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## THE ROLE OF RELIGIOSITY IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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In this study, we aimed to review the literature on the relationship between religiosity and intimate relationship functioning. Since religious approaches put the relationship and the life of the couple in a broader perspective and give it a special character, religiosity may have a significant influence on the relationship of religious couples. Scientific research in recent years has widely confirmed the long-standing observation that religiosity is manifested in the relationship of religious couples, and this is reflected in both positive and negative aspects. In a positive context, religiosity plays a supportive role in relationships and has a positive effect on the stability and quality of the relationship as well as on the physical and psychological well-being of the couple and other family members. We present three theoretical frameworks which, in the past few years, have greatly contributed to understanding the effects of religiosity on relationships and facilitated the clarification of the diverse context of the topic. These are 1) the role of sanctification 2) marital relationship as a way of being religious and 3) marriage and religiosity as attachment-based phenomena. As a conclusion, we evaluate the major strengths and biases of the existing research, and theorize and suggest future domains for investigation.

**Keywords:** theories on religiosity, intimate relationships, sanctification of marriage, attachment to God

### 1. The concept of religiosity in the psychology of religion

Religiosity fundamentally determines the ideas, intentions, actions, and behaviour of a religious person. In recent years, the clarification of the multidimensional nature of religiosity has become an important subject of research in the psychology of religion. Therefore, we would like to state at the very beginning of our work that religiosity is a complex and varied phenomenon, which manifests itself in a range of differences among the individual patterns of religiosity.

Gordon ALLPORT (1950) was the first to note that, just as there are no two identical personalities, there are also no two identical religious ways of believing. He

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defined religiosity as a complex sentiment and differentiated between mature and immature religiosity. Mature religiosity is characteristic of mature personalities; it is closely connected to the definitive traits of the personality, and extends these traits to the sphere of religion. The elaboration of the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity is based on the differentiation between mature and immature religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity means a deep, internalised, mature faith with a deeply experienced and realised, unified outlook, along with increased spiritual wellbeing and more effective coping strategies. Extrinsic religiosity is not internalised, it does not infuse the personality; it is defined by authoritarian religious regulations and norms. It is also utilitarian because even though religion offers security, solace, and a sense of community, the individual will use religiosity to gain advantages. As ALLPORT and ROSS write: 'Perhaps the briefest way to characterize the two poles of subjective religion is to say that the extrinsically motivated person *uses* his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated *lives* his religion' (1967, 434). The results of empirical research conducted with individuals indicate that mental health correlates positively with intrinsic religiosity, and it correlates negatively with extrinsic religiosity. Mature, intrinsic religiosity tends to be an enhancing, strengthening, and healing force for many people. These effects manifest themselves in the attitude shown towards the ego, other people, and God (KOENIG et al. 2001) Relationship-related research suggests that intrinsic religiosity shows correlation with commitment, forgiveness, empathy, and supportive experience of relationships, as well as secure attachment (GODDARD et al. 2012).

At the individual level, religiosity offers a framework of interpretation and world view that gives meaning to experience; may contribute to coping better with the self, relationships, and challenges; strengthens a sense of control over life situations; and increases self-esteem and satisfaction (HOMAEI et al. 2016). Different religious communities and traditions offer their members their own moral codes and help them comply with these guidelines, facilitate appropriate behaviour, and sanction deviations. Therefore, religious communities and traditions also offer an outlook and principles (e.g. moderation, avoidance of addictions) that can directly contribute to wellbeing, thus supporting the physical and mental health of the individual (ABU-RAIYA et al. 2015).

Research results indicate that spirituality and religiosity have a positive effect on relationship balance, happiness, self-esteem, and optimism (ELLISON & FAN 2008), and correlate negatively with anxiety and depression (ROSMARIN et al. 2009). The psychological importance of religiosity is evident in stressful situations among others. In evaluating situations, a spiritual perspective means a holistic and growth-oriented point of view; the individual realizes the temporariness of the situation, becomes aware of coping strategies and limitations, and puts the current, painful situation in a broader context: it is considered a trial or punishment from God, which is also an opportunity for finding meaning and spiritual growth (POMERLEAU et al. 2016).

