

14. Psychosocial Development and Faith

As we showed in our presentation of Erikson in Part II, his theory undertakes the coordination of a dizzying range of factors. In the study of ego development he has tried to relate biological maturation with changes in social role and to coordinate both with an account of persons' conscious and unconscious psychic modes of adaptation. Erikson is frequently criticized for the breadth and inclusiveness—and the resulting lack of precision—of his constructions and interpretations. Efforts to design empirical tests of the claims of his theory have yielded very mixed results.²⁰ Nonetheless, the central lines of his account of the growth and crises of the healthy personality have much to commend them. They were formed out of the testing and refinement in clinical experience of Freud's pioneering work. They were tested and corrected for bias in the context of several kinds of cross-cultural studies. Moreover, their use and widespread intuitive acceptance by a large and thoughtful audience represents another important, if unscientific, kind of validation.

From the beginning Erikson's account of stages or eras and the emergent crises which typify them has served as an important framework for our studies. Initially I was inclined to hypothesize stages of faith that largely paralleled Erikson's eras. After encountering the structural-developmental theories, however, and after coming to terms with their more rigorous understanding of structural stages, I began to change the focus of my effort to find stages of faith. I and my associates began to rely on Erikson's theory more as a background against which to hear and analyze the life stories that persons shared with us. We began to realize that a time of movement from one of Erikson's eras to another frequently correlated with or helped to precipitate a

change in the structural operations of faith. *But not always.* More recently we have come to see that a person's structural stage of faith (correlated with other structural aspects) has important implications for the way the person will construct the experience of crisis that inaugurates a new Eriksonian developmental era. Research by Richard Shulik, for example, has shown that elderly persons best described by faith Stage 3* construct their experience of the process of aging in qualitatively different ways than do those best described by faith Stages 4 or 5.²¹

Any effort to synthesize the perspectives of structural-developmental and psychosocial theories must come to terms with what Shulik's findings help us to see: in terms of the structural stages, normal persons can reach a longlasting or even a lifetime equilibration at any Stage from 2 on. This fact affects the *way* they experience and deal with the psychosocial crises Erikson has identified, but it in no way means that they will avoid or bypass them. Research is likely to show that a person of twenty-two, whose moral and faith structuring is best described by Stage 2, will indeed encounter the physical, social and emotional issues of the crisis of intimacy. But he or she will "construct" and experience them without benefit of a capacity for mutual interpersonal perspective taking, without a self-reflective sense of identity and with a construction of the ultimate environment likely based on intuitions of cosmic reciprocity.** As will become clear in subsequent sections of the book, other twenty-two year olds, structurally operating at Stage 3 or 4, will construct, interpret and respond to the issues of the intimacy crisis in qualitatively different ways than one at Stage 2. In some respects, we might say, *it is not even the same crisis for persons at these three different stages.*

Perhaps a chart will help to visualize the interplay we see between structural and psychosocial stages (Table 3.1). The left-hand column lists structural-developmental stages. Across the bottom are the psychosocial stages of Erikson. The solid segments of the horizontal bar lines indicate the kind of optimal correlations between structural equili-

*Faith stages will be distinguished from other stages in this manner.

**Cosmic reciprocity means the projection of a reciprocal sense of fairness—that is, goodness should be rewarded, badness punished; if I do my part you should do yours,—as the guiding image for grasping the character of the ultimate environment. It is a "pre-personal" way of constructing an image of God or reality. A Stage 2 atheist is one whose rejected God is of this sort.

Table 3.1 Interplay Between Structural and Psychosocial Stages

<i>Structural Stages</i>	<i>Trust vs. Mistrust</i>	<i>Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt</i>	<i>Initiative vs. Guilt</i>	<i>Industry vs. Inferiority</i>	<i>Identity vs. Role confusion</i>	<i>Intimacy vs. Isolation</i>	<i>Generativity vs. Stagnation</i>	<i>Integrity vs. Despair</i>
6								
5								
4								
3								
2								
1								
0								
<i>Average Ages</i>	0-2	2-3	3-6	6-12	13-20	21--	35--	60--

brations at each stage that would shape the person's experience of all the subsequent psychosocial crises.

In sum, Erikson's eras and crises provide a helpful guide to what Sheehy calls "predictable crises" of the life cycle. From our standpoint, those crises of trust, autonomy, initiative, and so forth, which are reasonably correlated with maturation and age, represent life challenges with which all persons must deal. As a part of their coping, in their adaptation, faith forms, functions and is changed. If Piaget and Kohlberg have given us impetus to study the structuring activity of faith, Erikson has helped us in many ways to focus on the *functional* aspect of faith, the expected existential issues with which it must help people cope at whatever structural stage across the life cycle.

