

FAITH STATES

A DYNAMIC THEORY OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- ▶ Describe and discuss origins of faith development ideologies from early Christendom
- ▶ Summarize and critique modern faith development theories consistent with a Protestant understanding of faith
- ▶ Analyze Faith State theory and discuss potential applications

What is *faith*?

- ▶ Hebrews 11:1, 6 – Basic definition of faith; and it's a must have
- ▶ Eerdman's Bible Dictionary
 - ▶ Faith – Human belief in and reliance upon the divine.
- ▶ Romans 5:1 – We are justified by faith
- ▶ Ephesians 2:8-10 – Faith Originates with God and is connected to our design for action
- ▶ James 2 – Faith is intended to result in active obedience
- ▶ John 3:36 – Belief is equated to obedience

What is *mature faith*?

- ▶ *Faith must be characterized by heartfelt belief and exemplified in Christ centered action.*

How does *faith grow*?

- ▶ 2 Peter 1:5-8 – We are to be adding to our faith
- ▶ Hebrews 12 – In light of examples of faith, we are to endure or persevere as we live out our lives
- ▶ As Paul says in Romans 4, faith is what justifies and is the source of righteousness (Romans 3), but faith is proven out by works.

Faith development

EARLY CHRISTENDOM

How does faith develop?

- ▶ A historical example – Teresa of Avila
 - ▶ Born - March 28, 1515; Died – October 4, 1582 (67 yrs. old)
 - ▶ Reformers of Carmelite Order
 - ▶ Mystic – focused on contemplative communion with the Father
 - ▶ Motto - *Lord, either let me suffer or let me die*



Interior Castle (Mansions)

- ▶ Picture: "I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle, made of a single diamond...in which there are many rooms..."
- ▶ Structure: "You must not imagine these mansions as arranged in a row, one behind another, but fix your attention on the centre, the room or palace occupied by the King." p. 21



Interior Castle (Mansions)

- ▶ **Foundational belief:** "We shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God: let us think of His greatness and then come back to our own baseness; by looking at His purity we shall see our foulness; by meditating upon His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble." p. 23

First Mansions

- ▶ Soul is enjoying grace but surrounded by sin and tempted to leave the dwelling place.
 - ▶ Progression to the next stage indicates a deepening of roots and communion with the Lord
 - ▶ Here she warns of going back from later mansions to this one, indicating the possibility of moving back and forth, not just forward progression (p. 25)
 - ▶ Caving in to temptation and sin contributes to moving backward, thus connecting belief and action in faith development

Second Mansions

- ▶ Very similar to first mansions
- ▶ Practice and Prayer – moving toward daily prayer and increased interest in contemplation. Sin is still close. Can go back to first mansions.
- ▶ Able to more readily hear God here through sermons and conversations

Third Mansions

- ▶ Desire for Exemplary Life – faith has moved to a place of desire to move forward in practice and service to the Lord
- ▶ "For they are so near the first mansions that they might easily return to them..." p. 45
- ▶ Obedience in daily walk is linked to belief

Fourth Mansions

- ▶ Deeper communion with God
- ▶ A recognition of the difference between thought and understanding
- ▶ Reptiles of previous mansions have a harder time entering here: A Corner has been turned
- ▶ It is also harder to backslide into previous mansions from here
- ▶ Now, more contemplative prayer is achievable

Fifth Mansions

- ▶ Union where soul is readied to receive gifts from God
- ▶ The acts of Loving God and Loving Our Neighbor work toward achieving this end
- ▶ Our actions line up more thoroughly with God's will as we love others
- ▶ Sufferings here point us back to the Father
- ▶ Devil seen as still at work trying to turn people back toward previous mansions
- ▶ Active submission to the Father's will is part of maturity

Sixth Mansions

- ▶ Equates deepening of faith with successful resolution of greater trials
- ▶ The soul is more concerned about God's glory than its own
- ▶ It is now much more challenging to backslide, but also viewed as temporary (come and go from here)
- ▶ Results in authentic grief over disconnection with God whether due to sin or withdrawal as intimacy with God builds

Seventh Mansions

- ▶ The goal of faith: Heaven
 - ▶ Arrival – nothing can pull someone from this mansion
 - ▶ Can only arrive here by God's will. Humanity does not possess the ability to make it here on its own.

Teresa's Conclusions

- ▶ "Reflect carefully on this, for it is so important that I can hardly lay too much stress on it. Fix your eyes on the Crucified and nothing else will be of much importance to you," p. 163
- ▶ "Anyone who fails to go forward begins to go back, and love, I believe, can never be content to stay for long where it is," p. 164

Interior Castle - Summary

The Main Points

- ▶ Teresa believed there was the ability to move back and forth from one mansion to another. Not fixed stage-to-stage development.
- ▶ Fluid development based on experience
- ▶ The closer one grows with God, the stronger faith becomes, the better
- ▶ Facing sufferings and continued returning to the Lord are part of growth

Faith development

CURRENT THEORIES

Prominent Theories – Fowler

Fowler

1. Intuitive-Projective
2. Mythic-Literal
3. Synthetic-Conventional

This is the stage of preschool children in which fantasy and reality often get mixed together. However, during this stage, our most basic ideas about God are usually picked up from our parents and/or society.

When children become school-age, they start understanding the world in more logical ways. They generally accept the stories told them by their faith community but tend to understand them in very literal ways. [A few people remain in this stage through adulthood.]

Most people move on to this stage as teenagers. At this point, their life has grown to include several different social circles and there is a need to pull it all together. When this happens, a person usually adopts some sort of all-encompassing belief system. However, at this stage, people tend to have a hard time seeing outside their box and don't recognize that they are "inside" a belief system.

