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## FORMS OF RELIGIOUSNESS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON QUALITY OF LIFE

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### Abstract

Psychology of religion is a phenomenon that has been drawing attention of notable Western European psychologists since the early days of the last century. Their interest has focused primarily on the birth and ripening of religious faith, on evolution of understanding of God, on the character and dynamics of religious experience, on mental functions of belief in God, etc. It is natural since religion and faith belong to the most private and intimate spheres of human life. However, the extent to which an individual is immersed in these questions varies – it depends on the degree an individual denomination expects its followers to participate to and on the strength of one's personal conviction. The aim of this paper is to make a selective summary of the theoretical sources of psychology of religion in the context of its ability to improve the quality of life. This topic has drawn only marginal attention in transforming countries. It could be partially the result of the fact the previous regime considered religiousness an unwanted phenomenon. This attitude is reflected in a degree of the society's secularization and the manifestation of certain displeasure at demonstrations of religious displays as such. Nevertheless, in critical periods of one's life, even a person who does not partake in religion in his everyday life tends to rely on faith – according to C.G. Jung this can be attributed to a natural process of human maturing, which leads to the integration of divine archetype. This stereotype appears also in mass media – maybe a greater swath is held by sects and their manipulative techniques or miraculous healing methods rather than meaningful spirituality better meeting human needs.

*Keywords:* psychology, religion, faith, spiritual need

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### 1. Introduction

As stated by several North American forecasters, we are able to recognize that mankind is standing at the crossroads of industrial and post-industrial historical period, still, no consensus has been reached about the nature or character of the evolution of human race in the third millennium. In the like manner, we have been unable to designate general priorities of this development in the knowledge–information oriented society. Upon researching the sources of the mankind's global problems on the turn of millennia, D. Kováč draws the

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attention to three outcomes of American studies to be considered from psychological point of view: influx of women in management, new chances of religion and the man as a creator of future. In reference to the conclusions of the American Psychological Association our scrutiny will focus on the problem known as ‘aging optimization’. The author we quote draws on scientific studies of Roman club in the European context of the matter and among the most pressing problems of humanity he lists, but not exclusively, discrimination of minorities, religious and/or ethnic groups, absenting equal access to welfare, discrimination of the elderly, insufficient balance between material and spiritual needs, etc. [1]. Upon presenting questions of humankind’s global problems, it is only natural we cannot turn a blind eye on the fundamental philosophical and metaphysical problems of human existence and the ensuing theological aspects thereof – what is the purpose of human existence? What is the mankind’s direction and destination? To put it in the words of C. Trestmontant: “Is there already a standard of thinking and acting the mankind would be able to give their justified consent to or do we need to discover it first?” [2] The question asked about a standard of thinking and acting is closely linked to the question of the final destination of the creation. There are enough proponents of the idea there is no objective standard of human acting. And undoubtedly so, even in countries where religiousness has been hardly hit by the state atheistic propaganda – anybody who manifested his faith had to hide its outward display in order to avoid conflict with the ruling power. This was a forced atheism, not one born out of conviction. Or, to put it even more precisely – this was a mock atheism forced upon the people. Paradoxically, the society was outwardly atheistic, but inwardly strongly religious, at least if we count the number of people who admitted their denomination in the early stages of the country’s transformation. Generally speaking, we cannot say the relation towards religiousness forcibly moulded by the state won. However, it would not do justice to assert the pressure exerted left no impact. This is not evident only in how an individual deals with spirituality in his own life; it is also evident in how some institutions function these days. Acceptance of faith is strictly constraint within the borders the society has drawn for this purpose. A part of society is not oriented towards pursuing any objective goal and so does not seek any standard for activities that would lead to its attainment. A part of society believes there are no higher goals the mankind should pursue. These people believe the human fate is finiteness, nothingness. This belief is, of course, reflected in practical workings of people, and therefore also in politics.

It is definitely not incidental aging of population is one of the mankind’s global problems unequivocally identified across different sources. The population is aging and therefore the question of quality of life, especially later in life and in old age (or according to the epigenetic diagram in the adulthood and mature adulthood stage) becomes ever more pressing. This fact seems to correspond with opinions the human race has no other destiny than live and become extinct in the end.

