

Faith Process in Human Development

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Abstract: This paper looks at Faith as a process of growth. Starting with Erikson's life as a journey of growth in eight psychosocial stages, it looks at various scholars who applied it to faith development. After comparing the theories of James Fowler, Scott Peck, Friedrich von Hugel and John Westerhoff, the author adopts the ring theory of Westerhoff and elucidates the relationship between Faith, Reason and Wisdom. These are similar to the three rings of tree, one developing over another layer. Faith is visible in the 'Affiliative stage' of Westerhoff. Reason is visible in the 'Searching Faith' of Westerhoff. Wisdom is manifested in the 'Owned faith'. During the searching faith, the clash of world views become very important and the author examines three dominant world views for this stage to demonstrate the conflicts a person faces in dealing with Faith. Thus, the process of Faith involves Reason and Wisdom.

Key words: stages of faith, Erik Erikson, John Westerhoff, worldviews, holographic worldview.

1. Theories of Human Development and Faith Process

Faith is a life-long process. Faith as a finished product is one that is stagnant. Faith as a response to God's Revelation and as an expression of trust in the unknown is a process that has degrees of conviction that is shown in living, knowing, and understanding. Starting from infancy, Faith goes through different stages of development. In order to be able to determine the *state* of our Faith we need to know the *stage* of our Faith. Faith – like life – is a journey of growth, development and becoming. It involves change, movement, loss and gain. A number of phases or stages of the faith journey can be identified, mirroring the stages of human

psychological development from infancy to adulthood. Life as a journey of growth is pioneered by Erik Erikson¹. Erikson stressed the importance of cultural influences on development and outlined eight psychosocial stages, periods during which all individuals must confront a common crisis, caused in part by the new demands posed by different phases of life. He presents human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which the healthy personality weathers, emerging and re-emerging with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase in the capacity to do well, according to the standards of those who are significant to him. The individual who resolves such a crisis improperly will, according to Erikson, face problems later.

**The Eight Psycho-social stages of Human Development
According to Erikson²**

Stage	Basic Conflict	Important Events	Outcome
Infancy (birth to 18 months)	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.
Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Toilet Training	Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.
Preschool (3 to 5 years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Exploration	Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.
School Age (6 to 11 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of

			competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.
Adolescence (12 to 18 years)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Social Relationships	Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Relationships	Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.
Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work and Parenthood	Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.
Maturity(65 to death)	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Reflection on Life	Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfilment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.

Faith founded on our belief system is also a dynamic experience and it develops corresponding to our physical and neural growth. Inspired by Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development, several authors have depicted faith as a growth journey in phases. The theory of 'stages of faith' was originally spelt out by Professor James Fowler in 1981. In his book entitled *Stages of Faith*³ he identified 6 stages of spiritual development. Fowler's stages relate to normal/typical human spiritual development, in terms of the individual's relationship to the 'Universal' or 'Transcendent' (not necessarily God). Fowler's six stages of Faith are the following⁴:

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith

Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith

Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith

Stage one and two are focused on Faith per se. Stage 3, 4 and 5 deal with Reason and Faith. Stage six deals with Wisdom and Faith.

Fowler's stages correspond roughly to an age range. M. Scott Peck's schema, by contrast, is not tied to specific age ranges but relate to stages in the development of religious faith leading to and following on from a conversion experience. In this schema, a person may convert at any age, and at any later age may start to question and then deepen their faith. He enumerates four stages in his book, *Further Along the Road Less Travelled*:⁵

Stage I is chaotic, disordered, and reckless. Very young children are in Stage I. They tend to defy and disobey, and are unwilling to accept a will greater than their own. Many criminals are people who have never grown out of Stage I.

Stage II is the stage at which a person has blind faith. Once children learn to obey their parents, they reach Stage II. Many so-called religious people are essentially Stage II people, in the sense that they have blind faith in God, and do not question His existence. With blind faith comes humility and a willingness to obey and serve. The majority of good law-abiding citizens never move out of Stage II.

