

## **Beyond dogmatism: the need for closure as related to religion**

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**ABSTRACT** *Our theoretical assumption is that behind the dogmatism-religion positive but not systematic relation, a clearer one may exist between religion and need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). A positive association of religiosity with need for closure was hypothesized (except with the decisiveness facet). Subjects (n = 239) were administered the Need for Closure Scale (NFCS), the Religious Fundamentalism Scale and a two-dimensional religiosity scale. Religious fundamentalism was positively correlated with the total NFCS, preference for order and predictability. Classic religiosity predicted high need for closure (all facets except decisiveness). However, spirituality-emotional religion was associated with low close-mindedness and low decisiveness but still high discomfort with ambiguity. Discussion includes arguments favouring the usefulness of the need for closure construct for understanding many aspects of religious personality (e.g. dogmatism, authoritarianism, prejudice, multiple conversions, distinction between permanence in order-closure and urgency for closure).*

### **Introduction**

*Dogmatism, close-mindedness and religiosity*

Are religious people more dogmatic, more close-minded? Of course, one may distinguish between close- and open-minded religious dimensions (e.g. fundamentalism, orthodoxy vs. quest, faith maturity, historical relativism) and see whether these dimensions are differently related to constructs such as authoritarianism, prejudice, integrative complexity of thought, and so on (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Batson *et al.*, 1993; Hutsebaut, 1996; Leak & Randall, 1995). However, one could argue that the findings within this perspective are not always so surprising: for instance, fundamentalists are high in authoritarianism whereas people high in 'quest' religiosity are (fortunately) low in authoritarianism. In our opinion, our first question still remains intriguing: do religious people,

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by their religiosity *per se*—independently of their open- vs. close-mindedness in religion—tend to be high in dogmatism and constructs related to close-mindedness?

The empirical literature, especially in the last decade, suggests that when studies are based on measures of general religiosity, not close- or open-minded religion, but religiosity *per se* (e.g. attitude to religion, intrinsic religiosity, religious affiliation, religious behaviour and practices such as prayer, church attendance, reading of the Bible), and when the results are significant (this is not always the case), the association between religiosity and constructs relative to close-mindedness is always positive. For example, this is the case with (Rokeach's) *dogmatism* (Francis, 2001, for review), *authoritarianism* (Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; Leak & Randall, 1995), *risk avoidance* (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995), *low spontaneous humor creation* (Saroglou, in press; Saroglou & Jaspard, 2001), *low openness to experience* (Saroglou, 2002b, for review), *stereotypical thinking* (Watson *et al.*, 1999), non-proscribed *prejudice* (Batson *et al.*, 1993; Duck & Hunsberger, 1999), *in-group favouritism* (Burris & Jackson, 1999; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999), values emphasizing the need for *reduction of uncertainty* (values of *conformity, tradition and security*) and low importance attributed to the values emphasizing *openness to change* (values of *self-direction and stimulation*) (Schwartz & Huisman, 1995).

### *Questioning the construct of dogmatism as related to religiosity*

If the panorama of the relationships between religiosity and close-mindedness is so dark, why do studies on dogmatism and religiosity not provide systematic findings? As mentioned above, when results are significant, the association is positive, but several studies failed to demonstrate any association (Francis, 2001, for review). Beyond many possible interpretations regarding measures of religiosity, sample composition, or discrepancy between theory and measurement of dogmatism, we propose one that directly concerns the construct of dogmatism itself as defined by Rokeach (1954, 1960).

According to Rokeach (1954, 1960), dogmatism can be defined mainly at two levels (we simplify here for the purposes of the presentation). The first one, this of the *isolation* between and within *belief* and *disbelief* systems, is characterized by little differentiation within the disbelief system, isolation of parts within and between belief and disbelief systems, and high rejection of disbelief system. The second level—that of the *subordination* of the *peripheral* beliefs to the *central* region of beliefs—is characterized by the dependence-submission in an authoritarian way of the peripheral parts of beliefs to what constitutes the central beliefs. In the dogmatic person, changes to the central region of beliefs would substantially affect peripheral beliefs, but changes to the peripheral beliefs are less likely to affect the central region of beliefs; also facts or events at variance with the belief system would tend to be assimilated and reinterpreted as not contradictory.

