

Stages of Spiritual Development

Theologian and psychologist, J Fowler proposed a foundational model of seven stages linked to age

<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2219.htm>

	Approx . Ages	Stage	Characteristics
Stage 1	3-7	Intuitive-predictive	Egocentric, becoming aware of time. Forming images that will affect their later life.
Stage 2	6-12	Mythical-literal	Aware of the stories and beliefs of the local Christian community. Using these to give sense to their life experiences.
Stage 3	12-	Synthetic-conventional	Extending faith beyond the family and using this as a vehicle for creating a sense of personal identity and ethics
Stage 4	early adult	Individuated-reflective	The sense of identity and faith outlook on the world are personalised and the student develops explicit systems of meaning.
Stage 5	adult	Conjunctive	The student faces up to the paradoxes of life experience and begins to develop deeper ideas and becomes more oriented towards other people.
Stage 6	adult	Universalizing	The student becomes quite altruistic and feels an integral part of creation, having experience of a transcendental God

Ethical development models can be seen like Kohlberg, he drew upon Piaget's stages of cognitive development to produce his model

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL3ADOS6XsY>

<p>Level One: Child Pre-conventional Morality</p>	<p>Stage 1: Punishment-Obedience Orientation Stage 2: Instrumental Relativist Orientation</p>
<p>Level Two: Child –young teen Conventional Morality</p>	<p>Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation</p>
<p>Level Three: Adult Post-Conventional Morality</p>	
<p>Stage 5: Social Contract Orientation</p>	
<p>Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation</p>	

Friedrich von Hügel and Gerard Huges made additions along with Scott Peck, all of which suggest stages rather than the more modern understanding that sees development as more a process.

This is a synthesis of the models:

0 Pre encountering Jesus (foetus)

The student is self-serving and manipulative, giving affection, compliance and affirmation only when expecting a reward

1 New convert and disciple (infant)

There is a childlikeness and naivety, and lots of joy. Faith is very strong but understanding and experience are small. It is the honeymoon period, yet to be tested in the trails of life.

2 Institutional (child)

The student is actively attending services and seminars, listening to podcasts and devouring faith building literature. There is a fundamentalist feel about things, an “in “ group –“us” and an external “them the unsaved”. A degree of dogmatism is present and a desire to comply with doctrine and the cultural practises of one’s home church.

3 Challenging (adolescent)

The student challenges and rethinks the strict cultural rules and protocols of their church and like churches. Absolute obedience to the priest/pastor/elders is withdrawn. There can be accusations of backsliding but the student may well be going through the desert experience, the “dark night of the soul” where doctrine and dogma are tested. Ideals give way to deeper and more real spiritual understandings and attitudes. A traditional Catholic might attend a Pentecostal church or vice versa. A theological evolutionist becomes a creationist or vice versa. Secular and other faith positions are considered for insights to living at times as the student seeks an alternative understood to be authentic and pure of compromise.

4 Communal (adult)

The student has a deep faith based on a history of answered prayers, mystical experiences, grasp of the metanarrative of the gospel, friendships with sincere and like-minded believers. There is less reliance on church authorities for directives about all lifestyle choices. Service to the community, disciplines that promote spiritual growth are in place and these are chosen rather than assigned by an individual in oversight. Sympathy for other denominations grows and there is less dogmatism. The wider body of Christ as the Bride is acknowledged and living out a consistent Biblical lifestyle is attempted. There is recognition that in the future firmly held doctrinal beliefs or current Christian practised might be modified as a result of experience and ongoing revelation. Treasures and what seems the best from the earlier three stages are internalised and core for the present. To these are added new insights tempered by experience and enhanced discernment. Altruism and service to the community are attributes that can be observed and the student understands that spiritual development is a communal affair, not something one can effectively achieve without the interface of a community of believers.