

Religious Faith

Personal Forms of Presentation

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Summary

The article deals with the peculiarities of religious faith as seen through the prism of its manifestation in a person. These manifestations are expressed in existential–soteriological and dialogical presentational forms, through which a psychotherapeutic effect occurs in the individual. In the biblical context, faith is seen as an existential foundation for life actions, a source of confidence in one’s existence and salvation. Special emphasis is placed on trust, which serves as a basis for the dialogue between a person and God, a manner of “co–creation” with Him. It is noted that religious faith, by exerting a psychotherapeutic effect, becomes an important tool for resolving life problems. Faith in God, firstly, changes a person’s attitude towards life and death, toward himself and his values; secondly, it shapes positive life strategies, thus making life more fulfilling and meaningful. The positive role of religious faith is emphasized in extreme situations when a person needs to maximize the concentration of his spiritual and physical strength. In summary, religious faith, by expanding a person’s resourceful capabilities, becomes a way for him to accumulate experience and resilience.

Keywords: *religious faith; confidence and trust; dialogue; psychotherapeutic effect; stability of religious faith*

Introduction

Under the circumstances of modern geopolitical challenges, when value attitudes are changing, when human existence is threatened, when civilizational shi-

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fts are becoming more and more diverse, unstable, inconsistent, and sometimes unpredictable, the search for irrational systems of perceiving and understanding the world, which would guide one toward absolute meaning, is increasingly becoming actualized. Such a phenomenon is religious faith, which acts as an important factor of human identity, the psychotherapeutic consolation that »digs and moves mountains« (Skovoroda, 2005, 195). Religious faith, as a unique imperative of one's self-actualization, makes it possible to reformat the entire system of its values, enriches the spiritual space and protects against a state of insecurity and depression.

Profound changes in modern civilization encourage the general public to rethink the idea of the future of humanity, man's place and purpose therein, the significance of epochal shifts for his mental balance, for mutual trust, tolerance and respect for the value priorities of the other. These problems are aggravated by a person's insecurity, which, of course, prompts him to search for those existentials that can serve as a certain refuge. Sometimes it is religious faith that becomes the factor that helps overcome cognitive dissonance and restore balance by joining with the sphere of the Absolute. After all, it satisfies certain worldview orientations, attests to the search for new opportunities for the ideological consolidation of the constructive assets of religious experience, helps to maintain a positive attitude towards life, to support mental health and spirituality, as well as to develop strategies for overcoming stress and anxiety. At most times, when a person is certain that his life has meaning, he is able to overcome incredible difficulties.

In modern religious discourse, special attention is given to the problem of faith. In the vast majority of cases, various ways of taking faith into consideration, the aspects of including faith in the discourse are singled out, and are particularly meaningful (Predko, 2021) when faith determines certain meanings in a person's life. A number of articles are devoted to the analysis of the experience of faith with an emphasis on conceptual biblical ideas (Granovskaya, 2010; Predko, 2023). Based on empirical studies, Dollahite et al. (2019) emphasize that religious faith strengthens family relationships. Currently, there are a number of articles the authors of which believe that religious faith has a positive effect on human health (Hvidt et al., 2017; Robson, 2022; Polyshchuk, 2006).

However, despite the variety of approaches and the originality of the ideas expressed, the topic of religious faith — especially the question of understanding this phenomenon through the prism of its manifestation in a person — needs further consideration. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to clarify the peculiarities of various personal forms of presentation of religious faith which unfold during the interaction between man and God. The goal involves the sequential solution of the following tasks: a) focusing on the biblical interpretation of the phenomenon of "religious faith"; b) revealing the dialogical manifestation of this phenomenon and its essential characteristics; c) discovering the potentiality of religious faith in extreme situations — its effect on a person.

