

An Attempt to Relate the Teachings of The URANTIA Book on spiritual and religious growth to J. W. Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

See J. W. Fowler, "Stages in Faith: The Structural-Developmental Approach," in Values and Moral Development, ed. T.C. Hennessey (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 191-203; reprinted in Lawrence Kohlberg and Clark Power, "Moral Development, Religious Thinking, and the Question of a Seventh Stage," Zygon, vol. 16, no. 3 (September 1981), pp. 203-259.

The following pages attempt to present teachings of The URANTIA Book, primarily about the religious growth of Jesus, in conformity with Fowler's stages. These pages are largely unintelligible apart from reference to Fowler's work. It will be seen that Jesus does not fit perfectly, but the major reservations about Fowler's scheme will be reserved for the conclusion.

This is a first draft, a hasty effort at a worthy project. Quotations and references are to The URANTIA Book, C 1955, The URANTIA Foundation, all rights reserved. The views here represent no official position whatsoever.

Stage One: The Faith of Early Childhood (Jesus' age: 3-7)

A. Locus of Authority

The child's first impressions of the universe derive from the mother, of the Father in heaven from the earthly father. (1922.4)

Jesus induction into Jewish concepts of religion came originally from his parents.

It is possible for a child to begin a sincere and open and real communion with the Father in heaven, even as Jesus did, going beyond his standard prayer ritual. (1360.2) Such a relationship could be called intuitive, but not projective, at least not in the sense in which the term is often used--to deny the validity of the concept of God being used and/or to deny that genuine contact is occurring. (The Spirit of Worship makes contact with the child prior to the bestowal of the Thought Adjuster.)

B. Criteria and Modes of Appropriation

Joseph was very involved with Jesus' early education. Jesus assisted Mary with many household tasks. The chazan was consistently supportive.

The early tendencies of children to help others can be nurtured, giving rise to a normal, rather than stormy, spiritual birth. (1131) Jesus was delighted with his Alexandrian playmates (1355.2), with his siblings (1357.2, 1357.7, 1362.1, 1365.2), with relatives (1359.5), and with neighbors, both adults and contemporaries (1365.4). Jesus cooperated when Joseph needed to explain the reasons for curtailing self-will in the interest of the group. (1360.5)

A free play life is very helpful to childhood and beyond. To some extent, this was hindered in Jewish culture of Jesus' day.

C. Symbolic and Conceptual Functioning

A "reverent and sympathetic contact with nature" was an early mode of Jesus learning; later, it is observed, he was full of questions about science and religion. (1364-65) This illustrates Fowler's sequence of stages.

Jesus' moral training and spiritual culture began in the home, and theological education in religious institutions. (1362#5) The tendency of mind to become fantastic was curbed by the method of learning by repetition large portions of the Bible. (1362c) He met all kinds of people and learned to cope with life from mingling with them.

Parents are not to force adult concepts onto children's growing religious experience.

D. Role Taking and Extensiveness of Identification

Jesus identified with the history and traditions of the Jewish people (1359d-

1360.1)

Jesus was able to understand the group interests of the family when Joseph explained them.

The "first great shock of Jesus' young life occurred" during this period, however, as he began to discover that "his earthly parents were not all-wise and all knowing." (1359.3)

E. Prototypical Challenges with Which Faith Must Deal

Jesus had to deal with his parents' limitations, conflict with the prayer ritual through which his parents recommended that he seek communication with God, his own at times inappropriate aggressive tendencies, and the challenge of finding the Father's will concerning a practical and particular matter. (1365.4)

Stage Two: Mythic-Literal Faith (average ages: 6.5-11)

A. Locus of Authority.

Note that in Fowler's stage two, mythic-literal faith (average ages: 6-11), which Jesus begins to enter in early childhood, the realm of religious authorities and the appeal of religious symbols arises. This is visible in Jesus' appreciation of religious symbolism--beginning at age 5 (1359d) and peaking, perhaps, on his first visit to Jerusalem (1378.2)--respect for the chazan of the local synagogue where he went to school between age 7 to 10. (1362.3) This is also visible as the authority of scripture begins to loom large for a period in Jesus' life (notable especially in the teen-age wrestling with prophecies). And the great names of Jewish tradition acquired vividness for him as he hears the retelling of their exploits while on the journey through the historic lands on the trip to Jerusalem. (1374b)

The very authorities--parents and school--who have been nurturing Jesus' growth now provide him with the significant religious conflicts of his later childhood.

