**BIGARD MEMORIAL SEMINARY, ENUGU**

**ASSIGNMENT ON psychology OF RELIGION**

**TOPIC: DISCUSS THE four (4) major theories of psychology of religion**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In order to mediate the human religiousness in all its variations, the discipline; psychology of religion plays a great role. The awareness of the limitations of our religion in the aspect of offering us all we can ever think of or the excesses of religious fanatic crawl to the ambience of religious psychology. The need to discover the areas and the mediating factors that could help to augur the both fields of study uses the instrumentality of the theories of psychology of religion.

The challenge for the psychology of religion is essentially threefold: (a) To provide a thoroughgoing description of the objects of investigation, whether they be shared religious content or individual experiences, attitudes, or conduct. (b) To account in psychological terms for the rise of such phenomena, whether they be in individual lives. (c) To clarify the outcomes- the fruits, as William James put it-of these phenomena for individuals, and the larger society.

Be that as it may, these outcomes or challenges pose a great effect to the mediation in the excesses of religion in a bid to input psychology theories and terms in the affairs of religion.

Hence, we shall be discussing the major theories of psychology of religion, coupled with the explication of its founding concepts.

**PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION**

Psychology of religion can be seen as the systematic application of psychological theories, methods and interpretive frameworks to the content of religious traditions and of the related experiences, attitudes and actions of individuals. Psychologists of religion want to identify what religion is all about psychologically. Psychology of religion deals with those areas within general scientific psychology whose goal is the understanding of the processes that mediate human religiousness in all its variations. Psychologists of religion pursue three major projects;

(1) systematic description, especially of religious contents, attitudes, experiences and expressions.

(2) explanation of the origins of religion, both in the history of the human race and in individual lives, taking into account diversity of influences.

(3) mapping out the consequences of religious attitudes and conduct, both for the individual and for society at large.

These projects help to discover the rapport between human beings and supernatural beings, and how it affects the human behaviour in his relationship with the divinity.

Psychology of religion deals in several methods namely;

* Reductionism
* Idiothetic approach
* Nomethetic approach
* Qualitative approach
* Quantitative approach

**THE FOUR MAJOR THEORIES OF PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION**

There are four major theories of psychology of religion, they include the following;

* Attribution theory
* Coping theory
* Inter disciplinary theory
* Fowler’s theory

1. **ATTRIBUTION THEORY.**

Man is by nature a being endowed with curiosity and inquisition. He tries as much as possible to give explanation to events of his life and thus, attributes the causes to something. It can be oneself, others, chance, God etc. Attribution theory is concerned with psychologist’s explanation of the causes of human actions, that is the causal explication of people’s behavior. However, the search for meaning is the core the theme in our framework for the psychology of religion. Having known that man is a meaning-driven creatures and religion in all its clarity can distinctly provide meaning, even when it is applied to the daily activities of man. Thus, attribution theory is therefore a theory of meaning.

One can easily consider the might of God's power in the Judeo-Christian tradition and thus, whenever things of greatest significance occur, man attributes it to God. For instance, a disaster in an insurance company, unexpected death of a youth, winning dollars in lotteries etc. All these could be unanticipated and are often explained by such phrases as “God works in mysterious ways”. Nevertheless, it makes people to withdraw from blame. It even kills the zeal to discover the scientific causes of our plights especially we attribute causes to God.

**What motivates attribution?** These attributions are made as a result of the need to know, that is the need for meaning. The need to know the cause of events. This can be out of curiosity. In addition, is a need for mastery and control as well as the need to maintain self-esteem. People assign causality in order to maintain and enhance their self-esteem and also to master and control. However, it was Bulman Wortman that suggested self-esteem as one of the motivators of attribution.

More still, psychologists of religion have categories the variety of possible referents which an individual may attribute the causes of events. One is naturalistic and the other is super naturalistic (religious). Naturalistic attribution comprises of people, natural events, accidents, chance etc. Supernatural is attributed to God. However, people may still believe that multiple agents are simultaneously at work; such as when God is perceived as working through a naturalistic cause. Example is a natural disaster or a person’s altruistic act of goodness can be seen to have been inspired by God. Sometimes, we hypothesize that situations involving high ambiguity and threat may have the greatest likelihood of calling forth religious explanations.

**APPLYING ATTRIBUTION THEORY**

Attribution theory can be applied to juror decision making. Jurors use attributions to explain the cause of the defendant's intent and actions related to the criminal behavior. The attribution made (situational or dispositional) might affect a juror's punitiveness towards the defendant.

When jurors attribute a defendant's behavior to dispositional attributions they tend to be more punitive and are more likely find a defendant guilty and to recommend a death sentence compared to a life sentence

**TWO TYPES OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY**

**(a) Internal attribution**; this is a situation whereby the behaviors of man are attributed to some internal features of the person that performed the action. Exams, his personality, innate or inherent traits etc.

