Styles of Faith

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Styles of Faith

Introduction to Theory and Research in Faith Development

By

Heinz Streib
Zhuo Job Chen

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Introduction

This book is an invitation to reflect, and perhaps *engage* in research, about faith styles and faith development. For a very brief description of what faith styles are, imagine four people: The first person, Bert, believes that the religious texts of his religion are absolutely true and authoritative, and supports that the religious prescriptions of his religion should be enforced also for anyone else. The second person, Sophia, with intellectual humility, is open for encountering and experiencing new religions and worldviews that were unknown to her before, and supports learning from each other in inter-religious dialog. The third person, Chris, based on his own autonomous reflection, prefers an approach of rationality, and suggests fair coexistence and mutual tolerance of all worldviews and religions. Finally, the fourth person, Mary, is deeply embedded in her religious community and wants to preserve harmony, rather than thinking outside the box; she tries to avoid any conflict with critical questions. How do we understand the difference between these four people? The four individuals may look at their own meaning-making and at other religions and worldviews in radically different ways that range from an egocentric, to a conventional, to a rational and fair, and finally, to an open and curious approach. The faith style model that we will explain in this book understands these different approaches as *structural or stylistic differences in faith*. The different faith styles, in turn, are based on the different ways of how the individuals apply perspective-taking and responsiveness to the Other.

So, what is at stake in faith development? The dynamic and significance of faith development is most obvious when we consider the contrast between the beginning and the end, the lower point and the desired goal of development: Egocentrism vs. caring for the Other; Sociocentrism vs. appreciation for the Other's presence; Ignorance vs. openness for the inspiration by the Other; Narcissistic focus on "those like us" vs. openness for "those *not* like us;" Xenophobia vs. openness for diversity, for strangers, and for the Strange.

This book is about *Styles of Faith* and aims at presenting faith development theory and research at the current state. The engagement with faith development began for the first author of this book in the 1980s at Emory University with a Ph.D. dissertation (Streib, 1991) about faith development theory (Fowler, 1981) with James Fowler as advisor. In retrospect, it looks as if some questions don't disappear but will continue to challenge us. For example, the question about the very definition of faith. Our conceptualization of faith presented in Chapter 1 refers to H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, who were also key

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references for Fowler. This concept of faith may appear new and perhaps provocative for some readers. With reference to Tillich's notion of faith as *ultimate concern* and with updated references to philosophy and psychology, we have sharpened what "faith" should mean in today's world.

In Chapter 2, we discuss the dynamics of faith development. How can we conceptualize and justify that faith styles form a hierarchy? What is the aim of faith development? Despite the considerable modifications that Streib (2001; 2003b; 2003c; 2005; 2013; Streib et al., 2020) has proposed with the religious styles model, it has deep roots in Fowler's (1981) theory. However, we disagree with Fowler's structural-developmental assumptions, which posit that development proceeds in a monodirectional and irreversible sequence of stages. On that front, we regard the development of perspective-taking as the backbone and key motivation for faith development.

In Chapter 3, we present information about the key measure of faith development: the faith development interview (FDI) and the rating system. We explain how we have worked with the faith development interview in our research, and how we innovated the methodology and design of faith development research.

Chapter 4 will summarize quantitative results from decades of collaborative research hosted in Bielefeld, Germany and Chattanooga, USA. The central theme of our joint research projects at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Bielefeld University was on deconversion, spirituality, and faith development from a longitudinal perspective. The Deconversion Study[1] (Streib et al., 2009) focused on changes in religious affiliation, centrifugal migrations in the religious fields, and their psychological consequences for the individual. The Spirituality Project[2] (Streib & Hood, 2016) investigated changes in the growing diversity of worldviews, with a focus on the increasing preference for self-identifying as "more spiritual than religious." In the more recent projects, we have focused on the longitudinal investigation of change, re-interviewing former participants for a second time (Streib et al., 2022); and the recently completed projects added a third and fourth wave of data,[3] which adds to a total of about 1,500 FDIs including n = 324 participants with two or more FDIs (for more details, see our Omnibus Document: Streib & Chen,

1 The Deconversion Project was funded 2002–2005 by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG, Grant#STR570/5-3).

2 The Spirituality Project was funded 2009–2012 by the DFG (Grant#STR570/15-1).

3 We have re-interviewed former participants in Wave 2 (2014–2017), which was jointly funded by the DFG (Grant#STR570/20-1) and the John Templeton Foundation (JTF, Grant#52249), Wave 3 (2017–2021), funded by the JTF, Grant#60806, and Wave 4 (2022–2024), jointly funded by the DFG (Grant#STR570/22-1) and the JTF (Grant#61834).

2024b, https://osf.io/nyaxz). Integral to all these projects is a focus on faith development that attends to cognitive-structural changes and posits increasing openness to inter-religious dialog as the aim of development.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents our perspectives on future research and application of the faith styles model. Thereby, we focus on the question of deconversion and faith development, the question of how the faith styles model can be used for classification of religious communities and conducting research in the religious fields. Additionally, we look beyond the religious field and discuss the question of what the faith styles model has to contribute to understanding ideological networks and scenes, and finally ask what it means to promote faith development in a world of othering and xenophobia.

CHAPTER 1

What Is Faith?

1.1 Faith and Religion

This book is not about religion. Psychologist Vassilis Saroglou (2011) and a great number of colleagues (Saroglou et al., 2020) propose that *believing, bonding, behaving* and *belonging* cover the four key dimensions of religiousness across cultures. Based on this definition, religion is mainly identified by affiliation with one specific world religion, denomination, or church (*belonging*); emotional attraction to their rituals and atmosphere (*bonding*); consent to a set of beliefs (*believing*); and observance of a set of rituals and moral prescriptions (*behaving*) in an established religious tradition. Certainly, we regard this 4B model as a great initiative toward a coherent understanding of the dimensions of religiousness for the psychology of religion. However, in the context of this chapter, the 4B conceptualization of religion enables us to characterize an innovative and expanded understanding of "faith" that we adopt in this book. We argue that faith cannot be restricted to religion, but faith is different from religion.

The difference between faith and religion has been emphasized by William Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), a versatile Canadian comparative religion scholar. Cantwell Smith (1963) distinguished *faith* from the contents of *belief* and institutions of *religion*, describing faith as a deeper and more personal orientation of the individual towards oneself, other human beings, and the universe. Faith, says Cantwell Smith (1979, p. 129), "is an essential human quality" and "constitutive of man as human." Further, personality is "constituted by our universal ability, or invitation, to live in terms of a transcendent dimension, and in response to it."

Another important figure in the study of faith is James Fowler, a professor of religion at Emory University, who in his seminal book *Stages of Faith* introduced the model of faith development, explicitly embracing Cantwell Smith's view that

> (f)aith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered and sustained by a religious tradition, in some cases and some degree by its doctrines; but it is a quality of the person, not of the system. It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever

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> one handles; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension. (Fowler, 1981, p. 11, quoting Cantwell Smith, 1979, p. 12)

With his own definition of "faith," Fowler intends a comprehensive and precise description of how the individual finds meaning, and how this meaning-finding is deeper and more inclusive than "religion:" It is *deeper*, because the meaning-finding of "faith" promotes religion—construed as believing, bonding, behaving and belonging—to flourish. The meaning-finding of "faith" is more *inclusive*, because it includes, beyond the Christian denominations and other world religions, forms of spirituality and non-theistic meaning that are normally not regarded as religion. Along these lines, Fowler (1981, pp. 92–93) defines faith as

> people's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others, and world … as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence … 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.

In this definition, Fowler clearly states that faith is based on experience, that faith *is* experience. But he adds immediately that these experiences are considered to be "related to" and "affected by," the "ultimate conditions of existence." The experiences of faith are in *response* to the "ultimate conditions of existence." And the reference to "ultimacy" is a specification of these experiences *as* experiences of *faith*.

This is not the language normally used in religious communities, nor in psychology. Rather, Fowler adopts the terminology used in theology and the philosophy of religion, and his definition of faith reflects a train of thought that has been developed by theologians such as H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Niebuhr (1929; 1943) frequently talks about "the ultimate," "ultimate reality," and "ultimate environment," and he strongly argues that the relation to "ultimate reality" should not be distorted by worshipping idols or less ultimate matters. Similarly, Tillich (1951) talks about "ultimate concern" as basic element of his definition of "God." Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* begins with a seminal definition:

> Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern. Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his

> very existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns—cognitive, aesthetic, social, political. Some of them are urgent, often extremely urgent, and each of them as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. If it claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name. If a national group makes the life and growth of the nation its ultimate concern, it demands that all other concerns, economic well-being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed. (Tillich, 1957a, p. 1)

It is important to note that the train of thought for which we refer to Niebuhr and Tillich involves a reversal of the usually taken-for-granted way of describing or defining "God." This train of thought follows the direction indicated by Martin Luther, "What you … set your heart on and what you rely on is actually your God" (Large Catechism). We regard this as a very important characteristic of "faith," because it not only offers a deeper perspective on faith, but also opens the possibility that faith is wider and more comprehensive, including non-religious forms of meaning-making.[1]

In a comparable line of thought, social phenomenologists have suggested that "religion" belongs to the phenomena in which we experience the transcending of ordinary, everyday consciousness (Schütz, 1932; Luckmann, 1967; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973; 1989; Luckmann, 1991). It is especially what Luckmann (1991) later called the experiences of "great transcendencies" in which we cross the thresholds to the extraordinary and largely unknown realms such as those experienced in mysticism, extasy, or vis-à-vis our own death. Such experiences of transcendence elicit responses that invite us using symbols and narratives that may be part of the traditions of religions for understanding and communicating these experiences.

It seems that religion and faith can be closely linked together on the basis of the traditions that we have introduced: Cantwell Smith, Niebuhr, Tillich, Fowler and the social-phenomenological approach. Thus, half a century after *Stages of Faith*, we continue to endorse Fowler's wide definition of faith as a *human universal*. And we happily accept this heritage and use the term faith[2]

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1 As noted elsewhere, we have adopted Tillich's suggestion to specify the definition of faith as experiences of transcendence and the meaning we receive from being ultimately concerned (Streib & Hood, 2011; 2013).

2 In our earlier studies, the term 'religion' was sometimes used interchangeably with 'faith.' Terms such as 'religious style' (Streib, 2001) and 'religious type' (Streib et al., 2020) have been

in Fowler's and other's wide understanding. Therefore, in the light of the definitions discussed, we define faith as *people's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others, and world that yield experiences of transcending their ordinary consciousness, foster their meaning-finding, and shape their ways of symbolizing the Ultimate and their ultimate concern.*

With the development of his wide understanding of faith, Fowler was perhaps ahead of his time. But this may be now the more helpful for understanding how people create and shape their meaning and worldview today. There are versions of faith that require neither an institution (*religion*) nor a dogmatic system (*belief*) about the supernatural—for example, "spiritual, but not religious" self-identifications, or agnostic or non-theist versions of meaning-finding.[3] We regard Tillich's talk about faith as "ultimate concern" as the most promising and most helpful approach to the definition of faith in contemporary culture. The interpretation of Fowler's "faith" with Tillich's "ultimate concern" opens up an interface to the discussion about worldviews, as we now consider.

1.2 Faith and Worldview

When the definition of "faith" is much wider than "religion" and includes forms of non-religious identity, why not consider another terminological option and relate "faith" to "worldview"? The model of faith styles and Fowler's stages of faith could perhaps be adequately understood as models of worldviews, when "worldview" refers not only to religious and spiritual, but clearly also to agnostic, non-theistic, and non-religious versions of meaning-making.

However, questions arise whether worldview is a term that is used precisely enough and consensually defined so far. "Worldview" is often used without much conceptual precision and depth as, for example, in "worldview conflict." Some innovative contributions to psychology nevertheless suggest defining "worldview" as constituted by how human beings (should) answer

commonly employed in research, as seen in works by Streib et al. (2023) and in the latest edition of the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Streib & Keller, 2018). Thereby, we have suggested that 'religion,' in this context, is understood in the conceptual framework of the social-phenomenological tradition. However, because this social-phenomenological perspective may not be widely understood, we consistently use the term 'faith' and employ the terms 'faith style' and 'faith type' to ensure clarity and minimize confusion and maximize a common understanding.

3 For a critical discussion of the various approaches that are used in studying religion including substantive, functional, comparative, and family resemblance approaches, see McCutcheon (2024).

the *big questions* that address the most fundamental dimensions of life and the ultimate horizons of human meaning making.[4] There are some interesting approaches to conceptualizing "worldview" in psychology: The models of Koltko-Rivera (2000; 2004) and of Johnson et al. (2011), which Bou Malham (2017) in his dissertation has developed further and advanced into a psychological measure for worldview assumptions. According to Johnson et al. (2011), six categories are included in the concept of worldview: ontology, epistemology, semiotics, axiology, teleology, praxeology.[5] There are parallels to the understanding of worldview by Taves and colleagues (2018b; 2018a; Taves et al., 2018; Taves & Asprem, 2019; 2020), who highlight the inclusiveness of the term worldview and suggest that using the term worldview may lead beyond the polarity of religion and non-religion. And they go even so far as to suggest a change of name from Religious Studies to Worldview Studies.

Regarding "faith," we note some interesting parallels between the worldview categories abovementioned and a system of categories introduced by Fowler who labelled them the Aspects of faith. Fowler's (1980; 1981) list includes: Form of Logic, Role Taking, Form of Moral Judgment, Bounds of Social Awareness, Locus of Authority, and Symbolic Function. For a brief description of the Aspects, we may refer to the *Manual* (Streib & Keller, 2018, pp. 19–23). The Aspects of Faith are important categories in evaluating the faith development interviews, since each of the FDI questions is expected to elicit Aspect-specific responses from the participants. Later in this chapter and in Chapters 2 and 5, we further detail the significance of the Aspects of faith.

Here is our conclusion: Faith is about worldviews, and research about faith could be considered a division of worldview research. That Fowler's Aspects of Faith correspond to philosophical categories in the worldview models is informative for the understanding of our "experiences of self, others and world." And this fortifies once more the need for a wide conceptualization of faith that is not confined to a set of beliefs and rituals of a particular religious tradition.

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4 For a more detailed discussion of worldview and faith, see Streib and Hood (2024), especially p. 26.

5 Johnson et al. (2011, p. 143) give their definitions in Table 1: "Ontology (Beliefs about who or what is in the world; here we include other branches of metaphysics: theology, cosmology (origins), and the nature of the self); Epistemology (What can be known and how one should reason); Semiotics (Symbols, gestures, and language used to conceptualize and describe the world; time, space, and meaning); Axiology (Proximate goals, values, and ethics; includes beliefs about human action; good and evil; beliefs about change); Teleology (Ultimate goals, beliefs about the afterlife, and consequences of action; predicated on beliefs about origins (cosmology)); Praxeology (Social norms and sanctions in a community, informed by the foregoing beliefs, values, and ultimate goals)."

But worldview, at least at this state of conceptualization and research in psychology, should rather serve as an umbrella term to reaffirm a wide understanding of faith and inspire faith development theory and research to think and network outside the box. *Faith* shares with *worldview* the search for the best answers to the *big questions of humanity*.

1.3 Styles of Faith: Options for the Construction of a Typology

In *Stages of Faith*, Fowler advanced the understanding of faith by introducing an individual-differences perspective on faith. Probably most provocative for many of Fowler's contemporaries in theology and religious studies was the assumption of intra-individual differences: that faith evolves and changes throughout an individual's lifespan, and this change should be called faith *development*.

As our book aspires to continue and advance Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, we must be explicit about which of Fowler's basic assumptions are considered worth preserving and which assumptions should no longer apply. And here we need to reconsider Fowler's theoretical justification for his individual-difference model of faith. Fowler presented a model of faith development that was clearly rooted in the cognitive-structural theory of the 1970s, and conceptualized a mono-directionally upward, sequential, and irreversible progress through stages that are understood as "structural wholes." Fowler was very keen that his model be consistent with the interpretation of Piaget's work by Kohlberg and colleagues (1983). It is noteworthy here that cognitive-structural development in the Kohlbergian tradition was defined in clear demarcation from what they called "maturational development;" the cognitive-structural stages were labelled "hard stages," while the maturational stages were regarded "soft stages" (Power, 1991). In hindsight, it appears that Fowler may have been overly uncritical not only of this hard vs. soft stage distinction, but also of the cognitive-structural paradigm in general as the dominant foundation to explain the coherence of what he called a "stage,"[6] the differences between the stages of faith, and the reasons why there is faith development.

6 Still two decades after *Stages of Faith* and in response to Streib's (2001) revision, Fowler (2001, p. 171) justified his unrestricted consent to the basic assumptions for structural-developmental 'stages,' among them the assumption of a "structural whole," as established by Kohlberg (1983).

In Fowler's model,[7] the Aspect *Form of Logic* has primacy as the leading Aspect, because Fowler assumed that Piaget's developmental model (or what the Kohlberg group explained to be Piaget's model) is the foundation of the sequence of stages of faith. Generally, it was assumed that stages differ according to the cognitive operations that the individual has developed so far: preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational. But only by a further differentiation within Formal Operations (in *Early* formal, *Dichotomizing* formal, *Dialectical* formal, and *Synthetic* formal), Fowler could associate six forms of Logic to his six stages of faith. Because we regard this interpretation of Piaget's cognitive development highly speculative, we disagree that cognition should be regarded the "motor of development."[8] Thus, for the 2018 edition of the Coding Manual, Keller and Streib (2018, p. 10) have excluded the aspect Form of Logic and promoted Perspective-taking to the first position as leading aspect of faith.

Another major change is that we present only four styles of faith, while Fowler's model included six stages of faith. Fowler's Stage 6 of "Universalizing Faith" has been eliminated from the model of faith styles (Streib, 2001). In the *Manual* (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 10), we summarize the reason:

> The conceptual reason for this is that a psychologically plausible model of religious styles does not need, and should not be based on, teleological and theological (eschatological) propositions, which Fowler (1981) himself could not resist to describe with the theological metaphor of the Kingdom of God.

Further, Fowler's Stage 1 of "Intuitive-projective Faith" was excluded, because the frequency of this style is extremely low in samples of adults.[9]

In conclusion, we critically advance the model of faith development regarding the foundation for the construction of a typology of faith styles: It is not the Aspect *Form of Logic* and the development of cognitive operations that account for the differences between, and the development of, the faith styles. Rather,

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7 See, for example, the table in Fowler (1981, pp. 244–245).

8 See Streib's long-standing critique of cognitive development as motor of faith development (Streib, 2001; 2003c; 2005; 2013). See also Noam's (1990, p. 378) critical statement: "It is my view that cognitively based theorists have overlooked the central structuring activities of the self by defining the epistemic self as the sole representative of structure. In the process, I believe, the cart was placed before the horse, life history became content to the structure of the epistemic self. … Epistemology replaced life history."