Our assumption is that religiosity is less likely to be characterized by the first-level dogmatism, and more likely to be associated with the second-level dogmatism. In other words, religious people may be interested and open in many things even

contradictory to their faith, but everything has to be integrated, or better still, subordinated in some way to their faith.

Such an assumption may not be purely speculative. For example, *need for meaning* is considered to be a motivational force of religiosity (Hood *et al.*, 1996) and has been proved to have an important role in religious coping (Pargament, 1997). Interestingly, *integrative complexity of thought* (ICT) is not negatively associated with intrinsic religiosity (Batson & Raynor-Prince, 1983) nor even with religious fundamentalism (RF; Hunsberger *et al.*, 1994; Pancer *et al.*, 1995; in these studies, RF was related to low ICT in only religious-existential issues, but not in other issues). Religiosity also does not predict low *intelligence* (Francis, 1998) nor low *need for cognition* (Burris *et al.*, 1996). We may then assume that it is not sure that religious people are not interested in their disbelief system. They may even be inclined to know well the beliefs of non-religious people, to differentiate complex ideas and opinions that challenge their belief system, and to not isolate the disbelief system from the belief system.

On the contrary, it is the second-level dogmatism that may be associated with religiosity. What may be aversive for religious persons is the disorder among ideas, the chaos in the inner world, the simultaneous presence of incompatible elements, and the lack of integration-subordination of everything to what constitutes the fundamental, essential body of their belief system. Several findings from the psychology of religious personality may be considered as supporting this idea. For example, religiosity is associated with high *orderliness* and obsessional traits (Lewis, 1998, for review), high *conscientiousness* (Saroglou, 2002b, for review), low *impulsivity* (see Francis, 1992), and high *conservatism* in a variety of domains (Hood *et al.*, 1996, for review). To give examples from the past, the mistrust of early Christianity toward dreams and laughter seems to be based on the highly valued ideal of *self-mastery*: dreams and laughter were seen as phenomena that escape the control of the vigilant faithful (Saroglou, 1992, 2002a). Finally, we may assume that the need for meaning when combined with the need for control (considered by Hood *et al.*, 1996, as another essential motivational force of religiosity), takes a specific form: it is a need for meaning that offers consistency, order and integration.

In conclusion, it is not sure that religiosity is related to indifference to, isolation and rejection of new, complex ideas and stimuli that may challenge the belief system; it is more likely that all these ideas and stimuli, in order to be integrated, have to be subordinated to the central religious beliefs in such a way as to avoid disorder and chaos. Religiosity, then, is more probably predictive of high need for order, structure and closure.

#### *A new perspective: need for closure and religiosity*

How can this assumption be transformed in a research hypothesis? One way could be to distinguish in the Dogmatism Scale between items that tap the dogmatism of the first level (isolation between the belief and the disbelief systems) and those that

tap the dogmatism of the second level (subordination of the peripheral beliefs to the central beliefs). Unfortunately, the specific content of the items of the Dogmatism Scale is very often confounded with structure. For example, 'Man on his own is a helpless and miserable creature' is classified by Rokeach (1960) as referring to the central-peripheral dimension. 'The United States and Russia have just about nothing in common' is assumed to refer to the belief-disbelief systems isolation.

