

COMPASSION: AN EXPRESSION OF CHARITY IN TREATMENT OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ILLNESS IN INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

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SUMMARY

This article discusses the notion of compassion using interdisciplinary approach - theological and psychological - providing a brief development of the notion, as well as distinct image in relation to other, similar notions. Seeing that compassion contributes to psychological, spiritual, as well as social health, the article also discusses the importance of compassion in life of individuals and communities. Compassion is also one of the core notions in world religions, and it is key to making communication between religions possible, and equally importantly, opens up a dialogue between religion and various scientific approaches. This article mostly refers to the notion of compassion as described in the Bible, namely New Testament, from aspect of Christianity. Still, in a smaller extent, we researched how Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism perceive and describe compassion. Development of compassion in personal and social relations greatly helps in achieving a healthier society, both for individuals and for the whole communities.

Key words: compassion – suffering – psychology – theology - religion

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INTRODUCTION

Compassion is the kind of topic that creates the opportunity of finding common grounds in science and religion, for individuals and community, God and man, which does so in small everyday encounters, events, mutual suffering, illness, social manifestations etc. Psychology, theology, pedagogy, medicine, nursing, and philosophy have all in a way dealt with the notion of compassion. In this paper, our starting point was psychological approach to compassion, i.e. the anthropological experience we encounter in various groups of people, no matter their age or religion, where the notion of compassion is manifested both verbally and non-verbally. Subsequently, in order to make the topic of our research as clear as possible, we deemed important displaying a differential image of compassion in relation to similar notions. Furthermore, we found that there are certain overlaps between the notion of compassion and other notions similar to it, especially on the etymological level, due to both linguistic and other reasons. Afterwards we observed compassion as it is perceived in the Bible, namely in the Catholic theology, as well as a brief description of compassion in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. As we recognize compassion as an effective treatment for illnesses in individuals and in communities, the final part of this paper contains several concepts about the importance of developing compassion.

TO BE COMPASSIONATE: A CHALLENGE AND TREATMENT FOR CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND SUFFERING

Compassion is the reply of a human being encountering another human being, community, people or hu-

manity in general, that is going through challenging times and suffering. What kind of reply it is, is something we are trying to answer in our paper, using psychology, theology, and several other postulates of philosophical approach. Aristotle seems to be the first to take in consideration compassion as positive human virtue, he was the first to define it in a certain way, concluding that we are moved by other people's innocent suffering because we perceive that similar turmoils can happen to us, too. If we look at the origin of the word *compassion*, we see that its meaning is 'co-suffering', and with other people's suffering we understand what sympathy, compassion and solidarity mean (Aristotle in Kasper 2015). We acknowledge that the same suffering might happen to us. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle shows how the depiction of the protagonist's fate in tragedy causes us to feel compassion, *eleos* (ἔλεος, οὐς, τό), as well as fear, *phobos* (φόβος, οὐ, ό), which leads to audience's *chataris* (Kasper 2015:37). Compassion, a word in the English (also French and Italian) language, comes from a Latin word *compati* (*past participle compassus*), meaning 'to suffer with others', but today, its meaning is much broader.

There are many various reasons, types, and causes for suffering and evil in society (Haller 2019), where many questions are left unanswered. On the other hand, we can pinpoint some of them, and work toward their prevention or even affect them. On the level of society, psychiatrist Haller (2015) lists the following processes which lead to someone becoming ill: calumny, causing notoriety, discreditation, defamation, neglect and oppression on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religious or sexual orientation etc. Other processes of falling ill that carry significant personal or interpersonal meaning are: insulting, shaming, belittling. Some might even add bitterness, but it is more often a consequence, rather than

a cause, to other actions. In such cases particularly, compassion may be seen as a treatment to these processes of falling ill, on both personal and interpersonal levels.

ACTUALITY AND MEANING OF COMPASSION FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

The importance of compassion is recognized in many domains of our society. Most of world religions put compassion in the centre of beliefs and practicing those beliefs. Also, according to Sprecher and Fehr (2005), in health system, education, legislation, and psychotherapy (*Compassion Focused Therapy*), compassion is defined as inclination toward others, be it familiars or strangers through humanity. It encompasses feelings, cognition, and behaviours oriented toward caring, attention, tenderness, and proneness to helping others, supporting and understanding others, especially if others are perceived as if they need help or are in need.

