



THEOPHANY



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**IMPARTIALITY, EXTROVERSION, AND MENTAL HEALTH OF
MODERN ISLAM IN THE LIGHT OF THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION**

By

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Abstract

This article contains some thoughts-questions, which have arisen with a view to an interactive discussion between (Orthodox) Christian Theology and Islam in the light of the Psychology of Religion. In this short invitation, four issues are briefly presented: (1) the revival of religions and in particular Islam, (2) openness, multi-dimensionality, and resilience of Islam, (3) interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Shi'itic Islam via the Psychology of Religion and the Cultural Psychology of Religion, and (4) the psychotherapeutic nature, and generally the coping, of the Iranian Religion.

Keywords: *righteousness, justice, Shi'itic Islam, Shari'a.*

Introduction

I applied the word *impartiality* in the title of this speaking because, theologically, that word refers to the concept of God's *righteousness*. And the righteousness of God imposes justice, namely mutual respect among all people, especially Christians, according to the Koran.

In this short invitation, I have chosen to briefly present four issues, which are personally intriguing, especially in the current crucial –from many views–period, that may seem quite interesting: (first) the revival of Religions, in particular Islam, (second) openness, multi-dimensionality, according to Abu-Raiya (2013), and resilience of Islam, (third) interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Shi'itic Islam via the Psychology of Religion and the Cultural Psychology of Religion, and (fourth) the psychotherapeutic nature, and generally the coping of the Iranian Religion.

All those who have long dealt with and study the eternal, and are not satisfied by the only things in this world will welcome, I think, the revival of Religions. This is especially seen after the emergence of the new wave of godlessness and the general impasse in general today in which modern man has come to the worship of Technology and the secular spirit of Consumerism. According to Armstrong (2000), about 50 years ago, popular opinion assumed that religion would become a weaker force and people would certainly become less zealous as the world became more modern and morals more relaxed. Seminal thinkers of the nineteenth century –Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim,

Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud— all predicted that religion would gradually fade in importance with the emergence of industrial society. The belief that religion was dying became the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century. However, according to Norris and Inglehart (2004), during the last decade, the secularization thesis has experienced the most sustained challenge in its long history. But the opposite has proven true. Theologian and author Karen Armstrong documents that Fundamentalism has taken root and grown in many of the world's major Religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Even Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism have developed fundamentalist factions. Reacting to a technologically driven world with liberal Western values, fundamentalists have not only increased in numbers, they have become more desperate, claims Armstrong (2000), who points to the Oklahoma City bombing, violent anti-abortion crusades, and the assassination of President Yitzak Rabin as evidence of dangerous extremes. This tendency of man shows that he has spiritual resistances to mass mechanization, and thus his brutalization, that is to say his dehumanization; If only this global religious revival does not lead — through the worship of partial modern messiahs and saviors, as is the case with the so-called *new religiousness* or the *new religious movements* in Christendom — to the greater splitting of humanity and to religious syncretism, namely the amalgamation of different Religions and cultures.

Levels of "tolerance" in Religions through the Psychology of Religion

As is well known, many major Religions, without falling into sects, possess on themselves and operate with an openness, polymorphism, and flexibility (expansive or systolic interpretation of their sacred texts – scriptures), either in individual (see *etic*), or in collective (see *emic*) socio-political and cultural levels. In other words, pre-Christian (for example, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, ancient Hellenism) and post-Christian Religions (for example, Christianity and Islam) see the gods, God, or his law now more strictly (see *Rigorism*) and inhuman, and now more tolerably and philanthropically by dispensation. There are many such examples. In Zoroastrianism, the god of good (Ormuzd) and the god of evil (Ahriman) were worshipped at the same time. In ancient pagan Greece, there was the Apollonian and Platonic spirit on the one hand and the inexorable god Zeus and the Dionysian spirit on the other. Besides, in Judaism, the jealous god Yahweh of the Old Testament was worshipped, and the legalistic *Secretaries* and nationalist *Pharisees* were along with the fanatical *Zealots*, while until today *Zionists* were, at the same times as the Jewish Prophets, who were more open and ecumenists, as well as the *Sadducees*, who were more "relaxed" religiously. Moreover, in Christianity, as well in Islam, there were the gentle and lamblike martyrs who sacrificed themselves. In contrast, there were also the rebellious *Zealots* of Thessalonica in Greece, the Crusaders of the West, the Calvinists in Europe, and later the so-called *Theology of the Revolution*. Eventually, in Islam, while there has been historically violent Islamization at almost the same time as the worship of Ali, alms for the poor, Sufiism, etcetera developed. Likewise, some of the great Religions or the same ones at different times, sometimes over-

underlined God and over-reduced man, and sometimes extolled man, and underestimated God. But these differences mean either a bigger or a lesser subjugation of man to the law of God, respectively. Hence the various problems begin, particularly if we bring into account the diverse interpretations of *Qur'an* (namely the Word of Allah) or *Hadith*. For example, Shi'i Islam's teachings and norms have been subject to competing operations under different historical conditions, according to the research of Silberman, Higgins and Dweck (2005). Moreover, all these major Religions had and have the ability to adapt to all economic and political regimes, either left or right, either west or east, either socialist or capitalist. For example, the ideal world view that came about after the revolution in Iran appears to be highly resilient and survives among pious Iranians, despite widespread political dissatisfaction, according to Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008). Therefore, the whole psycho-sociological situation formed like this scale of Religions connects various grades of the vector between God and man, and by extension, people among themselves, both as in-groups and as outside groups. Agreeing to a survey by Adem Aygün (2013), Islamic religiousness in general can be subdivided into four types: traditional, ideological, laicist, and endo-psychic.

And so, the discipline of Psychology of Religion and/or Cultural Psychology of Religion as sciences tries to study Religions as objectively as possible, without bias, bigotry, or fanaticism, disclosing the similarities and differences between Religions. Above all, however, if we temporarily set aside all the other characteristic elements of a religion (Belief, Ritual, Ethics, muster or flock) and focus on its anthropological and psychological parts only, namely, on the mystical or transcendental (see *Numen*) experiences experienced by the believer, either in his prayer or during his *hajj* to Mecca or to Mashhad, then, perhaps surprisingly, we find that the gist or the core of each Religion, which is precisely the holistic experience of the *Sacred*, mobilizes any religious or spiritual manifestation or exposure, while this is moved on similar scales between believers of all Religions. Meanwhile, this *Numen* and its biome gives man a "creature-feeling", namely an emotion of a creature.

The Divine and the Human (e.g. Psychology) in Religions

Of course, in Islam and especially in Shi'ism, as in Christianity, but for different reasons, *secular* (or temporal and profane) cannot be distinguished from *sacred* (or spiritual), although in individual or/and collective – this social practice is being carried out. For example, religious citizens in Tehran make a distinction between the general principles of Islamic rule and the specific national government, as Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008) write; that is why these religions are facing the problem of secularization. "*Didn't you think that those in heaven and earth glorify God, along with the birds that spread their wings? All beings know their prayer and its glorification of God,*" the Koran quotes (Chapter 24, 41-42). However, that common and catholic element of Religions, namely, *Divine* and its human experience, if it set as the basis on interfaith dialogues, is certain to promote inter-religious mutual understanding, comprehension, and worldwide peace, as Seegobin (2014) suggests, as long as it is not in the hands

of various governments and their political interests. Furthermore, the word *Islam* etymologically comes from the word *Salam*, the main meaning of which is peace and the secondary surrender to Allah and subjugation. The Orthodox Church has always believed in freedom and dialogue, which is why it has never organized crusades or inquisitions. Modern relevant research shows that after September ninth of two thousand one, American Protestant Christians treat Islam in four ways: Apologetically (namely that Christianity is superior or better), eschatologically (namely that Islam will hasten the end of humanity), empirically (namely through psycho-spiritual mutual understanding) and spiritually (namely that Christians with spiritual weapons must subjugate Islam). In fact, intratextual or intertextual Fundamentalism can be further deadened when we take into account the cultural differences of each person: topography, history, traditions, morals and customs, educational level, etc. Islamic Psychology is an emerging area of cross/inter-disciplinary scholarship that brings together numerous professional fields from Psychology, Counseling, Psychiatry, social work, public health, pastoral care, and Islamic Studies to various subspecialties of Psychology such as Clinical/Counseling, Forensic, Industrial/Organization, Health, and Positive Psychology, to name a few. Also included are areas of the Islamic Sciences related to *Ilm Al-Nafs* (Science of the Self) and topics related to the nature of the human being. As such, in its current state of becoming, Islamic Psychology could be loosely defined as "*the space where Psychology and related disciplines engage scientifically with Islam*", Al-Karam (2016) writes.

Finally, in our time among religious psychologists, it is commonplace that "being religious" functions comfortingly, palliatively, remedially, beneficially, and therapeutically, Al-Karam and Haque (2015) say. Especially in cases of depression and somatization, according to Hedayat-Diba (1999), when, of course, it is not deformed and stretched (intensified) into absurd and bizarre extremes, what we theologically call heresies and sects, caused usually by megalomania, phylarchy, ambition, authoritarianism and the supposed omniscience of the leader. Islam holds a long tradition of interest in mental wellness. The earliest recorded psychiatric institutions —established over a thousand years ago— were in Muslim countries (Loewenthal, 2000, p. 22).

Recapitulation

To sum up, as believers, we welcome the revival of faith (see *amn > iman*) in God, since it provides security and trust of a holy mission, namely the existential meaning, into the life of every believer, as Woodberry (1992) says. Indeed, psychologists Hood, Hill and, Williamson (2005) write that as we conclude from the revelation of Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in the *Qur'an*, every man's life is imbued with meaning.

All major and historical Religions, such as Islam, operate more strictly, narrowly, and restrictively, and now more open and liberally in varying degrees with regard to ritual, moral, social, political issues, as rational beings, endowed by God. We must, therefore, be tolerated, long-suffering, lowly, moderate, temperate, patient and forgiving in the face of everything different culturally and

religiously. In this way, we honor and respect the human *person* in the best possible way, imitating God, whom His actions in the world are diverse and also, He has given us the freedom of the will.

After all, since sacredness, as Christianity and Islamism accept, overwhelms all the aspects of our life (social, political, economic), we must, living in multicultural societies, focus our interfaith dialogues on this. Research by Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008) in Iran shows that Friday prayers have potentially gained a new meaning among Iranian citizens because of the politicization of religion under theocratic rule (see *Shari'a*). Still, because this is the cultural and religious idiosyncrasy of Islam or of each person separately and each self-identity, we Westerners must respect it, because, if you sever from it, then you will rightly think that via Secularism, you will westernize or/and Christianize. Subsequently, as Gwoffrey Scobie (1975, p. 70) remarks, "*very conservative beliefs can be held in a non-dogmatic way*". Authentic and healthy religious (or spiritual) experiences, either of the faithful Christian (experiencing an empathy with Christ or Divine Grace), or of the faithful Muslim (experiencing an empathy with Muhammad or Allah), create psychological euphoria and spiritual wellbeing to every believer, and loving and peaceful behavior in his outward social and political relations.

Ultimately, since the healthy, namely intrinsic, religiosity and not extrinsic, neurotic and compulsive one, has been shown by extensive psychological empirical research to contribute positively to both mental, as well as in (psycho-genic) biological diseases, we must join forces, and indeed we therapists of the Psychology of Religion, in the direction of spiritual, psychotherapy in general.

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HOW POVERTY AFFECTS RELIGIOSITY – ASPECTS FROM THE GREEK DEBT CRISIS

By

Dr. Nikolaos Denaxas, MA, Ph.D.

Abstract

In this paper I argue for social ethics of poverty from a sociological and theological perspective: how poverty as a social and economic situation is disproportionate to the wealth that an organized society has referred to contemporary examples and how religiosity is actually affected by these standards. Poverty, as a status of limited economic and social activity, existed from the very moment the first human society was formed. By the time that wealth emerged as a crucial historical subject and as a key differentiating factor between the people, it has been consolidated in the consciousness and the collective unconscious of mankind, as well as the class stratification of society, together with contradictions and an ontological dimension of this differentiation. On the basis of the above, I will also refer to the differences between the social class hatred which triggers tensions, social anomalies and conflicts and in addition, solidarity, class cooperation and inevitability of the reciprocity of social dependencies, values that the Christian teaching, the Fathers of the Church such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Maximus the Confessor, and at last the very act of our Church, have highlighted, over the centuries. Furthermore, I will try to answer if there are any spiritual prerequisites for social peace, unity and prosperity in today's globalized world. Can there be a substantial transformation, a spiritual "Metamorphosis" of societies in this direction? And at last, is money itself evil or is its usage that defines whether it's bad or good?

About religiosity

Religion as a historical dimension, as experience and institution, is in turn a social phenomenon, as all social systems, whether developed or not, are not aimed at the spirituality of the inner human but in social reality. Any alteration of the process of religiosity, may alter both the message and the purposes of any Religion. What we can safely say is that religiosity is a dynamic process, an integral part of all societies. This process though cannot be confused with Religion/-s or Religionism. Religiosity can define all the above and seems to have an independent process through history. So, religiosity could be the social dynamics that develops inner and outer mechanisms of seeking the Divine, by activating the necessary reflexes of every human being so that he/she is inspired positively by this perspective.

How we can define poverty

Something very common that we can currently retrieve from financial analysts and sociological and political science papers, is that poverty as a social and economic situation is disproportionate to the wealth that an organized society has. The world's richest 1% get 82% of the wealth, says Oxfam" (*bbc.com*, last retrieved 6/9/2018).

Poverty, as a status of limited economic and social activity, existed from the very moment the first human society was formed. By the time that wealth emerged as a crucial historical subject and as a key differentiating factor between the people, it has been consolidated in the consciousness and the collective unconscious of mankind, as well as the class stratification of society, together with contradictions and an ontological dimension of this differentiation.

Keynes describes the phenomenon of poverty as a paradox, especially when it manifests itself in times of economic growth and abundance, attributing it to the inadequacy of active demand (Keynes, 1936). Indeed, he points out that the richer a society is, the greater the gap between actual and potential production and between workers with certain margins of consumption and the unemployed, who are condemned to under-consumption and poverty. Sources of poverty are not just unemployment that is infinitely expanding—especially in times of crisis— but also temporary employment conceiving explosive dimensions (Vergopoulos, 2008).

People who are on the verge of poverty or live within these given conditions usually come to realize the unfavorable situation they found themselves in, due to the static and the relentless fiber of the individual problems that poverty creates and reproduces. As Bauman observes: "*Poverty is a social and mental state (...) when "you are poor", it means that you are blocked from what is perceived as "normal life"*" (Bauman, 1998). Poverty, especially at a time of general capitalist crisis and massive destruction of capital, has an ontological dimension, as it develops a latent and distorted social and economic consciousness.

As a result, poverty, over time and especially in Capitalism, given the economic and social structures of the system, is a situation inherent in social exclusion. Paul Lafarge, K. Marx's son in law, in his book *<The religion of capital>* refers to the social and economic isolation that a man encounters because of poverty and unemployment, through an ironic and yet tragic acting play: "*- In which way your God (The Capital) punishes you? – He condemns me with unemployment. In this way they anathematize me. Meat, wine and fire are prohibited for me. They condemn me, my wife and children dying from hunger*" (Lafarge, 1887).

How religiosity is actually affected by these given standards?

Nowadays, the world seems to be in turmoil: the war in Syria, the rise of nationalism in response to the imposed economic federalism of the EU, with the economic crisis not actually being overcome, but spreading through restrictive **austerity** policy. Capitalism is globalized, with its positive and negative aspects: along with quick and via internet transactions, comes i.e. child labor. Poverty isn't something that only Third World countries experience.

So, if poverty can affect religiosity itself or its quality, then specific elements of the political and economic spectrum can have a good, bad or the worst effect on people's attempts to access the Divine.

Obviously, what is not globalized is a vision, something that will inspire people and drive them to what the Church refers to as "the King's road," to an actual ethical, truly humane standard. Here we can find main differences between the Word of Church, which lies mainly on what Jesus Christ mentioned: "*Whoever comes with me, I will never cast out*" (Mark. 7, 34). Whoever and **not** whatsoever, so that everyone is obliged to follow His Word. Following is optional, not enforced.

Globalization, on the other hand, along with consumerist ethics ("*you exist as a person, as an individual as long as you can consume*") is compulsive. Either you (can) choose to be a part of this or you have to be against it. This actually determines the very meaning of what Globalization is. It will be crucial to quote what the Patriarchs and Archbishops of Ecumenical Orthodoxy mention about this subject: "*Our Church has a big responsibility in order to fight hunger and every form of human need amongst the World. This phenomenon lays on a period of time that most of world's countries live under an established globalized financial regime, which causes a crucial cultural identity crisis, because hunger, not only threatens human lives, but offends the greatness and the sanctity of human creation and at last God Himself*" (Final decisions of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Orthodoxy, 2016).

As I've already mentioned about religiosity and religion as much, they are connected and they can actually be two different things. We can also understand that religiosity can be affected by a range of social manifestations. Poverty especially affects not only the given economic situation of an individual, but the inner man as well. It affects his soul, the way he sees and approaches and interacts with other people. Given the fact that public space expands when people know, value and respect its existence, poverty can be a shrinking factor of it.

On the basis of the above, there may be differences between the social class hatred which triggers tensions, social anomalies, conflicts and solidarity, class cooperation and the dynamics of social dependencies, values and facts that the Christian teaching, the Fathers of Church serve over the centuries.

Poverty and Church

Poverty cannot be seen from only one side and this is what the Christian Church is teaching. Poverty can be the chance for expressing solidarity and compassion. So, the power is not only determined by those who are willing to give, but also to those who get. The mechanism of capitalist accumulation and the general conditions for the development of capitalist production created an imbalanced ratio between the offer and the demand of labor power, reproducing and sustaining social pathogens such as poverty and malnutrition.

The current form of Capitalism seems to be determined on the occasion that the crisis forcibly ends the illusions of consumerist needs, redefining everyone's basic material needs directly.

What is also interesting is that just years before the 2008 crisis burst (2006), financial gurus were pointing that in the years to come poverty will rise and

that could be a problem because poverty as a situation affects people's judgment to such an extent that it would be desirable to even deprive them of their right to vote.

The poor as an existence is not treated anymore as part of society, but as part of a wider set that could support him in his difficult situation and help him to overcome it. *"Nowadays, someone who is considered poor, is not a rich man with just less money, but one 'different kind of man', is the personification of all 'public evil' (...) eliminated by the given 'moral' values of a society"* (Bauman, 1998). Not having the ability to consume, the poor become something like a "moral harassment" for the fraudulent bourgeois world.

This attempt to shift responsibilities from those who are actually to blame to those who are permanent, scientifically sickly and technically marginalized is—I believe—the cornerstone of modern mass Psychology, which is fully integrated within the context of the superstitious idealization of wealth and those who are profoundly enjoying it. As Berdyaev observes, *"the economic world of stock exchanges and banks, in fact, creates a clandestine world more of a mystical world, because indeed there is a mysticism of money that is not divine, not natural, but devilish and just as such, it governs the world"* (Berdyaev, 1946). I will talk about money and whether it is evil or not later.

Christian teaching moves within Jesus' prompting *"to love each other"*, as opposed to the Old Testament laws that justify violence, actually limiting the cycle of love only to those who were "blessed" with the Jewish identity. This can be another main differentiating factor between Christianity and ideology. Ideologies are creations, inspirations of the human mind. Just because of this fact, ideologies simply have an expiring date; they die sooner or later. And demise due to the necessity law of History; they become outdated and at last obsolete. Ideologies at last are made to serve the man, societies and give temporary solutions.

