

DARIUSZ KROK,
Instytut Psychologii Uniwersytetu Opolskiego
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1034-0944>

PRZEMYSŁAW KRÓL
Instytut Psychologii Uniwersytetu Opolskiego
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1576-1665>

Openness to interreligious dialogue – psychological antecedents and processes

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the psychological antecedents and processes that play a crucial role in building and developing openness to interreligious dialogue. Two factors turn out to determine the ways in which interreligious dialogue is led: personality traits (agreeableness and openness to experience) and religious attitudes (intrinsic religiosity). They create an atmosphere of tolerance that is especially important in dialogue as it promotes the religious freedom that is a necessary condition for interreligious dialogue. The effectiveness of interreligious dialogue depends on the presence of personal and group factors which all contribute to the final outcome, e.g. genuine autonomy of religious motivation, the ability to differentiate between essential and peripheral elements in religion, or authenticity of religious beliefs connected with commitment. Moreover, they frequently interact with each other in influencing the final forms of interreligious dialogue.

Keywords: openness, interreligious dialogue, personality, religious attitudes, dialogue processes.

Otwartość na dialog międzyreligijny – psychologiczne uwarunkowania i procesy

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest określenie psychologicznych uwarunkowań i procesów, które odgrywają kluczową rolę w budowaniu i rozwijaniu otwartości na dialog międzyreligijny. Dwa czynniki decydują o stylu prowadzenia dialogu międzyreligijnego: cechy osobowości (ugodowość i otwartość na doświadczenie) oraz postawy religijne (dojrzała re-

ligijność). Formują one atmosferę tolerancji, która jest szczególnie ważna w dialogu, gdyż tworzy wolność religijną, która jest niezbędnym warunkiem dialogu międzyreligijnego. Skuteczność dialogu międzyreligijnego zależy od obecności czynników osobistych i grupowych, które określają jego ostateczny charakter, np. prawdziwa autonomia motywacji religijnej, umiejętność różnicowania zasadniczych i peryferyjnych elementów religii lub autentyczność przekonań religijnych związana z zaangażowaniem. W wielu sytuacjach wymienione czynniki wchodzą we wzajemne interakcje, które wpływają na finalne formy dialogu międzyreligijnego.

Słowa kluczowe: otwartość, dialog międzyreligijny, osobowość, postawy religijne, procesy dialogu.

Interreligious dialogue irrevocably turns out to be a fundamental moral requirement for developing a modern and democratic society. It is also a concept that is closely related to personality, religiosity, and social behaviour. People have been always striving to find and establish a common ground on which they could build constructive and functional social structures and develop democratically oriented religious communities. Authentic interreligious dialogue represents an attitude of openness that encompasses mutual understanding, respect for differing views, and the ability to accept every human being as he/she is, without judging or prejudicing. Interreligious dialogue can be achieved and practiced on a basis of mature personality and religiosity which are opened to the dimensions of both religious and psychological factors. The aim of this article is to examine the psychological antecedents and processes that are responsible for creating authentic openness to interreligious dialogue.

1. The structure of interreligious dialogue

Human participation in social interactions is established upon the regularity of the everyday experience of individuals. All social interactions and behaviour, irrespective of their content or the age of the participants, involve a highly intricate and closely coordinated sets of behaviour that are a consequence of individual activities¹. They comprise dialogues, discussions, or debates conducted according to sets of rules established by societies. Dialogue always occurs in interpersonal and social contexts, and is very frequently multifaceted². It consists of different personal and social factors define the individuals' capacity to participate in social life and establish social relations with others.

¹ Rudolph H. Schaffer. 2017. Acquiring the concept of the dialogue. In *Psychological development from infancy*. Ed. Marc H. Bornstein, William Kessen, 279–280. London: Routledge.

² Julia Alves Brasil, Rosa Cabecinhas. 2019. "Intercultural dialogue and intergroup relations in Europe: contributions of Cultural Studies and Social Psychology". *Comunicação e Sociedade* 35: 105–106.

From a psychological perspective, dialogue plays an extremely important role in religious thinking. This is due to the subtlety of religious matters and the particular sensitivity of people to religious issues³. What people think and feel about religiousness represents the most delicate and intricate spheres of their mental life. It is rooted in the centre of human personality and social relations. An authentic attitude of dialogue in religious thinking helps individuals to establish social relations and facilitates ideological discussions. Numerous examples of collaboration and dialogue between different religions indicate the need for mutual respect and transparency of thinking.

