

The Challenges of Faith in the Quest for Cosmic Citizenship

David Kantor

Contents of this Study:

Introduction and questions for evaluating your religious experience

Faith as Ultimate Concern

Faith, Doubt, Risk, and Courage

Faith and Community

Faith and Belief

Faith, Love and Action

The Content of Faith

Introduction to the Stages of Faith Development

Primal Faith: The personality foundations of the faith adventure (Infancy to the beginning of language acquirement)

Stage 1 Faith: Faith in self-constructed mental images which represent feelings about life and attitudes toward primary caregivers (From approximately 3 years of age until the arrival of a Thought Adjuster) The formation of images which represent feelings and the elements of power in our early life occurs here. The faith experience at this stage consists of the degree to which we trust that these self-constructed images represent reality.

Stage 2 Faith: Mythic/Literal Faith; Faith that beliefs and attitudes of the family as well as stories told within the family and community are literal representations of reality. (Arrival of Adjuster to the onset of puberty. The achievements of this stage may be sustained through life)

Stage 3 Faith: Conventional and Synthesized Faith; Faith attitudes which are synthesized from one's own experience combined with the attitudes expressed within one's significant social communities. (Ages ~ Adolescence through early adulthood; in many people this stage is sustained through life.) The emergent strength of this stage is the forming of identity and the shaping of a personal faith

Stage 4 Faith: The Reflective Faith of an Individual; Faith attitudes developed as a

result of critical thinking about the elements of one's beliefs (Ages ~ Early Adulthood - Midlife; may be sustained through life) The emergent strength of this stage is the reflective construction of a personal ideology and the formation of a vocational dream with its imagined social identity.

Stage 5 Faith: Integrative/Expanding Faith; Faith attitudes which attempt to reach beyond the integrated unconscious processes and the intellectual constructs of the self (Ages ~ Mid-Life and beyond – unusual before mid-life) Stage 5 knows the sacrament of defeat and the reality of irrevocable commitments and acts. Its emergent strength is the ability to live with paradox and to develop a sense of responsibility for the world which spans beyond the attainables of one's lifetime.

Stage 6 Faith: Universalizing Faith: Faith attitudes of a personality consciously integrated with the Supreme (Ages: Mid-life and beyond; very few persons achieve this level of living faith maturity due to its self-transcending nature.) Here we begin to participate in "the faith of Jesus." as described in Paper 196. This is the level of the first psychic circle.

Getting Through the Stages

Conclusion

Material for Additional Study: Stages of Development in the Life of Jesus

The Challenges of Faith in the Quest for Cosmic Citizenship

Note: The following material is derived from the work of Dr. James Fowler as set forth in his book, "Stages of Faith." Fowler's work is based on the stage theories of psychological and social maturation developed by Erick Erickson, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. I have taken their work and attempted to correlate it with The Urantia Book's material on faith and spiritual growth, in particular the ascent through the psychic circles of consciousness of progressive kinship with the cosmic actuality of the Supreme Being. In addition, there is significant material included on the nature of faith derived from the work of Dr. Paul Tillich in his essay, "Dynamics of Faith."

1114:2 101:7.4 "The great difference between a religious and a nonreligious philosophy of living consists in the nature and level of recognized values and in the object of loyalties. There are four phases in the evolution of religious philosophy: Such an experience may become merely conformative, resigned to submission to tradition and authority. Or it may be satisfied with slight attainments, just enough to stabilize the daily living, and therefore becomes early arrested on such an adventitious level. Such mortals believe in letting well enough alone. A third group progress to the level of logical intellectuality but there stagnate in consequence of cultural slavery. It is indeed pitiful to behold giant intellects held so securely within the cruel grasp of cultural bondage. It is equally pathetic to observe those who trade their cultural bondage for the materialistic fetters of a science, falsely so called. The fourth level of philosophy attains freedom from all conventional and traditional handicaps and dares to think, act, and live honestly, loyally, fearlessly, and truthfully."

Introduction

Everyone reading this study has begun the journey of faith; a journey whose destination we understand to be the presence of the Universal Father whose nature is ultimate reality, ultimate beauty, ultimate goodness, ultimate truth and divine love. While our creative spiritual imaginations provide us with insight into the nature of the goal of our journey of faith, we sometimes find ourselves puzzled and confused regarding the best way to attain that goal.

I would like to share with you a road map of the portions of this journey which we are likely to encounter during our lives here in this world as we progress from infancy to old age. The authors tell us that if we embark upon this journey, ". . . you are sure to encounter, and if you have the courage, to traverse, the rugged hills of moral choosing and spiritual progress."

If we know something about the path ahead, which winds through these rugged hills of moral choosing, perhaps we will be better equipped to deal with the uncertainty and difficulty which *The Urantia Book* guarantees we will encounter.

The Urantia Book refers to this process as the ascent through the psychic circles -- the path which leads from the first moments of self-consciousness in childhood, to a consciousness of universe citizenship later in life. It is important to understand that this ascent through the psychic circles relates to personality integration with the Supreme Being. Hence, growing through the psychic circles involves the attainment of ever more meaningful levels of functional personality integration with the social milieu in which we find ourselves living. We become more

real as we achieve increasing integration with the lives and purposes of others in combination with a pursuit of the Father's will.

647:5 56:10.14 "The universe is a whole; no thing or being exists or lives in isolation. Self-realization is potentially evil if it is antisocial. It is literally true: "No man lives by himself." Cosmic socialization constitutes the highest form of personality unification. Said Jesus: "He who would be greatest among you, let him become server of all."

As human beings we each have many concerns which demand our attention in our daily lives. We are concerned about our needs for shelter, food, clothing, economic security for our families, education and health care for our children. We have concerns about social and political matters. We also share some concerns about our spiritual lives and our personal relationships with God.

To help us think about these matters I would like to share some questions with you. These are questions which you should answer for yourself. Your answers will help you gain a deeper perspective on the primary elements of your spiritual life.

Some questions about those things which occupy your attention:

1. In daily life, to which tasks do you devote your best time, energy and thinking?
2. What are the causes, dreams, goals or institutions to which you contribute time or creative effort?
3. As you live your life, what power or powers do you rely on and trust?
4. To what or to whom are you committed in life? In death?
5. With whom or with what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love?
6. What are your most sacred hopes, your most compelling goals and the primary purposes in your life?

These questions are intended to help you become more aware of those realities which truly occupy the center of your life and command your creative attention.

Let's try to summarize all these questions with another question -- What is the central value, or set of values, relative to which all of your other life situations are evaluated or subordinated? Stated another way, "What is your ultimate concern in life?"

Do you structure your life around the needs of your job or career? Do you evaluate everything on the basis of how it will effect you economically? Do you base your major life decisions on what you believe people in your community might think of you? Is your life structured around the needs of your family?

That which truly constitutes our personal religious life is the devotion with which we pursue that which is of greatest importance to us – that which we believe will bring fulfillment and meaning to our life. Our personal religion may be wholly material, social or spiritual, but we each have elements in our lives which we pursue with religious devotion. The task of religious growth as it relates to cosmic citizenship and personality integration, is to make sure that those central values to which we are devoted – our ultimate concerns – are truly spiritual in nature and cosmic in scope. The reason for this is to be sure that we don't develop our lives relative to some temporary phenomenon in the universe which will one day collapse and require us to start over.

1100:3 100:6.1 “Religion is not a specific function of life; rather is it a mode of living. True religion is a wholehearted devotion to some reality which the religionist deems to be of supreme value to himself and for all mankind. And the outstanding characteristics of all religions are: unquestioning loyalty and wholehearted devotion to supreme values. This religious devotion to supreme values is shown in the relation of the supposedly irreligious mother to her child and in the fervent loyalty of nonreligionists to an espoused cause.”

Carefully evaluating the above questions will give us an idea of how our personal religious life appears when evaluated on the basis of the ideas given in *The Urantia Book*. In *The Urantia Book's* view of personal religious experience, the behaviors in which we engage as we pursue whatever reality we deem to be of supreme value, these constitute our religious life. From a psychological perspective, that to which we are supremely devoted plays the role of God in our lives.

Our God may be our career, our bank account, our family, our social image, or a role we play in a human institution or organization.

Important as each of these are, if they are treated as the highest center in our lives, they become idolatrous because they take a position in our inner lives which should be dominated by our personal relationship with the Father and the desire to do his will.

I am not suggesting that we sacrifice these important and necessary elements of our personal lives. What is required is that we subordinate them to the pursuit of the Father's will. That is to say, when we make decisions regarding our family lives, our careers, our economic needs, our social roles we learn to make them relative to a sincere seeking of the Father's will – our consideration of God and our desire to do his will in all things must become our supreme value. Thus our spiritual experience can come to coordinate and integrate all of the other concerns which affect us in daily life.

Given this understanding of the religious life, what is faith? Why is it important? How does it grow and develop over the course of a human lifetime?

Faith as Ultimate Concern

What is faith? For purposes of our discussion today we will consider faith to be our attitudes of devotion to that which is of greatest concern to us in life.

In much of the highly competitive developed world, economic success is the god to which many people are devoted. They may go to church on Sunday and consider themselves to be religious but their ultimate concern is with their economic success.

Faith is a state of being ultimately concerned; the nature of one's beliefs is significant in the life of the believer, but it does not matter for the formal definition of faith.