Strauss et al. (2016) see compassion in mutual connection of the following elements: recognizing suffering, understanding the universal concept of human suffering, empathy toward a person who is suffering, emotional resonance to other's troubles, tolerance to unpleasant emotions occurring as a feedback of helping the person in pain, and all this by staying open-minded and accepting the suffering of other people, where the motivation to act is to relieve the pain of another person.

Kanov et al. (2006) claim that compassion encompasses three elements: noticing, feeling, and responding. Noticing another person's suffering means experiencing, whether by cognition of it, or subconsciously physical or affectionate reaction to suffering. Feelings are described as emotional reply to suffering and experiencing empathetic caring by identifying ourselves with the person in pain, as well as imagining and picturing the circumstances they are in. Responding includes having the wish to act in order to relieve the pain of the person who is suffering. Gilbert (2000) defines compassion through evolutionary prism by claiming that it is a developed motivational system which fuels negative emotions, which mammals develop in order to shape and build affection, as well as engage the cooperative behavior in order to preserve the community. Also, both Gilbert (2000) and Kanov et al. (2006) recognize three elements of compassion: the cognitive one, the emotional one, and the behavioral one.

Various research emphasise that compassion and suffering are universally connected, admitting that co-sufferers we can also picture ourselves experiencing other people's pains (Strauss et al. 2016). Lazarus (1991) defines compassion as being touched by another person's suffering in a way which makes us want to help them. Developing social feelings such as compassion is key to successfully form relationships, as well as being able to maintain our physical and mental health, especially when we are faced with difficult situations (Klimecki et al.

2013; 2014). To deal with oneself or others by compassion promotes welfare and increases mental health (Cosley et al. 2010, Feldman & Kuyken 2011, MacBeth & Gumley 2012). Gilbert (2005, 2010), Neff & Germer (2012) point out that compassion relieves reactions to stress, and that it is a central process during psychopathological recovery. Furthermore, compassion is described as vicarious experience caused by other people's woes (Ekman 2003, Hoffman 1981), as a mixture of grief and love (Shaver et al. 1987), or even as a subtype or form of love (Post 2002, Sprecher & Fehr 2005, Underwood 2002).

Analyzing the notion of *eleos* (ἔλεος, οὐς, τό), which used to be translated as *pity*, Nussbaum (1996) states that compassion encompasses three beliefs: 1) suffering is not a triviality, it is very serious; 2) belief that suffering is not primarily caused by the person's own wrongdoing; 3) belief that there is a possibility of the compassionate person to experience something similar to what the person suffering is going through. She also stipulates that the compassionate person needs to be aware that they are different from the person who is in pain. It is the only way to evaluate the meaning of their suffering without completely identifying with it. Another person's suffering may be the object of my caring and attention only if I recognize some form of connection with that person, understanding what such situation would put me in if I encountered that form of suffering.

It is also useful to understand the differences between the terms *pity* and *compassion*. Nussbaum (1996: 29) makes a clear distinction by providing the following conclusion: "I shall use the term 'pity' when I am talking about the historical debate, since that is the term generally used in English to translate both Greek *eleos* and French *pitie*; but since, from the Victorian era onward, the term has acquired nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer that it did not have formerly, I shall switch over to the currently more appropriate term 'compassion' when I am talking about contemporary issues".

Therefore, we must warn that the word *pity* is not suitable to express what Aristotle wanted to convey by using *eleos*, and that the more suitable term should be *compassion* (German *Mitleid*, Croatian *suosjećanje*, Italian *compassione*). Through compassion, in order to give feedback to liberalist theory which suggests that reason is the main factor that conducts social and political life, Nussbaum (1996) states that compassion holds within itself cognitive and emotional element as the core of social emotion. Accordingly, every type of compassion is also a form of deliberation.

COMPASSION: DIFFERENTIATION AND SPECIFICITIES OF SIMILAR NOTIONS

Gilbert (2010) enlists six other adjectives similar to compassion: sensitivity, sympathy, empathy, motivation/caring, distress tolerance and non-judgement. Sensitivity is an ability of reading other people's emotions and being

willing to help. Sympathy is showing that you care about other people's suffering, while empathy is being able to identify with the suffering person. Motivation/caring is the willingness to act against the cause of suffering. Distress tolerance is defined as an ability to endure unpleasant emotions within oneself when faced with another person's suffering without being overwhelmed by those emotions. Non-judgement is being able to accept and cope with another person regardless of them being in different circumstances or coping with their suffering causes unpleasant emotions in us, emotions such as frustrations, anger, fear or disgust.

