

# 1 PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND CULTURE

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6 relations, morality, community, personality

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## 16 Summary

17 After a brief introduction to psychology of religion as a scientific discipline, this article reviews  
18 psychological theories that propose explanations of religion as an individual and social reality, and  
19 provides information from recent empirical literature that, at least partially, confirms these theories.  
20 The theoretical and empirical evidence presented here encompasses a variety of psychological fields  
21 examining cognitive, emotional, relational, social, clinical, developmental, and personality  
22 dimensions of religion. Religion is thus seen as a set of beliefs, emotions, rituals, moral rules, and  
23 communal aspects. The article emphasizes, but is not limited to, a functionalist approach to religion;  
24 both a “defensive” and a “prospective” creative conception of religion are examined. The main  
25 arguments are that religion 1) is a specific quest for meaning but is not defined by it; 2) contributes  
26 to the strengthening of self-control; 3) is animated by the aspiration for unity, integration, and  
27 harmony; 4) provides personal empowerment and social support as well as clues for construction of  
28 identity as a continuity of belonging; and 5) reinforces altruistic tendencies although it is not the  
29 source of morality. For every argument, positive (e.g. optimism, self-control, peace of mind, self-  
30 esteem, prosocial concerns) as well negative (e.g. fundamentalism, obsession, fixation on the  
31 maternal world, conservatism, out-group prejudice), consequences of religion for personal and  
32 social well-being are depicted. Special attention is paid to relations between religion and culture:  
33 consideration of religion as culture or sub-culture; regulation of the equilibrium between absorption  
34 by, and rejection of, culture; cultural-religious differences versus cross-cultural invariants in  
35 psychological aspects of religion. Finally, new challenges for the psychological understanding of  
36 religion (and modern spirituality), due to the combination of factors such as secularization,  
37 individualization, and globalization, are examined.

## 38 1. Introduction

39 Psychology of religion is the discipline that studies religion and religious phenomena using  
40 psychological theories, concepts, and methods. It is interested in how religion (of individuals and  
41 groups) interacts with personality, biology, and culture and with the multiple dimensions of human  
42 being and its development in society (i.e. cognitive, affective-emotional, relational, social, and

43 moral dimensions). This discipline considers religion as influenced by psychological realities and as  
44 having an impact on these realities.

45 Its history represents a century of theoretical and empirical work. Two major traditions have  
46 contributed to the development of psychology of religion as a psychological discipline distinct from  
47 philosophy of, anthropology of, sociology of, and comparative study of religion. The first tradition  
48 is psychoanalysis (**see *Psychoanalysis***), mainly the Freudian school but also the psychoanalysis and  
49 psychodynamic theories of Freud's successors. The interest of this tradition, as applied to religion  
50 and religious phenomena, has been to focus on 1) the relations between religion and a structural  
51 approach to the psychic world, seen as a continuum between normality and pathology; 2) the way  
52 religion interacts with psycho-sexual, affective, and relational development from childhood to  
53 adulthood; and 3) the links between religion, culture, and the progress of humans as cultural beings.

54 The second tradition comes from "mainstream" psychology and dates from the beginning of the  
55 twentieth century. Within this tradition, psychology of religion has applied theories and methods from  
56 empirical psychology (interviews, case studies, questionnaires, experimental studies, content analyses  
57 of documents) (**see *Methods in Psychological Research***) to religious realities (deconstructed as  
58 objects of psychological investigation such as behaviors, cognitions, emotions, motivations,  
59 attitudes, stereotypes). Consequently, psychology of religion interacts with questions emerging  
60 from many sub-fields of psychology: psychology of human development and education (**see**  
61 ***Developmental Psychology***), personality psychology (**see *Psychology of Individual Differences***  
62 ***With Particular Reference to Temperament***), social psychology (**see *Social Psychology: A Topical***  
63 ***Review***), clinical psychology and psychotherapy (**see *Clinical Psychology: A National Perspective***  
64 ***on Origins, Contemporary Practice, and Future Prospects***), and "even" neurosciences and  
65 cognitive psychology (**see *Cognitive Psychology***).

66 Many definitions of religion are possible and they may always be criticized as somehow influenced  
67 by philosophical, theological, and, in general, ideological conceptions of religion, as well as cultural  
68 and historical "incarnations" of religion. It may also happen that definitions of religion emphasize  
69 one or another psychological theory. For the purpose of the present article an operational definition  
70 of religion is maintained enjoying a certain consensus within psychology of religion: religion is a  
71 set of beliefs, ritual, community, moral codes, and emotional aspects.

72 It is impossible to summarize here the questions and achievements of psychology of religion in their  
73 entirety. Rather than offering an historical overview or an exhaustive survey of the many issues of  
74 this discipline, the present article attempts to present a comprehensive overview of theories and  
75 related empirical evidence that may be considered as answering the following question: Why, from  
76 a psychological perspective, are people (or why do they become or stay) religious (today)? The  
77 theoretical considerations presented here come from various psychological frameworks including  
78 psychoanalysis. Research evidence is provided, with an emphasis on recent studies and with  
79 particular attention paid, where possible, to studies in other than Christian environments.  
80 (Unfortunately, for historical reasons, most of the research in psychology of religion has been  
81 conducted in Christian environments.) Nevertheless, through the examination of this specific, but  
82 broad question (i.e. the psychological explanation of religion), several other subjects are treated  
83 here such as religion and mental health, religious personality, religious cognition, religion and  
84 culture, contemporary spirituality, ideal visions of human development, religion and society, and  
85 religion and values-morality.

86 For convenience of presentation, in this article the terms "religious people," "religiosity," and  
87 "religiousness" are used as equivalent, and refer to general, personal religiousness (traditionally also  
88 labeled as intrinsic religion). Of course, there are many classifications of different religious types  
89 and/or religious dimensions, but no broad consensus exists about them among psychologists of  
90 religion, and their introduction here would be confusing rather than helpful with regard to clarity. In  
91 addition, when scales measuring different religious dimensions are administered to samples  
92 representative of the general population (especially in secularized societies), they overlap because  
93 they all also tap into a common (more or less intrinsic) pro-religious attitude. Nevertheless, where it  
94 seems necessary, this article will present distinctions between closed-minded religion (such as

95 religious fundamentalism) and open religion (e.g. questing religiosity), and between (contemporary)  
96 spirituality and traditional religiosity.

## 97 **2. Religion as (Not Only) a Quest for Meaning**

### 98 **2.1. The Quest for Meaning and Religion: Positive and Negative Components**

99 A first, common, way to explain religion psychologically is to consider its relation with the quest  
100 for meaning. People try to understand events that “happen” to them in their internal and external  
101 worlds. A complex process is to be expected behind this attempt at understanding. On the one  
102 hand—on a first level— human beings give a label to events (physiological reactions, for example,  
103 need labeling in order to be perceived as specific emotions), attribute causal explanations to them,  
104 and consequently, establish links between otherwise seemingly disparate phenomena. On the other  
105 hand—on a second level—humans try to interpret these events by integrating them into broader sets  
106 of micro-theories that constitute a kind of “world view,” theories that offer meaning (especially  
107 order and finality) to human destiny and to the world, both seen as wholes.

