Faith Development as Change in Religious Types: Results from Three-wave Longitudinal Data with Faith Development Interviews

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Abstract

Faith, as a way of how people understand God and the world and make or discover meaning in their life, is characterized by individual differences and changes over the lifetime. Our research investigates these changes over the lifespan in terms of hierarchically ordered types that are the elements in our developmental model, which is a critical advancement and modification of Fowler's theory of faith development. This study is the first to investigate whether there *is* development in faith over the adult lifespan and to identify predictors of developmental change. Our mixed-method design used three-wave longitudinal data (mean lag time 10.47 years from Wave 1 to Wave 3). A sample of $N = 75$ participants were interviewed with the faith development interview three times and each time answered comprehensive questionnaires. Results evidenced faith development over the lifespan: a majority in our data moved to a higher type, while change to a lower type did occur. *Openness to experience* and the religious schema *truth of text and teachings* were potential antecedents for faith development.

Keywords

religious development; faith development; religious change; longitudinal; structural equation modeling; openness to experience; religious schema;

This study is a contribution to research on individual differences and lifespan developmental changes (intra-individual differences) in religious, spiritual, or non-religious faith. Thereby research is focusing on the structural differences in *how* individuals make meaning, *how* they construct relations to others, *how* they justify decisions and actions, and *how* they understand the coherence of the world. With such focus on structural difference rather than on content, this study is in general agreement with Fowler's (1981) approach to faith development.

Fowler's (1981) *Stages of Faith. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* was widely discussed in the 1980s and 1990s. Fowler applied Piaget's model of cognitive development, interpreted through the lenses of Kohlberg's theory of moral development, to the domain of faith. Still today, Fowler's work can be regarded as the most prominent proposal to understand faith as developing over the lifetime. Two points of criticism against Fowler's model and the faith development research stand out and substantiate the aims of this study. First, under the a priori assumption of a mono-directional, stagewise, and irreversible development in faith, there has been no rigorous, longitudinal investigation exploring whether there *is* faith development over the lifespan. Second, there has been no rigorous psychological investigation of predictors that may cause individuals to progress in faith development.

This study, therefore, aims at investigating faith development. This includes, first and foremost, searching for evidence whether there *is* development of faith over the lifespan. This study also aims at identifying predictors, covariates, and outcomes of such development. Thus, this study belongs to our attempts to better integrate Fowler's model in contemporary psychology. Of course, we need explain first the conceptual framework for a model of faith development on which this study is based.

Broad Definitions of ‘Faith’ and ‘Religion’

Fowler’s concept of ‘faith’ corresponds to Cantwell Smith’s (1963, 1979) definition of ‘faith’ as distinct from ‘belief’ and (organized) ‘religion.’ Based on Cantwell Smith’s conceptualization, Fowler (1981, pp. 92-93) defines ‘faith’ as:

“People’s evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them), as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them), and shaping their lives’ purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in the light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images - conscious and unconscious - of them).”

We are in general agreement with this definition of faith and find it noteworthy, because of its clear and exclusive focus on the structure, rather than on contents. Noteworthy is also the broadness of this definition that aims at a common core across religions, rather than at distinctions in contents of belief between religious traditions. Thus, this definition implies that ‘faith development’ should not be confused with the accumulation of religious knowledge, or with [2] an increase in strength of religious conviction; faith development does not mean an increase in frequency of private or public religious praxis, nor an increase in observing religious prescriptions and leading a moral-religious life; and finally, faith development does not mean an increase in religious experience. But rather, in all these dimensions of religiosity (cf. Glock, 1962), a faith development perspective discerns the individual differences in construction and reconstruction of meaning.¹

¹ ‘Faith’ and ‘religion’ can be used interchangeably, when defined so broadly. ‘Religion’ can be defined with reference to Luckmann’s (1967) concept of ‘transcending’ everyday consciousness (*genus proximum*) and Tillich’s (1957) ‘ultimate concern’ (*differentia specifica*), as Streib and Hood (2011, 2013) argue. ‘Religion’ in this wide understanding then is, as noted for Cantwell Smith’s understanding of ‘faith,’ neither defined by consent to a set of beliefs, nor by ritual observance or organizational belonging, but rather by structure and function of meaning making and meaning discovery.

Faith, so broadly defined, entails an account for inter-individual and intra-individual differences. Development consists in changes in an individual's lifetime. Faith development consists in intra-individual differences between structurally distinct styles of understanding, appropriation and reconstruction of the propositional, narrative, and symbolic expressions that religious and worldview traditions offer, and individuals use, for making or discovering meaning of extraordinary and everyday experiences. When such structurally distinct styles that change in an individual's lifetime are regarded to present a hierarchical order, we speak of faith development identified in terms of ordinal increase in clearly operationalized variables.

The Model of Development and the Hierarchy of Types

Our study is based on a revision of Fowler's (1981) model of faith development, which we regard the most prominent proposal in this domain. Despite a series of necessary critical modifications, Fowler's model has the potential to serve as foundation for the structural-developmental typology of faith development that is used in this study. Fowler emphasized that the differences in his typology are based on strictly *structural* characteristics and all stages rank on a spiral line (Fowler, 1981, p. 275) through which individuals are supposed to stride in one direction progressively and sequentially on an ideal ontogenetic developmental trajectory. Fowler's model shares much of this developmental optimism—including a prescriptive intention for the higher stages—with many structural-developmental models that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s under the influence of Kohlberg (1981, 1984) and his reading of Piaget.

