Chapter 5
Stages of Faith Development

And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.

Paulo Coelho, 2002b, 22

5.1   Chapter Preview

The chapter focuses on FDT and James Fowler's theoretical perspective on the stages of faith development across the life span. This theory is examined as one of the psychological theories applied in the psychobiography on Paulo Coelho. Fowler's theory on "stages of faith development" is firstly introduced and the term/concept of faith is defined. The FDT is explored in more depth and Fowler's seven aspects of influencing the stages of human faith development are presented. The theory is discussed in general, with regard to its current state and with regard to writing and psychobiographical research. Critical responses to FDT are outlined and a chapter summary is given.

5.2   Introduction

The development of religious and spiritual faith has been of interest in theology, as well as in the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, history and anthropology. Across disciplines, James Fowler's FDT has been the most influential framework relevant to religious and spiritual development during the past decades (Coyle, 2011).

Fowler's work originated in 1968 and was first published in an elaborated form in 1981 in "Stages of faith" (Fowler, 1981). The theory has since attracted attention across disciplines. It inspired empirical research in the US and beyond (Streib, 2005) and stimulated critical responses, which led to an interdisciplinary scientific discourse on faith and its development in human beings. Heywood (2008, p. 263) emphasises that FDT has been cited as "a psychologically based theory of human religious development within the broader framework of a theological anthropol-

ogy". Originally, it was developed to "map" faith development to provide new ideas to pastoral and educational practices (Coyle, 2011) and was primarily developed in the context of practice, aiming at identifying psychological structures of the human being and knowing (Fowler, 2001, p. 159). FDT was viewed as a "framework for understanding the evolution of how human beings conceptualize God, or a Higher Being, and on how the Higher Being impacts on core values, beliefs and meanings in the life of individuals and in their relationships with others" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17).

Fowler's theory is based in the scientific tradition of structural stage theories of development. According to Fowler (1986), the stage theory claims to identify and to explicate fundamental underlying structures that shape the development of an individual throughout his/her lifetime. These underlying structures are assumed to be universal and independent of culture. Fowler (1986, p. 27) highlights that development is based on sequential and invariant stages, which are viewed as "deep structural operations of knowing and valuing which underlie, ground, and organize the thematic content" of an individual's faith.

Fowler's FDT has inspired a huge number of theoretical and empirical research studies that focus either on the theory as such or its application in religious education, pastoral care and church work (Streib, 2003). The empirical studies on FDT use mainly the faith development instrument as described in the manual (Moseley, Jarvis, & Fowler, 1986, 1993) in its classical form, in a variation of the instrument or in a scale-type form (Streib, 2005).[1]

The FDT has been used in life history research, claiming to focus on the narrative structure of the life history, including the "socio-historical conditions and their impact on the narrative structure of self-understanding" and appreciating life-historical aspects of the individual being researched (Streib, 2005, p. 111).

5.3   Defining Faith

Fowler (1974) defines faith based on the concept of faith promoted by the theologian-ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr (1960), the theologian-philosopher Paul Tillich and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who was a scholar of comparative religion.

Niebuhr (1960) regards faith as a universal process that develops in human beings to find meaning in their lives. The meaning is created by applying trust and loyalty in selected attractive centres of value. These value centres are seen as representing their reality and are therefore experienced as sustaining, reliable and dependable. According to Nelson (1992, pp. 63–64), Fowler refers to faith in a broad and generic way, as the "human faith" in which every individual "believes". Accordingly, Fowler (1986, p. 16) defines faith as a "generic human phenomenon – a way of leaning into or meeting life, whether traditionally religious, or Christian, or not". Fowler therefore defines faith as independent of cultural and religious presuppositions and

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[1] The manual (Moseley et al., 1986, 1993) will be explained in Sect. 5.8.1.

rather as dependent on the aspect that "we all make meaning in our world, regardless of our belief system" (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 27). According to Elifson and Stone (1985, p. 27), "Meaning-making is dependent on the developmental stage" and is an orientation of the person, his/her purpose and goal, hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions.

The "opposite of faith is not doubt, but nihilism ... and despair about the possibility of even negative meaning" (Fowler, 1981, p. 31). According to Fowler and Keen (1978, p. 1), "anyone not about to kill himself lives by faith". The authors highlight that the heart of an individual always rests somewhere. The place of rest does not necessarily have to be religion or religious belief, but faith in the following sense (Fowler, 1980):

> Faith has to do with the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning. It is a mode of knowing and being. In faith, we shape our lives in relation to more or less comprehensive convictions or assumptions about reality. Faith composes a felt sense of the world as having character, pattern and unity. (p. 53)

One of the main contributions of FDT is according to Fowler (2004, p. 417) the idea that faith is defined in a functional and structural form so that it "can be inclusive of the dynamics of faith in many traditions". Fowler (2004, p. 417) further highlights that the "structuring power" of the "substantive contents of faith make tremendous impacts on the perceptions, motives, visions, and actions of believers" and that his theory supports the matching of competences of each stage, "and the operations of mind and emotion that characterise them with ways of teaching and with the symbols, practices, and contents of faith at different levels of reflexive inquiry and complexity."

Fowler emphasises that God may play a role in the creation of faith, while highlighting God's impact on creating the natural laws of human development (Fowler, 1984, pp. 73–75). However, Fowler is not convinced that faith is fundamentally a gift of God's grace and completely separate from being a human achievement. In contrast, theologians highlight that faith is definitely a gift of God's grace (Osmer, 1992, p. 141).

Fowler and Keen (1978, p. 24), define the individual's faith as spirituality as having a core disposition that informs a person's behaviour and see it as "a way of moving into and giving form and coherence to life." Faith is therefore strongly connected to "making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning" (Fowler, 1986, p. 15), which is necessary to deal with the burden of meaning-making (Fowler, 1981, p. 33). Fowler and Keen (1978, p. 25) see faith as "the composing or interpreting of an ultimate environment and as a way-of-being-in-relation to it." Faith affects how individuals lean into something and how they see their experiences in life. Fowler emphasises that faith is a kind of activity that could even be verbalised as "faithing", which

> must be seen as a central aspect of a person's life orientation … It plays a central role in shaping the responses a person will make in and against the force-field of his or her life. Faith, then, is a core element in one's character or personality. (p. 16)

According to this understanding of faith, Fowler defines the concept in a constructivist way, as meaning-making. Therefore, Fowler highlights the changes across a lifetime in the form, structure and content of faith (Fowler, 1981). These changes are understood as a "conversion" (1981, p. 281), as well as a "recentering of our passion" (Fowler, 1984, p. 140).