108 Religious people, then, attribute religious meaning to events from the internal and the external  
109 worlds. They do so according to the context, the character (e.g. positive or negative, health  
110 problems or financial issues) and the importance (e.g. very or not important, important to me or to  
111 others) of the event. These attributions are often not spontaneous: they belong to and come from a  
112 cultural environment that precedes individuals and that offers already elaborated “solutions.”  
113 Religion then appears as a mechanism useful for meaning. As a cultural system, it proposes beliefs,  
114 an explanatory discourse on reality, theories on humankind and the world; reality then seems  
115 meaningful as inserted into a rationale, a logic of finality referring to an origin and an end. For  
116 example, an event that is at first view neutral, like the death of someone close, may be seen, in a  
117 magic rationality of causality, as a consequence of divine punishment or as an invitation of this  
118 person by God to his kingdom. This death may also be experienced as a “calling,” a vocation for the  
119 surviving person, and in any case it will be interpreted in a way that makes it meaningful within the  
120 life and history of the individual taken as a whole.

121 This process of construction-appropriation of meaning corresponds to two broad theoretical  
122 assumptions and related empirical evidence (not necessarily incompatible with each other). On the  
123 one hand, the quest for meaning within religion may reflect the desire of individuals for knowledge  
124 and may provoke a dynamic of creativity. History of art is an eloquent example of the impact of  
125 religious ideas and feelings on artistic creation: art and religion share not only the quest for the  
126 sublime, but also the will to look for an alternative meaning to the immediate perception of  
127 everyday reality. In addition, empirical research indicates that openness to, and interest in,  
128 spirituality as well as “mature” religiosity (but not intensity of religiosity per se) seem to be typical  
129 of people who are also open to experience, fantasy, imagination, and creativity (see the factor  
130 openness of the Five-Factor Model of personality). Finally, self psychology, humanistic personality  
131 theories, and contemporary “positive” psychology emphasize the idea that self-actualization,  
132 enhancement of one’s own capacities and widening of the self, as well as satisfaction of higher level  
133 needs (as distinguished from lower level needs such as survival, nutrition, and protection) are  
134 inherent dimensions of human beings and their development. Within this framework of thought,  
135 religion has its place as contributing to this positive, prospective dynamic.

136 On the other hand, the quest for meaning may be regarded as a defense against negative situations:  
137 the more uncertainty, ambiguity, and doubt are inherent in events and reality, the more humans need  
138 to cope with these situations by looking for meaning; religion may then be compensatory and, at  
139 least, functional. Empirical evidence is strong enough in this direction. Situational factors such as  
140 personal crises (death of a loved person, serious diseases, failures, suffering, and frustration) favor  
141 the intensification of the quest for meaning and lead (in relation to personality and educational  
142 factors) to concrete decisions on religious issues such as having recourse to prayer or entering into a

143 religious group. Religious representations about death and the afterlife may certainly be considered  
144 as coping mechanisms to face death anxiety, as confirmed by several studies. Finally, recent  
145 empirical literature indicates that not only children but also adults are prone to magical (and  
146 religious) thinking when they lack information, in conditions of uncertainty, and in the face of  
147 inexplicable phenomena.

## 148 **2.2. Specifics of the Religious Quest for Meaning**

149 Affirming that religion can be understood as an attempt to look for meaning in life cannot be taken  
150 as a psychological *definition* of religion. Not everything in religion can be explained as resulting  
151 from a motivational need for meaning; the following sections will try to demonstrate this. Neither is  
152 religion the only psychosocial system of meaning: philosophical systems, political ideologies, and  
153 popular wisdom assume similar functions.

154 However, what appears as challenging for psychology of religion is that the quest for meaning  
155 within religion presents a series of particular characteristics. First, it is typically within religion that  
156 the quest for meaning focuses on the question of the origin and the end of the person and the world.  
157 In addition, religion offers concrete discourses and narratives that pretend to “explain” these  
158 enigmas, or, in other words, that attempt to fill in what objectively speaking may only seem like an  
159 absence.

160 Second, contrary to scientific rationality and philosophical thought, the construction of religious  
161 meaning is realized within a specific tradition. Independently of its likelihood for transformation  
162 and adaptation to historical changes (for instance, modernization), religious meaning has to stay, at  
163 least to a minimum extent, in continuity with a tradition, in conformity with an authority that is  
164 based (partially) on the past (revelation, religious institutions), or at least in conformity with what is  
165 extricated as a consensus from a group (religious orthodoxy).

166 Third, the religious quest for meaning is of a particular kind: it refers to the need for an  
167 interpretative system that is also an integrative one, a system that introduces order and coherence, a  
168 system that tends to integrate in a whole and harmonious way beliefs, world views, moral precepts,  
169 habits, traditions, behaviors, and experiences-expressions of emotions. As recent studies have  
170 found, religion is associated to the (motivational) need for (cognitive) closure, and especially the  
171 need for order and predictability. These two characteristics of religious meaning—conformity with  
172 something that precedes and preference for order and integration—may explain why not only  
173 closed-minded religiosity (e.g. religious fundamentalism) but also intensity of religiosity per se are  
174 to a certain extent related to dogmatism, conservatism, and authoritarianism (whose main  
175 components are authoritarian submission and conventionalism).

176 Four, when questioned, via interviews and questionnaires, religious people seem to be highly and  
177 actively interested in the quest for meaning and they report having found a purpose to their lives;  
178 they also believe in the existence of a just world. These studies indicate something specific to  
179 religious meaning: the affirmation that the world is meaningful and that life has a meaning and is  
180 worthy of being lived; the possibility of meaninglessness in life is excluded. This tendency may  
181 explain another strong empirical finding that religion is associated with optimism as a personality  
182 trait.

183 Finally, from a human development and socio-historical evolutionary perspective, religion  
184 (including contemporary not strictly religious spirituality) intervenes progressively more on what  
185 was above called the “second level” of meaning (i.e. looking for the final cause, the ultimate reason  
186 of things, meaning as orientation in life), and less on the “first level” of meaning, that is, causal  
187 attributions of a first kind in order to understand concrete events in life. In a childhood-like  
188 dimension and in ancient world-like societies, typically (but not exclusively) religion shares with  
189 magical thinking the tendency to attribute intentions to (divine) entities that combine properties  
190 typical of everyday experience (these entities are then familiar to people) with counterintuitive  
191 characteristics (i.e. characteristics that violate intuitive expectations); these entities are then  
192 attractive.

### 193 **3. Religion as the Strengthening of Self-Control**

#### 194 **3.1. Religion as Satisfying the Need for Control**

195 Psychologically, religion may also be considered as a way to reinforce self-control. Individuals, in  
196 addition to the need for meaning, are characterized by the need for mastery of things and for self-  
197 control. Already, behind the need for meaning one can suspect a component that is related to the  
198 need for control of what in a given situation is a source of novelty, surprise, frustration, defeat, and,  
199 in general, a feeling of loss of control. Being informed of, understanding, and interpreting situations  
200 and events are mechanisms that contribute to the feeling of control. People desire to have things  
201 under control, to believe in their capacity to change a situation (primary control) as well as in their  
202 capacity to change themselves in order to change reality (secondary control).

