A Faith Development Perspective on Fundamentalism[1]

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Content

Abstract

The article presents a new approach for conceptualizing 'fundamentalism' from the perspective of faith development theory. Thereby the metaphor of 'revival' is explicated in developmental terms. Implications for the design of empirical research on fundamentalism are outlined. The argument is based not only on insights from James Fowler's work, but incorporates contemporary suggestions for a modification of structural-developmental theory, and rests especially on the author's recent revision of faith development theory, the religious styles perspective. The conceptualization and explanation of fundamentalist orientation as 'revival' requires that some structural-developmental premises, such as 'sequentiality,' 'irreversibility' and 'structural wholeness' are put up for fresh discussion and qualification.

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Fundamentalism – A Working Definition and a Question

The global occurrence of fundamentalist developments call for a global perspective.[2] In the meantime however, not only the global perspective, but the connotation of terrorism occupies our attention. Many contemporaries need to think twice to realize that there may be also fundamentalists who are *Christian* and fundamentalists who are *not* political. It seems to have resided into the background that, at the basis of the fundamentalist movements, there are religious attitudes. There is some reason to call attention to such background dimensions. A similar reminder may be in place for the relation of fundamentalism and individual biographical development. More specifically, fundamentalism has roots in religious socialization and religious development. A faith development perspective, as I will argue, may give some indication for a biographical reconstruction, but also for the individual's opportunities to change and to find new ways of biographical transformation which perhaps may involve deconversion.

When we trace fundamentalism's basic orientations back to its origin, to the point where the first U.S.-American Protestants proudly identified themselves as 'fundamentalists', the emerging new fundamentalist movement appears as a reaction against developments in science, in society, but even more rigorously in theology and in the religious leadership. From the early times, fundamentalism holds on to some basic claims (Ammerman 1991; Marty & Appleby 1992; Sandeen 1970): inerrancy or infallibility of the holy scripture as a whole; literal understanding of, and authoritative belief in, a selection of basic propositions (in the early Protestant fundamentalism, virgin birth, bodily resurrection and the return of Jesus belong to these essentials); rejection of the results of modern science wherever they contradict fundamentalist teachings; the claim that only people subscribing to these fundamentals are truly religious. From this self-description, It is obvious that fundamentalism is a reaction to modernity. To speak indiscriminately of fundamentalism as anti-modernism (Meyer 1989) or even of a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996), however, needs to be qualified (Riesebrodt 2000), since the fundamentalist reaction to the processes of modernisation itself is using, or striving for, rather advanced 'modern' scientific arguments, means of communication and organisational strategies: if we want to speak of anti-modernism, then it should be qualified as *modern* anti-modernism (Küenzlen 1994; 1996). If translated into developmental terms, this working definition will become meaningful, as I will show below.

In a wider philosophical perspective, fundamentalist revivals appear as indications of disturbances to which the project of modernity is exposed. With reference to Lyotard's (Lyotard 1984; 1988; 1993) analysis, we could say that the smooth teleological meta-story of modernity, which is a meta-story of development, is challenged by postmodern disturbances. Such disturbances also include individual and global fundamentalisms.

To understand fundamentalists, we have to deal with puzzling questions like these: How does it fit together that a person, on the one hand, is able to deal with everyday situations successfully on the basis of practical reason and, for example, is able to design and control technological machines of high complexity – remember that a significant number of fundamentalists are graduates from our universities –, and that the same person, in matters of collective and personal future, of meaning, in matters of religion resorts to the most simple answers, suppresses questions and doubts, and subjects to the *grand simplificateurs*? In terms of developmental theory: How can we understand that a person is able to perform formal operations in most domains which are relevant for business and every-day life and that this same person is not able, or not motivated, to apply formal-operational thinking to existential questions, but takes every word of a guru or fundamentalist leader as the revelation of truth? Traditional Piagetian developmental theories, especially when they are accommodated to Kohlberg's story line, face a predicament here, because the theory does not account for regression, and – despite some awareness of horizontal and vertical *décalage*[3] – a 'structural whole' is assumed.

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[2] The Chicago Fundamentalism Project (Marty & Appleby 1991; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1995) has made a major contribution to addressing fundamentalism in such a global perspective across cultures and religious traditions.

