
PERSPECTIVE

The Psychology of Religion in Poland

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The psychology of religion in Poland is examined from 1913 to 1939 and from 1975 to today, with reference to the main contributors, the institutions where they worked, and the specific topics that have been investigated.

An analysis of the development of the psychology of religion in Poland distinguishes between two different periods in the history of this branch of knowledge. The first covers the years 1913 to 1939; the second began in 1975 and has lasted until today.

The year 1913 has been recognized as a starting point for the Polish psychology of religion because in that year Polish psychologist Jan Władysław Dawid (1859-1914) published a series of articles under the title *Psychologia Religii* (*The Psychology of Religion*; Dawid, 1913). In these articles, he defined the position of the psychology of religion relative to the other scientific disciplines and described its basic research problems. Dawid (1913) constituted both a summary of Dawid's research and a program of future investigations. Because of Dawid's premature death, he was never to realize his program.

Dawid (1913) is a set of reflections on the problems of religious experience and an attempt to construct a typology of individual religiosity. Dawid regarded religious experience as an entirely conscious mental state, with no narrowing of an individual's field of consciousness under the influence of accompanying emotions. Nevertheless, Dawid definitely came close to

James in his concept of mystical states of consciousness and mystical experience. He regarded those experiences as being connected with turbulent personality changes under the influence of traumatic events affecting individuals.

Religious experience provokes an attempt at a new arrangement of a person's inner life at a time when the person's previous arrangement has fallen into pieces or has been completely destroyed due to mental breakdown.

A model that was based on the comprehensive structure of the psyche and in which it was possible to differentiate between elementary and independent parts was basic to Dawid's typology of religiosity. This model, however, did not exclude the possibility of indicating several kinds of elements that prevail in the human mind. The same elements could also be detected and pointed out in religious life as a specific form of mental life. Thus, Dawid identified "emotional" religiosity (in which feelings and contemplation are most important), "active" religiosity (which focuses on consequential dimensions of religion, such as norms and moral principles of a religion), and "intellectual" religiosity (which is built around logical justification of religious behavior and/or feelings).

The scientific output of another psychologist and philosopher, Edward Abramowski (1868-1918), also belongs to this first period in the Polish psychology of religion. Abramowski was a founder of the Institute of Psychology in Warsaw. He dealt with two main issues in his work: religious experience and prayer. He regarded religious experience to be a cognitive process, conditioned by an inflow of stimuli from the surroundings and experienced through the nervous system. The cognitive way in which memory, thought, and attention do not take part leads to acquiring information that, as a consequence, is hidden in the subconscious and creates latent kinds of memory. In Abramowski's (1912) terminology, this is individual *cryptomnesy*. Cryptomnesy affects, in turn, a very wide spectrum of individual attitudes and experiences, including what is religious.

Research into the structure, prerequisites, and functions of prayer is found in Abramowski's investigations of the phenomenon of cryptomnesy. Prayer constitutes a liberating factor for subconscious content, which is released as an effect of the lasting state of involuntary concentration in the praying person. The outcome of this release is positive changes in the human mind and a new integration of experiences and strivings.

Władysław Witwicki (1878-1948), a philosopher and theoretician of art, was also very active in the psychology of religion. He was interested in religious feelings and religious thinking as they were related to the differences and similarities between religiosity and mental disorders. According to Witwicki, a base for human religiosity was constructed by sacred emotions. This base results in an anthropomorphic perception of the world and in the interpretation of relationships in a magical way. This way of perceiving the world creates religious feelings in the individual.

Witwicki (1939) also conducted interesting research on religious faith as professed by educated people. In an analysis of his research results, he dealt with the problems of the moral appraisal of religious belief by an individual and the role of aesthetic factors in formulating attitudes toward religion.

