

# Trans-cultural/religious constants vs. cross-cultural/religious differences in psychological aspects of religion

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## *Abstract*

Are there trans-religious, trans-cultural constants in psychological aspects of religion across different religions and cultures? An excessively culturalistic approach may overlook this possibility, putting an emphasis on the uniqueness of the religious phenomenon studied as emerging from a complex of multiple contextual factors. This article reviews empirical studies in psychology of religion in the 1990s that mainly include participants from different Christian denominations, but also from other religions: Muslims, Jews and Hindus. It appeared, at first, that several cross-cultural/religious differences can be documented (especially between Catholics and Protestants), but the interpretation of these differences is not simple, as other factors may interfere. Secondly it turned out that an impressive series of psychological constants also exist across different denominations, religions, and cultures. These constants include personality correlates, gender and gender orientation, positive and negative values, cognitive and affective aspects, identity formation, social attitudes and consequences.

## *Introduction*

It is a well-established idea that, in order to understand religion well in general, and specific religious facts in particular, one has to take into consideration the specific context: particularities of the religious denomination, culture, and history (e.g., Belzen, 2001). An excessive application of this principle in psychology of religion could lead to the idea that everything studied as a religious fact (beliefs, cognitions, emotions, values, personality correlates, mental health consequences, etc.) is a unique fact that has to be understood as a (unique) product of the interaction between a large variety of factors (among which cultural ones are especially vulnerable to high variations over time). This excessively culturalistic approach sometimes gives the impression that empirical work in psychology of religion based on samples from specific or general populations is poorly indicative of valid information and that case studies constitute better, if not the best, ways for a comprehensive psychological understanding of religion. For instance, Belzen (2001) affirms that “the so-called ‘mainstream’ psychology has for decades now been characterized by a tendency towards decontextualization and naturalization of its objects” (p. 15).

Cross-religious and cross-cultural differences cannot of course be ignored. In many textbooks on psychology of religion one can find examples of particularities in psychology of Protestant vs. Catholic religion, or of Jewish vs. Christian religion. To our knowledge, however, there is not any article or chapter that reviews cross-religious/cultural differences in psychology of religion. Consequently, the

first aim of this paper is to look for such differences, at least by limiting our review in empirical literature to the last decade.

However, asserting and/or finding such differences can not mask the other, complementary, question: Are there also some psychological constants of religion, beyond cultural, denominational, religious differences? Is there something universal in the psychological realities that influence, reflect, or are influenced by, religion? This is the second aim of our study. Again, this question will be investigated through the review of relative empirical literature of the last decade (our review contains studies published up to November, 2001).

### *Differences between religions*

In many textbooks on psychology of religion, one can find disparate examples of psychological differences between religions (or denominations or cultures). For example, *deities* in different cultures may be distinguished as benevolent vs. malevolent and this distinction corresponds to differences in parental educational styles (supportive vs. rejecting, respectively) (Lambert et al., 1959; Rohner, 1975). A second classic example comes from the specificity of Catholicism (vs. Protestantism) providing strong *female figures* in the pantheon, i.e. the Virgin Mary and female saints. The introduction of these female figures corresponds to the fact that, in Catholic environments, men are seen as being more similar to women, compared with Protestant environments. Similar differences have been observed between India (Hindu pantheon including females figures) and Pakistan (Muslim religion) (see Hinde, 1999, for review). Finally, as reminded by Argyle (2000), the famous Durkheim theory on greater impact of Catholicism, compared with Protestantism, on preventing *suicide* (because of the stronger integration of Catholics in the Church and the sharing of common beliefs and rituals) received some empirical support a century ago, but this difference in suicide rate all but disappeared during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Pescosolido and Georgianna (1989) compared fifty-two denominations in the USA and found support for a "revised" version of Durkheim's theory: suicide is prevented by social network support, which is high for Catholic churches and some fundamentalist Protestant ones and low for mainline Protestants like Presbyterians and Lutherans, who show high scores for suicide.