Almost as fundamental for our work as Erikson's theory of the developmental eras and their virtues has been his own understanding of and attention to faith. His account of the crisis of the first stage, basic trust vs. mistrust, avowedly deals with the foundations of faith in human life. Erikson carefully avoids any heavy-handed determinism of the sort that would suggest that everything decisive for faith occurs in the first twelve or the first sixty months of life. But he does make plain how powerful a factor the quality of the child's first mutuality with the conditions of his or her existence and with those who mediate the ultimate environment is for all that comes thereafter in identity and faith. In a remarkably suggestive subtheme of his book *Young Man Luther*, Erikson, carefully avoiding the reductionism that marks the work of Freud and many Freudians on these matters, suggests some of the universal features of religious images of God that have their infantile origins in the child's experiences with his or her parents.²² His attention to *fidelity* as the virtue emerging in adolescence and the accompanying attention to ideology as the young person's necessary concern for finding a comprehensive "world image" provide access to other central aspects of faith. The study of identity crisis and resolution, through the reshaping of images of faith by young Luther, opens ways to understanding the interplay of faith and culture as well as many other rich issues. Erikson's representation of ethical development in terms of widened care and more inclusive identity contributes an important set of criteria for growth in faith as well as in moral action. Avoiding the trap of identifying faith with religion or belief, Erikson suggests something of his overall orientation toward faith with this statement:

Each society and each age must find the institutionalized form of reverence which derives vitality from its world image. . . . The clinician can only observe that many are proud to be without religion whose children cannot afford their being without it. One the other hand, there are many who seem to derive a vital faith from social action or scientific pursuit. And again, there are many who profess faith, yet in practice breathe mistrust both of life and man.²³

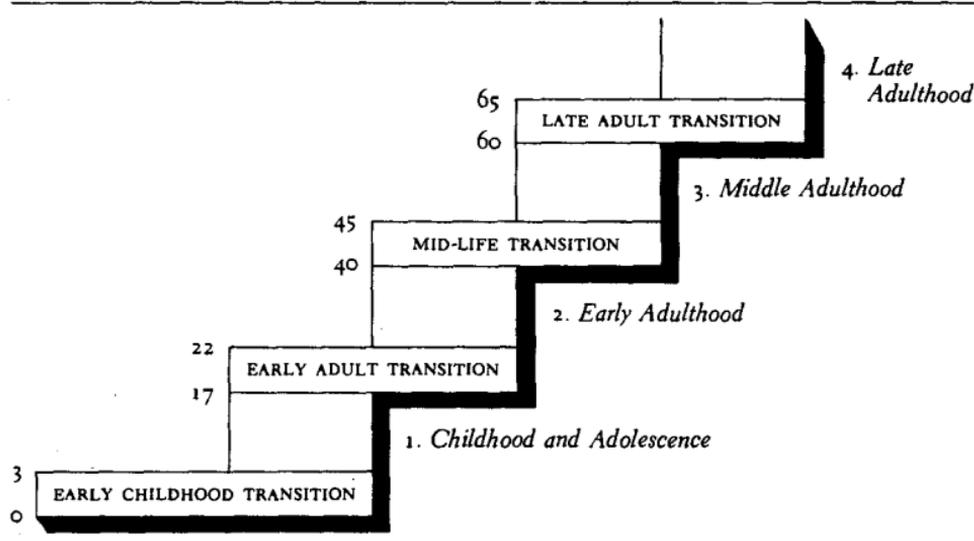
I have found it easier to put on paper the influence of Piaget and Kohlberg on our work than I have that of Erikson. I believe this is because Erikson's influence on me has been both more pervasive and more subtle; it has touched me at convictional depths that the structural developmentalists have not addressed. As unsystematic and unsatisfactory as it may seem, I simply have to say that Erikson's work has become part of the interpretative mind-set I bring to research on faith development. The explicit references in these pages to aspects of that influence are, I'm afraid, really only suggestive clues to a much greater—and more grateful—indebtedness.