## 2. Religiosity in intimate relationships

In recent years, many studies in the psychology of religion and family psychology – particularly in the English-speaking world – have shown that religiosity has a significant impact on the functioning of close relationships, and generally shows a positive correlation with the quality of relationships and family life (PARGAMENT & MAHONEY 2005). Although religiosity may have impact on all intimate ties, the rest of the article summarizes the literature with regard to romantic intimate relationships, mainly marital couples.

Most religious traditions emphasize the importance of love, commitment, loyalty, mutual support, and forgiveness. These skills and attitudes are proven to play a major part in the quality and stability of marriages (HORVÁTH-SZABÓ 2010). Research on the connection between religiosity and relationships generally shows that deeply religious married couples, on average, have a slightly higher level of commitment, marital stability, and marital satisfaction than non-religious couples, and consequently, their marriage may function better (MAHONEY 2010). Therefore, religious commitment has a positive effect on the quality of relationships (WOLFINGER & WILCOX 2008), for instance by strengthening values, faith, and behaviour which support marriage (e.g. empathy, altruism, lack of aggression; SAROGLU et al. 2005). Certain aspects of religiosity positively correlate with commitment and loyalty (BURDETTE et al. 2007; DOLLAHITE & LAMBERT 2007), good conflict management skills (GARDNER et al. 2008), forgiveness (MCDONALD et al. 2017), and coping as a couple (PARGAMENT et al. 2017). Religious faith and actions may contribute to psychological wellbeing and mutual support in marriage, thus strengthening marital harmony (LAMBERT et al. 2012).

The role of religiosity manifests itself at various stages of relationships. It may affect the following areas: the decision to marry, long-term commitment, actions that aim to strengthen and enrich the marriage, and effective coping strategies in crisis situations. (MAHONEY 2010). When the family life-cycle goes through transitions, couples usually experience crises. One such situation is pregnancy and parenthood, when couples usually experience conflicts and negativity in the relationship, feel increasingly dissatisfied and the possibility of divorce threatens. It is important to identify the factors that keep couples motivated to solve their problems and maintain their relationship (KUSNER et al. 2014).

We will present the results of research conducted in the English-speaking world, concerning the effects of religiosity in various stages of relationships.

The effects of religiosity may appear at the early stages of choosing a partner. One study shows that emerging adults who are religious will be more likely to choose a religiously homogamous partner and this homogamy may contribute to satisfaction within the relationship (BRAITHWAITE et al. 2013).

In studies involving emerging adults, religiosity correlated positively with marital attitudes, with the assumption that marriage is good for the individual, and with marital readiness, meaning a realistic assessment of when the individual is ready for

marriage. Research findings suggests that religious people are more likely to think of marriage as a successful and happy prospect, and tend to spend more time and energy preparing for marriage, while non-religious people are slightly more likely to consider marriage a legal contract. Additionally, the more young people were religious, the more likely they were to know when they were ready for marriage (MOSKO & PISTOLE 2010).

Another study focused on individual religious beliefs along with relationship religiosity in dating couples (LANGLAIS & SWARTZ 2017). Relationship religiosity refers to activities related to religion, such as discussing religious topics, studying religion together, praying together, attending religious ceremonies together, and connecting through religion as a couple. This manifestation of faith as relationship religiosity acts as a connection between individual religious belief and relationship satisfaction, as well as individual religious belief and commitment to the partner; it shows stronger correlation with relationship satisfaction than the religiosity of the partner or the individual.

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of newlyweds in America have shown that religious couples are generally expected to have greater relationship stability, greater relationship satisfaction, and lower incidence of domestic abuse and divorce (SULLIVAN 2001). Results indicate that religiosity moderates the inverse relationship between marriage risk factors (e.g. big age gap, neuroticism of partners) and relationship satisfaction. Religious married couples with high levels of commitment find it harder to consider divorce. In times of relationship distress, these couples are more likely to seek help than non-religious couples. All of this contributes to the long-term quality, satisfaction, and stability of the relationship.

Research involving expecting couples, or couples raising small children indicate that religiosity tends to accompany stronger commitment to the relationship, and more time spent in activities that enrich the relationship. Religious couples usually experience more varied and stronger positive feelings about pregnancy and birth, such as admiration, respect, and gratitude, and they also offer more support to each other. All these factors strengthen relationship stability, relationship satisfaction and long-term commitment (MAHONEY et al. 2009).