Interestingly, Fowler (1986) states that although the content of the faith of an individual might change, the structure usually stays the same. The belief and reality a person changes to will still be referred to in the same way. However, Fowler also states (1986, p. 37) that faith develops in human beings when they grow older and continue to believe in the same things, but believe in them in a different way.

With regard to the definition of faith, Fowler and Dell (2004) refer to Smith's (1979, p. 11) definition of faith, which "involves an alignment of the heart or will, a commitment of loyalty and trust." Therefore, Fowler (1981) concludes that faith is a resting of the heart in trust and loyalty to a reality of being or power. Faith is seen as "... an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life ... faith is always relational; there is always another in faith" (Fowler, 1981, p. 16). He therefore emphasises the social component of faith as well as the aspect of self.

5.4 The Birth of the Faith Development Theory of James Fowler

Faith development studies started with the work of the Harvard professor, Lawrence Kohlberg, in the late 1960s. He researched Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in the context of moral development (Fowler, 2004, p. 409). Fowler became interested in Kohlberg's work and soon discussed faith development with his students. He said (Fowler, 2004, p. 409) that one of his important experiences was talking to three Jesuit students who were attending his courses in the early 1970s. The encounter with these students had an impact on his spiritual belief and practices: Fowler recognised that at that point in time, his faith was rather cognitively oriented and "that my deeper needs for prayer and spirituality might not be met. They introduced me to the Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius" (Fowler, 2004, p. 409). Fowler attended a guided retreat in the Ignatian tradition and gained new experiences, which included not only cognitive, but also emotional development potential.

Originally, Fowler developed his FDT from a multi-perspective paradigm and created a theoretical matrix to structure aspects of faith. It was through listening to individual's stories on spirituality that Fowler gained interest in developing his empirically based developmental theory (Fowler, 1992, 2004). According to Fowler (2004, p. 412), FDT is characterised by a "phenomenological account of what faith does, with a conceptual model of what faith is". Faith provides human beings with orientation in life, a life purpose, the creation of life and "its origins, its ordering, its enormity, its hospitality to life in its myriad forms and expressions, and its mystery" (Fowler, 2004, p. 412). The development of the theory and the faith development

stages "sought to extend the structural developmental traditions in the research of Piaget, Kohlberg, and others" (Fowler, 2004, p. 412). Fowler (1984) saw his personal motivation founded in the question of what theorists taught referring to maturity, destiny and wholeness. The foundational theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson and Levinson are not discussed in this study in depth.[2] However, it needs to be highlighted that Piaget's and Kohlberg's structural development theories contributed to Fowler's theory in terms of "the broad epistemological focus of the theories, as well as the structure of knowing provided by these theories" (Burnell, 2013, p. 125). These two aspects of the structural development theories influenced the finding and the description of the structural features of faith "to make comparisons possible across a wide range of content differences" (Burnell, 2013, p. 125). The faith theory integrated the concepts and descriptions of cognitive and moral reasoning while integrating those with the newly established modes of knowing and valuing (Fowler, 1981). The psychosocial developmental theories of Erikson and Levinson, however, contributed to Fowler's FDT in a subtle and pervasive way and became "part of the interpretative mind-set" that affected the development of the FDT (Fowler, 1981, p. 110). According to Coyle (2011), Fowler incorporated perspectives on 'form of logic' or cognitive development (drawn from Piaget); the development of the capacity to take the perspectives of others; the development of moral judgment/reasoning (from Kohlberg); the recognition of others as belonging to one's faith community; the selection of authorities for meaning-making; 'form of world coherence' or the development of approaches for 'unifying meanings' (from Erikson's and Levinson's lifespan developmental theories); the understanding of symbols and of stages of self (from Kegan).

In the beginning, Fowler (1981) developed seven dimensions of faith development, which were later extended to eight dimensions (Moseley et al., 1993). Although the theory was criticised strongly, modified and qualified in several respects, its central features and assumptions remained the same.

5.5   Basic Assumptions in Faith Development Theory

The theoretical framework of faith development is based on certain stages a person goes through in life and can be seen as "faith-as-a-process". Fowler (1981) believes that the stages usually develop according to the life circumstances and that they are influenced by the life context and the life experiences of an individual (Fowler, 1981). At the same time, Fowler assumes that the faith development stages are universal in terms of referring "to the way in which all human beings make meaning in life" (Hughes, 1997, p. 1). Gollnick (2005), for example, addresses the evolving relationship of spirituality and religion and the consequences for understanding

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[2] For a presentation and discussion of these foundational theories and their influences with regard to Fowler's faith development theory, see the work of Barbara Burnell (2013, 121–133).

personality development and the way in which personality development and sense-making are (unconsciously) affected by religion and spirituality.

Fowler and Dell (2004) highlight that the FDT is a

framework for understanding the evolution of how human beings conceptualize God, or a Higher Being, and how the influence of the Higher Being has an impact on core values, beliefs, and meanings in their personal lives and in their relationships with others. (p.17)

Fowler (2004) emphasises that faith

seems to have a broadly recognizable pattern of development. This unfolding pattern can be characterized in terms of developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses. Our ways of imagining and committing in faith correlate significantly with our ways of knowing and valuing more generally. (p. 405)

According to Dell (2000), faith needs to be understood as fundamental to social relations, the making of personal and cultural meanings and personal identity. According to Dell and Fowler (2004), it is a centring process, integral to as well as underlying the formation of meanings, beliefs and values of a person. Fowler (1987, p. 55) states: "The emergence of awareness, of reflective consciousness and eventually of various kinds of self-reflectiveness, comes in humans as a gradual and difficult sequence of developmental construction."

Fowler (1987) identified four assumptions that are substantial to the FDT:

(a) Human beings are "genetically potentiated for partnership with God" (Fowler, 1987, p. 54).
(b) Potentiation does not necessarily transfer into the realisation of the partnership of God.
(c) The partnership with God develops through the interaction of the creator and human beings.
(d) Interaction and dependence upon God and the environment are based on a non-conscious matter.

Fowler developed the faith development stages based on data that were generated from lengthy structured interviews with individuals of different ages, religions, life experiences and meanings attributed to these experiences (Streib, 2005). Fowler and Dell (2004) highlight that FDT aims at giving coherence to people's lives, links individuals to trust and loyalty to others, creates a sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference and is seen as an effective coping strategy to deal with daily challenges. It is questioned whether the development theory of Fowler offers a neutral description of how people develop throughout their life or of how they should develop (Astley, 2009, p. 4). However, it is stipulated that:

(a) Faith is seen as something we believe in, such as an object of worship, acknowledged influential power, a life-directing narrative or myth of who we are and should be, and of what 'life is all about'.
(b) The theory concentrates on faith as a form, rather than on faith as a content (the "how" of faith).
(c) Faith develops and should be called "faithing" (Astley, 2009, pp. 2–3).

