

Growing pains: a reflection on the experience of suffering accompanying an epistemological crisis

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ABSTRACT

The experience of suffering is ubiquitous and often the subject of attention by pastoral practitioners and theologians alike. The particular kind of suffering that is addressed in this paper is the suffering accompanying an epistemological crisis. For one facing such a crisis, the traditional schema of interpretation has broken down irremediably in highly specific ways, to the point where not only individual beliefs, but the entire belief system, fails to provide the explanatory power it once did. In other words, the world no longer makes sense. For a person facing such a crisis the loss of meaning and the inability to make sense of their world and their life can be experienced as intense suffering that inevitably has broader implications than those of a purely individual nature such as psychological, emotional and intellectual. For as Alasdair MacIntyre acknowledges an epistemological crisis is always a crisis in human relationships. In this paper I explore the notion that if properly understood within the context of normal faith development as outlined by James Fowler, an epistemological crisis can be interpreted as the growing pains signalling personal development and maturity. Such an interpretation may not only bring relief to the sufferer but has implications for the broader faith community.

Introduction

Few if any of us think of suffering as a good thing. Indeed, many Christians identify suffering as a serious theological problem that can be a stumbling block to faith.¹ But what if there are certain types of suffering that are best viewed as growing pains signalling personal² development and maturity?

When I was a teenager I suffered at times from severe leg cramps. To my relief I discovered that there was nothing sinister causing my pain but rather it signalled my development towards physical maturity. Once I understood my condition within this context I was able to live with the pain knowing that it was all part of growing up.

¹ The ongoing attention given by apologists to the problem of suffering would attest to this.

² I intentionally have chosen to use the term personal here rather than spiritual or psycho-spiritual so as not to reinforce the tendency we have to reduce the reality of our being addressed here to some aspect or aspects of that reality. An epistemological crisis ultimately impacts intellectual, psychological, spiritual and physical aspects of our being. I would also include social here but it is difficult to find a term to cover all of these aspects.

This example is suggestive of the truth that the experience of suffering of whatever kind is complex and multidimensional in nature. There is the experience of suffering that is the direct result of some underlying condition or set of conditions e.g. leg cramps. This may include physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, social or a complex combination of these. But suffering may also be experienced as the indirect result of how those same painful conditions are interpreted and understood. Such interpretations may themselves be pain inducing or pain reducing in their overall effects upon the sufferer.

A pain inducing interpretation of one's experience of suffering may turn out to be as harmful to our state of being as the underlying condition itself. The experience of suffering is thereby intensified. The person who believes that their painful condition must be the direct result of personal sin will suffer more than a person who has a more adequate understanding of God's nature and ways of acting in the world.

The purpose of this paper is not to address the first type of suffering and the strategies one might develop to deal with the underlying condition/s leading to one's experience of suffering. Rather, it is the suffering arising from the interpretation of a particular kind of condition or experience that interests me here. In the process, I hope to open up a space for ongoing dialogue where understanding and healing may take place.

I am particularly interested in the experience of suffering accompanying an epistemological crisis, or in other words, a crisis of belief. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, one who is plunged into an epistemological crisis knows this, 'that a schema of interpretation which he has trusted so far has broken down irremediably in certain highly specific ways.'³ In short, the world no longer makes sense. For a person facing such a crisis the loss of meaning and the inability to make sense of their world can be experienced as intense suffering that inevitably has broader implications than those of a purely individual nature such as psychological, spiritual and intellectual. For as MacIntyre acknowledges an epistemological crisis is always a crisis in human relationships.⁴

Now this failure or breakdown in epistemology has been interpreted in various ways. Probably the most inadequate and unhelpful interpretation is that an epistemological crisis is due to a failure of faith. Dare I say that the language of "backsliding" or "falling away" has sometimes been too quickly applied by some Christians to those undergoing such a crisis? For those experiencing this crisis such an interpretation is bound to intensify the suffering.