Strauss et al. (2016) also stipulate that compassion is not just how we feel toward someone familiar, but we can also feel it toward strangers. Sprecher and Fehr (2005) have emphasized in the development of the scale of 'compassionate love' that compassion applies also to strangers in general in our society. We find suitable to emphasize the distinction between empathy and compassion. Gilbert (2010), Kanov et al. (2006), as well as Dalai Lama (2005) include empathy in the notion of compassion, and they view empathy as the core element of compassion. One of the differences is understanding that the wish to act or in fact act is a constituent element of compassion, but not necessarily of empathy. Another distinction is that compassion is present in situations such as suffering or turmoil, while empathy can be felt in broader spectre of emotions, e.g. anger, joy, hope etc. Sprecher and Fehr (2005) claim that compassion is a broader concept compared to empathy because we can feel compassion toward whole humanity, while empathy is connected with interpersonal relationships. Recent neuroscientific research has shown that different parts of brain are activated when one feels compassion as opposed to feeling empathy (Klimecki 2014). Lazarus (1991) pinpointed that empathy is oriented toward sharing emotions with another person, while compassion is also proactive and makes one want to help the person in need. Sprecher and Fehr (2005) put the emphasis on the fact that the notion of compassion is much broader than empathy, as it includes tenderness, caring, and all other aspects of empathy, but also behavioral predispositions as selflessness and devotion.

Neff (2003) has coined the term self-compassion stating that it can be seen as being compassionate to ourselves. Self-compassion consists of three elements: kindness (it is better to be kind, and not self-condemning or judging toward ourselves), mindfulness (just like *tolerance in distress* includes encompassing/containing unpleasant feelings in full consciousness rather than identifying with them), and common humanity (to observe someone's suffering as a normal part of human lives rather than an isolated case).

Pity is also similar to compassion in some of its aspects, but it does not include the desire to help another person. Sometimes it may encompass elements of condescension, in a sense that we put ourselves on a higher

position than others and then we observe everyone from above (Cassell 2002). Altruism has a wider focus of action than compassion and can take more toll by investing yourself into it. Moreover, altruism may have a wider motivational spectre that no longer needs to include the same elements as compassion (Strauss et al. 2016). Finally, compassion is often confused with kindness (the quality of amicable, generous, and respectful approach to others). UK's Department of Health (2013) describes compassion as 'intelligent kindness'. Still, the two terms differ in meaning, and compassion therefore goes beyond kindness – it is not necessarily connected with suffering only, for example when we are moved by someone's pain and suffering; it also works vice versa, and kindness can extend compassion as it is not connected strictly to suffering – e.g. we can also be kind if we buy someone a present for their birthday (and they are not suffering). Also, compassion is not always a part of being kind, and we can be compassionate toward someone we love and cherish regardless of them being harsh, rude, inconsiderate toward us etc.

Nussbaum (1996) notices similarities between compassion and righteousness, with key difference that compassion is oriented toward needs but does not provide thinking about freedom, rules, or respect for human rights. The following difference between compassion and righteousness is in that compassion does not assume that the suffering person does not deserve all hardship and problems they are facing and enduring, compassion does not demand that the person has the right to seek relief.

We would also like to mention the Croatian word *sućut* (Eng. *condolence*), which is used mostly in situations when someone loses a person they loved by death. Similarly, in Croatian, we have the word *smilovanje* (loosely translated to English as *mercy*), which has its roots in Greek *eleos*, but also it also denotes discrepancy between the person that feels *smilovanje* and the person that receives it. In Catholic liturgy and prayers, we find an invocation "Lord, have mercy (Κύριε, ἔλεησον)!" which asks that God is the one who shows mercy.