Religiosity may play a part in the quality of the relationship at an advanced age too. Positive effects may be apparent during personal crises such as illness, retirement, and other life-altering events. Faith can protect the relationship from the negative consequences of health problems; for example, while caring for a family member with dementia, religious beliefs can protect caregivers from deteriorating health (DAMIANAKIS et al. 2018).

Several consistent findings suggest that the relationship between religiosity and marriage may be constructive primarily when the faith of the partners is active, driven by intrinsic motivation, if the partners are able to harmoniously experience their individual and shared religious beliefs, and when their religiosity is manifested in principles as well as rites while anchored in a religious community (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2017). Consequently, empirical studies of religiosity

revealed negative as well as positive effects and correlations with relationship functioning (DOLLAHITE et al. 2019). Going beyond the good-bad approach of simplified religiosity, in recent years, researchers have addressed the question of how it is possible that religious belief, which is generally supportive and often very helpful, can sometimes also be detrimental to the life of an individual, a relationship, a family, or a community. These approaches, which combine the positive and negative effects of religiosity, contribute to a better understanding of these correlations (MAHONEY 2010). More recently, DOLLAHITE and colleagues (2018) published a comprehensive study, examining the contexts where this double effect may be manifested. One such context may be the role of God in the relationship of the couple or the family; whether God is a confidant or an authority figure, and whether this interpretation strengthens or obstructs and weakens the relationship of family members. Another important consideration is whether religious regulations and faith would encourage family members to carry out actions which are important for their relationship with one another, and whether religious experiences unify or distance family members.

All in all, the main finding of the research is that the relationship between religiosity and the functioning of relationships is generally positive, but this is not true for all traits of religious belief and all relationships. Here are some factors that may be relevant to the interpretation of the above relationships as far as we know.

### **3. Psychological models of the role of religiosity in relationships**

Over the past two decades, researchers have sought to identify traits of religious belief that are relevant to the issues and factors mentioned above, and to outline the cases where religious belief has a positive effect on relationships.

At the turn of the millennium, following the development of the psychology of religion, the study of the relationship between religiosity and relationships took a new direction. In early sociological studies, religiosity was conceptualized as a non-specific, distal construct. (PARGAMENT et al. 2001), where religious behaviour was connected to formal, institutional religious acts. Examples of such behaviour are church visits, frequency of prayer and self-rated religious salience. Later, researchers in the psychology of religion found it necessary to approach religiosity through specific proximal constructs that more accurately represent the function of religiosity in the lives of individuals. Some examples of such constructs are: personal contact with God, intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation, faith in divine support, and spiritual support as a coping mechanism (COTTON et al. 2006). Below, we outline three theoretical frameworks which, in the past few years, have greatly contributed to understanding the effects of religiosity on relationships and facilitated the clarification of the diverse context of the topic.

### 3.1. Marriage as a sacred union

Kenneth Pargament and Anette Mahoney, two renowned scholars of the psychology of religion, were the first to suggest that when studying the connection of religiosity with relationship satisfaction and stability, one should take into consideration other, deeper religious characteristics besides, the external characteristics (such as frequency of church visits and religious homogeneity of the couple). These were defined as direct characteristics of the couple's religious life and they were marked in two closely related areas. One is the joint participation of the partners in religious events, and practising religion together (for example, praying together), as well as discussion of religion-related issues. The other is the idea of the sacred quality of the relationship (MAHONEY et al. 1999), which will be described in detail below.

Some researchers assumed that psychosocial functions and essential elements work separately, while both mechanisms are capable of promoting or inhibiting healthy family relationships, marital relationships, and parent-child relationships. Therefore, they focused their research on the mechanism of the effects of religion and religious principles on the relationships within the family. According to the theory, the concept of sacredness is manifested in several aspects of life, transcending the theological framework of the metaphysical interpretation of reality: it relates to certain objects, time and space, certain life events, cultural products, people, activities, and family relations (MAHONEY et al. 2003). This is called 'sanctification', which is defined as a psychospiritual construct and, unlike the theological interpretation, it is described as a psychological process that allows people to attribute spiritual qualities and meaning to certain aspects of life (PARGAMENT & MAHONEY 2005). According to this approach, sanctification occurs in two forms. In theistic sanctification, the person, based on their faith, experience, and concept of the divine considers a certain object a manifestation of God. The other form is non-theistic sanctification, when the person attributes spiritual characteristics and sacred qualities to an object, without any exact reference to a personal God; for example, transcendent attributes (holy, divine, miraculous, blessed) or timelessness (everlasting, endless). In this framework, sanctification of marital and family relationships means the extent to which the person considers God actively present in marital, parent-child and family relationships, and the extent the person experiences sacred qualities in this context (MAHONEY et al 2003).

