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# ASPECTS OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

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(Received 6 May 2019, revised 17 May 2019)

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## **Abstract**

The human person has a multidimensional existence, and his relationship with reality takes place not only via pragmatic rationality or intentionality but also through contemplation and feeling. Religion gives man the chance to project within a horizon of validity that transcends any factual data. Religious experience is consubstantial to the human being. However, the association of psychology with the human soul (the term originally comes from the Greek words *psyche* or soul and *logos* or study) implies also a focus on the internal life of the person. The present paper attempts to bring to light a new perspective on religion and religious experience – the psychological one, consequent to which it will also emphasize the possibility of dialogue between religion and Psychology and highlight the reciprocal advantages that result from the collaboration of the two. While religious traditions are being exploited as a potential source of therapeutic techniques, other aspects of their reasoning, although relatively neglected, may provide valuable insights. For instance, religious theories of psychopathology offer fascinating perspectives on important problems like depression, anxiety, or addictions. Moreover, this dialogue between Psychology and religion is poised to explore the importance of community and relational context for spirituality.

*Keywords:* religion, psychology, religion

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## **1. Introduction**

In dealing with a host of social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual needs of the contemporary world, the dialogue between religion and Psychology, which is the science concerned with the human psyche and soul, becomes a necessity.

Without laying claims of being an exhaustive study of the problem, the present paper attempts to bring to light a new perspective on religion and religious experience, namely the psychological one, while highlighting not only the possibility of dialogue between religion and psychology, but also the reciprocal advantages that a collaboration between the two affords.

Many studies have come to claim that religion caters to more than one aspect of a man's everyday life, and all the more so in times of acute emergency. In this respect, in his analysis of religion, Pargament [1] delineates the essential

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functions that it fulfils in a man's life, based on how people related to religion throughout history. 1. Religion assigns value and sense to life, it has helped immensely in elucidating the sense and finality of life, and it still provides meaning and reasonability to people going through stressful and emotionally taxing times. 2. Religion secures the feeling of control over life and events, particularly in situations when the man is overwhelmed and overcome by hardships. 3. Religion offers comfort, it eases the man's anxiety and provides him with a safe haven, i.e. spirituality that takes him away from the outside madding world, wherein he feels vulnerable and exposed, and connects him with a greater and protective force that is beyond him. 4. Religion encourages spiritual intimacy, it provides the framework – the enlarged community and the tools – the practice of spiritual virtues such as charity, which enable the man to form and cultivate social spiritual bonds with both clergymen and laymen, and give him a specific social relational identity. 5. Religion engenders transformation and changes in a man's life. Despite the conservative role that scholars assign to religion in general – that of maintaining man's sense of purpose, control, comfort, fellowship and closeness to God – any man undergoing a reconfiguration of his belief system will also go through major alterations in all the dimensions of his existence, the more he strives to calibrate his life according to the new meanings he attaches to it, the greater his overall transformation.

The human being is, by his own dichotomous nature, a spiritual being, a person capable of maintaining communion - both with the One who created him and with his fellowmen. And these relationships, expressed both by soul experiences (feelings and emotions) and by concrete facts, can be analysed (and even demonstrated, for those who seek evidence of the reality, the consubstantiality with the human being, and the absolute necessity of the Christian religious experience) from the perspective of the religious psychology, or planted, educated and guided through authentic Christian pedagogy.

## **2. The need for transcendence of the human being**

The human person has a multidimensional existence, and his relationship with reality takes place not only via pragmatic rationality or intentionality but also through contemplation and feeling. Religion gives man the chance to project within a horizon of validity that transcends any factual data. Religious experience is consubstantial to the human being. A place, an object, an act acquires meaning by being linked to some reference points that transcend them. Religion imparts meaning and direction to existence [2].

According to the Christian faith, the man is made of a material body and of what we call soul, which cannot be reduced to matter. It is because of this soul that the human being becomes someone and not something. The soul is a substrate endowed with consciousness and the ability of conscious and free reactions, through which man manifests himself as someone conscious and unique, and which sustains in him the will to perfect himself eternally. This

substrate cannot be defined in its essence. We can only describe it in its manifestations, knowing that it makes the man a conscious and voluntary subject, one that is unique and irreplaceable.

Thus, the body-soul structural duality makes the man a complete being, designed to reign over all creatures.