A second (possibly but not necessarily indirect) way to operationalize our assumption could be to focus on the more recent construct of need for closure. Need for closure is defined as the desire for definite knowledge-answer on some issue and the eschewal of confusion and ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994, 1998). The need for closure is considered as a latent variable manifested through five aspects. People with a high need for closure:

- (1) 'desire definite order and structure in their lives and abhor unconstrained chaos and disorder' (*preference for order*);
- (2) 'would experience as aversive situations devoid of closure' (*discomfort with ambiguity*);
- (3) desire a secure or stable knowledge, that means 'a knowledge that can be relied across circumstances and is unchallenged by exceptions or disagreements' (*preference for predictability*);
- (4) 'do not desire that their knowledge is confronted by alternative opinions or inconsistent evidence' (*close-mindedness*); and
- (5) feel 'an urgency of striving for closure in judgment and decision-making' (*decisiveness*) (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994, p. 1050).

Many elements suggest that this construct may be useful in relation to our theoretical assumption that religiosity is related to a kind of dogmatism that mainly expresses need for order, structure and integration as closure. First, *dogmatism* and need for closure are theoretically (close-mindedness, discomfort with ambiguity) and empirically related, but only weakly (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Second, need for closure is weakly correlated (negatively) with the *need for cognition* (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Third, preference for *order* constitutes in all studies using the corresponding scale (NFCS) the first and more important factor (often together with preference for *predictability*, explaining an important amount of the total variance). Fourth, the NFCS is highly correlated with the *Need for Structure Scale* (Leone *et al.*, 1999; Neuberg *et al.*, 1997), a scale measuring the desire for (simple) structure. However, according to Kruglanski *et al.* (1997), need for 'closure' defines better this desire for having some knowledge on a given topic, any knowledge as opposed to confusion and ambiguity, that means *not* necessarily a desire for a *simple* structure. Fifth, the desire for closure may manifest itself equally with regard to diverse types of belief (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996); in that sense, it is *not* necessarily a desire for *specific* closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Consequently, the items of the scale do not tap a specific content of beliefs. Sixth, the NFCS has predicted in-group bias such as *identification* with an *in-group member*

and acceptance of an in-group member's beliefs and attitudes (Shah *et al.*, 1998). Seventh, whereas previous psychological analyses depicted close-mindedness in terms of cognitive style or structure, the need for closure emphasizes a *motivational* dimension (remember the theoretical importance of the need for control as a motivational explanation of religiosity in Hood *et al.*, 1996). Finally, contrary to previous psychological notions, the NFCS does not stress, according to Webster and Kruglanski (1998), a *dysfunctional* nature of uncertainty avoidance (this may also be interesting in relation to religious personality and membership in religious groups).

The only facet of the need for closure scale that seems to be problematic in relation to religion is decisiveness. This facet, in general, exhibits inconsistent relations with the remaining facets and occasionally relates differently to external constructs (see Neuberg *et al.*, 1997). In addition, there is no empirical evidence that allows us to hypothesize that religiosity is positively correlated with decisiveness. Indeed, religiosity is often associated with obsessional traits (Lewis, 1998, for review) and we may expect that the ideal of perfectionism does not promote the urgency of striving for closure in judgment and decision-making.

The present study is then investigating the following hypothesis: religiosity and religious fundamentalism are positively associated with the need for closure, and this relationship applies to all facets of the need for closure construct except decisiveness.

## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 239 students (156 women and 83 men) from a (French-speaking) Belgian University were administered the Need for Closure scale, the Religious Fundamentalism scale and a Religiosity scale. Eighty-seven participants were undergraduate psychology students (72 women and 15 men) and took part in the study to obtain credit for their introductory psychology course and 152 participants (84 women and 68 men) were undergraduate students in the department of economics and political and social sciences. Comparisons on the above-mentioned measures did not reveal significant differences between these two samples of students except for one of the two dimensions of the Religiosity scale ('openness to spirituality-emotional religion'), a difference explained mainly by a gender difference (women were higher in that dimension and dominant in the psychology student sample).

