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The traits of personality in the religious crisis

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THE TRAITS OF PERSONALITY IN THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS (CECHY OSOBOWOŚCI W KRYZYSIE RELIGIJNYM)

Przedmiotem badań był kryzys religijny. Dotychczasowe rozważania teoretyczne na temat kryzysu religijnego pozwalają stwierdzić, że jest on głęboko osadzony w osobowości człowieka. Konsekwencje kryzysu religijnego nie ograniczają się do sfery religijności, ale przenoszą się na teren całej osobowości człowieka. Celem badania było poszerzenie wiedzy o jego korelatach osobowościowych. Cel ten zrealizowano przez analizę cech osobowości osób (zmienna niezależna) i określonej postaci zaangażowania osoby w kryzys religijny (zmienna zależna). Badania zostały przeprowadzone na próbie losowej w grupie osób w wieku od 18 do 35 r. ż. Do wyodrębnienia grup zastosowano podskalę kryzysu ze Skali Postaw Religijnych Wł. Prężyny. Sformułowaną hipotezę badawczą sprawdzono za pomocą Kwestionariusza Osobowości R. B. Cattella 16 PF. Osoby kryzysujące charakteryzują się postawą bardziej „od ludzi” z dość dużą dozą nieśmiałości, przy czym zachowują się w sposób niekonwencjonalny, mają duże intensywne wewnętrzne życie psychiczne, wyższy poziom lęku. Cechuje je duża skłonność do obwiniania się, są bardziej radykalne i krytyczne od osób nie kryzysujących. Poszukują nowych rozwiązań. W większym stopniu wykorzystują swą inteligencję. Wysoki wynik w czynniku O oznacza stan rozbicia w związku z sytuacją lękorodną, nie jest o jednak słabość psychologiczna, ale duża wrażliwość emocjonalna.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys religijny, kryzys psychologiczny, osobowość, nawrócenie, religia.

Introduction

The topic of a religious crisis is one of the topics most often researched by religion psychologists¹. According to Allport religious crisis is a significant turnabout or intense experience typically of long-lasting effects.

This phenomenon has been a subject of interest for researchers in the domain of psychology of religion as crisis of religion.

It was studied by authors such as: E. D. Starbuck², W. James³, W. H. Clark⁴, A. T. Boisen⁵, G. W. Allport⁶ and others. In Poland the most prominent authors include: F. Głód⁷, Z. Chlewiński⁸, J. Makselon⁹, Z. Płużek¹⁰. According to Allport religious crisis is a significant turnabout or intense experience typically of long-lasting effects. The ultimate result is conversion or depression. Religious crisis is related to psychological crisis, is one of the types of psychological crises. It is different, nevertheless, as it runs in two dimensions: natural and supernatural¹¹. William James¹² presents the most exhaustive picture of religious crisis. James uses term 'conversion' in place of 'crisis'. According to James certain persons undergo a „re-birth” from religious [attitude] to nonreligious, while others go in the opposite direction. Following a period of stability and

¹ G. W Allport, *Osobowość i religia*, Warszawa 1988.

² E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, London 1899.

³ W. James, *Doświadczenie religijne*, Warszawa 1958. W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*, London 1992.

⁴ W. H. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion*, New York 1968.

⁵ A. T. Boisen, *Religion in Crisis and Custom. A Sociological and Psychological Study (in) Crises in Personality Development*, WestPoint, USA 1973, pp.42-70. A. T Boisen, *Crises in Personality Development*, in: *Personality and Religion. The Role of Religion in Personality Development*, William a. Sadler Jr.(ed). London 1970, pp. 191-205.

⁶ G.W. Allport, *op. cit.*

⁷ F. Głód, *Psychologiczna analiza kryzysów religijnych u ludzi dorosłych*. Praca doktorska, Lublin 1974, Archiwum KUL.

⁸ Z. Chlewiński, *Religijność dojrzała (szkic psychologiczny)*, in: *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii pastoralnej*, ed. Z. Chlewiński, Lublin 1989.

