data), pastor / church chairperson, and 4 other church leaders. The total number of participants will be 240 persons.

Related to this project, may I request you as secretary of the Malaysia Baptist Convention to complete the attached questionnaire. Please read it carefully and answer all the questions with as much detail as possible and return the completed pages to me in the self addressed envelope before **April 1st 2006.**

I appreciate your cooperation. If you are interested to receive a copy of the tabulated results of this survey, please write your email address and mail the attached reply slip. I will send you a copy of the results at the conclusion of my research.

If you would like to discuss your participation in this survey with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <harknessallan@omf.net>; tel. (65)6778-5141), chair of the AGST(M/S/T) Education Programs Advisory Committee which is responsible for reviewing this study.

Thank you for your valuable time.

Sincerely yours in Christian Fellowship,

Rosalind Lim-Tan
Child Studies Coordinator
Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary
Penang, Malaysia
Tel: 04-8812462
Email: childhood@mbts.net.my

c.c. Rev. John Kok, chairman, Malaysia Baptist Convention

SOCIOLOGICAL DATA OF THE MALAYSIAN BAPTIST ENGLISH-SPEAKING
CONGREGATIONS: CHILDREN AND FAITH NURTURE

• **Malaysia Baptist Convention (MBC)**

1. According to the MBC interpretation of Baptist polity, what is an acceptable age for a child to make a confession of faith in Jesus?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

2. According to the MBC interpretation of Baptist polity, what is an acceptable age for a child to be baptized into a Baptist church with parents' consent?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

3. According to the MBC interpretation of Baptist polity, what is an acceptable age for a child to participate in the Lord's Supper?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

4. According to the MBC interpretation of Baptist polity, what is an acceptable age for a child to be admitted to the membership of a local Baptist congregation?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments _____

5. According to the MBC interpretation of Baptist polity, are child members of a local Baptist congregation granted full membership rights?

If “yes,” clarify membership rights.

If “no,” are there reasons for the decision?

6. From your experiences as MBC secretary, what are some key, common, or significant practices used by the English-speaking Baptist congregations to nurture children’s faith?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

Clarification / Comments

7. Does the MBC have a department to look into children’s spiritual needs?

If “yes,” what is its role, mandate, and effectiveness?

If “no,” are there historical reasons for not having one?

8. Does the MBC have a system / program / model to help the English-speaking Baptist congregations disciple their children in the Christian faith?

If “yes,” please name and describe the system / program / model _____

If “no,” please explain the situation _____

9. What programs for children has MBC facilitated on a national level in the last two years?

MBC Children’s Program for 2004	MBC Children’s Program for 2005

10. What emphasis has MBC promoted within the English-speaking Baptist congregations in the last 3 years?

Tick the appropriate themes.

Emphasis		2003	2004	2005
1	Children and their Relationship with God			
2	Children and Mission / Evangelism			
3	Children and Worship			
4	Children and Christian Education			
5	Children and Family			
6	Children and the Church			
7	Children and Social Services			
8	Children and Faith Development			
9	Other Themes Related to Children:			

11. What percentage of the MBC budget has been (is) set aside for children’s ministries since 2003? (This could be children related education programs, mission, discipleship, camps, etc).

2003 _____
2005 _____

2004 _____
2006 _____

Other related comments:

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHURCH SECRETARIES LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY

Date: 8th March 2006

Dear Church Secretary,

Greetings!

My name is Rosalind Lim-Tan and I am a Ph. D candidate of the Asia Graduate School of Theology (Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand). As part of the requirements for my Ph. D studies, I am working on a research project entitled “Developing a Childhood Faith Formation Model for the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking Congregations: A Vygotskian Approach.”

This research arises from a concern for spiritual nurture of children and the need for Malaysian Baptists to address the issue within the denomination. Your knowledge of the church data can offer insights on how the Malaysian Baptist congregations help children grow in the Christian faith.

Related to this project, may I request you as church secretary of a Malaysian Baptist congregation to complete the attached questionnaire. Please read it carefully and answer all the questions with as much detail as possible. Then, kindly return the completed pages to the person who gave it to you before **April 1st 2006.**

I appreciate your cooperation. If you are interested to receive the tabulated results of this survey, please write your email address and mail the reply slip. I will send you a copy of the results at the conclusion of my research.

