# The EMCAPP Journal

## Christian Psychology Around The World

**Some of the Main Articles**

- A Holistic Perspective of Stress
- Stress and the Cross. A psycho-theological interpretation of human struggle
- Evil Rumors
- Deep spiritual Reading in the digital age – Encounter with god, live transformation and coping with stress
- Stress Perception and Measurement in Missionary Populations

Focus Topic:

## "Coping with Stress in Theory and Practice of Christian Psychology"

# Editorial

There was once a time, although that was certainly far back in the past, when no-one spoke about stress; that is, the term was not widespread at the time, and indeed unknown to most people. Not as if there was no stress back then, for it has always existed! Since the end of the 19th century, in fact, people have often spoken of "signs of fatigue".

But such things as stress management competency, which refers to the individual's own responsibility for being stressed or not, first appeared as part of a view that has developed since the 1960s. This is also the case with the view that stress not only produces direct symptoms, but can in turn be a factor in further mental incapacitations (diathesis stress model).

The first differentiation which we make is between two kinds of stress: the distress which causes us difficulties, and the eustress which, although it challenges us, does not exceed our coping capacity and can in many cases be useful in waking us up or leading us on to greater efforts. Distress comes in two variants, one which demands too little of us, otherwise described as prolonged boredom, and one which demands too much and can in the long term lead to burn-out. In analogy with burn-out, one speaks in the case of too little challenge over a long time period of a bore-out.

In this edition of Christian Psychology Around The World, we present a colourful spectrum of questions to ponder over, urgent needs, practical concepts, and experience.

Welcome to a journey into the "World of Distress", taking with us in our travelling bag these words of Jesus: "My burden is light" (Mt. 11,30) and "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (Jn. 14,27)

Yours,
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**Why do we have a bilingual journal?**

In our movement for Christian Psychology, we meet as Christians with very different backgrounds: different churches, different cul-tures, different professional trainings…

There is a common desire for the movement, but highly "multi-lingual" ideas of its realization! Therefore, a bilingual journal is just a small reference to our multilingual voices to remind us:

- Languages are an expression of cultures, countries and of their people. By writing in two languages, we want to show our respect to the authors of the articles, to their origin and heritage, and at the same time symbolically show respect to all the readers in other foreign countries.
- There are many foreign languages that we do not understand. Within our own language, we intend to understand one another, but we fail to do so quite often. To really understand one another is a great challenge, and we also want to point to this challenge by offering a bilingual journal.
- "When languages die, knowledge about life gets lost." (Suzanne Romaine, 2011)
- Finally, there is a pragmatic reason: As we want to have authors from one special country to write the main articles of every journal, it will be easier for them to distribute the journal in their own country, when it also is in their own language.

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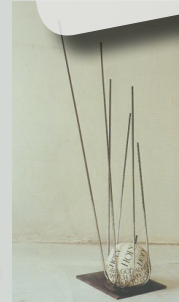
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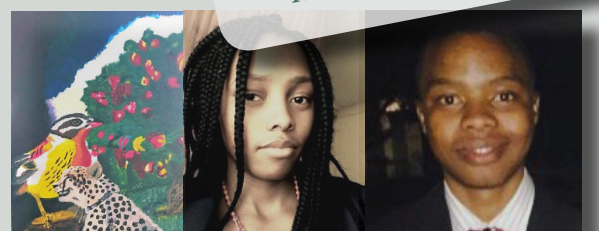
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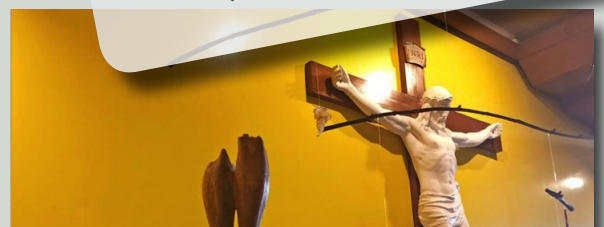
# About the Artist: Diane Fairfield



Diane E. Fairfield, born and raised in Northeast US, is an artist who now resides in the Southwest where her paintings are greatly influenced by the vast expanses that surround her. Her artistic passion was ignited in her as a child and, though her life took her in many other directions, she always returned to art and now paints full time. She has a vivid memory of the first time she knew she wanted to be an artist. At the age of 5, when drawing a scene with rain, her teacher complimented her on her accomplishment, using it as an example to the other children and succeeding in turning on a switch within her. That passion remains.

Her college and career years were also spent in the Northeast US where she evolved into a career in human resource management. A major in commercial art in college, she realized that discipline did not fulfill her artistic passion and therefore continued studies in fine art following college. Fairfield has taken courses and workshops at a number of institutions both in New England and Arizona and continues to study through her own research and exploration.

In 1997 she and her husband made a major life decision and moved to southeast Arizona, leaving their careers and traditional life styles behind. One of the driving reasons for this change was to enable them to pursue art full time. Once they had moved from a suburban, career-driven life in the Boston area of New England to an extremely rural life in an undeveloped area in Arizona, their time was initially consumed in building their new home, beginning with a barn for their horses. Animals, and especially horses and dogs, are one of Diane's great loves, thus the need to take care of them first.

Following that accomplishment they turned their hands to building their house and art studio themselves out of straw bale construction. Once completed, they began to fulfill their dreams of being fully engaged in art.

Diane is a colorist whose style is painterly and



Streams in the Desert

How Long?

intuitive. Often she does not rely heavily on preliminary sketches other than the occasional thumbnail but prefers to plunge in, beginning with an idea of the composition followed by quick application of initial color. From there she builds the painting, line upon line, layer upon layer, often using palette knives and other tools to apply paint directly without brushes. She is inspired by the natural environment around her, her faith, and the visions seen in her "mind's eye". For Fairfield, painting is a way of expressing not only the seen but the unseen, which for her are interwoven. "The challenge is to paint not only what my eyes see but also to make the invisible visible. I paint to express the wonder of what I see both physically and spiritually and am rarely as happy as when at work in my studio."

The big sky, clarity, and the open space atmosphere, in which she now lives, impact much of her work along with the brilliant colors of the southwest skies. Viewers of her work have described it as "powerful" and having a quality that "draws you in".

Loving art that suggests rather than gives detail, her desire is to invite viewers into her paintings to experience what she sees, both naturally and spiritually. The themes that dominate her work are landscapes and nature, abstractions and spiritual or visionary work; often these are interconnected.

In her vision of art she is committed to communicating about beauty and the glory of God. "There is much in this life to pull us down and oppress us. My desire is to create a space where people can be uplifted and inspired - a place where they can get in touch with something that enriches them" says Diane.

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Part One

# Understanding Stress and Coping

Steven L. Voss (USA)

# A Holistic Perspective of Stress

I recall my first introduction to an academic understanding of stress during a college course I took in the 1980's. It was a psychology course and the instructor had us read about Hans Selye, the Hungarian/Canadian endocrinologist who studied the effects of stress on the body. I still recall the basis of his theory by the acronyms of "GAS" and "ARC." "GAS" was how I remembered the key ideas of the General Adaptation Syndrome. The acronym "ARC" dealt with the effect of long-term stress on the body. The letter "A" represented the alarm reaction, which is the initial response to the stressor. "R" stood for resistance, which is the body's mobilization effort to deal with the stressor and "C" was the crash or exhaustion that would take place after a prolonged period of stress.

## Development of the Construct of Stress

Selye's research (1976) was focused on the physical effects of stress on the body. The major implication of his work showed there was a physical and psychological connection: a body-soul connection. Psychological and environmental stressors could lead to physical and emotional exhaustion and bodies could pay the price. Selye borrowed the term stress from engineering, a field where stress was defined as effects of pressure or force on metal or other objects and the total amount of resistance that could be withstood. Since the time that Selye developed his theory, a more complex understanding of how stress impacts health and bodily systems has emerged. Maté (2003) has summarized more recent findings of this connection in a book for the general public entitled, When the Boy Says No.

The term stress eventually became a household term, but it has not always been that way. Hutmacher (2019) stated that the term stress only came into use during the last half of the 20th century. Kugelmann (1992) has also addressed the history of the construct and emphasized

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The term stress eventually became a household term, but it has not always been that way. Hutmacher (2019) stated that the term stress only came into use during the last half of the 20th century. Kugelmann (1992) has also addressed the history of the construct and emphasized the recent normalization of the word as applied to human experience. For example, a student recently came into my office and talked about how stressed she was because of a friendship concern. During exam weeks, students commiserate about the stress they feel. A client started our session recently by discussing the complexity of her life and the stress she experienced from in-laws. Another client talked about the stress of his job. Still another client was forlorn by the stress of health issues. Prior to the mid 1900's, this phrase would not have been used. Though the terminology is relatively new, the experience is not. Before the common expression of the word stress, people experienced events that brought them worry, depression, grief, sorrow, and other emotions. Today we often associate these experiences with stress. In the more general use of the term, modern persons often use the term stress to communicate that life is getting out of balance (Hutmacher, 2019).

The cocept of stress has become reified. Contemporary psychological research has solidified the concept of stress in our daily lives. Meyers and DeWall (2019) in their introductory psychology text divide stressors into three major categories: "catastrophes, significant life changes, and daily hassles" (p. 385). These are the common experiences of humanity throughout the ages. A simple review of human history shows that humans have faced these types of experiences both globally and historically. However, in the last approximate 70 years, we catalog these events as being stressful. Indeed, a modern view of the construct of stress has added to an understanding of the complex relationship between the body and the soul, our physiology and our psychology. Selye's (1976) significant contribution was to show the relationship between cellular events and behavioral and interpersonal events. We now commonly accept that there are interactions between psychological experiences and physical symptoms.

The growth of the field of health psychology, specifically psychoneuroimmunology provides a growing body of research that shows that physical, bodily, and psychological events are not isolated and indeed work together to impact mental and physical health. Kiecolt-Glasser, et al., (1998) provide a vivid example. Using small puncture wounds purposely inflicted into the skin, these researchers showed that research participants heal 40% slower if the wound occurred prior to a major exam compared to a wound that occurred during summer vacation when there is less stress. In other studies, it was shown that married couples in conflict heal from the same type of puncture wound at slower rates (Kiecolt-Glasser, et al., 2005). Other research shows the relationship between psychological trauma and inflammation on a cellular level, a condition associated with heart disease and other health issues (O'Donovan, Neylan, Metzler, & Cohen, 2012).

This article is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of the research that shows a mind-body connection. Previously cited studies are only examples of the types of research being done in the area of mind and body. A simple review of the literature will provide a plethora of evidence to show this connection. For the lay reader, Maté (2003) provides a host of clinical examples to show how psychological factors and stress can impact physical health. Rather, the focus of this article is to consider stress as modern construct that can be understood physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

**Stress and Modern Life**
Throughout time, challenging events and times have tested the fortitude of persons. Today we

call these events and experiences stressors. Cultural and technological changes in recent years have resulted in an expansion of stressors experienced by many people around the globe. Rapid changes in modern life have accelerated the need for more flexibility, a task that is difficult for many (Hutmacher, 2019). Though technology may reduce stress in some ways, it can increase stress in other ways. Stone (2017) summarized five modern-day stressors that are unlike stressors in previous generations. He suggested that in contemporary culture, 1) we interact with a greater diversity of people, 2) because of television and other modern modes of media, we compare ourselves to higher standards, 3) we specialize more which means that we have to work harder and harder to achieve mastery in a subject, 4) the economy changes quickly and so do jobs. This results in an angst with the concept of obsolescence, and last, 5) innovation happens faster. Innovations are often highly beneficial, but the cost of innovation is often felt in the markets, economy, jobs, and predictability in life. These stressors often lead to the perception that life is out of control. Stressors like these are what often lead people to feel agitated and experience some form of nervous tension. The problem is that these ongoing stressors impact the physiology in a subtle but ongoing way. For some persons, stress may go unnoticed. Others may seek it out. In my own clinical experience, I have worked with individuals who might be described as adrenaline junkies. They are not aware of their stress, but they are aware when life is quiet, and they are not being "stressed" with a constant and demanding schedule. This person seems to thrive on the "rush" of the stress hormones that charge their activity level.

Another example of the adrenaline junky is the person who lives in a pattern of ongoing busyness. The lack of either intentional or unintentional boundary setting, and ongoing commitments can lead to burn-out and exhaustion. The person thrives on their busyness and does not risk life without a packed shedule. It may be the need to be needed and sometimes it is the exhilaration from the rush of stress chemicals. Other times busyness can be intentional in order to avoid aspects of life that may be un-

pleasant, elicit anxiety, or lead to other negative reactions.

In her book, Invitation to Retreat, conference leader and spiritual director, Ruth Haley Barton (2018) discussed the exhaustion that is often felt by people who thrive on the next message and post that is made, the newest news alert, or other messages that bombard modern smart phones. This overstimulation and information overload can easily distract people from the important things in life, can reduce attention where it is needed most and, in my observation, can marginalize the important people in a person's life. Barton (2018) wrote that one of the great dangers to the church today is not hedonism, but rather the distraction that is brought on by constantly being "plugged into" the world. Whether the constant checking of one's phone for messages and updates is the problem or the symptom may be debated. What I find is that in either case, it is problematic for healthy functioning.

The impact on the body may go unnoticed for years, but eventually the toll on the body will exert itself. There will be the exhaustion that Selye discussed. The body is prevented from returning to a normal state of homeostasis and will eventually experience cellular damage. Selye (1976) found that stress tends to impact three major types of tissue or organs in the body. These include the adrenal glands which are part of the endocrine system; the thymus, spleen, and lymph glands in the immune system; and the intestinal linings of the digestive system.
Ongoing stress on these physical systems and organs has a negative impact on physical health. The psychological impact of stress on persons in terms of mental illness and damaged relationships is also clear. It is common today to accept that stress plays a part in the development of psychological disorders. The diathesis-stress model suggests that many psychological disorders are the result of biological or psychological predispositions (the diathesis) plus the addition of stressors in a person's life. Learning how to manage stress is an important skill to learn as it aids in the prevention of illness and improves heath.

Called Out from the Desert

**Theological Perspectives of Stress**

There are multitudes of environmental events that can serve as stressors for people, some of which have already been discussed. Through the lens of the biblical writer, stress and worry may not be strongly differentiated. Stress, at least as a conscious experience is often communicated as worry, fretting, or being overwhelmed. Stress can come from experiencing horrific events and it can be experienced as a result of daily hassles like busy schedules, crowded traffic commutes, or appliances breaking down. Some stress is brought on by our choices and commitments while other stressors are out of our control. How is one to see these events through a biblical or theological lens?

Writing from the perspective of a tripartite nature of humanity, where persons are considered to consist of body, soul, and spirit, the impact of stress must be considered in each area of our lives. The evidence is clear about the impact of stress on the physical and psychological aspects of our lives as previously discussed. But what about the spiritual component of our lives? If present human experience is consistent with the human experience of persons in biblical times, there may be examples of stress that Jesus and Paul address with persons, even if stress was not part of the nomenclature. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs us to trust in God for our daily needs and not be anxious like the pagans who worry about "tomorrow." A person whose spirit has been brought to life through a relationship with Jesus (1 John 5:12) has a new perspective. In this new life, our spirit can commune with God's spirit to give peace in times of potential stress about one's personal needs. Paul built on this idea and said "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7, New International Version). By writing these words, it seems obvious that believers were feeling anxious and stressed. But through the lens of spiritual reality, the believer can do something that unbelievers cannot accomplish. Believers can trust God. Paul and Jesus prvide a spiritual perspective that is not only applicable for believers in an ancient time, but also for modern believers.

But how does this relate to modern stressors? Remember that stressors are obstacles or events in our environment. Stress is experienced according to the interpretation given these events. Stressors deal with those things that put pressure on us. It makes really no difference what the pressure or stressor is. It is the experience of the stressor that causes eventual breakdown or exhaustion. There are many stress management techniques that psychologists and counselors can prescribe. They all work to varying degrees of success because they address the psychological and physical aspects of humanity. In this sense, believers and non-believers can all benefit equally well. However, a biblically informed psychology will also address the third part of human nature, the spirit. Because man's spirit has been brought from death to life (Rom. 6:13, 8:10; 1 John 3:14), believers have a spirit that has communion with God. We have access to the Father through the Son and because of this we have spiritual life. Spiritual life allows us to see the world, including our stressors differently. Paul wrote that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14, NIV). In coping with stress, the person born of the spirit can reframe the stressors in life through the lens of God's perspective. This psychological reframe goes beyond the soulishness of the person: it has spiritual meaning that only a child of God can fully grasp (1 Cor. 2:14). Where other stress management techniques address the body (exercise, breathing), or the soul (distraction, relaxation, list making, prioritizing, reframing), spiritual approaches are ultimately predicated on trust in the person of Christ. Through trust in Christ, stressors have the potential to take on meanings beyond simple psychological reframes. For example, the writer of Hebrews tells us to consider how the stressor (struggle, hardship) can be seen through the lens of spiritual discipline (Heb. 12:7). In this sense, the uncontrollable events that bring the experience

of stress can be seen to produce Godly benefit (Heb. 12: 10-11). Even in the secular literature, there is evidence that stress and trauma can have benefits for people (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996). Though like a reframe, the difference is that trust in God allows the stressor to have spiritual benefit. The person without the spirit cannot envision this.

Not all stressors are equally stressful or damaging and being stressed repeatedly in small ways may be as damaging as more catastrophic events. Ongoing daily hassles can impact our health as negatively as large catastrophic stressors and, in some ways, may even be worse as they wear down the physical and psychological defenses that ward off illness. Ongoing stress we live with because of lifestyles, either within or out of our control can wear on us. This was the point Selye (1976) and Maté (2003) made. We must consider the ways we drive ourselves and instead pursue lifestyles that incorporate balance and rest.

Theologically, the problem of stress may be traced to the original garden. The man and woman were given a choice in the garden. What is not known is whether in their pre-fall nature they experienced the stress of choice. From an existential point of view, our own freedom can bring anxiety and stress. Upon grasping the responsibility persons have with freedom, the fear of failure or the anxiety over potential outcomes of a choice can lead to feeling stressed. It is not unusual to listen to my students or clients lament over having to decide between different jobs, to marry a person or not, to break up or not, or even to make a move across the country for a new job. In these cases, personal intentional sin is not the problem. In each of these cases, the angst of the responsibility for the choice is experienced. Change creates the state of the unknown. Change is scary. Knowing that one is responsible for their choices and the outcome of the choices is a heavy burden for some people. In the garden, the freedom to choose was given to the man and woman. It is interesting to consider if the pre-fall couple experienced stress over the choice. The scripture is quiet on this topic. It is entirely speculative that Eve may have felt stress. Perhaps in her gullibility, the experience

of stress was not present. Either way, stress was sure to follow. In the moment that their "eyes were opened" (Gen. 3:7), they felt the change and certainly the stress of the new awareness of guilt and shame was experienced. From that point forward, the weight of decision making would be with humankind. It would mean that decisions could have bad consequences and the person making the decision would be responsible. There is often heavy weight – stress – that is experienced with this reality. Furthermore, the stress of guilt and shame that accompanies a sinful choice would become a reality. In a lost condition, man's dead spirit disconnects him from God. Yet, because of the innate spiritual nature of the human creature, it is possible to ask questions about meaning. Unfortunately, meaning is often sought in things other than God. The search for meaning does not necessarily lead to finding meaning. Frankl (1984/1946) referred to this as existential frustration. Jang's research (2016) confirmed Frankl's ideas. His data showed that it is possible that a search for meaning can be related to distress, but if meaning is found, as is often the case in religious experiences, the distress is dispelled. Finding meaning in life reduces distress. However, if a person engages in a religious experience but fails to find meaning in it, then distress or anxiety will likely not decrease. Jang's (2016) work provides a steppingstone to further explore existential meaning and its relationship to distress.

From the biblical narrative of the fall, a couple things stand out. First, the stress of the guilt led to covering and hiding. The couple covered their nakedness and they hid from God. In this example, the couple did what humans have been doing since that monumental time in history – hide. Hiding and covering are ways to deal with stress and are a cause of stress. Often the ways we avoid issues in our lives only leads to more stress. Avoidance and withdrawal are only short-term solutions but generally can lead to the experience of more stress.

In Genesis 3:17-19, God spoke to the man and told him he would be engaged in painful toil (Gen. 3:17). Pain will also accompany the birth of children (Gen. 3:16). The areas of life designed to be blessings, relationships and work,

are instead now going to be filled with pain, sorrow, and grief. One perspective to consider is that the relational and work areas of life will not only be painful in themselves, but they will be out of balance and this will also produce pain and stress. A concrete way of understanding the original meaning of stress can be helpful: pressure applied against an object that will eventually weaken or fracture the object. In human terms, this is felt as exhaustion or pain. When the stress of a life lived out of balance presses on the human psyche and on human relationships, the result can be what once was called a "break-down" and in the case of relationships, perhaps a break-up. These tragic experiences are too common and give testimony to the disorder and chaos in our lives.

The imbalanced and sinful condition of humanity is also described in Romans 1:25. In this passage, Paul refered to the human condition of trading truth for lies, for worshipping created things rather than the creator. The result is that God gave humanity over to its desire. The outcome is found in Romans 1:26-32. The stress brought on by such experiences is clear.

Theologically, some of the stress humanity experience in life comes from living life our own way. In our lack of trust in God, we live independent of God and his design. We seek peace but largely can't find it. However, as believers, we know that peace comes from a trusting relationship with Jesus. Notice what Jesus said in John 14:27. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (NIV). The peace that Jesus gives cannot be found in the things of the world or the human relationships we try to form. Our spiritual identity is designed to be in Christ and when we have that priority straight, we are on a plane to handle the many stressors of life in a way that leads to confidence and trust that God will walk with us through the stressors and difficulties of our lives (Ps. 23:4ff.).

Believers, too, can confuse priorities. Jesus confronted Martha for prioritizing things over persons in Luke 10:38-42. "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, NIV). It is apparent that Martha had become stressed over the preparations, an experience many people can have when entertaining guests. This is an example of a stress brought on by prioritizing events over persons and putting too much focus on the wrong thing. If I were to set down with Martha in my psychotherapy office, I might explore with Martha the mindset she had while fussing over the preparations for her company. Was she perfectionistic and driven to appear adequate? Was she rule-conscious and bound by narrow confines of how to entertain? Was she playing out themes from her childhood where she was an oldest child and expected to be the responsible one? Did she wrestle with sibling rivalry and her need was to look superior? Was she simply following the expected custom of the day for serving a guest? No matter what the psychological explanation, Jesus's words were clear. Martha had her priorities backwards. Mary had chosen to spend time with her guest, to prioritize the person over appearance and service. In this biblical example of stress, we can learn that stress can occur when our priorities are not in a healthy order, even for those who have a relationship with Jesus.

**Body Care and Sabbath as Ways to Destress**

Health-care professionals are often expected to help people learn to handle their stressors in healthy ways. This expectation exists although there is often little or no formal training to help professionals learn how to help others manage stress. Most mental health professionals, at some point in therapy, will assist clients to handle stress in healthier ways.

Helping people manage their stress is an important task for a therapist. Furthermore, from a holistic and Christian perspective, it is important to note that because stress can impact physical health, helping people manage stress is consistent with care and nurturance of the temple of the Holy Spirit, the human body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Though the context of this verse is not about stress, a general application is that we are to honor God with our bodies (v. 20). God came to redeem embodied souls and the

resurrection of the body reminds us of the importance of bodies. Stress management in this sense is truly a spiritual endeavor. Stress management is not engaged just to relieve feeling of pressure. Stress management is taking care of ourselves because it honors God.

A closer look at the scripture reveals Jesus's perspective. Consider Mark 6:31-32, "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place" (NIV). I have emphasized the quiet and solitary place because one of the antidotes to stress and busyness is to retreat from it. Jesus prescribed this for his disciples and the application is clear for our lives too. Even from the beginning, God instructed humanity to have a day of rest. Though there are several implications to a day of rest, at least one of them is that we need to retreat from our work. We need boundaries, even around our schedules and work. The health of our body, soul, and spirit depends on taking a break from our work. Spiritually, it reminds us to be dependent on God, not ourselves. We quickly become spiritually unbalanced when we depend more on ourselves and what we believe we can accomplish than the God who gives us life and our work meaning.

A couple years ago, I experienced an especially challenging time. I had let life and work get out of balance. When the academic year was over, I engaged in a personal and private spiritual retreat to the mountains. There, in a quiet place, away from the distractions, I was able to let go of the burdens I had let take over my life. I rested from my work, and I reconnected with God. Retreats can be seen as a weakness. But retreats can be ways to regroup in order to fight another day. This retreat to a quiet place allowed me to rejuvenate spiritually, psychologically, and physically. Spiritually guided retreats are excellent ways to deal with stress.

A sabbath was designed by God to remind us of our dependency on him as well as for body and soul rest (Exod. 20:8-11). It is to be a holy day and set apart for the Lord. Cessation from our work reminds us that our focus in life and work is to be on God, not our accomplishments. Accepting our limitations may allow us to set boundaries around our lives that provides the body and soul the relief needed to rejuvenate. Living life at full speed may be admirable from a worldly or production standpoint, but in the end, it leads to burnout. It also speaks to a life that may be filled with pride in what one can accomplish or alternatively, it could represent a lack of trust in God. Letting go of our over-busy agenda allows us to admit to God that he is in control and I am not. How much stress could be reduced from our lives if we let go of co-dependent behavioral patterns and trusted God? Can we take a day each week and rest in the biblical sense? Some of us may struggle with this in our busy, modern culture, but I am convinced that God's plan for rest was truly designed to benefit our body, soul, and spirit.

**Conclusion**
The human person was designed as a body-soul-spirit to be in relationship with God. The fall led to spiritual death as well as a life that quickly gets out of balance. In a fallen world, we will experience stress and tribulation. The experience of stress exacerbates our fallenness by its negative impact on our physical, mental, and spiritual life. Jesus reminds us: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV). Stress will be part of life. Still, we can have peace.

Though many stressors are out of our control, some are within our ability to change or be reduced. Whether we can control the stressors or not, it is imperative that we learn to manage our stress as it ultimately allows us to care for our bodies which are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Changing our lifestyle can be a way of honoring God. We can show more dependency on him and less on ourselves, which is often rooted in psychologically misguided attempts to deal with life, ourselves, or others. There are many psychological tools available to help deal with stress, but a biblically informed psychology will also help us see our circumstances through the eyes of Christ who wants to mature us in Godliness and holiness.

Called out of Doubt

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**Maria Joubert (Russia)**

# Comment to "A Holistic Perspective of Stress"

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**Former contributions in our eJournal by Maria you can see her:**

An article by Steven L. Voss is focused on the current topic of stress. The author aimed to "consider stress as modern construct that can be understood physically, psychologically, and spiritually."

The author starts out the article reminding a reader various facts about stress and its negative impact on the physical and mental health of a person. Consequently, the author's conclusion looks clear: the response to stress should be the retreat, taking care of one's physical and mental health, relaxation and restoration of the lost balance. Perhaps the author's discourse would be more complete if he also touched on the topic of the impact of stress on spiritual health.

Another part of the article is dedicated to the modern concept of stress. The author, referring to researches of Kugelmann and Hutmacher, speaks of the widespread use of the term 'stress' in the last half of 20th century and points out that over time the word 'stress' began to replace person's experiences of "worry, depression, grief, sorrow, and other emotions". It seems that the concept of stress has become all-embracing, and vast variety of human experiences may be called just 'stress'. This arises a question if there are some risks that the focusing on the concept of stress is replacing the meaning of all these emotional and moral experiences and to devalue them. If it is so, does it mean that in this case therapy are forced to deal with client's stress, and not to relate to the essential content of his experience and its sense.

Speaking about a theological perspective, the term 'stress' toward a person's relationship with God may be also problematic. In the situation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the original garden God does not worry about their stress. He cares about other things. Of course, God helps a person in all situations, including stressful ones, and this is a matter of our faith. However, God saves a person and takes care of his soul without concern how to reduce a person's stress level. We can assume that stress is not the subject of a relationship between God and the man. When a person experiencing repentance, he faces one of the biggest stress. We may suppose that for God in His care of human soul, the depth of person's remorse is more important than the force of human stress.

The main idea of the author was to tell about stress as a modern construct on physical, psychological, and spiritual levels, as a person was designed by God as a body-soul-spirit. However, after reading this text, a reader still wonders "how does human stress manifest itself in the context of the spiritual level?" and "what is the structure of stress in the spiritual space?", because the answers on these questions are not much clear from the article.

## Romuald Jaworsky (Poland)

# Stress and the Cross

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**Former conributions in our eJournal by Romuald you can see her:**
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https://emcapp.ignis.de/1/#/46
https://emcapp.ignis.de/1/#/34

Although the concept of „stress" is ambiguous, it can be said that it concerns difficult situations, when the body and mind are alert and prepared to cope with such situations, counteract them or use them to one's advantage in fulfilling desires and aspirations. In the Christian tradition, dealing with hardships in life is often symbolized and referred to as the "Cross". Christians, aware of the challenges life might bring in fostering and implementing their values, define the efforts and struggle to remain faithful to God as "carrying the Cross". Since psychology describes being



## Romuald Jaworski (Polska)

# Stres i krzyż. Psychologiczno-teologiczna interpretacja ludzkich zmagań

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Wprawdzie pojęcie „stres" jest niejednoznaczne, jednak można zgodzić się z tym, że dotyczy sytuacji trudnych i szczególnej mobilizacji organizmu i osobowości dla zaradzenia sytuacji stresowej lub wykorzystania jej przy realizacji pragnień i dążeń. W tradycji chrześcijańskiej konfrontację z trudnościami życia określa się często jako „krzyż". Chrześcijanie świadomi wyzwań, jakie niesie życie w związku z osiąganiem i realizowaniem wartości, określają trud i zmagania realizowane w imię wierności Bogu jako „niesienie krzyża". Skoro konfrontacja z trudnościami życia jest opisywana w psychologii jako stres, a w teologii jako krzyż, to warto zastanowić się, jakie znaczące elementy treściowe opisujące zmagania człowieka odnajdujemy w każdym z tych ujęć.

Spojrzenie na trudne doświadczenia egzystencjalne z wielu perspektyw (np. psychologicznej i teologicznej) pozwala często lepiej je opisać i zrozumieć. Także analiza ludzkich zmagań z

confronted with the difficulties of life as stress, and theology as „the cross“, it is worth examining what significant aspects describing human struggles these two approaches highlight.

Considering difficult existential experiences from several points of view (e.g. psychological and theological) often allows to better describe and understand them. Also, analyses of human struggles with difficulties conducted simultaneously from the psychological and theological perspective can result in interesting and valuable insights. Taking into account semantic and methodological differences and, at the same time, exploring significant aspects of these concepts based on studies in both domains can be heuristically rewarding. Popular sayings such as: "per aspera ad astra" and "there is victory in the Cross" abound in literature and culture. These sayings reflect the belief that achieving important and valuable goals requires going through hardship, suffering and pain. However, the meaning lies not in these painful experiences, but in the final purpose of man.

The Cross has become a symbol of pain, suffering, anguish, torment and humiliation, but, on the other hand, also a sign of victory over fear, pain, hatred and even death.

In psychology, stress is associated with human struggles with difficulties that arise on the way to achieving goals. H. Selye's biological and Lazarus' psychological concepts complement each other, making for an interesting interpretation of one's feelings and experiences occurring in confrontation with internal and external obstacles on the way to success.

Suffering involved in overcoming difficulties and its interpretation is a key to understand experiences and behaviour of people pursuing some goals. Understanding this phenomenon allows for better understanding of the dynamics of change and development in human life.

Suffering is the trigger bringing about changes. When one does not hurt, there is no motivation for change, no major impulse for development. Patients, when asked about the period when they experienced the most significant development in their lives, often pointed out times when they were suffering.

Now a generation is on the rise. One that had

trudnościami dokonana równocześnie z perspektywy psychologii i teologii może przynieść ciekawe i wartościowe owoce. Uwzględnienie różnic semantycznych i metodologicznych a zarazem wydobycie istotnych treści tych pojęć poprzez wykorzystanie dorobku badań w obu dziedzinach może być heurystycznie owocne. W literaturze i kulturze znane są powiedzenia: „per aspera ad astra" i „przez krzyż do zwycięstwa". W tych powiedzeniach ujawnia się przekonanie, że osiąganie ważnych i wartościowych celów wiąże się z trudem, cierpieniem i bólem. Jednak sens tych bolesnych doświadczeń leży nie w nich samych, ale w celu do którego człowieka zmierza.

Krzyż stał się symbolem bólu, cierpienia, udręki, męki i poniżenia, ale też znakiem zwycięstwa nad lękiem, bólem, nienawiścią a nawet śmiercią.

W psychologii pod hasłem stresu opisane są zmagania człowieka z trudnościami pojawiającymi się na drodze realizacji celów. Koncepcja biologiczna H. Selyego i psychologiczna Lazarusa uzupełniają się stanowiąc ciekawą interpretację doznań i przeżyć występujących w konfrontacji z przeszkodami wewnętrznymi i zewnętrznymi występującymi na drodze do sukcesu.

Cierpienie związane z pokonywaniem trudności i jego interpretacja jest kluczowym hasłem do zrozumienia wielu przeżyć i zachowania ludzi dążących do celu. Zrozumienie tego fenomeny pozwala lepiej zrozumieć dynamikę zmian w życiu człowieka i właściwości rozwoju życia.

Cierpienie jest czynnikiem wyzwalającym zmiany. Gdy nic nie boli, nie ma motywacji do zmian, brakuje istotnego impulsu dla rozwoju. Pacjenci pytani o to, kiedy doświadczyli najbardziej znaczącego rozwoju w swoim życiu, odpowiadali najczęściej: „Wtedy, gdy cierpiałem". Wzrosło pokolenie młodych ludzi, którym rodzice i otoczenie usuwało z drogi życia wszelkie trudności. Ci, którzy byli wychowywani bezstresowo nie nauczyli się walki, nie opanowali strategii pokonywania trudności, wycofują się i rezygnują z realizacji pragnień, przeżywają głęboko porażki i klęski życiowe. Czy możliwe jest na co dzień osiągnięcie znaczących celów i realizacja zadań życiowych bez wysiłku, trudu i cierpienia? Określony optymalny poziom
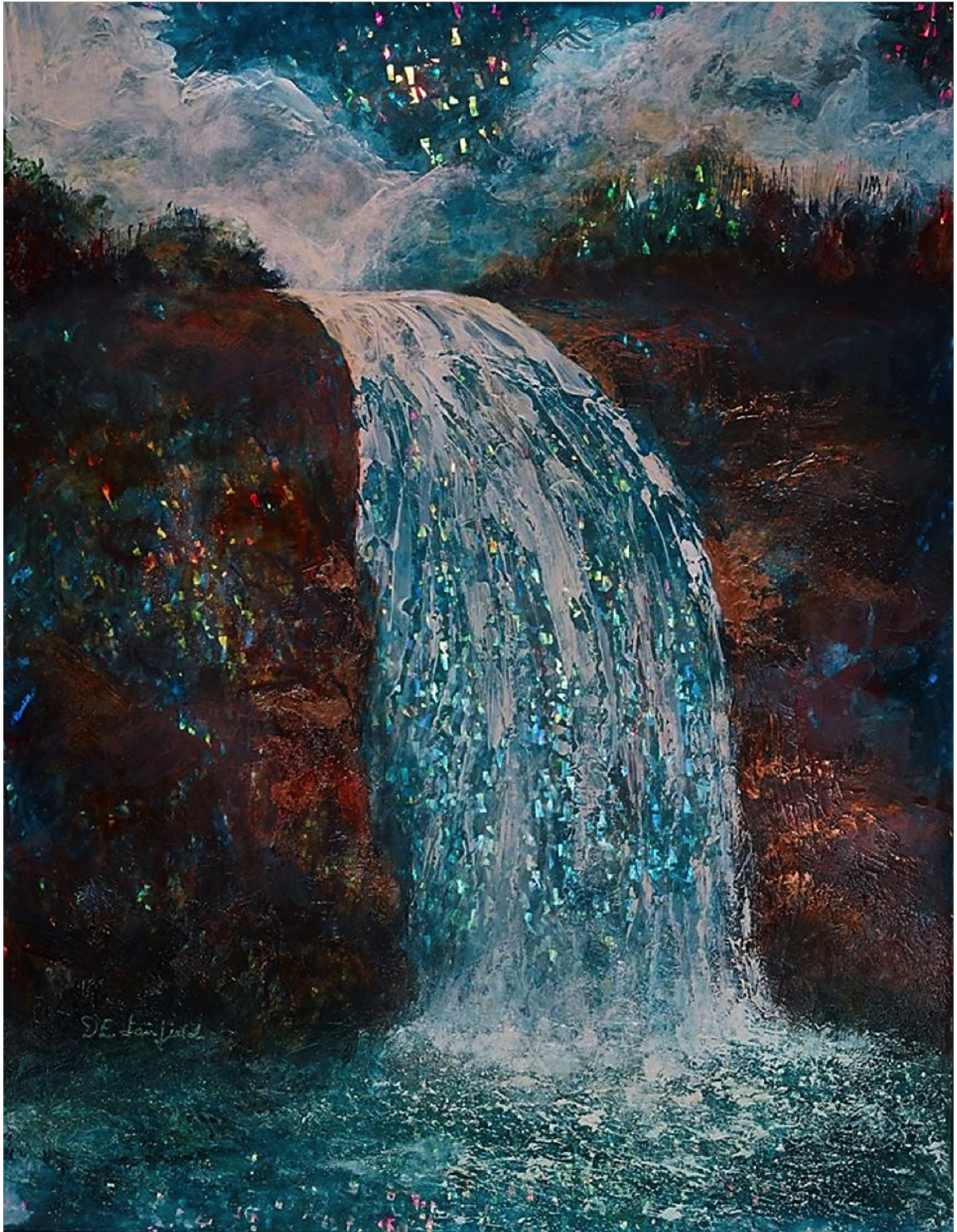
Pour Out On Us

all difficulties removed from their lives by their parents. One that was brought up in a stress-free environment and had never learnt to fight and master the strategy of overcoming difficulties. One that easily gives up their aspirations and agonizes over life failures. Is it possible to achieve significant goals and accomplish anything in life without effort and suffering? A certain optimal level of stress and struggle is necessary for successful life, which is confirmed by psychologists. Theologians, in turn, regard facing one's Cross as an inspiration and stimulation on the way to achieving the goal of life, which is maturity and , in the end, salvation.

Theology and ministerial practice deals with different attitudes towards the Cross as a symbol of suffering. There are people who tend to run away from it, denying their hardships and ignoring them, favouring an easy and pleasant life. Such individuals expect success without any personal effort and commitment. However, when they fail to achieve it, they experience frustration and resentment towards people around them and God. On the other hand, other people cherish suffering as a gift and as an end in itself. At the beginning, they often find joy in their suffering, but later they tend to develop bitterness and disillusionment with life, which they think brings only hardships, fear and pain. They become disappointed with themselves and people around them.

Theology devotes a great deal of attention to searching for the source and causes of suffering. What is pointed out as an answer, is the original sin. It had left a scar on human nature and the whole human existence and is the ultimate cause of all pain and suffering. Demon activities, destructive social impact of specific people and social groups are indicated as the causes of the hardships experienced, but also God can be regarded as one who inflicts suffering on people, especially when they need stimulation for development.

**Psycho-theological interpretation of stress and the Cross**

The theory developed by H. Selye raises the issue of the level of stress. After the impact of a stressor reaches its culmination point, the meaning of stress changes. In the first stage,

napięcia i walki jest konieczny dla życia. Psychologowie odpowiadają: warunkiem efektywnego życia jest optymalny poziom stresu. Teologowie mówią o konfrontacji z krzyżem, jako inspiracji i stymulacji na drodze realizowania celu życia jakim jest dojrzałość i zbawienie.

W teologii i duszpasterstwie mówi się o różnych postawach wobec krzyża symbolizującego cierpienie. Są osoby, które mają tendencję ucieczki od krzyża, wypierania trudności, nie dostrzegania ich, lansowania życia łatwego i przyjemnego. Oczekują one osiągania sukcesu bez osobistego trudu i zaangażowania. A gdy ten sukces nie nadchodzi przeżywają frustracje i ujawniają postawy roszczeniowe wobec otoczenia, wobec ludzi i Boga. Są też inne osoby, które pielęgnują cierpienie traktując je jako dar i cel sam w sobie. Osoby te często najpierw odnajdują radość z doznawanego cierpienia a potem głębokie rozgoryczenie i zawód życiem, które ich zdaniem przynosi tylko trud, lęk i ból. Przeżywają rozczarowanie sobą i otoczeniem.

W teologii dużo uwagi poświęca się poszukiwania odpowiedzi na pytanie o źródła i przyczyny cierpienia. W odpowiedzi wskazuje się na grzech pierworodny, który stał się przyczyną zranienia ludzkiej natury. Ta rana ogarniająca całość ludzkiej egzystencji jest ostateczną przyczyną każdego bólu i cierpienia. W poszukiwani przyczyn doznawanych trudności wskazuje się na działania demonów, destrukcyjne oddziaływanie społeczne określonych ludzi i grup społecznych. Także Bóg spostrzegany jest jako ten, który bywa dawcą cierpienia, szczególnie w sytuacjach stymulacji rozwoju i wychowania.

**Teologiczna i psychologiczna interpretacja stresu i krzyża**

W koncepcji stresu opracowanej przez H. Selyego mowa jest o znaczeniu poziomu stresu. Gdy siła stresora wzrasta osiąga punkt szczytowy, po którym dochodzi do zmiany znaczenia stresu. W tej pierwszej fazie stres jawi się jako rzeczywistość korzystna ułatwiająca mobilizację organizmu i sprzyjająca osiąganiu zamierzonych celów. W tej drugiej fazie stres oznacza zmęczenie, wyczerpanie i zagrożenie dla organizmu. Dlatego nie tylko nie sprzyja realizacji zamiarów, ale wręcz utrudnia je.

stress seems to be a beneficial factor that positively stimulates the body and is conducive to achieving the intended goals. In the second stage, however, stress brings fatigue, exhaustion and becomes a threat to the body. Far from facilitating achieving goals, it hinders the process. We can, therefore, distinguish between positive stress (eustress) and negative stress (distress). It can be said that the perception of the difficulty experienced or the type of stress (positive or negative) depends on its stage and intensity. While experiencing a stressful situation, the initial positive impact that the escalating difficulties might have, tends to reach a critical point, after which it becomes negative bringing destruction and exhaustion of the body.

 The psychological theory of stress, developed by Folkmann and Lazarus, explains the concept as a dynamic relationship between an individual and his environment, which he regards as one that requires of him an effort to adapt or which is beyond his abilities to meet its expectations. In such an approach, stress is not rooted in a situation or in a person, although it largely depends on these factors.

When facing difficulties, people make an initial assessment of how they perceive their hardships: whether they are neutral, beneficial or threatening and whether they require adaptation effort. Three categories can be distinguished as a result of this assessment: 1) harm, loss or damage; 2) threat, as although there have been no losses thus far, they are anticipated; 3) challenge when the event is perceived by the individual as one that motivates him to fight. Another question follows the initial assessment: „What can I do in this situation?" and one's own physical, mental and social capabilities are evaluated.

The first and second assessment processes are interdependent and conducted almost simultaneously. If the first assessment identifies the relationship of the individual with his environment as stressful, then the process of coping is initiated. The second assessment determines the selection of specific methods of coping ; usually these are: searching for information, direct action, refraining from action, and internal processes that regulate emotions, such as repression, rationalization, and projection.

The biological theory of stress tries to explain

Jest zatem stres pozytywny (eustres) i negatywny (dystres). Można powiedzieć, że wartość przeżywanej trudności, albo znaczenie stresu (pozytywne lub negatywne) zależy od jego fazy i nasilenia. W przeżywaniu sytuacji stresowej intensyfikacja trudności i dolegliwości najpierw wzrasta w kierunku optymalnego nasycenia, by po przekroczeniu tego punktu stać się źródłem destrukcji, wyczerpania i zniszczenia organizmu.

W koncepcji psychologicznej stresu, wypracowanej przez Folkmann i Lazarusa stres jest rozumiany jako dynamiczna relacja pomiędzy człowiekiem a otoczeniem oceniana przez jednostkę jako wymagająca wysiłku adaptacyjnego lub przekraczająca możliwości sprostania jej. Przy takim ujęciu stres nie jest umiejscowiony, ani w sytuacji, ani w osobie, choć jest przez nie uwarunkowany.

Osoba w zetknięciu z trudną sytuacją dokonuje oceny pierwotnej: „Czym jest dla mnie to zdarzenie?" Czy jest faktem neutralnym, korzystnym czy zagrażającym i wymagającym wysiłku adaptacyjnego? W wyniku oszacowania zdarzenie zostaje zaklasyfikowane jako: 1) krzywda, strata, szkoda lub uraz; 2) zagrożenie, ponieważ straty nie wystąpiły jeszcze, ale są przewidywane; 3) wyzwanie, gdy zdarzenie spostrzegane jest przez jednostkę jako prowokujące do walki. Po ocenie pierwotnej następuje wtórna: „Co mogę w tej sytuacji zrobić?" Oszacowanie zostają własne możliwości: fizyczne, psychiczne i społeczne.

Procesy oceny pierwotnej i wtórnej są współzależne i dokonują się niemalże jednocześnie. Jeżeli relacja jednostki z otoczeniem, w ocenie pierwotnej, oszacowana jest w kategoriach stresowych, to uruchomiony zostaje proces radzenia sobie (coping). Ocena wtórna decyduje o doborze określonych działań związanych z radzeniem sobie. Najczęściej wymienia się cztery sposoby radzenia sobie: poszukiwanie informacji, bezpośrednie działania, powstrzymywanie się od działania i wewnętrzne procesy regulujące emocje, takie jak wyparcie, racjonalizacja, projekcja.

Koncepcja biologiczna stresu zmierza do wyjaśnienia procesów fizjologicznych towarzyszących sytuacji stresowej. Natomiast koncepcja psychologiczna lepiej opisuje

the physiological processes associated with stressful situations while the psychological theory better describes experiences (cognitive and emotional), as well as decision making processes in such situations.

Did Jesus, aware of the approaching suffering on the Cross, experience stress? Was he willing to accept the Cross? In his internal struggle, did he have any conflicting thoughts? Did he consciously provoke and at the same time avoided stressful situations? "But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed". "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from". Also, he spoke to his disciples: "you will be hated by all for my name's sake", "but he who endures to the end will be saved".

Jesus' attitude to suffering and death on the Cross is an example how to experience stress for all believers who follow the Saviour in His path. Human life is an intersection of two lines or rather two paths: a horizontal one representing human worldly experiences with a vertical one containing God's instructions for man. When these two paths cross, an individual starts asking himself questions about the meaning and direction of his life. Such a moment can prove very difficult, but at the same time liberating and lending new energy to overcome negative sensations, such as pain, anxiety and resignation. The real meaning of suffering can be found

|  | Stress | The Cross |
|---|---|---|
| Origin (causes) | Difficult life situations | Juxtaposing one's own way of life with God's plan |
| Structure (important elements) | Stressor, duration, immunity of the body, Dynamics of the stress process (stages) | Effort and struggle to achieve important goals. Relating one's own life with the life of Jesus Timelessness |
| Function (meaning) | Stimulation and then exhaustion of the body | Overcoming difficulties in the name of greater values (salvation) |

przeżycia (poznawcze i emocjonalne) oraz decyzje w sytuacji stresowej.

Czy Jezus świadomy zbliżającego się cierpienia na krzyżu przeżywał stres? Czy pragnął tego krzyża? Czy w swej wewnętrznej walce nie doświadczał antagonistycznych przeżyć? Czy świadomie nie prowokował sytuacji stresowych a zarazem ich unikał? „Chrzest mam przyjąć, i jakże bardzo pragnę aż to się stanie" „Ojcze odbierz ode mnie ten kielich". Także do swoich uczniów mówił „Będziecie w nienawiści z powodu mnie i mojej nauki", „ale kto wytrwa do końca, będzie zbawiony".

