PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND CULTURE

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Summary

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

1. Introduction

Psychology of religion is the discipline that studies religion and religious phenomena using psychological theories, concepts, and methods. It is interested in how religion (of individuals and groups) interacts with personality, biology, and culture and with the multiple dimensions of human 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the quest for meaning may be regarded as a defense against negative situations: the more uncertainty, ambiguity, and doubt are inherent in events and reality, the more humans need to cope with these situations by looking for meaning; religion may then be compensatory and, at least, functional. Empirical evidence is strong enough in this direction. Situational factors such as personal crises (death of a loved person, serious diseases, failures, suffering, and frustration) favor the intensification of the quest for meaning and lead (in relation to personality and educational 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 than 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.

3. Religion as the Strengthening of Self-Control

3.1. Religion as Satisfying the Need for Control

Psychologically, religion may also be considered as a way to reinforce self-control. Individuals, in addition to the need for meaning, are characterized by the need for mastery of things and for self-control. Already, behind the need for meaning one can suspect a component that is related to the need for control of what in a given situation is a source of novelty, surprise, frustration, defeat, and, in general, a feeling of loss of control. Being informed of, understanding, and interpreting situations and events are mechanisms that contribute to the feeling of control. People desire to have things under control, to believe in their capacity to change a situation (primary control) as well as in their capacity to change themselves in order to change reality (secondary control).
It is as if religion both satisfies and animates this need. Faith, as an act of belief and confidence in things or beings that, among others, stand out because of their omnipotence and their providential care, implies the possibility and even the necessity of changing oneself and the world. Believing that "faith can move mountains" not only constitutes an attachment to a metaphor: the impact that faith and confidence in the capacity of changing oneself have on recovery from numerous physical and mental problems is an evocative illustration of this. Finally, every religious group and religious movement is concerned with this transformative dimension and can be classified according to its preferential tendencies: transforming the world versus first transforming oneself.
Of course, the type of religiosity and the type of relation with God (collaborative, self-directive, or deferring) may be a moderator of the relation between religion and the feeling of control (accentuating an internal or external locus of control). Nevertheless, in general, religion seems to satisfy the need for control. A first sign in this direction is that in adults, unlike in children, the link between conditions of uncertainty, absence of information, and the inexplicability of things, on the one hand, and recourse to magical thinking, on the other hand, is mediated by the feeling of lack of control. A second argument comes from a vast empirical literature providing evidence that religiosity is followed by many indicators of mental health, mainly highly subjective well-being and happiness, but also objective indicators of health such as absence of unhealthy-destructive behaviors (alcohol, drug, and tobacco use, suicide), and longevity. It seems as if the benefits of religion for mental health are, to some extent, a consequence of self-control (i.e. healthy behavior): in the USA, among church members, the strictest religious groups, which have strong demands on behavior (Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Orthodox Jews, and Amish), have the greatest longevity. The review of the literature on the religion-mental health relation sheds light on the fact that religion has positive consequences on self-control in individuals in which control is lacking (under-control). However, the price to be paid for this seems to be a certain risk of over-control: religion also predicts rigidity of thought, if one refers to constructs such as dogmatism, authoritarianism, and need for closure.

3.2. Religion as Demanding Self-Control

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

part in, satisfies, and even contributes to this need for continuity with what precedes, this need of belonging to, and not breaking off, the filial line. Indeed, religion intervenes not only in the education of the following generation, but also in the choice of the marriage partner: in multi-religious societies, people may choose a partner who is similar or different in personality dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness, but they tend to get married to a partner who shares the same religious beliefs and the same openness (to experience, to values). Finally, one cannot help but conclude that the way of placing oneself in relation to parental religion seems to be more important for understanding adult attitudes to religion than the individual, “autonomous” religious quest: conversions or renunciations of religion are relatively rare in comparison to fidelity to familial non-religiosity or to familial religiosity.