COMPASSION IN THE BIBLE, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SYNOPTIC GOSPELS, NAMELY THE VERB ΣΠΛΑΓΧΝΙΖΟΜΑΙ (*SPLANHNIZOMAI*), AND THE NOUN ΣΠΛΑΓΧΝΑ (*SPLANHNA*)

Due to complexity of the notion of compassion, as shown so far, we shall especially deal with the verb *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splanhnizomai*), which occurs 12 times in synoptic gospels (Mt 9, 36; Mt 14,14; Mt 15,32; Mt 18,27; Mt 20,34; Mk 1,41; Mk 6,34; Mk 8,2; Mk 9,22; Lk 7,13; Lk 10, 33; Lk 15,20), and the noun *σπλάγχνα* (*ων, τά, splanhna*), which occurs once (Lk 1, 78), both being translated as compassion, sympathy, to have mercy or merciful.

In the twelve occurrences, Jesus is the subject in 8 sentences (Mt 9, 36; Mt 14,14; Mt 15,32; Mt 20,34; Mk 1,41; Mk 6,34; Mk 8,2; Lk 7,13), one subject is the people asking for mercy (Mk 9,22), in two occurrences God is the one described as merciful (Mt 18,27; Lk 15,20), introduced as the Lord and Merciful Father, while the occurrence of the noun (Lk 1,78) is connected to the passage where God's heart (διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ) is described as compassionate, merciful, the womb of compassion. If we look at Jesus' encounter with suffering, we can find features of compassion in all occurrences of the suffering as enlisted by Strauss et al. (2016), which were mentioned previously in this paper. Sometimes in Croatian (and French) language, the word *σπλαγχνίζομαι* is translated as both a verb and a noun derived from the words mercy, tenderness, impassionation, or to have mercy (Rječnik biblijske teologije: 537). Mercy is, on the other hand, distinct term from compassion, and we will mention it later in our paper briefly in order to distinguish one from the other, while deeper understanding of the two notions can only be achieved through more extensive research in a more detailed scientific paper.

One of the highlights in the Bible, when Jesus endures the biggest possible suffering and continues to love, stays merciful, and compassionate is the moment when the crowd shouts "Crucify him!", and he stands before them as the divine Bridegroom that keeps on loving on the Lithostrotos, described in John 19, 13-15: "When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge's bench in the place called Stone Pavement (Lithostrotos), in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold, your king!' They cried out, 'Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'"

The word Lithostrotos is mentioned twice in the Bible. The first time, in Song of Solomon, the most beautiful love poem in the Bible (Cant 3, 10-11): "He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat (*λιθόστρωτον*) of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart." Salomon, Bridegroom, sits on the Lithostrotos. Jesus, in John's Gospel, at noon, on the sixth day of the John's Gospel, is brought to Lithostrotos, and while enduring the biggest injustice of the people, he forgives, and he is compassionate, he remains also in this situation divine Bridegroom. This is the encounter of God and Jesus which can heal both individuals and communities.

Christianity thinks of the encounter of God and man as high-quality goal and purpose of the human life which brings salvation of man. Jesus Christ was the culmination of that encounter, which John the Evangelist mentions in prologue (1,14): "The Word became flesh and made his

dwelling among us" (Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). Jesus is the Eternal Word (ὁ λόγος) incarnated, and in His love he is Jesus from Nasareth, a historical person in touch with people, the compassionate one. Jesus loves, he feels our suffering, and the consequence is the benefit for the compassionate person, for the person who receives compassion, and everyone who witnesses it. The echo of witnessing compassion is very specific for New Testament, namely the one between God and man. The effect compassion has on those who witness it is beneficial, healing, and therefore the community that witnesses compassion experiences *chataris*, liberation, cleansing, reconciliation, all that in live image of unifying Jesus, i.e. God, and man, but this time through witnessing Jesus' encounter live, and not in theatre as was used to succeed in Greek, ancient time. Compassion is the realization of love and it is always intertwined with love, but it is also a moment of seeing God in every human being. It may be seen as a consequence of encountering God, who feels compassion toward man because He loves him, and as such has beneficial effect on the human nature.