1. *A Biblical understanding of faith*

For a long time, the content of religious faith was just copied from its biblical definition. However, only one aspect of religious faith is recorded in accordance with this view. Undoubtedly, the content of religious faith is much more universal. There is a definition of faith in Holy Scripture: »Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen« (Hebrews 11:1). In this case, faith for Paul the Apostle appears not only as foreknowledge of something that does not yet exist, but will exist; it is not only a basis for hope, but also confidence in its implementation. Ontologically, faith acts as a way of giving existence to what is expected. It is also confidence in the existence of what is still not visible, hidden from sensory perception. It is further noted that faith is also a means of knowledge and understanding: »By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible« (Hebrews 11:3). Citing examples of historical biblical figures — Abel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and others, who performed actions based on faith despite life circumstances, Paul the Apostle notes that faith is the basis for life choices. However, in order for a person's expectations to be justified, he must have good reason for confidence, namely, a conviction based on evidence. »For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity, that they may be without excuse« (Romans 1:20). Therefore, faith is a certain projective possibility, owing to which a dialogue is built between man and the realm of the Divine. »Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him« (Hebrews 11:6). Faith in this case is a quest which is reflected in two-way connections, relationships that are crowned with spiritual joy. Man, drawing near to God, encourages God to draw near to him. Moreover, he must be heard, which also depends on his beliefs. »So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God« (Romans 10:17).

However, the path to religious faith is, on the one hand, not easy as it is brimming with temptation, doubt, mistrust, and, consequently, the internal spiritual struggle to attain it. On the other hand, a person who believes receives solace, reinforcement of spiritual strength, and is generously endowed by God: he acquires divine power and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, joy, love, a softened heart — all of which can strengthen him and lead him to the ultimate goal of salvation. Salvation in Christianity is the eternal union with God in His Kingdom, which can only be achieved by a perfected individual, the one who has attained spiritual purity, love, and mercy in his earthly life.

The Bible is full of examples of miraculous healings worked by Jesus Christ. We find many such moments in the Gospel of Matthew: »they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them« (Matthew 4:24); »And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord,

if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed« (Matthew 8:2–3); »When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon–possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick« (Matthew 8:16); »And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.’ But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour« (Matthew 9:20–22).

Therefore, religious faith contains both significant psychotherapeutic potential and soteriological purposes, by proffering the conditions, ways and means of salvation.

In the texts of the Old and New Testaments, faith is placed in opposition to unbelief, doubt, and fear. Faith can be gained, strengthened, and it can be lost, weakened. Having passed through temptation (trials), faith is strengthened, becomes firm, unshakable or else is impoverished, fades, and finally is destroyed. Having passed through the crucible of faith, a person’s patience increases. The Bible states that the effectiveness of faith is supported by deeds. »What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead« (James 2:14–17).

Consequently, faith and deeds are interdependent, connected to each other, inseparable. More precisely, it can be said that faith contributes to things, but not in the sense that it accompanies them, but incites to action and thereby contributes to one’s improvement.

Therefore, in regard to the biblical understanding, faith is grasped in its existential and soteriological meanings: as a basis for life actions, as a means of becoming endowed with the expected existence and salvation of a person. At the same time, faith in the unseen is contrasted with visible circumstances, its dynamic character is noted, and its active nature is constituted. The phenomenon of faith legitimizes the existence of a transcendent level of existence, attests to the fact of the existence of the supernatural Absolute, and promotes dialogue within the system of “man–God” relationships.

2. *Religious faith as a dialogue*

The growing interest — as regards modern theoretical thought — in the phenomenon of religious faith as a dialogue is caused by the emergence of inter–religious contradictions and the effort to preserve one’s religious identity. At the same time, these processes often contribute to the emergence of new social risks and religious conflicts. We are speaking of the problem of the Other, where

religious faith presupposes a radical asymmetry between the Self and the Other, or about the philosophy of dialogue and related issues of responsibility and trust which constitute, in turn, the principle of tolerance as a construct of mutual understanding and respect in one's perception of the other who is of another faith.

For an understanding of the dialogic role of religious faith it is very useful to view it as a “point of support,” a projective possibility to go beyond the boundaries of the “I” and thus enable the integrity and resilience of the individual. According to Granovskaya (2010, 343), faith can be considered »in two guises — as trust in the indications of the senses, that is, in the possibility of penetrating into objective reality (as opposed to already confirmed knowledge), and as an attitude towards knowledge that is not fully confirmed today, that is, taken for granted in those cases when the subject is something hypothetical«.

