

Article

The Role of the Meaning of Life and Religious Experience of God's Presence and God's Absence Amongst Students with Different Levels of Conscience Sensitivity

Stanislaw Glaz

Jesuit Academy Ignatianum in Kraków, ul. Kopernika 26, Poland; E-Mail: zjglaz@cyf-kr.edu.pl

Received: 23 January 2013; in revised form: 17 February 2013 / Accepted: 26 February 2013 /

Published: 26 February 2013

Abstract: The aim of the author's own research was: (a) defining the level of meaning in life and the level of religious experience (God's presence and God's absence) in groups of students with high and low levels of conscience sensitivity and (b) showing the connection between meaning in life and the level of religious experience (God's presence and God's absence) in groups of students with high and low levels of conscience sensitivity. The study was conducted in 2009–2010 among university students in Kraków. The subject group consisted of students of several non-Catholic public and state universities. All participants were Polish born, culturally homogeneous, and stemmed from families of average affluence. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 25. Two-hundred and forty sets of correctly completed questionnaires were used for the results analysis.

Keywords: meaning in life; religious experience; conscience sensitivity; students

Introduction

Research results so far show a lack of a uniform opinion among psychologists about the origin of religious experience. For instance, it is thought that St. Paul's vision near Damascus was a result of a dysfunction of the occipital lobe of the cerebral cortex [1]; that religious experience is a result of a conflict between id and ego [2]; and that religious experience can be invoked by psychedelic substances [3,4]. Therefore, Pahnke [5] embarked on a study of psychedelic experience. He was determined to find out whether experiences invoked by such substances bear any resemblance to the experiences of mystics or whether they differ. Such subjective states invoked by chemical substances

have been described by many scientists [6,7]. For some, such an experience is positive; in others, however, it can lead to irrevocable mental dysfunctions or personality changes [3,8,9].

Religious experience is a kind of communion with a force perceived as divine [10]; it is a feeling of sacredness and dependence at the same time [11]. It is experiencing 'something more', *i.e.*, experiencing a higher, divine reality [10,12]. Religious experience can be simple or mystical in character. In a mystical experience—which is more intense—a feeling of delight, elation, revelation, even ecstasy appears, and the relation that is established between a human being and Transcendence is deep [13].

According to researchers, a human being can experience God's presence as well as God's absence. During this experience, he or she acquires new knowledge about himself or herself, other human beings and about God. The experience of God's presence is accompanied by feelings of happiness and satisfaction, whereas while experiencing God's absence a man feels forlorn by God, dissatisfied and is in fear [14,15].

Clark [16] and James [10], in analyzing mystics' texts, pointed to important features of religious experience mystical in character. These include: 'inexpressibility'—which means a difficulty or inability to put in words states that a person felt during a mystical experience; passiveness—a mystic feels captured by a higher force beyond him; brevity—although its results are long-term, the intensity of the experience itself is short-lived.

The subject of meaning in life can be considered on two levels: as one of the human needs and as a state of meaning in life, *i.e.*, a sense of meaning in life [17,18]. A human being fulfills his or her meaning in life by striving for perfection within a certain community [19]. Meaning in life is up-dated by self-accomplishment of 'one's own potentialities' [20]. It is supposed to be revealed in pursuing one's own interests [21,22]. Meaning in life is related to 'will of the sense', which constitutes in a dynamic tendency motivating a man to take action in order to fulfill his or her needs [23]. The meaning has got its specific features [24]: being common—as it appears in any everyday situation and in every man's life; being particular—in a given situation it can be ascribed to a particular person; being unique and inimitable—what has not been done cannot be done ever again; continuity and changeability—every day expects a person with a different sense, and some sense always exists.

Investigating the subject of meaning in life also requires considering the concept of conscience. It is a kind of base line that regulates the update of a sense of meaning in life [18]. Conscience is in a way an instrument of security in life [2]. It can be *authoritarian* or *humanistic* in character [25]. The *authoritarian* conscience is the internalized voice of an external authority, which includes parents, tutors, or any other person who represents a certain set of moral values in a given society. The *humanistic* conscience, however, is a voice present in every human being. It is a voice of loving care of oneself. Conscience is defined by two specific dimensions: transcendent and immanent [24]. It is more than the mere 'I'. It emerges from transcendence and constitutes its voice. It is transcendent in a sense that it points out to realities that are beyond us, such as beauty, good and the Absolute.