Each religion sets specific requirements and principles for people to follow that are a condition of belonging to that given religious group. Sallie B. King formulates a very interesting and precise understanding of interreligious dialogue which can be defined as intentional encounter and interaction among members of different religions⁴. This definition reflects a situation in which people belonging to different religious traditions are willing to engage in mutual social interactions with the aim of establishing common values, standards, and modes of behaviour. There could exist a wide variety of interreligious dialogues: official or institutional dialogue among people or groups chosen by their religions as official representatives, intergroup dialogue, parliamentary-style dialogue, verbal and even non-verbal dialogue, spiritual dialogue, practical dialogue and internal dialogue. They all refer to a interpersonal encounter during which people share common thoughts and feelings.

Dialogue can be understood as: (1) a method, (2) a process and (3) a social attitude⁵. The method of dialogue represents a way of interpersonal communication through conversation or other means of communication that are aimed at mutual understanding, rapprochement and collaboration towards specific tasks. The process of dialogue is expressed in the conversation strategy leading to partners sharing their points of view and ways of life. Finally, the attitude of dialogue means permanent readiness and pursuit through conversation and other means to understand people, cooperate with them and seek new ways to develop mutual relations.

A dialogue attitude seems to be most desirable in the context of religious contact as a factor conducive to establishing positive and constructive relationships in interpersonal and social dimensions. The emphasis lies on the quest to understand the people involved in the relationships, show openness to others and the

³ Leon Turner. 2008. *Theology, psychology and the plural self*. London: Routledge, 6.

⁴ Sallie B. King. 2011. Interreligious dialogue. In *The Oxford handbook of religious diversity*. Ed. Chad Meister, 101. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Janusz Tarnowski. 1990. „Na czym polega dialog?”. *Edukacja i Dialog* 3 : 14.

desire to learn their views and arguments, even when they differ from our own point of view. Without meaningful dialogue in the religious context, any form of interpersonal communication is doomed to fail, as individuals remain resistant and immune to collaboration.

Interreligious dialogue can be considered as a specific form of general, human dialogue. However, interreligious dialogue is also uniquely defined by the presence of the transcendent element, which, in addition to the horizontal form of social life, includes a vertical form, i.e. transcendence⁶. Therefore, while defining religious dialogue, its role and importance for society, we need to refer to the religious subject and object (man and God) simultaneously, taking into account their individual and social conditions. The following questions are to be carefully considered and answered: Who is a human being? What are his/her needs, potentials and values? What is the place and meaning of religious dialogue in individual and social terms? The main characteristic feature of interreligious dialogue is thus openness to the transcendent element which places a human perspective in a wider, “metaphysical context”⁷. In this sense, interreligious dialogue should contain more active listening to transcendent elements which provide us with a universal platform for understanding and collaboration.

Examining the defining features of interreligious dialogue, Catherine Cornille states that the common denominator in all its forms is “mutual respect and openness to the possibility of learning from the other”⁸. The category of interreligious dialogue tends to encompass any form or degree of constructive engagement between religious traditions. As a consequence, interreligious dialogue can be distinguished from other forms of interreligious engagement that lack an actively constructive element, such as the neutral study of religion, or more traditional apologetics. It differs from religious studies approaches, because participants of interreligious dialogue approach one another from a faith position and engage in the pursuit of truth and of personal and religious growth that may include both deeper self-understanding and new insights and practices from the other religion.

In the context of interreligious dialogue, an important question arises: To what extent can the specific features of religious thinking promote or weaken the attitudes of dialogue? The answer to this question is extremely difficult, because religious thinking does not exist in isolation from individuals and their mental

⁶ Sławomir Bukalski. 2004. Psychologiczne aspekty dialogu międzyreligijnego. In *Religie w dobie pluralizmu i dialogu*. Ed. Andrzej Wańka, 62. Szczecin: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego; Tadeusz Pikus. 2007. „Dialog religijny i jego obszary”. *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 20 : 234.

⁷ Jeff Astley. 2017. “Conceptual enquiry and the experience of “the transcendent””: John Hick’s contribution to the dialogue”. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 20 (4) : 312–313.