1780:5 160:5.3 "The object of religious devotion may be material or spiritual, true or false, real or unreal, human or divine. Religions can therefore be either good or evil."

1088:7 99:3.6 "Many individual social reconstructionists, while vehemently repudiating institutionalized religion, are, after all, zealously religious in the propagation of their social reforms."

Faith is not an act of the rational mind – it is not a creation of the will. Neither is it an act of the unconscious. But it is an act in which both the rational and the nonrational elements of our being are transcended. Faith exists prior to any attempt to derive it from something else because any such attempt is itself an indicator of the existence of faith.

We are driven toward genuine spiritual faith by our awareness that we somehow belong to the infinite. Faith is similar to love in that we do not own love like a possession, but rather discover it as a quality of our interpersonal relationships. We learn how to enhance love, how to increase its presence through loyalty and devotion. Faith is like this; we cannot own it like a possession but we experience it as a quality of our orientation toward that which is of ultimate concern to us. And, as is the case with love, we learn how to enhance it and increase its power through loyalty and devotion. Faith has been described as "the infinite passion" – it is a passion for the infinite.

In true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about that which is truly ultimate. In idolatrous faith, finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy. The inescapable consequence of idolatrous faith is deep disappointment, a disappointment which penetrates into the very heart of our existence. Idolatrous faith finds its center in something which is more or less on the periphery. Therefore, the devotion of idolatrous faith leads to a loss of the center and to a disruption of the personality. The ecstatic character of even an idolatrous faith can hide this consequence only for a certain time. But finally it breaks into the open.

He who enters the sphere of faith enters the sanctuary of life. Where there is true spiritual faith, there is an awareness of holiness.

The human heart yearns for the infinite because that is where our finite nature wants to rest. In the infinite, the finite sees its own fulfillment. The feeling of being consumed in the presence of the divine is a profound expression of our relation to the holy. It is implied in every genuine act of faith, in every state of ultimate concern.

Faith, Doubt, Risk, and Courage

An act of faith is an act of a finite being who is attempting to orient himself with respect to the infinite. It is a finite act with all the limitations of a finite act. Faith is certain in so far as it is an experience of the holy. But faith is uncertain in so far as the infinite to which it is related is understood by a finite being. This element of uncertainty in faith cannot be removed, it must be accepted. And the element in faith which accepts this uncertainty is courage.

In the courageous acceptance of uncertainty, faith shows most visibly its dynamic character. Where there is daring and courage, there is always the possibility of failure. And in every act of faith this possibility is present. The contents of our ultimate concern, whether it be our nation, our material success, or God himself, are concerns whose real nature may not be accessible to immediate awareness. But the risk must be taken.

There is risk if what was considered as a matter of ultimate concern turns out to be a matter of temporary or transitory concern – as for example, the attainment of social status. The risk to faith in one's ultimate concern is that what was considered to be a matter of ultimate concern may prove to be a matter of transitory concern. This is indeed the greatest risk we can take in life. For if it proves to be a failure, if that to which we have devoted ourselves turns out to have been a temporal creation of our imagination, the meaning of our life breaks down; we find that we have surrendered ourselves to something which is not worthy of such surrender.

The most destructive form of doubt is not a doubt about facts or conclusions. Genuine skeptical doubt is an attitude of actually rejecting the possibility that we can be certain about anything. It is a doubt about whether it is possible to understand anything as being true. Therefore it cannot be refuted logically. Such an attitude necessarily leads either to despair or cynicism. And often, if this alternative becomes intolerable, it leads to indifference and the attempt to develop an attitude of complete unconcern. Skeptical doubt may serve an awakening and liberating function, but it also can prevent the development of a centered personality.

1766:4 159:3.8 "Faith is to religion what sails are to a ship; it is an addition of power, not an added burden of life. There is but one struggle for those who enter the kingdom, and that is to fight the good fight of faith. The believer has only one battle, and that is against doubt--unbelief."

But the doubt which is inherent in faith is not skeptical doubt. It is the normal, healthy doubt which accompanies every risk. It does not question whether or not a certain proposition is true or false; but it is aware of the element of insecurity in every concept which we attempt to elevate to the level of that which represents the infinite.

At the same time, the doubt which is a part of faith accepts this insecurity in an act of courage. Faith includes courage. Therefore, it can include the doubt about itself. Any act in which courage accepts risk is an indicator of the existence of faith.

1223:3 111:7.1 "Uncertainty with security is the essence of the Paradise adventure--uncertainty in time and in mind, uncertainty as to the events of the unfolding Paradise ascent; security in spirit and in eternity, security in the unqualified trust of the creature son in the divine compassion and infinite love of the Universal Father; uncertainty as an

inexperienced citizen of the universe; security as an ascending son in the universe mansions of an all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving Father.”

Faith and Community

In order to explore the content of our faith we need language and stories. The religious language of sacred stories is created in the community of believers and cannot be fully understood outside this community. But within the community, the religious language enables the act of faith to realize a richer content because it embodies the combined experience of many truth seekers. Faith needs its language; without language and stories, faith could not be conscious of itself. This is the reason why faith communities are important.

When we participate in study groups we not only study *The Urantia Book*, but we also become more aware of the experiences and insights of others; we are enriched and we contribute to the strengthening of faith by the manner in which we participate

1094:2 100:0.2 “Spiritual growth is mutually stimulated by intimate association with other religionists. Love supplies the soil for religious growth--an objective lure in the place of subjective gratification--yet it yields the supreme subjective satisfaction. And religion ennobles the commonplace drudgery of daily living.”

The problem which arises here is that the community itself, with its own needs and attractions, stands in danger of replacing the life of faith. Communities of believers must evolve in a way which facilitates the relationship between God and each participant. The challenge for the community is to learn how to mobilize faith in the hearts of believers without becoming obsessed with ideology, without becoming an idolatrous replacement for the spiritual faith which originally led to the creation of the community

1487:1 134:4.4-9 "Religious peace--brotherhood--can never exist unless all religions are willing to completely divest themselves of all ecclesiastical authority and fully surrender all concept of spiritual sovereignty. God alone is spirit sovereign.

"You cannot have equality among religions (religious liberty) without having religious wars unless all religions consent to the transfer of all religious sovereignty to some superhuman level, to God himself.

"The kingdom of heaven in the hearts of men will create religious unity (not necessarily uniformity) because any and all religious groups composed of such religious believers will be free from all notions of ecclesiastical authority--religious sovereignty.

"God is spirit, and God gives a fragment of his spirit self to dwell in the heart of man. Spiritually, all men are equal. The kingdom of heaven is free from castes, classes, social levels, and economic groups. You are all brethren.

"But the moment you lose sight of the spirit sovereignty of God the Father, some one religion will begin to assert its superiority over other religions; and then, instead of peace

on earth and good will among men, there will start dissensions, recriminations, even religious wars, at least wars among religionists.

"Freewill beings who regard themselves as equals, unless they mutually acknowledge themselves as subject to some supersovereignty, some authority over and above themselves, sooner or later are tempted to try out their ability to gain power and authority over other persons and groups. The concept of equality never brings peace except in the mutual recognition of some overcontrolling influence of supersovereignty."

Another problem faced by communities of believers deals with faith and doubt within the community of faith itself. The question is whether the dynamic concept of faith is incompatible with a community defined by creedal expressions or which relies on shared beliefs for the maintenance of social coherence. Such a situation will lead to problems if it excludes the element of doubt regarding the truth of the shared meanings which define the social boundaries of the community. The concept of the "infallibility" of a creed, shared beliefs, a decision by a council, a bishop, or the contents of a book excludes doubt as an element of faith in those who subject themselves to these authorities. They may have to struggle within themselves about their subjection; but after they have made the decision, no doubt can be admitted by them about the infallible statements of the authorities. Such a faith has become static, a non-questioning surrender not only to the ultimate, but also to its symbolic expression as formulated by the religious authorities. In this way something preliminary and conditional – the human interpretation of the content of faith – is treated as if it were ultimate and is elevated above the risk of doubt. This is idolatrous faith because its object is a human formulation which is merely representative of the infinite, but not the infinite itself.

When I speak of the "content of faith," I am referring to the stories, rituals of expression, and other factors which enable us to socialize our faith experience – to share it with other travelers on the journey. The "object of faith" is the infinite; the "content of faith" consists of the stories we tell ourselves and each other about the nature of the infinite and our relationship to it.

Pride and fanaticism are the unmistakable symptoms of doubt which has been repressed. Doubt is overcome not by repression but by courage. Courage does not deny that there is doubt, but it accepts doubt as an inevitable expression of its inability to fully grasp the infinite. Real courage does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction or belief. Real courage enables us to live with the risk without which no creative life is possible. Living faith is not a matter of doubtless certainty, but rather a matter of daring courage which accepts the possibility of failure.

When we talk about the possibility of failure in relation to faith, it is important to understand that the real risk of faith is in the domain of what we have chosen to believe is true about reality as a result of our experience of the presence of the infinite. There is always the chance that our beliefs have been constructed upon erroneous assumptions, or that they have been created by unmet needs of our unconscious minds.