### *Measures*

*Need for Closure Scale* (Kruglanski *et al.*, 1993). This 42-item 7-point (totally disagree/totally agree) Likert-type format scale measures need for closure as

TABLE 1. Examples of items of the Need for Closure Scale (Kruglanski et al., 1993)

<i>Need for closure facets</i>	<i>Items</i>
Preference for order	I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life I find that a well-ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament
Preference for predictability	I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions
Decisiveness	I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently When faced with a problem I usually see the one best solution very quickly
Discomfort with ambiguity	I feel uncomfortable when someone's meaning or intention is unclear to me When I am confused about an important issue, I feel very upset
Close-mindedness	I <i>prefer</i> interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own (R) I dislike questions that could be answered in many different ways

defined by five different facets: preference for order, preference for predictability, decisiveness, discomfort with ambiguity and close-mindedness. Examples of the items are given in Table 1. The five-factor structure has received confirmation and cross-cultural validation in a series of studies and the scale—either as total or through its facets—has been predictive of a series of related constructs and experimentally measured behaviours (Kruglanski *et al.*, 1997; Webster & Kruglanski, 1998). In our participants, a four-factor structure seemed to correspond better to our data (preference for order and predictability constituted together a main composite factor); however, given the important literature supporting the five-factor solution, five scores were computed by averaging items that belong to each facet as in the English original scale. In addition, except the intercorrelation between order and predictability (0.56), intercorrelations between facets were low (from  $-0.03$  to  $0.37$ ) and reliabilities of the facets were satisfactory (Table 2).

*Religious Fundamentalism Scale* (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). This 20-item scale—in a six-point Likert-type format in our French version—measures the fundamentalist religiosity whose main characteristic is the belief in the uniqueness of a set of religious teachings that contain the fundamental, basic and inherent truth about humanity and deity, and on the necessity to follow this truth according to practices of the past. The scale has been found to be predictive of several close-mindedness-related characteristics such as prejudice, dogmatism, and authoritarianism.

*Religiosity Scale.* We developed a 10-item, 7-point Likert-type format scale in order to assess the importance of religion in the personal life in general as well as the degree people—particularly in secularized societies—may be attracted by, or interested in, some specific aspects of religion. The scale includes items on importance of God (1), religion (2) and spirituality (3) in one's life, frequency of prayer (4), as well as six items on the degree of attraction by / interest in religious ritual (5), meaning and values (6), aspect of community (7), emotional and relational dimension (8), personal experience (9), and on 'the fact of belonging, after all, in a certain tradition-identity (Catholic, Christian, Muslim, etc.)' (10).

The administration of this scale to the participants of this study revealed a clear two-factor structure when a principal component analysis followed by varimax rotation was conducted. In Factor 1, which may be labelled as 'Openness to spirituality-emotional aspects of religion', items 8, 9, 6, 3 and 7 had their principal loadings (0.83, 0.79, 0.75, 0.70 and 0.62, respectively). In Factor 2, which may be labelled as 'Classic religiosity', items 10, 2, 5, 1 and 4 had their principal loadings (0.83, 0.76, 0.75, 0.62 and 0.60). Eigenvalues of the two factors were 5.19 and 1.19, explaining 63.77% of the total variance. The two factors demonstrated high reliability (0.86, 0.85). We then decided to use these two factors as distinct (although related to each other;  $r = 0.64$ ) religious dimensions.

## Results

Means, standard deviations and reliabilities of the measures can be seen in Table 2. In zero-order correlations, religious fundamentalism was positively correlated with need for closure in general ( $r = 0.17, p < 0.01$ ), as well as with preference for order ( $0.17, p < 0.01$ ) and predictability ( $0.13, p < 0.05$ ). Classic religiosity was related to high need for closure in general ( $0.15, p < 0.05$ ), and high preference for order ( $0.19, p < 0.01$ ) and discomfort with ambiguity ( $0.16, p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, spirituality-emotional religion was unrelated to need for closure in general, and

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics of religion and need for closure (NFCS) measures

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Religious fundamentalism	39.31	10.66	0.77
Classic religiosity	12.54	6.29	0.86
Spirituality-Emotional religion	18.60	7.74	0.85
Total NFCS	193.76	34.10	0.83
Order	4.82	1.30	0.76
Predictability	4.35	1.48	0.76
Decisiveness	4.29	1.53	0.75
Discomfort with ambiguity	5.95	1.06	0.60
Close-mindedness	3.40	1.08	0.58

Note:  $n = 239$ .

was negatively related to decisiveness ( $-0.15, p < 0.01$ ) and close-mindedness ( $-0.18, p < 0.01$ ).