So, the phenomenon of faith includes a component of trust, which emerges as an intimate and individual process of establishing a personal connection with the personified Absolute Subject. It turns out that during prayer, areas of the brain are activated, which are typically involved in human communication (Neubauer, 2014; Schjoedt et al., 2009). From a scientific point of view, this means that Christians perceive God as a concrete personality with whom they develop trusting relationships. Trust goes beyond subjectivity and demands from the subject of religious cognition an experience of constant presence of the Almighty and an openness to dialogue with God. Trust, as the beginning of faith, manifests in the disclosure of the profound qualities of a person, their free agency, and their ability to generate new meanings, overcoming the stereotypical nature of reproductive behavior. Trust is limited to matters within the scope of human understanding. Moreover, trust arises as an appeal to the Other within a specific social space, while confidence arises as an appeal to the Other within oneself. It serves as the factor through which religious truth is recognized even in the absence of proof. Going beyond individual capacities, faith–trust is capable of overcoming doubts. Therefore, religious faith enables the self–transcendence of human beings.

The basis for the concept of trust is the communication process. Actually, faith grows from the seed of trust that necessarily involves hope. Moreover, we are not talking about hope in itself, but about the very process of realizing this hope. Hope is an extremely strong motive for human activity, as it affirms faith, instills confidence in one's intentions and actions. Faith–hope gives the subject of religious knowledge confidence in his need and necessity, in his uniqueness and irreplaceability. Contextually, for religious faith, the Other is not an individual who simply exists by himself. For faith–dialogue, it is of utmost importance to find the one with whom you can get along, to find the support that unites and does not promote separation, and to enable the expansion of the human boundaries of Otherness and communication — tolerant coexistence. Dialogue, meeting face to face, revelation, “between” — are various metaphors describing this unique state. Therefore, Buber (1951, 131) notes: »It is that which can be compared with the immediacy to a beloved person, who has just this and no other form and

whom one has chosen precisely as this form. It is a Thou, which, determined as it is, as It were appertains to one.«

3. The positive potential of religious faith

As research shows (Polyshchuk, 2006), the dialogical essence of faith is most vividly revealed in borderline situations, when a person and his life come under the pressure of problematization (military operations, grief, life crisis, illness, etc.). In this situation, one's life imperatives are violated — disbalanced by an existential crisis — which prompts one to seek religious faith. Often it is faith which mitigates the situation, becomes the point of support that is able to prevent the disintegration of the personality. Dollahite et al. (2019) noted that in those families in which religious faith is traditionally transmitted between generations, the family microclimate is significantly better and is preserved in its invariance. Let us draw attention to the experience of religious faith in Ukraine during the full-scale Russian military aggression, particularly to the way in which military actions (which change a person's mental state) relate to a change in one's religiosity.

The full-scale Russian military aggression against Ukraine not only radically changed the lives of Ukrainians, but also caused a feeling of constant endangerment, anxiety, fatigue, and exhaustion. What is more, experts are already recording an increase in the number of visits to psychologists, psychotherapists or psychiatrists, to whom Ukrainians complain of excessive anxiety, a state of uncertainty, depression, which are often accompanied by panic attacks (Ignatiev, 2022). Specialists are often approached with the problem of one's not being able to overcome obsessive thoughts and of that very state that constantly accompanies a person and from which it is impossible gain relief on one's own. And although “mental problems do not hurt”, they still cause discomfort and worsen the quality of life. However, in wartime conditions, Ukrainian society has demonstrated a high level of resilience, as the value of the Resilience Index decreased minimally (from 3.9 to 3.7) (Rating Group, 2023). However, »about 8% of the people believe they have serious disorders that greatly affect their lives. Another third have moderate disorders« (Rating Group, 2023). 29% of Ukrainians under the age of 35 experience worsening mental health. Moreover, Ukrainians testify to the strengthening of empathetic attitudes — the tendency of affiliation (desire to be together with others) has increased (Rating Group, 2023).

3.1. The positive effect of religious faith

According to the results of a sociological survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service from November 4 to 11, 2022, it was found that if in 2020, 40% of the respondents noted the positive role of the Church in Ukrainian society, then in 2021 the share of such respondents increased to 49.5%, and in 2022, after the start of full-scale Russian aggression, an even greater increase