Streib (2001) has criticized and advanced Fowler's model and thereby replaced 'stages of faith' with 'religious styles.' Abandoning the terminology of stages intends to free the description of religiosity from the confinement to a model of a stage-wise, mono-directional, and invariantly sequential line of development, while retaining the core of Fowler's typology. The religious styles that are suggested by Streib (2001) put more emphasis on the inter-

personal relation and thus the labels for the religious styles slightly differ from Fowler's labels for faith stages. But Fowler (2001, p. 171), in response to Streib's (2001) presentation, reaffirmed that he still believes that stages are "sequential, invariant, and hierarchical." In agreement with Streib (2001), we reject Fowler's assumption of a sequential and invariant development, while we generally agree with Fowler in regard to the assumption of a hierarchy, but claim that the hierarchical order is plausible especially on philosophical-ethical grounds. Thus, our developmental model is both normative and value driven, as will be detailed below.

As the *Coding Manual* from its first (Moseley et al., 1986) to the current edition (Streib & Keller, 2018) propose, religious styles are assessed by an interview, which Fowler called the faith development interview (FDI). The FDI is a semi-structured interview with 25 questions that elicits narration and reflective responses on life-review, past and current relations, values and commitments, and finally on religion and worldview. Evaluation proceeds by the interpretative identification of one of the religious styles for each of the 25 answers. This procedure results, for each interview, in 25 variables denoting religious styles.

Streib et al. (2020) explain that the 25 styles can be combined into a final total FDI score using the predominant or substantial frequency of the assignment of a specific style in one interview. This total FDI score is called the religious type. The four religious types reflect Allport's (1954, p. 456) contrast between the religion "of an ethnocentric order" and the religion "of a universalistic order," but differentiate the binary contrast into four types. Here is a brief summary characterization of the four types:

1. The *Substantially Ethnocentric* Type is characterized by a substantial presence of mythic-literal understanding, substantial ethnocentric, mono-religious claims for the exclusive truth of texts and teachings of one's own tradition, and a substantial support for a system of punishment and reward in regard to justice in heaven and on earth.

2. The *Predominantly Conventional* Type has a predominant inclination for consent to the conventional beliefs and prescriptions of one's group, religious community or immediate small lifeworld; it has a desire for mutual interpersonal harmony, while rejecting critical questioning.
3. The *Predominantly Individuative-reflective* Type invites critical and autonomous reflection—featuring multi-religious plurality; in case of conflicting validity claims, models of tolerance are considered.
4. The *Emerging Dialogical-xenosophic* Type is characterized by an openness for inter-religious dialog and for being challenged and changed by the encounter with the Other/the Alien. On top of the use of critical and autonomous reflection there emerges xenosophia, the wisdom in encountering the Strange/Alien (Waldenfels, 2011; Nakamura, 2000; Streib, 2018).

The religious types present a hierarchical order. They are both normative and value driven. We base our developmental hierarchy on firm philosophical-ethical and philosophical-phenomenological ground when we assume that a style of openness for dialog and xenosophia is ethically higher than mere individuative reflection and tolerance (Streib, 2018); reflection and tolerance are, in turn, ethically higher than mere conventionalism. And all of the above are ethically higher than ethnocentric attitudes and mythic-literal understanding.

Progression from Type 1 to Type 4 is understood as developmental progress. Thus, we expect to find cases in our three-wave data who progress to a higher type over the three times of [3] measurement and have arrived at a higher type at Wave 3 (*movers* upward). Further, since we discard the assumption of an exclusively irreversible progressive development, we expect cases who regress on a lower type (*movers* downward). Any substantial portion of movers downward would suggest the rejection of Kohlberg's and Fowler's assumption of an exclusively irreversible progressive development. And finally, we expect to find a

considerable number of *stayers*, that is participants who have the same religious type consistently over all three times of measurement or at least between at Wave 1 and Wave 3.

Based on our basic definition of faith development and on the construction of religious types, this article will present results from three-wave longitudinal data that include three faith development interviews with the same persons. Before we are going to present methods and results, we explicate and justify the hypotheses with reference to extant research.

Evidence that There Is Faith development over Time

As part of the cognitive-structural theorists, Fowler was without doubt convinced that his model presents a line of progressive and invariantly sequential development of faith. Confirming earlier statements (e.g. Fowler, 1980, p. 65), Fowler (2001, p. 171) asserted “that the structural stage sequence is sequential, invariant, and hierarchical” and presents “a typology of structural wholes.” Fowler thus regarded his model of stages of faith in line with Kohlberg et al.’s (1983, p. 238) criteria for “hard” cognitive-structural stages (structural difference, invariant sequence, structural whole, hierarchical integration), which Kohlberg presented as *Piagetian* criteria. Though Fowler emphasized that stage transitions do not occur automatically at a certain age, the assumption of an “invariant sequence” nevertheless implies that faith development is progressing with life-time—which, in turn, excludes the option that individuals may regress on a lower faith stage at a later time. We need to note this here, because such *a priori* assertion of the criteria for cognitive-structural stages may explain why an engagement in empirical research that would put the Kohlbergian assumptions to the test and investigate whether there *is* progressing development in faith stages had no priority for Fowler and other researchers in faith development.