Prominent Theories - Fowler

4. Individuative-Reflective

This is the tough stage, often begun in young adulthood, when people start seeing outside the box and realizing that there are other "boxes". They begin to critically examine their beliefs on their own and often become disillusioned with their former faith.

5. Conjunctive

It is rare for people to reach this stage before mid-life. This is the point when people begin to realize the limits of logic and start to accept the paradoxes in life. They begin to see life as a mystery and often return to sacred stories and symbols but this time without being stuck in a theological box.

6. Universalizing

Few people reach this stage. Those who do live their lives to the full in service of others without any real worries or doubts.

Prominent Theories - Peck

- I. Chaotic-Antisocial

People stuck at this stage are usually self-centered and often find themselves in trouble due to their unprincipled living. If they do end up converting to the next stage, it often occurs in a very dramatic way.

- II. Formal-Institutional

At this stage people rely on some sort of institution (such as a church) to give them stability. They become attached to the forms of their religion and get extremely upset when these are called into question.

- III. Skeptic-Individual

Those who break out of the previous stage usually do so when they start seriously questioning things on their own. A lot of the time, this stage ends up being very non-religious and some people stay in it permanently.

- IV. Mystic-Communal

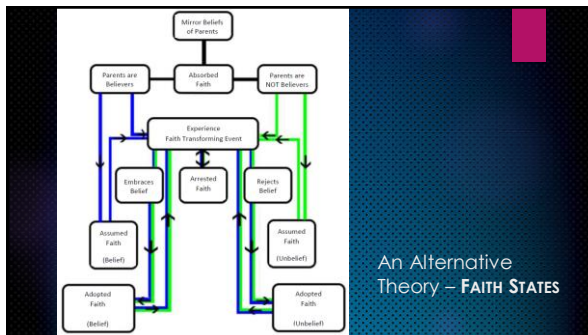
People who reach this stage start to realize that there is truth to be found in both the previous two stages and that life can be paradoxical and full of mystery. Emphasis is placed more on community than on individual concerns.

Critique

- ▶ Simple Linear Design
 - ▶ Belief yields actions with no other factors
- ▶ Unilateral Direction
 - ▶ Only moving forward or stagnation

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A PROPOSED THEORY



Alternative – FAITH STATES

- ▶ Absorbed Faith– Beliefs of parents are mirrored and uncritically mimicked and accepted (low exploration, low commitment)
- ▶ Assumed Faith– Adopts unchallenged belief of parents (low exploration, high commitment)
- ▶ Arrested Faith– Beliefs are suspended to respond to faith transforming event (high exploration, low commitment)
- ▶ Adopted Faith– Beliefs are owned in a new way due to resolution of faith transforming event (high exploration, high commitment)

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- ▶ A **Faith Transforming Event (FTE)** is a macro-transaction where an individual is no longer able to reconcile prior beliefs due to new information the individual either voluntarily discovered or involuntarily confronted.
 - ▶ Can happen at any time
 - ▶ Always leads to questioning
 - ▶ Can happen more than once
 - ▶ Can lead to Questioning, Arrested Faith, or Adopted Faith

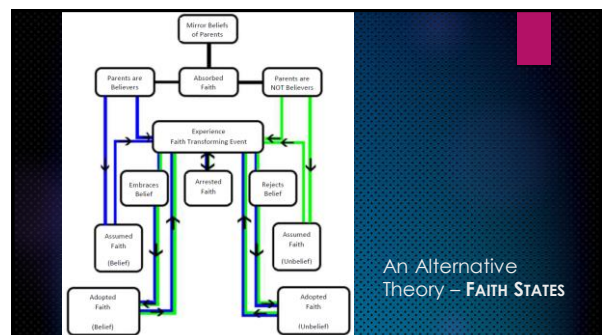
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- ▶ The **Faith Transforming Event interaction (FTEI)** is constituted by the measurable aspects of the FTE including proximity, magnitude, resolution, and attitude.
- ▶ Proximity: How recently has the FTE occurred
- ▶ Magnitude: Scale of 1 to 10, how big was the FTE (How much did it affect you?)
 - ▶ Proximity could influence sense of magnitude (in middle of it, seems bigger)
- ▶ If the individual primarily processes information experientially (if they are a 'feeler') this could influence view of magnitude

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FTEI continued:

- ▶ Resolution: If the FTE is concluded, has the person returned to previous position with more resolve, or have they shifted to a new position
 - ▶ Some will wait to see how God acts first, which in and of itself may indicate information about their faith state
- ▶ Could be measured on a scale from -1 to 1 (-1 indicating transition away from prior belief, 0 indicating questioning, and 1 indicating reaffirmation of prior held belief)
- ▶ Cognitively based
- ▶ Attitude: How does the individual 'feel' about God at the moment? Did He 'come through'? Did He 'let the person down'?
 - ▶ Could be measured similar to Resolution (-1 indicating attitude toward God shifted away from previous, 0 indicating no change, 1 indicating attitude toward God has been thoroughly reinforced and deepened)
 - ▶ Emotionally based



Potential Applications

- ▶ A new method of measuring faith maturity
 - ▶ Faith Maturity Scale and Spiritual Well-Being Scale have been used but experience limitations with evangelicals
- ▶ Utility in local churches
 - ▶ Considerations for Sunday School Placement
- ▶ But, validation and assessment needs to be done
 - ▶ Which are my next steps.

Discussion

- ▶ Questions?
- ▶ Handouts and PowerPoint are available at:
<http://www.faihtstates.com/aacc>