It had been a longstanding belief medicine could treat people's physical ailments. The premise for this hypothesis was Christian based duality of body and soul. We speak about physiological perception of the body in this context. Discovery of interrelation between physical health and mental well-being, initiated by increased interest in Asian and Indian tradition of regulating bodily processes by employing mental techniques, led to an increased role of Psychology in healthcare. In spite of this holistic approach, Psychology itself has its constraints. Therefore, an ever increasing scrutiny is given to the role of healthy spirituality and the religion's mental hygiene function in the context of quality of life. The assumption is that a religious approach to life may help a person to better cope with crises in life. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as follows: health is a condition of physical, mental and social well-being. We also wish to add spiritual well-being to this definition.

## **2. Psychology of religion in transforming countries**

### ***2.1. Scientific premises of psychology of religion***

Psychology of religion as a scientific discipline studying relation of religious habits and their link to mental processes emerged in Western Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, a large swath of writing was devoted to general history of religion, undoubtedly activated by spreading Marxist materialist worldview leaning on Cosmology. Psychology itself as a scientific discipline gave rise to psychology of religion by means of psychophysiology, represented in Europe at that time especially by W. Wundt (myths as projection of human emotions and needs) and O. Külpe (utilization of experimental methods in examining religious experience), and depth psychology represented by, above all, S. Freud and C. G. Jung. An important contribution to the development of a new scientific field was the American school of psychology of religion, especially in the aspect of interrelation between religion and Physiology. The most interesting proponent of this school is William James, as quoted by Nils G. Holm; his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* has influenced the psychology of religion in numerous countries. The most notable psychological works dealing with religion are those of S. Freud and C.G. Jung. Depth psychology inspired several scientific schools in their quest for examining the role of religion in a man's life despite the fact that Freud's approach to religion is rather negative – he sees the phenomenon of religion as a compulsive neurosis. His opinion is that religion is a demonstration of collective infantile escape reaction. In a similar manner, G.W. Allport designated outer religious demonstrations a neurosis. He parts with Freud when he contemplates religious experience as a shift towards a man's inner involvement, which he does not consider a way to manage fear, but a unifying experience. C.G. Jung, Freud's one time student, studied myths and rituals of foreign religions. Analyzing the same, he uncovered striking similarity in forms of ritual and mythical manifestations of most common religions, thus concluding that there is a

collective unconscious typical of human race. This unconscious contains structures – archetypes – common to the entire humanity. An archetype of God comes into the forefront with ever more vengeance regardless of the fact whether an individual considers himself religious or not. The process of human maturing leads to the integration of divine archetype [3].

In spite of dimmed interest in psychology of religion notable in Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field has not stopped drawing consistent scientific attention and nowadays also interdisciplinary examination. The topic is addressed not only by number of significant experts, be they psychologists, philosophers, sociologists or theologians – it is useful to note the representatives of French and especially of Scandinavian school, but also by the International Society for psychology of religion and religious studies in Belgium, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in the USA, the Donner Institute for History of Religion and Culture in Finland, academic workplaces, etc. A substantial source of knowledge is brought by specialized conferences and several scientific magazines – specifically the publication *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* and the yearly *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*.

## **2.2. Sources of the psychology of religion in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic**

The situation in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic is very similar to the situation in other transforming countries – the foundation for theoretical sources of the psychology of religion were laid only after the East Block had disintegrated. As noted in 1999 by P. Říčan and Z. Vojtíšek, Psychology considers religion an interesting phenomenon, but it is only marginally represented in the basic literature on Psychology, if represented at all. Regardless of the fact that at the time both authors reflected especially Czech psychology, the common history of both nations allows for transposition of the body of knowledge to the modern Slovak pendant, too. The situation is improving only gradually, which is why Slovak psychology relied heavily on foreign sources. Currently, there are several authors engaged in consistent research of the psychology of religion, the most prominent of them being M. Striženec with his publications *Current psychology of religion* [4], *Newer psychological views of religion and spirituality* [5], etc. Then there is L. Košč and his works *Pastoral psychology and Pastoral – psychological counselling* [6, 7], E. Klčovánská, P. Halama, V. Šatur and others. Among the most prominent in the Czech Republic ranks especially P. Říčan, J. Křivohlavý, V. Smékal, J. Papica and others.

An important leap forward is the examination of the psychology of religion topic within a grant funded project under the auspices of the Institute of experimental psychology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the result of which was a joint monography *Religiousness, Spirituality and Individuality* [8]. Another positive thing is the fact the notion of the psychology of religion also appears in the material Concept of subject orientation focused research

undertaken by the Slovak Academy of Sciences which served as a Green Paper for government policy discussion.