COMPASSION AS SEEN IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Compassion is the topic which can connect world religions, political beliefs, but also academic, spiritual, and pastoral theology (Kasper 2015). Pope Francis (2016) mentions *compassion* (Italian *compassione*) five times in his encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*), and in one occurrence he talks about compassionate caring for fragile people (92, 115, 144, 175, 308; 38). When we analyze the term *compassion* in different languages as described in the aforementioned encyclical (we analyzed Latin, Italian, French, German, English, Russian, and Croatian), we see that in Italian (*compassione*), French (*compassion*), and Russian (*сострадания*), the word is repeated in all six instances in the same form, while different words with similar meaning are used in other languages. Notably, in German, in two instances we have the word *Mitleid*, while the other four use the term *Mitgeföhl*. This is what we pointed out because we will soon cite the renowned German theologian J. B. Metz and see how he distinguishes between *Mitleid* and *compassion*. In Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 1994) we can find the term *compassion* substituted with *mercy* in several parts (1503, 1506, 2448, 2571, 2575, 2715, 2843 etc.) where God and God's people (Abraham and Moses) are described as compassionate, as well as others to whom God has spoken. The light in Christ's eyes brings enlightenment to our heart's eyes; it teaches us that we observe everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all people (CCC, 2715).

W. Kasper and J. B. Metz also discussed the term *compassion*. Although both agree on the basic importance of *compassion* in the 21st century, there are certain

differences in the way they define the term *compassion*. Kasper (2015) partially identifies compassion and empathy, and then he connects compassion to the organization for helping children in need. But even then, Kasper says: “Therefore compassion is not a topic which only refers to experiencing suffering and turmoils of contemporary time, but it is applicable to general human experience. That is why compassion is appropriate as a starting point for theology, but also for forming dialogue with other religions or representatives in politics... The word compassion must not be understood only as a sympathetic behaviour, but within it we recognize the word ‘passion’, which incites us to be passionate about injustice in our world, about relations which cry for heavens, they cry for justice” (2015: 29-32). Kasper (2015) states that Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustin defined compassion as co-suffering, following Aristotle’s teachings, namely *miserum cor habens miseria altruis* (to have an aching heart caused by other person’s pain). Compassion, according to them, does not just presume affectionate aspect, but also effective, active one, which include bettering the conditions the person suffering is in. The afore mentioned theologian Metz (2000) writes the following regarding terminology: “I have time and time again tried to find one convincing German word for the basic sensitivity of the Christian philosophy. *Mitleid* (co-suffering) denotes somewhat too clean world of feelings, and sounds primarily privatizing, but the foreign word *empathy* sounds too non-political and non-social. Therefore I stick with the word I see in other languages but cannot find German equivalent for – *compassion*.”

To find the most appropriate word for its subject is not always an easy process, especially if the subject originates from another people, and belongs to a different context. Compassion is an example of such word. Kasper (2015) he mentions the word *Mitleid*, but he also leaves the English word *compassion* next to it.

Talking about God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a God of Jesus, is not the fruit of some monotheism, but one “weak”, vulnerable, and empathetic monotheism, in the centre of which we see a God who is sensitive of those who suffer (Metz 2000). To speak of Jesus’ God means to speak unconditionally of suffering and endures of strangers, and denounce unaccountability and fake charity. Compassion sends us to the first lines of battle of political, social, and cultural conflicts. To acknowledge and speak up about other person’s suffering is the basis of all future peace negotiation politics, of all forms of social solidarity in the wake of evergrowing gap between the rich and the poor, and all other promising attempts to understand cultural and religious differences (Metz 2000). Metz also critically discusses whether the proclamation of Church is fundamentalist, as in it, the God’s authority is separate from the sufferer’s authority, even though Jesus himself proclaimed that all history of humanity is beneath the authority of those

suffering (Mt 25). Metz clearly states that “For me, the authority of the sufferer is the only authority in which God, who conducts and judges, can be reflected in all people.” Compassion is the answer to the world’s suffering, and all great world religions have dealt with the mystery of suffering. Mysticism of the Bible is political, namely the mysticism of political, social compassion (Metz 2000). Its categorical imperative is: wake up, open your eyes. Jesus does not speak of mysticism of having one’s eyes shut, but rather about mysticism present when one’s eyes are open, and at the same time it demands unconditionally to observe and acknowledge another person’s suffering. It is important to know the difference between mercy and compassion in theology (Vuković & Bošnjaković 2016), but this paper does not discuss it. Still, according to Kasper (2015), compassion is more appropriate as a starting point of theology seeing that God is perceived as a reality that predicts and conducts everything, and one should not speak of particular categories, but rather using universal categories. Specifically, when we say mercy, which is specifically biblical message, we not only include ethical and social consequences of mercy but we convey the message about God and his merciful nature, and only then are we focused on the commandments that follow (Kasper 2015). Jesus Christ is God’s mercy in flesh, to know Christ is to know God’s mercy (Kasper 2015). The final, and initial source of both compassion and mercy, especially in terms of love, is Holy Trinity, which is proclaimed in paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, in his passion, death, and resurrection. We must stipulate that Christianity developed caring about the poor as a community. The Book of Acts (4, 32-35) writes: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.” For Ökle, who used to be the head of Max-Planck Institute for history in Göttingen, that quote is the most efficient, and most successful thing of all time, and if we could translate from German the word *folgenreichste*, it would be – words that consequentially bring affluence (Lütz 2018).