In order to carry out this research, Witwicki designed the first Polish verbal projective technique. As a result of his research, he formulated a statement about psychological contradictions between the results of an intellectual analysis of religious dogmas and the emotional acceptance of those dogmas. Later, he showed that creeds, as compared to more neutral statements, have different characteristics and belong to different mental fields. He concluded that, although operating close to each other (but on different levels), they are not contradictory, or, as we say today, the contradictions are reconciled just by placing them in different spheres of mental life. Witwicki's point of view on the psychological mechanisms controlling such a reconciliation of contradictory pieces of information pertinent to the same object in the consciousness of an individual belongs to the same pattern of thinking as Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Witwicki's results exemplify one of the ways by which an individual can solve specific kinds of dissonance.

The achievements of psychologist Stefan Błachowski (1869–1962) center on the domain of ecstatic states of consciousness and on personality features precipitating religious psychosis and magical behavior (Błachowski, 1937). In this research, Błachowski utilized experimental methods and was the first to evoke, under a laboratory condition, a state of religious ecstasy, using only a method of verbal suggestion. In his analysis of the origins of religious delusions, he concentrated on the influence of suggestion in social groups and on the conditions releasing infantile mental content and prelogical thinking.

This first period of development of the Polish psychology of religion came to an end in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II. Research institutes were closed, scholars dispersed. After the war, the psychology of religion was revived following the political events of October 1956. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that research on the psychology of religion was always a matter of peripheral interest for psychologists, although it was occasionally undertaken by scholars in other disciplines.

The situation changed after the Second Congress of Polish Science, which formulated a general research program on religion that began in 1975.

The Institute of the Science of Religion at Jagiellonian University in Cracow became the coordination center for these investigations. The research program of the institute has dealt with the issues of the system of values as connected to the structure of world view (Domagała & Olearnik, 1980), the structure and the dynamics of youth attitudes toward religion (Grzymała-Mosczyńska, 1981), the social perception of those with differ-

ent attitudes toward religion (Mądrzycki, 1980), the relationships between magic attitudes and neuroticism levels (Doktór, 1980), the autonomy of individuals and their religious attitudes (Socha, 1988), the clinical aspects of religiosity (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 1987), and the new religious movements in Poland (Doktór, 1990).

Jagiellonian University remains the largest but not the only center of psychological research on religion in Poland. Other studies of the psychological aspects of religiosity are occasionally undertaken in other centers: the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, the Institute of Youth Research in Warsaw, and the Pedagogical College in Cracow.

A complete picture of the psychology of religion in Poland also involves the state of the disciplines in academic centers connected with the Christian Church—the Catholic University of Lublin and the Academy of Catholic Theology and the Christian Theological Academy, both in Warsaw. Moreover, there is some research being conducted at higher theological seminaries and at the papal theological academies.

From a research perspective, the Catholic University of Lublin is undoubtedly the most interesting—Zdzisław Chlewiński and Władysław Prężyna being its two principal psychologists. Their research concentrates on attitudes toward religion and personality correlates (Chlewiński, 1987; Prężyna, 1981) and is accompanied by a sound methodological reflection on the problems of the applicability of psychological tests and measures of attitudes.

One interesting problem undertaken in Prężyna's (1977) research concerns a description of the connection between personality and the centrality of the object of a religious attitude.

Chlewiński (1982) edited a book, *Psychologia Religii*, that presented different theoretical problems and empirical studies related to the psychology of religion. The authors of the book, from the Catholic University of Lublin, undertook very different problems, including religion from a psychoanalytic point of view, religion and humanistic psychology, developmental aspects of religiosity, father figures and the representation of God, and clinical aspects of religious experience, attitudes, and behavior.

There is no separate publication in Poland devoted entirely to the psychology of religion. There are, however, many periodicals—published by academic centers—that print articles concerning this discipline: *Studia Religioologica*, *Studia Theologica Varsoviensia*, *Rocznik Teologiczny Chrześcijańskiej Akademii Teologicznej*, *Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, *Ateneum Kapłanskie*, *Homo Dei*, *Novum*, and *Wież*. (Information on these periodicals is available from Grzymała-Moszczyńska.)

At the Institute of the Science of Religion at Jagiellonian University, the

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