Conscience can be considered structurally and dynamically [26]. The structural side of conscience is shaped during ontogeny and relates to the sphere of cognitive appraisal. The dynamic side qualifies conscience as a conscious act thanks to which a human being—on the basis of the information about a planned act, relying on a system of moral norms—generates an evaluative-imperative judgment about the act he or she has just performed.

Conscience is a conscious part of the inner (psychological-spiritual) reality of a human being. It makes judgments about what is morally right or wrong, it directs a man towards values. It is an organ of meaning in life; it brings it out. On the one hand, conscience comprises a set of rules according to which a person assesses his or her own conduct with regard to the internalized moral norms and values; on the other hand, though, as a control system, it signals whether a given activity has been performed well or not [27–29]. Conscience has an important characteristic—sensitivity, which is an ability of a human being to react to what seems morally right or wrong and values—both in their objective and subjective dimension [30,31]. It is a human ability to acquire certain stimuli, which trigger clear reactions. They are 'directions' of a relatively permanent and specific way of behavior, a result of learning and self-upbringing, which are acquired in the process of personality development [27,32].

Research Problem

Research by Buksik [32] shows that the higher the level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and to moral values, the more intense the religious attitude. The more young people are open to transcendental signs and the greater their experience of God's intimacy, the more meaningful their lives seem to be and the more life satisfaction they declare. They have better relations with their families and friends, a greater feeling of personal security, and they also seem to be more socially involved [33,34]. Another study [35] finds that the experience of a son's fear of God is vitally and positively related to the experience of being close to the world and other people and to self-trust [36]. In addition, according to the research by [37], the higher the level of social competence, the lower the level of religious experience.

In order to determine the intensity of religious experience with its functions in human life, and to show its connection with various dimensions of human life, appropriate study tools were designed [38,39]. In order to determine the intensity of religious experience—that is God's presence and God's absence within Christianity, the author of this paper has designed the *Scale of Religious Experience* as a study tool [40,41]. Studies carried out by applying the Scale among numerous groups prove that people with a high level of experience of God's presence reveal greater curiosity in seeking something new, greater involvement in pursuit of goals and a sense of meaning in life than people with a low level thereof [40]. A high level of a sense of meaning in life is revealed by males studying forestry who have a low level of experience of God's presence [42]. Other studies show that females studying philosophy have a higher level of God's presence than female students of vocational schools [43]. The analysis of yet another study reveals that a variable 'fascination with God' appears to be a strong variable accounting for the experience of God's presence [42]. The emotional sphere appears to play an important role in accounting for the variable 'experience of God's presence' [44]. Research results indicate that having an artistic bent has a considerable influence on the dynamics of religious experience [14]. Research by [33] proves that people more open to experience turn out to be more susceptible to religious experience. Intensity of religious experience strongly correlates with frequency of religious practice [45]. People with intensive religious experience far more often than others realized the significance of a positive meaning of religious experience in their lives [38,46].

The analysis of the subject indicates that meaning in life is connected with conscience sensitivity and religious experience. The existence of this connection suggests that people with a high level of

conscience sensitivity may be accompanied by a higher level of meaning in life and religious experience—God's presence and God's absence—rather than people with a lower level thereof. Research also suggests that certain variables relating to a sense of meaning in life may have a strong impact on religious experience in a group of people with a high level of conscience sensitivity, and other variables in a group of students with low sensitivity.

A question arises: who should be subjects of the study? In the period of socio-economic change, looking for new solutions in one's individual and social life, departing from existing values in favor of the newly-arisen ones, it seems only essential to conduct the study among university students [45,47].

The *Scale of Religious Experience* created by the author of this paper [40,41] includes religious statements, which help to define the level of intensity of religious experience—God's presence and God's absence. The statements refer to the Christian religion and cognition that is related to it. Religious cognition occurs in a relation, which exists between man and God. A human being can get to know himself or herself, another person or God, better, and gaining this knowledge enriches his or her personality and spiritual life. As mentioned before, meaning in life can be considered as a need of meaning in life or a state of meaning in life. The latter is connected with the subjective experience of meaning in one's own life; an emotional element constitutes its greatest part. A person with a great sense of meaning in life tends to achieve more life satisfaction and is rather creative. A need of meaning in life, however, is materialized by pursuit of goals, their attainment and affirmation of one's own life [18]. The element of pursuit prevails here. According to Buksik's theory [32], conscience sensitivity refers to oneself and to another human being as well as to values and the surroundings. It is cognitive-aspiring and evaluative in character.