In the late stages of completing this book I had my first opportunity to meet and work with Daniel Levinson. I had read and taught Levinson's thought as expressed in *The Seasons of a Man's Life*.²⁴ In my reading and teaching, however, I had focused more on Levinson's "periods" and "transitions" in adult development than on the broader framework of "eras" he has proposed. As I heard him speak and then when I conversed with him privately, two new understandings struck me forcefully. First, I began to see that for Levinson, time—chronological time by which we measure aging—has ontological significance. Being and time are profoundly linked in our experiences of self and others and in our ways of responding to our world. Second, I recognized that while the *periods* Levinson has identified may be variable and susceptible of differing rates and intensities of transition, the impact on one's way of being in the world resulting from the transition from one *era* of life to another is inevitable, unvariable and necessarily profound.

Levinson has come to view the life cycle as divided into eras of roughly twenty years duration.

Infancy, childhood and adolescence constitute the life cycle's first broad era. Revolutions in both physical and psychic life are more frequent in this first era than in later ones, due to the rapidity of bodily maturation and of cognitive and emotional development. The years

Table 3.2 Levinson's Eras of the Life Cycle



from seventeen to twenty-two, in Levinson's view, represent both the culmination of the first era and the inauguration of the next, the first adult era. In these years a person must complete the tasks of forming a personality, of acquiring basic abilities to think and learn, of shaping values and beliefs and of preparing for separation from the matrix of home and family that has nurtured and sustained growth in the first era.

Overlapping with this work of culminating the first era, the young girl-woman or boy-man must begin the tasks of creating a life structure for the next developmental era, the first adult era. Issues of choice must be faced: the focus of study or apprenticeship, the patterns of intimacy and partners in it, the shaping of a personal and vocational "dream." The young adult takes on the tasks of building a first adult life structure that, with necessary modifications and changes, will carry him or her to mid-life.

The years from forty to forty-five Levinson sees as another major era transition. Here again the tasks of one era need to be brought to culmination and completion, even as the person begins to undertake the construction of a life structure for the second adult era, "middle adulthood." Assessments of the last era's "dream," of its patterns of commitment in work and love, and of its dominant images of self, world and reality demand attention. One's sense of time and timing begins to change. Goals, priorities, relationships, and roles must be

examined and may need to be changed. To a degree that surprised me, Levinson stressed how the early phases of the middle adult era parallel the uncertainties and stress of the twenties. We are, he points out, novices at middle adulthood, having to reshape significantly our ways of being.

The years from sixty to sixty-five, Levinson believes, bring another era shift. They represent the culmination of middle adulthood and the beginning of a third adult era, late adulthood.

I offer this overview of Levinson's account of the principal eras and transitions in the life cycle because I am coming to believe that they hold important clues for understanding the natural relation of transitions in psychosocial development to structural stage change in faith development. The results of our research so far suggest the *optimal* parallels shown in Table 3.3

A reflective examination of these parallels suggests that during the rapid revolutions in cognitive, psychosocial and physical growth that occur during the years from birth to twenty-two (Levinson's first era), we recognize four different structural stages of faith. As we shall see, not all children make these faith stage transitions, just as not all children attain the cognitive structures of formal operational thought. Ordinarily, however, Synthetic-Conventional faith does take form during adolescence and represents the culminating form of faith for the first era of the life cycle.

The period from seventeen to twenty-two, the time Levinson sees as marking the transition to the early adult era, corresponds with what appears to be the optimal time for beginning a transition from a Synthetic-Conventional toward an Individuative-Reflective stage of faith. As our subsequent discussion of these stages will show, many young adults, for a variety of reasons, do *not* enter upon a faith stage transition at this point. This group moves into the creation of a first adult life structure guided by their Synthetic-Conventional faiths. As they encounter the various predictable and unpredictable crises of their twenties and thirties some of them will make belated and usually more difficult transitions in faith stage. Some never do. Only with extended longitudinal studies will we gain reliable knowledge on these matters. Our preliminary research suggests, however, that if the transition from Synthetic-Conventional to Individuative-Reflective faith does not occur before or during the mid-life transition, its chances of occurring at all decrease markedly.