9 We would suggest (re-)considering Style 1 characteristics in theory and research, when the focus is on the faith development in childhood and early adolescence.

we contend, the differences in faith styles originate in the different ways in how the individual responds to the others in his or her environment, how the individual responds to the unexpected and strange challenges and concerns in their life, and how they respond to the Ultimate and the "entirely Other" that the Ultimate represents. In other words, styles of faith differ according to the styles of responsiveness. This opens a new perspective on different versions of faith; but this requires more explanation—to which we now turn.

1.4 Faith and Responsiveness

Faith, according to our definition, is constituted as an interpersonal and interactive process that includes a relation to the ultimate. Inspired by Niebuhr (1961), Fowler (1981, pp. 17, passim) presents faith as a dynamic triangle between self, others, and "shared centers of value and power." Faith is an interactive process. As Fowler (1981, p. 16ff.) noted, faith is a verb. Faith means responding to an Other.

The interactive, interpersonal model of faith invites the interpretation of faith as responsiveness. In a recent target article, Streib (2024a) delineated the concept of responsiveness with reference to the thought of Bernhard Waldenfels (2011; 2012), a German philosopher who presents a responsive phenomenology.[10] Streib's (2024a) article also presents a proposal of a model of styles of responsiveness that rests on a typology of perspective-taking.[11] Now, we use this model of styles of responsiveness for interpreting faith development.

Our new model suggests that faith is a result from responsiveness to an Other, whereby the Other can be, for example, another human being or the ultimate horizon. The most adequate and optimally developed version of responsiveness includes the openness for something unexpected and never-heard-of: responsiveness to the *radical* Other. And the "ultimate" in Tillich's ultimate concern can be understood as an "entirely Other." In conclusion, we claim that

10 Waldenfels (2012, pp. 423–424) describes the key experience in responsive phenomenology: "When responding, we are always incited, attracted, threatened, challenged, or appealed to by a somewhat or a somebody, before taking the initiative and aiming at something or applying certain norms."

11 For our understanding of the development of perspective-taking, it is important to consider Habermas's (1983) reconstruction of Selman's (1980) social cognition model of perspective-taking. Habermas's reconstruction had a clear focus on the speaker perspectives in the first, second, and third person. For the first three styles of perspective-taking, this reconstruction is parallel to the model of styles of responsiveness (Streib, 2024a).

the concept of responsiveness profiles the concept of faith and the differences between the styles of faith.

Based on these considerations we now describe each of our four faith styles in terms of responsiveness and include a characterization of the respective version of perspective-taking. This characterization presents the current state of our theory of faith styles.

– In the *egocentric-sociocentric faith style*,[12] there is a predominance of an egocentric or sociocentric perspective, while interactive perspective-taking and other-oriented responsiveness are lacking. This style includes ethnocentric and authoritarian structures, by which challenging and critical questions are answered with reference to absolute authority and the absolute validity of prescriptions and rules. Texts, prescriptions, narratives, and symbols are thereby interpreted literally and without the awareness of the difference between the symbol and the phenomenon that is symbolized (no semiotic difference). Contingent events such as disasters and catastrophes may likely be understood as punishment by God or a merciless higher power. People who are regarded as out-groups are excluded—with the tendency to regard and treat them as enemies or evil forces. Ethnocentric authoritarianism is the (toxic) opposite to tolerance and wisdom as xenosophia. Recalling the Introduction where we introduced four people who represent different styles of faith, we now can explain that Bert represents the egocentric faith style.
– In the *conventional faith style*, there is a predominant application of a second-person (I–you) perspective—which leads to a conventional preoccupation with personal relations in one's lifeworld. Responsiveness is rather limited to the circles of relations in one's small lifeworld. Different from the egocentric-sociocentric style, the conventional style does not feature self-centered, egocentric absoluteness of authority and absoluteness of truth, but openness to processes of reaching and preserving common sense in a tradition. Thus, conventionality also means that, if ignorance of challenging and critical questions is impossible, these challenges are brushed aside with reference to the conventions of what one ought to believe and how one ought to behave in one's own family, group, or tradition. Consent

12 For this style, the names have evolved, however not the essential characteristics. The respective name preferences put certain aspects in the foreground: When Fowler's (1981) name was "mythic-literal faith," he highlighted the hermeneutical characteristic how texts and prescriptions are understood; Streib (2001) labelled this the "instrumental-reciprocal or do-ut-des" religious style to move the preoccupation with punishment and reward in the relation to the divine into the foreground. Now, we emphasize perspective-taking and thus suggest "egocentric-sociocentric" as label and as key characteristic.

and harmony in one's own small lifeworld and "family" has priority. Also, different from the egocentric-sociocentric style, out-groups with ethnic, cultural or religious differences can be acknowledged and tolerated—if they keep a respectable distance. The conventional faith style is represented by Mary.

– The *individuative-reflective faith style* is enabled and based on the emergence and application of the third-person perspective and a negotiatory style of responsiveness. This faith style features individual autonomous rationality. Authority is located not in an unquestionable tradition, nor in the conventions of one's group, but in one's own judgment as an individual. Controversial questions about morality or world coherence are considered part of legal or scientific discourses in which the individual participates. The social horizon is not limited to one's own group but includes societal and potentially global partners. The in-group out-group divide can be integrated into models of ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism. In the case of conflicts, a model of respectful tolerance or diversity can be considered. Chris represents the individuative-reflective or negotiatory faith style.
– The *xenosophic-dialogical faith style* is based on the ability for a reversal of perspectives that exceeds perspective-*taking* and features perspective-*getting*.[13] The dialogical character of this style builds upon the capacity for individuative reflection and communicative action that characterizes the previous style, but it is ready to adopt a new structure of communication that is based upon mutual unprejudiced *listening* and intellectual humility, which includes respect for the others' viewpoints, affords xenocentric openness, and the readiness to revise one's own viewpoint. Thus, this style favors the wisdom that emerges from an open and unprejudiced encounter with the Unknown, Strange or Alien that we call *xenosophia*.[14] Questions

13 Perspective-*getting* is the process that the perspective of another person *comes to* the observer (e.g. by a story told about this other person), while in perspective-*taking* the observer actively tries to take the other person's perspective, actively imagines standing in the other person's shoes. The idea of a reversal of perspectives in the highest style and the label "xenosophic" is developed and explained by Streib (2024a) with reference to Glăveanu's (2019) "allocentric approach." Support for the effectiveness of the reversal of perspective-taking to perspective-*getting* in real-life comes from prejudice research (Paluck et al., 2021), for example, from experimental research by Kalla and Brookman (Broockman & Kalla, 2016; Kalla & Broockman, 2020; 2023), Eyal and colleagues (2018), or Strickler (2025).

14 To our knowledge the term "xenosophia" was first used and explained in Nakamura's (2000) dissertation about Waldenfels's philosophy of the Alien. We have used the term to name a subscale of the Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010). It also appears in the title of a book (Streib & Klein, 2018) in which we present research on prejudice in

of morality can be approached with reference to an ethic that is regarded as superior to the legal framework in one's present society: Reference to human rights is key. Symbols and narratives are appreciated as powerful, notwithstanding the awareness of a semiotic difference.[15] Sophia represents the xenosophic-dialogical faith style.

Taken together, we claim that perspective-taking is the backbone for the models that differentiate not only between the styles of *responsiveness*, but also between the styles of *faith*. And note that these faith styles are not necessarily experienced in isolation but rather may overlap in the phenomenology of faith responses to the other. As we further detail in Chapter 2, the styles of responsiveness are the foundation of the model of faith style development, in which the development of perspective-taking is key to understanding the dynamic of the development in faith. In conclusion, with this interpretation of faith as responsiveness and the dynamics of faith as difference in terms of perspective-taking, we present a reconstruction of Fowler's faith development theory.

1.5 Styles of Faith in Various Aspects

The differences between the styles of faith can also be illustrated in Aspects. What Fowler (1981) called the "Aspects of Faith," appear, in light of our discussion on worldview categories (see above on pp. 7–9), as an attempt to demonstrate the significance of faith in a wide horizon that includes perspectives such as *ontology* (what exists, is real), *cosmology* (where do we come from, where are we going), *axiology* (what is the good that we should strive for), *praxeology* (what actions should we take), *epistemology* (how do we know what is true) and *Semiotics* (how symbols, rituals, and narratives present the world).[16] In more simple words: "faith" shares with "worldview" the search for the best answers to the *big questions of humanity* (see, for example, Taves & Asprem, 2019).

Fowler suggested to understand the Aspects as windows to a person's faith. With the window metaphor, he implies that there is something like a core

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Germany, and which includes a theoretical chapter on xenosophia (Streib, 2018). Finally, xenosophia was included in a recent article (Streib, 2024a) and has invited a critical discussion (Streib et al., 2024).

15 This is what Ricoeur (1960) has called "second naïveté" to describe a post-critical re-appreciation of narratives, symbols, and metaphors, despite the previous demythologizing and critical deconstructions.

16 Most explanations in brackets are taken from Taves and Asprem (2019).

which is called *faith*, and the Aspects present us with a multi-perspective view on this core. In other words, faith styles are reflected in a variety of worldview domains and in specific areas of life. The Aspects are explications of how the different faith styles are reflected in the different domains and categories. This needs to be unfolded in more detail. And in this book, we present and discuss all six of our Aspects.

Here, we begin with the Aspect of Social Horizon. And we note how the gradually expanding social horizon contributes to understanding the differences between faith styles. The social horizon is assumed to expand gradually as the individual develops and makes progress in exploring their world: from "those like us" in the egocentric-sociocentric style of faith, to conventional faith with focus on groups in which the individual has familial relations, and to societal reflections and finally to dialogical openness toward other groups—even to groups that are *not* like us. Table 1 illustrates the different individual perceptions of the gradually expanding social horizon as progress in the model of faith styles.

By including Social Horizon as an Aspect of faith, it is assumed that this sociological categorization reflects the differences between the styles of faith. This function of widening social awareness in developmental models is not new and not unique to faith development theory. A similar pattern is presented in Erikson's (1959b; 1959a) stages of identity. This illuminates the characteristics of the different faith styles and helps us with interpreting empirical data such

TABLE 1 Faith styles differentiated according to the aspect of social horizon

Faith styles	**Social horizon**
Egocentric-sociocentric	Is ethnocentrically restricted to oneself or "those like us" in familial, ethnic, racial, or religious terms
Conventional	Has a focus on one's own small lifeworld or a network of groups in which one has personal or familial relationships
Individuative-reflective	Features the widening of perspective on local, national, and global society as composite of interest groups with intent to negotiate truth and rightness claims
Xenosophic-dialogical	Extends beyond interest groups (to "those *not* like us") with pathic openness to the truth and rightness claims of outgroups or other religious traditions

as faith development interviews. Therefore, we agree with Fowler's assumption that Social Horizon is important to consider as one of the Aspects.

We will in Chapter 5 refer to the style differences in various other domains, include the respective Aspect tables, and describe the significance for understanding the differences in specific areas of life, such as understanding the difference between faith communities and understanding symbols and narratives, when confronted with ideological narratives. But first, we will in Chapter 2 elaborate the significance of the Aspect of Perspective-taking as backbone of our model of the developmental dynamic of faith styles.

1.6 Styles Are not Stages

In this book we continue our reasoned decision to talk about styles, not stages.[17] And it may be necessary to explain the most important characteristics of a style and the incisive differences between style and stage. By using the term "stage" it is usually assumed that an individual can only be on one "stage" at a time. Further, the term "stage" suggests that the progress from one stage to another requires taking a *step*, in technical terms: a "stage *transition,*" which usually involves the abandonment of the structures that were applied on the stage that has been left. Indeed, the concept of "stage" comes loaded with heavy developmental assumptions—which is true especially for the structural-developmental tradition, where faith development theory originated.[18] These criteria for a "stage" model are not plausible anymore.[19] Thus, we have reasons for *not* using "stage" anymore, but using the term "style" instead, as suggested by Streib (2001). The most important feature of the "style" is that it permits fluidity.

17 The preference for the term ‚style' was introduced and justified by Streib (2001) after a preceding text about "Religion as question of style" (Streib, 1997; 2003b).

18 According to Kohlberg and colleagues (1983), the assumptions for a 'stage' does include that there is: a structural difference, a 'structural whole,' an invariant and irreversible sequence, a hierarchical integration, and universal validity. This set of assumptions a priori exclude any developmental trajectory that may deviate from the mono-directional stage-wise upward development.

19 For a sharp critic of Kohlberg (and of Habermas), see Döbert (1990; 1991), who's critique is also relevant for faith development. For a critical evaluation of the stage concept and its appropriateness for faith, see (Streib, 1991; 1997; 2001; 2003c; 2003b; 2005; 2013; Streib & Hood, 2024).

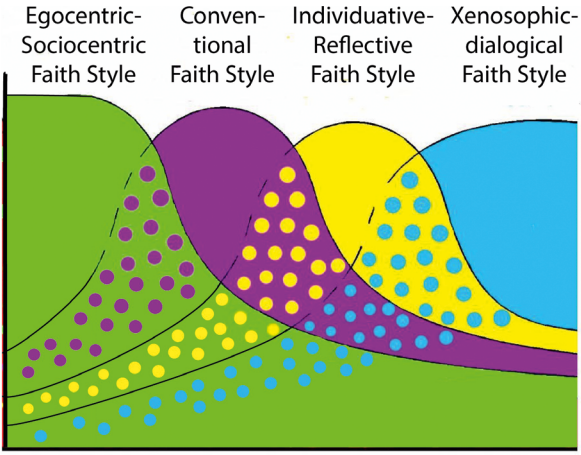

FIGURE 1 Four styles of faith

For a "style," we assume that an individual can apply two or more styles simultaneously, while one style may be in the foreground, applied more often and preferred more strongly. For understanding the flexibility of a "style," we can refer, for example, to the preference for a style of music. By listening regularly to a musical genre, going to specific concerts, or even by one's own playing, a certain musical style is *my own*—notwithstanding the possibility that I can appreciate music of different genres at the same time. Nevertheless, the revision of faith development theory in terms of "styles" goes beyond a lifestyle formation process, because faith is more than a lifestyle preference. Faith is about meaning. The differences between faith styles are differences in meaning-making or meaning-finding in one's relations to oneself, others and world. Thereby, the conceptualization of the faith styles (Streib, 1997; 2001; 2003b) has called for more attention to the importance of the interpersonal domain in the formation of one's faith styles.

The visualization of the four faith styles using the imagery of waves in Figure 1 features the idea of not only a come-and-go flexibility, but of potential preparatory emerging developments and potential sediments below the surface. There may be much more going on below the surface of the currently preferred faith style. Based on this fluidity of faith styles, it is possible to imagine a revival of, or return to, previous styles. And this could open doors to new possibilities in understanding conversion-like turns in a person's biography such as the unexpected attraction of fundamentalist or conspiracy worldviews, after the individuative-reflective style has been developed. For an approach

for explaining fundamentalist turns in people's biographies using the styles perspective, see Streib (2007).

The account for such synchronous presence of different styles is important in understanding a person's biographical trajectory in terms of faith in a case study: The understanding can afford more ambiguity and account for changes, when the trap of putting the person in a box of one faith stage is avoided. Thus, the model of styles is also important for interpreting faith development interviews, because it contradicts the assumption that only one interpretation and thus one style assignment can be correct. Instead, as visualized in the Style-Aspect-Map in Figure 2, the question is which style is more in the foreground and dominant. Nevertheless, the fluidity of faith styles has limits, because the order of the styles is thought to be hierarchical.[20]

In conclusion, faith should not be regarded as monolithic, but as manifest in different styles. The different versions of making something one's ultimate concern indicate a variety of styles of faith. In our construction of a typology of faith styles the differences in perspective-taking are the guiding principle. Thus, the typology of faith styles reflects the typology of styles of responsiveness. These considerations raise the question about the dynamics of development in faith that we address in our next chapter.

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20 It would be a misreading of the conceptual change from stages to styles (Streib, 2001) that a style was defined by the rejection of everything that the cognitive-structural developmentalists included in the definition of a hard stage. On the contrary, the qualitative differences—also between the *styles*—reflect a hierarchical order and thus we regard the language of higher vs. lower, upward vs. downward, developmental progress vs. regression as adequate also for the faith styles. But the faith style hierarchy is neither a developmental line as it were a continuous variable, nor does faith develop as body and mind mature (the older, the higher). Rather, style development describes a change through qualitatively different modes of meaning-finding in faith. And the hierarchical order is justified primarily by philosophical-ethical reasoning as reflected in Habermas's (1983) reconstruction of Selman's (1980) social cognition model of perspective-taking, in Glăveanu's (2019) model of approaches to interpersonality that culminates in a "allocentric approach," and in Waldenfels's responsiveness that inspired us to define the highest faith style as xenosophic-dialogical. Thus, the talk of "higher vs. lower" styles or of "regression vs. progress" may remind some of the stage models, but this only works if our new, philosophical-ethical justification for the hierarchical arrangement is ignored.

CHAPTER 2

The Dynamics of Development in Faith

Why and how does faith develop? What does *development* mean when we talk about the development of *faith*? Based on everything we have written about faith development so far, development in our model of faith development means progress in the hierarchy of faith styles. To bring our understanding of the dynamic development of faith in sharper focus, we first ask whether this development is related to age.

2.1 Does Faith Development Depend on Age?

It is obvious that the development of faith is different from other domains in developmental psychology. Developmental psychology presents us with developmental trajectories that appear to correlate with or are very likely dependent on *age* such as motor skill development, development of cognitive abilities, or language development. In contrast to such developmental trajectories, faith development is obviously not related to the chronological age of the individual. Empirical research presents mixed results: Fowler, for example, has identified in the table of stage assignments to $n = 349$ faith development interviews in the 1970s a "stairstep pattern of the relation between age and stage" (Fowler, 1981, p. 319)—which he understood as support for his idea of progressing faith development as people get older. But upon closer inspection we find this conclusion not convincing, at least for the participants 50 years and older, who appear to engage in regression. Also, we can report from our own studies with longitudinal faith development interviews (Streib et al., 2023; Chen & Streib, under review) no coherent findings regarding the relationship between faith development and age. Getting older does not necessarily mean developing upward in terms of the faith development model.

An interesting parallel may be wisdom research. The assumption "the older, the wiser" is not supported by empirical research (for a most recent summary, see Glück, 2024). But the lack of evidence of a clear relation between wisdom and age does not prevent wisdom researchers from talking about the development of wisdom; on the contrary, wisdom researchers request that wisdom should be included in the curriculum of schools, because the education for wisdom is regarded urgent in our world (Sternberg & Hagen, 2019).