203 It is as if religion both satisfies and animates this need. Faith, as an act of belief and confidence in  
204 things or beings that, among others, stand out because of their omnipotence and their providential  
205 care, implies the possibility and even the necessity of changing oneself and the world. Believing  
206 that “faith can move mountains” not only constitutes an attachment to a metaphor: the impact that  
207 faith and confidence in the capacity of changing oneself have on recovery from numerous physical  
208 and mental problems is an evocative illustration of this. Finally, every religious group and religious  
209 movement is concerned with this transformative dimension and can be classified according to its  
210 preferential tendencies: transforming the world versus first transforming oneself.

211 Of course, the type of religiosity and the type of relation with God (collaborative, self-directive, or  
212 deferring) may be a moderator of the relation between religion and the feeling of control  
213 (accentuating an internal or external locus of control). Nevertheless, in general, religion seems to  
214 satisfy the need for control. A first sign in this direction is that in adults, unlike in children, the link  
215 between conditions of uncertainty, absence of information, and the inexplicability of things, on the  
216 one hand, and recourse to magical thinking, on the other hand, is mediated by the feeling of lack of  
217 control. A second argument comes from a vast empirical literature providing evidence that  
218 religiosity is followed by many indicators of mental health, mainly highly subjective well-being and  
219 happiness, but also objective indicators of health such as absence of unhealthy-destructive  
220 behaviors (alcohol, drug, and tobacco use, suicide), and longevity. It seems as if the benefits of  
221 religion for mental health are, to some extent, a consequence of self-control (i.e. healthy behavior):  
222 in the USA, among church members, the strictest religious groups, which have strong demands on  
223 behavior (Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Orthodox Jews, and Amish), have the greatest  
224 longevity. The review of the literature on the religion-mental health relation sheds light on the fact  
225 that religion has positive consequences on self-control in individuals in which control is lacking  
226 (under-control). However, the price to be paid for this seems to be a certain risk of over-control:  
227 religion also predicts rigidity of thought, if one refers to constructs such as dogmatism,  
228 authoritarianism, and need for closure.

#### 229 **3.2. Religion as Demanding Self-Control**

230 Not only does religion seem to satisfy the need for control, but it is also as if it animates this need.  
231 An overview of the ideals that are dominant among many different religious traditions points out  
232 the importance of the ideal of self-control. In many traditions, religious persons are supposed to  
233 master not only their actions, but also their words and thoughts. The Christian spiritual ideal of self-  
234 mastery has been so extended that it has embraced even spontaneous, natural phenomena such as  
235 dreams and laughter. Both of the latter are seen with suspicion, certainly in medieval, but  
236 sometimes also in contemporary, Christianity, because they constitute phenomena that escape  
237 control: during the dream the “intellect” travels without the individual’s control (for example, John  
238 Climacus, seventh century) and excessive laughter is not indicative of a “well-regulated soul” and  
239 of self-mastery (for instance, Basil the Great). In fact, all the realities characterized by Christian

240 spirituality as vices may be understood as failures of self-control and the corresponding virtues can  
 241 thus be seen as the proof of establishment of self-mastery.  
 242 It is in the religious ritual that this tendency towards over-control may be observed in a clear way.  
 243 This was the subject of the first psychoanalytic description of religious phenomena by Freud.  
 244 According to Freud, religious ritual presents many similarities with the ceremonial character of the  
 245 obsessive individual: stereotypical repetition, meticulous character of the observance, unconscious  
 246 motives, defense against guilty feelings, repression of sexual drives, return of what is repressed.  
 247 Freud concludes that religion in general should be considered as a universal obsessional neurosis  
 248 (just as neurosis may be seen as an individualized “religion”).  
 249 It is necessary, of course, to place these conceptions into their historical context, that of a religion  
 250 with a strong emphasis on the repression of sexuality, on feelings of guilt, and on divine punishment  
 251 from a God represented as a severe judge. Contemporary research indicates that such a  
 252 representation of God has heavily declined. Moreover, although Freud’s description of religious  
 253 ritual can be applied to a very specific type of religiousness (i.e. an obsessive neurosis of religious  
 254 culpability), a simple extension of his approach to religion in general is problematic. In a recent  
 255 review of empirical literature, it was found that religiosity does not express obsessive *symptoms* (in  
 256 terms of psychopathology). However, and this makes Freud’s considerations original and still  
 257 interesting, the studies reviewed indicate clearly that religious people present obsessive personality  
 258 *traits*: a general spirit of orderliness.  
 259 Indeed, various studies using other theoretical frameworks converge on the conclusion that self-  
 260 control is important in the religious personality (without leading necessarily to psychopathology).  
 261 Religious individuals tend to be high in conscientiousness (a broad factor in the Five Factor Model  
 262 of personality) and low in impulsiveness. The dominant place of the need for control in the religious  
 263 life can also be approached, at least partially, through another reality constant in various religions:  
 264 the embarrassing status of sexuality, a dimension of life where enjoyment necessarily implies loss  
 265 of control. Despite the sexual liberation of the 1960s, and regardless of the contemporary discourse  
 266 giving value to sexuality and body in many religions, empirical research constantly, even in the  
 267 1990s and among young people, confirms that religiosity is followed by conservative practices in  
 268 sexuality, discomfort with nudity, and, in general, low importance attributed to hedonistic values  
 269 (for instance, hedonism and stimulation in studies using Schwartz’ values model).

#### 270 **4. Religion as Nostalgia for Unity and for Return to the “Maternal Breast”**

271 Although Freud has neglected the maternal dimension in religion and religious experience, he has  
 272 not excluded the possibility that this dimension may explain, to some extent, the religious quest (see  
 273 Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*). Since then, many psychoanalytic theories have examined  
 274 this possibility. Religious experience may be understood as animated by the nostalgia for the  
 275 “maternal breast” or, in other words, by the nostalgia for the “oceanic feeling” (i.e. the aspiration  
 276 for a homeostatic, unitary, undifferentiated world, a world of complete satisfaction of needs such as  
 277 the maternal world). The religious quest and experience express this feeling of an indissoluble bond,  
 278 of a belonging to the world as a whole, like the infant that constitutes a unity with its mother, a  
 279 unity that represents for the child the world in its entirety. Another experience seems to be similar to  
 280 the religious experience on this level: the state of being in love is a state where frontiers between the  
 281 self and the other are abolished, where two persons make up a whole.  
 282 Many theoretical and empirical works on religious experience support these considerations. First,  
 283 religious discourses abound in themes and elements symbolizing the maternal world. This is the  
 284 case, for example, in Christianity if one considers the representation of “Church-Mother,” the  
 285 conception of the community as Church and mother, the immersion into the undifferentiated and  
 286 unifying world of the baptismal waters, the nostalgia for a lost paradise, and the important thematic  
 287 of universalism and equality between brothers and sisters, children of the same God. Moreover,  
 288 studies using a psychoanalytic paradigm indicate an intense “hanging on to the mother” (to  
 289 psychological traits of the maternal world) in people with an intense religiousness, especially people

290 just beginning in their religious life. In addition, narratives and autobiographies of great mystic  
 291 figures are filled with discourses presenting the mystic relation with God as a close love  
 292 relationship; religious conversion and religious vocation are experiences that, phenomenologically,  
 293 are similar to the experience of falling in love. More generally, a constant of religious, especially  
 294 mystic, experience across different religious traditions is the experience of unification with an  
 295 encompassing reality, of the eclipse of the self, time, and space, of unity with the whole. It then  
 296 becomes clear why aesthetic experiences, such as musical experiences, may be so similar to  
 297 religious experiences.