Without an element of doubt we lose the power to have a faith capable of powering an unending quest for truth which includes constant critical evaluation, discarding of illusions and restructuring of the content of faith. Thus we are equipped to pursue the quest for the infinite

itself, rather than becoming paralyzed by centering our lives on a set of beliefs which merely represent the infinite.

Communities of faith must be sure that they include a means for criticism and self-correction. *The Urantia Book* notes that “Religion can be kept free from unholy secular alliances only by . . . a critically corrective philosophy.” In this same section the revelators suggest guarding against fanaticism “by the compensations of the scientific mental attitude.”

One of the great dangers in the formation of religious communities is a paralysis of spiritual growth which occurs when members of the community construct their social identities out of the roles they imagine themselves to be playing in the community. This difficulty is compounded when those social roles are reinforced by other members of the community. Genuine spiritual growth will eventually demand the abandonment of identity based on roles played in human social systems.

Faith and Belief

One of the most ordinary misinterpretations of faith is to consider it an act of knowledge that has a low degree of evidence. In this situation, we are speaking of “belief” rather than “faith.” Often this takes the form of a type of knowledge which not only has a low degree of evidence, but which is supported by religious authority. In this case, an act of will by the believer is supposed to compensate for the lack of evidence to support the belief.

The Urantia Book has a whole section devoted to this topic, on page 1114 with additional material on page 1108. I encourage you to review this important material as part of this study. These selections contain some of the clearest commentary about the nature of faith and belief in *The Urantia Book*.

1114:5 101:8.1 "Belief has attained the level of faith when it motivates life and shapes the mode of living. The acceptance of a teaching as true is not faith; that is mere belief. Neither is certainty nor conviction faith. A state of mind attains to faith levels only when it actually dominates the mode of living. Faith is a living attribute of genuine personal religious experience. One believes truth, admires beauty, and reverences goodness, but does not worship them; such an attitude of saving faith is centered on God alone, who is all of these personified and infinitely more.

"Belief is always limiting and binding; faith is expanding and releasing. Belief fixates, faith liberates. But living religious faith is more than the association of noble beliefs; it is more than an exalted system of philosophy; it is a living experience concerned with spiritual meanings, divine ideals, and supreme values; it is God-knowing and man-serving. Beliefs may become group possessions, but faith must be personal. Theologic beliefs can be suggested to a group, but faith can rise up only in the heart of the individual religionist.

"Faith has falsified its trust when it presumes to deny realities and to confer upon

its devotees assumed knowledge. Faith is a traitor when it fosters betrayal of intellectual integrity and belittles loyalty to supreme values and divine ideals. Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty of mortal living. Living faith does not foster bigotry, persecution, or intolerance.

"Faith does not shackle the creative imagination, neither does it maintain an unreasoning prejudice toward the discoveries of scientific investigation. Faith vitalizes religion and constrains the religionist heroically to live the golden rule. The zeal of faith is according to knowledge, and its strivings are the preludes to sublime peace."

1108:3 101:3.4 "Through religious faith the soul of man reveals itself and demonstrates the potential divinity of its emerging nature by the characteristic manner in which it induces the mortal personality to react to certain trying intellectual and testing social situations. Genuine spiritual faith (true moral consciousness) is revealed in that it:

1. Causes ethics and morals to progress despite inherent and adverse animalistic tendencies.
2. Produces a sublime trust in the goodness of God even in the face of bitter disappointment and crushing defeat.
3. Generates profound courage and confidence despite natural adversity and physical calamity.
4. Exhibits inexplicable poise and sustaining tranquillity notwithstanding baffling diseases and even acute physical suffering.
5. Maintains a mysterious poise and composure of personality in the face of maltreatment and the rankest injustice.
6. Maintains a divine trust in ultimate victory in spite of the cruelties of seemingly blind fate and the apparent utter indifference of natural forces to human welfare.
7. Persists in the unswerving belief in God despite all contrary demonstrations of logic and successfully withstands all other intellectual sophistries.
8. Continues to exhibit undaunted faith in the soul's survival regardless of the deceptive teachings of false science and the persuasive delusions of unsound philosophy.
9. Lives and triumphs irrespective of the crushing overload of the complex and partial civilizations of modern times.
10. Contributes to the continued survival of altruism in spite of human selfishness, social antagonisms, industrial greeds, and political maladjustments.

11. Steadfastly adheres to a sublime belief in universe unity and divine guidance regardless of the perplexing presence of evil and sin.

12. Goes right on worshiping God in spite of anything and everything. Dares to declare, "Even though he slay me, yet will I serve him."

Faith, Love and Action

The concern of faith is identical with the desire of love; union with that to which one belongs and from which one feels estranged. We could even ask, "Is there such a thing as love without faith?" There is certainly love without the acceptance of doctrines; faith as a set of accepted and defended doctrines does not produce acts of love. But faith as the state of being ultimately concerned implies love – the desire and urge toward union with that from which we feel separated. The more love is present, the more faith has conquered its demonic-idolatrous possibilities. An idolatrous faith which gives ultimacy to a secondary concern stands against all other secondary concerns and excludes love relations between the representatives of contrasting claims. The fanatic cannot love that against which his fanaticism is directed, for "love is the desire to do good to others." Idolatrous faith is also confronted with the challenge of repressing the doubts which always characterize the elevation of something secondary to a level of ultimacy.

Lastly we must understand that faith as a state of being ultimately concerned reaches out into the world as action. This is faith which seeks to transform and unite with God all that which appears to be separated from him.

2047:6 192:2.2 "If you love me, Peter, feed my lambs. Do not neglect to minister to the weak, the poor, and the young. Preach the gospel without fear or favor; remember always that God is no respecter of persons. Serve your fellow men even as I have served you; forgive your fellow mortals even as I have forgiven you. Let experience teach you the value of meditation and the power of intelligent reflection."

1780:5 160:5.3 "If something has become a religion in your experience, it is self-evident that you already have become an active evangel of that religion since you deem the supreme concept of your religion as being worthy of the worship of all mankind, all universe intelligences. If you are not a positive and missionary evangel of your religion, you are self-deceived in that what you call a religion is only a traditional belief or a mere system of intellectual philosophy."

The element of religious concern – the content of faith

Again, when I speak of the "content of faith" I am referring to the beliefs, stories, rituals of expression, and other factors which enable us to socialize our faith experience – to share it with other travelers on the journey.

Faith is never experienced in isolation from some form of content. It is experienced in, with and through its content -- the ideas, language, stories, and rituals of a faith community. An analytic mind can understand the content of faith as being something different from the the spiritual

experience of faith.

The Urantia Book contains stories about reality which help us understand our experience of faith as it relates to a personal universe -- a universe structured around relationships between personalities and personality systems. For most of us, these stories form a significant part of the content of our faith. Many people in our world use stories from the Bible or some other sacred text to accomplish the same spiritual purpose -- the illumination of the values which enable us to progress in our moral and spiritual lives.

What is important to appreciate is that the goal of our experience of faith is infinite, while the stories with which we attempt to understand and to socially express this experience of faith are finite. Therefore we should be aware from the beginning that our stories, our understandings, our sacred texts, our revelations, are always going to fall short of fully expressing that to which they point. It is a fact that, because of our extreme finitude as human beings, any way in which we attempt to symbolize the infinite is going to be very limited.

The Urantia Book refers to the paradigms within which we do our thinking and choosing as "universe frames" and we find a brief overview of the topic on page 1260. The revelators comment that,

1260:2 115:1.1 "Partial, incomplete, and evolving intellects would be helpless in the master universe, would be unable to form the first rational thought pattern, were it not for the innate ability of all mind, high or low, to form a universe frame in which to think. If mind cannot fathom conclusions, if it cannot penetrate to true origins, then will such mind unfailingly postulate conclusions and invent origins that it may have a means of logical thought within the frame of these mind-created postulates. And while such universe frames for creature thought are indispensable to rational intellectual operations, they are, without exception, erroneous to a greater or lesser degree.

"Conceptual frames of the universe are only relatively true; they are serviceable scaffolding which must eventually give way before the expansions of enlarging cosmic comprehension. The understandings of truth, beauty, and goodness, morality, ethics, duty, love, divinity, origin, existence, purpose, destiny, time, space, even Deity, are only relatively true. . . . Man must think in a mortal universe frame, but that does not mean that he cannot envision other and higher frames within which thought can take place."

Farther on in this study, when we discuss the stages of faith, we will see that the ascent through the psychic circles involves moving through a series of universe frames. We live within each one for a season, learning and growing. These are paradigms, frames of reference constructed of meanings and values. But sooner or later there comes a breakdown of our conceptual scaffolding, our universe frame, and we must move on to a more expanded one within which we can experience further growth.

One of the great dangers of religious life is that we can easily mistake a particular "universe frame" for reality itself and become arrested in our development. This is the basis of religious conflict and religious wars. When we have an experience of the presence of God, this experience may be made possible because of a relationship we have with a book, with a person, with a

group, with a place, with an object, with a piece of music – almost anything is capable of mediating the presence of God to us. The problems begin when we mistake the medium through which the presence of God is experienced for the experience itself.

