Fowler’s Stage Theory of Spiritual Faith Development

“Pre-stage”
- Rudimentary symbolic thought and language skills
- Trust and safety
- Corresponds to infancy (0-2 years)

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith
- Intuitive images of good and evil
- Imitation and modeling of parents
- Fantasy equals reality
- Autonomy and initiative
- Corresponds to early childhood (2-6 years)

Stage 2: Mystical-Literal Faith
- More logical and concrete thinking
- Literal interpretation of religious stories
- Deity conceived as parental figure
- Corresponds to middle and late childhood (6-12 years)

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith
- More abstract thinking
- Achieving a sense of spiritual identity through conformity to others’ (parents, peers, teachers, media) religious beliefs
- Corresponds to early through mid-adolescence (13-16 years)

Stage 4: Individuating-Reflexive Faith
- Now capable of assuming full responsibility for own spiritual beliefs
- In-depth “soul searching”
- Corresponds to late adolescence and early adulthood (17 or 18 through 40 years)

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith
- More open to opposing spiritual views
- Derives from self-awareness of an individual’s finiteness and limitations
- Other-directedness
- Corresponds to middle adulthood (40-65 years)

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith
- Transcending spiritual belief systems to achieve “oneness” with all beings
- Conflicting events reconciled in this lifetime
- Corresponds to late adulthood (over 65 years)

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