⁸ Catherine Cornille. 2013. Introduction. In *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Vol. 120. Ed. Catherine Cornille, xii. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

processes⁹. On the one hand, the characteristic features of religious thinking associated with existential questions or dilemmas of faith can facilitate dialogue by enabling people to examine a given topic from different points of view. As a result, people may take into consideration different ideas and ideological traditions, which broadens their scope of potential answers and enlarges their intellectual horizons. On the other hand, emphasising religious beliefs and values may constrain a person's views to the opposite than their own and increase the tendency to xenophobia or cognitive isolationism. This ambiguity thus encourages us to closely analyse both differences and similarities in interreligious dialogue, which may depend on personality traits and social conditions.

The meaning and productivity of interreligious dialogue in the contemporary diverse world are inseparably associated with the attitudes of participants and their openness to common values and ideas¹⁰. Authentic dialogue prompts people to look for the good, which is both temporal and eternal. People can reach the truth through reason and faith, including religious faith. Therefore, these two qualities, found in both science and religion, can complement each other. Science can cleanse religion of error and superstition, and religion can remove from science false assumptions or unsubstantiated convictions. It is fully understandable that religious dialogue, like non-religious dialogue, has a firm scientific foundation¹¹.

Knowledge about other religions, especially about their assumptions, ethical requirements and customs, is extremely important if human relations are to be conducted as part of interreligious dialogue. Not only is this approach conducive to building peaceful future of the world, but it will also bring mutual spiritual and intellectual benefits to different groups and societies. Research on religion, narcissism, individualist and collectivist values in Iran and the United States has demonstrated that the use of social science in connection with religious topics might be useful in creating a “space” for conducting a constructive and fruitful dialogue between different civilizations¹². As social science and religious issues often overlap on a basis of common interest in individual and social relations, interreligious dialogue can unquestionably benefit from their mutual theoretical and empirical interactions.

⁹ Dariusz Krok. 2012. Dialog w myśleniu religijnym. Wpływ religijnych stylów poznawczych na formowanie postawy dialogu. In *Człowiek dialogu*. Ed. Zygfryd Głaeser, 724. Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.

¹⁰ Jeannine H. Fletcher. 2018. “Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations”. *Anglican Theological Review* 100 (2) : 443–444.

¹¹ Tadeusz Pikus. 2006. *Etiologiczna demarkacja dialogu religijnego w Kościele katolickim*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 433.

¹² Nima Ghorbani, Paul J. Watson, Stephen W. Krauss, Mark N. Bing, Kristl H. Davison. 2004. “Social science as dialogue: Narcissism, individualist and collectivist values, and religious interest in Iran and the United States”. *Current Psychology* 23 (2) : 120.

Four different types of interreligious dialogue present in the modern world can generally be distinguished¹³: (1) The dialogue of theology focuses on the attempt to understand one another's beliefs, doctrines, and teachings. This type will generally involve getting to know each other's sacred texts and trying to understand their true meanings; (2) The dialogue of spirituality incorporates the experiences that give rise to the beliefs. This type aims at appreciating the feelings that people from different religions have while practicing their rites and ceremonies; (3) The dialogue of action consists of concrete activities during which people act together to confront and resolve common problems related to religious matters; and (4) The dialogue of life represents the interaction that takes place when people from different religions live in the same area. It involves everyday social and cultural activities that are directly or indirectly connected with religious behaviour.

Interreligious dialogue necessitates important changes in an individual's understanding of religious traditions. Due to internal precepts of dialogue, interreligious dialogue assumes a certain degree of humbleness about one's own conception of truth despite the fact that most religions claim to possess dogmatic uniqueness or exclusivity. Religious traditions need to realise that an unnecessary prerequisite of dialogue is the attitude of humility and inclusiveness. This does not mean rejecting fundamental dogmas or teachings; it rather requires adopting more openness and acceptance. The concept of religious truth has undergone a significant paradigm shift that has resulted in acquiring more recognition and acceptance of the reality of religious plurality, higher degrees of religious tolerance and openness toward other religions¹⁴. The world has become more pluralistic and diverse, and that has changed people's perception of their own religious systems. Although interreligious dialogue tends to remain a challenge for some religious traditions, it needs to accept the inevitable cultural and social changes occurring in modern societies. The democratic consensus postulates civil liberties to be indispensable for democratic stability and the normal functioning of communities.