Stosunek Jezusa do męki i śmierci krzyżowej stanowi wzór przeżywania stresu dla wierzących, idących za Zbawicielem Jego drogą. W ludzkim życiu krzyżują się dwie linie (dwie drogi): pozioma (horyzontalna) charakteryzująca ludzkie doświadczenia doczesne, z pionową (wertykalną) zawierającą Boże wskazania dla człowieka. W punkcie spotkania tych dróg człowiek stawia sobie pytania o sens i kształt swojej drogi życia. Ten moment i to miejsce spotkania mogą okazać się bardzo trudne, ale także wyzwalające nową energię pozwalającą pokonać negatywne doznania (ból, lęk, rezygnację). Prawdziwy sens cierpienia można odkryć w sytuacji dostrzeżenia ostatecznego celu życia, jakim jest zbawienie.

W tym kontekście rodzi się pytanie o znaczenie przeciętnych i niezwykłych, małych i dużych, cierpień przeżywanych przez człowieka. Czy chrześcijanin ma godzić się na każde cierpienie, na ból i krzywdę, która go spotyka? Czy uprawnionym jest stanowisko osób, które rezygnując z przeciwstawiania się złu (krzywdzie, niesprawiedliwości) deklarują, że to cierpienie jest ich krzyżem, który muszą nosić w imię wierności Jezusowi?

Warto podjąć próbę wzbogacenia spojrzenia na walkę człowieka, która się dokonuje w dążeniu do znaczących celów życia. Interpretacja stresu jako rzeczywistości psychofizycznej i krzyża, jako rzeczywistości psychoduchowej może być podejmowana z potrójnej perspektywy: 1) genetycznej – wyjaśnienia przyczyn zjawiska, 2) strukturalnej – poznanie istotnych elementów tego doświadczenia, oraz 3) funkcjonalnej – wskazanie na znaczenie stresu i krzyża w ludzkim życiu.

when one realizes the ultimate goal of life, which is salvation.

In this context, the question arises about the importance of human suffering - the average and the extraordinary one, the small and the great one. Are Christians to accept all suffering, pain and harm that they encounter? Is the point of view of people who, by giving up resisting evil, such as harm or injustice, accept suffering as their Cross, which they must bear in the name of Jesus, legitimate?

It is worth to take a closer look on human struggle in pursuit of important goals in life. One can interpret stress as a psychophysical phenomenon and the Cross as a psychospiritual one from three different perspectives: 1) genetic - explaining the origins of the phenomenon, 2) structural - examining the essential elements of this experience, and 3) functional - determining the importance of stress and the Cross in human life.

Stress occurs when a stressor comes to play an important role. Its structure depends on the time and stage in life, the impact of the stressor as well as on the psychophysical resilience and perception of the level of threat resulting from the stressor. Stress is positive when it is not too great and serves to stimulate the body to overcome difficulties.

Christians in their journey on the Way of the Cross focus on Jesus and his struggle with the experience of the Cross. Realism in the Christian sense does not accept an illusory and utopian vision of life without suffering or effort. The Cross, which symbolizes struggle and suffering is an integral part of human life.

On his own Way of the Cross, man is not left alone without help. He feels that God is on his side and supports him in difficult moments.

Often the same phenomenon is described in different terms. The analysis and evaluation of difficult experiences in life can take a form of a discussion or rather a dialogue between psychological and theological approach. While during discussions, the goal of the supporters of a given theory is generally to persuade the other party and reject or at least discredit different ideas, dialogues are more about recognizing diverging aspects of the examined phenomenon proposed

|  | Stres | Krzyż |
|---|---|---|
| Geneza (przyczyny) | Trudne sytuacje życiowe | Konfrontacja własnej drogi życia z Bożym planem |
| Struktura (istotne elementy) | Stresor, czas trwania, odporność organizmu, Dynamika procesu zestresowania (fazy) | Trud i dążenie do osiągnięcia ważnych wartości. Związek z życiem Jezusa Ponadczasowość |
| Funkcja (znaczenie) | Mobilizacja a potem wyczerpanie organizmu | Pokonanie trudności w imię wyższej wartości (zbawienie) |

Stres pojawia się, gdy do znaczenia dochodzi stresor. Jego struktura uzależniona jest od czasu i fazy życia od wielkości stresora a także odporności psychofizycznej i interpretacji poziomu zagrożenia wyzwolonego stresorem. Znaczeni stresu jest pozytywne, gdy nie jest nadmiernie duży i służy mobilizacji organizmu do pokonania trudności.

Chrześcijanie w swoich przeżyciach wędrowania drogą krzyżową zorientowani są na Jezusa i jego zmagania z perspektywą i doświadczeniem krzyża. Chrześcijański realizm wyraża się w tym, że nie akceptuje iluzorycznej i utopijnej wizji życia beż cierpienia, trudu, wysiłku. Krzyż symbolizujący trud i cierpienie jest bowiem wpisany w program życia ludzkiego.
Przy zmaganiach z krzyżem człowiek nie jest pozbawiony wsparcia, nie jest pozostawiony sam sobie. Ma poczucie, że Bóg stoi po jego stronie i wspiera w trudnych momentach.

Często mówimy o tym samym różnym językiem. Spotkanie psychologii i teologii w analizie i ocenie trudnych doświadczeń może mieć charakter dyskusji lub dialogu. W dyskusji zwolennicy danego stanowiska na ogół zmierzają do celu jakim jest przekonanie do ich stanowiska i odrzucenie a przynajmniej zdyskredytowanie innych koncepcji. W dialogu chodzi raczej o dostrzeżenie odrębnych elementów badanej

When the Desert Blooms

by the other party in order to fully understand and describe the phenomenon in question. The purpose of dialogue is also to use new valuable information learnt from the other party in a constructive way. The dialogue between theological and psychological approach that focuses on searching the meaning of hardship and suffering may prove to be valuable and lead to a fuller description of these human experiences in order to help people cope with difficult life situations.

**Stress in life and teaching of Jesus**

It is worth to focus on the biblical and theological interpretation of the Cross[1]. According to St. Paul (1 Corinthians 1:23), the Cross is outrageous to Jews and ludicrous to pagans, but to Christians it is God's strength and wisdom, as well as a sign of unconditional love and the cornerstone of deep hope. Jesus died for us on the Cross, because he loved us. That is why the Cross is a sign of love, just as every effort and suffering undertaken out of love. According to St. Paul, the meaning of the Cross in the lives of Christians, is manifested in the fact that those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). In this way, the Cross becomes a sign of new life and a symbol of dignity and pride (Galatians 6:14).

The authors of the Gospel quote a number of Jesus' statements that reveal the interpretive depth of the mystery of the Cross. The Cross is shown as a necessary stage on the path to the victory of life over death (Luke 9:22). Jesus encourages his followers to carry their own Crosses every day (Luke 9:23). And it does not necessarily mean being ready for martyrdom, but is more about persevering in dealing with difficulties of everyday life. In the Gospel of St. John, crucifixion is portrayed as the exaltation of Jesus (John 3:14) and his victory of "drawing all people to himself" (John 12:32) .

In order to answer the question how Jesus coped with stress, an analysis should be made taking into account the distinction between everyday

**Stres w życiu i nauczaniu Jezusa**

Warto zwrócić uwagę na biblijną i teologiczną interpretację krzyża[1]. Według św. Pawła (1Kor 1,23) krzyż jest zgorszeniem dla Żydów i głupotą dla pogan, ale dla chrześcijan jest siłą i mądrością Boga. Jest on znakiem bezwarunkowej miłości i podstawą głębokiej nadziei. Na krzyżu Jezus za nas umarł z miłości do nas. Dlatego krzyż jest znakiem miłości. Znakiem miłości jest każdy trud i cierpienie podejmowane z miłości. Sens krzyża, według św. Pawła, w życiu chrześcijan przejawia się w tym, że przynależący do Chrystusa ukrzyżowali swoje ciało z namiętnościami i pożądaniami (Gal 5,24). W ten sposób krzyż staje się znakiem nowej egzystencji i poczucia godności i dumy (Gal 6,14).

Ewangeliści przytaczają szereg wypowiedzi Jezusa odsłaniających głębię interpretacyjną tajemnicy krzyża. Krzyż jawi się jako konieczny etap w drodze do zwycięstwa życia nad śmiercią (Łk 9,22). Jezus zachęca swoich naśladowców do codziennego niesienia swego krzyża (Łk 9,23). Chodzi przy tym nie tyle o gotowość do męczeństwa, ale o wytrwałość w radzeniu sobie z codziennymi trudnościami. W Ewangelii wg św. Jana ukrzyżowanie jest ukazane jako wywyższenie Jezusa (J 3,14) i Jego zwycięstwo polegające na „przyciągnięciu wszystkich do siebie" (J 12,32) .

W odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak Jezus radził sobie ze stresem, należy dokonać analizy uwzględniając rozróżnienie na stres codzienny i stres traumatyczny związany z perspektywą

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1 Por. A. Grun, Das Kreutz. Bild des erloesten Menschen. Vier Turme Verlag Munsterschwarzach 1996, s. 27n.

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stress and traumatic stress associated with looming suffering and death on the Cross. Regarding the daily challenges that Selye defines as eustress, we see Jesus during the course of his life. We meet him in situations when he preaches, cures the sick, is confronted with people critical towards him or even opposing him. He experiences difficulties of being misunderstood and rejected (e.g. in Nazareth), and he even has to struggle with natural phenomena, such as the storm on the lake. He faces all these situations with composure (calming both his own emotions and phenomena around him). He often explains his views and actions, thus proving deep awareness of himself and the surrounding world. To maintain harmony in life, he cares for a balance between work and rest. He goes to sleep or rests in situations that requiring focusing attention (for instance, when he chooses apostles). He also spends long hours praying. He encourages his students to be vigilant and prepared for the unexpected ("Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return"). He demands that those who follow him be ready to take up their Cross each day and follow Him. At the same time, he cares about the physical condition and need of rest of the apostles ("Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while"). In his everyday decisions, he was guided by a safe lifestyle manifested in an attitude of obedience to the Father and ministry.

Facing imminent suffering and death on the Cross, Jesus has a high level of awareness of the threat, but also of the purpose he needs to fulfil. He knows that in order to achieve such an important goal he will have to face pain, suffering and loneliness. Hence, he prepares people closest to him for these difficult events. Jesus himself receives the support provided by his Father. He also seeks support of others (for instance when he encourages the apostles in Gethsemane to stay awake and pray), as well as refers to important figures, guardians of the cultural and religious heritage (when he meets with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor). At the hour of death, he remains faithful to his mission to save those he loves. This love is a motivation but also

męki i śmierci krzyżowej. Odnośnie do codziennych wyzwań, które Selye określa jako eustres widzimy Jezusa pielęgnującego rytm życia. Spotykamy Go w sytuacjach pracy nauczycielskiej, leczenia chorych, w konfrontacji z osobami krytycznymi a nawet walczącymi z nim. Doznaje trudności w postaci niezrozumienia i odrzucenia (np. w Nazarecie), a nawet w zmaganiach ze zjawiskami przyrodniczymi (burza na jeziorze). Sytuacje te przyjmuje ze spokojem i opanowaniem (zarówno własnych emocji jak i zdarzeń w otoczeniu). Często wyjaśnia swoje stanowisko dając dowód głębokiej świadomości siebie i otaczającego świata. Dla zachowania rytmu życia troszczy się o równowagę między pracą i odpoczynkiem, udaje się na spoczynek, na sen lub w sytuacjach wymagających większej uwagi (np. wybór apostołów) spędza długie godziny na modlitwie. Swoich uczniów zachęca, by trwali w gotowości do przyjęcia nieoczekiwanych zdarzeń ("Niech będą przepasane wasze biodra i zapalone pochodnie a wy jak słudzy oczekujący powrotu Pana"). Wymagał, aby osoby idące za nim były gotowe wziąć swój krzyż na każdy dzień i naśladować Go. Równocześnie troszczy się o kondycję i wypoczynek apostołów ("Idźcie na miejsce samotne i odpocznijcie nieco"). W codziennych decyzjach wskazywał na bezpieczny styl życia przejawiający się w postawie posłuszeństwa Ojcu i służby.

W konfrontacji z zagrożeniem męki i śmierci krzyżowej Jezus charakteryzuje się wysokim poziomem świadomości zagrożenia, ale też celu do którego zmierza. Wie, że dla osiągnięcia tak ważnego celu będzie się musiał zmierzyć z bólem, cierpieniem i osamotnieniem. W tej sytuacji przygotowuje najbliższe otoczenie do tych trudnych zdarzeń. Sam korzysta ze wsparcia jakiego udziela mu Ojciec. Poszukuje także wsparcia społecznego (zachęcając apostołów w Ogrójcu do czuwania modlitewnego) oraz odwołując się do znaczących postaci stojących na straży dziedzictwa kulturowego i religijnego (spotkanie z Mojżeszem i Eliaszem na górze Tabor). W samej godzinie męki i śmierci pozostaje wierny swemu posłannictwu, swej misji uratowania tych, których kocha. Ta miłość jest motywem ale też wsparciem, źródłem siły pomagając osiągnąć zamierzony cel ("Wykonało się").

a source of support and strength, helping him to achieve the intended goal ("It is finished").

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**Paul C. Vitz (USA)**

# Comment to "Stress and the Cross - A psycho-theological interpretation of human struggle"

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Dr. Vitz's work is focused on the integration of Christian theology, especially Catholic anthropology, with psychology and breaks from secularism and post-modern relativism. This is expressed in his work on the just published Catholic Christian Meta Model of the Person. He also addresses: hatred and forgiveness; the importance of fathers; psychology of atheism; and the complemenentarity of men and women. He has published seven books and many articles, videos, Op-Eds, etc.

**Former contributions in our eJournal by Paul you can see her:**
https://emcapp.ignis.de/9/#p=60
https://emcapp.ignis.de/7/#/26
https://emcapp.ignis.de/5/#p=128
https://emcapp.ignis.de/5/#/134
https://emcapp.ignis.de/5/#/150
https://emcapp.ignis.de/5/#/160

This is a very stimulating essay and my comments will be mostly additions or reinforcements of his points. First, Jarworski's emphasis on the positive importance of stress and hardship in life is important and often neglected in psychology. He writes "A certain optimal level of stress and struggle is necessary for successful life… ." From learning to walk, to learning to read and write, to learning to play a sport or a musical instrument, the same is true. In the US this understanding is often expressed as: "No pain, no gain."

In this context Jarworski notes that members of the present generation have had so few difficulties, because of over protecting parents, that they are endanger of rejecting all stress and are leading weak, unfulfilled lives. There is certainly a group of the under-stressed in the present generation. In the US we are aware of many young people who feel entitled to success. Often, their parents constantly hovered over them in a protective way. (We call them "helicopter parents" because they so frequently hover over their children.)

However, I think there is an even larger group who come from the growing number of dysfunctional families that have produced, not under-stressed, but over- stressed children. These young people account for our increasing number of youthful suicides and a high level of general depression in the younger generations.

What is perhaps most important in Jarworski's piece is that he addresses the physiological, psychological and theological (spiritual) approaches to stress: the three levels of stress. Although each level has its own epistemology and independence, nevertheless, all three occur together when we experience stress. As he points out, each level needs to be evaluated for its own contribution to stress. But, also, because they interact with each other. For example, though he doesn't mention it, there is the well- known placebo effect; that is a person's belief that when he or she has been given a helpful medicine, the belief somehow results in a positive physiological response although the medicine was, in fact, inert. A hopeful psychological state positively effects their bodily response.

The awareness of the three levels of body, mind and spiritual as simultaneously co-occurring in human stress, as well as in other mental conditions, has received a major emphasis at Divine Mercy University, with its recent publication of "A Catholic Christian Meta-Model of the Person" (2020). In this model the different levels are described as "integrated layers" of the person.

Of course, influence can flow not just from a higher level onto a lower one, e.g. the mind on the body, but there is also influence from a lower level to a higher level. Priests have long known that excessive and repeated requests for confession, known as scrupulosity, is a disorder. It is a form of obsessive/compulsive behavior which is both neurological and mental in origin but typically presents itself as a higher level moral and spiritual concern, and also as a lived stress.

Many priests are also aware that certain kinds of painful stress can be experienced by people suffering from serious amounts of self-hatred. This masochistic motivation can sometimes present itself as Christian humility and sometimes as a request for some kind of extreme penance.

Throughout his essay, Jaworski makes it clear, that Jesus calls us to "The Way of the Cross", and Scripture shows us his physiological, psychological and spiritual responses to his own stress. But, because Jesus gives us his peace---a peace that passes all understanding, many can come to bear their suffering, and experience, at the deepest level, that their cross, their burden, is light.

One important inevitable contributor to stress for Christians is the requirement to love. At the psychological level, those we love make us vulnerable: those we love may reject us, or leave us by death. Stress and sorrow are inevitable as part of the consequences of love. At the spiritual level, even the love of God can make us vulnerable to the experience of being abandoned by God as described in the dark night of the soul and mentioned in the spiritual lives of many saints. Even in spiritual learning and development: "No pain, no gain."

Vitz, P. C., Nordling, W. J., & Titus, C. S. (Eds.) (2020). A Catholic Christian Meta-Model of the Person: Integration with psychology and mental health practice. Sterling, VA: Divine Mercy University Press.

**David Nehring (USA)**

# Coping with Stress – Christian Perspectives

Stress is often defined as "the demands of the situation threaten to exceed the resources of the individual" (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Hans Selye also gives his famous definition "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change," (cited in Schneiderman, Ironson and Siegel , 2005). The first time I ran across truly traumatic stories as a young psychologist assistant (trainee) I spent ten minutes after session throwing up in the toilet. Both of the definitions of stress fit my response at the time. Van Der Kolk (2014) describes polyvagal dynamics of fight, flight and freeze and how the emotional and behavioral relates to the neuroanatomy, which describes what my clients, and to a lesser extent myself, were going through at the time. The ventral vagal complex picks up assessments coming in from the assessments in the hippo-campus and amygala, undercutting some of the activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, leading to autonomic arousal (fight or flight), initiated by the hippocampus and amygdale leading to the activity mediated by the hypothalamus-adrenal-pituitary axis (Wehrenberg and Prince, 2007) and its production of agitation, stomach issues, primitive, black and white thinking, and a cascade of cortisol which they (and I) may be leaking for months or years to come.

But these "demands … [that] threaten to exceed the resources of the individual" is what life is, ultimately, especially for the Christian (John 16:33b). Knowing the details of the stress response helps to understand what we and others are experiencing, but becoming grounded in God in a way that places relationship over subject matter is vitally important in dealing with the stresses of work and life because our confidence must not be from my knowledge or technology but from a God who is acting and who loves me and loves my clients (Phil 3:3). It becomes about what he is doing as He, the real doctor, is doing the real work. I have my part to do as well in which I am to be faithful, and I can be confident in the technology that constitutes my part, which I use to help clients

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deal with intractable problems, irrational but deeply committed thinking, chronically conflicted relationships and occasionally horrible stories. In order to cope with stress in working with theory and practicing the delivery of services of Christian Psychology, it is important to develop perspective on how the typical approaches to this, coping mechanisms, self care, and internal therapeutic work, fit in the broader context of living, thinking about and growing in a an authentic Christian life. And if we take a somewhat different perspective on both theology and psychology, and look more deeply at suffering and faith, a deep conversation with God begins to emerge that defines the life of faith.

I first begin teaching stress management while assigned to an active duty base in Air Combat Command of the United States Air Force where we were tasked with training personnel in stress management in situations where they were in turn training for combat entailing stresses designed by an opposing force to overwhelm them. Part of my job was training personnel in the psychological aspect of "self aid and buddy care" which typically included concepts such as being aware of the stress performance curve (cf Anderson, 1976) taught us by Col. Karl O. "Skip" Moe., guided imagery, relaxation brea-

thing, diet, exercise, affiliation, pleasurable activities and related self care topics.

Self care and self focus are helpful immediate tactics for short term coping and should be used to the degree that they integrate well with the walk of faith and faithfulness, but life itself often might bring events that severely dampen their effectiveness. More fundamental is the intrinsic work of becoming aware of and interpreting our own emotional reactions as a language which, when interpreted, help us understand ourselves which is hugely important in understanding others, sharing hope, and working on relationships with loved ones. And while this has entailed exploring my own story it is set in the greater context of life events are part of the dialectic with a living God. Indeed, we can think about our own therapeutic work as confession (recognizing behaviors), taking ownership and repentance (behavior change) when set in a God context, even as we may be thinking of these in theoretical therapeutic terms. And having worked through the conflicts within myself, others and with God, often with some anguish, we know we are getting to resolution on that point when we arrive at that place of gratitude, praise, worship, and compassion directed at others. At the same time, thinking in terms of the therapeutic systems helps me generate hypothesis when looking at the behavior of clients and having a language to talk about them to other professionals, even while bearing in mind the biblical truths that transcend and illuminate those theoretical systems. As important as theories are, and while utilizing the tools of self awareness, management, and working through my own issues, the primary tool principle for self work is that I recognize and continually remember that I walk in the immediate presence of the living God (Willard, 1998) who actually loves me, loves the other person, and is doing good things.

**Deeper Issues**

Job is instructive. After saying how he does not and can not comprehend God or what God is doing, Job demands to know how he is supposed to work out this relationship if not by doing what he understands is the right thing (Job 31). After this, Elihu, reminds Job of the critically important understanding that God is wise, good and majestic, elements that are critical to how we approach God. But that is not God's main point or purpose (Job 38.2) because essentially Job knows this, he just can't comprehend how these fit the context of devastating realities. God responds by telling Job that he will not and cannot understand what God is doing and so his comprehension is not the basis of this relationship (Job 38 – 40:2). Job's response, wisely, is to repent (Job 40:3-5). But then God does something extremely interesting. In Job 40:6-14 God sounds like He is bragging (accurately) when He makes twelve statements about Himself. But several years ago I noted that every one of these self statements, every point God makes about Himself is attributed to Messiah at some point in the Bible, starting with the first one in verse 8 (cf Rom 3:24; Gal 2:16). It is like God is saying "you can't do these things, but in Messiah I will." Of course Job can't know that - which is God's point.

Throughout the Bible God proclaims His love for us often times in ways that to are quite counterintuitive (e.g. Isa 5:25-30). But our comprehension is not required for acknowledging the fact that this, indeed, is love. Our minimal apprehension and ongoing reception of that reality concomitant with the honest appraisal of apparently contradictory facts is required. That does not mean that God will not, in time and when He sees fit, meet my need for some comprehension but only after and to the degree that I keep this principle straight: God has no requirement to make himself comprehensible, only that it is clear Who He Is and what He asks of me right now. He is doing stuff and He wants to include me in it (Gen 18: 17-19; Luke 15:31). So, a great deal of our work concerns becoming aware of our unconscious expectations, their contradictions and setting this in the context of a God who is there. This might require releasing expectations and desires that will not come to pass, perhaps because they may be unrealistic, but more typically because that my expectations do not conform with God's work at that time. Central to the process of letting these go is being willing to engage in lamentation as part of release (Psalms of Lament, Lamentations). We can only receive what God has for us if we

first release what we have held onto that God is now not ordaining. That allows us to next engage in submission and perspective taking, not unlike "radical acceptance" in Dialectic Behavior Therapy (DBT, Pederson, 2017) but letting go in favor of a greater meaningful context, not just what I take to be what is. Meditating on the myriad realities of His goodness and contemplating His presence in the here and the now is the basis for gratitude and hope (again, not unlike DBT). Of course, clinical work, and life, is comprised by the myriad of obstacles to this process and patiently walking down the road becomes part of the "Way we should walk" together. It is about the journey, but it is also about the destination – that's the point of a path.

**Suffering as both normative and fundamental**
It is a truism that life brings suffering. The question is not whether life brings difficulty and pain (Peck, 1978, p. 1) but its meaning. In Matthew 10:16-39, Jesus, in sending out the twelve, promises them painful, humiliating and dangerous experiences. In John 15 and 16, Jesus first tells the twelve that he "loves" them (v. 9-12), and that there are his "friends" (v. 13-15), they are to "love one another" (v. 12- 17) but then tells them that the world will "hate" them (v. 19-21). He expands on this theme of rejection, suffering and tribulation (chap 16) but importantly connects managing this with the "Helper" (15: 26) upon which he expands (16: 5-15). Weathering this requires what the King James Version calls the "comforter." (John 15:16, KJV)
Paul in Rom 5:3 and 8: 17 and 1 Th 1:6, and 2 Tim 1:8 and 2:3 considers suffering normal and a necessary part of Christian growth deeply intertwined with the ministry of the Holy Spirit and power (2:3), in Phil 1:29 with salvation and the Holy Spirit. In this world, "self aid and buddy care" while being an important tactic is stress management, not an overall strategy (see also Acts 14:22). Further, James asks us to assign positive value of suffering, considering this as an investment that will pay large dividends. James appears to have Mal 3:3 and Zech 13: 9 in mind where the heat of refinement results in an increase of value when he returns to the theme of refinement in James 5:10-11, referencing Job. Peter's first letter echoes these themes which

opens with the idea of purity being refined by trials, again with reference to the word and to the Spirit (e.g vs 1:22). He moves on to us suffering harsh and unjust behavior by those with power (2:19-20), then discussing close relationships, moving on to loving one another but possibly suffering at the hands of other believers and others for our righteousness (3:14), and in 4:1, when we accept such suffering, that sin has far less control over our lives. But it is in 4:12-19 that Peter paints the most powerful image of those who have served together and suffered. The image is like the special intimacy war buddies share who suffer the same sorrows and then experience the same victories when coming home together. They are bonded both in suffering and later in glory when that comes (vs 13), and further in 5:1, this time identifying himself with that fraternity before ending in 5:9-10 where God will "perfect, establish, strengthen and settle" (NKJV) us.

**Gaining Some Perspective**
Now, it is important to be clear that I am using the term "Christian" in a more restricted sense, meaning someone who approaches life, thought, and relationships first with God as a fundamental axiom of reasoning, relating, and organizing their life and behavior, and this firmly rooted in Christian scripture. The connection of the Christian with God, furthermore, is mediated through the person of Christ, the understanding of this being also rooted in the scripture though augmented by their theological tradition. All of this is to say that the Christian is an authentic disciple of Christ (Acts 11:26). In Christian Psychology faith is not ancillary to how a person's life operates but is fundamental, definitive and pervasive in its influence (Deut 6:5; John 8:42; 14:15). But with that comes the concern not simply to offer services, but to also love God and to love others (Mar 12:29-31).
But this "loving God and others" is not primarily affirmational, though does affirm, but is highly principled as it derives from 1 John 4:7 - 5: 3 where "the love of God" is defined in terms of principles of behavior, though it is modified and further expanded by 1 Cor 13 because the latter is not a definition but a description. Notice that the issue is 1 John is both following

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commandments and abiding in relationship. We notice something similar in Leviticus where we read the sentence "I am the Lord" in context of commands, for instance in chapters 18 and 19. Being clear who God is and how He has formed people is fundamental to understanding love.

Moreover, while being assisted by psychology and theology, the grounding of faith arises from a walk with God that is informed by but not defined by the former while not being entirely subsumed by the latter. Theology is how a given group of people think, talk, and write about things of faith as they seek to reflect in sound ways on the teaching of the Bible, so it is not faith itself. It is about being able to address faith with others (1 Pet 3:15) and to discern sound teaching (Tit 1:9; 2:1) and is both dialectic and didactic and therefore important, but is not the basis of our faith relationship with God, which is transrational in the same way axiomatic thinking precedes the logic of geometry. The Bible of which theology speaks is truth and is about Truth, and so theology in turn is thinking, speaking and writing about truth. And in this process of growing in Biblical truth I am always under the grace of God in faith.

On the other hand, psychology might be thought of not so much as being about truth but rather as being about true things. Psychology, as science, is defined by Meyers (2007) as "the scientific study of behavior and mental processes" (p. 2). But because Christian metaphysical thought was important in establishing the basis for science, psychology as a Christian discipline, as science, is better understood in the context of that sixteenth (Vendel, 2011)or even thirteenth century (Leahey, 1987) metaphysical thought that produced it. Consequently, systematic empirical work of much of psychology becomes intrinsic to but not restrictive of Christian Psychology where it is subsumed by a greater transcendent understanding with biblical underpinnings and theological correlates rather than operating with these two in parallel (Johnson, 2000). With this understanding, the entire topic of epistemology in empirical psychology becomes how we can know some things about human persons … fairly confidently, but not absolutely. Science is about coming know

true things confidently about a subject matter set particularly when I am standing outside of those things, "true things." Talking about "the truth" seems to go beyond this to include articulating the overall meaning as entailing the order of valued relations and relational values (often implicit, latent or taken as "self evident"). Within a scientific field I might get to that place in a very specific topic but it cannot be taken more broadly than that.

But in the "social sciences" the issue becomes more complicated. In science, we seek to apprehend, measure, describe and, in understanding, transcend the specific phenomenon in the subject matter set that we are studying. But in the social sciences you and I are comprised of the "true" things that comprise the subject matter set we are apprehending, in fact discovering about ourselves. We do in fact comprise members of the set that we are trying to transcend through scientific study. But because ultimately we are members of that subject matter set, we cannot honestly and truly transcend that subject matter set in the way that apprehends the "truth" of a subject matter set, for to do so would be a violation of logical types (Bateson, 1972), which results in paradox. We can isolate off aspects and parts of ourselves, but not entireties of ourselves and our psychological functioning. To arrive at "truth" about ourselves so construed, strictly through science and intellect, entails a logical violation because that implies transcending with meaning the set of which we constitute a part.

In contrast, what is more effective for the Christian Psychologist , seems to be that when it comes to personhood, humanity, overall psychological functioning, etc., knowing truth, while entailing a lot of truth things, is not simply cognitive but ultimately relational, total, ontological; it's knowing Truth (like, the Person, John 14:6). I know Truth, the Lord, and the truth he creates in a similar way that I know my wife, or the way my children came to know my wife, which is why both of these are models for the relationship with Truth (John 1:10-13; Eph 5:31-32). Therefore, I learn mostly true things from psychology, and I learn truth and about Truth (Logos) through the Bible (Rhema), but it is in transcendent relationship with Him who

interacts with me in and beyond these that I know truth, because both true things and truth is what proceeds from the mouth of Truth. Total reality is that which is a consequent of God's creation and upholding of it (Col 1:16). Scientific findings are simply what I and others feel really confident are true because we believe we have discerned (confidently, for the present) that they proceed from God's past and currently creative action. Psychology is functioning to provide greater detail (truth things, mostly) to the truth I gain through scripture and the walk, a lot like the magnifying glass I might take to looking at the splinter in my daughter's foot – It may not help me see my daughter but it sure helps in making out the splinter she is shedding tears over.

**Stresses in the psychology of sanctification**

These "demands [which] … exceed the resources of the individual" is intrinsic to Christian maturation which is about transformation of the person self in its entirety (Rom 12:2; Phil 3:21) not just in the self as understood by the self but the ontological entirety of the person including self. That will include not just self awareness, but also subconscious dynamics as well as other nonempirical realities of the person. Change at such a basic level will often be experienced as a disorienting loss of the integrity of the self experienced as suffering and pain. Paul talks about what is at stake in Romans 7 (vs 24) which he calls a "law" of sin (amarta, or "missed it" or "off the path") and evil (kakos, or "bad"; similar to the Hebrew ra or r'a or rah) intrinsic to our personhood (18-18, 23). Mind (or intellect) might seem like it is is OK (vs 22-25) but in Rom 12 (2) he says that needs transformed too. The solution comes in 8:1-2 in the form of a walk which he identifies as a "law" relating to "Spirit" related to "life" all of which is "in Christ." So the critical change required to deal with intrinsic evil is a shift from the "law" of sin and death to a "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (NKJV). As a psychologist I find "evil" and "sin" pretty strong words that I would rather not use but an honest appraisal of the situation, and the text, rather forces it (but with others I must confess to using euphemisms like "messed up").

So, addressing this being "messed up" requires participating in true, thorough, transcendence; not just our appreciating the reality of a transcendent spirituality, but our thorough apprehension of sin's (and evil's) origin, nature and its amelioration (the converse of John 1) and a corresponding walking in a "law of the Spirit of life." But for this to actually happen first requires the experience and persistence of evil (kakos or rah) in order for the true transcendent ameliorization to be clearly manifest as it takes effect (Rom 7:13). I have to know what sickness truly is and how sick I really am for me to apprehend how this Physician heals me. So, it is this "messed up" aspect of ourselves that is being addressed in the suffering of the sanctification process through the unilateral restructuring of the person even in intrinsic, even preconscious decision making process that is the target of renewal (Rom 12:2). This requires the surrender of personal sovereignty in the matter in favor of God (1 Peter 4:13), authentically, not putatively. Moreover, while this mandated suffering is normative and central, it further requires the individual Christian centrally hold to the goodness of God despite the fact that the experience of evil will undercut the very experience of goodness and the communion (bonding) that is intrinsic to relationships, whether with God (vertical ) or others (horizontal) . It is this powerful pressure to capitulate to the conclusions of evil (and worse) that serves as a powerful context for the exercise of personal and collective sovereignty in either the expression or negation of both horizontal and vertical bonding (communion); faith in its affirmation, or failing that sharing of success with God in faith, providing the ultimate casus belli of God's efforts unilaterally on our behalf, which is the underlying reality.

True, transcendent response to evil entails seeing the development of it, the declaration and manifestation of it, and the realization of damage done by it before definitively addressing it through countering it with godly goodness, godly truth and godly beauty. That process, therefore appears to require us to experience, endure and struggle with it as God works with us, though long before we see it, if we see it at all, effecting our transformation into partners,

truly beloved, loyal and loving family members with Him in dealing with it. So, by having such knowledge we are equipped to participate with God in His overcoming evil, which is a very important secondary purpose of our lives, starting with ourselves. But for this processing of suffering to see its end, is purpose, the meaning only arises in the context of dialectic with God, with others, and a transition from a "me" to a "we."

## Me and we

Longer term growth and effective buffers to stress and trauma require both vertical and horizontal communion experienced both immediately and long term. Stress and trauma management is the sense that: "In all of this I am not alone." In military combat operations (in the US at least) a cardinal value is that they will not leave a member behind, a value considered fundamental to effective combat operations (AF 2005). Another example is my wife's labor and delivery of our children. Amongst all of the measures taken to support a good outcome in that process, the most powerful thing she needed was to feel my hand gripping hers, to hear my voicing speaking to her in the delivery process, and to see my face, often right in the middle of her contractions. She needed to be aware of my presence even as her entire being was directed to delivering our child.

Under stress and duress we do much better when there is a sense of others with which we identify, in our minds comprising a "we," to be there with and for us. For instance, immediately following the attacks of Sept 11, 2001, churches were filled the week of the event though one month later they were back down to normal levels. While there was a sense of crisis, of stress, then people needed one another and needed a sense of presence of God. In the book "Tribe" Sebastian Junger (2016) discusses this need for a connected group of people with which we identify which makes stress and tribulation something that we can actually thrive under. Another example, settlement of the midwestern United States occurred in settler groups coming from specific regions in Europe and often settling in religious and ethnic groups, in those areas often recognized to this day, allowing people to settle and thrive in a new country un-

der very adverse conditions (Ostergren, 1983). Jews, with their history of experiences of anti-Semitism, will conceptualize themselves as an "extended family" (Jewfaq, 2020), underscoring the shared kinship motif. This development of bonded people when applied to Christian faith has been called "horizontal communion" (Longenecker, 2008). Indeed, the early church shared this concept of peoplehood (1 Peter 1:1; 2:9-10) or of being "fictive family (DeSilva, 2000a).

What seems highly significant about this family and peoplehood identity in the life of the biblical community is that in it there appears to be no loss of the importance of the individual as it relates to the group (see Paul's specific mention of individuals at the end of many of his letters). At the same time, the communal group can remain strong precisely because it is not simply a collective, but a family, a nation (1 Peter 2:9-10). This is because the values that are being cherished are not the synthetic of a collective to meet goals but are authentic values crucial in providing for effective support in relationships needed to withstand stress because they are based on principles of human being, articulated throughout the scripture. Thus the principles transcend the shifting collective wills and power dynamics of the group because they are transcendent and organic, defining essential aspects of being human, "truths," and required to develop a sustained sense of being alive as a human. The words "Be fruitful and multiply," the ten commands given at Sinai, "Love the Lord …, " and "Love your neighbor …" as well as other commands of scripture express basic authentic values and each reflects some fundamental principle of sovereignty to be respected in human life. When these principles are realized and shared in relationship they create a deep sense of "we," simultaneously cultivating and affirming a more functional self while creating authentic communal relationships that cannot be manifested in the same way apart from these authentic principles.

## Spiritual Dialectic

As powerful and critical as bonding with others is, what becomes more critical is the vertical communion with God. Willard's (1998) concept of the heavens expresses that spiritual reality, or

real reality in Lewis (1946, p 70; or perhaps "hyperreality") not truly separate from but encompassing empirical reality, reality more intensely real than the empirical, albeit perhaps communicated at times by less real symbolic language. Because psychology as an empirical science typically is restricted to scholarship common to the scholastic community, in the context of psychology spirituality is typically only about religious practice. However, when speaking from a transcendent Christian metaphysics we are looking at how the science of psychology fits within that transcendent understanding because the empirical realities themselves fit in the larger ontological hyper-reality. But as long as we are distinguishing work that is empirical from that which is specific to those accepting the specified metaphysics we are on sound scholastic grounds, if we do not expect those who do not share our metaphysics to share our conclusions or some of our operations.

But to engage in relationship with God, a being who resides primarily in the heavenlies, any trust relationship I develop must be based on the pure recognition of the nature of the person I am dealing with, God, and of my relationship to Him (child; Matt 18:3). The recognition is Christian faith which is the recognition of God as in some way occupying the center of a good, loving, and trustworthy construct of "we," where God is fundamentally distinct from the "me" but, crucially, not separate from "me" because it also entails a connection to God such that we can deeply internalize that good, loving, trustworthy and beautiful connection. It is Buber's "I and thou" (Buber, 1970) rising to some degree a measure of a "we." But in my experience of "we" with others there is sensory impact in the form of tears or smiles, clasping hands or hugging, or enacting mutually beneficial action that establishes a firm residence in the middle and lower parts of my brain that my frontal and temporal lobes in turn can work with. This becomes available to my brain as a postulated potential symbol of bond with God as I bond with others in our horizontal experience of "we." So, since with God I am dealing with a non-empirically spiritual being that relationship will commonly leverage off a number of other experiences or relationships used to symbolize this relationship.

But there is a difference when I or others experience God not symbolically but experientially, in either presence or in a wholly unnatural, even entirely unreasonable internal experience of peace and comfort. As a psychologist this is not very hard to explain away as epiphenomenon. But I have also had such experiences provided me, or as a family, immediately preceding some profound and traumatic blow. Note, this is before and in the absence of any evidence of the impending event, but to a degree commensurate with its gravity, events that were quite the surprise. These have a strong kinesthetic non sentimental component, corresponding best to the comfort spoken of in 1 Cor 3 and 4. While not under our control or management, even more so they function as an anchor, an Ebenezer (1 Sam 7:12), that provides a critical dialectic counter natural skepticism and a fundamental benchmark guiding understanding in subsequent events.

Habbukuk (2:4) talks about the righteous living by faith, or faithfulness. Wilson (1989) discusses faith (amunah), characterizing the idea as steadfastness and perseverance in a task. Similarly DelSilva (2000) looks at the historical, epigraphical context of the word "faith" translated by the Greek form (pistis) relating it to how a client responds to a patron (DeSilva, 2000b) in an ongoing, long term relationship. So, "faith" in Habbukuk is really an ongoing dynamic or characteristic as opposed to "faith" as a singular act. Hence reading casually can result in the illusion where "faith" seems to refer to how determined I am or how hard I work at believing something, rather than the characteristic of faithful role understanding and action. In this relationship, God's character features inscrutable mystery and transcendence with designs and workings entirely beyond my comprehension (though He occasionally gives me a teasing peak behind the curtain) but Who specifically and inevitably treats me with committed graceful loving kindness, which I in turn have to persistently bear in mind, taking the latter as "a given."

So, what I continually come back to, every single day, is the intentional recognition of God's trustworthiness, goodness, beauty and love. And over time, this appears to be having mid-

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brain and lower brain stem effects (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:4). As the prospect of the sanctifying reorganization of our personhood is very onerous it requires holding clearly in mind the depth of God's good intentions for us, God's beautiful manifestation to us and of us; and God's expression of his love for us and his cultivation of love for one another. Subsequent spiritual, providential, and relational experiences then begin to give affective, transintellectual grounding to this theopsychological process.

While in the delivery of services to others addressing emotional and/or behavioral disturbance is the immediate and perennial focus, overall the more important purpose is bringing to awareness the nature of individual choices, what these are saying, and ultimately how these fit into a greater flow of life in a greater God context. The client may or may not choose communion, but their response fits into the greater story the manner of which they have the opportunity to discover. Not owning what is not mine relationally (while taking ownership for what is) is highly important, as it is for understanding generally and as it is for respecting and loving others. I bear witness, I minister through the clinical work, and I intercede, but that is as far as my role goes.

Staying clear on my role, keeping perspective on what my understanding gains me and what it does not, and being faithful in doing what is mine to do while practicing the psychology within the technology, ethics, and understandings of the field is very helpful in dealing with the stresses of theory and practice. Doing my own work within myself and continuing to grow emotionally in the greater context of that God story, also is also vital but more so when I accept the suffering as intrinsic and necessary to my being transformed by God. Being clear on the limits and the strengths of both theology and psychology is perhaps more important, as is having a truly Biblical way of understanding life that pushes a bit beyond both. But most important is the sense of identity and community that both horizontal and vertical communion afford in dealing with the stresses of life. In this, understanding that the walk with God is a real, powerful, and present dynamic that grounds who we are because of who He is and when we truly walk that by faith it provides a deep, strengthening resource that will surprise and fascinate because ultimately it constitutes a deep, transcendent conversation with a Living God.

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## Daniel Eytan (Israel)

# A comment to: Coping with Stress - Christian Perspectives

I was very glad when I read the article by David Nehring, with its title "Coping with Stress", during those days on which we in Israel celebrate Pessah (Passover) under the shadow of the Covid19, and the major commemorative dates after it, like Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah), then Remembrance Day dedicated to fallen soldiers, and right after that we celebrate Independence Day, and all this with the same restrictions in every country around the world because of Covid19.

I have to express thanks for the opportunity to write this comment and I would like to clarify that English is not my mother tongue: my background is a mix of Karaite Jews and „normal" Jews (my roots are half from Egypt; half from Sicily).

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But as I read I couldn't help but think that this time is also the beginning of spring in Israel, and I couldn't help associating „spring" with „freedom". Passover, Independence day ... shoa': the majority of my patients are adults and old people who survived the holocaust and different wars in Israel, many of them at this time alone, without family, some of them suffering from ptsd, panic, anxiety, anger, impulsiveness etc.

And in my head I kept thinking: "How does the word of God fit in the hecatomb of outraged life?"

Many of them have different lives, different social positions and different marital status, but all ask where God was when these terrible situations happened. Not just holocaust survivors, I mean everyone.

Currently, over the past 20 years we (in Israel) have gained an expanded understanding of a variety of social life issues, some of them overstepping limits and tolerance in many ways and others where we have let them „cool down" perhaps so as not to disturb others. However,

they did not have that and they lived - and still live - dealing with stress in our Israeli society, the daughter of a great social burden of post trauma, with great expectations and hopes, but also with great faults that we should deal with.

In my experience as a Jew there, having served in the army, then as a reservist, and after years re-enrolled as a military psychologist, I have seen a decrease in the ability to handle these by soldiers, unlike the first 60 years of Israel, where ideals, even if one were not religious, were paramount, love for the homeland – our promised land – was stronger than any recognition and bleeding for it was perhaps the greatest contribution that any Israeli fighter could aspire to… or at least I grew up with those ideals.

I agree when David Nehring writes „self aid and buddy care".

We once had a notion of that, but part of our ego, in our narcissistic society, has become a premise and we understand that teamwork must be of greater benefit than the achievement of a few. As an example we can go back to the

times of Moses and Pharaoh, when the Creator told him what to do and what to transmit to the people ... and after the liberation, Israel went its own way and they did not remember the One who led them out. And even so, like the faithful father that He is, He did not take away either His love or His correction...

Growing hurts, correction leads us to feel different emotions, some accept the correction and others rebel against Him. As David Nehring writes about DBT „radical acceptance", the idea is clear as water, or perhaps it is not just an idea. As many of you know, one of the elements of DBT is mindfulness. There we have to observe, describe, participate – non-judgmentally and effectively…

And now I want to present a simple exercise to those who read this: in the book of Psalms there is concrete and spiritual evidence, showing the results for those who meditate on its law. Not surprisingly, Orthodox Jews, men and above all women, secular Jews and atheists, from all sectors of Israeli society, even from other religions, when they are in crisis, hospitals, alone, abandoned, losing faith or also burdened with anxiety or suicidal thoughts and more: they read Psalms.

The bad thing is that after that they forget and stop meditating on His law... and again I see an association with Moses when he came down with the tables of the law...

Did you know that meditation and contemplation cause brain changes with greater prominence of neural networks of concentration, attention, abstraction and verbal fluency?

Let it be clear: mindfulness is a type of meditation; what I propose is to do what is written is the books of Psalms – meditate on its law and be handled by its holy spirit in its presence.

Anyway, now I am referring to the Spiritual Dialectic about which David Nehring writes: this reminded me of Bion when he writes about psychological containment as an aspect of resilience and refers to the capacity to internally manage the troubling thoughts and feelings and behavior that arise as a consequence of stress.

And what better management of our interior is there than when we surrender and follow His commandments? – Not as a series of automatic phrases, but by understanding the heart of God as a father, who is with His children at all times, under all circumstances, no matter what they do, the father who knows what is best for them, even when they do not acknowledge it or deny it or forget it... even when they get angry with Him, because I am sure that, just like in the Holocaust, and then in the different difficulties that we have faced in this piece of land, God was always there. Seeing, caring, being there even with all the difficulties of their children, feeling their suffering but also healing, blessing them, restoring them, Israel and all those who have believed in His Name.

## Nicholas DiFonzo (USA)

# Evil Rumors

**Abstract**

Using a Christian psychology approach, this article explores the connection between rumors and stress. Christian psychology begins with Scripture and the relevant texts of the Christian tradition in order to orient subsequent texts, including those of modern psychology. Christian psychology has reconceptualized rumor as information and stories that are interpreted and responded to within theological narrative and cosmic conflict contexts. Stress can be recast as divine pruning, a growth-oriented trial. Rumors linked to stress—fear rumors—are therefore information and stories about trials that God uses to prune his children. When confronted with fear-rumors, God's people are to hold fast, unmoved, rooted in a trustful security. They are to be informed, not alarmed. In contrast, modern conceptions of rumor as naturalistically evolved collective threat detection systems bear a striking similarity to modern understandings of stress as adaptive threat appraisal systems. In sum, Christian psychology understands rumor stress as a pruning process; modern psychology links rumors and stress as collective and individual survival signals.

**Evil Rumors**

The choir sang an Anglican chant based on Psalm 112: "They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; their heart is right; they put their trust in the LORD." (Hurd, 1987, p. 253). Verse 7 is translated in various ways: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." (King James Version). "Of an evil report he is not afraid, prepared is his heart, confident in Jehovah." (Young's Literal Translation). "He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord." (English Standard Version). The psalm speaks about good and upright persons—they delight in God's commands, are gracious and compassionate, lend freely, and conduct their affairs with justice. The psalmist describes such people as unshaken by bad news, evil tidings, and tragic reports. Such persons trust in the Lord.

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Bad news, evil tidings, and tragic reports would all be considered "stressors" today. In this article, I explore the connection between rumors and stress. I approach the matter from a Christian psychology perspective, then discuss modern conceptions linking rumor and stress. Along the way I highlight the role of grounding assumptions in our understanding of rumor and stress. I turn first to a Christian psychology conceptualization of rumor.

