



## **This special issue on religious experiences and spirituality in cultural psychiatry**

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The field of religion, spirituality and health is slowly gaining academic respectability. Over the past decade or so there have been a large number of academic publications examining the complex relationships between these three phenomena, many of which have significant implications for clinical practice. The WACP has recently established a Special Interest Group for Faith, Science and Mental Health to provide a forum for discussing spirituality and mental health and to plan future research projects. Broadly the field has focused upon theoretical and clinical aspects of three domains: religious beliefs and attendance; religious coping and religious/spiritual experiences.

This edition of the WCPRR on Religious Experiences and Spirituality in Cultural Psychiatry includes papers from renown authors worldwide which further the debate on religion and mental health. Simon Dein in *Religious experience: Perspectives and research paradigms* sets the scene by examining the category of religious experience and the overviews the diverse methodologies deployed to assess it. He concludes by arguing that religious experience is at its heart cultural. Using ideas from psychoanalysis and contemporary neuroscience, Goffredo Bartocci furthers our understanding of religious experience. His paper *From the intuition of duality to the religious double register* argues for detachment and the intuition of duality as the neural ground for the construction of the self. He asserts the importance of the conditioning power of the cultural double register imposed by the modern world antinomy between science and monotheistic dogma on the development of mind. Gian Giacomo Rovera in *Cultures and Religions in the Crisis of Post-Modernity* reminds us that the *sacred/religious* element makes the greatest contribution to developing *Value Orientations*, both at individual and community level. Building upon the exchange between Adler and Jahn, he examines how concepts of religion in post modernity impact upon new age philosophies, new psychotherapies and new religious movements.

Focusing upon messianic movements, Wolfgang Jilek and Louise Jilek-Aall, in *Psychology and psychopathology of messianic-prophetic movements: Observations on so-called "Cargo Cults" in New Guinea* provides a detailed analysis of Cargo Cults in Melanesia and points out that some cult prophets show manifest symptoms of psychiatric disorder. This is a particularly welcome contribution to religion and mental health literature where psychological/psychodynamic accounts of messianic movements are rare.

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In relation to religious coping Kate Loewenthal et al's *A gift that lasts? A prospective study of religion, cognition, mood and stress among Jews and Protestants* examines the relationship between religious coping beliefs and distress, positive affect, and intrusive thoughts in a sample 33 Protestants and 55 Jews. The study suggested that the long-term effects of religious coping were more marked on positive than on negative affect offers some support for the possibility that the stress-moderating effects of religious coping beliefs may be causal. This study increases our understanding of how religious coping 'works' and has significant implications for psychotherapeutic practice. Valerie De Marini's paper *Philosophy's role for guiding theory and practice in clinical contexts grounded in a cultural psychiatry focus: A case study illustration from southern Norway* underscores the importance of having a foundational philosophy of mental health care for consistency in clinical decision-making relating to theory and practice in cultural psychiatry. In particular, she points out the importance of obtaining existential information in the clinical process, a point which should be taken seriously by cultural psychiatrists and psychologists in an era where spiritual assessment is becoming more important in psychiatry generally. Micol Ascoli et al. in *Race, culture, ethnicity and personality disorder Group Careif position paper* discusses the impact of culture on ethnicity on the controversial diagnosis of personality disorder. Specifically religious/spiritual factors may influence the development of 'normal' personality. Although awaiting further empirical research, it appears that spirituality may be a useful coping strategy in those with diverse types of personality disorders.

Finally, Francesca Zanatta et al.'s *Communication as magic: An ethnographic study on child-God communication in Northern Italy* describes the results of a qualitative study examining children's conceptualizations of prayer. In particular, her work reinforces the growing literature that prayer is more than magical requests, perhaps more appropriately framed in terms of communication or a relationship with the Divine.

In all these papers provide a valuable contribution to the rapidly emerging field of religion, spirituality and health. We hope that you enjoy them.