2. Personality traits and religious attitudes in promoting vs. blocking dialogue

Personality can play an important role in supporting vs. obstructing interreligious dialogue, as it psychologically regulates cognitive and emotional reactions

¹³ Paul F. Knitter. 2013. Inter-religious dialogue and social action. In *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Vol. 120. Ed. Catherine Cornille, 134. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁴ Cornille. 2013. Introduction, xiii.

and predisposes individuals to act in specific ways¹⁵. In relying on personality traits, we can predict what a person will do in a given situation. This approach is based on a well-established assumption that accurate knowledge of a person's personality will allow us to predict their future behaviour. Personality traits are relatively constant and manifest themselves similarly in common social situations.

One of the best known and influential theory of personality is The Big Five theory of personality traits that identifies five distinct fundamental factors: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience¹⁶. The theory uses terms derived from common language and suggests these five broad dimensions to describe the human personality and psyche. Out of the five factors, the following two appear especially significant to any form of dialogue, including interreligious dialogue: agreeableness and openness to experience.

In psychological terms, the attitude of dialogue corresponds to the personality trait of “agreeableness” as it describes one's interpersonal orientation towards others, including sympathy, courteousness, interpersonal flexibility, kindness, trust and forgiveness¹⁷. The agreeableness trait represents individual differences in general concern for social harmony. Agreeable individuals tend to value harmonious collaboration with others. They are generally kind, considerate, trustworthy, helpful, and willing to cooperate and compromise their interests with other people. Individuals who score high on agreeableness are likely to be nice to others and willing to help them, and they think other people have similar attitudes. In contrast, individuals with low agreeableness personalities tend to be competitive or challenging, which can often result in being argumentative or untrustworthy. Disagreeable individuals are generally unconcerned with the well-being of others and are suspicious, unfriendly, and uncooperative.

Research conducted by Aysu Ezen-Can and Kristy E. Boyer revealed associations between agreeableness and willingness to engage in dialogue¹⁸. One of the research aims was to examine the relationship between students' level of dialogue interaction and personality profile (pre-existing attitudes toward the learning task were also assessed). The results demonstrated that personality characteristics were significant predictors of the extent to which students are willing to engage

¹⁵ Lauren J. Human, Marie-Catherine Mignault, Jeremy Biesanz, Kathrine H. Rogers. 2019. “Why are well-adjusted people seen more accurately? The role of personality-behavior congruence in naturalistic social settings”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 117 (2) : 465–482.

¹⁶ Daniel Cervone, Lawrence A. Pervin. 2015. *Personality, binder ready version: theory and research*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 231–232.

¹⁷ Dong Liu, Keith W. Campbell. 2017. “The Big Five personality traits, Big Two metatraits and social media: A meta-analysis”. *Journal of Research in Personality* 70 : 231.

¹⁸ Aysu Ezen-Can, Kristy E. Boyer. 2015. “Choosing to Interact: Exploring the Relationship between Learner Personality, Attitudes, and Tutorial Dialogue Participation”. *International Educational Data Mining Society*, 125.

in dialogue with the tutoring system, as well as the number of task actions students make. Agreeableness, which was conceptualised in terms of seeing oneself as someone who is helpful and unselfish with others, was found to be a significant predictor of participation from a task-related perspective; the students who were more agreeable made more task interactions considering compile/run events. The results indicate that people who are agreeable tend to be cooperative and willing to engage in interactions requiring open and dialogical attitudes.

An association between agreeableness and various dimensions of religiosity was also found by Krok. Agreeableness positively correlated with three religiosity subscales: Religious beliefs ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$), Prayer ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$) and Participation in religious services ($r = 0.26; p < 0.05$), as well as with the general result of religiosity ($r = 0.21; p < 0.05$)¹⁹. Considering the above relationships, it should be stated that agreeableness is positively associated with such spheres of religiosity as having religious beliefs, practicing prayer and participating in various forms of religious worship, as well as with generally understood religiosity representing the individual's attitude towards God and the belief system. The findings point out that people high in agreeableness are more religiously oriented, and thus more willing to engage in religious matters. It does not necessarily imply that they would automatically be more open to interreligious dialogue. However, being more religiously oriented, they would be more likely to respond to religious topics.