Despite such low priority for quantitative evidence, Fowler has reported empirical results in an effort to show progressive faith development over the lifespan. Fowler (1981, pp. 317-319) presented the statistics of $N = 349$ FDIs that he and his colleagues had evaluated before 1981 as “preliminary” (p. 323) evidence that there *is* progressive development of faith

stages over the life-span. This was demonstrated with reference to the age distribution of faith stage assignments as summarized in the table “Distribution of Stages of Faith by Age” (Table B.3, p. 318), which looks like a “stairstep pattern of the relation between age and stage” (p. 319). And because the sequence, especially in the age groups of children, adolescents and early adults, indicates a stage-like, upward movement from age group to age group, it could be taken as indication for the progressive development of stages of faith. Closer inspection of the age groups in adulthood and old age, however, indicates an up and down of frequencies in the age groups, especially of stage three and stage four assignments. Thus, Fowler’s frequency statistics could be interpreted as conflicting with his own assumption of an exclusive upward direction of faith development. And Fowler (1981, p. 323) was careful enough to caution that these descriptives were not presented “to confirm or refute the theory” developed in the book. And he decided to put them in the Appendix. Nevertheless, this is the most comprehensive empirical result in faith development research so far to provide preliminary evidence of a stage-wise upward progression of faith. And while, of course, from a methodological perspective, it is highly questionable to base evidence for the existence of faith development on the distribution of scores in the age groups in cross-sectional data, Fowler’s research report has established an ambitious thesis that calls for rigorous examination by further research. Another reason for such examination is the fact that subsequent research using the FDI such as Broun’s (1984) or Turner’s (2008) dissertation research did not find a significant correlation between age and faith stage.

These inconsistent and methodological questionable results can only be re-examined by new research based on a longitudinal design. This is what this study does. The assumption of changes in faith development over the lifetime is ambitious and interesting enough, to be established it as hypothesis for this study (H0; H1).

Personality as a Potential Predictor of Faith Development

The hierarchy of the styles and types describes an increasing openness to the other and the world. Can we conclude then that this hierarchy relates to personality factors, and to *openness to experience* in particular? This may be plausible because *openness to experience* (*openness*) relates to the increasing reflectivity and complexity and the widening of the social horizon in faith development, as assumed in both Fowler's and Streib's models. Therefore, *openness* stands out as potential covariate and/or predictor for faith development that we need to include in our study.

As previous research documents, not all five factors of personality relate to religiosity with equal strength, and this relation depends on what is understood by 'religiosity.' According to Saroglou's (2002, 2010, 2017) meta-analyses of research in personality and religion, *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness* are reliably related to general religiosity, but not the other three factors of personality. But when Saroglou included a distinction between different versions of religiosity, namely (a) 'religiosity' in general, (b) 'spirituality/mature faith' and (c) 'religious fundamentalism,' the results have changed: High *openness* "predicted modern and reflective forms of religiousness such as spirituality," while low *openness* "emerged as a personality trait associated with strong forms of religiousness such as fundamentalism" (Saroglou, 2010, p. 115).

In our own previous research in the context of the construction of the four religious types (Streib et al., 2020, pp. 121-122), we found evidence that scores on *openness* generally increase as the religious types progress. However, for evidencing *openness* as predictor for faith development, these cross-sectional results are insufficient. Longitudinal data are required.

Recently, we presented first tentative results with a Cross-lagged Panel Analysis (CLPA) based on two-wave data indicating that *openness* may be a predictor for progress in religious styles (Streib, Chen, et al., 2019). But only an analysis of three-wave data may allow

to fully evidence that increasing agreement with *openness* is related to the hierarchical order of the religious types and put the following hypotheses to the test: *openness* at the initial time of measurement predicts faith development across the waves of [4] measurement (H2), and: change of *openness* across the waves of measurement correlates with change of religious types across the waves of measurement (H4).

Religious Schemata as Possible Predictors for Development

The Religious Schema Scale (RSS; Streib et al., 2010) was conceptualized on the basis of the religious styles model. The RSS is designed to measure three religious schemata: (1) a holding on to one's own beliefs in an exclusivist and absolutistic way, measured with the subscale *truth of texts and teachings (ttt)*, (2) the application of autonomous reflection to take other worldviews into account, measured with the subscale *fairness, tolerance and rational choice (ftr)* and (3) the openness for dialog and for encounter with the previously unknown worldview, measured with the subscale *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog (xenos)*. Even though we emphasized that the RSS is not simply a scale to quantitatively measure Fowler's stages of faith or Streib's religious styles, the RSS subscales are presumed to specifically relate to the religious styles.