Some other cross-religious/cultural differences were mentioned in empirical literature in the 1990s. First, perhaps in line with Durkheim's theory emphasizing differences between Catholics and Protestants with regard to social support through religion, in a recent large study ( $N = 17,739$ ) in many (11) European countries, fewer *depression* symptoms were found among the female elderly with high rates of regular church attendance in generally Roman Catholic countries, whereas higher levels of depressive symptoms were found among the male elderly in Protestant countries (Braam et al., 2001). (With regard to suicide rates, an important literature exists indicating that Jews are particularly vulnerable to depression and

suicide, although no clear interpretation of this phenomenon is established; Koenig et al., 2001, for review).

Similarly, a series of studies seem to indicate a difference between Catholics and Protestants in the way religion is perceived-experienced as a means of keeping *continuity with parents' religion* and familial environment in general. Catholics, compared to Protestants, show higher agreement with parents' religion and realize fewer conversions or changes of religious affiliation (Sandomirsky & Wilson, 1990). The impact of parents' divorce on switching religious affiliation is stronger for Catholics than for Protestants in general, and stronger for conservative Protestants than moderate ones (Lawton & Bures, 2001). (In fact, according to this study, the impact of parental divorce for those raised Catholics or conservative Protestants is not necessarily a search for a "surrogate family" through another religious affiliation, but the strongest reaction is rather apostasy.) In a study of 1.339 married adults in USA, Argue et al. (1999) found a non-linear increase in religiosity with age, with the greatest increase (once the cohort effect was controlled) occurring between ages 18 and 30; interestingly, the age effect was stronger for Catholics than for Protestants, a finding that is consistent with prior research (Chaves, 1989; Hout & Greeley, 1987).

An important literature exists which attempts to investigate Weber's theory of the Protestant *work ethic*. Reviews of previous studies (Argyle, 2000; Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Hood et al., 1996) suggest that there are no systematic differences between Protestants and Catholics on work, work ethic, achievement and so, and even that existing differences may be confounded with socio-economic differences within the same country (e.g., USA). However, overall, where significant differences exist, Protestants or Protestant countries have higher scores on Protestant work ethic than Catholics or Catholic countries (e.g., Giorgi & Marsh, 1990; data from ten European countries). Finally, studies in the USA indicate high achievement, job status, and income among Jews, even higher than among Protestants (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Hood et al., 1996, for reviews).

In line perhaps with some aspects of Protestant theology and ethics, one can read results from a recent study on *creativity*. Through a regression analysis on a database of nearly 1.400 notable 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century achievers in six science-related and three arts domains, Berry (1999) found that, taking into account the numerical strength of each religious tradition within the different countries, Protestant fruitfulness was greater in the sciences, whereas Catholics were more creative in the arts. Berry's interpretation of results focuses on Protestant stress on utilitarianism and importance of studying a supposedly orderly Nature "for the glory of God and the good of Man", as well as on Catholic higher conduciveness to pursuit of sensual beauty. Finally, in a recent study in the USA, Catholic participants scored higher than Protestants on *mysticism* (Hood's Mysticism scale), a finding due, according to the authors, to the longer and stronger tradition of mysticism in the Roman Catholic branch of Christianity (Mercer & Durham, 1999).

Another recent study tries to distinguish between religion in Western societies and religion in Eastern societies. Miller (2000), extending a previous study (Miller

& Hoffmann, 1995), found that being irreligious represents a *risk-taking behavior* in Western societies (Christians and Muslims, in USA, Italy, and Turkey) but not in Eastern societies (Hindus and Buddhists, in India and Japan). In the first set of countries, religiosity was negatively related to risk preference, but in the second set of societies, the two constructs were unrelated. Miller (2000) explained this difference by the fact that Christianity and Islam emphasize exclusivity in their spirituality. Similarly, in studies in Belgium (Catholic tradition), it was found that religiosity is negatively associated with, and inhibits, *spontaneous humor creation* (Saroglou, in press; Saroglou & Jaspard, 2001); and in a study in the United Kingdom (Anglican background) it was found that participation in church was negatively correlated with cheerfulness (Hills & Argyle, 1998); however, it has been argued that other Eastern religious traditions feel more comfortable with humor and the comic dimension in general (Moreall, 1999; an argument needing, of course, empirical confirmation).