Stage III is the stage of scientific skepticism and inquisitiveness. A Stage III person does not accept things on faith but only accepts them if convinced logically. Many people working in scientific and technological research are in Stage III.

Stage IV is the stage where an individual starts enjoying the mystery and beauty of nature. While retaining skepticism, he starts perceiving grand patterns in nature. His religiousness and spirituality

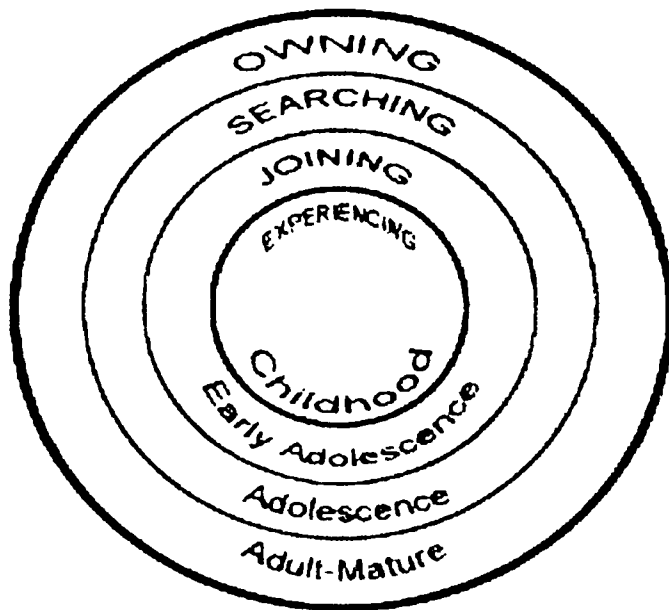
differ significantly from that of a Stage II person, in the sense that he does not accept things through blind faith but does so because of genuine belief. Stage IV people are labelled as mystics.

Friedrich von Hugel⁶ offers a 3 stage faith development for “Integrated Religious Development”.

The three key stages he outlined are connected with childhood, youth and adulthood. Children can grow up happily within an ‘institutional’ kind of faith, where their images of life are shaped by their belonging to a family and church tradition. They learn to say night prayers or to prepare for communion. They find themselves at home in faith as inherited. But some years later a young person can run into many new questions and he or she needs a more ‘critical’ approach: at this stage one’s faith looks for reasons that make sense. For von Hügel a third or adult stage of faith goes beyond these two institutional and rational dimensions to what he calls a more ‘mystical’ phase. By this he meant that “faith also needs to be experienced in depth, to be felt rather than seen or reasoned about and to be loved and lived rather than analysed”⁷. And he summed up his threefold adventure of faith in one concise sentence: ‘I believe because I am told, because it is true, because it answers to my deepest interior experiences and needs’⁸.

Westerhoff⁹ identifies four concentric “rings” that an individual passes through on his or her journey of spiritual development. According to him, Faith grows like the rings of a tree, with each ring adding to and changing the tree somewhat, yet building on that which has grown before. Adapting Westerhoff’s terminology a bit¹⁰, the rings may be named as *experiencing, joining, searching, and owning* styles of faith as shown in fig. 1.

Fig. 1



The circle at the centre is *experiencing*. This stage is linked to childhood, and the key is for children to experience the faith community as a place where they feel loved and accepted.

The second circle is *joining*. This is a stage in early adolescence and is a time when the young person looks to belong to a faith community and to join “God’s family.”

The third circle is *searching*. This stage corresponds to later adolescence and the natural shift in intellectual capacity. To use Piaget’s terminology, one moves from concrete to formal operations. Adolescents are questioning their experience of faith, the church, and what they have been taught, as well as the experiences of others.

The fourth circle is *owning*. This is a stage during adulthood when the person makes a decision to believe and personalize what they have been taught as a child. This person is now believing because he wants to.

