

Fowler's stages of faith development

A series of stages of faith development was proposed by Professor James W. Fowler, a developmental psychologist at Candler School of Theology, in the book *Stages of Faith*. This lengthy study contains a framework and ideas which have generated a good deal of response from those interested in religion.

It proposes a staged development of faith (or spiritual development) across the life span. It is closely related to the work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg regarding aspects of psychological development in children and adults.

Faith is seen as a holistic orientation, and is concerned with the individual's relatedness to the universal:

Stage 0 – “Primal or Undifferentiated” faith (birth to 2 years), is characterized by an early learning of the safety of their environment (i.e. warm, safe and secure vs. hurt, neglect and abuse). If consistent nurturance is experienced, one will develop a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine. Conversely, negative experiences will cause one to develop distrust with the universe and the divine. Transition to the next stage begins with integration of thought and languages which facilitates the use of symbols in speech and play.

Stage 1

“Intuitive-Projective” faith (ages of three to seven), is characterized by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the Unconscious. Intuitive images of good and evil. fantasy and reality are the same.

Stage 2

“Mythic-Literal” faith (mostly in school children), stage two persons have a strong belief in the justice and reciprocity of the universe, and their deities are almost always anthropomorphic. Literal interpretation of religious stories. God is like a parent figure.

Stage 3

“Synthetic-Conventional” faith (arising in adolescence) characterized by conformity. More abstract thoughts.

Stage 4

“Individuative-Reflective” faith (usually mid-twenties to late thirties) a stage of angst and struggle. The individual takes personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings. For the first time, individuals are capable of taking full responsibility for their religious beliefs. In death exploration of one's values and religious beliefs is carried out.

Stage 5

“Conjunctive” faith (mid-life crisis) acknowledges paradox and transcendence relating reality behind the symbols of inherited systems. becoming more open to paradox and opposing viewpoints.

Stage 6

“Universalizing” faith, or what some might call “enlightenment”. Transcending belief systems to achieve a sense of oneness with all being.. Conflictual events are no longer viewed as paradoxes.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fowler's_stages_of_faith_development