5.6   Influencing Constructive Dimensions of Faith Development Theory

Before the stages of human faith development are introduced in Sect. 5.7, seven influencing constructive dimensions will be presented. These dimensions are viewed as influencing the development of the faith development stages (Elifson & Stone, 1985, pp. 27–31).

(a) Form and growth of logic

The form of logic describes the thinking of the person towards an object, as described by Piaget in terms of sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational development stages. Fowler, who extended Piaget's stages of development, added two more stages with regard to adult development: a dialectical form of reasoning, in which ideas and things fit into categories, and a dialogical form of reasoning, in which ideas and things can be viewed as fitting simultaneously into more than one category (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 28). The form and growth of logic according to the different stages affect faith development in individuals.

(b) Social perspective-taking

Based on Selman's work, Fowler highlights that a person moves from a rather egotistical and "me-centred" perspective to a more dispassionate perspective in which the person becomes able to know what another person feels or knows and how he/she perceives the world (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 28). The social perspective has an impact on faith development and its stages.

(c) Form and development of moral judgement/reasoning

Based on Kohlberg's work, Fowler highlights that moral judgement is characterised by the question, "What is the nature of the claims that others have on me, and how are these claims to be weighted?" (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 28), including patterns of moral reasoning and moral justification. Deeper understanding of the judgements a person makes in life affects the way in which an individual develops in terms of faith.

Fowler (2004) added four more constructive dimensions to these three dimensions:

(d) Bounds of social awareness

This aspect is referred to as describing the mode of group identity, the membership of a person in social groups, the inclusiveness of the social worlds and group definitions. Fowler emphasises the development of individuals from valuing their immediate family to valuing others within and without the boundaries of immediate familial, racial, social or religious communities (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 30). This dimension also includes the ability to construct the perspective of others.

(e) Locus of authority

The locus of authority deals with the way individuals deal with authority. It describes their movement from dependence on an external, unquestioned view of authority to the understanding that authorities are not always "correct" and that "correctness" is rather an issue of differences of authorities. The aim with regard to locus of authority is therefore to gain a position in which there is external evidence while maintaining consistency of personal experience (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 30). The view on authorities influences the phases of stage development, as explained in Sect. 5.7.

(f) World coherence

There is a movement from experiencing and perceiving a rather simple and unrelated series of episodes in the world to experiencing the world and its events as related and continuous in terms of richness, diversity, oppositions and unity (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 30). The world view is seen as changing from an episodic to a narrative, then symbolic and conceptual world view. This aspect shows that individuals move from a view of events as random and disconnected towards a perception of coherence and meaning in events, which finally leads to a complex form of world coherence. An individual becomes part of all that he/she has met in his/her life before (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 30). Fowler (2004, p. 413) concludes that a form of world coherence includes the ability to reconstruct "a coherent and meaningful account of the world" and that this has an impact on faith development.

(g) Symbolic function

The final dimension highlights how symbols are understood and used, symbols being experienced as emotionally and/or conceptually powerful. Through experiences, symbols evoke emotional and cognitive responses and the richness of the symbols is seen in the interplay of affective and cognitive domains for self and others (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31).

These seven constructive dimensions build a basis for the stages of faith development, which are explained in the following section.

5.7 Fowlers' Stages of Faith Development Theory

The faith development stages are divided into a pre-stage (Stage 0), three lower stages of development (Stages 1–3), which usually occur from childhood up to adulthood, and three higher stages of development (Stages 4–6), which are usually experienced in adulthood or might even never be attained (Ashdown & Gibbons, 2012). Although all stages are worth developing and build onto one another, Fowler (1981, p. 101) highlights that the later stages are more comprehensive and adequate than earlier stages of development (Fowler, 1981, p. 101) and the last stage is described as a philosophical and theological tradition and commitment (Astley, 2009, p. 5) rather than a practical development stage.

Each stage level allows for the development of greater self-knowledge, as well as greater intimacy with others and God (Fowler, 1981, 1987). While developing through these stages, human beings develop a "disposition of faith" (Fowler, 1987, p. 56), which involves both cognitive and emotional aspects of the self.

5.7.1   Stage 0 – Primal Faith

The first stage is Stage 0 and is called "undifferentiated faith" or "primal faith" in the age between birth and 3 years. During this life phase the development of the child is huge in many developmental areas, such as brain development, as well as physical development. In this phase, many factors play together, leading to development in terms of maturation, psychosocial experiences, the role of religious and cultural symbols, meanings and practices. Fowler highlights (1987, p. 58): "As we move into the world, faith begins with a kind of prelanguage disposition of trust and loyalty toward the environment into which we emerge." A baby builds up trust and relationships, as well as loyalty, with the primary care-givers (Fowler, 1981; 1996; Stroud, 2004).

At the age of 1 year, a child attains object performance, meaning that the child realises that objects continue to exist even when out of immediate sight (Dell & Duncan, 1998).

The most important aspect is the relationship to the parent and/or caregiver to create trust, bonds and meaningful commitments (Fowler & Dell, 2004). According to the authors, this is the phase in which the child learns to make healthy attachments in other relationships (Fowler & Dell, 2004) and builds trust (Erikson, 1963). By forming healthy relationships on a constant basis, the child is able to develop a sense of separation, which is reflected in a separate identity from the care-giver. This is important for forming a healthy self-image (Fowler, 1984, 1987).

5.7.2   Stage 1 – Intuitive-Projective Stage

Stage one occurs between the ages of four and seven and is labelled "intuitive-protective faith". Fowler and Dell (2004) point out that in this phase, gross and fine motor skills develop, as well as the cognition that is linked to the central and peripheral nervous systems. The play of children in this age group moves from parallel play to associative play. During this stage, thoughts are rather egocentric and fantasy and reality are not distinguished (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31). However, the aspects of autonomy, shame and doubt, as well as self-control and willpower, become more relevant (Dell & Duncan, 1998). Fowler and Dell highlight that the child's meaning-making is mainly based on emotional and perceptual ordering of experiences, as well as on imaginative understanding, which is influenced by a reality that is understood as mysterious. This stage of faith develops with language

development from the age of 2 years old and proceeds through the age of six to 7 years (Fowler, 1981, 1984, 1987). In addition, topics such as power and power-lessness become relevant and faith is "drawn to symbols and images of visible power and size" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 23). According to the authors, faith is mainly constructed through symbols and images during this phase of development and the child gets an idea of good and evil. At this stage, emotional and imaginal orientations and values are implemented and Croucher (2010) refers to this stage as the magical world stage. Fowler (1976) points out that during this stage long-lasting orientations of good and evil in terms of emotions and images are built. Stories and pictures of good and evil are created and deep feelings of terror, guilt, compassion and companionship are possibly aligned with religious symbols. Croucher high-lights that the world of meaning of a child is formed through stories and symbols at this stage; wonder and understanding of God are central at this age. Fowler (1984) emphasises that particularly the symbols enrich the base of meaning and children experience identification as well as aspiration through symbols. During this stage, faith changes and grows dynamically. At the same time, children can form lasting emotional and imaginal orientations and connotations to faith, owing to the strength of symbolism and imagination (Fowler, 1981, 1987).