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To add another example: Cognitive-structural models such as Kohlberg's model of moral development do not claim an essential association between development and age. Kohlberg and colleagues (1983) give their own, specific reason for the missing link: As noted above, a "hard stage" includes by definition the rejection of the assumptions of "maturational" development. And Kohlberg's moral judgment, as any "true Piagetian" stage theory, is regarded "hard" and not "maturational." In contrast, soft stage developments may more likely correlate with age because they feature functional phases or cultural ages, as Snarey (1983) notes. Thus, cognitive-structural development is not assumed to automatically progress as the individual gets older. Rather, Kohlberg and colleagues have adopted the Piagetian explanation that stage transitions occur from experiences that force the individual to reconstruct (accommodate) the cognitive structures in order to successfully assimilate the new phenomena. Fowler adopted this understanding for faith development.

2.2 What Causes the Emergence of Higher Faith Styles?

We agree that faith development is probably not related to age, but we do not agree with the mechanism of stage transition that is assumed in the Piagetian tradition. Instead, we need to modify and advance this cognitive-structural model of stage transition. Our explanation of the emergence of a new style must be different, in the first place, because styles are *not* stages. Styles are not overcome by the advent of the next higher style. There is strictly speaking no *transition* at all. Rather, a new style emerges and enlarges the number of perspectives that are available to the individual. Thus, we disagree with the exclusive validity of the cognitive-structural model that traces stage transition back to the cognitive mechanism of assimilation and accommodation as if it were the one and only true explanation.

Instead, we suggest considering multiple possibilities and a variety of paths for the change of preference from one to another faith style. We claim that the emergence of a new style involves structure, content, and narratives, as Streib (2005) has unfolded in a proposal for a revision of faith development research. There are three ideal typical avenues:

- Structural: Through an unexpected challenge or occurrence such as a crisis, the individual is stimulated to re-think and perhaps change to another style of understanding *what they are ultimately concerned about*.
- Content: Reading and meditating philosophical, ethical, or religious texts—for example, the Declaration of Human Rights, the Sermon on the Mount—may lead to re-structure the understanding of one's "ultimate concern" in a higher style.

– Narrative (describing faith style change in narrative terms): By considering a story that reflects positive change and presents, for example, an alternative to the culturally normative biography—a deviation from the dominant master story (McLean et al., 2018),—a new version of narrative identity and meaning-making in a new style may appear attractive.

These possibilities are selective, exemplary, and perhaps rather hypothetical; and it may be difficult to test them in empirical research, except when we attend to a substantial number of narratives that participants tell. Until convincing results are presented that prove the opposite, we maintain that there is no single explanation for the emergence of a new style; instead, we suggest reckoning with a variety of individual trajectories. But what may be regarded as common in the developmental avenues is the encounter with something new, unexpected, unheard-of, or strange—which underscores the importance of responsiveness also for considering a new style of faith, a new and more adequate way of being "ultimately concerned."

Of course, also the analysis of our quantitative data opens up avenues and candidates that contribute to faith development. As our research results (for more details, see Chapter 4) suggest, there are preconditions without which a change in faith style would be difficult to imagine. One of the predictors is *openness to experience*, a personality trait that is regarded as one of five factors that make up one's personality tapestry. Since we have assessed, in all of our questionnaires, the five factors of personality for every faith development interviewee using the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1985), we have data. And on the basis of these data, *openness to experience* is revealed as predictor of faith development. Without *openness to experience*, an individual is less expected to search for a new way of thinking, including the interpretation of their ultimate concern.

Another necessary precondition for a faith style change is dissatisfaction with the traditional religiosity or worldview in which the individual has been socialized. This leads to something that may appear paradoxical: Low religiosity may be a predictor for developing higher faith styles. As our empirical results demonstrate, low prayer frequency and low experience of divine intervention are significant predictors for faith development. This is confirmed by the results for the subscales of the Religious Schema Scale (RSS; Streib et al., 2010), especially by the subscale *truth of texts and teachings*, but also, albeit somewhat weaker, for the other two RSS subscales (*fairness, tolerance & rational choice* and *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog*), which also emerged as predictors for faith development in our study (Chen & Streib, under review). It is low agreement to an ethnocentric religiosity and high agreement to a dialogical version of religiosity that serve as predictors for faith development. We will discuss in more detail the predictive effect of low religiosity, low scores

on religious schemata, and high openness to experience in some more detail in Chapter 4.

Even more challenging is an explanation for the change from higher to lower faith styles—as presented by numerous participants who were interviewed two or more times. We may speak of *regressing*, when an individual is losing interest in a higher faith style and returns to prefer and use a lower faith style. When we do not exclude regression a priori and subscribe to the assumption of irreversibility, we need to consider that some individuals may change their style and regress to lower faith styles. In the case of regression, low openness to experience and high praxis and experience in traditional religiosity may play a role.

In conclusion, we reject conceptualizing faith development in line with Kohlberg's (1983) core characteristics such as structural wholeness, monodirectionality, sequentiality, and irreversibility. Instead, we claim higher individual degrees of freedom in developmental trajectories than originally recognized by Fowler. Therefore, the factors that impact the progress of faith development need to be viewed much wider and diversified to include structural, content-based, and narrative prompts to encounter the unexpected and Strange to re-shape an individual's ultimate concern.

2.3 The Aim of Faith Development

What is at stake in faith development? The dynamic and significance of faith development becomes clear when we consider the contrast between the lowest style and the desired goal of development, that is, the contrast between the egocentric-sociocentric style and the dialogical-xenosophic style. Thus, as noted in the Introduction already, faith development is taking place in the field of tension between the ego and the Other: egocentrism vs. care for the Other; sociocentrism vs. appreciation for the Other's opinion; egoism vs. attention to the Other's needs and welfare; ignorance vs. openness for the inspiration by the Other; narcissistic focus on "those like us" vs. openness for "those *not* like us;" xenophobia vs. openness for diversity, for strangers, for the Strange.

For our new and revised description of faith development and the aim of faith development, we present a re-interpretation of Fowler's (1981; 1996) conceptualization. We further add our advancement of what we have changed and modified in two decades of intense empirical (Streib et al., 2009; Streib & Hood, 2016; Streib & Klein, 2018; Streib et al., 2022; Streib & Hood, 2024) and theoretical (Streib, 2001; 2005; 2013; Streib & Hood, 2024) engagement with faith development. And finally, we re-interpret the faith development model

in terms of our engagement with and inspiration by Waldenfels' (2011; 2012; 2020) responsive phenomenology (Streib, 2024a; 2024b). The result can be stated in the following way: *Faith and responsiveness are siblings*. Both faith and responsiveness are relevant in social interaction, questions of prejudice, and the abhorrent scandals of othering, hate, violence, and annihilation. To nurture and develop faith means to develop and nurture responsiveness. To have true faith and be truly "ultimately concerned" means to hope for and work for responsive relationships in our world.

This suggests an answer to the question of the aim of faith development: Faith in its most mature style contradicts any attitude and action of othering and prejudice. The highest style of faith features dialog that is based on the utmost unprejudiced attention to the Other. Responsiveness is fully developed in the most mature faith style. Therefore, faith in its most mature style means to engage in mutual perspective-*getting*, listening to, and being responsive to the Other. Thereby, this most mature style includes attention to manifestations of the Other, where the Other has no voice, cannot speak for themselves, cannot take on a speaker's perspective. Examples for such kind of manifestations of silencing of the Other are the marginalized minority groups of people, or victims of war or starvation whose names are at risk of being forgotten and not remembered, or future generations, that is, humans who are not yet born or children who cannot (yet) speak for their rights. Another example is nature, because the species of animals and plants threatened by extinction as well as the temperature balance of the atmosphere cannot claim their rights themselves, but depend on human attention, responsiveness, and depend on our advocacy. It should be noted that the experience of radical Otherness also consists of the shocking and challenging realization that actors, who actively promote such destruction, exist and act in our world.

Finally, a text about "faith" must include a focus on the responsiveness to the Ultimate as ultimate Other. One example for this is the encounter with other religions and belief systems, because they come to us as challenge, as incomprehensible, perhaps as strange and alien. Being open to the encounter with such strangeness, and being responsive to this challenging experience, are capacities in the most mature faith style. We may name this the *competence for dialog*. Dialog is mutual responsiveness, where responsiveness consists in allowing oneself to be challenged, re-thinking one's own religious or cultural habits, and appreciating new insights and new perspectives—and perhaps new possibilities for our own religious or cultural life.

This responsiveness as readiness for dialog receives a deeper understanding by considering the meaning of the Ultimate as *radical Other*. God, the divine, the higher power, the "ultimate conditions of existence" (Fowler)—or however

we name them—become idols, when we regard them as concrete and manifest objects (that "exist"), while, in fact, they should be regarded to be symbols that refer to something else. This understanding of ultimate Otherness *as symbol* (we could call this *semiotic alterity*) is, we should note, inspired by the discourse about semiotics in theology and the philosophy of religion—for which we may refer once again to Tillich.[1] The undeniably *symbolic* character of every talk about God or religious manifestation is one of Tillich's basic assumptions. It runs through his work from the early essay about religious symbols (Tillich, 1928; 1940) to the Systematic Theology (Tillich, 1951; 1957b; 1963). Thus, religious beliefs that are rooted in different, and sometimes *very* different and apparently incompatible, traditions are not "true" in the sense that they depict a reality with exactness and exclusive validity but are all *models* that await to be overtaken by new, better models tomorrow. This way, the Ultimate understood as *radical Other* opens a perspective how inter-religious dialog could proceed on a solid foundation—*intellectual humility*.

From these considerations about inter-religious dialog, it is obvious that the aim of faith development is not the increase and intensification of individual *religiosity*, as we have noted already in Chapter 1. Instead of the intensification of conviction (and perhaps overconfidence), we would expect an increase in *intellectual humility* in relation to *faith*.

Perhaps this is the place in our book to counter another, opposite misunderstanding: We should emphasize that the aim of faith development in our view is *not* deconversion or secularization—even, of course, deconversion or secularization trajectories may be found in some people's faith development trajectories. But this is not part of the theoretical assumption about the aim of development. While, for some readers, the dynamic of faith development may look like a move away from institutional religion or even triggering the necessity of leave-taking from organized religion, it should be underscored that the dynamic of faith development describes, first of all, a dynamic of change in *style*, that is the dynamic of *how* religiosity or spirituality is understood, validated, and practiced; changes in content are secondary, and changes in affiliation or membership may follow or not. Therefore, the theoretical model of faith development in terms of faith styles includes the possibility that an individual engages in faith development moving up in the hierarchy of faith styles but remains affiliated with their religious tradition and continues membership in their religious organization. Several case studies in our sample reflect such a biographical trajectory. Dialog, wisdom, intellectual humility are the features of faith style change and the aim of faith development, while

1 For a more detailed description of the contribution of Tillich's theory of the symbol, see p. 47.

secularization and de-institutionalization in the religious field are, regardless of the fact that they are highly interesting questions, part of other theoretical discourses—and not at least questions for empirical investigation, as we will discuss in Chapter 5.

In conclusion, we label the most mature faith style "xenosophic" to summarize the features and competencies of this highest faith style. "Xenosophic" means that this style favors the wisdom that affords and emerges from an open and unprejudiced encounter with the Unknown, Strange or Alien. In this sense we claim that xenosophia is the aim of faith development. And, as we have noted, the most mature style of faith involves the readiness for inter-religious dialog, since it features the greatest openness for, and full awareness of, the radical otherness of the Ultimate. Finally, the consequences developed in the xenosophic style are giving voice to people without a voice—marginalized people, the annihilated, and future generations, as examples—and to processes in the world that need advocacy—the extinction of species or global warming, as examples. The developmental aim of responsiveness and of faith is taking sides with the marginalized. Responsiveness at its best gives birth to a highly developed morality and ethic (Waldenfels, 2016).

2.4 The Dynamic Development of Faith in Terms of Perspective-Taking

What constitutes the dynamic of faith development and the progress in the hierarchy of faith styles? We suggest considering the model of perspective-taking, which also Fowler has included in his Aspects of faith. Fowler regarded Selman's (1980) model of perspective-taking as one of his Aspects that explain the differences between faith styles in their developmental progress. We attribute even more importance to perspective-taking and made it to the leading Aspect, because, as a model of social cognition, it clearly speaks to the interpersonal and social communication that is at stake in both faith and responsiveness. Also, Streib (2024a) has used Selman's (1980) model of perspective-taking as reconstructed by Habermas (1983) to sketch a model of styles of responsiveness. And since we argue in this book that responsiveness and faith are closely related, we introduce perspective-taking as backbone of faith development. Table 2 is based on an adapted and extended version of Habermas's (1983) reconstruction of Selman's (1980) social cognition model of perspective-taking. The differences between the faith styles can be explained by the different speaker's perspectives in the first, second, and third person, except for the xenosophic-dialogical faith style: Here, in the xenosophic-dialogical faith style, we posit the *reversal of perspectives*—which is our own advancement.

To go more into detail and focus on the dynamic between the faith styles, the progress from the Egocentric-sociocentric to the Conventional style involves an emigration from the cage of egocentric or sociocentric preoccupation with oneself to take other people into consideration. To see the interpersonal other and their needs, interests, and perspectives in second-person perspective is constitutive of close and stable social networks that form one's lifeworld, but tend to establish conventional sets of habits, rules and norms that are largely implicit and rather not called into question—and are sometimes felt as a cage of life-world conventions.

The gain in the move from the Conventional to the Individuative-reflective style is the ability to openly and rationally communicate and negotiate the ideas of what is right and should be done—which also includes disagreements. The new and additional competency here is the ability to view oneself and personal others from a third-person perspective. This opens the possibility to negotiate disagreements and conflicts from a bird's eye view. In Habermas' (1981a; 1981b) terms of communicative action, the fair negotiation of truth and rightness claims is now possible without remaining entangled in lifeworld conventions.

The dynamic from the Individuative-reflective to the Xenosophic-dialogical style, necessitates going beyond the theory of communicative action by envisioning and aiming at a theory of communicative *listening*. For this fourth

TABLE 2 Faith styles and the developmental dynamic of perspective-taking

Faith styles	**Styles of perspective-taking**
Egocentric-sociocentric	First-person only, that is, egocentric or sociocentric blindness for social perspective-taking; ignorance about or defensiveness against the perspectives of others
Conventional	Second-person (I–you) perspective: the personal other (their needs, interests, perspectives) is "seen" in mutual interpersonal perspective—which leads to the constitution of conventional life-worlds
Individuative-reflective	Third-person perspective: Inter-personal communication and potential disagreements viewed from a bird's eye view feature the fair negotiation of truth and rightness claims
Xenosophic-dialogical	Reversal of perspectives that features perspective-*getting*: Being aware of and appreciating the perspectives of others *on* oneself and one's own concerns

style, therefore, a change of perspectives is necessary: from perspective-taking to perspective-*getting*.[2] The idea of a reversal of perspectives in the highest style and the label "xenocentric" style is developed and explained by Streib (2024a) with reference to and high appreciation for Glăveanu's (2019) allocentric approach. Glăveanu presents a new understanding of the self-other relation that he calls "*allocentrism*"—as clearly opposed to *ego*centrism. Glăveanu (2019, p. 444) is proposing a new reading of intersubjectivity "that starts from the other and what it means to be other to other people, instead of systematically focusing on the self, how the self becomes self, and how it becomes other (within itself)."[3] This reference to Glăveanu strongly supports our conceptualization of the dynamics of adopting a higher style of faith that is going beyond perspective-taking to perspective-*getting*. This final change in perspective-taking/perspective-getting is regarded as the aim of the dynamics of the backbone model of faith development.

This strong emphasis on the Aspect of perspective-taking does not mean that we suggest paying less attention to other Aspects in the faith development model: Social horizon (that we introduced and discussed above), Morality, Locus of authority, World coherence, and Symbolic functioning that will be presented and discussed in Chapter 5. On the contrary, these additional Aspects enrich the view on faith and faith development as a comprehensive worldview that includes many dimensions as discussed in worldview research (see Streib & Hood, 2024, p. 26).

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2 Some more details about the reversal of perspective-taking to perspective-getting are given in Footnote 13 in Chapter 1.

3 Going some more into detail: In Glăveanu's (2019) text, the allocentric approach is the fourth, and most desirable, in the typological climax that includes three other approaches to intersubjectivity. The climax begins at the lower end with what Glăveanu calls the 'cognitive approach' that features 'being self'; next is the 'pragmatist approach' where the self has "the propensity of 'becoming other'" and perspective-taking accounts for differences; a third model is the 'dialogical approach' or 'becoming self' for which Buber is named as the main reference. And finally, Glăveanu presents his 'allocentric approach' that features the self-understanding of 'being other' and "aims to approach intersubjectivity from the position of the other and what it means to be other, rather than the self." (Glăveanu, 2019, p. 454). And Glăveanu (2019, p. 454) explains that in allocentrism "(r)eality, in particular the reality of the other, is no longer a construction of the self or a kind of strangeness expressed in dialogue, but a premise for responsibility. The other can never be fully tamed or understood—just as the self will never be fully understood by others—but this motives partners to constantly grasp towards each other. It is this grasping, this need for establishing relations and understanding, that makes connecting to others in allocentrism an intersubjective project that is always ongoing but never completed."

CHAPTER 3

Measurement: the Faith Development Interview

In this chapter we turn our attention from conceptualization to empirical research. We will explain how faith development can be measured. After all that has been said in the previous chapter, it should have become clear that the faith development model describes a dynamic that consists of qualitatively different and hierarchically ordered styles. Thus, faith development is not a continuous variable. Between the faith styles, there are qualitative, typological differences. We cannot imagine an item or individual scale in a questionnaire that would adequately measure faith development as conceptualized.[1]

Thus, our focus is on the classical instrument for research in faith development: the Faith Development Interview (FDI) that was created and originally published by Fowler (1981, pp. 307–312) and intensely applied by Fowler himself and in the circle of collaborating researchers. The first edition of the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Moseley et al., 1986) was published rather late, at a time when many researchers and doctoral students outside of Fowler's research circle wanted to include the FDI in their research (for a comprehensive review, see Streib, 2003a); it was the time when faith development research began to spread in the USA and other regions of the world.

3.1 The Faith Development Interview as a Research Tool

The FDI is a semi-structured interview that may last between 30 minutes to 2 hours. The interview consists of 25 questions (each includes optional

1 Despite Fowler and colleague's (1986) skepticism against any pencil and paper approach, there was a number of attempts to create scale-type instruments to measure faith development; see the reviews by Streib (2003a) and Parker (2006; 2010). The reviews note limitations, because there was no convergent validation by the simultaneous use of Fowler's FDI; and some scales give rise to the suspicion that something other than faith development is measured. Also, most scales were developed, but not much used in faith development research. An exception may be Leak's (1999) Faith Development Scale that has been validated (Leak, 2003; 2008), used in subsequent research, and contributed interesting results, for example, about progressing faith development during undergraduate studies (Leak, 2003), or about the relation of faith development and prejudice reduction (Crownover, 2007; James et al., 2011). It should be noted that this scale measures faith development rather reduced to a two-option model.