If you would like to discuss your participation in this survey with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <harknessallan@omf.net>; tel. (65)6778-5141), chair of the AGST(M/S/T) Education Programs Advisory Committee which is responsible for reviewing this study.

Thank you for your valuable time.

Sincerely yours in Christian Fellowship,

Rosalind Lim-Tan
Child Studies Coordinator
Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary
Penang, Malaysia
Tel: 04-8812462
Email: childhood@mbts.net.my

SOCIOLOGICAL DATA OF THE MALAYSIAN BAPTIST
ENGLISH-SPEAKING CONGREGATIONS: CHILDREN AND FAITH NURTURE

Please tick the preferred answer. If not applicable, leave spaces blank.
You can tick more than one response for some questions

1. How many children between the ages of 7-12 years were baptized in your church the last 3 years?

2003 _____
2004 _____
2005 _____

2. What programs does your congregation have for children ages 7-12 years?

Sunday school _____
Crèche _____
VBS _____
Children Worship/ Church _____
Cell Groups _____
Children's Club _____
Weekday Kindergarten _____
Before and after school care _____
Others _____ (Please
Specify)

3. Does your congregation take a stand on the acceptable age a child can make a confession of faith in Jesus?

If "yes," please state the age category

If "no," is there any reason for the decision

4. Does your congregation take a stand on the acceptable age a child can be baptized?

If "yes," please state the age category

If "no," is there any reason for the decision

5. What is the physical structure used by your congregation for gathering together?

Purpose built (built as a church) _____
Converted shop house _____
Converted residential unit _____

Converted office space _____
 Rented hall _____
 Others _____

6. Which of the themes listed below were preached about in your church services in 2005?

Children and their relationship with God _____
 Children and Mission/Evangelism _____
 Children and Worship _____
 Children and Christian Education _____
 Children and Family _____
 Children and the Church _____
 Children and Social Services _____
 Children and Faith Development _____
 Other themes related to children _____

7. What best describes the place of children in your congregation?

Children not present, congregation is adult orientated _____
 Children present but ignored _____
 Children given some attention _____
 Children are given the main focus _____
 Children and adults have separate worship and teaching programs _____
 Children progress from "children's church" to "adults' church" _____
 Children's ministry mostly concentrates on education and social needs _____
 Others _____

8. Did any new families join your congregation for worship in 2005?

Circle the preferred answer Yes / No / Not Sure
 How many families? _____

9. Did your congregation hold any parenting programs in 2005?

Circle the preferred answer Yes / No / Not Sure
 Please name the program (if any)

10. Did your congregation hold any evangelistic programs for children in 2005?

Circle the preferred answer Yes / No / Not Sure
 If yes, please clarify

11. Did your congregation hold any training sessions for its children's workers in 2005?

Circle the preferred answer

Yes / No / Not Sure

If yes, please clarify

12. Does your congregation have a designated staff in charge of children's work?

Circle the preferred answer

Yes / No / Full time paid staff / Part time paid staff / Volunteer staff

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PASTORS AND CHURCH LEADERS LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY

Date:

To Whom It May Concern,

Greetings!

My name is Rosalind Lim-Tan and I am a doctoral candidate in the Asia Graduate School of Theology (Malaysia/Singapore/Thailand). As part of the requirements for my Ph. D studies, I am working on a research project entitled “Developing a Childhood Faith Formation Model for the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking Congregations: A Vygotskian Approach.”

This research arises from a concern for spiritual nurture of children and the need for Malaysian Baptists to address the issue within the denomination. Your pastoral experiences can offer insights on how the Malaysian Baptist congregations can help children grow in faith.

Related to this project, may I request you as member of a Malaysian Baptist congregation to complete the attached questionnaire. Please read it carefully and answer all the questions with as much detail as possible. Then, kindly return the completed pages to the person who gave it to you before **April 1st 2006.**

I appreciate your cooperation. If you are interested to receive the tabulated results of my survey, list your email at the end of the questionnaire. I will send you a copy of the results at the conclusion of my research.

