

Stages of Faith

Stage 1 *Intuitive-Projective* (2-6 years)

The characteristic of this phase is “fantasy”. The child uses fantasy to fill up the gaps in his or her understanding of reality. It gets in contact with so many different impressions, but doesn’t have the capacity to explain these impressions or phenomena. Fantasy and intuition fill these gaps.

The child uses his/her fantasy world to express and to understand everything he/she encounters. Stories, fairytales and summarizing their experiences in strong imagery is a plus during this phase.

Dangers are that this fantasy can be used against the child to enforce certain rules and regulations in the child. Also the child runs the danger, because of its free fantasy, to develop uncontrolled fears and destructive imagery. The fantasy can be locked into these images.

Development takes place when the child develops logic and tries to distinguish between reality and how things appear. It’s important to distinguish reality from imagination or at least promote logic in order to stimulate the development of the next stage of faith.

Stage 2 *Mythical-Literal* (6-12 years)

Stories are developed with more logic, but they are still the main way of expressing their faith experiences. Descriptions and symbols are of great importance. However stories and symbols are experienced as one-dimensional, meaning the symbol has only one meaning.

The child views the world as a logical state of action and reaction, this stimulates the logic in a child. If I do this I get this reaction. The child learns that there are others with their own perspectives.

Dangers: a certain one-dimensional faith can be developed. There is only one interpretation in the logic possible. Faith is seen as action and reaction. God does this for me if I do this for Him. Actions of other people can be interpreted as a reaction to their action. Abuse, mental as well as physical or sexual, is therefore often seen as their own fault.

Development takes place when the person discovers that logic is not always present, that not every reaction is caused by a logical action. Inconsistency in the constructed stories and interpretations come to light

and deserve a reinterpretation. The person is forced to take a step back and analyse the situation in a different manner.

Stage 3 *Synthetic-Conventional* (12-18 years)

A person in this stage has to balance many things in his life. The need for a faith that keeps or binds everything together becomes prominent. The person looks for an identity and a perspective on life. Group binding and conformism are important. The perspective is related to the value of the person. Interpersonal contact confirms the chosen perspective. Differences in perspective are interpreted as differences in type of humans. Group identity is the most important.

Dangers are that persons can be over idealised and that later decisions are skewed by this. Changes in faith or changes in identity of these idealised persons can cause faith crises.

Development is encouraged through the realisation that people change and that faith develops. Changes in faith of authority figures in a group are triggers to analyse his/her own faith better. A change in environment, and thus a change of identity group, places one's own values in a different perspective.

Stage 4 *Individual-Reflective* (18-35 years)

The person becomes completely responsible for his/her own actions. The identity of the person is no longer formed by the group. This causes a tension between the self (identity) and the group (paradigm).

The difference between the self and the group, or between identity or the paradigm, start to count in the judgement of behaviour and faith of others. By this development symbols and other faith signs demythologised.

Dangers are inherent to the analytical and critical look at faith and symbols. Because of the analytical perspective, which manages to place many things in perspective, an overestimation of the self can develop. This causes to fit all other faiths, thoughts and acts in their own perspective.

Development because of the analytical side, which places many things in perspective, a restlessness about the self developed paradigm emerges.

Symbols become meaningless or empty, the meaning of faith becomes flat and compromises are made to maintain the analytic inside.

Stages 5 and 6 (35+)

Generally these stages do not develop before the age of 35. In general symbols are given a new meaning. One discovers that not everything can be dealt with from an analytical perspective, but that one has to express certain aspects of faith in symbolic acts. One has developed a certain respect and appreciation for the other and his or her faith. Even though he is solidified in his identity, he wants to give space for the other to experience the same development. However through the appreciation of the other an apathy develops for acts of faith. Even though the symbols have new meaning, relativism keeps popping up.

Stage 6 is characterised by a universal faith. This faith battles for freedom, equality and justice. The image of the Kingdom of God is one of the strongest symbols. The characteristics of this image are universal faith principals.