298 Finally, an indirect confirmation of the “homeostatic” character of religious experience (avoidance  
 299 of serious variations caused by excitations and conflicts) may be the fact that religion seems to  
 300 satisfy a need for unity between, and integration of, the multiple dimensions of individual,  
 301 relational, and social life. At least historically, but to some extent also today, religion, through its  
 302 rituals, beliefs, narratives, moral codes, symbols, and emotional aspects, has been the psychosocial  
 303 mechanism that satisfies this need in a way that encompasses a maximum number of internal and  
 304 external divisions inherent in humans: gender differences, generational differences, ruptures  
 305 between present, past, and future, dichotomy between “soul” and “body,” discrepancy between the  
 306 cognitive-rational and the emotional-affective dimensions of human existence, discordance between  
 307 beliefs and moral actions, separation between self and others, nature and culture, private and public  
 308 spheres of life, humanity and the universe. This specific trait of religion can be put in relation to  
 309 what Hinde calls “peace of mind,” in the sense that within religion there is a compatibility and even  
 310 mutual support between the different aspects of the self-system: attributions, attitudes, relationships,  
 311 behaviors, and this in the many life-situations that one encounters. This peace of mind as provided  
 312 by religion may be less obvious in societies characterized by complexity, plurality, discordance, and  
 313 sometimes incompatibility between different subsystems and between different points of view.

314 Understanding religion as offering answers to the need for unity (in its largest, most encompassing  
 315 sense) may be useful in order to consider the quest for spirituality (in the modern sense of a  
 316 spirituality independent from traditional religions) as a new form of religious quest. Although this  
 317 spirituality does not seem to have any ritual structure (especially ritual in a community), nor faith in  
 318 beliefs established by an authority, nor suspicion towards hedonistic values, it still shares with  
 319 “classic” religion the same “thirst” for a broad unity between the individual, humanity as a whole,  
 320 and the universe. Several recent studies on the personalities of people seeking spirituality converge  
 321 on the point that spirituality emphasizes a desire for connectedness-relationality-universalism  
 322 (between humans, between living beings, between beings, in the universe) as well as the affirmation  
 323 of a transcendental reality that both exceeds the person and serves as a principle unifying the world  
 324 as a whole. Consequently, this spirituality shares another element with classic religion: the belief  
 325 that the world is meaningful and that there is a purpose to the life of individuals.

## 326 **5. Religion as Paternal Protection and as a Working out of Parental Relationships**

### 327 **5.1. God as Protective Father**

328 According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the basic explanation of religion is to be found in the  
 329 relation between the child and its father: both in individual life and in collective history, God is  
 330 considered as a projection of the real (and imaginary) father. The neurotic feelings of guilt (related  
 331 to the sexual and destructive impulses) and the ambivalence typical of the Oedipal complex are  
 332 projected onto the divine figure. This is the thought dominant in *Totem and Taboo*. In the other  
 333 classic Freudian work on religion, *The Future of an Illusion*, the emphasis is given to this dimension  
 334 of God-father as an omnipotent father who offers protection to human beings that, faced with the  
 335 cruelty of nature, turn to God and religion for assistance and protection, exactly as a child does with  
 336 regard to the father. Consequently, according to Freud, religion is an illusion, not necessarily in  
 337 terms of an error (most religious assertions are unverifiable) but rather as the improbable

338 accomplishment of strong desires having their origin in childhood and reflecting the human  
339 dependence on nature.

340 As far as neurotic feelings of guilt within religion are concerned, contemporary research has offered  
341 several clarifications. As presented above, religion is associated with obsessional traits, with a spirit  
342 of orderliness, and with conscientiousness as personality dimensions, but not with obsessional  
343 symptoms as a clinical problem. In addition, studies on God representations indicate clearly that the  
344 old figure of God as judge administering punishment or reward is importantly diminishing in favor  
345 of the figure of God as loving caretaker, partner, or friend. As far as the Freudian theory of God as  
346 projection of father is concerned, contemporary research offers some evidence, at least under  
347 certain conditions.

348 It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to test the hypothesis that the genesis of religion, on the  
349 individual and the collective-historical level, is due to the projection of the paternal figure: religious  
350 signifiers are already provided by culture and precede individuals. However, the impact of paternal  
351 (parental) relations on religiosity and God representations as well as the protective and supportive  
352 character of divine figures, as hypothesized by Freud, have received, to some extent, confirming  
353 evidence. First, religion seems to accomplish this protective-supportive function: people tend to  
354 have recourse to religion especially during situations of personal crisis and distress. Second, many  
355 studies have demonstrated that God representation in children and adults includes traits typical of  
356 the father (e.g. authority, order, law, structure), although this representation is more complex than  
357 Freud had hypothesized: it also includes components typical of the mother (availability, caring,  
358 love) and in some cases, especially among believers, maternal traits are dominant in the God figure,  
359 while in other cases, especially among non-believers, paternal traits are dominant in God  
360 representation. Other studies indicate that God representation corresponds to the parent of the same  
361 sex, or to the parent for whom the child has a preference, or even the ideal parents rather than the  
362 real ones. Third, the quality and type of parental relations (e.g. loving and non-directive versus  
363 authoritarian and punitive parents) seem to predict corresponding God images (e.g. loving God  
364 versus God as a judge).

## 365 **5.2. Religion as a Working Out of Parental Relationships and of the Filial Line**

366 More recently, some additional insight into people's religiosity has been provided through the  
367 application of attachment theory to the psychology of religion. Attachment theory is interested in  
368 the importance for the child (and later, for the adult) of establishing a privileged relation of  
369 proximity with a person in its close environment (e.g. the mother, the close partner) that constitutes  
370 an attachment "object," a trust and security basis. Applied to religion, this theory allows for a  
371 perception of God as an attachment figure, as an object of proximity and trust providing a loving  
372 relation and security. Many studies in the 1990s established two patterns of results with regard to  
373 these issues. On the one hand, subjects with a secure adult attachment (to their partner) are more  
374 likely to be religious and to possess a loving God representation than adults with an insecure  
375 attachment (correspondence model); this holds particularly true for religiosity through socialization  
376 (i.e. continuity with parental religiosity). On the other hand, among individuals who have  
377 experienced an insecure attachment in their childhood, some of them may later find in religion a  
378 substitute secure attachment figure (e.g. God) and be attracted by religious experiences (e.g.  
379 conversion, glossolalic groups) that provide emotional regulation (compensation model).