These concepts should help us understand the nature of doubt. Once we have embarked upon the journey of faith, that which is at risk when we find ourselves doubting, is the content of our faith. We might find ourselves asking, “Does *The Urantia Book* really contain the truth about reality?” Or we might ask, “Does the Bible really contain the truth about reality?” We may have doubts about whether or not a particular book is a faithful guide which can be trusted to lead us to our goal. But the fact that such doubts disturb us is proof in itself that faith is operating in our lives – we are ultimately concerned even when we are experiencing doubt about the way in which we understand or express our involvement with that ultimate concern.

If we understand this, and if we understand why *The Urantia Book* warns us about “the relativity of concept frames,” we can more easily appreciate why a ruthless quest for truth must ever be our guiding principle. If we are truly growing in our faith experience, we will move through a number of “universe frames” during our mortal lives, each providing a conceptual environment within which we can experience growth, but each of which stands in danger of becoming an idolatrous substitute for the transcendent goal of faith -- an idolatrous substitute which can prevent further growth.

The remainder of my presentation will be devoted to sharing with you the road map of the faith journey which I mentioned earlier. We’re going to review the various stages of faith through which we pass on our mortal journey. We will also consider the psychological and spiritual crises which characterize the transitions between these stages.

1097:6 100:4.2 “Religious perplexities are inevitable; there can be no growth without psychic conflict and spiritual agitation. The organization of a philosophic standard of living entails considerable commotion in the philosophic realms of the mind. Loyalties are not exercised in behalf of the great, the good, the true, and the noble without a struggle. Effort is attendant upon clarification of spiritual vision and enhancement of cosmic insight. And the human intellect protests against being weaned from subsisting upon the nonspiritual energies of temporal existence. The slothful animal mind rebels at the effort required to wrestle with cosmic problem solving.”

We will find that meaningful growth demands a willingness to experience difficulty.

Introduction to the stages of faith development

These stages which I’m going to describe are very general in nature – they only describe what happens to most people most of the time. Not everyone fits into this pattern. Also, when I indicate the ages at which these various stages are likely to be encountered, please be aware that these are *general* age ranges. They indicate when a particular stage is most likely to be encountered. They do not indicate a maximum age by which time a person will make a transition to the next stage. Some people move through all the stages; others move slowly through some of the stages but not all of them; other people get arrested at a particular stage and never move on at all.

It is also important to appreciate that these stages refer to faith attitudes which dominate the decision-making processes of the personality. For example, we may hold an intellectual belief that all men and women in the world are our brothers and sisters in the Father's family, but we may not have reached the stage of faith in which our day-to-day decisions are dominated by this awareness. We may be in intellectual accord with the concept of cosmic citizenship, but this does not mean that our personal identity has been so transformed that all decisions affecting the welfare of other persons are made relative to this truth.

435:7 39:4.14 "The keys of the kingdom of heaven are: sincerity, more sincerity, and more sincerity. All men have these keys. Men use them--advance in spirit status--by decisions, by more decisions, and by more decisions. The highest moral choice is the choice of the highest possible value, and always--in any sphere, in all of them--this is to choose to do the will of God. If man thus chooses, he is great, though he be the humblest citizen of Jerusem or even the least of mortals on Urantia."

Again, it is helpful to think of these stages as "universe frames" through which we pass as we experience religious growth. Here is an outline of the basic stages as they relate to the work of James Fowler.

Faith Stage	Average Age at Entrance	Psychic Circle (p. 1209)	Highlight of Stage	Level of Golden Rule (p. 1949)	Phase of Philosophy (p. 1114)
1	3 years	Seventh	Consciousness of Personal Morality		
2	Arrival of Adjuster			Level 1	Level 1
3	Adolescence to Early Adulthood				Level 2
4	Early Adulthood to Midlife	Third	Consciousness of Social Systems	Level 2	Level 3
5	Midlife	Second		Level 3	Level 4
6	Midlife and beyond	First	Consciousness of Cosmic Citizenship	Level 4	

Note also that we can correlate levels of the Golden Rule, the psychic circles, and the four phases of the evolution of religious philosophy with these stages of development. For purposes of study, do you think that there is any correlation between these stages and the four levels of the realization of values which are mentioned on page 68, paragraph 5?

I said that we could consider each of these stages to be a particular "universe frame" or a "concept frame." That means that each of these stages may be viewed as a particular psycho-social paradigm consisting of meanings and values, the inner environment from within which we conduct the affairs of our lives. For purposes of our discussion we will consider these stages of religious development, these "universe frames" to be characterized by five factors whose content changes with growth. These are:

1. Personal values

2. Social values
3. Supportive stories
4. Faith experience
5. Faith challenges

Primal Faith: The personality foundations of the faith adventure (Infancy to the beginning of language acquirement)

The foundation for human religious experience is established in our first years of life. During this period the newborn child develops a basic orientation to reality which conditions all subsequent experience. At this stage we develop basic attitudes toward life which may be dominated by trust and hope or suspicion and fear.

These basic attitudes which appear in human life prior to the beginnings of faith are established almost exclusively as a result of the relationship between the newborn child and its caretakers. Our caretakers are the greatest power in our early life. The nature of the relationship which we form with these caretakers greatly influences the nature of the relationship with God which will be formed later in our lives.

The Urantia Book refers to parenthood as “the supreme responsibility of human existence.” Jesus “exalted family life as the highest human duty.”

On page 1922 we read about a conversation which Jesus had with John Mark.

1922:3 177:2.5 "For more than an hour Jesus and John continued this discussion of home life. The Master went on to explain to John how a child is wholly dependent on his parents and the associated home life for all his early concepts of everything intellectual, social, moral, and even spiritual since the family represents to the young child all that he can first know of either human or divine relationships. The child must derive his first impressions of the universe from the mother's care; he is wholly dependent on the earthly father for his first ideas of the heavenly Father. The child's subsequent life is made happy or unhappy, easy or difficult, in accordance with his early mental and emotional life, conditioned by these social and spiritual relationships of the home. A human being's entire afterlife is enormously influenced by what happens during the first few years of existence."

In this early stage of life the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love must be nurtured in an environment in which fears of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations may be present. The quality of personal interaction, the strength of trust, autonomy, hope and courage developed in this period support all that comes later in faith development.

Once we begin to develop language skills – the ability to use symbols in speech and to engage in ritual play, the doors are open for the true beginnings of the faith adventure.

Stage 1

Stage 1 Faith: Faith in self-constructed mental images which represent feelings about life

and attitudes toward primary caregivers (From approximately 3 years of age until the arrival of a Thought Adjuster) The formation of images which represent feelings and the elements of power in our early life occurs here. The faith experience at this stage consists of the degree to which we trust that these self-constructed images represent reality.

Elements of Stage 1 Faith

Stage 1 Personal Values

In this stage personal values center completely around the needs of the self.

Stage 1 Social Values

In this stage we learn how to manage life by imitating our primary caretakers. We are powerfully influenced by their examples, moods, actions and the characters in the stories they tell us.

Ideas of justice and fairness are viewed in terms of punishment and reward.

In this stage of development we use the newly developed tools of speech and symbolic representation to organize our sensory experience into units of meaning. During this period we assume without question that the experiences and perceptions we have of a phenomenon represent the only available perspective and that this perspective is shared by everyone else.

Stage 1 Supportive Stories

Imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures and symbols, and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting images that represent both the protective and threatening powers in our life. These stories help us to order our feelings and perceptions.

The gift or emergent strength of this stage is the birth of imagination, the ability to unify and grasp the world of experience in powerful images when presented in stories which resonate with our intuitive understandings and feelings toward our social environment.

Stage 1 Faith Experience

We experience faith as trust in primary care givers. Our beliefs are unconsciously assimilated from the basic beliefs and attitudes of family members. We experience a naïve, literal belief in the reality of these stories.

1094:5 100:1.3 "Give every developing child a chance to grow his own religious experience; do not force a ready-made adult experience upon him. Remember, year-by-year progress through an established educational regime does not necessarily mean intellectual progress, much less spiritual growth. Enlargement of vocabulary does not signify development of character. Growth is not truly

indicated by mere products but rather by progress. Real educational growth is indicated by enhancement of ideals, increased appreciation of values, new meanings of values, and augmented loyalty to supreme values."

1186:8 108:2.1 "Though the Adjusters volunteer for service as soon as the personality forecasts have been relayed to Divinington, they are not actually assigned until the human subjects make their first moral personality decision. . . . Adjusters reach their human subjects on Urantia, on the average, just prior to the sixth birthday. In the present generation it is running five years, ten months, and four days; that is, on the 2,134th day of terrestrial life." 1187:1 108:2.2 "The Adjusters cannot invade the mortal mind until it has been duly prepared by the indwelling ministry of the adjutant mind-spirits and encircuited in the Holy Spirit. And it requires the co-ordinate function of all seven adjutants to thus qualify the human mind for the reception of an Adjuster. Creature mind must exhibit the worship outreach and indicate wisdom function by exhibiting the ability to choose between the emerging values of good and evil--moral choice."

Stage 1 Faith Challenges

The challenge of this period is the formation of symbols and images which can hold and order feelings and impressions.

The main factor causing transition to the next stage is the emergence of rational thinking combined with the arrival of a Thought Adjuster. At the heart of this transition is our growing concern to know how life works and to clarify for ourselves the distinctions between what is real and what only seems to be real.