**Christian Psychology**

Christian psychology is ancient—it has existed since the time of Christ, but also nascent—it has only recently been resurrected among Christians as distinct from Integration, the dominant current approach of Christians to psychology (Johnson & Jones, 2000). The distinction is about the starting point: With what texts does one begin? One can start with the Scripture, allowing Christian thought to form the categories and contours of our psychological method, theory, and practice, then incorporate other texts, including those of modern psychology (Johnson, 2007). Alternately, one can begin with the texts of modern psychology, allowing them pride of place in shaping our psychological method, theory, and practice, then incorporate the texts of Scripture. The results are not

equivalent. The former yields a psychology that is a holistic expression of one's Christianity—it has the "feel" (i.e., intertextual cues) of Christianity (e.g., it is ordered by an understanding of the triune God, a biblical anthropology, or the redemptive work of Christ) yet is meaningfully conversant with modern research (e.g., (Knabb, Johnson, Bates, & Sisemore, 2019). The latter yields an integrated or Christianized version of a modern psychology—it has the "feel" of modernity (e.g., a Christianized psychodynamic therapy retains the foundational aim of client self-awareness of influential unconscious processes), even when critiqued and reformed by a Christian anthropology. New wine cannot be poured into old wineskins.

**Interpreted Embraced Theological Narratives in Wartime**

Rumor, a venerable topic in modern social psychology, was recently reconceived using the worldview elements of Christian psychology (DiFonzo, 2019). Rumors are "shared information and stories that are: 1) seen as unsubstantiated, 2) embedded within theological narratives, 3) spiritually-dimensioned, and 4) embraced or rejected." (p. 3). This approach attended explicitly to Christian epistemological, theological, meta-physical, and human volitional assumptions at variance with implicit worldview elements in modern theories. The following summarizes this reconceptualization of rumor (see DiFonzo, 2019, for fuller treatment).

First, rumor is information that is perceived by some individuals or groups as unsubstantiated. This element of the definition highlights the pivotal (and often political) role of hermeneutics and authority inherent in the designation of what is considered rumor and what is considered fact (Fine & DiFonzo, 2011). In general, psychology has paid little attention to worldview influence on hermeneutics. Nevertheless, evidence does not speak for itself and there are no immaculate perceptions (Slife & Williams, 1995). Evidence is always interpreted in the context of a worldview, surround, or narrative, and the "facts" are "theory laden" (dependent upon prior knowledge; Hanson, 1958). This is not a post-modern abdication of realism. Rather, a Christian epistemology holds a high view of evidence, but interprets evidence within a biblical worldview. This has even wider implications than might be supposed, for interpretation has as much to do with a right attitude as it does with a right understanding.

Second, rumors are stories that when unpacked turn out to draw their meaning from within larger social identity (Maines, 1999), cultural (Bernardi, Cheong, Lundry, & Ruston, 2012), and theological narratives. Theological narratives, or stories about God and his relationship with humanity, are replete in every book of the Bible. Indeed, the grand metanarrative of Scripture (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration; see Gould, 2007) may be viewed as a battle for hearts and minds fought using two conflicting narratives: "God is good" (e.g., loving, near, generous, freeing) vs. "God is bad" (e.g., tyrannical, spiteful, distant, condemning). The meanings of all stories are ultimately connected to one or the other understanding of God. This is the "No Neutrality Principle," the idea that because all things relate to God "no one can approach any intellectual endeavor from a position of strict religious neutrality" (Anderson, 2009, p. 447).

Third, rumors exist in a context of spiritual realms in conflict. The Bible amply testifies about the instrumental use of rumor by the enemies of God. Indeed, God accomplishes his will by faith (Heb. 11), Satan by rumors. By rumors, Satan tempted Eve: "Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?" (Gen. 3:1, The Message). By rumors, the Canaanite reconnaissance majority fomented fear: "And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored." (Num. 13:32) . By rumors, rabble-rousers provoked grumbling: "…the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.'" (Num. 11:4-5). By rumors, the Sanhedrin crucified Jesus: "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" (Matt. 26:59-60). By rumors, the Jewish leaders persecuted Paul: "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world." (Acts 24:5). One aspect of rumor then is its propagandistic

utility for accomplishing destruction and mayhem in a spiritual war.

Fourth, a central element of rumors is their reception. Humans choose non-deterministically to embrace or reject rumors. Modern mainstream psychology has almost uniformly assumed determinism (Slife, O'Grady, & Kosits, 2017), but the Scriptures assume a non-trivial agency: "…I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." (Deut. 30:19). Luther's teaching on the eighth commandment is relevant here. Luther taught that we should not listen or spread slander against our neighbor, but give our neighbor the benefit of the doubt, and "…explain everything in the kindest way." (Luther's Small Catechism, 1943, p. 75). Luther understood that people choose how to respond to rumors.

In sum, Christian psychology conceives rumors as information and stories that are interpreted and responded to within theological narrative and cosmic conflict contexts. How might these ideas be linked to stress?

**Divine Pruning and Evil Rumors**

Scripture understands the mechanistic idea of "stress" using human terminology: trials, temptations, and suffering. For God's people, these experiences are understood as divine pruning: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2). Pruning cuts away the dead branches to make room for live growth. Pruning by the gardener is meant for the good for the tree—it grows stronger and flourishes. Similarly, trials are meant for the good of the believer, part of a fatherly discipline that paradoxically signifies sonship: "the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (Heb. 11:6). The end goal is righteousness and peace: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Heb. 11:11). Suffering is part of a development of character culminating in hope: "…suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, charac-

ter; and character, hope." (Rom. 5:3-4). In sum, stress may be understood as divine pruning, a growth-oriented trial ordained by the hand of a loving Father.

Rumors of trials, temptations, and suffering are therefore information and stories that God uses to prune us. They are rumors of dreaded events, and have been dubbed dread or fear rumors (Knapp, 1944).

They are "bad news"—such as when we hear of coming layoffs and loss of employment. They are "evil rumors"—such as when we are slandered falsely. They are "bad tidings"—such as when we learn of an impending viral epidemic, war, or any other perceived threat to well-being. They are sometimes about the possibility of tragic loss and death.

Fear rumors need not lead inevitably to fear. They can be interpreted within a Biblical surround, assessed with respect to theological narrative, evaluated as to their source and intention to harm, and either embraced or rejected. We have seen how Psalm 112 characterizes persons rooted firmly in God: they are not shaken by evil rumors, bad news, or threats. The theme is seen in other Scriptures, for example, Jesus' warning: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." (Matt. 24:6). In other words, a good, powerful, and knowing God has the situation under control, the calamity is part of his plan.

These ideas dovetail with recent research demonstrating that a deeply felt confidence gained through Christian contemplation of God's all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful nature led to reduction in chronic worry and stress (Knabb, Frederick, & Cumming, 2017). In these samples, a deep awareness of God's love, power, and knowledge was incompatible with fear, worry, and stress. It may be that contemplative Christians were more fully able to: 1) interpret stressful reports within a biblical frame ("God has all things under control"), 2) perceive them within the "God is good" narrative frame ("God has my welfare in mind"), 3) consider their spiritual realm origins ("Is this report intended to discourage, distract, and provoke distrust?"), and 4) reject their dread meaning ("I am aware

of this report but I will not be alarmed").

To bring this Christian psychology of rumor and stress into sharper relief, I next describe modern psychological conceptualizations of rumor and stress. Modern psychology conceives of rumors as part of adaptive collective threat appraisal, and stress as part of adaptive individual threat appraisal.

**Collective and Individual Threat Detection**

Modern psychology understands rumor as unsubstantiated information that circulates in service of collective attempts to adaptively cope with uncertainty and deal with perceived risk (Bordia, DiFonzo, & Chang, 1999). When a community faces the perplexing event (e.g., how could our president be assassinated by a lone gunman?) people discuss rumors to make sense of the matter. Making sense (i.e., understanding) is seen as evolutionarily adaptive (Fiske, 2018). When communities face a potentially threat (e.g., the exponential spread of the coronavirus, (J. Cohen, Feb. 19, 2020), people share rumors to prepare against danger; this, of course, is also adaptive. When reliable news is absent, perceived as partisan, or inconsistent (e.g., when newspapers are state-controlled; Bauer & Gleicher, 1953), people improvise news; this is rumor (Shibutani, 1966). Considered this way, rumors function as a way that a group makes sense of the unexplained, and detect and deal with threat.

Threats may be tangible, as when lives, livelihoods, health, or safety are endangered. Rumors abound in the midst of natural disasters (Prasad, 1935), organizational changes affecting job security (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994), and when children become autistic for no apparent reason (Jolley & Douglas, 2014). Threats may also be intangible, as when a rumor threatens a deeply cherished value (Federico, Williams, & Vitriol, 2018), or when one's social group is derogated (DiFonzo et al., 2014). Rumors in cases involving threat afford coping functions. When rumors help groups make sense of and prepare for a threat, they fulfill a problem-focused coping (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005). When rumors simply help groups to understand an unavoidable threat, they afford an emotion-focused coping (Walker & Blaine, 1991).

Rumors have been linked to psychological stress and strain in a couple of ways. First, rumors of potential threat may lead to stress. For example, systematic categorization of rumors circulating among hospital employees undergoing major changes (e.g., in infrastructure, staffing, management, technology) were predominantly negative; hearing these negative, vs. hearing positive, rumor predicted change-related stress (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, & Difonzo, 2006). In addition, stress may lead to rumor discussion. In a meta-analysis of research on antecedents of rumor transmission, anxiety and uncertainty—both of which are psychological states closely linked to stress—most strongly predicted rumor transmission (Rosnow, 1991). Modern psychology's contention that rumors of threat (i.e., fear rumors) are stressful is not surprising, because modern psychology conceptualizes stress as an adaptive response to threat at the level of the individual. Modern psychology understands stress primarily using metaphors from material and machine mechanics. Materials (e.g., steel) are stressed when force is applied to them; too much force and the material deforms or fails. A related concept, strain, is the relative degree of deformation in the stressed material. Machines are also stressed when they cannot perform as designed because of excessive work demands (e.g., engines cannot achieve their rated rotation speeds when moving excessive loads). Using the materialist mechanics frame combined with naturalistic evolutionary adaptation, psychological stress "occurs when an individual perceives that environmental demands tax or exceed his or her adaptive capacity." (S. Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007, p. 1685).

The experience of stress happens when overload occurs in response to threat, presumably because all of an organism's resources must be marshalled for action. Psychological stress then arises when an experience is appraised as threatening (Gianaros & Wager, 2015). The system is (or at least, was) adaptive; these mechanisms are thought to have naturalistically evolved as a way for organisms to respond more effectively to predation or natural disaster (Segerstrom &

Miller, 2004). The idea is that animals that did not stress in the face of danger did not survive to pass on their genes. The physiological pathways for such appraisals are often cast as the (leftover from pre-historic periods but now problematic) causal circuitry of stress, for example, as when threat appraisals "…originate in brain systems that also control physiological stress reactions in the body." (Gianaros & Wager, 2015, p. 313). Stress is thus typically understood as a consequence of threat appraisal within a naturalistic evolutionary and adaptive frame.

**Conclusion**

Rumors may or may not be stressful, depending on one's "felt" worldview. In this article, I explored the link between rumors and stress from the perspective of Christian vs. modern psychology. The modern psychological understanding of the rumor-stress link is naturalistic throughout. Rumor is a collective, and stress is an individual, adaptive threat detection mechanism that arose out of a materialistic evolutionary heritage. The use of the word "stress" draws its intended meanings from material and engine mechanics. Thus modern psychology links rumors and stress as collective and individual survival signals. Coping with stress and fear rumors would then seem to be a zero-sum game in which the material must receive reinforcements, or the force applied must be reduced. Alternately, the threat detection mechanism has become too sensitive and thus "maladaptive." Therapy then involves threat reappraisal as "irrational."

From a Christian psychology approach, rumors are information and stories interpreted and non-deterministically responded to within theological narrative and spiritual warfare con-texts. Stress is a part of the pruning process, an instance of fatherly discipline for our benefit. To cope with evil rumors, bad reports, and unwelcome news, Scripture and recent research suggest that a deep awareness of God's goodness, power, and knowledge leads to decreases in worry and stress.

The dimensions of a Christian psychology approach to rumor suggest mechanisms for how decreases in stress occur. Bad news can be interpreted within a biblical surround, in full view of the Scriptural theme that God has all things under control. Evil rumors can be set within the "God is good" narrative frame, fitted within a larger story that God "has my welfare in mind." Evil tidings can be considered in light of their possible origins and intent to discourage or provoke distrust, cognizant that earth is situated in a spiritual war zone. Fear rumors can be received in view of the available choice options; we can be informed yet not alarmed, even about terrible "wars and rumors of wars."

Indeed, Jesus commanded his disciples to not be alarmed (Matt. 24:6). To this final thought, Matthew Henry's commentary on this verse continues to be as fitting now as when it was first penned:

"See that ye be not troubled. Is it possible to hear such sad news, and not be troubled? Yes, where the heart is fixed, trusting in God, it is kept in peace, and is not afraid, no not of the evil tidings of wars. Be not put into confusion or commotion; see that ye be not. There is need of constant care and watchfulness to keep trouble from the heart, but it is against the mind of Christ, that his people should have troubled hearts, even in troublous times." (Henry, Scott, & Stokes, 1833, p. 145).

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**Andrey Lorgus (Russia)**

# Comment to „Evil Rumors"

Andrey Lorgus - psychologist, anthropologist, Orthodox priest, E M C A P P B o a r d member, rector of the Institute of Christian Psychology (Moscow), the first Dean of Psychology Faculty at St. John the Divine Russian Orthodox University (2002 – 2008); counseling psychologist, lecturer of psychology and anthropology. Heading the ICP Online Department of „distance education". Research interests: Personality psychology and Family psychology. Born in 1956. Graduate of Lomonosov Moscow state University (1982), Faculty of psychology.

„The article by Nicholas DiFonzo addresses the spiritual dimension of the problem of „rumors" perception, specifically, their assessment from the point of view of a person who is trusting the Bible. A believer, more specifically, a Christian - such a person is considered by DiFonzo, builds his attitude to the world and everything in it, as an observer located on the axis Man – God. This axis provides a person meta-position where different meanings and relationships are possible. This position allows us to see the event, or imaginary event (rumor) in the ultimate God-man perspective, when any threat (if the rumor is threatening) can be understood as a divine gesture, as the good will of God the Father. In this position, a person is not seized with fear and his anxiety can decrease and develop into ordinary attention to the world and all what is in it.

However, the author emphasizes that this perspective, unlike „rumor" requires a personal, not a social position. That is, a personal reflexive and sober position. And this demands the skill of spiritual sobriety, self-organisation and self-attentiveness.

Sobriety and reflection, in contrast to the ordinary consciousness, which is susceptible to rumors and gossip, are based on a personal approach, as opposed to a socially oriented approach. The more a person is absorbed by the influence of his reference group, the more he is subject to the fears and anxieties that „rumors" bring. The more mature and experienced people are more resistant to rumors and pseudo-threats.

Thus, personal stress tolerance depends on the spiritual maturity and religious experience of

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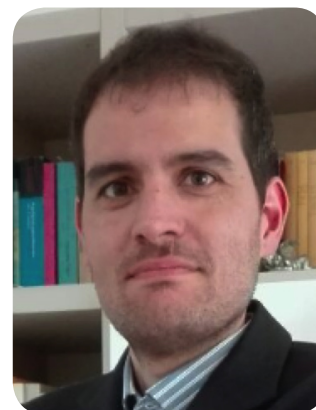https://emcapp.ignis.de/3/#/24
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the individual, which is inversely proportional to the social dependence. Spiritual maturity opens a deep and full-flowing channel to the world of the Bible, its eternal experience and blessing.

**Stefano Parenti (Italy)**

# Coping the Selye's Stress Theory with a Thomistic Approach

**Stefano Parenti (Italia)**

# Adattarsi alla teoria dello stress di Selye grazie all'approccio tomista

Stefano Parenti, psychotherapist, President of the Italian Catholic Psychological Association
Stefano Parenti is husband, father of three little mischievous kids (and a fourth is coming!) and works like psychotherapist in Milano, Italy. Since university times, he had the need to find a link between psychotherapy and faith, between work and life. Because all of the temporary approaches to therapy are build upon anthropologies far away from Church's one, he was searching for authors and professionals who have arleady linked this two parts. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rudolf Allers, Magda Arnold and some friends help him to find an integration and, overall, to understand that Catholics are called to continue the traditional psychology that was erased by modern and post-modern times.

Like Rudolf Allers, psychotherapist, wrote in a historical letter sent to Agostino Gemelli in 1936: "A Catholic medical psychology must be a real synthesis of the truth contained in existing systems - and unacceptable because of their pure materialism - and the truth of Catholic philosophy and theology. This synthesis can be accomplished only by people prepared in medicine, psychology or philosophy, with great practical and personal experience: so this work must be carried out by doctors, psychotherapists and definitely by Catholic secular scientists"[1]. Allers claims that a psychotherapy theory, to be completely catholic, must include two elements:
1. The truth made evident by the temporary approaches;
2. The truth present in the tradition, that is in the Magisterium of the Church.
Between these two, Catholics have to make a synthesis: an integration between what is true in the temporary theories but that in the mean-

Lo psicoterapeuta Rudolf Allers in una storica lettera inviata ad Agostino Gemelli nel 1936 scrisse: "Una psicologia medica cattolica deve essere una vera sintesi delle verità contenute nei sistemi già esistenti - e inaccettabili visto il loro spirito di materialismo puro - e le verità della filosofia e della teologia cattolica. Questo lavoro di sintesi non può essere compiuto che da persone istruite nella medicina o psicologia e nella filosofia, e che possiedono una esperienza pratica e personale assai grande: cioè questo lavoro deve essere fatto da medici, specialisti di psichiatria, dunque da scienziati cattolici laici"[1]. Allers sostiene che una teoria della psicoterapia, per essere pienamente cattolica, deve contenere due elementi: 1. le verità poste in evidenza dalle impostazioni contemporanee e 2. quelle presenti nella tradizione, ovvero nel Magistero della Chiesa. Tra queste il cattolico è chiamato a compiere una sintesi: una integrazione che premi ciò che c'è di vero nelle teorie con-

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1 Rudolf Allers letter to father Agostino Gemelli at September 29, 1936; cfr. Jore Olaechea Catter, Rudolf Allers psichiatra dell'umano, D'Ettoris, Crotone 2013, p. 90.

1 Rudolf Allers *lettera a padre Agostino Gemelli* del 29 Settembre 1936; cfr. Jore Olaechea Catter, *Rudolf Allers psichiatra dell'umano*, D'Ettoris, Crotone 2013, p. 90.

time discards the background setting, because of based on philosophical foundations far away from tradition.

We will compare the stress theory and the Christian anthropology. We will refer to Hans Selye's conceptions, for the first one and to formulations of Thomas Aquinas for the second one, in order to arrive at a summary that makes progress the traditional psychology in dialogue with the temporary settings.

**Hans Selye**

As Rudolf Allers, also Hans Hugo Bruno Selye (1907-1982) was born in Vienna, where a lot of temporary psychotherapies were born: Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, Alfred Adler's individual psychology and Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. As many of them and like his father, also Hans was a doctor. From him Hans caught the advice to don't become ever a looser[2]. His mother, who managed the family surgical clinic, insisted that her son "constant quest for excellence and intellectual sophistication"[3]. From her Hans took the admiration for greatness: "This feeling has become the most intimate characteristic of my nature"[4]. When he was four years old, he was already talking four languages and he worked

temporanee ma allo stesso tempo che ne rigetti l'impostazione di fondo, poiché edificata su fondamenti filosofici distanti dalle concezioni tradizionali.

Svolgeremo un confronto tra la teoria dello stress e l'antropologia cristiana. Ci riferiremo alle concezioni di Hans Selye per la prima, ed alle formulazioni di Tommaso d'Aquino per la seconda. L'intento è di giungere ad una sintesi, che faccia progredire la psicologia tradizionale in dialogo con le impostazioni contemporanee.

A. Hans Selye

Proprio come Rudolf Allers anche Hans Hugo Bruno Selye (1907-1982) è originario della medesima Vienna in cui sono sorte molte delle psicoterapie contemporanee: la psicoanalisi di Sigmund Freud, la psicologia individuale di Alfred Adler e la logoterapia di Viktor Frankl. Come molti di loro, e come suo padre, anche Hans era un medico. Da lui prese l'ammonimento di non diventare mai un perdente[2]. La madre, che amministrava la clinica chirurgica di famiglia, esercitò una costante pressione affinché suo figlio "ricercasse l'eccellenza e la raffinatezza intellettuale"[3]. Da lei prese l'ammirazione per la grandezza: "Questo sentimento è diventato la caratteristica più intima della mia natura"[4]. A quattro anni parlava già quattro lingue e per tutta la vita lavorò

2 Hans Selye, *Stress of my life,* Litton Educational Publishing, USA 1979, p. 11: "In case of defeat, don't be a loser. It becomes a habit in life to give in, and you must be prepared to overcome many defeats before you become a man".

3 Siang Yong Tan & A Yip, *Hans Selye (1907-1982): Founder of the stress theory,* Singapore Med. J. 2018 Apr. 59 (4), pp. 170-171.

4 *The stress of my life,* p. 22: "My mother always stood in speechless admiration before anything truly unique and great. She probably influenced me at a very early age more than anyone else". Selye grew up probably without the mother's love, p. 8: "In retrospect, I am baffled by the feeling that it was my teacher who played the traditional maternal role, while my real mother was undoubtedly my greatest teacher. (…) I think of her in terms of education and culture, affairs of the mind but noto f the heart. She never cried (…) and she could not tolerate little boys with tears in their eyes. But children can't help crying once in a while, and as a result I spent more time in the company of my governess than with my mother".

2 *The stress of my life,* p. 11: "Nel caso di una sconfitta, non essere un perdente. Altrimenti diventa un'abitudine ad arrendersi nella vita, e tu devi essere preparato a superare molte sconfitte prima di diventare un uomo".

3 Siang Yong Tan & A Yip, *Hans Selye (1907-1982): Founder of the stress theory,* Singapore Med. J. 2018 Apr. 59 (4), pp. 170-171.

4 *The stress of my life,* p. 22: "Mia madre restava sempre in una silenziosa ammirazione di fronte a qualsiasi cosa di veramente unico e grande. Probabilmente mi ha influenzato sin da piccolo più di qualsiasi altro". Selye è cresciuto probabilmente privo dell'affetto materno, p. 8: "Retrospettivamente, sono sconcertato dalla consapevolezza che è stata la mia insegnante a svolgere il tradizionale ruolo materno, mentre la mia vera mamma è stata senza alcun dubbio la mia insegnante più importante. (…) Penso a lei riguardo all'educazione ed alla cultura, alle questioni della testa ma non quelle del cuore. Non ha mai pianto (…) e non ha mai potuto tollerare i ragazzini con le lacrime agli occhi. Ma i bambini non possono fare a meno di piangere di tanto in tanto, e quindi ho trascorso molto più tempo in compagnia della mia governante che con mia mamma".

very hard all his life[5], so much that he was considered "a compulsive worker"[6] (he wrote more than 40 books and thousands of articles). He received early education in a Benedictine monastery from which he learned the foundation of Christianity which then repudiated. At 17 he attended the University of Medicine in Prague. After graduation he made a career in research. He took his doctorate in philosophy of chemistry, a branch of the Philosophy of science begun by the philosopher Friedrich von Schelling. He claimed that the physical and spiritual nature was a game among strengths in search of balance, the same dynamics of physics and chemistry. He won a research grant at the Johns Hopkins University, financed by Rockefeller Foundation and moved at the McGill University in Montreal, where remains for the rest of his life as director of the Institute of experimental medicine and surgery. The Selye's personal life was a "riot": he got married three times and had five children from the first two wives. He got married for the third time when he was old: she was his historical secretary. "In my life – write Selye – I shall have accomplished only one thing: a better understanding of stress"[7]. In his last work he writes a letter to an imaginary friend, saying he has no one to share the meaning of the life with[8].

a ritmi forsennati[5], tanto da essere ritenuto un "lavoratore compulsivo"[6] (scrisse più di 40 libri e centinaia di articoli). Dopo aver ricevuto la prima educazione in un monastero Benedettino, da cui apprese i fondamenti del cristianesimo che in seguito ripudiò, a 17 anni frequentò l'università di medicina a Praga e, una volta laureatosi, intraprese la carriera di ricercatore. Si dottorò in filosofia della chimica, una branca della filosofia della scienza che ha origine dal filosofo Friedrich von Schelling il quale sosteneva che la natura (sia fisica che spirituale) fosse un gioco tra forze in cerca di equilibrio, le stesse dinamiche studiate della fisica e della chimica. Dopo essersi aggiudicato una borsa di ricerca alla Johns Hopkins University, finanziata dalla Rockefeller Foundation, si trasferì alla McGill University a Montreal, dove risiedette per il resto della vita, ricoprendo la carica di direttore dell'Istituto di Medicina Sperimentale e di Chirurgia della stessa università. La vita personale di Selye fu un "tumulto": si sposò tre volte ed ebbe cinque figli dalle prime due mogli. La terza divenne sua consorte in tarda età: era la sua segretaria storica. "Nella mia vita – scrive Selye - ho portato a termine solo una cosa: una migliore comprensione dello stress"[7]. Nella sua ultima opera scrive una lettera ad un amico immaginario, dicendo di non avere nessuno con cui condividere il senso della vita[8].

La teoria dello stress[9]

Nel 1926, durante il secondo anno di studi, Se-

5 "When I entered medical school at the age of eighteen (…) I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning to study in our garden until about six in the evening, with very few interruptions. (…) Now, at the age of sixty-seven, I still get up at four or five o'clock in the morning and still work until six at night, with few interruptions", cfr. Hans Selye, *Stress without Distress,* J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadeplhia & New York 1974, p. 97.
6 John Simmons, *The scientific 100. A Ranking of the Most Influential Scientists, Past and Present,* Citadel Press, Kensington USA 1996, p. 405.
7 *The stress of my life,* p. 22.
8 Hans Selye, *From dream to discovery,* Hill Book Co., New York 1964, p. XIII.

5 "Quando a diciotto anni cominciai a studiare medicina (…) presi l'abitudine di alzarmi alle quattro di mattina e studiare, in giardino, fino alle sei di sera, con qualche breve intervallo. (…) Oggi ho sessantasette anni e ancora mi alzo alle quattro o alle cinque di mattina, e ancora lavoro fino alle sei di sera con poche interruzioni", *Stress senza paura,* p. 97.
6 John Simmons, *The scientific 100. A Ranking of the Most Influential Scientists, Past and Present,* Citadel Press, Kensington USA 1996, p. 405.
7 *The stress of my life,* p. 22.
8 *From dream to discovery,* p. XIII.
9 Utilizzeremo soprattutto l'opera in cui Selye si espone nel campo della psicologia e della morale, *Stress without distress,* J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia & New York 1974. Faremo però ricorso anche alla suo libro più famoso, *The stress of life,* McGraw Hill, USA 1956, e ad altri due testi in particolare, il monumentale *Textbook of endocrinology,* Acta Endocrinologica, Montreal 1947; *The story of the adaptation syndrome,* 1954.

## The stress theory[9]

In 1926 during the second year of study, Selye hypothesized a universal reaction of the organism to pathologies: "a stereotyped response to any exacting demand made upon the body"[10]. When there is a specific response of the patient to a specific disease, there is also a universal and non-specific reaction: "Whether a man suffers from a severe loss of blood, an infectious disease, or advanced cancer, he loses his appetite, his muscular strength, and his ambition to accomplish anything; usually, the patient also loses weight, and even his facial expression betrays that he is ill"[11]. In 1936, ten years later, "in the course of my experiments in which rats were injected with various impure and toxic gland preparations that, irrespective of the tissue from which they were made or their hormone content, the injections produced a stereotyped syndrome (a set of simultaneously occurring organ changes)"[12]. The same alteration was induced by many other factors: "cold, heat, infection, trauma, hemorrhage, nervous irritation, and many other stimuli"[13]. Selye called this non-specific reaction "general adaptation syndrome" (GAS) or biological stress syndrome. The GAS is a process with 3 stages: a. alarm reaction; b. stage of resistance; c. stage of exhaustion[14]. Selye defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the

lye ipotizzò l'esistenza di una reazione universale dell'organismo alle patologie: "ogni volta che dal corpo si esige una prestazione molto impegnativa, esso reagisce nello stesso modo"[10]. Laddove vi è una risposta specifica del malato ad una specifica malattia, vi è anche una reazione aspecifica ed universale: "Che uno soffra per una grave emorragia, o per una malattia infettiva, o per una forma di cancro in stato avanzato, sempre perde l'appetito, la forza muscolare e la volontà di agire; di solito diminuisce anche di peso e mostra persino nell'espressione del volto di essere malato". Nel 1936, esattamente dieci anni più tardi, "nel corso di esperimenti in cui si iniettavano ai topi vari preparati ghiandolari impuri e tossici, osservai che le iniezioni, indipendentemente dal tessuto da cui provenivano e dal loro contenuto ormonico, provocavano una sindrome stereotipa (una serie di mutamenti avveniva simultaneamente in determinati organi)"[11]. Lo stesso tipo di alterazione era indotto da molti altri fattori: "freddo, caldo, infezioni, traumi, emorragie, irritazione nervosa e molti altri stimoli". Selye chiamò questa reazione aspecifica "sindrome generale di adattamento" (GAS) o sindrome di stress biologico. La GAS venne teorizzata come un processo in tre stadi: a. reazione d'allarme; b. fase di resistenza; c. fase di esaurimento[12]. Selye definì lo stress come "la reazione aspecifica del corpo a qualunque esigenza gli venga imposta"[13] e ne parlò in termini di "mutamenti biochimici" che sono "tendenti sostanzialmente a tener testa a qualsiasi maggiore esigenza che venga imposta alla macchina umana"[14]. Lo stress "non si può evitare" e "la

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9 We will quote primary the book in which Selye exposes himself in the field of psychology and moral, *Stress without distress* (SWD)*, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia & New York 1974. We will also appeal to his most famous book, *The stress of life* (SOL), McGraw Hill, USA 1956 and to other three books in particular, the monumental *Textbook of endocrinology*, Acta Endocrinologica, Montreal 1947; *The story of the adaptation syndrome*, 1954; *From dream to discovery,* Hill Book Co., New York 1964.
10 *SWD,* p. 35.
11 *Ibidem.*
12 *Ibidem,* p. 36.
13 *Ibidem,* p. 38.
14 *La sindrome di adattamento*, Istituto sieroterapico Milanese Belfanti, 1955, p. 20 [op. orig. *The story of the adaptation yndrome*, 1952].

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10 *Stress senza paura,* p. 35.
11 Ibidem, p. 36.
12 *La sindrome di adattamento*, Istituto sieroterapico Milanese Belfanti, 1955, p. 20 [op. orig. *The story of the adaptation yndrome*, 1952].
13 Ibidem, p. 27. "La parola «stress» entrata nella lingua inglese attuale dal francese antico e dall'inglese medievale come derivazione della parola «distress». La prima sillaba è caduta, col passar del tempo, nel pronunciare il vocabolo e, con il progredire degli studi e delle ricerche, le due parole hanno assunto significati completamente diversi nonostante l'origine comune. L'attività collegata con lo stress può essere piacevole e spiacevole; il «distress» (l'angoscia) è sempre spiacevole", p. 31.
14      Ibidem, p. 26.

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body to any demand made upon it"[15]. He spoke about "biochemical changes" that are "essentially meant to cope with any type of increased demand upon the human machinery"[16]. "Stress is not something to be avoided" and "complete freedom from stress is death"[17]. Stress is also present "in lower animals" and "even in plants"[18]. Therefore, Selye claims that stress must not be confused with feelings of unpleasantness or "distress": the harmful effect "depends merely on the intensity of the demand made upon the adaptive capacity of the body"[19].

## The antecedents

The stress theory was not a lightning bolt. Selye recognized Claude Bernard (1813-1878) and, above all, Walter B. Cannon (1871-1945) among the first to anticipate his conceptions ("He had the greatest influence on me, and throughout my life I always felt very close to him"[20]). "The great French physiologist Claude Bernard who during the second half of the 19th century – well before anyone thought of stress – first pointed out clearly that the internal environment (le milieu intérieur) of a living organism must remain fairly constant, despite changes in its external environment. (…) Some fifty years later, the distinguished American physiologist, Walter B. Cannon suggested that «the coordinated physiological process which maintain most of the steady states in the organism» should be called «homeostasis»"[21]. By both these authors Selye carried on the study about adrenaline and sympathetic nervous system, until the formulation of the two laws on homeostasis and adaptation. But the most important thing was that Cannon

mancanza assoluta di stress significa morte"[15]. Lo stress si riscontra anche "negli animali inferiori" e "perfino nelle piante"[16]. Dunque, per Selye, non va confuso con la sensazione di spiacevolezza o "angoscia": l'effetto dannoso "dipende soltanto dall'intensità dell'esigenza imposta alle capacità di adattamento del corpo"[17]. Gli antecedenti

La teoria dello stress non fu un fulmine a ciel sereno. Selye riconobbe che tra i primi che anticiparono le sue concezioni vi furono Claude Bernard (1813-1878) e soprattutto Walter B. Cannon (1871-1945) ("He had the greatest influence on me, and throughout my life I always felt very close to him"[18]). "Il grande fisiologo francese Claude Bernard fu il primo a rilevare chiaramente, durante la seconda metà dell'Ottocento – molto prima che si parlasse di «stress» - che l'ambiente interiore (il *milieu intèrieur*) di un organismo vivente deve rimanere il più possibile costante, nonostante i mutamenti del suo ambiente esterno. (…). Una cinquantina d'anni dopo Walter B. Cannon, illustre fisiologo americano, propose di chiamare «omeostasi» quei «processi fisiologici coordinati che conservano la maggioranza degli stati costanti nell'organismo»"[19]. Da entrambi gli autori Selye riprese gli studi sull'adrenalina e sul sistema nervoso simpatico che portarono alla formulazione delle due leggi dell'omeostasi e dell'adattamento. Ma soprattutto Cannon fornì a Selye l'idea centrale della teoria dello stress, ovvero che dalla fisiologia del corpo umano si ricava la filosofia della condotta umana. Nell'epilogo del suo libro *Wisdom of the body,* Cannon "espresse la convinzione che il comportamento e la filosofia dell'uomo potessero essere guidati, in grande misura, dalla ricerca biologica. «Non potrebbe essere utile», si domandava, «prendere in esame altre forme di organizzazione – industriale, domestica o sociale – alla luce dell'organizzazione del corpo?»"[20]. Selye fa propria l'idea di Cannon: "Gli stessi principi (specificità degli organi,

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15 SWD, p. 27. "The word «stress» allegedly came into common English usage, via Old French and Middle English, as «distress». The first syllable eventually was lost through slurring, as children turn «because» into «cause». In the light of our investigations, the true meaning of the two words became totally different despite their common ancestry, just as in correct usage we distinguish between «because» (since) and «cause» (reason)", p. 31.
16 *Ibidem,* p. 26.
17 *Ibidem,* p. 32.
18 *Ibidem,* p. 31.
19 *Ibidem,* p. 31.
20 *From dream to discovery,* p. 16.
21 SWD, p. 34.

15      Ibidem, p. 32.
16      Ibidem, p. 30.
17      Ibidem, p. 31.
18      *From dream to discovery,* p. 16.
19      Ibidem, p. 34.
20      Ibidem, p. 68.

provided to Selye the central idea of the stress theory. From the physiology of the human body we can obtain the philosophy of human behavior. In the epilogue of his book Wisdom of the body, Cannon "expressed his conviction that the behavior and philosophy of man should and could be guided, to a large extent, by biological research. «Might it not be useful», he asked, «to examine other forms of organization – industrial, domestic or social – in the light of the organization of the body?»"[22]. Selye makes the idea of Cannon his own: "The same principles must govern cooperation between entire nations: just as a person's health depends on the harmonious conduct of the organs within his body, so must relations between individual people, and by extension between the members of families, tribes, and nations, be harmonized by the emotions and impulses of altruistic egotism that automatically ensure peaceful cooperation and remove all motives for revolutions and wars"[23].

**The stress psychology**

In Selye's opinion, the biological stress theory involves a real philosophy. The introduction of Stress without distress, his most popular book begins with: "Almost four decades of laboratory research on the physiological mechanisms of adaptation to the stress of life have convinced me that the basic principles of defense on the cellular lever are largely applicable also to people and even to entire societies of man"[24]. Selye speaks about "natural philosophy of life" that declines in "a code of behavior based on scientific principles, rather than on superstition, tradition, or blind subservience to the commands of any «unquestionable authority»"[25]. He calls this moral: "the philosophy of gratitude"[26] or "altruistic egotism", the explanation of which "biological roots" it is "the main purpose" of his written[27]. Selye starts his argumentation saying that "Actually, the two main problems of life are maintenance of the species and maintenance of

messaggeri chimici e meccanismi di feedback) dovrebbero governare la cooperazione fra nazioni: come la salute di una persona dipende dall'armonico comportamento degli organi dentro il suo corpo, così i rapporti fra le persone e, per estensione, fra i membri di famiglie, tribù e nazioni, dovrebbero venire armonizzati da sentimenti e impulsi di egotismo altruistico, capaci di garantire automaticamente una cooperazione pacifica e di eliminare ogni motivo di rivoluzione e di guerra"[21].

La psicologia dello stress

La teoria biologica dello stress implica, dunque per Selye, una vera e propria filosofia. L'introduzione di Stress senza paura, il suo testo più divulgativo, inizia con le seguenti dichiarazioni: "Dopo circa quarant'anni di ricerche in laboratorio sui meccanismi dell'adattamento allo stress del vivere, sono convinto che gli stessi principi fondamentali di difesa che entrano in funzione per le cellule sono ampiamente validi anche per gli esseri umani, e addirittura per intere società umane"[22]. Selye parla di una "filosofia naturale del vivere" che si declina in "un codice di comportamento basato su principi scientifici, piuttosto che sulla superstizione, la tradizione o la cieca obbedienza agli ordini di una qualsiasi «autorità indiscussa»"[23]. Questa morale è ciò che chiama "the philosophy of gratitude"[24] o "egoismo altruistico", la spiegazione delle cui "radici biologiche" costituisce "lo scopo principale" dei suoi scritti[25]. Selye inizia la sua argomentazione dichiarando che: "I due grandi problemi della vita sono, in realtà, la conservazione della specie e la conservazione dell'individuo"[26]. "Dopo che un nuovo essere vivente è apparso nel mondo (…) da quel momento in poi, per tutta la vita, il suo problema principale sarà l'adattamento, cioè la conservazione dell'omeostasi"[27]. "Se volete tracciarvi uno schema di filosofia naturale del comportamento, dovete innanzi tutto domandarvi: «Qual

22    Ibidem, *p. 69.*
23    *Ibidem,* p. 70.
24    *Ibidem,* p. 17.
25    *Ibidem,* p. 18.
26    SOL, p. 287.
27    SWD, p. 62.

21    Ibidem, p. 69.
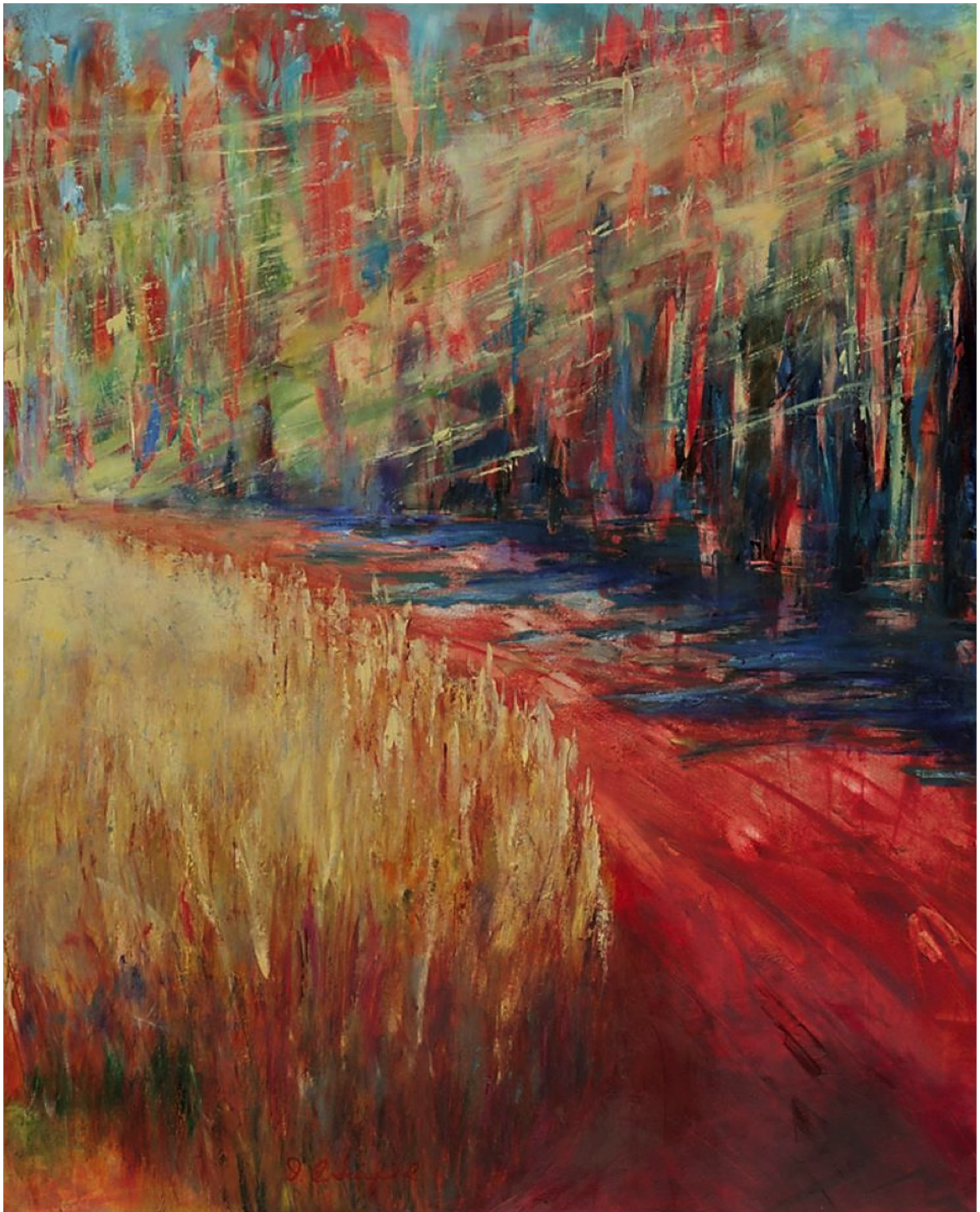22    Ibidem, p. 15.
23    Ibidem, p. 16.
24    Stress of life, p. 287.
25    Ibidem, p. 61.
26    Ibidem, p. 52.
27    Ibidem, p. 53.

A Walk in the Woods

the individual"[28]. "After a new living being has arrived in this world, there is not much you can do about his inherited characteristics, but he is immediately exposed to a hostile environment to which you can help him adjust"[29]. "First of all, if you attempt an outline for a natural philosophy of behavior, you must ask yourself, «What does, or should, motivate my conduct?» and «What is the aim of life?». In fact, has life any «aim» other than to continue its existence (…)?"[30]. To this rhetorical question Selye adds that the main threat to survival is the desire to survive of the other human beings[31], that is the "selfish impulse"[32], concrete act of the "instinct for self-preservation"[33]. However, selfishness "it is also dangerous to society. We are afraid of it, because it harbors the seeds of fight and revenge"[34]. How to grow up without giving vent to the struggle for life (the aggression, the supremacy, the war)? Through cooperation, says Selye. One more time the idea comes from biology: "Presumably, in the course of evolution, living beings have learned to defend themselves against all kinds of assaults (whether arising in the body or coming from its environment) through two basic mechanisms which help us put up with aggressors (syntoxic) or destroy them (catatoxic)"[35]. To cooperate with a possible enemy, we must replace selfishness with altruism. This is difficult to realize[36] and must be shared, as it happens - in his opinion - for

è, o dovrebbe essere, la ragione della mia condotta?» e «Qual è lo scopo della vita?». Infatti, la vita ha forse altro «scopo» oltre a quello di continuare?"[28]. A questa domanda retorica Selye aggiunge che la minaccia principale alla sopravvivenza è il desiderio di sopravvivenza degli altri uomini[29], ovvero l'"impulso egoistico"[30] che costituisce l'atto pratico dell'"istinto di autoconservazione"[31]. Tuttavia l'egoismo "è anche pericoloso per la società e ne abbiamo paura, perché contiene i germi della lotta e della vendetta"[32]. Come poter prosperare senza dar sfogo alla lotta per la vita (l'aggressione, la supremazia, la guerra)? Con la cooperazione, dice Selye. Ancora una volta è la biologia a fornirgli l'idea: "È probabile che gli esseri viventi, lungo le fasi dell'evoluzione, abbiano imparato a difendersi da ogni tipo di aggressione (sia dentro il loro corpo che proveniente dall'esterno) mediante due meccanismi di base: sintossici, che aiutano ad accordarsi con l'aggressore, e catatossici, che aiutano a distruggerlo"[33]. Per accordarsi, cioè per cooperare con un possibile nemico, è necessario sostituire l'egoismo con l'altruismo. Questo, però, oltre ad avere dei limiti di attuazione[34], deve essere condiviso, come avviene - a suo dire - per le altre forme di vita[35]. La legge morale

28 *Ibidem,* p. 53.
29 *Ibidem,* p. 54.
30 *Ibidem,* p. 59.
31 *Ibidem*, p. 67: "The stress of living with one another still represents one of the greatest causes of distress".
32 *Ibidem*, p. 60: "Living beings are motivated by a variety of impulses, among which the selfish desire to maintain oneself, to stay alive and happy, is one of the most important".
33 *Ibidem*, p. 61: "Egotism or selfishness is the most ancient characteristic feature of life. From the simplest microorganism to man, all living beings must protect their own interests first of all. We can hardly expect someone else to look after us more conscientiously than after himself. Selfishness is natural (…)".
34 *Ibidem.*
35 *Ibidem,* p. 48.
36 *Ibidem*, p. 76: "The imperative biological laws of cybernetic self-defense make it difficult to earn love by constantly choosing purely altruistic decisions".

28        Ibidem, p. 58.
29 Ibidem, p. 66: "Lo stress del vivere l'uno con l'altro costituisce tuttora una delle principali cause di angoscia".
30 **Ibidem, p. 59:** "Gli impulsi che danno una motivazione agli esseri viventi sono molti e vari e fra di essi uno dei principali è l'egoistica volontà di conservarsi, di restare vivi e felici".
31 **Ibidem, p. 60:** "L'egotismo, o egoismo, è il più antico carattere distintivo della vita: dal più elementare microrganismo fino all'uomo, tutti gli esseri viventi devono innanzitutto proteggere sé e i propri interessi. Non si può pretendere che altri prendano cura di noi più scrupolosamente che di se stessi. L'egoismo è un fatto naturale (…)".
32        Ibidem.
33        Ibidem, p. 47.
34 **Ibidem, p. 75:** "Le leggi biologiche imperative dell'autodifesa cibernetica rendono difficile conquistarsi l'amore scegliendo costantemente soluzioni esclusivamente altruistiche".
35 **Ibidem, p. 131:** "Gli organismi unicellulari cominciarono ad aggregarsi e a formare individui multicellulari più robusti e più complessi; entro il loro ambito, alcune cellule dovettero rinunciare in parte alla loro indipendenza per specializzarsi nella nutrizione, nella difesa o nella locomozione, ma la sicurezza e la sopravvivenza di ogni individuo risultarono accresciute".

the other life forms[37]. So the moral law of the human being cannot be declined in the Evangelical precept «love thy neighbor as thyself»[38], but in a code more "conform with biological laws"[39]: «earn thy neighbor's love»[40]. "Our homeostatic security in society is best ensured by the incitement of positive feelings toward us in as many people as possible, for no one would have any personal motive in attacking someone whom he loves, respects, and trusts, to whom he fells grateful, or whose excellence in some field demonstrates the feasibility of achievements which may be worth duplicating"[41]. In Selye's opinion the real altruism is "a modified form of egotism, a kind of collective selfishness that helps the community in that it engenders gratitude"[42]. He calls this behavior "altruistic

dell'individuo, allora, non può declinarsi nel precetto evangelico "ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso"[36], bensì in un codice più "conforme alle leggi della biologia"[37]: "*Guadagnati* l'amore del tuo prossimo"[38]. "Il risvegliare nel maggior numero possibile di persone sentimenti positivi verso di noi è la migliore garanzia per la nostra solidità omeostatica nella società, perché nessuno può avere un motivo personale per attaccare un altro, se lo ama, lo rispetta e ne ha fiducia, se gli è grato o se gli riconosce in un qualsiasi campo una tale bravura che il suo operato merita di continuare a ripetere i successi già ottenuti"[39]. Per Selye l'altruismo vero e proprio è "una forma corretta di egotismo, una sorta di egoismo collettivo, che giova alla comunità, in quanto genera gratitudine"[40]. Chiama questo codice di comportamento "egoismo altruistico": "aiutare gli altri per l'egoistica ragione di ottenere, a pro-

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37 *Ibidem*, p. 128: "Unicellular organisms began to aggregate and form stronger, more complex multicellular beings; in these, certain cells had to give up part of their independence to specialize in nutrition, defense, or locomotion, but thereby the security and survival value of each individual were raised".

