



Phases of faith

I have walked through many lives, some of them my own. *Stanley Kunitz*

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else” *1 Thessalonians 3:12*



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It's in the eyes, a reflection



In his book *Painting the word* John Drury analyses Titian's *The Vendramin Family* (above) exploring the different stages of development through how the eyes are used. This usefully also illustrates the phases of faith. There are the children's gazes, on the right, 'lively, but with a fidgetiness that can tip over into boredom' and on the left 'hemmed in by their elders... two have lapsed into bored abstraction while the third is just entering the adult world of steady contemplation.' This coming-of-age is exemplified by the 'fervent gazes' of the young and the mature man in crimson robes. The old man in the centre, however is friendly, comfortable, familial and welcomes us too to walk through our many lives.

Additional reading material (poems):

*The Layers** by Stanley Kunitz
Fathoms by RS Thomas

Wherever we need to go

The stages of faith are a useful map and a ray of hope for the pilgrim. They have an ancient history trawling back to St Theresa of Avila's interior rooms, the progress of the soul in the writings of St John of the Cross, John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's progress* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. One image analogy, among many, is that of the successive rings seen through a section of a tree. Faith is a dynamic, changing and evolving process of becoming. It is a verb, not static like a noun, something we have or have not. It is a way of living that encompasses all of life. Beliefs may remain unaltered but what changes is our understanding, experience and outworking of these beliefs. Of six stages of faith that for example James Fowler outlines none is higher or better than any other though each phase does offer a deeper and broader understanding and experience of faith than the stage which precedes it. Yet I turn, I turn.../...every stone on the road/ precious to me*. *Transitions between faith phases are not a stroll in the park but a shipwreck*. Dissolution of sense and an experience of ambiguity and alienation are typical. Such uncertainty may cause paralysis and choosing not to move on.

Phase/Ring 1. The innocent - Similar to pre-school's blend of fantasy and experience.

Phase/Ring 2. The Literalist - Strongly influenced by rules and authoritative teaching and a literal interpretation of the Bible. God is a stern but loving parent.

Phase/Ring 3. The Loyalist - A tribal stage of conformity to deep convictions and security in strong commitments. God is external and transcendent.

Phase/Ring 4. The Critic - Received beliefs and values now examined and a new sense of self emerges, and of standing out against significant others.

Phase/Ring 5. The Seer - Seldom reached before mid-life. Humbled by the unconscious and unknown. Aware of the need to hold and face polar tensions, truth is multiform and complex, will live with ambiguity, wonder and mystery, open to other traditions and receptive to a return to symbols.

Phase/Ring 6. The Saint - Decentering of self to receive others regardless and abandonment to the ultimate, universal authority of God in all of life is a notable feature.

Read Alan Jamieson's *A Churchless Faith* pp 110-120 and *Women's spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, Joann Wolski Conn (ed.), pp 226-232

The Coracle Trust - Helping transition in faith through the life stages

Web: www.coracletrust.org.uk | Email: coracletrust@gmail.com | Phone: +44 (0)131 668 3943