Agreeableness appears to contribute to interreligious dialogue on a basis of prosociality and prosocial behaviour. Agreeableness and prosociality can be viewed as different intrapersonal systems consisting of structures and processes that operate in concert. Agreeable individuals being altruistic, straightforward, trusting, and compliant were found to be more engaged in prosocial behaviour²⁰. This result can be promising for a propensity to engage in interreligious dialogue. As agreeableness is a personality trait that reflects cooperativeness, politeness, and friendliness, people high in this trait can behave in more trusting, affectionate, and altruistic ways. Consequently, they are more likely to establish prosocial and empathetic relations in religious areas, show great concern for the religious views and beliefs of others, and be able to understand their perspectives, even though they differ from their own. As agreeable people are more likely to control their anger and negative emotions, and more inclined to avoid conflict²¹, they are

¹⁹ Dariusz Krok. 2009. Strukturalne powiązania religijności i duchowości w kontekście czynników osobowościowych. In *Osobowość i religia*. Ed. Henryk Gasiul, Emilia Wroclawska-Warchała, 291. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego.

²⁰ Gian Vittorio Caprara, Guido Alessandri, Laura Di Giunta, Laura Panerai, Nancy Eisenberg. 2010. "The contribution of agreeableness and self-efficacy beliefs to prosociality". *European Journal of Personality* 24 (1) : 52.

²¹ Chien-Che Kao, Wen-Bin Chiou. 2019. "The moderating role of agreeableness in the relationship between experiencing anger and creative performance". *The Journal of Creative Behavior* (in press).

better “psychologically predisposed” to run conversation around controversial issues, generate religiously cooperative visions, and accept different religious opinions. This attitude will undoubtedly promote every form of productive and successful interreligious dialogue.

Another personality trait that seems highly beneficial for interreligious dialogue is openness to experience. This defines the way in which an individual reacts to unknown situations and events. People with a high level of openness to experience are characterized by a tendency to positively evaluate life experiences, active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, show attentiveness to inner feelings and preference for variety, display tolerance to new events, and exhibit intellectual curiosity²². This will involve having an interest in science, the ability to constructively solve problems and seek answers to important life questions. Such a person is creative, flexible, curious and adventurous. By contrast, people with a low level of openness tend to be conventional and traditional in their outlook and behaviour. Instead of venturing into new territories, they prefer familiar routines to new experiences, and rather have a narrower scope of interests. In following traditional routines and established schedules, they prefer familiar ways of doing things and gain comfort from the environment they are already accustomed to.

As interreligious dialogue require a great deal of openness to religious diversity and receptivity to different, sometimes opposing views, the trait “openness to experience” seems highly desirable in embracing different religious traditions and practices. Openness to new ideas is one of the most important presuppositions to leading a genuine and productive dialogue in the sphere of religion: “Inter-religious dialogue thus requires, on the part of participants, willingness to openly and humbly engage the larger tradition with the fruits of the dialogue, and on the part of official representatives of the traditions encouragement and openness toward the fruits of the dialogue”²³. While engaging in interreligious dialogue, people seek out new, alternative ideas and try to come to terms with different perspectives and attempt to understand the reasons expressed and shared by others. Higher levels of openness enable people to be more open to different viewpoints and arguments. As a consequence, people are often more willing to understand religious perspectives that they have not experienced previously.

Openness to experience also assumes a high degree of flexibility and receptivity to others. Interreligious dialogue, on its part, involves an honest and constructive exchange in which participants are willing to listen to and learn from

²² Cervone, Pervin. 2015. *Personality, binder ready version: theory and research*. 230.

²³ Catherine Cornille. 2013. Conditions for inter-religious dialogue. In *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Vol. 120. Ed. Catherine Cornille, 20–33. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

one another²⁴. Therefore, people with strong openness are likely to be flexible in their opinions and not constrained by rigid beliefs and values. They will competently get involved in constructive interactions between religious perspectives, texts, teachings, and practices with the aim of deriving more value and growth. In this sense, interreligious dialogue offers a chance of gaining a deeper knowledge of other traditions as participants attempt to find out more about others' points of view. Through constructive confrontation of different teachings, individuals can obtain a broader foundation for discernment of insights that are generated during dialogue.

Research conducted in social psychology revealed that people with a high level of openness to experience tend to initiate more intergroup contact, report less prejudice and discrimination, and build more positive impressions of individual out-group members than do people with a low level of openness²⁵. It was also found that individuals high in openness are more tolerant of diverse worldviews compared with people low in openness; nevertheless, at the same time, people both high and low in openness are more intolerant of groups whose worldviews conflict with their own²⁶. These results stress the ways in which individual difference traits and features of the target groups may interact to affect prejudice. They also point out some limitations regarding openness to experience; namely, it is just one of many possible individual difference variables that can predict tolerance.