The definition of the study subject in this paper hence suggests investigating the existence of a relationship between particular indicators of human life such as: (1) meaning in life expressed by: (a) a sense of meaning in life (SZ), which defines a state of meaning in life, (b) attainment of goals (CZ) and (c) affirmation of one's own life (DZ), which are a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, and (2) religious experience expressed by the state of: (a) God's presence (OB) and (b) God's absence (NB) in groups of people with a high (H) and low (L) level of conscience sensitivity to themselves and to moral values.

The aim of the study induced the author of this paper to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Is the level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values differentiated by variables: (a) relating to meaning in life: a sense of meaning in life—as a state of meaning in life, attainment of goals and affirmation of life—as sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life; (b) and relating to religious experience, that is experience of God's presence and God's absence?

Carrying out a threshold classification of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values suggests that students are accompanied by a certain level of meaning in life and religious experience depending on the intensity of conscience sensitivity.

2. Which variables related to meaning in life—a sense of meaning in life (as a state of meaning in life), attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life (as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life)—to what extent and in which order account for the variance of dependent variables related to religious experience, *i.e.*, experiencing God's presence and God's absence in groups of students with a high (H) and low (L) level of conscience sensitivity to themselves and to moral values?

This research question aims at revealing the influence of a predicator of religious experience—understood as God's presence and God's absence—such as meaning in life, taking into consideration the level of intensity of conscience sensitivity to oneself and to moral values.

Hypotheses

The research questions suggest posing the following hypotheses:

1. Students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values are accompanied by a higher level of meaning in life—understood as a state of meaning in life, attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life—as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life as well as religious experience: God's presence and God's absence, than students with a lower level of conscience sensitivity.
2. A sense of meaning in life (as a state of meaning in life) contributes to a greater extent to accounting for the variance of experience of God's presence in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values than in a group of students with a lower level of sensitivity.
3. Attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life (as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life) contribute to a greater extent to accounting for a variance of experience of God's absence in a group of students with a higher level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values than in a group of students with a lower level of sensitivity.

Methods Applied and Their Characteristics

In order to solve the research problem the following research tools were applied:

(a) *The Scale of Religious Experience* (SRE) by S. Głaz. The author has created a research tool for measuring the intensity of religious experience—God's presence and God's absence. It is comprised of a set of 37 statements religious in character and referring to the Christian religion. They take into account the following elements: the object of religion (God personalized), the subject of religion (a human being), relation personal in character. Each statement on the scale is accompanied by seven possible answers. The task of a respondent is to choose an opinion on the seven-point Likert-type scale expressing to what extent he or she agrees or disagrees with a given statement. The scale has three sub-scales. The first one describes the intensity of experience of God in general (DB); Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency is 0.92. The second scale serves to measure the intensity of experience of God's presence (OB), with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency at 0.94. The third scale describes the intensity of experience of God's absence (NB). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency is also high and stands at 0.91 [40,41]. The scale was tested on several samples, which included students of Catholic state universities as well as elderly people. The results obtained are related. The correlation coefficients are at a high level and positive (0.54–0.64). In the present study, the second and third sub-scales were used. Criterion validity: correlation (p Spearman) between the *Scale of Religious Experience* and Prężyna's *Scale of Religious Attitude* is 0.63.

(b) *The Purpose in Life Test* (PLT) by J. Crumbaugh & L. Maholick. The test was constructed on the basis of Frankl's [48] existential frustration theory and noogenic neurosis. The starting point was

an operational understanding of meaning in life. The test consists of three parts. In the first part there is a seven-grade scale comprised of 20 statements. Number 1 stands for the optimal intensity of the lack of meaning in life, whereas number 7 indicates the strongest intensity of a positive attitude to life. In the present study, the first part of the questionnaire was used. The classification of the statements in this first part was carried out in the following way: All the statements were grouped in three sets. These are: a sense of meaning in life (SZ)—this factor describes the level of intensity of a sense of meaning in life (inner satisfaction); attainment of life goals (CZ)—it describes a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life; and the last factor relates to affirmation of life (DZ), and it also describes the sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency for consecutive sub-scales ranges from 0.88 to 0.92. The reliability indicator calculated using the r Pearson for the present, revised list of statements is 0.81, and 0.90 after verification with the Spearman-Brown formula [17].