⁹ J. Makselon, *Kryzys religijny*, in: *Psychologia dla teologów*, ed. J. Makselon, Kraków 1992, pp. 293-300.

¹⁰ Z. Płużek, *Psychologia pastoralna*, Kraków 2002.

¹¹ Tamże.

¹² Za J. Kuczkowski, *The Psychology of Religion*, Kraków 1993, pp. 251-320.

balance (self-unification), religiousness, comes a period of storm, stress and disintegration¹³. According to another author, Anton T. Boisen¹⁴, religious crisis is a normal psychological development crisis of a human being, just reaching the religious [domain]. The few definitions presented above give a flavour of the multiple ways of approaching the topic. Religious crisis is a complex phenomenon not subject to one theory. In general there are common elements shared by all authors, including: a change in life, sudden or gradual, sudden change in the religious life of a person, an unpleasant state of emotional tension and doubts in the domain of religion. The crisis may lead to a positive result, where an individual achieves a higher, more mature level of faith or, it may lead to a negative result, where an individual loses faith or becomes an agnostic.

Based on the current state of knowledge, I understand the religious crisis as follows:

A religious crisis is a psychological state of longer or shorter duration, arising when:

- 1) religious values are lost or called into question, or
- 2) the relation between a man and God becomes broken or hindered, or
- 3) the worth of paths leading to God is being questioned.

On the basis of the current state of knowledge, I understand under the notion of religious crises what follows:

The religious crisis is a psychological state of longer or shorter duration, triggered when:

The problem

The objective of the study was to deepen the understanding of the psychological phenomenon of religious crisis, approached as a kind of psychological crisis. The study was inspired by theoretical premises as well as by the results of the previous empirical research. Theoretical considerations lead to a conclusion that a religious crisis has deep roots in the personality of a human being. Personality may be a significant factor for the emergence of the crisis and its course. Also, the religious consequences of the crisis are not limited to the sphere of religion, but move into the entire personality of an individual.

¹³ H. S. Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James*, North Carolina 1981, pp. 111-119.

¹⁴ A. T. Boisen, *op. cit.*

There are sufficient grounds to assume that religious crisis is also – to some extent – a psychological crisis that causes resonance in the human personality. Existing empirical studies suggest a link between personality and the fact of experiencing a religious crisis¹⁵. In the study I was looking for a relation between the system of personality traits (independent variable) and a specific form of involvement of a person in the religious crisis (dependent variable).

Methodology

I used the following methods in the study: Personality Questionnaire by R. B. Cattell 16PF, Religious Attitudes Scale (*Skala Postaw Religijnych*) by Wł. Prężyna. The study was conducted in 1993 within the territory of Poland. Participants were of Roman Catholic denomination. I distributed 200 sets of tests, of which 162 sets returned. Of these 162 tests, following statistical pre-treatment aimed at distinguishing groups more clearly, ultimately I took 120 tests for further analysis.

The characteristics of the respondents

The study group included 120 subjects, including 58 females (48,3%) and 62 males (51,6%). The average age was 24,3, and the standard deviation SD = 4,81.

Tab. 1. Age of respondents.

Age of respondents	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
18 – 21	24	20.00	20	16.66	44	36.66
22 – 25	15	12.50	17	14.16	32	26.66
26 – 29	15	12.50	14	11.66	29	24.16
30 – 33	4	3.33	2	1.66	6	5.00
34 – 37	4	3.33	5	4.16	9	7.50

The method used to determine the existence of a crisis and used for the purposes of the division into groups was the subscale of religious crisis in Religious Attitudes Scale Wł. Prężyna, composed of 6 questions.

¹⁵ G. W. Allport, op. cit., W. Prężyna, Kryzys religijny a cechy osobowości, „Roczniki Filozoficzne” 1971, no 4, pp. 153-165.

In the subscale the respondents determined the severity of the crisis in the 7-grade continuum, where 1 equals total absence of crisis and 7 equals deep crisis. The results fell within the range from 6 to 42 points. To simplify the counting results were divided by 6 (the number of scales). The end result was contained between points 1 and 7. In fact in the study the lowest result was 1.33, and the highest 6.33.