In her dissertation research, Turner (2008, p. 92) found high correlation ($r = .49, p = .023$) between the FDI scores and scores of the RSS in her (relatively small) sample of 21 participants. From analyses in our *Spirituality Study* (Streib & Hood, 2016) on the relation between the religious schemata and the stages of faith, Streib et al. (2016, p. 389) concluded that "it is not the ratings on the single RSS subscales, but their combination which identifies the faith stages resp. religious styles." And still using cross-sectional data in our construction of the four religious types (Streib et al., 2020, pp. 121-122), we found that agreement with *ttt* is decreasing as the types progress from the Substantially Ethnocentric to the Individuative-reflective Type (with a partial slight increase again to the Dialogical-xenosophic Type). For the scores on the *xenos* subscale, it the reverse: *xenos* is increasing as the types progress.

Only longitudinal analysis can test whether (a) *ttt* at Wave 1 predicts faith development across the three times of measurement (H3), and (b) whether changes in the RSS subscales *ttt* and *xenos* across the times of measurement correlate with changes in religious types (H5).

Well-being as Possible Outcome of Faith Development

Progress in religious styles and types may relate to an increase of a sense of autonomy and a sense of personal growth. *Autonomy* and *personal growth*, however, are two subscales of the Psychological Well-being and Growth Scale (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1996, 1998a, 1998b). The Ryff-Scales have been included in the questionnaires of all three waves of our research for an assessment of outcomes. Thus, especially the subscales for *autonomy* and *personal growth* may help us identify the outcomes of faith development. While, to our knowledge, the Ryff-Scales have not been included in the assessment of faith development so far, they may open a perspective on the outcomes of faith development, and especially two subscales of *autonomy* and *personal growth* may play important roles as outcomes of faith development, when faith development is supposed to result in higher autonomy and higher sense of personal growth. Again, we have first tentative indication from CLPA with two-wave data that higher scores on *autonomy* may be the outcome of the progress in religious styles and types (Streib, Chen, et al., 2019). However, three-wave data are needed to test the hypotheses whether higher scores on the Ryff-Scale subscales *autonomy* and *personal growth* at Wave 3 are *predicted* by faith development (H7; H8) and whether faith development mediates the prediction of *openness* on *personal growth* (H9).

Summary of Hypotheses

Using longitudinal data from three participations in an FDI and in a questionnaire survey, this study allows to fill a gap in the literature by generating evidence for the questions (a) whether there *is* faith development in terms of changes in religious types, (b) whether such development is predicted by the personality factor of *openness* and by the religious schemata

of *truth of texts and teachings (ttt)* and *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog (xenos)*, (c) whether changes in religious type covary with changes in *openness*, *ttt* and *xenos*, (d) whether the well-being factors *autonomy* and *personal growth* are predicted by faith development, and finally (e) whether faith development mediates the prediction of *openness* on *personal growth*. The Hypotheses for this study that were pre-registered at the Open Science Framework (osf; Streib, Hood, et al., 2019) are integrated and slightly expanded in the following list:

- H0. The descriptive evaluation of religious types over the three waves of measurement will reveal change and stability: Besides stayers (estimated 40%-50%), there will be movers upward (cases who are on a higher type at Wave 3 compared to Wave 1) and movers downward (cases who are on a lower type at Wave 3 compared to Wave 1).
- H1. As will be quantified as a linear slope of change in religious type across the three waves, there will be an upward change in religious type, evidencing progressive faith development.
- H2. *Openness* (NEO-FFI) at Wave 1 predicts faith development across the three waves.
- H3. The RSS subscale *ttt* at Wave 1 predicts faith development across the three waves.
- H4. Change of *openness* (NEO-FFI) across the three waves correlates with change of religious types across the three waves.
- H5. Changes in the RSS subscale *ttt* across the three waves correlates with changes in religious types across the three waves.
- H6. Changes in the RSS subscale *xenos* across the three waves correlates with changes in religious types across the three waves.
- H7. The scores on the Ryff-Scale subscale *autonomy* at Wave 3 are predicted by faith development.
- H8. The scores on the Ryff-Scale subscale *personal growth* at Wave 3 are predicted by faith development.

H9. Faith development mediates the prediction of *openness* on *personal growth*. In a three-wave cross-lagged panel analysis, *openness* at Wave 1 predicts religious type at Wave 2, which in turn predicts *personal growth* at Wave 3. [5]

Method

Participants

Analyses are based on a longitudinal sample of $N = 75$ participants who completed three FDIs and answered a comprehensive questionnaire at each time of interviewing. All research projects were simultaneously collecting data in Germany and the USA to potentially allow cross-cultural comparison. In the sample of this study (demographics as reported at Wave 3), 16 (21.3%) lived in the USA, 59 (78.7%) in Germany; 35 (46.7%) identified as female, 40 (53.3 %) as male. Mean age at Wave 1 was 45.8 years (range: 18 to 76 years) and 57.0 years (range: 27 to 85 years) at Wave 3. Tertiary education was reported by 72.0 %. Mean annual per-capita income was reported at a mean of \$38,010.