The child experiences a growing need to know what is real and what only seems to be real towards the end of this stage and the transition towards the next faith stage depends on the emergence of concrete and operational thinking (Fowler, 1981, 1986).

5.7.3 Stage 2 – Mythic-Literal Stage

The second stage is defined as "mythic-literal faith", which is developed from approximately seven to 11/12 years. During this phase, thinking skills increase and "enable the ordering of experiences" (Hughes, 1997, p. 1).

Time and space concepts develop and narratives are enjoyed; individuals do not differentiate their own self from these narrations (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31). The world view becomes more linear, more predictable and more orderly and Fowler and Dell (2004) highlight that a feeling for linearity and predictability is developed. Fowler (1981) points out that the children's experiences are not as dependent on feelings and fantasy as during previous stages. During the phase of mythic-literal faith development, the child develops forms of logical thinking, as well as the abil-ity of conscious interpretation and meaning in life (Piaget, 1976). Levine (1990) emphasises that during this age, children develop their self-esteem, self-awareness, their identity, they explore their limits and autonomy and their individuality while negotiating their conformity, as well as abilities to deal with emotions, needs and attention.

Narrative and narrations become highly important during this stage of faith development (Stroud, 2004) and the child depends less on feeling and fantasy (Fowler, 1984). However, stories are highly important for the child and the need to

understand the world through narration and stories through the perspective of self and others grows (Fowler, 1981). The child understand the stories on a concrete level, but the deeper meaning is not yet understood consciously (Straughn, 2010). However, the child gains an idea of the perspective of the self and others and experiences differences in perspectives between the self and others (Croucher, 2003; Fowler, 1981, 1987). Fowler points out that the child, who can now empathise with the perspectives of others, also learns to include the perspective of God. Usually, during this stage, the child defers to the perspective of others (Fowler, 1981).

With regard to faith and God, children at this age construct God in personalised terms, with highly differentiated internal emotions and interpersonal sensitivities. They recognise "the cosmic pattern of God's rule" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 21) and develop concepts of fairness and morality. The child believes that "goodness is rewarded and badness is punished" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 22). However, the concepts and symbols are mainly literal and concrete. Faith during this stage relies on the stories, rules and implicit values of the family and/or community (Dykstra, 1986; Fowler, 1984). Because of this strong connection of faith to the family and the community, the self of the child, as well as the sense of identity, is based on the sense of the family and community to which he/she belongs.

Fowler and Dell (2004, p. 22) have coined the term "11-year-old atheists" who temporarily or permanently give up their belief in God because of the recognition that bad things also happen to good people. Children usually develop emotional and interpersonal skills and interrelatedness during this stage because of their ability to differentiate and distinguish between people and groups they belong to or do not belong to and objects and identification with the self and others become important during this stage (Fowler, 1981, 1984, 1987).

The child experiences the need to develop when stories are contrasting or even clash. These contrasting and contradictory experiences lead to reflection on stories and narratives to find deeper meaning. In view of the cognitive development highlighted by Piaget (Fowler, 1986), reflection becomes possible.

5.7.4   Stage 3 – Synthetic-Conventional Stage

Stage 3 is named "synthetic-conventional faith" and occurs from 11 or 12 years to the age of 17 to 18. However, this stage can potentially last into middle age and possibly late adulthood. According to Hughes (1997, p. 1), self-awareness that increases the significance of building up interpersonal relationships grows significantly. During this time, meaning is primarily created through relationships and roles. Fowler and Dell (2004) point out that this phase brings about cognitive functioning and interpersonal perspective-taking in which abstract thinking progresses and reasoning increases. Abstract thinking becomes more important than before at this stage and has an impact on the importance and definition of faith and hypothetical considerations (Fowler, 1981). The social perspective increases in importance and the individual extends his/her experience beyond the family (Fowler, 1981).

Perspectives of teachers, peers, religious communities or other communities in general are taken into account (Fowler, 1987).

Hughes (1997, p. 1) highlights that "The desire to go with the crowd, to conform is strong." The individual cannot yet differentiate him/herself from the relationship to others and depends on the views of others (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31). There is a lack of third-person perspective, so that the adolescent might be over-dependent on the responses and mirroring of others. This may lead to a sudden awareness of inferiority (Fowler, 1981). According to Fowler, the concept "synthetic" leads to the integration of stories, values and beliefs into a "supporting and orienting unity" (Fowler, 1987, p. 60).

In terms of belief, God is represented with personal qualities of acceptance, love, support, understanding and loyalty and the young adolescents develop beliefs, values and a personality through their relationships (Fowler & Dell, 2004). This development is often characterised by contradictions, which need to be negotiated intrapersonally, and identity and ideologies are built up. According to Fowler and Dell, young people often experience a split between emotions and cognition and a split with God might be experienced. Even during this stage the person has not developed a third-party perspective and individuals might get stuck in over-dependence on the mirroring of others and their evaluations of the individual. This is particularly true in the context of evaluations, perspectives, responses and expectations of teachers, parents, peer groups and the social and/or religious community around the individual (Burnell, 2013, p. 142). Croucher (2010) defines this stage as the faith community stage and Fowler (1981) refers to it as "ultimacy".

Fowler (1981) highlights that many individuals may not move past Stage 3 in adulthood and might remain in this stage (Fowler, 1984). Burnell (2013, p. 142) emphasises that Stage 3 is a "conformist stage that is accurately attuned to the expectations and judgement of significant others. If this stage does persist into adulthood, it indicates that something has hampered development past this stage." This hampering could refer to stunted cognitive development or discouragement of religious formation of beliefs and values (Fowler, 1981).

The following stages, Stages 4 to 6, are typically encountered in adolescence. It needs to be kept in mind that individuals in the higher stages are relatively rare and the transition from one stage to the next is not inevitable or assumed. Fowler (1981) emphasises that the transition from Stage 3 to the next is based on contradictions and/or clashes between valued authority sources, changes in sanctioned leadership or policies and practices, experiences that induce critical reflection on self and others, values, judgements and opinions (Fowler, 1981).

