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## THE RELIGIOUS FEELING AND MORAL VALUES. COMPARATIVE STUDIES

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***Abstract:** Before having been researched from an ethnological, historical, psycho-sociological point of view, **religion** - namely issues regarding its essence, origins and development - had been an object of reflection for generations of thinkers preoccupied with the inherent oscillations and non-sequiturs, what we might call a philosophy of religion. Religion is not merely a form, or a system of thought, it is a vast reality which needs to unfold the fate and the happiness of man. This is why the link between God and man must be a free one, to make room for the sanctions that reward the good or the bad deeds of men in this lifetime. It needs to be a conscious one, because it is a reality that the man can only encompass with his mind and is of a spiritual nature, therefore unseen*

***Key Words:** sentiment, religion, values, Orthodox, Muslim.*

### INTRODUCTION

We cannot define religion based on sociological and psychological research. From an etymological point of view, the term **religion** comes from a family of Latin words which initially designated certain practices related to the sacred and to which in time the faith and the theoretical aspects of religion were added<sup>1</sup>.

- **religare** – Cicero said that this term denotes fulfilling one's duties towards the Gods. Lucretius defined religion as "the feeling and faith and duty towards the gods".

- **relego** – the word in an iterative, this meaning that religion refers to rebuilding the link with the sacred (the Quran means "to

read", Biblos denotes "the Book", the Mantras are fragments of poems).

- **religio** – is translated by covenant, a covenant between the individual or the community and the sacred.

- **relegare** – to connect, connection, it represents the connection with the divine. This connection was initially established by practices (eg: shamanism is a system of practices).

Later, the word **religion** added, associated the spiritual aspect as well, designating not only the practices, but also the faith. In the Middle Ages, the basic term was **fides** (faith). During this time, the practical activity shifts on a secondary plane, the term **religio** referring more to the monastic practice.

Bearing the meaning of *faith*, religion can be **false** or **true**. The rebirth is what separates the true religions (Christianity) from the false ones (superstitions).

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<sup>1</sup> Florian, Mircea (1993), *Misticism și credință*, Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, p. 22

The definition of religion, according to Durkheim, is the following: “**Religion is a solitary system of faiths and practices related to the sacred**”<sup>2</sup>.

**The religious feeling** is defined as "purity, veneration and piety", "reasoning for the affective evaluation of an invisible world", "mental faculty or disposition which, independent or in spite of the senses and of reason, makes the human being capable of feeling the infinite under various names and divine disguises"<sup>3</sup>.

The man as an individual or as a member of the family or of society needs religion. Through it, man knows God as the source of truth and as norm of the moral life, bringer of happiness. Through religion, man becomes confident with his deeds and rises above the creatures living around him.

Man has the religious feeling as something more than any other living creature. And if Aristotle called the human being a social animal, modern later anthropology calls man a religious animal. Religion is necessary for the family and for society as a whole and the fact that those who want to hurt the institution of family or society itself start by hurting the religious feeling, and those who want the social nucleus, family, to gain prestige, talk about the absolute utility of religion.

The value we believe in and that we cherish ask us to choose and praise those forms of conduit which sustain and help spread in the whole world the values that deserve to exist, and to avoid, despise and, if possible, to decimate those deeds which undermine our values. Unfortunately, the next step is a more difficult one.

"What are values?" - here is a question whose answer is not easy to find, although we are dealing with a pretty common word in the daily vocabulary. In the first instance, values appear as attributes of persons, ideas, deeds, institutions or things which are important, worthy of being respected and

cherished, and which people consider as worthy of trying to see accomplished to the fullest extent. To put it briefly, value is important and respect-worthy. Important *for whom* and *why*?

There were various answers to these questions, formulated during the ages, and each of them had pros and cons.

Moral values always refer to the effects or consequences of our actions on the others or on our own selves. They define those character traits that when cultivated and, more than anything, put into practice, are capable of reining in our aggressive and antisocial impulses, stopping us from causing useless harm and unnecessary suffering but, most of all, to stimulate our attitudes of solidarity with the others in such a way that our deeds lead to the full affirmation of the humanity within ourselves and within our fellow men.

#### **Factors influencing the religious life**

The religious life of communities of believers is not subject to a casual determinism. There is a plurality of factors which influence it and their role modifies according to age, culture and geographic areas. Thus we have a model of added values which influence in a very diverse manner the confessional distribution and intensity of the religious life.