As classic religiosity was importantly related to openness to spirituality-emotional religion, we investigated the distinct impact that each of these two dimensions had on need for closure and its facets, by conducting six (1+5) multiple regressions. As detailed in Table 3, classic religiosity clearly predicted high total need for closure and high scores in all facets except decisiveness, whereas interest in spirituality-emotional religion predicted clearly low total need for closure and low scores in all facets except discomfort with ambiguity. Similar results were obtained with regression analyses conducted separately in men and women (women scored higher in classic religiosity and openness to spirituality-emotional religion,  $t_s = 2.20, 2.40, p < 0.05$ , respectively, as well as lower in decisiveness and higher in discomfort with ambiguity,  $t_s = -2.03, p < 0.05; 2.08, p < 0.01$ , respectively). Classic religiosity predicted high need for closure ( $B_s = 0.51, 0.41; t_s = 3.17, 2.67; p = 0.002, 0.009$ ; respectively for men and women), whereas openness to spirituality predicted low need for closure ( $B_s = -0.42, -0.40; t_s = -2.64, -2.56; p = 0.01, 0.012$ ; respectively for men and women). Finally, in partial correlations controlling for openness to spirituality, religious fundamentalism was associated with total need for closure ( $0.21, p < 0.001$ ), preference for order ( $0.17, p < 0.01$ ) and predictability ( $0.17, p < 0.01$ )

Moreover, because of the intercorrelations between the facets of the NFCS, we decided to investigate which facet(s) of the NFCS was (were) unique predictor(s) of religion, independently of the impact of the other facets. Three

TABLE 3. Multiple regressions of the religious dimensions on need for closure

<i>Predicted variables</i>	<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Partial correlations</i>
Total NFCS	Classic religiosity	0.34	4.11***	0.26***
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	-0.29	-3.57***	-0.22***
Order	Classic religiosity	0.30	3.65***	0.23***
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	-0.17	-2.04*	-0.13*
Predictability	Classic religiosity	0.22	2.64**	0.17**
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	-0.22	-2.67**	-0.17**
Decisiveness	Classic religiosity	0.08	0.98	0.06
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	-0.20	-2.40*	-0.15*
Ambiguity	Classic religiosity	0.14	1.66+	0.11+
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	0.03	0.40	0.03
Close-minded.	Classic religiosity	0.32	3.91***	0.24***
	Spirituality-emot. relig.	-0.38	-4.72***	-0.29***

Note.  $N = 239$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . +  $p < 0.10$  (two-tailed).



regression analyses were then conducted respectively for three predicted variables (RF, classic religiosity and openness to spirituality-emotional religion) and each time all five NFCS facets were included as independent variables. First, it turned out that no one specific facet predicted RF. Second, preference for order was the only significant predictor of high classic religiosity ( $B = 0.22, t = 2.65, p < 0.01$ ). Finally, openness to spirituality-emotional religion was predicted, as we already knew, by low close-mindedness ( $B = -0.15, t = -2.26, p < 0.05$ ), and low decisiveness ( $B = -0.14, t = -2.06, p < 0.05$ ), but also by high discomfort with ambiguity ( $B = 0.14, t = 1.97, p < 0.05$ ).

