

Notes on Stages of Faith Development

What is Faith?

The opposite of faith is not doubt, but nihilism – belief in nothing and the inability to imagine any kind of transcendent environment or ‘heaven’ place. Faith is an alignment of the heart and will, a commitment of loyalty or trust.

Belief is “holding an idea to be true” and relates to concepts or processes. Belief is abstract, faith is relational

Polytheism (no one center of value strong enough to focus or order one’s life – many different ‘gods’ or identities)

Henotheism (belief in one god without asserting that it is the only God. It is a pattern of faith and identity where one deeply invests in a value or power so that it is the focal unit of personality and outlook. I.e. Money, power, celebrity, youth/immortality/fear of death, fear of..., philosophies, ideologies... Ultimately it is idolatry.)

Monotheism (loyalty to a principle of being that is the source and center of all being)

Cognitive development and Swiss Cheese

	Age range	God Is	I Am	Characteristics	% of Adult Population
Stage 0	Infant	Everything other than me and my parents	I am here	Basic trust that their needs will be provided and trust in the relational experience. Neglect or failure of mutuality in this stage can cause attachment disorders, isolation, or excessive narcissism. Changes as communication increases	
Stage 1	2/3 – 6/7	God is Santa Claus	I am who others tell me I am (I am a boy/girl, I am	Cognitive development = construction of God (Agency that you can’t explain), imagination, pieces of stories, imitative, strong taboo, God with two faces, death, ideas about God are not compared or ordered	

			(name)		
Stage 2	6/7-12	God is Magic	I am what I do	Can start to form systems, systems of right/wrong, perspective taking, God can take our perspective so motive matters, fairness and reciprocity, story is ESSENTIAL, begins to own the stories of their community, literal interpretations, symbols are one-dimensional, trapped in the narrative, I AM WHAT I DO (if I do a bad thing, I am bad), perfectionism vs rejection	7%
Stage 3	12 +	God is personable	I am who my tribe is	Last stage of biological development, I see you seeing me, social pressure, tries on different identities, authority is in the group, belief is a combination of what he/she has been taught and what they feel, tacit knowing, community and companionship, need to symbol to explore the meaning, symbols are sacred, social constructs are based only on relationship (cannot conceive of networks, rules, or systems), non-analytical, my faith is the same as everyone's faith, conformist stage, make good congregants and volunteers	24%
Transition	15 +	Crisis of Faith		2 part transition: Leave home emotionally, leave home physically, Begin to find identities that don't change with the group. Evaluates oneself apart from the group. Can lose faith here. Many don't make the 2-part transition.	16.4%
Stage 4	20 +	God is my own	I am what I believe/choose	Process of leaving creates examination, "make faith own", identity is self-defined, internal locus of authority, formulaic, either/or, examines assumes values to determine what they think about them, narcissistic, symbol and meaning are separated to examine meaning, developing own world view, critical reflection on identity and ideology, can be a good leader, defines identity in relationship to 'others'	24.8%
Transition	30 +	Crisis of Faith		Negative experiences accumulate, archaic and disturbing inner voices accumulate, God does not participate in the formula, come to the end of self-knowledge, dark night of the soul, disillusionment and compromise accumulate, mysteries that cannot comprehend, can lose faith, often leaves church	8%
Stage 5	30 +	God is multifaceted	I am at the beginning of a long journey	Becomes a learner of concepts instead of a definer of them, willed nievete, dialogical, both/and, looking at things through different lenses and multifaceted, truth teaches you itself and can be found in lots of places, symbol and meaning reconnected because both are needed to understand, no longer trusts self and therefore needs more universals to hold onto, must include a reclaiming and reworking of one's past, is vulnerable to learn from	7%

				the 'other' and boundaries are permeable, community is inclusive	
Transition	?	Crisis of Faith		Complacency because of complexity or lack of control either causes to lose faith or actualizes, conflicting loyalties causes one to choose an ultimate conviction, courage must arise	
Stage 6	?	God is absolute	I am one with...	Incarnation of truths, absolute of the particular, radical and total commitment of being, courage, love, there is no other, transcendent, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi,	1%

Swiss cheese and discipleship