Finally, impressive empirical evidence suggests that the greater strictness of some religious groups corresponds to less health problems in some domains and even to greater longevity. For example, in the USA, the greatest longevity of church members is particularly marked for Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Orthodox Jews and the Amish (Jarvis & Northcott, 1987; Levin, 1994). Similar interpretations may be applied in order to explain why people affiliated with some religious groups (e.g., Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists) have lower rates of cancer compared to other religious groups (Koenig et al., 2001).

A question relative to the religion-longevity relation is that of impact of religious festivals-holidays on mortality. Interestingly, these holidays and their approach seem to inhibit mortality in Christians (Christmas and Easter; Idler & Kasl, 1992), male (but not female) Jews (Passover, Yom Kippur; Idler & Kasl, 1992; Phillips & King, 1988), Chinese women (Harvest Moon Festival; Phillips & Smith, 1990) and Israeli Moslem men (but not women) ('Id el-Adhha; Anson & Anson, 1997).

### Discussion

In conclusion, recent studies in the 1990s confirm the assumption that psychological dimensions of religion may differ across different denominations, religions, and cultures.

This tentative overview was only indicative and by no means exhaustive, although we tried to review as many studies as possible. Unfortunately, studies in non-Christian religions and in non-Western countries are excessively rare. It is too early for proposing a theory in order to understand cross-religious/cultural differences in psychology of religion. Many problems and questions arise.

First, we may wonder whether the observed differences are (exclusively) due to differences in theology, anthropology, ritual, ethics, etc. between religions/denominations or whether they rather reflect cultural differences (involving, for instance, history, mentality, and socioeconomic development). It is interesting to

notice that in a recent study on changes of values in 65 societies, it was found that the differences between the values held by members of different religions within given societies are much smaller than are cross-national differences (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Second, it is also possible that the importance of conservative/rigid vs. traditional/liberal forms of religiousness within specific societies may predict, more clearly, cross-religious and denominational differences than differences in theology, anthropology, rituals, and ethics specific to each religion. The present review mentioned the importance of strictness of the religious group as predictor of some indicators of health and longevity. Another example comes from the literature on the representations of God. Some denominational differences in God concepts (Evangelicals, Methodists, and Roman Catholics in the USA) seem to be explained by conservatism-traditionalism vs. secularization rather than by intrinsically denominational factors (Noffke & McFadden, 2001). In addition, it is generally accepted that the great figures of saints and mystics from different religions resemble each other more than do people with an average religiosity in everyday life.

Third, the socio-economic and educational status of a specific community within a given society may explain (at least partially) some cross-religious differences within the same society. For instance, the fact that, in the USA, Jews have greater professional achievement and consecutive high incomes compared to Protestants, and that the latter are higher in these domains than Catholics, may correspond to respective differences in levels of education (see Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, for a review). More recently, Lehrer (1999) found that Jews had higher educational attainment compared to Catholics and mainline Protestants who, in their turn, had higher educational attainment compared to fundamentalist Protestants.

Fourth, the minority vs. majority status of a religious community within a given society may explain some differences otherwise attributed to differences between denominations per se. Conversely, communities of the same religion in different societies may dispose of different (e.g., minority or majority) status. For instance, by comparing the behavior of, and between, Christian (minority) and Muslim (majority) children in Egypt, Royle et al. (1999) found that Christian children demonstrate greater in-group favoritism and out-group denigration than Muslim children towards the children of the "other" religion. Another example may also be evocative. Based on data from 71 nations, Levav and Aisenberg (1989a, 1989b) found that the percentage of Muslims is negatively related to suicide, whereas Williams and Hunt (1997) found that Muslims (social minority) living in Scotland present a significantly higher risk of depressive symptoms. It is, of course, another issue that, within a specific community, higher religiosity (for instance, higher religiosity among Muslims in the USA) is related to fewer psychosomatic symptoms, more happiness in life, and greater job satisfaction (Jamal & Badawi, 1993).

