

in: Leslie Francis, Jeff Astley and Mandy Robbins (eds): *The Fourth R for the Third Millennium: education in religions and values for the global future*, Dublin: Lindisfarne Books 2001, 177-199.

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## **IS THERE A WAY BEYOND FUNDAMENTALISM? CHALLENGES FOR FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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### **Introduction**

The global occurrence of fundamentalist developments and their highly political and sometimes scandalous quality call for a global perspective. The Chicago Fundamentalism Project (Marty and Appleby 1993a; 1993b; 1994a; 1994b; 1995) has the merit to address fundamentalism in such a global perspective across cultures and religious traditions. The global and highly political perspective however should not divert attention from the fact that there are also quiet and a-political currents within the fundamentalist movements. Moreover, it can be argued that at the basis of any fundamentalist orientation, there are religious orientations and attitudes. The global and political perspective should furthermore not obscure the possibility of individual biographical developments which may open up opportunities to change and to find new biographical trajectories, to engage in de-conversion and transformation. The study of biographies opens such a perspective. The two ex-fundamentalist case studies which will be portrayed in the first section below demonstrate not only the possibility of change, but also very different avenues of de-conversion and transformation.

Change, development, transformation is the hope and expectation not only from a political, societal and educational standpoint, but also from the perspective of the scientific study of religion. In any form, also in its a-political and less scandalous versions, and especially as an orientation of the individual person, fundamentalism presents a challenge for education – and for education in religion in particular, if it is true that at the core of any fundamentalist orientation there is a religious dimension.

Fundamentalism presents a challenge for religious education which must be recognised sufficiently. It is my thesis that religious education could provide decisive transformational potentials, if – but only if – it remembers its proper aims.

For that reason, we shall clarify and elaborate (in the second section) what fundamentalism is, how it develops, and what exactly we understand as specific developmental transformation which may lead beyond fundamentalism. This chapter will also propose a structure and aims for religious education.

### **Case Studies**

Political concern about so-called sects and psycho-cults led the Federal German Parliament to set up an Enquête Commission. The Final Report of the Commission (Deutscher Bundestag 1998), however, arrived at the moderate conclusion that new religious movements, fundamentalism and psycho-groups “do not pose a threat for government and society or for any of the relevant domains in society” (284). Such rather moderate conclusion is in part due to a closer investigation of the biographical dynamics involved in joining and leaving such groups as it is presented in the results of qualitative-biographical research which has been initiated by the Enquête Commission itself.

The aim of my research project on Christian-fundamentalist converts and deconverts was to compare and contrast biographies or careers of members and ex-members of Christian-fundamentalist milieus and organizations. The project took a qualitative approach and followed the method of biographical-reconstructive research, which means that the biographies in various dimensions are reconstructed from the data (narrative interviews with an average length of approximately two hours). Of the 22 interviews conducted, 12 were contrastively selected for analysis. Our analytical interest was focussed on the relation between ‘religious career’ and biography; on the question of personality change and continuity, and on questions of identity in the situation of dramatic processes of conversion and transformation (for more details on the method see Streib 1999a; 2000a; for our results and the report see Streib 1998a; 1999b; 2000a; 2000b).

The advantage of qualitative-biographical research is that it offers insights into the deep structures of the biographical dynamics in a diachronic perspective which is reflected in the narrative dynamic. Thus, it may contribute to a fresh understanding of fundamentalist conversion and deconversion. Before summarising some of the results, discussing its implications for an understanding of fundamentalism and drawing conclusions for religious education, I shall present two of the case studies.

### *Sarah*

Sarah (twenty-one), born in 1976, grew up in a fundamentalist family together with three older and three younger siblings. Her mother took care of the household, her father worked as a clerk in a firm. Sarah remembers her father as an authoritarian and cruel person. As members of a fundamentalist small church, Sarah's parents raised their children in the thought system and rules of this church. After leaving high school, Sarah left home and began training as a nurse, but she had to abandon it because of psychological problems, and moved back home. Not long after her return, the entire family left this church: the father because he considered it not truly Christian enough; Sarah de-converted from the fundamentalist milieu altogether, was driven from home by her parents, moved to a female friend's house and later in with her boy-friend. She began vocational training as ergo-therapist and expected to take the exam soon after the time of the interview.