Christian transcendence serves as a binder, a vehicle and a guide to meanings and human comprehension. Religious attitude allows the human to attain the fullness of humanity. The man alone will not be able to understand his world if he does not rally God to the whole of his existence. The religious man is the man par excellence; of all his traits, the religious one rules above all others, discriminating and determining them.

According to Louis Lavelle, life without religion equates to an inauthentic life and an axiologically decentralized existence. There is no value that does not ultimately imply a religious character. Religion, he states, is the act that transcends anything relative, it finds instead of nothingness this absolute of the act that makes us participate and which absolutizes and valorises anything relative. Religious values fortify interiority and direct the individual to conquer a genuine world that is based on moral autonomy [3].

### **3. The universality of faith**

Faith, in its general sense, is a very common state of mind, for “everywhere where human life exists, there is faith” [3, p. 13]. Between these two notions, life and faith, there is such a correlation that, if we try to remove the faith, we will surely reach the suppression of human life itself, because without faith man cannot live. Man trusts in his own power of knowledge, for “it is the faith of the spirit in himself, in the fundamental settlements, in his forces, to build up an edifice of truth” [3, p. 16]. Furthermore, faith also plays an important role in the acquisition and communication of knowledge, thus generalizing knowledge in society. Education of any degree is largely used by faith. From the student who listens to his parents and teachers and to the scientist who leans on everything that science has previously discovered, we are the debtors of the great-unseen debtor that is science. Most ideas and data are received through education and almost no one considers doubting them. Their acceptance is based on the trust in the authority of the person that delivers them. Historiology itself is built upon and maintained by the confidence people invest in the testimonies of the past. Faith perpetuates the present, updates the past and prepares the future. With its help, we journey through centuries and millennia, we raise up facts buried in oblivion. In the garment of memory and intelligence, faith eternalizes the world [3, p. 16].

In Romanian, we have many homonymous words, terms that can be used in several ways. The word faith is part of this category of words. We can designate it to notions like: opinion, trust, scientific belief, religious belief, subjective belief, and faith in its objective application (the doctrine of faith). In one of its uses, expressing a strong belief, faith is a state of mind, which employs

the soul in its whole. Thus, we can speak of faith or trust in science and politics, of patriotic belief - which is the sure conviction in the destinies of science, politics, homeland, etc. Faith becomes the fruit of personal tendencies or reflections.

Subsequently, belief-conviction is the result of long research and personal experience that a person has had or done in any direction. The conclusions he reaches give him such a great sense of certainty, such a great deal of security in supporting and practicing them, that sometimes the subject can even give his life in their defence (Galileo Galilei, who defended his theory even on the scaffold).

Thus, adherence to human knowledge is called scientific belief, for which the French have adopted the term *croyance*, while adherence to divine teaching is called religious belief, for which the French use the word *foi*. Contrary to the scientific belief, which is relative, religious belief is infallible, since the origin of this teaching is divine. The authority of the Church, through which revelation is offered to us, is also infallible.

In the current language, the word *faith* also has the meaning of the object of faith, teaching, or in other words, what a man believes. The subject-faith is the acceptance of the truth itself, the receptive attitude that the believer adopts towards the teachings with which he comes into contact. As for the religious belief, it can be strongly affirmed that it is universal, since there was never such a thing like an atheist nation anywhere, as Plutarch wrote: “States without strongholds, without knowledge, without laws have been known to exist..., but no one has ever seen a people without faith in divinity...” [3, p. 18]

#### **4. Dimension of religiosity**

That religiosity is a multidimensional concept is already a point of convergence for most researchers today. However, these dimensions differ heavily in their number and nature.

##### **4.1. Religious motivation/religious orientation**

Allport and Ross [4] split the religious motivation into two – the intrinsic and the extrinsic direction. They went on and defined extrinsic religiosity as being self-centred; people extrinsically motivated go to church in order to perform an act of societal duty, to socialize, to be seen by others complying with the norm, and hence to receive their due social recognition and advancement; their church attendance secures and preserves their social comfort and status. In contrast, Allport views intrinsic religiosity as a rather different orientation – those who are intrinsically motivated to be religious are the same who understand the certitude of religion as a finality *per se*, who place religion at the core of their existence and shape their lives according to its principles [5].