[3] The Piagetian and, even more, the neo-Piagetian understanding of *décalage* indicates an awareness of non-synchronicity of cognitive development, but it explains only a delay of an assumed developmental progression and neither Piaget, nor Piagetian scholars have

The cognitive-structural theories of development in their traditional shape of a structural, hierarchical, sequential, and irreversible logic of development can be seen as the developmental psychology variant of the modern meta-story. If unchanged, they neither fully account for fundamentalism in adulthood, nor can they provide us with an explanatory framework for the individual fundamentalist revivals and conversions. A solution, therefore, derives from a modification of the developmental model which should allow us to take account of and explain the developmental dynamics of fundamentalism.

Fowler's Faith Development Theory and Fundamentalism

From structural-developmental theory, and I focus here on James Fowler's (1981) faith development theory, we derive an inspiring explanatory tool for understanding the religious diversity of modernity and postmodern times – a diversity which is becoming even more diverse, as inner (biographical) and as outer (societal) religious plurality are growing, including new religious and fundamentalist orientations, but also a new search for spirituality. The problem however may emerge that the one preeminent faith development master story with its focus on religious cognition and its almost unquestioned accommodation to the Kohlbergian structural-developmental plot (or its specific 'logic of development') may reveal insufficient to account fully for the new variety of religious orientations and developments in their rich and deep life-world and life-history relatedness. Thus fundamentalist orientations and turns in a person's biography may present also a challenge to Fowler's faith development theory.

Let us now turn to Fowler's work and examine the understanding of fundamentalism there. While in *Stages of Faith*, a portrait of sequential faith development has been presented which is coherent across domains or Aspects and does not include regression (though Fowler talks about 'recapitulation' of earlier stages[4]), there is some account for fundamentalist turns in Fowler's later writings. In *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Fowler 1987), Fowler applies his theory of faith development also to religious communities; he then talks about 'modal levels of development' of these communities. As the communal equivalent to the 'Mythic-Literal Faith' (Stage Two), Fowler (1987: 85) identifies fundamentalist communities. Childhood and adult forms of Stage Two Faith have common features. Among these are: "literal interpretations of symbols and events", "absence of an ability to understand interiority" of oneself and others, that "lawfulness and order are imposed on the universe ... by recourse to the idea of moral reciprocity". From this text, we derive some confirmation, that Fowler associates fundamentalism with his Stage Two of Mythic-Literal Faith.

When Fowler wants to explain the continuation of Mythic-Literal Faith into late adolescence and adulthood, introduces a differentiation of domains: For adolescents, Fowler (1987: 86) says,

"where religious norms and beliefs have been enforced with rigidity and forms of emotional coercion, this construct of moral reciprocity becomes a more permanent fixture in their souls. Though they ... may reject the God of the quick-payoff universe at the level of cognitive self-understanding, emotionally they get stuck in the structures of the Mythic-Literal stage. They move on into adolescent and eventually adult roles and relationships without the emotional freedom and the capacity for intimacy that are required for mutual interpersonal perspective taking. Often they operate in the areas of relations and religion with the kind of naive manipulation which first arose as a result of the embeddedness of the Mythic-Literal stage in the structure of its own interests, needs, and wishes."

explicated a 'theory of *décalage*' (Bidell & Fisher 1992: 110; 116; Case 1992; Chapman 1988; Cocking 1979; Montada 1998), even though there is an assumption among some neo-Piagetian developmentalists "that horizontal *décalage* is the rule in development rather than the exception" (Canfield & Ceci 1992: 289).

[4] In Chapter 23, we find the notion that a recapitulation of earlier stages may be necessary and help to promote faith development.

And even more precisely, when talking about adult fundamentalists, Fowler makes the distinction between the emotional and religious domain, on the one hand, and the occupational world, on the other:

> "In fact, we see a fair number of persons – usually men – who may exhibit considerable cognitive sophistication in their occupational worlds (as physicians or engineers, for example) but who in their emotional and faith lives are rather rigidly embedded in the structures of Mythic-Literal faith and imperial selfhood."

Thus, facing of explanation of fundamentalism, Fowler himself carefully has introduced a differentiation between domains.