The dynamic of Sarah's narrative reveals her present problems to make something of her life, her anxiety with regard to the challenges she faces and her hatred of her own biographical past. Her elementary need to feel at home in a warm, caring and unconditionally loving environment was not fulfilled by her family. On the contrary, she tells us about having been beaten and driven from home. Religion, for Sarah, tastes of patriarchal-authoritarian and of fundamentalist orientation. Sarah considers herself to have been oppressed and exploited. She continues to have difficulties with developing initiative and an ability to cope with conflicts.

In contrast to these negative experiences and developments, Sarah also reports positive experiences within the fundamentalist milieu: feelings of community in the Church which compensated for the

devastating atmosphere in the family. For years, Sarah lived in the milieu and thought-system of that fundamentalist group and was convinced that she was on the right track.

It was due to conversations in school and to the model of her older brother (who rebelled against this religious orientation and was also expelled from home), that Sarah gradually came to question the narrow-mindedness of the family's church. An important factor in her final decision to leave the church and home certainly was Sarah's simultaneous (delayed, but all the more vehement) adolescent process of detachment, especially from her father, who was both one of the leading figures in their church and an authoritarian parent. Sarah's rebellion against her father was based on the contradictions between word and deed she saw in him thus went parallel to her rebellion against his faith.

While Sarah did not possess the resilience and strength to challenge her father's world view and dissociate herself from it during late childhood and adolescence, she had mustered the courage to find her own way and to criticise the inconsistencies in the world view of her church and the lack of warmth in the relations between church members only a few years before the interview. As a result of her ever more acute criticism and her increasing independence, Sarah was shunned and emotionally rejected by church members and family alike. This suffering, which resulted in suicidal tendencies, induced her to risk limited confrontation with her environment and, more importantly, to escape from it.

In retrospect, Sarah refers to some rare, but highly significant situations which helped her develop a mode of thinking which differed from that of her fundamentalist milieu and which helped her to finally find a way out: elucidating moments with her mother, opportunities to talk about questions which Sarah had heard in religious education classes.

### *Thomas*

Thomas (forty-eight) lived, during his childhood and adolescence, in a big city in Northern Germany. After graduating from high school, he went to university to study biology to become a science teacher. Having passed his first examination and having completed his training as a teacher, he did not obtain full-time employment as teacher for reasons we do not

know. For the following twenty years he earned his living by doing different jobs here and there. At the time of the interview, Thomas lived with a woman, her two little children and an eight-month-old infant who was their own child.

As the reason for his attraction to sects and fundamentalist groups, Thomas told us that, as a student at the university, he found it both strange and appealing to have a sign hung on the door of his next door neighbour's flat 'do not disturb - meditation'. Thomas explains his attraction with his feeling at that time:

I had the feeling, about myself that this is not all, how I live. Well, it was the search for more intensity ... for a certain kind of release from burdens which I felt with which, which perhaps were not always clear ... what it was. But a little lack of freedom, together with guilt, being dependent on... my family, uh, perhaps also a lack of self-confidence, I would say, was a kind of basic structure.

Years later, as Thomas was approaching his second exams in practical teacher training and felt the stress and pressure of these forthcoming exams, he was introduced to Bhagwan meditation by a friend. After a first-time visit, he remained in the Bhagwan movement for three or four years, living in various communes. As reasons for leaving, Thomas mentions that the ideology of the movement had become too narrow for him and that he felt too oppressed and was not satisfied with open sexuality. After this time, when his girl-friend had gone to India, Thomas moved back to his home town. There, through an old friend, he found his way into a bio-energetics group (which only went by this name obviously, but was some hardcore encounter group). Thomas tells us about a seven-day workshop, where everybody was confined to a room without eating or sleeping and about having similar exercises every week. Surprisingly, however, his account is not completely negative:

Standing without moving which after some time hurts so much that you begin to scream and to tremble ... uh and then there come such basic feelings, there comes the screaming of a three-year-old ... uh, or a rage or this and that, then this system

of this person was uh actually a therapeutic village uh let's say always, always living in therapy ... uh, to liberate yourself.