## **Discussion**

Our hypothesis that religiosity is associated with high need for closure (NFCS) in general, and with all the NFCS facets (need for order, need for predictability, discomfort with ambiguity and close-mindedness) except decisiveness in particular, received moderate but clear confirmation, if however religiosity is conceived in classic, traditional terms (e.g. importance of God and religion in personal life, religious practice, belonging to a religious tradition). Multiple regression of the five NFCS facets on classic religiosity, controlling for between-facets overlaps, revealed that preference for order was the strongest if not the only predictor of the NFCS-classic religion relation. This result seems to correspond to our theoretical assumption that need for order may play an important role in understanding the more general association between religiosity and constructs related to close-mindedness. Finally, people who scored high in religious fundamentalism also tended to be high in total need for closure, preference for order and predictability, but the associations were not stronger than these of classic religiosity with NFCS. (It is not to be excluded that when scales such as the RF are administered to samples that are not particularly religious and samples that rather reflect the secularization of European societies, their predictivity may be confounded with that of general religiosity).

However, contrary to classic religiosity, openness to spirituality-emotional religion (expressed in our subscale by the importance of spirituality in life and by the interest in religious meaning and values, emotional-relational, community and personal-experiential dimensions of religion) was unrelated or even (when controlled for its overlap with classic religion) negatively related to need for closure in general, and to all facets except discomfort with ambiguity. This striking difference in the way our two religious dimensions were related to need for closure seems to be in line with the findings of recent studies on religion and Big Five Openness to Experience (although we do not assume that NFCS is identical to this factor). When studies use measures of religiosity per se, religiosity is either negatively related or unrelated to openness, but when studies use recent spirituality measures the association with openness is positive (Saroglou, 2002b, for a review).

One possible interpretation of this spirituality-low NFCS relation is that people who are interested in non-traditional ways of religiosity, or in religious aspects that

have come to be valued in recent years (emotionality, importance of personal experience, spirituality, quest of meaning and values not directly related to religious dogmas), are non-conventional and so may be low in need for closure. Prudence is needed, however, with regards to an enthusiastic view of the above findings. When multiple regressions of the five NFCS facets on openness to spirituality-emotional religion controlled for the overlap between facets, this religious dimension was predicted by high discomfort with ambiguity.

The results of this study as well as several characteristics of the need for closure construct (and the corresponding scale) suggest the usefulness of the NFCS for understanding religious personality. For example, further research should investigate whether need for closure (in particular preference for order) may explain (at least partially) the fact that religious people seem to be high in constructs related to close-mindedness. Need for closure could possibly explain why religious people tend to be dogmatic although they are not low in integrative complexity of thought (Hunsberger *et al.*, 1994; Pancer *et al.*, 1995); or why they tend to be high in authoritarianism and prejudice although they report systematically low psychoticism (Francis, 1992) and high agreeableness (Saroglou, 2002b, for review) and prosocial behaviour (Batson *et al.*, 1993). In addition, our inspection of the NFCS items suggests that their content is not in (at least direct) accordance or discordance with explicit religious beliefs or prescriptions. This may be particularly useful for the psychology of religion research, where some debate exists on whether specific religious values and beliefs or specific religious ethical prescriptions complicate our understanding of dogmatism (e.g. Cox, 1985; Wilson, 1985) and prejudice (Batson *et al.*, 1993) as related to religious personality. Moreover, the fact that the NFCS measures the need for closure as a need for a definite, non-specific knowledge may be particularly useful for studying the personality of converted people, and especially of people with multiple conversions.

Finally, need for closure has been found to affect information-processing activities either through an *urgency*-‘seizing’ tendency (a desire to attain closure as soon as possible) or through a *permanence*-‘freezing’ tendency (a desire to preserve past knowledge or to safeguard future knowledge; Webster & Kruglanski, 1998). Neuberg *et al.* (1997) hypothesized that the NFCS decisiveness refers to seizing, whereas the other facets refer to freezing (a ‘pure speculative’ hypothesis according to Kruglanski *et al.*, 1997, p. 1009). Anyway, given that in our study classic religiosity predicted high need for closure in all facets except decisiveness (a facet that was even negatively related to openness to spirituality), further research should investigate whether the need for closure, order, and permanence in that order as function of religiosity does not necessarily imply the *urgency* for closure.

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