Stage 2

Stage 2 Faith: Mythic/Literal Faith; Faith that beliefs and attitudes of the family as well as stories told within the family and community are literal representations of reality. (Arrival of Adjuster to the onset of puberty. The achievements of this stage may be sustained through life)

The emergent strength of this stage is the forming of stories of faith; the formation of stories which help to explain our role in the cosmos, and which contain our first symbolizations of the mysterious and the unknown. At this stage we experience entrance into the seventh psychic circle.

1210:8 110:6.13 "*The seventh circle.* This level is entered when human beings develop the powers of personal choice, individual decision, moral responsibility, and the capacity for the attainment of spiritual individuality. This signifies the united function of the seven adjutant mind-spirits under the direction of the spirit of wisdom, the encircuited of the mortal creature in the influence of the Holy Spirit, and, on Urantia, the first functioning of the Spirit of Truth, together with the reception of a Thought Adjuster in the mortal mind. Entrance upon the seventh circle constitutes a mortal creature a truly potential citizen of the local universe."

Elements of Stage 2 Faith

Stage 2 Personal Values

In this stage personal values may expand slightly to include the needs of family members. Our self-image begins to develop based on images presented by care givers. The self is still at the center of decision making -- other people are viewed in terms of how they will impact the needs of the self to feel secure, needed, loved, free, important, and esteemed.

A form of moral judgment emerges which is based on ideas of reciprocal fairness. "I did this for you, now you must do this for me."

Understandings of God in this stage also take on a pattern of reciprocity. We engage in prayers and acts of praise in an attempt to store up God's good favor against times when special help or forgiveness may be needed. In this stage, the individual tries to bargain with God. We believe that if we want God's help and protection we have to do our part -- we try to make "deals" with God.

Stage 2 Social Values

The boundaries of social consciousness in this stage extend to people who "are like us" in familial, ethnic, racial, class and religious terms. In this stage we learn to make adjustments in our perceptions and to coordinate our own perspective with that of another person found in our immediate world.

This is the faith stage of the school child, though we sometimes find the structures dominant in adolescents and in adults.

The locus of authority is in the family and the family's immediate community. People in authority roles recognized by the family become authority figures for us. Experiences in school create the beginning of awareness that a larger world exists than that of the family and immediate community. Exposure to mass media contributes to this early expansion of our social consciousness.

Stage 2 Supportive Stories

Characteristic of this stage is the ability to find meanings in our experiences by relating them to stories we've been told. In the previous stage, *images* were derived from stories. In this stage, this process is further developed and we are now able to derive *meanings* from the stories which we are told. If we picture the flow of our lives as a river, this stage tells stories that describe the flow from the midst of the stream. In this stage we do not have the ability to step out on the bank beside the river and reflect on the stories about the flow and what they might mean.

In this stage we begin to take on for ourselves the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to our community. Beliefs are appropriated with literal

interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. In this stage, story, drama and myth emerge as ways of finding and giving coherence to experience.

Stage 2 Faith Experience

When we enter this stage of faith development we place full trust in our primary care givers and the values of our significant community. We become idealists and assume that everyone and everything should be perfect -- family, friends, teachers, school, neighborhood and church. "Perfection" at this stage is understood to be conformance to the values of our significant community.

Our beliefs are based on stories and symbols of the dominant cultural influence. This may be family, community, church, school and mass media. We tend to possess a great degree of certitude; we have complete confidence in our perceptions (things are either black or white) and in our opinions (we are always right).

Stage 2 Faith Challenges

The task of this stage is the formation of a coherent explanation of the self and world made up of images, beliefs, and values of family and the community to which the family belongs. There is also the beginning of an ability to enter into the perspectives of others.

Our transition into Stage 3 begins with the discovery that there are competing stories whose meanings contradict each other. This leads to reflection on those various meanings. The transition to more formal thinking makes such reflection possible and necessary. Previous literalism breaks down and an overconfidence in our own assessments leads to disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings. Conflicts between authoritative stories must be faced. For example, conflicts between the Genesis story of creation and evolutionary theory. The discovery of such conflicts as well as growing awareness of a greater world create the need to find some means of unifying the increasingly diverse content of mind and experience.

Stage 3

Stage 3 Faith: Conventional and Synthesized Faith; Faith attitudes which are synthesized from one's own experience combined with the attitudes expressed within one's significant social communities. (Ages ~ Adolescence through early adulthood; in many people this stage is sustained through life.) The emergent strength of this stage is the forming of identity and the shaping of a personal faith

Elements of Stage 3 Faith

Stage 3 Personal Values

In Stage 3, values center on the needs of self and the support of roles played in the social environment. Moral judgment is based largely on interpersonal expectations and implicit understandings reached between people. A distinct self-consciousness develops during this stage.

Stage 3 Social Values

Stage 3 thinking typically orients to groups or classes other than its own as though they were merely aggregates of individuals. We operate under the assumption that all social relations are simply extensions of interpersonal relationships. A concept of other groups and of society at large as entities with their own internal integrity has not yet formed. We do not think of society in terms of a network of laws, rules, roles and systematically determined patterns designed to serve the interests of a group. This means that other persons are known and evaluated in terms of their supposed personal qualities and interpersonal ways of relating. In a real sense, in this way of knowing, persons are separated from the social system factors shaping and limiting their lives.

The dangers or deficiencies in this stage are twofold. The expectations and evaluations of others can be so compellingly internalized that later autonomy of judgment and action can be jeopardized. Interpersonal betrayals may give rise either to despair about the possibilities of a personal God or to a compensatory intimacy with God unrelated to practical matters of daily life.

The locus of authority lies in the peer group and its leadership, the dominant culture; in the consensus of valued groups, and in personally worthy representatives of belief-value traditions such as respected teachers, priests, bishops, etc.

Our self-image is increasingly derived from roles we play in our families and in our peer relationships. Identity may also be derived from an imagined role in a powerful mythological story.

The world view now includes the family, school, work, media, church, nation, and the world as understood through mass media or schooling.

Stage 3 Supportive Stories

The forming of a personal myth is a primary element of this stage -- the myth of our own becoming, incorporating stories of our past and anticipated future in an image of an ultimate environment unified by the characteristics of our personality.

Because at this stage our religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith, it is not surprising that so many of the images for transcendence that appeal to us in this stage have the characteristics of a divinely personal significant other, such as a personal saint, angel, companion or other imagined divine being.

Stage 3 Faith Experience

In this stage, the growing extensions of social boundaries lead to the synthesis of a world view derived from stories and symbols of the family, religion of the family, peer beliefs,

and mass media.

Faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of an increasingly complex and diverse range of involvements. Faith must unify values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook.

There is acceptance and trust in beliefs of significant communities -- family, church, etc. The discovery that all people and situations are imperfect can lead to anger and cynicism.

Stage 3 faith typically has its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, but for many adults it becomes a permanent place of equilibrium. It structures the ultimate environment in interpersonal terms. Its images of unifying value and power derive from the extension of qualities experienced in personal relationships. It is a “conformist” stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective.

At Stage 3 we acquire an “ideology,” a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but we have not examined it and in a sense are unaware of having it. Differences of outlook with others are experienced as differences in “kind” of person. Authority is located in the incumbents of traditional authority roles (if perceived as personally worthy) or in the consensus of a valued, face-to-face group.

Stage 3 Faith Challenges

The main task of this stage is the synthesis of personal identity from the beliefs of our culture -- family, peers, school, church, TV, movies, etc.

In this stage, a personal and largely unreflective synthesis of beliefs and values evolves to support identity and to unite us in emotional solidarity with others.

At this stage, formal operational thinking, with its new capacity for reflection on our own thought and ways of experiencing, invites us mentally to step outside the flow of life’s stream and to analyze the process. From a vantage point on the river bank, we can take a look at the flow of the stream as a whole. We can see and name certain patterns of meaning arising out of our collection of stories. A myth or myths of the personal past can be composed; this represents a new level of story, a level we might call the story of our stories. And with this comes the possibility and burden of composing myths of possible futures.

Images and values embraced at this stage are largely unexamined. Meanings and values are valued and embraced, made part of our behaviors, but they have not been critically evaluated. That is the meanings and values of our life have not been examined to determine if they are integrated into a coherent and rational system which has internal consistency. In fact, any attempt to analyze the content of faith at this stage feels like a fundamental threat to the integrity of our identity and sense of selfhood.

In Stage 3 we most likely hold a philosophic view of reality which is not genuinely the result of an introspective process. Rather, it is expressed for the purpose of making us one with our community—or our perceived community. Faith at this stage is “synthetic” in that it is non-analytical; It develops as a result of choosing various meanings and values which exist in the social environment and which are implemented in the behaviors of significant persons in our social communities.

A discussion of values and convictions by a Stage 3 person is a means of asserting his solidarity with the community which he calls his own and from which he derives his social identity. This person does not discuss values in order to distinguish himself or to examine the values or to be sure that his views are correct. Rather, in such discussion he seeks to establish a sense of commonality or relatedness with significant other individuals or a significant community.

Factors contributing to the breakdown of Stage 3 and to readiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and inviolable, or the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how our beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how “relative” they are to our particular group or background. Frequently the experience of leaving home precipitates the kind of examination of self, background, and life-guiding values which lead to stage transition at this point.