380 More generally, parental religiosity and the quality of parental relations seem to have a broader  
381 impact on people's religiosity than simply on their kind of God representation. The life-span  
382 development of an individual with regard to religious issues may be theorized as a function of  
383 parental relations. Religious (mainly familial) education and positive parental relationships are the  
384 best predictors of future religiosity, less doubt, and less frequent reject of religion in the next  
385 generation. Even in the presence of doubts and apostasy (e.g. in adolescence), previous religious  
386 education increases the likelihood of a possible return to religion, especially during the period when  
387 the subject as an adult may assume the responsibility of educating children. It is as if religion takes



388 part in, satisfies, and even contributes to this need for continuity with what precedes, this need of  
389 belonging to, and not breaking off, the filial line. Indeed, religion intervenes not only in the  
390 education of the following generation, but also in the choice of the marriage partner: in multi-  
391 religious societies, people may choose a partner who is similar or different in personality  
392 dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness, but they tend  
393 to get married to a partner who shares the same religious beliefs and the same openness (to  
394 experience, to values). Finally, one cannot help but conclude that the way of placing oneself in  
395 relation to parental religion seems to be more important for understanding adult attitudes to religion  
396 than the individual, “autonomous” religious quest: conversions or renunciations of religion are  
397 relatively rare in comparison to fidelity to familial non-religiosity or to familial religiosity.  
398 Many scholars in studies of religion put an emphasis on this aspect of religion as an insertion into a  
399 filial line: the religious group (and also the religious individual) constitutes itself as far as it lies  
400 within a religious lineage. It may happen, especially in the case of modern, new religious  
401 movements, that the lineage is imaginary. In line with this perspective, religion can be seen as a  
402 particular type of answer to the need for belonging—an otherwise universal need: it reflects the  
403 need for belonging to something that comes from the past and is dependent on the positive elements  
404 of the familial atmosphere. The power of this need becomes manifest when one considers  
405 contemporary religiosity in many European countries. Many sociologists of religion agree on the  
406 existence of two distinct dimensions, not necessarily connected: a religion of believing and a  
407 religion of belonging. Believing without belonging may be common (for instance, contemporary  
408 spirituality); belonging without believing is also possible.  
409 With regard to the links between religion and mental health, two implications can be drawn on the  
410 basis of the above considerations. First, the insertion into a religious group and the intense and close  
411 relations between members may provide important social support. Many studies indicate that if  
412 religiosity is associated with happiness and subjective well-being this may—partially—be explained  
413 by the impact of the social support offered by the religious group. For instance, religion is negatively  
414 related to loneliness. In this perspective, it may also be understandable why in conversions and  
415 decisions to enter into a religious group (especially groups of small size) the intermediate contact  
416 person seems to be more attractive than the set of religious ideas per se that the group professes.  
417 Second, the links between religion and mental health may also be explained by another reality, that  
418 is, the positive consequences of the relation that the religious person entertains with a  
419 transcendental being perceived as full of love and goodness, as absolutely available, and as valuing  
420 the partner of the relation as somebody who is worthy of being loved and trusted; religiosity, for  
421 instance, seems to favor enhancement of self-esteem, an important aspect of mental health.  
422 Finally, the fidelity to, and continuity of, the parental religion and the reality of belonging to a  
423 religious group do not only have positive consequences for the individual. As now established in a  
424 variety of countries and religious traditions, religious people tend to grant high importance to the  
425 values of tradition and conformity, and tend to be conservative on many issues (for instance, in  
426 sexuality, but also in political opinions and choices); they also tend to be high in authoritarianism (a  
427 construct including authoritarian submission).  
428 This points again to the impact of parental authority on religious transmission in early childhood.  
429 Scholars who find it hard to conceive that religion and religious beliefs (such as the belief in entities  
430 with counter-indicative properties) persist today, emphasize the possible impact of parental  
431 attitudes: it is not to be excluded that magical and religious thinking are not an inherent way of  
432 thinking in childhood. It may be that such beliefs (for instance, the belief in Father Christmas) are  
433 encouraged by parents as realities that can happen or that really happen. In both secular and  
434 religious spheres, people (children and adult) entertain magical worlds. But under the influence of  
435 an authoritative parental figure, in children, magical and real worlds may come together and be seen  
436 as one.

437 **6. Religion as an Extension of the Altruistic Imperative**438 **6.1. Religion and Altruism**

439 Recent developments in sociobiology have also allowed for alternative considerations of cultural  
 440 phenomena including religion. According to early sociobiologists, our biological heritage  
 441 predisposes us to selfishness, and socializing forces such as religion are necessary to counteract this  
 442 innate selfishness and to encourage prosocial behavior. Taking into account even more recent  
 443 sociobiological approaches favoring also a natural kin-specific altruism, Batson proposes an  
 444 alternative view. Both selfishness and altruism being natural (animal and human) tendencies, the  
 445 specificity of religion is to extend the range of this limited, kin-specific altruism through the use of  
 446 kinship language and imagery. Indeed, religious ideas, such as “brotherly love” and that “we are all  
 447 children of God” (often including non-religious people), seem to have as function the extension of  
 448 the range of application of natural (close) kin-specific altruism. Others, such as Hinde, observed  
 449 that although the religious altruistic ideal includes reciprocity and is not necessarily sacrificial, the  
 450 particularity of religion is that it favors the *initiation* of reciprocity (“It is more blessed to give than  
 451 to receive”; Acts 20, 35). Also, under some conditions, religion seems to promote the ideal of self-  
 452 sacrifice.

453 Religious people seem to be inspired by these ideals, at least in the way they perceive themselves  
 454 and desire to be. Invariably across cultures and religious contexts, religiosity is associated with the  
 455 tendency to be agreeable, generous, warm (see the agreeableness factor of the Five Factor Model),  
 456 to be friendly and not distant (low psychoticism in the Eysenck’s model of personality), to be ready  
 457 to undertake altruistic actions if necessary (Batson) and to forgive (Enright, McCullough), and to  
 458 grant high importance to the value of benevolence (Schwartz).

459 This strong and almost universal effect observed on the basis of questionnaires is less confirmed in  
 460 studies investigating real behavior. Certainly, it seems that religion predicts volunteering.  
 461 Moreover, intrinsic religiosity predisposes people to undertake prosocial actions (although there is  
 462 doubt about the “purity” of this altruism). In addition, people high in quest religiosity (i.e. religious  
 463 people valuing doubts and open to change) tend to act prosocially, particularly in a way that  
 464 respects the needs expressed by those in distress and that makes a distinction between those needing  
 465 help and their stereotypical category of belonging. Finally, people high in quest religiosity and  
 466 people with a religiosity characterized by relativism and symbolic, non-literal, thinking tend to be  
 467 neither racist nor prone to prejudice. However, overall, the effect of religion on real altruistic  
 468 behavior is slight in comparison to theoretical expectations. Several hypotheses are advanced to  
 469 explain this paradox. First, the discrepancy between self-reported altruism as function of religiosity  
 470 and real behavior could be an effect of moral hypocrisy. A second, more optimistic, interpretation  
 471 may be that religious people have good intentions (“the spirit is willing”), but “the flesh is weak.” A  
 472 third hypothesis for exploration is that religion may have non-aggression, non-violence, and non-  
 473 conflict as a positive effect rather than prosocial, helping, altruistic behavior: for instance, in many  
 474 religions the prohibition of killing is not applied only to the act of murder, but is extended to the  
 475 prohibition of killing the other through slanderous words and through slanderous thoughts. A final  
 476 possibility could be that the impact of religion is clearer in the context of concrete interpersonal  
 477 relationships marked by a certain commitment than in the context of impersonal contacts asking for  
 478 “good deed” type reactions.