But an epistemological crisis, or a crisis of belief, is not the same as a crisis of faith. According to Harvey Cox, faith and belief are not the same thing. Faith is more fundamental than belief. Cox illustrates this difference in a reference to the philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943).

In her *Notebooks*, she once scribbled a gnomic sentence: "If we love God, even though we think he doesn't exist, he will make his existence manifest." Weil's words

³ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* Vol. 60, Number 4 (1977): 458.

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," p. 455.

sound paradoxical, but in the course of her short and painful life—she died at thirty-four—she learned that love and faith are both more primal than beliefs.⁵

In this paper I will offer a very different interpretation of the experience of an epistemological crisis that places it within the context of normal faith development as outlined by James Fowler.⁶ Further, I contend that an epistemological crisis is most likely to occur in the transition from stage 3, the synthetic-conventional faith stage, to stage 4, the individuating-reflective faith stage. On this reading an epistemological crisis can be seen not as a crisis or failure of faith, but, on the contrary, signals a movement toward maturity. But first let me outline the context and characteristics of an epistemological crisis.

The context and characteristics of an epistemological crisis

In his philosophical work Alasdair MacIntyre argues against the modernist conception of an abstract disembodied rationality—Nagel's view from nowhere—and instead argues that there is no such thing as rationality that is not the rationality of some tradition.⁷ Therefore, we share a basic set of beliefs and assumptions, a common interpretive narrative, with a primary community of influence. It is against this backdrop of a tradition or socially embodied paradigm that an epistemological crisis is to be understood. It is not simply or only a description of the state of the individual mind.

In his paper, *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*,⁸ MacIntyre identifies the conditions under which an epistemological crisis may occur. Firstly, there is the onset of radical interpretive doubt where not only individual beliefs but also one's shared interpretive framework or paradigm is brought into question. Like Descartes, attention turns to questioning traditional beliefs in a radical way, perhaps for the first time.

While radical doubt may well be a necessary condition for an epistemological crisis to occur, it is not sufficient. One may well take on a stance of radical doubt only to discover that those doubts are without foundation. However, for an epistemological crisis to occur another condition must be met—the recognition and failure of the traditional paradigm one embodies.

With the onset of radical doubt may come the recognition, perhaps again for the first time, not only that one embodies with others a particular paradigm, but also that one may come to recognise “the possibility of systematically different possibilities of interpretation, of the existence of alternative and rival schemata which may yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on around him”.⁹ In short, the relativisation of one's inherited worldview.¹⁰ What was simply taken as reality now is seen as a particular way of viewing reality. What is

⁵ Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 4.

⁶ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1981).

⁷ MacIntyre refers to this shared conceptual scheme/framework as a tradition while Thomas Kuhn uses the term paradigm. Still others use the term schema. I prefer the phrase socially embodied paradigm but may use the above terms interchangeably.

⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,” *The Monist* Vol. 60, Number 4 (1977): 453-472.

⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,” 454.

¹⁰ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1981), 179.

more, the paradigm that is embodied can now only be treated as one likely story¹¹ in competition with perhaps many other likely stories that may or may not be coherent interpretive accounts of the ways things are.

According to MacIntyre, a tradition may at any time lapse into incoherence and it is at the point where certain individuals become aware of this that an epistemological crisis may result. For those facing an epistemological crisis the standard explanations of how and why things are the way they are, no longer make sense in the way they used to. Untested assumptions now are seen for what they are—untested assumptions. Certain beliefs no longer make sense, and because our beliefs fit together like a web,¹² there can be a rapid dissolution of intelligibility once the process of radical questioning gets under way. Such questioning inevitably creates a domino effect. Now as MacIntyre argues, it is simply not possible to call all our beliefs into question at the same time. The very process of radical doubt requires that at least some of our assumptions remain firmly held. But there is the very real possibility that a great many of our beliefs may fail to offer the coherence and explanatory power they once did.