COMPASSION AS INTERSECTION OF WORLD RELIGIONS (HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, ISLAM, JUDAISM)

Snyder and Lopez (2007) note that certain Eastern schools of thought and philosophies affect and can be applied in positive psychology. That includes some enlightenment ideas, such as circle of life, deriving from

Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, which emphasise the chastity and transcendency in a specific way of community life, as well as some aspects of compassion and harmony (Napper 2009). Hinduism is one of the ancient religious traditions, and after Christianity and Islam, it is the third greatest world religion. Hinduism uses the term *ahimsa* when they want to express compassion, although it is not the word's sole meaning. Its primary meaning is connected with denouncing harmful and forceful, and Mahatma Gandhi is mentioned specifically as the one to renew the old *ahimsa* practice and apply it in various aspects of life, even in politics (Kasper 2015). In the sect called Radha Soami (Babb 1981), the notion of compassion is known as *dayā*. Having in mind that visual dimension is extremely important in their teachings, the look that guru and the follower share is the key to seeing real truth, the follower feels waves of spiritual turmoils from within, and the look that guru gives them is called compassion – *dayā*. In the aftermath, the follower finally sees what they never saw before, and they also see the guru for what he really is – Supreme Being (Babb 1981).

In Buddhism as well, compassion is one of the central concepts, in both old teachings and the new (de Silva 1995, Trungpa 1973), although in this case it is important to note that there are debates about whether Buddhism is a religion or a school of wisdom (Kasper 2015, Lütz 2012). Acknowledging the importance of applying compassion in today's scientific researches derives also from Buddhism teaching, and Dalai Lama (Strauss et al. 2016). Dalai Lama (2005) defines compassion as openness for other's suffering, and commitment to relieving it. True compassion needs to encompass wisdom and kindness (Dalai Lama 2005). That means that we should be understanding towards the nature of the suffering we want to deliver others from (wisdom), but also feel deep intimacy and empathy with other living beings (loving kindness). Contemporary definition of compassion is seen as being rooted in motives of taking care of others, which encompasses several competences that a person must possess for enactment of compassion – empathy, sympathy, generosity, openness, tolerance in distress, loyalty, and courage (Gilbert 1989, 2009, 2010, Dalai Lama 1995, Gilbert & Choden 2013, Goetz et al. 2010).

Jinpa, the Buddhist who helped developing compassion training at Stanford (Jazaieri et al. 2013) defined compassion as multidimensional process with four key components: cognitive empathic consciousness, sympathetic caring for emotional distress caused by suffering (affective component), desire to witness relieving the pain (intention), and willingness to participate in helping someone suffer less (motivation). Buddhist monk Ricard (2013) defines compassion as a form of altruistic love which occurs when we see others suffering, and the person is expected to worry for the suffering one, spot the suffering, have a need that the

others are delivered from suffering, and knowing it is up to them to try and act against the source of suffering. According to Buddhism, the main reason for suffering is ignorance, more specifically not knowing, not spotting, and not understanding someone's suffering.

Ali Engineer (2001) writes about compassion as much more important aspect of Islam in comparison to *jihad*. Compassion represents the true spirit of Islam and more prolific for its teachings than any other aspect of it. In Islam, compassion is the centric notion of the religion, after *tawhid* (unity with God) and *risalah* (Muhammad's mission). Each sura in Qur'an (except for one) begins with "in the name of Allah the Merciful, Compassionate one", and among 99 God's names, the most common ones are Merciful and Compassionate that Muslims are ought to summon. Besides, every Muslim needs to have compassion (*rahmah*) toward prisoners, widows, orphans, and pay tax as a form of mercy (*zekat*) (Kasper 2015). Allah sends his messenger Muhammad as act of mercy toward the world (Qur'an 21:107), and as such is known as both the Prophet and *as rahmatan lil 'alamin* (the mercy of the worlds). The true follower of the Prophet needs to be merciful and compassionate toward everyone in the world. Someone cruel and insensitive to the suffering of others cannot be good Muslim or the Prophet's successor in any way (Ali Engineer 2001).