(c) *The Scale of Conscience Sensitivity* (SCS) by D. Buksik [32] was applied in the study of conscience. It has a seven-point continuum of answer categories to each of the 31 statements. The scale also includes four buffer questions. It consists of two sub-scales. The version of the scale comprises statements meant to examine conscience sensitivity to moral values (WSI)—it is an evaluative characteristic of conscience; and conscience sensitivity to moral values (WSWM)—it is a cognitive-aspiring characteristic of conscience sensitivity. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency for consecutive sub-scales ranges from 0.87 to 0.91. The reliability indicator calculated using the test-retest method is 0.72.

Research Strategy

The questions of meaning in life, religious experience and conscience sensitivity are by no means unfamiliar to psychologists investigating existential issues. However, a lack of further detailed research is noticeable, which encourages new investigation of the subject. Alongside the aforementioned methodological principles at hand, a further strategy of this study was outlined.

The aim of the present study was:

(a) to define the level of meaning in life: (1) a sense of meaning in life (SZ)—as a state of meaning in life, attainment of goals (CZ), affirmation of life (DZ)—as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, and (2) the level of religious experience: God's presence and God's absence in particular groups of students with a high (H) and low (L) level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values;

(b) to show the relationship between meaning in life: (1) a sense of meaning in life (SZ)—as a state of meaning in life, attainment of goals (CZ), affirmation of life (DZ)—as a sign of the accomplishment of the need of meaning in life; and (2) religious experience: God's presence and God's absence in particular groups of students with a high (H) and low (L) level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values.

The variable related to conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values was dichotomized. The values obtained in the *Scale of Conscience Sensitivity* provided the criterion for the dichotomy. Two groups of people were formed: with low and high results of conscience sensitivity. Low scores among the respondents—both males and females—in conscience sensitivity are a sten score of ≤ 4 , whereas

the high ones are a sten score of ≥ 8 . The group of respondents with a low level of conscience sensitivity comprises 61 persons, the mean score (M) for this group being 3.1 (SD = 1.2). The group of respondents with a high level of conscience sensitivity, however, comprises 72 persons, the mean score (M) for this group being 8.9 (SD = 2.56). There is a statistically significant difference between the results achieved by both groups of $F = 18.02$; $p < 0.001$.

The research results among students with a high and low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values obtained by means of the *Test of Meaning in Life* and the *Scale of Religious Experience* were further analyzed. In order to show the significance of differences between the groups of respondents (university students with a high and low level of conscience sensitivity) the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied. The results were subsequently interpreted based on the mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD). Showing statistically significant differences will enable to find answers to the main research question—namely, to what extent the level of conscience sensitivity differentiates the students' other variables.

The procedure of the analysis of the multiple stepwise regression was also applied. This type of method has several functions: it aims at finding independent variables—so-called 'significant'; it describes the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable (multiple regression coefficient—R); and it sets the percentage value of the explanatory variance of a dependent variable (R^2), it shows the order in which independent variables are entered into the equation of the regression.

In order to get empirical material with help of which the research problem can be solved, an appropriate study among university students—male students of electrical engineering and philosophy, and female students of pedagogy and physics—was conducted. The survey was conducted in 2009–2010 in Kraków. The subject group consisted of students of several non-Catholic public and state universities. All participants were Polish born, culturally homogeneous, and stemmed from families of average affluence. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 25. The survey was scheduled for after university classes. Two-hundred and forty sets of correctly completed questionnaires were used for the results analysis.

Results Analysis

A. In accordance with the assumption, the analysis of the obtained results enabled to answer the question to what extent the level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values differentiates meaning in life: a sense of meaning in life (SZ) (as a state of meaning in life), attainment of goals (CZ), affirmation of life (DZ) (as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life) and religious experience, understood as experience of God's presence (OB) and God's absence (NB).