All $N = 75$ participants had their first interview and survey in either the Deconversion Study (Streib et al., 2009) or the Spirituality Study (Streib & Hood, 2016) with $N = 272$ and $N = 108$, respectively. Both studies used convenience sampling through media such as paper ads, radio, or websites for reaching out to participants. Problems with locating participants at still valid addresses and getting consent for re-interviewing has limited re-participation in Wave 2 to 24.5%, but re-participation rate (of re-interviewees in Wave 1 and Wave 2) in Wave 3 was 80.6%. Time lag between the initial FDI at Wave 1 and the second FDI at Wave 2 is 6.9 years—with a subgroup difference: participants with their first FDI in the Deconversion Study ($N = 34$) have a time lag of 10.1 years (range: 6.1 to 13.4), while participants with their first FDI in the Spirituality Study have 4.3 years (range: 3.9 to 5.3) between first and second FDI. Mean time lag between the Wave 2 FDI and Wave 3 FDI is 3.6 years (range: 2.08 to 5.05). The mean time lag between the first interview at Wave 1 and the last interview at Wave 3 is 10.47 years (range: 6.53 to 16.36 years).

Measures

The FDI is a semi-structured interview that may last between 30 minutes to 2 hours. The interview format (for wording of interview questions asked in these FDIs and for evaluation prescription, see Fowler et al., 2004; Streib et al., 2016) consists of 25 questions (including associated follow-up questions) that address *life review* (Sample question: “*Reflecting on your life, identify its major chapters*”), *relationships* (“*Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents and your current relationship to them?*”), *present values and commitments* (“*Are there any beliefs, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?*”) and finally *religion and world view* (“*If people disagree about a religious issue, how can such religious conflicts be resolved?*”). Evaluation of the FDI is an interpretative process of identifying, in the responses to the respective FDI question, the structural pattern as described in detail in the *Coding Manual*. This evaluation concludes with the assignment of one of the styles to the respective interacts in the FDI transcript that contain the answers of the interviewees to each of the 25 questions. After entering evaluation results into the quantitative data base, this results in 25 variables with integers for the style assignments. FDI rating checks by a second blind rater in random subsamples of ca. 17% of Wave 1 and Wave 2 FDIs resulted in inter-rater agreement of 80% and 69%, respectively. 79% inter-rater agreement was indicated for the ratings of a first, second and a third, final rater of the entire Wave 3 FDI sample.

Our method of constructing the final total FDI score is the religious type (Streib, Chen, & Hood, 2020). To construct a summary evaluation of one FDI, the type is constructed according to the following algorithm: Out of the 25 rating variables, if frequency of Style 2 rating is equal to or more than 5 (20%), a person’s religious type will be Type 1 (*substantially ethnocentric*); if frequency of Style 5 rating is equal to or more than 5 (20%), the type is decided as Type 4 (*emerging dialogical-xenosophic*); else, the type is Type 2 (*predominantly conventional*) if frequency of style 3 rating is greater than that of style 4 rating, or Type 3

(*predominantly individuated-reflective*) if frequency of style 4 rating is greater than that of style 3 rating. A specific rule is set in place to break the ties introduced by an identical frequency of Style 3 and Style 4 ratings, and/or both Style 2 and Style 5 ratings exceed 20%. For these situations, the case should be associated with the higher type.

Openness to experience (openness) was assessed in all samples with the *NEO Five Factor Inventory* (NEO-FFI, Costa & McCrae, 1985) in the English version of the questionnaires; for the German versions, the translation by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1993) was used. We used a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.” For means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of this and the following scales, see Table 1.

The *Religious Schema Scale* (RSS, Streib et al., 2010) was included also in all three samples. This scale consists of three subscales measuring three religious schemata, but we used only two subscales in our analyses: The schema that features an exclusivist and authoritative understanding of one’s own sacred texts is assessed by the subscale *truth of texts and teachings (ttt)* (sample item: “*What the texts and stories of my religion tell me is absolutely true and must not be changed*”). For the assessment of the opposite notion, the appreciation of difference, of the other, and of dialog, the subscale *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog (xenos)* was constructed (sample item: “*We need to look beyond the denominational and religious differences to find the ultimate reality*”). Items were rated on five-point scales.

For the assessment of outcomes of faith development, we included the *Psychological Well-Being and Growth Scale* (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The German version has been validated and used in the Berlin Aging Study (BASE). This scale assesses six characteristics related to personal growth and well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998a, 1998b), but assuming that especially two subscales will play important roles as outcomes of faith development, the analyses used: *autonomy* which measures the extent an individual is able to govern him- or herself and function independently of others (sample item: “*I have confidence in my opinions,*

even if they are contrary to the general consensus.”) and *personal growth* or the process of healthy [6] psychological development over time (sample item: “*For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.*”).

| Table 1 |

Analytic Procedures

We used both hierarchical linear model (HLM) and latent growth model (LGM) to test H1. In HLM, we treated the religious type as an ordinal outcome variable. We used R packages *ordinal* to estimate hierarchical linear slope of the ordinal variable religious type with cumulative logit link functions and *lme4* for continuous variables openness and *ttt*. LGM was conducted on Mplus 8.3 and served as cross-validation of results for testing H1. Since LGM as a latent variable approach has more stringent requirement for sample size than does HLM, hypothesis testing for H2 through H8 only used HLM. To test H9, we fit structural equation models on Mplus 8.3.