There could be some danger in having an extremely high level of openness. People who score very high on this trait can challenge authority and question traditional values. At its most extreme, it can even lead to negative personality outcomes, hostility to the law and established rules²⁷. They can manifest a disregard for conventionality and an extreme form of self-expression that does not take into account social norms and commonly accepted values. As the basic requirements of interreligious dialogue include acceptance and mutual understanding, there must exist an optimal level of openness to experience that would consider the perspectives and values shared by all participants involved in the dialogue.

In addition to personality itself, religious attitudes also play a significant role in interreligious dialogue. Examining religiousness from a cognitive perspective,

²⁴ Paul Hedges. 2016. The theology of religions typology redefined: Openness and tendencies. In *Twenty-first century theologies of religions: Retrospection and future prospects*. Ed. Elizabeth J. Harris, 77–78. Leiden: Brill.

²⁵ Mark J. Brandt, John R. Chambers, Jarret T. Crawford, Geoffrey Wetherell, Christine Reyna. 2015. "Bounded openness: The effect of openness to experience on intolerance is moderated by target group conventionality". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109 (3) : 549.

²⁶ Brandt, Chambers, Crawford, Wetherell, Reyna. 2015. "Bounded openness: The effect of openness to experience on intolerance is moderated by target group conventionality", 564.

²⁷ Ralph L. Piedmont, Martin F. Sherman, Nancy C. Sherman. 2012. "Maladaptively high and low openness: the case for experiential permeability". *Journal of Personality* 80 (6) : 1641–1642.

Robert O. Allen and Bernard Spilka found relationships between religious involvement and the attitude of dialogue²⁸. The authors distinguished two types of religiosity: committed religiosity (which contains a significant level of agreeableness) and consensual religiosity. Committed religiosity is defined as cognitively open, complex, based on abstract analyses, internally developed and artistic. Consensual religiosity is characterized by low awareness, cognitive rigidity, literal thinking about religious content, isolation and excessive concretization. Research on both orientations showed that people with a high level of committed religiousness more often attended church, considered themselves more religious, and also had less tendency to prejudice and excessive care for material things, compared with a group with high consensual religiosity.

In the further studies of Bernard Spilka and his colleagues, it turned out that the scale measuring committed religiosity is strongly correlated with the scale of intrinsic religiosity (Pearson's r ratio was within .62-.88)²⁹. Intrinsic religiosity is characterized as religion that is an end in itself and a principal motive in one's life. People with intrinsic religiousness perceive their religion as the framework for their lives, trying to consistently live their religion. The intensity of the relationship between committed religiosity and intrinsic religiosity thus indicates the psychometric occurrence of one dimension. Committed religiosity and intrinsic religiosity tend to be closely related, which points to the fact that people scoring high on these measures can successfully engage in interreligious dialogue on the basis of their religious characteristics.

3. Personal and group tolerance in interreligious dialogue

The ability to enter into interreligious dialogue is a feature of intrinsic religiosity. People who are characterised by intrinsic religiosity show readiness for dialogue or discussion³⁰. This is expressed in tolerance towards people of a different religion or worldview. By promoting tolerance, which is especially important in dialogue, we express our acceptance and respect for undisputable human rights that are guaranteed to every person and nation. Authentic tolerance can promote the religious freedom that is a necessary condition for interreligious dialogue. The postulate of tolerance is primarily due to the fact that people strive for the

²⁸ Robert O. Allen, Bernard Spilka. 1967. "Committed and consensual religion: A specification of religion-prejudice relationships". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (2) : 192–193.

²⁹ Bernard Spilka, Barbara Minton, Douglas Sizemore, Larry Stout. 1977. "Death and personal faith: A psychometric investigation". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16 (2) : 176.

³⁰ Zdzisław Chlewiński. 2000. *Religia a osobowość człowieka*. In *Religia w świecie współczesnym*. Ed. Henryk Zimoń, 123. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.

truth in different ways, and the implementation of many points of view helps discover the truth. In other words, strong convictions about the human freedom of thought expressed in the concept of tolerance underlie every kind of genuine dialogue.