Many scholars in studies of religion put an emphasis on this aspect of religion as an insertion into a filial line: the religious group (and also the religious individual) constitutes itself as far as it lies within a religious lineage. It may happen, especially in the case of modern, new religious movements, that the lineage is imaginary. In line with this perspective, religion can be seen as a particular type of answer to the need for belonging—an otherwise universal need: it reflects the need for belonging to something that comes from the past and is dependent on the positive elements of the familial atmosphere. The power of this need becomes manifest when one considers contemporary religiosity in many European countries. Many sociologists of religion agree on the existence of two distinct dimensions, not necessarily connected: a religion of believing and a religion of belonging. Believing without belonging may be common (for instance, contemporary spirituality); belonging without believing is also possible.

With regard to the links between religion and mental health, two implications can be drawn on the basis of the above considerations. First, the insertion into a religious group and the intense and close relations between members may provide important social support. Many studies indicate that if religiosity is associated with happiness and subjective well-being this may—partially—be explained by the impact of the social support offered by the religious group. For instance, religion is negatively related to loneliness. In this perspective, it may also be understandable why in conversions and decisions to enter into a religious group (especially groups of small size) the intermediate contact person seems to be more attractive than the set of religious ideas per se that the group professes.

Second, the links between religion and mental health may also be explained by another reality, that is, the positive consequences of the relation that the religious person entertains with a transcendental being perceived as full of love and goodness, as absolutely available, and as valuing the partner of the relation as somebody who is worthy of being loved and trusted; religiosity, for instance, seems to favor enhancement of self-esteem, an important aspect of mental health.

Finally, the fidelity to, and continuity of, the parental religion and the reality of belonging to a religious group do not only have positive consequences for the individual. As now established in a variety of countries and religious traditions, religious people tend to grant high importance to the values of tradition and conformity, and tend to be conservative on many issues (for instance, in sexuality, but also in political opinions and choices); they also tend to be high in authoritarianism (a construct including authoritarian submission).

This points again to the impact of parental authority on religious transmission in early childhood. Scholars who find it hard to conceive that religion and religious beliefs (such as the belief in entities with counter-indicative properties) persist today, emphasize the possible impact of parental attitudes: it is not to be excluded that magical and religious thinking are not an inherent way of thinking in childhood. It may be that such beliefs (for instance, the belief in Father Christmas) are encouraged by parents as realities that can happen or that really happen. In both secular and religious spheres, people (children and adult) entertain magical worlds. But under the influence of an authoritative parental figure, in children, magical and real worlds may come together and be seen 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, the
575 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 ±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.

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Intrinsic (religious orientation): Being religious with religion as a goal in itself (and not to serve other, external purposes) and as a principle unifying the multiple aspects of an individual's life.

Just-world beliefs: The often assumed, rather than consciously articulated, belief that people in general get what they deserve.

Kin-specific altruism: The natural tendency in many species, including humans, to help or make sacrifices for others, thus promoting the likelihood of survival and development of group (kin) members who share common genetic capital.

Need for closure: The need-desire for definite, any knowledge, or answer on some issue and the eschewal of confusion and ambiguity; this is translated into a need for order, structure, and predictability in life, urgency of striving for closure in judgment, and discomfort with alternative opinions or inconsistent evidence.

Neuroticism: A broad personality dimension that reflects emotional instability, negative emotionality, anxiety, and/or depression.

Orthodoxy (religious): A strong attachment to religious beliefs and/or practices in conformity with what is considered legitimate and "authentic" by religious authority, usually with regard to tradition.

Positive psychology: A recent tendency in psychology to study human strengths and virtues and to adopt an open and appreciative rather than negative, problem-focused, and defensive perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities.

Psychoticism: A broad personality dimension in Eysenck's model that reflects traits typical of low tender-mindedness such as being cold, hostile, unfriendly, unhelpful, and lacking empathy and guilt; this dimension corresponds to low agreeableness and low conscientiousness in the Five-Factor Model.

Quest (religious orientation): Being religious in a rather autonomous way that values doubt, includes self-criticism, deals with existential questions without reducing their complexity, and is open to change.

Secularization: The modern decrease in the presence and influence of religion in the life of 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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