38 *Ibidem*, p. 20: "However, my belief, which is based on biological laws, is that, for the great majority of people, and certainly for society as a whole, the best motive is not to «love thy neighbor as thyself» (for that is impossible), but to «*earn* thy neighbor's love». It permits you to express your talents by the most powerful means of maintaining security and peace of mind. It does so through a kind of altruistic egotism that gives expression to the inherent selfishness of living matter without causing guilt feelings; nor can it be subject to attack or hostility, since it is useful to everybody". P. 119: "The effort to «love thy neighbor as thyself» probably has done more good, and more to make life pleasant, than any other guideline. The only trouble is that strict adherence to such behavior is incompatible with the laws of biology".

39 *Ibidem*, p. 121: "I am convinced that without rejecting the principle «Love thy neighbor» we can adapt it to conform with biological laws discovered in our time (…). As adapted, it neither presupposes nor excludes the existence of an infallible commander whose orders must be blindly followed. And, most important, it does not deny the essentially egoistic nature of living creatures. All that is needed is a simple rewording of the dictum".

40 Ibidem, p. 122: "Thus expressed, we need not offer love on command to people who are truly unlovable; we need not love others as much as ourselves, which would be contrary to the laws of biology. Now success is up to us!".

41 *Ibidem,* p. 75.

42 *Ibidem*, p. 61. Selye gives a lot of examples taken from biology about "collaboration among living beings" that "reduces to minimum the inner stress": lichens, pea roots, coral polyps, some hermit crabs, etc. p. 65 e ss.

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36 Ibidem, p. 19: "La mia convinzione, fondata su leggi biologiche, è che per la grande maggioranza della gente, e certo per la società nel suo complesso, il principio migliore non è «ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso» (cosa impossibile), ma «*guadagnati* l'amore del tuo prossimo». È un principio che permette di manifestare le nostre doti con i mezzi più efficaci per conservare la sicurezza e la pace dello spirito, mediante una specie di egotismo altruistico che esprime l'egoismo innato della materia vivente senza provocare senso di colpa, e che non può trovarsi di fronte ad aggressioni od ostilità, perché è utile a tutti". P. 122: "Più di ogni altro principio, probabilmente, l'«Ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso» ha contribuito a fare del bene e rendere la vita migliore. L'unico problema è che il rispetto assoluto di un simile comportamento è incompatibile con le leggi della biologia".

37 Ibidem, p. 124: "Sono certo che, senza rigettare il principio dell'«Ama il prossimo tuo», possiamo modificarlo perché si conformi alle leggi biologiche che abbiamo imparato (…). Modificandolo, tale principio non presuppone né esclude l'esistenza di un potere infallibile, i cui ordini vadano seguiti ciecamente, né, punto di massimo rilievo, esso nega la natura essenzialmente egoistica delle creature viventi. Basta semplicemente enunciarlo con parole nuove".

38 Ibidem, p. 125: "Esprimendolo così, non dobbiamo offrire amore, su comando, a individui che è impossibile amare; non dobbiamo amare gli altri come noi stessi, che sarebbe contrario alle leggi della biologia. Il risultato è nelle nostre mani".

39 Ibidem, p. 74.

40 Ibidem, p. 60. Selye offre numerosi esempi tratti dalla biologia di "aiuto fra le componenti di un organismo" che "ne riduce al minimo lo stress interno": licheni, le radici dei piselli, i polipi del corallo, alcuni paguri, ecc. p. 65.

egotism": "to help others for the selfish motive of deserving their help in return"[43]. "Now my thesis is that man, with his most highly developed central nervous system, can consciously use his mind to direct his actions according to the laws of Nature; and once he fully understands the philosophy of egoistic altruism, he is no longer ashamed of being an egoist. He admits to being self-centered and acts primarily for his own good; he greedily collects a fortune to assure his personal freedom and capacity for survival under the most satisfying conditions, but he does so through amassing any army of friends"[44]. To act this way Selye says that "we should adapt our moral code and values to fit the exigencies of the times to come"[45]: "win the goodwill of others, and so develop "good reputation" from others[46]. "You are as valuable and secure as past accomplishments and present capabilities have helped to make you; in other words, you are worth as much as your ability to earn your neighbor's love"[47].

**Philosophical references**

When Selye writes, he refers to many authors, from Aristotele to Bertrand Russel, but he does not inscribe his theory in any philosophical current[48], despite he knows there are "philosophical implications of stress research"[49]. So we must take the main principles.

Selye studies the "non-specific adaptation response" on the mouses, when they are invaded by harmful or disturbing alien substances (poisons, hot or cold). The same response is speculated also on the human beings, especial-

pria volta, l'aiuto e la cooperazione"[41]. "Ebbene, la mia tesi è che l'uomo, con il suo sviluppatissimo sistema nervoso centrale, può consapevolmente usare la propria mente per guidare le proprie azioni rispettando le leggi della Natura; e se capisce pienamente la filosofia dell'egotismo altruistico, non si vergogna più di essere un egoista. Riconosce allora di essere egocentrico e agisce innanzi tutto per il proprio bene; mette avidamente insieme una fortuna per garantirsi la libertà personale e la possibilità di sopravvivere nelle condizioni migliori, ma lo fa raccogliendosi un esercito di amici"[42]. Per agire in tal modo Selye sostiene che sia necessario "adattare il nostro codice morale e i nostri valori alle esigenze dei tempi futuri"[43]: "conquistarsi la buona volontà altrui e l'apprezzamento per il nostro operato", ovvero raggiungere una "buona reputazione" da parte degli altri[44]. "Il vostro valore e la vostra sicurezza saranno quali vi avranno fatto il lavoro passato e le capacità presenti; in altre parole, voi valete quanto la vostra capacità di guadagnarvi l'amore del prossimo"[45].

Riferimenti filosofici

Nei suoi testi Selye fa riferimento a numerosi autori, da Aristotele a Bertrand Russell, ma non iscrive la sua teoria in alcuna corrente filosofica[46], benché riconosca che vi siano delle "implicazioni filosofiche contenute nelle ricerche sullo stress"[47]. Tocca dunque a noi coglierne gli assunti principali.

La "risposta aspecifica di adattamento", che Selye studia nei topi quando vengono invasi da sostanze aliene (organi di altri animali), nocive

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43 *Ibidem,* p. 76.
44 *Ibidem,* p. 115-116.
45 *Ibidem,* p. 91.
46 *Ibidem,* p. 125: "Remember that no matter what your degree or title, your highest rank is the reputation of your name".
47 *Ibidem,* p. 125.
48 Even if he gives net judgments abve some of them, as "the sterile dialecticism of the medieval scholastics who were so interested in mental gymnastics that they never bothered to verify the workability of their ideas", *From dream to discovery,* p. 278.
49 SWD, p. 22. And, p. 116: "In any event, all that I have said here is not really new; it has been the basis of most religions and philosophies of conduct throughout the ages – expressed in one form or another by a variety of holy man, prophets, and sages (…)".

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41      Ibidem, p. 76.
42      Ibidem, p. 118.
43      Ibidem, p. 91.
44 Ibidem, p. 128: "Ricordate che il massimo grado che possiate raggiungere, indipendentemente da ogni qualifica o titolo, è la buona reputazione".
45      Ibidem, p. 128.
46 Anche se dà giudizi netti su alcune di esse, come "the sterile dialecticism of the medieval scholastics who were so interested in mental gymnastics that they never bothered to verify the workability of their ideas", *From dream to discovery,* p. 278.
47 Ibidem, p. 20. Inoltre, p. 119: "Tutto quel che ho detto, comunque, non è totalmente nuovo; è stato alla base di quasi tutte le religioni e le filosofie etiche per secoli e secoli – è stato espresso in forme diverse da un'infinità di santi, profeti e saggi (…)".

ly for sick people. The pathology would be the (specific) response of a (non-specific) adaptation of the body to a virus or to a bacteria or to a trauma. Selye applies the ideas of "stressful factors", "homeostasis" and "adaptation" to the human being's biology but also to his psychology, because he thinks that laws observed on the bodies are effective also for souls[50]. About that he follows two teachers, Bernard and Cannon, who had made the same choice early: the scientism. "This is the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge rather than those of positive sciences; and it relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the real of mere fantasy"[51]. Selye thinks that the wise religion and philosophy should be replaced with the science: thanks to the study of stress physiology, today also the moral can have laws based on certain bases[52]. Selye's scientism presupposes two concepts more: positivism and utilitarianism. If positive science leads to the certain knowledge - that means the experimental disciplines versus philosophy and above all metaphysics - is true just what can be measured and demonstrated. Only physical reality is totally true while metaphysics loses its value and consistency, getting only simple epiphenomenon of materiality[53]. According to an ontological perspective, in fact, positivism is expression of materialism, for which the human being is just matter, even in his

(veleni) o fortemente perturbanti (caldo, freddo) viene ipotizzata anche negli esseri umani, ed in particolare nei malati. La patologia costituirebbe la risposta (specifica) di un adattamento (aspecifico) del corpo umano ad un virus o un batterio o un trauma. Selye applica i concetti di "fattori stressanti", "omeostasi" e "adattamento" non solo alla biologia dell'essere umano, ma anche alla sua psicologia, ritenendo che le leggi osservate nei corpi valgano anche per le anime[48]. Segue, in questo, i due maestri Bernard e Cannon che avevano solcato la medesima strada prima di lui, quella dello *scientismo*. "Questa concezione filosofica si rifiuta di ammettere come valide forme di conoscenza diverse da quelle che sono proprie delle scienze positive, relegando nei confini della mera immaginazione sia la conoscenza religiosa e teologica, sia il sapere etico ed estetico"[49]. Per Selye la saggezza della religione e della tradizione va sostituita con la conoscenza scientifica: oggi, grazie agli studi sulla fisiologia dello stress, anche la morale può avere delle basi certe per le sue leggi[50]. Lo scientismo di Selye presuppone due altre concezioni: il *positivismo* e l'*utilitarismo*. Se le sole scienze "positive" portano alla conoscenza certa – ovvero le discipline sperimentali, in opposizione alla filosofia ed in particolare alla metafisica – è verità solo ciò che si può misurare e dimostrare. Solo la realtà fisica è assolutamente vera, mentre la metafisica perde di valore e di consistenza, riducendosi a semplice epifenom-

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50 *Ibidem*, p. 72: "The laws which regulate the involuntary biochemical responses within our body during stress are virtually identical with those governing voluntary interpersonal behavior".

51 **John Paul II**, *Fide set ratio,* LEV, Città del Vaticano 4 Settembre 1988, n°88.

52 **SWD**, p. 20: "However, my belief, which is based on biological laws, is that, for the great majority of people, and certainly for society as a whole, the best motive is not to «love thy neighbor as thyself» (for that is impossible), but to «*earn* thy neighbor's love»". P. 129: "(…) a natural code of ethics". P. 124: "«Earn thy neighbor's love». Thus expressed, we need not offer love on command of people who are truly unlovable; we need not love others as much as ourselves, which would be contrary to the laws of biology. Now success is up to us!".

53 *Ibidem*, p. 52: "At first sight, it is odd that the laws governing life's responses at such different levels as a cell, a whole person, or even a nation should be so essentially similar. Yet this type of simplicity and uniformity characterizes all great laws of Nature".

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48 Ibidem, p. 71: "Le leggi che regolano le reazioni biochimiche involontarie dell'organismo durante lo stress sono praticamente identiche a quelle che governano il comportamento interpersonale, volontario".

49 **Giovanni Paolo II**, *Fides et ratio,* LEV, Città del Vaticano 14 Settembre 1998, n°88.

50 **Stress senza paura** p. 19: "Però la mia convinzione, fondata su leggi biologiche, è che per la grande maggioranza della gente, e certo per la società nel suo complesso, il principio migliore non è «ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso» (cosa impossibile, ma «*guadagnati* l'amore del tuo prossimo»". P. 129: "Un codice etico secondo natura". P. 124: "«Guadagnati l'amore del tuo prossimo». Esprimendolo così, non dobbiamo offrire amore, su comando, a individui che è impossibile amare; non dobbiamo amare gli altri come noi stessi, che sarebbe contrario alle leggi della biologia. Il risultato è nelle nostre mani".

spirituality. The spiritual aspects are resumed by Selye in the form of idealism[54] and through the evolutionary mechanism which permeates the entire Selye's production[55]. In the first decade of XX century, in the United States the positivism becomes pragmatism, according to which the acts of thought share, especially the beliefs, are useful just to guide the practical life. Further declination of this conception is the utilitarianism, according to which the choices will be neither right nor wrong - because the universal good and evil (metaphysical) do not exist - but the choices are useful or useless in order to obtain a target. As Selye says to propose the "altruistic egotism": "it is easy to pursue the altruistic egotism which admittedly tries to help others for the selfish motive of deserving their help in return"[56]. Even the love to a child is in Selye's opinion a selfish act: "Isn't this why people adopt children? The main gratification of adopting children is that it furnishes us with the purpose of earning their love"[57].

In stress theory the human being is just a little more advanced than an animal and he behaviors like that: homo hominis lupus. He can act astutely and use others for his own interest, in a kind of relationship like do ut des[58]. Intelligence does not mean selfish spiritual dimensi-

eno della materialità[51]. Da una prospettiva ontologica, difatti, il positivismo è espressione del *materialismo*, l'idea secondo cui l'uomo è fatto unicamente di materia, anche nei suoi aspetti spirituali. Questi ultimi, che non possono però essere pienamente evasi, rientrano in gioco sotto forma di *idealismo*[52] e, soprattutto, nel *meccanicismo evoluzionistico* che permea l'intera produzione di Selye[53]. Negli Stati Uniti il positivismo assume una forma originale nei primi decenni del XX secolo, il *pragmatismo*, che vede negli atti del pensiero, in particolare le credenze e le convinzioni, solamente uno strumento utile ad orientare la vita pratica. Una ulteriore declinazione di tale concezione è l'*utilitarismo*, secondo cui le scelte della volontà non sono né giuste né sbagliate - dal momento che viene negata l'esistenza del bene e del male universali (metafisici) - ma utili o inutili nel raggiungimento di un fine. È questa l'argomentazione con cui Selye propone il suo "egoismo utilitaristico": "è facile perseguire quell'egoismo altruistico che apertamente cerca di aiutare gli altri per l'egoistica ragione di ottenere, a propria volta, l'aiuto e la cooperazione"[54]. Anche l'amore, come quello per un figlio, è in realtà per Selye un gesto egoistico: "Non è per questo che si adottano i bambini? La grande gioia dell'adozione nasce dal fatto che ci offre lo scopo di guadagnarcene l'amore"[55].

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54 Curious, in this regard, the sentence that states: "In research, we soon learn that abstractions are often just as, or even more, effective than tangible, individual facts", *From dream to discovery*, p. XIV. Mostly if confronted with: "A hypothesis is a guess; a theory is a partially proven guess; a "biologic truth" is an unscientific exaggeration, for it implies a completely proven theory, and this does non exist in biology" p. 279.

55 For example: "In order to adjust or repair a machine we first have to know how it works. This is of course also true of the stress-machinery with which man combats the wear and tear of whatever he does in this world", *Stress of life*, p. 257. "Life is largely a process of adaptation to the circumstances in which we exist", *ibidem*, p. vii.

56 *Ibidem*, p. 76.

57 *Ibidem*, pp. 123-124.

58 *From dream to discovery*, p. 147: "True fellowship is best established through the policy of 'give and take'".

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51 *Stress senza paura*, p. 52: "Appare strano, a prima vista, che debbano essere così sostanzialmente simili le leggi che governano le reazioni vitali a livelli tanto differenti come quelli della cellula, dell'individuo e addirittura delle nazioni. Eppure questo carattere di uniformità e di semplicità appartiene a tutte le grandi leggi della Natura".

52 Curiosa a tal proposito l'affermazione secondo cui: "In research, we soon learn that abstractions are often just as, or even more, effective than tangible, individual facts", *From dream to discovery*, p. XIV. Soprattutto se confrontata con: "A hypothesis is a guess; a theory is a partially proven guess; a "biologic truth" is an unscientific exaggeration, for it implies a completely proven theory, and this does non exist in biology" p. 279.

53 Ad esempio: "In order to adjust or repair a machine we first have to know how it works. This is of course also true of the stress-machinery with which man combats the wear and tear of whatever he does in this world", *Stress of life*, p. 257. "Life is largely a process of adaptation to the circumstances in which we exist", *ibidem*, p. vii.

54      Ibidem, p. 76.

55      Ibidem, p. 126.

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on, but a process that comes from sensitivity[59]. In Selye's thought there is the influence of the modern philosophy and of the first therapists as the eros and thanatos antinomy by Freud or the balance between will to power and feeling of community by Adler. If God existed he wouldn't be involved with the action of human beings (atheistic position); the only force we can make experience is "the Nature"[60], whose laws we know, through science. Religion is imposed by the authority, often in disagreement with other principles whose moral codes only depends on the power of will[61]. These pragmatist, anti-religious and scientistic emphases are typical of the stress theory by Selye and denote the humanism: a philosophical and religious current that makes the self-worship - or self-worship or self-love[62] - the main value. Humanists, in different

Nella teoria dello stress l'uomo è dunque poco più che un animale evoluto, e come tale si deve comportare: *homo hominis lupus*. Lo può fare con astuzia, usando gli altri per il proprio tornaconto, secondo una modalità di relazione *do ut des*[56]. L'intelligenza non è espressione di una dimensione spirituale autonoma, ma un processo derivato dalla sensitività[57]. Queste concezioni richiamano molte filosofie moderne ed anche le impostazioni dei primi psicoterapeuti viennesi, come l'antinomia di *eros* e *thanatos* descritta da Freud o l'equilibrio ricercato da Adler tra *volontà di potenza* e *sentimento di comunità*. Per Selye, inoltre, Dio se c'è non c'entra con i dinamismi umani (posizione ateistica); l'unica forza di cui si ha esperienza è "la Natura"[58], le cui leggi sono conoscibili attraverso la scienza. La religione è una credenza imposta dall'autorità, sovente in conflitto con altre convinzioni, i cui codici morali possono essere seguiti solo

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59 SWD, p. 68: "Though decisions based on logic are safer, it is emotion that induces a man to sacrifice his life for his country, to marry for love, to commit sadistic crimes, or to join a religious order; he uses logic – if at all – only afterward, to rationalize the emotional act and to pursue his course more efficiently". P. 106: "Instincts and emotions set the course of life, but logic, guided by intelligence, is the only way to check that you are employing the best means to stay on that course. As previously mentioned, you use pure cool logic only to verify how best to direct your life in the service of an emotionally selected aim. Ideas (scientific, philosophical, literary) also come intuitively without the guidance of logic. They strike us at the most unexpected times (…) nut unless you take note and articulate them they evaporate, and you cannot later work them out intellectually by logic". The last Selye's book, *From dream to discovery*, seems to detach from this conception: he repeats the traditional faculties of intellect and will as core of the anthropology, cfr. p. 54 e 147.
60 **Quoted many times with a capital N, for example** SWD p. 19.
61 *Ibidem*, p. 19: "(…) the best motive is not to «love thy neighbor as thyself» (for that is impossible)". P. 122: "(...) we need not love others as much as ourselves, which would be contrary to the laws of biology". P. 120: "Frankly, I for one cannot abide by it. When I was younger I really tried hard, but I soon found that, try as I might, I could not love my neighbor as much as myself...even if success had not depended so much on the nature of my neighbor. With some of them – very few – I can come quite close to following the command, but I would be lying if I tried to convince myself that with more effort I might succeed in following it as a general law".
62 Cfr. Paul Vitz, *Psychology as religion. The cult of self-worship*, 1977 [tr. It. *Selfismo e culto di sé*, EDB, Bologna 1987, in particolare p. 99].

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56 *From dream to discovery,* p. 147: "True fellowship is best established through the policy of 'give and take'".
57 Ibidem, p. 67: "Anche se le conclusioni fondate sulla logica sono più sicure, è l'emozione, il sentimento, che spinge l'uomo a sacrificare la vita per il proprio paese, a sposarsi per amore, a commettere delitti sadici, o a entrare in un ordine religioso; la logica egli la adopera – se ma la adopera – solo in un secondo tempo, per razionalizzare l'atto emozionale e raggiungere più efficacemente il suo scopo". P. 108: "Sono gli istinti e le emozioni che determinano il corso della vita, ma la logica, guidata dall'intelligenza, rappresenta l'unica maniera di sapere con certezza se, per seguire quel corso, si stiano, o no, impiegando i mezzi migliori. Come ho già detto, ricorriamo alla logica, pura e fredda, solo per determinare il modo migliore di dedicare la vita ad un fine, scelto invece emotivamente. Anche le idee (scientifiche, filosofiche, letterarie) nascono intuitivamente, senza la guida della logica. Ci si presentano improvvise nei momenti più inattesi (…) ma se non prendiamo nota e non diamo loro un'articolazione, svaniscono e non possiamo poi elaborarle intellettualmente con l'aiuto della logica". L'ultima opera di Selye, *From dream to discovery*, sembra distaccarsi da questa concezione riproponendo le facoltà tradizionali di intelletto e volontà come centro dell'antropologia, cfr. p. 54 e 147.
58 Citata più e più volte proprio con la maiuscola, ad es. Stress senza paura p. 50.

ways, claim that the human being does not need God because he can get happiness himself (Selye summarizes his proposal in: "the recipe for a full and happy life"[63]). Humanism is definitely a real religion: the idolatry of human being[64].

**Some contradictions**

Reading Selye's written we find some contradictions:

Selye defines stress as a "nonspecific response of the body". However in the last section of the physiology chapter he explains that nothing is completely nonspecific" because "It must be clearly understood, therefore, that specificity and non specificity, both in disease and in treatment, are relative concepts"[65]. He does not clarify the conditions of this relativity.

He takes an ambiguous position about the moral codes before his proposal. If at some point he respects and considers them like alternative ways to him[66], at other times he discredits them[67], because unfounded on biological laws[68]

volontaristicamente[59]. Questi accenti pragmatisti, antireligiosi e scientisti denotano la teoria dello stress di Selye delle caratteristiche tipiche dell'*umanismo*: la corrente filosofico-religiosa che eleva il *selfismo* – o culto di sé o egocentrismo[60] – a valore fondamentale. Secondo gli autori umanisti, eterogenei tra loro, l'uomo non ha bisogno di Dio perché può darsi da sé stesso la felicità (Selye riassume la sua proposta in questo modo: "la ricetta per una vita piena e felice"[61]). L'umanismo è a tutti gli effetti una vera e propria religione: l'idolatria dell'uomo[62].

Alcune contraddizioni

La lettura dei testi divulgativi di Selye presenta alcune affermazioni contraddittorie.

Selye definisce lo stress come una "reazione aspecifica del corpo". Tuttavia, dedica l'ultimo paragrafo del capitolo sulla fisiologia a spiegare che "niente è completamente aspecifico" perché "occorre avere ben chiaro il principio che specificità e aspecificità, sia nella malattia che nella terapia, sono concetti relativi"[63]. Non vengono precisati, però, i termini di questa relatività.

Una medesima ambiguità la riscontriamo nella posizione che prende nei confronti dei codici morali antecedenti la sua proposta. Se in alcuni passaggi non solo li rispetta, ma anche li

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63 SWD, p. 137.

64 In the first Humanist Manifesto we read: "Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created. Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process", cfr. Roberto Marchesini, *ONU e transgender, la carica degli umanisti*, La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana, 29-08-2019.

65 SWD, p. 58.

66 *Ibidem*, p. 20: "I would like to dispel from the outset any thought that I consider my code to be the only way of living that can bring happiness. Far from it. People are very different, and no one formula could be equally appropriate for everybody".

67 *Ibidem*, p. 120: "Far be it from me to condemn the dictum «Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself», especially since I am convinced that it has long been most useful to humanity as a personal goal to strive for. But as the philosophical outlook and knowledge of man have developed since Biblical times, more and more of us have asked ourselves: How do we know who formulated this command, and is it really possible to follow it?".

68 *Ibidem*, pp. 121-122: "I am convinced that without rejecting the principle «Love thy neighbor» we can adapt it to conform with biological laws discovered in our time (…) we need not to love others as much as ourselves, which would be contrary to the laws of biology".

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59 Stress senza paura p. 19: "(…) il principio migliore non è «ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso» (cosa impossibile)". P. 124: "(...) non dobbiamo amare gli altri come noi stessi, che sarebbe contrario alle leggi della biologia". P. 123: "Io per primo, lo dico francamente, non riesco ad accettarlo. Da giovane volli provare, e con molta decisione, ma mi resi conto che, per quanto ci provassi, non riuscivo ad amare il prossimo quanto me stesso, ance quando il riuscirci non dipendeva dal carattere del mio prossimo. Con qualcuno – pochissimi – arrivai quasi a rispettare il comandamento, ma cercare di convincermi che con uno sforzo maggiore avrei potuto seguirlo come legge generale sarebbe stato un mentire a me stesso".

60 Cfr. Paul Vitz, *Selfismo e culto di sé,* EDB, Bologna 1987, in particolare p. 99.

61       Ibidem, p. 137.

62 Nel primo Manifesto Umanista del 1933 si legge: "Gli umanisti religiosi considerano l'universo come auto-esistente e non creato. L'Umanesimo crede che l'uomo è parte della natura e che è emerso come risultato di un processo continuo", cfr. Roberto Marchesini, *ONU e transgender, la carica degli umanisti*, La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana, 29-08-2019.

63       Ibidem, p. 57.

and impracticable for his own experience[69].

3. Also the continuous emphases on the scientific principles is not in line with the covered topics: Selye utilizes the research about the animal reign to the psychology and philosophy of human beings.

4. He describes the altruistic selfishness like a "sound biological law"[70], but this is inconsistent because it is denied by experience: "If I knew a simple answer to something that puzzled a young graduate student, I often allowed him the satisfaction of proving that he could work it out himself, but when it came to my peers, I am afraid my desire to show off my superiority always got the better of me"[71].

5. Finally there is the Selye's sincerity. If the last purpose is earning the love, the admiration, we wonder which tools are legitimate to obtain it. Also the fraud, the hoax, the lie? Definitely Selye says: No. Unfortunately it comes the doubt that for utilitarianism, masks are unavoidable. "The idea of science that one gets from textbooks – the picture of a scientist, as reflected by his lectures or biography – is a far cry from reality. I suspected this then as much as I know it now"[72].

riconosce come strade alternative alla sua[64], in altri li delegittima[65], poiché infondati sulle leggi biologiche[66] e poiché impraticabili per la sua esperienza[67].

Anche il continuo richiamo ai principi scientifici stona con gli argomenti trattati: Selye si riferisce alle ricerche della biologia del regno animale ma ascrivendole alla psicologia ed alla filosofia dell'uomo.

È contraddittorio nei confronti del cuore della sua proposta, l'egoismo altruistico, descritto come una "salda legge biologica"[68] ma smentito dall'esperienza: "Nel caso di un giovane laureato preoccupato di risolvere un problema, anche

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69 *Ibidem*, p. 123: "Frankly, I for one cannot abide by it. When I was younger I really tried hard, but I soon found that, try as I might, I could not love my neighbor as much as myself…even if success had not depended so much on the nature of my neighbor. With some of them – very few – I can come quite close to following the command, but I would be lying if I tried to convince myself that with more effort I might succeed in following it as a general law. When it comes to an obnoxious aggressive enemy who makes very effort to destroy me and all the things I belive in, and when I think of the lazy drunkard who lives as a parasite off the efforts of others, or of an incorrigible criminal and corrupter of youth, I feel it would be most unnatural for me to love him as much as myself or even as much as some of my truly lovable relatives or friends. Actually, I cannot succeed in loving even my most lovable neighbor as much as myself. In the extremely remote eventuality that I would have to decide whether my neighbor's or my life should be saved, I would choose my own".
70 *Ibidem,* p. 122.
71 *Ibidem,* p. 124.
72 *From dream to discovery*, p. 3.

64 Ibidem, p. 18: "Vorrei cancellare fin dal principio anche la minima impressione che il mio codice rappresenti per me l'unico modo di vivere capace di dare felicità. Sono ben lontano da questa idea. Le persone differiscono grandemente fra loro e non esiste una formula unica eguale per tutti".
65 Ibidem, p. 122: "Sono ben lontano dal condannare la massima Ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso, soprattutto essendo convinto, come sono, che sia stata per secoli preziosa all'umanità, offrendole un fine da raggiungere e per cui sforzarsi. Ma, poiché dai tempi della Bibbia l'orizzonte filosofico e il sapere dell'uomo si sono evoluti e ampliati, in sempre maggior numero ci siamo chiesti: come sappiamo da chi fu emanato questo comandamento? Ed è possibile veramente obbedirgli?".
66 Ibidem, p. 124: "Sono certo che, senza rigettare il principio de l'Ama il prossimo tuo, possiamo modificarlo perché si conformi alle leggi biologiche che abbiamo imparato (…) non dobbiamo amare gli altri come noi stessi, che sarebbe contrario alle leggi della biologia".
67 Ibidem, p. 123: "Io per primo, lo dico francamente, non riesco ad accettarlo. Da giovane volli provare, e con molta decisione, ma mi resi conto che, per quanto ci provassi, non riuscivo ad amare il mio prossimo quanto me stesso, anche quando il riuscirci non dipendeva dal carattere del mio prossimo. Con qualcuno – pochissimi – arrivai quasi a rispettare il comandamento, ma cercare di convincermi che con uno sforzo maggiore avrei potuto seguirlo come legge generale sarebbe stato un mentire a me stesso. Davanti a un nemico aggressivo e odioso, che cerca in ogni modo di distruggere me e tutto ciò in cui credo, o quando penso all'ubriacone ozioso che vive da parassita delle fatiche altrui, o al criminale incorreggibile e a chi corrompe i giovani, sento che sarebbe per me contro natura amarlo come me stesso o anche quanto amo i miei parenti e amici, davvero degni di affetto. In verità nemmeno il mio prossimo più amabile riesco ad amarlo come me stesso. Nell'eventualità, remotissima, di dover decidere tra la vita del mio prossimo e la mia, sceglierei la mia".
68        Ibidem, p. 125.
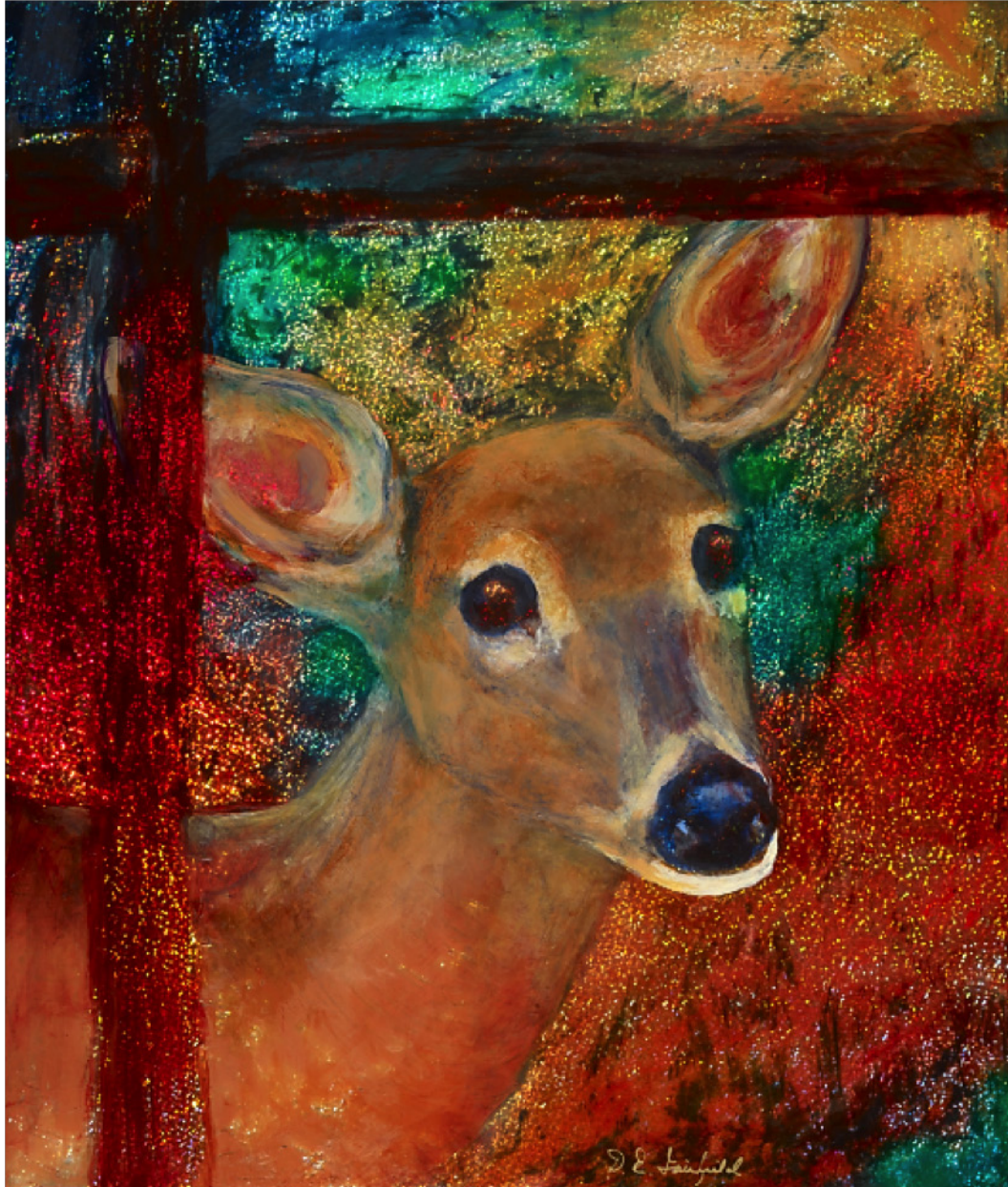
Expectant Hope #1

"The fact is that we are vain, very vain"[73].

**A Christian judgement**

Now we compare the stress theory by Selye with the Christian anthropology. We do this through Thomas Aquinas' thought (1225-1275). There are a lot of reasons to do this.

First of all because, over time and till now, the Catholic Church used the Thomistic approach[74] and prescribes its teaching in the Pontifical Universities[75]. Thomas Aquinas is Doctor of the Church, because his doctrine is eminent; he is doctor in humanity (doctor humanitatis), as John Paul II wrote[76]. Furthermore Thomas Aquinas among the Christian authors, is particularly "secular": he refers to the Holy Bible (Holy Bible says that…) just where the natural reason is unable to light up the reality. His perspective is the synthesis among the previous

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73 *Ibidem,* p. 15: "Vanity becomes objectionable *only* when the legitimate pride in a recognized accomplishment turns into an indiscriminate craving after fame for its own sake".

74 "It should be clear in the light of these reflections why the Magisterium has repeatedly acclaimed the merits of Saint Thomas'thought and made him the guide and model for theological studies. This has not been in order to take a position on properly philosophical questions nor to demand adherence to particular theses. The Magisterium's intention has always been to show how Saint Thomas is an authentic model for all who seek the truth. In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason", in John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, LEV, Città del Vaticano, 15 Ottobre 1998, n° 78.

75 "The research and teaching of philosophy in an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy must be rooted in «the philosophical patrimony which is perennial valid», which has developed throughout the history, with special attention being given to the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas", Pope Francis, *Veritatis gaudium,* LEV, Città del Vaticano, 29 Gennaio 2018, note applicative art. 61.

76 Cfr. John Paul II, *Inter munera academiarum,* LEV, Città del Vaticano, 28 Gennaio 1999: "Nelle condizioni culturali del nostro tempo sembra veramente opportuno sviluppare sempre più questa parte della dottrina tomistica che tratta dell'umanità, dato che le sue affermazioni sulla dignità della persona umana e sull'uso della sua ragione, perfettamente consone alla fede, fanno di san Tommaso un maestro per il nostro tempo. Gli uomini, soprattutto nel mondo odierno, sono preoccupati da questo interrogativo: cosa è l'uomo?".

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sapendo la semplice risposta che gli ci vorrebbe, gli lascio la soddisfazione, di solito, di dimostrare che sa cavarsela da solo, ma in un confronto con i miei pari temo che il desiderio di esibire la mia superiorità avrebbe sempre la meglio su di me"[69].

Un ultimo aspetto riguarda la sincerità di Selye. Dal momento che il fine ultimo, per lui, è il guadagnarsi l'amore degli altri, ovvero l'ammirazione, viene da chiedersi quali strumenti siano leciti per ottenerlo. Anche la truffa, l'inganno, la menzogna? Selye dice apertamente di no??. Sorge però il sospetto che, per utilitarismo, le maschere siano inevitabili: "L'idea di scienza che uno prende dai libri di testo – l'immagine dello scienziato, come viene rappresentata dalle sue lezioni o dalla sua biografia – è molto lontana dalla realtà. Lo sospettavo allora tanto quanto lo so ora"[70]. "The fact is that we are vain, very vain"[71].

**B. Un giudizio cristiano**

Confrontiamo ora la teoria dello stress di Selye con l'antropologia cristiana. Il termine di paragone si fonderà sulle formulazioni di Tommaso d'Aquino (1225-1275). I motivi di tale scelta sono molteplici. Prima di tutto perché la Chiesa Cattolica nel corso dei secoli si è ampiamente servita dell'impostazione tomista[72] e tutt'ora ne prescrive l'insegnamento nelle Università

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69      Ibidem, p. 127.

70 From dream to discovery, p. 3.

71 *From dream to discovery,* p. 15: "Vanity becomes objectionable *only* when the legitimate pride in a recognized accomplishment turns into an indiscriminate craving after fame for its own sake".

72 "Alla luce di queste riflessioni, ben si comprende perché il Magistero abbia ripetutamente lodato i meriti del pensiero di san Tommaso e lo abbia posto come guida e modello degli studi teologici. Ciò che interessava non era prendere posizione su questioni propriamente filosofiche, né imporre l'adesione a tesi particolari. L'intento del Magistero era, e continua ad essere, quello di mostrare come san Tommaso sia un autentico modello di quanti ricercano la verità. Nella sua riflessione, infatti, l'esigenza della ragione e la forza della fede hanno trovato la sintesi più alta che il pensiero abbia mai raggiunto, in quanto egli ha saputo difendere la radicale novità portata dalla Rivelazione senza mai umiliare il cammino proprio della ragione", in Giovanni Paolo II, *Fides et ratio,* LEV, Città del Vaticano, 15 Ottobre 1998, n° 78.

conceptions - especially between Platonism and Aristotelism (but also stoicism, epicureanism, skepticism and so on) - and among these and the Revelation.

A large part of the Thomistic thought speaks about the human being so much that it's possible to educed a real psychology accomplished and rooted, as an unexpected Erich Fromm said: "we can learn about a psychologist system more in Thomas Aquinas than the main books written about this subject: we can find in his system many very interesting and depth topics as narcissism, pride, humility, modesty, feelings of inferiority and many others"[77].

## Philosophy

The philosophic perspective by Thomas Aquinas is told realistic: the truth is the correspondence between the objective world and the subjective perception[78]. Aquinas recognizes the existence of a metaphysic reality a little different from the materiality, and as Aristotele, he distinguished the matter from the form. The investigation tools of metaphysics are different from those of physics: the first one applies to the spiritual entity (entity as entity), the second one to those materials. Aquinas identifies God as spiritual entity over all[79]. Also the angels and their opposite, the demons, are separated substances that is without matter[80]. On the contrary the inanimate world is matter, not shapeless but marked[81]. All we know as living beings like the vegetables, the animals and the human being are a specific case of matter and form. Since they are alive they have a principle that make them alive; it is spiritual that we call soul. But only the human being has soul and a body: "sinolo", using an Aristotelian expression[82]. The soul of a human being gives life and makes life human, also in the material part, the body. As Aristotele also Thomas identifies three main principles of

Pontificie[73]. Tommaso d'Aquino è Dottore della Chiesa, in quanto la sua dottrina è eminente, ed in particolare è dottore di umanità (*doctor humanitatis*), come scrisse Giovanni Paolo II[74]. In secondo luogo poiché tra i pensatori della cristianità è un autore particolarmente "laico": ricorre alla Sacra Scrittura (la Bibbia dice che…) solo laddove la ragione naturale è incapace di illuminare la verità. La sua prospettiva rappresenta, infatti, la sintesi tra le concezioni antecedenti – in particolare il platonismo e l'aristotelismo (ma anche lo stoicismo, l'epicureismo, lo scetticismo ecc.) – e tra queste e la Rivelazione. Infine, larga parte dell'impostazione tomista è dedicata all'uomo, tanto che è possibile rinvenirvi una vera e propria psicologia, compiuta e fondata, come attestò anche un inaspettato Erich Fromm: "In Tommaso d'Aquino si incontra un sistema psicologico da cui si può probabilmente apprendere di più che dalla gran parte degli attuali manuali di tale disciplina: si incontrano in esso trattati interessantissimi e molto profondi di temi come il narcisismo, la superbia, l'umiltà, la modestia, i sentimenti d'inferiorità, e molti altri"[75].

## La filosofia

La prospettiva filosofica dell'Aquinate viene definita *realista*: la verità è la corrispondenza tra il mondo oggettivo e la percezione sogget-

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77 E. **Fromm**, *Psicologia per non psicologi*, cit., p. 82, cit. in Echavarria M. F., *Da Aristotele a Freud,* D'Ettoris, Crotone, p. 41.
78 "Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus", cfr. Tommaso d'Aquino, *Somma Teologica,* I q. 16 a. 1 co.
79 *Ibidem,* I q. 3 a. 7 co.
80 *Ibidem,* I q. 50 a. 2 co.
81 *Ibidem,* I q. 65 a. 4 co.
82 *Ibidem,* I q. 75 aa. 1-7.

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73 "La ricerca e l'insegnamento della filosofia in una Facoltà ecclesiastica di Filosofia devono essere radicati nel patrimonio filosofico perennemente valido che si è sviluppato lungo la storia, tenendo conto particolarmente dell'opera di san Tommaso d'Aquino", Papa Francesco, *Veritatis gaudium,* LEV, Città del Vticano, 29 Gennaio 2018, note applicative art. 61.
74 Cfr. Giovanni Paolo II, *Inter munera academiarum,* LEV, Città del Vaticano, 28 Gennaio 1999: "Nelle condizioni culturali del nostro tempo sembra veramente opportuno sviluppare sempre più questa parte della dottrina tomistica che tratta dell'umanità, dato che le sue affermazioni sulla dignità della persona umana e sull'uso della sua ragione, perfettamente consone alla fede, fanno di san Tommaso un maestro per il nostro tempo. Gli uomini, soprattutto nel mondo odierno, sono preoccupati da questo interrogativo: cosa è l'uomo?".
75 E. **Fromm**, *Psicologia per non psicologi*, cit., p. 82, cit. in Echavarria M. F., *Da Aristotele a Freud,* D'Ettoris, Crotone, p. 41.

the human soul and their functions: a vegetative principle for the biological function, a sensitive principle for animals and human beings and a rational principle, belonging only to human beings. The Thomistic anthropology is a precise system of faculties[83].

## Anthropology

The bodily biological functions by Selye match to the vegetative powers of the soul: alterations, chemical reaction and other dynamics that does not require a knowledge. The main psychological aspects of the stress theory, refer to the powers of the sensitive soul that is to the senses and appetites. The senses are both external (sight touch taste smell hearing) and interior: the common sense, fantasy, memory and the cogitative[84]. Instead the appetites[85] are the passions, that we call feelings or emotions. Let's see shortly how they work. Some object stimulates the external senses. For example let's take an apple. Its color stimulates the sight, its perfume stimulates the smell, its peel stimulates the touch, its consistency the taste. Informations about these features are collected by the interior sense called "common sense", while the imagination (fantasy) products a mental image of the object feel (the apple's ghost). Through a specific perception memory indicates if their apple is already known in the past. At last the cogitative power gives a value judgment: if it's attendant or absent, if it's a Good or Evil, if it's easy to reach or difficult to avoid.

Contemporary to this cognitive project and especially to the cogitative work, it takes action also the appetitive side of the sensitive soul that reacts to the knowledge. The knowledge itself is already a reaction to the object's attendance. The appetition is the effect of this knowledge (we can say that it's a secondary reaction). If the object is considered as a good, present and achievable, the appetite will be the desire that is tendency to action to a specific Good (as the apple in our example). On the contrary if the object is considered as evil present and avoidable, the reaction will be the dislike (for example if the

tiva[76]. Tommaso riconosce l'esistenza di una realtà metafisica che ha delle peculiarità differenti dalla materialità, come già Aristotele distingueva la materia dalla forma. Gli strumenti d'indagine della metafisica, di conseguenza, sono diversi da quelli della fisica: la prima si applica agli enti spirituali (l'ente in quanto ente), la seconda a quelli materiali. Tommaso individua come ente spirituale per eccellenza Dio[77]. Anche gli angeli, e la loro controparte i demoni, sono "sostanze separate", ovvero senza materia[78]. Al contrario il mondo inanimato è materia, non informe, però, ma segnata[79]. Quelli che secondo la terminologia contemporanea sono gli "esseri viventi", e quindi i vegetali, gli animali e l'uomo, rappresentano un caso particolare di materia e forma. Essendo vivi possiedono un principio che li anima, di tipo spirituale che appunto chiamiamo anima. Solo l'uomo, però, è un composto di anima e corpo: "sinolo" secondo un'espressione aristotelica[80]. L'anima dell'uomo dà vita e rende umana la vita, anche la sua parte materiale cioè il corpo. Seguendo Aristotele anche Tommaso identifica tre principi dell'anima umana, con relative funzioni: un principio vegetativo, deputato alle funzioni organiche (biologiche), un principio sensitivo, comune all'uomo ed agli animali, ed un principio razionale proprio solo degli esseri umani. L'antropologia tomista si presenta allora come un quadro preciso ed articolato di facoltà[81].

## L'antropologia

Le funzioni corporali, di cui parla Selye quando si riferisce alla biologia, corrispondono alle potenze vegetative dell'anima umana: alterazioni, reazioni chimiche ed altre dinamiche che non implicano una conoscenza. Gli aspetti più psicologici della teoria dello stress, invece, si riferiscono alle potenze dell'anima sensitiva, ovvero ai sensi ed agli appetiti. I sensi sono sia esterni (vista, tatto, gusto, olfatto, udito) che

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83 *Ibidem,* I qq. 78-83.
84 *Ibidem,* I q. 78 aa. 3-4.
85 *Ibidem,* I q. 81.

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76 "Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus", cfr. Tommaso d'Aquino, *Somma Teologica,* I q. 16 a. 1 co.
77      Ibidem, I q. 3 a. 7 co.
78      Ibidem, I q. 50 a. 2 co.
79      Ibidem, I q. 65 a. 4 co.
80      Ibidem, I q. 75 aa. 1-7.
81      Ibidem, I qq. 78-83.

apple is rotten). There are also specific passions for an object different to obtain or to avoid: they are the hope and the desolation, the fear and the boldness, the anger. It happens when the apple is in the supermarket: if I want to reach it, it's necessary to get dressed, to take the car, get into the traffic, survive the tail of the crates and so on. In this case the desire (concupiscible appetite) will be boosted by hope (irascible appetite).