5.7.5   Stage 4 – Individuative–Reflexive Stage

In the early twenties, thirties or forties, the next stage is developed, which is called "individuative-reflexive faith". The transition to this fourth stage may be long and difficult (Huges, 1997, p. 1). Burnell (2013, p. 144) highlights that the transition

usually occurs in the thirties and forties and usually coincides with the "development of what Fowler referred to as an executive ego, which means that individual authority is relocated within the self" (Fowler, 1984, 1987).

This stage is influenced by two main developments (Fowler & Dell, 2004): On the one hand the development of the ability to reflect on and evaluate personal values, beliefs, commitments, relationships etc. in a critical way, on the other hand through the development of a self-identity that is based on self-worth that allows independent judgement in relation to other individuals, institutions and the world view in general. Individualism is developed, authorities are questioned and interpersonal and intrapersonal boundaries are clarified (Fowler, 1984). This stage develops when value concepts and belief systems are questioned. Croucher (2010) refers to this stage as the rational construct stage.

During this phase, previously unconscious beliefs and commitments are more consciously adopted. Individuality emerges and is defined less by one's relationships than before. Astley (1991, p. 28) highlights that during this stage the "danger of the conceited autonomy and pretended independence" grows owing to a growing consciousness of being able to choose one's belief and value system. An orientation towards the self therefore occurs within the individual and social relationships are evaluated. The individual's role within his/her social role is assessed (Fowler, 1981). Fowler (1986) emphasises that during this stage, the individual regains his/her authority, which is relocated in the self, interrupting the external influence of others as an authority. Burnell (2013) highlights that individuals develop a greater awareness of their own ideology and their nurturing external factors. In Coelho's (2002b) words: individuals become aware of their own values and wishes that are then reflected in the universe.

In addition, this developmental stage is mainly characterised by a growing coherence and tidiness of faith. Personal beliefs are assessed, objectified and clarified (Burnell, 2013). According to Elifson and Stone (1985, p. 31), meaning is derived more from within than from external sources and the personal life philosophy becomes important. Straughn (2010) points out that the individual clarifies his/her boundaries and develops personal identities with more depth and accuracy. This process can have a disruptive impact on the individual and his/her relationships (Fowler, 1981). However, during this process, a third-person perspective develops, awareness about self and others increases, particularly with regard to beliefs and ideologies of the self as well as others (Fowler, 1987). With the development of the third-person perspective, individuals develop their ability to evaluate the views, ideologies and expectations of the self, as well as of others (Fowler, 1987) and are able to understand others' views and ideologies in the same way as their own (Fowler, 1981). With this third-person perspective and the possibility to understand more than the own perspective, critical and conflictive aspects can be mindfully considered in the evaluation process (Fowler, 1987). During this stage, the individual experiences tension with regard to (1) individuality vs. group membership, (2) subjectivity and the power of emotions vs. objectivity and critical reflection, (3) self-fulfilment and self-actualisation vs. service to and for others as primary concern and

(4) the question of commitment to the relative vs. the struggle with the possibility of an absolute.

Fowler (1981) emphasises that at the end of this stage, traditional beliefs do not need to be rejected or retained, but should rather be integrated and held with self-awareness and intentional choice. However, the difficulty during this stage seems to be the challenge of letting go of the authority of others and the fear of losing relationships to others when they are transforming. Fowler highlights that individuals also fear to be abandoned by their original community while at the same time being insecure about their new values, beliefs and perceptions. This process can last several years (Fowler, 1981). Fowler (1987) comments that it might happen that the individual does not proceed with the different processes within this stage of faith development and that the process of going through this stage might not be completed. In this case, an individual might find him/herself stagnating between Stage 3 and Stage 4 (Fowler, 1987).

Fowler (1986) states that an individual might move to the next stage when he/she experiences the need to move on with the images of the self and others. Is this the case, the individual might feel the need to transform on a deeper level with regard to energies that are explored within the deeper self on a deeper level. Individuals might also feel that the explanations and meanings that they have created during this stage are not intense and deep enough and they might feel the need to move to the next stage, which seems to explore a deeper, multi-layered truth (Fowler, 1981).

5.7.6   Stage 5 – Paradoxical-Conjunctive Stage

The "conjunctive faith" (Coyle, 2011) stage is described in the following section. Hughes (1997, p. 1) calls this stage "balanced faith" or "inclusive faith" and highlights that it is developed when the Piagetian development of logical thought is said to give way to relational and contextual reasoning. This stage rarely occurs before the age of 30 years. Rather, this stage is usually developed in midlife or beyond, if it is developed at all (Fowler, 1987).

During this stage, usually the coherence and tidiness of Stage 4 dissolves and Stage 5 is mainly characterised by a 'new openness to others and an ability to keep in tension the paradoxes and polarities of faith and life" (Hughes, 1997, p. 1). According to Fowler (2001), this stage involves dialogical and dialectical ways of thinking. It is an integrative stage that reunifies what has been separated before (Fowler, 1981). Elifson and Stone (1985, p. 31) mention that symbols integrate multiple conceptual and affective meanings, creating an experienced richness and depth. Fowler and Dell (2004) see this phase as characterised by the reflexive adult thinking and experiencing that the truth can be multiple in itself and can also be viewed from multiple perspectives. Fowler (1984) mentions that during this stage, opposites and contradictions are reconciled while the individual can stand the pressures and tensions. The individual encounters contradictions and reunifies the contradic-

tions and paradoxes within him/herself without leaning towards the one or the other side (Fowler, 1981).

During this stage, individuals develop an interest in various cultural and religious traditions and integrate new insights into their own beliefs and traditions. The own cultural and social boundaries are overcome (Straughn, 2010).

The individual deals with paradoxes on different levels and learns how to deal with conscious and unconscious complexities, increased awareness of dependence and independence and the development of solidarity towards friends and strangers (Fowler, 1981). Fowler (1987) emphasises that this is the stage in which the desire increases to explore and find new ways to define the relationship to the self and to God. The individual is consequently not bound anymore to the social or religious group or the self, but rather refers to the interconnectedness and interrelatedness and complexities of the world and things in the world and above (Fowler, 2001). Straughn (2010) highlights that the boundaries of the previous stages are overcome in this stage and Fowler (1986) adds that opposites are unified.

At this stage, the individual is aware that the unconscious is highly influential and that the conscious power of the individual, the group and society is limited (Fowler, 1987). These individuals are able to see the limitations in themselves and their own belief systems and can recognise symbols and meanings beyond their own faith traditions (Fowler, 1981).

At this stage, the individual is still able to connect to the former belief while striving to change and transform. However, Burnell (2013, p. 147) points out that these individuals may feel "stuck between the two opposites. As these individuals long for transformation, their loyalties or commitments to persons or institutions may keep them stuck." Fowler (1981) states that individuals might be torn apart by the vision of a transformed world and the experience of the reality that the real world has not yet been transformed. This experience might lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, frustration and homelessness (Fowler, 1984). However, the individual in this stage might reach out for loyalty across communities, increasing openness and acceptance of transitions and communities, reference to a symbolic and mythical reality, humble awareness, understanding of a multi-layered complexity and the strength to see and uphold opposite tensions (Fowler, 1984).