Undoubtedly interesting input into providing solutions to the problems of the topic, when we look at them from a wider perspective, are some research undertakings ongoing at Comenius University - Department of Arts. It is worth mentioning the research examining links connecting internet users to spirituality done by J. Holdoš and J. Považan. Their research focused on possible relation between pathological use of internet and spirituality, but at the same time also on perception of internet as a spiritual space [9].

On the other hand, it is necessary to mention factors that are bound to impact the possible problem solving outcomes for a long period to come. We are talking especially about specific attributes of religious environment. The first factor is a marked weakening of the position of religions considered traditional in our geographic region. To certain degree, this phenomenon strengthens interest in alternative religions, which might be more acceptable for some people, since they are not burdened with vehement counter propaganda. Another reason might be a particular negative experience with displays of traditional religions. To much, Christianity has become a system of orders and bans with harsh repercussions of their violation. The current problems of the Church have no small impact on the attitude towards traditional religions. The second specific factor of Czech and Slovak religious scene is the degree of society's secularization, which results in a certain aversion to religious manifestations as such (despite of the fact the Slovak society is less secularized than its Czech counterpart) [10].

### **3. Development of religiousness and its forms**

Religious psychology deals in detail especially with the connections between religion and mental health. However, this study perceives the relation between religiousness and health in a wider context. We want to focus on those stages in a person's life when he realizes the most the quality of his life, i.e. in mature and senior age. In those stages, the religion often becomes a buffer to bear the brunt of stressful situations, diminishes a person's fear of death, influences his choice of difficulty-coping strategies and implies an option of effective support one may count on to receive from religious community [11]. In spite of the fact M. Striženec refers to the outcomes of the research in Germany according to which the idea of greater devotion in older age ceases to be the norm, this is the period of life when individual religiousness changes most frequently. The need for social religious practice is replaced with personal prayer time and meditation. At the same time, this is a stage characterized by the return to faith or finding one's faith. There are several research studies (also in the field of religion sociology) confirming the fact religiousness may be impacted by age or fitness.

Maturing stages in an individual's life is the object of attention of developmental psychology, which studies physiological, cognitive and social aspect of this process. Studying the relationship of an individual towards religiousness requires both cognitive and social aspect. There are a number of schemes attempting to analyze individual phases of acquiring religious maturity. One's relation to religiousness and spirituality is forged in childhood. Simply said, this development spans the early adulthood, too (20–30 years). At this age, a person experiences intimacy in relationship with another human which brings along new openness to transcendental You. Transcendental Me is being formed in adolescence, according to Allport, it is this particular period when in whirlwind of doubts and faith, a mature faith is forged. The generativity stage of life (adulthood, 40–60 years) is characterized by passing on spiritual tradition as a part of providing for one's family and contributing to society. This is the age when a person develops in doing. The last stage, the mature age and senior age, 60+) is characterized by integrity (according to Erikson's theory of eight stages of mental development). Its opposite pole is desperation stemming from impending death. M. Striženec says: "The virtue here is wisdom, but dogmatic ritualism can also be observed. Religiousness of senior age should be meditative – a search for inner peace in silent prayer." [5, p. 35]

Quite contrary to the assertions of German research outcomes [11, p. 37] it is a general prevailing opinion that religiousness increases with age. It is a result of the feeling of loneliness, fear of illnesses, anxiety about nearing end, but also a feeling of uselessness and ostracism from society or absence of positive stimuli. It is the natural spiritual maturity of an individual which governs his relation to religiousness.

An entire community of psychologists (to mention just a few: C. Rogers, B.F. Skinner, A. Maslow, W. James, etc.) have engaged itself in examining the profile of a religious mature individual. At the beginning of his research, the American professor of social psychology G.W. Allport differentiated between mature and immature personality (later, he talks about mature religious sentiment and then about inner and outer religious experience). An outer religion attenuates basic anxiety by providing encouragement, safety or status, thus becoming a purposeful tool. If we examine the inner type of religion, it becomes the goal in itself and attains the position of leadership. Contradicting Allport's classification, R.O. Allen and B. Spilka distinguish between consensual and agile religiousness [12]. Agile religiousness according to them is distinctive, self-critical and abstract. The consensual form demonstrates itself as non-critical, hidden and conditioned by consenting approval of the others.