A dangerous fact—and in my humble opinion, can lead to social and religious heresy—is when religion seems to be a part of an ideological-political pattern. This happens when religion is alienated or downgraded and totally naked from its original signifier.

Greek Orthodox Fathers urge us to contrast the Christian teaching with any ideology that produces and reproduces hate and blind intolerance. Those who are actually reborn in Spirit and regenerated through the spiritual baptism of the Church, acquire something beyond chauvinism, social classes and ideologies. The Saints of Church also propose class collaboration that leads to class mobility rather than class struggle or conflict.

Under these circumstances, Neoliberalism and the politico - economic doctrines this kind of ideology produces impose a kind of heresy for Orthodox economic policy. Not like what S. Huntington says about Orthodoxy—that it's actually a heresy of Bolshevism (Huntington, 1996)—but in ethical, social and even economic terms.

Poverty cannot be seen from only one side and this is what the Church is teaching. Poverty can be the chance for expressing solidarity and compassion. So, the power is not determined by those who are willing to give, but also to

those who get. I will also mention, how in Greece, especially during the first years of the debt crisis, the Greek Orthodox Church made the slogan "*no one alone in the crisis*", actually happen, giving it a substantive, spiritual, more solid background and actual meaning.

Everything that narrows public space, thought and spirituality itself as a crucial social process, is inhumane. Ecumenical Orthodoxy, through its recent Holy Synod which took place during Summer of 2016 in Columbaria (Crete) made clear that: "*Church cannot be indifferent with financial situations that have negative effects to all humanity*", adding that: "*(for our Church) viable economy is the one that combines effectiveness with justice and social solidarity*" (Final decisions of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, 2016). In the same Synod, Nationalism (but not healthy patriotism) is condemned as the main reason causing wars and conflicts between nations, a threat to peace, which is against God's will.

Under the pressure of the ruthless rhythms of the system that crush man and transform his very immediate needs into inaccessible luxuries, a tremendous mental endurance and vigor is required to remember the fact that Jesus blesses the poor without rewards to those who benefit from their situation ("*Blessed be ye the poor*": Luke 6, 20). The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the "*fierce fighters*" of life, facing their difficulties, as challenges for spiritual greatness, imitating the profound and "*just*" (fair-minded) Job. In the Bible, the word "*poor*" receives religious content and becomes synonymous with the words *righteous* and committed to God or reserved for God (poor by world, but rich by God).

Facing the strain of pressure caused by the instant and thus a violent shortage of a man's basic needs, the poor resent and become more and more disappointed. Sometimes he expresses their disappointment with violent and aggressive ways. However, the eschatological theology of Christianity can help people to better understand the mediocrity of our world's harsh reality; it's characterized by states of permanent anxiety and sadness. Disobedient and oppressed in capitalist society poor workers, associated with fraudulent and formal freedom, must constantly struggle to improve their social situation, because this is their actual subjective interest, but also the objective truth.

There can be times that the poor, needy and oppressed, the "*damned*" of this world, is indulging in hate and vileness for the people who may be responsible for his situation, either it concerns with his close social or family environment, whether it has to do with the powerful and rich in general.

The financial determination and the utilitarian spirit of an inexorable Capitalism leaves little or no space for the development and consolidation of a climate of social peace and a level of understanding and cooperation between the classes. Teaching, tradition and the act of our Church—including soul healing, therapeutic and pastoral work, which attempt to inspire the leaders of this world, giving them intellectual enlightenment, the prospect for building a mild economic – social and political ambience, securing a certain level of social peace. In St. Basil the Great's Liturgy, we read that people should pray for their leaders "*deep and inalienable peace, which will ensure a peaceful and quiet life, with piety and*

modesty for all" (see *Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ ἐν Ἀγίοις Πατρός ἡμῶν Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου*. Cf. II Tim. 1-7).

The frustrated feeling of class hatred and the inelastic diffusion of the wrath of the unjust, can only have devastating effects for both the societies and the soul of the indignant. Christianity does not recognize the arrogance and the hatred that class struggle imposes. Christianity does not accept the denial of the human person or his image because this is the actual image of God, neither by the class nor by its representatives (Berdyayev, 1946).

There is a relentless psychological law —more so a fact— that sees the one who hates as "infected" by the actual object of his hatred. For Christianity, man is a unique psychosomatic entity, as a person who is not just something that came out of his sociopolitical environment.

The consumerist society, which is underpinned by the capitalist system, set out concrete and relentless criteria for the identification of an individual. The person is degraded —sometimes by his own will (!), sometimes in a violent way— to someone, where through his own consumer power, he eventually develops a distorted consciousness: A latent and pernicious view about a person or society as a consumer goods. Besides, it seems that in the post-modern society infested with consumerist ethics, there is no place for the poor.

The attitude of the Greek Orthodox Church can only be explained within the context of its theological approach over the wealthy and those who have power (financial – political etc.). In the case of the Greek debt crisis, which burst in 2010, Greek Orthodox Churches' public speech and preaching weren't limited or mainly characterized by anti-capitalist or anti-austerity aphorisms and anathemas.

Confirming its spiritual and social role the Church, as an institution, was the helper and supporter of the poor, the unemployed and those who were hit by the crisis and austerity measures, the refugees and the immigrants included. These people (refugees/immigrants) had a special misfortune to live in this very difficult period of time in Greece.

Every single local parish, especially those who are located in big cities in which problems that the crisis caused can be more harsh and violent, as dynamic social cells of our Church, have contributed most to the overall effort for multilateral support to those in need. The parish is part of the sanctified forms and structure of Orthodox communalism. An important work is also being done by the NGO of the Church of Greece, "Mission", a charity, non-profit association whose main goal is "*the instrument, the humble factor of the relief of the people*". NGO Mission, beyond everyday meals, spiritual and material support and immediate assistance to those in need, despite the difficulties the crisis occurred, has developed a range of diverse activities, the promotion of our ecclesiastical Tradition, etc.

A church cannot be confused with any charitable organization. Its main purpose is ecumenical salvation and internal peace. The church only uses its charitable actions to relieve the poor and to inspire political leadership. Church "*isn't a creation of this world, but it exists for the sake of this world*". Nevertheless, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in the years of the crisis, the Church in

Greece replaced the social state that was actually dissolved.

In Greece, especially during the first years of the debt crisis, the Greek Orthodox Church, made the slogan *"no one alone in the crisis"*, actually happen, giving it a substantive, spiritual, more solid background and actual meaning. The most important thing is that most of our fellow Greeks (Christian or not) got inspired and welcomed that stance, since this multilayered assistance was given unconditionally to all those in need, despite someone's religion, ethnicity or political beliefs.

There is not any specific list of beneficiaries of the charitable act of the Church (or at least it shouldn't exist). The church asks directly all people: *"What do you want me to do for you"* (Mark. 10, 51). One who can be benefited by the charitable act of the Church, is everyone, despite his/her ethnic, political, religious background. Christians now should act in the same way, expanding the Word of Church by their very actions, expressing solidarity and compassion. Besides, our Lord sets the basis of every charitable act, saying: *"This (charity) is something that you should do to commemorate me"* (Luke 22, 19).

Apostle Paul, in order to encourage and promote *"Logeia"*, a popular habit of collecting money or other goods for the less fortunate, will highlight: *"your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need"* (II Cor. 8, 13 – 14).

In Christian teaching, the value of human existence does not depend on its external traits, the economic power or weakness of every human being, but the common human substance that comes from the origin of the same Father. St. John Chrysostom, separates the material goods into free and non-free. Free are those which were given to man, through the creation of the world, to enjoy them without limitations and conditions. As non-free, are those which are acquired through work, that is, those who have conditions for possession and use, such as wealth, money or property.

J. Chrysostom sees this very fundamental cosmological arrangement as a measure of the wisdom of God, perfectly integrated into the eschatological teaching of the Church. Based on this observation Saint Gregory Palamas, proceeds further, expanding the communal freedom of free goods, to non-free ones, to those that acquired with personal contribution and work, since for their creation the raw materials (sun, water, air, etc.) belong again to God. These are his words: *"All goods that come from the treasury of God, they are common (accessible) to all people"* (Homily 14, MPG 151, 164 B).

With the above, we can see a distinction between Christian teaching and the "spirit of Capitalism" especially about property and material goods. The difference is fundamental and is mainly found in the fact that Christianity is the faith in Revelation rather than a metaphysical management logic of a historically given economic situation. Free goods were created by God or by His Grace and offered to people for good use in the context of interdependence: interdependence through the division of labor and the reciprocity of social dependencies.

Man should be considered as an administrator, a simple operator especially for the free –given by nature– goods and not an owner. In the *Psalms* we

read: "Lord owns the earth and it's everything, the universe and everyone that lives within it" (Ps. 23,1).

So, there are any spiritual prerequisites for social peace, unity and prosperity in today's globalized world. Can there be a substantial transformation, a spiritual "Metamorphosis", of societies in this direction?

World leaders consume too much of their power, make too much efforts, investing into financial "reform" plans, productivity reconstruction by social destructive measurements and no one seems to understand the need of an actual spiritual reconstruction of our societies, a real and solid vision that can be inspired by our Church's Word. Something that could have real "macro" results not only in Economy but –by all means– restoring humanity: a real "Metamorphosis".

Property and wealth

Money currencies, which are to a certain extent a cultural achievement and a social and economic conquest of mankind, facilitate trade by making them more direct since they act as general commercial equivalents.

The use of both money and property as a mean of enforcing and coercing, as a tool of repression of a social class over another surpasses their simple utilitarian and socially compatible qualities. The capitalist system hypocritically reaffirms the personal initiative on ownership to the means of production as well as in general (Berdyaeu, 1946). St. John Chrysostom (*Homily in the I Corinthians*) will mention that "our own interest is related to the interests of the others".

Money is a mean of trading, a useful general commercial equivalent. The tendency to accumulation and over-accumulation is something different. However, money cannot be evil itself. Money doesn't value as itself rather from its usage as a means of exchange and payment. Therefore, it is morally neutral (Weber, 1922). Niall Ferguson also underlines that: "Money is conventionally accepted as a means of trading that has the merit of eliminating the disadvantages of exchanging products" (Ferguson, 2008).

Aristotle will notice that money is an intermediary, a regulatory instrument in trade, as an exchangeable substitute for the human trade needs (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*). He is the first to deal in detail and in depth with the phenomena of Economic Science, formulating the theory of value. He separates the values of goods according to their usage and their exchange value.

He gives an exact definition of the term money (numismatics: νόμισμα) by referring to the Greek word νόμισμα (lit. coin but means money in general) pointing that this word is actually underlining the very meaning of its usage: "We call it money (νόμισμα) because it's not a natural creation, but a creation of law and it's in our power to transform and change its usage and make it actually useless" (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*).

Oswald Spengler will now say: "Credit money, in the form of the English ratio between world trade and the export industry in a country without peasantry, serves as a basis to define capital, value, price, property, which are then applied without turning to other levels of culture and other life cycles" (Spengler, 1918).

Weber, referring to the "anthroposophical", as he characterizes, Austrian writer Ferdinand Kurnberger's (1821-1879) perception of the accumulation of wealth, considers that simple savings and the efforts that an individual makes to save money, is a moral duty that partially forms a "peculiar morality" (Weber, 1905).

We cannot, however, demonize money and consequently, our daily transactions with it, seeking alternative methods such as the exchange of products, since this would be anachronistic, dangerous (i.e. cryptocurrencies) but also extremely difficult, especially now that societies are increasingly removed from traditional primary production methods.

It's money's usage that can be defined as evil, selfish etc. and not money whatever currency there is. During the last 8 years, due to the Eurozone crisis, political movements in many countries whose economies participate in the Federal Currency System, blamed Euro currency and its faulty architect for every single problem their countries dealt with (poverty rates rising, unemployment etc.).

Despite the fact that several positions of these movements are indeed solid, based on serious and real facts, blaming just a currency for any problem comes up isn't something that—at least for now— can give real solutions. Reality shows that misunderstandings, delays and misinformation could drive not many, but a specific, crucial set of people to become an easy audience to opportunist and populist leaders.

So, the multiple use of the money for selfish purposes, its "hoarding"—which goes beyond the tendency to secure certain limits on property— and the illusory shine of luxury, which is guaranteed by money, leads to a change of the natural balances, which God himself lied to this world as the foundation for its proper functioning. The Fathers of Church point out the enormous danger that this situation can cause to the people, while underlining the need for better management of wealth for the benefit of society.

St. Maximus the Confessor (*Chapters about love*), speaking about the "passive and the impassive" gaining of goods and wealth in general will mention that: "*all those who gain goods without any effort they don't feel sorry if they lose it. On the contrary they feel happy for something like that. But all those who gain goods with effort and pain, they feel sorry if they lose their ownings. In the Evangelion, the rich man left Jesus with sorrow. Either the ownership of good comes to be passive or impassive, it controls a man's life*".

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LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

By

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Abstract

This is a study, at the core of which lies the investigation, the understanding and the approach of the religious phenomenon through J. Lacan's psychoanalysis. Lacan's post-structural approach to every subject leaves the whole question of religious sentiment and religious phenomenon lurking and creeping throughout his work, and our aim is to overcome these barriers, which Lacan poses, thus in order to approach, as accurately as possible, the locus of religion in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan places the "Divine" on the level of the *symbolic*, thus giving us two crucial elements: firstly, the position of God in the human soul, and secondly, the dangers that arise from a possible expulsion from this position.

Keywords: *Lacan, Religiosity, Post-Structuralism, Psychoanalysis.*

Introduction

French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan were born in Paris in 1901. During the curricula of the circulars, in which he excelled, he showed a special appeal in Religious and Latin, while he developed a special passion for Philosophy, which will accompany him in the whole theorizing of Psychoanalysis. In 1932, after completing his medical studies and specializing in Psychiatry, he published his doctoral thesis entitled "*De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*". After this he studied Psychoanalysis with the psychoanalyst Rudolph Loewenstein (1898-1976) and was later accepted into the *Psychoanalytic Society of Paris*. In 1936, at the International Psychoanalytic Conference, he presents his interpretation of the "mirror stage", which, at least at the time, would go down in history as interrupted by a Freud biographer, named James. In 1945, he taught at the Sedan Clinic and finally at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*. His teaching is published with early cancerous rhythms and is entitled "*J. Lacan - Le Séminaire*". His death occurred in Paris in 1981.

The figure of Lacan, together with his overall course in the field of Psychoanalysis, was a "shadow" domain in the field of Psychology for years. It is only in the last few years that various studies have been published relating Lacan's teaching in the fields of religion or Theology. At the same time, the Lacanian texts themselves give the scholar the opportunity to approach —up to a point— his most comprehensive religious-psychological view, which, however, is not presented verbally or systematically, but is expressed through the concepts of

the core of Lacanian thought (e.g. symbolically). This is the greatest difficulty in approaching religious concepts and symbols in his work. These cryptic references in the field of religion, very far from Freudian references, create difficulties for the seeker, who wants to draw and use this content.

In the present study, a thorough effort is made to approach the Lacanian work from the point of view of religion, having as basic research guidelines the questions which are related to the position of the *Divine (Sacred or Holy)* in the Lacanian system. Our goal is to enrich the field of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and—if possible—to draw some conclusions, which will be fertile ground for a new turn or deepening of the Psychology of Religion. This paper deals with the issue of religiosity in Psychoanalysis, as it evolved with the contribution of J. Lacan. Lacan did not only influence the history of psychoanalytic practice, but also many other fields of the humanities. With Lacan, transcendental thought begins to enter other fields, which are linked, either purely or indirectly, into the realm of Psychoanalysis. By theorizing the practice of Psychoanalysis, Lacan reinterprets how he sees the patient, as well as how the various scientific fields (e.g. the field of Linguistics, Anthropology, or Social Theory) were perceived, according to firstly its importance as an object, and secondly the very strength of their theories, seeing them being used now on the basis of "reading" clinical symptoms.

Theology, as a special scientific domain, has been affected, as we shall see, by this form of Psychoanalysis. The Psychoanalysis of Lacan did not adopt an "aggressive" attitude toward Theology and religiosity, as for example, Freudian did, but went to try to interpret it and place it in the very broad mental structures. A second question is merely related to the distribution of matter, concerns the relationship between Psychology and Psychoanalysis. In the end, the most comprehensive psychoanalytic practice was denervated when it falls into the realm of "Psychology of Depth" and is thus distributed as another practice within the science of Psychology?

Without any intention of making any evaluative judgments, historically and preliminary, Psychoanalysis have been included many times in the textbooks of Philosophy and History of Psychology as an integral and necessary part of Psychology. In fact, several times it has been regarded as the incarnation or the evolution of the science of Psychology itself. As we work within the framework of Lacanian thought, it would be useful, as we think, to quote Lacan's own thought on the relationship between these two "objects". For Lacan, Psychoanalysis doesn't seem to be at the core of the realm of Psychology and its hybrid forms. Lacan himself, after all, did not consider the soul as an organ and therefore had no hope of healing any mental pain or grief e.g. of Chemistry and Pharmaceuticals. Something like this sounded completely meaningless to him. Lacan emphasizes that the oral formulation of a memorandum is the remedy itself. After all, Lacan rejected this discarded and highly "castrated" manner by which Psychiatry treats Psychoanalysis. To the extent, however, that Freud and Lacan chose to capture in writing their most comprehensive theoretical constructs, we think it is positive to treat their overall relationship in the light of an intertextuality. Perhaps we should treat Freudian works as hypertext before the Lacanian

topic. By proclaiming the "return to Freud" through the science of dreams, Lacan will have formed such a thought, which will give him a distinctly distinct of the psychoanalytic identity. With the "return to Freud" one can see a combination of both thoughts. Lacan will accept the "three-dimensional" psychoanalytic perspective: the perspective of the analyzer, the perspective of the analyst, and the perspective of a "judge" created by the *Superego*.

Another notable distinction between Freud and Lacan is the treatment of the Oedipus complex. According to Lacan, the Oedipus complex is a symbolic structure, and actually the primary structure, which defines our symbolic and unconscious thoughts. The importance of the Oedipus complex lies in the fact that it marks the transition from the *Imaginary* to the *Symbolic*, but through a third space, the "*name of the father*". This term does not symbolize the real father, but the paternal significant (*signifiant*); the *sign* is a symbolic position, which the child perceives as the locus of the object of the mother's desire.

Lacan's theory of psychoanalytic practice is full of numerous neologisms and a variety of forms, which is the main reason why even today, Lacan faces a division among researchers. The absence of vocabulary *entries* for Lacanian Psychoanalysis in many books connected with the history of Psychology is proof of this.

Regardless of whether and to what extent this practice is oversimplifying and in line with historical reality, it is used here as a sign of the fact that Lacan was for several decades a controversial figure in Psychoanalysis, a "sect" of it, as those who perceive Psychoanalysis as a form of "religion" say. Thus, Lacan comes into the field of Psychoanalysis, as the child—in his view—comes into a consolidated language system, which not only alienates him, but also leaves him with a sense of imperfection, when he handles linguistic structures. In the same context, Lacan will try to change the form and content of many psychoanalytic terms in order to reinterpret them conceptually and semantically.

In this degree of reinterpretation, his theoretical approaches, which began in 1953, acquire particular importance and led to the rupture of the official psychoanalytic institutions, as well as with the introduction of new terms/concepts.

Lacan, as early as 1953, began to move away from traditional Psychiatry for the reasons outlined in the preambles of this work. In fact, he has already approached "in the light of" Psychoanalysis and reinterpreted the field of psychosis, thus making it clear that the field of the Lacanian *Symbolic* is closer to its discovery. The crime of the Papin sisters was a beneficial condition for Lacan to approach the question of psychosis and to introduce himself to the understanding of nerves. For Lacan, psychotics convey their questions and doubts to others in a willingness to get rid of their anxiety; at the same time, by transmitting these feelings to others, others become their pursuers, in addition to their carriers of negative characteristics.