**The specificity in human beings.**
This process is common to human beings and other animals, but not to plants, because they have neither knowledge nor appetition. It's already obvious that a theory traced on the biological world is inappropriate to describe the animal's psychology and also less approver ti describe the human process. The human being, apart from this psychological process inherent to the sensitive soul, owns two specific faculties of the cognitive soul that are the intelligence and the will. They are two vis with a lot of potentialities[86]. Now we will only say that the intelligence from the particular object (the apple) abstracts the essence or universal (we could call it the "applety", the idea of the apple), that is the shape or matter. The intelligence compares the notion of apple with the other universal, as for example the time, the space, the subject itself and so on and the intelligence starts up the will that is a superior appetite to the emotions, because it is on the same level of the rationality. So the will choses how to behave not only in relation to that specific object (the apple) but also in relation to all apples and to that apple in relation with the subject itself. If, for example, I suffer from hyperglycemia, the apple, although it is desirable, may not be desired because it's not appropriate to the diet.

**Stress criticism**
According to the Thomistic anthropology, the individual reacts always to the stimuluses that fall within the field of action of the senses, trough their irritation and the resulting knowledge. This is the reason because qualifying stress as a non-specific perturbation ok homeo-

interni: il senso comune, la fantasia, la memoria e la cogitativa[82]. Gli appetiti[83] sono invece le passioni, che oggi chiamiamo sentimenti o emozioni. Vediamo brevemente la loro dinamica. I sensi esterni vengono irritati dalla presenza di un oggetto che stimola la loro funzionalità. Prendiamo come esempio una mela. Il colore stimola il senso della vista, il profumo l'olfatto, la superficie della buccia il tatto, la consistenza il gusto ecc. Le informazioni riguardo queste caratteristiche vengono assemblate dal senso interno chiamato "senso comune", mentre l'immaginazione (o fantasia) produce una immagine mentale dell'oggetto percepito (il fantasma della mela). La memoria segnala con una percezione particolare se quella mela è già stata conosciuta nel passato. Infine la potenza cogitativa dà un giudizio di valore: se è presente o assente, se è un bene per il soggetto o un male, se è facile da raggiungere o difficile da evitare. In contemporanea a questo processo conoscitivo, e specialmente all'opera della cogitativa, si attiva anche la parte appetitiva dell'anima sensitiva, che reagisce alla conoscenza. La conoscenza in se stessa è già una reazione alla presenza dell'oggetto, l'appetizione è la conseguenza di questa conoscenza (è una reazione secondaria, se così possiamo dire). Se l'oggetto viene valutato come un bene, presente e raggiungibile, l'appetito sarà il desiderio, cioè una tendenza all'azione che mira a possedere quel bene particolare (nel nostro esempio la mela). Se invece l'oggetto viene valutato come un male, presente ed evitabile, la reazione sarà il disgusto (se la mela, ad esempio, è marcia). Vi sono poi delle passioni specifiche per un oggetto che è arduo da raggiungere o da evitare: esse sono la speranza e la disperazione, il timore e l'audacia, l'ira. È il caso in cui la mela, ad esempio, si trova al supermercato: per raggiungerla è necessario vestirsi, prendere l'auto, affrontare il traffico, sopravvivere alla coda delle casse, ecc. Allora il desiderio (appetito concupiscibile) sarà potenziato dall'emozione della speranza (appetito irascibile).

**L'aspetto specifico degli esseri umani**

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86 *Ibidem,* I qq. 79-82.

82      Ibidem, I q. 78 aa. 3-4.
83      Ibidem, I q. 81.

The Sheep

stasis, like Slyer does, is misleading. The Thomistic psychologist Magda Arnold says that smartly: "Obviously, the notion of stress, at first applied to extreme disturbances, has come to be used for conditions encountered by any living organism in its everyday existence. Such usage (…) is too wide to be useful"[87]. We do recognize that the word "stress" comes from physics[88] and put on a human discipline as the psychology can have just an analogical meaning. In particular an other very important Thomistic psychologist Rudolf Allers declared that. "No physiologist, and practically no psychologist for that matter, has today a clear notion of the significance of analogy (…) the notion of analogy has been practically lost"[89]. Also the idea of homeostasis comes from physics. Do we have proof that human beings are homeostatic? It really seems not: according to the anthropological principle for which properly human actions[90]

Tutto questo procedimento è comune all'uomo ed agli altri animali, ma non alle piante, che sono mancanti di conoscenza ed appetizione. Vediamo già come una teoria ricalcata sul mondo della biologia rischi di essere ben poco adeguata per descrivere la psicologia di un animale ed ancor meno delle dinamiche umane. L'uomo, infatti, oltre a questo procedimento psicologico dell'anima sensitiva, possiede due facoltà specifiche dell'anima razionale sua propria, ovvero l'intelligenza e la volontà. Si tratta di due *vis* dalle molteplici potenzialità[84]. Qui si dirà solamente che l'intelligenza astrae dall'oggetto particolare (la mela) l'essenza o l'universale (la 'melità', si potrebbe dire, l'idea della mela) che corrisponde alla forma o sostanza. L'intelligenza mette a confronto il concetto di mela con gli altri universali, ad esempio il tempo, lo spazio, il soggetto stesso ecc., ed attiva la volontà che è un tipo di appetito superiore alle emozioni, poiché si trova sul livello della razionalità. La volontà dunque sceglie come comportarsi nei confronti non solo di quel particolare (quella mela in particolare) ma di tutte le mele e della mela in rapporto al soggetto stesso. Se, ad esempio, soffro di iperglicemia la mela, per quanto desiderabile, può non essere voluta, in virtù del fatto che risulta inappropriata alla dieta.

Critica allo stress

Secondo l'antropologia tomista l'individuo reagisce sempre agli stimoli che rientrano nel campo d'azione dei sensi, se non altro con la loro irritazione e la conoscenza che ne ricava. Questo è il motivo per cui parlare di stress come perturbazione aspecifica dell'omeostasi, come fa Selye, è fuorviante. Lo attesta elegantemente la psicologa (tomista) Magda Arnold: "Obviously, the notion of stress, at first applied to extreme disturbances, has come to be used for conditions encountered by any living organism in its everyday existence. Such usage (…) is too wide to be useful"[85]. Bisogna riconoscere che il ter-

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87 **Magda B. Arnold,** *Emotion and personality, vol. 2,* Columbia University Press, USA 1960, p. 240.

88 Richard Lazarus finds it is already being used in the XIV century and overall in the 1600 a.C. by the physicist Robert Hooke, cfr. Richard S. Lazarus, *From psychological stress to the emotions: a history of changing outlooks,* Annu. Rev. Psychol., 1993, 44, pp. 1-21. Also Selye in some pages acknowledges this derivation from the physic, cfr. La sindrome di adattamento, pp. 25-26: "Nella ricerca di tale nome mi imbattei ancora nel termine "stress", usato a lungo nell'inglese comune e particolarmente nel campo della fisica per indicare la somma di tutte le forza che agiscono contro una resistenza (non importa quali esse siano). Per esempio i cambiamenti indotti in una striscia di gomma durante la trazione, od in una molla durante la pressione, sono stati tutti descritti come fenomeni di stress. In tal modo lo stress fisico deve certamente considerarsi come una reazione aspecifica. Mi pareva che la manifestazione aspecifica della sindrome d'adattamento fosse l'equivalente biologico di ciò che era stato chiamato "stress" nella materia inanimata e da definirsi meglio, forse come "stress biologico".

89 **Rudolf Allers,** *The succesful error,* Sheed & Ward, USA 1940, p. 54 e 69.

90 **Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between actions of** man and human actions. The firsts are made by man but withouth the full election of the will – they are the so called involuntary actions, as scratching your beard -; the second ones are the properly human actions, as it is, those that belong only to the rational nature, cfr. *Summa theologiae,* I-II q. 1 a. 1 co.

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84 Ibidem, I q. 79-82.

85 Magda B. Arnold, *Emotion and personality vol. 2,* Columbia University Press, USA 1960, p. 240.

are not caused by other but free (causa sui[91]). No homeostatic balance is responsible for the words, for the acts, for the people's voluntary movements. Let's mention about this the Thomistic psychology John Gasson: "homeostasis reduces all human activities to the status of passive reactive system. Psychological dynamics would require a self-initiated change in the state of the system; the introduction of tensioni is not sufficient to give the system the activo-active character which psychological states require"[92]. So the first criticism to the Selye's theory impacts on one of its foundation: we can't speak about stress neither homeostasis, because the specifically human actions are active and not reactive to the environment. The second criticism attacks the specificity of the stimulus. One of the most popularizer of the stress there in psychology, Richard Lazarus, after decades of experimental research, realizes that people react to the stressor very differently "We concluded that to understand what was happening we had to take into account individual differences in motivational and cognitive variables, which intervened between the stressor and the reaction"[93]. Lazarus resumes the emotion theory by Magda Arnold and verifies that the way to reach by the individual to stressors (that he calls "coping"[94]) depends on the appraisal that

mine "stress" deriva dalla fisica[86] e che quando viene applicato ad una disciplina propriamente umana, quale la psicologia, può avere solamente un significato analogico. Proprio un altro grande psicologo tomista, Rudolf Allers, ha autorevolmente denunciato che: "la nozione di analogia si è praticamente persa. Mente e materia stanno l'un l'altra in una relazione di analogia, proprio come tutti i vari strati di realtà che si possono distinguere. Le categorie che descrivono o determinano le relazioni che si hanno tra i singoli fenomeni dei differenti strati sono anch'esse analogiche l'un l'altra"[87]. Anche l'idea di omeostasi è mutuata dalla fisica. Abbiamo le prove che gli esseri viventi siano omeostatici? Sembra proprio di no: in virtù del principio antropologico secondo cui le azioni propriamente umane[88] non sono causate da altro, ma libere (*causa sui*[89]). Nessun equilibrio omeostatico è il responsabile delle parole, dei gesti, dei movimenti volontari delle persone. Citiamo a tal proposito lo psicologo (anch'egli un tomista)

91 "Free-will is the cause of its own movement, because by his free-will man moves himself to act", *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 83 a. 1 ad 3.

92 Magda B. Arnold & John A. Gasson, *The human person. An approach to an integral theory of personality,* Ronald Press Company, New York 1954, pp. 134. P. 135: "When we consider more complicated activities, those which have a predominance of psychological components, for instance, the insufficiency of the concept of homeostasis is much more evident. For example, an anxious person may experience intense fear – which produces rather massive physiological effects. Even though the original situation is no longer dangerous, these physiological effects themselves become fear-producing (the person notices his racing heart and suspects heart disease); as the fear increases, so do the physiological effects, until our patient develops a full-blown heart neurosis. Sheer homeostasis will never cut into this circular reaction".

93 Richard S. Lazarus, *From psychological stress to the emotions: a history of changing outlooks,* Annu. Rev. Psychol., 1993, 44, pp. 1-21.

94 "A person's ongoing efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands appraised as taxing or overwhelming", ibidem.

86 Richard Lazarus ne riscontra l'utilizzo già nel XIV secolo e soprattutto nel 1600 per opera del fisico Robert Hooke, cfr. Richard S. Lazarus, *From psychological stress to the emotions: a history of changing outlooks,* Annu. Rev. Psychol., 1993, 44, pp. 1-21. Anche Selye in alcune ricostruzioni riconosce la derivazione del termine dalla fisica, cfr. La sindrome di adattamento, pp. 25-26: "Nella ricerca di tale nome mi imbattei ancora nel termine "stress", usato a lungo nell'inglese comune e particolarmente nel campo della fisica per indicare la somma di tutte le forza che agiscono contro una resistenza (non importa quali esse siano). Per esempio i cambiamenti indotti in una striscia di gomma durante la trazione, od in una molla durante la pressione, sono stati tutti descritti come fenomeni di stress. In tal modo lo stress fisico deve certamente considerarsi come una reazione aspecifica. Mi pareva che la manifestazione aspecifica della sindrome d'adattamento fosse l'equivalente biologico di ciò che era stato chiamato "stress" nella materia inanimata e da definirsi meglio, forse come "stress biologico".

87 Rudolf Allers, *The succeful error*, Sheed & Ward 1940, p. 1.

88 San Tommaso distingue tra azioni dell'uomo ed azioni umane. Le prime sono compiute dagli uomini ma senza la piena elezione della volontà – sono le cosiddette azioni involontarie, come il grattarsi la barba -; le seconde sono le azioni propriamente umane, cioè quelle che appartengono solamente alla natura razionale, cfr. *Summa Teologica*, I-II q. 1 a. 1 co.

89 "Il libero arbitrio è causa del suo operare; perché l'uomo muove se stesso all'azione per mezzo del libero arbitrio", *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 83 a. 1 ad 3.

is the sensitive evaluation of the goodness or badness of the stressful object, of the facility or difficulty to obtain or avoid it. The appraisal is just the word with which Magda Arnold has roundly translated in contemporary language the action of the internal sense of the cogitative of the Thomistic psychology[95]. So it's possible to theorize the non specific reaction for the lower beings as the plants and the microorganisms, while it becomes always more specific for the higher beings - according to the thomistic classification - above all with the beings equipped with knowledge. According to this knowledge the reaction becomes specific.

We add a third criticism. Selye builds the morality on the biology laws. Stress causes anxiety, the anxiety hurts and therefore it's necessary to live reducing stress as much as possible.

If the human being was animated only by the sensitive functions, as it happens to the animals, Selye would probably be right. Minimum effort maximum result. But the human being is rational, that means that his most important capacities are intelligence and will. A proper "human ecology" requires that the superior powers order by itself the lower ones[96]. So, an act as fight against the evil, can produce a strong stress - a reaction at the level of the sensitive soul, of appetites - but can be also the right option. Using the will in order to make a decision can involve suffering, but yet fully satisfy those who perform it. The Saints and the heroes are a good example of it. It's curious that also Selye realizes this same dynamic: "In the extremely remote eventuality that I would have to decide whether my neighbor's or my life should be saved, I would choose my own. There are exceptions to this (a parent may not hesitate to die in order to save a child from a burning building), but – let us admit it – they are rare and cannot justify this type of behavior as a general guideline for conduct"[97]. Are we sure they are so rare?

In conclusion we can say that the problem of Selye's theory is that he wanted to describe the human being by modeling the vegetal and ani-

John Gasson: "L'omeostasi riduce tutte le attività umane ad un sistema passivo di reazione (…) Le dinamiche psicologiche richiederebbero un cambiamento auto-indotto nell'equilibrio del sistema; l'introduzione di tensioni non è sufficiente per dare al sistema il carattere attivo-attivatore che richiedono gli stati psicologici"[90]. Dunque una prima critica alla teoria di Selye ne colpisce uno dei fondamenti: non è possibile parlare di stress in assoluto né di omeostasi, poiché le azioni specificatamente umane sono attive e non reattive all'ambiente.

Una seconda critica attacca l'aspecificità dello stimolo. Uno dei principali divulgatori della teoria dello stress in psicologia, Richard Lazarus, dopo decenni di ricerche sperimentali, si rende conto che le persone reagiscono in modo molto differente agli stressor: "We concluded that to understand what was happening we had to take into account individual differences in motivational and cognitive variables, which intervened between the stressor and the reaction"[91]. Lazarus riprende la teoria delle emozioni di Magda Arnold e verifica che il tipo di risposta dell'individuo ai fattori stressanti (che lui chia-

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90 Magda B. Arnold & John A. Gasson, *The human person. An approach to an integral theory of personality,* Ronald Press Company, New York 1954, pp. 133-134. P. 135: "Quando consideriamo delle attività complesse, che hanno una predominanza delle component psicologiche, l'insufficienza del concetto di omeostasi è ancora più evidente. Per esempio, una persona ansiosa può sperimentare una paura intensa – che produce enormi effetti fisiologici. Anche se la situazione iniziale non è più pericolosa, questi effetti fisiologici diventano produttori di paura (la persona nota una tachicardia e sospetta di un malore); quando la paura aumenta anche gli effetti fisiologici aumentano, fino a quando il nostro paziente non sviluppa una vera e proprio nevrosi cardiaca. La semplice omeostasi non descriverebbe mai la rottura di questa reazione circolare. Il paziente potrebbe, durante la reazione circolare, decidere di rassegnarsi alla malattia cardiaca, e smettere di preoccuparsi. Il circolo vizioso si fermerebbe, anche, e la nevrosi non si svilupperebbe – ma l'omeostasi non potrebbe dare conto del modo in cui si rompe il circolo vizioso. Oppure il cerchio può essere rotto con la psicoterapia che riduce la paura, ma anche qui l'efficacia della terapia non è il risultato del semplice riequilibrio di un sistema disequilibrato".

91 Richard S. Lazarus, *From psychological stress to the emotions: a history of changing outlooks,* Annu. Rev. Psychol., 1993, 44, pp. 1-21.

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95 Stefano Parenti, *Magda Arnold psicologa delle emozioni,* D'Ettoris, Crotone 2017, p. 116.
96 For example *Summa theologia* I q. 81 a. 3 co.
97 SWD, pp. 120-121.

mal life. As other perspectives[98], also he has a "look from below"[99], that is not able to fully gather the specifically human dynamics, becoming in fact inhuman.

Towards integration: how to conceive stress
The concept of stress, as formulated by Selye, cannot be part of a realistic anthropology. I'd like suggest a different way to conceive stress - commonly used term now - integrating it in the dynamics of human fields as they are explained by the traditional psychology. As reaction to an event, the stress overlaps with the activity of the sensitive soul or sensitivity. The apple I see provokes my external senses, starts up the internal ones and produces a tendency to act called emotion (in addition to calling into question the intelligence and the will). But as Magda Arnold[100] says, talk about it in this way, is useless and in my opinion also misleading: the life itself would be a stress because it's a continuous meeting between me and not me. Stress, as conceived by contemporary psychology that has elected it the universal evil (let's think for example about the many books against stress) can be better realized as a certain kind of answer to a certain kind of stimulus: an extraordinary answer to a stimulus, that tends to an extraordinary action. A chief, who prescribes the execution of a task to his subordinate, make a routine action that does not disturb the normal operation. But, if that

ma *coping*[92]) dipende dall'appraisal, cioè dalla valutazione sensitiva della bontà o cattiveria dell'oggetto stressante, della sua presenza o assenza, della facilità o difficoltà a raggiungerlo o evitarlo. L'appraisal non è nient'altro che la parola con cui Magda Arnold ha esplicitamente voluto tradurre nel linguaggio contemporaneo l'azione del senso interno della cogitativa della psicologia tomista[93]. Dunque la reazione aspecifica la si può teorizzare per gli esseri inferiori, come le piante o i microrganismi, mentre diviene sempre più specifica quando si sale nella scala degli esseri – secondo la classificazione tomista – in particolare con le creature dotate di conoscenza. In virtù proprio di tale conoscenza la reazione si specifica.

Aggiungiamo una terza critica. Selye edifica la morale sulle leggi della biologia. Lo stress produce angoscia, l'angoscia fa soffrire, dunque bisogna vivere riducendo al minimo lo stress. Se l'uomo fosse animato solo dalle funzioni sensitive, come lo sono gli animali, Selye probabilmente avrebbe ragione. Minimo sforzo, massimo risultato. L'uomo però è un essere razionale, ciò significa che ha nell'intelligenza e nella volontà le sue facoltà più significative. Una corretta "ecologia umana" prevede che siano le potenze superiori ad ordinare a sé quelle inferiori[94]. Dunque un'azione, come ad esempio quella di lottare contro un male, può produrre un forte stress – una reazione a livello dell'anima sensitiva, degli appetiti – ma essere comunque la scelta giusta da opzionare. Una decisione della volontà può implicare fatica e sofferenza, eppure appagare pienamente chi la compie. I santi e gli eroi ne sono un esempio. È curioso che anche Selye si accorga di tale dinamica: "Nell'eventualità, remotissima, di dover decidere tra la vita del mio prossimo e la mia, sceglierei la mia. Esistono eccezioni a questo (un genitore non esita a morire per salvare un figlio dalla casa in fiamme), ma sono rare, riconosciamolo, e non giustificano la scelta di questo comportamento come schema generale

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98 Rudolf Allers defines psychoanalysis a "psychology from below". Nearer to Selye's scientist perspective we judge as severe as the psychology of the family by Alfred Kinsey.
99 Rudolf Allers, *L'amour et l'instict. Étude psychologique*, Études carmelitaines, 1936, 21 pp. 90-124: "Questo modo di considerare la natura umana non è che una delle numerose forme da cui si manifesta una tendenza generale che, dopo secoli, ha pervertito la mentalità occidentale. Potrebbe chiamarsi: lo sguardo dal basso. Tutto ciò che è inferiore, tutto ciò che si avvicina alla natura brutta o perfino morta, è giudicato come più vero, più naturale, più importante. Se uno getta lo sguardo su tante eresie, tante mode intellettuali, anche deviate, tante pseudo-filosofie, tante idee sociali contemporanee: dappertutto incontrerà questa idea funesta secondo cui l'inferiore costituisce il fondo e il centro della realtà, ciò che realmente importa, che cercarlo, è fare un atto di scienza, e ce viverla è conformarsi alle esigenze più vere della natura umana".
100 Magda B. Arnold, *Emotion and personality, vol. 2*, op. cit., p. 240.

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92 "A person's ongoing efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands appraised as taxing or overwhelming", ibidem.
93 Stefano Parenti, *Magda Arnold psicologa delle emozioni,* D'Ettoris, Crotone 2017, p. 116.
94 Ad es. *Somma Teologica*, I q. 81 a. 3 co.

day, the employee gets sick, even carrying out an order is perceived hardly o stressful. The idea to cook a soft-boiled egg can be without stress, but if it's necessary to buy the egg while outside it's raining heavily, also the thought of having to traffic to achieve the culinary goal, may require extraordinary effort. Coming back home from work every day is normally a simple common and predictable action. The same walk during the peak hours requires much more energy. We can add many other examples to explain that stimuli with a surplus of activities as answer are those that, in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, are called arduous[101]. An arduous good is an object that supposes strength, energy and rush to be obtained. An arduous evil is an entity that requires strength, energy and rush to be avoided and struggled. Previously, we saw that in traditional psychology - according a Thomistic language - appetites activated by arduous one are called irascible: hope and desolation, fear and bravery, anger[102]. These reactions coincide with stress: a movement of sensibility that requires an energetic extraordinary rush. We find a correlation of these dynamics in the old doctrine of four habits by Thomas Aquinas[103] and anatomically related to "stress system": "The temperament depends on the pituitary secretion (from the pituitary gland), from the thyroid and adrenals - because this secretion defines the preponderance of the pulse to the fight or to the pleasure"[104].

We can speak about stress inside a Thomistic conception also by a second perspective. It may possible object that also the irascible appetites

di condotta"[95]. Siamo sicuri che siano così rare? Possiamo concludere con una considerazione riassuntiva. Il problema della teoria di Selye risiede nell'aver voluto descrivere l'uomo prendendo a modello la vita vegetale e animale. Come altre impostazioni[96], anche il suo è uno "sguardo dal basso"[97], che quindi non è in grado di cogliere appieno le dinamiche specificatamente umane, risultando, nei fatti, disumana.

Verso l'integrazione: come concepire lo stress

Il concetto di stress, così come formulato da Selye, non può trovare spazio in un'antropologia realista. Desidero allora avanzare un modo diverso di concepire lo stress - un termine che ormai è entrato a far parte del linguaggio comune – integrandolo nelle dinamiche delle facoltà umane così come descritte dalla psicologia tradizionale.

In quanto reazione ad un evento, lo stress coincide con l'attività dell'anima sensitiva o sensibilità. La mela che mi trovo dinanzi irrita i sensi esterni, attiva quelli interni e produce una tendenza all'azione che si chiama emozione (oltre a chiamare in causa l'intelligenza e la volontà). Come dice Magda Arnold[98], però, parlarne in questo modo è inutile e, aggiungo io, fuorviante: la vita stessa sarebbe uno stress in quanto incontro continuo tra l'io ed il non-io. Lo stress, così come viene concepito dalla psicologia contemporanea che lo ha eletto a male universale

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101 *Summa theologiae* I q. 81 a. 2 co: "Two appetitive powers (…) and another, whereby an animal resists these attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called the irascible. Whence we say that its object is something arduous, because its tendency is to overcome and rise above obstacles".

102 *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 23 a. 1 co: "Since the soul must, of necessity, experience difficulty or struggle at times, in acquiring some such good, or in avoiding some such evil, in so far as such good or evil is more than our animal nature can easily acquire or avoid; therefore this very good or evil, inasmuch as it is of an arduous or difficult nature, is the object of the irascible faculty".

103 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 126 a. 1 ad 3.

104 Felix O. Bednarski, *L'educazione dell'affettività alla luce della psicologia di S. Tommaso d'Aquino,* Massimo, Milano 1986, p. 22.

95 Ibidem, p. 123.

96 Rudolf Allers definisce la psicoanalisi una "psicologia dal basso". Più vicina alla impostazione scientista di Selye, giudichiamo altrettanto severamente la psicologia del matrimonio così come elaborata dall'entomologo Alfred Kinsey cfr. Roberto Marchesini.

97 Rudolf Allers, *L'amour et l'instinct. Étude psychologique*, Études carmelitaines, 1936, 21 pp. 90-124: "Questo modo di considerare la natura umana non è che una delle numerose forme da cui si manifesta una tendenza generale che, dopo secoli, ha pervertito la mentalità occidentale. Potrebbe chiamarsi: lo sguardo dal basso. Tutto ciò che è inferiore, tutto ciò che si avvicina alla natura brutta o perfino morta, è giudicato come più vero, più naturale, più importante. Se uno getta lo sguardo su tante eresie, tante mode intellettuali, anche deviate, tante pseudo-filosofie, tante idee sociali contemporanee: dappertutto incontrerà questa idea funesta secondo cui l'inferiore costituisce il fondo e il centro della realtà, ciò che realmente importa, che cercarlo, è fare un atto di scienza, e ce viverla è conformarsi alle esigenze più vere della natura umana".

98 Magda B. Arnold, *Emotion and personality vol. 2,* op. cit., p. 240.

coincide with a "normal behavior". This is not universally true, because many people can't be brave, hopeful and to get angry (the therapies whose core is the awakening of virility focus precisely on education of such dimensions[105]). But it's a right objection, in my opinion, for two reasons. First, because the repeated emotions tend to become attitudes, according to Arnold's language, or habits, according to the classic thomistic direction. A student, who has problems at school, can feel desolation sitting in front of books. If he trains to become brave, to deal with effort, to fight the boredom and laziness, it's possible that he feels hope little by little. Then, if he pushes forward, it's also possible that the hope to succeed in his study becomes his usual emotion. Then, there is a second reason that call into question the superior faculties of the human being. When we speak about senses and appetites, must remember that we are only on the first floor of the building of the human soul: on the ground floor - if so you can say - there are the faculties of the vegetative soul, while on the second floor there are intelligence and will. The finalized exercise of the will, that is the choice of good versus evil, develop an arrangement in the lower faculties: senses and appetites arrange themselves to act better and for the better. It's the traditional principle of virtue or habitus[106]. A virtuous student, for example, faced with a multitude of tasks to perform, exercises the virtue of studiositas: a "keen application of the mind to something"[107]. This habitus belongs to the great virtue of temperance that withdraws man from things, which seduce the appetite from obeying reason"[108]. In fact every student trains to be tempered: he knows that a day passed playing the playstation is more desirable than a day passed studying, but he also knows that the first option is not reasonable, because studying is his real good. On the contrary, the lazy student prefers the comfortable option to the right choice (indeed he laziness is vice, opposite to the virtue). Therefore, the virtues arrange the appetites to a behavior in harmony with the

(si pensi ad esempio ai tanti manuali contro lo stress), può invece essere meglio inteso come un *certo* tipo di risposta ad un *certo* tipo di stimolo: *una risposta stra-ordinaria ad uno stimolo che inclina ad un'azione stra-ordinaria*. Un capo che prescrive l'esecuzione di un compito ad un suo sottoposto, compie un'azione di routine che non turba il "normale funzionamento". Se però quel giorno il dipendente accusa influenza o malessere, anche eseguire un ordine viene percepito come gravoso o stressante. L'idea di cucinarsi un uovo alla coque può non suscitare particolare stress, ma se l'uovo è da comperare, e fuori piove a dirotto, il pensiero di dover trafficare per raggiungere il proposito culinario può richiedere uno slancio straordinario. Il tragitto di ritorno dal lavoro a casa rappresenta normalmente un'azione semplice, scontata, comune. Lo stesso percorso durante le ore di traffico richiede ben altre energie. Si potrebbero aggiungere molti altri esempi in cui gli stimoli che richiedono un surplus di attività come risposta sono quelli che, nella tradizione aristotelico-tomista, si chiamano *ardui*[99]. Un bene arduo è un oggetto che presuppone forza, energia, slancio per essere raggiunto e posseduto. Un male arduo è un ente che domanda forza, energia e slancio per essere evitato e combattuto. Abbiamo visto in precedenza che nella psicologia tradizionale – secondo una terminologia tomista – gli appetiti attivati dall'arduo sono detti *irascibili*: speranza e disperazione, timore e audacia, ira[100]. Queste reazioni corrispondono allo stress: un movimento della sensibilità che richiede uno slancio energetico stra-ordinario. Troviamo una correlazione di queste dinamiche nell'antica dottrina dei quattro temperamenti, assunta da San Tommaso[101] ecorrelata anatomicamente

105 Cfr. Roberto Marchesini, *Quello che gli uomini non dicono,* Sugarco, Milano 2015.
106 *Somma theologiae* I-II q. 49 a. 3 co.
107 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 166 a. 1 co.
108 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 141 a. 2 co.

99 *Somma teologica* I q. 81 a. 2 co: "La seconda facoltà, che porta l'animale a resistere agli attacchi di chi gli contrasta il possesso delle cose giovevoli, o di chi lo molesta: e questa facoltà è chiamata irascibile. Per tale ragione si dice ce il suo oggetto è l'arduo; appunto perché tende a vincere e a sopraffare gli agenti contrari".
100 *Somma teologica* I-II q. 23 a. 1 co: "L'anima però talora è costretta a subire una difficoltà o un contrasto nel conseguire il bene, e nel fuggire il male, in quanto esso si trova come al di sopra del potere ordinario dell'animale. Perciò il male o il bene, in quanto si presenta arduo o difficile, è oggetto dell'irascibile".
101 *Somma teologica* II-II q. 126 a. 1 ad 3.

will, to the contrary, the vice leads to conflict between faculties. According to this perspective stress coincide not only with the movement of the irascible appetites, but also with an action contrary to habits and to acquired habitus. For a lazy student, to study a chapter of history, proves stressful. A student, who has studiositas, instead, will not prove stressful. The first one lives a higher subjective perception of stress than theater. But stress will change just when from vicious he will gradually become virtuous.

By ending, according to a Thomistic perspective, we can realize stress in two ways. Generally speaking, it is stressful any action that requires the intervention of the irascible appetites. Specifically, we define stress the necessary effort to resist the vice and to incardinate a virtue.

## Conclusions: implications for the clinic.

A bank employee feels nervous, boredom and complains about a total lack of desire to work. The rhythms of the day, the use of monotonous conversation with colleagues on usual practices frightens and depresses him. He can just complain, which increases fatigue in every action. The patient feels stressful; perhaps to describe it, we could use a word that comes from studies applied to work: burnout. In order to help this person in obvious difficulty, the clinic can take different paths. If he conceives stress according to Selye, he will plane the patient in the third stage of the general adaptation syndrome: breakdown. He will look for a new adjustment: "The best way to avoid harmful stress is to select an environment (wife, boss, friends) which is in line with your innate preferences – to find an activity which you like and respect"[109]. After all, one of the three options of microorganisms facing an aggression is the escape (the other two options are indifference and comparison). But what to do if there is an agreement to be honored as in marriage, or if there are not possible alternatives, as in the search for a new job in late age? In Stress without distress, Selye catches the point speaking about motivation, but he's not able to develop it: "I am not going to tell you what should motivate you; whether you wish to serve God, king, country, family, political party,

al "sistema dello stress": "Il temperamento dipende in particolare dalla secrezione pituitaria (dall'ipofisi), dalla tiroide e dei surrenali – in quanto tale secrezione determina la preponderanza dell'impulso alla lotta o ai piaceri"[102].

Possiamo parlare di stress all'interno di una cornice concettuale tomista anche da una seconda prospettiva. Si potrebbe infatti obiettare che anche gli appetiti irascibili corrispondono ad un "normale funzionamento". Questo non è universalmente vero, poiché molte persone mancano di coraggio, di speranza e di capacità di arrabbiarsi (le terapie con al centro il risveglio della virilità puntano proprio all'educazione di tali dimensioni[103]). È però una obiezione corretta, a mio avviso, per due motivi. Primo, perché le emozioni ripetute tendono a diventare attitudini, secondo il linguaggio della Arnold, o abitudini, secondo la dizione classica di Tommaso. Uno studente in difficoltà con la scuola può provare disperazione nel sedersi di fronte ai libri. Se si allena a diventare coraggioso, ad affrontare la fatica, a combattere la noia e la pigrizia, è possibile che provi a poco a poco speranza. Se poi persevera nel tempo, è possibile che la speranza di riuscire nello studio divenga la sua emozione abituale. C'è poi un secondo motivo, che chiama in causa le facoltà superiori dell'essere umano. Quando parliamo di sensi ed appetiti dobbiamo ricordarci che siamo solamente al primo piano dell'edificio dell'anima umana: al piano terra - se così possiamo dire - ci sono le facoltà dell'anima vegetativa, mentre al secondo piano ci sono l'intelligenza e la volontà. L'esercizio finalizzato della volontà, cioè la scelta del bene a discapito del male, costruisce una disposizione nelle facoltà inferiori: i sensi e gli appetiti si dispongono ad operare al meglio e per il meglio. È il concetto tradizionale di virtù o habitus[104]. Uno studente virtuoso, ad esempio, è **colui che di fronte ad una mole di compiti da svolgere esercita la virtù della** *studiositas*: una "forte applicazione dell'anima a qualche

109 SWD, p. 85.

102 Felix O. Bednarski, *L'educazione dell'affettività alla luce della psicologia di S. Tommaso d'Aquino,* Massimo, Milano 1986, p. 22.
103 Cfr. Roberto Marchesini, *Quello che gli uomini non dicono,* Sugarco, Milano 2015.
104 *Somma teologica,* I-II q. 49 a. 3 co.

to work for good causes, or to fulfill your «duty» is up to you"[110].

Talking about motivation means dealing with the reasons, the question - in a word - the meaning that work is worthwhile. It is a level where psychobiology has nothing to teach since it is the ground of intelligence and of will, that as we learned, obey different laws. Burnout sufferers are first of all called to rediscover the value of work, the meaning it has in their life. Only in this way he will be able to honor it and voluntarily adhere to it, enduring fatigue and even rejoicing in it, because it becomes tool of virtue (as Thomas Aquinas teaches). The values are not subjective, but objective, even if it's necessary that are recognized by the subject[111]: from the cheaper ones (such as the salary) to the relational ones (such as a father who sacrifices himself for his family), to the relationship with God. A therapy that wants to promote a "look from above" and be fully Christian, is called to enter the educational field to help patients climb the scale of values to the top (that it is also the foundation of life as the saints testify). But, in order to do so, he must dispose of a materialist and biologic anthropology in order to assume an adequate vision of human being, free and capax Dei.

cosa"[105]. Questo habitus fa parte della grande virtù della temperanza che "ritrae dalle cose che attraggono l'appetito contro la ragione"[106]. Difatti ogni studente si allena ad essere temprato: sa che un pomeriggio trascorso davanti alla playstation è più appetibile che speso sui libri di scuola, ma sa anche che la prima opzione non è ragionevole, poiché studiare è il suo vero bene. Il pigro, al contrario, elige l'opzione comoda alla scelta giusta (la pigrizia è infatti un vizio, una disposizione contraria alla virtù). Dunque il possesso delle virtù dispone gli appetiti ad un funzionamento in sintonia con la volontà, il vizio al contrario porta al conflitto tra le facoltà. Lo stress, secondo questa seconda prospettiva, corrisponde non solo al moto degli appetiti irascibili, ma ad un'azione contraria alle abitudini ed agli habiti acquisiti. Per uno scolaro pigro dover studiare un capitolo di storia si rivela un'azione stressante. Per un alunno dotato di studiositas, invece, no. Il primo vive una percezione soggettiva di stress superiore rispetto al secondo. Lo stress, però, potrà cambiare allorquando da vizioso diverrà a poco a poco virtuoso.

In conclusione, da una prospettiva tomista possiamo intendere lo stress in due modi. A livello generale è stressante ogni azione che richiede l'intervento degli appetiti irascibili. In modo specifico è stress l'impegno necessario a contrastare il vizio ed incardinare una virtù.

Conclusioni: implicazioni per la clinica

Un impiegato di banca lamenta nervosismo, tedio e una totale mancanza di voglia di lavorare. La ritmicità della giornata, l'impiegarsi sulle solite pratiche, i colloqui monotoni coi colleghi di sempre lo atterrano e lo spengono. L'unica attività che gli sorge spontanea è il lamento, che colora di fatica ogni movimento. Il paziente si dice stressato; forse per descriverlo potremmo azzardare l'utilizzo di un termine che deriva proprio dagli studi dello stress applicati al lavoro, il *burnout*. Per aiutare questa persona in evidente difficoltà, il clinico può percorrere diverse strade. Se concepisce lo stress come Selye tenderà a collocare il paziente nel-

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110 *Ibidem,* p. 82.
111 **Rudolf Allers**, *Riflessioni sulla patologia del conflitto,* Etude carmelitaines, April 1938: "We know that man has power to ignore the axiological laws".

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105 Tommaso d'Aquino, *Summa theologica,* II-II q. 166 a. 1 co.
106 Tommado d'Aquino, *Summa theologica,* II-II q. 141 a. 2 co.

la terza fase della sindrome generale di adattamento: l'esaurimento. Si muoverà dunque perché trovi un nuovo adattamento: "Per evitare uno stress dannoso il modo migliore consiste nello scegliersi un ambiente (moglie, padrone, amici) in accordo con le nostre preferenze istintiva – trovare un'attività che piace e che si rispetta"[107]. Del resto, una delle tre opzioni dei microrganismi di fronte ad un'aggressione è la fuga (le altre sono l'indifferenza o lo scontro). Ma come intervenire se, invece, c'è un accordo da onorare, come nel caso di un matrimonio, o non c'è alternativa possibile, come nella ricerca di un nuovo lavoro in tarda età? In *Stress senza paura* Selye coglie il punto parlando di motivazione, ma non è in grado di svilupparlo: "Non tocca a me dirvi quale dovrebbe essere la vostra motivazione, e non ve la dirò. Sta a voi decidere se volete servire Dio, il re, la patria, la famiglia, il partito politico, o prodigarvi per una buona causa, o compiere il vostro dovere"[108]. Parlare di motivazione significa avere a che fare con i motivi, cioè le ragioni, il perché - in una parola - il senso per cui valga la pena lavorare. Si tratta di un livello in cui la psicobiologia non ha nulla da insegnare, dal momento che è il terreno proprio dell'intelligenza e della volontà che, come abbiamo appurato, obbediscono a leggi differenti. Chi soffre di burnout è innanzitutto chiamato a riscoprire il valore del lavoro, il senso che esso ricopre nella sua vita. Solo così potrà onorarlo ed aderirvi volontariamente, sopportando la fatica e persino gioendo per essa, poiché diventa strumento di virtù (come insegna San Tommaso). I valori non sono soggettivi, ma oggettivi, anche se è necessario che siano riconosciuti dal soggetto[109]: da quelli più economici (come lo stipendio), a quelli relazionali (pensiamo ad un padre che si sacrifica per la famiglia), al proprio rapporto con Dio. Una terapia che voglia promuovere uno "sguardo dall'alto" ed essere pienamente cristiana è chiamata ad entrare

nel campo educativo[110] per aiutare il paziente a salire lungo la scala dei valori sino al vertice supremo (che poi costituisce anche la base della vita, come attestano i santi). Per farlo, però, dovrà disfarsi di un'antropologia materialista e biologicista, ed assumere un'adeguata visione dell'uomo, libero e *capax Dei*.

Stress of life
"ogni emozione, ogni attività causa stress" p. vii.
"…for any emotion, any activity causes stress".
EVOLUZIONISMO
MECCANICISMO
La syndrome di adattamento
"Nella ricercar di tale nome mi imbattei ancora nel termine "stress", usato a lungo nell'inglese comune e particolarmente nel campo della fisica per indicare la somma di tutte le forza che agiscono contro una resistenza (non importa quali esse siano). Per esempio i cambiamenti indotti in una striscia di gomma durante la trazione, od in una molla durante la pressione, sono stati tutti descritti come fenomeni di stress. In tal modo lo stress fisico deve certamente considerarsi come una reazione aspecifica. Mi pareva che la manifestazione aspecifica della sindrome d'adattamento fosse l'equivalente biologico di ciò che era stato chiamato "stress" nella materia inanimata e da definirsi meglio, forse come "stress biologico". P. 25-26
ENDOCRINOLOGIA
Teoria unificata della medicina p. 204
Terapia aspecifica uguale alla stress terapia

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107     Stress senza paura p. 100.
108     Ibidem, p. 82.
109 Rudolf Allers, *Riflessioni sulla patologia del conflitto,* Etude carmelitaines, Aprile 1938: "Si sa dunque che l'uomo ha il potere di ignorare le leggi assiologiche".

110 **Martin F. Echavarria,** *Sulla problematica epistemologica e pratica della psicologia contemporanea nella sua relazione con la fede cristiana*, www.psicologiacattolicesimo.blogspot.it: "(…) la psicoterapia si converte, per la sua finalità ultima e per il suo intervento principale, in una rieducazione della vita emozionale della persona dalla ragione e dalla volontà, aperte all'influenza della grazia; come dire in una forma di pedagogia morale speciale".

**Krzysztof Wojcieszek (Poland)**

# Comment to "Coping the Selye's Stress Theory with a Thomistic Approach"

Doctor habilitated, professor Pedagogium - Higher School of Social Sciences in Warsaw, molecular biologist (UŁ), ethics (UŁ), doctor of humanities (philosophy, ATK), habilitation in the field of social sciences in the discipline of pedagogy (UAM in Poznań), author of many preventive programs widely used in Poland: „Noah", „Debate", „Correction", „Barrier", „Sellers", „Taste of life or debate about afterburners", „ARS, or how to care for love", „Jungle" and others. Author of over 150 articles and books. Currently, he manages the Department of Social Prevention, Resocialization and Social Work at the WSNS Pedagogium. He served as President of the European Society for Prevention Research (EUSPR).

The text of the article by S. Parenti awakened memories in me. Fifty years ago, I was reading for the first time Selye's book about his conception of the adaptation system. It came from the library of the scientific institute where I started working after my biological studies. At the same time, I read passionately many philosophical works because my second full-scale philosophical studies were ongoing. I grew up as a Thomist, of my own will and initiative, because philosophy in my country ("People's Republic of Poland") was Marxist-profiled. For texts and discussions about St. Thomas Aquinas I had to look actively, and sometimes it was not always easy. Some items were even formally banned (e.g. J. Maritain's „Integral Humanism"). Since these parallel readings, I have been trying to harmonise precisely my knowledge as a biologist and philosopher.

I am making this biographical remark because I think that the issue raised by S. Parenti requires a complete understanding of dual preparation - both biological and philosophical. It concerns issues that arose on the basis of these two separate methodologies and are of great importance for psychology. It seems to me that most psychologists or psychotherapists only have knowledge in one of these two areas. This makes it difficult for them to fully understand the content of S. Parenti's proposal.

Before I make a few remarks on this text, I want to emphasize strongly that I was happy with the very fact that the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (anthropology) was used as an interpretative key to psychological concepts. The concept of stress as a general adaptive reaction was the work of physiologists, and became one of the fundamental tools of psychology. And one of the formulas for the interpretation of human behavior, which Parenti aptly notes. Thus, the very fact that someone undertakes to reinterpret a concept so rooted in the thinking of psychologists deserves attention and applause. In today's conditions, S. Parenti's text is proof of intellectual independence and courage. Thank you for undertaking such a difficult task.

Now that I have praised the author, emphasizing the importance of his work in the context

of contemporary culture and reductionism (scientism) prevailing almost everywhere in the understanding of man, I can go on to deal with what seems to be slightly weaker aspect of the author's suggestion.

First of all, from reading the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas (As a philosopher, I am as a Thomist from the so-called "Warsaw school of consistent Thomism"), in my opinion, a slightly different picture of this saint's attitude emerges on the issue of stress. As in many other cases, this relationship was ... prophetic. I am of the opinion that the saint anticipated the 20th-century knowledge of our body's responses to stressors. This can be seen when we go into the text of his treatise on feelings or treatise on virtues (relevant fragments of Theological Summa).

Well, considering the issue of sadness (Summa Theologiae, 1-2, qu. 37-38), St. Thomas notes that it is absolutely necessary to avoid this feeling, which threatens the life of man. Sadness destroys. Thus, it anticipates the knowledge we have gained, e.g. thanks to the study of the impact of stress on health, which is currently very accurate and extensive, those interested are even familiar with the findings of Holmes and Rahe (1967, SRRS) about the relationship between illness and stress. Now, the saint is not limited to warnings about sadness.

He gives five specific tips on how to avoid it, in proportion to the strength of the feeling (stress?) (STh, 1-2, qu.38). These tips are, in turn: a) providing yourself with some equivalent pleasure; b) expressing sadness (crying out); c) blaming friends with their sadness; d) „the strongest pleasure" or contemplation of truth and the fifth, final way, about which more in a moment.

When we consider this scale of preventing sadness, we see a convergence with modern psychological knowledge regarding various aspects of „coping" (e.g. expression or burdening friends). Today we know how effective social support is in reducing tensions (by the way, it is also somewhat harmful for the supporters themselves, but not so much as to make them give it up). The fourth way is to refer to the concept of in-

sight known to psychotherapists. The most interesting, however, is the last way, which perfectly characterizes Aquinas' approach to man: he advises that in such a final situation, when none of the previous ways worked, just ... take a warm bath and go to sleep. I consider this to be a great anticipation of later knowledge, revealing the saint's cognitive attitude. Well, this attitude was extremely open to natural knowledge. It is not difficult to know what sources our philosopher used. After all, he was considered an Aristotelian, and the Stagirite was a called a naturalist (both naturalist and philosopher).

However, in the case of St. Thomas we have another important influence, the leadership of a Dominican saint - Albert the Great of Cologne, who for many years was the most important teacher of St. Thomas, and at the same time was an outstanding (perhaps the greatest in Europe then?) naturalist. I always wondered how it happened that Saint Thomas did not devote himself solely to studying nature with such a teacher, but apparently he decided that there are more important matters? Probably right. However, Saint Albert had to teach his student a modern scientific attitude. And he succeeded. Reading St. Thomas, I see it all the time. Would someone not having a sense of the principles of organic life pay attention to such specific aspects? Probably not. St. Thomas Aquinas did not waste the time spent with Saint Albert. He had good knowledge of nature, probably exceeding even Aristotle's conceptions. He owed it to his master, Saint Albert the Great. This is hidden behind the veil of his philosophical and theological considerations. Yes, he had to use mainly Aristotelian tools, then considered revolutionary progressive, but thanks to Saint Albert probably already distanced himself from them to some extent.

And here is my fundamental comment on the text of S. Parenti. So-called rational (or Thomistic) psychology was and still is based on the biology of Aristotle, and not based on the core philosophy of St. Thomas (original metaphysics of esse). And like Aristotelian physics today (in some respects), one "smells a rat". Meanwhile, modern Thomism has many more propositions,

because it has already distanced itself from the nineteenth-century purely Aristotelian interpretation of Thomism. The best example is the work of the Warsaw Thomists (school of Prof. M. Gogacz), who made an effort to purify Thomism from too much Aristotelian influence. They also started a discussion with friends from the so-called Lublin philosophical school (Prof. Krąpiec, Prof. Kamiński and successor).

Before World War II, Thomism was almost exclusively Aristotelian, some of the original aspects of this philosophy were forgotten. Gradually interest in so-called rational psychology expired, even in Lublin. A new search was necessary. If you are interested, please refer to the excellent review of the philosophy of consistent Thomism in English (Andrzejuk et al., Krakow, 2019).