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follow-up questions) that address four areas: *A. Life review* (Sample question: "Reflecting on your life, identify its major chapters"), *B. Relationships* ("Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents and your current relationship to them?"), *C. Present values and commitments* ("Are there any beliefs, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?") and finally *D. Religion and worldview* ("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 each FDI question, the structural pattern as described in detail in the *Manual* (current edition: Streib & Keller, 2018) and documenting this faith style assignment.

3.1.1 *The FDI Questions*

Table 3 presents the 25 questions (including the follow-up questions) in the current version (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 12).[2]

TABLE 3 Faith development interview questions

Life review	
1.	Reflecting on your life thus far, identify its major chapters.—If your life were a book—how would you name the different chapters?—What marker events stand out as especially important?
2.	Are there past relationships that have been important to your development as a person?
3.	Do you recall any changes in relationships that have had a significant impact on your life or your way of thinking about things?
4.	How has your world view changed across your life's chapters? How has this affected your image of God or of the Divine, or what is holy for you? What does it mean to you now?
5.	Have you had moments of intense joy or breakthrough experiences—moments that have affirmed or changed your sense of life's meaning?
6.	Have you experienced times of crisis or suffering in your life? Have you experienced times when you felt profound disillusionment, or that life had no meaning?—What happened to you at these times?—How have these experiences affected you?

2 Available also at https://osf.io/zy2v8.

TABLE 3 Faith development interview questions (*cont.*)

Relationships	
7.	Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents? How do you see your current relationship to them? Have there been any changes in your perceptions of your parents over the years? If so, what caused the change?
8.	Are there any other relationships that are important to you?
9.	What groups, institutions, or causes, do you identify with? Why are they important to you? Are there groups that have been important to you, but are not important anymore? Did you leave a (religious) community recently?
Present values and commitments	
10.	Do you feel that your life has meaning at present? What makes your life meaningful to you?
11.	If you could change one thing about yourself or your life, what would you most want to change?
12.	Are there any beliefs, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?
13.	When or where do you find yourself most in communion or harmony with the Universe?
14.	What do you consider mature faith or a mature way to handle existential questions?
15.	When you have an important decision to make, how do you generally go about making it? Can you give me an example? If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to whom or what would you look for guidance?
16.	Do you think that actions can be right or wrong? If so, what makes an action right in your opinion?
17.	Are there certain actions or types of actions that are always right under any circumstances? Are there certain moral opinions that you think everyone should agree on?
Religion and world view	
18.	Do you think that human life has a purpose?—If so, what is it? Are we affected by a power or powers beyond our control?
19.	What does death mean to you? What happens to us when we die?
20.	Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person? (Or would you prefer another description?) What does it mean to you?
21.	Do you pray, meditate, or perform any other spiritual practice?
22.	Are there any religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? If so, what are they and what makes them important?

TABLE 3 Faith development interview questions (*cont.*)

23.	What is sin, to your understanding?
24.	How do you explain the presence of evil in our world?
25.	If people disagree about issues of world view or religion, how can such conflicts be resolved?

The wording of the FDI questions is largely identical with Fowler's (1981, pp. 307–312) original. Changes include that we have carefully reworded some questions, for example, the question: *Do you consider yourself a religious person?* has been changed to read: *Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person?*

3.1.2 *Evaluation Procedure*

> A key point in coding a FDI is learning how to think in structural terms. Structures are patterns of cognitive and affective operation by which content is understood, appropriated, manipulated, expressed, and transformed. In the interviewee's responses to the questions of the FDI, we are seeking not so much the "what" of content, but the "how" and the "why" that indicates structure and style.

This quote from the current *Manual* (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 19)—the words can be traced back to the first edition (Moseley et al., 1986)—expresses precisely the core task of FDI evaluation. This consists of identifying *structure,* because the styles of faith and the differences between them—egocentric-sociocentric, conventional, individuative-reflective, xenosophic-dialogical—are essentially based on *structural* characteristics.

Of course, it should not be ignored that the answers in the FDI are rich in *content* and may include a wealth of *narratives*—and this needs to be taken into account in faith development research (Streib, 2005)—but the primary task in FDI evaluation is the interpretation for *structure* and structural difference. Thereby, "structure" means attention to the HOW and WHY of understanding and meaning-making: by giving priority (a) to the egocentric self, (b) to the conventional small life world, (c) to the autonomous reflection, or (d) to a dialogical and xenosophic openness. Thus, coding an FDI passage means focusing attention on *structure* not on *content* and *narrative*, and identifying the specific and prevalent faith style that the interviewee is using in a specific interview passage, and finally assigning the faith style that appears most adequate to this interview passage. But already here challenges arise for the

interpretation process: The focus on the *structure* of an interview passage can be distracted by the *content* that is being talked about in the passage; and many of the FDI questions strongly elicit content-loaden responses, which makes it rather difficult to keep the focus on structure, particularly for beginners in FDI coding.

To warrant a maximum of between-rater consistency, the *Manual* contains descriptions of rating guidelines for all faith styles in each Aspect (Perspective-taking, Social horizon, Morality, Locus of authority, Form of world coherence, Symbolic function). Thereby, each FDI question is assigned to one of the six Aspects according to which Aspect they may contribute the

TABLE 4 Association of FDI questions to aspects

FDI question		**Aspect of faith**
1	Life chapters	Perspective-taking
2	Past relationships	
3	Changes in relationships	
7	Parents	
5	Breakthrough	Social horizon
6	Crises	
8	Current relationships	
9	Groups	
12	Beliefs, values, commitments	Morality
16	Action right/wrong	
17	Always right	
23	Sin	
10	Your life meaning	Locus of authority
11	Change one thing	
15	Important decision	
18	Purpose of human life	
13	Harmony with universe	Form of world coherence
19	Death	
24	Evil in the world	
25	Religious conflicts	
20	Religious person?	Symbolic function
21	Religious ideas, symbols, rituals	
22	Pray, meditate?	
4	Image of god	
14	Maturity	

most structural information. The association is presented in Table 4, which is adapted from (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 24).

The coding criteria for the Aspect-specific criteria for assigning a faith style to the interview passage, are the largest part of the Manual (Streib & Keller, 2018, pp. 28–54). The codings of the responses to each of the 25 FDI questions should be documented in a spreadsheet or data set. In the *Manual* we recommend an electronic spreadsheet that also allows for noting the coder's justification of their decision for a specific faith style. This is helpful when two raters are preparing the comparison of their ratings to discuss and resolve disagreements, or when a third expert rater decides on the final rating in case of different style assignments.

In conclusion, the interpretation of the passages in the FDI and the assignment of faith styles is a process of interpretation that theoretically could go on infinitely in case of disagreements and has to be brought to an end optimally by an experienced rater who is an expert in faith development. The flipside of such interpretive openness is that we cannot expect very high inter-rater agreement scores. This is only natural in such an open interpretation of a semi-structured interview, where the questions serve more like a trigger for the interviewee to respond, for example, with a narrative spanning several paragraphs or several pages in the transcript. The FDI evaluation that is based on 28 pages of coding criteria is not comparable with the evaluation of brief and standardized texts with the help of a scoring scheme with, say, five or eight options. Nevertheless, we claim that the FDI and this manualized evaluation are the ideal solution.

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research with FDI

3.2.1 *Faith Style Ratings for Case Studies*

For the work of qualitative analysis of individual cases or small groups of cases, the assignment of a faith style has proved to be important. Thus, we regard it as important for the work on case studies that the faith development interview scores are considered. The perspective of interest is a widening focus that begins with an idiographic view on the individual at the time of the interview (in terms of faith style). It expands with a biographical perspective by additional attention to intra-individual commonalities and differences in faith style preferences by comparing one or more follow-up FDIs with the same person. And finally, with reference to Lamiell (1981), the idiothetic focus enables us to compare several participants by an interpretation of their inter-individual commonalities and differences.

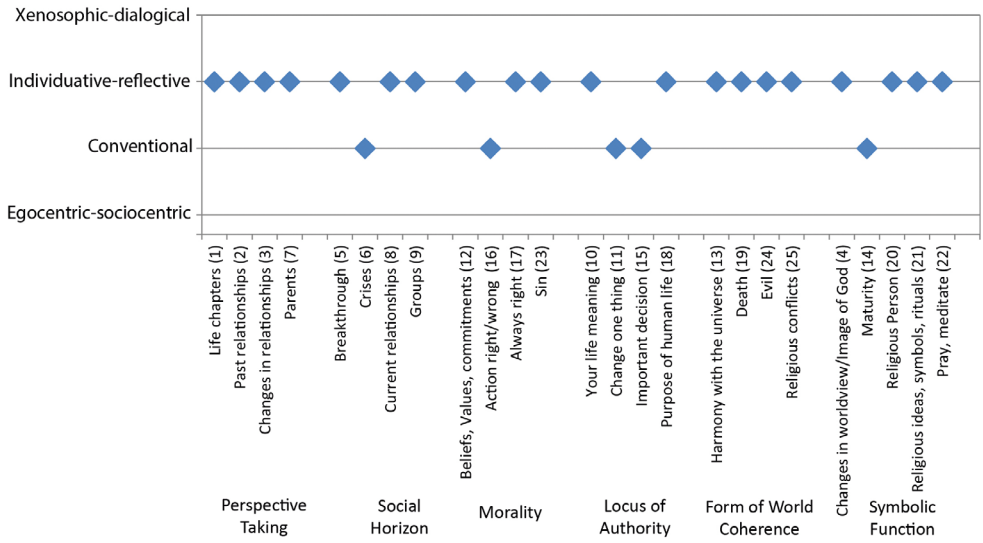

FIGURE 2 Example of a style-aspect map

For such qualitative evaluation and comparison, it is always the ideal solution to consult the original transcript of the interviews. But as the number of interviews per person and also the group of cases that we want to compare grows, the researchers may need a memory aid for the individual faith style ratings. For this purpose, we have developed in the 2018 *Manual*, what we called the Style-Aspect Map. Figure 2 presents an example adapted from the *Manual* (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 27).

This figure shows that the faith style assignments to the individual FDI questions may span more than one faith styles—two styles in this case, but other maps show even three faith styles. This is not unexpected but declared normal by the faith styles perspective (Streib, 2001), which assumes that there may be not just one faith style equally dominant in all Aspects and in all responses that an interviewee gives for the FDI questions. On the contrary, as the wave image (see Figure 1) suggests, there is likely more going on below the surface of the currently most preferred faith style. In conclusion, the Style-Aspect Map can be a helpful tool to assist in comparing participants or groups of participants. In the voluminous body of publications with case studies that are authored by the researchers of our teams in Chattanooga and Bielefeld (for the more recent ones, see Bullik, 2022; Keller, 2022; Streib et al., 2022; Bullik, 2024; Streib & Hood, 2024), the reader can find many examples that demonstrate the importance of the faith style for the interpretation of the biographical trajectory in the case study.

The work with case studies brings to our attention the treasure of the faith development interview as Fowler's ingenious creation: The FDI starts with an invitation to the interviewee to reflect on the course of their life divided into chapters as if it were a book. Thus, the FDI begins with a powerful invitation to the interviewee to respond with a *biographical narrative*. For many interviewees, this sets in motion an enormous enthusiasm to not only narratively reconstruct their biography but respond to the other FDI questions also with a story. Thus, the strong narrative characteristic in many FDIs opens the door for narrative analysis and biographical reconstruction in case studies. But this great potential of the FDI is not primarily connected to the aim for which it was designed originally: faith development. An interesting example for this is Fowler's own famous case study, Mary's Pilgrimage (Fowler, 1981, pp. 217–268). This case study has been highly applauded, for example, by Nelson and Aleshire (1986), two experts in empirical analysis, who were invited to evaluate the empirical quality of faith development research in its early times. Nelson and Aleshire found Fowler's text about Mary highly applaudable and the best of Fowler's results, just *because* it did not only present and discuss faith development but that it integrated the faith development evaluation into a psychoanalytically informed reconstruction of Mary's biographical journey in a voluminous, 50 pages long, case study. In conclusion, the FDI may be the basis for a much more comprehensive evaluation of the interviewee's biographical trajectory and faith journey, and the coding for faith style is just one perspective to be integrated in the biographical dynamic of the case study.

3.2.2 *Faith Style Ratings for Quantitative Analysis*

When we now move on from qualitative to quantitative analysis, additional questions emerge. One of them is how we may, in a methodologically acceptable way, arrive at one final score for the entire 25 questions of FDI. When style assignments are entered into a quantitative database, this results in 25 variables with integers for faith style. The question then arises as to how we should continue to work with these 25 variables—take Figure 2 as example. Intuitively, we may see that a certain faith style is obviously dominant; but many style-aspect maps are more complex. How can we calculate a final score in a methodologically acceptable way? Fowler's original instructions beginning with the earlier editions of the *Manual* (Moseley et al., 1986; DeNicola & Fowler, 1993; Fowler et al., 2004) suggested averaging these ratings to calculate the mean score for the entire FDI. However, this approach can be criticized, because it oversimplifies the complexity of faith development, treats style assignments as they were values on a continuous scale, and ignores the de facto variance.

TABLE 5 Summary of faith style, faith type, and coding criteria

Faith styles	Key coding criteria for faith styles	Faith type	Criteria for faith types
Egocentric-sociocentric	Characterized by an authoritative and exclusive regime of religious texts and teachings that are understood mythic-literally and regarded absolute. Assumptions about justice in relation to the divine world reflect a system of punishment and reward.	Type 1 Substantially ethnocentric	If frequency of the Egocentric-sociocentric style rating is equal to or more than 20%
Conventional	Characterized by the implicit consent to conventions of one's group or lifeworld. In-group harmony and mutuality have higher priority than explicitly dealing with questions and arguing validity claims.	Type 2 Predominantly conventional	If not assigned as Type 1 or 4, frequency of the Conventional style rating is greater than that of the Individuative-reflective style rating
Individuative-reflective	Characterized by the critical and autonomous reflection that is the basis for negotiating and deciding validity claims, including questions of religion, worldview, and faith.	Type 3 Predominantly individuative-reflective	If not assigned as Type 1 or 4, frequency of the Individuative-reflective style rating is greater than that of the Conventional style rating
Xenosophic-dialogical	Characterized by perspective-*getting*, intellectual humility, openness for dialog, learning from the other, and for the creativity and wisdom that emerges from encountering the Other/strange (xenosophia).	Type 4 Emerging dialogical-xenosophic	If frequency of the Xenosophic-dialogical style rating is equal to or more than 20%

Note: A specific rule is set in place to break the ties introduced by an identical frequency of the Conventional style and the Individuative-reflective style ratings, while both the Egocentric-sociocentric style and of the Xenosophic-dialogical style ratings are below 20%. For these situations, the case should be associated with the higher type.

An alternative approach proposed by Streib, Chen and Hood (2020) suggests constructing *faith types* based on the mode of faith style assignments, with each type representing a combination of dominant and lesser styles. This method provides a more nuanced understanding of an individual's faith development and reinforces methodological rigor. The overall faith type is determined based on the mode of style assignments across the 25 interview questions. However, since assignments for the egocentric-sociocentric and the xenosophic-dialogical styles are less common and often overlap with adjacent styles, relying solely on the pure mode method may not accurately capture a person's overall style. Therefore, our model suggests a heuristic that places more weight on these styles on the bottom and the top. Table 5 provides a concise overview of the understanding of faith styles and their relationship to faith types.

This approach of faith type construction as proposed by Streib at al. (2020) is our current proposal on how to construct a final rating for the entire FDI. Though a latent class analysis and a machine-learning algorithm suggested a similar type construction (only slightly less precise), we do not claim that this algorithm is the final word in quantitative research with the faith development interview. Perhaps there are other proposals in the future that replace the faith type construction. Anyway, all our recent analyses and statistics including the faith development interview that are reported in this book include faith development scores based on this faith type construction.

We think that faith type construction was necessary: While the FDI evaluation according to the *Manual* was designed for drawing qualitative or less ambitious quantitative conclusions based on rather small samples, our aim was establishing a methodologically sound way for empirically evaluating the faith development model. We claim that, with the faith type construction approach, we could provide a solid basis for conducting quantitative analyses, including the identification of predictors and outcomes, about faith development. This is what we now move on to demonstrate in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Faith Development in the Mirror of Quantitative Results

Our entire series of individual projects on changes in religiosity and worldview has employed a mixed-methods design. In all research projects, we administered the faith development interview (FDI) at least to a selection of the sample. But we have always invited participants to also answer a questionnaire survey—with the effect that just about all interviewees participated in both the FDI and the survey.[1] This opens the possibility for us relating the results from the faith development evaluation to the results in the questionnaire surveys. Since we have completed several waves of data collection, the number of participants with two FDIs is high enough to warrant sufficient statistical power.

What aim did we have in mind for the relation of FDI and survey results? In the first projects—Deconversion, Spirituality, Xenophobia in Germany—the scales were included in the questionnaires to explore the participant's deconversion experiences, their self-identifying as "more spiritual than religious," or their prejudices. In the later waves of our longitudinal research the scales serve an additional function: The survey results indicate how faith development is reflected and mirrored in various psychological variables. Ultimately, these quantitative variables allow contextualizing and profiling our faith development model from a psychological perspective, with special attention to the psychology of religion.

In the Appendix to this book, we describe the most important variables and psychological constructs that were included in the questionnaires. We moved this text into the Appendix, because not all readers may need an introduction to the measures included in our questionnaires. Nevertheless, this information is important for understanding our analyses and conclusions on how the results of the faith development evaluation are reflected in the quantitative results. Favorable for such a relation is that in the selection of constructs and

1 In the Deconversion, Spirituality, and Xenophobia Projects, the total numbers of participants who answered the questionnaire only were much higher than the FDI interviewees. For more details, see Table 1 of our Omnibus Document (Streib & Chen, 2024b), which is available at https://osf.io/nyaxz.

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scales for the individual questionnaires we were cautious about maintaining continuity. Measures were added, rather than deleted, as is mandatory for longitudinal research.

4.1 Predictors for Faith Development

We begin with the identification of predictors. What predicts transitioning to a higher faith type in the second FDI? Table 6 presents three domains that produced significant results: personality, religious schemata, and religiosity.

4.1.1 *Personality*

How does *faith* development relate to personality traits? How does *religiosity* relate to the five personality factors? Approaching these questions, a meta-analysis by Saroglou (2010) revealed that general religiosity is related to *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness*, but not *openness to experience*. However, Saroglou's meta-analysis found that correlations with *openness to experience* became significant when general religiosity was broken down into two distinct forms: fundamentalist religiosity and spirituality or mature religiosity. These two forms may represent different stages or styles within the process of faith development. Accordingly, while fundamentalist religiosity tends to show little or no relationship with *openness to experience*, mature forms of faith are positively associated with *openness to experience*.