For Lacan, the birth of man has always been premature and the premature birth of persons involves various risks. Evidence of this is that if we leave after birth, we are more likely to die. This is the context in which man's first contact with himself will take place. The child meets an unspeakable source of anguish, looking into the mirror: *image*. In most cases, he cannot recognize himself in his

totality. The mirror cannot reflect the emotions, thoughts or fantasies that come with the new person. The young man, for the first time, places himself in front of him. The moment is crucial for the whole developmental course of man, who will continue to be accompanied by a feeling of imperfection and stress, every time he sees himself, a product of time, in photographs, recordings or mirrors.

This "dismembered" (double: divided / torn) baby's body goes through a process of bonding, which allows the young person to exercise a new control over his body imaginatively, that is, he is captured by this external image. This gives rise to the more general phenomenon of transference or imitation. The young man now will undergo a somehow alienation, which Lacan calls *imaginary* (to the level at which this identification of the young man with his idol takes place), thus implying the reflection the captivity of the child in the image. Lacan will come back to this subject later, to go into greater detail on this scene.

Fundamental to all Lacanian thought is his lecture in the context of the newly established psychoanalytical society, titled "*Real, Symbolic and Imaginary*". Lacan handled certain studies of the psychologist Melanie Klein (1882-1960) as the trigger. Klein released a case study on a patient. Her young patient sees the psychoanalyst as a piece of furniture, as she is beyond the *Symbolic* and the *Imaginary*. This child lived exclusively in the Lacanian *Real*.

For Lacan, the *Symbolic* is related to "speech" and symbolic function, as the anthropologist Levi Strauss (1908-2009) meant it. On the other hand, the *Imaginary* is related to the image of our peers, but also to our own representatives. Finally, the *Real* (*réel*)—which is distinguished from *reality*—is what remains outside the establishment of the *Symbolic*, although in the construction of the *Symbolic* Lacan considers that the expressive possibilities of the human nature are realized through the field of language. In fact, Lacan himself states "[...] *The whole problem from now on lies in the coupling of the symbolic and the imaginary within the composition of the real*".

Actually, the Lacan proclamation draws important conclusions. As mentioned above, the *Symbolic* indicates the overall order of the language, while the *Imaginary* is a typical human production, possibly a product of the possession of the neocortex. Finally, we should not confuse, first, the *Real* with reality, and, second, the *Real* (like, for example, religion might be) with the truth. Lacan presents religion as the negation of truth and not reality. According to Lacan, the '*real*' is the concrete, the visible. Another key element for a better understanding of the Lacanian theory is—as we will see below—that the *real* and the *imaginary* are connected.

Lacan's composition of *Symbolic* is distinguished between speech and language. The subject is understood as distinct from the Ego (which, in essence, consists of an imaginary structure). Thus, the subject may be religious in different ways with respect to the (narcissistic) Ego. After all, the epitome of Lacanian production could be traced exactly to this period, the period of the examination of language in Psychoanalysis and the formation of perhaps the most important Lacanian thought: "*The unconscious is structured as language*".

Of course, the cultural context greatly influences Lacan, and more specifi-

cally the material is drawn from this field of study of Structuralism and of linguistic theory. L. Strauss's structural methodology derives from this distinction of the founder of modern Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) between language and speech: the distinction between a given system, such as language, and the individual expression or manifestation of this system, as in speech²⁹.

Also important for the formation of Lacanian thought —as mentioned above— is the theory of Saussure, which will distinguish three aspects of language: a) language itself as a universal human phenomenon of communication, b) language as a specific language or linguist system, and c) speech as the language with the use of the specific verbal act or statement.

Because of the more general purpose of this study, it is not possible to further develop the totality of Lacanian thought and the psychoanalytic theory of its founder. It must be noted, however, that Lacanian innovations, the new elements of Lacanian thought do not stop here. As a product of time, we will see that new groundbreaking Lacanian concepts will come to frame, or even improve, the field of Psychoanalysis, theorizing Freudian imperatives, Freudian thoughts and hypotheses (see *ideal ego*, the *ideal of the ego* and so forth). What is worth noting, however, is that a significant difference between Lacan and Freud, creeps in at this point; by mapping the symbol, Lacan essentially states that from the moment the symbols appear, the material of mind is classified according to it, but without stating that everything is reducible to the *Symbolic*. This is the difference, because for Lacan for whom the unconscious is structured as a language, the unconscious is a significant material. Therefore, the unconscious is a process of meaning, but it cannot be independently controlled: Language speaks through us, instead of us through language. This, translated religiously, would mean that "Holy" speaks through our consciousness.

Lacan, as is well known, will define the unconscious as the discourse of the "Other" (any object, which as a reflection or projection replaces our lack), while the "great Other" (the symbolic locus or order, or "place of truth", good or bad faith / trust with another subject, starting with the mother and then the woman in general) is the language itself, the *symbolic order*, the one that cannot be fully assimilated by the subject, the really great otherness, that is the nuclear of our unconscious.

Later, we will examine how the symptom, for Lacan, is understood as a discourse, characterized by the impossibility of its realization and which has to find the channels of outsourcing. The person talks a certain way about the symptoms and therefore there is a need to decipher them. Censored conscious messaging can lead to psychosomatic illnesses. Lacan believes that there are certain passages so that if there are words trapped in the body as symptoms, they can be externalized. It is possible that entire nerves can be organized by words (religious or spiritual). Therefore, for Lacan, words are the material of symptoms.

Ab initio, the subject is born, formed and it will acquire the cognitive patterns within the "place of the other" and that is why Lacan's therapeutic ap-

proach aims at the need of the individual to escape from the "doors of identification" and develop deeper relationships with the others. Here we can see the great contribution of Lacanian theory in comparison with other theories, as for instance by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). It is not just a superficial or sharp approach of the subject to the Other, but for a precisely intersubjective identification of the subject with the very discourse of the Other; while the Phenomenology of E. Husserl (1859-1938) informs us that, being a selfish subject with an egoistic horizon, I cannot know if others are really present in my consciousness and if they are as real as I am —introducing some kind of autism— Lacan considers it necessary for the subject to consist of an interactive "being", as correctly predicted by the German existential philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as early as 1927 in his work "*Sein und Zeit*". According to the Lacanian theory, I "submit" for the sake of the Other. Lacan understood as early as the 1950s how the intersubjective approach is necessary for subjective completion; he increasingly emphasized the organizational character of the *Symbolic*, that is, the social, cultural, and linguistic networks within which we are born. All this is pre-existent in our birth. The language is at its "place" prior to the moment of our birth. And all these environmental networks, such as religion, will be the most comprehensive background in which we move with birth; we are bound through the image and through the words and names that others use for us. In other words, our identity —as it were— depends on how we accept the words of the "Great Other" (first our mother and then all the others, in general). Lacan, after all, will find even in the dialect of *master* and *slave* and in the "*Phenomenologie des Geistes*" of the philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) that the genesis of consciousness has to become with the Other, clause that he will re-use in his late phase.

Thus, the subject of the Lacanian tradition is, in the final analysis, a break in principle within the discourse itself. From the perspective of the concept of "great Other" we pass to the object "a", which seems to be the desire of the Other, who comes to define the *subject*. Man is born when he hears the desires of others. It is laying in dialectic between Levinas, Lacanian analysis, both subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and the philosophy of Romanticism developed during the interwar period, and the Belle Epoque, which deal with the Other with a narcissistic egoistic way, in a way through which the Other is extinguished and lost, but also through which the Other is useful only to the extent that it builds my subject. The *Other* in French Philosophy, most notably in E. Levinas, lasts for me only an instant; the moment, which will help the consciousness of my subjectivity.

Unlike Levinas, Lacan considers it impossible for the Other to exist without the subject. It is impossible that man's desire can be desired by the Other, or: man desires the Other's desire for him. Thus, the fold from which the little *a* appears is created by the collapse of the hypothetical unity of the mother with the child. There's of course a whimsical degree.

Desiring to recognize and find the small *a*, I desire even more and as I seek the desire of the Other, my castration will occur, that is, precisely in the search for the knowledge of the desires of the other, the ignorance of which creates a

deficient feeling in me... "I am subjectivized" by the Other; I passively accept the desire of the Other and I "castrate" him, interiorizing him. Essentially, this is the psychoanalytic Lacanian reading of Freud, who described to us the subject as a game, as a tool of desire in the hands of the Other and his desires. It is within this theoretical framework that Lacan comes in medias res to further theorize Psychoanalysis, as well as to give it new theoretical concepts in its theoretical arsenal, either ab ovo or by reinterpreting the existing ones.

A. Is there a religiosity in the Lacanian theory?

In our overall aim, the question arises of how the religious phenomenon is treated in Lacanian writings and seminars. Already from the second Seminar, which examines the "Ego" in Freudian theory and the technique of Psychoanalysis, Lacan states that "some people become anxious when they see me referring to God" to complete his sentence saying: "nevertheless I arrest God *ex Machina*, unless we detach the *Machina ex deo*". Lacan's speech is filled with metaphors from Christian Theology. Lacan's "god" defines otherness and as an element of language itself is hidden within the unconscious¹. God —more or less— is present through even his absence in the Lacanian work. Lacan, of course, mentions him verbally, but his whole discourse is symbolic (*the name of the Father*). In fact, in the most "theological" seminar, the 20th, there is that "strange" and unconventional dialectical connection about female sexuality and God. God, for Lacan, is, as Slavoj Žižek (1949-) observes, not dead, but unconscious! This, semantically, points to the existential position that God is, but does not exist, since, according to Lacan, it is a complete, coherent, non-castrated and non-deleted Other, an *Other* with a capital *A* and without a *barre*.

Lacan, continuing within the framework of Freudian thought, speaks of the relationship between Psychoanalysis and religion through two well-known texts by Freud: "*Totem und Tabu*" and "*Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion*". Freud speaks there of some kind of progress of spirituality towards an aesthetic of the visible with Mosaic Monotheism and of a return of the repressed, not of the image of the sovereign, great, man, but of the dying father with the effective prohibition of incest through intercourse of speech! In other words, we have here, as it were, a return to religiosity, already when the father cries out for his murder. The murder of the father (patricide) allows the passage of the Freudian *imago* in the Lacanian "*name of the father*" (Oedipus ban, the "No" of the taboo of incest). The father, consequently, now returns "death", without a divine image with Mosaic Monotheism.

But God, who exists in his absence, clearly exists with one name; the name of the father, as the representative of the law. As a result, Lacan concludes:

*"The myth of the father's murder is precisely the myth of a year in which the god died. But, if God died for us, it means that He has always been dead. That's precisely what Freud says. It never existed, except in the mythology of the sons, that is to say of this command which is commanded to love this father"*².

¹ E. Boliaki, "Jacques Lacan, Religion and Ethics", *Theology* 76/1 (2005) 182.

² J. Lacan, *Seminar of Jacques Lacan (Book 8)*, Polity, Cambridge, 2015, p. 209.

The *void* (sic) created by the death of the father, which is translated by Freud as the birth and transmission of the Law concealing obsessive compulsions, does not persuade Lacan to adopt this interpretation. Lacan goes on to say that respecting this discrepancy is a word that can go further. That is why, in his work, we will repeatedly encounter the famous verse of Exodus 3:14: «*Εγώ ειμί ο ων*». In Lacan's opinion, the relationship between the words *I* and "*I am*" is a metonymic relationship: one implies the other. While for all beings the "is" (*être*), which belongs to the symbolic order, is opposed to the existence (which belongs to the order of the *real*), for God, the Implicit and the Absolute, this differentiation is not valid, because the core of our "being" is Other, the foreign, the elsewhere (see *ex-sistence*). The (human) subject is decentralized; his center is external to himself (see *eccentric*). From this, anthropologically, it follows that the subject is born with the lack (*manque*), a castration of the "being", the lack of a signifier in the Other' (cf. "Lack of meaning") desire (*désir*), that institutes the metonym of the lack of "being" (*manqué à être*). Theologically it confirms that, as far as God is concerned, we cannot, in the existent way, claim either that existence (*person*) precedes His essence (*nature*), or that essence precedes His existence. There is a gap for Lacan; in the absence of the name or in a name which cannot be pronounced (cf. *tacit* and *implied*). God does not identify himself with a primary name and cannot be named after his father, except by some others than himself, such as, for example, the Divine Word, which addresses Him as "my father"³.

At the same time, Lacan tries to point out the equivalence of three-dimensional fatherhood. Each being is bound to the other and neither can deceive the other two. For Lacan, Christianity is a drama that "literally" perpetuates the death of God and at the same time makes him a faithful supporter of the only love, which has since manifested itself as the command to "*love your neighbor as yourself*". He added, indeed, as we shall see later, that "the death of God" and "the love of neighbor" are terms of historical solidarity. The great Other, then,

³ The psychoanalyst P. Julien in his book "*God in our soul*", gives a nice interpretation regarding the names of God: "One cannot define the being - father according to a single dimension. Indeed, fatherhood presupposes three complementary approaches, three dimensions called symbolic, virtual and real. Initially, a symbolic god, that is, in the place of signifiers, paternity is a name of the father, indicating an attitude. The father is not the one who calls himself a father, but the one who can occupy a position, which has been named. It was named by whom, only by the mother, who transmits to the son or daughter the way of placement between her and the child". For Julien, Lacan managed to read exactly this through the answer of the god "I am who I am". That is, to be named by myself, to call myself. "The second dimension of fatherhood comes from the son or the daughter. It is that of the virtual [...] Thirdly, this conflict between the father in the symbolic and the father in the virtual can only find its solution with a third dimension of the father in the real. Indeed, only he allows the mourning of the ideal father to be performed. He is supposed to be able to establish the law of good. This is exactly the law that the real father relates to. The Father within the real is the man who desires a woman and precisely because of this mating a double possibility will be passed on to the next generation. "First the mourning of an ideal father should be performed and then slowly leave mother and father so that one day he can be engaged to a wife or a husband who comes from another family". The reading, made by Julien under the Lacanian words, appears here, of course. It is a product of Lacan's immersion in Sociology and specifically in the "sociology of the gift" by Marcel Mauss.

the Other with a capital A, is the important Other, the one who gives meaning to our requests. Initially the mother, who gives meaning / significance of the reactions of the child and contributes to the formation of the child's self and then the father, the unconscious, or even God himself⁴. In the first phase of life, the young person perceives the otherness of the Other whatever its gender either for masculine subjects or for feminine subjects.

B. The "Triumph of Religion".

In the interview entitled "*The Triumph of Religion*", Lacan makes one of the most groundbreaking and shocking states in the tradition of Psychoanalysis: "*Religion will triumph, and that means that Psychoanalysis will have failed*". In this interview, Lacan "cracks" the relationship between the (ecclesiastical) sacrament of Holy Confession and Psychoanalysis, which had gained ground, in the interval; he redefines practices and classifies them as diametrically opposed, while the forthcoming "triumph of religion" makes the following claim:

"Certainly not because of the confession. If psychoanalysis does not triumph over religion, it will die because religion is fearless. Psychoanalysis will not triumph. It will survive or it will not survive".

To the question whether he is convinced that religion will triumph, Lacan responds categorically:

"Yes. It will not only triumph over Psychoanalysis, it will triumph over many other things [...] Science is something new and will bring a lot of shocking things into the life of each of us. But religion, mainly the true⁵, has resources that we cannot even imagine [...] It took them a while, but the people of religion suddenly realized the fate that awaited them with science. They will need to give meaning to all the upheavals that science will introduce. And as to the meaning, they know the subject well. They are capable of really giving meaning to everything [...] And religion will give meaning to the most bizarre trials, those for which scientists themselves begin to have a slight sense of anxiety. Religion will find in all this a multitude of juicy meanings. It is enough to see how it works today, as it is modernized"⁶.

⁴ Mother represents the otherness later in the Object Relations theory (1930). This School will appreciate the role of the mother much more. The role of the father is of course as important as that of the mother and the deprivation of the father can be just as harmful as that of the mother. In the early phase, his role functions as a maternal surrogate and in another "expression" of the mother, while it seems that, a product of time, the one with the prohibitions and the laws will be the one who will introduce the child to the symbolic level and will intrude to erode and break the binary relationship (mother - child), turning it into a triple.

⁵ When Lacan speaks of true religion, he means Roman Catholicism. There is, as he says, a true religion, and that is the Christian Religion, while a little below he will state: of. He will succeed, it is certain, because he has the means [...] He will find a correspondence of everything with everything. This is exactly its function. Here, in essence, Lacan jokingly comments on the whole issue under the Freudian approach to religion. To a large extent, this is an issue related to the independent controllability and refutability of theological cases. Lacan does not rant here, but produces a lamentable elegy.

⁶ J. Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion & Speech to Catholics*, translated by N. Karagianni, Ekkremes Publishing House, Athens, 2005, p. 103.

Psychoanalysis has often been treated as a religion and in some cases as a Kabbalistic sect. For many decades Lacan evoked the monotheistic foundations of Western subjectivity as a set of dialectic fissures, which continued to break with the modern subject. In particular, the way Lacan treats the (Mosaic) Decalogue and the interpretation he makes of it, is indicative of this fact. As Lacan would say, the first commandment separates the **name** of the God from its (ancient) Greek meaning and ancient Greek Philosophy. The second commandment separates Monotheism from the heathen cultures, but whereunto it is born and re-registered. Lacan here, in the second commandment, not only isolates Judaism from its social and cultural context, but also the very ethics of a culture.

Of particular importance, after all, is the way in which Lacan deals with the ninth commandment («οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον σου μαρτυρίαν ψευδῆ»). According to Lacan, the "neighbor" is not the friend, not the brother, not even the citizen or any subject. Above all, the neighbor is the bare minimum of a social relationship; he is the object of the highest moral imperative. I should love her as much as I would love myself. Precisely here lies the dialectic between the death of God and the love of "neighbor", because, for Lacan, these terms are historically in solidarity. All these force us to read Lacan critically. Lacan uses the 9th Commandment to distinguish between the Decalogue and Philosophy, giving the example of the soothsayer Epimenides (7th – 6th BC) with the paradox of the phrase "Κρήτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται". Maybe, in a true context, even this sentence had the capacity to remove the paradox, but for Lacan it does not. For Lacan, the mandate "You should not lie" creates the desire to lie. For Lacan, the unconscious includes his own paradox, where the only truth is that there is no truth!

If we wanted to look at the whole issue of Lacanian Psychoanalysis from a prism of evaluative neutrality —if, of course, this is possible— we would find that there are mainly anti-religious positions of Lacan in his work. After all, Lacan is very accurate with regard to religious myths. Although he will never verbally declare every religious person to be psychotic, he regards psychosis as a cause for the continuation of religious myth. The psychotic would never be surprised that there are vocal hallucinations, visions and mystical experiences. The paradox, however, is that the objective reality that Lacanian work has far more informative content on the question of religiosity than even the works, for example, of Jung and Freud.

One of the misrepresentations of J. Lacan is the one he will make in the seminar "*Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*", where he will connect Psychoanalysis with religion⁷. For Lacan, the gods are part of the kingdom of the *Symbolic*. Lacan will not take a clear stand in favor of an atheistic attitude during his Seminars, perhaps because, if he did, he would essentially overturn the basic view that atheist can speak only to one who has mastered the symbolic meanings, related to God through a theological training, and therefore only theologians are able to speak within a theistic context.