Results

Evidencing Faith development: Change of Type

In response to H0, 16 (21.3%) individuals moved down in types, as defined by a lower type at the third measurement than that at the first measurement; 25 (33.3%) individuals stayed with their type, among whom 17 stayed across three measurements whereas 8 fluctuated either up or down at the second measurement and returned at the third measurement; and 34 (45.3%) individuals moved up to a higher type. Figure 1 shows the trend both at the individual level (i.e., the gray lines in the background) and at the group level (i.e., the thicker lines in the foreground) estimated for each of the three groups (i.e., down-mover, stayer, and up-mover). We observed that down-movers started at a higher type, whereas up-movers started at a lower type, than stayers, indicating a negative association

between intercept and slope. There was no age or gender differences between these three groups.

| Figure 1 |

It's important to distinguish mean-level change from rank-order stability. While the former is the degree to which a certain population changes, as was examined by mean difference over time, the latter is the degree to which people maintain or shift their position in the distribution over time. Autocorrelations enable examination of rank-order stability. Overall, there was weak rank-order stability for religious types. Type at Wave 1 correlated (polychoric correlation) with type at Wave 2, $r = -.24$, at Wave 3, $r = .64$, and type 2 and type 3 correlated at .29. In comparison, the rank-order stability (median for three Pearson correlations) for *openness* was .65, *ttt* .83, *xenos* .76, *autonomy* .51, and *personal growth* .64. Therefore, not only was there evidence showing faith development at the population level, but individuals could shift position in their respective population as well. In other words, there was not a fixed pattern of movement. People could move to any directions across time.

To examine H1, we tested the slope of time in HLM with time as a level 1 variable (coded linear increments of 0, 1, and 2) nested within individuals at level 2, predicting religious type as ordinal outcome variable. Random intercepts and slope were estimated thus allowing individual slopes to vary from the fixed effect. The linear slope of time was positive and statistically significant, $b = .698$, $p = .001$, indicating faith development. Individuals differed from each other indicated by random slopes, $SD = 0.948$. There was a negative correlation between intercept and slope suggesting that for people at a lower initial type, they tended to move upward over time, and vice versa.

These results were validated in a different yet related model, LGM. In this model, the intercept and linear slope of religious types that change across three discrete measurements (coded as 0, 1, and 2) were estimated as latent variables. The model fit acceptably to the data, $\chi^2(56) = 54.04$, $p = .549$. The slope of change was positive and significant, $\alpha = .696$, $p = .002$,

consistent with results of HLM. Overall, H1 received support. Figure 2 shows the overall trend for all people across three measurements. Against the fairly large individual variability, indicated by the grey lines in the background, the overall trend was positive and statistically significant, indicated by the upward coral line in the foreground. [7]

| Figure 2 |

Predictors of Faith Development

To test H2 and H3, whether *openness to experience* or *truth of text and teachings* (*ttt*) measured at the initial time would predict faith development, we first saved random intercepts and slopes of the time variable from the hierarchical linear models used in testing H1. Then we regressed the slope on *openness* or *ttt* controlling for intercept. *Openness to experience* measured at Wave 1 significantly predicted faith development, $t = 2.06, p = .043$; initial *ttt* also significantly predicted faith development, $t = -2.87, p = .006$. Assuming equal starting religious type, people of higher *openness* were more likely to move upward, whereas people of higher *ttt* were more likely to move downward over time. H2 and H3 received support.

Covariates of Faith Development

To test H4, H5 and H6, whether changes of *openness*, *ttt* or *xenos* would concur with faith development, we estimated and save random slopes of *openness*, *ttt*, and *xenos*. Then, we correlated their slopes with the slope of religious type. However, none of these slopes – *openness* ($b = .034, p = .093, SD = .066$), *ttt* ($b = .028, p = .274, SD = .010$), *xenos* ($b = .047, p = .099, SD = .006$) – were significantly different from 0, and individual variances were small. In particular, the HLM results for *ttt* and *xenos* suggested that random slopes should not be estimated due to lack of individual differences. Since correlations of two variables is predicated on the variance of each, we expected little association between slope of *openness* and that of religious type, and we could not estimate the association between slopes of *ttt* or *xenos* and that of religious type. Indeed, the slope of *openness* did not correlate with the slope of religious type, $r = -.18, p = .121$. H4, H5 and H6 did not receive support. Interestingly, the

results suggested that people remained quite stable in their *openness*, *ttt* and *xenos*, at least in self-report measures.

Outcomes of Faith Development

To test H7 and H8, whether faith development would predict psychological wellbeing, we regressed *autonomy* and *personal growth* at the third measurement on slope and intercept of religious type saved from HLM. Faith development did not predict *autonomy*, $b = -.10, p = .247$, or *personal growth*, $b = .115, p = .182$. H7 and H8 did not receive support.