If you would like to discuss your participation in this survey with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <harknessallan@omf.net>; tel. (65)6778-5141), chair of the AGST(M/S/T) Education Programs Advisory Committee which is responsible for reviewing this study.

Thank you for your valuable time.

Sincerely yours in Christian Fellowship,

Rosalind Lim-Tan
Child Studies Coordinator
Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary
Penang, Malaysia
Tel: 04-8812462
Email: childhood@mbts.net.my

A QUESTIONNAIRE TO DETERMINE CHILDHOOD FAITH
FORMATION BELIEFS AMONG ENGLISH-SPEAKING
MALAYSIAN BAPTIST LEADERS

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Note in the survey that “child” or “children” refers to primary aged children 7-12 years.

Circle the appropriate responses:

Gender: Male / Female

Age Group: 20- 30 years 30 – 40 years 40 – 50 years above 50 years

At what age did you first make a confession of faith to believe in Jesus?

How many years have you been a member of Baptist church?

What links do you have with children? (you may circle more than one response)

Parent / Sunday school teacher / Children’s ministries /

Others _____

Are you presently involved in some form of children’s ministry?

Yes / No

If the answer is “yes,” please describe

Number of years associated with children’s ministry _____ / Not applicable

Have you had any formal training in children’s ministry?

Yes / No / Currently in training

If “yes,” please describe _____

Have you attended any children’s ministry workshop in the last 1 year?

Yes / No

If “yes,” please describe

(Circle the preferred answer)

During 2005:

Did you personally know of a primary-aged child who became a Christian?

Yes / No / Not Sure

Did you lead any primary-aged child to Christ?

Yes / No / Not Sure

Did you witness a primary-aged child being baptized?

Yes / No / Not Sure

Did you pray with a primary-aged child on any occasion?

Yes / No / Not Sure

SECTION A: This section surveys the place of children in the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations.

Please tick (✓) the statements which best reflect your opinion of **primary-aged children** in your congregation. You can tick more than one response.

1. What best describes the place of children in the life of your congregation?

Children not present, congregation is adult orientated	_____
Children present but ignored	_____
Children given some attention	_____
Children are given the main focus	_____
Children and adults have separate worship and teaching programs	_____
Children progress from “children’s church” to “adults’ church”	_____
Children’s ministry mostly concentrates on education and social needs	_____
Others _____	_____

2. How important is children’s ministry in your congregation?

Top priority	_____
Fairly important	_____
Mediocre	_____
Not very important	_____
Neglected	_____
Equal attention as other ministries	_____

3. In your personal opinion, what role can children play in the life of a congregation like yours?

Please describe _____

4. What strategy does your congregation have to nurture children’s spiritual growth?

Please describe _____

5. What is the main component of your congregation?

Mainly families with young children	_____
Mainly middle age adults with teenage children	_____
Mainly working young adults	_____
Mainly senior citizens	_____
Mainly youths	_____
Different age groups equally represented	_____

SECTION B: This section surveys the evangelism, discipleship, and teaching of children in the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking congregations.

Please tick (✓) the phrases which best reflect your opinion of **primary-aged children** in your congregation. You may tick more than one response in any question.

• **Malaysia Baptist Congregation (MBC)**

1. In your opinion what is an acceptable age for a child to make a confession of faith in Jesus?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

2. In your opinion, what is an acceptable age for a child to be baptized?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

3. In your opinion, what is an acceptable age for a child to participate fully in the Lord's Supper?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

4. In your opinion, what is an acceptable age for a child to be admitted to the membership of a local church?

Tick the appropriate age group

Below 4 years	_____	4 – 6 years	_____
6 – 8 years	_____	8 – 10 years	_____
10 – 12 years	_____	12 – 14 years	_____
14 – 16 years	_____	Above 16 years	_____

Clarification / Comments

5. Which of the themes listed below were mentioned in your worship services during 2005?

Children and their Relationship with God	_____
Children and Mission / Evangelism	_____
Children and Worship	_____
Children and Christian Education	_____
Children and Family	_____
Children and the Church	_____
Children and Social Services	_____
Children and Faith Development	_____
Other themes related to children	_____

6. In your opinion what must children do to become Christian?

Say the “sinner’s prayer”	_____
Understand the salvation story	_____
Confess Jesus as Lord	_____
Be baptized	_____
Children are Christians by virtue of “believing parents”	_____
Others	_____

7. In your opinion what concepts do you think children between 7-9 years (Std. 1- 3) and 10 – 12 years (Std. 4 - 6) can most likely understand? Tick the appropriate concepts according to age group.