We will enlist a few Hebrew notions which express Biblical sense of God's mercy, which they share with Christians. One of the well known biblical notions is *hesed*, meaning "alliance between people", but also "loyalty to the made alliance", even "loyalty to self", kindness, well-being (Kasper 2015, Rječnik biblijske teologije 1993:536). When it comes to compassion, Old Testament uses the word *rahamim*, or *rehem* meaning "mother's womb", but it also means human inner parts, consequently the origin of the feeling (Malekar 2001). *Rahamim* is a noun meaning "the feeling of mercy" (Pope John Paul 1994), and the place the feeling comes from. It denotes affiliation of one being to the other, tenderness, sympathy, but also forgiveness that comes from the feeling (Lujčić 2016). In Exodus, we recognize three manifestations of God [3,14: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"; 33,19: "And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy (*hen*) on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion (*rachamim*) on whom I will have compassion."; 34,6: "And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate (*rachum*) and gracious (*henun*) God, slow to anger, abounding in love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emet*)"']. The mentioned expressions confirm the reality of compassion in context of God and his attitude toward the Chosen People. God is manifested as merciful and compassionate: he feels for

humans in deep emotions of mother's womb (*rehem*), he loves with strength of mother's love, but also with strength of father's loyalty and responsibility to his love (*hesed*). Specifically in the third announcement of God's name, we see the core claim of Israel about the substance of their God (Kasper 2015). We can conclude that compassion is present in God's being from the very beginning, i.e. that God is in Himself merciful and compassionate, and he claims it consistently. Compassion therefore denotes God's loyalty, kindness, forgiveness, affection, sensitivity, even motherly love toward the Chosen People. In fact, Davies (2001) in his *Theology of Compassion*, writes the following quote: "Rabbi Abba bar Mammal said: God said to Moses: I am called according to my acts. At times i am called El Shaddai, Seba'ot, Elohim and Yahweh. When i judge creatures, I am called Elohim; when I forgive sins, I am called El Shaddai; when I wage war against the wicked, I am called Seba'ot, and when I show compassion for my world, I am called Yahweh – Rabbah on Ex. 3.14."

For the purpose of this paper, we believe that the overview we provided is enough for understanding the position of *compassion* in world religions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING COMPASSION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL LEVEL

Having in mind everything written on compassion from psychological and religious perspective, we see that the quality and value of compassion for both individuals and communities is of great importance and utility. Therefore we provide several guidelines in developing compassion on both levels, taking into account that indeed compassion is the key of the possible meeting point of all great world religions, and one of the starting points in such communication.

On the basis of research, Klimecki et al. (2012) noticed that after compassion training which included meditation for enticing kind and graceful approach to oneself and others, on the verge of contemplative traditions of the East, compared memory training, such acts increased positive emotions and sensitivity to other people's suffering. Also, more activity was noticed in special neurological networks including medial orbitofrontal cortex and putamen. There are also links between parenting style and children's sympathy and care (Eisenberg et al. 2015) and between secure attachment in childhood and ability to be compassionate in adulthood (Gillath et al. 2005). In Western civilization built on Judeo-Christian tradition, there is a challenge of rediscovering the value of contemplation and meditation as a chance of meeting God that is compassionate, and who has beneficial consequences for the contemplating person, but also other people that person encounters, expecting them to manifest the experience toward their familiars.

