Relating Faith Development and Religious Styles: Reflections in Light of Apostasy from Religious Fundamentalism

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Summary
This paper provides a relational analysis of James Fowler’s (1981) *Faith Development Theory* (FDT) and Heinz Streib’s (2001) *Religious Styles Perspective* (RSP) in light of a recent study of apostasy from religious fundamentalisms. Empirical support is provided for both theories. RSP is endorsed as a more encompassing theory of religious development which accounts for more contingencies than FDT. However, FDT is subsumed rather than superseded by RSP as a powerful lens through which to observe cognitive dimensions of religious development. The paper introduces an integrative paradigm, *phenomenological empiricism*, to conceptualise a complementary relationship between FDT and RSP as key theories in the future study of religious development.

Keywords
Faith Development Theory, Religious Styles Perspective, apostasy, religious fundamentalism, phenomenological empiricism

Introduction
This paper contributes to an ongoing discussion concerning the relationship between James Fowler’s *Faith Development Theory* (FDT)¹ and Heinz Streib’s *Religious Styles Perspective* (RSP).² Both theories seek to identify key factors

influencing and directing religious development throughout the lifespan. Fowler’s FDT emphasises cognitive changes as the primary factor influencing religious development. Accordingly, it presents a universal, linear, and teleological perspective of faith stages developing throughout the lifespan. Streib’s RSP emphasises multiple socio-cultural, interpersonal, and psychoanalytic factors that influence religious changes in a complex life-world. It presents a less linear perspective in which complex and diverse life changes can revive past styles and create new trajectories of religious development. In the following paper I provide, (i) a brief description of FDT and RSP in light of their philosophical traditions, (ii) an analysis of their relative strengths in light of a recent study of apostasy from religious fundamentalism, and (iii) a complementary coordination of both theories within the paradigm of phenomenological empiricism.

The coordination of FDT and RSP addresses an underlying philosophical issue in the psychology of religious development. It was perhaps inevitable given the traditional philosophical leanings of “psychology” and “religion” that issues of compatibility would manifest in diverse forms long after the fields merged in name. Accordingly, FDT and RSP draw on slightly different philosophical traditions. Fowler’s FDT foregrounds the epistemic self in the structuralist tradition of Piaget’s genetic epistemology. It is most concerned with cognitive structures and “ways of knowing” that construct cultural knowledge. Alternatively, Streib’s RSP foregrounds the ontological self in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ricoeur’s (1985/1988) phenomenology. It is most concerned with socio-cultural complexities and relational “ways of being” in the world and represents a challenge to the primacy of the epistemic self assumed by structural-developmental theory. As others have noted it is important to remember that “behind Fowler stands Piaget, behind Piaget stands Kant, and that matters much more fundamental than ‘stages’ are being addressed” (Parks in Dykstra and Parks, 1986, p. 141) in theories relating to religious development.

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3) This paradigm will be described and elaborated in a later section.