Tab. 2. Distribution of the respondents in the intervals of the crisis scale

Result	Number of respondents	%	% cumulated
1.33	1	0.6	0.6
1.50	2	1.2	1.9
1.67	3	1.9	3.7
2.00	3	1.9	5.6
2.17	6	3.7	9.3
2.33	3	1.9	11.1
2.50	5	3.1	14.2
2.67	6	3.7	17.9
2.83	13	8.0	25.9
3.00	9	5.6	31.5
3.17	4	2.5	34.0
3.33	10	6.2	40.1
3.50	7	4.3	44.4
3.67	11	6.8	51.2
3.83	11	6.8	58.0
4.00	7	4.3	62.3
4.17	10	6.2	68.5
4.33	5	3.1	71.6
4.50	3	1.9	73.5
4.67	7	4.3	77.8
4.83	8	4.9	82.7
5.00	8	4.9	87.7
5.17	4	2.5	90.1
5.33	2	1.2	91.4
5.50	5	3.1	94.4
5.67	3	1.9	96.3
5.83	2	1.2	97.5
6.00	2	1.2	98.8
6.17	1	0.6	99.4
6.33	1	0.6	100.0

Average for the entire sample is 3.758. Standard deviation 1.108. Median is 3.667. The distribution is slightly positively skewed. On the basis of the test (by SPSS) examining the compliance of the empirical distribution of the theoretical distribution (the distribution of the population) the degree of compliance is significant at the level of 0007. This demonstrates that there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis (whose content is that the sample comes from a normally distributed population). For the base to isolate groups with different degree of the experience of religious crisis I took the criterion of quartile, which deviation value Q_2 is 3,67 (in 7 degree-scale).

People who were in first quartile ($Q_1=2.83$) are constituting non-crisis group (NKR), while people, whose results were found in forth quartile created crisis group. After the removal of the extreme groups, a numerous group of people was left. Based on the scale, I isolated also a third group -which I called the intermediate group. As a criterion for the isolation of the groups I adopted the theoretical median on the scale. For this group I have chosen people, whose result was between 3.5 and 4.5 of the seven-grade scale, so it was a group with the attitude closest to the value of 4. The middle score on this scale is 4. People from this group will be representing indirect attitudes between persons in crisis and not in crisis.

The number of people in each group is 40. It was as a result of eliminating people, who were outside quartiles and motivated by the of need to isolate equi-numerous group for the purpose of facilitating statistical calculations.

The results

Used in study 16 factorial personality questionnaire R. B. Cattella is quite simple method of getting information about 16 basic dimensions of personality.

Average results, standard deviations and the significance of differences between two groups -the crisis one and the non-crisis one presents table 1 and graph 1.

Table 3. Average results, standard deviations and the significance of differences between groups: the crisis-one and the non-crisis one.

factor	The non-crisis group		The crise-group		t	p.i.
	X	SD	X	SD		
A	6.00	1.99	5.00	1.96	2.27	0.03
B	6.22	2.20	7.07	1.57	1.99	0.05
C	3.87	2.05	3.62	1.81	0.58	n.i.
E	3.80	1.68	4.10	1.50	0.84	n.i.
F	4.12	1.59	4.57	2.02	1.04	n.i.
G	6.42	1.39	5.95	2.05	1.21	n.i.
H	4.42	2.05	3.27	1.89	2.61	0.01
I	6.97	1.86	6.75	2.05	0.51	n.i.
L	5.60	1.94	6.17	1.78	1.38	n.i.
M	6.20	1.92	7.82	1.72	3.98	0.000
N	2.57	1.85	4.10	2.50	3.10	0.003
O	6.35	2.25	7.72	2.01	2.88	0.005
Q1	4.02	1.73	5.37	1.64	3.58	0.001
Q2	7.12	1.77	7.57	1.68	1.17	n.i.
Q3	5.42	1.96	4.77	1.49	1.67	n.i.
Q4	4.30	2.59	5.10	2.20	1.49	n.i.

