FUNDAMENTALISM AND STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines religious fundamentalism in light of structural-developmental theory. Reciprocally, it provides a critique of the structural-developmental approach in light of its application to religious fundamentalism. The product is a conceptual synthesis between observed fundamentalist characteristics and the evolving tradition of developmentalism. The findings of this conceptual synthesis are used to generate principles for developmentally sensitive religious education. The thesis focusses on Protestant Christian Fundamentalism while utilising illustrative examples from diverse faith traditions described in current literature as *fundamentalist*.

This conceptual synthesis adopts a historical-chronological approach to developmentalism in order to reflect the historical context of the current debate between the associated discourses of both paradigms. This historical-chronological approach to developmentalism enables a more explicit critical analysis of the implicit assumptions of the modern discourse. The conceptual synthesis culminates with an interpretation of religious fundamentalism in light of James Fowler's Seven Aspects of Faith.

The thesis provides a conceptual synthesis between fundamentalism and structural development. It does not purport to offer a definitive empirical testing of this theory at this stage. It uses existing empirical evidence of development to analyse descriptions of fundamentalism in current literature.

The methodology used to mediate the reciprocal analysis of fundamentalism and structural-development is based on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1989). This methodological approach offers tools and terminology for the examination of fundamentalism and developmentalism as discourses while offering a structuralist reference for value judgments implicit in the analysis and discussion of implications for religious education.

Findings revealed general congruency between early developmental structures and elements of fundamentalism. The contents and dynamics of fundamentalism resist the development of later stage structures. Hence, ontogenetic development is affected by the phylogenetic structure of the fundamentalist discourse; cultures can reflect stage-specific structuring tendencies and therefore affect individual development. Stage crises and transitions provide a powerful interpretive model for the dynamics of interaction between fundamentalism and other discourses. The analysis revealed the potential for a form of recapitulated fundamentalism prompted by dissonance between convergent epistemologies and emerging divergent epistemologies of later development. This suggests that purely content-based assessments of fundamentalism may not account for its developmental range.

The recapitulation of fundamentalism and its appearance in phylogenetic forms challenges traditional developmental assumptions concerning stage progression. It provides a rationale for further investigation of the structuring powers of contents within the developmental discourse. This investigation necessitates the integration of concepts including compartmentalisation, cognitive dissonance and consonance into the structural developmental model.

The thesis offers a theoretical defense of facilitated development beyond fundamentalism as a structural developmental representation. It proposes broad principles for the facilitation of such development in the context of schooled religious education. These principles of a developmentally sensitive religious education are *holistic*, *dynamic*, *progressive*, *experiential*, *interpersonal*, *intrapersonal*, *meta-contextual*, *objectified* and *critically reflective.*

Key Words

Faith, Belief, Worldview, Discourse, Education, Christianity, Fundamentalism, Liberalism, Structural Developmental Psychology, Stages of Faith.

Key Authors

Kant, Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Oser, Gmünder, Fowler, Geisler, Schaeffer, LaHaye, McDowell, Rushdoony, Newbigin, Spong, Tillich, Marsden, Barr, Marty and Appleby, Armstrong, Winell, Vogt, Babinski, Strozier, Cohen, Shinn.

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