The results of MAHONEY and colleagues suggest that those who attribute sacred qualities to marriage will experience personal advantages, wellbeing, and less conflict. In case of conflict they will report cooperative, solution-focused communication rather than hostile, destructive communication more often than those who hold marriage a less sacred union. Those who consider marriage a sacred union usually feel more compelled to protect the relationship, even if they have to make sacrifices and prioritise their partner's needs over their own (PARGAMENT & MAHONEY 2005). Studies verified that greater sanctification of marriage moderates inequities perceived in the marriage (DEMARIS et al. 2010), predicts less marital

conflict and individual anxiety, and more relationship satisfaction and stronger commitment (MAHONEY 2013). Those who consider their marriage a part of the divine plan and experience the active presence of God in their relationship generally show somewhat greater commitment, deeper communication and marital intimacy and usually enjoy greater relationship satisfaction (POMERLEAU et al. 2016). They are more likely to invest time, energy and emotions in the long-term maintenance of the relationship, make efforts to overcome difficulties, show forgiveness, and they also tend to emphasize positive feelings experienced in the relationship while attributing less significance to negative feelings, which means that they are more resilient to relationship stress (ELLISON et al. 2011).

STAFFORD (2013) studied the relationship between the sanctity of marriage, relationship maintenance and the quality of marriage and concluded that if one partner holds the marriage sacred, it will have a positive effect on the relationship satisfaction of both spouses. This positive effect is supported by actions that aim to strengthen the relationship, such as self-disclosure and expressing positivity.

Recently, while studying the relationship between sanctification and relationship satisfaction, the mediating role of dyadic coping was proven (RUSU et al 2015). Dyadic coping is a stress-control process where the couple employs positive and negative coping strategies to combat stress together. Those who consider marriage sacred usually support their spouse more effectively during stressful times, which results in higher relationship satisfaction for both partners. Supportive dyadic coping increases marital wellbeing by reinforcing commitment and mutual support.

In the study of the protective effects of religious resources, another construct appeared besides the sanctification of marriage: spiritual intimacy. Considering marriage a sacred union motivates new parents to find constructive solutions to conflicts, as the loss or deterioration of their bond would have negative spiritual and psychological consequences for themselves and their child. Spiritual intimacy is related to investing in a relationship. It refers to the relationship behaviour when spouses are able to talk to each other about sensitive issues, they share their religious experiences, their doubts, and the depths and heights of their quest for God. This type of intimacy is a relationship resource that deepens trust, attachment, emotional security, and the awareness or belonging together (PADGETT et al. 2019).

All in all, sanctification has a positive impact on work, marriage and parenthood. The associated physical and psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction together enhance life satisfaction (PERRONE-MCGOVERN et al. 2006), and life satisfaction in turn has an effect on relationship satisfaction and stability (GUSTAVSON 2016).

### **3.2. Marriage as a way of experiencing God**

Loren D. MARKS and David DOLLAHITE (2017) introduced new angles in the study of the connection between religiosity and marital relationships. In their research, the importance of interculturalism was emphasized from the very beginning, and accordingly, they included Christians, Jews and Muslims in the research (DOLLAHITE et al.

2004). Another important factor of their research is the consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of religiosity in the context of the functioning of relationships. It is important to point out that religiosity may help or hinder relationships, depending on the religiously motivated actions of individuals and families (BURR et al. 2012). Finally, a new approach to religiosity has been proposed to examine the relationship between religiosity and the functioning of family relationships.