B. Criteria and Modes of Appropriation

During Jesus' later childhood (8-12), he exhibits an independent evaluation of the religious standards of his society. He understands clearly that there is nothing sacrilegious about drawing portraits of others--even of one's teacher (1366c) or about the Greek athletic games (1370c); he criticizes the ritual with the parchment on the doorpost as idolatrous. (1372c) He is outraged by the bloody and unjust commerce in the temple at Jerusalem and the unspiritual teachings of the priests. (1377ff)

C. Symbolic and Conceptual Functioning

In his teenage years, Jesus manifests an ability to recognize truth from whatever source--and to be able freely to interrogate the text and its applicability to his own situation.) Jesus is never captivated by religious authorities as such, always evaluating them by the standards of his own understanding of real religion.

D. Role Taking and Extensiveness of Identification

Jesus progressively identifies as a member of his family and as a member of the Jewish religio-cultural community.

E. Prototypical Challenges with Which Faith Must Deal

Jesus acquired a comprehension of the dependable universe from his well-regulated and loving home life and Nazareth experience.

Stage Three: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (average ages: 12-adulthood)

Mediocre conventionalism is noted on p. 1457d and 1114.2 "merely conformative, resigned to submission to tradition and authority"; or "satisfied with slight attainments, just enough to stabilize the daily living". The sharp contrast that Jesus draws between the religion of the spirit and the religion of the mind (1729-1733) deepens the revelation of the inferiority of merely conventional faith.

And "the majority of professed Christians of Western civilization are unwittingly actual secularists." (2081.3)

Though Jesus attempted to minimize appearances of being different, he never seems to have passed through this stage of faith development. Nonetheless we are told, perhaps with reference to other issues (1395.2-3), that Jesus "passed through all those conflicts and confusions which the average young persons of previous and subsequent ages have undergone." (1393.6)

The Fowler account is suggestive and helps us understand, perhaps, something of the stage at which so many have come to rest.

Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective Faith (average ages: 18-adulthood)

A. Locus of Authority

Jesus' shock in Jerusalem and his early teen-age years of wrestling with questions pertaining to the scriptures and associated religious writings somewhat illustrate this stage.

Jesus seems never, however, to have responded to charismatic leadership, recognizing, for example, even in the Book of Enoch which contained his favorite concept about the "Son of Man" that the author had commingled many poor teachings along with the prophetic insights. (1390.4) He "sat at no man's feet." (1388.3)

B. Criteria and Modes of Appropriation

Jesus continues to evaluate religious tradition in the light of the truth that he is discovering. (1388.5)

C. Symbolic and Conceptual Functioning

Jesus works to figure out a consistent and correct picture from the scriptural sources of history and prophecy at his disposal.

Jesus works out, slowly, and in detail, his thoughts about the diverse prophecies of the scripture. He worked out (age 11-13) the masterful concept of group solidarity that enable him to unify the chronic tension between his loyalty to supreme values and his obligations to relative, parental authority. (1373.1)

D. Role-Taking and Extensiveness of Identification

Jesus assumed the role of father and bread-winner to his family; he identified with their needs as having priority over the urging to be about "his Father's business." (1389.8)

"As he grew older, Jesus' pity and love for the Jewish people deepened" (1386.3)

Jesus identifies the temple as his Father's house, and is busy there in temporary transcendence of his human family.

E. Prototypical Challenges with Which Faith Must Deal

Jesus by the age of 12 conceived the profound desire to liberate the spiritual captives of the Jewish people. (1376.2; 1386.3)

Jesus longed for a trustworthy friend in whom to confide; lacking one, he kept his own counsel. (1391.5) But he did not regress into the chronic self-pity of isolation; he forged ahead, establishing social bonds in his family, and preparing for the advancing socialization of his work with the apostles and others.

Stage Five: Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith (averages ages: minimum about 30)

A. Locus of Authority

By his early teens, Jesus attained the level of internalization of authority that Fowler describes for this stage. The full internalization of Jesus' sense of authority comes at the time of his baptism.

B. Criteria and Modes of Appropriation

Later in his adult life, Jesus consciously embarked on a universal mission, albeit under the conditions of Palestinian religion. He was obliged to make

strategic adjustment to the necessities of dealing with the consciousness of his day. (1532.2; 1749.5)

C. Symbolic and Conceptual Functioning

Jesus recognized the need to give teaching appropriate to individual needs—significantly differing versions of gospel truth, presented in stories and proclamation.