## **4.2. Prayer**

Prayer is a fundamental feature of a wholesome religious life. It has been defined as “thoughts, attitudes and actions designed to express or experience the connection to the sacred” [6]. Prayer props our spiritual quest, enhances our contemplation, and provides the locus for our meeting with God [7].

Prayer is an admirable coping strategy that is rendered effective by its ability to supply the mechanism that leads the man to feel in control, irrespective of what hardships he is facing; it is also responsible for converting negative events into opportunities for spiritual advancement, as it is through prayer that man is granted the strength to overcome illness and the grace to conceive mental models of a loving God, that give his life meaning and purpose [8]. The state of well-being is tightly connected with the state of prayer, as the latter induces relaxation, an increased self-esteem and optimism in the praying man [9].

## **4.3. Religious coping**

Coping is a cognitive and behavioural attempt to lessen, suppress and/or tolerate those internal or external demands that exceed man’s personal resources [10]. Religious coping employs religious beliefs, practices and acts to assist the man in his quest to solve problems, overcome difficult or stressful situations and to avoid or minimize any negative emotional effects these situations might produce [11].

Religion is what people often resort to when they are going through extremely challenging times in their lives, especially when they feel threatened by something or crushed by anguish. There are as many different ways in which people use religion to adapt to these distressing situations, as there are types of religious inclinations. In analysing the ways in which people adapt to stress by resorting to religion, the connection between well-being and religion becomes clear [5].

Psychology possesses certain instruments capable of measuring the religious coping styles (the collaborative, passive, and self-directed style) and the religious coping strategies (positive and negative).

Upon inquiry on their coping techniques when faced with stressful situations, a lot of people reference religion.

The classification done by Pargament [11, p. 310] enlists two types of religious coping, namely positive and negative. According to him, the patterns of positive religious coping include: practicing religious forgiveness, asking for religious support, fostering spiritual connections, collaborating with others in religious coping, religious cleanse, and giving a favourable religious reinterpretation to the situation. The positive religious coping skills are the perquisites of a man’s authentic spirituality, of his certainty that God is synergistically present in his life, that life has a clear purpose and that his spiritual connection with others is both necessary and consequential. Conversely, the pattern of negative religious coping points to a man’s spiritual disconnect, to

a high degree of interpersonal religious disappointment, to the re-evaluation as regards God's punishment, and ultimately to a demonic reassessment of God's power. The negative religious coping skills are the expression of a relationship with God that is characterized by uncertainty and insecurity, of a worldview that is frail at its best, and of an inner religious conflict in the quest for meaning [5].

A man's way of engaging in the process of religious coping can be classified as: passive religious coping (the man remains passive as he relinquishes all responsibility to God, and God fully accepts this responsibility); collaborative approach (the responsibility to find a solution is shared, hence a partnership is formed between the man and God); and self-direction (the belief that the man is endowed by God with suitable problem-solving skills, which he must actively use). The self-directed people do not necessarily perceive their relationship with God as being close during their religious coping process. Pargament [11, p. 311] argues that the most useful way of religious coping is the collaborative one, whilst the passive and the self-directed coping have generated mixed results.

Pargament [12] proves that the mental health and spiritual development of a man is closely connected to his inclination towards religious coping efforts that presume his believing in a God Who is loving and fair, to his perception of God as a supportive partner, to his participation in religious rituals and his search for spiritual support. Nevertheless, there are also studies that highlight the negative effects brought about by religious copings – strong distress in the case of the loss of a close friend or family member, various negative emotions, low self-esteem, anguish, fear and anxiety.

Researchers associate positive religious coping strategies with low rates of depression, with an increased self-esteem, with an elevated life satisfaction and quality, whereas negative religious coping strategies are usually coupled with high rates of depression and anxiety [13].

#### ***4.4. Religious support***

The spiritual support provided within religious communities is positively connected with an increased self-esteem, sense of hope, and with personal coping resources [14].

In one study, Larson and Goltz [15] acknowledged that an active participation in the life of a religious community leads to greater family cohesion and a heightened family satisfaction. The religious involvement in a community is associated with the stability and quality of the marital relationship, while the religious affiliation alone, without active involvement does not appear to have a great positive impact on the degree of marital satisfaction.

