

The Process of Maturing: Human Childhood and Adulthood in a Theological Perspective

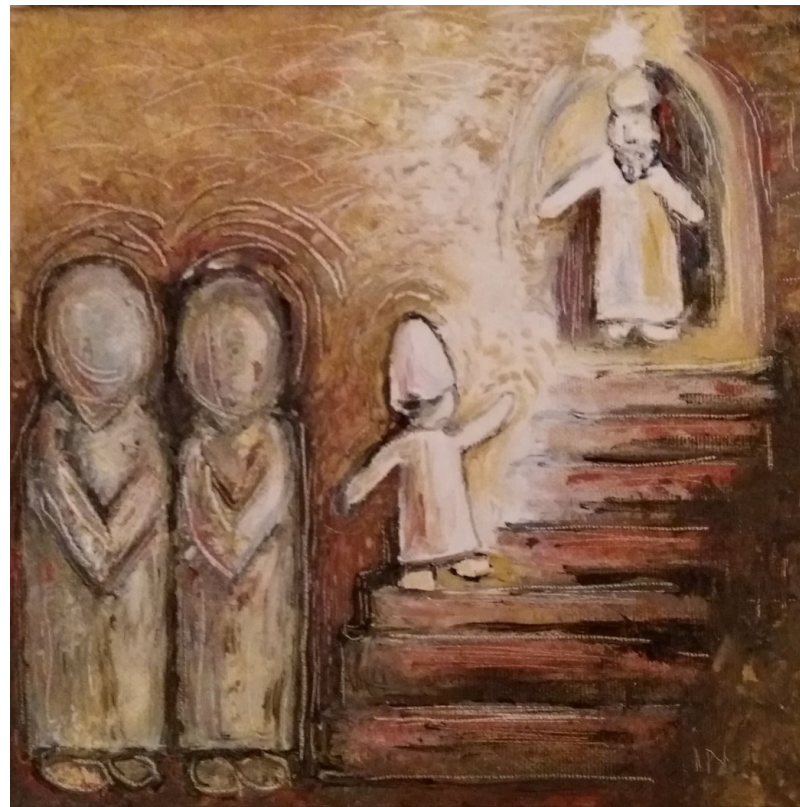
Ivana Noble: Introduction

International Scientific Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Conference - UNCE No. 204052 (HUM/012)

Prague, 2-5 September 2021

In Cooperation with Carmelite Monastery Hradčany and Jabok College

Mary Hops on the Temple Stairs, IN 2021



The Process of Maturing – Psychology of Religion

In 1981 James William Fowler (1940–2015) an American Methodist theologian and Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University, wrote a book which soon became a standard textbook for Psychology of Religion, *Stages of Faith*. In his sketch of the developmental process in "human faith", he integrated Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, Erik Erikson's developmental psychology, and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral theory.



The Process of Maturing – Psychology of Religion

- What are you spending and being spent for? What commands and receives your best time, your best energy?
- What causes, dreams, goals or institutions are you pouring out your life for?
- As you live your life, what power or powers do you fear or dread? What power or powers do you rely on and trust?
- To what or whom are you committed in life? In death?
- With whom or what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love?
- What *are* those most sacred hopes, the most compelling goals and purposes in your life?

James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, New York: Harper Collins, 1981, 3.

The Process of Maturing – Psychology of Religion

Fowler's Six Stages of Faith

- 1) intuitive-projective
 - 2) mythic-literal
 - 3) synthetic-conventional
 - 4) individuative-reflective
 - 5) conjunctive
 - 6) universalizing faith
- the stages of faith do not necessarily correspond either to physical or to psychological and moral maturation
 - “Faith is not always religious in its content or context. ...Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose.”
(Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 4)

Theology as an Obstacle?



“Rather steadfastly I have kept the focus on *human* faith.... I have avoided giving direct attention to normative perspectives on the being, character or will of God. I have hoped that readers from a variety of religious affiliation would find this way of looking at so fundamental a feature of human life to be fruitful and informing.” (Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 292)

“The structural-developmental perspective , with its formal descriptions of stage-like positions and styles of being in faith, has a contribution to make in clarifying what might be meant by a *good faith*. The stage theory is not a theology ...has no religious richness or sufficiency to offer. Apart from the stories, the images of power and the centres of value that particular faith traditions can offer the faith stages are mere scaffolding. What these stages do offer, however, is this: they provide formally normative criteria for determining how adequate, responsible and free of idolatrous distortions our ways of appropriating and living from our particular traditions of faith actually are.” (Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 293)

The Process of Maturing: A Theological Perspective

St Paul, Catacomb of St Thekla, Rome, 4th century

1 Corinthians 13:11-12 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Philippians 3:12-15a Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind;



Varied Images of Childhood and Maturity



Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Matthew 18:3 Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 11:16-19 But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

The Process of Maturing

St Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c.202)

But things which are made by [God], in as much as they have received a beginning of their existence at a later time, must fall short of the one who made them. Things which have come into existence recently cannot said to be unoriginated. To the extent that they are not unoriginated they fall short of being perfect, for, in as much as they have come into being more recently, they are infants, and, in as much as they are infants, they are unaccustomed to and unpracticed in perfect discipline. A mother can offer adult food to an infant, but the infant cannot yet digest food suitable for someone older. Similarly God, for his part, could have granted perfection to humankind from the beginning, but humankind, being in its infancy, would not have been able to sustain it. (*Against Heresies* IV.38.1)



St Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.22.4.

He came to save all through means of Himself — all, I say, who through Him are born again to God — infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all.

The Process of Maturing St Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c.202)



“Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.”

St Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*
IV.20.7.

A human being alive is the glory of God, and the vision of God is the life of a human being.

Against Heresies IV.20.7.