Looking at the development of these four concentric rings in an individual’s faith development, one can compare the growth of a person through faith, reason and wisdom. In the first stage, a person

experiences faith in the family. In the second stage, that faith is accepted without any questioning. In the next stage, faith is questioned and in the process, it is made one's own. As the person grows further, this faith process leads to wisdom. As a tree grows taller, similar to the aging of the tree, so also the width of the tree increases adding new layers. Fig 2, demonstrates the growth and integration of Faith, Reason and Wisdom.

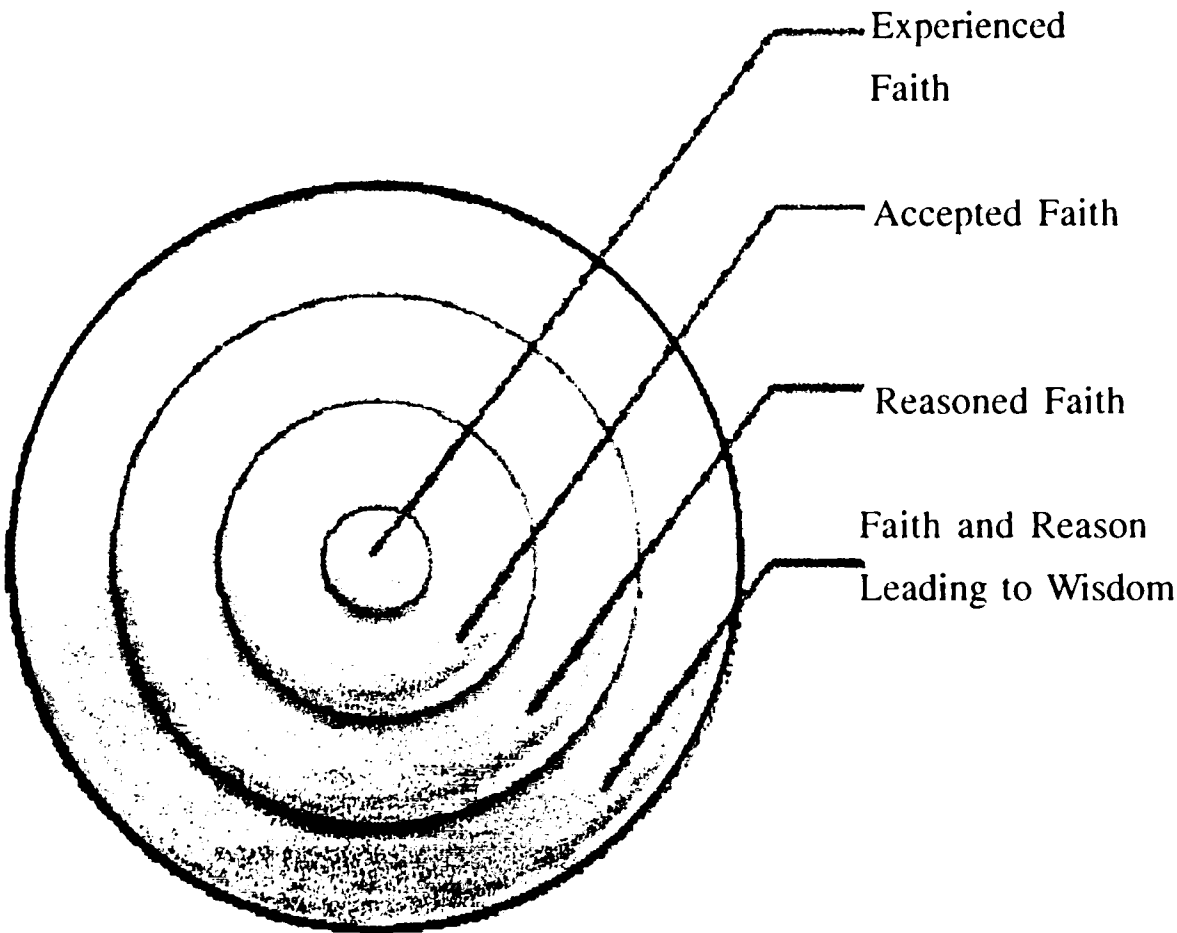


Fig 2

Having briefly looked at the different stages proposed by different thinkers, let us consider Westerhoff's stages in more detail.