### **5. The religious psychology and its directives**

All the humanities have found an outstanding advisor in Psychology. Theology itself, the science of God, is largely used by Psychology. Hence the

emergence of the psychology of religion, i.e. the study of religion and religious phenomena via psychological theories, concepts and methods, which was created as an independent discipline during the first two decades of our century, although the beginning of such problems could already be found in Tertullian's study *De Anima*. The experimental psychology of religion attempted to invade the very being of religion, by means of questionnaires filled-in by religious people or by appealing to the testimonies of great personalities.

But it is very difficult to define the being of religion because the religious feeling manifests itself in a wealth of external forms that cannot be reduced to simple theoretical formulas. The enthusiasm of some psychologists exaggerated the role of psychology in religion. Their attempt to explain religion only with the aid of psychology, presenting it as an exclusively human activity, gave birth to what we call psychologism.

Religion, however, according to its most elementary definition, is a complex act, given that it is the connection between man and God. And this connection is not only the work of man but especially of God, for it would not have been created if God had not revealed Himself and His teachings, for the salvation of the world.

In his work 'The Psychology of Religious Life' professor Lucian Bologna outlined several directives of religious psychology, considered as a self-standing discipline [16].

### ***5.1. The ethnological directive***

The Ethnological Study of Religion deals with the genesis and evolution of religious life on the social side. Research in this direction strives to show how religion came to be in the life of the primitive man, what was the psychological substrate upholding his religious experiences, what are the key phases in the evolution of religious beliefs from the primitive era to the modern one, what were the external causes - social and cosmic, and the internal causes - psychological, that generated a certain status quo of the religious life in a certain period of time, and what were the reasons that urged the man to grow into a more spiritualized state of religiosity.

All these issues are not only based on a specific religious material, attitudes, beliefs, ceremonies, and religious practices, but also on data concerning the degree of culture of the primitive man and of the human being in different cultural stages [16, p. 14].

### ***5.2. The psychological-ontogenetic directive***

The research done in this directive has established the existence of a process of evolution in the content of religious experiences, and the dependence of this evolution on the social and cosmic conditions as well as on the psycho-physical evolution of the individual. They have sought to show that religious life is a natural reality related to the psycho-physical structure of the human body itself, as it is subject to a natural process of evolution. Unfortunately, those who

have followed this directive stopped at the simple acknowledgement of the religious life and of its relations with general psychophysical evolution, without formulating a deeper or more documented explanation regarding the religious life [16, p. 15].

### ***5.3. The psychological-structural directive***

In this directive, researchers studied the religious life of the adult in all its aspects, not to establish its evolutionary forms, but to capture the intimate nature of religiosity, its determinant causes and its role in the life of the person. Based on these studies, the ontogenetic evolution of the religious life has been established, leaving aside the specifics of religious experiences, as well as the subjectivity and variety of religious internal experiences.

Having established that, after passing through the concretism and anthropomorphism of childhood, the religious life is shaken and altered all the way through adolescence, only to return to balance when the mature age is reached, neither do they explain the reason why it falls under the psychophysical evolution of the individual, nor do they account for its specific character, which makes it so necessary for people. By the law of evolution, as these researchers have settled, the religious experience has been framed in a formal, superficial law, without letting it penetrate the subjective interior of the religious experience in order to understand it [16, p. 17].

### ***5.4. The psychopathological directive***

The research done in this direction is based on the clinical cases of religious phobias, ecstasy, mysticism, etc. There is also the social side of pathological religious experiences - such as fanaticism, demonomania, etc. Therefore, the specificity of this directive lies in the study of religious life in its abnormal and pathological dimension. The religious phenomenon, like any psychic phenomenon, appears more accentuated, better outlined in these abnormal cases. However, the studies are usually focused only on the structural aspect of the religious life of the person [16, p. 21].

### ***5.5. The Orthodox directive***

All the studies mentioned here, done based only on statistical data, have researched the religious life only at the surface. They have statistically identified in the ontogenetic evolution certain phenomena in order of their predominance, without penetrating, through psychological analysis, the very phenomenon of religious experiences.

Seeking to refine the phases of the religious life through which the individual passes, these researchers have forgotten to insist on the essence of the religious experiences and life. The problem that is posed to us is precisely this aspect, which we consider to be fundamental. It is not imperative to resort to the evolutionary study of ethnic-religious manifestations, or to pathological cases,

but it is necessary to analyse psychologically the religious experiences of normal people. Thus, this directive has to examine: 1) the influence of family, school, church, society, profession, and nature on the life and religious experiences of the person during childhood, adolescence, and maturity; 2) religious beliefs, religious sentiment, and the motives of religious practices in their ontogenetic evolution; 3) true religious experiences manifested by shocks, doubts, and reproaches of religious consciousness [16, p. 21].