**(b). External attribution**; here, the human behaviors are attributed to some external factors that are often beyond human control. Example; the environment, the situation of the place or time when the action was performed.

Based on the foregoing, there is need to point out the causes of human religiosity, by this I mean the attribution of human religiosity to some factors such as; finding meaning in the supreme being, situations beyond human control, man as a religious being, personal idiosyncrasies, consciousness of positive and negative effects etc.

1. **COPING** **THEORY**

Coping theory is all about the conscious and unconscious efforts we put into solve problems and reduce psychological stress. These efforts can be called coping skills. In psychology, coping skills are adaptive tools we proactively administer to wall out burnout. Coping theory varies from person to person. But the same individual can apply two coping mechanism completely to adapt to similar stressors.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), one of the pioneers of the coping theory, defined coping as: constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Coping involves spending mental energy in a way that can reduce stress. Whether conscious or subconscious, the ultimate goal of all coping mechanisms is to solve a problem and return homeostasis.

Coping strategies can be positive or negative, depending on whether they increase or reduce mental wellbeing. Coping is dependent on personality patterns and perceptual experiences. The strategies one chooses for adapting to a situation is highly individualized.

**How does religion enter the coping theory?** People do not face stressful situations without resources. They rely on a system of beliefs, practices, and relationships which affects how they deal with difficult situations. In the coping process, this orienting system is translated into concrete situation-specific appraisals, activities, and goals. Religion is part of this general orienting system. A person with a strong religious faith who suffers a disabling injury, must find a way to move from the generalities of belief to the specifics of dealing with the injury.

**Coping functions of religion:** One is the need for meaning; being able to comprehend tragedy to make it meaningful, probably constitute the core of successful Colin and adjustment. Religion performs this role especially in personal crisis. Another function is importance of control. There are three forms of secondary control which can help man to cope.

1. **Interpretative control;** when people are in seemingly hopeless situations, in order to cope, they reinterpret and construe their situations in less troubling or even positive terms. Thus, claiming that things could be worst.
2. **Predictive control**; Predictive control assures a person that things will turn out all right in the end. For example, another patient with cancer stated, “Because of my relationship with God, I had faith that this cancer was not going to take my life”
3. **Vicarious control;** When people feel that they may not be able to cope with their troubles— particularly in cases of serious illness, where death is a possibility—they often turn to their God, and vicariously, the deity becomes a support or substitute for their own efforts. In religion, prayer is also a coping method. Sometimes when we realize that God help those who help themselves, we use collaborative coping.

**FACTORS FOR ACTIVE COPING**

There are some factors that most of us use for active coping. They are; **1) Emotional distancing;** where we stay indifferent to what is going on around and prevent the distress from controlling our actions. **2) Escape and avoidance**; where we deny the existence of stress as a coping response.

**3) Radical acceptance** – where one resorts to unconditional self-acceptance for adapting to adversity. **4) Positive reappraisal** – where we seek to find the answer in the struggle and grow from it.

**5) Strategic problem-solving** – where we implement specific solution-focused strategies to get through the tough time and redirect our actions accordingly. Other factors are Self-Control, confrontation and social support. Religion can play constructive roles in the problems of our lives that can affect our psychology. Example are religious coping with aging, serious illness and the loss of a child

**Illustration**. Practically, I, Christopher, was expelled from the seminary in 2017. It was stressful and devastating but my positive coping approach to the situation helped me to interpret the situation as God's will. Later, I was called back.

**MERITS OF COPING THEORY ESPECIALLY AMONG THE AGEING SICK ONES**

**(1)** Evokes comforting emotions and feelings;

(**2)** Offers strength, empowerment, and control;

(**3**) Eases the emotional burden of the illness;

(**4**) Offers social support and a sense of belonging;

(**5)** Offers spiritual support through a personal relationship with God;

**(6)** Facilitates meaning and acceptance of the illness;

**(7**) Helps preserve health;

(**8**) Relieves the fear and uncertainty of death;

**(9**) Facilitates self‐acceptance and reduces self‐blame. These perceived benefits suggest potential mechanisms by which religion/spirituality may affect psychological adjustment.

Nevertheless, humans tend to neglect the cause of their problems when they begin to cope with it and may remain there for long.

1. **INTERDISCIPLINARY** **THEORY**

My illustration of interdisciplinary is a class studying the New Testament from both the literary and historical points of view. Of, relating to, or involving two or more academic disciplines that are usually considered distinct.

Due to much emphasis on how religion develops in early life and changes over life span. This seems to touch many arenas and thus numerous disciplines here ha e the prospects to provide theories for the psychology of religion. The term interdisciplinary is applied within education and training pedagogies to describe studies that use the insights of several established disciplines. It draws knowledge from other several fields like sociology, anthropology, culture etc.