⁷ S. Žižek, "Cogito, Madness, and Religion: Derrida, Foucault, and Then Lacan", *Theology after Lacan. The Passion for the Real*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2015, p. 2.

For Lacan, Psychoanalysis is neither in favor of, nor against any particular religion. It should also be noted that the anecdotal incident in which Lacan sent a postcard from Thessaloniki to the philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990), portraying the archangel Gabriel in a monastery, writes:

“Dear Louis, this photo is by Father Photios [...] The cell he holds is located in Karyes, the capital of this peninsula, where the monks feel at home and call it a sacred mountain”.

For Lacan, it is precisely religion —and especially its functional extensions— which is based on the *Symbolic* (level). This raises an issue, related to the fact that there is no locus (“place”), that a central identity can be created and therefore a single and general construction of a worldview, but multiple modifications of human experience to approach the truth of Faith. This is quite important for two reasons: the first relates to the fact that Lacan continues to associate religiosity with neurosis and psychosis, but without generalizing this thought, writing that not all religious people are psychotic or neurotic. This impossibility of creating a center, from which a certain Faith derives, and which is evenly spread to the members of a Religion, enables the approach of religiosity in a very different way to its members.

The second reason, which follows from this case, is related to Lacan's structuring and postmodernism. For Lacan, the whole theological discourse constitutes a form of speech and, therefore, contains a kind of deficiency, thus introducing us to a peculiar mystical Lacanian Theology, as described by the French philosopher Catherine Clément (1939-)⁸. The point is that, as a product of time, there is an explosive emergence of Theology in Lacan's writings, and what the seminars did was bring to light the ways of the religious and theological tradition, which are a constant source of reference for Lacan and, in particular, to the extent that Theology plays a central structural role in Western subjectivity for him.

So, the following paradox is created: Primary Lacan has a profound difference with the latter. Contrary to what we usually find in the early theological standardization of Lacan's work, which is based on a central philosophical critique of Theology, but has little to do with theological discourse, the latter part, which was originally judged to be “transcendental”⁹, includes terms such as

⁸ E. Castelli, *The Postmodern Bible*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 209: “Mystical theology [is] One that would involve real risks... for Lacanian analysis ‘does not provoke any triumph of self-awareness’. As Roudinesco rightly points out: ‘It uncovers on the contrary, a process of decentering, in which the subject delves into the loss of his mystery’”.

⁹ Here, of course, an important question arises: Is Lacan a structuralist? Language is a structure, while speech is an act, in which the subject and the Other are involved. Of course, for Lacan, speech may not be the very actual dissemination of information between two people, but a random manifestation of monologues. Since Structuralism aimed at eliminating the subject and the concept of subjective action, replacing it with the autonomy of linguistic structures, Lacan is by no means a structuralist, because although he shares the idea of the autonomy of the Symbolic, at the same time he constantly seeks position of the subject. That is why, after all, he will connect language with the blocking of a possible subjective identity and the alienation, which is placed in the class of language. Thus, for Lacan, we often realize

"Catholic", "Reformed", "Buddhist" etc. In the following years, in the place of the "great Other" a dangerous meaning begins to enter: the meaning of God, whoever becomes this "great Other", completely abandons himself in his own creation and, now unconsciously, leaves people, without any superior force watching over them. From the Heideggerian point of view, it seems that man alone bears the burden of his freedom (see J.-P. Sartre) and the very destiny of his (his) God. It will be done, as Žižek will say, with the tears of Christ himself upon the cross, who realizes his own weakness, revealing in the same time that God is atheist. Obviously, Žižek's Christology is both orthodox and exemplary. According to Žižek, Orthodox Christology is that Christ must indeed be God in order to "push" —in a way— the consequences of logic at the extremes (see the crucifixion of Logic: *madness*), while at the same time that within God Himself there is a "community".

In the area of recruiting, Lacan also included religious questions. For Lacan, our entry into a sacred temple, like our gaze on the icons, which in any case acts as triggering mechanisms, contains two very important differences. My gaze on the image, on its hagiography (on the sacred objects), is my desire for something I cannot have. God treats us as a desire and as an impossible object, which is sought for ever but escapes us from the subject. He is a negative (decisive) God, whose impossibility of fulfilment forces the subject himself to give up any positive approach to Him. Here the Orthodox theologian can distinguish a tonality of Eutychianism or transcendence. From this point of view here an Apophatic Theology of the Western type arises. God, for Lacan, as a great Other, into the symbolic order and the network that shapes reality for us, does not speak, but is spoken with us in the middle of the symbolic structure.

C. The 20th Seminary and God.

At the 20th Seminary, Lacan states that Christianity is the "true religion" (sic). This true religion sets out the secret and moral nature of Greek philosophical thought, combining paternal and maternal material. For Lacan, Christianity is the true religion, insofar as it is the only Religion that can explain the topology of the western soul, which Psychoanalysis discovers, and the relation of this topology to the question of "being", which belongs to the womb of a culture that Christianity helped to create. Christianity revealed the lie of Greek ontology and

that words are not designed for us and, in a way, there is a potential barrier between spreading the message: what I am thinking to say and what I am finally saying. For Lacan, only - and partly in fragments - poetry can convey - with its symbolic way of development - the reality of the mind. But if there are still doubts as to whether Lacan is a post-structuralist, I do not think there is any doubt today that Lacan is postmodern, in the sense that he believes that there is no single right way to approach reality. Lacan adapted to his psychoanalytic theory the basic principles of the postmodern conception of reality. This is precisely the reason for his opposition to Freud, who had found in sexuality the defining parameter for the formation of the human personality, already from childhood, while Lacan considered the social context and symbolic structures as causes of its formation as a whole. sexuality and personality in a long evolutionary course and yet moved away from single-factor explanations.

modern Romanticism, expressing the truth of human reality and exposing the void that occupies the place of the Other in the heart of desire.

In this 20th Seminar, Lacan creates a rift within God himself, dividing Him, while creating, on the one hand, a concept of theological rationalism, which corresponds to the male God, and, on the other, a maternal face of God, which intrudes with concepts such as diversity, sexuality, embodiment and so on.

Concerning corporeality, Lacan "sees" an empathetic disposition of Christianity towards the soul of Christ and especially over His body; the body, which human nature defines to have a beginning, but the Divine defines without end. Thus, Christianity introduces a shadowy concept of the flesh and lets it infiltrate the purity of the Greek philosophical tradition, while condemning man with the intolerable thought of the impossibility of eternal bodily life. The human spirit can only conceive of God as something intangible. Humankind conceives God as infinite.

Returning to Žižek's analysis, reopening the question of diversity and desire in Lacan's interpretation of the Christian God, Žižek translates the relevant hagiographic passages as the very transition from Judaism to Christianity, which ultimately obeys the womb of transition from the masculine (patriarchal) to the feminine (maternal) formula of sexual life. The dialectic of the sexes in the Bible itself, after all, is used by Lacan himself, who usually refers to the well-known passage of the hymn of love from the "Letter to the Corinthians" of the apostle Paul, to support his claim¹⁰. This passage is clearly imbued with Lacanian connotations, when in its conclusion Lacan will relate the question of the mirror to the fetal worldview or the questions of knowledge and truth.

On the other hand, Lacan will draw attention to corporeality and the Art of baroque bodies, which represent the deities, and which express the incarnate Christ, who is presented as the fragile little brother of the God of Greek desire. Lacan's Christ suffers and dies; he remains connected mainly with sacrifice and death, rather than with His resurrection, and in such a way that there is no concept of the mother's body in Him and the joy of the fertility of birth and incarnation.

Lacan redefines the overall theological framework by replacing the Freudian model of instincts with a post-Saussurian adaptive model of language and speech discrimination. So, the channel of communication between these two quantities is discovered, as for Lacan the symbolic order is the place, where all Theology belongs and becomes psychoanalytically perceived. Indeed, using the same channels of communication, Lacan finds ways to penetrate in the other aspects of religiosity, such as those expressed by Buddhist Philosophy. Lacan mentions Buddhism several times in his work in various places, while it is worth mentioning that he does not examine it exhaustively, to the extent that he examines the "true religion", i.e. the Roman Catholics. Buddhism is part of the Lacanian "*Écrits*", especially in the field of function and speech during Psychoanalysis. There, Lacan will say that we need to look at the traditional facts

¹⁰ St Paul, 1 Corinthians 13.

provided by Buddhists, and refers to the characteristic error of existence, which is divided into three headings: that of love, hate and ignorance¹¹.

At the same time, Lacan at the 16th Seminary, makes an especially paradoxical reading of the difference between the philosophical and theological psychoanalytic tradition. What distinguishes, says Lacan, the God of the Jews, the one who was characterized as the cause of Monotheism by the other gods, was not a peculiar development; what sets him apart is that this God is to be defined by the fact that he speaks. In Christianity, reason (Heb. *Davar*) is revealed immediately, positioned in the order of the *Real*. It is the interface between Christianity and Psychoanalysis. Lacan holds himself not only to the fact that God speaks and is revealed, but also the fact of His general Revelation.

D. The 'Great' Other.

In this last part of the examination of Lacanian Psychoanalysis we will deal more with "*Discours aux Catholiques*". Indeed, when he refers to the "imminent triumph of religion", Lacan does not prevail, but simply recognizes something that is inevitable. It is precisely at this point that he will reveal that Theology and religion are ideological practices with all the symbolic ones. It is this Lacanian conception which today will enable Theology not only to converse, but also to supplement Lacanian thought itself. For Lacan, it seems that what enabled Theology to lose part of its towards its global survival was this triumphant theological alliance with neoliberal Capital. This is where the entire question arises of whether religion continues to triumph in the modern world under the guise of Capitalism.

Finally, Psychoanalysis consists of a special Theology, treating theological questions with acuteness. In particular, Lacanian Psychoanalysis does not refer to or examine God as such, but focuses on the meaning of the *Other*. In this sense, the Lacanian "god" is hidden and hence a question must be asked: what happens if the *Other* does not exist? What would that mean, after all, if God had not existed for Psychoanalysis? It seems that the "great Other" is an auxiliary and beneficial factor in the overall stabilization of the *symbolic order*, which—as a part of it—is based on the "name of the father" and which provides the "laws" and shapes our rituals and beliefs.

The father, then, must survive, in order to maintain and perpetuate the law, even if Christianity will eventually create a "rift" at this very point with the event of the Crucifixion. So, for Lacan, if one really wants to identify oneself as an "atheist" and wants to maintain an atheistic attitude, he must really take the (mental and moral) responsibility for his atheism. If we humans are to understand God's position, we must rewrite a part of our *Symbolic*. He identifies himself with the "place of the Other" and with otherness. If, in fact, God leaves this point, we will lose some of our otherness. God is at the confluence of the *Real* and the *Imaginary*, and therefore with his non-existence there will be a point of

¹¹M. D' Amato, "Lacan avec le Bouddha", *Theology after Lacan. The Passion for the Real*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2015, p. 74.

emptiness. Therefore, Lacan reminds us that, in spite of our atheism, we continue to believe in God, because, as F. Nietzsche said, we keep faith in the language. That is why the only ones who can truly be atheists are the ones who can talk about God, i.e. theologians. Thus, Theology will survive, but perhaps as an ideology; Psychoanalysis, no. In its 36th paragraph "*Speech to the Catholics*" J. Lacan will refer to the famous work *<Totem und Tabu>* of S. Freud and prohibition, which occurs, because the father died, and because he is ignorant of the fact that he has died. Lacan observes:

*"Whatever Freud's justified denial of any personal inclination toward religious sentiment, religiosity, that it is definitely the place where an experience is articulated as such, about which, of course, Freud's least concern is to characterize it religious as it tends to universalize it, but which nevertheless articulates it precisely on the terms that the predominantly Judeo-Christian religious experience itself has historically developed and articulated. In what sense is Freud interested in monotheism? He knows as well as any of his disciples that the gods are innumerable and unstable, like the forms of desire, that they are their living metaphors. But this is not the case with the one and only god. If he sought his original in a historical model, the visible model of the Sun of the first Egyptian religious revolution, the model of Akhenaten, he did it to reconnect with the spiritual model of his own tradition, the God of the Ten Commandments"*¹².

Conclusion and Critical Remarks.

In this part we will try to capture what is implicitly creeping throughout this article; that is, the very relation of Lacanian Psychoanalysis to religion. A guide for the consideration of this fundamental question of our objective will be this dialectic coexistence of the two above quantities.

We first saw how Freudian Psychoanalysis coexist with Lacanian Psychoanalysis, possessing both religious and theological meanings. In particular, we have seen that religiosity holds a special place for the more general formation of the *symbolic* of the subject. We also considered Lacan's views about religiosity itself and how it survives. Lacan analyzes these issues piecemeal in his seminars, which is a hindrance to Lacan's attempt to address the question of religiosity.

In the "manifesto" of Atheism ("*Die Zukunft einer Illusion*"), Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis, predicts that it is inevitable that religion will disappear, doomed in the face of the steadily accelerating progress of Science. According to the Enlightenment account, Freud had the "belief" that the progress of knowledge is related to leading the apocalyptic knowledge of Theology to its rationalization. Almost a century later, religion and the religious phenomenon continue to live, having in fact—inexplicably for many—consolidated and embraced the new technologies very easily, the new worldviews and the new findings of Science.

¹² J. Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, translated by N. Katsogianni, Ekremes, Athens 2005, p. 64.

Lacan, in one of the most explosive parts of his production, in the 11th Seminar, claims that the true formula of Atheism is not a dead god, but an unconscious God, far from materialistic approaches like Freud's and 18th century French Encyclopedists. That is why, in the 17th Seminary, he will explain why the final act of a complete atheist cannot be the "death of God". Religious beliefs continue to benefit from the "mental existence" after His death! Therefore, indeed, Lacan asserts that the atheist must know that God is unconscious, something which thus Psychoanalysis is far from His death and escape. In other words, by continuing the Freudian interpretation, God still exists in the unconscious (as C. G. Jung had argued on several occasions), therefore not dead. Lacan draws attention to the fact that her father's death can reinforce religious imperatives, something that will make the return of the God ever stronger. To protect Psychoanalysis from the creeping and an unconscious existence of religiosity in the mind of the analysand, a practice must be applied which is not possessed by any kind of "gods".

Professor of the Psychology of Religion at the University of Athens, S. Tsitsigkos (2011), referring to the Freudian view of religion as universal forced neurosis, relativizes the "positivity" of the natural sciences, that is, the modeling of Physics in all sciences, when they come to suggest scientific frameworks stating that Psychoanalysis eventually succeeded to some extent, replacing the mythical with the animistic stage and the Christian God with the unconscious as its substitute, as well as the Christian Religion with a new secular and scientific "religion"¹³. Nowadays the action of Psychoanalysis is limited and less than 10% of psychologists belonging to the American Psychological Society admit that they work in psychoanalytical practice.

More phenomenologically, we could say that in Lacanian Psychoanalysis there are religious and anti-religious readings. Lacan challenged the supposedly given interpretation of Freud's writings, undermining the central position of the Ego in post-Freudian Psychology and affirming the language-analytic functions of the unconscious, proposing the categorization of psychic function into three classes (*imaginary, real* and *symbolic*), on the basis of which all psychic phenomena can be described. God in Lacan's work continues to live and appears inexplicably in these places where he is completely absent, in a special (decisive) manner: Unconscious! For Lacan, this anesthesia of God is, as we have seen, the bridge towards an atheistic society and an atheistic Psychoanalysis. But the Lacanian "God" is, essentially, hidden (*Deus absconditus*) in the *Symbolic* through a consolidated and fanciful "collective symbolic unconscious" that continues to live.

A hindrance to our search was the fact that Lacan makes almost no reference to Orthodox Christian tradition and worship. Also, the Lacanian concepts, which happen to be in theological discourses and the discourse of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, might move in a framework of overlap, but also almost opposite contents. For instance, the Lacanian sense of love and affection is striking to the

¹³ S. K. Tsitsigkos, *Psychology of Religion in the 21st century*, Arreton, Athens, 2011, p. 145.

extent that they are close to Christianity. In the 12th Homily of <in Colossians>, Saint Chrysostom writes:

«Ὅταν δὲ συνίωσιν οἱ σύζυγοι οὐκ εἰκόνα ἄψυχον, οὐδὲ εἰκόνα τινός ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ ποιοῦντες τοῦ θεοῦ, καθ' ὁμοίωσιν» (When spouses come together seem not as a lifeless image, nor with anything found on earth, but with the realization of the divine will, based on "likeness").

So, St. John Chrysostom refers to this holistic question, examining and evaluating the act of love as a type and image of the union of the Divine nature with the human one in the Divine Incarnation of J. Christ, reminding us briefly about what Lacan mentions in his late phase, regarding female sexuality (*jouissance*) and God. Lacan appears to be reconnecting eroticism with the Divine. In the context of a dualist (Western) conception, love was identified with sexual function, while love was placed in the space of the soul, in a spiritual realm. In other words, there was an "in a sense" fold, a multi-rift between love and God, but "God" was the very meaning and essence of eroticism and Love. Thus, the distortion of erotic sentiments cannot be linked to what Christian Theology calls "the transitional state" and the subsequent exclusion of God from this field. And yet, again, the Lacanian view does not allow us to draw a conclusion unscathed, since the question of the Lacanian view of our desire is raised; we desire something from the Other, knowing that he cannot provide it to us. We look for the Other's gaze, knowing that it will leave us a sense of incompleteness. This very feeling of imperfection, the feeling of emptiness, is directly related to human desire and is a node that we cannot read unless we read it verbally with a theological sense.

Lacan clearly draws a distinction between *need*, *demand* and *desire*. Man, in order to satisfy his *desire* (*besoin*), must go through the signifiers of the Other. The subject must articulate his *request*, which is addressed to the Other. What is not satisfied by demand, what each request leaves in balance, is desire. Lacan will illustrate this point with an excerpt from the famous "Confessions" of St. Augustine. There, the Saint, recounting a childhood memory, confesses that, seeing his younger brother, breastfeeding, he was seized with envy. Lacan uses this example, several times and insists on the dimension that Freud projects on the meaning of jealousy, which the subject feels if he realizes that someone else has taken the position that he would like to be there. He will later say that this image of satisfaction, that the subject has seen, embodies object A.

This vision of Freud is similar to the one developed by psychologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980). This is about the need of the individual to maintain an ideal and the need to follow a Religion. According to Fromm, for late Psychoanalysis, there is no human being without religious need, that is, the need for a framework to be worshiped. Naturally, by adopting Kantian terminology here, the manner in which Erich Fromm defines this need has nothing to do with Lacanian necessity. The important element and the reason why we insist so much on Fromm's Psychoanalysis is that it allows a conclusion to be "infiltrated" into the discussion, according to which the interests of the devoted

religious person and the psychologist coincide. The theologian is keenly interested in the teachings of a Religion, while the psychologist is also interested more or less in the moral content of a Religion, namely in how it manifests itself in human behavior and its effect on him. In this light, Lacan himself understood that during Psychoanalysis—whether it took the form of his own technique or Freudian Psychoanalysis—he observed and participated in thoughts and feelings, which were imbued with a very intense way from the religiosity of the examinee, something that C. Jung similarly had observed: Studying neuroses, he studied religion. After all, Freud was the first to conceive of the relationship between the two.

Erich Fromm comes to agree with Lacan and at the same time disagrees with Freud, who interpreted religion as a collective childish neurosis of humanity, reversing—like Lacan—this claim and interpreting it as a neurosis form of private religion. That is why Lacan will not take a second step to characterize the psychotic and the neurotic as the bearers of religion and to say that all religious people are psychotic.