As a philosopher and biologist, I am convinced that it is necessary to rebuild the description of man by constantly using various tools and keys, including adopting purely biological, psychological and philosophical approaches – views forming part of the specific methodology of these sciences, each different in nature. That is why I remembered my intellectual adventures from many years ago. S. Parenti's work has its meaning here, but it is, in my opinion, insufficient, because it does not have a sufficient sensitivity to aspects that arise from research contact with living organisms, contact that is unique to a biologist. It is difficult to replace this kind of insight with meditation or reading. The use of Aristotelian tools, although temporarily opening original perspectives, is not enough. It would be necessary to study simultaneously many scholastic thinkers, especially St. Albert and St. Thomas, but not only them. It's a road that is just beginning to be marked out and point towards the horizon. All trials and efforts are welcome, including the work of S. Parenti. Its undoubted strength is its struggle against very harmful reductionism in the understanding of man. It is appropriate to congratulate S. Parenti once again for his excellent work.

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## From Stress No to Healing No

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**Stephan Schöbe (Germany)**

# The Personality System Interaction Theory (PSI Theory) and Stress

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The aim of this article is to examine whether the Personality System Interaction theory of Prof. Dr. Julius Kuhl can contribute to stress management and to what extent it can be related to Christian concepts.

### The 4 macrosystems of the PSI theory

In his fundamental work on the PSI theory relating to a comprehensive representation of existing personality concepts, Kuhl speaks of seven functional levels. These functional levels integrate the most common approaches adopted in the theories discussed in personality psychology. (Cf. Kuhl 2001: 89ff).

The first three functional levels (automatic control/habits, temperament, affective regulation/ reward and punishment systems) can be described as simple or elementary, the last three (motives and emotion/thinking and feeling/volition) as complex or highly inferent. The basis for this differentiation is the relation to neuronal network models. More complex functional levels display greater networking and are interconnected over more levels than the elementary ones. (Cf. ibid., 100 and 455).

The fourth functional level (progression and regression/stress regulation), located between the simple and complex functional levels, is described by Kuhl as a kind of clearing house. Here balances are drawn up to decide whether the elementary or the highly inferent system level should have priority in processing information and planning action as well as in carrying out action. (Cf. ibid., 456).

In what follows, we shall examine level 1 (automatic control/habits) and level 6 (thinking and feeling), each consisting of two macrosystems focused on the aspects of central tasks, perception and information processing, the affective situation, and execution of action.
Particular importance is attached to the affective situation, since this influences which macrosystem will receive favour for its activity. Within the framework of the PSI theory, a distinction is drawn between positive and negative affect. In positive affect, the nucleus accumbens neuronal level is involved, in the negative the amygdala. Furthermore, two forms are distinguished. The affective situation in each case can vary continuously between strong and damped. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 35).

### The first level: intuitive behavioural control and object recognition

The first level in the PSI theory relates to the task of priming human behaviour in approaching (using the macrosystem of intuitive behaviour control) or avoiding (by the macrosystem of object recognition). Correspondingly, either energy is made available or the focus is put onto receiving details. These impulses can also appear together, leading to an ambivalent evaluation of the current situation. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 4f and also 8ff).

### Intuitive behaviour control
### Central tasks

Intuitive behaviour control, hereafter abbreviated to IBC, is responsible for automatic action sequences and behaviour routines. This system is active when action takes place intuitively or spontaneously. The actions or forms of behaviour involved here are those which require no special planning or forming of intentions.

ren. (vgl. ebd.: 100 und 455).
Die vierte Funktionsebene (Progression und Regression/ Stressregulation), die zwischen den einfachen und den komplexen Funktionsebenen angesiedelt ist, beschreibt Kuhl als eine Art Verrechnungsstelle. Hier wird bilanziert, ob die elementaren oder die hochinferenten Systemebenen den Vorrang bei der Informationsverarbeitung und Handlungsplanung sowie Handlungsausführung erhalten. (vgl. ebd.: 456)
Im Folgenden werden Ebene 1 (automatische Steuerung/ Gewohnheiten) und Ebene 6 (Denken und Fühlen), jeweils bestehend aus zwei Makrosystemen, fokussiert auf die Aspekte zentrale Aufgaben, Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung, Affektlage und Handlungsausführung erläutert.
Eine besondere Bedeutung kommt der Affektlage zu, da diese Einfluss darauf hat, welches der Makrosysteme in seiner Aktivität begünstigt wird. Im Rahmen der PSI-Theorie wird zwischen positivem und negativem Affekt unterschieden. Beim positiven Affekt ist auf neuronaler Ebene der Nucleus accumbens involviert, bei negativem die Amygdala. Weiterhin wird zwischen zwei Ausprägungen unterschieden. Die jeweilige Affektlage kann sich kontinuierlich zwischen stark oder gedämpft bewegen. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 35)

### Die erste Ebene: Intuitive Verhaltenssteuerung und Objekterkennung

Die erste Ebene der PSI-Theorie bezieht sich auf die Aufgabe, das menschliche Verhalten bezogen auf Annäherung (durch das Makrosystem der intuitiven Verhaltenssteuerung) oder Vermeidung (durch das Makrosystem der Objekterkennung) vorzubahnen. Entsprechend wird entweder Energie bereitgestellt oder der Fokus auf Detailwahrnehmung gelegt. Diese Impulse können auch gleichzeitig auftreten, was zu einer ambivalenten Bewertung der aktuellen Situation führt. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 4f sowie 8ff).

### Die intuitive Verhaltenssteuerung
### Zentrale Aufgaben

Die intuitive Verhaltenssteuerung, im Folgenden mit IVS abgekürzt, ist zuständig für automatische Handlungsabläufe und Verhaltens-

Smalltalk, for example, works particularly well when the IBC is activated. In this case, it would be disadvantageous if too many intentions were formed, since other persons participating in the conversation would see this consciously controlled discussion-partner as inauthentic. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 4).

Likewise, the IBC fundamentally makes energy available for action. It seems that, without this system, it is impossible to carry out actions reliably and protractedly. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 22f).

**Perception and information processing**

Since the IBC enables sequences of actions to be realised, it works on the one hand sequentially, carrying out the necessary individual actions step-by-step and successively in order to carry out the current action sensibly. At the same time, however, it takes into account numerous stimuli which are considered as context-sensitive information, thus guaranteeing appropriate adaptation to the surrounding conditions. This processing is done almost entirely unconsciously and in the sense of a parallel processing of information. Actions can therefore be carried out quickly and adaptively, corresponding to each situation, without need for any further reflection. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 5).

This parallel processing can be observed, for example, "…when experienced dancers succeed, even on densely packed dance floors, in controlling the numerous (almost) simultaneous body movements in synchronisation with the rhythm and movements of the partner, at the same time carrying out corrective movements in order to avoid collisions with other dancers". (Ibid., 5).

The IBC is thus more than a system for calling up rigid automatisms. It enables context-sensitive and fast action. Kuhl points out that this partial system can be described as "sensumotoric". (Kuhl 2001: 327). On the one hand, it processes a multiplicity of sensory impressions, while on the other hand taking care of the motoric realisation, thus controlling actions and behaviour. (Cf. ibid., 326ff).

It is interesting in this context that this macrosystem makes use of its own unconscious perception system, which provides the relevant in-

routinen. Dieses System ist aktiv, wenn intuitiv oder spontan gehandelt wird. Hierbei geht es um Handlungen oder Verhaltensweisen, die keiner besonderen Planung oder Absichtsbildung bedürfen. Small Talk etwa gelingt so richtig gut, wenn die IVS aktiviert ist. Hierbei wäre es ungünstig, wenn zu viele Absichten gebildet würden, da der sich bewusst steuernde Gesprächspartner dadurch von anderen am Gespräch teilnehmenden Personen als nicht authentisch erlebt wird. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 4)

Ebenso stellt die IVS grundsätzlich Energie für Handlungen bereit. Ohne dieses System erscheint es unmöglich, dauerhaft und verlässlich Handlungen durchzuführen (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 22f).

Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung

Da durch die IVS Handlungsabfolgen realisiert werden können, arbeitet sie einerseits sequenziell, sie führt Schritt für Schritt die notwendigen Einzelhandlungen nacheinander aus, um die aktuelle Handlung sinnvoll auszuführen. Dabei berücksichtig sie jedoch auch zahlreiche Reize, die als Informationen kontextsensibel berücksichtig werden und so eine adäquate Anpassung an die Umweltbedingungen gewährleistet. Diese Verarbeitung läuft weitestgehend unbewusst und im Sinne einer parallelen Informationsverarbeitung ab. Somit kann situativ schnell und angepasst gehandelt werden, ohne darüber nachdenken zu müssen. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 5)

Beispielsweise kann diese parallele Verarbeitung daran erkannt werden, „…wenn geübte Tänzer es schaffen, auch auf dicht gedrängten Tanzflächen synchronisiert mit dem Rhythmus und den Bewegungen des Tanzpartners die vielen (fast) gleichzeitigen Körperbewegungen zu steuern und dabei auch Korrekturbewegungen umzusetzen, um Kollisionen mit anderen Tänzern zu vermeiden"(ebd.: 5).

Somit ist die IVS mehr als ein System für das Abrufen von starren Automatismen. Sie ermöglicht es, kontextsensibel und rasch zu handeln. Kuhl verweist darauf, dass dieses Teilsystem als „sensumotorisch" (Kuhl 2001: 327) bezeichnet werden kann. Einerseits verarbeitet es eine Vielzahl an Sinneseindrücken und andererseits

formation for movement control - information which is not available to the conscious perception. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 181f).

**Affective situation**

The affective situation is positive during activation of the IBC. If the IBC is activated, the prevalent mood is therefore good. Correspondingly, the IBC can be activated by generating positive affects. Storch and Kuhl designate this process as "self-motivation" ["Selbstmotivierung"]. (Storch/Kuhl 2013: 41).

If someone finds himself in this micro-system too often or for too long, this eliminates the possibility of thinking through different problem-solving action options objectively and calmly without a direct impulse towards action. If spontaneous attempts to solve it do not succeed, "self-restraining" ["Selbstbremsung"] (cf. ibid., 74) in the sense of affective regulation has to be carried out. To activate the macrosystem of the intentional memory (see below), therefore, it would be necessary to damp a positive affect.

**Execution of action**

In keeping with its name, carrying out action in the IBC can be described as intuitive. If the IBC macrosystem is activated, energy is available for action. This can be used for actions ranging from spontaneous to impulsive. (Cf. Storch/ Kuhl 2013:22). One of the dangers here, however, is that no rests or breaks are taken. (Cf. ibid., 23).

**The object recognition system**
**Central tasks**

The central task of the object recognition system, hereafter abbreviated to ORS, is to separate individual objects from their context to enable them to be perceived more precisely. This involves a system of conscious perception which separates sensations and experiences from the context in question so that they can be considered and processed as details. The system is primarily activated by unfamiliarity, unexpectedness and also by mistakes. This enables dangers to be noted and recognised again in other contexts. To this extent, the ORS is of great importance in enabling learning from mistakes and dangerous experiences. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 8f).

sorgt es für die motorische Umsetzung, steuert also Handlungen und Verhalten (vgl. ebd.: 326ff).

Interessant ist hierbei, dass dieses Makrosystem über ein eigenes, unbewusstes Wahrnehmungssystem verfügt, das relevante Informationen für die Bewegungssteuerung bereitstellt, die dem bewussten Wahrnehmen nicht zugänglich sind (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 181f).

**Affektlage**

Die Affektlage ist bei aktivierter IVS positiv. Ist die IVS aktiviert, herrscht also gute Stimmung vor. Entsprechend kann die IVS aktiviert werden durch Generierung positiven Affekts. Storch und Kuhl bezeichnen dieses Vorgehen als „Selbstmotivierung" (Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 41).

Befindet sich jemand zu oft oder zu lange in diesem Makrosystem, hat dies zur Folge, dass nicht die Möglichkeit besteht, sachlich und nüchtern ohne direkten Handlungsimpuls verschiedene Handlungsoptionen zu durchdenken, um ein Problem zu lösen. Gelingen spontane Lösungsversuche nicht, müsste im Sinne der Affektregulation eine „Selbstbremsung" (ebd.: 74) durchgeführt werden. Es müsste also positiver Affekt gedämpft werden (vgl. ebd.: 74f), um das Makrosystem des Intentionsgedächtnisses zu aktivieren (s.u.).

**Handlungsausführung**

Die Handlungsausführung bei der IVS kann entsprechend ihrem Namen als intuitiv bezeichnet werden. Ist das Makrosystem der IVS aktiviert, steht Handlungsenergie zur Verfügung. Diese kann für spontane bis impulsive Handlungen genutzt werden. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013:22)

Die Gefahr besteht jedoch u.a. darin, dass keine Pausen eingelegt werden (vgl. ebd.: 23).

**Das Objekterkennungssystem**
**Zentrale Aufgaben**

Die zentrale Aufgabe des Objekterkennungssystems, im Folgenden mit OES abgekürzt, ist es, einzelne Objekte aus ihrem Zusammenhang herauszulösen und so genauer wahrnehmen zu können. Es handelt sich hier um ein System bewusster Wahrnehmung, das Sinnesempfindun-

The ORS thus supplies important details for other systems, which can then make use of them and in turn embed them in larger contexts. (Cf. Kuhl et al. 2010: 86).

**Perception and information processing**
As mentioned above, the perception is directed towards details, with the particular aim of analysing deviations from the norm. This macrosystem is therefore also described as an "error-zoom" ["Fehler-Zoom"] (Storch/Kuhl 2013: 29). When this system is activated, details are observed very precisely and the proverbial "hair in the soup" is found. (Cf. ibid.).

It is important here to bear this point in mind: If the ORS is activated very frequently, that is, if the perception and information processing is very strongly directed towards details which are then extracted from their context, the total overview of the current or life situation can be lost. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 189). One result of this can be that perceptions of potential danger sources (e.g. predatory animals) are no longer evaluated in the context in which they are perceived (e.g. visiting the zoo). This means that contextual information can no longer be used for calming the ORS, resulting in a panic which the external observer sees as exaggerated.

**Affective situation**
Since object recognition is primarily activated by perceiving unfamiliar and deviant phenomena, either of which may also indicate danger, it is associated with an anxious or negative mood. "Negative moods activate the ORS in combination with a special sensitivity for incongruences and potential danger signals." (Kuhl et al. 2010: 86).

The person must therefore be prepared to tolerate a negative mood so as to be able to analyse mistakes precisely, for example. We shall return to this aspect in more detail in the course of the article.

**Execution of action**
Once the ORS has been activated, attention is paid to details and, above all, to mistakes. This can be helpful in proofreading, but in communicative contexts, however, it lacks the social relation which would be needed for more holistic

gen und Erfahrungen aus dem jeweiligen Kontext löst, um diese als Einzelheiten betrachten und verarbeiten zu können. Es wird v.a. aktiviert durch Neuartiges, Unerwartetes oder auch durch Fehler. Gefahren können so bemerkt und in anderen Kontexten wiedererkannt werden. Insoweit hat das OES eine wichtige Bedeutung, um aus Fehlern und gefährlichen Erfahrungen lernen zu können. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 8f) Somit liefert das OES wichtige Einzelheiten für andere Systeme, die diese dann nutzen und wieder in größere Zusammenhänge einbetten können (vgl. Kuhl et al. 2010: 86).

Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung
Wie eben bereits erwähnt, ist die Wahrnehmung auf Einzelheiten gerichtet, v.a. um Abweichungen von Gewohntem zu analysieren. Daher wird dieses Makrosystem auch als „Fehler-Zoom" (Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 29) bezeichnet. Wenn dieses System aktiviert ist, werden Details sehr genau beobachtet und somit das sprichwörtliche „Haar in der Suppe" gefunden (vgl. ebd.).

Wichtig erscheint hier noch folgender Hinweis: Wenn das OES sehr häufig aktiviert ist, die Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung also sehr auf Details gerichtet ist und diese aus dem Zusammenhang herauslöst werden, kann der Überblick über die aktuelle oder die Lebenssituation insgesamt verloren gehen. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 189) Dies kann zur Folge haben, dass Wahrnehmungen von potenziellen Gefahrenquellen (z.B. Raubtiere) nicht mehr aus dem Kontext heraus beurteilt werden können, in dem sie gemacht werden (z.B. Zoobesuch). Somit können Kontextinformationen nicht zur Beruhigung des OES genutzt werden und Panik entsteht, die von außen betrachtet als übertrieben erscheint.

Affektlage
Da die Objekterkennung vorrangig durch die Wahrnehmung von Unbekanntem und Abweichungen aktiviert wird, was jeweils auch auf Gefahren hinweisen kann, geht sie mit einer ängstlichen bzw. negativen Stimmung einher. „Negative Stimmungen aktivieren das OES in Verbindung mit einer besonderen Sensibilität für Unstimmigkeiten und potenzielle Gefah-

perception and information processing. Thus there are certainly areas in which this system provides an important foundation for action, but it is limited to specific tasks. The ORS is seldom needed directly in social interactions. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 29ff)

### The sixth level: thinking and feeling

The next two macrosystems in the PSI theory are assigned to the sixth system level: thinking and feeling. (Cf. Kuhl 2001: 624ff).The two macrosystems on this level are the intentional memory (cf. Kuhl 2015: 178ff) and the extensional memory (cf. Kuhl 2015: 183ff).

It can be said that these two systems are related more closely, but in some cases also more antagonistically, to the systems on the first level. (Cf. Kuhl et al. 2010: 86ff). These relationships will be examined in more detail after the following outline of the intentional and extensional memories.

### The intentional memory (thinking)
### Central tasks

The central task of the intentional memory, hereafter abbreviated to IM, is the forming of intentions and plans. It then retains these intentions and plans until a favourable opportunity for action is found. If a suitable situation for the retained intention occurs, the IBC will carry out the intentions accordingly. (Cf. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 178f).

To prevent merely spontaneous actions in difficult situations, the IM is activated so that the encountered problems can be solved. At the same time, the IBC is inhibited. This means that impulsive actions are restrained, or that there is no immediate response to every impulse for action. If, however, the inhibition is too great and cannot be cancelled again at the appropriate moment, it can lead to procrastination. (Cf. Kuhl et al.: 2010: 84 and also Kuhl 2015: 179f). The IM will thus be activated whenever problems or hindrances emerge during the execution of actions or when desired actions cannot be realised immediately because no suitable opportunity arises. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 178f).

rensignale" (Kuhl et al. 2010: 86).
Somit muss die Bereitschaft bestehen, eine negative Stimmung auszuhalten, um z.B. Fehler genau analysieren zu können. Auf diesen Aspekt wird im weiteren Verlauf dieses Artikels noch ausführlicher einzugehen sein.

### Handlungsausführung

Ist das OES aktiviert, wird auf Details und v.a. auf Fehler geachtet. Dies kann beim Korrekturlesen hilfreich sein, in kommunikativen Kontexten fehlt jedoch der soziale Bezug, da hierfür eine ganzheitlichere Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung notwendig wäre. Es gibt also durchaus Bereiche, in denen dieses System eine wichtige Grundlage für Handlungen ist. Allerdings beschränken sich diese auf spezifische Aufgaben. Das OES wird selten direkt in sozialen Interaktionen benötigt. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 29ff)

### Die sechste Ebene: Denken und Fühlen

Die nächsten beiden Makrosysteme der PSI-Theorie sind der sechsten Systemebene zugeordnet: Denken und Fühlen (vgl. Kuhl 2001: 624ff).

Die beiden Makrosysteme dieser Ebene sind das Intentionsgedächtnis (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 178ff) sowie das Extensionsgedächtnis (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 183ff).

Es kann gesagt werden, dass diese beiden Systeme mit den Systemen der ersten Ebene in enger, zum Teil auch antagonistischer Beziehung stehen (vgl. Kuhl et al. 2010: 86ff). Diese Beziehungen werden nach der nun folgenden Vorstellung des Intentions- und Extensionsgedächtnisses genauer erläutert.

### Das Intentionsgedächtnis (Denken)
### Zentrale Aufgaben

Die zentrale Aufgabe des Intentionsgedächtnisses, im Folgenden mit IG abgekürzt, ist das Bilden von Absichten und Plänen. Weiterhin hält es diese Absichten und Pläne aufrecht, bis eine günstige Gelegenheit zum Handeln gefunden wurde. Tritt die zur gespeicherten Absicht passende Situation ein, wird die IVS die Durchführung entsprechend umsetzen. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 178f).
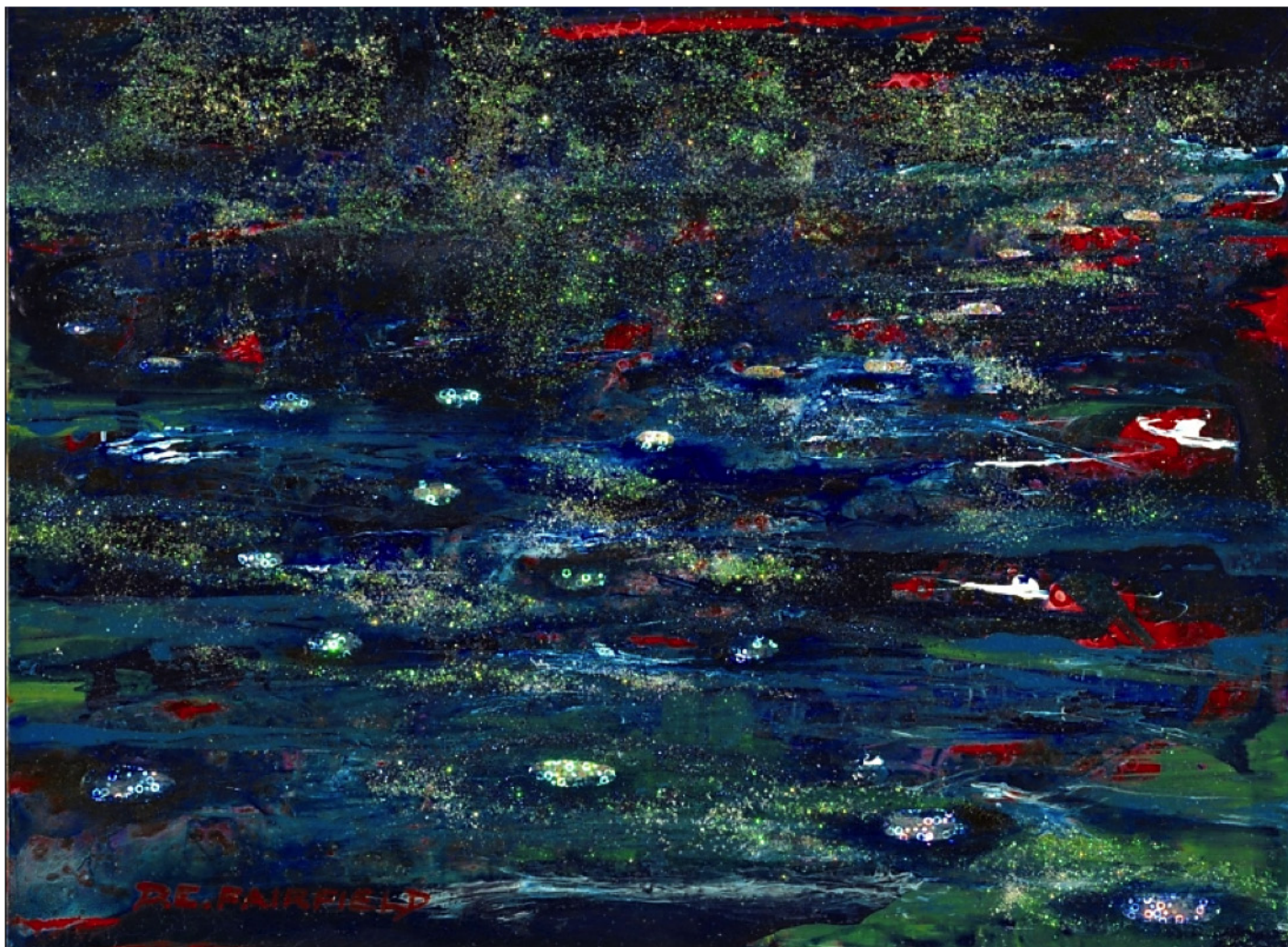
The Rain Is Coming

## Perception and information processing

The IM works sequentially and analytically. Thinking and planning are the principal activities. Its contents are conscious and can be put into words. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 23f).

The information retained here relates primarily to actions, and serves to preserve the intention for certain actions if these cannot be carried out directly. (Cf. Kuhl 2010: 358).

This sequential and analytical way of working can be described as an «either/or logic». (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 184).

## Affective situation

Encounters with hindrances or difficulties lead to a damping of positive affect. Correspondingly, the IM is associated with damped positive affect. It is therefore necessary, if one is to be able to think and plan well, to be prepared to tolerate damped positive affects. Only this way can one sustain an intention which cannot be realised immediately. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 178f).

## Execution of action

Since the IBC is inhibited by the activation of the IM, execution of action by the IM involves less energy and can be described as "slow". (Kuhl 2010: 658). This analytical-sequential thinking correspondingly permits no spontaneous action. (Cf. Kuhl 2010: 644ff).

The IM proceeds with planning, diligence and exactness. Projects which involve human interactions, and can hardly be planned, represent a great challenge for this system. In this case, it may happen that the person reflects long on possible action options without taking any concrete action. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 19f).

## The extensional memory (feeling)
### Central tasks

The extensional memory, hereafter abbreviated to EM, is a very extended "network of implicit experiential knowledge". (Kuhl et al. 2010: 85). This means that this fourth macrosystem in the PSI theory stores life episodes in just the same way as preferences, values, needs or fears. (Cf. ebd.). Its central task is to call up, in any given situation, all experiences from one's own history which could be relevant to the situation. (Cf.

Damit in schwierigen Situationen nicht lediglich spontan gehandelt wird, wird das IG aktiviert, um das aufgetretene Problem lösen zu können. Gleichzeitig wird die IVS gehemmt. Somit werden impulsive Handlungen gebremst bzw. wird nicht jedem Handlungsimpuls sofort nachgegangen. Ist die Hemmung jedoch zu stark und kann zu gegebener Zeit nicht wieder aufgegeben werden, kann dies zu Prokrastination führen. (vgl. Kuhl et al.: 2010: 84 sowie Kuhl 2015: 179f)

Das IG wird demnach aktiviert, wenn Probleme oder Hindernisse im Handlungsvollzug auftreten oder gewünschte Handlungen mangels Gelegenheit nicht sofort umgesetzt werden können (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 178f).

Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung
Das IG arbeitet sequenziell und analytisch. Denken und Planen sind die vorrangigen Aktivitäten. Seine Inhalte sind bewusst und können sprachlich wiedergegeben werden. (vgl. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 23f)

Hier werden v.a. handlungsbezogene Informationen gespeichert, die die Absicht zu intendierten Handlungen aufrechterhalten sollen, wenn diese nicht direkt ausgeführt werden können (vgl. Kuhl 2010: 358).

Die sequentielle und analytische Arbeitsweise kann als eine «Entweder-oder-Logik» bezeichnet werden (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 184).

### Affektlage

Das Auftreten von Hindernissen oder Schwierigkeiten führt zu einer Dämpfung des positiven Affekts. Entsprechend geht das IG mit gedämpftem positivem Affekt einher. Um gut Denken und Planen zu können, muss also die Bereitschaft bestehen, positiven Affekt zu dämpfen. Nur so kann eine Absicht, die nicht sofort umgesetzt werden kann, aufrechterhalten werden. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 178f)

### Handlungsausführung

Da die IVS durch die Aktivierung des IG gehemmt wird, ist die Handlungsausführung des IG wenig energiereich und kann als „langsam" (Kuhl 2010: 658) bezeichnet werden. Das analytisch-sequentielle Denken lässt demnach keine spontanen Handlungen zu. (vgl. Kuhl 2010:

Storch/Kuhl 2013: 31).

An important partial area of this macrosystem is the self. (Cf. Kuhl et al. 2010: 85). In this regard, it is significant that the EM is the only one of the four macrosystems which can store feelings. Correspondingly, this system is of great importance for self-perception and for the regulation of feelings. But it also plays a central role in decision-making, in social relationships, and in personal crisis management: "The extensional memory is especially important for complex decisions in which many framing conditions have to be taken into account, but also for a holistic understanding of people and for managing negative experiences". (Cf. ibid., 85). To this extent, the EM also plays a decisive role in stress management. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 31). Kuhl therefore states that the term feeling is suitable for this macrosystem, since it stores not only knowledge content, but also life episodes from which this knowledge has been generated. Likewise, this system can perceive the partial brain areas which are responsible for the formation of feelings and also send control impulses to them. It is thus of central importance for emotional regulation. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 185ff).

**Perception and information processing**

The perception function has a very holistic orientation. Polysemantic aspects are taken into account. The perceived content is therefore not all conscious, while the holistic and broad perception is reminiscent of the IBC. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 5f).

Within the function of the EM, very large amounts of information are presented simultaneously. This also means that information is processed in parallel, holistically, and with a very high degree of integration. This enables several aspects of one experience to be called up simultaneously, although this process is not necessarily conscious. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 31). In this context, Kuhl speaks of the "`most intelligent` functional level" of the human being. (Kuhl 2015: 184).

It is important for self-perception, and for personality formation, that knowledge from the object recognition macrosystem is integrated into the self, e.g. after painful experiences. The precondition for this, however, is a positive

644ff)

Das IG geht geplant, gewissenhaft und genau vor. Vorhaben, die sich auf menschliche Interaktionen beziehen, die nur schwer planbar sind, stellen eine große Herausforderung für dieses System dar. Hier kann es passieren, dass lange über mögliche Handlungsoptionen nachgedacht wird, ohne eine konkrete Handlung auszuführen. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 19f)

**Das Extensionsgedächtnis (Fühlen)**
**Zentrale Aufgaben**

Das Extensionsgedächtnis, im Folgenden mit EG abgekürzt, ist ein sehr ausgedehntes „Netzwerk impliziten Erfahrungswissens" (Kuhl et al. 2010: 85). Das bedeutet, dass in diesem vierten Makrosystem der PSI-Theorie Lebensepisoden genauso gespeichert sind wie Vorlieben, Werte, Bedürfnisse oder Ängste (vgl. ebd.). Seine zentrale Aufgabe ist es, zu einer gegebenen Situation sämtliche Erfahrungen aus der eigenen Geschichte aufzurufen, die für diese Situation relevant sein könnten (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 31).

Ein bedeutsamer Teilbereich dieses Makrosystems ist das Selbst (vgl. Kuhl et al. 2010: 85). Wichtig ist hierbei, dass das EG das einzige der vier Makrosysteme ist, das Gefühle speichern kann. Entsprechend ist dieses System von großer Bedeutung für die Selbstwahrnehmung und für die Regulation von Gefühlen. Aber auch für das Treffen von Entscheidungen, für soziale Beziehungen und für das persönliche Krisenmanagement spielt es eine zentrale Rolle: „Das Extensionsgedächtnis ist besonders wichtig für komplexe Entscheidungen, bei denen viele Randbedingungen berücksichtigt werden müssen, aber auch für das ganzheitliche Verstehen von Menschen und für die Bewältigung negativer Erfahrungen" (ebd.: 85). Insoweit spielt das EG bei der Stressbewältigung auch eine entscheidende Rolle (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 31).

Der Begriff des Fühlens wird von Kuhl daher als passend für dieses Makrosystem bezeichnet, da hier nicht nur Wissensinhalte, sondern auch Lebensepisoden gespeichert sind, aus denen dieses Wissen generiert wurde. Ebenso kann dieses System die Teilbereiche des Gehirns, die für die Entstehung von Gefühlen zuständig sind, wahrnehmen und ihnen auch Steuerung-

view of one's own existence. Without this basis, it is hardly possible to learn from painful experiences or mistakes. "However, the extensional memory can only afford to integrate negative feelings as well when there is assurance that the overall balance will remain positive". (Kuhl 2015: 185).

Meaningful contexts are also perceived by the EM. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 5ff).

### Affective situation

The EM is associated with damped negative affect. The fundamental mood can be described as calmness. (Cf. Storch/Kuhl 2013: 38f).

### Execution of action

In keeping with the characteristics already mentioned, execution of action by the EM can be described as calm and cautious. In this mode, less attention is paid to details. More precisely, details cannot be observed as intensively in this mode, since the mode of perception here has a holistic orientation. If details are to be examined more closely, the ORS is called for. (Cf. ibid., 27f; 31).

The EM is activated by scalability issues, or fundamentally by the presentation of choice options or by indirect suggestions rather than direct instructions. This overloads the ORS, which is detail-oriented, or the IM with its dichotomous way of processing. The parallel processing of the EM is required here. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 187). Likewise, the EM, and thus the self as well, is activated when one feels understood.

As already mentioned above in the remarks on perception and information processing, the EM also perceives meaningful contexts. Because of the link to emotional regulation, meaningful contexts perceived by the EM have more influence on future behaviour than the meaningful contexts recognised only by the IM. (Cf. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 5ff)

### Affective modulation of the macrosystems

A central tenet of the PSI theory is that the four macrosystems are affectively modulated. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 177). This means that the system in question can only exploit its full potential when the appropriate affective situation prevails. Affective regulation is thus an important basic

simpulse senden. Somit ist es für die Emotionsregulation von zentraler Bedeutung. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 185ff)

### Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung

Die Wahrnehmung ist sehr ganzheitlich orientiert. Polysemante Aspekte werden berücksichtigt. Daher sind die wahrgenommenen Inhalte nicht alle bewusst, zum anderen erinnert die ganzheitliche und breite Wahrnehmung an die IVS. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 5f)

Im Rahmen des EG werden sehr viele Informationen gleichzeitig bereitgestellt. Dies bedeutet auch, dass es Informationen parallel, ganzheitlich und mit einer sehr hohen Integrationsleistung verarbeitet. Somit können mehrere Aspekte einer Erfahrung gleichzeitig aufgerufen werden, ohne deshalb zwingend bewusst werden zu müssen. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 31)

Kuhl spricht in diesem Zusammenhang von der „`intelligentesten` Funktionsebene" (Kuhl 2015: 184) des Menschen.

Wichtig für die Selbstwahrnehmung und die Persönlichkeitsbildung ist das Integrieren von Erkenntnissen aus dem Makrosystem der Objekterkennung in das Selbst, z.B. nach schmerzlichen Erfahrungen. Dies setzt jedoch eine positive Sicht hinsichtlich der eigenen Existenz voraus. Ohne diese Basis ist ein Lernen aus schmerzlichen Erfahrungen oder Fehlern nur schwer möglich. „Das Extensionsgedächtnis kann es sich allerdings nur leisten, auch negative Gefühle einzubinden, wenn gesichert ist, dass die Gesamtbilanz positiv bleibt" (Kuhl 2015: 185).

Auch sinnstiftende Zusammenhänge werden durch das EG wahrgenommen (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 5ff).

### Affektlage

Das EG geht mit gedämpftem negativem Affekt einher. Die Grundstimmung kann als Gelassenheit bezeichnet werden. (vgl. Storch/ Kuhl 2013: 38f)

### Handlungsausführung

Entsprechend den bereits erwähnten Punkten kann die Handlungsausführung durch das EG als gelassen und umsichtig bezeichnet werden. Auf Details wird in diesem Modus weniger ge-
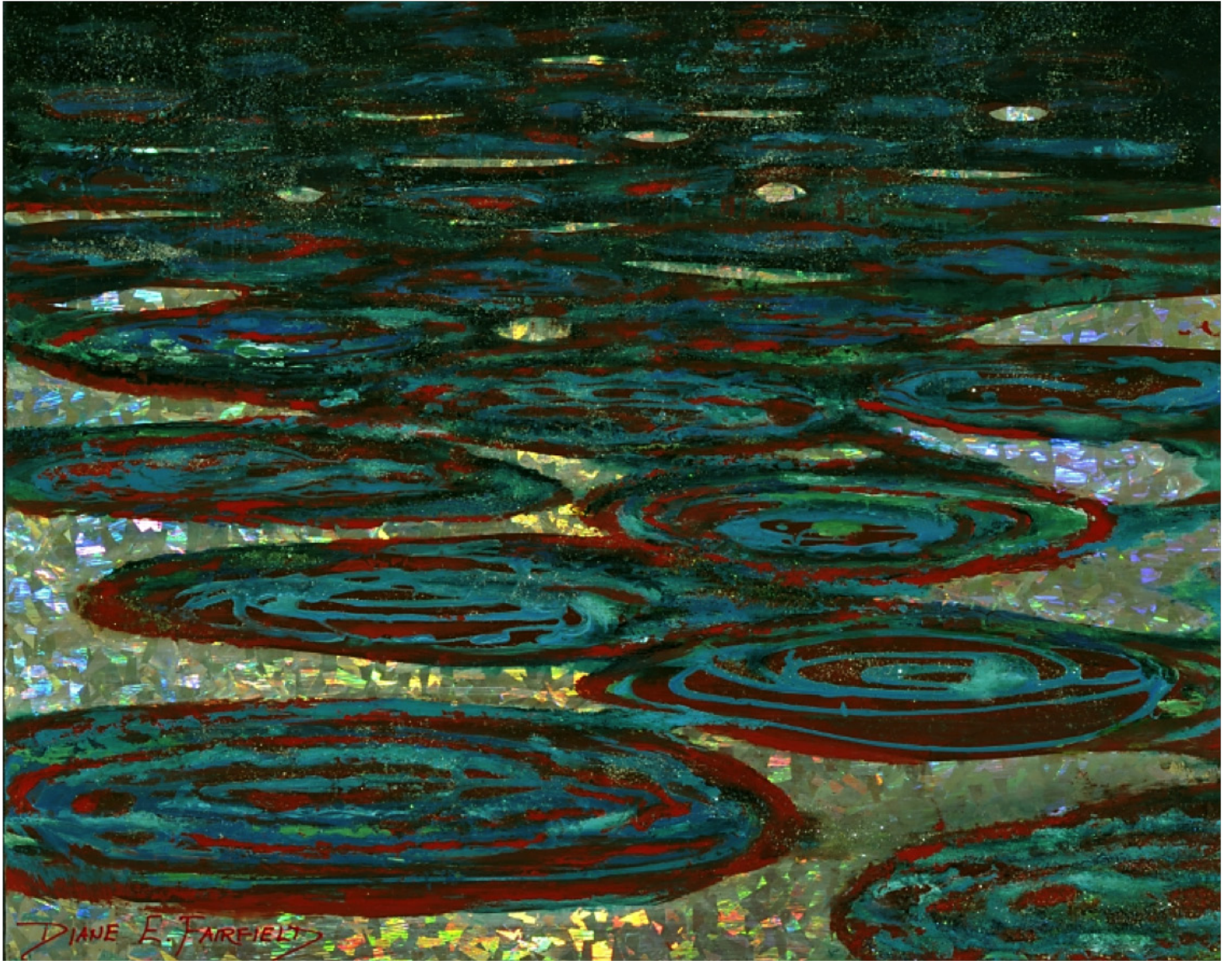
Tiptoe through the Raindrops

competence if the four macrosystems are to be activated optimally. Depending on the context, it can also be important to able to put oneself into either a more positive or more negative fundamental mood in order to activate the right macrosystem for the current situation. Since each macrosystem is associated with different perceptional possibilities and information-processing possibilities, persisting in an unsuitable macrosystem can mean that the relevant problem-solving information is not taken into consideration, since it is not perceived or is not given goal-oriented processing. If a person is, for example, very anxious, he/she cannot switch to the macrosystem which is needed in order to obtain an overview of the situation. This macrosystem (in this case the EM) is activated during damped negative affect and can only develop its functional capacity under this condition. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 177 and 183ff).

## The two central modulation assumptions of the PSI theory

From the comments above on the four macrosystems of the PSI theory, it is already clear that the systems are mutually connected or are related to each other in such a way that, for example, inhibition of the IBC is caused by the activation of the IM.

Within the PSI theory, a total of seven modulation assumptions have been formulated. (Cf. Kuhl 2001: 163ff). It would exceed the limits of this article to mention them all here. We shall therefore examine here only the two modulation assumptions which Kuhl deals with in his explanations of the PSI theory in various publications. (Cf. e.g Kuhl et al. 2010: 86ff, Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 10f and also Kuhl 2015: 189ff).

We can therefore speak of two central modulation assumptions with regard to the interplay of the macrosystems. These will now be elucidated in what follows.

## The first modulation assumption of the PSI theory

The first modulation assumption is formulated thus:

"One can retain difficult or unpleasant intentions better in one's memory (IM) if one can, for

achtet. Genauer: auf Details kann in diesem Modus nicht so intensiv geachtet werden, da der Wahrnehmungsmodus hier ganzheitlich orientiert ist. Sollen Details genauer in den Blick genommen werden, ist das OES gefragt. (vgl. ebd.: 27f; 31)

Aktiviert wird das EG durch Skalierungsfragen oder grundsätzlich durch das Anbieten von Wahlmöglichkeiten oder durch indirekte Anregungen statt direkter Aufträge. Dies überfordert das detailorientierte OES oder das IG mit seiner dichotomen Verarbeitungsweise. Die parallele Verarbeitungsweise des EG ist hier gefragt. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 187) Ebenso wird das EG und damit das Selbst aktiviert, wenn man sich verstanden fühlt.

Wie oben bereits bei den Erläuterungen zu Wahrnehmung und Informationsverarbeitung erwähnt, werden auch sinnstiftende Zusammenhänge durch das EG wahrgenommen. Durch den Bezug zur Emotionsregulation haben die im EG wahrgenommenen Sinnzusammenhänge mehr Einfluss auf künftiges Verhalten als die lediglich im IG erkannten Sinnzusammenhänge. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 5ff)

**Affektmodulation der Makrosysteme**

Eine zentrale Erkenntnis der PSI-Theorie besteht darin, dass die vier Makrosysteme affektmoduliert sind (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 177). Dies bedeutet, dass das jeweilige System dann sein volles Potenzial ausschöpfen kann, wenn die dazu passende Affektlage besteht. Affektregulation ist somit eine wichtige Grundkompetenz, um die vier Makrosysteme optimal aktivieren zu können. Je nach Kontext kann es also wichtig sein, sich in eine positivere oder auch negativere Grundstimmung versetzen zu können, um das für die jeweilige Situation passende Makrosystem zu aktivieren. Da jedes Makrosystem mit unterschiedlichen Wahrnehmungsmöglichkeiten und Informationsverarbeitungsprozessen einhergeht, kann ein Verharren in einem unpassenden Makrosystem bedeuten, dass die relevanten Informationen für eine Problemlösung nicht berücksichtigt werden, da sie nicht wahrgenommen oder nicht zielführend verarbeitet werden können. Ist eine Person beispielsweise sehr ängstlich, kann sie nicht in das Makrosystem wechseln, welches notwendig wäre, um den Überblick über eine Situation zu

a while, tolerate the loss of positive affect A(+) associated with every difficult or unpleasant situation.

The intuitive behavioural control which supports the self-regulating realisation of the relevant intentions stored in the intentional memory is activated by positive affect A+." (Kuhl 2015: 189).

The first modulation assumption is also termed the "volitional priming assumption" ["Willensbahnungsannahme"]. (Kuhl et al. 2010: 87). If no intentions are stored in the IM, the IBC intervenes in the current situation either by drawing on proven behaviour patterns, for which no conscious control is necessary ("stimulus control through habits" ["Reizsteuerung durch Gewohnheiten"], Kuhl 2015: 189), or by reacting to supposed or explicit expectations from outside ("external control" ["Fremdsteuerung"], ibid., 189).

If it is a matter of realising one's own intentions, these must therefore be formed in advance. This may sound trivial. The decisive point here, however, is that it is necessary to exit from positive affect, since damped positive affect A(+) is necessary in order for the IM to do its job of solving problems and planning. This damping of positive affect must therefore be tolerated. (Cf. ibid., 190).

After the forming of intentions in the IM, on the other hand, positive affect A+ must again be generated so that energy can be made available for action. This can come from outside via encouragement or from inside via self-motivation. (Cf. Kuhl et al.: 2010: 87).

In this context, Kuhl looks more closely at positive thinking and observes that positive thinking about an intention alone reduces the probability of realising it. If, however, a pendulum movement takes place between the positive consequences of the realisation and the reflection on possible difficulties and challenges, the probability of actually realising the desired intention is increased significantly. This is shown by Kuhl's findings on the so-called Stroop effect. Analogous findings have also been published by Oettingen, although her investigations were into concrete everyday situations. Concluding the study, she presents a procedure which corre-

gewinnen. Dieses Makrosystem (in diesem Fall das EG) wird aktiviert bei gedämpftem negativem Affekt und kann nur unter dieser Bedingung seine volle Funktionsweise zeigen. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 177 und 183ff)

**Die zwei zentralen Modulationsannahmen der PSI-Theorie**

In den Erläuterungen zu den vier Makrosystemen der PSI-Theorie klang an manchen Stellen bereits an, dass die Systeme untereinander in Verbindung stehen bzw. aufeinander bezogen sind, so etwa die Hemmung der IVS durch die Aktivierung des IG.

Im Rahmen der PSI-Theorie werden insgesamt sieben Modulationsannahmen formuliert (vgl. Kuhl 2001: 163ff). Diese alle auszuführen, würde wiederum den Rahmen dieses Artikels sprengen. Es sollen daher die beiden Modulationsannahmen dargestellt werden, die auch Kuhl im Rahmen seiner Erläuterungen zur PSI-Theorie in verschiedenen Publikationen aufgreift, ohne die anderen Modulationsannahmen zu erwähnen (vgl. etwa Kuhl et al. 2010: 86ff, Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 10f sowie Kuhl 2015: 189ff).

Es kann demnach von zwei zentralen Modulationsannahmen hinsichtlich des Wechselspiels der Makrosysteme gesprochen werden. Diese werden nun im Folgenden erläutert.

**Die erste Modulationsannahme der PSI-Theorie**

Die erste Modulationsannahme lautet:

„Schwierige oder unangenehme Absichten behält man besser im Gedächtnis (IG), wenn man den Verlust von positivem Affekt A(+), den jede schwierige oder unangenehme Situation mit sich bringt, eine Weile aushalten kann. Die intuitive Verhaltenssteuerung, die die selbstregulierende Umsetzung der jeweils im Intentionsgedächtnis gespeicherten Absicht unterstützt, wird durch positiven Affekt A+ aktiviert." (Kuhl 2015: 189)

Die erste Modulationsannahme wird auch als „Willensbahnungsannahme" (Kuhl et al. 2010: 87) bezeichnet. Wenn keine Absichten im IG gespeichert sind, greift die IVS in der aktuellen Situation entweder auf bewährte Verhaltensmuster zurück, für die keine bewusste Steue-

sponds to the pendulum technique formulated by Kuhl. (Cf. Oettingen 2015).

**The second modulation assumption of the PSI theory**

The second modulation assumption:
"The separation of individual objects from their context and the observation of irregularities and errors are reinforced by negative affect.
If one succeeds in regulating negative affect back to below a critical threshold, one becomes more strongly aware of the self again, thus becoming literally more ´self-conscious´ and once again gaining an overview of the many experiences, action options, creative ideas and meaningful insights offered by the extensional memory." (Kuhl 2015: 193).