Indeed, already our results (Streib et al., 2023, p. 304), based on a smaller sample (n = 75), have indicated that openness to experience "significantly predicted faith development" such that "people of higher openness were more likely to move upward." And from our most recent replication based on n = 324 participants with at least two faith development interviews (Chen & Streib, under review), we have confirmative evidence that openness to experience predicts faith development.

We conclude that there is a strong and not easily explained away[2] effect of *openness to experience* at a previous time on the preference for a higher faith type at a later FDI. Thus, rather than by other personality traits, faith development is predicted by curiosity, unconventionality, aesthetic and intellectual

2 The *E*-value = 1.73 indicates that to explain away the association, a variable has to be associated with both the predictor and outcome at the strength of 1.73, which is considered sizable (for the E-value of this and results mentioned later in this text, see Table S4 in Supplemental File to Chen & Streib, under review).

TABLE 6 Associations of predictor variables assessed at A1 with faith type assessed at A2 (n = 324)

Predictor variables assessed at A_1	Faith type assessed at A_2	
	Odds ratio (95% CI)	p-value
Big Five personality		
Openness to experience	1.48 (1.14, 1.92)	.004
Religious schemata		
Truth of texts and teachings	0.56 (0.42, 0.76)	< .001
Fairness, tolerance & rational choice	1.34 (1.04, 1.73)	.024
Xenosophia/inter-religious dialog	1.40 (1.08, 1.81)	.011
Religious centrality		
Prayer frequency	0.53 (0.37, 0.74)	.001
Experiencing divine intervention	0.70 (0.50, 0.97)	.031

Note: Each row represents an individual ordinal logistic regression, where A_2 faith type serves as the outcome variable and an A_1 psychological construct is the predictor. Demographic variables and A_1 faith type are included as covariates. The coefficients for demographic variables are derived from a single ordinal logistic regression that includes all demographic variables and A_1 faith type as predictors. The two assessments, A_1 and A_2 are separated by an average of 7.4 years (SD = 4.3). This is a simplified version of Table 4 in Chen and Streib (under review) and presents the predictors that are significant with $p < .05$; we should note however that, after the application of multiple testing, only results with $p < .01$ remained significant.

interests that have been identified as facets of openness to experience (Saucier, 1998; Chapman, 2007). It may be going too far to conclude that faith development is nothing but a function of personality. But our results clearly indicate that personality and faith development are related via *openness to experience*.

4.1.2 *Religiosity*

From a psychology of religion perspective, we evaluated how FDI results associate with constructs such as religious beliefs, the image of God, religious praxis, religious experiences, religious fundamentalism, and religious pluralism. With a model that is based on *faith*, and faith being defined as different from religion, as we explained in Chapter 1, the relation may be more complex. In fact, the relation between faith development and religiosity could be inverse—which may nevertheless indicate a close relationship, albeit a negative one.

One measure for religiosity in our questionnaire was Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Scale that assesses public and private practice,

religious experience, ideology and the intellectual dimension. Our data show that *prayer frequency* (private praxis) is a robust *negative* predictor for faith development, and *experiences of divine intervention* (religious experience) is also a *negative* predictor, albeit with less robust significance. Thus, the data clearly substantiates an inverse relation between faith development and religiosity.

4.1.3 *The Religious Schema Scale*

Regarding the Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010) our hypothesis was that the subscale *truth of texts and teachings* (*ttt*) negatively predicts faith development such that people with higher *ttt* are more likely to move downward in faith style over time, while the RSS subscales *fairness, tolerance & rational choice* (*ftr*) *and xenosophia/inter-religious dialog* (*xenos*) positively predict faith development such that people high in *ftr* and/or *xenos* move upward in faith type over time.

Our previous study (Streib et al., 2023) has documented, based on a sample of n = 75, that (only) the RSS subscale *ttt* predicts faith development; this is confirmed by the results of the latest study (Chen & Streib, under review), based on n = 324 cases with two FDIs. The RSS subscales *ftr* and *xenos* emerge as significant, but less robust in multiple testing. Thus, our hypotheses were supported by the larger sample size, albeit not robustly.

We can conclude that very likely the RSS has predictive validity for faith development. Each of the three religious schemata that are measured by the RSS appears to predict faith development. While *xenos* and *ftr* display predicting effects for faith development, as strongest predictor emerged the subscale *ttt* indicating that low agreement to this ethnocentric and fundamentalist schema predicts faith development. Thereby, the result that low religiosity (prayer frequency and experiencing divine intervention) predicts faith development may appear less inexplicable, when also low agreement to the *truth of texts and teachings* of one's religious tradition has an effect in the same direction.

4.2 The Dynamics of Faith Development as Reflected in the Outcomes

What do the outcomes of faith development add to understanding the dynamics of faith development? Considering the outcomes of faith development may contribute not only to better understanding the model of faith development but also realizing why development in faith is needed in a world of othering, prejudice, and hate.

We report results on cognitive constructs, religious beliefs, fundamentalism, and prejudice. These outcomes are significant ($p < .05$, see Table 7), but, again, not robust against multiple testing (see Chen & Streib, under review). Although not fully meeting the higher criteria of statistical analysis, the results open perspectives on faith development outcomes that future research could corroborate.

4.2.1 *Cognitive Structures*

Faith development stands in the polarity between unreflective, unquestioned (over-) confidence, on the one end, and the openness for the dialogical and processual character of truth and rightness, and the readiness to revise one's viewpoint on new convincing arguments in intellectual humility, on the other end. This would suggest that faith development dovetails with changes in an individual's cognitive characteristics that become visible in the changes of cognitive constructs. Our research results yield perspectives on cognitive characteristics such as need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, and intellectual humility.

Faith development is related to *need for cognition* as designed by Cacioppo and Petty (1982). We argue that emigration from the niche of blind preoccupation with one's ego or group, to increasingly interacting with the pre-formulated answers in conventional communities and applying the rules in the societal system, to finally seeing oneself in the eyes of an Other is going hand in hand with the interest in reflection and the joy of thinking. This would suggest that *need for cognition* is related to progressive faith development. As documented in Table 7, the analysis of our data indicates that indeed *need for cognition* could be one of the outcomes of progressive faith development and people who develop a higher faith type report higher interest in reflection and the joy of thinking.

The progress in faith development may reflect a decrease in the related cognitive construct of *intolerance for ambiguity* (Budner, 1962). This is hypothetically plausible, when we consider the developmental line of egocentric-sociocentric absoluteness, to the more fluid reference to convention and tradition, and the open-ended competitive negotiation of truth and rightness claims, to finally feature receptiveness (pathos), dialog, and attentiveness to those who cannot speak for themselves: The higher the faith style, the higher the necessity and competence to reckon with the ambiguity of perspectives. The special profile of tolerance of ambiguity relates to the development of fluid attention to the Other who is beyond our control. Our recent results support the assumption that ambiguity tolerance is an outcome of faith development.

TABLE 7 Associations of faith type change and faith type assessed at A1 with outcome variables assessed at A2 (n = 324)

Outcome variables assessed at A_2	Faith type change		Faith type assessed at A_1	
	β (95% CI)	*p*-value	β (95% CI)	*p*-value
Religious schemata				
Truth of texts and teachings	−0.27 (−0.49, −0.04)	.022	−0.10 (−0.23, 0.03)	.128
Religious centrality				
Belief in existence of God	−0.24 (−0.48, −0.01)	.039	−0.16 (−0.29, −0.03)	.020
Prayer frequency	−0.13 (−0.37, 0.11)	.295	−0.18 (−0.32, −0.04)	.011
Religious services frequency	−0.14 (−0.39, 0.11)	.285	−0.15 (−0.30, −0.00)	.044
Religious worldview				
Fundamentalism	−0.41 (−0.70, −0.12)	.007	−0.20 (−0.38, −0.02)	.026
Intolerance of ambiguity	−0.22 (−0.55, 0.12)	.204	−0.19 (−0.37, −0.00)	.045
Need for cognition	0.33 (0.03, 0.64)	.034	0.19 (0.03, 0.36)	.022
God representation				
Authoritarian	−0.41 (−0.77, −0.04)	.030	−0.31 (−0.50, −0.11)	.002
Group-focused enmity				
Xenophobia	−0.32 (−0.76, 0.12)	.154	−0.22 (−0.44, −0.00)	.047
Racism	−0.49 (−0.85, −0.12)	.009	−0.19 (−0.39, 0.00)	.055
Homophobia	−0.33 (−0.68, 0.01)	.059	−0.20 (−0.40, −0.01)	.044
Intellectual humility				
Openness to revising one's viewpoint	0.30 (−0.16, 0.76)	.193	0.30 (0.07, 0.53)	.010

Note: Each row represents an individual logistic regression, where A_2 psychological construct serves as the outcome and faith type change and A_1 faith type serve as the predictor variables. All demographic variables and the corresponding A_1 baseline variable (except God representation, group-focused enmity, and intellectual humility) are included as covariates in each regression model. The two assessments, A_1 and A_2 are separated by an average of 7.4 years (SD = 4.3). This is a simplified version of Table 5 in Chen and Streib (under review) and presents the predictors that are significant with $p < .05$ in one of the two assessments; we should note however that all these results did not reveal to be robust against multiple testing and therefore can only interpreted with caution.

Intellectual humility (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016) is a third cognitive construct that revealed as an outcome of faith development. Intellectual humility reflects the dynamic between the faith styles, in particular the tension between the egocentric-sociocentric and the xenosophic-dialogical faith

style. And, again, the data indicates that one subscale of intellectual humility, namely openness to revising one's viewpoint, is an outcome of preferring a higher faith type.

We conclude that the three constructs of cognition that we have measured are significant ($p < .05$) outcomes of the development of higher faith types. This suggests that faith development belongs to the transformations in one's biography that are very likely influencing the individual's cognition: to increase the joy of thinking, the tolerance of ambiguity, and the openness to revising one's viewpoint.

4.2.2 *Religiosity*

As noted above, we measured *religiosity* in our questionnaires using individual items that are included in Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Scale and are designed to assess five core dimensions of religiosity. Data analysis shows that *low* prayer frequency (private praxis) and *low* belief in the existence of God, and *low* religious attendance frequency are outcomes of faith development.

For the Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al.; 2010) we hypothesized that faith development predicts lower agreement to the subscale *ttt,* and higher agreement to *ftr*, and *xenos*. Data analysis reveals that only *ttt* reached significance ($p < .05$). Because, as noted above, lower *ttt* emerged not only as strong predictor, but also as outcome, we may assume a kind of circular effect of mutual reinforcement of disagreement with the ethnocentric schema and the development of faith.

A third variable completes the set of anti-ethnocentric and anti-fundamentalist outcomes of faith development in the domain of religiosity: the rejection of an authoritarian God representation (Johnson et al., 2018). Conceptually we argued that faith development as movement away from unreflective holding-on to a system of traditional beliefs and away from conventional beliefs onto a level of individuative-reflective and dialogical openness may dovetail with greater agreement to the mystical and the ineffable God image and lower agreement to the benevolent and the authoritarian God image. Our data indicate that faith development is specifically associated with lower endorsement of the authoritarian representation of God, a view typically rooted in traditional forms of religious or evangelical conservative belief.

We also can report conceptual and empirical perspectives on the relation of faith development and *religious fundamentalism*, assessed by items from the Religion Monitor (Huber, 2009). In the faith development model, the egocentric-sociocentric faith style is considered to have an affinity with fundamentalist beliefs—Fowler used the label "mythic-literal" for this style.

In contrast, people using the individuative-reflective and, more explicitly, the xenosophic-dialogical faith style reject fundamentalism and feature pluralism instead. Conceptually, this clear correspondence can be established. Data analysis supports this at least partially: the rejection of *fundamentalism* is a significant outcome to faith development.

4.2.3 *Prejudice Reduction*

The psychology of prejudice presents us, in Allport's (1954) words, with the puzzle that religion can "make" and "unmake" prejudice. But Allport (1954, p. 456) also indicates a solution by introducing the contrast between the religion "of an ethnocentric order" that supports prejudice and the religion "of a universalistic order" that reduces prejudice. The tension between these two versions of religiosity, universalistic vs. ethnocentric, is reflected in the faith development model, as Streib, Chen, and Hood (2023, p. 299) contend. The faith development model, however, extends the binary opposition into four different religious types. This would suggest that the outcome of progression to the preferred use of the highest faith style is low agreement to xenophobia and prejudice.

This assumption is supported by our data: We have included in the questionnaire for the latest wave of measurement items assessing the syndrome of Group-focused Enmity (Heitmeyer, 2002; Zick et al., 2008; Küpper & Zick, 2014). Our selection from the GFE syndrome included xenophobia (prejudice against immigrants), prejudice against black people, women, and homosexuals. Results demonstrate that a decrease in xenophobia, racism, and homophobia can be outcomes of the development to a higher faith type. These are indications that prejudice reduction is the outcome of faith development.

4.3 Conclusion

In the application for our recently completed project,[3] we have included the project aims for investigating two potential outcomes of faith development: a. God representation (or the symbolization of transcendence), b. prejudice reduction (or responding to the strange). These two potential outcomes of faith

3 The project was live between 01/2022 and 09/2024, it was supported by funds from JTF, Grant# 61834, and the German Research Foundation, DFG, Grant STR 270/22-1, and has completed the fourth wave of data collection. The official project title was "Outcomes of Life-span Development of Religious Styles: Changes in Symbolizing Transcendence and in Responding to the Strange."

development should answer these questions: Does progressive faith development reduce the agreement to an authoritarian image of God, perhaps in favor of a mystical God representation? Has faith development an effect on reducing prejudice and xenophobia? Now, after the final analysis of our comprehensive data (FDI evaluations and questionnaire answers) of all waves of our research, we are pleased to report that both of our assumptions are generally supported by our data: Faith development reduces the agreement to an authoritarian God representation; Faith development reduces prejudice (xenophobia, racism, and homophobia).

Analyzing all our available data yields a broad focus: The dynamics of faith development are reflected in a set of psychological variables. As detailed above, we can summarize the psychological areas in which faith development shows effects; they include cognitive psychology with constructs such as *need for cognition*, *tolerance of ambiguity*, and *intellectual humility*; they include the psychology of religion with constructs such as the *God image*, religious *fundamentalism*, and the *truth of texts and teachings* of one's religious group; and they include the psychology of prejudice with the constructs of *xenophobia, racism,* and *homophobia*. It is not difficult to identify common features and similarities among these outcomes of faith development. We summarize this in a pointed statement: If we desire to nurture *openness to revising one's viewpoint*, the *joy of thinking*, and the *tolerance of ambiguity*, if we desire to reduce agreement to an *authoritarian image of God,* minimize *fundamentalism*, and decrease agreement to the *truth of texts and teachings* of one's religious group, and if we desire to reduce *xenophobia, racism,* and *homophobia*, then we should encourage faith development.

The coherence and similarities among these effects of faith development become obvious by taking into consideration what they may help to overcome: Faith development with all these outcomes stands in sharp opposition to attitudes and behaviors of othering, hate, and violence that are abundant in our world today. This suggests an important program for education in our schools and in public education: *education for responsiveness*. In other words, faith development including its outcomes converges in an ethics of responsiveness, thus, in the countermovement against all the disastrous consequences of irresponsiveness for humanity and ecology.

The supposed flipside of faith development, as our results indicate, is the decline in belief in the existence of God, in the frequency of prayer, and in the attendance at places of worship. While, perhaps, the simultaneity of decreasing *religiosity* and growing *faith* may appear paradoxical, we find these outcomes of faith development not unexpected. Our interpretation begins with a rather obvious consideration about the dynamic of development: To

consolidate the development in faith, most individuals need a break from the religion of their childhood and the religion of their past. To engage in openness for something new such as a higher faith style that features openness to the ideas of others, tolerance for ambiguity, and a new way of looking at things, people may need to call into question their holding-on to the *truth of texts and teachings* of their religious tradition, and perhaps question and doubt their previously firm and taken-for-granted belief in the *existence* of the divine to consider perspectives that we call agnostic or non-theistic. Distance from their past religious communities and their ritual praxis such as prayer and service attendance—whether we call this "deconversion" or not—can be necessary, when an individual is searching for and exploring a new, more appropriate construction of their ultimate concern.

But there is more to learn from these apparently paradoxical results. These outcomes may teach us a lesson in the philosophy of religion. This lesson is about how the faith development model incorporates the most important insights from the philosophy of religion, for which we refer to Tillich's work. Our empirical results document that faith development brings about higher *tolerance for ambiguity* and higher *openness to revising one's viewpoint*. When this is applied to our perspectives on the world and the divine, it means that the more ambiguity tolerance and intellectual humility I have, the lower my claims for absolute certainty and confidence that *my* conviction of the existence of the divine, *my* image of God, *my* church and their teachings, *my* understanding about how a religious person should behave. That certainty and confidence decline when faith develops may appear as paradox.

A helpful solution for this paradox comes from semiotics, from the theory of religious symbols. In 1928, Tillich published his seminal and very influential essay about religious symbols (Tillich, 1928; 1940). There he proposed a set of characteristics of the symbol. The "first and basic characteristic of the symbol," Tillich (1940, p. 13) says, "is its figurative quality" (in German: "Uneigentlichkeit"). This means that "the inner attitude which is oriented to the symbol does not have the symbol itself in view but rather that which is symbolized in it. Moreover, that which is symbolized can itself in turn be a symbol for something of a higher rank." We call this awareness of the difference between the symbol itself and the phenomenon that is symbolized: the *semiotic difference*. Tillich's second characteristic of the symbol is "perceptibility" (in German: "Anschaulichkeit"). And this means that "something which is intrinsically invisible, ideal, or transcendent is made perceptible in the symbol and is in this way given objectivity."

The essentially *symbolic* character of every talk about God or the Ultimate runs through Tillich's work from the early essay about the religious symbol to

the Systematic Theology (Tillich, 1951; 1957b; 1963). It is Tillich's view that the relation to the Ultimate radically transcends all existing manifest religious communities and churches, all established rituals and belief systems, and all concepts of God by understanding them as *symbolic references* to the Ultimate that is beyond our reach and grasp. This view is rooted in Tillich's theory of symbols and opens a perspective on the relevance of ambiguity tolerance and intellectual humility for faith development.