2.Experienced Faith

Westerhoff's first stage of faith begins at birth. It does not necessarily determine the course of our later faith, but it does lay the foundations on which later faith will build or that will have to be

rebuilt in later faith. We find this stage grounded in that which comes through feelings or sensory experiences in the form of interactions with others and our world.

It is critical during this infancy stage that a child is able to develop a basic sense of trust in him/her self, in other people and in the world in general. Infants need emotional support that includes attention, warmth and touch, interest in what they are doing and empathy. When these basic emotional needs are not met, a child is not able to sense the world as trustworthy. The ability to trust and respond to those who have primary responsibility for their care is the foundation for future development and it is critical for the way they hold their faith. Basic trust makes it possible for the child to have hope. The failure to develop trust and to attach strongly to a caring adult has implications for the child's life of faith. A child who has not learned to trust other people may find it difficult to trust God and God's care for him/her. The lack of empathy will limit the child's ability to love others and the possibility of the child's healthy future development—emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual—is compromised.

Erikson's second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt (ages of 18 months to 3 years), also occurs during the "experienced faith" stage. During this time, a child begins to see himself/herself as a separate being interacting with people and objects around him/her. At this age, children have also gained more control over their physical movements. This stage has been described as a delicate balancing act: setting limits and experiencing newness of self-regulation. Eriksson states, "This stage becomes decisive for the ratio of love and hate, cooperation and willfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression. From the sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem comes a lasting sense of good will and pride."¹¹

Usually by age four, children have fully arrived into Eriksson's third stage. Pretend play, sometimes called symbolic play, gives the child an opportunity to practice the roles and behaviours of their culture. During these early years they learn to trust other people, themselves, and the world, not because they are told of their worth and the world is trustworthy, but because they experience it as

such. At the core is the faith which they experience from their earliest years of life.

Faith as an essential human experience, according to behavioural sciences, is a nurtured behaviour. Faith is implanted in an individual from the moment of his/her conception and developed by the early experiences of human interaction with the parents and the family. Later, it is cultivated and shaped by sound beliefs, which form the foundation of faith and which are inculcated in a human person. Andrew Newberg says in his book *Born to Believe*¹² that no one is born with certain faith or religious affiliation but he/ she is taught to form and to live his/her beliefs. Beliefs of a particular religion or ideology are transmitted to him/her which become his/her convictions and commitments giving orientation and power to live.

The belief system of an individual depends on the parallel development of the brain and its activities like cognition. Jean Piaget¹³ speaks about the four stages of cognitive development from the birth to adolescence, when individuals grow learning in the first stage through sensory experience but later in the adolescent stage they are capable of abstract learning.

A person who did not have a normal childhood and did not experience trust and faith is going to find it difficult to experience faith in his/her life. As that person grows up, the affiliative faith (second stage) may not take place at all. Some people through therapy and such other experiences may develop faith later.

3. Affiliated Faith (Early adolescence)

It is a time of belonging to a group and a time which centres around the imitation of what the group does. These are busy, active years for the child and the family. The primary social context is school followed quickly by sports teams, music lessons and groups, scouting, and the church. Eriksson identifies this stage as that of industry versus inferiority. A child's job or task is to learn the basic skills of life and how to function. As a child moves into what we call the primary and elementary school years (6-11), the style of their faith takes on a different quality. As another ring is added, the qualities of experienced faith are not left behind completely; rather the new is

added to the old and the quality of faith changes. This doesn't necessarily correlate in chronological stage only. The journey of faith assumes these qualities and stages at any age.