According to MARKS and DOLLAHITE (2017), religiosity, and therefore the connection between religiosity and the functioning of relationships, can be best described in three dimensions: religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious community. The dimension of religious beliefs relates to personal belief, frame of interpretation, and meaning. Religious practices refer to visible or hidden behaviours and actions, such as prayer, the study of sacred texts, the rituals, and the traditions embedded in a certain religion. The third dimension is the religious community, which includes social support, participation, and involvement in the life of the community (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2017). Here, we will briefly review the interrelationship between religiosity and marital relationships along these three dimensions.

### 3.2.1 Religious principles

Based on the idea of Mahoney and colleagues that a sacred marriage means experiencing God in a relationship, GOODMAN and DOLLAHITE (2006) focused their research on the ways couples perceive the active presence of God in their relationship and how this affects their marriage. Studying couples with strong religious beliefs, researchers found that couples who believe their marriage is important to God, moreover, they consider it as part of the divine plan, experience the active presence of God in their relationship. This activity can be manifested in three ways.

Couples experiencing God indirectly have emphasized the importance of religious beliefs and cultural and social influences. In this view, marriage is organized around values like loyalty, humility, good deeds, morality, distinct gender roles, and exalted goals. While some couples who experience divine manifestation directly report on the presence of God in their relationship, others talk about experiencing the actions of God. The God of being has been described as being responsible for the relationship providing support for it. The God of doing was described as responding to prayers and helping the relationship through the Holy Spirit. Each of the interviewed couples attributed the stability and unity of the relationship, the growth, loyalty, as well as their happiness and peace to God's role in the relationship. All of this is consistent with the previously proven connection that religiosity has a positive effect on the stability and satisfaction of a relationship.

Religious couples often report that they believe in experiencing the active presence of God, which strengthens their commitment to the relationship. In the Bible, this is symbolised by the threefold cord. ('And if one prevaileth against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken' Eccl 4:12). For these couples, their wedding is a special event when they not only make

a commitment to each other, but receive God in their relationship, and God then becomes a constant presence and resource in their life, like the third of the threefold cord (LAMBERT & DOLLAHITE 2008). The experience of God's true presence in marriage not only sanctifies and strengthens the relationship, but also maintains the desire for the couple to find meaning and purpose in their life together. It inspires spouses to devote energy and attention to preventing and solving relationship problems. It reinforces the idea of achieving the desired harmony together. And, finally, it deepens the belief that shared religious experience, shared religious practices, and presence in a religious community will help resolve conflicts and challenges in the relationship (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2011).

For religious spouses, marriage is a holy covenant, and, accordingly, it means more than an individual, more than a couple, and more than a family. Devoutly religious couples often emphasize that marriage requires a high degree of altruism from individuals. The need for altruism is most evident in the shared desires and goals of the companions in the relationship, and it is sustained by the basic human desire that individuals want to be part of something greater. In religious marriages, there are three ways to fulfil this desire: by believing that marriage is a sacred union approved by God; that husband and wife complement each other; and that marriage is a life-long commitment (DOLLAHITE et al. 2012).

According to most devoutly religious couples, the purpose and meaning of marriage is becoming a family with children. At the same time, the presence of God gives marriage a higher quality than a relationship, by considering God as the creator of the marriage who is present in the relationship, forming a triad with the married couple, providing support and help in times of need. Those who view marriage as God's image consider it unique, unparalleled, and therefore place it in the context of a long-term perspective that supports commitment (GOODMAN et al. 2013).

It is evident that the role of religiosity in marriage is proven empirically as well as by practical experience. However, the question of whether and in what ways religiosity strengthens or weakens marital and family relations is increasingly in focus (DOLLAHITE et al. 2004).

At this point, it is important to address the phenomenon of theistic triangulation, which does not necessarily strengthen marriage but may also weaken it. The concept of triangulation comes from BOWEN (1978) and describes the phenomenon when spouses involve a third party in solving their problems by talking to this third person separately. In the theistic triangulation, God is not considered neutral or attentive to the requirements of the relationship. Instead, God is seen as biased, a person who works in coalition with one spouse against the other. However, experience shows that this method of coping is not adaptive, it does not facilitate problem solving, but rather deepens existing differences (BUTLER & HARPER 1994). This inhibitory action is manifested when spouses seek God's support by avoiding confrontation with the problem, thereby actually using religious distraction, or involving God in such a way the conflict is perceived as an action of God to punish one of the spouses (HEIDEN ROOTES et al. 2009). The extremely rigid refusal of divorce based on religious principles is

also harmful, as it may endanger families and individuals who are victims of domestic abuse and infidelity (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2017).