It has been attempted to define the fundamental or unique cause which determines the religious life. The purpose was to influence this cause and to manipulate the believers and the religious life.

During the communist times, had they been able to discover the cause of man's faith, it would have been very easy to eliminate it. But faith is determined by a large number of social, natural, personal factors, each of them modifying its role during the life of the man of faith.

The religious life varies, depending upon one's natural environment, political system, economic situation, place of living, social events, culture etc. All these factors influencing the religious life are assimilated by the believers through their own social filter, i.e. the family, school, culture that encompass the individual.

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<sup>2</sup> Durkheim, E. (1912), *Les formes elementaire de la vie religieuse*, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Mânzat, I. (1997), *Psihologia credinței religioase. Transconștiința umană*, Ed. Știință & Tehnică, Bucharest, p. 135.



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**The natural environment** has a bigger religious influence both upon the individual and upon populations in the incipient periods. Natural factors mostly influence the child and the archaic population. Nature influences the religious feeling by means of impressionability. Man notices the complexity of nature, is incited by the landscape, by the social order and harmony, because ever since childhood it was taught to him that it was all the hand of God. The evolution in terms of age decreases the role of the social environment in the religious life. It has been noted that the natural environment mostly influences boys. Natural phenomena (earthquakes, thunders, storms) predominantly influence girls, who attribute these manifestations to the sacred.

Family plays a fundamental role in forming a religious life in the first part of childhood (up to 14 years of age). Family, mostly the grandparents in the modern society, transmits the religious model to the children. Family acts upon children by means of: family atmosphere, family practices, religious education, family events. For the child religiosity is not something distinct and specialized, it is identified with the entire spiritual life (God is good, God is right, God is beautiful, God rewards them or God punishes them). It has been observed that the downfall of authority in families pushes children away from religious faith. Abandoned children, orphans, children coming from broken homes are more easily convertible to other religions or atheism.

**The territorial community** - the village, the town, the geographical area has a number of religious models that it passes down to the descendants by means of the atmosphere from that community, by practices, events within the community, all having a religious influence on

people. Communities have certain traditions that influence the believers as long as they stay within the boundaries of the community.

**Church** plays an important role in the forming of religious life, both as a place of worship and by means of the staff in churches. This personnel plays the role according to the number of believers that the community has. Priests play a less important role if the number of believers is large, or if they are located at large distances. Frequenting the house of worship is discontinuous. The quality of the church staff is that of transmitting, in time, the religious feelings and of guaranteeing a frequent presence in churches.

**Culture** is yet another important factor in forming the religious life. The Enlightenment, the Positivist and Marxist currents have stated that the higher the culture, the lower the religious state becomes. The religious state, as a spiritual experience, is influenced both theoretically and dogmatically by the level of education and culture. As feelings, it continues to exist, no matter the level of culture. The illiterate, the intellectuals and the scientists can have the same amount of faith. Studies in this field proved that as the culture level gets higher, the peripheral religiosity is gradually eliminated and the religious experience of the true believers is consolidated.

**School** - education implements certain spiritual values which modify the religious proportion from the affective level to the intellectual level. The modification takes place quicker in the case of boys, who reason their faith before girls and become more selective. Girls stay affective in their religiosity for longer and towards adolescence they tend to a religiosity with specific aspects (they start believing in female religious personalities:

The Virgin Mary, St. Friday etc.). Moreover, their religiosity is a more intimate one - they retreat and pray in solitude.

The bio-psychic dynamics of the human personality - some psychologists and sociologists have exaggerated the personality factors in the religious life. For example, Jung when talking about extroverts and introverts, shows that the extroverts are more sociable and have a more frequent religious practice, while the introverts, oriented towards the interior, live their religious feelings more intensely, even if they express them less. Research outlined a few stages in the religious evolution of personality. There is an ascension of the religious state under the influence of family until the age of 13-14 in the industrial and developed areas. In the case of the less developed countries, this ascension continues until the age of 15-16. The period of adolescence represents a search of the religious ideal and a decline of the religious state. After 20 years the religious life recovers. During the mature years it is stable, not very intense, but the cases of conversion (confessional migration) are very rare.