Graph no 1: the profile of the results in the non-crisis group and the crisis group.

As you can see from posted data intergroup differences statistically significant were in factors: A, B, H, M, N, O, Q1. Factor A differentiates significantly for persons schizothymic and affectothymic. The factors B, M and O are in two groups above average (above 5,5 sten). The factors H, N and Q1 are below average. This means that people in religious crisis have similar personality traits, but they are different in statistically significant as far as the intensity of those features is concerned (see graph no 2).

The graph no 2: extracted factors of people without crisis and in crisis.

The factor A: Schizothyme – Affectothyme

There is a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p.i.<0,05$). The people from the crisis group show characteristic features of schizothyme. They have temperamental tendency to restraint expressing their emotions, they are restraint in contacts with others, and they make an impression of emotionally reserved individuals. The people from the non-crisis group

are affectothymic (cyclothymic), they are outgoing and cooperate with others easily, they have changes in the mood, they are soft hearted, they have trust in people and they get involved in many undertakings. Table no 4 shows that almost half of the group (42%) from non-crisis group have low results.

Table no 4. Percentage distribution of low and high results in groups in factor A.

The results of groups	Low stens: 1 – 4	High stens: 7 – 10
gr. NKR	20%	35%
gr. KR	42%	22.5%

Factor B: Intelligence

People from crisis group had statistically significant higher result compared with people from non-crisis group ($p.i.=0,05$). Greater ability to use intellectual abilities, good insight into matters and critical judgment. It can be said that even 70% persons in crisis group have high results.(see table no 5).

Table no 5. Percent distributions of low and high results in each groups in factor B

The results in the group	low stens 1 -4	high stens: 7 – 10
gr.NKR	15%	50%
gr.KR	7.5%	70%

Factor M: Practicality and unconventionality.

The difference between groups in this factor revealed the high level of significance ($p = 0.000$). It means that people experiencing crisis behave in a more unconventional way than people without crisis.

They are characterised by immersing into ideas, dreams, at the cost of reality of everyday life. They are characterised by vivid imagination, creative personality and an independent way of being. This factor is considered to be of temperamental origin. We can see that more clearly in the percentage distribution (see. tab. no 6). Over 70% of high results and very little percentage of low results were achieved by people in crisis.

Tab. no 6. The percentage distribution of low and high results in separate groups in factor M.

The results in the group	low stens: 1 -4	high stens:7 -10
gr. NKR	22.5%	45%
gr. KR	2.5%	72.5%

Factor O: Inclination to blame oneself.

People in crisis possess significantly higher results (almost 8 standard ten) than people without crisis and from the middle group (6 out of standard ten, see. tab. no 7). These people are characterised by a strong tendency to blame oneself, a feeling of lack of stability, lack of self-trust, frequent remorse of conscience, feeling of guilt, inability to overcome everyday problems, are easily discouraged, have a tendency for self-pitying. It is also confirmed by the result in table no 24. Only 5% of people in crisis have low results, the remaining ones have a high one (70%) or a middle one.

Tab. no 7. The percentage distribution of low and high results in separate groups in factor O.

The results in the group	low stens: 1 – 4	high stens: 7 – 10
gr. NKR	22%	48%
gr. KR	5%	70%

Factor H. Courage – Shyness.

People in crisis gained significantly lower result from people without crisis ($x = 3.27$, $DS = 1.89$) are characterised by a higher level of shyness, difficulty with describing their experiences and feelings, do not feel well in large groups, prefer contacts with fewer people, reserved, have narrowed interests, are meticulous and precise. They get confused in a complicated situation, notice danger quickly. This factor is one of the most genetically conditioned ones¹⁶. It is noticeable that over 70% of people gained low results in the crisis group (Tab. no 8).

¹⁶ Z. Płużek, 16 czynników Kwestionariusza R. B. Cattell, Lublin 1994, maszynopis, Archiwum KUL.

Tab. no 8. The percentage distribution of low and high results in separate groups in factor H.

The result in the group	Low stens 1–4	High stens: 7-10
gr. NKR	55%	17.5%
gr. KR	72.5%	5%

Brightness.

The lowest value was gained by people without crisis ($X = 2.57$, $SD = 1.85$) and the highest – by people in crisis ($X = 4.10$, $SD = 2.50$). The difference between the non-crisis and the crisis groups is statistically significant ($p.i. > 0.01$). People in crisis are characterised by a greater insight into themselves and understanding others, with an element of restraint towards people. In Table no 9 we can see that over half of the people in crisis gained low results.

Tab. no 9. The percentage distribution of low and high results in separate groups in factor N.

Result in the group	Low stens 1–4	High stens: 7-10
gr. NKR	80%	2.5%
gr. KR	52.5%	20%

Factor Q1. Conservatism – Radicalism.

People from the crisis group gained a significantly higher result ($X = 5.37$, $p.i. = 0.001$) than people without crisis ($X = 4.02$). People in crisis are characterised by more radical attitude, inclination to break off with traditional customs and opinions, searching for new solutions, they have leadership tendencies and are very critical. People from the non-crisis group are characterised by more conservatism and low tendency to change. It is visible in the percentage distribution (see Tab no 10) that 3/4 of the people in crisis gained low and middle results.

Tab. no 10. The percentage distribution of low and high results in separate groups in Q1 factor.

Results in group	Low stens 1–4	High stens: 7-10
gr. NKR	65%	10%
gr. KR	27.5%	27.5%

Discussion

While analysing the research results of the Cattell's test, one might claim that people in crisis are characterised by features of schizothyme, are careful with expressing their feelings, make an impression of being reserved, in their interpersonal contacts they behave in a restrained way. These are the people with an element of shyness and difficulty in describing their experiences. They do not feel well in large groups of people, prefer contacts with fewer people, behave in an unconventional way, they are characterised by vivid imagination, they like to immerse into ideas, dreams. They are characterised by creativity and independent way of being. The above mentioned features of personality are described in the A, H and M factors. According to Cattell these are temperamentally conditioned features. People in crisis differ significantly in terms of the O factor. As much as 70% people gained high results in this factor (see. Tab. no 3 no 7). This means that these people feel very tired of participation in many involving situations, feel incapable of facing everyday difficulties, are easily discouraged and they have a vague feeling of guilt. The high O factor (7.7 standard ten) according to Cattell is not a feature of fear but a state of disruption because of a reaction to an awe-inspiring situation or repeating mistakes or failures¹⁷. As Płużek states the high result in the O factor is particularly characteristic for crises of faith¹⁸.

There are no differences between groups in factors C, G and Q3 which indicate personality integration (see. tab. no 20, p. 182). Both groups are characterised by weak personality integration. The difference in terms of the B, N and Q1 factors is noticeable. People in crisis benefit from their intellectual skills in a better way. They have a better insight and ability to adapt intellectually. They are characterised by more critical judgment (B), an element of idealism

¹⁷ Z. Płużek, Lęk charakterologiczny, in: Lęk. Różnorodność przeżywania, ed. W. Tłokiński, Warszawa 1993, p. 35-48.

¹⁸ Z. Płużek, 16 czynników Kwestionariusza R. B. Cattell, op. cit.

towards people (N) and a greater tendency to break their traditional views and rules and greater criticism.