## **6. The psychological structure of faith**

### ***6.1. Intellectual elements in the faith***

#### *6.1.1. The gnosiological character of belief*

According to a misconception, belief has no gnosiological value; moreover, it is even stated that ignorance and faith are homonymous. The past century housed the conviction that the report between faith and science is the same as that between light and darkness, and science would have no other mission than to fight for the removal of religious faith.

Auguste Comte formulated this conception in the theory of the three phases through which humanity has passed and will pass. He characterized the stage of religious belief as primitive and ignorant. With time, this phase would disappear only to be replaced by the philosophical phase, and third, the phase of positive science would come when there will be no trace of religion. In Comte's view, religious belief is obscurantist and detrimental to progress. And, unfortunately, Comte is not alone. This theory seems to be accepted by most positivists, followers of the idea: 'With every step that science takes forward, God takes one step back'. What an erroneous idea! Those who can say this, acknowledge their own helplessness, limitation, and intellectual superficiality because they cannot distinguish between faith and subjective and objective knowledge. Knowledge provides us with ideas about the concrete reality, and faith includes ideas that teach us about the supernatural reality. Both have the same function of making us aware of the truth. Unlike Science, faith puts the spirit in contact with realities that do not fall under the senses, because of the time and space that distances them, and especially because of their supernatural character.

According to Thomas Aquinas, we distinguish two elements in knowledge: the material object, or what is known and tangible and the formal object; that one by which knowledge is made possible. Based on the nature of the formal object, knowledge can be intrinsic - when knowledge derives directly from the nature of the object of knowledge, from within, and extrinsic - when knowledge is based on external testimonies about the object to be known. In this latter category of extrinsic knowledge, the scholars have also included faith, as it is considered 'knowing by hearing'. The gnosiological character of religious belief is not always in a full understanding of the object of faith, and of religious

ideas; but this does not mean that the act of faith is devoid of any rational explanation and based only on blind trust. For how could man believe in the revealed truths, if he had no knowledge of them? Thus, Harent affirms that the word 'faith' would never have come to mean doctrine, had there been no adherence to a doctrine; it is precisely because of its gnosiological character, that the religious belief received the name of *knowledge through grace*, thereby specifying the fundamental role of divine grace in the theological virtue of faith. [3, p. 29].

### 6.1.2. *Faith and reason*

One of the most debated issues in history was the relationship between faith and reason. The views have varied very much over time, having been formulated by both philosophers and the so-called 'scientists' and by theologians. Here is a brief account of the most important points of view on this issue:

Blessed Augustine observes that reason and faith are moving towards the same object - the supernatural, but each one acts in its own way: reason uses natural light and faith the 'supernatural' light. Faith is superior to reason, which it constantly enlightens. The object of faith can only be accessed by faith, but we have the opportunity to investigate the authority of the one who guarantees faith. In this case, the reason is a kind of 'preamble to faith', a preparatory of faith, which can prove the existence and perfection of God.

Nineteenth-century Nominalism finds that there is no connection between reason and faith because no dogma can be demonstrated. During the Middle Ages, another hostile attitude towards reason's overly grand involvement in faith emerged, manifested through the course of mysticism, which opposed the excess of dialectic intellectualism that encompassed faith. Descartes is yet another one of those who deny the conflict between faith and reason, which he states belong to two separate domains. John Look, although a notorious empiricist, admits nonetheless the existence of the revealed truths of faith. The Deism, however, dismisses from religion any revealed truth that cannot be demonstrated. David Hume exposes the limits and the uncertainty of reason, thus proving the possibility of mystery. Kant criticizes the arguments used by natural theology and argues that reason is worth only in the possible experience. The transcendent cannot be the object of the experience. Faith escapes theoretical reason, but it is based on practical reason. Spencer provides a peaceful solution to us by separating the realms or spheres of the two means of knowledge: the natural and the supernatural. Religion begins where Science ends.

All the philosophical and theological theories on the relationship between faith and reason can be grouped into three broad directions: rationalism, fideism, and semi-fideism.