Thomas also tells us that he has had good experiences in this group. After the group leader's death, Thomas left and went on to live a rather quiet life, belonging to the church choir of a main-stream Protestant parish, and earning his living as a taxi driver and as a market salesman once a week. Then he met Scientology agents on the street and agreed to take a 'personality test.' And, unlike one of his friends who left Scientology after a first visit, Thomas became involved:

Yes I took these tests and somehow I had been caught, though I really did not want to go there (fast) I wouldn't have gone there at all first ... but once I was there I said, well, what of it, then also I got somewhat curious and certainly this ... this desire again for that ... uh redemption, liberation from the past, from a very burdensome past ... yes, that was it and they promised me something ... they had also some sort of therapy: ... they certainly now uh they are certainly harder, let's say more intransigent, more sectarian than anything I have ever seen before.

Thomas describes his attitude towards this new group – in contrast to his attitude towards the previous groups – in terms of cost and profit. And although Thomas talks extensively about a positive experience in Scientology 'therapy', the healing of a falling trauma which had plagued him very often in his dreams, his portrait of Scientology is generally negative and critical. He felt particularly uncomfortable with the lie detector. Thomas, however, was not able to leave the organisation of his own volition. This was possible for him only in the context of joining a new group.

This began again by accident: Thomas read an advertisement 'Tonight: Gospel Meeting' and followed this invitation. He went to this meeting in a charismatic church, his feeling of strangeness dissipating fast and being replaced by deep fascination. Thomas was especially impressed by a nice young woman's account telling him about Jesus, who was alive and had helped her; and Thomas was not

sure whether he was infatuated with this woman or attracted by her faith. In any case, he decided to come back for Sunday service. Thomas remembers about his first visit to this gospel church that he had to go to the bathroom to cry, so emotionally overwhelmed was he when the group started to dance and praise the Lord. This experience affected Thomas so deeply that he stayed and became a member of this fundamentalist charismatic church. And this is where he met a woman who urged him to terminate his relationship with Scientology; Thomas responded immediately, cancelling a cheque and never returning to Scientology.

It appears surprising that Thomas, after his extensive tour through groups which were rather critical of Christianity, obviously had no problem with fundamentalist thinking in this group. This points to a characteristic attitude which we can observe throughout Thomas' tour: the ideology or doctrinal truth did not play a decisive role in joining a group and does not seem to have made any difference to Thomas – except when he was required to submit: then he had to get away. Rather, motivation and fascination for Thomas consisted in the feelings of relief and in the therapeutic effect the group provided for him.

At the time of the interview, Thomas was living a rather secluded life together with his new partner and their children. Faithfulness to this woman is important to him, and he tells us that he reads to the children from the children's Bible. Looking back upon his tour through the various groups and organisations, Thomas uses biblical language, a quote from Paul to explain in what sense he regards himself as a Christian, maintaining that he does not want to be a prisoner of Christ.

I did not want to be a prisoner of Christ so to speak ... that uh, I have decided against that, I have realised ... insofar I am ... uh, if this is a Christian and when I understand this now as a Christian, then I am not a Christian any more. ... I am not a disciple of Jesus ... in that sense ... uh ... but I would not say Christianity is the worst there is, but I would say that I have said there I have experienced liberation, but I have said also ... uh can say also, in this se- where I really say a sect, Scientology ... there this has helped me and ... with Bhagwan that ... has helped me, because in each... a good friend she says I have taken a little bit from everywhere, from Anthroposophy this, from Bhagwan that.

We have no reason to doubt Thomas' self-reflective summary: in each group he found, at least temporarily, some relief. For Thomas, conversion is not a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but rather a repeated one of getting deeply involved. He was repeatedly able to find a temporary solution, and his rebellion against demands for submission repeatedly motivated him to leave these groups. Thomas' self-reflective account leads us to call him, in my terms, an 'accumulative heretic' (see below).

Is Thomas however both a compulsory convert and a compulsory heretic without any change? Upon following his narrative carefully, a transformation process becomes visible which has developed through the long tour through all the different groups and movements, at the end of which a more self-assertive, more individual person emerged. His almost restless search has come to an end not only in warmth and embeddedness, but also in responsibility with a nuclear-family situation.