In his paper for the APA Symposium 1999 on "Religious Development Beyond the Modern Paradigm" (Fowler 2001), and in response to the author's presentation (Streib 2001) which is taken up in this article, Fowler has proposed to assume four types across and within the stages of faith. Fowler distinguishes: the *totalizing type,* the *rational critical type,* the *conflicted or oscillating type,* and the *diffuse type.* The *totalizing type* can be identified in fundamentalist and authoritarian personalities. The *rational critical type* can, due to the experience of clear, but disputable systems of value and belief, arrive at a personal judgment and also develop a second naivite. The *conflicted or oscillating type* is emotionally and intellectually divided and without any roots. The *diffuse type* has a fragmented and incoherent world view and has a problem to be exposed to experiences and relational bonds.[5] The difference between these four types is a difference in *certainty* by which world views are held.

It is obvious, however, that Fowler's four types have some similarities with features of the Stages: when the *totalizing type* projects authority in a leading person, narrative or belief, it resembles features of the Mythic-Literal Faith. The *rational critical type* combines characteristics which are expected in *individuative-reflective faith* and opens a perspective towards symbolic interpretation and second naivite which we expect in *conjunctive faith.* The *conflicted or oscillating type* and the *diffuse type* refer, at least partially, to Stage Three in which, instead of an explicit and reflected system, we expect an *implicit system.* Beyond the detection of parallels, we can assume that, in a specific type, certain features of an earlier stage are present or re-emerge in particular strength.

Thus also the assumption of a revival of earlier stage characteristics within later stages – as kind of heterodyne process – can be seen as consistent with Fowler's recent combination of types with stages. But more: when we would have to reckon theoretically with a spectrum of all four types on every faith stage, we are reminded to attend to the potential stage-specific variations of fundamentalist orientations.

These are two lines of thought in Fowler's work which I regard as the most explicit approaches to an explanation of fundamentalism in light of his theory of faith development. They do not call into question his theory of stages of faith, however they indicate his cautious deviation from a purist Kohlbergian type of structural-developmental model. Here I can pick up a thread and agree to the proposal "that we develop a theory of types that can cross-cut stages, but not replace them" (Fowler 2001: 169). But I am convinced that the theory of the conceptualization of stages of faith and of development will not remain the same, when we take on this project. There is much evidence from neo-Piagetian and postformal theory to work on a revision, to specify critical points and – for my part – to talk about religious styles.

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[5] Correspondence of these four types can be drawn to the typology of religious attitudes which have been described by Hutsebaut (Hutsebaut 1996) with reference to Wulff (Wulff 1991; Wulff 1997) and which have been clarified further by Duriez; Hutsebaut & Fontain (Desimpelaere et al. 1999; cf. Fontaine et al. 2000: 73). These four types are: a. Orthodoxy, b. External Critique, c. Symbolic Belief, d. Historical Relativism. Solid correspondence can be seen between Fowler's *totalizing type* and Hutsebaut's *orthodoxy type*; b. between Fowler's *rational critical type* and Hutsebaut's *symbolic belief type;* c. between Fowler's *conflicted or oscillating type* and Hutesabaut's *resaltivistic type.* Only for Hutsebaut's type of *external critique,* there is no exact equivalent in Fowler's typology.

Necessary Revisions of Faith Development Theory

My critique of faith development theory centers around the problem of overestimating cognitive development as it were the *motor* of religious development, thus excluding dimensions of *content*, *experiences*, and *function* of religion.[6] As I have stated elsewhere (Streib 1991; 1997; 2001), the overburdening of cognitive development leads to the disregard for dimensions which are just as crucial for the constitution development of religion: the psychodynamical-intrapersonal dimension (the psychodynamic of the self-self-relationship); the relational-interpersonal dimension (the dynamic of the self-other relationship); the interpretative, hermeneutic dimension (the dynamic of the self-tradition relationship); the life-world dimension (the dynamic of the self-social world relationship).