Nussbaum (1996) states that watching a theatre drama helps people in their understanding of other people's suffering, they can identify with the characters, protagonist, hero as a valuable person whose suffering is not caused by him being evil, and that is why drama is a good way of inciting compassion (1996). A caring viewer will feel compassion by understanding the process. It is very important to note that Nussbaum talks about tragedies that, during time, lead the viewer to cross borders that society enforced (1996). Through sympathetic identification, the hero moves from Greece to Troy, from male world of war and violence to female world of domesticity. Compassion asks the viewer to not only identify with those that are like him in some way – aristocrats, army generals, fugitives, beggars, and slaves, but also with those groups he could never belong to – Trojans and Persians, Africans, women, daughters, or mothers. In the process of watching the drama unfold before their eyes, the young Athenian will refrain from knowing only his own well-being and comfort, from being a member of a certain people or ethnic group, even from his own gender. He is asked to see the trouble of human life from the perspective of women who were kidnapped during war, the queen that cannot experience the power because of their gender, the sister who must break chains of womanhood in order to be compassionate and brave. By becoming a woman in this imagination, he can see that he can remain himself, a sensible human being with various moral and political affiliations. That does not mean that the young man will leave the theatre carrying radical social changes, but some ideas about humanity will be planted inside him, and they may turn into habits at some point. What Nussbaum (1996) means is simply that compassion in tragedy envisions a powerful idea of societal justice.

Lessing (2013) states that a compassionate man is the best man, as compassion is the most virtuous of all types of virtues. The one who makes us compassionate is the one who makes us more virtuous, and a drama which encourages us to it, makes us better people if we truly understand its purpose. It may be that people are not perfect in their compassion, but it cannot be a reason to deny that a great deal of human behavior can be explained through compassion. Nussbaum (1996) cites the following practical strategies in developing compassion:

- Public education should in every level of schooling nurture the abilities of identifying with others, and participate in their suffering. That means that humanities and art should have a lot of space in education from an early age. It means to recognize how art's purpose is to make positive political changes, even though the attempt is not necessarily political;
- Developing compassion in politics;
- Compassionate identification needs to be included in economy plans, showing the understanding of human suffering and deprivation most groups are in;

- Lawyers and judges should see beyond facts, but also include empathy to understand lives of other people. In that way, their decisions will be more righteous and they could estimate the circumstances that lead certain people to certain actions;
- Compassion should be present in public institutions, especially in the domain of distributing the goods. Institutions that promote compassion may contribute to encouraging individuals to be compassionate. Reciprocal influence of institutions vs. individuals may encourage spreading the mentality of compassion.

Taking into account the recent events that hit the world, such as wars, fugitives, famine, COVID-19, violating, abusing, and neglecting of the poor, the children, women and marginal groups, we understand that this paper questions the challenge of the quality of compassion that one feels. It can be the cure for both individuals and communities during their fight against egoism, narcissism, utilitarianism, capitalism, fundamentalism, exclusion of those who are different, against the interest of the few above the majority. Compassion benefits all, and everybody wins.

CONCLUSION

It is safe to say that compassion really is the cure for both individuals and communities is contemporary society. It becomes, and remains a challenge to permanently incorporate compassion in personal, familiar, social, spiritual and religious lives, both through experience and scientific research. The benefits of compassion are undeniable and proven in scientific (psychological and theological, in our case) research, as well as in religion. Compassion has healing powers, it helps in achieving love, well-being of the oppressed, sad, belittled, forgotten, and poor. It may be the intersection and a point where religions and science meet, where rich and poor understand each other, as well as the path to recovery of the society and the world. Compassion is the chance, the possibility for an individual and society to choose a more harmonious life in a world of variety – in cultures, customs, giving way to those who are more vulnerable, marginalized, peripheral, and in more pain. Caring toward the minorities contributes to achieving beneficial state of both individuals and society. Compassion is not exclusive, but the opposite – it is an inclusive way which follows a rule *vita tua, vita mia* (Scilligo 2009). It is a challenge, which leads to reevaluation of virtue in Western civilization. We are aware that our approach to the topic was interdisciplinary with some general postulates of the covered disciplines, which allowed us to widen our perspective and achieve more integrated insight with a possibility of dialogue, but such approach does not go into detail of any given point of view.

It would be useful for psychology to take into consideration scientifically validated scales for measuring compassion, both in others, as well as in self-observing. Also, it would be useful to get insight for potential dangers of compassion (e.g. *burnout syndrome*), as well as the possibility of quality-quantity compassion research, but that is a topic for further research. Interdisciplinary approach, though, gives a notional and meaningful clarity, as well as understanding the contextual variations in which we can recognize, apply, and explore compassion, and through it all, learn from it.

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