Crisis leading from Stage 3 to Stage 4:

The ability to think critically and reflectively begins to challenge the accuracy of our perception of reality. A sense of assurance about our former world-view dissolves and is replaced by:

1. Tension between inherited beliefs and the need to be critically reflective about our ideas, ideals and values.
2. A need to replace inherited symbols and stories of the past with scientific and philosophical concepts and propositions which are believed to be more “objective”.
3. The need for internal integrity -- the meanings and values which shape our lives must reflect a coherent internal consistency.

Stage 4

Stage 4 Faith: The Reflective Faith of an Individual; Faith attitudes developed as a result of critical thinking about the elements of one’s beliefs (Ages ~ Early Adulthood - Midlife; may be sustained through life) The emergent strength of this stage is the reflective construction of a personal ideology and the formation of a vocational dream with its imagined social identity.

Elements of Stage 4 Faith

Stage 4 Personal Values

In this stage we are conscious of being an individual distinct from the group. A societal perspective on moral values begins to develop which is usually class-biased. There is an emerging sense of responsibility for personal commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes.

Stage 4 Social Values

In Stage 4 we construct a perspective genuinely aware of social systems and institutions. In addition to apprehending other persons in terms of their personal qualities, we also take into account the influences of their ideologies and the social experiences which have shaped their views. In Stage 4 we also achieve a working understanding of social relations in systems terms, no longer constructing social relations as merely the extension of interpersonal relations.

The ability to function relative to social systems seems to be the key to breaking through the third psychic circle. Just as the making of a moral choice indicates the presence of a personality ready to begin the process of developing interpersonal relationships, so does the ability to function consciously as a living part of a social system indicate potential for functioning consciously as a living part of the Supreme. This means that we have become capable of making moral choices which are simultaneously relative to the welfare of a social system as well as to the welfare of specific individuals comprising that social system.

This is the point at which we are assigned a personal seraphic guardian of destiny. This seraphim will then work to guide us through the remaining circles, toward functional identity with the Supreme and true cosmic citizenship.

The movement from Stage 3 to Stage 4 is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes and address the issue of developing an autonomous selfhood while still functioning as part of a community.

This stage is marked by a double development. Previously sustained in our identity and faith by an interpersonal circle of significant others, we now claim an identity no longer defined by the composite of our roles or meanings to others. To sustain that new identity we compose a meaning frame conscious of its own boundaries and inner connections and aware of itself as a “world view.” But at this stage we are still not likely to attend to the unconscious factors influencing our judgments and behaviors.

The locus of authority becomes our own internal judgment as informed by an ideological perspective. Authorities and norms must be congruent with this in order to be accepted as valid.

Many people complete only half of the transition to Stage 4. By virtue of college experience, travel or of being moved from one community to another, many persons come face-to-face with the relativity of their perspectives, and those of others, to their life experience. But they fail to interrupt their reliance on external sources of authority—and

may even strengthen their reliance upon them—in order to cope with this relativity.

Stage 4 Supportive Stories

Rational thinking dominates; symbols and stories which were meaningful in earlier stages are consciously rejected but continue to operate unconsciously.

Stage 4 Faith Experience

Perhaps more so than in any other stage transition, the transition between Stage 3 and Stage 4 activates the processes of courage, doubt and risk-taking which we discussed earlier. Because this stage focuses so completely on rational thought, comparisons of meanings become more easily possible. Faith is placed in the world of scientific and philosophic concepts. The determining orientation of faith becomes the assumption that rational thought can discover the truths of ultimate reality.

Inherited beliefs and stories are replaced with stories and symbols of the scientific and philosophical world.

For some adults, the transition to Stage 4, if it happens at all, occurs in the thirties or forties. It can be precipitated by changes in primary relationships such as divorce, the death of a parent or children growing up and leaving home. Or it can result from the challenges of moving, changing jobs, tumultuous social or political changes, or the experience of the breakdown or inadequacy of our previous faith position.

For those who have previously enjoyed an unquestioning relationship to God and to their fellow worshipers through a set of religious symbols, this translation of the meanings and values of religious symbols into the elements of rational thought can bring a sense of loss, dislocation, grief and even guilt. Of necessity, if we are to make this transition, we must grapple with doubt and we must have the courage to take the risk of moving forward to wherever the unflinching quest for truth might take us.

1773:5 160:1.8 "The wise and effective solution of any problem demands that the mind shall be free from bias, passion, and all other purely personal prejudices which might interfere with the disinterested survey of the actual factors that go to make up the problem presenting itself for solution. The solution of life problems requires courage and sincerity. Only honest and brave individuals are able to follow valiantly through the perplexing and confusing maze of living to where the logic of a fearless mind may lead. And this emancipation of the mind and soul can never be effected without the driving power of an intelligent enthusiasm which borders on religious zeal. It requires the lure of a great ideal to drive man on in the pursuit of a goal which is beset with difficult material problems and manifold intellectual hazards."

Stage 4's strength has to do with its capacity for critical evaluation. But there is danger in this strength. An excessive confidence in the conscious mind and in critical thought can create excessive self-confidence. There is usually passionate attachment to these

individually constructed philosophical or metaphysical images – just as passionate as the fundamentalist belief in a particular story.

The transition to Stage 4 represents a significant upheaval in our life and may consume as many as five or seven years or longer. It is much less severe if it happens during young adulthood as a natural accompaniment of leaving home and the construction of one's first adult life structures. When this transition occurs in later adulthood, it is much more traumatic because of its impact upon the more established and developed system of relationships and social roles which constitute an adult life structure.

Stage 4 Faith Challenges

The task of this stage is the construction of an individual world view based on critical, reflective thought.

Crisis leading from Stage 4 to Stage 5:

Crisis in Belief: There is a realization that the “objective” world view constructed during Stage 4 is not able to provide meanings and values which are useful in understanding the greater depths of experience which may be encountered in the later life of a mature thinker. This dissatisfaction leads to gradual or abrupt feelings of sterility and disillusionment, precipitating the well-known “mid-life crisis.” Symptoms of this crisis may include mental depression and/or physical illness.

Crisis in Trust: Traumatic life experiences such as illness, death, divorce, etc., may shatter one's former trust in God, in people and in one's self. Formerly trusted perceptions of reality, including our past understandings of God's intervention in human affairs, no longer provide help or hope in the face of powerlessness, disenchantment, and/or in the face of radical evil and suffering.

Stage 5

Stage 5 Faith: Integrative/Expanding Faith; Faith attitudes which attempt to reach beyond the integrated unconscious processes and the intellectual constructs of the self (Ages ~ Mid-Life and beyond – unusual before mid-life) Stage 5 knows the sacrament of defeat and the reality of irrevocable commitments and acts. Its emergent strength is the ability to live with paradox and to develop a sense of responsibility for the world which spans beyond the attainables of one's lifetime.

Elements of Stage 5 Faith

Stage 5 Personal Values

Stage 5 involves going beyond the consciously developed systems and clear boundaries of Stage 4 to include our unconscious processes. In this stage we must come to terms with the fact that the conscious ego is not master in its own house. Stage 5 understands

that the content of faith, as well as the symbols and stories used to understand and share faith, are all shaped by unconscious processes.

The disrupting trends of our unconscious processes are one of the great problems of all personal life. If we fail to establish a uniting center of values, relative to which we attempt to organize all of the processes of our inner lives -- including our unconscious needs and desires -- the result can be a complete disintegration of the personality.

Moral judgment in this stage 5 reaches beyond the interests of the self and seeks higher principles which are universal in nature.

There is a deepened sense of self as both individual and an integral part of the human community. There is a recognition of oneself as paradox: both gifted and flawed, strong and weak. There may be a revival and expansion of earlier perceptions of the self as defined by a role played in a mythological story.

Stage 5 Social Values

The boundary of social consciousness now extends beyond class interests and seeks to become more universal in nature. There is a deepened interest in the values of groups, classes and traditions other than our own.

An internal locus of authority continues to evolve. There is an integration of our judgments and experiences with reflection on claims made by others and of various expressions of cumulative human wisdom. We begin to function in more consciously effective liason with the Adjuster in the choosing of the values relative to which we make our decisions.

Symbolic thinking regains equal value with critical and reflective thinking. Old symbols acquire a new richness of meaning and value. There is a growing recognition that all "knowing" is metaphoric; there is a readiness for participation in the reality expressed in symbol and myth.

The tasks of this stage are:

1. The recognition and acceptance of life as having contradictory or inconsistent qualities.
2. A reworking of the image of self and world integrating symbol, story and scientific/philosophic understanding.
3. An understanding that "truth" is found within numerous stories and interpretations, not exclusively within one's own.
4. A claiming and reworking of the meaning and value of one's own life, past and present.

Our world view becomes that of the universe as a living organism of which the self is a living, contributing part. This is not merely an intellectual assent to an idea. Rather does this concept of the universe as a living organism become the central point of value relative to which we choose the moral and spiritual values which are implemented into our behaviors and decision-making processes.

Stage 5 Supportive Stories

At Stage 5, self-selected supportive stories provide symbolic representations of the infinite. There is an openness to meanings and values which might be derived from other stories. There is a recognition that the purpose of stories is to facilitate the choosing of higher meanings and values rather than to authoritatively represent actual reality.