Finally, social and cultural changes may be supposed to have an influence on cross-religious differences. For instance, one may suspect that secularization (we are aware of the limits of this construct; see e.g., Berger, 1999, but the construct is

still relevant) combined with the recently increasing interest in spirituality (a spirituality partially independent of traditional religions) in many societies, could level established or hypothetical cross-religious/cultural differences in psychological aspects of religion (the opposite hypothesis is not to be excluded either: new differences may emerge).

### *Trans-religious/denominational constants*

Beyond differences between religions/denominations in psychological aspects of religion, psychology of religion can also argue for the existence of many and important trans-religious/denominational constants. These constants include mainly personality, gender differences, values, social consequences, and mental health as related to religion.

From a theoretical perspective, if we focus on an (operational) definition of religion (allowing avoidance of the two extreme attitudes: restricting too much and thus neglecting religious facts, or broadening too much and thus accepting everything as religion), we may consider that such a definition may apply to religion almost universally, beyond variations specific to cultures and religions. This seems to be the case with the well-known Verbit (1970) model defining religion by the co-presence of the following dimensions: ritual, doctrine, emotion, knowledge, ethics, and community, dimensions that correspond very narrowly to Glock's (1962) dimensions: ritualistic, ideological, experiential, intellectual, and consequential. More recently, Hinde (1999) also defines religion as a set of rituals, beliefs, emotional aspects, moral codes, and community. Similarly, according to Hervieu-Léger (1999), religious identity is structured on the basis of four poles: community, emotion, ethics, and culture.

Of course, specific religious traditions and historical forms of religions may emphasize one or another aspect. Some religions seem more ritualistic; some periods of Christianity favored rational sophistication in theology, whereas other periods of Christianity put the emphasis on the emotional-experiential dimension; some individuals find in religion a structure of organized principles guiding moral decisions, whereas others are attracted by the social support provided by community. However, what is striking is that, at least until today, the above four or five components are co-present in every religion, and that the integration of all of them in a structured whole distinguishes religion from other similar social/ideological constructions (e.g., nation, political ideologies, existential philosophies).

The similarities between different religious traditions have been hypothesized as clearer when the focus is on mysticism. Interestingly, Hood et al. (2001) recently found that three factors are common in reported mystical experience among American (mostly Christian) and Iranian Muslim participants: introvert, extrovert, and interpretative dimensions of mysticism. In additions, in both samples, the Mysticism scale was similarly related to religious and health dimensions (introvert dimension predicted psychological dysfunction).

*Social consequences: authoritarianism, prejudice, and conservatism*

Several studies, all using Altemeyer's Right Wing Authoritarianism scale, found that religious fundamentalism (and religiosity per se: religious practice, intrinsic religion, orthodoxy) is positively related to *authoritarianism*. This is the case with Christian (mainly Catholic and Protestant), Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish participants from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ghana, Israel, Palestine, South Africa, and USA (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Danso et al., 1997; Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; Duckitt, 1993; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Heaven & Connors, 2001; Hunsberger, 1996; Hunsberger et al., 1994, 1996, 1999, 2001; Leak & Randall, 1995; Rubinstein, 1996; Wylie & Forest, 1992). Interestingly too, in the Russia of 1993 (following the collapse of communism), with adults from Moscow (Christian Orthodox environment), McFarland et al. (1996) found that whereas, at first view, religiosity in general was unrelated to authoritarianism, it was however linked to authoritarianism among those who clearly rejected communism.

The debate is still open on whether *prejudice* and discrimination as a function of religion is typical of only religious fundamentalism (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Fulton et al., 1999) or of the high authoritarianism of religious fundamentalists (Hunsberger, 1995; Laythe et al., 2001; Wylie & Forest, 1992), or of orthodoxy (e.g., Duriez & Hutsebaut, 2000; Eisinga et al., 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1993) or even of intrinsic religion per se (e.g., Batson et al., 1999). In addition, there is still discussion on whether the contribution of religion is limited to only non-proscribed prejudice (e.g., attitude towards homosexuals) and cannot be generalized to proscribed prejudice (e.g., racism) (Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Hunsberger et al., 1999; Laythe et al., 2001; see also Batson et al., 1993) or on whether the religion-prejudice relation problem should be understood in terms of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Burris & Jackson, 1999; Jackson & Esses, 1997; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). Beyond the complexity of the question across these studies, the general pattern of results is that at least some dimensions/components of religion are followed by prejudice towards (some) targets. On the basis of the above studies in the 1990s, it turns out that this pattern is true for Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus from the USA, Canada, Belgium, Ghana, and the Netherlands.