The supportive effects of similarities of faith, principles, and values in a relationship are also worth pointing out. The divergent and often conflicting beliefs and values, especially those regarding marriage, gender, and parental roles may result in deep and often irresolvable conflicts that overload the marital relationship (DOLLAHITE et al. 2018).

Thus, it is of utmost importance that religious beliefs should not be self-serving, nor disconnected from the behaviour in the context of everyday life of the partners. Religious beliefs may be supportive or damaging factors in the marriage and the family, depending on the actions of the family members, based on these beliefs (BURR et al. 2012).

### 3.2.2. Rituals

Religious practice offers a unique opportunity to strengthen the intimacy between and the commitment of family members, including spouses, and to strengthen family cohesion (MARKS 2004). In an institutional framework, such rituals are sermons or the mass, celebrations, rites of passage, pilgrimages, praying together, studying sacred texts, and singing (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2012). Rituals related to religious holidays have been positively associated with relationship satisfaction, reinforcing relationships by making individuals feel part of the family. At the same time, they combine values with behaviour, helping individuals navigate the systems of value which sometimes transcend generations, providing a sense of continuity and thus offering security for family members. Holidays rise above everyday life by enriching it with symbolic content and shared experiences (FIESE & TOMCHO 2001).

Religious family rituals (e.g. prayers before meals or evening prayers) reinforce the closeness of family relations by bringing members closer to one another and to God (DOLLAHITE & MARKS 2009). Sharing religious practices deepens commitment and supports shared coping methods. Relationship conflicts are more often followed by regret and forgiveness when the couple is open to shared religious coping. Pastoral care also appears to be an important opportunity in times of conflict or relationship difficulties (GOODMAN et al. 2013). The positive effect of religious rituals on marriage can be summed up as follows: they provide structure and rhythm of life, reassure, strengthen physical and mental wellbeing, improve the quality of life, reinforce marriage ties, give meaning and purpose, bring the couple together, and support the individual's and the couple's relationship with God (MARKS & DOLLAHITE 2012).

### 3.2.3. Community

For religious couples, an important aspect of marriage is the opportunity to become an integral part of a congregation and thus connect with other couples and families. This connection begins with the wedding vows taken in front of the congregation,

and is manifested on every occasion when the couple, and later the family, take part in the activities of the congregation (DOLLAHITE & MARKS 2009). Congregation membership is associated with a sense of belonging to a larger family and can play a supportive, sustaining role in the most important, positive or negative events of family life (BROWN et al. 2011).

When studying the connection between belonging to a religious community and marital stability, a connection was found between active participation in the life of the congregation and marital faithfulness. Persons belonging to a religious community and regularly participating in social events (such as liturgical events) are less likely to have extramarital affairs than those who do not belong to such a community (BURDETTE et al. 2007). Results from various studies also indicate that frequent attendance to congregational events is the only religion-related feature that has a positive correlation with marital faithfulness, but this correlation is only strong when active participation in the life of the community is associated with relationship satisfaction and happiness, that is, those who are more satisfied with their relationship are expected to be faithful in the long run (MARKS et al. 2011).

Although the occurrence of marital conflicts and domestic abuse is less likely among active congregation members, this is only true when both spouses consider belonging to the congregation equally important, and the responsibilities undertaken at the congregation do not place a burden on the relationship, but serve its balance and growth instead (DOLLAHITE et al. 2017).

It is noteworthy that over the past two decades, churches made special efforts to offer marriage preparation courses for engaged couples, and marriage enrichment programs for married couples (LAKATOS 2014). As most marriage preparation courses take place within the ecclesiastical framework, there is a particular emphasis on understanding the impact of religiosity on the stability and quality of marriage (praying together, religious coping methods), and strengthening relationships with the religious community (BEACH et al. 2011).

### **3.3. Marriage as an attachment**

In recent years, the attachment-theoretical approach provided new perspectives on the interrelationship between religiosity and marital relationship. Attachment theory (BOWLBY 1988) originally aimed to understand the early interactions between individuals and their significant others. HAZAN and SHAVER (1987) studied couples' relationships and involved Bowlby's theory by suggesting that the categories of childhood attachment styles can be applied to categorise and analyse romantic relationships, too. An important distinction is, however, that whereas adult attachment patterns are predisposed by early attachment experiences, they may be also be different, because attachment in a relationship is a two-way process that requires mutual care (ZEIFMAN & HAZAN 2008).