Fowler calls it the age of *mythic-literal* faith¹⁴. Adolescents at this stage enter into the world of identity formation, adventure, personalisation and assertion. Anything and everything they learn are visualized and dramatized yet critically analysed before assimilating them. The characters in the stories and narratives become real and they develop a strong sense of justice, love, truth, etc. represented by the myths and legends. Adolescents identify themselves with the characters of the narratives and stories and their beliefs are formed as literal interpretations or as moral rules and attitudes. Moreover the sources of perception and inputs of information are no more the classical agencies, like family, school, etc. and the authority of parents and teachers is eroded by the peers and the media. Affiliative faith extends to the age of *synthetic* and *conventional* faith of Fowler. As individuals they form their identity, faith and personality. It is characterized by conformity to religious authority and the development of a personal identity but also pulled asunder between personal judgment and expectations and dictates of the authority

This phase of a person's growth is recognized as a time of testing. It is a matching of the person with peer expectations. Where traditions, values, and practices are similar, there usually is a good match and the individual merges his or her identity with that of the body. There is little room for personal differences due to a strong emphasis on unity and conformity in belief and practice. The concerns of belonging, for security, and for a sense of power (and identity) that come from group membership are the key drivers in forming one's faith concept during this period. This level of faith is expressed, at the earliest, during the adolescent years.

4. Searching Faith And Reason (late adolescence onwards)

The third stage of faith development, **searching faith**, is the faith of questioning and internalizing what we have long been taught. Searching faith usually begins during late adolescence and often

continues in earnest during young adulthood. This stage can be troubling for parents, teachers, etc. if not properly understood. And, of course, it's risky. However, only by questioning and testing what we have long been taught can we truly come to accept and internalize these teachings. Searching faith is a necessary prerequisite to owned faith.

The Fourth and fifth stages of James Fowler - *individuating* and *reflective* as well as *conjunctive* faith coincide with this stage. This stage develops in an individual due to critical reflection on the self and on the world-view. As adults, they take responsibility for their emotions, beliefs, attitudes, commitments and life-style. Fowler calls it as 'demythologising stage' which is marked by uncertainty and conflict between personal conviction and the imposition and expectation of society. However, there is openness to a new complexity of faith, but this also increases the awareness of conflicts in one's belief system.

The *conjunctive*¹⁵ stage is when the individual goes through the mid-life crisis. He or she acknowledges the absurdity of life and the transcendence relating reality behind the symbols of inherited systems. Hence, Fowler says that there should be a critical recognition of one's social unconscious - the myths, ideal images and prejudices - built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group, etc. The limits of logic are acknowledged and the paradoxes in life are accepted. Life is understood as a mystery and key to solve it is to be found not with mere critical thinking but with naive faith and simplicity. Faith is enlivened rather by surrendering to the intricate presence of the divine rather than wriggling with the complexities of life.

The individuals in this stage lives and acts in a divided situation - divided between an untransformed world and a transforming vision and loyalties that they have inherited and nurtured. Their convictions and commitments to truth and values are real but the power of evil that has confronted them in their life, is also alarmingly factual. Hence, faith is challenged by the aggression of the faithless world. If proper care is not taken, persons at crisis of identity and

accomplishments may give up faith completely or turn out to be indifferent practitioners of religious rituals in a routine manner.

4.1 The clash of worldviews during the questioning phase

Everyone lives with a world view and all of us have an orientation to the world that situates us with respect to the earth and its happenings, and to our fellow humans and other creatures who live with us on this planet. Our worldview is constructed from the totality of our life experiences. It is made up of womb and birth experiences, of our formative years, of interactions with parents other humans, genetic sensitivities and insensitivities, physical and cultural circumstances, linguistic environments, education and so on. It is the prevailing myth within which we live. We can define a worldview as “*the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things and their relationships.*” So, a worldview is the basic perspective we use to understand the world around us and our experience of it. A worldview is an everyday ordinary-language description of the world that shapes and guides our lives, helping us to explore, understand and explain the world around us and everything in it, and how these are all related to each other, by giving us a way in which we can see them.

