

K. Helmut Reich -

- holds doctoral degrees in Electrical Engineering (Technical University of Brunswick, Germany), Physics (University of Nottingham, England) and Theology (psychology of religion, University of Utrecht, the Netherlands). He currently does research in cognitive and religious development and is best known for his 2002 book "Developing Horizons of the Mind: Relational and Contextual Reasoning and the Resolution of Cognitive Conflict."

Reich has determined that people's reasoning powers develop over time—and that some of us reach a final resting stage at a higher level of reasoning than others. Our powers of reasoning develop in accordance with our growth opportunities and those whose reasoning is further developed can resolve cognitive conflict better than those whose reasoning is less mature. Reich uses the term "relational and contextual reasoning (RCR) " to describe the most advanced levels in a person's reasoning ability and has linked levels of spiritual development to levels of reasoning skill.

To a person at Reich's first reasoning level, if one description/explanation/model/theory/ interpretation is right, any and all other(s) must be wrong—no other competing concept could possibly have any validity. Also, at this level, the person believes that what is true never changes—once decided, the truth is not subject to any further investigation. When applied to the cognitive, or reasoning aspects of religious belief, this earliest level would compare loosely to the Faithful level as described in this book. Here a person believes his own particular religion is the only "right" one and that if his God is right, that of all the other religions must be false. Further, at this level a person would consider it sinful or wrong to even look into any other forms of belief, lest they lead him astray.

From that most rudimentary form of reasoning, more complex and advanced levels show an ever-broadening perspective. A person at Reich's level II can allow that "maybe there is something valid" to each of two competing viewpoints. In terms of religion, other religions might be seen as having commonalities with one's own, so a person may allow them some validity. At Reich's third level of reasoning a person recognizes and accepts the existence of a greater level of complexity and can concede that both (or all) descriptions/explanations/ models/theories that compete with the one he may hold are definitely needed to account for the phenomenon under study. In religious terms this would mean that he could see where some other religions contain concepts or ideas that are lacking in his and will use the input of other faiths to complete his understanding.

At Reich's level four a person can explain how all the descriptions/explanations/models/ theories are related to each other. Reich specifically states that the form of logic espoused in Fowler's upper stages (or our Mystic level) is typical of his RCR levels III and IV. This is where a person has awareness of the paradoxes that must be accepted if he is to grow beyond his Rational level beliefs. At Reich's level IV, a person must be willing to allow that while science and logic are necessary, they may not supply all the answers, that there may be Truths in all religions, that all humans are all separate individuals and yet somehow all connected –that god in whatever form could be both a separate entity

and yet still a part of every being at the same time. This is the level of reasoning that must be achieved to comprehend spiritual development theory—and the level at which the discussion parts of this book are written.

The highest level of reasoning, Reich's level V, is apparently about as rare as Fowler's highest stage—Universalizing Faith—typical only of the Gandhi's and the Martin Luther Kings of the world. Reich plainly states that Fowler's highest stage is "not in contradiction with RCR level V." Here the person can supply an overarching synopsis of the entire controversy itself. At this level, there is the ability to recognize multiple, possibly competing, perspectives as all having validity and all contributing to a complex, and constantly evolving, whole. In terms of religion, this highest level probably represents something too complex to even describe, but would definitely include the fact that all religions have some validity, that the definition of God could be much more vast than the human-like being described by most of our religions, and that our understanding of god is constantly evolving.

Taking a bird's eye view, we can see that Reich's reasoning levels do correspond somewhat with the spiritual stages. Faithful level and most Rational level people assume there is a black and white answer—either God exists or God does not. If God exists, the scientists must be wrong. If science is responsible for our existence, then the Bible must be wrong; God did not create the world. At the Mystic level, as one becomes more tolerant of paradox and mystery, a person is not so demanding of a definite answer. A Mystic may begin to realize that there may be truth in science and that maybe God or god (whoever or whatever that is) had a hand in it all as well. Maybe God is scientific and not magical.

I very much doubt there is anyone alive who can hand us Reich's level (v) "overarching synopsis" about religion. But we can learn a lot by considering by advancing the logic of Reich's second, and third levels and perhaps even his fourth level.