The reference to insights from semiotics is not new in the theory of faith development. The assembly of Aspects of faith includes, since Fowler's (1981) book, an Aspect called "Symbolic function."[4] In the faith development model, symbolic function aims, in the xenosophic-dialogical faith style, at an approach of "second naïveté"—which designates a post-critical understanding and appreciation of the symbol. This refers to an insight from Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher who developed a theory of symbols (Ricoeur, 1965), metaphors (Ricoeur, 1975), and narratives (Ricoeur, 1983; 1984; 1985), and of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1990). What Ricoeur (1960) has written in the Conclusion of his book on the *Symbolism of Evil* about the "second naïveté," became highly attractive for theologians and scholars in religious studies. Thus, Fowler included Ricoeur's idea of a "second naïveté" in his 1981 book. The "second naïveté" indicates that the radical rationality and demythologization as featured by the Individuative-reflective faith style—and may also be applied to the existence of God—is not the last word in faith development, because there is another, higher style that features "second naïveté," which at the same time develops a new appreciation of the symbol *and* keeps the awareness of a semiotic *difference* between the symbol and the symbolized.

We conclude that the faith development project is characterized—and supported by our data analysis—as promoting *faith* at the cost of traditional *religious* conviction and commitment. This is suggested by the results from our quantitative results that *openness to revising one's viewpoint, joy of thinking, tolerance of ambiguity*, disagreement to an *authoritarian God image, fundamentalism*, and the *truth of texts and teachings* of one's religion are the most important outcomes of faith development. And we conclude that the results from our quantitative data contribute to profiling the conceptualization of 'faith' and faith development: Faith, *mature* faith, *highly developed* faith is not characterized by an authoritarian holding-on to a system of traditional propositions, prescriptions, and organizations. Instead, the core of the faith development model is the commitment to faith as ultimate concern and xenocentric

4 The Aspect 'Symbolic function' corresponds to categories in world view research (Streib & Hood, 2024, p. 26, Table 1.1).

responsiveness, where the individual let themselves be affected—in pathic openness—by the ultimate Other and the many manifestations of the Other that they encounter.

And these manifestations of the Other include the foreign or different fellow human being—results in our data were significant for immigrants, people of color, and homosexuals. Here, as predicted and the data confirm, faith development motivates prejudice reduction. That faith development has the effect of reducing prejudice clearly demonstrates its support for an ethic of responsiveness. Conceptually, we have assumed this effect of faith development by naming the highest faith style xenosophic-dialogic. Now empirical evidence is added.

CHAPTER 5

The Faith Styles Model—Perspectives on Future Research and Application

The reader of this book may so far have obtained the impression that faith development only applies to individuals. The individual is the protagonist, as it were, who undergoes or actively promotes biographical change and transformation of faith styles. The faith development interview that documents such change and transformation is therefore typically an individual interview. And in statistics with mixed-methods data that include FDI evaluation (see, for example, Streib & Keller, 2022), we are proud to claim that a name (which is a pseudonym, of course) can be attached to every data point, and the individual (of course as a *pseudonymized* individual) can be identified. Thus, the faith development model, as introduced so far and documented in our research, appears to be a rather individual business. However, that is only half the story.

Certainly, case studies start with a focus on the individual and expand to longitudinal case studies, when they are based on repeated interviews and questionnaire data. These are great results about individual biographical trajectories (Bullik, 2022; Streib et al., 2022). But in the work on case studies, also patterns of characteristics have been observed for certain groups of cases such as Protestants, atheists, and people in older age (Bullik, 2024; Streib & Hood, 2024).

Faith development does not occur in isolation but is always related to a social context. Take deconversion as an example. Deconversion can be understood as a case where the interaction between an individual and their previously more or less valued religious-social environment (primarily church and family) has led to an estrangement and eventually a break. So, deconversion requires a perspective considering both the individual and the community. The individual may increasingly alienate themselves from the beliefs, rituals, and experiences of the community and eventually leave. The characteristics of the community and the reaction to the potential deconvert are at least of equal importance. The process of deconversion calls attention to the necessity of a good enough "fit" between the community and the individual (for the proposal of a 'fit model' for conversion and deconversion, see Paloutzian et al., 2013). The model of the 'fit' between individual and the community, of course, is a composite of a plentitude of factors such as social relations, emotional atmosphere, aesthetic satisfaction with rituals, agreement in moral standards,

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consent to beliefs and teachings, to name a few. And, in terms of faith styles, we may add that the predominant faith style—or what a potential deconvert perceives to be the predominant faith style of the community—could be an important factor for the process of deconversion.

Here we may ask: Is there sufficient evidence that churches and religious communities have a predominant faith style? At least there is a beginning: In the early times of faith development research, Fowler and his colleagues have begun to consider what they called the "modal level of development" in a church or community (Fowler, 1987, p. 69). Part of this early discussion is Simmonds's (1986) dissertation in which he compared two churches using faith development interviews with church leaders and with adolescents from both communities—to conclude that "the community modal level of faith was the determinative factor in the difference …" (Simmonds, 1986, p. 221). Unfortunately, this initial empirical documentation of a difference in the modal level of development apparently had no follow-up investigations and the entire discussion about the model level of development "remained rather marginalized" in faith development research (Streib, 2003a, p. 35). Therefore, we cannot present a research tradition with studies about the faith style of communities. For example, we do not have faith style analyses for the different denominations. And it is not clear what the "modal level" would indicate anyway, since it is likely that members in a community, when investigated with the faith development interview, present results that may spread over the entire range of the faith type options. Should we, instead of focusing on the members, perhaps focus on the mission statements and the teachings of founders and leaders of a community? Would this say something more reliable about the faith style that they think their members do or should primarily use?

Notwithstanding the complexity and immaturity of the "modal level of development" and the "fit," we will in this final chapter reflect on new areas of application of the faith styles perspective such as the analysis of religious communities in the contemporary religious landscape, or the analysis of ideologies that may not manifest as religion. The questions for this chapter are therefore these:

- How is individual faith development related to deconversion? How much evidence do we have about this relation? What are the desiderata for future research?
- Does the model of faith styles provide an opportunity for constructing a classification of religious communities in the religious field?
- Then—corresponding to our wide concept of faith—we widen our focus from religious communities to include *ideological* communities and networks: What does the model of faith styles contribute to understanding

ideologies and thus to understanding individual trajectories in and out of ideologies?
– And finally, we ask what it means to develop faith in a world of othering and xenophobia.

5.1 Deconversion and Faith Development

Our research about deconversion began in the 1990s, when *Enquête Commission of the German Parliament* commissioned expert reports about why people join and leave so-called sects and psycho groups, including Christian-fundamentalist churches (Streib, 1999). In contrast to the concern of at least some members of the Parliament who assumed that sects and cults (in the focus was the Church of Scientology) are dangerous for our constitution and they recruit and perhaps "brainwash" German people, our case studies demonstrated rather the opposite: Our cases represented individuals who actively and according to their own decision joined and left religious and spiritual communities. The surprise was the trajectory of a type that we called the "accumulative heretic," who joins and leaves several groups without being harmed, but rather with gaining something for themselves. The accumulative heretic mirrors the type of "active convert" that, according to Richardson (1985), is the most common type in the new religious movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Streib's (1999) small-scale interview study for the *Enquête Commission* did not include an FDI, but narrative biographical interviews. Nevertheless, these cases can be evaluated through the faith development lens: Especially the accumulative heretic demonstrates conversions and deconversions beyond the egocentric and conventional styles but rather applying a style of individuative-reflectively and self-determined openness for migrating across the religious landscape.

Certainly, not *all* types of deconverts display a preference for the higher styles of faith development. There are deconverts who seek a new home in religious and ideological groups that feature an egocentric-sociocentric or at least a rather narrow conventional style. But the active deconvert—and the accumulative heretic—were influential for us in developing our definition of deconversion, as we describe next.

5.1.1 *Conceptual Approach to Deconversion*

While we were preparing and conducting the Deconversion Study (results were published in Streib et al., 2009), we engaged in clarifying the conceptual base and proposing a definition of deconversion (an influential book in our discussion was Barbour, 1994). With reference to Barbour, we presented five criteria for deconversion (Streib & Keller, 2004):

1. Loss of specific religious experiences,
2. Intellectual doubt, denial, or disagreement with specific beliefs,
3. Moral criticism (toward community and leaders),
4. Emotional suffering, and
5. Disaffiliation from the community.

Except for Emotional suffering, these criteria, when reflected upon using the faith development framework, feature individuative reflection and autonomous action by the deconverting individual. Thus, from a conceptual point of view, we should expect that deconversion does dovetail with faith development.

In the same direction point the deconversion trajectories that we conceptually defined as spanning from religious switching, migration to integrating or oppositional churches, and privatizing or heretical deconversion (continuous religiosity without new affiliation), to secularizing exit. Most of these trajectories describe an individual progress in self-determination, autonomy, and critical thinking. We have found these criteria and trajectories plausible over the time of our research (Streib et al., 2009; Streib, 2014; Hood et al., 2022; Keller et al., 2024). For an illustration, we reproduce the figure used by Streib (2009; 2014) in Figure 3.

Finally, on the basis of case studies using narrative and faith development interviews, we constructed a typology of deconversion narratives (Streib et al., 2009, pp. 113–216), which includes: 1. Pursuit of autonomy, 2. Debarred from paradise, 3. Finding a new frame of reference, 4. Lifelong quest—late revisions.[1] Also, these types of deconversion narratives, except the "Finding a new frame of reference" type, feature a movement that corresponds with the process that is described by progressing faith development.

5.1.2 *Empirical Results about Deconversion and Faith Development*

The results of our combined qualitative and quantitative data in the Deconversion Study confirm the assumptions mentioned in the previous section: As reported (Streib et al., 2009, p. 102), different from the people who did *not* deconvert, the deconverts who were assigned the conventional faith style were considerably fewer, while ratings for the individuative-reflective style were much more frequent for the deconverts. This was true in both the US and Germany, and for both tension and no-tension groups. Then, after the next wave of data collection, we could report, for a rather small sample however, that this trend for deconverts may be true also in longitudinal perspective (Streib et al., 2022, p. 70).

1 After a slight revision (Keller et al., 2022) in light of longitudinal case observation (for details, see Table 30.2 in Keller et al., 2024, p. 493), the type of Lifelong quest and late revisions was split into Lifelong quest for meaning and Late revisions.

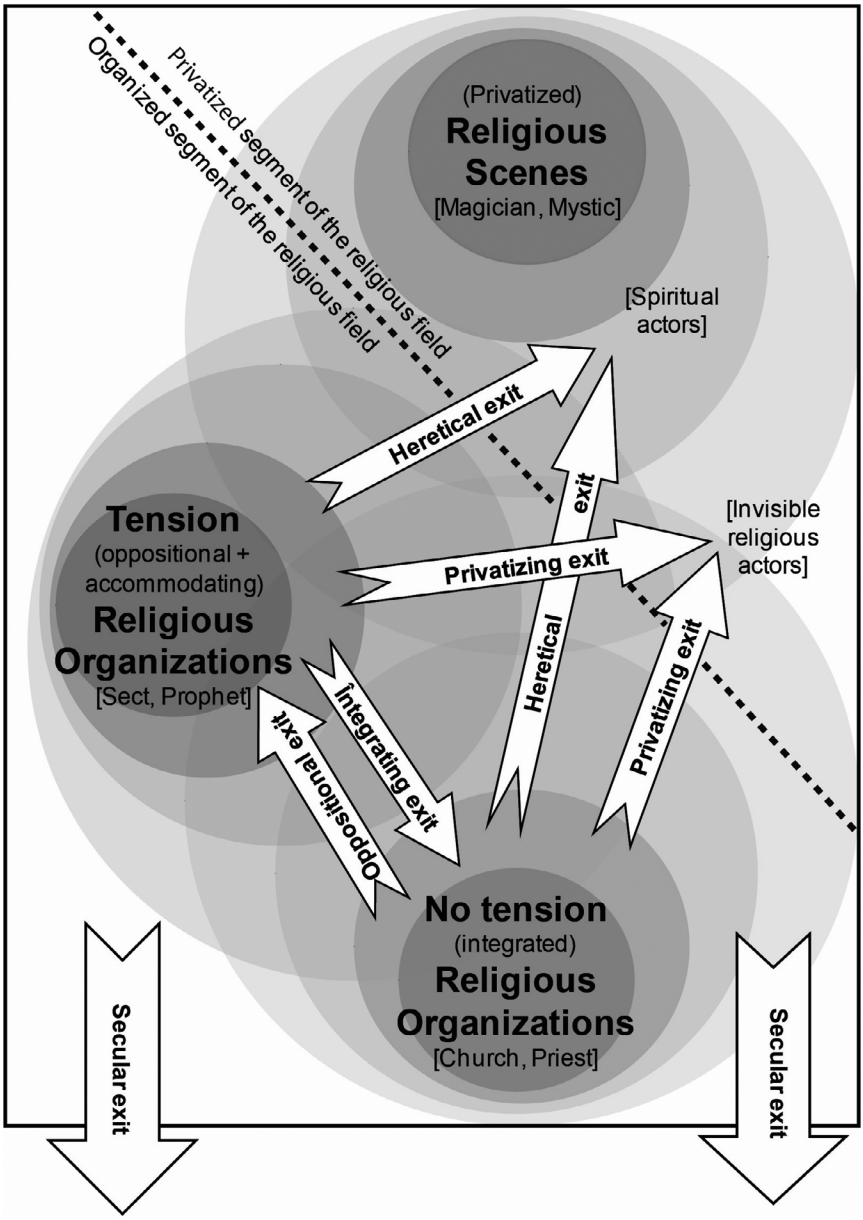

FIGURE 3 Deconversion trajectories in the religious field

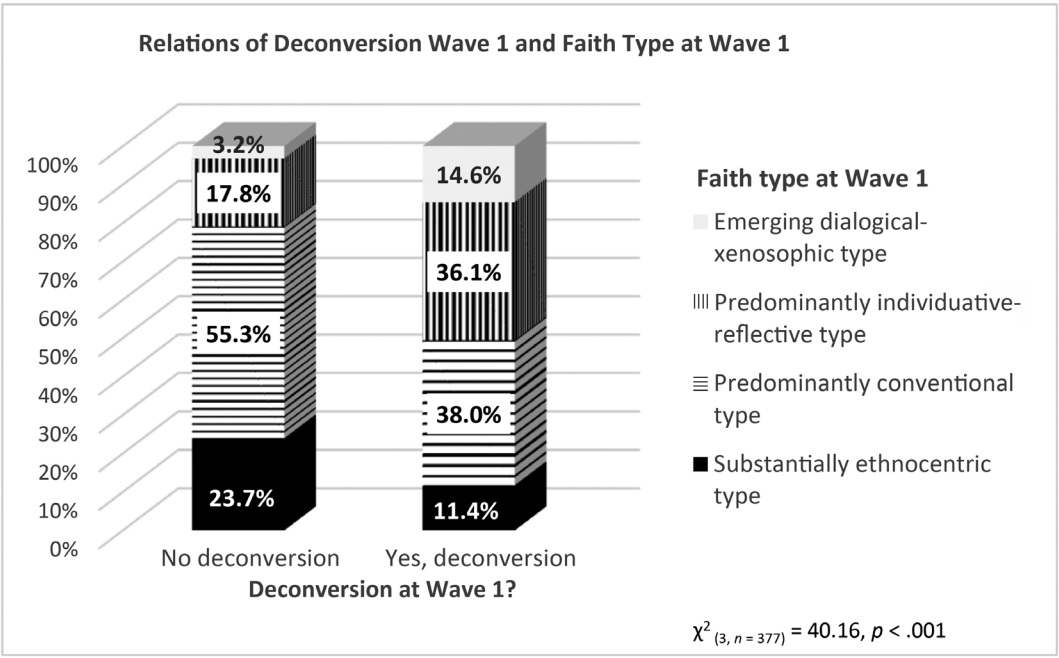

FIGURE 4 Cross-tabulation of deconversion at Wave 1 and faith type Wave 1

Now, we are able to present the results based on much larger samples that include all cases with an FDI rating *and* a response to the—retrospective—questionnaire item "Have you left a religious tradition or worldview in the recent or more distant past?" Wave 1 data include $n = 377$ cases that answered this question positively. Results in Figure 4 are based on the cross-tabulation of deconversion (Yes; No) with the four faith styles in these $n = 377$ Wave 1 cases. A Chi-square test indicated that the variables for deconversion and faith development are related ($\chi^2_{(3,\, n\,=\,377)} = 40.16$, $p < .001$).

Results presented in Figure 4 document that 57 (36.1%) deconverts, but only 39 (17.8%) cases with no deconversion, were rated as Predominantly individuative-reflective. The inverse distribution is documented for the Predominantly conventional type, where only 60 (38.0%) deconverts were classified as Predominantly conventional, but the high number of 121 (55.3%) with no deconversion. Also, a much higher number of deconverts, but only a few with no deconversion, were assigned to the Emerging xenosophic-dialogical type. And we see an inverse distribution for the Substantially ethnocentric type. Because the question about deconversion is retrospective, the results can be interpreted as the effect of *deconversion* on the preference for a *higher faith style* after deconversion.

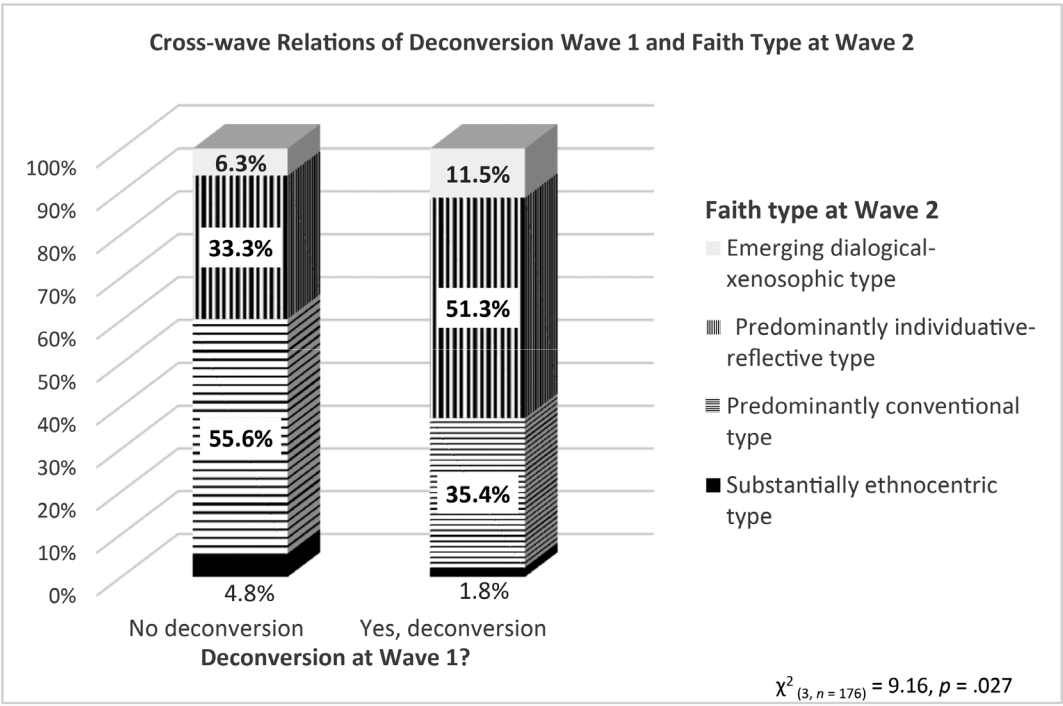

FIGURE 5 Cross-wave relations of deconversion at Wave 1 and faith type at Wave 2

As shown in Figure 5, a similar pattern of distribution between the type assignments, especially for the Predominantly conventional and the Predominantly individuative-reflective types, is documented also longitudinally by the cross-tabulation of deconversion (Yes; No) at Wave 1 and faith type at Wave 2, albeit based on a smaller sample of $n = 176$.