From a psychological point of view, the term of tolerance can be defined as the inner quality (i.e. an attitude) of being able or willing to accept the behaviours of other people despite their having opposite or contradictory views³¹. Tolerance is a concept that refers to interpersonal, social, and existential issues. A psychological perspective on tolerance consists of three dimensions: (1) cognitive – a person has affirmative beliefs about another person or group, (2) affective – a person expresses positive feelings about others, (3) behavioural – a person has positive intentions to behave in certain ways towards others. The entire aforementioned is inextricably interconnected in everyday behaviour.

Appreciating a high value of tolerance, UNESCO provided a comprehensive definition of the term: “Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.”³². Hence, tolerance is an active interpersonal attitude that comes from the conscious realization that people have universal human rights and need to accept the fundamental freedoms of others. Therefore, practising and upholding tolerance is a fundamental human responsibility that secures democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of prejudice, dogmatism and authoritarianism as attitudes undermining and contradicting equal and legitimate social relations.

In psychology, two types of tolerance can be distinguished: interpersonal and intergroup tolerance. The first reflects tolerance for individuals with a different opinion, while the latter focuses on tolerance for individuals from a different group³³. Interpersonal tolerance occurs when people who possess different opinions, values, or preferences are willing to accept and interact with one another. It refers to the personal interactions that take place in many forms of human com-

³¹ Andrew M. Colman. 2015. *A dictionary of psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 746.

³² UNESCO. 1995. Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (22.10.2019). http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13175&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

³³ Tetsuro Kobayashi. 2010. “Bridging social capital in online communities: heterogeneity and social tolerance of online game players in Japan”. *Human Communication Research* 36 (4) : 547–549.

munication. On the other hand, intergroup tolerance denotes the situation when two or more groups with different views, values, or standards interact with one another. This form of tolerance reflects approving of viewpoints endorsed by the outgroup, holding positive feelings towards outgroup members, and displaying willingness to interact without group members³⁴. Both interpersonal and intergroup tolerance can play a significant role in interreligious dialogue that is frequently conducted on personal and group levels.

The inner nature of the interreligious dialogue that is based on open and authentic interactions among members of different religions, assumes that tolerance has a very important place in a modern society willing to embrace democratic principles. In pluralistic societies, people should consider it expedient to accept the religious views of others in order to promote tolerance and reduce prejudice. Interpersonal and intergroup tolerance becomes indispensable attitudes to building a more tolerant society, promoting diversity, and creating peaceful social relations. It becomes especially important in everyday life, as people are guided by values that clearly set goals, standards for thinking and feeling, as well as ways of acting. Respect for the person's value system defines the real dialogue that can be called "the search for shared values".

The effectiveness of interreligious dialogue depends on the presence of personal and group factors (conditions) which all contribute to the final outcome. The following baseline factors for conducting effective and constructive dialogue are proposed:

- (1) Genuine autonomy of religious motivation³⁵. Intrinsic religiosity is expressed in the fact that religious motifs are autonomous, autotelic, and not instrumental. People characterized by authentic autonomy of religious motivation treat religion as the highest value and as something that gives meaning to their lives. The fact that religious motifs become superordinate goals enables people to engage in open and fruitful interreligious dialogue³⁶. Participants in dialogue may find their common goals, either inside or outside of their religions.

³⁴ Noa Schori-Eyal, Eran Halperin, Tamar Saguy. 2019. "Intergroup commonality, political ideology, and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties in intergroup conflicts". *Journal of Peace Research* 56 (3): 426–427; Maykel Verkuyten, Kumar Yogeeswaran, Levi Adelman. 2019. "Intergroup toleration and its implications for culturally diverse societies". *Social Issues and Policy Review* 13 (1) : 5–7.

³⁵ Chlewiński. 2000. *Religia a osobowość człowieka*, 105.

³⁶ Mustafa Tekke, Paul J. Watson, Nik A. Hisham İsmail, Zhuo Chen. 2015. "Muslim religious openness and ilm: Relationships with Islamic religious reflection, religious schema, and religious commitments in Malaysia". *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 37 (3) : 296–297.