Rationalism is a hostile attitude to the belief that only what is rational is true and that only what can reasonably be accepted from religion must be

accepted; mysteries and miracles must not be received. The reason is the measure and criterion of truth.

Fideism is the antipode of rationalism, exaggerating the role of faith to the detriment of reason. The main point of fideism is mistrust in the value of reason and the evidence that it provides. Semifideism has a more conciliatory attitude to reason, allowing for it to hold a certain role in the act of faith.

And yet, the truth falls somewhere in the middle: reason plays an important role in faith, because the reasons behind faith, however rudimentary, are never lacking in reason. The intellectual element is active even in the actual act of faith, when adherence to the doctrine of faith occurs. It is the first contact that the object of faith - the doctrine of faith – has with the intellect of a man. Of course, this first moment is not equal to a profound understanding, but it is merely an informal exchange that actually turns on the intellect. It is the gnosiological character of faith.

The act of faith cannot be deprived of intellectual elements, for reason establishes credibility by investigating the motives of faith, and examines, as much as it is possible, the object of faith, which often exceeds its power of understanding [3, p. 31].

### *6.1.3. Affective elements in religious belief*

Affectivity occupies a very important place in a man's life. From simple sensations to superior and complex feelings, the life of the human psyche is laden with affective states. Affectivity has a tremendous contribution in the act of knowledge, as it exerts a great influence on knowledge, perceptions, and senses, determining the attention, the judgment and the will. As with any psychological fact, there is a lot of affection invested in the faith. That is why the psychological phenomenon of religion and belief was not exempt from the unilateral interpretation of sentimentalism, which reduces religion to mere sentiment. Under the influence of the famous theologian Father Schleiermacher, who formulated a whole theory about the being of religion in his famous 'Reden über die Religion', at the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant theology was based only on feelings. Religion was considered neither a science, nor a moral set of principles, but an absolute sense of dependence, or 'creature-feeling' as Rudolph Otto calls it [3, p. 58].

In his 'Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion', August Sabatier sees the religious feeling draw its life from the fundamental contractions of an inner life.

Sentimental psychologists reduce religion to a simple, self-created, inner attitude, to an affective state that any individual may have in his own particular way. Others have stated the origin of religion lies in fear. But if the basis of religion were the feeling of fear, would that not mean that the most fervent practitioners of the faith, the martyrs must consequently have been the most fearful people as well?

Another theory is the odd Freudian interpretation of religion, which claims that the psychological phenomenon of religion is the source of erotic feeling.

The truth is that the role of the affective element in the act of faith is altogether different. It helps to prepare the faith but does not stop at the intellectual adherence stage. In the face of divine immensity, the believer's soul is overwhelmed by the sense of infinity. In contact with the eternal truth, the believer appears fully satisfied and strives to assimilate it entirely. The certainty of faith produces satisfaction and peace. After that, the heart of the believer is flooded by a strong emotion of love and a feeling of incessant thanksgiving. These feelings are then manifested through acts of worship.

The soul of the true Christian resembles a volcano filled to the brim with effervescent faith, from which the deeds of faith erupt. It conditions both contemplative faith and the dynamism of faith. When kindled by feeling, faith becomes boundless; it can then move mountains [3, p. 60].

#### *6.1.4. The voluntary element of the religious behaviour*

The volunteer element plays a special role in human activity. Whether it is intellectual or physical, human activity hangs from the will of the will. Faith itself is, by and large, a volunteer act, for in the act of faith the object does not impose upon our spirit forcefully, but the ego makes a move towards this object, giving freely its assent to that teaching. Will yields the impetus that pushes the spirit to investigate the motives of faith. It directs research and supports it in the extreme difficulties and fluctuations that abound in the process of conversion. Enlightened by intelligence, demanded by divine grace, drawn by the good and by the voice of consciousness, the will freely utters a volunteer 'fiat': 'I want to believe'.

In an increasingly dehumanized world, apparently under the authority of psychoanalysis, statistics, and machinery, Christians must urgently reiterate the supreme value of human freedom. There is nothing more important in the whole universe than the free choices made by people with reason and conscience. As human beings, although we are conditioned by the environment and unconscious motivations, we are never powerless slaves.

God established us here on Earth as emperors. He invested us with the power to rule all living creatures. Let us not give up this royal authority out of cowardice or lack of imagination [17].