479 An additional parameter that complicates the question of altruism within religion needs to be taken  
 480 into consideration: this is the in- versus out-group distinction. Several recent studies suggest that  
 481 religious people (especially religious fundamentalists), through their self-identification as a member  
 482 of a religious group or in situations threatening values of the group, tend to display prejudice and  
 483 lack of helpfulness towards out-groups. More generally, it is assumed that religion emphasizes the  
 484 distinctiveness of the group. These considerations are not necessarily in conflict with Batson’s ideas  
 485 cited above: religion may promote an altruism that considerably extends the range of natural kinship

486 (and the effects of this altruism can be seen more clearly within extended kinship), but this  
487 extension has its limits and does not reach universalism. Even more, out-group prejudice may be the  
488 consequence of (extended) in-group favoritism.

## 489 **6.2. Religion and Morality**

490 It is certainly not the case that religion alone promotes “cultural” altruism. More importantly, it  
491 cannot be claimed that religion is a (the) *source* of morality. Indeed, the two domains, religion and  
492 morality, are *a priori* distinct. Recent studies by Turiel demonstrate that the distinctiveness between  
493 the two domains is perceived very early in childhood. There are limits to religious authority in  
494 moral judgments. People use moral reasoning to reflect critically on religious and cultural  
495 traditions. Moreover, differences in people’s informational assumptions (implied by different  
496 religious and cultural traditions, such as different conceptions of when exactly human life begins)  
497 do not account for all differences in moral decisions (see, for example, the universality of the value  
498 of human beings and life).

499 However, the fact that religion is not the origin of morality and that morality and religion are  
500 distinct domains does not imply that they are independent from each other. They are connected in a  
501 specific way, and religion has a specific role in morality. First, religious ideals such as altruism are  
502 parallel to a core characteristic of moral rules: to guarantee and maintain social coherence beyond  
503 egoistic impulses (see also the Freudian analysis of religion and culture, where both contribute to  
504 morality on the level of egoistic natural tendencies). Second, religion seems to reinforce natural  
505 moral tendencies (e.g. altruism), to motivate people to follow them, and to lead to a higher standard  
506 of moral behavior. In other words, religion very often legitimates and stabilizes moral codes. This is  
507 possible, for instance, through the association of moral codes with divine prescriptions, through the  
508 accentuation of afterlife rewards or punishments, and through the impact of exemplary religious  
509 figures as models. In fact, it may be considered that, at least in the past, religion has been the most  
510 effective ideological basis for moral precepts. Of course, the question arises whether and how this  
511 may still be possible in a secularized society, especially a society with multiple and divergent  
512 ideological frameworks of reference.

## 513 **7. Religion and Culture**

### 514 **7.1 Religion as Culture**

515 Following what has been presented above, it becomes clear that religion, through its beliefs, rituals,  
516 moral codes, and emotional and communal aspects, is intrinsically related to culture. Very often,  
517 especially in traditional societies, religion identifies itself, at least partially, with culture.  
518 Alternatively, especially in modern multicultural societies, religion constitutes a specific sub-culture  
519 that interacts with other sub-cultures within the same society.

520 Freud perceived with subtlety the similarities between religion and culture. Both are human  
521 creations that help us to face the cruelty of nature. Both possess mechanisms that help regulate the  
522 negative impact that egoistic and sexual impulses have on social well-being (see also the risk  
523 evoked by Freud that humans may kill each other when egoistic impulses apply to the same sexual  
524 objects). Consequently, in removing people from total dependence on the elements of nature, both  
525 are factors of human progress. Religion shares with other cultural dimensions, such as art and  
526 philosophy, the same will to step back from the immediate perception-experience of everyday  
527 reality and to think about the meaning of human existence and the purpose of life.

528 Specific differences between cultures seem to correspond to differences between religions related to  
529 these cultures. For example, authoritarian and punitive versus democratic and supportive  
530 educational parental style corresponds to deities that are malevolent versus benevolent, respectively.  
531 The work ethic, if we follow Weber’s classic theory, seems to be different in Protestant and

532 Catholic countries: Protestantism emphasizes work and achievement, mainly as a means of  
533 salvation. Female stereotypes tend to be more favorable in Catholic than in Protestant countries, a  
534 fact that has been interpreted as resulting from the strong presence of the Virgin Mary and of female  
535 saints in Catholic Christianity. (The same seems to be the case in India, in comparison to Pakistan,  
536 because the Hindu pantheon includes goddesses.) It emerges that religion often parallels culture,  
537 although causal (probably bi-directional) connections between the two domains are likely to be  
538 complex and difficult to substantiate.

539 Sometimes religion and culture may be in conflict. Religious prescriptions may resist cultural  
540 prescriptions, especially in moral domains. It may also happen that under certain conditions religion  
541 finds itself at odds with a materialistic, hedonistic, individualistic, or even humorous society.  
542 Another cause of discrepancy may be the fact that culture, following historical evolution, is  
543 constantly changing. Religion, of course, also changes, but because of its task of remaining in  
544 conformity with its origins (e.g. revelation, sacred texts) and of thus preserving its authenticity, it  
545 seems to change less rapidly than culture.

546 However, an important task for all religions is to adapt, to some extent, to modernity in order to  
547 maintain their vivacity and to avoid marginalization. Of course, as far as a specific religion or a  
548 specific religious group aspires to be perceived as offering an alternative view of things, religion  
549 has to keep a certain distance from society: its prophetic dimension pushes religion constantly to  
550 question the world. Nevertheless, if this distance becomes too great, religion risks becoming  
551 sectarian. It may therefore be assumed that the great traditional religions have historically proven  
552 themselves capable of accommodating cultural and historical evolution to a certain extent.

## 553 **7.2. Cultural Variations in Religion**

554 Cultural and religious-denominational differences also exist and may be reflected in differences in  
555 the psychological parameters of religion. Some of these differences have already been presented  
556 above: work ethic, value of femininity, God representation. Additional differences will be presented  
557 in this section: some seem obvious, others less so.

558 Some religions emphasize the importance of beliefs in religious life and put moral codes in second  
559 place; others take the opposite stance. For some it is the philosophy of life that constitutes the  
560 central element, while for others the observance of ritual is of capital importance. A series of  
561 denominational differences between Protestants and Catholics has been observed in empirical  
562 studies. In general, feelings of guilt are more prominent in the Protestant world. Also, in Protestants  
563 the percentage of men that are religious (in their beliefs or behavior) is considerably lower than in  
564 Catholics. This difference might be explained by the presence of sacred feminine figures in  
565 Catholicism (the Virgin Mary and women saints), a fact that, according to a psychoanalytic  
566 rationale, should make it easier for Catholic boys and men (than for Protestants) to have a relational  
567 proximity with the divinity (girls and women being supposed to have the “advantage” of a possible  
568 “heterosexual” link with a masculine God). Moreover, the effectiveness of religious socialization  
569 varies as a function of denomination: agreement with parents’ religiosity seems to be higher in  
570 Catholic families (emphasizing the community and filiation aspects of religion) than in liberal  
571 Protestant ones. For similar reasons (impact of community on social support), the percentage of  
572 suicides has been hypothesized (Durkheim) to be higher in Protestants than in Catholics and some  
573 studies tend to confirm this hypothesis, at least for the first decades of the twentieth century.  
574 Finally, in multicultural, multi-religious cultures such as the USA it seems that, to some extent,  
575 the degree of strictness in rules of life as function of specific religious groups predicts greater longevity  
576 as well as higher average number of children.