The meaning of religion becoming an inner phenomenon is the object of the attention of H. Sundén, one of the most prominent representatives of Scandinavian school of psychology of religion. In his opinion, there is no religious experience without previous adoption of model patterns. Drawing on teaching of the Church about learning and roles, he differentiates between a man of roles and a man of learning. The first one takes over the God's role from the Bible which helps him to weave his own pattern of perceiving the world. Such

individual understands God as an acting person, which enables the former to build an intimate relationship with Him. This approach requires a high level of flexibility. The second personality type takes over dogmas from religious tradition. He accepts orders and bans, which significantly impact the creation of his opinion of life. This personality type clings to the safety of known things and is mostly closed to accept new arguments. This type of religiousness is compared to a shell by Sundén – it safeguards a person from the stress of life [3, p. 100-110].

Let us mention *Psychoanalysis and Religion* by E. Fromm, a work inspired by depth psychology, in which the author suggests that the critical question for mankind is not whether to be or not to be religious, but what kind of religiousness we should strive for [13]. Fromm proposes dividing religiousness into two types – authoritarian and humanistic. An individual practicing authoritarian religion feels he is controlled by higher force – Deity here is worshipped for its power and ability to control the individual, not for its moral attributes. This type of religiousness is called unchanging submission to It (Deity) by Its followers. With respect to authoritarian religiousness, Fromm pinpoints its negative effect in the context of mental health because it retards development of one's own authority. On the contrary, Fromm finds humanistic religiousness useful for one's mental health. This type of religiousness focuses on God as a truly attainable symbol. It is not based on a hierarchical structure, but rather on an equal relationship between man and God. Dual differentiation between religious experiences is also applied by A. Maslow [14]. He has defined religious persons as top and non-top. The first group is composed of people capable of transcendental experience upon which they perceive the world (the mankind, the Universe) as an integral whole and they yearn to be able to get to know it holistically independent of human experience. According to Maslow, this is the healthy type of religious experience. Individuals belonging to the second group fail to partake on useful religious experience by ignoring, refusing or forgetting top experience.

#### **4. Relation between faith and health**

We are primarily interested in people's attitude to religiousness in the context of health in later middle age and old age. The conservative attitude to the verification of faith which is resulting from unwillingness to share their religious experience or even to talk about this experience, does significantly influence the research even nowadays. Therefore, we have decided to present types of religiousness and the relation between faith and some psychosocial aspects in an insofar unpublished research (questionnaire SROS II), with the average age of subjects 20.18 years [15]. We assume that the forced atheism of controlled group did not impact the participants in their critical stage of forming self-perception.

Out of 100 subjects in the first group, 63 respondents were engaged in Church (hereinafter Group I). The second group consisted of 37 psychology students (hereinafter Group II) familiar with or aware of the topic, but who, at

the time of their selection, did not verbally pronounce their allegiance to faith (which, according to discriminating analysis of the respondents' type identification proved entirely untrue). Out of several hypotheses, let us present two – we assumed there was a difference in how the two groups perceived the degree to which their health could be impacted by faith and we assumed there was a difference in perception of how one could improve his health actively. The hypotheses were verified by Mann-Whitney U test. Considering the aspect of life satisfaction and stress perception, the difference between the groups was  $p = 0.000$ ; Group I was less satisfied with their life and perceived stress more intensely than Group II. At a significant level of  $p = 0.002$  did Group I more often voice their belief that faith could have a positive impact on their health than did Group II. Group II perceived significantly better their own resistance to challenges ( $p = 0.017$ ). No significant difference was established in perception of quality of their own health and possibility to actively improve the same between the examined groups.

The results of this research confirmed that the range of inner religiousness differentiates the group of the engaged religious (Group I) from the disengaged one (Group II). There was no significant difference between the outer religiousness of the groups. The finding that Group II was less perceptive to stress is interpreted in our opinion by the fact that the respondents from this group, who are psychology students, are better equipped to handle stress or, contrary to the others, they behave purposefully (i.e. they knew what answers were socially desirable). Increased stress perception in Group I might have been caused by the awareness of social pressure present in post-communist society towards active religious practitioners. The difference in attributing better health prospects to faith on behalf of Group I is considered having been expected. We assume that the results are a consequence of Christian philosophy expecting God to be a healing power (and thus promoting health).

## **5. Faith and media**

Following the demise of socialist regime, the media also became open to religion. However, at the beginning, the primary motive was not the role of faith in human life. The profane media suddenly gained access to an area which used to be a taboo, and so were the topics inhabiting that realm. Private media lacks any serious ambitions in this respect even now (excepting the Christian oriented media). Their interest in religious topics is drawn only when the topic departs from the standard. And there is a very slight probability that their attitude towards religious topics will change. The functionalist theory of media does state that the purposes of media are to inform, to spread culture, to entertain, to draw attention to social and political issues (and also to educate). However, the contents of majority of published dailies (and also their online versions) prefer to entertain, and to do that also in presenting the news. The viewers or readers do not encounter any philosophical topics, not even on rare occasions in spite the



media being a tool for enforcing our society's values thus forming and reflecting the image of a man of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century [16].