It is very sad that the secularized man feels God as an enemy to freedom. The Hegelian-Marxist dialectics depicts the relationship between the master and the slave; Freud speaks of the 'sadist father' complex that incites to 'patricide'; for Nietzsche, God is the 'Celestial Spy' whose gaze encumbers and reifies. For these, the usual idea of divine omnipotence and omniscience transforms history into a puppet theatre. Within this determinism, only God is free, and as a result, He seems to be the only guilty of the existence of evil.

In recommending apophatism, the negative approach of the mystery of God, the Fathers of the Church warn us that the notions of ‘omnipotence and omniscience’ carry the risk of anthropomorphism and show that these categories cannot apply to God. He is ‘altogether different’, that is mysterious and ‘endlessly sought’. According to Saint John of Damascus, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity come together not on purpose to be confused, but to encompass One Another. Each divine Person reveals Himself by revealing the Others, by encompassing Them and receiving everything from Them, while giving Himself fully to the Others in the eternal dynamics of Trinitarian love, which becomes the equivalent of freedom. The man created in the image of God embarks on an intimate relationship with the Trinitarian mystery, and sinks into the very heart of sacrificial love. This is why God ‘withdraws’, leaving man’s passions of the heart as a space for his own freedom, for, as the patristic adage says, ‘all things are possible to God, except to force the love of man’. Because He wants to establish His relationship with the man on consensual reciprocity, God somehow becomes ‘vulnerable and weak’. He renounces his own omnipotence, shares the bread of suffering with the man, because He wishes to drink with him the wine of joy. In fact, this ‘weakness’ is the peak of divine omnipotence that does not want to create a passive reflex, an obedient puppet, but a ‘new creature’, free in the way divine freedom exemplifies, that is, unlimited and capable of loving God for Himself, yet equally capable of opposing Him with a refusal.

## **7. Conclusions**

Almost all of the humanities have found an outstanding aide in psychology. Theology, ‘the science of God’, also largely employs the study of psychology. Between the two fields of science, there are many similarities, but also many differences. This chapter aims to bring to light these similarities and differences, reflected especially in the issue of the parallel between the *spiritual father and the psychologist*.

First, we must state that religious psychology alone is not able to elucidate all the secrets of the human soul under its religious aspect, in the same way as Psychology in general is unable to explain scientifically the relations between soul and body, between the freedom or determinism of the states of the soul, or the intimate nature of intelligence, etc. And yet, the theory of religious knowledge and the Philosophy of religious value base their affirmations on the results of individual and collective religious psychology.

In general, theologians are unfavourable to Psychology, asserting that it has not yet reached the degree of objectivity the other sciences have; for very often the philosophy of psychologies interferes with the results of scientific research. Psychologists, on the other hand, at their best try to ignore methodically the transcendental realities; that is, neither to affirm nor to deny them. Thus, the psychologists remain somewhere at the periphery of the religious experience and risk losing the very essence of it. Another category of psychologists, however, did not adopt this somewhat reserved attitude on the

issue of the transcendent in the study of religious phenomena; they do not see the religious or mystical phenomena other than as pathological manifestations, outbursts of the subconscious in consciousness, or suppressions of erotic tendencies.

In the face of such tendencies, theologians have taken a stand by undertaking studies in religious psychology themselves. They have shown that psychologists have no reason to deny the supernatural and the interference of the supernatural in nature. Moreover, they have drawn attention to the fact that the religious phenomenon is far too complex for someone to enter it armed only with the precision instruments of experimental psychology; a serious religious psychology must by all means take all steps necessary towards an objective study, without overlooking the fact that a certain spiritual inclination is also needed, in order to get close to the religious phenomenon [18].

As F. Heller says: "It is psychologically impossible to study religious life without taking a position in one way or another. The psychologist of religion cannot be just a geometrician or an anatomist of the soul. Religion is a phenomenon of culture packed with value." [19]

By drawing a parallel between the psychological and the theological perspectives on human existence in general, and on man's soul life in particular, we will show that the Church also has its psychologists - the spiritual fathers; and we will seek to bring to light the fact that the 'spiritual treatment' does not exclude the psychological one, but rather it complements it.

In a post-Christian era in which psychoanalysis has become the new religion, and the psychoanalyst the 'priest' of this new religion, it is important to rediscover the spiritual values within the Church and to stress once more the crucial importance of the spiritual father in the life of the believers.