The breakdown in one's interpretive framework can lead to tremendous personal and existential suffering. This can be a frightening place to be. Because language is tied to belief,¹³ language itself can fail. And because paradigms are socially embodied, the breakdown in one's interpretive framework can lead to a failure both to understand others and to be understood by others. The person experiencing an epistemological crisis may find themselves a stranger and an outsider to normal discourse. It is not just that one particular aspect or belief seems no longer to make any sense, but the whole way of seeing and interpreting reality. MacIntyre offers the following insight into the state of one for whom all the traditional interpretive markers have failed. He states that,

[t]o be unable to render oneself intelligible is to risk being taken as mad, is, if carried far enough to be mad.¹⁴

Robert Persig also brings this point home in his enigmatic *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* where he narrates the following:

[t]here is only one kind of person, Phadrus said, who accepts or rejects the mythos in which he lives. And the definition of that person, when he rejects the mythos, Phadrus said, is 'insane.' To go outside the mythos is to become insane . . .¹⁵

¹¹ In his *Timaeus*, Plato describes his attempt at explaining how the world came into being as a "likely story." Any philosophical and theological attempts to understand reality are at best, "a likely story."

¹² The metaphor of the web to describe the way our beliefs hold together has been used by a number of philosophers including W.V.O. Quine.

¹³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 374.

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," 455.

¹⁵ Robert Persig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), 333.

We have an account of an epistemological crisis in the book by Gordon Lynch *Losing My Religion? Moving on from Evangelical Faith*. He writes in his journal:

I'm sitting here, as dusk falls this evening, wondering what to write. I feel I am experiencing a loss of faith. Part of me feels like drawing a thick black line between all I have written before [in the journal] and this, because it feels like I (or something) has changed irrevocably, that I can't feel in the same way that I used to, that I can't identify with what I have thought and said about God in the past. . . . I followed the path that I believe God wanted for me. . . . Now I have come to the end of the path, and it seems to be the end of any sign-posts as well. My uncertainties about God make it difficult to hope for divine guidance or to expect or experience the sense of direction I have had before. . . . So here I am, standing on a barren heath, wondering how I got here and where I should go now.¹⁶

The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy also gives us an insight into his own “epistemological” crisis:

I felt that something had broken within me on which my life had always rested, that I had nothing left to hold on to, and that morally my life had stopped. . . . All this took place at a time when so far as all my outer circumstances went, I ought to have been completely happy. . . . And yet I could give no reasonable meaning to any actions of my life. And I was surprised that I had not understood this from the beginning.¹⁷

Of course, one does not stay in a state of crisis indefinitely. The resolution of an epistemological crisis may come by way of a reinterpretation of one's original socially embodied paradigm in light of new evidence and knowledge or, alternatively, by way of a paradigm shift to a competing socially embodied paradigm that bears a family resemblance to one's original, such as the shift from the conservative evangelical paradigm to the progressive paradigm as in the case of Gordon Lynch.¹⁸ Alternatively an epistemological crisis might be resolved through a more radical shift to a very different socially embodied paradigm such as a move from Christianity to Buddhism or Hinduism or even secular Humanism.

Interpreting such a crisis

In some conservative circles where faith is reduced to belief in a set of propositions, the kind of crisis we have been describing is interpreted as a failure of faith. Backsliding, if you will. But what if such a crisis can be interpreted not a failure of faith but rather the signalling of progress in faith development? I think that this is where the work of James Fowler provides a useful framework for understanding the experience of an epistemological crisis that allows us

¹⁶ Gordon Lynch, *Losing My Religion: Moving on from Evangelical Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2003) 32-33.

¹⁷ James Gollnick, *Religion and Spirituality in the Life Cycle* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 159.

¹⁸ *Moving on from Evangelical Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2003)

to view such experiences as a normal part of personal development rather than as some kind of pathology.

Fowler wrote an influential book in 1981 entitled *Stages of Faith*. In this book, he identifies six stages of faith development that a person might pass through in their faith journey. Fowler identifies these as:

Stage 1. Intuitive-Projective Faith (*Early Childhood*)

Stage 2. Mythic-Literal Faith (*Childhood*)

Stage 3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith (*Adolescence*)

Stage 4. Individuative-Reflective Faith (*Young Adulthood*)

Stage 5. Conjunctive Faith (*Adulthood*)

Stage 6. Universalizing Faith

In particular, it is the transition from stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional faith) to stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective faith) that I am most interested in considering here. And so, it is to Fowler's own description of these stages and the events that precipitate them that we now turn.