Biography in a broader, multi-perspective understanding requires that we give primacy to interpersonality, social relations, and life-world as the basis for life-history.[7] This focus on basically interactive, relational processes includes attention to the development of object relations in a psychoanalytic perspective.[8] From this point of view, I appreciate the extensive references to psychoanalytic contributions about infancy and early childhood which Fowler (1996) includes to offer a rich description of the early stages; while I agree with this portrait of the origin of faith in early childhood, I suggest that this portrait of faith and faith development be expanded on the other stages or styles of faith. I therefore do not agree, without qualifications, with Fowler's (1996: 57) statement that the faith stages could still be "held to be invariant, sequential, and hierarchical"; and I doubt especially that a stage is a "structural whole". The principle of "structural wholeness" has been established by Kohlberg. But Carpendale (2000) argues with reference to Chapman (1988) and others that Kohlbergs "structural whole" is not identical and not consistent with Piaget's earlier work, and that Piaget should not be blamed for this Kohlbergian misreading. For my line of argument, I rather reckon with cross-domain variance of styles.

I suggest to understand religious development as the interrelation of 'themata' and 'schemata' – thus as a complex process of a plurality of entangled factors. 'Themata' are present in the individual as remembered *experiences* – and sometimes traumata – from previous life-history which call for a religious response. 'Themata' of course change as the interpersonal, social and societal relations change over life time. 'Schemata' are relational styles which the person applies in processing experiences of self, others and world and thus also in responding to or working on the 'themata.' From existing structural-developmental theories, we have descriptions of various schemata or styles and of their developmental sequence, but it is necessary to note that, rather than forming a structural whole, these schemata or styles may vary across domains. Two recent contributions also point in this direction:

With Cartwright (2001) I maintain that cognitive development is not necessarily coherent across the different domains, but may be domain-specific and occur at any point in a lifespan, depending on individual

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[6] Gil Noam's metaphor of the cart (cognitive competencies) which the theories of cognition have placed before the horse (the life history) refers also and above all to the neglect of the emotional, psychodynamical dimension. This critique also concerns the cognitive-structural theories of religious development. A more substantial regard for the psychoanalytical and psychosocial would lead to displace the cognitive-structural view as the exclusive key theory. Noam's aim thus is 'Going beyond Piaget' (Noam 1990).

[7] Here, I can refer to Noam's (Noam 1985; 1988b; 1988a; 1990; Noam et al. 1991) critique and moderation of the exclusive attribution of developmental dynamic to the development of cognition, and his fresh approach to the developmental dynamic in terms of interpersonal relations.

[8] Here I refer to the psychodynamic tradition represented by Erik Erikson's (1968) and Ana-Maria Rizzuto's (1979; 1991; 1996) (1991; 1996)work and to their contribution to an understanding of *life-history*. Rizzuto's contribution is of special importance because she has integrated the development of God representations into the psychodynamic view. Religious development appears in a new light, when the mother child dyad is understood as the origin of religion, when the transitional space between caretaker and child and the transitional objects which arise here are assumed to be the origin of the God representations.

experience.[9] Thus it may be worthwhile to consider Cartwright's assumption that individuals' subjective experiences, including social interactions, contexts, and life events, stimulate the process of moving beyond prior stages of development and engage in new models of thought (Cartwright 2001: 217).

Likewise, Clore and Fitzgerald (2002) suggest that faith development is "additive and integrative, rather than a sequence of abandonment and acquistion."[10] With reference to Commons et.al. (1984), Labouvie-Vief (1992) and Sternberg & Berg (1992) they maintain that "more developed persons do not repudiate prior stages; they discover new ways to adopt earlier ways of knowing."[11]

This will have decisive consequences for the concept of fundamentalism. But before I explicate these consequences, I briefly sketch the dimensions of this theoretical revision in a more comprehensive perspective on religious development.

The Religious Styles Perspective

The religious styles perspective rests on a relational concept of faith, it is based on the assumption that interpersonal relations and their (psycho-) dynamics are both: *indicators* and *promoters* of religious development. The concept of 'style' suggests placing more emphasis on the factors of life-history and life-world for religious development.[12] In an earlier article (Streib 2001), I explicate the concept of religious style by highlighting three of its most decisive dimensions: a. the self-other-dynamic as related to the psychodynamic history of 'themata;' b. the narrative character of biography; and c. the life-world aspect which qualifies life-history as milieu sequence.