The values obtained by means of the *Test of Meaning in Life* suggest two emerging statistically significant differences between the young people with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and to moral values and those with a low level of sensitivity. The persons with a high level of conscience sensitivity have a higher level of a sense of meaning in life ($F = 4.21$; $p < 0.01$) and a higher level of awareness of attainment of life goals ($F = 5.32$; $p < 0.01$) than the persons with low conscience sensitivity. In the third factor (DZ), there is a noticeable differentiating tendency. Students with high conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values reveal greater affirmation of one's own life than students with lower sensitivity. The scores from the *Scale of Religious Experience* indicate a

statistically significant difference in the factor relating to experience of God's presence, which means that people with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values reveal a higher level of experience of God's presence than the ones with a low level thereof ($F = 4.11$; $p < 0.01$). As far as experience of God's absence is concerned, both groups scored similarly.

B. It was also the author's intention to study the relation between meaning in life (a sense of meaning in life, attainment of goals, affirmation of one's own life), which is an independent variable, and the dependent variable 'experience of God's presence and God's absence' in a group of people with a high and low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and to moral values. (See Table 1 for results of this analysis).

Table 1. Independent variables relating to meaning of life: a sense of meaning in life (SZ)—as a state of meaning in life, attainment of goals (CZ) and affirmation of life (DZ)—as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life accounting for the variance of religious experience: God's presence (OB) and God's absence (NB) in groups of students with a high (H) and low (L) level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. The results of the analysis of the multiple stepwise regression.

Groups	Independent variables explaining variance of OB	R	β	B	Percentage value of explained variance ($R^2 \times 100\%$)
H	SZ	0.5291	0.53	0.36	28
	DZ	0.5517	0.55	0.16	30
	CZ	0.5758	0.59	0.23	35
L	DZ	0.3906	0.39	0.31	15
	SZ	0.4143	0.41	0.24	17
	CZ	0.4616	0.46	0.18	21
	Independent variables explaining variance of NB	R	β	B	Percentage value of explained variance ($R^2 \times 100\%$)
H	SZ	0.4291	0.40	0.23	16
	CZ	0.4404	0.41	0.10	17
	DZ	0.4601	0.41	0.18	20
L	CZ	0.2531	0.26	0.14	7
	DZ	0.3041	0.30	0.22	9

Three independent variables relating to meaning in life: a sense of meaning in life (SZ), affirmation of life (DZ) and attainment of goals (CZ) account for the variance of the dependent variable, *i.e.*, experience of God's presence (OB) in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. The first variable—a sense of meaning in life—accounts for 28% of the variance of the dependent variable—experience of God's presence ($R = 0.5291$), all of them together account for 35% of the variance of the dependent variable OB ($R = 0.5758$). The goodness of fit of the equation of stepwise regression determines the F-test value $F = 8.51$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$. Also the three independent variables relating to meaning in life: affirmation of life (DZ), a sense of meaning in life (SZ) and attainment of goals (CZ) account for the variance of the dependent variable, *i.e.*, experience of God's presence (OB) in a group of students with a low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and

moral values. The first variable—attainment of goals (DZ) accounts for 15% of the variance of the dependent variable—experience of God's presence (OB) ($R = 0.3906$), and all of them together account for 21% of the variance of the dependent variable OB ($R = 0.4616$). The goodness of fit of the obtained equation of stepwise regression determines the F-test value $F = 4.93$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$.

The three independent variables relating to meaning in life: a sense of meaning in life (SZ), attainment of goals (CZ) and affirmation of life (DZ), account for the variance of the dependent variable, *i.e.*, experience of God's absence (NB) in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. The first variable—a sense of meaning in life—accounts for 16% of the variance of the dependent variable—experience of God's absence (NB) ($R = 0.4291$), all of them together account for 20% of the variance of the dependent variable NB ($R = 0.4621$). The goodness of fit of the obtained equation of stepwise regression determines the F-test value $F = 7.21$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$. Two independent variables relating to meaning in life: attainment of goals (CZ) and affirmation of life (DZ), account for the variance of the dependent variable, *i.e.*, experience of God's absence (NB) in a group of students with a low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. The variable 'affirmation of one's own life' accounts for 7% of the variance of the dependent variable—experience of God's absence ($R = 0.2531$), whereas both of them together account for 9% of the variance of the dependent variable NB ($R = 0.3041$). The goodness of fit of the obtained equation of stepwise regression determines the F-test value $F = 6.43$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$.