- (2) The ability to differentiate between essential and peripheral elements in religion³⁷. Religion is a phenomenon that has many aspects, some of which are very important, while others are less important. A person characterised by intrinsic religiosity can effectively examine important aspects of his/her religion and distinguish essential elements from those that are only marginal. The determinant of intrinsic religiosity that is reflected in the ability to be aware of essential and peripheral elements of religious beliefs and practices is significant for participating in fruitful and constructive dialogical exchange.
- (3) Authenticity of religious beliefs connected with commitment. On the cognitive level, religiosity is a set of beliefs and concepts regarding transcendent reality, a person, the world, and mutual relations between them. While considering interreligious dialogue, it is important to realize that it is not a purely intellectual phenomenon, but it always contains an element of choice and decision based on religious beliefs. Interreligious dialogue should be thus focused on personal commitment that guides one's life and determine authentic religiosity³⁸. Authentic interreligious dialogue involves alternating between engaging in dialogue with the other and with one's own tradition. Two factors become very important: first, people consciously and voluntarily need to accept their religious beliefs and values, and second, both those beliefs and values are real motivations which activate, direct and support their dialogical actions.
- (4) The articulation of a clear purpose³⁹. The interreligious dialogue process must encompass clearly defined purposes and objectives, including establishing common points, ultimate resolution of the conflict, solving particular problems between the communities, rebuilding relationships, removing prejudices and stereotypes, and developing methods to reconcile differences. Those objectives must be realistic and attainable; otherwise, they can lead to frustration and disappointment among both participants and organizers. Having clear and realizable objectives enables participants to create effective rules and design guidelines that facilitate the dialogue and guarantees its success. Understanding and incorporating participants' concerns through pre-dialogue analysis also contributes to

³⁷ Zdzisław Chlewiński. 1989. Religijność dojrzała. In *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii pastoralnej*. Ed. Zdzisław Chlewiński, 18. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.

³⁸ Cornille. 2013. Conditions for inter-religious dialogue, 23.

³⁹ Ayse S. Kadayifci-Orellana. 2013. Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding. In *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Vol. 120. Ed. Catherine Cornille, 157. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

attaining realistic goals, empowering the parties, and generating a sense of responsibility.

- (5) Securing the balance of power⁴⁰. One of the most important factors responsible for the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue is a proper selection of participants in terms of their “public power” i.e. access to political, economic, and social resources they hold. Structural injustices may obstruct freedom of expression and impede the nature of the meeting, as participants are not able to relate on an equal level with one another. Research has demonstrated that unequal power relations have an effect on persistent dialogical tensions⁴¹. The conditions securing power balances must be carefully laid down by selecting a neutral religious space, paying attention to religious, social and political realities, and empowering the weaker party. As the sphere of religion is very sensitive, flexibility and adaptation are critical factors for the success of conducting an effective interreligious dialogue process.
- (6) Examination of similarities and differences. Religions include a certain degree of both dogmatic and moral similarities and differences. Many religions often encompass similar values, principles, and practices. They also share comparable values and standards such as peace, harmony, compassion, justice, love, and caring for the needy. Focusing on these similarities and universal values is beneficial for finding common ground that brings people and communities closer. At the same time, potential differences need to be also addressed as, unsurprisingly, religions differ among themselves in terms of beliefs and behaviour⁴². The principle of objectivity requires all parties involved to highlight similarities and admit differences in order to establish a productive and transparent interreligious dialogue. However, focusing first on the similarities between religious traditions can help participants to build an atmosphere of openness and trust, which in turn allows them to understand existing differences and provides an opportunity to resolve them.

⁴⁰ Kadayifci-Orellana. 2013. *Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, 158.

⁴¹ Scott C. Hammond, Rob Anderson, Kenneth N. Cissna. 2003. “The problematics of dialogue and power”. *Annals of the International Communication Association* 27 (1) : 152–153.

⁴² Kadayifci-Orellana. 2013. *Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, 160.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, this article shows that interreligious dialogue is strongly embedded in both religious and psychological factors. Its psychological antecedents and processes contribute to creating an attitude of openness and transparency that enriches interreligious dialogue. Personality traits (predominantly agreeableness and openness to experience) and religious attitudes (mainly intrinsic religiosity) tend to play a significant role in promoting interreligious dialogue as they regulate cognitive, emotional, and behavioural reactions. As a consequence, the efficacy of interreligious dialogue largely depends on the presence of the personal and group conditions that help provide the final outcome. They indicate that virtually any aspect of interreligious dialogue is influenced by psychological factors connected to either personality or group processes. In evaluating interreligious dialogue, future research could focus on examining more closely the interactions between personal and group processes in regard to their influence on interreligious dialogue, or investigate psychosocial mediators taking part in relationships between personality factors and various dimensions of interreligious dialogue, e.g. conflict resolution, inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness, or communication forms.

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