How age influences the religious life<sup>4</sup>:

- **until 7 years of age**, the child grows within the family and adopts the religious model of the parents.
- **after 7 years of age** the family religious ideas and beliefs are completed by the school influences. Schooling increases the theoretic aspect of religiosity, while diminishing the affective dimension. Besides the positive aspects of the religious education in schools, there is also a negative side: pushing children away from the religious experience. Students perceive Religion as a compulsory subject, ruled by grades, a schedule, exams, and all this serves to diminish the affective attachment. When no longer under supervision, children tend to avoid the practices they had complied with before.
- after 13 years of age they have access to religious literature and to means of

information that bring to their attention other models besides the family religiosity and they begin to doubt the authenticity of their parents' model.

- adolescence is a transition period, when the personality leaves the realm of childhood, claims the adult status which is only obtained when no longer claimed. The adolescents have the tendency to verify the authenticity and veracity of everything they had known up to that point. They exaggerate antagonism (opposition), manifested in different shapes: it can be detached from previous values, it practices a real or fictitious narcissism. From a religious point of view, the sacred and the traditional church seem as values belonging to the aged. They would like to create their own model regarding the sacred. The evasion towards the secular-sacred models appear now, they admire cinema artists, musicians and people from other confessions. Some theoreticians state that this tendency towards religious evasion is formed on the basis of a lack of bio-psychical maturity.
- towards 25 years of age, when an adult, the person becomes religiously stable, the religious and spiritual influences affect him or her less. They generally return to the religious life from their previous family. During this time the religious practices are lower, so is the religious extremism, the adult perceives the church more as an institution.
- the third age reawakens the preoccupations related to religiosity. More than anything it is faith that grows bigger, the religious practices aren't extraordinary intense. The reasons why the practices are thus restrained belong to the secular (people are old and can no longer often get to church, are ill etc.).

#### **The affective dimension of religiosity (faith)**

The religious life is accomplished in several correlated dimensions, but some can be more emphasized or more diminished. For example, some believers may be more intensely religious, without having an accentuated practical externalization as

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<sup>4</sup> Meslin, M. (1993), *Știința religiilor*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, pg. 154



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compared to others, with less faith, who frequent church on a more regular basis.

Faith is the affective dimension of religiosity. Even in the current times there are theologians who consider that the religious feeling is born in man, as a gift from God. Man has set himself apart from other living creatures by moral feelings and religious feelings.

In reality people are born and acquire predispositions which in contact with the religious models become religious feelings.

Faith is defined as a power, a confidence that turns what we wish for into something that exists. Paul the apostle said in his letter to the Jews: "faith is the entrusting (confidence) in what one hopes for". (Jews 11:1). This confidence encompasses some certainties:

- God exists.
- God influences the world, the man, the everyday life.
- A relationship with God is possible.

These certainties form in the believer the psychic state of dependency towards God. Being aware of certain religious models, this dependency transforms into a psychological need. In the centre of this need lies the conviction that God is sublime. The sentiment of guilt (sin) and the expiatory (salvation) wish appear.

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source of truth and as norm of the moral life, bringer of happiness. Through religion, man becomes confident with his deeds and rises above the creatures living around him.

Man has the religious feeling as something more than any other living creature. And if Aristotle called man a social animal, the modern anthropology calls him a religious animal. Religion is necessary for the family and for society as a whole and the fact that those who want to hurt the institution of family or society itself start by hurting the religious feeling, and those who want the social nucleus, family, to gain prestige, talk about the absolute utility of religion.

Religious feelings can be amplified or diminished by correlating them with the events in their lifetime or in contact with art. The diminishing of the religious feeling can reach to atheism. Extracting normal religious feelings may create states of social disintegration. Religious disintegration may take two forms for psychologists:

- religious passion.
- religious insanity.

Religious passion is socially manifested as fanaticism, fundamentalism and it engulfs the life of the individual who neglects other social obligations. Passion can be of two kinds:

- bigot - the bigot is a very gullible person, with a pure soul and who wants salvation at any cost. The bigot is excessively pious, the rituals he or she practices are meticulous. However, bigots lack judgement, which makes it easy to manipulate them.
- mystic - the mystics are maniacs who can manifest themselves either periodically (under the form of seizures), or permanently. The mystic becomes one with the divine, his visions tend to

seem to him more real than the actual truths.