Summary

The analysis of the research problem concerning the relationship between meaning in life—*i.e.*, a sense of meaning in life, attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life—with religious experience—*i.e.*, God's presence and God's absence—in groups of students with a varied level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values indicates that all of these dimensions are important and significant, and that each of them performs an appropriate role in the entire human existence.

1. The first hypothesis, which indicates an important relationship between the level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values among students with a level of meaning in life, *i.e.*, a sense of meaning in life—as a state of meaning in life, attainment of life goals and affirmation of one's own life—as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, as well as religious experience, *i.e.*, God's presence and God's absence, was confirmed to a great extent. Students with high conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values are accompanied by a higher level of sense of meaning in life, inner satisfaction with life—as a state of meaning in life, a higher level of the awareness of attainment of life goals—as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, and a higher level of experience of God's presence, than students with low conscience sensitivity. Moreover, both groups of students—those with a high and those with a low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values—are accompanied by equal intensity of affirmation of one's own life as a sign of the accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, and of experience of God's absence.

Whereas the first part of the hypothesis was proved correct, the second did not. In accordance with Buksik's [32] and Głaz's [41] assumptions, students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values, which are characterized by a well-developed structure of conscience that is cognitive-striving and evaluative in character, were expected to have a higher level of affirmation of

one's own life, as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life and experience of God's absence, than students with low sensitivity.

2. The second hypothesis, which indicates the contribution of a sense of meaning in life (as a state of meaning in life) to explaining the variance of experience of God's presence in groups of students with varied levels of conscience sensitivity, was fully confirmed with regard to the theoretical background [17,41]. Comparing the contribution of the variable 'a sense of meaning in life as a state of meaning in life' to accounting for the variance of religious experience of God's presence in groups of people with a high and a low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values, one has to admit that the variable in question—in accordance with the hypothesis—contributes several times more to accounting for the variance of experience of God's presence in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity than in a group with a low level thereof.

3. Similarly, the third hypothesis, which indicates the contribution of attainment of life goals and affirmation of one's own life (as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life) to accounting for the variance of experience of God's absence in groups of students with varied levels of conscience sensitivity, was fully confirmed. Comparing the contribution of these two variables—*i.e.*, attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life as a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life—to accounting for the variance of religious experience of God's absence in groups of students with a high and low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values, it should be acknowledged that the variables in question, in accordance with the researchers' assumptions [18,32,49] and with the hypothesis, contribute to a greater extent in accounting for the variance of experience of God's absence in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values than in a group with a low level thereof.

The research analysis indicates that a sense of meaning in life, which determines the state of meaning in life in a person's life, is the strongest predictor of experience of God's presence and God's absence in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity. It suggests that a sense of meaning in life (as a state of meaning in life) is significantly related with religious experience, referring to both God's presence and God's absence, as well as with a considerable conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. The results of other research seem to confirm it [41]. It also remains in accordance with Frankl's theory [24], who thinks that if an individual has a considerable sense of meaning of life, he or she also has a well-formed conscience, *i.e.*, sensitive to moral values, beauty, good, and also has a reference to the Absolute.

All three variables: a sense of meaning in life—defining a state of meaning in life, inner satisfaction with life, attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life, which are a sign accomplishment of the need of meaning in life, are stronger predictors of experience of God's presence and experience of God's absence in a group of students with a high level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values than in a group of students with a low level of sensitivity. They account for double the variance of religious experience: God's presence and God's absence in a group of students with high conscience sensitivity than in a group with low sensitivity. It has been rightly noticed [48,26] that thanks to conscience and its cognitive-aspiring and evaluative dimension a human being can read in the objective dimension values—which are unique and inimitable—that a particular moment in life brings, and derive satisfaction from them. Studies conducted by the author indicate that high conscience sensitivity is significantly related to a sense of meaning in life, attainment of goals and affirmation of

one's own life, and, simultaneously, to religious experience concerning both God's presence and God's absence. This correlation suggests that in a group of students with high intensity of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values, thanks to its cognitive-aspiring and evaluative dimension, the young people in question manage to accomplish the goals they have in life and which appeal to them, they affirm their lives, respect moral values, and have a reference to God personified, as well as derive inner satisfaction from a worthy way of living [50].