My condensed definition reads: "Religious styles are distinct modi of practical-interactive (ritual), psychodynamic (symbolic), and cognitive (narrative) reconstruction and appropriation of religion which originate in relation to life-history and life-world and which, in accumulative deposition, constitute the variations and transformations of religion over a life time, corresponding to the styles of interpersonal relations." A multi-layeredness of religious styles which can be designated as internal pluralism corresponds to the determined

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[9] Cartwright is probably right that the postformal operations models (1982; Labouvie-Vief 1992; 1996; 1997; 2000; Sinnott 1998; 2001; 2002a; 2002b) may help to clarify and advance our understanding of religious and faith development, especially on the higher stages. However, it would be an unjustified exaggeration – which I see in some of Cartwright's (2001: 213) statements – to assert that previous theories of religious, spiritual or faith development have failed to incorporate features of neo-Piagetian and postformal theories of cognitive development. Such criticism may have some more ground in regard to Oser's & Gmünder's (Oser & Gmünder 1984) theory of religious judgment, even though one ought not ignore that Oser's higher stages require correlation of two contradicting perspectives. But this criticism is even less adequate in regard to Fowler's (1987) theory of faith development. Fowler has taken a decisive step forward and has advanced the Piagetian framework by adding stages which mainly describe changes which occur in adult faith and by taking 'correlation' or 'conjunction' as central feature of Stage Five faith. Further, one should not ignore Fowler's (1987) attempt to correlate his stages of faith with Kegan's (1982) neo-Piagetian model of the evolving self. The critique of Oser's, but especially of Fowler's conceptualization of religious or faith development thus has be more specific.

[10] Clore and Fitzgerald state that "it is not likely that individuals would drop elements of faith that have given them meaning" and that "more integrated levels do not destroy the integrity of lower levels, but transform them and incorporate them into the new integration.... Rather than a sequential set of displacements, faith involves a progressive integration of new elements into an existing base. This may yield a synthesis that contains apparent contradictions, and our analysis suggests that individuals resolve these contradictions in unique ways, but they do not abandon core elements of their faith." (Clore & Fitzgerald 2002: 104)

[11] Clore and Fitzgerald (2002: 105) even go as far as to "question the advisability of designating an individual by one or another dominant stage." And indeed, thier correlation matrix (Table III) indicates strong overlaps of faith development profiles of different levels – which may be taken as some evidence that stages (or levels) never occur purely as if previous faith orientations would have abandoned. However, I doubt that this correlation matrix can ground the far-reaching assertion that there is no "dominant stage" for a person at a certain time.

[12] Noam (1985) has made use of the style concept in this sense.

more-perspectiveness . The so-called 'milestone model', brought into discussion by Loevinger (1976), is therefore better suited to illustrate religious style development than stagewise, ascending models. The 'milestone model' draws the respective style as a rising curve which, while descending again after a culminating point, persists on a lower level, while the subsequent styles attain their own climaxes. From such developmental perspective, there are no plausible reasons either why a certain style should not, at least as precursor, develop earlier than structural-developmental theories normally assume, but especially that a potential relevance of a certain style continues after its biographical peak.

While my description of the various religious styles take up essential explications from Fowler's stages, however qualifying them with reference to Noam's interpersonal styles and Rizzuto's psychodynamic perspective on God representations, the religious styles model intends not only to qualify the hierarchical order of stages, but also to express the multi-layeredness of religious orientations at a certain point in life-time. The religious styles model therefore questions the structural-developmental principle of 'invariant sequence' and of 'structured whole.' The claims of *invariance* and *sequentiality* need to be modified and the assumption of *structured wholeness* should be dropped for *religious* development, when we assume that the most decisive structuring power for the transformation of religion emerges from the 'themata-loaded' domain of the interpersonal, the psychodynamic, and from social relations – which may cause significant variance across domains.

In respect to our topic, I want to mention only the description of one style, the Instrumental-Reciprocal or 'Do-ut-des' Religious Style. This style makes use of the development of an inner self as distinguished from an outer, when the child becomes aware of his or her own needs and interests as opposed to those of other people. Thus one's own needs and desires can become part of a reciprocal exchange. In regard to religion, the do-ut-des reciprocity is the basic pattern for both, the interpersonal and the God-human relation: 'good' is what God and the authority persons wish and demand; 'bad' is what results in punishment and mischief; means of trade are obedience and fulfillment of religious commandments. The psychodynamic challenges concentrate on the crisis of 'Initiative vs. Guilt,' but also already on 'Industry vs. Inferiority.' The God representation, to adopt Rizzuto's terms, concentrates on more or less aggrandized parental images. Fowler's characterization of this style's pattern of understanding as 'mythic-literal' describes another aspect: religious images and feelings are integrated in a story, myths play an important role. An awareness of the metaphoric or symbolic difference, however, may not be developed which would allow to change details of the story or religious rule. Literally everything happened precisely as told in the story, literally everything has to be observed exactly as the religious rules prescribe. It is obvious that this description of the reciprocal-instrumental style portraits the fundamentalist world view and attitude. However, we do not call children fundamentalists, but we regard these styles as adequate in infancy and childhood. Only their continuity or revival in adolescence and adulthood is the characteristic of fundamentalism, as I will explain now.