All of us live out of a worldview, even if we do not realise it, or are unable to articulate it if asked. But a systematic articulation of a worldview is not what drives us in life; it is the worldview itself which does that, so being able to spell out and examine a worldview is not essential for living. It is not the articulated presentation of the worldview that drives us, but the actual worldview rooted in our deepest being. Thomas Kuhn’s influential book, *the Structure of scientific revolutions*, maintains that both theories and data in science are dependent on the prevailing paradigms of the scientific community. He defined a paradigm as a cluster of conceptual, metaphysical, and methodological presuppositions embodied in a tradition of scientific work. With a new paradigm, the old data are reinterpreted and seen in new ways, and new kinds of data are sought. A paradigm shift is, in Kuhn’s words, “a radical transformation of the scientific imagination”, a ‘scientific revolution’ which is not the product of experiment alone¹⁶. In the choice between paradigms there are no rules for applying scientific

criteria or for judging their relative importance. Their evaluation is an act of judgment by the scientific community. A paradigm defines a community which works together within a set of shared assumptions. An established paradigm is resistant to falsifications, since discrepancies between theory and data can be set aside as anomalies or reconciled by introducing ad hoc hypotheses¹⁷.

a. The Christian worldview

A truly Christian worldview accepts the dominion of God over the world he has made, and made known through his revelation to us in Scripture. We need a worldview because we are creatures of God created to respond to him in how we live our lives, that is, we are responsible beings who cannot hold purely arbitrary beliefs or make unprincipled decisions. We are created responsive creatures, and need something to guide us in the responses we make, to hold our responses together to form a coherent and consistent way of life.

The major themes of a biblical worldview are: **Creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.**

These themes are not simply chronological, although that is part of the structure of Scripture. They are introduced progressively in chronological order, but continue to be expanded and developed and are interwoven with each other throughout the whole of Scripture.

There is not much point in discussing discernment of spirits unless there is a spiritual world to discern. If we are indeed confined to the everyday world of space and time, talking about spiritual influences is quite nonsensical. If one is going to try to distinguish which influences come from God and which come from some other source, it is first of all necessary to believe that there is a spiritual world and that it affects our world profoundly.

One aspect of the New Testament narrative which has been discredited almost universally in modern times is the belief in the realm of spiritual beings, a vast realm of angelic and also demonic beings. Along with the belief in spiritual healing, dreams, visions and other such

intrusions into our self-contained physical world, the idea of active and effective spiritual entities is regarded as absurd.

b. The materialistic worldview/scientific worldview

In the last 500 years, materialistic philosophy has permeated every level of society. So pervasive has it been that most people, in one way or another, have come under its influence. This fundamental materialist philosophy arose from an understanding of the universe which was based on a mechanistic model. Scientific materialism makes two assertions: (1) the scientific method is the only reliable path to knowledge; (2) matter is the fundamental reality in the universe.

Newton built an understating of the universe, complete as far as it went, which was so successful that until the present century it was accepted by all scientists. For Newton matter was extended in space, and reality consisted of concrete objects moving in space and time. Measurement of mass, motion and other properties, and their interrelationships, provided the model of the universe.

Biological science went ahead to attempt to explain life and living phenomena in terms of mechanical causality, using the concepts and physics and chemistry. Darwin enunciated the theory of evolution. Molecular biology has made extraordinary discoveries about the nature and function of genetic material, and in the area of genetic engineering immense new visions have opened up, all within the framework of this mechanistic system. Life, itself, then, came to be explained exclusively in terms of mechanism. In cosmology and the natural sciences generally the existence of God was no longer necessary. In psychology the existence of a soul was considered superfluous. The whole human being could be explained in terms of mechanistic causality.