was recorded — that of 59%, which has been the highest indicator since 2000. 26% of the respondents said that, after the start of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine (after February 2022), they assessed themselves as becoming more religious and believing people than they were before, 4% of them — less religious and believing people than they were before the war, and 65% of the respondents said that there had been no changes in their attitude to religion and faith (Razumkov Center, 2022). However, among the older respondents, there are more people who have strengthened their faith since the beginning of the war (34% among respondents aged 60+, while among people under 30 it is only 18%). So, it is typical for people to turn to faith, to God in times of war, crisis, and instability. In general, in 2022, 74% of Ukrainians considered themselves religious believers. At the end of 2021, there were fewer such citizens (68%). The least number of religious believers is to be found among those aged 18–24, and that is 61%. However, in this age group, their share increased most significantly in comparison to 2021, when it was only 48% (Barsukova, 2023). »For some individuals, religious faith may enhance the ability to cope with negative life events, whereas for others, negative life events may result in greater religious faith« (Agorastos et al., 2014, 94). So, »Faith seems to move mountains in the sense that religion is associated with positive health outcomes« (Hvidt et al., 2017, 294).

Psychologists and psychiatrists focus on the positive potential of religious faith (Polyshchuk, 2006; Hvidt et al., 2017; PRC, 2019). Usually, pathological reactions of grief as a type of psychogenic depression, arising in the case of the death of a loved one, are widespread in late life. During the examination of elderly and senile persons, visiting the territorial center of social services, the fact has been established that patients with pathological reactions of grief and depression often turn to religious faith and religious practice to alleviate their severe mental state (Polyshchuk, 2006). In the case of the death of a husband, religious rites are performed with the participation of relatives: mourning the deceased in church, vigils on the 9th and 40th days after death, going to church often, praying diligently or trying to pray and lighting candles. According to the self-reports of patients, staying in the Ukraine temple, praying, immersion in religious ideas and experiences had a calming effect (Polyshchuk, 2006). The emotional pain of loss subsided, thoughts and ideas became organized, and for a while, a feeling of humility was manifested. Many people had ideas about the afterlife, about the immortal soul of the deceased with whom one can converse in an imaginary way or aloud, which was what most of the respondents did during frequent visits to the cemetery, sorting through the husband's belongings, and his photos. Imaginary communication with an image of the deceased brought temporary relief of this mental state, alleviation of depressive disorders. Religious rites and rituals practised by the majority of those examined had a psychotherapeutic effect. Their performance was accompanied by an improvement in their mental state. All of the above testifies to the positive influence of religious faith on the mentally ill.

Therefore, religious faith is not only a person's internal relationship to the world, as a result of which the construction of subjective reality takes place, but also the factor that stabilizes his state of mind and instills hope in human existence.

3.2. *The cumulative effect of religious faith*

Religious faith seems to have a “sense of transcendence”, which reflects the direct, vertical (man–God) and indirect, horizontal (man–religious symbols) connections. Usually, a vertical connection reflects a person's direct communication with God. The horizontal connection is formed indirectly through religious images, representations, symbols, etc.

Let us give an example of how religious symbolism can strengthen the belief effect, contribute to the cumulative possibilities of faith. Recently, an exhibition titled *ХРАМ: Українська самоідентифікація* (“TEMPLE: Ukrainian Self-Identification”) showcased the paintings of Anatoliy Kryvolap and Igor Stupachenko opened at the Lavra gallery in Kyiv (Kyiv City Council, 2023). In the ancient village of Lypivka, Makariv district, Kyiv region, there is a church that has been destroyed several times throughout history. During the Soviet era, it was demolished, but later a new church, entrusted again to the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, was built under the patronage of Bohdan Batrukha. In February 2022, it was “shot” by Russian aggressors, with the chests of archangels torn out and the seraphim and Pantocrator subjected to “gunfire”. Nevertheless, the church stood its ground and later was transformed into a shelter for children, women, and the elderly. The war did not halt the work of artists who decided to complete the frescoes. Today, the Lavra gallery hosts an exhibition of newly created works prepared for installation in the Church of the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God: the Nativity, the Dormition of the Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Last Judgment, figures of inspired angels, elderly apostles, Mary, and Jesus. The artists managed to give new meaning to the expression *By death, he vanquished death*, restored Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Vrubel's *Lamentation* from the Kyrilivska Church, etc. There is incredible longing, sorrow and weeping of all the mothers of the world for their sons killed in the war and their saving faith in the victory of life over death. A blossoming of rich, incomparable colors (Red, Violet, Yellow, Blue), which synergistically absorb, magnify, and enlighten, thus creating a visualization of Faith, Hope and Love — a symbolic symphony of the victory of good over evil. Thus, faith, objectified in religious symbols (relevantly, a religious symbol objectifies the experience of practising one's faith, acts as a sort of manifestation of the transcendent) is able to express, preserve and transmit the connection between man and God.