### **Research Results in Broader Perspective**

The two case studies of Sarah and of Thomas are part of our research project on fundamentalist biographies, but they have implications beyond the primary political focus and scope of the Enquête Commission. The case studies yield insights into the biographical dynamics and developments of fundamentalists, into their processes of transformation and deconversion which developmental psychology must sort out and investigate further. These are basic research results in regard to education in religion – in any case, of religious education which does not want to ignore and exclude the non-mainstream or 'off-road' variants of contemporary religious orientations (cf. Streib 1999a; Streib and Schöll 2000). I shall now summarise the most important results.

#### *Themata*

In our analysis of life themes, we did not find (as some in the Enquete Commission had expected us to find) a single typical 'sect biography.' We could identify neither a single typical biographical pattern of fundamentalist converts or deconverts, nor a typical bundle of motivational factors. Certainly, we did search the biographical



narratives for motivational factors, for ‘life themes’ or ‘themata’ (Noam 1990) which the subjects bring with them into fundamentalist milieus. While we were able to identify childhood traumata, childhood anxiety or unsatisfied hunger for love and acceptance, the motivational factors we found were only of the same kind found in non-fundamentalist biographies as well.

### *Typology*

Comparison of the cases locates them within a typology. We were able to identify three types of fundamentalist ‘careers’: The first type were those ‘governed by tradition’ who, innocent of alternatives, has been born into or grown into a fundamentalist orientation. The second type were the ‘mono-converts’ who converts once in a life-time into a religious orientation that they did not have before. The third type were the ‘accumulative heretic’ (Berger 1979) whose biographies are a tour through different religious orientations. The latter I regard as a new type of religious socialisation.

Sarah is a typical case for the tradition-guided type of fundamentalist and Thomas is a very typical case of an accumulative heretic. Accumulative heretics nevertheless convert to fundamentalist belief systems – albeit only temporarily. This typology suggests a clarification of the nature of fundamentalist conversion and deconversion.

### *Biographical Dynamics and Developments*

The analysis of the interview material included a special focus on the biographical dynamics and developments, the biographical consequences. We analyzed indicators of transformation and decompensation. Despite the subjects' struggle with often traumatic themata and despite some signs of decompensation, the case material also revealed problem-reducing effects, or indications of developmental transformation.

Thomas is a typical case who has undergone a transformation during his journey through a variety of religious milieus, which finally enabled him to cope with his unrelieved desire for unconditional love. Sarah has experienced times of crises up to some severe episodes of decompensation; only after deconversion has she entered into transformation.

Comparison of the cases (and also comparison between Thomas and Sarah, because I have chosen these two cases as examples of the extremes) reveals that transformation and de-compensation are not distributed equally among them. The tendency could be demonstrated that the 'type governed by tradition' suffers more negative consequences and in some cases de-compensation, while the 'accumulative heretics' develops more easily into transformation. I consider the documentation of these transformation processes the most important result of our research which parallels other analyses.

Our observation that the 'accumulative heretic' type fundamentalists develop more easily into progressive transformation can be related to Kilbourne's and Richardson's (1985) observation about such effect in 'social experimenters.' Another parallel can be drawn to Generation X biographies. In his stimulating analysis, Beaudoin (1998) portrays the specific way in which Generation X adopts religious orientations, remains suspicious toward institutions and traditions and puzzles together its own religiosity. Though Beaudoin's portrait of Generation X's "irreverence as a spiritual gift," does not focus on fundamentalist orientations, the irreverent tendencies may serve as a safeguard against total submission in certain cases of fundamentalists as well; and they may be present in Generation X cases above the average.

Implications for intervention, counselling and education can be drawn from such an analysis. Certainly, therapy should be provided to help the troubled individual to work on and cope with traumatic life themes which he or she took into the fundamentalist or new religious milieu and which did not find resolution there. It is necessary to assist these transformation processes and there are some valuable contributions to consider (cf. Streib 2000c), but the need for therapy is rather the exception. The prophylactic aspect of education in school and public education seems to be more important. Religious educators are called upon to make explicit their own contribution to the prophylactic response to the fundamentalist challenge. But what should people learn? What are the specific goals of religious education when it tackles the fundamentalist challenge? This is what I would like to make explicit in the final part of this chapter. First, however, I shall

highlight some features of the concept of fundamentalism from which I draw my educational conclusions.