Stage 5 Faith Experience

In the domain of faith there is an increasing effort to live relative to one's best understanding of God's purposes. There is a sense that we are participants in a created, ordered universe; that the Creator is ultimately in control; that our existence contains meaning and is of value in the universe.

Belief at this stage includes a realization and acceptance of the fact that all human ideas and understandings are fallible and destined to change. There is an understanding that God alone is infallible and changeless. A genuine openness to the truths of traditions and communities other than one's own appears.

Stage 5 Faith Challenges

Stage 4 is satisfied with an "either/or", "black and white" view of reality in which concepts are well-defined by rigorous logical thinking. Stage 5 sees both (or the many) sides of an issue simultaneously and suspects that things are organically related to each other.

[1105:1](#) [101:1.4](#) "Religion lives and prospers, then, not by sight and feeling, but rather by faith and insight. It consists not in the discovery of new facts or in the finding of a unique experience, but rather in the discovery of new and spiritual meanings in facts already well known to mankind."

[1096:3](#) [100:2.6](#) "The goal of human self-realization should be spiritual, not material. The only realities worth striving for are divine, spiritual, and eternal. Mortal man is entitled to the enjoyment of physical pleasures and to the satisfaction of human affections; he is benefited by loyalty to human associations and temporal institutions; but these are not the eternal foundations upon which to build the immortal personality which must transcend space, vanquish time, and achieve the eternal destiny of divine perfection and finaliter service."

Stage 5 understands that truth is more multidimensional and organically interdependent than most theories or accounts of truth can grasp. Stage 5 also sees that the relativity of

religious traditions which matters is not their relativity to each other, but their relativity to the reality to which they mediate relationship. Stage 5's radical openness to the truth of other traditions is not mere tolerance; it stems from the awareness that the reality of the infinite is greater than any medium of expression.

The new strength of this stage comes in the rise of the ironic imagination—a capacity to fully accept the most powerful meanings of our personal experience or of our social group, while simultaneously recognizing that these values are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality. The danger of this stage lies in the direction of a paralyzing passivity or inaction, giving rise to complacency or cynical withdrawal, due to its paradoxical understanding of truth.

1138:5 103:7.7 "What both developing science and religion need is more searching and fearless self-criticism, a greater awareness of incompleteness in evolutionary status. The teachers of both science and religion are often altogether too self-confident and dogmatic. Science and religion can only be self-critical of their facts. The moment departure is made from the stage of facts, reason abdicates or else rapidly degenerates into a consort of false logic."

Stage 5 involves a critical recognition of our social unconscious—the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of our nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like.

Crisis leading from Stage 5 to Stage 6:

The crisis leading to Stage 6 is the recognition that loyalty to emerging new meanings and values may require sacrifice -- of our lifestyle, social position, or in some cases, of life itself.

Stage 6

Stage 6 Faith: Universalizing Faith: Faith attitudes of a personality consciously integrated with the Supreme (Ages: Mid-life and beyond; very few persons achieve this level of living faith maturity due to its self-transcending nature.) Here we begin to participate in “the faith of Jesus.” as described in Paper 196. This is the level of the first psychic circle.

Elements of Stage 6 Faith

Stage 6 Personal Values

In Stage 6 the center of value is the evolving Supreme Being. All moral values are calculated relative to this central reality and an attempt is made to understand the will of God as a critical determiner of value choices. The self and all others are regarded as children of God.

Stage 6 Social Values

This stage sees the emergence of universal ethical principles. The boundaries of social

consciousness are expanded to include personal identification with an evolving universe of personality relationships

Not only does Stage 6 understand its relationship to the Supreme, the Stage 6 individual's life is dominated by motives deriving from this insight. Stage 6 understands the nature of one's participation in an inclusive commonwealth of being. While Stage 5 acts out of loyalty to the present order, to its institutions, groups, and compromise procedures, Stage 6 involves becoming an activist incarnation of the imperatives of the great commandment which Jesus gave us -- that we love one another as he loved us.

The locus of authority is centered on personal judgment informed by the experiences and truths of previous stages, purified of egoistic striving, and linked by disciplined intuition to the principle of being and to the purposes of a transcendent power.

The world is understood as a living part of a universal spiritual creation of a divinely integrated intelligence.

Stage 6 Supportive Stories

Personal and social identity at Stage 6 is experienced as relationship to the Supreme. It transcends forms of social identity projected from roles in metaphysical stories which supported faith in earlier stages. Stories may be used to symbolize various truths but the individual is likely to draw upon a larger pool of stories instead of relying on a single story.

Stage 6 Faith Experience

Stage 6 faith is faith in God and in God's purposes; the dedication of our will to the doing of the will of God to the best of our understanding.

In stage 6, beliefs about God become less important than our personal experience of God as active and present in our life and in the world.

Stage 6 Faith Challenges

The tasks of this stage are:

1. Devotion to doing the will of God, as it is best understood.
2. Living a life of service -- to both friends and enemies.
3. Non-resistance to evil
4. Living out, through faith, the highest interpretation of the Golden Rule -- learning to love one another as Jesus loved us.

Stage 6 is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it live consciously in an ultimate

environment which is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. They are powerful in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic and ideological shackles we place and tolerate on human life. Through their decisions and actions they help humanity to experientially know the meaning of living in the presence of God.

1095:6 100:2.2 "Spiritual growth is first an awakening to needs, next a discernment of meanings, and then a discovery of values. The evidence of true spiritual development consists in the exhibition of a human personality motivated by love, activated by unselfish ministry, and dominated by the wholehearted worship of the perfection ideals of divinity. And this entire experience constitutes the reality of religion as contrasted with mere theological beliefs."

Beyond paradox and polarities, persons in this stage are grounded in a oneness with the Supreme. Their visions and commitments free them for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love, devoted to overcoming division, oppression, and violence, and in effective anticipatory response to a universal commonwealth of love and justice.

1949:6 180:5.4 "The true child of universe insight looks for the living Spirit of Truth in every wise saying. The God-knowing individual is constantly elevating wisdom to the living-truth levels of divine attainment; the spiritually unprogressive soul is all the while dragging the living truth down to the dead levels of wisdom and to the domain of mere exalted knowledge."

Getting Through the Stages

How do we go about traversing these stages of growth? These stages should not be viewed as levels of achievement, but rather descriptions of stages we will encounter in a natural, evolutionary process. Our efforts should be directed toward the tasks of the stage in which we find ourselves, rather than an effort to force a transition to the next stage.

In our efforts to traverse the psychic circles, we might ask, "What is it that retards our growth and prevents us from moving into the next higher circle?" The answer is "fear." It is fear, *The Urantia Book* tells us, which is the opposite of faith. We are told that one of the great tasks of mortal life is to transmute the fear inherited from our evolutionary origins into the faith of our spiritual heritage.

It is fear which keeps us from progressing -- most often a fear that critical evaluation of our beliefs and assumptions might expose illusions which we have found comforting and upon which we have come to depend for identity. One of the greatest betrayals of spiritual integrity in which we might engage is to use the concept of "faith" as an excuse to avoid critical evaluation. "Unreasoned fear is a master intellectual fraud practiced upon the evolving mortal soul."

The boundary between our present circle of attainment and the next circle is really the boundary between our faith and our fear; the boundary represents unconquered fear. For example, in the seventh circle when the ascender's social consciousness is based on the immediate family and the family's community, it is fear and uncertainty regarding personal relationships outside this

boundary which keeps the ascender confined to this circle.

When this fear is transmuted into faith, the ascender's social boundaries expand and it is possible to move into the next higher circle. This higher circle, in turn, has a boundary of fear which must be conquered before additional progress may be made. Thus it is a process of transmuting fear into faith which enables us to traverse these circles and eventually become comfortable functioning as a cosmic citizen. Any time we find that we are dividing people up into "us" and "them" categories and relating to members of the different categories with different sets of values, we can be sure that we are in one of the lower stages of development and that fear -- conscious or unconscious -- is playing a dominant role in shaping our behavior.

The admonitions to spiritual growth which we find in The Urantia Book will work at any stage and will faithfully guide us on our path.

These admonitions for growth are:

1. The continual seeking of the Father's will.
2. Worship – evolving friendship with God.
3. Service – the unselfish service of our fellows.
4. The unending quest for truth

One of the beauties of the teachings of Jesus is that if we simply follow his great commandment, which leads to worship and service, we will find ourselves progressing in a natural manner. Jesus was not an administrator who came to give us rules and regulations, he is our creator and he came to tell us how to live progressively and meaningfully within the system which he created.

1773:5 160:1.8 “The wise and effective solution of any problem demands that the mind shall be free from bias, passion, and all other purely personal prejudices which might interfere with the disinterested survey of the actual factors that go to make up the problem presenting itself for solution. The solution of life problems requires courage and sincerity. Only honest and brave individuals are able to follow valiantly through the perplexing and confusing maze of living to where the logic of a fearless mind may lead. And this emancipation of the mind and soul can never be effected without the driving power of an intelligent enthusiasm which borders on religious zeal. It requires the lure of a great ideal to drive man on in the pursuit of a goal which is beset with difficult material problems and manifold intellectual hazards.”