Lacan, however, unlike Fromm and Freud, did not talk somewhere verbally about the authoritarian form of religion, but from the context, we can reach certain conclusions. The key element of authoritarian Religions and authoritarian religious experience is submission to a transcendental power, a power greater than man. The most elementary virtue of this type of faith is submitted. This was basically the type of religion that Freud ignited, the monotheistic religion of the Old Testament, that he had in his mind, something that could characterize today the way with which the theology of Calvinism developed. In dominant religion, God is a symbol of power and strength. He is the supreme power, while man is utterly weak and dependent upon him. It obviously has political implications, linked for example, with Hitler and Stalin, and their authoritarian governments. In states where human life has no value and where the authoritarian position of the ruler has been ideal, which is so abstract and so distant that one can hardly find any connection with life and people, such as is in fact. On the one hand, the Aryan race is hematologically invulnerable, on the other hand the courageous proletariat. For this reason, Lacan will most probably stop at Marxism and not continue on the practical implications of Leninism and Stalinism¹⁴.

On the contrary, humanist Religions, according to E. Fromm, are precisely those that Psychoanalysis would approach sympathetically, such as for example, are the Buddhism of the first years, the teaching of Socrates, of Christ and the Pantheism of Spinoza¹⁵. Spinoza specifically has catalytic influences on Lacan. Consequently, the theology of Freud is so different and heterogeneous

¹⁴ In recent years, and especially after Žižek's approach to Lacanian Psychoanalysis, there has been a new term in the vocabulary of Political Philosophy: Lacanian-Marxism (like Freud-Marxism); J. M. Rabate, *The Cambridge companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2003, pp. 153-154.

¹⁵ J. Lacan, "captured" by the phrase of B. Spinoza "Desire is the essence of man", and which he will classify as a guide for his own psychoanalytic version. Here, according to A. Vergote, there is another great difference between Freud and Lacan, in the level of desire, and the difference lies in the fact that Freud operates with a causal dependence on the past.

from that of Lacan. Freud focuses on the principle of the Old Testament Law, which is written in the spirit of authoritarian religion. God is the sovereign and patriarch of the tribe and creates man for his own pleasure. Lacan treats a humane religion, Roman Catholic Christianity, which is based on the New Testament. Lacan, then, immediately recognized that people's faith and feelings are rooted in their character and that it is shaped by the overall religious, economic, social and political context that prevails within the *Symbolic*. Lacan will not stop after revealing these psychological processes—which, in a way, underpin religious experience—but proceeds to discover the conditions that lead to the development of authoritarian or, conversely, humanitarian religion, respectively, from which the various kinds of religiosity and religious experience derive.

We have seen some basic points, which form the foundations of the psychoanalytic edifice, with Freud's theoretical framework first and Lacan later, demonstrating the multidimensional structure of the human personality, the dynamics of the functions that compose the various psychic phenomena, and its role language network in the development and evolution of the subject. Lacan, extending the Freudian view, presents, in an inventive way, the *unconscious* to be structured as a language, to have a series of mechanisms similar to those that structure the network of *signifiers*, highlighting as a feature the discontinuity, the inadequacy and the lack of coherence between in these two systems. The conceptual dimensions in the works of Freud and Lacan have common points of reference in terms of the intense action of the individual to make his desires known and to fulfill them.

Lacan, symbolizing and theorizing the entire psychoanalytical development hitherto known, was the cornerstone of the transformation of Psychoanalysis in science. He was not only the most important psychoanalyst since Freud's time, not only a milestone in the further examination of psychoanalytic structures and the structures of religiosity, but also something else, broader, more positive and more critical. Lacan influenced the course of Theology itself at the start of the postmodern era. Lacan's positions will be an indicator not only of the course of the innate branch of the Psychology of Religion, but also, more broadly, of the change of a *paradigm*, according to the Th. Kuhn concept, which it would finally lead us to understand where God Himself is hidden within the mental structures of the human psyche and to reconsider and perhaps reinterpret—without any disposition to rationalize faith (which would obviously be in vain)—our relationship with God himself.

Let us keep, in conclusion, that the god of Lacan did not die, but in a state of "anesthesia", i.e. *Sabbathism*. Lacan showed particular respect for the phenomenon of religiosity and developed an almost anti-Freudian reading of the phenomenon, to the extent that he recognized that he had the ability to stabilize, transmit, and solidify critical stories from the *Symbolic* level itself. After all, his postmodern discourse and belief that the path to truth has many "ways" almost compelled him to use traditional arguments about how religion might be a beneficial factor. It largely denies the Freudian-Darwinian view that we should cut off everything that is considered prescientific. Lacan placed the psychoanalyst

in the place of the Great Other, for this is exactly how he resembles the desire of the analysand.

Finally, another important question arises from our study: Since Psychoanalysis as a practice was to be a creation closely linked to the Jewish Tradition, due to the cultural context of the life of its founder, it is also an atheistic practice, a practice that is not necessarily atheistic, but a practice that does not "seek" involvement with theological and religious events, and is nevertheless excluded from theological discourses. Why is Lacan insisting on coming back to religion? For, for Lacan, the psychoanalytic discourse, the discourse of Psychoanalysis is, doubtless, colored by what it seems to reject, that is to say by religion; that is, where holiness itself is based, of which Lacan speaks, and at the basis of which is this "strange" phenomenon, called "*jouissance*". In other words, their pleasure, pain and unease are no different, and where the singularity of Christian love emanates; there, again, exactly, that the pleasure and the love of the Other will occupy the space of the lost—not the phallus, but the breasts—of the holy Good of Sicily¹⁶.

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¹⁶ St Agathi of Sicily (235-261 AD) underwent a mastectomy by the prefect Quintinianum as a result of her refusal to renounce Christianity in order to become his wife. Lacan refers to it in his second seminar. Here it is used in the light of the relationship between God and the female *Jouissance*, as correlated by Lacan in his late phase. Indeed, in the 1972-3 Seminar, Lacan uses the term "God" as a metaphor, i.e. as the replacement of one signifier by another, for the "great Other".

FORGIVENESS AND THE INFLUENCE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY IN DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

By

Khader I. Alkhouri, MA, Cand. Ph.D.

Abstract

In this concise and general article, we give some basic conceptions of the forgiveness of the grand Religions, making at the same time a comparison of the concept of forgiveness between these Religions or cultures, in relation to the therapeutic dimension of the latter; something that in recent years —under the science of the Psychology of Religion— has seen the light of day, hundreds of empirical researches, which confirm the most above claim.

Keywords: *Psychotherapy, forgiveness.*

*“Without forgiveness, life is governed by...
an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation”*
(Roberto Assagioli)

Introduction

Scientific interest in forgiveness has rapidly increased in the recent years (Ho & Fung, 2011). By the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, a large number of articles about forgiveness therapy began appearing in the *Mainstream Journal* (Enright, 1991). The title of this article could cover multiple volumes. However, in the context of an article we tried to summarize, as best as possible, a huge and vast material, just to give a taste of this dimension (of forgiveness) in Religions. That is why, and in advance, we are requesting the reader's discretion.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of the verb of forgiving is "*stop feeling angry or resentful towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake*" (Bowker, 1997). Psychologically and socio-culturally, forgiveness is the process that involves a change in cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behaviors regarding the transgressor (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).

The word forgiveness is written (סלח/salah) in Hebrew, and (ἀφίημι/afiimi) in Greek ancient, and (أَغْفَر / 'aghfar) in the Arabic language, and (原谅/ yuánliàng) in Chinese (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 2021).

Interpersonal forgiveness between people can be divided into two types: A- definitive forgiveness: it is a decision to treat the perpetrator as a valuable person and not to avenge the perpetrator. B- emotional forgiveness: implies a decrease in negative emotions (i.e. dissatisfaction, bitterness, hostility, hatred,

anger, and fear) neutralizing them with positive other-oriented emotions (i.e., sympathy, compassion, altruistic love, or maybe romantic love). Any variable that helps people form their hostility will be important in facilitating physical health. If forgiveness is an alternative to cognitive doubt, it could also help mitigate the negative effects of life (Greenberge, 1995, pp. 1262-1296).

Psychology has not yet reached a consensus on the definition of forgiveness, but at least it agrees on a continuous "process" and psychologists have suggested several models that describe this process (Cordova et al., 2006). Some studies focus on interpersonal differences in the degree of forgiveness, such as people being neurotic and irritable, who are less likely to forgive the perpetrator even after a long time, and may even plan retaliation (Maltby, et al., 2008). But studies have shown that the circulatory system and nervous system of some people are healthier than those who cannot forgive others (Oyen, Ludwig & Laan, 2001). Dr. Fred Luskin of Stanford University found that learning can make people more tolerant and healthier.

In Christianity

In Christianity the forgiveness of sins is the deepest rock on which a Christian bases his life (Kurt, 1965). Christian Theology clarifies that Jesus Christ died to atone for the sins of others in this sense. So, forgiveness does not depend on the repentance of the perpetrator to the victim, and few, if any sins are too serious to forgive (Marty, 1998). In the Christian Church, the institution of forgiveness is baptism, which must not be repeated, as mention in St. Paul's letter to Ephesus (4, 5: "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*"), and in the Acts of the Apostles (2, 38: "*And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*"). Forgiveness, however, means love i.e. sacrifice and therefore forgiveness is a central issue for any moral and any concept of mental health (Outler, 1954). In Christian therapy, the forgiveness model *REACH* is an effective model of promoting forgiveness that includes five steps: pain, withdrawal, develop empathy towards the perpetrator, providing an altruistic gift of forgiveness, a commitment to forgive (Norcross, 2011). The powerful and penetrating role of forgiveness in the Christian faith and the beliefs about human connection and altruism that inherent in spirituality is particularly consistent with a therapeutic approach to forgiveness (Eugene, 1995).

Passages from the Holy Bible:

Matthew 18, 18: "*Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (The Holy Bible, 1989). That is; I assure you that all sins you leave tied and unforgivable to the earth will remain tied and unforgivable in heaven. And all you forgive on earth will be forgiven and saved in heaven.

Matthew 18, 21: "*Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times*" (The Holy Bible, 1989).

Here we find in the Gospel that Jesus Christ teaches us how many times to forgive not only seven times, but seventy-seven times, namely without limit.

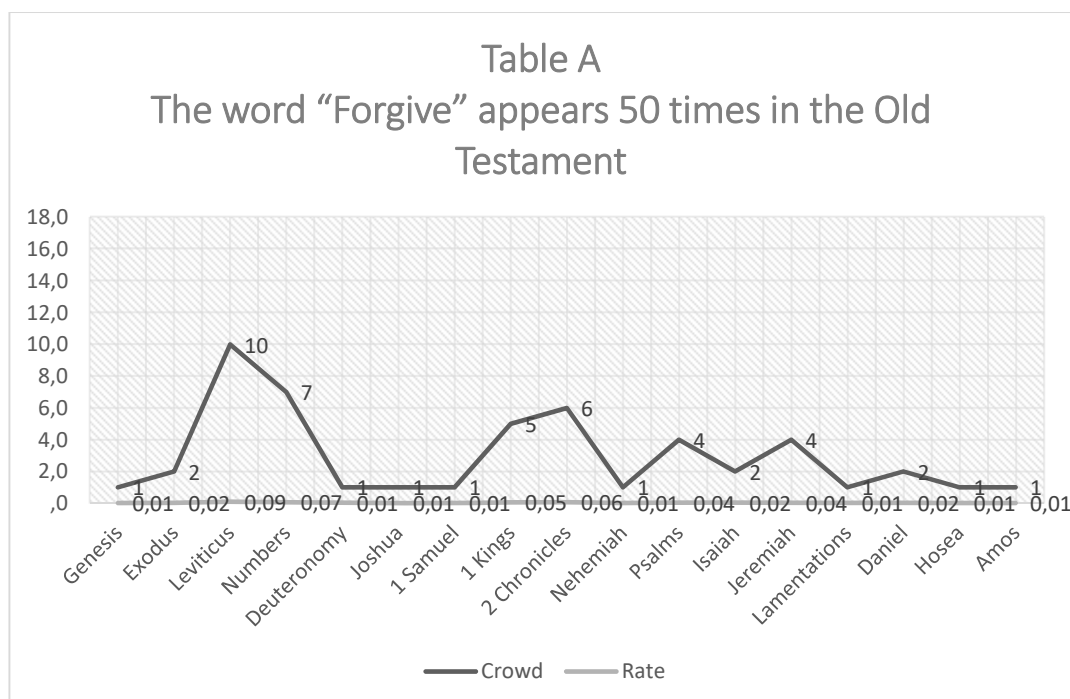
Mark 11, 25: *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses”* (The Holy Bible, 1989). Jesus Christ tells us to forgive with all our hearts, if we have anything against someone, for our Heavenly Father to forgive our misdeeds.

According to traditional Christian teachings, the forgiveness of others is among the spiritual duties of the Christian character, God is considered as the source of each forgiveness, which is made possible through the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and means baptism eliminates the ancestral sin and this manifests itself as an answer to God's forgiveness.

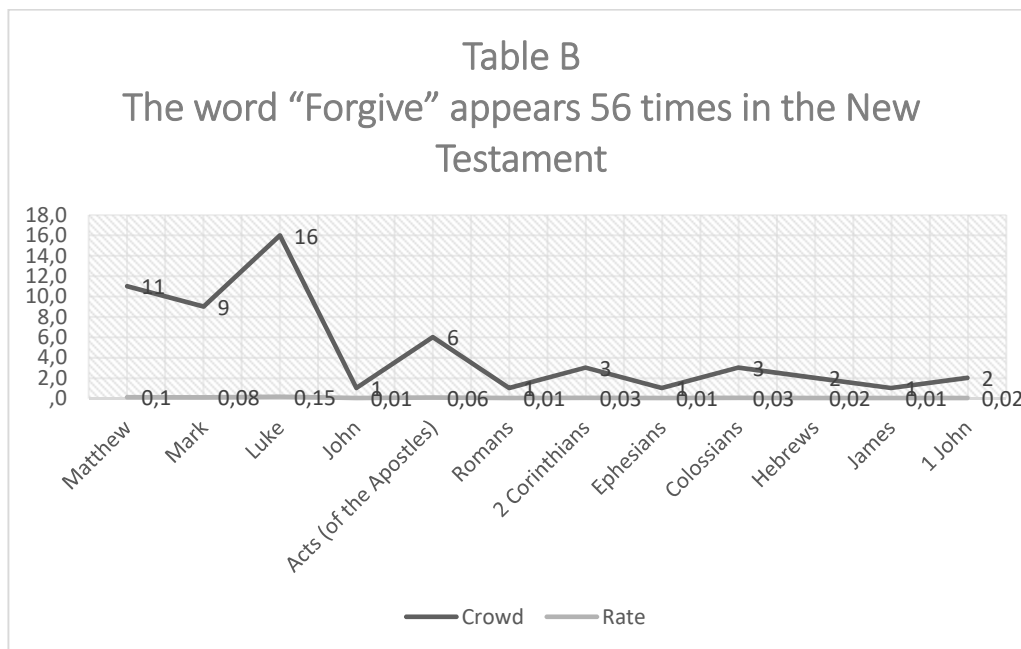
Matthew 6, 12: *“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”*.

Luke 23, 34: *“And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (The Holy Bible, 1989). Here we find that forgiveness is an act that comes from the divine nature and is transmitted through the teaching of Christ in human nature for the salvation of the human soul. The Church believes that if offenders can repent and correct their behaviors, they should be forgiven in opposition to Judaism because Christian doctrine contains unconditional forgiveness, representing God's term of love.

In tables A and B, we see how many times the word "forgiveness" is mentioned in the Old Testament and the New Testament.



(The Holy Bible, 1989)



(The Holy Bible, 1989)

In Judaism

Jewish Theology considers that forgiveness is very virtuous, but not for all offenses, also forgiveness cannot be extended by someone who was not the direct victim of an offense; some offenses are too serious to be forgiven and offenders must repent to offer them forgiveness. Also, forgiveness is considered an interpersonal process (Cohen et al., 2013).

Religious and spiritual forgiveness plays a large role in forgiving the offense of the person in the Jewish religious culture, and in forgiving, the offense must step in the religious act without overabundance. When you ask an offender for forgiveness you must sincerely forgive with a clear conscience and a willing spirit, for forgiveness is natural for the seed of Israel (Torah, *Teshuvah* 2:10). Man must apologize to those he has harmed to be entitled to forgiveness.

Prayer of Forgiveness from the Bedtime Shema

ריבונו של עולם הריני מוחל

ריבונו של עולם הריני מוחל וסולח לכל מי שהכעיס והקניט אותי או שחטא פגנדי. בין בגופי. בין במוני. בין בכבודי. בין בכל אשר לי. בין באונס. בין ברצון. בין בשוגג. בין במזיד. בין בדבור. בין במעשה. בין בגלגול זה. בין בגלגול אחר. לכל בר ישראל ולא יענש שום אדם בסבתי. יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהי ואלהי אבותי שלא אחטא עוד ומה שחטאתי לפניך מחוק ברחמיך הרבים אבל לא על ידי סורים ונהלים רעים. יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהנה צורי וגואלי

Ribono Shel Olam, I hereby forgive whoever has hurt me, and whoever has done me any wrong; whether it was deliberately or by accident, whether it was done by word or by deed. May no one be punished on my account. May it be Your will, O Lord my God, God of my parents, that I sin no more, that I do not revert to my old ways, that I do not anger You any more by my actions. May I do not do that which is evil in Your sight. Wipe away the sins that I have committed, with Your great compassion, but not through sickness or suffering. May these words of my mouth, and the prayers that are in my heart, are acceptable before You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer (Ps. 19:13) (Zalman, 2009).

Yom Kippur's goal is to bring about reconciliation between people and

every person and God: *"The tenth day of the seventh month is a day of atonement. It will be a sacred occasion for you, it is a day on which He redeemed on your behalf before your Hashem God a Sabbath of absolute rest will be for you"* (Levi. 23: 26-32).

If someone has offended or injured another person, they are obliged to sincerely ask for that person's forgiveness. The victim of the offense is respectively obliged to forgive, provided that the request has been made sincerely. All-day participation in the synagogue, even if spent in intense prayer, will not clear the slate for offenses committed against other people; the only real transgressions forgiven on this day are those committed against God. It is the day when God completes His decisions about the fate of every man which is prayer "על הא/al het", which are horizontal writings in which our infringements have been acknowledged over the past year, in the order of a thousand verses. People slightly clenched their fists to their chests while speaking a word. Most of the violations cited are moral failures, such as other people's offenses, gossip, lack of respect for parents and teachers, use of profanity, or dishonesty at work.

The whole prayer "על הא/al het" recited in the plural, to remind us that each of us has a responsibility in the well-being of our society, as well as to save individuals from the embarrassment of certain failures, we ask God to bless us and judge us, and we pray to God to hear our prayers and increase our good deeds (Waskow, 1991).

In Islam

In Islam, forgiveness does not mean the annulment of justice, because forgiveness can never replace justice. The (Allah/God) is the greatest forgiver, as well as the greatest judge. He forgives according to His righteousness (Islamic, 2001). Forgiveness is an important subject in Islamic spirituality, as mentioned in the Koran and translated into Arabic "(العَفَّارُ/Al-ghaffar)", "(التَّوَّابُ/Al-tawwab)" and "(العَفْوُ/Al-afuw)", that they represent three of the 99 names of God in Islam (Muhammad, 1999) and also is one of the most commonly used in prayer and often referred to by Muslim spiritual writers (Renard, 2002). Forgiveness is a virtue of power: *"Justice is closely bound to mercy, when Islam places justice next to mercy, places forgiveness next to justice - provided it is forgiveness while someone is strong"*, in a conversation with Dr. Ali Issa Othman (Waddy, 1990). In Islam, there is no atonement for sin, nor a justification for the forgiveness of sins. The (Allah/God) simply forgives anyone who chooses to forgive. This following statement in the Koran, as well as many others, shows the conditional nature of the Islamic religious Content (Ankerberg & Weldon, 2001).