Stage 3 typically has its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, but for many adults it becomes a permanent place of equilibrium.¹⁹

During this stage youths develop attachments to beliefs, values, and elements of personal style that link them in conforming relations with the most significant others among their peers, family and other adults. Identity, beliefs and values are strongly felt, even when they contain contradictory elements. However, they tend to be espoused in tacit rather than explicit formulations. At this stage, one's ideology or worldview is lived and asserted; it is not yet a matter of critical and reflective articulation.²⁰

Stage 4 most appropriately takes form in young adulthood but for a significant group it emerges only in the mid-thirties or forties.²¹ According to Fowler,

for this stage to emerge, two important movements must occur, together or in sequence. First, the previous stage's tacit system of beliefs, values and commitments must be critically examined. . . . Evocative symbols and stories by which lives have been oriented will now be critically weighed and interpreted. Second, the self, previously constituted and sustained by its roles and relationships, must struggle with the question of identity and worth apart from its previously

¹⁹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1981), 172.

²⁰ James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 61.

²¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182.

defining connections. This means that persons must take into themselves much of the authority they previously invested in others for determining and sanctioning their goals and values.²²

Fowler continues:

This transition represents an upheaval in one's life at any point and can be protracted in its process for five to seven years or longer. It typically is less severe for young adults, however, coming in that era as a natural accompaniment of leaving home and of the construction of a first, provisional adult life structure. When the transition occurs in the late thirties or early forties it often brings greater struggles. This is because of its impact upon the more established and elaborated system of relationships and roles that constitute an adult structure.²³

To summarise, in the transition from stage 3 to stage 4, individuals begin to look with critical awareness at their system of beliefs and values tacitly held. They begin to separate themselves out from the group that has up to this time provided a sense of identity and belonging. This is a time of alienation and disembodiment. What is particularly relevant to my argument is Fowler's observation that this transition can be precipitated by the experience of the breakdown or inadequacy of one's Synthetic-Conventional faith.²⁴

Now where I differ with Fowler is that in respect of an epistemological crisis, and the progression from stage 3 to 4 outlined in this paper, I think that what we are dealing with includes matters of belief and worldview. Fowler on the other hand does not see the stages of faith as primarily about matters of the contents of faith, but rather, about "differences in the styles, the operations of knowing and valuing, that constitute the action, the way of being, that is faith."²⁵ I have in my focus on the experience of an epistemological crisis therefore, sought to extend Fowler's theory by including matters of faith content and worldview in the transition from stage 3 to stage 4.

An epistemological crisis, then, should be interpreted not as a crisis or failure of faith, but, on the contrary, signals a movement toward maturity. For perhaps the first time in a person's life, at whatever age this may be, the conditions are right for deconstructing one's worldview and entering upon the journey of reconstruction. Now for some an epistemological crisis may not entail a paradigm shift but rather a significant reinterpretation of one's original socially embodied paradigm. For others, an epistemological crisis will lead to a "conversion" to another socially embodied paradigm.

Some implications of this interpretation

²² James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 62.

²³ James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 181-182.

²⁴ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 172.

²⁵ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 40.

Let us suppose then that an epistemological crisis may be interpreted along the lines set down in this paper. Not as a breakdown or hiatus in faith, but rather, as the growing pains of faith. In this final part of the paper I would like to consider the implications of such an understanding for the work of pastoral care and faith education broadly considered.

Firstly, in relation to the work of pastoral care, faith communities should take the idea of an epistemological crisis within the context of faith development much more seriously than currently is the case.²⁶ If suffering can be experienced as the result of such a crisis, then it seems to follow that effective pastoral care would require an integrated understanding of faith development and the epistemological implications of the transition from stage 3 to stage 4 and beyond. Journeying with people undergoing an epistemological crisis, and the transitioning to different stages of faith, will therefore require more than the traditional therapeutic approach can offer.