The second modulation assumption is also known as the "self-development assumption" ["Selbstentwicklungsannahme"]. (Kuhl 2010: 87).
The decisive point here is that it is essential to permit negative affect A- in order to be able to learn from experiences and, above all, from mistakes. Negative affect A- activates the ORS. This leads to greater success in separating irregularities and deviations from their context and thus obtaining a clearer understanding of the problem complex. If however one does not then succeed in damping this negative affect again, the contact to one's self, and thus to one's own values and goals, is lost. In such a state, it is easy for people to consider certain goals to be their own which have in fact been suggested to them from outside. In this context one speaks of "self-infiltration" ["Selbstinfiltration"]. (Kuhl 2015: 194). The self is infiltrated by external intentions and, under these conditions, the affected person thinks, on a conscious level, that he/she has chosen them personally. Kuhl provides evidence in this connection from diverse studies. (Cf. Kuhl 2001: 223ff; Kuhl 2015: 194ff).
Correspondingly, it is also possible during prolonged negative affect A- to speak of alienation ["Entfremdung"]. (Cf. ibid., 230). Depending on the characteristics, and in combination with other aspects of the personality, one can speak of manifest or latent alienation. (Cf. ibid., 230ff). If, for example, negative affect is generated by

rung notwendig ist („Reizsteuerung durch Gewohnheiten" (Kuhl 2015: 189)), oder reagiert auf vermutete oder explizite Erwartungen von außen („Fremdsteuerung" (ebd.: 189)).
Sollen nun eigene Vorhaben umgesetzt werden, müssen diese also zuerst gebildet werden. Dies mag trivial klingen. Der entscheidende Punkt ist jedoch, dass hier das Verlassen des positiven Affekts notwendig ist, da gedämpfter positiver Affekt A(+) notwendig ist, damit das IG seine Problemlöse- und Planungsarbeit verrichten kann. Diese Dämpfung des positiven Affekts muss also ausgehalten werden. (vgl. ebd.: 190)
Andererseits muss nach der Bildung von Absichten im IG wieder positiver Affekt A+ generiert werden, damit Handlungsenergie zur Verfügung gestellt werden kann. Dies kann von außen durch Ermutigung oder von innen durch Selbstmotivierung geschehen. (vgl. Kuhl et al.: 2010: 87)
Kuhl geht in diesem Zusammenhang auf das positive Denken ein und stellt fest, dass lediglich positiv über ein Vorhaben zu denken, die Umsetzungswahrscheinlichkeit für dieses Vorhaben reduziert. Wird jedoch eine Pendelbewegung zwischen den positiven Folgen der Umsetzung und dem Nachdenken über mögliche Schwierigkeiten und Herausforderungen ausgeführt, erhöht sich die Wahrscheinlichkeit deutlich, das gewünschte Vorhaben auch tatsächlich in die Tat umzusetzen. Dies wird durch Befunde von Kuhl zum sogenannten Stroop-Effekt gezeigt.
Entsprechende Befunde stellt auch Oettingen dar, die jedoch Untersuchungen in konkreten Alltagssituationen durchführt. Als Ergebnis ihrer Arbeit stellt sie eine Vorgehensweise vor, die der von Kuhl formulierten Pendeltechnik entspricht. (vgl. Oettingen 2015)

**Die zweite Modulationsannahme der PSI-Theorie**

Die zweite Modulationsannahme:
„Die Herauslösung einzelner Objekte aus ihrem Zusammenhang und die Beachtung von Unstimmigkeiten und Fehlern wird durch negativen Affekt verstärkt.
Wenn es gelingt negativen Affekt aktiv wieder unter eine kritische Schwelle zu regulieren, dann spürt man sich selbst wieder stär-
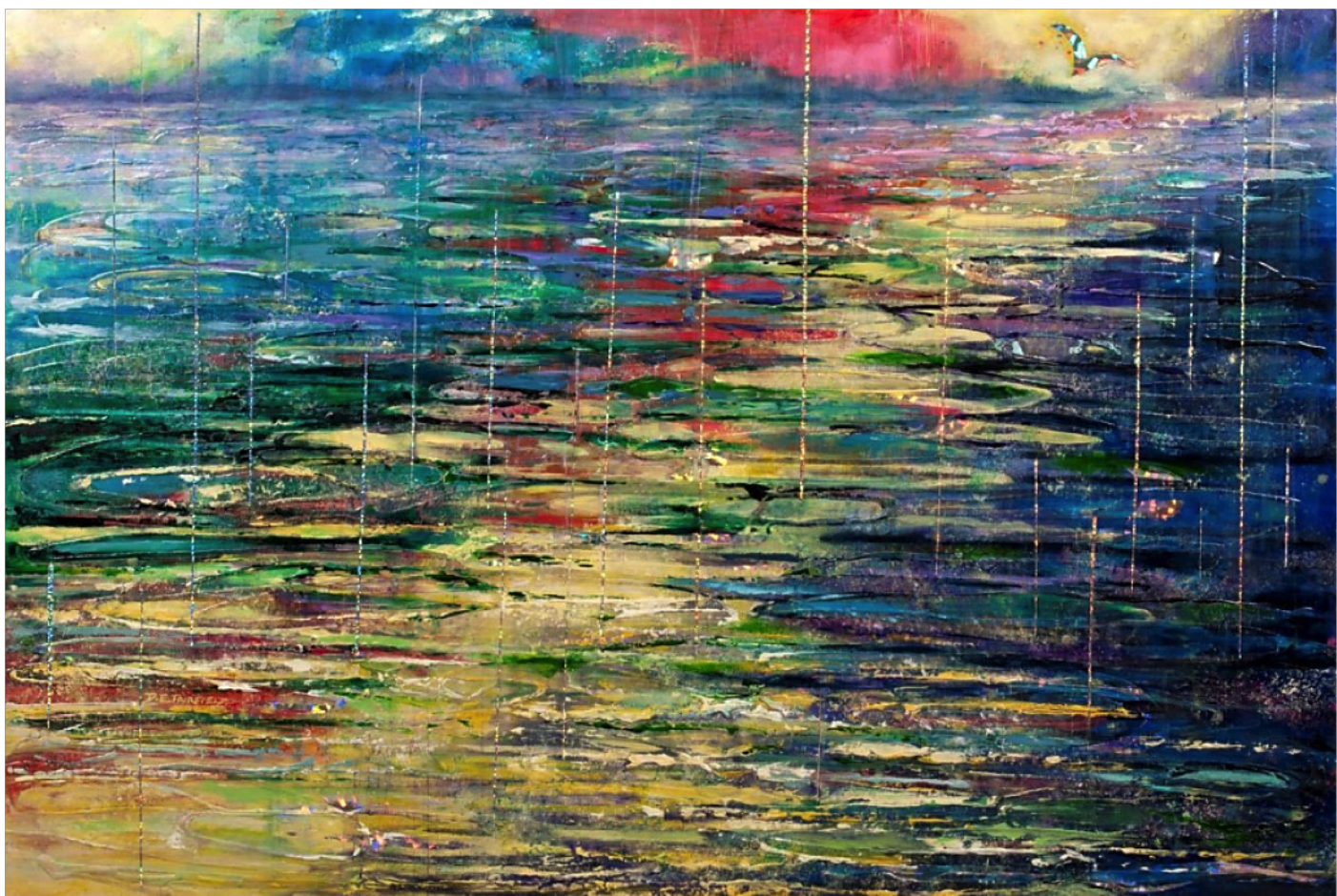
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prolonged experience of stress, this means, according to the second modulation assumption of the PSI theory, that the ORS is activated more and more, which also correspondingly raises the awareness of mistakes and irregularities. Access to the EM and to the self, however, becomes increasingly inhibited. Yet, under stress, it is precisely the EM that has to provide relief by drawing on past successful episodes or by making creative action options available. The requirement here is the ability to calm oneself by damping negative affect A(-). If this is not possible because access to the self is not achieved, the person concerned remains in a state of brooding and anxiety. Likewise, negative affect A- also inhibits the IBC, which needs positive affect A+ in order to provide relief by means of relaxed action routines and a good mood. (Cf. Kuhl 2015: 197f).

If, however, damped negative affect A(-) is achieved, the knowledge acquired by the activity of the ORS can be integrated into the EM. This means that action options, presented by the EM for the sake of achieving personal intentions and goals, are modified by learning from negative experiences and adapted more successfully to the situation in question. (Cf. ibid., 232).

If this process is unsuccessful, perhaps because negative affect is avoided after the subject becomes aware of the mistake, e.g. by relativising what has happened, it is indeed still possible to remember this episode, but no conclusions can be drawn from it regarding future action. So anyone who consistently avoids negative affect will be able to learn little or nothing from his/her mistakes and is in danger of repeating similar mistakes. (Cf. Kuhl/Strehlau 2014: 17).

**Stress and the 4th level**

Going on to stress management, level 4 of the PSI theory becomes important. Neurobiologically, the hippocampus is the central system here. Here it functions as a kind of "clearing house", keeping a count of whether experience and behaviour are currently coming more from the lower levels (= regression) or from the upper levels (= progression). In this context, it becomes clear that regression is not per se something negative. Rather, the important thing is the ac-

ker, wird also ganz wörtlich ´selbst-bewusster´ und überblickt wieder die vielen Erfahrungen, Handlungsmöglichkeiten, kreativen Einfälle und sinnstiftenden Einsichten, die das Extensionsgedächtnis anzubieten hat." (Kuhl 2015: 193)

Die zweite Modulationsannahme wird auch als „Selbstentwicklungsannahme" (Kuhl 2010: 87) bezeichnet.

Der entscheidende Punkt ist hierbei, dass das Zulassen von negativem Affekt A- unerlässlich ist, um aus Erfahrungen und v.a. aus Fehlern lernen zu können. Negativer Affekt A- aktiviert das OES. Somit gelingt es besser, Unstimmigkeiten und Abweichungen aus ihrem Kontext herauszulösen und so ein klareres Verständnis von der Problematik zu erhalten. Gelingt es jedoch nicht, diesen negativen Affekt wieder zu dämpfen, geht der Kontakt zum Selbst und damit zu den eigenen Werten und Zielen verloren. In einem solchen Zustand können Personen leicht Ziele, die von außen an sie herangetragen werden, für die eigenen halten. Es wird in diesem Zusammenhang von „Selbstinfiltration" (Kuhl 2015: 194) gesprochen. Das Selbst wird also von fremden Absichten infiltriert und die betroffene Person hält dann unter Umständen diese Absichten auf einer bewussten Ebene für selbst gewählt. Kuhl konnte diesen Zusammenhang in diversen Studien belegen. (vgl. Kuhl 2001: 223ff; Kuhl 2015: 194ff)

Entsprechend kann bei andauerndem negativen Affekt A- von Entfremdung oder auch „Alienation" (ebd.: 230) gesprochen werden. Je nach Ausprägung und in Kombination mit anderen Aspekten der Persönlichkeit, kann von manifester oder latenter Alienation gesprochen werden. (vgl. ebd.: 230ff)

Wird etwa durch andauerndes Stresserleben negativer Affekt generiert, bedeutet dies gemäß der zweiten Modulationsannahme der PSI-Theorie, dass das OES immer mehr aktiviert wird und damit auch der Blick für Fehler und Unstimmigkeiten. Der Zugang zum EG mit dem Selbst wird jedoch immer mehr gehemmt. Unter Stress müsste aber gerade das EG mit dem Rückgriff auf erfolgreiche Episoden oder durch das Zur-Verfügung-Stellen von kreativen Handlungsoptionen für Entlastung sorgen.

tivation of the right system to meet the current situation. (Cf. Kuhl 2009: 227ff).

The hippocampus is thus an important switching point between the macrosystems. At a low cortisol level, the hippocampus becomes activated and can therefore carry out its task of switching most satisfactorily. If, however, the cortisol level in the hippocampus is raised above a critical limit by an experience of stress, the activity of the hippocampus is inhibited and the switching becomes more difficult or even impossible. It may then happen that someone remains stuck in one of the partial systems which is unsuitable for the current context. In such a moment, appeals, which are generally directed to the IM, are of no help, since no action can be realised from that source. The important thing here is self-calming, since activation of the self inhibits negative affect: the perception can become more holistic again and action options can be generated. The cortisol level sinks correspondingly and releases the activity of the hippocampus once more.

From the Christian point of view, it is interesting here that Prof. Kuhl allocates spiritual experiences to the EM. This provides a model which explains why, for example, contemplation reduces stress and has an overall positive effect on brain health. Contemplative prayer, which leads to an awareness of the here-and-now, leaves room for neither planning activities in the IM nor error analysis in the ORS. Body-oriented rituals (e.g. liturgical dance or gestures in prayer) can give further support here. (For comprehensive details on this, see Kuhl's book "Spirituelle Intelligenz" ["Spiritual intelligence"], 2015).

In summary, therefore, it can be said that the PSI theory provides a broad explanatory model for human perception, feeling, thinking and behaviour, one which not only integrates the common concepts of personality theory, but can also explain, on the level of functional analysis, interventions in diverse schools of psychotherapy. It thus represents, on the one hand, a model for reflection on one's own therapeutic, advisory, or also pedagogical activities, while on the other hand offering the possibility of developing an understanding, in seemingly hopeless life situations, for a prevalent "dead-end" state:

Hier ist die Fähigkeit der Selbstberuhigung durch Dämpfung des negativen Affekts A(-) gefragt. Ist diese nicht möglich, da der Zugang zum Selbst nicht gelingt, verbleibt die betroffene Person in einem Zustand des Grübelns und der Angst. Ebenso wird durch den negativen Affekt A- auch die IVS gehemmt, die ja positiven Affekt A+ bräuchte, um über entspannte Handlungsroutinen und gute Stimmung für Entlastung zu sorgen. (vgl. Kuhl 2015: 197f)

Gelingt jedoch die Dämpfung negativen Affekts A(-), können die Erkenntnisse, die durch die Aktivität des OES gewonnen wurden, in das EG integriert werden. Somit können Handlungsoptionen, die das EG zur Erreichung persönlicher Absichten und Ziele bereitstellt, durch das Lernen aus negativen Erfahrungen modifiziert und besser an die jeweilige Situation angepasst werden. (vgl. ebd.: 232)

Gelingt dieser Prozess nicht, da etwa negativer Affekt nach dem Bewusstwerden eines Fehlers vermieden wird, z.B. durch Relativierung des Geschehenen, kann diese Episode in der Regel zwar erinnert werden, jedoch keine Schlüsse für künftiges Handeln daraus gezogen werden. Wer also konsequent negativen Affekt vermeidet, wird aus seinen Fehlern wenig bis nichts lernen können und läuft Gefahr, immer wieder ähnliche Fehler zu machen. (vgl. Kuhl/ Strehlau 2014: 17)

**Stress und die 4. Ebene**

Beim Umgang mit Stress wird nun noch Ebene 4 der PSI-Theorie bedeutsam. Neurobiologisch ist hier der Hippocampus das zentrale System. Dort findet eine Art Verrechnung statt, ob Erleben und Verhalten aktuell eher aus den unteren Ebenen (=Regression) oder aus den oberen Ebenen (Progression) gestaltet wird. In diesem Zusammenhang wird klar, dass Regression nicht per se etwas Negatives ist. Es geht vielmehr um die Situationsadäquate Aktivierung des jeweils passenden Systems. (vgl. Kuhl 2009: 227ff)

Der Hippocampus ist also eine wichtige Umschaltstelle zwischen den Makrosystemen. Bei geringem Cortisolspiegel wird der Hippocampus aktiviert und kann daher seine Aufgabe des Umschaltens bestens erledigen. Steigt jedoch der Cortisolspiegel im Hippocampus durch

more precisely, an understanding for the currently dominant active macrosystem, which is obviously not capable of perceiving, processing or achieving goals in a manner adequate to the situation. Besides this understanding, the PSI theory also offers ideas as to which partial system (or systems) should be activated in the life situation in question to enable the problems to be mastered.

In the book "Die Kraft aus dem Selbst" ["Strength from the self"] (3rd impression 2017), Kuhl joins Maja Storch to introduce 7 "psychogyms" to stimulate the various partial systems into action in a constructive way.

A strong personality, according to Kuhl, can switch between the 4 micro-systems as the situation requires. In this view, a core competence of strong personalities is affective regulation. Stress management, on the other hand, should include self-calming as a central element, which in a sense provides the precondition for further indispensable training and counselling content. In closing, a quotation from Prof. Kuhl: "… successful shaping of professional and private life is enabled neither by constantly developing one's intelligence nor by such components of emotional intelligence as optimism or unshakeable self-confidence, which seem to promise success, but by a differentiated approach to personal experiences in life, by personal intelligence." (Kuhl 2013, 17)

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Stresserleben über eine kritische Grenze, wird die Hippocampusaktivität gehemmt und das Umschalten wird erschwert oder sogar unmöglich. So kann es passieren, dass jemand in einem der Teilsysteme festhängt, das für den aktuellen Kontext ungeeignet ist. In diesem Moment helfen Apelle, die in der Regel an das IG gerichtet sind, nicht weiter, da daraus keine Handlung realisiert werden kann. Was hier von Bedeutung ist, ist Selbstberuhigung, da durch ein aktiviertes Selbst negativer Affekt gehemmt wird, die Wahrnehmung kann wieder ganzheitlicher werden und Handlungsoptionen können generiert werden. Der Cortisolspiegel sinkt entsprechend und gibt die Hippocampusaktivität wieder frei.

Aus christlicher Sicht ist nun interessant, dass Prof. Kuhl spirituelle Erfahrungen im EG ansiedelt. Dies liefert ein Erklärungsmodell, warum etwa Kontemplation einen stresssenkenden Effekt hat und sich insgesamt positiv auf die Hirngesundheit auswirkt. Das kontemplative Gebet, das zum Gewahrwerden des Hier-und-Jetzt einlädt, lässt weder Raum für Planungsaktivitäten des IG noch für Fehleranalysen des OES. Körperorientierte Rituale (z.B. liturgische Tänze oder Gebetsgebärden), können dies noch unterstützen. (siehe hierzu ausführlich das Buch von Kuhl „spirituelle Intelligenz", 2015).

Zusammenfassend kann also gesagt werden, dass die PSI-Theorie ein breites Erklärungsmodell für menschliches Wahrnehmen, Fühlen, Denken und Verhalten liefert, das nicht nur die gängigen Konzepte der Persönlichkeitstheorie integriert, sondern auch Interventionen diverser Psychotherapieschulen funktionsanalytisch erklären kann. Sie stellt damit einerseits ein Modell zur Reflektion eigenen therapeutischen, beraterischen oder auch pädagogischen Handelns dar, Andererseits bietet sie die Möglichkeit, in verfahrenen Lebenssituationen ein Verständnis für die aktuelle „Sackgasse des Lebens", genauer: für das aktuell vorrangig aktive Makrosystem, das offenbar nicht situationsadäquat wahrnehmen, verarbeiten und zielrealisierend handeln kann, zu entwickeln. Über dieses Verständnis hinaus bietet die PSI-Theorie auch Ideen an, welches Teilsystem (oder auch welche Teilsysteme) in der fraglichen Lebenslage aktiviert werden sollte, um die Probleme

bewältigen zu können.

In dem Buch „Die Kraft aus dem Selbst"(3. Aufl. 2017) stellt Kuhl gemeinsam mit Maja Storch 7 „Psychogyms" vor, um die diversen Teilsysteme in guter Weise in Aktion zu bringen.

Eine starke Persönlichkeit, so Kuhl, kann situationsadäquat zwischen den 4 Makrosystemen wechseln. Eine Kernkompetenz starker Persönlichkeiten ist in diesem Verständnis die Affektregulation. Stressmanagement wiederum sollte als zentrales Element die Selbstberuhigung beinhalten, gewissermaßen als Voraussetzung für weitere, unverzichtbare Trainings- und Beratungsinhalte.

Abschließend ein Zitat von Prof. Kuhl: „... eine erfolgreiche Gestaltung des beruflichen und privaten Lebens wird weder durch eine immer höher entwickelte Intelligenz noch durch erfolgsverheißende Bestandteile emotionaler Intelligenz wie Optimismus oder unerschütterliches Selbstbewusstsein ermöglicht, sondern durch einen differenzierten Umgang mit persönlichen Lebenserfahrungen, durch persönliche Intelligenz." (Kuhl 2013, S. 17)

**Charles Zeiders**

# Comment to "The Personality System Interaction Theory (PSI Theory) and Stress"

Even leading-edge psychological theory will benefit from the perennial wisdom of the Christian revelation.

The Personality System Interaction Theory (PSI Theory) of Dr. Julius Kuhl represents a scientific achievement in terms of a complete theory of human nature. PSI Theory organizes subjective states and observable behavior with precision. PSI Theory unifies advances in behavioral, cognitive, developmental, and neuropsychological research. It can specify up to 100 constituents of personality operations. PSI Theory describes four mental macrosystems (extension memory, intention memory, object recognition, and intuitive behavior control) together with models that show how system interactions are modulated by positive and negative affect to explain experience and behavior (Kazén, & Quirin, 2018). The theory has opened new frontiers in psychometric assessment, leadership research, and psychotherapy optimization. Peer reviewed journals demonstrate that PSI Theory is well-accepted and scientific. Rigorously so.

But importantly, Kuhl contends that his PSI Theory, based on neurobiological evidence, postulates that "at a psychological level, demand-related stress limits the pursuit of specific goals, whereas threat-related stress limits self-congruent choice of specific goals. Empirical evidence [shows these to represent]… two possible ways of losing volitional ("top-down") control." (Kuhl, p. 74)

PSI Theory, in other words, offers new insight into an old problem: stress. Stress threatens to rob higher consciousness from wisely impacting behavior. Stress robs right reason from human responsiveness. It is here that Christianity

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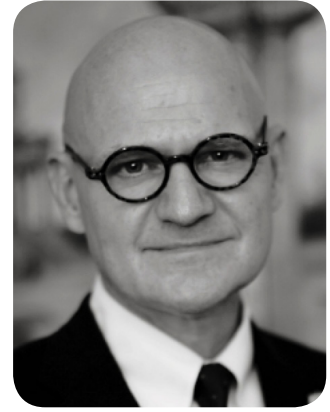
has something to offer in terms of mitigating the perniciousness of demand-related stress and threat-related stress. Among the wisdom of the Old Testament is the phrase "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), and in the New Testament, Jesus Christ himself exhorted his stressed disciples to "Come away with me privately to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31). Both scriptural revelations indicate that God intends to help the human being during stress, and these scriptures inspired Christian mystics to regularly rest from their stress by communing with the Holy Trinity in subjective quiet. Such practices as the Jesus Prayer, Contemplative Prayer, and Christ-consciousness interrupt the mad, sick, and sinful stress responses that human beings make in the face of emergencies. I have no doubt that a

study of 21st century Christian mystics, defined as those who cultivate subjective communion with The Holy Trinity in quiet, will demonstrate highly conscious, highly volitional responses to stress—at least in terms of Kuhl's PSI Theory—than those who lack such a mystical practice. Christian clinical experience affirms that the mystical-prayer-of-quiet facilitates "the peace which passes understanding" (Philippians 4:7), because mystical quiet is communion with the Perfect Love who "casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). As said, Professor Kuhl's PSI Theory is cutting edge, comprehensive, and helpful. His research establishes that stress creates systemic psychological liability in terms of human functioning. Christian mystical-prayer-of-quiet represents a God-inspired solution to the age-old problem of thoughtless responses to stress.

Anyone interested in the bio-psycho-spiritual impact of Christian mysticism will find resources at https://drzeiders.com/religion-and-spirituality/the-psychophysiology-of-the-jesus-prayer/

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**Johannes Haack (Germany)**

# Deep spiritual Reading in the digital age – Encounter with god, live transformation and coping with stress

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# Tiefes geistliches Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter – Gottesbegegnung, Lebenstransformation und Stressbewältigung

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## 1. The ability to read – a cultural technique across the last 6000 years

Reading is one of the greatest epigenetic cultural achievements of mankind (Wolf, 2018). In reading, we do not merely acquire new information. Reading changes our perceptions, our feelings and the way we think about ourselves, other people and the world. During relaxed reading, we can reduce stress and achieve peace of mind; and when we read the Bible we can even encounter God.

The responsibility for the success of our reading activities lies within a microcosm of brilliantly coordinated psychological and neurobiological processes all the way along the path leading from the text via the eyes to the brain and the heart. Here, the oculomotor function of the eyes helps, by means of saccades and fixations, in decoding surface signals on the level of word and syntax. Parallel to this, and already at an early stage, semantic content is processed. With chains of inferences, the continuous text (discourse) is linked to the reader's pre-existing knowledge. Recent experimental studies show that, in this context, not only the classical language centres, namely the cortex regions of the

## 1. Lesefähigkeit – Kulturtechnik seit 6000 Jahren

Lesen ist eine der größten epigenetischen kulturellen Leistungen der Menschheit (Wolf, 2018). Durch Lesen erfassen wir nicht nur neue Informationen. Lesen verändert unsere Wahrnehmungen, unsere Gefühle und unser Denken über uns, andere Menschen und die Welt. Im entspannenden Lesen können wir Stress abbauen und zur Ruhe kommen; und im Lesen der Bibel können wir sogar Gott begegnen.

Verantwortlich für das Gelingen unserer Leseaktivitäten ist ein Mikrokosmos brilliant konzertierter psychologischer und neurobiologischer Prozesse auf dem Weg vom Text über das Auge zum Gehirn und zum Herzen. Dabei hilft die Okulomotorik der Augen mit Sakkaden und Fixationen, die Oberflächensignale auf der Wort- und Syntaxebene zu entschlüsseln. Parallel dazu werden schon früh auch andere Bedeutungsanteile verarbeitet. Mit Inferenzketten wird der fortlaufende Text (Diskurs) mit dem Vorwissen des Lesers verbunden. Neue experimentelle Studien zeigen, dass dabei nicht nur die klassischen Sprachzentren, die kortikalen Regionen des Arbeitsgedächtnisses und der

working memory and the executive control in the brain, but also the imagination, emotion and empathy are involved. At the same time, our cognitive, affective and action-oriented reading goals influence the depth of understanding and the inner resonances during reading. A number of psycholinguists therefore distinguish between the basic ability to read and the higher level extended reading ability generally described as literacy. The latter includes deep understanding of meaning, joy in reading, and familiarity with various literary genres and media formats.

When readers are drawn deeply into the narrative flow of a book or identify emotionally with the protagonist in one of the scenes described, they experience the "lost-in-a-book" phenomenon. This is when they forget time and space around them and enter a state of self-forgetting. In cognitive literature studies and empirical aesthetics, attempts are made to measure this level of immersion or absorption when entering deeply into the world of a text by, for example, questionnaires, the measurement of eye movement, or piloerection ("goose pimples"). (See Hakemulder & Kuijpers, 2018). In what follows, we will encounter similar resonance phenomena during spiritual reading as well, when readers enter into biblical scenes with all their inner imaginative powers and have transcendental experiences.

To begin with, we can note that, during reading, many mental components show fine adaptation and interact at millisecond intervals. This fact makes reading a fascinating, but also extremely challenging, subject for research, for the whole person is involved at each processing step along the cascade of the reading process. During spiritual reading, we have to expand the horizon of our observations even further. Here it is possible for transcendental moments of encountering God to take place, as readers repeatedly report.

For the development of alphabetic scripts and the development of a culture of reading over more than 6000 years, there were no genetically pre-determined regions of the brain or hard-wired neuronal networks. Within certain limits

exekutiven Kontrolle im Gehirn aktiviert werden, sondern auch Imagination, Emotion und Empathie beteiligt werden. Unsere kognitiven, affektiven und handlungsorientierten Leseziele beeinflussen dabei die Verstehenstiefe und die inneren Resonanzen beim Lesen. Manche Psycholinguisten unterscheiden deswegen die basale Lesefähigkeit von der darauf aufsetzenden erweiterten Lesefähigkeit, die im Englischen als literacy bezeichnet wird. Sie schließt tiefes Sinnverstehen, Freude am Lesen, Vertrautheit mit verschiedenen Literaturgattungen und Medienformaten ein.

Wenn Leser tief in den Erzählstrom eines Buches hineingezogen werden oder sich emotional mit den Protagonisten einer beschriebenen Szene identifizieren, erleben sie das lost in a book-Phänomen. Sie vergessen dann Raum und Zeit der Umgebung und geraten in einen Zustand der Selbstvergessenheit. In der kognitiven Literaturwissenschaft und empirischen Ästhetik versucht man, diesen Grad der Immersion oder Absorption bei dem tiefen Eintauchen in die Welt eines Textes zum Beispiel durch Fragebögen, die Messung von Blickbewegungen oder der Piloerektion (Gänsehaut) zu erfassen (siehe Hakemulder & Kuijpers, 2018). Uns werden in den nächsten Abschnitten ähnliche Resonanzphänome auch beim geistlichen Lesen begegnen. Hier treten Leser mit den inneren Vorstellungskräften aller Sinne in biblische Szenen ein und machen transzendentale Erfahrungen.

Wir können festhalten, dass beim Lesen viele mentale Komponenten im Millisekundentakt fein abgestimmt und orchestriert werden. Diese Tatsache macht das Lesen zu einem faszinierenden, aber auch höchst herausfordernden Forschungsobjekt; denn an jedem Verarbeitungsschritt in der Kaskade des Leseprozesses ist die ganze Person beteiligt. Beim geistlichen Lesen müssen wir den Betrachtungshorizont noch weiter aufspannen. Hier können transzendentale Momente der Gottesbegegnung hinzukommen, von denen Leser immer wieder berichten.

Für die Entwicklung von Alphabetschriften und die Entwicklung einer Lesekultur vor mehr als 6000 Jahren gab es keine genetisch festge-

of mutational options within our brains (neuro-plasticity), however, existing regions of the cortex can be used in new ways while learning to read. In numerous experimental studies, the Paris-based neuroscientist Stanislaw Dehaene has shown that, during the development of reading competence during childhood, existing neuronal networks undergo a neuronal recycling in which the innate visual and phonetic abilities are re-arranged. This means that reading does not develop in a genetically fixed and automatic development sequence, but rather recruits existing areas of the cortex. Neuroplasticity thus opens up degrees of freedom in forming the new reading functions. If developmental stimuli are not given, however, these functions will not be formed completely. Under unfavourable circumstances, these deficits can lead to very superficial and unfocused learning processes. According to Maryanne Wolf (2018), key factors in the formation of reading ability are the writing system, the content (what we read), and the instructional method (the way we learn to read). At the end of this article, we will examine more closely the challenges, but also the opportunities, which new digital reading formats will provide for future generations of readers.

Reading aloud and silently can have very different forms and functions. With slow reading during study, new information can be absorbed: in this case, reading therefore serves the purpose of acquiring or refreshing knowledge before an examination. In professional life, experts can very quickly update or enrich their specialist knowledge during reading because of the amount they already know. The proofreader, on the other hand, reads slowly and thoroughly, but also superficially, in order to discover textual errors.

When it comes to leisure, we discover various forms of entertaining reading, providing either aesthetic pleasure, suspense, or meditative relaxation. In my taxonomy of cognitive, affective and action-oriented reading goals (Haack, 2018), I attempted to identify bases for these various reading strategies and kinds of texts.

In the psychologies of reading and religion, re-

legte Hirnareale oder fest verdrahteten neuronalen Netze. Innerhalb bestimmter Grenzen der Veränderungsoptionen unseres Gehirns (Neuroplastizität) können allerdings während des Leselernen vorhandene kortikale Areale neu verwendet werden. Der Pariser Neurowissenschaftler Stanislaw Dehaene hat in vielen experimentellen Studien nachgewiesen, dass bei der Entwicklung von Lesekompetenzen in der Kindheit ein neuronales Recycling vorhandener neuronaler Netze stattfindet, in dem die angeborenen visuellen und lautsprachlichen Fähigkeiten neu arrangiert werden. Lesen entwickelt sich demnach nicht in einer genetisch fixierten automatischen Entwicklungssequenz, sondern rekrutiert vorhandene kortikale Areale. Die Hirnplastizität eröffnet damit Freiheitsgrade für die Ausbildung der neuen Lese-Funktionen. Diese können allerdings auch beim Ausbleiben von Entwicklungsanregungen nicht voll ausgebildet werden. Diese Defizite können unter ungünstigen Umständen zu sehr oberflächlichen und unkonzentrierten Lernprozessen führen. Schlüsselfaktoren für die Ausbildung der Lesefähigkeit sind nach Maryanne Wolf (2018) das Schreibsystem und die Inhalte (was wir lesen), die Lesestrategien und die Lesemedien (wie wir lesen) und die Instruktionsmethode (wie wir lesen gelernt haben). Welche Herausforderungen, aber auch Chancen durch neue digitale Leseformate für zukünftige Lesergenerationen entstehen, werden wir am Ende des Artikels genauer erörtern.

Lautes und stilles Lesen kann sehr unterschiedliche Formen und Funktionen haben. Durch langsames studierendes Lesen können neue Informationen aufgenommen werden. Lesen dient hier also dem Wissenserwerb oder der Wissensauffrischung vor Prüfungen. Im beruflichen Lesen können Experten aufgrund ihres Vorwissens sehr schnell und konzentriert ihr Fachwissen updaten oder anreichern. Der Korrekturleser wiederum liest langsam und gründlich, bleibt aber oberflächenorientiert, um Schreibfehler zu finden.

Im Freizeitbereich finden wir verschiedene Form des unterhaltenden Lesens, ob ästhetisch-genießend, spannungsorientiert oder

search has been done on the particular form of reading which is the focus of this article, namely spiritual reading. Once we have briefly identified its place in the canon of spiritual exercises, we shall go on to look at the effects of spiritual reading, examine its traditional formats, and outline the challenges and opportunities it presents in the digital age. In conclusion, three impulses are given for a vision of deep spiritual reading, along with the tip for the use of the Psalms as a spiritual medicine cabinet.

## 2. What is spiritual reading?

Reading the Bible is one of the anchors in the spiritual life of any Christian. When the word of God is heard, spoken out aloud, or read silently, the believer is given insights into God, himself, and created nature. In this way, each person can experience how encounters with God bring deep changes in their lives and can develop friendship with God.

If we take other valued Christian literature besides the Bible into account, we can generally define spiritual reading as a spiritual exercise or discipline in which individuals have natural experiences and supernatural experiences of encounters with God with the aim of receiving insights, transformational stimuli and impulses for daily life.

In her highly recommended handbook, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (2015) presents a total of 75 spiritual disciplines grouped under 7 headings. These include not only generally familiar exercises such as contemplation, quietness, fasting, pilgrimage and intercession, but also less widespread exercises such as painting icons, Visio Divina, and sobriety. 4 spiritual reading exercises are also introduced: Bible study, devotional reading forms such as Lectio Divina, meditation, and learning Bible passages by heart. What role do these, and other forms of spiritual reading, play in the life of the believer?

## 3. Spiritual reading as an encounter with God and life transformation

The letters of the apostles Paul and Peter make it clear that God has fulfilled all the necessary preconditions so that every believer can mature spiritually and change his character. These so-called fruits of the Spirit are formed step by step

entspannend-meditativ. In meiner Taxonomie von kognitiven, affektiven und handlungsorientierten Lesezielen (Haack, 2018) habe ich versucht, diese unterschiedliche Lesestrategien und Textsorten psychologisch zu fundieren.

In der Psychologie des Lesens und der Religionspsychologie wird eine besondere Ausprägung des Lesens untersucht, die im Fokus dieses Artikels steht, - das geistliche Lesen. Nach einer kurzen Einordnung in den Kanon spiritueller Übungen werden wir uns mit den Wirkungen des geistlichen Lesens, mit traditionellen Formaten und seinen Herausforderungen und Chancen im digitalen Zeitalter befassen. Zum Schluss folgen drei Visionsimpulse für tiefes geistliches Lesen und ein Tipp zum Einsatz der Psalmen als geistlicher Hausapotheke.

## 2. Was ist geistliches Lesen?

Das Lesen der Bibel gehört zu den Ankerpunkten des geistlichen Lebens aller Christen. Im gehörten, vorgelesenen oder still gelesenen Wort Gottes werden dem gläubigen Menschen Einsichten über Gott, sich selbst und über die geschaffene Natur geschenkt. Menschen können so eine tiefe Lebensveränderung in der Begegnung mit Gott erfahren und Freundschaft mit Gott entwickeln.

Wenn wir über die Bibel hinaus weitere wertgeschätzte christliche Literatur einbeziehen, können wir geistliches Lesen allgemein als eine geistliche Übung oder geistliche Disziplin definieren, in der Menschen natürliche Erfahrungen und übernatürliche Erfahrungen der Gottesbegegnung machen, um dadurch Einsichten, Transformationsanregungen und Impulse für ihre persönliche Charakterveränderung im Lebensalltag zu erhalten.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (2015) stellt in ihrem sehr empfehlenswerten Handbuch unter 7 Oberbegriffen insgesamt 75 geistliche Disziplinen vor. Dazu gehören weitgehend bekannte Übungen wie Kontemplation, Stille, Fasten, Pilgern und Fürbitte, aber auch weniger verbreitete wie Ikonenmalen, Visio Divina oder Nüchternheit. Auch 4 Übungen des geistlichen Lesens werden vorgestellt: Bibelstudium, Andachtslesen wie die Lectio Divina, Meditation und das Auswendiglernen von Bibelversen.

by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the texts emphasise with the same intensity that this gift of growth must be supported by personal training (spiritual exercises). It remains a mystery how God's working interacts with the supporting readiness of the believer. For this phenomenon, the theologian Rudolf Bohren invented the term theonomous reciprocity. This mystery is described best in a chain of thoughts in 2 Peter 1, 3-9, where the reader is exhorted to respond to God's gifts of grace and power with his own initiatives for spiritual training.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a constant relationship with God, therefore, spiritual training helps us to align our cognitive, affective and action-oriented competences on our model Jesus Christ and to copy them in our lives. Spiritual exercises thus differ from spiritually inspired self-optimisation strategies as found in many self-help books. Spiritual exercises do not aim primarily at autonomous self-improvement. They also differ from the positive interventions suggested in Positive Psychology. The structure and content may be similar, and their effect on the person may even be similar, but the ultimate goal is different.

In his book Celebration of Discipline, published as early as 1980, Richard Foster points out a further important aspect (German: Nachfolge feiern – Geistliche Übungen neue entdeckt):

Welche Rolle spielen diese und andere Formen des geistlichen Lesens im Leben eines gläubigen Menschen?

### 3. Geistliches Lesen als Gottesbegegnung und Lebenstransformation

In den Briefen der Apostel Paulus und Petrus wird deutlich gemacht, dass Gott für jeden gläubigen Menschen alle Voraussetzungen erfüllt hat, geistlich zu reifen und seinen Charakter zu verändern. Durch den Heiligen Geist wird diese sogenannte Frucht des Geistes schrittweise ausgebildet. Trotzdem wird mit der gleichen Intensität darauf hingewiesen, dass dieses geschenkte Wachstum durch persönliches Training (geistliche Übungen) unterstützt werden muss. Es bleibt ein Geheimnis, wie dieses Wirken Gottes und die unterstützende Bereitschaft des Menschen zusammenwirken. Der Theologe Rudolf Bohren hat für dieses Phänomen den Begriff der theonomen Reziprozität geprägt. Am besten beschrieben finden wir dieses Geheimnis in einer Gedankenkette im 2. Petrusbrief 1, 3-8. In dieser Passage werden die Leser aufgefordert, auf die von Gott geschenkten Gnaden- und Kraftimpulse mit eigenen geistlichen Trainingsinitiativen zu antworten.

Alles, was zum Leben und zur Frömmigkeit dient, hat uns seine göttliche Kraft geschenkt durch die Erkenntnis dessen, der uns berufen hat durch seine Herrlichkeit und Kraft.
Durch sie sind uns die kostbaren und allergrößten Verheißungen geschenkt, damit ihr durch sie Anteil bekommt an der göttlichen Natur, wenn ihr der Vergänglichkeit entflieht, die durch Begierde in der Welt ist.

So wendet allen Fleiß daran und erweist in eurem Glauben Tugend und in der Tugend Erkenntnis und in der Erkenntnis Mäßigkeit und in der Mäßigkeit Geduld und in der Geduld Frömmigkeit und in der Frömmigkeit Brüderlichkeit und in der Brüderlichkeit die Liebe. Denn wenn dies alles reichlich bei euch ist, wird's euch nicht faul und unfruchtbar sein lassen in der Erkenntnis unseres Herrn Jesus Christus.

Geistliches Training hilft uns also in einer fe-

Even if we know the technique, this does not mean that we are actually practicing the spiritual exercises. The spiritual exercises are an internalised spiritual reality in which the inner attitude of the heart is much more important than the technique if we are to lead a truly spiritual life.

Nevertheless, some authors have taken up the challenge of examining how Positive Psychology on the one hand and church and theology on the other can learn from each other. Taking the examples of the virtues wisdom, forgiveness, thankfulness, humility, hope, and grace, the psychologist Mark R. McMinn shows, in his highly recommendable book The Science of Virtue – Why Positive Psychology matters to the church, that Christian counsellors, spiritual advisors and therapists should not ignore the numerous empirical findings on the effectiveness of positive interventions. They could learn from the psychologically well thought-out description and classification of virtues and vices in order to make more accurate descriptions of the spiritual paths of development in clients and patients. This does not enable a complete explanation of the uniqueness and sensitivity of a trusting relationship with God as a life resource, but does enable it to be described better than before.

Similar truths apply to research on spiritual reading. Empirical findings in the psychology of reading are opening up new horizons which provide a better understanding of the processes by which the reader encounters God in Holy Scripture.

## 4. Effects of spiritual reading: coping with stress and living longer

In evidence-based research on the effects of reading, a series of findings have in the meantime pointed out the positive effects of reading. Here one must distinguish between short-term effects in the reading situation itself and the long-term, sometimes lifelong, effects on the health and resilience of readers.

To date, the short-term effects involving the

sten Beziehung mit Gott unsere kognitiven, affektiven und handlungsorientierten Kompetenzen am Vorbild Jesus Christus auszurichten und sie in unserem Leben nachzubilden. Geistliche Übungen unterscheiden sich damit von spirituell inspirierten Selbstoptimierungsstrategien, die in vielen Selbsthilfebüchern zu finden sind. Geistliche Übungen dienen primär nicht der autonomen Selbstverbesserung. Sie unterscheiden sich auch von den in der positiven Psychologie vorgeschlagenen positiven Interventionen. Struktur und Inhalt können ähnlich sein, auch ihre Auswirkungen auf die Person können ähnlich sein, die Zielsetzung ist jedoch eine andere.

Richard Foster weist in seinem bereits 1980 publizierten Buch Celebration of Discipline (Deutsch: Nachfolge feiern – Geistliche Übungen neue entdeckt) auf einen anderen wichtigen Aspekt hin: Auch wenn wir die Technik kennen, heißt das nicht, dass wir die geistlichen Übungen tatsächlich ausüben. Die geistlichen Übungen sind eine verinnerlichte, geistliche Wirklichkeit, und die innere Herzenseinstellung ist dabei viel wichtiger als die Technik, um ein wahrhaft geistliches Leben zu führen.

Einige Autoren haben sich trotzdem der Herausforderung gestellt, wie Positive Psychologie und Kirche und Theologie voneinander lernen können. Am Beispiel der Tugenden Weisheit, Vergebung, Dankbarkeit, Demut, Hoffnung und Gnade zeigt der Psychologe Mark R. McMinn in seinem sehr empfehlenswerten Buch The Science of Virtue – Why Positive Psychology matters to the church, dass christliche Berater, Seelsorger und Therapeuten die Vielzahl empirischer Befunde zur Wirksamkeit positiver Interventionen nicht ignorieren sollten. Sie könnten von der psychologisch durchdachten Beschreibung und Klassifikation von Tugenden und Lastern lernen, um damit auch geistliche Entwicklungsverläufe von Klienten und Patienten angemessener zu beschreiben. Die Einmaligkeit und Sensibilität einer vertrauensvollen Gottesbeziehung als Lebensressource kann dadurch nicht vollständig aufgeklärt werden, aber besser als bisher beschrieben werden.
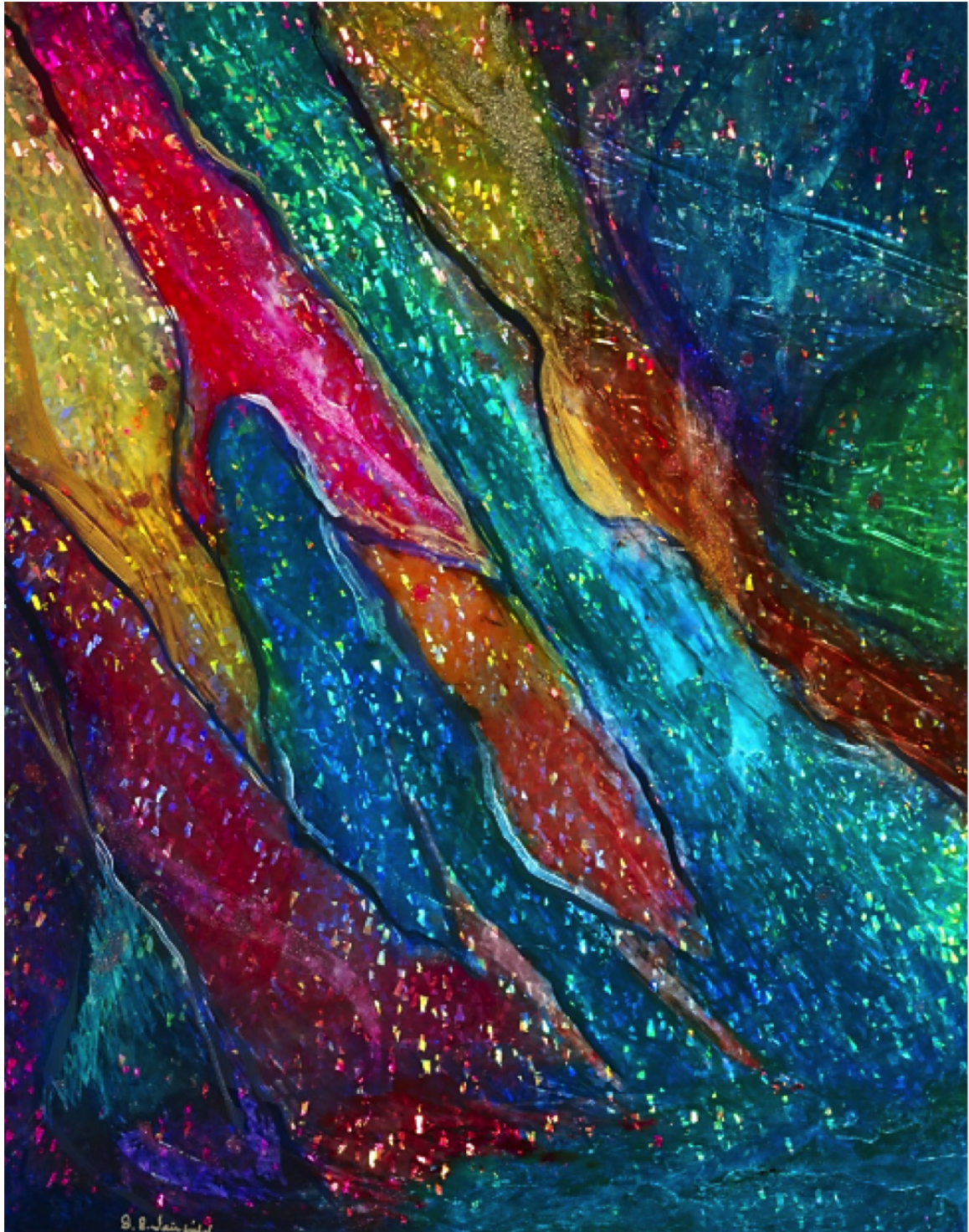
Healing Waters

interaction of body and spirit (embodiment) during spiritual reading have hardly been investigated. Many experiments involving the understanding of simple sentences and texts, however, have confirmed that the body is involved in the processing of text information during reading (see Buccino et al., 2016). During the reading process, for example, motor function areas in the cerebral cortex are are activated when verbs of motion are read. For example, if the premotor cortex, which is responsible for leg movements, is inhibited by transcranial magnetic stimulation, this can result in short virtual reading disorders. Even a similar inhibition of the leg musculature leads to comparable sight disorders in the reading process. These findings are evidence of the embodiment of language building-blocks during the reading process.

In addition to these cognitive forms of embodiment, emotional forms of embodiment have also been demonstrated. The same brain areas which are active during the experience of personal emotions are also activated during the reading of text content in which emotional events are described convincingly by personages in a story.

Recent years have also seen the publication of studies on the long-term effects of reading the holy scriptures of various religions. Here, test persons report on their personal state of mind, inner peace, stress reduction, blessedness and thankfulness in their relationship with God and their closeness to other fellow believers. For this purpose, such means as questionnaires or psycho-physiological measurements such as pulse rate variability are used. It can be assumed that, besides factors relating to personality and situation, the nature of the believer's picture of God exerts a great influence here. Does the believer perceive the reading as the fulfilment of an obligation towards a demanding and punishing God, or does he/she enjoy the time spent reading as an encounter with a loving God?