Responses to the unavailability of the loved person are organized along two dimensions (BARTHOLOMEW & HOROWITZ 1991), where one dimension is the model

of the self (self-image in attachment situations) and the other dimension is the model of the other (expectations, emotions, and ideas; BRENNAN et al. 1998). The two dimensions are well correlated with anxious and avoidant behaviours in attachment situations. While the negative self-model is characterized by anxiety, the negative other-model is characterized by a higher tendency for avoidance. The positive self-model and the positive other-model together mean secure attachment and readiness to adapt (ONISHI et al. 2001). According to the above, the following adult attachment styles can be distinguished: secure attachment, insecure-anxious attachment, insecure-avoidant attachment.

The research pointed out two important conclusions regarding the question of how attachment styles influence the quality of relationships (COLLINS & FEENEY 2004). On the one hand, adult attachment style influences motivation, and thus affects the development of close relationships (e.g. with insecure-avoidant attachment style it is more difficult to establish a close relationship than with secure attachment style) and on the other hand it affects how much a person is committed to a close relationship (MORGAN & SHAVER 1999). The degree of commitment plays a key role in the chosen form of relationship (marriage / cohabitation), its stability and, of course, its quality. Secure attachment is associated with better relationship functioning and predicts higher self-esteem, less fear of abandonment, constructive problem solving, and higher physical and psychological well-being than insecure attachment styles (CORDOVA et al. 2005). Thus, attachment style is shown to have a great influence on relationship satisfaction, the alternatives, and the investment in the relationship; and these together determine the extent of the commitment (ETCHEVERRY et al. 2013).

Attachment theory introduced new perspectives in the psychology of religion too. The perception that the relationship of the believers with God, which is the foundation of religious belief, may be associated with the mother-child relationship has greatly contributed to the study of several basic religious phenomena (representation of God, prayer, conversion, internalizing religious values), and to a better understanding of how religious persons work.

KIRKPATRICK and SHAVER (1990) elaborated the idea that early childhood attachment may influence the individual's relationship with God as well as religious beliefs. Even the earliest studies revealed that attachment to the mother has a complex effect on later religiosity, and that there is a connection between the individual's relationship with God and later religiosity in adult life. For religious people, God is a substitute attachment figure who provides shelter in difficult situations, and offers a solid foundation for exploring and experiencing life.

It is hopeful that, in adulthood, an insecure mother-child attachment can be compensated with a personal, loving, accepting God. In severe stress, crisis, or following a traumatic experience, an adult with avoidant or ambivalent childhood attachment style may go through a dramatic conversion and build a trusting relationship with God. However, such persons usually form an ambivalent attachment to God too, therefore the attachment feels stronger when they need protection and help, but

weaker when life is characterized by wellbeing (GRANQVIST & KIRKPATRICK 2013). These results provide a more accurate understanding of the effect of religiosity on relationships.

As secure attachment style results in better relationship quality and consequently stronger relationship stability, and an insecure attachment style leads to marital stress and dysfunction (COLLINS & FEENEY 2004), it is important to explore what could help persons with insecure attachment style to do well in marriage. So far, related to the role of religiosity in relationships, the role of religious commitment and positive religious coping has been proven to be helpful.

Examining the relationship between religious commitment and attachment style, the possible moderating role of religious commitment (belonging to a congregation, actively practising religion) has been outlined, as religious commitment can reduce the negative impact of avoidant attachment on relationship satisfaction (LOPEZ et al. 2011). Persons who have difficulty in forming close relationships (avoidant attachment) or persons whose spouse has such difficulties, find special solace in a personal relationship with God and the support of the congregation. Religiosity may offer a remedy here to relieve the relationship dissatisfaction of the person with avoidant attachment style and their spouse. Interestingly, this relieving, compensatory effect of religiosity is not evident in anxious attachments; in their case, an increase in dissatisfaction is more likely.