In the recent past, new wrinkles were added to the fabric of the universe: quantum mechanics, the Uncertainty Principle, String theory, dark matter, Higg's particle, black holes, expanding universe, and Relativity, to name a few. The whole field of communication has been modified by the new computer communication technologies using the different frequencies of the electromagnetic waves. Neuroscience has opened up new ways of looking at the functioning of

the brain. There is a whole lot of research trying to understand the source of emotions.

c. The holographic worldview

In the mid-1960's, Holography was developed, in which the interference patterns of twin laser beams create realistic three-dimensional images. Interestingly enough, any fragment of the holographic film can be used to create the entire original 3-D image. What is fascinating about the hologram is that if the photographic plate on which the object is recorded is cut into pieces, each piece when illuminated by coherent light will reconstruct the whole image, perfect in every detail, although less sharply defined. The hologram is a concrete example of the principle that the whole is present in every part.

If a hologram of a rose is cut in half and then illuminated by a laser, each half will still be found to contain the entire image of the rose. Indeed, even if the halves are divided again, each snippet of film will always be found to contain a smaller but intact version of the original image. Unlike normal photographs, every part of a hologram contains all the information possessed by the whole. The "whole in every part" nature of a hologram provides us with an entirely new way of understanding organization and order. The new physics presents us with an understanding of the physical world as a field of energies, an integrated whole in which the whole is present in every part.

Each of us, in the cells of our body, is linked with the original matter of the universe because the entire universe, and everything in it, is one integrated whole. We are all linked with all the original cells which began to form on this earth as it reached a state when life could emerge. The status of the observer in science has also been reconsidered. The earlier accounts had identified objectivity with the separability of the observer from the object of observation. But in quantum physics the influence of the process of observation on the system observed is crucial. In relativity, the most basic measurements, such as the mass, velocity and length of an object, depend on the frame of reference of the observer.

In addition to its phantomlike nature, such a universe would possess other rather startling features. If the apparent separateness

of subatomic particles is illusory, it means that at a deeper level of reality all things in the universe are infinitely interconnected. The electrons in a carbon atom in the human brain are connected to the subatomic particles that comprise every salmon that swims, every heart that beats, and every star that shimmers in the sky. Everything interpenetrates everything, and although human nature may seek to categorize and pigeonhole and subdivide, the various phenomena of the universe, all apportionments are of necessity artificial and all of nature is ultimately a seamless web.

In a holographic universe, even time and space could no longer be viewed as fundamentals. Because concepts such as location break down in a universe in which nothing is truly separate from anything else, time and three-dimensional space would also have to be viewed as projections of this deeper order. At its deeper level reality is a sort of superhologram in which the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously

I have listed just three worldviews. There are many others that a person may hold . Today we live in a world where a person may simultaneously hold multiple worldviews. When I teach Physics, I work out of a scientific world view. As a priest, I work out of a biblical world view. As a spiritual guide, I use a holographic worldview. At times they clash with each other. Some people find it very difficult to live with multiple worldviews without questioning their faith. Some others give up their faith because they believe in a scientific worldview.

5. Owned Faith And Wisdom (early adulthood onwards)

This stage only comes through the searching stage. This is the strong, personal faith that one witnesses to and one is willing to die for. This final stage of faith development, **owned faith**, rarely occurs before young adulthood. Because of the serious struggle with doubt that precedes it, owned faith may appear as a great illumination or enlightenment. It's now our own faith and no longer merely the faith of our parents, family, etc. Even though doubts and questions remain, those who own their faith want to witness it by personal

and social action, and are willing and able to stand up for what they believe.

James Fowler calls this stage as the stage of *universalizing* faith. It is an age of enlightenment and wisdom, which overcomes the paradoxes and uncertainties of the previous stages and arrives at the stage of making the imperatives of absolute love and justice real and tangible. Those who attain this stage of faith become actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. They would embrace everyone with compassion as members of a universal community, as St. Paul claims, ‘they have become all things for all people’.¹⁸

Conclusion

For a life that is Faith-filled, for a Faith that is lively, for a full-flowering and for a fruitful Faith all these three stages of Faith, Reason and Wisdom must be present for the faith journey of a spiritual person at any given time. Insistence on one at the expense of the other(s) can be detrimental. Faith as a process involves one leading to the other. My Faith is “richest”, “deepest” and “fullest” when all stages are operative.

Notes

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