

# Fowler's Stages of Faith

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# Note

- \* People may be between stages, and older people may be at much lower stages of faith reasoning than what their ages might suggest.
- \* Some younger people could also be more advanced in faith reasoning if they have higher intelligence
- \* The higher the faith reasoning, the more comfortable the believer is in mystery, the more tolerant they are of other religions, and the more they question their own beliefs (crisis of faith)
- \* Intelligent people can reason at lower levels of faith stages but people at higher faith stages are of higher intelligence

# Note cont'd

- \* Those identified as religious *peacemakers* – Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Berrigan brothers, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, Fr. John Dear, Mother Teresa, Bishop Oscar Romero, Dalai Lama, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Thich Nhat Hahn - tend to be at the higher levels of faith reasoning and those who are bigoted tend to be at lower levels, e.g., religious fundamentalists of all faiths

# Stage 1 (0-6years) Intuitive-Projective

- \* At these ages children are intuitive, egocentric, and not logical. Their understanding of sex, death, and taboo begin, and they may be overwhelmed by a sense of danger with regard to doing what's wrong versus right

## Stage 2 (7-12 years old) Mythic-Literal

- \* At these ages, children can narrate a life story of sorts. They tend to repeat what they have been taught by their parents and other close adults about truths and beliefs, which then serve as their morals and rules. They still literally see God as a father, and they see distinct categories of right and wrong.

## Stage 3 (13 to 20 years): Synthetic-Conventional

- \* By adolescence, the individual is constructing a life story. A “they” beyond the family is ascribed the authority to dictate values and beliefs, so faith remains conformist at this stage. Beliefs are not yet understood to be abstractions, and when others have different beliefs, they are judged to be wrong.

## Stage 4 (21-30 years): Individuative-Reflective

- \* Authority is shifting from the “they” to the self. People can recognize inconsistencies and conflicts in the beliefs and morals they have been taught, and they can think critically about them. People take responsibility for making commitments to a worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. They see those commitments as individual, belonging to self.

# Stage 5 (31-60 years): Conjunctive

- \* In early midlife, some individuals begin to see both sides of a problem at once and are able to resolve the conflicts in their beliefs using dialectical (postformal) thinking. The individual begins to appreciate the unknowable – what must be the unfathomable complexity of ultimate truth



# Stage 6 (over 60): Universalizing

- \* Transcending specific belief systems, perceiving a universal community, this individual actively makes “real and tangible... the imperatives of absolute love and justice,” unfettered by concerns about self. People at this stage live with “felt participation in a power that unifies and transforms the world.”

From Broderick. P.C. and Blewitt, P. (2015). *The life span: Human*

*development for helping professionals*. Boston: Pearson, p. 536