An altogether different situation comes to view when we look at media of public service. The period following the change in governmental system reopened the room for religious broadcasting. At that time, in the still national television and radio broadcasting company, editorial offices for religious broadcast had been formed and live broadcasts of religious services became integrated into the program. Special room was allowed for religious magazines whose function was to evangelize the society. It was the period when individual program types solidified their contours, broadcasting times were established, editors were profiled and so was the viewing community. What could be considered progress of that time was an overreach of spiritual topics in other types of broadcast, not only in relation to the liturgical calendar. Despite that, critical voices of broadcasted religious programs warned that the program attracted only those who had been won over long time ago, which should not have been its goal. This line of criticism conditioned further development of religious programs – it seemed that editorial offices responsible for religious broadcast by public service media had their exactly limited borders. The religious program editors usually did not partake in reflections of social life through religious prism in other (non-religious) programs. The public service media understood the participation of Church in broadcasted program as a pastoral activity issue. In Church circles, even this shift was met with enthusiasm due to preceding lack of catechesis and religious education among the believers [17]. Until now, there is still no one who would deal with religiousness and its link to quality of life in those media. This is surprising, because the media are literally flooded with healthy lifestyle topics. There are promoted stories of miraculous healing - often such information is broadcasted and the editors should be especially careful about. We talk about manipulative techniques of various sects, 'surefire' recipes for healing from any kind of illness leading to a patient's abandonment of prescribed treatment with possible lethal consequences, participation in spiritual experience of alternative religions usually incomprehensible to lay people, working of destructive religious cults, etc. The problem is that the editors themselves are lost in the above mentioned topics lacking relevant education in the field.

It could be also asserted that editors are equally ignorant on the correlation between faith and health and since these are rather abstract topics, they tend to avoid them in preparing broadcast programs. Or, more precisely – they have no clue what potential there is. This is evident in the research among the followers of a particular medium. In spite of the management's access to basic demographic data about the composition of their viewing community, no one deals with the psychological needs of this community or those of individual age groups within it more closely. Mental aspects of human maturing remain at the side. This is surprising especially with the public service media. The notion of 'public service' has more than thirty interpretations in the mass media theory. However, the basic understanding of the notion and its interpretation is a service

benefitting the hearers and the audience. It draws on the same identity of notions of the public and the audience; while the public is a collective community of individual media consumers. Taken from this perspective, public service broadcast no longer serves the purpose of meeting common needs, but the purpose of meeting individual interests. And meeting individual interests cannot be accomplished without the knowledge of an individual's mental development, and that also includes one's spiritual needs, aka religiousness. This perception of the audience is absent from the professional training of journalists.

The authors of this study are not aware of any expert consulting or advisory services used when selecting programs for the audience's individual age groups. To put it another words, a program for senior citizens is selected by people in their early adulthood. This is also the result of absenting external advisory boards on program composition recommended to public service media by the European Committee. Sadly, such recommendations have not made it through Slovak legislative process governing media. Slovak audience cannot make direct amends to journalist work. All they can do is to let their impact felt indirectly, with their selective approach to media.

## **6. Conclusions**

Healing by faith is still a kind of a taboo even in democratic developed world. In society, which finds itself in a process of transformation, the issue is avoided in public discourse, there are only few experts dwelling on it. This is undoubtedly the result of atheist propaganda. The substantial change brought about by the demise of previous regime opened the possibility of practicing one's religious freedom on one hand, however, no substantial leap forward happened in its perception by the society on the other. The psychology of religion is reflected somewhat surprisingly mainly from psychological point of view. We have not noticed any marked input from religionists apart a few exceptions. It does not provide any help that the issue is avoided by media. The religiousness itself is ostracized in profane media, not to speak of the impact of faith and other spiritual characteristics on health. As we have suggested, this is a topic requiring adequate knowledge from several scientific disciplines with the first place occupied by the knowledge of the issue of faith and religion. However, the editors lack relevant training in this respect. We are of the opinion that subjects like Psychology and religious studies should be an integral part of journalist training throughout their studies. It becomes evident that courses spanning one semester only cannot prepare the journalists to the desired extent.

The experts see a huge therapeutic potential in the link between religion (faith) and Psychology. Positive coexistence with one's own spirituality proves to be protective of one's health, which is especially true for the elderly.

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