No.	Concepts / Phrases	Age group 7-9 years (Std 1 - 3)	Age group 10-12 years (Std 4 - 6)
1.	Hell		
2.	Heaven		
3.	Salvation		
4.	Condemnation		
5.	Death		
6.	Everlasting Life		
7.	Lord’s Supper		
8.	Conversion		
9.	Worship God		

10.	Tithing		
11.	Offering		
12.	Prayer		
13.	Confession of sin		
14.	Sacrifice		
15.	Saviour		
16.	Forgiveness		
17.	Grace		
18.	“Repent from sin”		
19.	“Jesus is Lord”		
20.	“Invite Jesus into your Heart”		

8. In your own opinion, what are some of the most significant ways to nurture the faith of children in a congregation?

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____

9. Name one significant thing parents can do during the worship service to help their children learn how to worship.

10. Please tick the answer which best reflects your opinion of the statement related to your congregation's attitude towards **primary-aged children (7-12 years)** in your congregation.

		A- Always	S- Sometimes	R – Rarely	N – No	NS- Not Sure	
No.	Items	A	S	R	N	NS	
a.	My congregation encourages children to make public professions of their faith in Jesus.						
b.	My congregation systematically discipless children in the Christian faith.						
c.	My congregation trains their children to minister alongside the adults in various church ministries.						
d.	My congregation encourages children to respond during the altar call for prayer needs.						
e.	My congregation regularly includes children as a main topic in the church's prayer list.						
f.	My congregation takes into consideration children's needs when planning church activities.						
g.	My congregation is enthusiastic about children's participation in the worship services.						

Clarification / Comments related to the above statements

SECTION C: This section surveys the congregational culture and practices that affect faith development in children.

Please answer in a way which best reflects your opinion of **primary-aged children** in your congregation.

1. What ministries in your congregation do children serve for?
(You can tick more than one response)

Worship Team _____
 Ushers _____
 Program Planning _____
 Prayer Ministry _____
 Mission Work _____
 Fellowship _____
 Others _____

2. Rank 1- 4, who is most responsible for the spiritual welfare of children in your congregation?

Pastor _____
 Children's Church Director _____
 Sunday School Teachers _____
 Parents _____
 Others _____ (Please Specify)

3. How does your congregation show that children are welcomed?

4. Does your congregation identify, encourage, and train children to be potential leaders in the church?

Yes / No. Please clarify _____

5. Are parents encouraged to bring their children to the main worship service?

Yes /No. Please clarify

6. Are there opportunities in your church where children and adults spend leisure time together?

Yes / No. Please clarify _____

7. Are there opportunities in the congregation setting where children and adults study the Bible together?

Yes / No. Please clarify _____

8. Are there opportunities in the congregation setting where children and adults pray together?

Yes / No. Please clarify _____

9. During Sunday worship in your church, do ushers greet the children individually when they come for service?

Yes / No. Please clarify _____

<p>SECTION D: This section surveys the environmental factors that affect the spiritual growth of children in the Malaysian Baptist English-speaking Congregations.</p>

1. Is your church building physically “child-friendly?” i.e. Are measures taken to ensure the children’s physical safety in and around the church building?

Yes /No. Please clarify _____

2. Name some significant traditions in your congregation that remind the children of the art of Christian heritage they have as part of the congregation.

a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____

3. What are some significant ways that your congregation transmits Christian values to the children?

4. Is there any visual structure or physical arrangement in your worship auditorium / sanctuary that reminds children of God's presence? e.g. a cross, pictures of Jesus, etc

Yes / No. Please clarify

Other relevant comments: