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## FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION IN THE PROCESS OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

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### *Abstract*

Religion can be studied as a social phenomenon from the standpoint of anthropology, sociology, philosophy and psychology, but also as a personal view of the world, and in this sense it is not a biologically transferrable complexity, since the control over religious life is the matter of personal experience, personal perception of the world. God does not use force, but acts on communicative abilities of an individual that lead him/her to accept an offered idea willingly. It is certain that communication will be as good as a person is open to himself/herself and the others. In a constant, variable tendency to point to the significance and function of religious communication in the development process of an individual, we must also accentuate the significance of the method of indirect persuasion, using the practice of integrating emotions with reason and will. By analyzing the strategy of a new model of religious communication in the domain of interpersonal communication, we will come to the conclusion indicating that this model, in practice, offers concepts and patterns of behaviour in various social groups. The paper also deals with the review of a sociological phenomenon of religious communication with individuals, groups, and society. In a biological, social and psychological sense, an individual person is incomplete, unfinished. An individual can live only in society, in a cultural environment that also includes other people. The place where genuine communication is present is also the place where true values are shared, thus helping individuals to prosper.

In a person's interior there is not a fixed, true and real personality, precisely because "being a person" necessarily implies "existing as a person", being within a process. If I am a real person, then that is what I think, judge, feel, value, respect, assess, love or hate. A personality is that which is not common to another, what I want, what I fear, what I hope for, what I believe in and what I give myself entirely to. These are the concepts, which in a certain way define personality, and they are in a constant changing process. Personality, as well as communication, is not static. It is in a continuous process of oscillations and change. Those are precisely the elements, which motivate communication, but under the condition that there is no misuse, even if nudity of a personality is to be revealed, it must not cause sense of shame. Buber emphasises it as follows: "Dialogical basis of movement is turning towards the others. It seems that it is something usual and insignificant: if a person looks at someone, addresses that someone, that person then turns to him, usually with the body, but also with soul, to a necessary

extent; directing the attention to him. But, what out of all that is a significant action, done with the being? Thus, from incomprehensibility of the existing presentation, that one person becomes a presence and now, in our observation, the world is no longer an indifferent multitude of dots, one to which we direct perhaps a momentary attention, but rather an endless motion around one narrow wall of light outlines and great bearing capacity – endless but limited precisely with a wall, and thereby, even though not surrounded, has yet to become picturesque, free from its own indifference! Still, any hourly contact is worthy of taking as much as possible from our essential being /1/. Growth of personality and its regression originate from our relations with other people. Man becomes as a gender, not a sum of individuals. In a biological, social and psychological sense, an individual person is not complete, is not finished. A person may only live within a society, in a cultural environment represented by other people as well /2/. In the process of "existence" of a person, personality, what I am, shall be defined

by my relations to those who love me or who refuse to love me, to those whom I love or whom I refuse to love. It is certain that one relation will be as good as the quality of its communication. If the interlocutors may, in the communication process, tell one another who they are, i.e. what they think, feel, love, respect, what they fear, what they hope for, what they believe in, then anyone may grow successfully in the process of personality development. In that case, anyone can be what they are, without having to simulate. The true meaning of authenticity of personality comes to the fore when exterior is an expression of interior. Empathy is important in interpersonal communication due to frequent situations with lack of information based on which it is possible to make conclusions about the feelings of others. Word is a rather weak device for describing complex feelings. Besides, people often do not wish to show their true emotions, fearing that they might lead them to a predicament or that they might be rejected. Empathy is a way for us to "visit" conscience of others so as to obtain more information that way which would have been impossible to obtain otherwise. Empathy may lead to a much too strong relating to experiences of another person. But, at the same time, it provides an opportunity to learn more than what is on the surface. Empathy enables thought experimenting with different roles and deliberation of an issue from several standpoints. We may describe empathy as a "useful risk" which requires the ability of imaginative experimenting with different roles but also the ability of keeping the distance for the purpose of objective judgement. Empathy is not necessary in all kinds of interpersonal communication, it may always improve competence. Empathy enables the communicators to obtain information about the others which they may then use in their selection of words, presentation style or a choice of strategy.

A man must be free to express his thoughts both for himself and for general meaning, because it may happen that we do not know what we mean before we say it. I must have an opportunity to tell you "who I am", because only then may I learn who I am and may I act in line with my personality. Communicating as a function is in line with the deepest needs of the people to interact with those they find alike. Generally speaking, communicating should be understood as cooperation of the people with a psyche, within a certain unity they belong to, under the condition

of even partial alignment of their actions. In the language of existential psychology the word "communicating" exists to denote a special relation between two persons. That is a close connection between them. One being communicates with another, one being socialises with another. Gabriel Marcel calls such a relation "ontological togetherness", a real fusion of two beings. I enter the world of his reality and vice versa as much as possible. That is how something like "fusion" is created, even though everyone remains a complete person, because one is not one half of the two, but two are a half of one. So my interlocutor is no longer someone who merely helps me achieve my goals. Our relation is not like a relation between a subject and an object, we have experienced a mysterious but real togetherness. That means that "communicating, apart from exchange of spiritual and cultural goods, discovers small, intimate habits from everyday life" /3/. There where true communication exists, spiritual values which enrich the personality are awarded. Communication is the only way which leads to togetherness. Human life has its own laws which establish the relation between personalities and things; we use the things and accept the personality because if the things own us and not vice versa, we are not personalities. Personality whose life takes place at the subject-object level shows that it prefers things to people. That is thus an execution of death penalty over happiness and fulfilment of human hopes. This is necessary because it helps people foresee behaviour of others and coordinate their actions /4/.

Viktor Frankl /5/ writes in his book "Man's Search for Meaning" about his prison friend from the Nazi camp Dachau. He talks about the prisoners who have, after the liberation, found it very hard to get by in the free world and were ready to go back to the camp confines where they were used to living, after their long imprisonment. This is a dramatic dilemma which a man is feeling in the process of "origination" of personality. As the research has demonstrated, most are not eager to be involved in the process of communicating with others, because they are swept with an unpleasant feeling while they are discovering their personality. Some accept only to act out that "exit" while the others do not manage to find the courage to cross the entire road towards freedom. There are several phases between those two processes. We shall describe them in further elaboration as five

levels of communicating. The fifth level, which we shall discuss first, represents the lowest level of readiness to communicate, to present ourselves to others. Successive, downward level indicates a growing success in that endeavour. Denying the invitations for interpersonal interaction leads to isolation of the personality, not just isolation from others but self-isolation as well. We could also call the fifth level a "clichéd conversation". This level is the weakest response to a human dilemma and, on the other side, the highest level of communicating oneself. At this level there is no communication, except by pure chance. At this level clichéd conversations are maintained, such as "How are you? How is the family? Where have you been so far? I am so glad to see you". We do not actually mean any of the things we ask or say. If the other side takes our question seriously, we are at an awkward place, because we are neither open nor ready for communication.

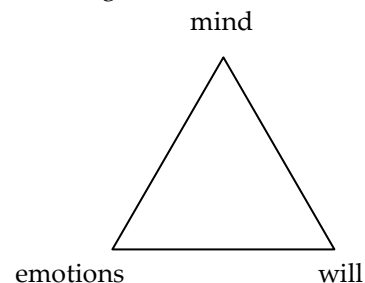
Luckily, the other side in the communication usually feels the superficiality and conventional character of our effort and question and retorts with a mere standard reply, "Excellent... thank you". There is not the least bit of the "personality exchange" level in such communications. Everyone remains within the isolation of their own pretence and "pretence of refinement". At the fourth level usually the facts about others are reported. At this level the personality does not remove itself from the confines of its loneliness, it does not open up towards real communication, since it reveals practically nothing about itself, because it always remains hidden under the mask of its "pretence". Granted, communication at this level tries to form an illusion about its knowledge and ideas just by providing mere reports or certain data. We do not provide any personal comment for those data, do not open up, do not designate or take any standpoint, we merely report it. At this level, the communicator is hiding behind the clichés, strives to close himself behind the "gossip-shield", conversational fragments or minor stories about other people. In that case the communicator does not give anything of himself and does not ask anything from others in return. The third level presents ideas and assessments. At this level only partial communication between the personalities is present. There the individual willingly undertakes a certain action outside of his "prison cell". He shall risk trying to convey some of his ideas and familiarise his interlocutor with

some of his assessments and decisions. However, communication on that level is kept within the confines of a strict censorship. While he is presenting ideas, he shall carefully observe his interlocutor and his reactions; he shall test the water temperature before jumping inside, he expects he is certain to be accepted, together with his ideas, assessments and decisions. If the interlocutor raises an eyebrow or "squints", starts to yawn or looks at his watch, he shall most likely retreat to a safe environment. He will rush to the silence covert or change the topic of the conversation or, even worse, start to talk about the things he assumes the other person wants to hear, try to be whatever pleases the other person. In that case I am no longer me. That is still not the deep level of communicating oneself to others. In order to get to the core, one must descend to the bottom /5/. At the second level of communicating, emotions are expressed and therefore we may call it "the courage level". The thing that separates us most clearly from other people, the thing that makes a person's communication a specific, unique perception, are the emotions. If you really want to know who I am, I must tell you about the inside (the courage level). If I am for or against something, there are people who will support my beliefs. However, those feelings, which are the basis of my ideas, assessments and beliefs, are only mine. No one will support any political party, or hold a religious belief or engage himself in an endeavour with the same emotional basis of eagerness or indifference. No one experiences certain occurrences in the same way. And that is the thing that often drives us to defend our insincerity, by donning our "pretence" of nobleness, we engage ourselves in establishment of superficial relations. In the communication process we are forced to live with suppressed feelings, which represent a dangerous and self-destructing path. Each relation where communication interaction needs to be achieved must have the significance of a true "meeting", must be based on openness, which implies a certain degree of bravery. We must say who we are, regardless of whether the person we are talking to likes that. The alternative is to remain in prison, which is a slow death of the personality. And thus we reach the first level or the so-called perfect communication. All deep and true friendships must be based on absolute openness and honesty. Communication at the level of fullness and courage may be extremely difficult,

however that level of communication leads to mutual exchange of "spiritual goods". Unfortunately, in the conditions of our disrupted relations, it is a false ideal one needs to strive to, because in order to understand people, we must also hear what they do not wish to say about themselves. At that level of communication, people are like two different music instruments, which play the same note, producing different tones, which join in a perfect harmony. Similarity is understood here as the basis, as a unique assumption for creation of a starting point. And because we are different and unique as personalities, we are able to... talk endlessly about ourselves (and among ourselves), about ideas and objects. Communication is the condition of psychological norm /7/, we do not exist as sum of individuals, because one is not one half of the two, but two are a half of one, mankind exists as gender. By engaging in communication, man feels the need to express "surplus" information or compensate for the lack thereof. Communication stimulates the needs such as feeling of loneliness, insecurity, and interest for communication grows thanks to the foundation platform of our preferences and beliefs. If certain results as common goods or achievements are expected from the communication process, then mutual "opening up" is absolutely necessary. That type of self-revelation may be achieved just with the help of what we would call communication at "the courage level". We shall dare to claim that there is no other way and that all the reasons, which would potentially be stated as justification for insincerity may be understood as a deception. It is much better, for a person, to tell the other person how they feel or think about him rather than to live in the conditions of torturing and uncomfortable relation of "pretence". Insincerity always breeds discomfort and suspicion. If we had to tell the other person that we do not admire them or if we were to be harsh in every occasion, that would be much better than creating an illusion of sincerity by "pretence". If the other person may not be accepted for what it is, then it is much better to avoid relations altogether, because in that case communication shall not be "mutual spiritual exchange" but communication at the level of subject-object. In this section we have spoken about communication at the "level of courage", which implies emotional openness and honesty. We will now try to deduct several core

rules of communication from this level communication.