1209:4 110:6.4 "When the development of the intellectual nature proceeds faster than that of the spiritual, such a situation renders communication with the Thought Adjuster both difficult and dangerous. Likewise, overspiritual development tends to produce a fanatical and perverted interpretation of the spirit leadings of the divine indweller. Lack of spiritual capacity makes it very difficult to transmit to such a material intellect the spiritual truths resident in the higher superconsciousness. It is to the mind of perfect poise, housed in a body of clean habits, stabilized neural energies, and balanced chemical function--when the physical, mental, and spiritual powers are in triune harmony of development--that a maximum of light and truth can be imparted with a minimum of temporal danger or risk

to the real welfare of such a being. By such a balanced growth does man ascend the circles of planetary progression one by one, from the seventh to the first."

These factors, if embraced, can lead us through these stages of growth. Not only do they lead from one stage to another, but they provide for a full realization of the potentials within each stage. Jesus commented to John that he must have “. . . faith in the effectiveness of the supreme human desire to do the will of God—to be like God.”

Conclusion

In conclusion it is important to appreciate that we are not engaged in the faith adventure alone. God is seeking to find us and to commune with us.

1454:1 131:10.4 "The Father in heaven will not suffer a single child on earth to perish if that child has a desire to find the Father and truly longs to be like him. Our Father even loves the wicked and is always kind to the ungrateful. If more human beings could only know about the goodness of God, they would certainly be led to repent of their evil ways and forsake all known sin. All good things come down from the Father of light, in whom there is no variableness neither shadow of changing. The spirit of the true God is in man's heart. He intends that all men should be brothers. When men begin to feel after God, that is evidence that God has found them, and that they are in quest of knowledge about him. We live in God and God dwells in us."

1733:6 155:6.18 "You are my apostles, and to you religion shall not become a theologic shelter to which you may flee in fear of facing the rugged realities of spiritual progress and idealistic adventure; but rather shall your religion become the fact of real experience which testifies that God has found you, idealized, ennobled, and spiritualized you, and that you have enlisted in the eternal adventure of finding the God who has thus found and sonshipped you."

May the Father in Heaven bless each of us with the challenges and difficulties which will lead us into a fuller actualization of our heritage as cosmic citizens.

Distribution of Stages of Faith by Age in the Research Sample

Research of Dr. James Fowler

(Stages with two numbers such as 5-6 indicate persons in transition between the two stages.)

Stage	0-6	7-12	13-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
6								1.6 %
5-6								
5					14.6 %	12.5 %	23.5 %	16.1 %
4-5				3.3 %	18.8 %	21.9 %	5.9 %	14.5 %
4			5.4 %	40.0 %	20.8 %	56.2 %	29.4 %	27.4 %
3-4			28.6 %	33.3 %	8.3 %			14.5 %
3			50.0 %	17.8 %	37.5 %	9.4 %	35.3 %	24.2 %
2-3		17.2 %	12.5 %	4.4 %				1.6 %

2		72.4 %	3.6 %	1.1 %			5.9 %	
1-2	12.0 %	6.9 %						
1	88.0 %	3.4 %						

Suggested reading:

Fowler, James W., Stages of Faith, Harper: San Francisco, 1981
 Jung, C. G., The Undiscovered Self, Penguin: New York, 1958
 Tillich, Paul, Dynamics of Faith, Harper: New York, 1958

Additional Study: The quotes below refer to stages of development in the life of Jesus. Do you think there is any relationship between these stages and those which are described in the material above?

Stages in the life of Jesus

1376:4 124:6.18 Thus ends the career of the Nazareth lad, and begins the narrative of that adolescent youth--the increasingly self-conscious divine human--who now begins the contemplation of his world career as he strives to integrate his expanding life purpose with the desires of his parents and his obligations to his family and the society of his day and age.

1482:1 133:9.6 -- the end of the mission of Joshua the teacher

1749:2 157:6.3 Jesus now entered upon the fourth and last stage of his human life in the flesh. The first stage was that of his childhood, the years when he was only dimly conscious of his origin, nature, and destiny as a human being. The second stage was the increasingly self-conscious years of youth and advancing manhood, during which he came more clearly to comprehend his divine nature and human mission. This second stage ended with the experiences and revelations associated with his baptism.

1749:2 157:6.3 The third stage of the Master's earth experience extended from the baptism through the years of his ministry as teacher and healer and up to this momentous hour of Peter's confession at Caesarea-Philippi. This third period of his earth life embraced the times when his apostles and his immediate followers knew him as the Son of Man and regarded him as the Messiah.

1749:2 157:6.3 The fourth and last period of his earth career began here at Caesarea-Philippi and extended on to the crucifixion. This stage of his ministry was characterized by his acknowledgment of divinity and embraced the labors of his last year in the flesh. During the fourth period, while the majority of his followers still regarded him as the Messiah, he became known to the apostles as the Son of God. Peter's confession marked the beginning of the new period of the more complete realization of the truth of his supreme ministry as a bestowal Son on Urantia and for an entire universe, and the recognition of that fact, at least hazily, by his chosen ambassadors.

2091:2 196:1.6 Just as men must progress from the consciousness of the human to the realization of the divine, so did Jesus ascend from the nature of man to the consciousness of the nature of God. And the Master made this great ascent from the human to the divine by the conjoint achievement of the faith of his mortal intellect and the acts of his indwelling Adjuster. The fact-realization of the attainment of totality of divinity (all the while fully conscious of the reality of humanity) was attended by **seven stages of faith consciousness of progressive divinization**. These stages of progressive self-realization were marked off by the following extraordinary events in the Master's bestowal experience:

Stages of "faith consciousness of progressive self-realization" in the life of Jesus:

2091:2 196:1.6 1. The arrival of the Thought Adjuster.

1425:1 129:4.2 The purely human religious experience--the personal spiritual growth--of the Son of Man well-nigh reached the apex of attainment during this, the twenty-ninth year. This experience of spiritual development was a consistently gradual growth from the moment of the arrival of his Thought Adjuster until the day of the completion and confirmation of that natural and normal human relationship between the material mind of man and the mind-endowment of the spirit--the phenomenon of the making of these two minds one, the experience which the Son of Man attained in completion and finality, as an incarnated mortal of the realm, on the day of his baptism in the Jordan.

2091:2 196:1.6 2. The messenger of Immanuel who appeared to him at Jerusalem when he was about twelve years old.

1398:4 127:2.12 This year (his 17th year) Jesus made great progress in the organization of his mind. Gradually he had brought his divine and human natures together, and he accomplished all this organization of intellect by the force of his own decisions and with only the aid of his indwelling Monitor, just such a Monitor as all normal mortals on all postbestowal-Son worlds have within their minds. So far, nothing supernatural had happened in this young man's career except the visit of a messenger, dispatched by his elder brother Immanuel, who once appeared to him during the night at Jerusalem.

2091:2 196:1.6 3. The manifestations attendant upon his baptism.

[See "The Baptism of Jesus," Page 1510, Paper 136, Section 2]

2091:2 196:1.6 4. The experiences on the Mount of Transfiguration.

1513:2 136:3.5 While he tarried on the mountain, talking with Gabriel, the Constellation Father of Edentia appeared to Jesus and Gabriel in person, saying: "The records are completed. The sovereignty of Michael No. 611,121 over his universe of Nebadon rests in completion at the right hand of the Universal Father. I bring to you the bestowal release of Immanuel, your sponsor-brother for the Urantia incarnation. You are at liberty now or at any subsequent time, in the manner of your own choosing, to terminate your incarnation bestowal, ascend to the right hand of your Father, receive your sovereignty, and assume your well-earned unconditional rulership of all Nebadon. I also testify to the

completion of the records of the superuniverse, by authorization of the Ancients of Days, having to do with the termination of all sin-rebellion in your universe and endowing you with full and unlimited authority to deal with any and all such possible upheavals in the future. Technically, your work on Urantia and in the flesh of the mortal creature is finished. Your course from now on is a matter of your own choosing."

[See "Plans for Public Work" page 1514, Paper 136, Section 4]

2091:2 196:1.6 5. The morontia resurrection.

[See "The Morontia Transit" page 2020, Paper 189, Section 1]

2091:2 196:1.6 6. The spirit ascension.

[See "The Master's Ascension" page 2057, Paper 183, Section 5]

2091:2 196:1.6 7. The final embrace of the Paradise Father, conferring unlimited sovereignty of his universe.

[See "The Last Group Prayer" page 1963, Paper 182, Section 1]

Notes for SS01

In the adolescent phase of infatuated love of God, the psychological experience of the love of God is heavily influenced by projections, needs and desires of the unconscious. In later stages, this love matures and is more analogous to the love of a mature marriage, where there is a much deeper affection based on shared experiences and understanding derived over a long period of time.

Be sure to emphasize the problems of community which relate to the development of social identity based on the aspects of a particular stage of growth. Any such development makes transition to the next stage difficult.

There is a stage in which faith is afraid of rational evaluation of unconscious factors because of the fear that looking at them will destroy the quality of faith which one has come to enjoy. The fear of the destruction is real and valid. But the quality of faith which will replace the more immature level of attainment will be much richer and deeper, and far more meaningful.

One must be careful at the stage of really opening up to spirit because this is in reality an opening up to unconscious levels of reality. This demands more rational work to be sure that unconscious needs and desires are not modulating the new levels of spirit being contacted. If this is not tended to, unconscious needs and desires and projections will capture the spirit consciousness and bend it toward the meeting of their objectives.