However, the variables—attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life, which are a sign of accomplishment of the need of meaning in life—prove to be the weakest predicators of experience of God's absence in a group of people with a low level of conscience sensitivity to oneself and moral values. A low level of conscience sensitivity is related to attainment of goals and affirmation of one's own life only to a small extent, and, therefore, these variables contribute significantly to accounting for the variance of experience of God's absence. In accordance with the assumptions of some researchers [26,51], such results were only to be expected. Immature conscience is deprived of sensitivity to oneself, moral values and to life goals, it lacks objective assessment and moral evaluation as well as an authentic experience of a relation to God personified [52].

The present analysis of the subject can make a contribution to more detailed empirical studies. There is a need for conducting a similar study among university students representing different cultural backgrounds to the one of the group tested here. What also would seem relevant is a confrontation with the results obtained by other researchers (Hubert, Pargament, Saroglou), whose findings refer to the relationship of religiosity (including religious experience) and personalities of university students. Many questions are still left with no answer, e.g., concerning the relation of conscience sensitivity with other, not studied so far aspects of personality; concerning factors in favor of religious experience, *i.e.*, God's presence and God's absence; concerning the role of one's own activity in discovering meaning in life and accomplishment thereof.

References

1. Maxime de Montmorand. *Psychologie des mystiques catholiques orthodoxes*. Paris: Alcan, 1920.
2. Sigmund Freud. *Introduction à la psychanalyse*. Paris: Payot, 1951.
3. Stanislav Grof. *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.
4. Huston Smith. "Do Drugs Have Religious Import?" *Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964): 517–30.
5. Walter Pahnke. "Drugs and Mysticism." *International Journal of Parapsychology* 8 (1966): 295–314.
6. Robert Masters, and Jean Houston. *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. New York: Delta, 1996.
7. Walter Clark. *Chemical Ecstasy. Psychedelic Drugs and Religion*. New York: Scheed and Ward, 1969.
8. Solomon Snyder. *Drugs and the Brain*. New York: Scientific American Books, 1986.
9. Jay Stevens. *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
10. William James. *L'Expérience Religieuse. Essai de Psychologie Descriptive*. Paris: Felix Alcan, 1908.

11. Rudolf Otto. *Le sacre: L'élément non-rationnel dans l'idée du divin et sa relation avec le rationnel*. Paris: Payot, 1968.
12. Carl Jung. *Esperanza e mistero*. Torino: Boringhieri, 1982.
13. Ralph Hood, Bernard Spilka, Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch. *The Psychology of Religion. An Empirical Approach*. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1996.
14. Stanisław Radoń, and Stanisław Głaz. *Przeżycia religijne młodzieży uzdolnionej artystycznie (Religious Experiences of Artistically Gifted Youth)*. Kraków: WAM, 2006.
15. Stanisław Głaz. *An Individual and Religious Experience*. Cracow: WAM, 2000.
16. Walter Clark. *The Psychology of Religion*. New York: Mac Millan, 1958.
17. Kazimierz Popielski. "Testy egzystencjalne: Metody badania frustracji egzystencjalnej i nerwicy noogennej (Existential Tests: Methods of Treatment of Existential Frustration and Noogenic Neurosis)." In *Człowiek – pytanie otwarte (Human Being—An Open Question)*. Edited by Kazimierz Popielski. Lublin: KUL, 1987, 237–61.
18. Viktor Frankl. *Der Wille zum Sinn*. Bern: Hans Huber, 1992.
19. Alfred Adler. *Understanding Human Nature*. New York: Greenberg Publisher, 1964.
20. Abraham Maslow. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York: Van Nonstrand Reinhold, 1968.
21. Carl Rogers. *Un modo di essere*. Firenze: Psycho-di Martinelli, 1983.
22. Rollo May. *Freedom and Destiny*. Now York: Norton, 1981.
23. Elisabeth Lukas. *Geist und Sinn. Logotherapie – die dritte Wiener Schule der Psychotherapie*. Monachium: Psychologie Verlags Union, 1990.
24. Viktor Frankl. *La sofferenza di una vita senza senso*. Torino: Boringhieri, 1987.
25. Erich Fromm. *Psychoanalyse und Religion*. Zurich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verl, 1966.
26. Zdzisław Chlewiński. *Dojrzałość: osobowość, sumienie, religijność (Maturity: Personality, Conscience, Religiosity)*. Poznań: W Drodze, 1991.
27. Gordon Allport. *Structure et développement de la personnalité*. Neuchatel: Delachaux Niestle, 1970.
28. Max Velmans. *Understanding Consciousness*. London: Routledge, 2000.
29. John Gibbs. *Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg and Hoffman: Moral Development and Reality*. London: CA Sage, 2003.
30. Kalevi Tamminen. "Religious Experiences in Childhood and Adolescence: A Viewpoint of Religious Development between the Ages of 7 and 20." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 4 (1994): 61–81.
31. Charles Mathewes. *Understanding Religious Ethics*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
32. Dariusz Buksik. *Wrażliwość sumienia (Conscience Sensitivity)*. Warszawa: Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej, 2003.
33. Dariusz Krok. "Structural Relations between Religiosity and Spirituality in the Context of Personality Factors." In *Personality and Religion*. Edited by Henryk Gasiul, Emilia Wrocławska-Warchala. Warsaw: UKSW, 2009, 280–99.
34. Michael Argyle, and Peter Hills. "Religious experiences and their relations with happiness and personality." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 10 (2000): 157–72.
35. Jerzy Szymoń. *Lęk i fascynacja (Fear and Fascination)*. Lublin: KUL, 1999.