وَإِنِّي لَعَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَىٰ (طه - 82)

Verily I am forgiving toward him who repenteth and believeth and doeth good, and afterward, walked aright (Taha - 82).

In Confucianism

Forgiveness in Confucianism, which is a moral and philosophical system, was originally developed based on the teachings of the Chinese intellectual and social philosopher Confucius, who lived in the 6th century BC.

In traditional Chinese culture, in the fifteenth chapter 15.24 of "The Analects of Confucius Yiren", the sentence "A gentleman's way is only faith and forgiveness". According to Confucius, the so-called "faith" is to treat others with all your heart, so the so-called "forgiveness" is to treat others like yourself used by Confucius student Zeng Shen.

15.24

子贡问道：“有没有一个可以终身奉行的字呢？”孔子说：“那就是恕吧！自己所不想要的也不要施加给别人。（Foundation, China Confucius, 2004）

In English:

Zi Gong asked, "Is there any word that we can use for the whole life?" Confucius said, "Forgive others. Do not give to others if you don't want it yourself".

4.15

孔子说：“参啊！我主张的道贯穿了一个基本概念。”曾子说：“是的。”孔子出去后，别的学生问曾参说：“那是什么意思？”曾子说：“夫子主张的道不过是忠恕罢了。（Foundation, China Confucius, 2004）.

In English:

Confucius said: "Shen! The Tao I advocate runs through a basic concept." Zeng Zi said: "Yes." After Confucius went out, other students asked Zeng Shen, "What does that mean?" Zeng Zi said, "The Master advocates. His way is nothing but loyalty and forgiveness".

The way of faith and forgiveness is an important content of Confucian thought; the treatment of others with faith and forgiveness is the basic requirement of kindness, that runs through all aspects of Confucian cultural thinking. In this chapter, Confucius said only that Tao has one for him.

This way of faith and forgiveness can be seen as an invention of Confucius. This invention has a great influence on future generations; the son considers the "Tao of faith and forgiveness" as a criterion for handling the relationship between people and ourselves, which is also the morality of Confucians. A feature of management. In this way, you can eliminate other people's dissatisfaction with yourself and facilitate interpersonal relationships, stabilizing in the same time the specific social order at the moment.

In Buddhism

The view of Buddhists on forgiveness is that it needs to be achieved with repentance and commendable actions (Edkins, 1893). Buddhism asks for forgiveness of the wrongs that others have done to us and that we should not overlook the thought that incidentally escapes this morality, and that forgiveness and reconciliation are more profitable than revenge, and stresses that hostility does not end with hostility (Oldenberg, 1882). Buddhism recognizes that sin cannot be forgiven if we do not pay the penalty for every wrong act (Rice Hosea, 1890). Buddha said: "*the one who does not ask for forgiveness is guilty of Dukkha*".

Dukkha = suffering or pain (Branch, 1849). Anger is considered an evil enemy number one contra of Atman, leading to malice and moral fall. The act of forgiveness eliminates Atman's both inner and outer enemies, so forgiveness implies the strength of the body as well as the mind (Chitkara, 1999): "*He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me — in those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred will never cease*" (Dhammapada 1.3-4; trans. Radhakrishnan) (Cook, 2010)

In Hinduism

In (Mahabharata/ "Maha" (= great) + "Barata" (race name), which means: "Great Barata"), next to Ramayana, one of the great Hindu epics, forgiveness is seen as the greatest virtue, as he says: "*Forgiveness is Brahma, truth, ascetic value and preservation, asceticism, holiness and the coherence of the universe*" (Ganguli, 2014). Thus, forgiveness is important with the *dharma* (= correct way of life) such as compassion, duty, and patience. In Hinduism, forgiveness is necessary if one chooses to follow the path right, according to Buddhism and Hinduism. Differently, unresolved issues such as anger will reappear in subsequent reincarnations through *karma*. However, it remains uncertain how these beliefs are treated in modern Hinduism, while forgiveness is described as a "removal" of the *negative* in contemporary Hinduism (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2001). But in another branch of Hinduism, which denies the forgiveness of sins, there is no promise of fulfilling one or any purpose in the other world.

However, since the influence of these principles in practical life is the most important thing, let's further compare the two systems related to the phase and the hopes they give for later life (Robson, 1893). On the other hand, forgiveness is also recognized as one of the 10 virtues and refers to karma. Forgiveness is believed to be a sign of strength. The Indian spiritual and political leader, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), said that the inability to forgive relates to spiritually weak people. So, forgiveness is to be understood as a commandment to Hinduism. Reluctance to forgive and the continued presence of negative emotions or unresolved conflicts may exist in future lives (Balkin, 2020). Also, forgiveness adopts the approach of explaining the boundless mercy, grace, and compassion on behalf of a God or a spiritual master (*gurus*) or power (*daya, kārunya, Krupa*). In this model, forgiveness is presented as emotion, love, and devotion (*bhāvāna, prema, bhakti*). In schools of religious studies where the concept of God is secondary or even free from forgiveness, it translates as a combination of human virtues that freedom forgives (Greenberg, 2007).

Secular and religious/spiritual forgiveness

Is forgiveness a spiritual or religious practice? Several have argued that counselors and therapists should make greater use of religiously based practices in counseling and treatment (Loewenthal, 1995). The religious content strongly supports it and this shows that forgiveness is characterized as a remission of religious practice. Nonetheless, for religious people, tolerance somehow remains an abstract moral value, because it is not an ethical practice that makes people justify the lack of pardon.

Studies have shown that spiritual pardon is related to forgiveness. Moreover, the impact of pardon on forgiveness is influenced by religion. Religion functions as a moderate effect of beliefs among high religious belief groups, and this relationship is quite important (Davis et al., 2010).

Forgiveness is a process, not just a decision (Worthington, Everett, Sandage, & Berry, 2000) with skills of patience and constant effort and courage; then it will be effective.

Man's tolerance is multifaceted. Researchers agree what is not forgiveness: Grace, excuse, culpability, oblivion due to damage to conscious memory, reconciliation, and refusal to admit the good. So, forgiveness is not studied as a spiritual or religious practice. Notwithstanding these studies are based on the character of the people, even though people forgive, we don't know ultimately if spiritual forgiveness affects our health (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000).

Forgiveness and psychosomatic health

Several studies provide the positive effect of forgiveness on health (Oyen, Ludwig & Laan, 2001) especially in high physiological and emotional reactivity e.g. blood pressure, heart rate, and negative emotions from memories of damage.

Forgiveness is an effective training; the religious and spiritual nature of tolerance is related to improved health as well as spiritual development, such as falling in the existence of God who extracts more inner peace in man (William & Harold, 2005).

Particularly, what is the relationship that mediates between forgiveness and health (Pandora, 2003)? Is it when some psychological studies often focus on physical and sexual abuse by members of religion (Blunt, 1999)?

Psychology and religion could form a more collaborative and constructive partnership, each helping to bring out the best in each other (Barbour, 2000). Since the appearance of the human being, there has been forgiveness (McCullough, 2008). In our daily lives, inevitably we will have conflicts with others, even blows, and the way of coping after an injury is related to spiritual-religious acts next to the person's body and mind if it is healthy and if the interpersonal relationship and society are harmonious.

The research found that forgiveness helps victims eliminate anger, relieve pain and maintain physical and mental health (Giacomo & McCullough, 2006). Consequently, forgiveness helps to improve people's relationships, as well effectively heal psychological trauma. So, forgiveness has been used as a therapeutic intervention goal since the 1870s (Wade & Johnson, 2008).

The Enright team, after their search for forgiveness, came up with a great plan to help people with forgiveness. Therapeutic and educational interventions based specifically on the Enright forgiveness model have developed in recent decades. Research shows that the increase in the ability to forgive, especially as a therapeutic agent has a positive impact on the psychological health of the human being (Baskin & Enright, 2004). For example, Reed and Enright (2006) found in their research that women who had experienced emotional internal abuse in their relationships found changes in scores from low to medium in their participation in *Enright Forgiveness Inventory* (EFI). Subsequently, they

saw significant and effective reductions in anxiety and depression, and increases in self-esteem (Reed & Enright, 2006). Several empirical studies are available to support forgiveness as an effective treatment for those dealing with mental health issues after injustices (Sandage & Worthington, 2010; Stratton, Dean, Nonneman, Bode & Worthington, 2008).

After several attempts, the model eventually evolved into a forgiveness intervention and is the model used to date and is in the table below (McKay, Hill, Freedman, & Enright, 2007).

Enright Forgiveness Process
1998

Uncovering Phase:

1. Examination of psychological defenses. (Kiel, 1986)
2. Confrontation of anger. (Trainer, 1981)
3. Admittance of shame, when appropriate. (Patton, 1985)
4. Awareness of cathexis. (Droll, 1984)
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the event. (Droll, 1984)
6. Insight that that injured might be comparing self with the injurer. (Kiel, 1984)
7. Realization that one may be permanently & adversely changed by the injury. (Close, 1970)
8. Insight into a possibly altered 'just world' view (Flannigan, 1987)

Decision Phase:

9. A change of heart, conversion, a new insight that old resolutions are not working (North, 1987).
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option.
11. Commitment to forgive the offender. (Neblett, 1974)

Work Phase:

12. Reframing, through role taking, who the wrongdoer (Smith, 1981)
13. Empathy toward the offender. (Cunningham, 1985)
14. Awareness of compassion, as it emerges, toward the offender. (Droll, 1984)
15. Acceptance and absorption of pain. (Bergin, 1988)

Outcome/Deepening Phase:

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and forgiveness process. (Frankly, 1959)
17. Realization that the self has needed others forgiveness in the past. (Cunningham, 1985)
18. Insight that one is not alone. (Universality, support)
19. Realization that the self may have new purpose in life because of the injury.
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive effect if this begins to emerge toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release.

The main effect of forgiveness is to reduce the deep anger or hatred of man. Anger is an important factor that endangers the physical and mental health of people. Anger is associated with coronary heart disease and other cardiovascular diseases (Swaffer & Hollin, 2001). It is also associated with certain common diseases such as cold or flu. Therefore, it can cause depression and anxiety (Sinikka, 2009). The study found that uncontrollable dynamic anger creates some problematic behaviors such as drug addiction, eating disorder; while on the other hand, the reduction of a person's anger helps maintain his heart health (Phillips, Henry, Hosie & Mine, 2008). Still, forgiveness is a good alternative for cognitive doubt, helping to reduce the negative effects of life events (such as interpersonal offenses in all its forms) and mitigating risk of mental health issues (Greenberg, 1995).

Depression and anxiety cannot be relieved, but the result of forgiveness is

the reduction of anger or hatred of the man. Therefore, the reaction of forgiveness may be more effective in dealing with individual anger. Over the past decade, forgiveness interventions have been used for victims of sexual abuse and interventions for promoting forgiveness have scientifically proven effective (Freedman & Enright, 1996).

According to McCullough, forgiveness is not motivation, but a change in motivation that is the transformation of the pro-social motivation of the offended person. In this process, positive behaviors replace negative behaviors and this process should be based on the affected person's empathy for the perpetrator (McCullough et al., 2001).

Sandage and Jankowski (2010) studied persistent forgiveness and mental instability. The relationship between quality mental health and psychological well-being shows that self-differentiation acts as an intermediate result (Jankowski & Sandage, 2010).

It is not denoted that forgiveness in psychotherapy answers all psychological problems. Most studies show that forgiveness therapy has a good effect on psychological problems caused by interpersonal injury. Interpersonal damage here includes damage between foreigners and also includes injuries among classmates and even injuries among family members (Louden-Gerber, 2009).

So, most studies have shown that forgiveness helps develop one's health; research on survivors of war in the Middle East found that forgiveness is negatively associated with depression and revenge and there is also a negative correlation between psychology and subjective well-being (Scull, 2010). Self-forgiveness has also been recognized as a healthy way to resolve harmful feelings of guilt and shame (Krentzman, 2016). Other studies found that between forgiveness and restraint there is a significant positive correlation. Also, research shows that between depression, forgiveness and cardiovascular condition, there is positive relationship, indeed cardiovascular pressure was being relieved, that is good for health (Whited, 2010). The researchers said that forgiveness tends to be beneficial, though not always, both for the forgiving person and for the general relationships of the people in whom the offense occurred. In particular, forgiveness seems to benefit not only physical health but also psychological well-being (Wade & Tittler, 2021). When we forgive ourselves, we are free to choose to forgive or not to forgive others; but, it can we make completely different choices than those who have hurt us (Davies, 2020).

Pearson's research revealed important correlations between universal love and positive effect. It is referred that universal love correlates negatively with measures that harm, psychological health, including negative effects, anxiety, and aggression; but it positively correlated with positive effects. Similarly, it is mentioned that there are positive associations between universal love and the related structures of compassionate love for humanity, self-compassion, empathy, the forgiveness of self and others and altruism (Trent, Beauregard, & Schwartz, 2019).

Also, the forgiveness of an older child towards abusing parents can extend forgiveness to a spiritual dimension, which can positively affect the physical and mental health of the child (Mahoney, Rye, & Pargament, 2007).

Conclusions

The scientific study of forgiveness has come of age, with strong links to physical health, mental health, and the benefits of the relationship (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010).

Also, forgiveness and religiosity have strong relationships with physical and psychological well-being, since the healthy soul of man depends on the inner/spiritual degree of faith. So, religion affects our health and forgiveness is a religious and spiritual act given the fact that we find it in the holy books/texts as we saw in the above extracts of the traditional major religions or in religious centers.

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NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES IN CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTS FROM THE 19TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY

By

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Abstract

In this article we summarize the scientific, philosophical and religious views on the near-death experiences of the last two centuries. These situations, which in terms of form and intensity vary, can be either visions or extracorporeal experiences. While Parapsychology and some eastern religions accept that they are either reincarnations or contacts with the souls of the dead, the Orthodox Christian Church insists that this is not a real round trip to the other world, but a death trance (*suspended animation*). In any case, we need other systematic investigations to respond to such phenomena.

Keywords: *Near death experiences, extracorporeal experiences, conscience, after life, visions, Heaven, hell, death.*

Introduction

The subheading of this work refers to Christian environments. The choice made divided the study into two environments, that of the West, as represented by Western Christianity and Western Philosophy and that of the East, as represented by Eastern Religions and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Much of the work analyzes the philosophical, psychological and theological differences in East and West perceptions of death and not just the phenomenon of return to life in the narrowly understood sense of "death experience". The 19th and 20th centuries, on which this work focuses, was the period of flourishing in the field of near-death experiences.

Research methodology.

On a few issues, it is easy to present disagreements about what life really is, what death is and where the dividing line between them is located. What should be done is to compare the phenomenon of life with the phenomenon of death. Next, the researcher will have to trace this faint line, separating one situation from the other. Of course, this is not the only way to do such research, but it was the most appropriate, based on the science of Psychology of Religion and the available material.

Usually, the subject of death experiences is approached by science not from the perspective of theoretical sciences and the Psychology of Religion. Through

Science and philosophical trends, which emerged during its formation, the psychological, philosophical and religious background of western Europeans was formed. This strong need to "scientificize" by the Western man shaped not only the Christian perceptions of the West, but also other religious movements within it. The problem in the relationship between spirit and matter, which Christianity reveals theologically and Science studies, cannot be missing from a work that deals with the boundaries between life and death. The Eastern Orthodox perspective has maintained a quite different attitude towards the subject of death experiences and their perspectives.

We see that the phenomenon of death experiences is multifaceted. Researchers emphasize different points, depending on their ideological background. Individuals who experience them, regardless of religion or nationality, vary considerably, especially between the Eastern and Western worlds. An important factor of these differences is found in the philosophical and theological conditions and the relationship between the material and the spiritual world.

The most important omission of this work is the non-analysis of the Christian environments of East and West, in further Confessions, in particular those of the Western Christianity, Protestants, Roman Catholics, etc. Also, references to the religion of people who experienced the near-death experiences, or researchers of the experiences, were almost non-existent. The reason for this basic omission, the in-depth reference to the perceptions, experiences and opinions of each Christian Confession, is due to the lack of relevant information from the available material. The few references to specific works were isolated and fragmentary. This may be related to the fact that Christianity focuses mainly on the final state of the soul and only secondly deals with the experiences, which relate to the first moments after death.

There is a great gap in the Orthodox Christian perspective of the near-death experiences. Most writers, who focused on the Orthodox teaching on death, usually repeated certain stories of ordinary people and Saints, who "came back" from death, without mentioning in more detail the phenomenon of modern research of near-death experiences.

The only exception was Father Seraphim Rose (1934-1982), who analyzed from an apologetic perspective the subject of modern near-death experiences. At this point I have to say that the theological views of Father Seraphim (2004) are not scientifically substantiated, as Science has not been officially positioned on what exactly awaits man after death, or even on whether there is an Afterlife. Moreover, we will see that Father Seraphim's views on death have supporters, but do not fully represent all Christians.

The most difficult thing about this work was not the study of death, but the study of the phenomenon of life. What really constitutes life also determines the limits of death. The central axis of this study is the relationship of Western Philosophy, Science and Christian Theology, with matter and spirit. Differences in the correlation of matter-spirit from different materialistic, theological, psychological perspectives were necessary to be analyzed, because the connection and disconnection of matter and spirit marks the boundaries between life and death and there can be no mention of death without these clarifications.

Basic definitions.

The term "near-death experience" was created in the mid-1970s by the American doctor Raymond Moody (2001), who recorded the experiences told to him by his patients. As hypnotist Rosemary Guiley (1950-2019) explains in her work <*The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*>, the term "near-death experience" is quite broad. It has been used to describe a variety of phenomena by people, who have come or believe they have come, very close to death. Throughout history and around the world, similar cases have been recorded. With the advancement of modern medical science, which enables valid intervention in order to save lives, which are at risk, we have the possibility to record such incidents.

But there is confusion about the definition of "clinical death", as there are several misunderstandings about whom we define as 'clinically dead'. As the cardiologist and Professor of Pathology of the University of Athens, Prof. Avramidis (1926-2020), explains, "clinical death" can be reversible. The "clinically dead" is at one stage, a path to biological or definitive death, in which man can return to life. In cases where a man returns to life, he may have experienced some near-death experience. The term 'clinically dead' is also used for people who appear to have died or are considered dead, such as in the event of electric shock, drowning, etc. The earlier cardiorespiratory resuscitation begins, the more likely it is to return to life, points out Prof. Avramidis (2007).

Near-death and extracorporeal experiences are not a modern phenomenon, although they occur more frequently since the 19th century. According to Father Seraphim (2004), interest in them was becoming more intense in the 20th century, especially in America, as public opinion begins to look beyond the theories of Materialism and Atheism. Interest in religion is currently rekindling. Professor of Philosophy David Lund (2009) informs us that research into death experiences has mainly attracted the interest of cardiologists, psychologists and parapsychologists.

It is a common belief that near-death experiences only take place in patients who are clinically dead. However, according to Rosemary Guiley (2007), research has shown that the majority of people were not at all close to the process of biological death, although they themselves had this experience and this perception. Some of these testimonies fall into the category of paranormal phenomena research. Rosemary (2007) informs us about a survey conducted in the United States in 1982. The survey showed that about 8 million adults reported experiencing near-death experiences.