Taken together, these results show evidence of the longitudinal influence of deconversion on faith development. And this association seems to be unidirectional, since our tests for reverse causation were all nonsignificant. This indicates that disaffiliation from their religious communities could have the effect of opening epistemic options for the individual, which is documented by a higher number of deconverts who prefer higher faith styles. Support for this summary statement comes from the findings of our most recent study about predictors and outcomes of deconversion for $n = 502$ cases in our database (Chen & Streib, 2025): The outcomes of deconversion for cognition (higher *need for cognition*), religiosity (low in almost all respects), and (lower) *fundamentalism* dovetail with the outcomes of faith development reported in Chapter 4 of this book.

It appears from these results that leaving one's religious community is associated with the progress in faith development. Of course, our results do not

indicate that deconversion is the necessary (let alone sufficient) condition for faith development. This association may not be true for every deconversion process. But the relation between deconversion and faith development is more than merely speculative. Thus, viewed from our results, deconversion does not appear as an accident that needs to be avoided. Is membership in a church necessary condition for salvation? We may deny this question—at least for Protestants. Rather, deconversion can be understood, with reference to Tillich (see the discussion about Tillich's philosophy of religion and his theory of symbols on page 47–48), as search for the Ultimate behind the manifestations of church (organizations; rituals; belief systems)—which corresponds with Tillich's (1929; 1942) Protestant Principle. With reference to Tillich, we can make a clear case for an unprejudiced perspective on deconversion, since we talk about faith and faith development, and not about religion and the intensification of religiosity, as noted throughout this book. The relation of progress in faith development and deconversion is therefore a question for which we can present first answers, but there is much left for future research.

Our results also indicate that deconversion is a phenomenon of deep sociological significance in today's secularizing societies in the Western world. In this part of the world, we see not only an enormous increase in the readiness for leaving religious organizations, but also the occasional encouragement of politicians, church leaders, and public educators that people should deconvert from so-called sects, cults and psycho-groups, as we have seen in Germany in the 1990s. Obviously, it is necessary to account for the differences between the religious groups. Mainline and integrated religious groups may be well respected, while oppositional religious groups tend to be regarded as dangerous, and they risk being called and treated as "cults." At this point, it may be interesting to consider what the faith styles framework has to contribute to understanding deconversion trajectories that differ according to the type of religious communities. In the next section we will discuss the potential contribution of faith development theory to the classification of religious, spiritual, and worldview communities.

5.2 Classification of Religious Communities Using the Faith Styles Model

Not only for the research perspective outlined in the previous paragraph, but also for a general research perspective for the religious field, we should turn to the question whether and how the faith styles model provides a framework for classifying religious communities. By discussing this question, we not only take the idea of a modal level of faith development further, but we are forging new

paths. In the Deconversion Study (Streib et al., 2009), we tried to find a way of determining the difference between the communities, and accounting for the new religious movements that the deconverts in our sample have left. We did not use the typology of faith styles as distinguishing criteria, but used, with reference to Bromley (1998), a typology that suggests differentiating between oppositional, accommodating, and integrated communities. In Figure 3 this distinction is reduced to tension vs. no-tension religious communities.

Now, we can explain the contribution of our faith style model also for defining the differences between religious communities. Our faith style model offers a valuable framework for distinguishing between different types of religious communities. It provides a critical lens for analyzing the religious and worldview landscape by identifying ethnocentric, fundamentalist, and extremist expressions on one end, and developmental pathways toward dialog, xenosophia, and responsiveness on the other. Within this continuum, the conventional and individuative–reflective styles serve as important transitional milestones between ethnocentric and xenocentric orientations.

Our characterizations of the different communities reflect, of course, the descriptions of the faith styles from Chapter 1. Thus, for describing the different types of communities, we find the style descriptions for two Aspects most helpful: the Aspect Morality (Table 8) and the Aspect Locus of authority (Table 9). These Aspect-specific style descriptions are particularly informative for the characterization of the various forms of communities.

TABLE 8 Faith styles differentiated according to the aspect of morality

Faith styles	**Styles of morality**
Egocentric-sociocentric	Morality is founded in a system of punishment and reward carried out by superior authorities (reciprocity; do-ut-des)
Conventional	Morality is grounded in interpersonal expectations in one's small lifeworld
Individuative-reflective	Moral judgments emphasize laws, rights or duties in terms of their function in maintaining a social system or order. Morality is explicitly and rationally defended
Xenosophic-dialogical	Dialogical ethics that is based on mutual pathic responsiveness; it may result in a prior-to-society, human rights perspective

TABLE 9 Faith styles differentiated according to the aspect of locus of authority

Faith styles	Styles of locus of authority
Egocentric-sociocentric	Authority is external and absolute. The egocentric/sociocentric authority is derived from this external authority
Conventional	Authority is grounded in tacit interpersonal values consonant with one's social group; the small lifeworld is the center of authority
Individuative-reflective	Authority is internal, grounded in a self-ratified ideological perspective; the autonomous individual is the authority; authority unfolds as autonomous and explicit system
Xenosophic-dialogical	Authority is neither inside nor outside, but in the dialogical space between multiple actors who are mutually responsive to each other

5.2.1 *Ethnocentric Faith Communities*

One type of religious community can be characterized as ethnocentric. For the internal organization in the community, authoritarian structures are typical; these structures may even include more or less obvious measures for controlling the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of their members. But authority is ultimately located external and absolute. Leaders in the community typically legitimize their authority with reference to divine authority. Critical questions are therefore answered with reference to the absolute authority and divine origin of teachings, prescriptions, and rules. Texts, symbols, narratives, and prescriptions are thereby interpreted literally and without the awareness of a semiotic difference, and the interpretation of the texts and teachings is clearly tailored to the established exegetical and theological authorities that declare their interpretation of the core theological truths as being the unchangeable word of God. This is called "fundamentalism" in Fowler's description and the respective stage was called "mythic-literal." Interestingly, Fowler (1987, p. 74) also talked about the fundamentalism of adults "who may exhibit considerable cognitive sophistication in their occupational worlds (as physicians or engineers, for example) but who in their emotional and faith lives are rather rigidly embedded in the structures of Mythic-Literal faith and imperial selfhood."

Ethnocentric or sociocentric religious communities typically feature a dualistic worldview that features an antagonism between God and Satan, Good and

Evil. This may yield self-claims such that only members of their own community will be saved, while all others are lost. For this type of community, a strong in-group identity is essential, while out-group people may be regarded as dominated by evil forces. It is clear then that, in the terms of the religious field (Bourdieu, 1971b; 1971a) which we have presented and illustrated with a special focus on deconversion (Streib et al., 2009; Streib, 2014) in Figure 3, this type of ethnocentric community represents the extreme case of high-tension oppositional groups that make fluctuation and migration in the religious field rather difficult. Deconversion from this type of religious high-tension or oppositional community is likely a conflicting process. Typically, therefore, deconverts from ethnocentric faith communities take secular exits. Until today, a substantial portion of deconversion studies investigates leaving this kind of fundamentalist, authoritarian, and high-tension religious communities (for recent reviews, see Streib, 2021; Steppacher et al., 2022). Perhaps nurturing faith development itself could help finding a way out (Streib, 2007).

5.2.2 *Conventional Faith Communities*

In the description of the conventional faith style, we have highlighted the importance of the second-person perspective. Thus, conventional faith communities are characterized by a focus on interpersonal relations that are based on the second-person perspective and are the core of the religious community. Responsiveness centers around this conventional circle of relations, while challenging experiences such as presented by inter-religious encounters and critical discourse are rather avoided. Consent and harmony in the religious community has priority. Challenging and critical questions tend to be ignored. The familiar is preferred. Alternative options for belief and morality are not negotiated but rather grounded in the interpersonal expectations in one's small lifeworld (Table 8), and decided with reference to tradition and convention. Authority is grounded in tacit interpersonal values consonant with the social group (see Table 9).

Conventional faith communities are typically *integrated actors* in the religious field. There are no high borders around the religious community, which makes it easier for deconverts and switchers to join and leave. Deconverts therefore harbor lesser feelings of being lost and abandoned by God and their former religious authorities. Nevertheless, deconverts may withdraw from the community because they feel too much restriction and pressure by the community's conventions. The conventional faith style is probably the most widespread style among the US churches and communities. This was already the assumption and observation in the early times of faith development research (e.g. Simmonds, 1986; Fowler, 1987).

5.2.3 *Individuative-Reflective Faith Communities*

Because the individuative-reflective faith style is based on the application of the third-person perspective, the individuative-reflective faith communities welcome that the individual adopts a perspective from a bird's eye view to feature an utmost "objective" rational discourse. Morality therefore is negotiated and explicitly rationally defended (Table 8). Controversial questions about morality, theology, or politics are considered part of the communication; discussions and negotiations are not avoided but rather invited to take place in the community. The social horizon is not limited to one's community but includes societal and global partners. Models of ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism are valued in teaching and practice.

The internal organization of individuative-reflective faith communities largely reflects democratic structures and open discussions. Authority is internal, grounded in a self-ratified ideological perspective (as noted in Table 9). External boundaries of the communities are rather low, attitudes toward a possible deconversion of members are not hostile; Rather, members are encouraged to find their own faith trajectory. Nevertheless, the individuative-reflective faith communities may place great value on the tradition and stability of the organization, including buildings, financial stability, or the integrity of the belief system and the tradition of rituals. The individuative-reflective faith communities may be internally democratic and flexible, but in the organizational substance rather conservative.

5.2.4 *Xenosophic-Dialogical Faith Communities*

The xenosophic-dialogical faith style is defined by the ability for a reversal of perspectives that includes mutual perspective-*getting*, which is the precondition of dialog. The structure of the xenosophic-dialogical faith communities therefore is characterized by mutual unprejudiced *listening*, intellectual humility, and dialogical conclusions. In this very dialog, there is the locus of authority in this type of religious communities—as stated in Table 9: Authority is neither inside nor outside, but in the space between multiple actors who are mutually responsive to each other. This type of community is also the home for a dialogical and responsive ethic that is based on pathic openness and may result in a prior-to-society human rights perspective (Table 8).

The internal organization in the xenosophic-dialogical faith communities reflects, as in the individuative-reflective faith communities, democratic structures, while intellectual humility and openness to dialog is highly appreciated. External boundaries and, generally, the relations with other actors in the religious field will be less competitive but rather inviting inter-religious dialog and cooperation. Finally, the xenosophic-dialogical faith communities

have typically a strong sense of their mission to lend their voice to people without a voice and to be ready for advocacy for an ecology at risk, for example. The xenosophic-dialogical faith communities take sides with the marginalized and victims. Thus, being there for others and being responsive to them is the most important thing, while the less important aims for xenosophic-dialogical communities are the stabilization of a system of beliefs, impressive buildings, financial wealth, or increase in membership figures. With respect to Tillich, we may suppose that the xenosophic-dialogical faith communities have an awareness of the provisional character of their "visible church" and may refer to what is called the "invisible church" in theology.

5.2.5 *Conclusion*

This draft of a typology of religious communities that is using the faith style model for classification is a theoretical outline. Empirical investigation of faith development on the level of communities appears to have not been pursued further after the rather tentative first attempts to work with the modal level of faith development (Simmonds, 1986). Also, we were reluctant to include names of churches and denominations in this classification. The primary reason for this is that the adoption and relevance of a specific faith style may not be identical in all parishes and groups that belong to one church or denomination, but there are likely differences in the predominance of a specific faith style. And taking seriously what we noted earlier about the simultaneous preference of more than one style and about the likely variety between members of a church, we can almost be sure that there are two or more styles used in one and the same congregation. And this variety should not be simply averaged away by estimating a modal level of faith development.

Despite these objections, this classification of faith communities according to their faith style could be an inspiration for empirical research and a contribution to the study of the variety of communities in the religious field. Which faith style is established, welcome, and nurtured in a community is an interesting and important question not only for better understanding the development of churches and religious groups, but also for understanding why individuals may tend to join or deconvert. We need studies about the question of the "fit" between the community and the individual, and the situation when there is "no fit," which may lead to deconversions. And the kind of project that we propose here is that the faith styles have a decisive role in determining whether a member feels at home in a community or not.

A related and more general question is how communities and individuals can communicate with each other while they prefer different faith styles. Can they openly discuss their differences? Does the realization of differences in

faith styles constitute misunderstanding or inspire learning from one another? For this research question it is a problem that faith development research so far has almost exclusively focused on biographical interviews with individuals, and we have no information on how interviewees interact with each other. Certainly, for the analysis of group discussions, the coding manual would have to be revised and adjusted. Also, for the analysis of texts such as sermons in church service, declarations of principles, news reports, and other fieldwork documents, a modified (and shorter) coding system is needed. Thereby, using the six Aspect tables that are presented in this book could be a beginning.

Taken together, we see great potential for using the faith style classification in research on religious communities and the differences between them. This is not a purely theoretical matter. On the contrary, it has to do with the organization of our societies, the question of how we want to live and the question of whether we will survive on this planet. The specific faith styles feature specific moralities—with an impact on societal and global structures. In face of the increasing influence of evangelical, fundamentalist, orthodox and ultraorthodox communities on politics and the institutions in so many countries of this globe, research about the religious fields appears an urgent desideratum. And using the framework of the faith styles model may add a new and enlightening perspective in this research.

5.3 Ideologies—Viewed from the Faith Styles Perspective

It is important to note that the faith development model suggests critical perspectives not only for the evaluation of religious communities, including new religious groups and spiritual scenes, but also for groups and scenes that are united by an ideology. Widening our focus from religious communities in the traditional sense to including *ideological* communities and networks is important because of the influence of ideological and extremist groups on culture, society and politics. Ideological groups appear to share many features with specific religious, especially higher-tension groups; for example, the unquestionable belief in authoritative myths and truth claims, or the high threshold for leaving. After most of the social relations—to family and friends—were broken with joining the community, there can be high costs for deconverts.

And it is possible that ideologies become dominant in religious or spiritual groups. The changes in the spiritual scenes may serve as an example: When spirituality was recognized as an independent (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006) and newly spreading phenomenon in the religious field (Houtman & Aupers, 2007), it appeared as an alternative way of describing one's experiences of

transcendence and one's relation to the sacred (Pargament & Mahoney, 2002) that does not necessarily need to be rooted in an established religious tradition or church. The "spiritual, but not religious" and the "more spiritual than religious" people were welcome by many as a new "post-Christian" movement outside the church walls. Our own research (Streib & Hood, 2016) revealed no coherent semantics but a variety of understandings of spirituality, which differ also according to the four groups: the "neither religious nor spiritual," the "more religious than spiritual" and "equally religious and spiritual", and finally the "more spiritual than religious." While many "more religious than spiritual" individuals conclude that spirituality is not much different from religion, the "more spiritual than religious" see an opposition to religion and have a tendency to associate their spirituality with mystical experiences (Chen et al., 2023).

Now, a substantial portion of the spiritual and esoteric scenes appears to have adopted conspiracy narratives in recent years. This gravitation toward conspiracy—that is also called by the neologism "conspirituality"—was perhaps fueled by the irritating shock that came with the Covid-19 crisis (Pummerer et al., 2021; Knasmuller et al., 2023). But the rise of conspirituality was discovered and discussed long before the Covid-19 breakout (Ward & Voas, 2011; Franks et al., 2013; Dagnall et al., 2015). The marriage or "elective affinity" (Harambam, 2024, p. 292) between conspiracy and spirituality has considerably changed the spiritual scene. We have in our comprehensive sample of faith development interviews (last wave of field work was completed in 2022) observed a tendency that some participants adopt conspiracy narratives. And we believe that many of our self-identified "spiritual" participants gravitate toward a more literal understanding of their narratives and symbols by which they explain their world.

Here, Jedinger and Siegers's (2024) recent study is noteworthy, because the authors, using the Post-critical Belief Scale (Duriez et al., 2005), could demonstrate that "literal interpretations of religious information are positively related to conspiracy beliefs for religious individuals and individuals contesting the existence of any transcendental reality" (Jedinger & Siegers, 2024, p. 17). By investigating not primarily the content, but rather the structure of interpreting religious and conspiracy information, Jedinger and Siegers (2024) claim to introduce a new approach in the study of spirituality and conspiracy—to which we would like to comment that their perspective is a rather similar to what we have elaborated in the faith styles model. We also assume that it is not the content but the structure of the narrative that makes the difference.

Nevertheless, our faith styles model does not work with the simple dichotomy between literal and symbolic, as assumed by Wulff (1997), Hutsebaut

(2000), and many others who further developed and used the Post-critical Belief Scale. But the faith styles model specifies four styles in the process from literal to symbolic, including two styles in between. Our proposal of how to understand this tension between literal and symbolic in light of the faith styles model can be optimally presented with reference to the remaining two Aspects (Table 10 and Table 11): The Aspect of World coherence (Table 10) describes styles of understanding the world in the tension between a concrete, literal interpretation, on the one hand, and a multi-perspective, symbolic interpretation, on the other. The Aspect of Symbolic function (Table 11) describes more specifically the style differences in the hermeneutics of the symbol that consist primarily in the tension between ignorance vs. awareness of the semiotic difference, but also in the difference in the evocative function of symbols to give rise to thought, emotions, and meaning in life.

It is noteworthy that the differences in both Aspects are differences in *hermeneutics*—hermeneutics understood as the art of interpreting texts (including symbols, metaphors, and narratives) and also interpreting the world. Applied to narratives, the most important question regards the hermeneutical structure by which the story is told and the hermeneutical structure by which the story is interpreted by the part of the recipient. Likewise, it is the hermeneutical structure of the symbol and how the symbol is interpreted by the observer that is key to the stylistic variety that the faith styles bring to light.

TABLE 10 Faith styles differentiated according to the aspect of world coherence

Faith styles	**Styles of world coherence**
Egocentric-sociocentric	World coherence is based on exclusive narratives that are literally understood; Awareness of causal relations, but understood concretely with openness for magic or anthropomorphisms.
Conventional	The coherence of the world is based on tacit, rather than explicit, systems. World coherence can be grounded in narratives that are interpreted uncritically as in convention and tradition.
Individuative-reflective	World coherence is based on an explicit system, rationally defended with reference to scientific evidence. This can lead to reductionism and low tolerance for ambiguity.
Xenosophic-dialogical	World coherence is characterized by multi-perspectivity, pluralist interpretations, and tolerance for ambiguity. Disparate perspectives can be held in tension.