### **Fundamentalism: concepts and explanations**

For clarification of the concept of fundamentalism in respect to the chances of transformation in a biographical and religious educational perspective, I refer to contributions from sociology and developmental psychology.

#### *Fundamentalism and modernity*

Fundamentalism is ‘anti-modernism’. Such understanding follows from sociological analysis, as Küenzlen (1994; 1996) suggests. When we trace fundamentalism’s basic orientations back to its origin, to the point where the first people and publications proudly identified themselves as ‘fundamentalists’, it appears as a reaction against developments in science, in theology, in society and in the churches. For an adequate description of fundamentalism, we can draw on the claims of the fundamentalist manifesto: infallibility and literal understanding of the scripture; literal understanding of some basic propositions such as virgin birth, bodily resurrection and the return of Jesus; rejection of the results of modern science wherever they contradict this literal understanding; the claim that only people subscribing to this manifesto are truly religious. From this self-description, it is obvious that fundamentalism is a re-action to modernity. However, this reaction to processes of modernisation itself is using rather advanced ‘modern’ scientific arguments, means of communication and organisational strategies: it is modern anti-modernism.

In a wider philosophical perspective, fundamentalist revivals appear as indications of disturbances which the project of modernity is exposed to. With reference to Lyotard’s (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 post-modern disturbances. Such disturbances also include individual and global fundamentalisms which again are based to no small degree on meta-stories themselves.

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 account for fundamentalism, nor can they provide us with an explanatory framework for the individual fundamentalist revivals. 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 the fundamentalism problem. From such a different developmental perspective, implications follow for religious education.

*Fundamentalism as Revival of the 'Do-ut-des' Style*

A new perspective emerges from the following question: How does the thesis 'fundamentalism is modern anti-modernism' translate into terms of developmental psychology? At first glance, such a translation appears impossible, since the structural-developmental theories at hand appear to be in line with the progressive-teleological myth of modernity and therefore seem to be incapable of regression. Oser's theory of religious development (Oser and Gmünder 1984) and Fowler's (1981) faith development theory are no exception here. A new model, however, while certainly originating in the family of theories which consider the Piagetian developmental model for various other domains, tries to take a broader perspective and to qualify the cognitive and structural one-sidedness in the Piagetian family of theories. Taking up the thread of my doctoral dissertation (Streib 1991), I have recently proposed a modification of structural-developmental theory of religion (cf. Streib 1997), especially of Fowler's faith development theory, from which a plausible explanation of fundamentalism can be advanced (Streib 2001): the religious-styles perspective.

The most significant qualifications of structural-developmental theory which the religious styles perspective suggests result from a decided focus on inter-personality, from a deeper account for the psychodynamic dimension, and from special attention to the religious milieu. For a revision of structural-developmental theory by focussing on the interpersonal, I refer to Noam (1985; 1990) and to Noam, Powers, Kilkenny and Beedy (1991). The new model proposes to describe religious development not in terms of stages, but rather in

terms of styles. Development, then, appears as a cumulative sequence of styles which supposedly peak at a certain point in life. These styles, however, are not assumed to disappear, but rather to decline and form a layer in one's psychic resources which can be recalled and revitalised later when the need arises.

The religious styles perspective can be described briefly as follows. First, the *subjective religious style* is predominant in early childhood when the symbiotic relation to the care takers still prevails and the development of basic trust is crucial.

Second, the *reciprocal-instrumental* or '*do-ut-des*' religious style develops when the child becomes aware of his or her own needs and interests as opposed to those of other people. *Do-ut-des* is the basic pattern for both the interpersonal and the God-human relationship: good is what God and the authority persons wish and demand, bad and immoral is what results in punishment – a '*do-ut-des*' economy. Means of trade are obedience and observation of religious commandments. The characterisation of this style's understanding pattern as 'mythic-literal' (Fowler) means that an awareness of the metaphoric or symbolic meaning has not yet developed, that we must not modify any detail of the story or of the religious rules. Literally everything happened precisely as told in the story, literally everything has to be observed exactly as the religious rules prescribe.