According to Fowler, an individual moves to the next and final stage when he/she experiences discomfort and longs for a transformation (Fowler, 1986).

5.7.7   Stage 6 – Universalising Faith

Finally, Stage 6 is defined as "universalising faith", which usually only occurs in later life, if at all. It is a very mature stage, hardly reached (Croucher, 2010) and is rather a teleological extension of the theory than an empirically grounded phenomenon (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31).

During this stage, the self is relinquished and abandoned, and a person is seen as a whole, regardless of social class, nationality, gender, age, political ideology, race

and religion (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Fowler (1984) highlights that this stage occurs across cultures, but is expressed in various ways. Polar tensions are embraced and transformed (Fowler, 1984).

A person turns to love for each and every person, altruistic values, such as helping others and "giving one's self even through self-sacrifice" (Hughes, 1997, p. 2). The individual identifies with the "whole of others" and loyalty becomes a "principle of being". Relatively few individuals claim this stage of vision and faith-related action, as seen in Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Theresa of Calcutta (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 31). Fowler (1987) also names former US president Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Sister Helen Prejean as individuals who are examples of having reached this stage of faith development. Croucher (2010) refers to this stage as the stage of selfless service.

At this stage, evil is opposed non-violently and with unconditional love. This is shown in actions that emanate from God's love and justice (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 32), for example in the life of the antiapartheid theologian Beyers Naudé (Fouché, Burnell, Van Niekerk, & Nortjé 2016). God becomes a new quality for individuals who reach this stage. Faith and belief in God become grounded principles of being and individuals identify with these principles while developing deep feelings of knowledge, respect and value towards others (Fowler, 1987). At the same time, God's goodness and humanity are seen as one in peace. Burnell (2013, p. 149) emphasises that this stage is marked by the "decentration of the self" and the ability to see the world from various perspectives.

Furthermore, the individual refers to "decentration of values and valuation" at this stage (Burnell, 2013, p. 149), which in the end emphasises the worth of God, the creator. These individuals can connect to others across faith developmental stages and various religions and faith traditions (Fowler, 1987). Both Dykstra (1986) and Croucher (2010) highlight that individuals who reach this stage of faith development may be seen as charismatic leaders, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Abraham Heshel (Burnell, 2013) or Beyers Naudé (Fouché et al. 2016).

In this section, the stages of faith development were discussed.

5.7.8   Summarising Remarks on the Stages of Faith Development

Fowler (1981, 1987) considered that in FDT, stages needed to be seen as invariant, sequential, discreet and hierarchical. Usually, an individual moves through the stages without skipping any and a transition towards the next stage is described as a transition into a higher sphere of development. The movement from one stage to the other is connected to specific cognitive development, particularly during childhood

and the teenage years (Fowler, 1984). Cognitive development is needed to move through the stages, particularly with regard to the growing complexity and the increasing tensions that might occur during certain stages, as described earlier.

The following section refers to faith development in the context of the vocation of an individual.

5.8 Faith Development and Vocation in Life

In Fowler's (1984) FDT, the concept of vocation in life is emphasised; vocation is viewed as shaping all the aspects of life while responding to God's call. Vocation in life is connected to the faith development stages (Fowler, 1987) and includes various aspects of an individual's life, such as relationships, work, leisure, resources, public and private life (Fowler, 1984). It develops from young adulthood to middle and late adulthood (Fowler, 1987), as explained in the following:

1. During young adulthood, the individual aims at clarifying and defining personal identity while searching and identifying his/her vocation in life.
2. During middle adulthood, which might be defined as between 28 and 40 years, individuals struggle with deepening and questioning life's vocation, while searching for it with regard to the calling of God (Fowler, 1984).
3. According to Fowler (1987), individuals only realise in the years after 40 what is important in their lives. Fowler (1984) sees a strong connection between finding one's vocation in life and dealing with vocational callings during this period of life.

Fowler (1987) strongly connects well-being to the idea that an individual has found his/her vocation in life. If this is not the case, Fowler (1984) emphasises that this could lead to ill health, burn-out phenomena and a crisis during mid-life. He highlights (Fowler, 1984) that during this period of life, the crisis of not having found or adhered to an individual's vocation in life might, however, lead to a deepening of spiritual development, spiritual depth and transcendence.

Fowler (1984) points out that a vocation is interlinked with the call for an individual to be bound to a particular vocation in life. Through the vocation in life, an individual creates a relationship with God that is at the same time connected to the development of faith. Faith development incorporates the development of a vocation in life and adherence to a calling in life. Fowler distinguishes vocations created in life from the three main relationships with God. The possible relationships with God through defining vocation in life are the following:

5.8.1 God's Creation and Caring for Others and the Environment

In this relationship with God, an individual participates in maintaining and extending care for the environment and the creation of God. Fowler (1987) emphasises that this may involve active parenting, involvement in care and education, community work and care for mental and physical well-being in the living context. The finding of vocation in life and the development of faith are interconnected.

5.8.2 God's Governance and His Justice and Lawfulness Within Societies (Fowler, 1987)

This category of having a relationship with God and the work of governance highlights the importance of promoting justice and faithfulness by involving organisations and structures in a local and global context (Fowler, 1984). Examples of promoting a relationship with God and governance include the fight for a just distribution of resources in the world, service for the common good, peaceful conflict resolution and avoidance of chaos and violence (Fowler, 1987).

5.8.3 God's Liberation from Socio-economic and Political Ideologies and Boundaries (Fowler, 1987)

This category includes involvement with God and the liberating and redemptive work in the world. This work relates to political, societal, economic and social aspects in societies in which individuals and groups are misused or dehumanised to enrich and benefit others, for example the elite (Fowler, 1987). According to Burnell (2013), this work is connected to solidarity with the oppressed and rejected, withdrawal from supporting forces that suppress others, as well as liberation from ego-centric motives of using power, purpose, significance and security in order to participate in liberation movements.

In late adulthood, the individual should be able to look at life and be sure about having lived his/her calling and vocation. Individuals who feel that they have lived their calling usually feel fulfilled, energetic and can balance their own needs with the needs of others (Fowler, 1984). Adults in late adulthood who have lived their calling and vocation usually encourage others who struggle with their vocation and support them while feeling fulfilled and blessed by God's support in their lives (Fowler, 1984).

In this section faith, vocation in life and their connection were presented. The following section focuses on empirical research and FDT.