The question of whether death experiences belong to paranormal phenomena cannot be answered with certainty. Professor of the Psychology of Religion at the University of Athens, Dr. Spyridon Tsitsigkos (2011), points out that some research correlates the perception of parapsychic phenomena, such as appearances of visions, ghosts and other unusual visual stimuli, such as auras, with the geomagnetic field. The geomagnetic field can affect parts of the brain, which are associated with the perception of visual stimuli and space, such as the occipital and lateral lobes. Some of these distortions may be inherited as predispositions to parts of the brain, which may increase the chances of perceived parapsychic phenomena.

Visions of a deathbed and death experiences

Lund (2009) explains that before the advancement of modern medicine, which increased the chances of resuscitation, research focused on dying people, who were seeing visions. Of course, those who returned to life were able to tell us their own experiences, as opposed to the dying, who recounted their experiences, only to those who were present by their deathbed.

In the case of visions from the deathbed, the testimonies come not from the patients themselves, but from the doctors, nurses and relatives, who were Present. Although they are indirect narratives, they have significant value as tell-tale elements and are among the most recent experiences, Lund (2009) points out.

Lund (2009) informs that Dr. Karlis Osis (1917-1997) did a pilot research on the visions of the dying. While this interest in death experiences has existed for a long time, there has been no systematic investigation of these narratives. The first pilot research was conducted by Osis (1961), according to paranormal authors Brad Steiger (1936-2018) and Sherry Steiger (1945-2020). In his book *<Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses>* (1961) Osis published the results of his research. The questionnaires and the following surveys revealed some interesting phenomena that require scientific study and evaluation. For example, in some cases, collective visions of both dying patients and doctors present or relatives were mentioned collectively. In several cases, experiences of extra-sensory interactions with patients were reported on behalf of doctors and nurses. Many of these experiences affected those who observed or experienced them. As a result, they changed their personal philosophy and lifestyle.

One of the most interesting results of Osis' research was that the near-death experiences had no link to brain injuries or degenerations. On the contrary, the experiences appear to have manifested themselves more strongly in patients with control of their senses and in complete alertness. Osis (1961) observed that this pattern is compatible with the theory of the afterlife of consciousness, as the more intact the physical and mental functions of the patient were, the more intense and experience. According to Brad and Sherry Steiger (2003), Osis (1961) himself pointed out: *"Most of the evidence, which goes hand in hand with the theory of postmortem existence, was mainly in patients who were not under the influence of sedatives or other medicines; environment"*. He also added that those patients who were under the influence of sedatives, those who had been diagnosed with some pathology, who were hallucinating, or those who had reduced perception and communication with the environment or some conscious damage, were more likely to experience experiences that are not consistent with the theory of consciousness after death.

As the philosopher Colin Wilson (1931-2013) observes, what one would expect is that most of the people who were approaching death would be frightened. Although the experience of pain was relatively common, Osis (1961) found that fear was not the dominant emotion in these reports. On the contrary, a large proportion had feelings of deep peace and euphoria. One in twenty even had various visions of a "paradise", or a "promised land" or beautiful cities.

Experience levels

Since the mid-1970s, distinguished researchers from death experiences, such as Dr. Raymond Moody (2001), Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004) and Dr. Kenneth Ring (2006), with their research, made these cases known to the wider public. The research of Kenneth Ring (2006), Raymond Moody (2001), Michael Sabom (1954) and other researchers converge on many points, Brad and Sherry Steiger (2003) inform us. The surveys contain thousands of different reports of death experiences. However, they give the impression that they repeat the same story, as if it were a single book, comments Colin Wilson (1987). Raymond Moody (2001) was particularly impressed by how often the same descriptions were repeated.

According to Colin Wilson (1987), the strongest argument in favor of the afterlife is that the same pattern cannot be repeated in hundreds of different stories and are all false or products of some vivid, uncontrollable imagination. Constantly, as Brad and Sherry Steiger (2003) describe, the passage through some kind of dark tunnel is mentioned, with a light at its end and the "incarnate" sensation that follows. Usually, patients see that their consciousness has been cut off from the physical body. They are not subject to all space and time commitments as before. During the out-of-body experience, due to their "incarnate" condition, they are unable to communicate with family members, medical staff and their friends, as long as they are not perceived by them.

Many say, however, that they encounter other spiritual entities with which they communicate without difficulty. Over and over again, some kind of telepathic communication is described with a well-intentioned "bright entity" or with Guardian Angels or dead relatives and friends. Quite often, meeting with some "bright entity" is accompanied by a brief review of life.

Some recount that some angelic entity leads them to heaven. Then there is the feeling that consciousness is at a limit or border, between life and death, but it does not pass it, and, ultimately, the return to life occurs. This feeling, that they must return to life, is often not accepted with positive feelings, but with intense discomfort, as most wish to stay in this status. Moody (2001) calls this recurring pattern a "*core experience*".

Lund (2009) agrees with the stages of the death experiences mentioned by the researchers, but is hastening to clarify that there are not all, stages in all death cases in exactly the same order. In other words, it is not a specific set of experiences, but a 'mosaic' of common experiences, which tend to be repeated.

On the other hand, Moody (2001) believes that "luminous existence" is the most striking common element of all other experiences, contained in the model of death experiences. Also, the meeting with this "light" exerted the greatest influence of all other experiences. Those who experienced it report that it is a "light", which quickly increases in size and brightness, which magnetizes them and emits a sense of love, peace and heat, as described by the Metropolitan of Naupactus and Saint Vlasios, Hierotheos Vlachos (2010), but also by Father Seraphim (2004). Everyone treats it as an existence, which has been sent to them, with a specific purpose. Usually, the meeting evolves as a kind of mental dialogue or a direct transfer of thought, Moody (2001) recounts. The "light" asks

them various questions about whether they are prepared to die and urges them to make a review of the events of their lives.

However, there is no criticism of any kind of these questions. In other words, they are not part of a more general 'crisis', but are questions that are being asked to help them take responsibility for their lives and their deeds. Sometimes, questions are accompanied by a kind of flashback to events in their lives. Venerable Metropolitan Hierotheos (2010), as well as Father Seraphim (2004), confirm that this is one of the special characteristics of modern near-death experiences.

Although this "light" is without a specific form, it leaves them with a sense of having a personality of its own. The identity attributed to it by those who have experienced it varies according to their religious background, Moody (2001) explains. Others call it Christ, others consider it "Angel" and others identify it with some deity.

Father Seraphim (2004) notes that Dr. Erlendur Haraldsson (1931) and Dr. Karlis Osis (1917-1997) refer to the experience of "light" as "bright existence" and "bright forms", but not Christ or spiritual being, deity or angel, as usually interpreted by those who interpret it have experienced. Father Seraphim (2004), Osis and Haraldsson (1977) come to a fairly reasonable conclusion, that for the most part, the interpretations given by the dying to the visions of the entities, which appear to them, depend on their personal, cultural and religious background.

The person, experiencing a near-death experience, usually feels at the time of death asphyxiation or severe pain. Some say they feel they are passing through a tunnel, at the end of which they see the light. When they go through the tunnel, they come out of their bodies and see it from another angle of space. This, to some, creates relief, while in others, it causes discomfort and confusion, Wilson (1987) points out.

In the first case, feelings of calm and acceptance of death prevail, while the person feels surrounded by the presence of loved ones of dead persons, relatives and Friends. According to Wilson (1987), in the event that the person has not accepted his death, he is embarrassed or even panicked, as he attempts to communicate with the people about the environment, they are fruitless. With the sole exception of animals, which sometimes perceive them, no one else seems to see them, listen to them or try to communicate with them. What they perceive as their body is now permeable as air, making contact impossible through touching. If feelings of confusion and denial of death persist, these spirits may be trapped on earth indefinitely, Wilson (1987) concludes. Similar death experiences are recorded by Dr Moody (2001).

Near-death experiences and extracorporeal experiences: similarities and differences

Father Seraphim (2004), however, believes that the out-of-body experience is not exclusively related to death or death experience. When the out-of-body experience does not occur in a person on the verge of death, then it can take longer than an out-of-body experience of a dying person. In such cases, it has been reported that the person acquires the ability to enter a different environment,

with a different atmosphere. Visions in this case are not just fleeting visions of some kind of garden or gate, but acquire a consistency. It looks like a kind of visit to an unknown world, as Father Seraphim (2004) explains.

Colin Wilson (1987) describes the phenomenon of extracorporeal experiences. He explains that in extracorporeal experiences most people report having the feeling of floating outside their body, with which they are connected, through a silver thread or string. Often, they have the ability to perceive events in remote places. They also experience a feeling of euphoria and freedom in this situation, while on their return to their bodies, on the contrary, they experience intense dissatisfaction, even in the earth.

Rosemary Guiley (2007) gives us some interesting information about the near-death experiences and extracorporeal experiences that accompany them. Often, a sense of peace, a ceasefire, or a sense that the person is dead, as well as some out-of-body experience, is mentioned. During the out-of-body experience, the person has the feeling that he is being driven over his body. Several experience a feeling of "pulling" through a tunnel, leading to a "light". Many describe meeting with heavenly entities or with dead friends and relatives, dressed in white floral garments. Heavenly entities can be a guardian Angel, a guide or the Supreme Being, showing them a summary of their earthly life. Finally, their reluctant return to life follows.

Although some report negative experiences, the majority record positive experiences, according to Rosemary (2007). Most develop a stronger inclination towards spirituality or faith in God. Some, however, face difficulties in adapting to everyday life.

Religious faith doesn't seem to affect whether someone has a death experience or not, Rosemary (2007) observes. But due to the differentiation of stories from culture to culture, it seems that their content is changing. Most, who had a near-death experience, report that their fear of death has disappeared and that they now believe in the afterlife. Some acquire psychic abilities.

Rosemary (2007) assumes that a near-death experience allows access to higher levels of consciousness, as it resembles the experiences of the shamans. Seraphim (2004) agrees with this finding. As he informs us, the Shamans, after being initiated, come through ecstatic, extracorporeal, situations in contact with "other worlds" and with Spirits. Initiation then allows them to consciously enter similar, ecstatic, extracorporeal situations.

But contact with "spiritual" worlds is not limited to out-of-body experience, stresses Father Seraphim (2004). Drug testing experiments, in particular LSD in the dying, resulted in the production of experiences that looked quite like death experiences. Dr. Kübler-Ross (1969, 1991, 1999) also participated in these experiments, Father Seraphim (2004) points out. The dying reported that they were living a brief flashback to the early events of their lives, that they were seeing a vision of blinding light, visions of the dead and other Spirits. They also considered received messages of spiritual content, such as teachings on reincarnation, on a world religion, and so on.

The relationship of matter and consciousness in Western civilization

The absolute separation of matter and consciousness is stressed in all aspects of the Western philosophical and religious spirit, due to the strong influence of Neoplatonic philosophical views. These dualist conceptions passed within Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The Western Christian has either demonized matter and body, or he has absolutized it (deification), resulting in religious indifference. In the case of demonization of matter, life, for the believer, becomes a series of legal and moral requirements, to God's "satisfaction". Death is understood either as punishment or as an inevitable natural event.

For the religiously indifferent, materialist, man, life becomes a struggle to acquire material goods. With the absolutization of matter, man turns into a secularized way of life, far from any notion of traditional religious/spiritual. Death as an existential question is silenced.

As Wilson (1987) comments for many scientists, the study of Paranormal Phenomena is a challenge. At best, the difficulty of interpreting them causes shame and embarrassment. At worst, they are treated as a scandal. But this may be because of Science itself, but because of the philosophical attitude that some scientists hold to interpret its findings, Wilson (1987) explains. The dominant role in this way of thinking is the dualism and mechanistic perception of the world. Based on this perception, every material reality, including body material, is understood.

As the Professor of Doctrine Theology, Megas Farantos (1993), has pointed out, the holy Augustine (354-430), influenced by Neoplatonism, considered that cosmic reality is divided into spirit and matter. The spirit excels of matter, while matter has a shadowy, inferior existence. Augustine regarded God as a Neoplatonic Monad and as a One. He emphasized God's "substance" and "simplicity" over His triad. By also rejecting God's divine (undying) actions and "hypostatic properties", he further emphasized His transcendental "nature" and "substance". However, the over-emphasis of "substance" at the expense of God's "substantive idioms" was never accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Church, Prof. Farantos (1993) explains. This way of thinking was adopted – more or less – by the philosophical and theological thinking of the West. Logicism is largely due to Augustine's Neoplatonic view of the primacy of spirit over matter. The perception of a God distant and "absent" from the world, contributed decisively to the birth of the atheistic currents of the Younger Years, as concluded by M. Farantos (1993).

The interpretation of death in Western Christianity and the Eastern Orthodox Church

Metropolitan Hierotheos (2010) gives us comprehensively the perceptions of death, prevailing in Western Christianity. Western theologians, under the influence of Augustine, consider death to be God's punishment for man's sin. Based on this perception, God decided to punish the man with death. Death is inherited throughout the human race, through the inheritance of guilt for sin, committed by Adam. The holy Augustine considers that man inherits the guilt for

Adam's sin and it is as if he has sinned himself, against God, causing his death.

According to another theory, the devil acted as an instrument of God's commandments and executed His decision to punish the human race. Some Protestants accept death as a simple fact, with no metaphysical implications. In any case, death is God's creation. But according to Orthodox Christian Theology, God is not the culprit of death. Death could not be the creation of a good God, stresses theologian Nikolaos Vasiliadis (1927-2016), in his book *<The Mystery of Death>* (2010). In the Old Testament, it is stated that: "*God's death has not been done, nor is it the loss of lives. He built everything in it, and the life-saving generations of the world, and it is not in them a medicine of havoc, nor of the kingdom on earth... justice for the immortal*" (Wisdom of Sol. 1, 13-25).

Saint John Chrysostom (349-407) considers that physical death, with the humiliation it brings to man, is ultimately a spiritual antidote to his arrogance. Thus, even death becomes a blessing for man, although it also depends on the man himself, whether he will take it as a blessing or not.

The relationship between body and soul in Orthodox Christianity

As Professor Tsitsigkos explains, Saint John Chrysostom does not regard the soul as a static phenomenon, which can be limited to predetermined phenomenological types. He recognizes its mobility and dynamics and treats it as a living organism, constantly evolving. With the evolution of the soul, it is understood the development of its properties, which will help it to progress morally and spiritually. However, this progress is not a unilateral moral improvement, or an attempt at knowledge of God and self-making divine (self-divinization), which we often encounter in Western philosophy or in the currents of modern Occultism.

Mental strength and energy, according to Cappadocia Fathers, is found in every part of the body, but especially in the nerves and brain. Saint Chrysostom pays special attention to the brain and the heart, where it places bravery, but believes that the soul manifests itself throughout the body. The heart is symbolically the seat of deeper emotions and anger, the brain is the seat of accounting and desire is found in the liver. At the same time, Saint Chrysostom observes that it is impossible to clearly define the physical point of manifestation of the soul, as impassable and sacred, even more so in the case of the saints, where their body is a temple of God, Professor Tsitsigkos notes.

Professor Tsitsigkos informs us that the way of connecting body and soul is not fully explained, according to Saint Chrysostom. The placement of Saint Chrysostom is contrary to any dualistic view of soul and body, which considers the body as an opponent of the soul. The soul needs the body to express itself. According to the holy father, the body needs the soul to survive, as its "heat" is the one that holds the "clay" of the body. Body and soul, they work together and influence each other. The interaction of body and soul is shown by mental phenomena, accompanied by physical changes. Emotional states, affect the body, breathing changes, there may be changes in facial expression, various spontaneous reactions, such as laughter or crying etc. Even after separation from the

body, the soul may not feel the body, but it does not enter a state of consciousness. She maintains her self-consciousness, since she can perceive both the living and the sleeping. He also experiences all emotions, "unconscious" conflicts, "psychological" defense mechanisms, rejoices, regrets, hopes, experiences grief, guilt, remorse, etc.

Scientific interpretations of death experiences

According to Professor Tsitsigkos (2011), the near-death experiences, although they had attracted the interest of scholars since antiquity, have been researched mainly since 1882, since the founding of the *Company Mental Research*. As a multifaceted phenomenon, they were examined from many different perspectives, from a religious, apologetic, anthropological, philosophical, pastoral, psychological and psychiatric perspective. The only certainty is that among the researchers, there was no final agreement as to the explanation of these experiences, as the phenomena themselves presented several differentiations, despite their similarities. Some have claimed that these are brain center malfunctions or the activation of psychological defense mechanisms.

As Professor Tsitsigkos (2011) explains, mystic experiences were interpreted until recently in Psychiatry, mainly from a medical, biological context. Experiences of loss of ego or self, were perceived as a result of brain disorders, such as hyperactivity of the epileptic system of the temporal lobe, changes in the brain chamber, inactivation of the cortex of the brain, frontal or parietal lobe. Observations of psychedelic experiences, depersonalization or synesthesia, may be associated with the use of hallucinogenic substances, such as drugs, LSD, mescaline, psilocybin and even with the production of endorphins. Other possible interpretations linked these experiences to hyperthyroidism, epilepsy, hypnosis, mental retardation and anthropomorphic thinking.

Brain and consciousness

Science cannot easily answer the question of whether there is any non-material, spiritual substance in man except the body and brain. The scientific study, as neuroscientist Andrew Newberg (2018) explains, presupposes the existence of a specific, material, measurable size. Some scientists consider the soul to be a function of the brain. However, according to Newberg (2018), the soul does not appear to be associated with any specific brain function. As Newberg (2018) explains, the most important problem, from a neurotheological point of view, is that we don't know when a man is experiencing a near-death experience. Not only do we not know if someone is close to biological death, but even when the near-death experience occurs, there is no way to estimate exactly when it begins.

In most death experiences, it is assumed that the experience begins at the moment when man enters the state of death. However, in reality, we do not know whether this interpretation is correct. For example, the near-death experience could begin the moment when man regains consciousness and comes to life, i.e. just before he recovers and not just before he dies. But even if we knew at the time of the onset of the death experience, there would be several technical

problems with brain imaging. For example, electrical activity in the central parts of the brain, such as the amygdala, chamber and hippocampus, would be almost impossible to detect in this case. Without a heartbeat, blood flow to the brain wouldn't be possible either, creating additional signal problems that we would receive from the imaging system, Newberg (2018) explains.

Neuroscientist Mario Beauregard and journalist Denyse O'Leary in their work *<The Spiritual Brain>* (2007) develop a non-materialistic theory about the origins of the soul. Beauregard describes the dead ends, which a materialistic view can face when examining experiences of consciousness, which seem to defy the concepts of space and Time. In particular, Beauregard believes that in the field of Quantum Mechanics, there are many indications of an existence beyond the boundaries of matter and that all of them converge towards a non-material origin of the soul, beyond the limits of the brain.

Dr. Sam Parnia (2005, 2013) is another researcher of near-death experiences, who believes that consciousness is beyond the materialistic limits of the study of science. Newberg (2018) informs us that in 2008 Sam Parnia started a study. The study was done in order to investigate, if there is any spiritual factor, beyond the material limits of the body. This study was called "AWARE" (Awareness During Rescue). The study included 2,060 patients who had gone into cardiac arrest. Of these, 140 people had survived, who were invited to give an interview about their experience. The study was designed in such a way as to determine whether patients' consciousness could perceive the environment without the involvement of the brain. In most death experiences, patients feel they are falling over their bodies, looking up in the space. When a patient was waiting, they asked him if he had experienced a death experience or if he felt it came out of his body. If he had experienced a death experience, other questions followed. Of the 140 interviewed, nine of them reported an experience related to the death experiences. Two patients had detailed memories of the surrounding material, and in one case, the description was considered valid. However, in both cases, the experience took place in a different place from where the shelf with the hidden image was located, so there was no additional element. Therefore, Newberg (2018) concludes, although the results of the survey were interesting, the data are not sufficient for any conclusion for or against the existence of consciousness outside the body.