1. Emotional openness must never contain judgement from the other party. A party may not judge the motives of others, only their results, because human being is very complex and layered, and in that regard, mysterious. Sincerity does not imply judgement of the interlocutor /8/. If I really want to get to know the intentions or motives of my interlocutor or his reactions, there is only one way for me to find out: I must ask him because man can only take a standpoint based on material evidence. Psychology of personality may not be neglected with all its complexity.
2. Emotions are not of a moral nature (good or bad), only of real, factual nature. Envy, rage, sexual desires or fears do not make a person either good or bad. In any case, these emotional reactions must be combined with mind and will, and before the combination is possible, and before the decision is made whether one should act in line with them, they must be allowed to "disappear", what they are saying must be heard. Perception of the overall emotions scale is part of the human condition, inheritance of every man.
3. Emotions must be united with mind and will. If only emotions were to rule human life, it would be a tragic and the worst kind of immaturity.



If we understand the meaning of unity, then we will easily understand the fact that the mind judges the necessity of desirability of acting in line with one's feelings, which are completely experienced, and the will is implementing that decision. The fact that a man is experiencing the feeling of fear is not in itself either good or bad. I am allowing that feeling of fear, I recognise and identify it. My mind passes a decision that I shall not act upon the dictate of that fear but contrary to it – tell the whole truth. It is considered normal that in an integrated, complete person emotions should not be suppressed but should also not dominate the entire personality. They are acknowledged (what I am feeling) and integrated

(I want or do not want to act according to that feeling).

4. In the communication of "the level of courage" emotions must be "expressed".

The most frequent reason we are not expressing our emotions is the fact that we do not wish to acknowledge them for some particular reason. We fear that the others will change their opinions about us or that they will reject us. We fear to say who we are because if we do, our interlocutor may not like it, and that is all we have.

All forms of communication clearly need to respect not just the communicator but also the one receiving the message. My judgement, in the process of integration of my emotions, decides that it is not a "suitable" moment for reporting to the other side about my emotional reactions. If the recipient is himself so agitated that he would most likely not be able to receive the information (communication) which would cause my statement of such facts, in his tempestuous emotional condition, to become reflected in a distorted image, it is possible that I would then have to postpone my intention and not provide the information.

Obvious and primary advantage of communication at this level shall be the real and authentic relation and something we have called a true "meeting" of persons. Here there is not only mutual communication between the personalities and, in line with that, sharing and experiencing the personality growth but it is reflected upon everyone in a more clear feeling of personal identity.

## CONCLUSION

We are right to ask the question "who am I" and that implies the fact that man, in essence, does not know himself. Personality is my complete opinions, my complete viewpoints; personality is everything that is not similar to someone else and everything that is unique /9/. If I have communicated the mentioned elements to others selflessly and openly, as clearly and as honestly as I can, I will observe in my feeling of identity the

evidence of considerable growth and simultaneously, deepened understanding of the other side. A clear truth shall become exposed that I shall understand the recognition of myself only to the extent to which I am willing to communicate with the other side. The next very important result of such research of communication is reflected in understanding myself because I have "communicated myself", and in that process the immaturity behaviour patterns are changed to maturity behaviour patterns. If we observe the personal reaction patterns, and if we research and value them, we shall come to an understanding that those are the patterns of oversensitivity. Regardless of what we have said about the emotions, we must point out that emotional compositions are often not of a purely biological character and that they are not inevitable. I may change my emotional compositions if I allow my emotions to be evident, to "appear" and after I have sincerely communicated them, I will judge whether they are mature or undesirable.