Religious insanity occurs when the believer manifests a permanent ecstasy, either passive (as is the case of Hinduism and Buddhism), or hysteric. The cases of religious hysteria are dangerous. Religious insanity can have two forms:

- theomania - in the case of theomania, the individual becomes one with God, thinks himself to be God or His Chosen One. Sometimes these individuals can be dangerous as well.
- demonomania - in the case of demonomania, the believer considers himself as possessed by the devil and commits devilish deeds, such as: vampirism, lycanthropy (the patient believes he has turned into an animal), erotomania (girls thought they could only have sexual intercourse with the devil). Such cases are treated by Church through exorcism.

The religious faith has a fundamental dimension of the spirit which can be expressed in a table of values. Faith is not an act of intellectual consent towards certain assertions, but moral commitment which involves the complete integration in a whole of both the intellectual consent and an infinite trust.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to highlight the intensity of the religious feeling and to identify the moral values of the study participants. It also aims to emphasize a possible relationship between the religious feeling and the moral values, as well as to highlight certain differences between the participants of Orthodox confession and

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	female	39	48.8
	male	41	51.3
	Total	80	100.0

those of Muslim confession as far as the religious feeling is concerned.

### Specific objectives:

- to evaluate the intensity of the religious feeling with persons belonging to the Orthodox and the Muslim confessions.

- to identify the moral values of the study participants;
- to emphasize significant relationships between the religious feeling and the moral values of the study participants;
- to highlight the significant differences between the Orthodox and the Muslim participants according to the religious feeling.

### Research Hypotheses

Hs. 1. It is presumed that the moral values adopted by the Orthodox participants are oriented towards freedom, honesty, education and independence, and those adopted by the Muslim participants are oriented towards altruism, tolerance, respect and responsibility.

Hs. 2. It is presumed that there are significant relationships between the religious feeling and the moral values of the Orthodox and Muslim participants.

Hs. 3. It is presumed that there are significant differences between the Orthodox and the Muslim participants in the intensity of religious feeling.

### Study Participants

Table 1. Frequency table for the "biological gender" variable

This study involved 80 subject, 39 women and 41 men, both Orthodox and Muslim. By analysing the sampled subjects from the perspective of the "age" variable, this varies between 19 and 62 years of age, the biggest frequency is that of the subjects who are 35 years old. The average age of the study participants is of 43.05 years.

### Instruments used

**The Questionnaire for Assessing the Religious Feeling (Chestionarul de evaluare a sentimentului religios - C.E.S.R.)** -is made up of 37 items and it addresses the Christian population in Romania, over 18 years of age. The religious feeling assesses the extent to which the individual got closer or further from divinity and expresses the degree of intensity of the religious life.

For the purpose of this study we built a Questionnaire for Assessing the Moral Value (Chestionar de valori morale - C.V.M.) - is





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made up of 20 items representing values that reflect the positive or the negative aspects of morality.

To validate this questionnaire we used the aspect validation method and for finding fidelity we used the test-retest method ( $r = 0.834$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the Alpha Cronbach coefficient of internal consistency ( $\alpha =$

love towards living creatures and responsibility. These results should not be surprising because the Orthodox are not very bound to the traditional family anymore while the Muslims are raised to respect the traditions and in the spirit of responsibility, especially for men, taught to respect their family and especially the elder.

		feeling	Values
feeling	Pearson Correlation	1	.750(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
values	Pearson Correlation	.750(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

In order to confirm the second hypothesis the data was subjected to a correlational analysis between the religious feeling and the moral values.

Table 2. The Correlation between "the religious feeling" and "the moral values"

0.820).

### Data analysis and result interpretation

In order to better emphasize the moral values that the survey participants have integrated, we have made a comparative analysis between the integrated values of the Orthodox and Muslim participants for each of the 20 items of the moral values survey.

From the analysis of the results of statistical processing it can be said that the first hypothesis was confirmed, the Orthodox participants adopted values based on freedom, honesty, patience, education and independence, and the Muslim participants adopted values based on respect, responsibility, tolerance, love towards their family, their peers, as well as to living creatures, based on altruism and responsibility. The Orthodox participants have registered higher frequencies for the "important" and "very important" answers for the following values: freedom, honour, patience, education, independence, and the Muslim participants have registered high frequencies for the same answer variants for the following values: kindness, love to your fellow men, love towards family, respect, tolerance,

The results obtained from a correlational analysis confirm the original hypothesis, i.e. there are highly significant relationships between the religious feeling and the moral values adopted by the study participants.