5.9   Empirical Research in Faith Development Theory

Empirical research procedures for FDT have been published in the Manual of Faith Development Research (Moseley et al., 1986, 1993). The empirical foundation for the theory of faith development was initially based upon 359 interviews conducted from 1972 to 1981, primarily in the US and Canada, with interviewees of whom almost 98% were of white origin (Fowler, 1981, pp. 313–314). The interviewees were 62 years and older and mainly belonged to the Christian, Jewish and Orthodox faith (Fowler, 1981, pp. 313–314). Research on FDT is currently highly heterogeneous. However, most research studies use the faith development interview structure suggested by the manual as one of the first approaches to FDT (Mosely et al., 1986; 1993). The manual explains the theoretical foundations of faith development, describes how to conduct a faith development interview and how a faith development interview is coded (including coding criteria) (Mosely et al., 1986; 1993). In this "classical" procedure of faith development research, the research attention is on the "structure" of FDT, while marginalising content, emotion and life history. Streib (2005, p. 104) emphasises the fact that the structural evaluation is the key to FDT. Fowler (1982), however, includes a variety of factors, such as life history and event markers; the contents of faith, dynamics of the unconscious or the regio-cultural force field are not evaluated explicitly. This "classical" approach has not been used in this study, because it is not compatible with the psychobiographical approach.

Streib (2005) has reviewed 53 articles and empirical studies that have used FDT, focusing mainly on quantitative research methods that are applied in faith development research. He argues for an inclusion of content-analytical and narrative-analytical procedures into faith development research and suggests a coherent methodological procedure for future research in FDT. According to Streib (2005, p. 100), FDT has experienced "widespread dissemination from the very beginning and creative evolution of both theoretical and research methods". Focusing on empirical research on FDT, Streib located around 100 dissertations, of which 90 focus on FDT only, and 10 – empirical mainly, but also theoretical – focus on its application.

The majority of the empirical studies use the faith development interview according to the manual (1986; 1993) (Streib, 2005). Streib highlights that six proposals for faith development scale construction have been developed in terms of quantitative faith development measurements (e.g. Barnes, Doyle, & Johnson, 1989; Clore, 1997; Green & Hoffman, 1989; Hiebert, 1993; Leak, 2003; Swenson, Fuller, & Clements, 1993). Selected proposals of faith development research have suggested using the quantitative measure more freely and actively (Hoffman, 1994; Rose, 1991). Faith development research has also been discussed in other empirical research frameworks, such as the qualitative research approach (Joung, 2007), contextual influence analysis (Barker, 2005), grounded theory (Bolen, 1994), thematic analysis (Watt, 1997), the phenomenological hermeneutical approach (Pender, 2000) and content analysis (Cowden, 1992).

The research on FDT contributes to a broad conceptual understanding, to developmental theory, guiding instruction and education and greater social understanding (Fowler, 2004). By studying the development of faith, understanding of the concept of faith improves and the impact of faith in the life of a person is explored. By understanding the development of faith, the theoretical development can provide guidelines on how to educate individuals and groups of various ages and cognitive development at certain stages of life and faith (Fowler, 2004). At the same time, the research on FDT serves the general elaboration of developmental theories and contributes to a greater understanding of social, theological and religious contexts (Fowler, 2001).

In this research on Paulo Coelho, no faith development interviews are analysed, as is usually done in faith development research. Coelho's mental and emotional processes are analysed in the psychobiographical frame, following an "interpretative research approach" (Streib, 2005, p. 101), using content analysis, as explained in Sect. 6.9. This study thus contributes to the more recently used empirical research approaches used in FDT.

5.10   Faith Development Theory in Psychobiography and Writing

With regard to FDT in writing and psychobiographical research, only a few authors (e.g. Elifson & Stone, 1985) could be found who have dealt with the topic of FDT and writing and it has been pointed out that FDT and writing related to "the individual's attained view of world coherence is the writer's ability to adapt to various modes of discourse (narration, exposition, argumentation, etc.) to express various ideas" (Elifson & Stone, 1985, p. 32).

In this context, the authors (Elifson & Stone, 1985) highlight that any writer who is not clear about his/her own and personal base of moral decision-making, competing claims and a conceptual system with its paradoxical truth might be restricted in his/her writing ability and should therefore focus on faith development.

The FDT has been used in previous psychobiographical research projects, such as a study on John Wesley (Fowler, 2001), as well as the study of the life of Mother Theresa (Stroud, 2004), the study on Beyers Naudé (Burnell, 2013; Fouché et al., 2016) and studies on Anne Hutchinson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Blaise Pascal and Malcom X (Fowler & Lovin, 1979).

Van Genechten (2009), who has written a psychobiography study on Helen Keller by using Levinson's life structure theory, highlights in her recommendations (Van Genechten, 2009, p. 87) that the use of James Fowler's FDT could provide new insights into the life of Helen Keller and could reveal further dimensions of her development. Collins (2013) emphasises that in the psychobiography on Jesus, the stages of faith development analysis could provide deeper insights and new perspectives into Jesus and his life. Other studies have dealt with faith in the context of

psychobiographical analysis (e.g. Kramer, 2002) and Runyan (2006) has pointed out that faith is crucial for phenomenologists who dedicate themselves to psychobiographical research.

As presented, some psychobiographical studies suggest using Fowler's FDT as a useful model for a psychobiographical researcher; however, only a few studies could be found that applied FDT in psychobiographical research. Even fewer could be found that referred to FDT in the lives of writers and authors. This adds to the statement of Streib (2005) in Sect. 5.7 that Fowler's FDT has mainly been used in quantitative studies and that there is an urgent need to apply it in qualitative studies, such as psychobiographies, to contribute to theory development and a deeper "Verstehen", as described in Sect. 6.3. Stroud (2004) adds to this argument by emphasising that the FDT should be used even more across psychobiographical studies to contribute to new longitudinal insights on the development of faith in individuals.

This study refers to these suggestions and uses Fowler's FDT to achieve deeper insights and new scientific findings of faith in the life and creative works of Paulo Coelho.

5.11   Critical Responses to Faith Development Theory

The FDT of Fowler has been criticised extensively (Astley & Francis, 1992; Dykstra & Parks, 1986; Fowler, Nipkow, & Schweitzer, 1991; Streib, 2001c). Selected critical aspects will be addressed in the following section. For a broader overview on critics, see the work of Heywood (2008).