Table 3.3 Psychosocial and Faith Stages: Optimal Parallels

<i>Levinson's Eras and Erikson's Psychosocial Stages:</i>	<i>Fowler's Faith Stages</i>
<i>Era of Infancy, Childhood and Adolescence</i>	
Trust vs. Mistrust	Undifferentiated Faith (Infancy)
Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt	{ 1. Intuitive-Projective Faith (Early Childhood)
Initiative vs. Guilt	
Industry vs. Inferiority	2. Mythic-Literal Faith (School Years)
Identity vs. Role Confusion.	3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Adolescence)
<i>First Adult Era</i>	
Intimacy vs. Isolation	4. Individuative-Reflective Faith (Young Adulthood)
<i>Middle Adult Era</i>	
Generativity vs. Stagnation	5. Conjunctive Faith (Mid-life and Beyond)
<i>Late Adult Era</i>	
Integrity vs. Despair	6. Universalizing Faith

From *Seasons of a Man's Life* by Daniel J. Levinson and others © 1978 by Daniel J. Levinson. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

So for some adults Synthetic-Conventional faith becomes a stable, equilibrated, lifelong structural style. For others it gives way, in the early adult era, to an Individuative-Reflective style. The structuring of this latter stage is ideally suited to the tasks and challenges of the first adult era. Again, we find that for a fair number of adults this stage, formed in the twenties or thirties, becomes a permanently equilibrated style of orientation. Although it may suffer buffeting in the middle adult transition, it can persist and sustain persons through the middle adult years. Our knowledge of this is based more on observations and speculation than on longitudinal research. My hypothesis, however, is that the work of the mid-life transition is better done if it includes or corresponds to a transition in faith stages as well.

It appears that at each of the major era transitions the shaping of the new era's life structure is enhanced if we engage in those tasks bringing new and enriched ways of being in faith. Put negatively, to approach a new era in the adult life cycle while clinging too tightly to the structural style of faith employed during the culminating phase of the previous era is to risk anachronism. It means attacking a new agenda of life tasks and a potential new richness in the understanding of life with the limiting pattern of knowing, valuing and interpreting experiences that served the previous era. Such anachronism virtually assures that one will settle for a narrower and shallower faith than one needs.

This preliminary look at optimal relations between psychosocial development and structural-developmental stages of faith may help clarify in what sense faith stages may be said to be normative. The faith stages soon to be discussed are not to be understood as an achievement scale by which to evaluate the worth of persons. Nor do they represent educational or therapeutic goals toward which to hurry people. Seeing their optimal correlations with psychosocial eras gives a sense of how time, experience, challenge and nurture are required for growth in faith. Education and nurture should aim at the full realization of the potential strength of faith at each stage and at keeping the reworking of faith that comes with stage changes current with the parallel transitional work in psychosocial eras. Remedial or therapeutic nurture is called for when the anachronism of a lagging faith stage fails to keep pace with psychosocial growth. Less frequently, but just as important, sometimes precocious faith development outstrips or gets ahead of psychosocial growth. In this situation help may be needed in overcoming or reworking crippled psychosocial functioning.

NOTES

1. For such a position see Gerhard Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
2. See Jane Loevinger, *Ego Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976).
3. In this position I am indebted—as in many places—to H. Richard Niebuhr. See especially his *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) and *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).
4. Flannery O'Connor, "The Turkey," in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), pp. 42–53.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 48, parenthesis added.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
9. See William F. Lynch, S.J., *Images of Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).
10. For a comparison of behaviorist, maturationist and structural-developmental approaches in the study of moral development see L. Kohlberg and R. Mayer, "Development as the Aim of Education," *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 42, no. 4 (Nov., 1972).
11. For a powerful critique of the postivistic philosophies of science to which Piaget is responding and by which his epistemological focus is largely determined, see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
12. James Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning" in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett, 1980), pp. 61–62.
13. See Ernest Wallwork, "Morality, Religion and Kohlberg's Theory" in Brenda Munsey, ed., *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1980), pp. 269–297.
14. Jean Piaget, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, trans. Wolfe Mays (New York: World, Meridian Books, 1971).
15. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," p. 63.
16. William F. Lynch, S.J., *Images of Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 19.
17. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Continuities in Childhood and Adult Moral Reasoning Revisited" in Paul B. Baltes and K. Warner Schaie, eds., *Life-Span Developmental Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1973), pp. 179–204.
18. See Stanley Hauerwas, "Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life" in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett, 1980), pp. 441–484.
19. Daniel Levinson et al., *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Knopf, 1978); George E. Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); Roger L. Gould, *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978); Gail Sheehy, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (New York: Dutton, 1976).

20. See Stuart T. Hauser, *Black and White Identity Formation* (New York: Wiley, 1971), pp. 7-20.
21. Richard Norman Shulik, "Faith Development, Moral Development, and Old Age: An Assessment of Fowler's Faith Development Paradigm" and Aging" (Ph.D. diss. Committee on Human Development, Department of Behavioral Science, University of Chicago, 1979).
22. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 263-266.
23. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 251.
24. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*.