577 However, three reservations about religious and denominational differences as translated into  
578 differences in psychological realities should be mentioned. First, these differences, as will be  
579 suggested in the next section, are less important than would be expected. Second, much caution is  
580 required with regard to causal explanations. It is possible that such differences are partially or  
581 completely explained by differences related to social and economic factors, history, people’s

582 mentality, and collective personality variations related to ecological factors (e.g. climate,  
583 geography). Much research is needed in the future in order to establish clear causalities explaining  
584 psychological differences between religions/denominations. Finally, for historical reasons, most  
585 research in psychology of religion has unfortunately been conducted in Christian, mainly Protestant,  
586 contexts.

### 587 **7.3. Constants Beyond Cultural Differences**

588 Beyond cultural and denominational differences in religion, a series of constants also exist.  
589 Contrary to what could be expected on the basis of an excessively culturalistic approach (see **Cross-**  
590 **Cultural Psychology**), many similarities exist across religions, denominations, and cultures  
591 regarding the ways religiosity is linked to human development, personality, mental health, and  
592 social behavior. Some examples will be presented here in favor of this perspective.

593 Individual variations on personality as function of religiosity seem to be similar, if not identical,  
594 regardless of the specific religious tradition. Reviews of studies using the Five Factor Model of  
595 personality or the three-dimensional model of Eysenck reveal a personality profile of religious  
596 individuals that remains cross-culturally and cross-religiously stable. Religiosity is mainly  
597 associated to high agreeableness and conscientiousness (and, similarly, to low psychoticism) and is  
598 unrelated to openness (openness to experience and open-mindedness) (see **Psychology of**  
599 **Individual Differences with Particular Reference to Temperament**). Another transcultural constant  
600 is that, on average, women tend to be more religious, more interested and engaged in religion than  
601 men. Moreover, sociological explanations of this reality (based on social roles, work division,  
602 secularization) do not seem to be sufficient: evidence also exists that gender differences in  
603 religiosity reflect transcultural gender differences in personality.

604 Another constant of religion is the importance attributed to some values. Several studies using the  
605 Schwartz model of ten values were conducted in the late 1990s among populations of the same age  
606 (young people) in a variety of countries (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Israel, Spain, the Netherlands,  
607 and the USA) and religions-denominations (Catholics, Jews, Orthodox, Protestants, other  
608 Christians). In all the studies, religiosity is characterized by high importance attributed to the values  
609 of tradition, conformity, and benevolence, as well as by low importance granted to the values of  
610 hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. Important similarities between samples were also  
611 observed regarding relations between religiosity and other values (power, achievement,  
612 universalism, and security); and minor differences regarding these latter values did not seem to be a  
613 function of denominational differences.

614 Similarly, psychological characteristics implying specific behaviors and social attitudes seem to  
615 accompany religiosity in a variety of contexts. In the USA, as well as in Europe and in Muslim  
616 countries, religiosity is associated with conservatism, both in issues of sexuality and in social-  
617 political issues. Also of interest is that the association between religion (especially religious  
618 fundamentalism) and authoritarianism is now established in different cultures (Canada, Ghana,  
619 Israel, and the USA) and religious traditions (Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Muslims). Finally, it  
620 has often been found that scientists are more religious than their colleagues in the social sciences  
621 and humanities (possibly because the former tend to be more conservative and can more easily  
622 compartmentalize their work, away from ideologies about human existence, society, and the  
623 meaning of life): this gap between scholars has been observed in both Western and Islamic  
624 countries.

## 625 **8. Perspectives**

626 The psychological theories of religion presented in this article are not necessarily antagonistic; they  
627 may rather be considered complementary. For instance, from the perspective of religion as a  
628 mechanism for self-control, it is to be expected that the quest for meaning also constitutes a  
629 mechanism that helps the strengthening of cognitive control over events and situations; that desire

630 for unity, insertion into a filial line, and membership in a religious group also contribute to self-  
631 control by reinforcing emotional stability; and that religious and moral imperatives of altruism are  
632 important in controlling personal impulses and drives, especially the egoistic ones. Indeed, the  
633 several components of a religious system (beliefs, rituals, emotional aspects, moral codes,  
634 community) do not merely influence each other, they are mutually supportive, and the integration of  
635 religious systems may be seen as a consequence of people's need for congruence between the  
636 various facets of their lives.

637 However, it is useful to observe here that, historically, religion as a system (of the individual and  
638 the group) has easily been functional in societies that were not as pluralistic as contemporary  
639 societies. The plurality of the latter, their pluri-perspectivism because of the different coexisting  
640 points of view (sometimes even incompatible with each other), as well as the proximity between  
641 cultures because of globalization, constitute new challenges for religion (at least traditional religion  
642 as integrated and integrative system). Psychologists of religion might then find it interesting to  
643 study, for example, whether some components of a particular religion can survive without the  
644 others: how can a particular moral code continue to be effective if the beliefs central to the religious  
645 system are not still acceptable? The inverse process is also possible and interesting to study, that is,  
646 the consequences of moral-cultural changes on religious beliefs. One cannot avoid noticing, for  
647 instance, that while humor and laughter were considered with suspicion in medieval Christianity  
648 (see, for example, the religious belief that Jesus never laughed), today in societies where humor is  
649 highly valued religious scholars and authors discover humor in biblical texts and try to insert humor  
650 as a value within spirituality. Another implication of pluralism and globalization in modern  
651 societies is the fact that, as depicted by sociologists of religion, people tend to "build" their religion  
652 in an autonomous way, by creating free compositions on the basis of various preexisting religious  
653 traditions and discourses, and by selecting elements at their convenience. An interesting research  
654 agenda might be to look for the principles that govern this process: these "compositions" are not  
655 necessarily as free as they look.

656 A second major issue for the psychological understanding of contemporary religion in a changing  
657 world is the fact that, despite a certain secularization, people are still religious, and some people  
658 even become religious although they have not received a religious education-socialization.  
659 Certainly, the impact of religious socialization is traditionally important for the continuity of  
660 religion in the next generation (this factor explaining  $\pm 50\%$  of the variance of religiosity). However,  
661 as the absence of familial religious education is increasing in modern Western secularized societies,  
662 the challenge for psychologists of religion may be that some theoretical explanations (and  
663 functions) of religion could become insufficient or problematic. Theories where religion and  
664 changes in an individual's religion originate in or are influenced by parental relationships, need for  
665 continuity, insertion into a symbolic filiation, and will of transmission may slip away or become  
666 secondary in favor of theories emphasizing the prospective-creative dimension of human existence,  
667 especially through active quest and construction of meaning, the desire for unity and relatedness,  
668 and the internalization of values pointing to altruism and reciprocity.