An impressive literature confirms that religion is followed by *conservative attitudes* and practices. This includes mainly conservative political preferences, as well as conservative attitudes and practices with regard to sexuality, family issues, and gender roles. This is the case in the USA (see reviews in Hood et al., 1996; Wulff, 1997), but also in all the European countries (see a large survey among young adults; Campiche, 1997; see in addition, Voyé & Dobbelaere, 2000).

Finally, as Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997) remind us, several studies have found that there is some difference in religiosity between scientists and non-scientists, with physical scientists being (relatively) more religious and social scientists less so. This finding, according the Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle, may be explained via the "scholarly distance" hypothesis (the greater the distance between religion

and the studied field is, e.g., sciences vs. social sciences, the more religious the scholars are), or in terms of unconventionality (people studying young, “unconventional” disciplines are more relativist and less conservative). The authors cite studies carried out not only in Christian environments (USA: Glenn & Weiner, 1969; Hoge, 1974; Jones, 1970; Lehman & Shriver, 1968), but also in Islamic environments (Iran and Egypt: Arjomand, 1986; the situation seems more complex in Israel: see Rubinstein, 1997).

*Aspects of mental health: optimism, attachment, and identity*

Although the relation between *optimism* and religion is not strong and sometimes even inexistent (e.g., Hunsberger et al., 2001, Maltby & Day, 2000), studies providing significant results confirm a model of positive association. In a study with religious participants in the USA characterized as fundamentalists (orthodox Jews, Muslims, Calvinists), moderates (Catholics, conservative Jews, Lutherans, Methodists), and liberals (reform Jews, Unitarians), Sethi and Seligman (1993, 1994) found that fundamentalists are more optimistic than those from moderate religions, who in turn are more optimistic than liberals. In addition, Schutte and Hosch (1996) found that religiosity is related to optimism (in zero-order correlations) in Anglo-American, Mexican-American, and Mexican national samples (but in multiple regressions, a model tested in which religiosity should predict optimism and both religiosity and optimism should predict low neuroticism, the religion-optimism relation was confirmed only in Mexican-Americans). Finally, aspects of Jewish identification are positively related to optimism in American Jews (Ressler, 1997).

Recent studies also investigated how child *attachment* history (secure or insecure attachment to parents) and/or adult romantic attachment (again, secure or insecure attachment, avoidance and/or anxiety in attachment) may predict attitudes and behaviors related to religion such as God representations, religiosity, conversion, religious changes in general, interest in reading spiritual books, interest in New Age, and types of prayer. Overall, through studies in Protestant, Catholic and secularized environments (USA, Sweden, Australia, Finland, Belgium) the attachment theory provided empirical findings that may be classified as either supporting a correspondence model – mainly as far as a religion based on the socialization to parents’ religion is concerned – or a compensation model, where an emotion-based religion seems to compensate for insecurity in attachment (see studies reviewed in Kirkpatrick, 1999; in addition, see Byrd & Boe, 2001; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999, 2000, 2001; Saroglou et al., 2001; Yli-Luoma, 1996).

Finally, a number of studies have investigated in recent years how religion, especially religion in adolescents, may have an impact on *identity* formation. These studies applied Marcia’s model of ego identity statuses. Overall, religiosity predicts high commitment (especially achievement) in identity and/or low religiosity predicts moratorium or diffusion identity statuses. This holds true for Chris-



tian (Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon) participants in the USA (Fulton, 1997; Markstrom-Adams et al., 1994; Markstrom & Smith, 1996; McKinney & McKinney, 1999) and Belgium (Hutsebaut, 1997; Verhoeven & Hutsebaut, 1995), as well as with Jewish participants in Canada (Markstrom & Smith, 1996) and Israel (Tzurial, 1984).