Personality responds to personality "wave lengths". If I am ready to step out of my prison and reveal parts of my personality to the other side, the result is almost always automatically and immediately shown: the other person feels free to reveal himself to me. By experiencing the contents of my honesty, the interlocutor feels free to communicate his feelings himself.

By studying communication as an activity in different cultures, it is possible to single out three basic types, which are implemented in establishment of relations with other confessions or in inter-confessional communicating. Quality of communication is closely linked to the type of communication itself. The traditional type of communicating is characteristic of a small village municipality where everybody knows everybody, where the role of each person in communication clearly determines his age and way of life and where communication norms are known by everyone, from a young age... Matching interests and common view of life contribute to ease of communication. No one feels alienated, isolated; there is no problem of lack of communication.

## Notes

/1/ Gradac, Literature, Art and Culture Magazine, number 126-127,1997.

/2/ This communicating is directed, on one side, to cooperation, aligning with those similar to ourselves, strengthening the community with the aid of energy of certain individuals. On the other hand, its goal is exception from within the unity, individual

enrichment (material, spiritual, physical) at the expense of the community (Sokoloff, 1976:110).

- /3/ Božović, Ratko, Cultural Need, Naučna knjiga, Belgrade, 1991.
- /4/ Communicative activity of personalities depends on many factors, most of all on age, contents, profession, preferences, whether or not a person is informed, as well as on character personality traits. The need for communication is willing and stronger if common interests and cultural level are stronger (Sokoloff, 1976:114).
- /5/ Frankl, V, Silent Plight for Meaning, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1987.
- /6/ Communication with the aid of approval implies partial identification with the role of another person, i.e. imaginary placement in his position (Sokoloff, 1976).
- /7/ V. Jerotić, Psychoanalysis and Culture, BIGZ, Belgrade, 1980.
- /8/ The Holy Bible, Epistle to the Romans, 14, 4., The Holy Bible of the Old and New Testament, Issued by the British and Foreign Biblical Society, 1995.

/9/ Berdyaev, Nikolai, The Meaning of the Creative Act, Logos, Belgrade, 1996.

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## FUNKCIJA RELIGIJSKOG KOMUNICIRANJA U PROCESU RAZVOJA LIČNOSTI

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### *Sažetak*

Religiju možemo izučavati kao društvenu pojavu sa stajališta antropologije, sociologije, filozofije i psihologije, ali i kao osobni pogled na svijet i u tom smislu ona nije biološki prenosiv kompleks, jer je kontrola nad vjerskim životom stvar osobnog iskustva, osobnog doživljaja svijeta. Bog ne rabi silu, već djeluje na čovjekove komunikativne sposobnosti koje ga dovode do voljnog prihvaćanja ponuđene ideje. Izvjesno je da će komuniciranje biti onoliko dobro koliko je čovjek otvoren prema sebi i prema drugome. U neprekidnom varijabilnom nastojanju da ukažemo na značaj i funkciju religioznog komuniciranja u procesu razvoja osobe, moramo naglasiti i značaj metode neizravnog uvjeravanja u kojoj se koristi praksa ujedinjenja emocije s razumom i voljom. Izučavajući strategiju novog modela religijskog komuniciranja u domeni interpersonalnih komunikacija, doći ćemo do zaključka koji ukazuje da on svojom praksom nudi koncepte i obrasce ophođenja u raznim socijalnim skupinama. Rad se, između ostalog, bavi izučavanjem sociološkog fenomena religijskog komuniciranja s pojedincima, skupinama, društvom i pojedincem. U biološkom, socijalnom i psihološkom smislu pojedinac čovjek nije potpun, nije dovršen. Osoba može živjeti samo u društvu, u kulturnoj sredini koju predstavljaju i drugi ljudi. Tamo gdje egzistira istinsko komuniciranje, tamo se dijele i istinske vrednote koje obogaćuju osobu.