No brain activity can adequately explain the near-death experiences, as they are particularly complex. However, as Professor Tsitsigkos in his work *<Psychology of Religion>* (2011) writes, the most widespread theory of interpretation of death experiences is that of the "circular causality" of physicist H. Haken (1927). The theory relates to the interaction of the mind over brain neurons. The "circular causality" refers to an "epileptic type" neuroelectric activity of the temporal lobe, which begins in the mind of man. Thus, the mind produces according to the cultural background of man, the corresponding reactions and experiences, as Prof. Tsitsigkos (2011) explains.

In addition to doctors and nurses, more and more scientists in the field of mental health are giving weight to religious issues. In particular, in the field of Psychology, emphasis is placed on views related to Eastern religions, as

Tsitsigkos (2011) informs us.

Psychology Professor Bernard Spilka (2003³), combining various death surveys, along with an earlier psychological analysis of T. Hooper (1962) distinguished eight basic psychological perspectives on death: (a) death as a natural end to life, (b) indifference to death, (c) death as a refutation of hopes and ambitions; (d) death as a last test of courage, (e) death as something unknown, (f) death as loneliness and suffering, (g) death as a means of detachment from material commitments, (h) death as for an eternal reward or conviction.

Neuroscientist Newberg (2018) makes an effort to explain the stages of near-death experiences (such as the feeling of going through tunnels, meeting with "bright" entities and visions of religious figures and relatives), from the perspective of Neurotheology.

The sensation of going through a tunnel could indicate changes in the visual system, as the oxygen supply and blood flow decreases in some parts of the brain. Newberg (2018) assumes that the blood and oxygen supply is more maintained in the central parts of the brain, while weakening in the periphery. This alters the function of peripheral and central vision. Since central vision remains intact and peripheral vision is impaired, this could explain the sense of vision through a "tunnel". Other explanations could be found in some kind of epileptic seizure or hallucinations. However, Newberg (2018) does not rule out the possibility that consciousness actually passes through some kind of tunnel, as it separates from the body.

Regarding the sense of flashback, Newberg (2018) believes that weakening parts of the cortex of the brain could lead to greater activation of central parts of the brain, which are responsible for memory. The more intense activation of the hippocampus could therefore be responsible for the flashback of life, which refers to certain death experiences.

According to Newberg (2018), changes in the function of the amygdala and hippocampus could be responsible for visions of religious figures, or "light" visions. Especially if the parietal lobe is affected, the areas, which are relevant to social interaction and/or vision, then it is possible to create the sensation in interaction with various 'light entities', or with other persons, dead friends, relatives, etc.

D. Lund (2009) explains that all materialistic interpretations of near-death experiences, come to a common conclusion, that near-death experiences are hallucinations and have no objective value. There, which differs from each other, is in what exactly causes these hallucinations.

A very popular materialistic theory, claims that these are physicochemical changes in brain function, derived either from anoxia, i.e. lack of oxygen, or hypoxia, i.e. excessive oxygenation of the brain. Some also consider that the near-death experiences come from damage to the temporal lobe or hallucinogenic substances.

Lund (2009) believes that the research of Moody (2001), and Osis & Haraldsson (1977) breaks down the theory of incomplete oxygenation of the brain. With all the research, Lund (2009) points out, there were people who experienced near-death experiences, having complete clarity and normal blood flow

to the brain, so they had normal oxygen levels.

More generally, genuine secret experiences do not seem to have anything to do with psychological exhaustion and isolation, but suggest some kind of artistic and philosophical creativity. On the basis of these new scientific approaches, those who experience similar experiences should not automatically be regarded as psychotic or neurotic, Prof. Tsitsigkos (2011) concludes.

According to Newberg (2018), the results of death experiences vary from person to person. A number of people say that no existing religious faith explains their experience. These people tend to turn to spirituality and no longer concern themselves with religiosity, in its conventional form. In many cases, however, death experiences match people's pre-existing faith. People, who belong to this category, deal with their religion more than before and become more active in their religious community. As Prof. Tsitsigkos (2011) informs us, in psychometric research, it was found that especially in older people, religious faith helps them on multiple levels. Not only does it reduce the impending fear of death, but it also helps the person feel that he/she deserves to be respected and carried weight.

Lund (2009) cites another materialistic theory, based on psychology. Her supporters believe that the person, who is experiencing a dying experience, is trying to cope with the fear and awe of death, with some psychologically defensive mechanism.

Psychiatrist Russel Noyes (1980, 1982-3, 2016) believes that a "psychological defense mechanism" catalyzes a person's sense of individual personality and leads him to "depersonalization". Others believe that near-death experiences are the products of a disorder that creates hallucinations, such as schizophrenia.

Lund (2009) rejects these versions. He believes that psychological considerations are insufficient to interpret the near-death experiences. Many people weren't afraid of death before they experienced a death, Lund (2009) explains. Moreover, many of them were not aware that they were in danger of dying until after the end of the experience. Therefore, the theory of a "psychological defense mechanism" to deal with the fear of death is unfounded, Lund (2009) concludes.

The theory of reincarnation

A key part of the Religions of Buddhists and Hindus is the belief in reincarnation, according to Professor K. Georgoulis (1965). Philosopher Socrates Gikas (1966) informs us that the cause of reincarnation is ignorance of the true nature of the soul-"Atman", as we read in one of the *Upanisades*. In Buddhism, the cause, leading to rebirth, is considered to be the very desire for life.

Several people claim that extracorporeal experiences instilled faith in reincarnation. Most claim to have been able to remember events from 'previous lives', through 'flashback', a hypnosis technique, by which events of the Past. Some scientists claim the same. *Theosophy* also adopts the faith in reincarnation. The occultist Annie Besant (1847-1933) explains that *Theosophy* evaluates the material world as a world of illusion and fallacy, where man is usually blinded. The rotation of reincarnations is believed that gradually allows for a person to

remain alert (Besant, 2002, 2003, 2207).

The process of death in Theosophy

In this day and age, as Father Seraphim (2004) said, faith in reincarnation, has become an integral part of Theosophy, Occultism and Spiritualism, and has significantly influenced today's popular glorification and religious perception. The theory of reincarnation is now quite widespread in the Western world. For the occultists, the soul after death, stays for a while in some "star field" and then returns to the earth, where it is reborn. According to Father Seraphim (2004), the use of terms such as, "star field" and "astral body", became popular among all occultists and psychics. Even when the same terms are not used, similar concepts are used, as the theoretical framework of Theosophy is considered a model of occult theory.

The "astral field" surrounds the Earth's world, but remains invisible to the average person, author Papastavrou (1958) explains. In the "astral field", each person will stay with his "star body" after death, for a shorter or longer period of time, according to Theosophy. Theosophy understands death as a long process of gradually excreting man's "Immortal Trinity" from his perishable bodies. Theosophical teaching believes that the complete purification of man can only occur when all the "shells" that entrap consciousness are broken and expelled. Mr. Papastavrou (1958) considers that the procedure can be divided into three episodes, "The Way of Return", "Withdrawal" and "Completion". The separation of consciousness from the physical body is only one stage of death, which they call the "Way of Requital".

In the next stage, "Leaving", consciousness eliminates the "stellar" and "lower mental" body. As long as its vitality lasts, it assimilates a part of the thoughts of earthly life. When the assimilation process is finished, the results of the collection of the "mental" are stored in its "higher" section, while the "lower mental", having completed the work disintegrates, according to Papastavrou (1958).

In the third and final stage of "Liberation" or "Integration", the "Immortal Trinity" remains liberated. Entering a state of meditation, it is joined by "Super-Soul". This only lasts as long as her *Karma* allows. After the permitted rest period, he is obliged to return to the material world and to be incarnated.

Death in the Tibetan "*Bible of the Dead*"

The Tibetan Bible of the Dead is a Buddhist text from the 8th century. It's a book about the dead, with instructions on the afterlife in which he will wander until the next rebirth.

Although reincarnation is undesirable, the consciousness of the deceased cannot have any spiritual development, as long as it remains in the intermediate postmortem state of the "Bardo", no matter if he's happy or unhappy there. For ordinary people, the next best possibility, except from the avoiding of reincarnation through the immediate release of "satori", is to be transmigrated into a human being. Reincarnation in a world other than man can delay him from his

cause. Only "satori" is considered to break the perpetual cycle of reincarnations and misery. The "satori" is conquered when the realization of the deceit of the "Samsara" becomes a reality and the thirst for existence in its illusory world fades. Essential for this effort, preparation in the concentration of the mind, under the guidance of a Guru, is considered.

"Bardo" is the intermediate state between life and death. It is considered that its duration is symbolically 49 days. According to this Buddhist teaching, over the course of 49 days, various visions of "peaceful" and "wild" deities appear in the dead. But, in reality, all deities are a kind of psychic projections of the dead. If the visions continue, the dead will end up being transmigrated, which, according to Buddhist doctrine, is evil. The benefit, which is considered to be reaped by reading the text, is that it helps him overcome the misleading illusions that manifest themselves at the time of death and avoid being re-incarnated.

According to the author Evans Wentz (1878-1965), deities are personifications of divine powers and represent the contact of man's consciousness with the macrocosm. Man's consciousness, as a microcosm, is symbolically confronted with his own tendencies in the macrocosm. In particular, "peaceful deities" are the expression of the noble, pure feelings of man. It's the face impulses of his heart. The "peaceful deities" represent emotion and appear first, just as emotion occurs before reason. Here are the visions of "angry deities", which represent the brain's tendencies for rationalization and are not cute or beautified, but frightening. Just as maturity comes after the end of childhood, so do the "angry deities", appear after the dawn of the visions of the "peaceful deities", Wentz (1970) points out. According to Carl Jung (1875-1961) respectively, the world of the deities and spirits of "Bardo" is a personification of the "collective unconscious" of every man. Contrary to Christian conceptions, the afterlife in "Bardo" does not include any eternal punishment or reward. It is simply a means for the soul to satisfy its existing materialistic aspirations through a rebirth, as long as it has not been enlightened. The purpose of the text is to remember the dead, of the muscular teachings he had received while he was alive, from his gurus and teachers.

As Father Seraphim (2004) explains, those who believe in reincarnation do not particularly deal with the question of the origin or destination of the soul, nor do they believe in the Middle Crisis of souls, which leads to foretaste of hell or paradise, as Christianity teaches. Of course, they don't even accept the Final Judgment. They are content with a vague idea of immortality, which, however, differs from the immortality taught by Christianity.

In conclusion, we see that occultism evaluates the body as inferior to the spirit. Life is considered an illusion. Death from this perspective is a temporary release from the prison of matter. Western researchers of near-death experiences, having this philosophical and theological background, are led to the obsolescence of the material body or at the other end, to the absolutization of him.

Death in the Orthodox Eastern Tradition: A vestibule of eternal blissfulness or tortures

Orthodox theologians have a quite different idea of what life really is. Matter is a key component of man, as is his soul. The soul is recognized as a guide of the body, but the body is not underestimated, nor is its value overlooked. A paradoxical finding is that while in relation to Western theology, Orthodox theology, emphasizes matter as a key component of man, it is not driven to the impasse of a materialistic worldview.

Death, like birth, is inextricably linked to a life of struggles against the passions. Sources for the view of the afterlife of the soul offer both the holographic testimonies and the Lives of the Saints.

According to Father Seraphim Rose (2004), the teaching of the Church, as we find it in the Lives of the Saints, in the texts of the Fathers, but also in the reality of today's Orthodox Mass, has a characteristic simplicity. This characteristic simplicity, however, has become the target of critical commentary, by some, who consider it to make Christian teaching unattractive and unconvincing to the average man of the 21st century.

As for the experiences, from the moment of death, the Bible, the texts of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the Lives of the Saints, offer many, genuine, personal experiences, Father Seraphim (2004) explains.

The soul of man who dies is met by angels, according to Father Seraphim (2004). These angels have been sent at the time of death to accompany the soul on its afterlife. Both their mission and their human form and their actions are clear.

When the soul of man comes out of her body, she is driven into the air-space and tries to reach her heavenly dwelling. The charges are evil spirits, which inhabit the intermediate space between heaven and earth. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Father Seraphim (2004), trying to give an answer, in relation to the nature and location of paradise and hell, utilizes the teachings of Bishop Ignatius and the Saint John Chrysostom. What we know is the position of the Orthodox tradition, in which it becomes clear that paradise is "up", hell "down", paradise in "heaven" and hell in "earth's bowels". Therefore, it is a place, but not in our own space-time, otherwise every time a drill reached deep enough or a satellite passed around the earth, it would pass invisibly through some super-worldly place.

On the other hand, atheists try to ridicule the concept of paradise, so some Christians, in order to avoid materialistic accusations, end up that heaven does not exist "nowhere". There is therefore a great deal of confusion and ambiguity, as Father Seraphim (2004) observes, but on trivial matters and not on substance.

According to Father Seraphim (2004), beyond the general knowledge that heaven and hell are places, we do not need to know anything more, that only to them, that God opens the spiritual eyes, it's revealed. The important thing, as St. John Chrysostom points out, is not the exact location of paradise or hell, but understanding how we can enter the paradise and avoid hell.

Critics of customs, teaching to consider it "unrealistic" and dismiss it as a fictional narrative or a later addition. Father Seraphim (2004) disagrees with this approach, believing that the teaching of customs is based on the Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints and is not an arbitrary interpretation.

Father Seraphim (2004) stresses that the important thing is to be able to discern spiritual realities. These experiences do not manifest themselves in our own rough, material world and the concepts of space and time exist differently in airspace. What is certain is that human language is insufficient to fully render them.

Father Seraphim Rose (2004) characterizes the appearance of customs "litmus test" of authentic Christian teaching on death. Since this element disappears from the deadly experiences of the West, however impressive they may be, or if they have no explanation of modern medical science, they remain shallow, in relation to Orthodox teaching.

Father Seraphim (2004) joins those who critically see the phenomenon of modern near-death experiences, as he disagrees with the identification of "bright existences" and angels. He observes that angels, as presented in the Orthodox Christian Tradition, have a much more specific form, but also a mission, in relation to the amorphous and indeterminate 'bright beings'. Father Seraphim (2004) considers that the wrong correlation of "bright existences" and angels is due to the influence of modern materialism on the understanding of spiritual reality. According to Father Seraphim (2004), authentic Orthodox teaching is outside the framework of the western dualist Philosophy. Father Seraphim (2004) considers that the western's dualist thinking is oversimplified and not sufficient to interpret spiritual reality. Father Rose (2004) points out that even the occult has been influenced by these dualistic conditions of Western philosophy, thus spreading the same vague and false ideas about spiritual reality.

As a consequence of this confusion, when the secularized man expresses some curiosity about the spiritual world, he has almost no interest in whether this, which is the product of imagination, unusual human forces or if it is a sign of divine, angelic or demonic effect. At this point Father Seraphim Rose (2004) expresses his own interpretation of the "bright being", according to which, it is much more likely, it is a demonic temptation than an angelic presence. First of all, "light" doesn't lead the soul anywhere, it just stops it and takes a look back at the past events of life. Then it has no specific form, like the angels in the Christian secretariat and tradition, so the identification of this "light" with an angel, a guide of the soul in the afterlife course, it is logically impossible.

On the contrary, R. Moody (2001) rejects the version of demonic temptation, believing that if the "bright existence" were demonic, it would be an ambassador not for love, but for hatred, and that it would not leave good feelings and impressions. Father Seraphim (2004) considers that Moody's assessment of "bright beings" is naïve. In much of the Christian secretariat, demons choose to mislead their victims, presenting themselves and their work as a good thing.

The assessment of Father Seraphim (2004) is that each man, especially accepts the last hours, demonic temptations, which vary, depending on his expect-

tations and spiritual level. For those who believe in hell, demons appear in horrible forms, in order to torture a man through fear. For those who do not believe in hell, or if they believe, they may consider that they do not belong there, as some Protestants, who consider themselves "rescued", demons choose different ways to mislead them. However, it is not out of the question that demons appear to certain righteous Christians, who believe in hell, with a misleading appearance, as angels of light.

According to Father Seraphim Rose (2004), the only safe criterion for distinguishing between angelic and demonic deathly appearances, is offered by genuine, Orthodox Christian teaching. However, due to the widespread dissemination of the dualistic ideas of Western philosophy, the criterion of several Orthodox Christians has been alleviated. As a result, many Orthodox Christians find it difficult to believe that demons operate in "material" ways and not just on a symbolic level. Similarly, those Orthodox who believe in the existence of demons are regarded by others as "naïve" or "conservative". The angels reside in the heavens, passing only through the "air space", as divine messengers. Also, the souls of the dead simply pass through the "air space", passing through the Partial Crisis, to reach the partial foretaste of paradise or Hades, as a foretaste of Hell. The chances of souls leaving their bodies not encountering demons are slim, Father Seraphim (2004) concludes.

On the contrary, the Orthodox Christian Literature places greater emphasis on these issues and places particular emphasis on the outcome of the soul. While all Christian experiences of death confirm the existence of paradise and hell, the need for repentance in man's life, the struggle not to lose his soul, there is a judgment of man by God, none of this is found in Western near-death experiences.

The reason why the demonic nature of these spirits is not obvious to those who have some kind of death experience is because they haven't really died, they don't have the protection and the guidance of the angels, who lead the soul after death. On the contrary, demons in the cases of souls, passing through the process of actual death, from their region, manifest all their wickedness and hostility. In other souls, they choose to show some other form, to mislead them. Father Seraphim (2004) stresses that only in the cases of the God-given visions of righteous Christians can we speak of the real emergence of entities from the "other world", angels and saints.

It is only through the study of Christianity that man gradually becomes able to distinguish between good and evil. This knowledge and experience of the Christian, can, as long as it is in God's purposes, make him capable, to see spirits, initially through his spiritual eyes and then, through his physical eyes. This process is called the opening of the senses and occurs by divine concession. The opening of the senses also occurs at the time of death, when man enters with his soul into the spiritual world.

Father Seraphim Rose (2004) observes that the only reason all these events seem incredible and unreal to modern man is the lack of familiarity with Christian Secretariat and Faith. This lack of familiarity with the Christian Faith is rooted in the well-founded, modern materialistic concept, according to which

consciousness and body are identified.

Probably the reason why the ancient secretariat did not make such extensive reference to the first moments, after clinical death, is because of the Christian, the existence of the soul and the existence of life after death, is a given reality. The weight is given to god's revealed word and God's commandments, while there is no corresponding curiosity for explaining phenomena, as there is in modern man, Metropolitan Hierotheos (2010) concludes.

An Orthodox view of modern near-death experiences

Father Seraphim (2004) does not regard modern death experiences as genuine experiences of death, but as extracorporeal experiences, as they do not, in his view, go hand in hand with the real experience of death. Therefore, they cannot give us the true picture of what happens after death. All they prove is that consciousness is maintained after it is exited from the body. Father Seraphim (2004) believes that in fact genuine Christian experiences offer much more information about the state of the soul after death than modern near-death experiences.

Father Seraphim (2004) accepts that Christian teaching about the air world and the true paradise and hell, located outside it, can protect the Christian, from being seduced by teachings, derived from evil spirits. This danger, however, the Christian can avoid when he believes that experiences in airspace are not what they seem.

Modern, near death experiences, Father Seraphim (2004) concludes, are contrary to the traditional Christian teaching of the afterlife. They have more similarities to the experiences of psychics, Shamans and pagan mysteries than to Christianity, as they limit life outside the body, in a state of spiritual euphoria, without fear, only with peace and pleasures.

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