It is noticeable that a crisis of faith does not overlap completely with what we understand as psychological crisis. People from the crisis group differ from people without crisis with their faith (centrality and intensity) and less with personality features. The crisis groups differentiated on a greater level from the non-crisis ones in terms of faith than personality features. People in the crisis of faith did not particularly differ in such factors as: anxiety level, extra – introversion or personality disintegration. They significantly differed from the non-crisis group in such terms of faith as centrality and intensity. It means that a crisis of faith cannot entirely be identified with a psychological crisis. It can be said that in that sense it is a kind of a psychological crisis as the consequences in the religious sphere expand onto the entire area of a man's personality. On the other hand the difference is that the dynamics of a crisis of faith does not go with changes in the personality sphere in a parallel way. It agrees with Plużek's statement (1991) that the crisis of faith differs from a psychological one as it occurs on two surfaces: natural and supernatural. Allport's (1988) or Prężyna's (1971) research would confirm that there exists a bond between personality and the fact of experiencing a crisis of faith, but the assumption, based on somebody's own research hypotheses that the crisis of faith is only a kind of a psychological crisis, seems to be wrong. It might be that way that the crisis of faith has already started and in the personality one cannot see the resonance which might be examined with the usage of personality tests or the crisis of faith has already stopped and the personality is still putting itself together and might still experience for example a higher level of anxiety. The personality might not "catch up" with changes in the religious sphere. It does not mean that for example anxiety does not indicate a crisis of faith. One can expect that the anxiety might indicate a crisis of faith but it does not need to mean the crisis or the lack of it. One can risk stating that only with the help of methods to examine personality, one cannot diagnose a crisis of faith completely. The unit might be in an initial phase of a crisis of faith and the increase in anxiety or personality disintegration will not occur there. It also does not mean that there is no bond between personality features. They had been previously discussed. The difference between these two concepts of crises does not seem great, but it is significant. It may be graphically represented with the help of two overlapping circles (drawing no 1). One circle represents the crisis of faith and the other – the psychological one. These circles overlap on the larger surface but there are small surfaces of fields which do not do that.

What is specific for psychological crisis only (the part of the circle marked with no 1), is a higher level of anxiety and personality disintegration (described by Cattell in factor Q3, C and G). On the other hand, what seems to be specific only for the crisis of faith, when the resonance of personality is unnoticeable (the part of circle marked no 2), is lowered centrality and intensity of religion but also a peculiar indifference towards God manifested in such dimensions as lack of strong need for God's help, greater independence from God's normative function, greater mutiny against God, lack of acceptance of dogmas, rejecting God as an ethical norm, increase of criticism towards ones views and a weak religion internalisation.

The above mentioned characteristic features of a psychological crisis and a crisis of faith may occur separately but they also might co-exist which happens most often (marked with field no 3, drawing no 10). As I mentioned before the consequences of the crisis of faith expand onto the area of the entire personality.

Drawing no 1. Relations between religion and psychological crisis.

What seems characteristic for the common area, where religious crisis coincides with the psychological crisis (marked part of the circle no 3) means:

– high result in scale O (by test Cattell). This mean state of breakdown in connection with the anxiety causing situation., this is not a psychological weakness, but high emotional sensitivity (Płużek 1993).

– syndrome of social maladjustment, reflected in the need of instant gratification, little ability to cope with difficult situations and low skill to overcome the traumatic situations.

– low self-acceptance which cause resonance in interpersonal relations.

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Fr Mirosław Nowosielski: The traits of personality in the religious crisis

The object of study was religion in crisis. Previous theoretical considerations about the crisis allow to conclude that it is deep set in human personality. The consequences of religious crisis are not confined to the sphere of religion, but move to the whole human personality. The goal of researches was broadening the knowledge about the personality correlations. The goal was carried out by analyzing persons personality traits (independent variable) and a specific way of an involvement in the religious crisis (dependent variable). The researches have been carried into random sample people from 18 to 35. To extract groups used subscale of the crisis W. Prężyna. Research hypothesis was tested with the help of 16-features personality questionnaire R.B. Cattell. People in crisis are characterized by attitude more „from people”, with shyness and they behave in nonconventional way, they have intense internal mental life and higher level of anxiety. They are characterized by big tendency to blame themselves, they are more radical and critical than people not in religious crisis. They look for new solutions. They use their intelligence to a greater extent. High result in factor O

means state of breakdown in connection with the anxiety-causing situation, but it is not a psychological weakness, but the high emotional sensitivity.

Key words: the religious crisis, the psychological crisis, personality, conversion, religion.

Nota o autorze:

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