Now while it is the case that psychology continues to frame the methods and concerns of Christian pastoral care training and practice within faith communities, there are good reasons why faith development models should be incorporated in our therapeutic approaches.²⁷ In their paper entitled "Using a faith development model in College counselling," Stanard and Painter investigate how the incorporation of faith development models, such as that developed by Fowler, might benefit college students. They conclude:

the outcome of the integration of faith development with the counsellor's therapeutic approach can facilitate the client's resolution of the presenting problem as well as promote personal and spiritual growth.

I would add that this application to the college context could be extended to other counselling contexts.

Further, since an epistemological crisis has to do with the critical assessment of one's beliefs and worldview, it seems reasonable to suppose that effective pastoral care would require the further integrating of the above insights with the philosopher's insights on matters related to belief. An epistemological crisis, after all, is first and foremost a crisis of belief. This focus on belief has become part of the work of philosophical counsellors whose practice has now become formally recognised in places like the USA. The purpose of philosophical counselling is not to displace traditional psychological counselling, but rather to complement it as a therapeutic method. Philosophical counselling assists those evaluating their beliefs and worldviews and seeks to address the malaise caused by unhelpful and harmful beliefs and systems.²⁸

²⁶ My observation as a pastor and teacher in a Wesleyan Evangelical tradition for nearly 30 years is that we are not adequately equipped to either recognise or respond to those undergoing an epistemological crisis and moving beyond stage 3 in their faith development.

²⁷ Rebecca Powell Stanard and Linda C. Painter, "Using a Faith Development Model in College Counselling," *The College Student Affairs Journal* 23.2 (Spring 2004): 197-207.

²⁸ See National Philosophical Counseling Association (NPCA) website (npcassoc.org) for information related to this practice.

Now one can imagine an optimal situation being one in which pastors and counsellors have the capacity and skills to understand and respond to a wide range of people transitioning to the different stages of faith development, and in particular, those experiencing an epistemological crisis. Furthermore, according to David Lyall it is more reasonable to expect a caring ministry to those at a stage of faith through which one has passed.²⁹ However, while this might represent an optimal goal, we cannot assume that all pastors will have passed through the stage of those for whom they are exercising a caring ministry. It is certainly not a condition of being a psychologist or counsellor to have experienced every situation they will meet in therapy. And just as pastors and counsellors are encouraged to know their limitations and when to refer when faced with complex psychological and emotional problems, so is it not also reasonable to expect the same insight in relation to complex issues related to faith development more generally, and epistemological crises in particular?

However, anecdotally at least, it would seem that a good many faith communities have not given due attention in their pastoral care programs to the idea of faith development in general and the transition beyond stage 3 in particular. And perhaps this is somewhat understandable given that for leaders seeking to grow the church, stability and order are seen as the necessary conditions for such growth. The sometimes chaotic and unsettling effects of radical questioning, deconstruction and disengagement of those in transition, may be viewed as a threat to the community's stability and even health.³⁰

What is needed though, by the stage 4 explorer involved in church groups and congregations, is the acknowledgement and support of their self-authorization.³¹ This means the acceptance by church leaders that their struggle in faith is legitimate and to be commended. Further, that providing a safe space for those in transition to belong, and to explore their faith with others, is as important as other missional strategies.

If the churches are truly to reflect the broader communities of which they are a part, then church leaders should make it a priority to welcome and include the sceptics and doubters and those moving beyond conventional faith. Arrested development can be a prognosis not only for individuals but also for faith communities if those experiencing an epistemological crisis continue to drift from the church. Beside which it should be recognised as a significant loss if faith explorers in most need of encouragement and support conclude that the only alternative given their condition is exile from the community.