Third, during puberty and adolescence, the *do-ut-des* style normally recedes to the background and is superseded by a new orientation which we call *mutual religious style*, when the widening of the interpersonal horizon, e.g. in the adolescent peer group, and the mutuality of relations permit such development. The new style rests on mutuality in one's religious group and prefers an image of God as a personal partner. The unquestioned security in one's religious group or its contrary: the dependence on their judgement, reveal that it is difficult to transcend the ideological and institutional group limits. The capacity to establish one's own critical and reflective point of view has not yet been developed.

Fourth, in the *individuating-systemic religious style*, in which the social world is understood as a system in which I have to look for, take and defend my own place. It is the style of identity formation in which through reflection we have to find our place in society. And this is also true for

religious matters: God, society, church, the human being - all have their well-defined places and roles.

Fifth, we hope for the development of the *dialogical religious style* which is able to realise that contradictions and differences need not result in exclusion and hostility towards others, but are opportunities to open up for, and learn from other people with religious orientations different from our own.

It is obvious that the description of the reciprocal-instrumental *or do-ut-des* style characterises exactly what the fundamentalist world view maintains. Fowler (1987: 85), too, has paralleled mythic-literal faith and fundamentalist communities: mythic-literal faith can in fundamentalist groups “constitute the modal level for the community”. And he suggests to distinguish two kinds of settings: “It makes a considerable difference whether this stage is experienced in a community as a way station on a longer journey or as having the characteristic of a final destination.” We do not call children fundamentalists, however, but regard this style as one adequate for childhood. We regard as characteristic for fundamentalism only the persistence or revival of the ‘*do-ut-des*’ style in adolescence and adulthood when most people have already developed mutual or systemic orientations. The systemic style stands for modernity’s competencies and requirements, it parallels the sociological notion of modernity. When in the midst of systemic or mutual style development – which is applied to most issues except for religion and ‘existential issues’ (cf. e.g. Hunsberger et.al. 1994; 1996) – the *do-ut-des* style re-emerges and gains influence, we can speak of a fundamentalist revival. The fundamentalist orientation develops the stronger the more the *do-ut-des* style gains ground and dominates. In this way, the interpretation of fundamentalism as modern anti-modernism translates well into the terms of developmental psychology.

### **The challenge to religious education**

Imagine Sarah and Thomas sitting in your religious education class! What would you expect them to learn? How would you react? Before the teacher is able to do anything, however, he or she must become aware of the fact that a student may have a fundamentalist orientation.

After identifying fundamentalist orientations, what are the basic aims of religious education? In short, religious education, despite all subject orientation, should be a place for talking personally, *for care of souls*, but also for reflecting and transforming one's religious orientation.

#### *'Care of Souls' in Religious Education*

Religion involves the person very deeply, its 'content' concerns us ultimately (Tillich, 1929, 1931, 1957). The interview material has great value in demonstrating the deep personal involvement in themes and questions which only the ignorant would treat as mere content. Especially for the sake of fundamentalist students, we need to pay new and careful attention to the student's needs. Therefore, I propose to (re-)consider approaches of counselling and pastoral care for religious education. In an atmosphere of mutual perception and encounter, students will be able to disclose their own religious orientation, and fundamentalists will not need to hide their opinion, *care of souls* can take place, and deconversion has an opportunity to develop in this environment.

#### *Transformation and The Goal of Religious Autonomy*

Fundamentalists, as our case material demonstrates, are able to engage in transformation. This might encourage religious educators to bear in mind that this potential exists. But can religious education continue to hold on to goals of reflection on religious matters only? Should individuating reflectiveness (Fowler) or religious autonomy (Oser) be still our main educational goals? The answer is yes, but only if there is a decisive qualification of structural-developmental goals.

The explication of the concept of fundamentalism which I have developed above has implications for religious education. If we understand fundamentalist orientations as a revival of the *'do-ut-des'* religious style, we look back from the actual state of development and inquire how previous orientations can be integrated. We deal with the difference, the clash, the split. And we ask how such 'dislocation of styles' can be overcome to the effect that the present mutual or systemic styles cover more ground. Here, the developmental expectation of religious autonomy is adequate, with the following important qualification. Religious autonomy must not be identified

with the strict and narrow systemic style of a rational worldview, but rather stands opposed to the fundamentalists' humourless one-dimensionality. Religious autonomy involves a playful ease which is aware of the fact that knowledge is preliminary and that we think in models. Finally, integration or 'healing the dislocation' means to develop the ability to tell and re-tell, to read and re-write the story of one's life in one's latest available style.