669 Similarly, a third issue for psychology of religion is to understand the contemporary quest for  
670 "spirituality," especially when this quest is clearly distinct from traditional religiosity. Some recent  
671 studies on psychological realities (such as personality and mental health) associated with spirituality  
672 indicate that the quest for spirituality is both similar to, and different from, traditional religiosity.  
673 On the one hand, contrary to indicators of religiosity, measures of interest in, openness to, or  
674 practice of spirituality are not correlated with constructs typical of closed-mindedness and  
675 submission to authority and tradition. Spirituality does not seem to correspond to authoritarianism,  
676 need for cognitive closure, and importance placed on the values of tradition and conformity; it may  
677 even be related to greater openness to experience, creativity, and fantasy (including openness to  
678 paranormal beliefs) as well as to greater extraversion. On the other hand, spirituality shares with  
679 religiosity the emphasis on connectedness and relationality between people; the importance of unity  
680 and universality; the quest for meaning and the belief that the world is meaningful; and,  
681 consequently, the reference to something-somebody that transcends the individual and humanity.

682 Some evidence also suggests that the seeking of spirituality may be motivated (as is religiosity) by  
 683 emotion-regulation needs.  
 684 A final challenge for the psychology of religion is to be aware of its limitations as a psychological  
 685 discipline looking merely for relations and determinisms in the psychic life of individuals, and thus  
 686 not supposed to rule on questions asking for a broad interdisciplinary, philosophical, and social  
 687 reflection, collaboration, and discussion. The case of the relation between religion and mental health  
 688 may be suggestive. As presented above, religion, through many aspects (social support, self-control,  
 689 self-esteem, optimism, substitutive attachment figures), seems to contribute to mental health, and  
 690 certainly to subjective happiness and well-being, but possibly also to some objective health  
 691 components. However, the positive or negative impact on health of specific realities (in this case  
 692 religion, but this is also valid for art, sexuality, humor, and activities such as smoking and drinking)  
 693 is an issue independent from the question of the relation that human beings maintain with objective  
 694 reality, with the truth of things, and with maturity ideals and cultural progress. Clinical  
 695 psychologists (**see *Health Psychology: Prevention of Disease and Illness, Maintenance of Health***)  
 696 can remind us here that the three key concepts cited above (optimism, control, and self-esteem)  
 697 certainly contribute to mental health. Nevertheless, as recently depicted, these three constructs  
 698 constitute par excellence three “positive illusions”: they translate a personal overestimation of one’s  
 699 own capacities, not an exact reflection of objective reality.

## 700 Glossary

701 **Agreeableness:** A broad personality dimension in the Five-Factor Model reflecting positive  
 702 qualities in interpersonal relationships such as helpfulness, trust, altruism, and tender-  
 703 mindedness.

704 **Attachment theory:** A theory that focuses on the behaviors, conditions, and different patterns  
 705 (styles) of the close relationship established between the child and a privileged person  
 706 (usually the mother or a substitute person) as well as on implications for the cognitive,  
 707 emotional, and social development, including adult love relationships.

708 **Authoritarianism:** The personal disposition for a high degree of submission to the authorities  
 709 perceived as established and legitimate; it is usually accompanied by conventionalism and  
 710 aggressiveness towards targets perceived as sanctioned by the authorities.

711 **Conscientiousness:** A broad personality dimension in the Five-Factor Model that includes  
 712 orderliness and methodicalness as well as will for achievement and success.

713 **Dogmatism:** A strong certainty in beliefs even in the face of disconfirming evidence as well as a  
 714 clear separation between the system of beliefs and the system of disbeliefs with a strong  
 715 rejection of the latter.

716 **Eysenck’s model (of personality):** A taxonomy of personality-temperament characteristics  
 717 covering three broad dimensions: psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion.

718 **Five-Factor Model (of personality):** A dominant descriptive model of personality where a  
 719 multitude of personality traits (within a variety of cultures) can be gathered into five broad,  
 720 almost exhaustive, factors: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness,  
 721 and openness.

722 **Fundamentalism (religious):** A way of being religious characterized by a strong attachment to the  
 723 uniqueness and superiority of (a part or the whole of a set of) one’s own religious beliefs in  
 724 comparison with other religious or non-religious beliefs as well as a dualism of thinking at  
 725 least on religious, ethical, and existential issues.

726 **Glossolalic groups:** Charismatic religious groups that practice “speaking in tongues” (i.e. speaking  
 727 a language incomprehensible to outsiders, usually during a religious ritual); this is  
 728 supposed to be an effect of the spirit of God and to have a specific meaning.

729 **Imaginary father:** The component of the father image where the child considers the father as  
 730 omnipotent, ideal, ambivalent, as object of both love and fear, and as a model of  
 731 identification.

- 732 **Intrinsic (religious orientation):** Being religious with religion as a goal in itself (and not to serve  
733 other, external purposes) and as a principle unifying the multiple aspects of an individual's  
734 life.
- 735 **Just-world beliefs:** The often assumed, rather than consciously articulated, belief that people in  
736 general get what they deserve.
- 737 **Kin-specific altruism:** The natural tendency in many species, including humans, to help or make  
738 sacrifices for others, thus promoting the likelihood of survival and development of group  
739 (kin) members who share common genetic capital.
- 740 **Need for closure:** The need-desire for definite, any knowledge, or answer on some issue and the  
741 eschewal of confusion and ambiguity; this is translated into a need for order, structure, and  
742 predictability in life, urgency of striving for closure in judgment, and discomfort with  
743 alternative opinions or inconsistent evidence.
- 744 **Neuroticism:** A broad personality dimension that reflects emotional instability, negative  
745 emotionality, anxiety, and/or depression.
- 746 **Orthodoxy (religious):** A strong attachment to religious beliefs and/or practices in conformity with  
747 what is considered legitimate and "authentic" by religious authority, usually with regard to  
748 tradition.
- 749 **Positive psychology:** A recent tendency in psychology to study human strengths and virtues and to  
750 adopt an open and appreciative rather than negative, problem-focused, and defensive  
751 perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities.
- 752 **Psychoticism:** A broad personality dimension in Eysenck's model that reflects traits typical of low  
753 tender-mindedness such as being cold, hostile, unfriendly, unhelpful, and lacking empathy  
754 and guilt; this dimension corresponds to low agreeableness and low conscientiousness in  
755 the Five-Factor Model.
- 756 **Quest (religious orientation):** Being religious in a rather autonomous way that values doubt,  
757 includes self-criticism, deals with existential questions without reducing their complexity,  
758 and is open to change.
- 759 **Secularization:** The modern decrease in the presence and influence of religion in the life of  
760 individuals and societies, especially in Western countries.

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789 **Biographical Sketch**

790 **Vassilis Saroglou** is assistant professor at the Department of Psychology of the Catholic University of Louvain (since  
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801 (stereotypes and cross-cultural differences). In addition to articles published in psychology, theology, and scientific  
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