Religious faith has a significant cumulative effect; it generates desired psychological states. In one symbolic event, sign, or action, it is capable of compressing and condensing feelings of awe, humility, gratitude, and so on. Moreover, »in its functional capabilities, religious faith is quite diverse: it integrates society, acts

as a compensatory and empathic factor, and is one of the components of goal-setting processes« (Predko, 2023, 279).

3.3. *Stability of religious faith*

Religious faith captures the important meaning of religion by activating the emotional–sensual, volitional and cognitive components of the psyche, which enables the intensification of religious consciousness and the actualization of religious activity. It is the functional manifestation of religious faith that allows us to identify the methods, forms (specificity of the manifestation) and its consequences of influence in religious tradition and society. As we have seen, the essence of religious faith lies in the creation of new values that give meaning to human life and contribute to self–actualization. In this case, faith can be interpreted as the main value orientation in a person’s life which ensures his convictions, his stability in overcoming adversities. »Last, but not least, religious beliefs can create a sense of purpose in someone’s life — the feeling that there is a reason and meaning to their existence. People with a sense of purpose tend to have better mental well–being, compared with those who feel that their lives lack direction, and — once again — this seems to have knock–on effects for physical health, including reduced mortality« (Robson, 2022).

Stability of religious faith can be explained by several factors. Firstly, its role in an individual’s life and his value system, where a certain dynamic stereotype is already formed, triggering the mechanism of psychological defense and filtering out anything that does not fit inside of its boundaries. Secondly, believers have often publicly demonstrated their adherence to specific religious beliefs, which creates social pressure. Deviating from previous convictions can lead to condemnation and possibly the loss of one’s religious identity. Thirdly, stability comes through the influence of a religious group in which the effects of emotional contagion and psychological support occur among members of a religious community. The cumulative effect of faith on a group level enhances prayerful dialogue and enables two–way contact between the individual and the divine. »It is the cumulative effect of faith, i.e. its influence at the group level that strengthens the prayer dialogue, enables two–way contact between I and You« (Predko, 2021, 39).

The stability of religious faith is also determined by the psychological characteristics of religious people. Typically, many believers in certain religious communities entertain the idea of their being chosen by God, thus believing in their chosenness, which reinforces their sense of superiority over others and blocks out any information that contradicts their faith. The mutual support of religious views among community members strengthens the stability and preservation of faith. Usually, adherents of religious cults fully submit to the leader of the community. The cumulative effect of religious faith extends to all group members and control mechanisms through group pressure, solidifying both faith itself and the desire to preserve it.

Conclusions

Thus, religious faith as a personal form of presentation is distinguished by certain features. Firstly, it contains significant existential and soteriological potential, since its bearer is aimed at effectively and practically overcoming the finitude of human existence in the pursuit of the eternal, Absolute being, in the hope of salvation, and immortality of the soul. Religious faith, manifesting itself through the prism of an individual's life activity, has the ability to endlessly reveal its content in the process of correlating with the realm of the Divine and vividly illuminates the meaningful life orientations of a person. Secondly, in the process of strengthening of the religious faith, trusting relationships are formed as is also an understanding with the One in whom a person has confidence. Belief in the supernatural includes belief in the existence of trusting two-way relationships between man and the realm of the transcendent. In this context, the object of religious faith acquires subject–dialogical personification, as it acquires the properties of an active interlocutor who is able to respond to appeals that are made to him. Thirdly, religious faith has significant psychotherapeutic potential, as it “relieves” existential tension, provides emotional release, stabilizes and integrates the mental state of the individual. It builds a kind of projective image of human existence in its intentions for the future. In having a calming effect on people, religious faith generates positive emotions, instills confidence, and protects against any stress. Fourthly, the experience of faith, having significant cumulative potential, contributes to the stability of personality formation and expands its resource capabilities.

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Vjera u Boga

Bit i osobno oblikovanje forme

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Sažetak

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Ključne riječi: vjera u Boga; pouzdanje i povjerenje; dijalog; psihoterapeutski utjecaj; stabilnost vjere u Boga

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