Attachment style is also predominant in one's choice of coping strategies. Secure attachment usually goes with cooperative coping strategies, avoidant attachment goes with self-directed coping strategies and anxious attachment goes alternately with resigned or self-directed coping strategies (BELAVICH & PARGAMENT 2002).

Religious coping strategies may be applied when assessing relationship problems (KRUMREI et al. 2011). Adult attachment style (within the relationship and to God) and the choice of religious coping strategy together influence relationship satisfaction. Positive religious coping is based on faith and trust in God; the individual is convinced that God loves them, cares about them, and offers strength in hardships, and it is assumed that God works together with believers to facilitate healing and growth. Negative religious coping is characterised by the sense of being abandoned by God and the idea that illnesses or problems are God's punishment (PARGAMENT 1997). Individuals with secure attachment style usually apply positive religious coping strategies to solve relationship problems, and this positively affects relationship satisfaction. Individuals with insecure attachment styles usually apply alternating (positive and negative) coping strategies, but only positive religious coping strategies may moderate relationship dissatisfaction stemming from avoidant attachment style. This effect does not apply to people with anxious attachment style (POLLARD et al. 2014).

As we have seen before, a person's relationship goals, beliefs, and attachment strategies are organized into internal working models, and the emotions associated with them play a strong activating role. Internal working models are shaped, refined, and maintained by emotional communication, and changing them is only possible by shaping emotional communication. In religious persons, the behaviour, emotions, and

ideas associated with God are organized into internal working models, too. If bonding with God provides security for the individual, then that security may well extend to relationship processes. Thus, MAXWELL and colleagues (2018) propose a new working model for the relationship: the shared working models (SWMs), which include the behaviour, feelings, and ideas the couple share when relating to God and their marriage. Similarly, to the attachment process of the individual, where the working model incorporates ideas about the self and the other, SWMs integrate the ideas connected to the relationship and God. Couples who consider God as a secure other will share an image of God who is approachable, attentive, reassuring, helpful, and encouraging; an image of God who offers help to maintain, improve, and nourish the relationship. This secure attachment may be accompanied by the conviction that God considers their relationship valuable, to be protected and cared for, which generates individual and shared behaviour, emotions, and thoughts that further enhance the couple's relationship with one another and with God. This means a sense of unity and togetherness, which goes beyond the level of the couple and affects relationships in the family and within the community (MAXWELL et al. 2018).

#### **4. Summary and outlook**

In this study, we reviewed and briefly presented the relationship between religiosity and relationship functioning. We may now conclude that scientific research in the recent years has widely confirmed the long-standing observation that religiosity is manifested in the relationship of religious couples, and that this is reflected in both positive and negative aspects.

At this point, we would like to reiterate that much of the research so far has been carried out in the Western world, and while there are efforts to extend the research to non-Christian couples, intercultural comparisons with Christian and non-Christian religious traditions would be important: What are the similarities (in terms of content and function) and what are the differences?

Of course, the connections revealed so far raise further questions, outlining new research directions that can complement the existing results and develop the theories further. Future research should, for example, cover community-centered social processes beyond the level of the couples' relationship: how acceptance, support, and ostracism / condemnation coming from the broader environment may be manifested in the relationship level of the couples involved. Trends in dealing with relationship crises, depending on the different types of religiosity, could also be investigated. The effect of a child's attitude to religion on the relationship between parents is also a context to be examined.

Longitudinal studies could reveal how changes in one's religiosity may affect the couple's relationship (e.g. one partner or both of them convert or choose another religious tradition; religious homogamy becomes heterogamy or vice versa, the non-religious partner converts to the religious partner's faith, or one partner turns sceptical about religion, etc.). Another aspect of longitudinal relationship dynamics may

be how the effect of religiosity on relationships would be complemented by the effect of relationships on religiosity. Finally, another important area may be exploring the possible bright and dark sides of religious over-idealization and ‘facade management’ in relationship maintenance.

In conclusion, religiosity has a significant influence on the relationship of religious couples. Religious approaches put the relationship and the life of the couple in a broader perspective, and give it a special character. In a positive context, religiosity plays a supportive role in relationships, and has a positive effect on the stability and quality of the relationship, as well as on the physical and psychological well-being of the couple and other family members. The desire to more precisely understand the direct and indirect effects will undoubtedly encourage dedicated researchers to further explore the connection between religiosity and relationship functioning in the future.

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