In sharp contrast to the 'revival' that is characteristic for fundamentalism, responsive religious educators may develop some appreciation for 'regression' which, when it is in the service of the ego (cf. Blos 1967; Hensler 1994), can become a helpful perspective in counselling and in religious education, when the individual re-visits patterns of thought and feeling in his life in order to work on them and hopefully to integrate them into his present thinking. Viewed from this perspective, what fundamentalist students need is not developmental impatience and provocative confrontation with the goal of religious autonomy, but rather *time*. Kegan (1982: 276) powerfully advocates such intervention which he calls '*joining the person*'. It is one of the tasks for religious educators indeed to join the fundamentalist meaning-maker, since he or she faces a world that is stimulating up to the point of being a threat to one's opinions and beliefs. This means to allow the student to hold his or her own views and to be integrated, even if it is strange to the teacher and the other students. Then it means cautiously inviting reflection.

### *Some goals of religious education*

Explicating the above reflections in educational goals leads me to conclude with a wider perspective, because I suppose that fundamentalism can be taken as a challenge reminding religious education to become again what it should be in the first place. I shall state this in seven theses:

First, religious education should be a process dealing with *perplexity* and *astonishment*, rather than providing a flood of answers to questions which are unknown to the students.

Second, religious education should be a "creative laboratory for thought experiments" (Ricoeur 1992) and for fiction (cf. Streib,



1998b), rather than a curriculum of clear-cut lessons about the facts of one's own religion or another.

Third, religious education has the task of *overcoming literal faith* (Tillich 1957: 244), and nurturing the '*conflict of interpretations*', leading to an understanding of theological truth as *outline, model* and *thought experiment* for our time. Therefore, acquaintance with the diversity of theological thinking is an important goal for religious education in response to fundamentalist tendencies.

Fourth, religious education needs to promote *playful ease*, rather than humourless narrow-minded factual knowledge. Playful ease is a habit which we expect to be available in an unrestricted and unspoiled way in childhood. Religious educators, however, may need to develop or regain it for themselves and for their students as a prophylactic competence against fundamentalism. Aren't we invited to "become like the children"?

Fifth, religious education should nurture the ability to tell and re-tell, to read and re-write the story of one's life in one's latest available style.

Sixth, religious education should put in motion the '*Protestant Principle*' (Tillich 1929) and transcend the concreteness of one's own church, community and religious tradition (which even exceeds the sphere of religion) in order to reflect on nature, culture and history *under the aspect of ultimate concern*. In short, and to quote Tillich once more, religious education has the goal of opening the students' minds (as deeply as in their unconscious dimension) for the *ultimate mystery of being* (Tillich 1931:234).

Seventh, religious education, thus understood, is an *aesthetic* adventure, rather than an instruction as it were in hermeneutic objectivity (Zilleßen 1994; 1995).

## **Outlook**

Our reflection on the concept of fundamentalism has focussed on the remark that fundamentalist revivals indicate that the project of modernity is exposed to grave disturbances. Further we noted that the developmental psychology variant of the modern meta-story: the cognitive-structural theories of development in their traditional shape of a structural, hierarchical, sequential, and irreversible logic of

development (if unchanged) do not provide us with the explanatory framework for the individual fundamentalist revivals. A solution derives from a modification of the developmental model: the religious style perspective allows us to take account of fundamentalism and opens a perspective of development and transformation beyond the fundamentalist orientation.

Such modification is part of a paradigmatic shift and re-balancing which exceeds, of course, the domain of cognitive development, of religion and of faith development, but has decisive consequences for them. It implies the re-balancing of disconnected reason with relational knowing, of universality with bodily being-in-the-life-world, of objectivity with object relation, of decentred subjectivity with openness for the Other. It is the task, to mention a few names, to re-balance the Piagetian and Kohlbergian structural teleology with the hermeneutic of Ricoeur (e.g. 1992), the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (e.g. 1988), and Tillich's philosophy of religion and his theory of the religious symbol. From these accounts, as I have tried to demonstrate, a modified perspective on development and transformation emerges with decisive implications for religious education. This may help to prepare religious education for the millennium which has just begun and in which we can not expect a decline of fundamentalist revivals.

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