Interdisciplinary theory is all about drawing from two or more academic disciplines to create a powerful learning and psychological experience. There are some ways man can cultivate these interdisciplinary skills. They are; collaboration, avoid brushing the surface, teaching by practical examples, plan assessments and offering regular feedbacks.

**MERITS**.**1)** It brings religion into the entirety of an individual’s life, by letting every discipline to contribute to relation. **2)** Organization is obtained when the various disciplines come together to work for better cooperation among them. **3)** Religion also aid to cohere various disciplines.

**DEMERITS.** **1)** Isolation of some disciplines may arise. **2)** The base of religion is questioned if it ventures into many disciplines. **3)** Problems from the disciplines that oppose religion.

1. **FOWLER’S THEORY OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT.**

Faith Development Theory is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the evolutionary process of the development of religious/spiritual values and behavior in the human life cycle. The articulation of faith development theory began in the 1980s with the work of James Fowler and colleagues, J. W. Fowler's faith development theory is a relatively recent achievement in cognitive developmental psychology, based on the earlier work of Piaget and L. Kohlberg in cognitive and moral development, and is a significant contribution to the integration of theology and psychology. In his book 1981 book Stages of Faith, James W. Fowler developed a theory of six stages that people go through as their faith matures based on the Piaget stages and Kohlberg stages. The basic theory can be applied, not only to those in traditional faiths, but those who follow alternative spiritualties or secular worldviews as well.

**HIS STAGES OF FAITH**

**Stage 1- Intuitive Projective;** This is the stage of preschool children in which fantasy and reality often get mixed together. However, during this stage, our most basic ideas about God are usually picked up from our parents and/or society. M. Scott Peckcalls simplified this stage as “**Chaotic-Antisocial”** For him, Peoplestuck at this stage are usually self-centered and often find themselves in trouble due to their unprincipled living. If they do end up converting to the next stage, it often occurs in a very dramatic way.

**Stage 2- Mythic-Literal;** When children become school-age, they start understanding the world in more logical ways. They generally accept the stories told to them by their faith community but tend to understand them in very literal ways. [A few people remain in this stage through adulthood.]

**Stage 3- Synthetic-Conventional:** Most people move on to this stage as teenagers. At this point, their life has grown to include several different social circles and there is a need to pull it all together. When this happens, a person usually adopts some sort of all-encompassing belief system. However, at this stage, people tend to have a hard time seeing outside their box and don't recognize that they are "inside" a belief system. At this stage, authority is usually placed in individuals or groups that represent one's beliefs. [This is the stage in which many people remain.] M. Scott Peckcalls simplified this stage as “**Formal-Institutional”** For Scott, at this stage people rely on some sort of institution (such as a church) to give them stability. They become attached to the forms of their religion and get extremely upset when these are called into question.

**Stage 4- Individuate-Reflective:** This is the tough stage, often begun in young adulthood, when people start seeing outside the box and realizing that there are other "boxes". They begin to critically examine their beliefs on their own and often become disillusioned with their former faith. Ironically, the Stage 3 people usually think that Stage 4 people have become "backsliders" when in reality they have actually moved forward. M. Scott Peckcalls simplified this stage as “**Skeptic-Individual”** For him, those who break out of the previous stage usually do so when they start seriously questioning things on their own. A lot of the time, this stage ends up being very non-religious and some people stay in it permanently

**Stage 5- Conjunctive Faith:** It is rare for people to reach this stage before mid-life. This is the point when people begin to realize the limits of logic and start to accept the paradoxes in life. They begin to see life as a mystery and often return to sacred stories and symbols but this time without being stuck in a theological box. M. Scott Peckcalls simplified this stage as “**Mystical-Communal”** For him,people who reach this stage start to realize that there is truth to be found in both the previous two stages and that life can be paradoxical and full of mystery. Emphasis is placed more on community than on individual concerns.

**Stage 6- Universalizing Faith:** Few people reach this stage. Those who do live their lives to the full in service of others without any real worries or doubts.

However, it is worthy to note that when Fowler was developing his theory, it is not as if there were no other potentially more credible and useful formats available for modelling psychological phenomena that involve change and development, such as a focus on process. To take one ‘extreme case’, just five years after the publication of Stages of Faith, Breakwell (1986) presented her initial elaborated exposition of what subsequently became known as identity process theory. In this work, she explicitly rejected the option of focusing her theory on specific identity content (just as Fowler did in relation to the specific content of faith) or (unlike Fowler in the main) on structural features. Instead, she opted to concentrate on what she assumed to be the universal identity processes (assimilation-accommodation – note the Piagetian debt – and evaluation) that she believed determined the ‘shape’ and content of identity change in response to threat.

Some of its advantages are that it is applied to every religion. It helps one to recognize his stage. It is useful in religious counseling. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there exists no clear cut distinction between the stages.

**CONCLUSION**

Conclusively, man entangles himself with the supreme being both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, he tends to explain his experiences from religious perspective. Belief in the supreme being tend to give both life and hope to man.

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