### *Personality, values, and gender differences*

Some *personality* dimensions seem also to be characteristic of religiosity across cultures and religious denominations. If we focus on studies that used Eysenck's taxonomy of three major dimensions of personality (psychoticism, neuroticism, extroversion), it appears that religiosity is constantly negatively associated with *psychoticism* in a variety of religious denominations (Protestants, Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Christians in general, Jews, and Muslims) and countries (Australia, Greece, Iran, Israel, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, USA) (see studies from 1992–1998 reviewed in Saroglou & Jaspard, 2000; in addition, see Bourke & Francis, 2000; Francis, 2000; Francis & Johnson, 1999; Francis et al., 1999; Ghorbani et al., 2000; Hills & Argyle, 1998; Maltby, 1999a, 1999b; Lewis, 1999, 2000; Robbins et al., 2001; Roman & Lester, 1999; Shuter-Dyson, 2000; Youtica et al., 1999). In addition, overall, no clear and systematic associations seem to be found between religion and the other two dimensions of personality, i.e., *neuroticism* and *extroversion* (Eysenck, 1998).

If we focus on studies that have examined religious personality from the Big Five perspective, it seems again that religion is positively associated with two factors, *Agreeableness* and *Conscientiousness* (factors that are considered as, together, reflecting Eysenck's psychoticism; e.g., Goldberg & Rosolack, 1992), constantly through different countries (Belgium, Canada, Poland, Taiwan, USA), although at the moment these results are limited to Protestants and Catholics (for a review, see Saroglou, 2002a; see also Kosek, 2000; Nielsen, 2000; Saroglou & Fiasse, in press). Religion seems also to predict low *openness to values* (a facet of the Big Five Openness to Experience factor) in the USA (Costa et al., 1986; Dollinger & Clancy, 1993) and Belgium (Saroglou & Fiasse, in press).

Moreover, it seems as if *extroversion* is, to some extent, typical of people who are interested in spirituality in Canada (MacDonald, 2000), USA (Nielsen, 2000; Piedmont, 1999), United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (Maltby & Day, 2001a, 2001b) (but not in Belgium; Saroglou, 2001; Saroglou & Fiasse, in press). Spirituality and faith maturity are followed by high *Openness to Experience* in Belgium, Canada, Taiwan, and USA (Saroglou, 2002a, for review; see also Saroglou & Fiasse, in press).

Schwartz's model of *values* has been used in many studies examining the importance religious people attribute to values. A strong cross-cultural/religious constant has emerged: religious people attribute high importance to "conservative" values (*Conformity* and *Tradition*) and to *Benevolence*, as well as low importance to "hedonistic" values (*Hedonism* and *Stimulation*) and to *Self-Direction*, and this is

true for 18 samples of people from 14 countries: Jews, Muslims, Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, and Christians in general, coming from Israel, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, Mexico, and the USA (see Saroglou Tuzkey, et al., 2002, for review). With regard to the remaining four values (*Achievement, Power, Universalism, and Security*), although significant results have not always been found across studies, the directions of the correlations are, in most cases, similar, allowing for a small but significant mean effect size (following a meta-analysis): religion predicts low importance of the three first values and high importance of the last one. In addition, social factors (secularization, church vs. state relations) seem to be more important than religious, denominational differences to understand differences on the magnitude of effects between samples.

An important literature also exists concerning *belief in a just-world* as a function of religiosity. Indeed, religiosity is constantly related to (some or all components of) just-world beliefs (BJW) in Germany (Dalbert et al., 2001), Hungary (Dalbert & Katona-Sallay, 1996), Poland (Szmajke, 1991), USA (Rubin & Peplau, 1973; but see Zweigenhaft et al., 1985), Great Britain (Crozier & Joseph, 1997; Furnham & Gunter, 1984, but some differences on BJW scores were observed across denominations; Furnham & Reilly, 1991), Canada (Sorrentino & Hardy, 1974), France (Bègue, 2002), Hong Kong (Catholic and Protestant schools vs. nonreligious schools; Hui et al., 1989), and Japan (Furnham & Reilly, 1991). In addition, Joseph and Stringer (1998) did not find differences in just-world beliefs between Protestant and Catholic students in Northern Ireland. However, the above studies are limited to Christian participants or environments.