Mediation Role of Faith Development

H9 conceptually joins H2 and H8 in one sequential process. To test H9, whether religious type would mediate the prediction of openness to experience on personal growth, we fit a three-wave CLPA. In this model, *openness to experience* at Wave 1 predicted religious type at Wave 2, which in turn predicted *personal growth* at Wave 3. In addition to these cross lags, autoregressions and correlations of disturbances were also included in the model. *Openness* at Wave 1 significantly predicted religious type at Wave 2, $b = 1.39, p = .008$, suggesting people of higher openness tended to develop higher religious types controlling for initial type. However, religious type at Wave 2 did not predict *personal growth* at Wave 3, $b = -.05, p = .550$. The indirect effect was thereby not significant, $b = -.06, p = .560$. Figure 3 shows this model along with autoregressive and cross-lagged coefficients on the paths. H9 did not receive support.

| Figure 3 |

Discussion

Evidence for Stability and Change

The descriptive evaluation of our data generally confirmed the hypothesized change and stability in religious type over the individuals' lifetime (H0). But contrary to our registered hypothesis (Streib, Hood, et al., 2019) that “between 40% and 50% of our participants will reveal as stayers,” we count in the three-wave data of this study only 33.3%

individuals who stayed at the same type at Wave 3 as they had in Wave 1. Thus, our data generally confirm assumptions of change and development in religious type, including the results presented by Fowler (1981, pp. 317-319), but they indicate a higher portion of movers in a longitudinal sample of *adults* with a mean age of 45.8 at Wave 1 and a mean age of 57.0 at Wave 3, and with a time lag of almost ten years between the first and the last interview.

Where did the movers go? Our results document 45.3% who moved up to a higher religious type, and 21.3% who moved down in types. Regarding the latter, this is a substantial portion of cases to [8] suggest the conclusion that faith development does not describe a mono-directional upward movement only. This study is the first to document evidence of downward movement in faith development for a substantial part of participants. Thus, the results of our longitudinal investigation of religious types contradict Fowler's assumption of a mono-directionally upward faith development.

On the other hand, our results identify half of our sample as upward movers. This corresponds to the results of LGM that indicate a linear slope of change in religious type across the three times of measurement, thus an upward change in religious type. This is evidence that there *is* progressive faith development over the lifespan. Therefore, our analyses support Fowler's assumption that faith development is generally progressive. But our results contradict any exclusion of downward change, thus falsify the assumption of invariant sequence. On the contrary, our results document considerable variety, as can be documented in the case studies of all individuals in our sample.

What Predicts Faith Development?

The Role of Openness to Experience

Our results reveal that *openness* measured at Wave 1 predicts faith development over the three waves of measurement. H2 was supported, and the test of H9 with a three-wave CLPA confirmed the prediction of religious type at Wave 2 by *openness* at Wave 1. Thus, results of this study show that *openness* is a significant predictor for progress in religious

styles, confirming tentative results with a CLPA based on two-wave data (Streib, Chen, et al., 2019). The results of this study can be discussed also in a wider perspective on the relation of personality and religion. As noted, not all five factors of personality relate to religiosity with equal strength, and especially *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness* are related to general religiosity (Saroglou, 2002, 2010, 2017). But after a typological differentiation is applied that accounts for the difference between a type of ‘spirituality/mature faith’ and a type of ‘religious fundamentalism,’ high *openness* relates reliably to versions of religion that are more mature and affine to “spirituality,” while *openness* relates negatively to forms of religion such as fundamentalism (Saroglou, 2010, p. 115). We argue that our types reflect the two versions of religion in Saroglou’s analysis: The Predominantly Individuative-reflective Type and especially the Emerging Dialogical-xenosophic Type represent the more mature and reflective versions, which more closely relate to “spirituality,” while the Predominantly Conventional and the Substantially Ethnocentric types represent stronger, eventually including fundamentalist forms of religiosity. Thus, our results correspond to the findings of Saroglou’s comprehensive meta-analyses, but add, based on our longitudinal data, an important perspective about the prediction of our hierarchically ordered religious types of religiosity by the personality trait of *openness*.

Truth of Texts and Teachings (ttt) and Faith Development

The second predictor that was put to the test in our study was the RSS schema *ttt*, which also significantly predicted the change in religious type, however negatively. H3, which hypothesized that *ttt* at Wave 1 predicts faith development across the three times of measurement, received support. The fact that *ttt* revealed as clear (negative) predictor for type development may be plausible from the correspondence of our lowest Type 1 and *ttt*: both feature an ethnocentric religiosity, including fundamentalist notions. Thus, the stronger agreement to *ttt*, the stronger the inclination to move down from higher religious types toward the Substantially Ethnocentric Type; and reversely: the lower agreement with *ttt*, the stronger

the inclination to progress in faith development toward the Predominantly Individuative-reflective and the Emerging Dialogical-xenosophic types.

Covariates of Faith Development

The hypothesized covariation of *openness*, *ttt* or *xenos* with religious types did not reach significance or could not be estimated [9] due to lack of individual difference; thus H4, H5 and H6 received no support in our data. Rather, our data suggest that participants remained quite stable in their *openness*, *ttt* and *xenos*. These results show that our previous findings using analysis of variance (Streib et al., 2020, pp. 121-122), which demonstrated that scores on *openness* and *xenos* generally increase, respectively decrease in the case of *ttt*, with progression from type to type, did not translate into patterns of longitudinal covariation. This, at first, unexpected finding is important, because it addresses interesting questions about the characteristics of faith development. When personality traits are considered fairly stable in the adult lifespan, *openness* may *predict*, but not necessarily *change with*, religious type change. These result from our data indicate that faith development in terms of religious styles and types are not simply a part of personality development. It may be different for the religious schemata, because we regard them to be more closely related to the religious types. And because the covariance of *ttt* and *xenos* to religious types could not be estimated due to lack of individual difference, we have to leave this question open for future research.

