Levels of Spiritual Development
(from Richard Rohr's book "The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See")

One of the more important breakthroughs in understanding why some people seem to "get it" (whatever "it" is) while many do not get it or even oppose or distort it, has now come to be recognized by teachers as diverse jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Abraham Maslow, James Fowler, Clare Grave, and Ken Wilber. Their insights remind us of Thomas Aquinas's observation that "Whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver."
In simple terms, whatever you teach or receive will be heard on at least eight to ten different levels, according to the inner, psychological, and spiritual maturity of the listener. Level 1 people will misuse spiritual teachings, the priesthood, spiritual direction, the Enneagram, or anything else that is presented to them. Levels 7 - 9 people will make lemonade out of even sour or unripe lemons. It does little good merely to assert spiritual teachings and, because people assent to them, to assume that they have any existential knowledge of what they are talking about. You can perfectly assent to the spiritual belief in the Real Presence, for example, and be totally incapable of presence yourself - so there will be no inner experience and no transformation of the self. One will manipulate or use the very teaching for ego enhancement purposes and control. This is likely what Jesus is referring to when he quotes Isaiah 29:13 in his Sermon on the Mount: "This people has all the right words, but no change of heart. It is all just a lesson memorized, a human commandment."
My own attempt to correlate the various diagrams of development that I have studied would have me put it this way. In my experience, we move from level 1 to level 9. (Note that this is merely a teaching tool; real life is actually much more subtle.)

Level One: MY BODY AND SELF-IMAGE ARE WHO I AM. Leads to a dominance of security, safety and defense needs. Dualistic/polarity thinking.

Level Two: MY EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR IS WHO I AM. Needs to look good outside and to hide or disguise the contrary evidence from others; I become so practiced at this game that the evidence is eventually hidden from myself, too. This EMERGENCE OF THE SHADOW is very common among conservatives.

Level Three: MY THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE WHO I AM. Development of the intellect and will to have better thoughts and feelings and also control them so others do not know, and so, finally, that I do not see their self-serving and shadowy character myself. This EDUCATION AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR TRANSFORMATION is very common among liberals and the educated. NORMALLY A MAJOR DEFEAT,SHOCK, OR HUMILIATION MUST BE SUFFERED AND PASSED THROUGH TO GO BEYOND THIS STAGE.

Level Four: MY DEEPER INTUITIONS AND FELT KNOWLEDGE IN MY BODY IS WHO I AM. This is such a breakthrough and so informative and helpful that many become stymied at this level. Leads to individualism, self-absorption, and inner work as a substitute for any real encounter with otherness.

Level Five: MY SHADOW SELF IS WHO I AM. The DARK NIGHT. My weakness comes to overwhelm me, as I face myself in the raw, unvarnished, uncivilized state. Without guidance, grace, and prayer, most go running back to previous identities. Time is of the essence here.

Level Six: I AM EMPTY AND POWERLESS. "God's Waiting Room." Almost any attempt to save the self by any superior behavior, technique, morality, positive role, or religious devotion will lead to regression. All you can do is wait and ask and trust. Here is where you learn faith and discover that darkness is the much better teacher. God is about to become real.

Level Seven: I AM MUCH MORE THAT WHI I THOUGHT I WAS. Death of the false self, and birth of the True Self. But because you are not at home here yet, it will first of all feel like a VOID, even if a wonderful void. "Luminous darkness," as John of the Cross would call it. Until you get to levels 5, 6 and 7, the Sermon on the Mount doesn't make much sense.

Level Eight: "I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE" (John 10:30). Henceforth there is only God or as Teresa said, "One knows God in oneself, and knows oneself in God." All else is seen as a passing ego possession, and I do not need to protect it, promote it or prove it - to anyone.

Level Nine: I AM WHO I AM - "just me." Warts and all, enough to be human, no window dressing necessary. This is the most radical critique of religion possible, because now you know religion is just a finger pointing to the moon, but not the moon itself. There is no need to APPEAR to be anything but who I really am. Fully detached from self-image and living in God's image of you - which includes and loves both the good and the bad. The serenity and freedom of the saints. Total Nonduality.

The goal is to keep people moving deeper into faith, knowing they will receive any and all information and experience at their level.