Many theologians and other researchers have strongly criticised the understanding and definition of faith (Coyle, 2005; Hughes, 1997). Coyle (2011) emphasises that Fowler's definition of faith appears to be the strongest point of criticism. Dykstra (1986, p. 56), for example, criticises Fowler's definition of faith as being too broad and too unspecific in theological terms, while Hughes criticises the complexity of his presentations of faith development, which draw on interdisciplinary perspectives. However, Hughes sees the main problem in Fowler's definition of faith as "meaning-making" (Hughes, 1997, p. 1). Hughes criticises Fowler's (1980, p. 53) concept and idea that faith "has to do with the making, maintenance, and transformation of human meaning" and accordingly Fowler's concept of faith is related to "human thinking, rational capacities, personal relationships, social awareness and moral judging" (Hughes, 1997, p. 1). According to Hughes (1997, p. 2), Fowler (1981) is more concerned about the "how" of faith than "the object of faith" in terms of what (or whom) to believe in. Hughes (1997, p. 2) states that is it is critical that Fowler defines Christian faith as a sub-set of the general phenomenon of faith and that his concept differs from a Christian perspective with regard to the possibilities of conversion. At the same time, in Christian faith there is a "supernatural element that makes its origin and growth distinctive", while in Fowler's theory on human development, the supernatural aspect is hardly reflected (Hughes, 1997,

p. 2). The main criticism from a theological perspective is therefore that particularly in an orthodox Christian understanding, faith is understood as a "human response to God's grace as a gift from God" (Coyle, 2011). However, Fowler's (1992) idea of focusing on the human dimension of faith should not deny or replace these kinds of understanding of faith and should rather be seen as additional insights into understanding of the ultimate reality.

Other critical work is to be found in the context of psychology of religion and religious development, primarily criticising the structural logic of development (Reich, 2005, 2008). Reich (2008), for example, highlights that more inclusive and comprehensible models of faith development need to be developed that should not over-emphasise cognition and cognitive development and should include emotional and psychodynamic dimensions as processes of transition and transformation. McDargh (2001) also points out that emotion-focused psycho-dynamic processes need to be addressed to find out why some people do not move beyond certain stages of faith development.

In this context, the gendered bias as well as its cultural specificity has been criticised (Coyle, 2011, p. 288). Elifson and Stone (1985) mention that particular differences in growth are based on culture, on social background, and on gender and are not adequately reflected in developmental theory. Ashdown and Gibbons (2012) highlight that the FDT that has been developed in North America has not been systematically tested cross-culturally. Since Fowler (1981) presents his theory, which explains humans' faith development regardless of religion, culture, ethnicity or nationality, although the empirical data have only been gathered in North America, the topic of culture still needs to be addressed with regard to FDT (Ashdown & Gibbons, 2012). By comparing participants from Guatemala and the US the authors show that participants with a lower level of collectivism among individuals predict higher levels of faith development. This finding is not surprising, since the faith development model describes the transition from lower to higher stages requiring the formation of a kind of personal or individual faith (Ashdown & Gibbons, 2012).

Barker (2005) shows in her work on contextual influences on FDT that identity development and the contextual frame are highly important in developing faith in terms of developing a spiritual 'me' besides developing a social and a material 'me' in her sample of religiously diverse adults in England.

Fowler's theory is influenced by his own socio-cultural and religious background (Baxter, 2006), highlighting that the development of the stages of faith is affected by the cultural environment (Fowler, 2001). Besides the influence of Fowler's individual, religious and socio-cultural background, De Laurentis (1985) states that the faith theory only refers to monotheistic frames of reference, particularly since the theory is based on a US-Canadian sample. Participants referred to their personal and individual concepts of beliefs, faith-building narratives and stories, while being interviewed in English. It can be assumed that participants from other cultures and religious groups, using a different mother tongue, might not refer to the same terms and value concepts described by Fowler (1981). However, Garland (2002), in Ashdown and Gibbons (2012), highlights that in related research, people described faith similarly by using terms such as trust and loyalty. Recent research therefore

suggests that faith development is culturally bound and needs a culture-sensitive approach (Farc, 1999; Ashdown & Gibbons, 2012).

Slee (2004) highlights that – since women usually score lower than men in faith development interviews and proceed to the later stages of faith development at later ages than men – the FDT does not account for gender-specific needs and distinctive patterns of women. Harris (1989) has from a feminist perspective argued that the stages of faith development are to be viewed as fluid, dynamic, non-hierarchical and influenced by emotion, cognition, imagination and relationships.

Several authors have fundamentally criticised the development of stage development models based on structural development theories (Cartwright, 2001; Nelson, 2002; Streib, 2005). Sternberg (2001a, 2001b) has pointed out that development – including faith development – might not proceed in an invariant or coherent series of stages. Cartwright emphasised, however, that in development processes there might be domain-specific progress that might not be reflected or captured in the developmental models.

Another point of criticim is that Fowler does not pay much attention to the processes of transition periods in his model (Hamrick, 1988; Rizzuto, 2001) and that hardly any longitudinal work has been done on FDT (Smith, 2003). Other authors, such as Nelson (2002), refer to the fact that regression needs to be seen as part of stage transition and that regression needs to be included in Fowler's faith development model as a part of development and transition. Streib (2001a, 2001b) highlights in at least two of his papers on faith development that there needs to be awareness that faith development stages can include the replication of earlier stages. In a later paper, he (Streib, 2003) points out that the development of faith might not be limited only to a certain path of development, but might even occur in multiple ways of development, using various development paths.

In parallel to the content-based and theoretically oriented criticisms, the FDT has been criticised as well for its insubstantial methodological empirical foundation (Nelson & Aleshire, 1986), as well as for its inflexibility to accommodate postmodern sensibilities (Coyle, 2011). Although Fowler (1996, 2001, 2004) refers to postmodernism in the context of theology, he does not deal with postmodernist approaches to faith and theology on a deeper and systematic level with regard to his own theoretical approaches (Coyle, 2011): Fowler postulates, for example, that postmodern approaches have to cope with definitions that are not understood as absolute explanations (Fowler, 1981) At the same time, he rejects in his early work relativist views that religious "claims and experiences have no necessary validity beyond the limits of communities that hold them" (Cloyle, 2011, p. 19). In later publications, Fowler discusses that moral and spiritual demands of postmodern life need to be met by leadership "that, in the power of God's Spirit, draws us toward a global faith and ethics", which from his Christian perspective is a desirable goal (Fowler, 2004, pp. 420–421). However, this perspective, as the base for FDT, could be questioned at the same time in terms of the compatibility of a Christian faith for the development of faith theory (Baxter, 2006).

5.12   Chapter Summary

The developmental approach of FDT across the life span makes the theory of James Fowler an interesting and significant one in psychobiographical works on extraordinary individuals. In this chapter the key terms and concepts of Fowler's FDT were presented and discussed. It was emphasised that his approach can be used in the analysis of a single case study and an individual life study approach and is therefore useful for this study, which focuses on the development of faith in Paulo Coelho. This theory is applied to Coelho's life in Sect. 7.6. Chapter 6 will provide insight into the research methodology used in this study.