The Revival Of Religious Styles: A New Explanation Of Fundamentalism

At a certain time in life, a certain style appears to be prevalent and to structure most of the religious activity and correspondingly most of one's interpersonal and social relations. Beyond the surface of everyday praxis and reconstruction, however, the previous styles are not eliminated, but rather they have disappeared and may have been forgotten. As in geological layers previous ages of our planet are invisible from the surface and nevertheless present and available, earlier religious styles are present and available in our psychic resources. But unlike geological layers, earlier religious styles may call for attention, require working-through, demand integration, need revisiting and reflection. Under healthy conditions, this working-through means both distanceation and integration in order to consolidate the present style. The ability to play with and deal with - reflexively and sometimes ironically – one's own and others' earlier styles is the indicator of a healthy

integration. In some cases, however, earlier religious styles are re-vitalized and regain part of their unquestioned and un-reflected power. I suggest to call this re-emergence of earlier styles a revival of earlier religious styles. Most obviously this is the case in fundamentalist biographies.

While, as stated above, traditional developmental theories lack an explanation for the phenomenon of fundamentalist turn in the individual, because they do not account for regression, but are assuming a 'structural whole,' the religious styles perspective suggests an understanding: Fundamentalism is the prevalence or the revival of literal understanding, of anxiety toward a taskmaster deity, of the 'do-ut-des' juridical structure, a prevalence or revival of the reciprocal-instrumental style and perhaps part of the subjective style. These advance to shape the approach to religious matters, while other styles which have already been developed and are used in other dimensions of a person's life are not applied to religion. A conflict and fracture of styles occurs.

The model which I have presented may help to understand not only the development of fundamentalism, but also its obstinate stability: the earlier styles do not only re-emerge, but they become predominant in matters of *religion*. Parallel to the understanding of fundamentalism as *modern* anti-modernism, I do not regard the do-ut-des styles as the same which it used to be in infancy and childhood, but later style patterns, mutual or systemic, merge with the re-emerging residuals. Not only a revival, but a kind of 'heterodyning' of styles takes place. This explains why the fundamentalist orientation is more stable, more rigoristic, more cruel: it bestows the earlier styles with the power of mutuality in group relation and/or the power of systemic-rational arguments.

But this blend or heterodyning of religious styles is not completely stable. In some cases, the mutuality or the individuative reflectiveness resists complete submission and surrender to the fundamentalist demand. The person experiences a clash of styles. Especially persons who are about to leave the fundamentalist orientation develop an awareness of the clash of styles up to the point where it becomes intolerable.

Healing here means to nurture and strengthen the present style of mutuality or individuative-systemic reflexivity and its application also in religion. Then the process of re-working earlier (fundamentalism-generative) style dimensions becomes possible. Here again, healing means the ability to tell and re-tell, to read and re-write the story of one's life in one's latest available style.[13]

Concluding Remark

Cognitive-structural theories of development in their traditional shape of structural, hierarchical, sequential, and irreversible logic of development are due to an all too optimistic interpretation of the project of modernity. If unchanged, they can not provide us with an explanatory framework for understanding fundamentalism and individual fundamentalist revivals. The religious styles perspective takes account of the fact that the project of modernity is exposed to grave disturbances and thus sketches the developmental psychology variant of a fundamental problem of modernity. The religious style perspective suggests an answer to these post-modern challenges and opens a perspective of development and transformation beyond the fundamentalist revivals.

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[13] For an approach to pastoral care and counseling with (ex-)members of fundamentalist groups based on the concept of narrative re-visting and re-working of earlier styles, see Streib (Streib 2000).

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