\*\* The correlation is significant for a threshold of 0.01.

A religious feeling of moderate to high intensity involves the integration of moral values expressing certain general requirements which are necessary for the behaviour of the participants, for an orientation towards the human ideal.

For the validation of the third hypothesis the obtained data was subjected to a comparative analysis meant to identify differences between the Orthodox and the Muslim participants, as far as religiosity is concerned.

Table 3. The average of the Orthodox and Muslim participants regarding the religious feeling

Table 4. Comparison of the means between the scores obtained for the religious feeling

	Levene pentru egalitatea dispersiilor		testul t pentru egalitatea mediilor			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	diferența mediilor
sentimente omogene	1.988	.163	15.974	78	.000	-30.431
Dispersie eterogena			16.047	77.989	.000	-30.431

The statistical analysis has allowed for the identification of significant differences between the Orthodox and the Muslim participants, from the point of view of the religious feeling. The t test for independent samples ( $t_{(78)} = -15.974, p < 0.01$ ) statistically argues in favour of this hypothesis. It can be noted that the value of t test is negative because the Muslim participants scored higher as far as the religious feeling is concerned, which means that they have a favourable attitude toward religion, have a knowledge and self awareness of religious nature, are closer to divinity and express a higher degree of internalization of religious ideas. This also concerns the religious training of the individual, in the Muslim environment if the man of the family is a religious one, he imposes the religious practices and devotion upon the other family members as well.

The Orthodox participants also have a religious feeling, but of a lower intensity than the Muslim ones. The Orthodox are more independent as far as practices and the individual religious devotion are concerned, they are subject only to their conscience on theological considerations.

### Conclusions

Based upon the methodological approach we may state that the hypotheses have been confirmed. Thus, the Orthodox participants showed high frequencies for the answer variants: "important" and "very important" for the following values: freedom, honesty, patience, education, independence, while the Muslim participants have had more frequent choice of the same

answer variants for values such as: kindness, love for one's fellow man, love for one's family, respect, tolerance, love towards living creatures and responsibility.

The Orthodox participants adopted values based on freedom, honesty, patience, education and independence, and the Muslim participants adopted values based on respect, responsibility, tolerance, love of family and fellow men, as well as towards living creatures, based on altruism and responsibility, because they are raised in a spirit of responsibility, especially in the case of men, with a high respect towards the family and especially towards the elderly.

Regarding the confirmation of the two hypotheses it should be noted that between the religious feeling and the moral values integrated by the participants there is a direct and reciprocal relationship, i.e. a religious feeling of moderate to high moral intensity leads to the adoption of moral values expressing certain general requirements that are necessary for the participants' behaviour for an orientation towards the human ideal.

Based on previous results, we can appreciate that the third hypothesis was also confirmed, showing that there are significant differences between the Orthodox and the Muslim participants regarding the religious feeling. The Muslim participants have a stronger religious feeling than the Orthodox ones, meaning that they have a favourable attitude towards religion, have religious knowledge and a religious conscience, are closer to the divine and express a higher degree of internalisation of the religious ideas. This also concerns the religious training of the individual, in the Muslim environment if the man of the family is a religious one, he imposes the religious practices and devotion upon the other family members as well.

The values we believe in and that we cherish ask us to choose and praise those forms of conduit which sustain and help spread in the whole world the values that deserve to exist, and to avoid, despise and, if possible, to decimate those deeds which undermine our values.

In the modern world, still very diverse, but slowly becoming more integrated by the process





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of globalisation, given both the weakening of the authority of local and traditional customs, and the great religious diversity, moral values tend to exert an increasingly coordinating and hierarchical role within the sphere of all values. This trend is still very feeble, due to competition with other dominant or hegemonic values. Religion has been the coordinating axis of the axiological spectrum for so long, but the world has started bowing to other "gods": profit, economical interests, the production and accumulation of material wealth, in close connection with science, which, on the one hand, has offered through the technical revolution increasingly efficient means of economical growth and progress in the sphere of utilities, while on the other hand usurping religion's supremacy on the

plane of spiritual living, becoming itself, for many laymen, a true religion.

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