TABLE 11 Faith styles differentiated according to the aspect of symbolic functioning

Faith styles	Styles of symbolic functioning
Egocentric-sociocentric	Symbols are not subject of interpretation but understood literally. Recognition for the semiotic difference, the difference between the symbol and the symbolized, is absent.
Conventional	Symbols are subject to conventional interpretations. There is a pre-critical openness to symbols and their power to evoke feelings and emotions that bind groups together.
Individuative-reflective	Clear account for the semiotic difference: symbols are explicitly translated into concepts or ideas, thus "demythologized." Awareness for the function of symbols for social systems
Xenosophic-dialogical	Recognition for the semiotic difference, but reappraisal of the evocative power of a symbol, featuring "second naïveté." Awareness of possible multiple meanings of symbols.

This focus on *structure* has the great advantage that the faith styles model can investigate and claim validity for a variety of domains that differ on *content*. Thus, we can evaluate narratives across domains that originate not only in traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other world religions, but also in esoteric and magic origins, and not at least in ideological and conspiracy contexts and networks. From this perspective, we appreciate the research design of Jedinger and Siegers (2024) to investigate literal (vs. symbolic) understanding across traditions—in their case, relating religious information and conspiracy.

Narratives in the egocentric-sociocentric style are told and retold to endorse and reinforce the exclusivity of oneself or one's own tribe or community. Thereby, they are taken *literally*, where "literal" interpretation means the belief that the protagonists and environments "existed," and the action or plot in the story has historical factuality. Everything "is true," everything has happened as told in the story or myth. There is no awareness that a story may have a referential meaning and may be telling something that should be understood *symbolically* (Table 11). The most important effect of the conspiracy myth is probably the stabilization and confirmation of one's own ego or one's own tribe. This speaks for the affinity of conspiracy myths with egocentrism/sociocentrism. It has been interesting but also difficult to witness that many previously light-hearted "spiritual" people have increasingly believed in conspiracy

narratives in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, which for many has meant replacing their light-heartedness with a system of meaning that is solidified in literalness, which must not be ironized, is causing fears of being manipulated and threatened with death, and communication to outsiders is a lost cause.

The steps in between widen our perspective on a possible process of learning and development: The conventional style ameliorates the exclusiveness and literal rigidity of the egocentric-sociocentric style, because of the acceptance of a variety of myths and narratives that constitute the tradition on which one's community is based. With the—mostly implicit—acknowledgement of a narrative variety in one's own tradition, the awareness that a narrative and a symbol is interpreted in one's tradition in a certain way, and the acknowledgment of the plurality including the awareness that myths and narratives from other traditions are "perhaps also true" (but only true for them, of course), the door for a kind of "soft pluralism" is open. And this means that sharp ideological boundaries are mitigated and fighting for an ideology is less likely.

The individual-reflective style is characterized by the critical examination of myths and narratives. These are examined based on the historical and physical theory available to the individual. The third-person perspective features the communication in the light of an external "objective" instance for truth. This may lead to the rejection of many myths and narratives, in particular ideological myths, and definitely conspiracy narratives. But individuals using the individual-reflective style, because of their low tolerance of ambiguity, may tend to be rigid and intolerant against irrational myths and narratives or against symbols that are difficult to understand and reduce to a single meaning.

Finally, the xenosophic-dialogical style features the full development of symbolic understanding. Due to the perspective-taking competencies that include an openness for understanding that and why the others are inclined to adopt specific narratives, including ideological ones, but rejecting ideological truth claims for themselves, people using the xenosophic-dialogical style may bring communicative openness and fluidity in the discussion of ideologies. Table 10 notes multi-perspectivity, pluralist interpretations, and tolerance for ambiguity as features for this style.

We conclude with a summary about the application of the faith styles model not only to religion, but also to ideologies. Our approach suggests analyzing both religious and ideological narratives and their reception and interpretation with focus not on content but on structure. Both religious and ideological narratives need to be examined critically, because the literal interpretation and the egocentric-sociocentric function of both religious and ideological information would lead communities, societies and nations into agglomerations of egomaniacs. The faith styles model is also important to indicate and insist

that the literal and egocentric-sociocentric style is not the end of the road. The first purpose of the faith styles model therefore is the suggestion of alternative styles. The second purpose is the proposal that development *is* possible. We need more research that may append to the study of Jedinger and Siegers (2024) and take the project further in several directions, including the differential perspective of the faith styles model. From the faith styles model, thus from a structural perspective on faith development, deconversion from religious communities and ideological communities are parallel. Deconversion may involve upward faith style changes. This is rather hypothetical but could be a beginning of a research program—deradicalization included. To become more concrete, we suggest engaging in research on *deconversion from conspirituality and radicalized ideologies*. This is not to say that deconversion from high-tension and other religious communities has become unimportant, but in recent times the enormous rise and devastating impact of ideologies and conspiracy networks suggest high urgency to deconversion from conspiracy, conspirituality, and radicalized ideologies.

5.4 Developing Faith in a World of Othering and Xenophobia

At the end of this final chapter, we locate the faith styles perspective in a wide horizon. This horizon reflects a world full of prejudice that creates vicious circles of othering (Streib, 2024a). Our talk about "othering" may need an explanation and a definition: The others that we imagine to be on our side and part of our ingroup are generally positively valued. However, when we refer to people of outgroups, the "other" may receive a negative valuation. Of course, not in every case, but a negative valuation is undeniable when "other" is used in the form of a verb as in *"to other"* or *"othering."* The process of making someone an *other* is related to devaluation and exclusion, if not hate and violence. Othering is a term often used in critique of colonialization (Siouti et al., 2022), critique against the devaluation of women (Scharff, 2011), sexual minorities (Verhoeven et al., 2023) or people from other religions (Shaker & Ahmadi, 2022; Gerteis & Rotem, 2023).

One vicious circle of othering consists of xenophobia, prejudice, hate, violence, war, death and devastation—which resembles Allport's (1954, pp. 14–15) list of acting out prejudice. Another vicious circle is othering *nature*, subduing the earth, commercial exploitation, neglecting ecological devastation, denial of the problem despite increasing evidence, global warming beyond the tipping points. And one vicious circle appears to superimpose the other: going

to war delivers not only the killing of people on a massive scale, but immense pollution, and scorched earth.

It is obvious that the egocentric-sociocentric style is playing a key role in these vicious circles of othering. Othering has an essential relationship with egocentrism and sociocentrism. The exclusive focus on one's own self-interested ego reduces everything in the environment to an object to be used and exploited. Othering fellow humans is just the other side of the blind focus on the ego. Othering nature and natural resources is the condition by which unlimited exploitation appears justified and any consideration of the consequences of technological exploitation are simply blinded. Therefore, the decisive role of faith development in this challenging situation is precisely the reduction of the egocentric and sociocentric attitudes of placing one's own self at the center, magnifying and worshipping the ego, one's own tribe or nation, or making one's ego, tribe or nation one's ultimate concern. We may remind here of quote from Tillich (1957a, p. 1), when he defined faith as ultimate concern: "If a national group makes the life and growth of the nation its ultimate concern, it demands that all other concerns, economic well-being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed."

Othering is the opposite to xenosophia. They compete with each other. Xenosophia features the perception of an Other as someone or something who has their own dignity, their own right to exist, and who has something to give to me—such as a new perspective, new experience, new relation, or a new inspiration because of its presentation of difference. How can progress to xenosophia be nurtured? What could be done in education? For an answer to these questions, a proposal by Verger (2025), in his text about the aesthetics of the possible, is interesting to consider. The aesthetics of the possible, Verger (2025, p. 15) says, "suggests that the crisis of sensibility, and lack of xenosophia, may be partly due to people not letting themselves encounter difference." Thus, Verger calls for an education focused on our ability to open-up to letting oneself be affected by the inherent alterity and difference of others' perspectives. We read this as powerful confirmation of our proposal that we need to foster perspective-*getting*, which is a key characteristic of the xenosophic-dialogical style.

In conclusion, the faith styles model could serve as a theoretical basis for developing proposals for action that help to overcome othering, because it posits dialog and xenosophia as the aim of development and suggests a dynamic development that aims at replacing othering with responsiveness to the Other. This proposal of a development from othering to responsiveness unites the faith styles model and the model of responsiveness styles.

Thereby, we have strong arguments that are rooted in the very definition of faith: When we interpret "faith," with reference to Tillich, as "ultimate concern," the dynamic progress of faith describes a movement from oneself to the Other. While many everyday concerns naturally center around self-interested needs (food, shelter, etc.), and while there are highly problematic determinations of the ultimate concern such as making one's own tribe, company, society, or nation the ultimate concern, the true determination of the ultimate concern is the Ultimate with a capital U—and echoing the "ultimate conditions of existence" in Fowler's definition of faith. And this undeniably is something outside oneself, and oriented toward an ultimate Other.

Appendix

What Was in the Questionnaires?

Demographics in all questionnaires included, of course, country, age, gender, education, income, and religious affiliation. But the demographic sections were much more detailed for religion, spirituality and worldview. They included in addition: questions for deconversion from past religious communities, for difference of respondents' religiosity from the religion of their parents, for self-identification as religious, spiritual, or atheist. Not all questionnaires included the questions for belief in God (sample item "*I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind.*"), for changes in belief in God (sample item: "*I don't believe in God now, but I used to.*"), and for religiosity as assessed by Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religiosity Measure, which includes public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology and the intellectual dimension.

The constructs and scales that we included in the questionnaires are listed in Table 12 and briefly presented in the text to follow. Thereby, the constructs are sorted according to their association to cognition, personality, well-being, religious attitudes and beliefs, and prejudice toward other people.

Now we briefly introduce and give some details about the scales we included in the questionnaires.

Need for Cognition

We administered the 18-item Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo et al., 1984). The measure assesses the openness and inclination to engage in thinking and reflection (e.g., "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems"). A seven-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) was used to rate each item.

Intolerance of Ambiguity

Participants completed Budner's (1962) Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale, which assesses the aversion to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable and see them rather as sources of threat (e.g., "What we are used to is always preferable to what is unfamiliar"). Items are rated using a seven-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). The Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale is among the frequently used measures for intolerance of ambiguity and related constructs (for a review, see Furnham & Marks, 2013).

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TABLE 12 Quantitative measures in the Bielefeld-Chattanooga research projects

Construct	Measure	T0	T1	T2	T3
Need for cognition	Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo et al., 1984)		x	x	x
Intolerance of ambiguity	Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale (Budner, 1962)		x	x	x
Intellectual humility	Intellectual Humility Scale (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016)				
Independence of intellect and ego					x
Openness to revising one's viewpoint					x
Lack of intellectual overconfidence					x
Respect for others' viewpoints					x
Big Five personality	NEO Five Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985)	x	x	x	x
Psychological well-being	Psychological Well-being and Growth Scale (Ryff, 2010)	x	x	x	x
Generativity	Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St Aubin, 1992)	x	x	x	x
Mystical experiences	Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975; Streib et al., 2021)	x	x	x	x
Religious schemata	Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010)				
Truth of texts and teachings		x	x	x	x

TABLE 12 Quantitative measures in the Bielefeld-Chattanooga research projects (*cont.*)

Construct	Measure	T0	T1	T2	T3
Fairness, tolerance & rational choice		x	x	x	x
Xenosophia/ inter-religious dialog		x	x	x	x
Religious worldview	Religion Monitor (Huber, 2009)				
Fundamentalism		x	x	x	x
Pluralism		x	x	x	x
Reflexivity on own religiosity			x	x	x
God representation	God Representation Scale (Johnson et al., 2018)				
Authoritarian				x	x
Benevolent				x	x
Mystical				x	x
Ineffable				x	x
Group-focused enmity	(Zick et al., 2008; Küpper & Zick, 2014)				
Xenophobia		x			x
Racism		x			x
Homophobia		x			x
Sexism		x			x
Attitudes toward refugees	(Streib & Klein, 2018; Streib & Chen, 2024a)				
War refugees		x			x
Economic refugees		x			x

Note: This is a condensed and restructured version of Table 2 in the Omnibus Document (Streib & Chen, 2024b). T0 = Wave 1 (2003–2016), T1 = Wave 2 (2013–2017), T2 = Wave 3 (2018–2019), T3 = Wave 4 (2022–2023).

Intellectual Humility

Newly included in the questionnaire of the most recent wave is the Intellectual Humility Scale (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016) that measures intellectual humility in four subscales: 1. Independence of intellect and ego ("When someone disagrees with ideas that are important to me, it feels as though I'm being attacked."), 2. Openness to revising one's viewpoint ("I have at times changed opinions that were important to me, when someone showed me I was wrong."), 3. Respect for others' viewpoints ("I respect that there are ways of making important decisions that are different from the way I make decisions."), 4. Lack of intellectual overconfidence ("My ideas are usually better than other people's ideas."). Items are rated using a five-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). For a recent review, see Porter and colleagues (Porter, Baldwin, et al., 2022; Porter, Elnakouri, et al., 2022).

Big Five Personality Traits

Participants in every individual project completed the NEO Five Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985). The 60-item measure assesses the Big Five personality traits (12 items each): neuroticism (e.g., "At times I have been so ashamed I just wanted to hide"), extraversion (e.g., "I really enjoy talking to people"), openness to experience (e.g., "I have a lot of intellectual curiosity"), agreeableness (e.g., "I would rather cooperate with others than compete with them"), and conscientiousness (e.g., "I try to perform all the tasks assigned to me conscientiously"). Participants responded to the items using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). This Five Factor Model of personality is one of the most cross-culturally studied psychological constructs. Contributions to the literature in personality psychology demonstrate cross-cultural validity as, for example, the reviews by McCrae (2002) and colleagues (McCrae et al., 2004) show.

Psychological Well-Being

We administered the Psychological Well-Being and Growth Scale (Ryff, 2010) in all questionnaires. The measure assesses six dimensions of psychological well-being (7 items each; but in the most recent questionnaire, we used the 3-item version—with the consequence that in longitudinal analyses we use the 3-item version only): autonomy (e.g., "My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing"), environmental mastery (e.g., "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live"), positive relations with others (e.g., "I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me"), personal growth (e.g., "I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time"), purpose in life (e.g., "Some people wander aimlessly

through life, but I am not one of them") and self-acceptance (e.g., "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out"). Participants responded to the items using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Ryff's scale is one of the most widely used psychological measurements of well-being. It was included in major US surveys such as the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS, Ryff, 2010).

Generativity

Participants also responded to the 20-item Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St Aubin, 1992), which measures the extent to which an individual has concern for the next generation (e.g., "I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people"). The items are rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never applies to me*) to 4 (*Applies to me very often or nearly always*). For a recent review, see Pratt and colleagues (2020).

Mystical Experiences

We administered the Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975) in all questionnaires. The measure contains three subscales that capture the core facets of a mystical experience: introvertive, which is composed of ego loss, timelessness/spacelessness, and ineffability, denoting an inward unitary consciousness beyond time and space (e.g., "I have had an experience that was both timeless and spaceless"); extrovertive, which is framed by unity and inner subjectivity, implying an outward merging with the wholeness of all existence (e.g., "I have had an experience in which all things seemed to be aware"); and interpretative, which incorporates positive affect, sacredness, and noetic quality that qualify both types of mysticism (e.g., "I have had an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to me"). Items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Very inaccurate*) to 5 (*Very accurate*). The original version has 32 items; in the most recent questionnaire we have included the 8-item short version (Streib et al., 2021).

Religious Schemata

All participants also completed the 15-item Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010). The measure includes three subscales (5 items each): truth of texts and teachings, a schema that features an ethnocentric, exclusivist, and authoritative understanding of one's own sacred texts (e.g., "What the texts and stories of my religion tell me is absolutely true and must not be changed"); xenosophia/inter-religious dialog, a schema reflecting an appreciation of difference, of the other, and of dialog (e.g., "We need to look beyond the denominational and religious differences to find the ultimate reality"); and fairness, tolerance &

rational choice, a schema that features rational exchange of arguments (e.g., "We should resolve differences in how people appear to each other through fair and just discussion"). Items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Definitely not true*) to 5 (*Definitely true*).

Religious Worldview

For the assessment of fundamentalism, pluralism, and the reflexivity on one's own religion, we used 15 items from the Religion Monitor (Huber, 2009). Nine items assess fundamentalism (e.g. "I am convinced that in questions of religion/worldview, my own religion/worldview is right while other religions/worldviews tend to be wrong"), three items assess pluralism (e.g. "For me every religion/worldview has a core of truth."), and three items assess reflexivity on one's own religion (e.g. "How often do you rethink certain aspects of your religious views or your worldview?"). Participants responded to the items using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*), or 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

God Representation

We administered a 20-item version of the God Representation Scale (Johnson et al., 2018), which assesses four different God representations using five adjectives each: the authoritarian God ("strict, punishing, wrathful, stern, commanding"); the benevolent God ("forgiving, merciful, compassionate, gracious, tolerant"); the mystical God ("nature, the universe, energy, consciousness, cosmic"); and the ineffable God ("unknown, unimaginable, unknowable, incomprehensible, inconceivable"). A seven-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) was used to rate each item.

The Group-Focused Enmity (GFE) Syndrome

Colleagues in the Bielefeld *Institute for the Study of Violence and Conflict* suggest combining prejudice against immigrants and other potentially disrespected groups in the syndrome of Group-focused Enmity (Heitmeyer, 2002; Zick et al., 2008; Küpper & Zick, 2014). The GFE syndrome includes six components: prejudice against immigrants, Jews, black people, Muslims, women, and homosexuals. In the GFE, xenophobia is assessed with items such as "There are too many immigrants in Germany" and "We need to protect our culture from foreign influences." Besides the items for xenophobia, we included racist prejudice ("Preferably, people of different races should not get married."), homophobia ("It is a good thing to allow marriages between two men or two women."), sexism ("Women should take their role as wives and mothers more seriously."), Items are rated using a four-point response scale ranging from 1 (*Absolutely disagree*) to 4 (*Absolutely agree*).

Attitudes toward Refugees

Respondents were asked about their attitudes toward refugees. For war refugees, the item said, "War refugees should be accepted into Germany." For 'economic' refugees, the item said, "Refugees who only come to Germany because of the better living conditions should directly be deported to their home countries." Both items were measured on a four-point response scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 4 (*completely agree*). These items were for the first time included in the questionnaires about prejudice in Germany in 2015/2016 (Streib & Klein, 2018). For a recent analysis of attitudes toward refugees in Germany (2015/2016 and 2022), see Streib and Chen (2024a).

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