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## The Symposium on Faith Development Theory and the Modern Paradigm

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## INTRODUCTION

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# The Symposium on Faith Development Theory and the Modern Paradigm

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Psychological theories, like all others, require reassessment from time to time, not only to consider how they might be further developed but also to take note of limitations on their explanatory power and on their educational or therapeutic value for contemporary children, adolescents, and adults. James Fowler's faith development theory (FDT) is no exception. Previous issues of this journal have brought Fowler's FDT into discussion, noting both its strengths and certain problematic features and suggesting ways in which research on the subject might be advanced. The present issue offers a fresh and more sustained reevaluation of this well-known theory.

The present discussion of FDT is timely in another way. This issue is offered in celebration of James Fowler's 60th birthday, which Fowler observed in the Fall of 2000. The articles reflect the considerable influence of his theory, which, now in its third decade, continues to inspire theoretical and methodological reflections. On this occasion we express our respect and gratitude for his work.

Challenges to FDT are not new, but they have become more systematic and urgent. The focus of such inquiries has centered on several issues, including the role of emotion in faith, the contributions of the psychodynamic unconscious, and the factor of the interpersonal. Challenging the image of the autonomous, reflective, mainly cognitive individual, which appears to be the common ground for the fam-

ily of structural–developmental theories, is a proposed developmental dynamic grounded in the real life world.

If we are justified in identifying modernity with the birth of the independent, autonomous, and rational individual, these challenges may be said to address the question, How does the faith development perspective relate to the project of modernity? Has this perspective, perhaps from its beginnings, already passed beyond modernity, or is there a need for advancement and revision that may deconstruct the theory’s entanglement with the modern project?

“Religious Development Beyond the Modern Paradigm?”—the theme of this issue—was the topic of a symposium held in Boston, on August 23, 1999, at the 107th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association and chaired by Heinz Streib and David Wulff. All of the contributions making up this symposium are included here: James Fowler’s opening statement, the constructive–critical reflections of Heinz Streib, John McDargh, and James Day, and finally, the thoughtful response of Ana-María Rizzuto to all of the articles. We hope that these articles will invite a thoughtful and lively response.