*Gender differences* in personality have been hypothesized to explain gender differences in religion (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Francis, 1997, for reviews). Although today the magnitude of gender differences in religion may be decreasing (in secularized societies such as Belgium, the effect is smaller for emerging spirituality than for classic religion; Saroglou, 2002b), an impressive constant in psychology of religion is that women are more religious than men. As a review by Francis (1997) demonstrates, this is the case with a variety of measures: church attendance, involvement on religious activities, prayer, reported mystical-religious experiences, belief in God, closeness to God, and in general, positive attitudes to religion. Studies reviewed by Francis come from a variety of countries such as UK, USA, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Columbia, Ireland, and Canada. Although published studies on gender differences in other religions seem to be lacking, it seems that women are more religious in Islam and Judaism (Beit-Hallahmi, December, 3, 2001, personal communication; Wondimu et al., 2001). (These differences may be less clear if we focus on religious public practices rather than beliefs and attitudes in Islam and Judaism, where traditions may be different for men and women; see, e.g., Loewenthal et al., 2002).

Beyond gender differences, recent research has investigated whether religion is predicted by *sexual orientation* (femininity and masculinity dimensions) by using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. It turned out that *femininity* is positively associated with

religious variables in Christian males and females from the USA (mainly Catholics: Thompson, 1991; mainly Protestants: Mercer & Durham, 1999) and the UK (mainly Anglicans; Francis & Wilcox, 1996, 1998), as well as in Muslim girls (living in the USA; Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999). In addition, cross-sex typed Jewish women living in Israel tend to be secular (Rubinstein, 1995).

### *Conclusion*

Contrary to an excessively culturalistic approach that emphasizes the uniqueness of each religious phenomenon as depending on history, culture, specific religion, and context in general, it seems that beyond certain differences, important psychological constants exist between different religions, denominations, and cultures. These constants include cognitive and affective dimensions, identity, personality, values and beliefs, gender differences, social attitudes, and aspects of mental health. In fact, across a variety of religious denominations, religiousness reflects conservatism and conventionality, authoritarianism and low importance in autonomy, prejudice and discrimination, traditional-conservative values, anti-hedonism, femininity over masculinity, specific attachment histories, reported altruism and agreeableness, need for order and for reduction of uncertainty, conscientiousness, and engagement in identity.

This review has been limited to studies published in the last decade. There is no reason to suspect that the above psychological dimensions characterizing religiousness are much different today from previous decades (see, e.g., Batson et al., 1993). However, an important limitation of the studies reviewed here taken as a whole is that Christian denominations and societies marked by Christianity, but also more generally societies of great monotheistic traditions (Christian, Muslim, Jewish), are overrepresented. Little, if nothing, is known about psychological aspects of religion in Eastern societies, and some theoretical (see attitudes toward humor; Morreall, 1999) and empirical (see attitudes toward risk-taking; Miller, 2000) evidence suggests that at least some of the constants found in our study would probably be less strong, or even disappear, once the panorama of world religions and cultures is broadened to psychological research.

Nevertheless, the amplitude of the constants reviewed here is impressive. Of course, more systematic research design is needed in order to carry out cross-cultural/religious comparisons. Many variables may have a confounding, mediating, or moderating effect, such as socio-economic status, development of society, cultural, ecological and historical factors, education and, age. However, it can not be excluded that once we control for these intermediate variables, a common pattern of psychological characteristics may still be present across religions and cultures, explaining why, within specific societies, cultures, and religions, some people tend to be more religious than others, or tend to be religious in one rather than in another way. Putting it in other words, there is no need to change the label of our discipline from 'psychology of religion' to 'psychology of religions'.

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