Secondly, in relation to faith education in all its diversity, from the formal training of pastors to the more informal education of ministry workers and the host of faith explorers, if transitioning from stage 3 to stage 4 is understood as part of the process of normal faith development, then our theological colleges and seminaries, as well as our local faith communities, need to become places where critical enquiry is normalised. Unlike the environment in which the religious commentator Karen Armstrong was formed, a time when,

²⁹ David Lyall, *Integrity of Pastoral Care*, (London: SPCK, 2001), 117.

³⁰ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journey's Beyond the Churches*, (London: SPCK, 2002), 69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

as she reveals,³² no one would ever have admitted to doubts in the convent, faith explorers of all ages and stages need to be free to ask their questions and challenge every aspect of their faith.³³

Now such a development would require a very different type of approach to education and personal formation to that generally imagined and practiced in many settings today. This approach would be much less along the lines of paternalistic oversight, with teachers and leaders dispensing confidently predetermined formulas of faith and patterns of personal formation,³⁴ and more along the lines of a mentor's, or facilitator's, oversight.³⁵ Educators, as fellow travellers, need to trust that people transitioning beyond stage 3 faith will find their way within a caring and supportive environment.

And if 'one size does not fit all' has become the mantra in higher education today, then it must equally become the mantra of those engaged in faith education. With texts like *Stages of Faith* and *Sacred Pathways*³⁶ altering the way we understand the journey of faith, we cannot imagine that people exploring their faith as a preparation for ministry within the Church, of whatever age or standard of education, will be at the same stage of faith or pursuing a uniform path toward God. The reality will be quite different with faith explorers at varying stages of the journey. Indeed, in any group of ministry or discipleship candidates you may reasonably expect to find faith explorers anchored in stage 3, those transitioning to stage 4 along with those who have moved beyond stage 4. Therefore, our curriculums and teaching and learning practice will need to reflect this reality.

In all of this, church leaders should view epistemological crises within the context of faith development as a positive challenge rather than a threat to the Church's life and mission. Conservative forces are on the rise throughout the world and with it a general retreat to fundamentalism and certainty. The answer to the angst of church leaders during such times should not be to blame education and the practice of critical enquiry for the ills of the Church, but rather to understand the fact that it is precisely the process of exploring faith critically that precipitates the very experience that signals progress in faith development—an epistemological crisis. Just as my leg cramps during the adolescent years turned out to be the signs of physical maturation, so the existential suffering of many faith seekers in transition may well be the sign of both personal and corporate faith maturation.

³² Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb out of Darkness* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005).

³³ This is not to say that there aren't theological colleges and seminaries that are safe spaces for critical thinking only that my experience as an educator within a Wesleyan Evangelical setting would suggest that such openness is frowned upon not by college and seminary leaders themselves but rather denominational leaders who exert significant control over the direction of the institutions they are responsible for.

Along with this of course must be the recognition that ministry of whatever sort can be carried out at whatever stage in the development process. Just as one does not have to be emotionally whole in order to minister to others so one does not have to have transitioned to a particular stage as a qualification to minister to others. This important insight was late coming to me and I have only recently reflected on the fact that I had been through theological training and was a pastor of a church at the time of facing my own epistemological crisis.

³⁴ This is not to deny that for those in stages 1, 2 and 3, paternalistic oversight may indeed be appropriate.

³⁵ Along the lines perhaps of the spiritual director more broadly considered.

³⁶ By James Fowler and Gary Thomas respectively

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that those who undergo an epistemological crisis will know something about personal suffering. When the world no longer makes sense and the traditional guides fail to show the way then one can easily imagine that they are truly alone. Further, that they are somehow to blame for their predicament, and that their failure to believe what others believe must be evidence of some underlying spiritual pathology. But what if an epistemological crisis, far from evidencing a failure in faith, can be viewed as a catalyst for further faith development.

As a Christian pastor and academic I work from the assumption that understanding can itself be a form of therapy. Could it be that understanding the contours of an epistemological crisis as part of normal faith development may help those faith explorers in transition to recognise their own experience and in the act of recognition, their own suffering will be relieved? This is certainly my hope.

About the author

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