36. Paul Watson, Ron Morris, and Ralph Hood. "Antireligious Humanistic Values, Guilt, and Self Esteem." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 535–46.
37. Elżbieta Rydz. "Beata Zarzycka Kompetencje społeczne a religijność osób w okresie młodej dorosłości (Social Competences and Religiosity of Early Adults)." In *Z zagadnień psychologii rozwoju człowieka*. Edited by Elżbieta Rydz, Dorota Musiał. Lublin: TN KUL, 2008, 65–82.
38. David Wulff. *Psychology of Religion*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997.
39. Ralph Hood, Peter Hill, and Bernard Spilka. *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. New York and London: Guilford Press, 2009.
40. Stanisław Głaz. *Doświadczenie religijne a sens życia (Religious Experience and Meaning in Life)*. Kraków: WAM, 2002.
41. Stanisław Głaz. *Osobowościowe uwarunkowania przeżycia religijnego młodzieży studiującej (Psychological Factors of Religious Experience in University Students)*. Kraków: WAM, 2011.
42. Stanisław Głaz. "Wpływ zmiennych egzystencjalnych na skutki przeżycia religijnego (Influence of Existential Variables on the Effects of Religious Experience)." *Czasopismo Psychologiczne (Journal of Psychology)* 1 (2003): 119–32.
43. Stanisław Głaz. "Wybrane determinanty przeżyć religijnych (Selected Determinants of Religious Experiences)." *Roczniki Psychologiczne KUL* 1 (2004): 77–99.
44. Stanisław Głaz. *Sens życia a religia (Meaning in Life and Religion)*. Poznań: Fundacja Humaniora, 2006.
45. Michał Drożdż. "Współczesne wyzwania duszpasterskie (Contemporary Priestly Challenges)." In *Naśladować Chrystusa (Imiter le Christ)*. Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 2003, 11–28.
46. Sławomir Zaręba. "Religion and the Values that Bring Sense to Life in the Opinion of Polish Youth." In *Personality and Religion*. Edited by Henryk Gasiul, Emilia Wrocławska-Warchała. Warsaw: UKSW, 2009, 415–36.
47. Kate Loewenthal. "Are Women More Religious than Men? Gender Differences in Religious Activity among Different Religious Groups in the UK." *Personality and Individual Differences* 32 (2002): 133–40.
48. Viktor Frankl. *Homo patiens*. Warszawa: PAX, 1971.
49. Stanisław Głaz. *Rola Kościoła w integralnym rozwoju młodzieży (The Role of Church in the Integral Development of Youth)*. Kraków: WAM, 2010.
50. Kenneth Pargament, Annette Mahoney, A. Sacred matters: Sanctification as vital topic for the psychology of religion. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 3 (2005): 179–98.
51. Michael MacLean, Lawrence Walker, and Kyle Matsuba. Transcendence and the Moral Self: Identity Integration, Religion, and Moral Life. *Theory and Psychology* 3 (2004): 359–86.
52. Marek Jarosz. *Interpersonalne uwarunkowania religijności (Interpersonal considerations of religion)*. Lublin: TN KUL, 2003.