Jesus created symbols of the bread and water of life to replace the conventional Passover symbols.

D. Role Taking and Extensiveness of Identification

Jesus gave himself fully to his family—and thus loved them greatly. (1419.2)

Jesus in his late teens faced the problem of political identification: would he lead the Zealots of his region? It was difficult to turn down this opportunity.

E. Prototypical Challenges with Which Faith Must Deal

Jesus' relative aloneness, without a friend in whom he could confide in his teen age years, not understood by his family, misunderstood by his apostles, rejected by the religious leaders, certainly faced the problems of creature isolation—and triumphed.

He realized that the termination of his earth career would frustrate his human desires (and perhaps some Local Universe interests), while fulfilling the eternal purpose of the Paradise Father.

Jesus faced every doubt and won, consistently.

Stage Six: Universalizing Faith (average age: minimum about 40)

A. Locus of Authority

Jesus enjoyed the sublime assurance of a thoroughgoing unity with the Paradise Father and saw the entire universe as friendly.

His discourse on reality shows that he could affirm ultimate universal harmony while lucidly recognizing the facts of imperfection.

His repeated seasons of communion with the Father lead him to the level of continuous communion. He nonetheless, even until the end, turned for specially focused times of communication with the Father.

B. Criteria and Modes of Appropriation

In Alexandria, Jesus helped Ganid to recognize the truth in all religions, while clearly advancing his own clear and integrating teaching.

C. Symbolic and Conceptual Functioning

Jesus used symbols creatively, sometimes with paradox (I am the shepherd; I am the door), in order to lead human consciousness to the peace of abiding in the love of God. He lived a life beyond philosophic or intellectual conflict.

D. Role Taking and Extensiveness of Identification

Jesus, through learning to love so many different types of people, acquired the ability immediately to identify with the humblest person, of whatever race or culture. He taught and practiced the brotherhood of man.

E. Prototypical Challenges with Which Faith Must Deal

Jesus remained morally engaged and responsibly active until the end. He refused the chance to terminate his earth career at his baptism and again at the Mount of Transfiguration.

He adjusted his ministry to the level of need of those about him. He willingly accepted the costs of incompletely teaching his followers when the time to die came so soon. He accepted tragedy without pessimism. He rehabilitated evil-doers by the power of his love.

He retained his humility, avoided every potential of pride by self-forgetful communion with the Father and self-giving service in devotion to the welfare of others.

He made creative contributions to future social evolution while restraining his

teaching to the field of religion.

He made no effort to correct most of the misunderstandings of himself.

He took on the full work of representing the Father to men, even in his hours of greatest human need.

Challenges to Fowler's scheme:

1. The concept of God as Father is tacitly treated by Fowler as an immature concept; it is implicitly regarded as "projective" in stage one, "anthropomorphic" in stage two. The fact that Jesus from his earliest religious consciousness had spiritual contact with the heavenly Father explains why his "locus of authority" is fully accounted for by none of the Fowler's first four stage descriptions. The fact of Jesus' intimate personal relationship with the Father, developed from early childhood, explains why he never went through the merely conventional faith stage.

It is essential to note in this regard that while Jesus passed through his growth stages more rapidly than the average mortal, a close and abiding personal relationship with the Father is possible for everyone.

2. The term mythic-literal faith is, presumably, intended to connote that the in later childhood the child responds to the myths, taking them literally, and attempting to work out their implications in a linear way that is beneath the maturity of adulthood. Jesus' scriptures, however, were full of historic persons and events, and full of sublime religious teachings. Given his personal knowledge of the Father in heaven, Jesus could not be said to have participated very heavily in this kind of faith.

3. Fowler's analysis of the temptations of stage six towards irresponsible mysticism seems based on patterns of religious development that are not rooted in Jesusonian religious development.

4. Jesus seems to have passed from the intuitive faith of his early childhood to the reflective-individuative faith of his teen age years without the mythic-literal or the merely conventional stages posited as typical by Fowler. Of course we should recognize that Fowler's stages are not meant to define what each person must do. Nonetheless, seeing Jesus' growth should inspire all parents and educators with a vision of a superior path to religious maturity.

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