Outcomes of Faith Development

Finally, on the question, whether faith development would predict facets of psychological wellbeing, *autonomy* and *personal growth* (H7 and H8), we had another unexpected finding: Faith development did not predict *autonomy*, nor *personal growth*; also in the CLPA (H9), type at Wave 2 did not predict *personal growth* at Wave 3. Thus, our first tentative indication from CLPA with two-wave data that higher scores on *autonomy* may be the outcome of the progress in religious styles and types (Streib, Chen, et al., 2019) were not confirmed by the CLPA in this study with three-wave data. There are strong conceptual

reasons why progression in faith development, which includes more elaborated individuated reflection and openness for dialog, could be expected to result in a higher sense of autonomy; and after progress in faith development, an individual could be expected to have a stronger sense of personal growth. Therefore, it is a puzzling question why the results in this study using the two subscales of Ryff's scale for Psychological Well-being and Growth did not substantiate these conceptual assumptions. Considering our relatively small sample size for explanation would suggest noting these hypotheses for future research.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be explicated. First, the sample size of $N = 75$ three-wave cases in our data is relatively small. This calls for replications using larger samples. Second, the time lag between FDIs at Wave 1 and FDIs at Wave 2 is not consistent, especially between participants who had their first FDI in the Deconversion Study and participants in the Spirituality Study. To base analyses on a three-wave assessment with more consistent time difference between the FDIs, it is necessary to add another wave of field work. Third, part of the positive upward slope could be due to ceiling or floor effects that a person who started at either extreme of the scale would only be able to move to the opposite direction if not staying at its starting type. Again, a larger sample size with greater variance in starting religious type would address this concern. Fourth, our sample is rather highly educated (72.0 % have tertiary education at Wave 3). This needs to be taken into account in the interpretation of the results. Fifth, with only 21% cases from the USA, the sample did not allow for cross-cultural comparison, unfortunately. Sixth, this study could not consider critical life events or world events that may have had an impact on faith development. While we would find this desirable in such a longitudinal study, we regret that we have no quantitative data that document the impact of critical events on our individuals. But the interviews, of course, include a wealth of such information. Thus, we may refer the reader to the case studies that will be published in articles and chapters elsewhere.

Conclusion

This study is the first to evidence, on three-wave longitudinal data from the evaluation of faith development interviews, that there *is* faith development over the lifespan. This study has also identified predictors of the development in religious types. Results indicate that *openness to experiences* and the subscale of Religious Schema Scale, *truth of texts and teachings (ttt)*, predicts individuals' faith development. In turn, the predictors further profile the model of religious types: While the predictor *ttt* reflects the anti-fundamentalist, anti-ethnocentric characteristic of the religious types, the predictor *openness* reflects their universalistic, dialogical characteristic.

Implications of this study are an invitation to further engage in the investigation of faith development. This study is a beginning and has left us with several open questions such as regarding well-being. And some questions were still untouched such as cultural differences, gender differences, or adolescence. But we hope that our study could demonstrate the effectiveness of an approach with the religious types model, which is based on faith development interviews. Conceptually, our research critically relates to Fowler's model of faith development, and our results partially support Fowler's assumptions by documenting that differences between structural styles are valid and empirically evidencing developmental progress. Therefore, we note that, while critique against Fowler's model and its strong dependence on Kohlberg's understanding of development is necessary, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We conclude that the account for distinct, hierarchically, thus developmentally ordered structural styles are an advancement of knowledge in the psychology of religion.

Finally, this study is an encouragement for the use of mixed-method designs. Because the ideal solution how to investigate faith development is still Fowler's faith development interview, interview evaluation and questionnaire answers are regarded complementary parts of a mixed method design. We thus regard idiographic and nomothetic approaches as

complementary. Such design also allows, at any time in the research process, to identify the individual who has a name (a pseudonym, of course) and has narrated valuable biographical retrospection and details about their current meaning-making in the interview.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas at Wave 1, 2, and 3 for the Scales Used in This Study

	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
<i>open</i>	3.92	.19	.74	3.89	.15	.74	3.96	.11	.80
<i>tnt</i>	2.53	.17	.88	2.35	.11	.88	2.55	.13	.84
<i>xenos</i>	3.64	.37	.71	3.59	.27	.60	3.77	.30	.69
<i>auton</i>	3.69	.16	.68	3.32	.46	.41	3.31	.41	.56
<i>pg</i>	4.31	.13	.72	4.14	.09	.67	4.28	.09	.76

Note. *open* = openness to experience; *tnt* = truth of texts and teachings; *xenos* = xenosophia/inter-religious dialog; *auton* = autonomy; *pg* = personal growth

Figure 1. Developmental trajectories for each individual in the background and overall trend of down-movers, stayers, and up-movers as the actual date of interviewing on the x-axis.

Figure 2. Overall trend of faith development over three measurements.

Figure 3. Cross-lagged panel analysis of openness, religious type, and personal growth variables with unstandardized coefficients on the path. All path coefficients are significant except the italicized ones.

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