In the Orthodox Christian tradition, the real psychologists and pedagogues are the saints, for, as Father Popovich says, "there is no true culture without holiness. The true, Orthodox and evangelical culture, illuminates the man with divine light and leads him to all that is immortal and eternal, uncorrupted." [20]

Ever since its inception, the Church has been endowed with the Holy Mystery of Confession (or Confession), symbolically called the Second Baptism or 'The Bath of Tears', in which the believer recognizes his own sins and receives forgiveness.

Long before the emergence of Psychology, the parents of the Church, the great spiritual Fathers practiced the extraordinary art of penetrating the subconscious: "Many passions are hidden in the soul and are totally overlooked until temptation reveals them"; or "those who show their thoughts heal themselves, and whoever hides them gets sick" – "Discern your thoughts and ask a parent who can recognize them" [20, p. 82].

The Parents have always insisted on the danger of seeking human help alone, and Saint Basil advises us to look for a 'friend of God', through which we have the certainty that God is speaking. This friend can only be truly found in the Church of Christ. But it is very sad that nowadays people appeal more to the psychiatrist than to the priest. Their suffering thus gets a technical name: 'Major

depressive state', 'anxiety', or 'neurotic-reactionary depression', and quasi-automatically this 'illness' also receives a 'medical treatment' premised on anti-depression; and people return to where they started from.

An unhappy man searches desperately for meaning and receives a label and a box. Then, with all the psychotropic drugs that help one overcome a difficult moment, these 'labelled depressions' resist or recur. The 'confessions' conducted by the psychoanalyst often prove to be superficial and ineffectual, as they are incapable of penetrating the nature of the human soul and of 'healing' the deeper wounds. Quite the reverse is the situation of those believers who seek to relieve their troubled souls before the Saviour's icon by repenting earnestly, washing away with their tears all the sins that darkened their souls and imploring God's help. In the Sacrament of Confession, the believer seeks not an external, legalistic absolution, but the healing of the deep wounds of the soul; for the confession made to the spiritual father is the vehicle by which we bring before Christ not only our sins, but also the reality of sin in us, this profound corruption of our nature that cannot be fully expressed in words, and which seems to evade our conscience and will. As a mystery of healing, Confession is not at all an embarrassing necessity, a discipline imposed by the authority of the church, but an act full of joy and saving grace [17, p. 53].

Despite these differences of perception, religious traditions offer great resources for the solution of many modern problems, and psychology can offer assistance in this endeavour.

The human person is both an individual person and a relational being. Thus, we need to avoid the extremes of individualism that ignores the necessity of social relationships and collectivism that ignores the uniqueness of the individual. This position has considerable support in the scientific literature, as well as in important positions taken by religious and philosophical writers.

Assuming that barriers to dialogue can be overcome, there are several potential areas for dialogue between psychology and religion in the future.

First, many scholars on the Psychology side of the conversation, as well as those on the religion side, have begun to make use of postmodern concepts and methods while avoiding the extreme relativism that has plagued postmodern thought in some areas of Social psychology and Philosophy. The willingness to consider qualitative approaches to investigation, sensitivity to differences among various religious traditions and an understanding of the importance of context in religious behaviour or experience are all valuable outcomes of a conversation influenced by postmodernism.

Second, there are many exciting possibilities for expanding the depth and breadth of topics related to religion or spirituality that are part of the dialogue. While religious traditions are being exploited as a potential source of therapeutic techniques, other aspects of their thought pattern have been relatively neglected and may provide valuable insights. For instance, religious theories of psychopathology offer fascinating perspectives on important problems like depression, anxiety, or addictions. A broader consideration of religious traditions

and practices is also at hand, with Islamic and Orthodox traditions taking their rightful place as partners in dialogue.

Finally, the dialogue between Psychology and religion is poised to explore the importance of community and of the relational context for spirituality. Many contemporary authors on both sides of the dialogue have become deeply conscious of this important aspect of human experience. It may be that this conversation will also have an impact on the broader field of Psychology, sensitizing it to these issues. A strong dialogue between Psychology and religion can help us move toward that goal while retaining the benefits that science has to offer us [21].

### Acknowledgement

This work was supported by a project financed from ‘Lucian Blaga’ University of Sibiu research grants LBUS-IRG-2018-04.

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