In a qualitative study with half-structured interviews, Hamilton et al. (2018) examined the spiritual reading habits of Afro-Americans. The

Ähnliches gilt für die Erforschung des geistlichen Lesens. Empirische Befunde der Psychologie des Lesens eröffnen neue Horizonte, um die Prozesse der Gottesbegegnung des Lesers im heiligen Text besser zu verstehen.

## 4. Wirkungen des geistlichen Lesens: Stressbewältigung und Langlebigkeit

In der evidenzbasierten Forschung zu Lesewirkungen gibt es inzwischen eine Reihe von Befunden, die auf positive Wirkungen des Lesens hinweisen. Zu unterscheiden sind kurzfristige Wirkungen in der Lesesituation selbst von den langfristigen, manchmal lebenslangen Wirkungen auf die Gesundheit und Resilienz von Lesern.

Die kurzfristigen Wirkungen zum Zusammenspiel von Körper und Geist (embodiment) im geistlichen Lesen sind bisher kaum erforscht. Dass der Körper aber an der Verarbeitung von Textinformationen beim Lesen beteiligt ist, konnte in vielen Experimenten zum Verstehen einfacher Sätze und Texte bestätigt worden (siehe Buccino et al., 2016). Während des Leseprozesses werden zum Beispiel dann motorische Areale in der Hirnrinde aktiviert, wenn Bewegungsverben gelesen werden. Ein Beispiel: Wenn beim Lesen des Satzes Er stieß den Ball mit dem Fuß fort der prämotorische Cortex, der für die Beinbewegungen zuständig, durch transkraniale Magnetstimulation gehemmt wird, können dadurch kurze virtuelle Lesestörungen entstehen. Sogar eine ähnliche Hemmung der Beinmuskulatur führt zu vergleichbaren leichten Störungen des Leseprozesses. Diese Befunde belegen die Verkörperlichung (embodiment) von Sprachbausteinen während des Leseprozesses.

Zusätzlich zu diesen kognitiven Formen der Verkörperlichung konnten auch emotionale Formen der Verkörperung (emotional embodiment) nachgewiesen worden. Die gleichen Hirnareale, die beim Erleben von persönlichen Emotionen wirksam sind, werden auch beim Lesen von Textinhalten aktiviert, in den emotionale Ereignisse von Personen in einer Geschichte eindrücklich beschrieben wurden.

main aim was to discover which spiritual goals the participants associated with certain Bible passages, such as God as protector, God as provider/benefactor, God as healer, praise and thanksgiving, remembering those who have gone before, prayers and life after death.

Certainly the best-known study on the role of Bible reading in stress reduction is the one by the American religious psychologists Krause & Pargament (2018). In interviews with over 2000 study participants with ages ranging from 18 to over 65, the correlations between stress-coping strategies and the spiritual reading habits were examined. It emerged that people who read the Bible more often

- more frequently experience stress reduction and gain fresh hope,
- more frequently carry out spiritual re-evaluations of past stressful events
- and, on the basis of these spiritual re-evaluations, look more hopefully into the future.

Unfortunately, this study does not indicate which Bible passages were read by the participants and were felt to be helpful. Similarly, there is no mention of the forms and purpose of their biblical readings. At the same time, the clear result is that, for many believers, spiritual reading has proved to be a useful and valuable coping resource.

In an ageing society, there has also been new discussion of the positive role of reading skills (literacy) in lifelong cognitive resilience and longevity. Since active deep reading stimulates all mental resources simultaneously, as we pointed out in chapter one, increasing numbers of researchers are tackling this topic. An overview of the potential of literacy as a broad deep-reading competence leading to health and well-being is provided in the publication by Stine-Morrow, Hussey & Ng (2015).

One of the recent studies on the positive effects of reading has a particularly eye-catching and curious title based on the old English proverb, An apple a day keeps the doctor away. In this case, however, the health-bringing apple is the

Es gibt inzwischen auch Studien zu langfristigen Wirkungen des Lesens heiliger Schriften in verschiedenen Religionen. Probanden berichten darin über persönliches Wohlbefinden, inneren Frieden, Stresslinderung, Segen und Dankbarkeit in der Gottesbeziehung und Verbundenheit mit anderen Glaubensgenossen. Dabei wurden Fragebögen, aber auch psychophysiologische Maße wie Herzratenvariabilität eingesetzt. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass neben Persönlichkeits- und Situationsfaktoren vor allem die Art der Gottesvorstellung einen wichtigen Einfluss hat. Nimmt ein gläubiger Mensch das Lesen als Pflichtpensum wahr, um einen fordernden strafenden Gott zu beeindrucken oder genießt er/sie die Lesezeit als Begegnung mit einem liebevollen Gott?

In einer qualitativen Studie mit halbstrukturierten Interviews wurden von Hamilton et al. (2018) die geistlichen Lesegewohnheiten von Afroamerikanern untersucht. Dabei ging es vor allem darum, mit welchen geistlichen Zielsetzungen die Teilnehmer bestimmte Bibelpassagen verbanden, wie Gott als Beschützer, Gott als Versorger/Wohltäter, Gott als Heiler, Lob und Dank, Erinnerungen an die Vorfahren, Gebete und Leben nach dem Tod.

Die wohl bekannteste Studie zur Rolle des Bibellesens bei der Stresslinderung stammt von den amerikanischen Religionspsychologen Krause & Pargament (2018). In Interviews mit über 2000 Studienteilnehmern in einem Alterspektrum von 18 bis über 65 Jahre wurden die Zusammenhänge zwischen Stressbewältigungsstrategien und den geistlichen Lesegewohnheiten untersucht. Es stellt sich heraus, dass Menschen, die häufiger die Bibel lesen

- Häufiger Stresslinderung erleben und Hoffnung schöpfen,
- Häufiger hilfreiche geistliche Neubewertungen stressbeladener Ereignisse vornehmen
- und aufgrund dieser geistlichen Neubewertungen hoffnungsvoller in die Zukunft schauen.

Leider wurde in dieser Studie nicht aufgenommen, welche Passagen der Bibel von Teil-

Even the Night Shall be Light

reading of a book: A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity. Health scientists at Yale University, on the basis of a nationally representative cohort of 3636 participants, sought to identify the factors favouring longevity. Part of the questionnaire was concerned with the participants' reading habits, alongside such variables as age, sex, family status, ethnicity, education, income, estimated physical health, comorbidities and depression. Taking all these influential parameters into account, a statistical analysis showed that regularly active readers who read books for an average of 30 minutes a day live 23 months longer, which is substantially longer than non-readers and somewhat longer than readers of newspapers and magazines. The longitudinal analysis covered a 12 year period and succeeded in identifying a 20% reduction in mortality among active readers. One must certainly be cautious about socio-medical findings of this kind, since they do not record the preferred genre of reading material, the cognitive engagement, or the manner of reading. Despite that, this represents an initial robust result which shows that reading books may not only introduce some interesting ideas and characters, it may also give more years of reading (Bavish, Slade & Levy, 2016, page 47).

## 5. Reading traditions in the history of Christendom

In the recent handbook of spiritual disciplines by Ahlberg Calhoun (2015), already mentioned above, a life-transforming effect is attributed to spiritual reading, helping the believing reader to reshape, during his/her spiritual journey, an ever greater number of elements of his/her personality according to the spiritual model provided by Jesus Christ.

In her comprehensive representation of Christian spirituality, the German theologian Corinna Dahlgrün allocates to spiritual reading a place among the methods and media of Christian spirituality. Together, these belong to the active toolbox of a believer and can be developed in the dialogue with the challenges of the present, but should be ready for correction in the light of the gospel. Firmly supporting core Protestant theology, the author criticises magical exercises

nehmern gelesen und als hilfreich empfunden wurden. Auch fehlen Hinweise auf die Formen und Ziele ihrer biblischen Lektüre. Gleichwohl bleibt eindeutig festzuhalten, dass für viele gläubige Menschen sich das geistliche Lesen als eine nützliche und wertvolle Coping-Ressource erwiesen hat.

In einer alternden Gesellschaft wird auch die positive Rolle von Lesekompetenzen (literacy) für die lebenslange kognitive Resilienz und die Lebensdauer neu diskutiert. Weil das aktive tiefe Lesen simultan alle mentalen Ressourcen aktiviert, wie wir im ersten Kapitel ausgeführt haben, wenden sich immer mehr Forscher diesem Thema zu. Einen Überblick über das Potential von Literacy als umfassender tiefer Lesefähigkeit für Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden von älteren Erwachsenen gibt die Publikation von Stine-Morrow, Hussey & Ng (2015).

Eine der neuen Studien zu den positiven Auswirkungen des Lesens fällt besonders ins Auge, weil sie mit ihrem kuriosen Titel ein altes englisches Sprichwort aufgreift: An apple each day keeps the doctor away. Dem gesund machenden Apfel entspricht allerdings in diesem Fall das Buchlesen: A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity. Gesundheitswissenschaftler der Yale University haben in einer national repräsentativen Kohorte von 3636 Teilnehmern versucht, die Faktoren zu finden, die eine lange Lebensdauer begünstigen. Teil dieser Befragung waren die Lesegewohnheiten der Befragten, zusätzlich zu Variablen wie Alter, Geschlecht, Familienstand, ethnischer Zugehörigkeit, Bildung, Einkommen, eingeschätzter physischer Gesundheit, Begleiterkrankungen und Depression. Unter Berücksichtigung aller dieser Einflussgrößen stellte sich nach einer statistischen Analyse heraus, dass regelmäßige aktive Leser, die durchschnittlich 30 Minuten pro Tag in einem Buch lesen, eine 23 Monate längere Lebensdauer haben, deutlich mehr als Nicht-Leser und etwas mehr als Zeitschriften- und Zeitungsleser. Die Längsschnittstudie war auf 12 Jahre angelegt und konnte eine um 20% reduzierte Sterbewahrscheinlichkeit bei aktiven Buchlesern feststellen. Sozialmedizinische Befunde dieser Art sind sicher mit Vorsicht zu ge-

with which the reader attempts to extort God's favour. She emphasises that man, in the light of the gift of justification, is called on to live in a manner corresponding to this gift. His gratitude for, and knowledge of, this justification should not be purely passive. He should also ensure that corresponding deeds follow on from this knowledge. (See Dahlgrün, 2009, page 423).

Spiritual texts can be read with a variety of goals and a variety of methods. The spectrum of reading styles ranges from academically informed theological study techniques to liturgical reading or to practical daily devotional forms for personal quiet times. These forms of reading are supported by numerous devotional books such as Moravian Daily Texts or the recommended readings in Our Daily Bread.

Today, ambitious contemporaries can meet all such requirements elegantly and flexibly using apps like Soultime. First of all, the mood of the user is detected digitally (mood monitor). Next, devotional formats suitable for him/her are suggested. These can include quiet areas with videos, Bible readings and modern or classical music (dwell). Besides this, there are talks on Christian meditation, reminders for suggested daily devotions, and a digital diary.

Harvey & Mobberly (2015) give us a comprehensive overview of spiritual reading methods. For this, they distinguish between academic reading styles, such as historical-critical or hermeneutic-interpretive reading, and other reading forms such as reading out of curiosity (searching for wisdom and life skills) and reading to strengthen one's empathy. This list of types of reading style, however, is not based on any catalogue of systematic, historical, text type-related, or even psychological criteria. In analogy with the neurocognitive classifications of meditative processes proposed by Dahl, Lutz & Davidson (2015), I have therefore attempted to draw up a taxonomy of reading styles. This differentiates between cognitive, affective and action-oriented reading goals (Haack, 2018). This aims to enable, from the psychological point of view, a more appropriate description of the healing effects of Bible reading.

What goals, and what expected effects, have been associated in the Christian tradition with the regular practice and refinement of indivi-

nießen, weil nicht erfasst wurde, welches Textgenre bevorzugt gelesen wurde, mit welchem kognitiven Engagement und welchem Lesestil gelesen wurde. Trotzdem handelt es sich hierbei um einen ersten robusten Befund, der zeigt that reading books may not only introduce some interesting ideas and characters, it may also give more years of reading (Bavish, Slade & Levy, 2016, Seite 47).

## 5. Lesetraditionen in der Christentumsgeschichte

In dem schon erwähnten zeitgenössisches Handbuch geistlicher Disziplinen von Ahlberg Calhoun (2015) wird dem spirituellen Lesen eine lebenstransformierende Wirkung zugeschrieben, die der gläubigen Leserin und dem gläubigen Leser auf ihrer geistlichen Reise helfen, immer mehr eigene Persönlichkeitsanteile nach dem geistlichen Vorbild Jesus Christus umgestalten zu lassen.

In ihrer umfassenden Darstellung christlicher Spiritualität ordnet die deutsche Theologin Corinna Dahlgrün geistliches Lesen den Methoden und Medien christlicher Spiritualität zu. Sie gehören zum aktiven Handlungsrepertoire eines gläubigen Menschen, die im Dialog mit den Herausforderungen der Gegenwart entwickelt werden können, aber bereit für die Korrektur aus dem Evangelium sein sollten. Die Verfasserin wendet sich mit einem Kernvotum protestantischer Theologie gegen magische Übungspraktiken, mit denen die Lesenden das Wohlwollen Gottes erzwingen wollen. Sie betont, dass der Mensch aufgerufen ist, im Gefolge der geschenkten Rechtfertigung so zu leben, wie es diesem Geschenk entspricht. Er solle sich nicht nur passiv dankbar, gerechtfertigt wissen. Er solle diesem Wissen auch die entsprechenden Taten folgen lassen (nach Dahlgrün, 2009, Seite 423).

Geistliche Texte lassen sich mit unterschiedlicher Zielsetzung und unterschiedlichen Methoden lesen. Das Kontinuum der Lesestile reicht von akademisch geprägten theologischen Studiertechniken über liturgische Leseformen bis zu alltagsnahen Andachtsformen in der persönlichen stillen Zeit. Diese Leseformen werden durch eine Fülle von Andachtsbüchern un-

dual and collective reading formats? In his study on spiritual reading practices, the religious scholar Karl Baier points in particular to those functions "by which texts can mediate religious experience, impulses for reshaping personal identity, and support in the integration of religious insights into the practice of daily life." (Baier, 2013, page 23).

In the Christian tradition, the spiritual exercise of Lectio Divina is among the best-known formats for spiritual reading. For this reason, after a glance back into history, we shall look at new forms of meditative reading inspired by this reading tradition.

## 6. Lectio Divina in monastic life – savouring the Bible

Around the year 1150, Guigo II, prior of a Carthusian monastery close to Grenoble, formulated guidelines for meditative reading of Holy Scripture under the title Scala Claustralium. This work belongs to the best-known tracts of the Middle Ages and also found its way into the reading culture of lay people outside the monastery. Guigo II described the spiritual reading exercise as ascending a stair of four steps.

These four steps, as Lectio Divina (divine reading), comprise reading aloud, meditation, prayer and contemplation. The meditation begins with repeated and attentive reading of the Bible text out loud (Lectio). This is followed by a phase of renewed reading, this time very slowly, in which the reader dwells on parts of the text, sinks into it more deeply and allows himself to be touched by it. At this stage, the reader is open for inner pictures, sounds, smells associated with the events in the text. It is thus possible, for example, for the encounter of blind Bartimaeus with Jesus in Jericho to be unfolded as a vivid scene in the reader's mind (Mark 10, 46-52). Whether as a thought, a feeling or an inspiration – the person meditating spends time with these impulses and takes time to sound them out further inwardly. As a third step, these inner impulses are worked into a prayer (Oratio). In a live dialogue with God, it is not simply a matter of speaking, but also of listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit within oneself. On the

terstützt wie die Herrnhuter Losungen (Quote of the day of the Moravian Bretheren) oder die Leseempfehlungen von Our Daily Bread.

Eine App wie zum Beispiel Soultime erledigt das heute für digital ambitionierte Zeitgenossen auf elegante und adaptive Weise. Zuerst wird die Stimmungslage eines Users digital abgefragt (mood monitor). Im Anschluss daran werden für sie/für ihn passende Andachtsformate angeboten. Dazu gehören Ruhezonen mit Videos, Bibellesungen und moderner und klassischer Musik (Dwell). Außerdem gibt es Vorträge zu christlicher Meditation, Erinnerungsimpulse für tägliche Andachten und ein digitales Tagebuch.

Harvey & Mobberly (2015) geben einen umfassenden Überblick über geistliche Lesemethoden. Sie unterscheiden dabei akademische Lesestile wie historisch-kritisches Lesen oder hermeneutisch-interpretatives Lesen von anderen Leseformen wie neugieriges Lesen (Suche nach Weisheit und Lebenskunst) und dem empathiestärkenden Lesen. Dieser Aufzählung von Lesestiltypen liegt allerdings kein systematischer, historischer, texttypbezogener oder gar psychologischer Kriterienkatalog zugrunde. In Anlehnung an neurokognitive Klassifikationen von Meditationsvorgängen von Dahl, Lutz & Davidson (2015) habe ich deswegen versucht, eine Taxonomie von Lesestilen zu entwerfen. Sie unterscheidet kognitive, affektive und handlungsorientierte Leseziele (Haack, 2018). Damit sollte es gelingen, aus psychologischer Sicht angemessener die heilsamen Wirkungen des Bibellesens zu beschreiben.

Welche Ziele und welche erwarteten Auswirkungen verbanden sich in der christlichen Tradition mit dem regelmäßigen Einüben und Verfeinern von individuellen und gemeinschaftlichen Leseformaten? Der Religionswissenschaftler Karl Baier verweist in seiner Studie über spirituelle Lesepraktiken vor allem auf die Funktionen kraft derer Texte Medien religiöser Erfahrung, Anregung zur Umbildung der persönlichen Identität und Stütze bei der Integration religiöser Einsichten in die Lebenspraxis werden können." (Baier, 2013, Seite 23).

In der christlichen Tradition gehört die geistliche Übung der Lectio Divina zu den bekannte-

fourth step (Contemplatio), the person meditating spends time silent in the presence of God. Today, the clear guidelines given by this Carthusian monk are still an inspiration for attentive Bible readers. Guigo II illustrates the function of the four steps of reading by comparing it to eating: in a certain sense, the reading introduces the solid food into the mouth, the meditation reduces into smaller parts and chews it, the prayer savours it, and the contemplation is the pleasure itself, which brings happiness and envigorates. The reading remains on the outer shell, the meditation penetrates to the core, the prayer expresses the desire, and the contemplation is the joy in the pleasure obtained. From all this, we conclude that reading without meditation is dry, meditation without reading goes astray, prayer without meditation is lukewarm, and meditation without prayer is fruitless. Fervent prayer achieves the level of contemplation, but the gift of contemplation without prayer would be an exception or bordering on a miracle.

Here Guigo II is making use of a food metaphor already familiar in antiquity. Reading is interpreted as pleasing and nourishing eating. The religious scholar Baier points out that, for Guigo II, reading resembles careful seeking, finding and eating of tasty grapes. The reading material becomes pleasurable and life-giving nutrition for the soul if one looks thoroughly into its deeper sense (the flavour hidden in the grape) and relates it to one's own life, allowing oneself to be moved by it emotionally and consuming it so intensely that it ultimately is transformed into flesh and blood, so to speak. (Baier, 2013, page 28). We can therefore join with Baier in speaking of incarnational reading. During reading, more happens than that the lips are moved and sound produced, or that the eyes are moved and the sense grasped. Rather, the reader finds that he/she is nourished, gripped and changed inwardly.

For those interested in the history of language, it is informative in this context to look at the etymology of the German verb lesen [read] more closely. In the digital dictionary of the German language compiled in the tradition of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the earlier form lesan/lesen in Old and Middle High German is still given as meaning select, gather, keep, take into one's

sten Übungsformaten spirituellen Lesens. Aus diesem Grund wollen wir nach einem historischen Rückblick neue Formen des meditativen Lesens anschauen, die durch diese Lesetradition inspiriert wurden.

### 6. Lectio Divina im Klosterleben - Die Bibel verkosten

Um etwa 1150 verfasste Guigo II, der Prior eines in der Nähe von Grenoble gelegenen Kartäuserklosters eine Anleitung zum meditativen Lesen der Heiligen Schrift mit dem Titel Scala Claustralium. Diese Schrift gehörte im Mittelalter zu den bekanntesten Traktaten und floss auch außerhalb der Klöster in die Lesekultur von Laien ein. Guigo II beschrieb die geistliche Leseübung als Aufstieg auf vier Stufen.

Diese vier Stufen umfassen als Lectio Divina (göttliche Lesung) das laute Lesen, die Meditation, das Gebet und die Kontemplation. Die Meditierenden beginnen dabei mit dem wiederholten aufmerksamen lauten Lesen eines Bibeltextes (Lectio). Dem folgt eine Phase des erneuten, diesmal sehr langsamen Lesens, bei dem die Lesenden in dem Text verweilen, eintauchen und sich berühren lassen. Lesende geben dabei Raum für innere Bilder, Klänge, Gerüche, die mit dem Geschehen im Text verbunden sind. So könnte sich zum Beispiel die Begegnung des blinden Bartimäus mit Jesus in Jericho als lebendige Szene in den Lesenden entfalten (Markus 10, 46-52). Ob es ein Gedanke, ein Gefühl oder eine Inspiration ist, - die Meditierenden verweilen bei diesen Impulsen und schenken sich Zeit, sie im Inneren weiter auszuloten. Als dritte Stufe folgt die Verarbeitung dieser inneren Impulse in einem Gebet (Oratio). Im lebendigen Gespräch mit Gott geht es dabei nicht nur um Reden, sondern auch um Zuhören auf die innere Stimme des Heiligen Geistes. Bei der vierten Stufe (Contemplatio) verweilen die Meditierenden schweigend in der Gegenwart Gottes.

Auch heute noch sind die anschaulichen Anleitungen des Kartäuser-Mönchs eine Inspiration für aufmerksame Bibelleser. Guigo II verdeutlicht die Funktion der vier Lesestufen mit der Nahrungsaufnahme:

Die Lesung führt die feste Speise gewisserma-

possession. In Modern High German, in contrast, the meaning familiar to us dominates: lesen = gather the meaning of written characters as well as render written characters in speech. Only in such nouns as Weinlese, Blütenlese, Ährenlese or Traubenlese [grape harvest, anthology, gleaning, grape harvest] is the original meaning still recognisable. Similar observations apply to the semantic variants of the corresponding Latin verb legere [read].

At this point one should bear in mind that in Christian meditation, as opposed to East Asian meditational forms, the aim is not to empty oneself inwardly. The Bible passages on which one meditates fill the reader and remain the internal reference point. During meditative reading of biblical texts, God's active word creates new things in the reader, who resultingly experiences the blessedness of being close to God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer identifies this essential characteristic of Christian meditation: A time of meditation does not cause us to sink into emptiness and into the abyss of isolation, but rather leaves us alone with the word. It therefore provides us with firm ground to stand on and with clear guidance for the steps that we have to take (Bonhoeffer, 2006).

### 7. Lectio Divina today - encountering God without distraction

Countless adaptations of Lectio Divina to the devotional styles of various churches and denominations have been made in the course of the centuries. Throughout the history of Christendom, we find rediscoveries of this reading tradition outside monastic culture as well.

Particular attention has been given to contemplative reading styles in the spiritual counselling of persons receiving medical, therapeutic or welfare services. In Germany, besides being available in courses in monasteries and retreats of the Lutheran and Catholic churches, they have become part of training programmes for spiritual care (see Dröge, Giebel, Lilie & Richter, 2019).

In evangelical circles, different evaluations can be heard at the moment. On the one hand, various holiness movements have considered re-

ßen zum Mund, die Meditation zerkleinert und zerkaut sie, das Gebet schmeckt sie und die Kontemplation ist der Genuss selbst, der beglückt und belebt. Die Lesung bleibt an der Schale, die Meditation dringt bis zum Kern, das Gebet drückt das Verlangen aus und die Kontemplation ist die Freude über den erlangten Genuss. Aus all dem können wir schließen, dass die Lesung ohne Meditation dürr ist, die Meditation ohne die Lesung in die Irre geht, das Gebet ohne die Meditation lau und die Meditation ohne das Gebet unfruchbar ist. Das eifrige Gebet erlangt die Kontemplation, aber die Gabe der Kontemplation ohne Gebet wäre eine Ausnahme oder grenzte an Wunder.

Guigo II bedient sich dabei einer schon in der Antike beliebten Speisemetapher. Lesen wird als lustvolles und nahrhaftes Essen gedeutet. Der Religionswissenschaftler Baier weist darauf hin, dass Lesen für Guigo II dem aufmerksamen Suchen, Finden und Essen köstlicher Trauben vergleichbar scheint. Der Lesestoff wird zur Lust und lebensspendenden Nahrung für die Seele, wenn man seinen hintergründigen Sinn (den in der Traube verborgenen Geschmack) gründlich und mit Bezug auf das eigene Leben erforscht, sich emotional von ihm bewegen lässt und ihn so intensiv aufnimmt, dass er schließlich gleichsam in Fleisch und Blut übergeht (Baier, 2013, Seite 28). Mit Baier können wir deswegen von einer inkarnierenden Lektüre sprechen. Beim Lesen werden nicht nur die Lippen bewegt und Schall erzeugt oder die Augen bewegt und der Sinn erfasst. Der Leser wird in seinem Inneren ernährt, ergriffen und verändert.

Für sprachhistorisch interessierte Leser ist es in diesem Zusammenhang bedeutsam, die Etymologie des deutschen Verbs lesen besser zu verstehen. Im digitalen Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, das in der Tradition von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm steht, wird als Bedeutung der althochdeutschen und mittelhochdeutschen Vorstufe lesan/lesen noch die Bedeutung auswählen, sammeln, aufheben, an sich nehmen zugeschrieben. Im Neuhochdeutschen dominiert dagegen die uns geläufige Bedeutung: Lesen = den Sinn von Schriftzeichen verfassen sowie Schrift durch Sprechen wiedergeben. Nur in Nomen wie Weinlese, Blütenlese, Ährenlese oder Traubenlese ist die ursprüngliche Bedeu-

gular Bible readings during the so-called "quiet time" to be valuable: this leads to an increased readiness to look into the greater depth sought in the Lectio Divina reading style. On the other hand, some evangelicals have voiced concerns that old liturgical forms could lead to an unintended alignment with dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church (see Howard, 2012).

The American theologian Jan Johnson has succeeded, in my opinion, with her extended variant of the Lectio Divina. (Johnson, 2016). Meeting God in Scripture. The German translation, Süßer als Honig, kostbarer als Gold. 40 Mal Bibel zum Eintauchen und Erleben, was published in 2018.

It is immediately obvious from the book that the author has had many years experience as a speaker, instructor and trainer in Christian contemplative exercises and spiritual growth. In her devotional book, she follows her own approach to meditative Bible reading, based on classical Lectio Divina. In the course of a 40-day programme with texts from the Old and New Testaments, readers receive concrete guidance.

Johnson takes account of the normal everyday reality of burdened and stressed people and adds two further steps to the four classical ones of Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio and Contemplatio, namely Silencio and Incarnatio:

| Silencio | Lectio | Meditatio |
|----------|--------|-----------|
| Relax | Read aloud | Reflect |

| Oratio | Contemplatio | Incarnatio |
|--------|--------------|------------|
| Answer | Rest | Act |

The new initial step, Silencio, leads through relaxation exercises to quietness and concentration, so that everyday turbulence can be left behind. The final step, Incarnatio, is intended to help to take action on the basis of what has become clear during the meditation. Those meditating find the two transitional zones at the beginning and end especially helpful, since they do not practice a monastic lifestyle and require more time to open themselves to attentive spiritual reading.

tung noch zu erkennen. Ähnliches gilt für die Bedeutungsvarianten des entsprechenden lateinischen Verbs legere (lesen).

An dieser Stelle ist noch festzuhalten, dass es bei der christlichen Meditation im Gegensatz zu ostasiatischen Meditationsformen nicht darum geht, sein Inneres zu leeren. Die meditierten Bibelworte füllen den Bibelleser und bleiben der innere Bezugspunkt. Im meditativen Lesen biblischer Texte kann Gottes schöpferisches Wort in den Lesenden Neues schaffen. Sie erleben dadurch Gottes beglückende Nähe. Dietrich Bonhoeffer bringt diese Ausrichtung christlicher Meditation auf den Punkt: Die Meditationszeit lässt uns nicht in die Leere und den Abgrund des Alleinseins versinken, sondern lässt uns allein sein mit dem Wort. Damit gibt sie uns festen Grund, auf dem wir stehen und klare Wegweisung für die Schritte, die wir zu tun haben (Bonhoeffer, 2006, S.62).

## 7. Lectio Divina in der Gegenwart - Unabgelenkt Gott begegnen

Unzählige Anpassungen der Lectio Divina an die Frömmigkeitsstile verschiedener Kirchen und Denominationen sind über die Jahrhunderte verfasst worden. Immer finden wir in der Christentumsgeschichte Neuentdeckungen dieser Lesetradition auch außerhalb der klösterlichen Kultur.

Vor allem in der seelsorgerlichen Begleitung von Menschen in medizinischen, therapeutischen und diakonischen Handlungsfeldern finden kontemplative Lesestile große Beachtung. Über Kursangebote in Klöstern und Einkehrzentren der evangelischen und katholischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands hinaus sind sie Teil von Ausbildungsprogrammen für Geistliche Begleitung und Spiritual Care geworden (siehe Dröge, Giebel, Lilie & Richter, 2019).

Im evangelikalen Raum gibt es zurzeit unterschiedliche Bewertungen. Einerseits wurde in den Heiligungsbewegungen die regelmäßige Bibellese in der sogenannten Stillen Zeit als wertvoll eingeschätzt. Dadurch erhöhte sich auch die Bereitschaft, sich mit den vertiefenden Lesestilen der Lectio Divina zu befassen. Andererseits wuchs bei einigen Evangelikalen

Body-oriented posture and breathing exercises following the approaches of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction method (MBSR) and finely portioned guidance on reflection lead readers through all 6 phases of this modern Lectio Divina. In particular, those who have become tired of reading the Bible, and are only continuing to work through the texts as an obligatory task, will find here many suggestions for slowing down their own reading style and focusing anew on personal encounters with God during meditative reading.

These guiding perspectives are also emphasised by the authors of a further highly recommendable German devotional book on meditative Bible reading: Like all spiritual disciplines, Biblical meditation is one way of becoming more attentive to the quiet, gentle voice of God. In addition, it makes us ready to react to this voice of God when we hear it. Combined with the study of Holy Scripture, this form of meditation helps not only those who have not been believers very long, but also those who have the feeling that they already know everything inside out. For even if we are familiar with the words and ideas of the Bible, through our reflection on his word God speaks to us in new ways again. (Harms & Doormann, 2014, page 20).

## 8. Digital spiritual reading – possibilities and challenges

It is not only children and young people who are currently facing major challenges in using social media, computer games or digital readers responsibly. Adult readers of spiritual literature, too, must readjust their reading habits in the digital age. What are the most serious problems arising from the use of digital information and communication media? Probably the constant interruptions and distractions. As negative factors, they can lead to the development of new, short-term, superficial reading styles. The pressure resulting from being swamped with information can then lead to permanent informational overloading and chronically fragmented concentration, which are increasingly hindering deep reading.

In two current meta-analyses comparing rea-

die Sorge, dass alte liturgische Formen zu einer unfreiwilligen Annäherung an Dogmen der römisch-katholischen Kirche führen könnten (siehe Howard (2012).

Eine nach meiner Einschätzung gelungene erweiterte Variante der Lectio Divina hat die amerikanische Theologin Jan Johnson entwikkelt: Johnson (2016). Meeting God in Scripture. Die deutsche Übersetzung erschien 2018 unter dem Titel Süßer als Honig, kostbarer als Gold. 40 Mal Bibel zum Eintauchen und Erleben.

Dem Buch ist abzuspüren, dass die Autorin eine langjährige Erfahrung als Rednerin, Anleiterin und Trainerin für kontemplative christliche Übungen und geistliches Wachstum hat. In ihrem Andachtsbuch verfolgt sie einen eigenen Ansatz des meditativen Bibellesens, der auf der klassischen Lectio Divina aufbaut. In einem 40-Tagesprogramm mit Texten aus dem Alten und Neuen Testament werden den Leserinnen und Lesern dafür konkrete Anleitungen gegeben.

Johnson berücksichtigt die normale Lebensrealität von beladenen und gestressten Menschen und fügt den vier klassischen Stufen Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio und Contemplatio die zwei weiteren Stufen Silencio und Incarnatio hinzu:

| Silencio | Lectio | Meditatio |
|---|---|---|
| Entspannen | Laut lesen | Nachsinnen |
| | | |
| Oratio | Contemplatio | Incarnatio |
| Antworten | Ruhen | Umsetzen |

Der neue Anfangsschritt Silencio führt durch Entspannungsübungen zu Ruhe und Konzentration, um den Trubel des Alltags hinter sich zu lassen. Der abschließende Schritt Incarnatio soll helfen, das in der Meditation Erkannte im Alltag umzusetzen. Diese beiden Übergangszonen beim Einstieg und beim Ausstieg werden vor allem von Meditierenden als sehr hilfreich empfunden, die keinen monastischen Lebensstil pflegen und mehr Zeit benötigen, um sich achtsam auf das geistliche Lesen einzulassen.

Körperorientierte Haltungs- und Atem-Übun-

Let Heaven Come

ding on screens and paper, with a total of over 170,000 participants, book-reading produced better results because readers apparently achieved a less distracted and more attentive reading performance. Comprehension of substantially long information texts is better on paper, especially when the reader is under time pressure. (Delgado et al., 2018; Clinton, 2019). Further systematic research is necessary here, however. For this reason, more than 130 reading researchers in Europe, after the conclusion of the E-Read Cost Initiative 2018, have called, in the so-called Stavanger Declaration, for the performance of readers of all ages to be investigated more systematically than in the past. Only so can well-founded recommendations be made for the development of new pedagogy and cultures in reading.

What happens when spiritual literature is read in different media formats? Tim Hutchins (2015) discusses the results of a survey of the use of new forms of digital Bible reading. He takes a positive view of the fast access available to various digital formats, translations and commentaries. He regrets, however, that the digital Bible has lost its status as a unique and holy item. In addition, one feels the absence of the physical contact that one has with the printed Bible.

Karen Swallow Prior summarises some of the new articles regarding reading the Bible on screens. In her article Screens are changing the way we read scripture (Christianity Today, August 2019), she indicates that 50% of all American Bible readers already prefer digital Bibles for reading, research, or looking for particular passages. The reasons offered are the greater comfort and faster access. Unfortunately, there are also disadvantages. It is paradoxical: while digital reading does in fact increase the time spent reading the Bible, there are losses in comprehension and attitude. One digital Bible reader hit the essential point: I read the Bible more frequently, but probably less thoroughly and deeply. A further disadvantage is the absence of materiality with the digital Bible. On the screen, it is less distinguished from other digital literature than with a tangible, printed Bible.

gen, die den Ansätzen der Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction-Methode (MBSR) folgen und fein dosierte Reflektionsanleitungen führen die Lesenden durch alle 6 Phasen dieser modernen Lectio-Divina. Vor allem bibelmüde Leserinnen und Leser, die nur noch Bibeltexte als Pflichtpensum routiniert abarbeiten, erhalten hier viele Anregungen zum Entschleunigen des eigenen Lesestils und zum neuen Fokussieren auf persönliche Gottesbegegnungen beim meditativen Lesen.

Diese Zielperspektive betonen auch die Autorinnen eines weiteren empfehlenswerten Andachtsbuchs zum meditativen Bibellesen: Wie alle geistlichen Disziplinen ist die Bibelmeditation eine Möglichkeit, aufmerksamer für die leise, sanfte Stimme Gottes zu werden. Außerdem macht sie uns dazu bereit, auf diese Stimme Gottes zu reagieren, wenn wir sie hören. Zusammen mit dem Studium der Heiligen Schrift hilft diese Form der Meditation sowohl Menschen, die noch nicht lange gläubig sind, als auch Menschen, die das Gefühl haben, schon alles in- und auswendig zu kennen. Denn selbst wenn uns die biblischen Worte und Gedanken vertraut sind, spricht Gott durch unser Nachsinnen über sein Wort noch mal neu zu uns (Harms & Doormann, 2014, Seite 20).

### 8. Digitales geistliches Lesen – Chancen und Herausforderungen

Nicht nur Kinder und Jugendliche stehen zurzeit vor großen Herausforderungen im verantwortlichen Umgang mit sozialen Medien, Computerspielen oder der digitalen Lektüre.

Auch erwachsene Leserinnen und Leser spiritueller Literatur müssen im digitalen Zeitalter ihre Lesegewohnheiten neu justieren. Welche Probleme sind bei der Nutzung digitaler Informations- und Kommunikationsmedien am gravierendsten? Vermutlich sind es die ständigen Unterbrechungen und Ablenkungen. Sie können als negative Wirkfaktoren zur Ausbildung neuer kurzgetakteter oberflächlicher Lesestile führen. Der Druck der Informationsüberflutung kann dann zur dauerhaften Informationsüberladenheit und zu chronisch fragmentierter Aufmerksamkeit führen, die tiefes Lesen immer mehr behindert.

## 9. The deep-reading and slow-reading movement

The term deep reading was used for the first time in 1994 by the North American literary critic Sven Birkerts in in his book Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age (German, 2017: Gutenberg Elegien – Lesen im elektronischen Zeitalter). In his analytical critique of the media, he laments the danger of losing deep reading in the electronic age. In the German translation, his definition of deep reading is as follows: Because we can control it, deep reading adapts to our rhythms of activity and needs. We have the freedom to pursue our personal associations. The term I have coined for this is deep reading, which means taking possession of a book slowly and meditatively. (Birkerts, 2017).

The noted reading researcher Marianne Wolf, already mentioned above, took up this term 15 years later from the viewpoint of a psycholinguist and cognitive neuroscientist. She uses it substantially more specifically and attaches to it a comprehensive list of further attributes, which will not be presented or evaluated here.

In a series of publications, however, she has not only examined the current state of research on the development of reading skills, but has also made a passionate plea for maintaining thorough and critical reading competences in school and university education, profession and leisure. She points to the danger of losing these skills in the age of digital distractions, especially for children and young people in underprivileged societal milieus and in countries with high illiteracy rates. (Wolf, 2018).

There is a danger of permanent mindless reading. The eyes of unconcentrated or tired readers wander over the text without extracting meaning. We have now reached the stage that, in pedagogical psychology, this phenomenon is not only a central topic in the diagnosis and therapy of children and young people with attention deficit. Adults, too, suffer under distraction and concentration problems in reading extended texts.

In zwei aktuellen Metaanalysen zum Vergleich von Bildschirm- mit Papierlesen mit insgesamt über 170.000 Teilnehmern schnitt das Buchlesen besser ab, weil die Lesenden offenbar unabgelenkter und achtsamer mit ihrer eigenen Leseperformanz umgingen. Das Verstehen längerer Informationstexte ist auf Papier besser, vor allem wenn Leser unter Zeitdruck stehen (Delgado et al. (2018); Clinton, 2019). Es bedarf aber weiterer systematischer Forschung. Deshalb haben mehr als 130 Leseforscher aus Europa nach Abschluss der E-Read-Cost-Initiative 2018 in der sogenannten Stavanger-Erklärung gefordert, Lesen als Schlüsselkompetenz des digitalen Zeitalters in allen Altersbereichen systematischer als bisher zu untersuchen. Nur so können fundierte Empfehlungen für den Aufbau neuer Lesedidaktiken und Lesekulturen entwickelt werden.

Wie sieht es beim Lesen geistlicher Literatur in unterschiedlichen Medienformaten aus? Tim Hutchins (2015) diskutiert die Ergebnisse einer Umfrage zu neuen Formen der digitalen Bibellektüre. Es gibt Vor- und Nachteile. Positiv gesehen wird die schnelle Zugänglichkeit von unterschiedlichen digitalen Formaten, Übersetzungen und Kommentaren. Bedauert wird allerdings, dass der digitalen Bibel ihr Status als einzigartiger heiliger Gegenstand verloren gegangen ist. Außerdem wird der fehlende physische Kontakt wie bei einer gedruckten Bibel vermisst.

Karen Swallow Prior fasst einige der neuen Artikel zum Bibellesen auf Bildschirmen zusammen. Sie beschreibt in ihrem Artikel Screens are changing the way we read scripture (Christianity Today, August 2019) dass bereits 50% aller amerikanischen Bibelleser für das Lesen, Recherchieren oder Textstellensuchen digitale Bibeln bevorzugen. Sie begründen das mit Bequemlichkeit und schneller Zugänglichkeit. Leider gibt es aber auch Nachteile. Es ist paradox: Digitales Lesen erhöht zwar den Zeitumfang des Bibellesens, das Verstehen und Verhalten werden aber verringert. Ein digitaler Bibelleser brachte es auf den Punkt: Ich lese die Bibel häufiger, aber vermutlich weniger gründlich und tief. Ein weiterer Nachteil ist die fehlende Materialität der digitalen Bibel. Sie hebt sich auf

At re:publica, a conference on the digital society held in Berlin, the abbreviation tl;dr = too long; don't read was intended to draw attention to a disturbing phenomenon: superficial, uncritical reading without background research, or even not reading at all, lead not only to stupidity, but also to divisive catchphrases and societal conflicts.

In spiritual reading in many Christian denominations, too, a retrograde tendency in deep reading of the Bible is noticeable. Interest in the Bible is declining. Church pastors complain of Bible-reading fatigue and the lack of relevance of the Bible for church members when making ethical decisions in everyday life.

According to a study of young Christians in Germany, no less than 75.5% of highly religious young people read the Bible at least once a week, and of these 27% daily. But, in their own words, only 40% take their orientation in everyday life from the Bible. When asked about the source of faith in everyday life, reading the Bible comes in only sixth place after praise, prayer, conversations with friends and family, youth camps, and sermons in church services. (see Faix & Künkler, 2018).

## 10. A plea for spiritual deep reading

How, in an age of digital distraction and fragmented attention, can we support anew and realise in practice the art of deep spiritual reading? The bombardment of all sensory channels with stimuli makes it necessary to plan carefully times of retreat, of peace and solitariness.

More than 120 years ago, the Pietist August Hermann Francke described vividly, in his guide to Bible reading, the interplay of attentive, peaceful, contemplatively reading and a living relationship with God:

Wherever one rushes through a chapter and then closes the Bible, soon letting what he had read drift out of his thoughts, it is no wonder that one can perhaps read through the Bible and yet not become more spiritual and devoted. Prayer and contemplation must always go hand-in-hand. If you are making no progress in

dem Bildschirm weniger stark ab von anderer digitaler Literatur als eine greifbare gedruckte Bibel.

## 9. Deep Reading und Slow Reading -Bewegung

Der Begriff tiefes Lesen (deep reading) wurde 1994 zum ersten Mal von dem nordamerikanischen Literaturkrititiker Sven Birkerts in seinem Buch Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age. Boston: Faber and Faber. Birkerts, S. (2017). Die Gutenberg-Elegien: Lesen im elektronischen Zeitalter. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer verwendet. In seiner medienkritischen Analyse beklagt er den drohenden Verlust des tiefen Lesens im elektronischen Zeitalter. In der deutschen Übersetzung definierte er tiefes Lesen wie folgt: Lesen passt sich, weil wir es kontrollieren können, unseren Aktivitätsrhythmen und Bedürfnissen an. Wir haben die Freiheit unseren persönlichen Assoziationen nachgeben zu können. Der Begriff, den ich dafür präge ist deep reading, die langsame und meditative Besitznahme eines Buches (Birkerts, 2017).

Die schon erwähnte renommierte Leseforscherin Marianne Wolf greift diesen Begriff 15 Jahre später aus der Sicht einer Psycholinguistin und kognitiven Neurowissenschaftlerin auf. Sie verwendet ihn bedeutend spezifischer und unterlegt ihm eine umfangreiche Liste von weiteren Attributen, die hier nicht im Einzelnen vorgestellt und bewertet werden sollen.

In einer Reihe von Publikationen hat sie aber nicht nur den aktuellen Forschungsstand zur Entwicklung der Lesefähigkeit erörtert, sondern auch in leidenschaftlichen Plädoyers für den Erhalt gründlicher, kritischer Lesekompetenzen in Schulbildung, Universität, Beruf und Freizeit ausgesprochen. Sie weist auf den drohenden Verlust dieser Fähigkeiten im Zeitalter digitaler Ablenkungen hin, vor allem auch für Kinder und Jugendliche in unterprivilegierten Gesellschaftskontexten und in Ländern mit hohen Raten von Analphabeten (Wolf, 2018).

Es droht die Gefahr des permanenten gedankenlosen Lesens (mindless reading). Un-

contemplation, you have to pray; and if prayer refuses to flow, you must contemplate the words a little. From prayer, contemplation will spring up and multiply; and through contemplation you will be aroused to prayer. (Francke, 1893, page 4).

How can this advice for the spiritual life be brought up to date for today?
What might be the form taken by first steps towards establishing a culture of deep spiritual reading?

My vision and wish is that private and public times and places should be set so that deep spiritual reading is practised and trained. Here are three recommendations:

**11. How about putting daily personal times of deep reading in the Bible into your personal day planner? Could these enable stressed people like us to get off the treadmill of long working days or unproductive media consumption in order to experience new closeness to God in meditative peace and relaxation?**

Yes, just try it, allow yourself the time to have 40 days of regular meditative Bible reading, perhaps using the excellent guidance on meditative reading by Harms & Doormann (2014) or Johnson (2018).

**12. How about setting up reading circles or clubs for Bible-weary church members, where inspiring spiritual literature is read slowly and aloud? What would happen if churches and monasteries offered quiet meditative forms of devotion on a larger scale than in the past, with meditative forms of reading as the central point?**

Inspiring suggestions for this can be found in Bittner (2009), who, drawing on his years of experience as a teacher and preacher, offers practical liturgical ideas for Bible-centred meditative devotions. Perhaps it is even possible that new forms of urban spirituality would arise. In the city monastery Segen, in the centre of the vibrant and culturally ambitious Berlin district

konzentrierte oder müde Leser lassen ohne Sinnentnahme die Augen über den Text wandern. Inzwischen ist dieses Phänomen in der pädagogischen Psychologie nicht nur ein zentrales Thema für die Diagnose und Therapie von aufmerksamkeitsgestörten Kindern und Jugendlichen geworden. Auch erwachsene Leser leiden unter Ablenkungen und Konzentrationsproblemen beim Lesen längerer Texte.

Das Kürzel tl;dr = too long; don't read auf der Berliner Konferenz zur digitalen Gesellschaft re:publica sollte auf ein beunruhigendes Phänomen aufmerksam machen: Oberflächliches unkritisches Lesen ohne Hintergrund-Recherche oder gar Nicht-Lesen führen nicht nur zur Dummheit, sondern auch zu spaltenden Parolen und gesellschaftlichen Konflikten.

Auch beim geistlichen Lesen ist in vielen christlichen Denominationen ein Rückgang beim tiefen Lesen der Bibel festzustellen. Das Interesse an der Bibel nimmt ab. Gemeindepastoren beklagen Bibellesemüdigkeit und die fehlende Relevanz der Bibel für ethische Entscheidungen ihrer Gemeindemitglieder im Alltag.

Nach der empirica-Studie über junge Christen in Deutschland lesen zwar 75,5 Prozent hochreligiöser Jugendlicher mindestens einmal pro Woche in der Bibel, davon 27 Prozent täglich. Nur 40 Prozent richten aber nach eigener Aussage ihren Alltag nach der Bibel aus. Bei der Frage nach den Glaubensquellen im Alltag landete Bibellesen nach Lobpreis, Gebet, Gespräche mit Freunden und Familie, Jugendfreizeiten und Predigten im Gottesdienst nur auf Rang 6 (siehe Faix & Künkler, 2018).

**10. Plädoyer für geistliches Tieflesen (Spiritual Deep reading)**
Wie können wir in einem Zeitalter digitaler Ablenkungen und fragmentierter Aufmerksamkeit neu die Kunst des tiefen geistlichen Lesens fördern und praktisch umsetzen? Das Bombardement von Reizen auf allen Sinneskanälen macht es erforderlich, Zeiten des Rückzugs, der Ruhe und der Einsamkeit einzuplanen.

Sehr eindrücklich formulierte der Pietist Au-
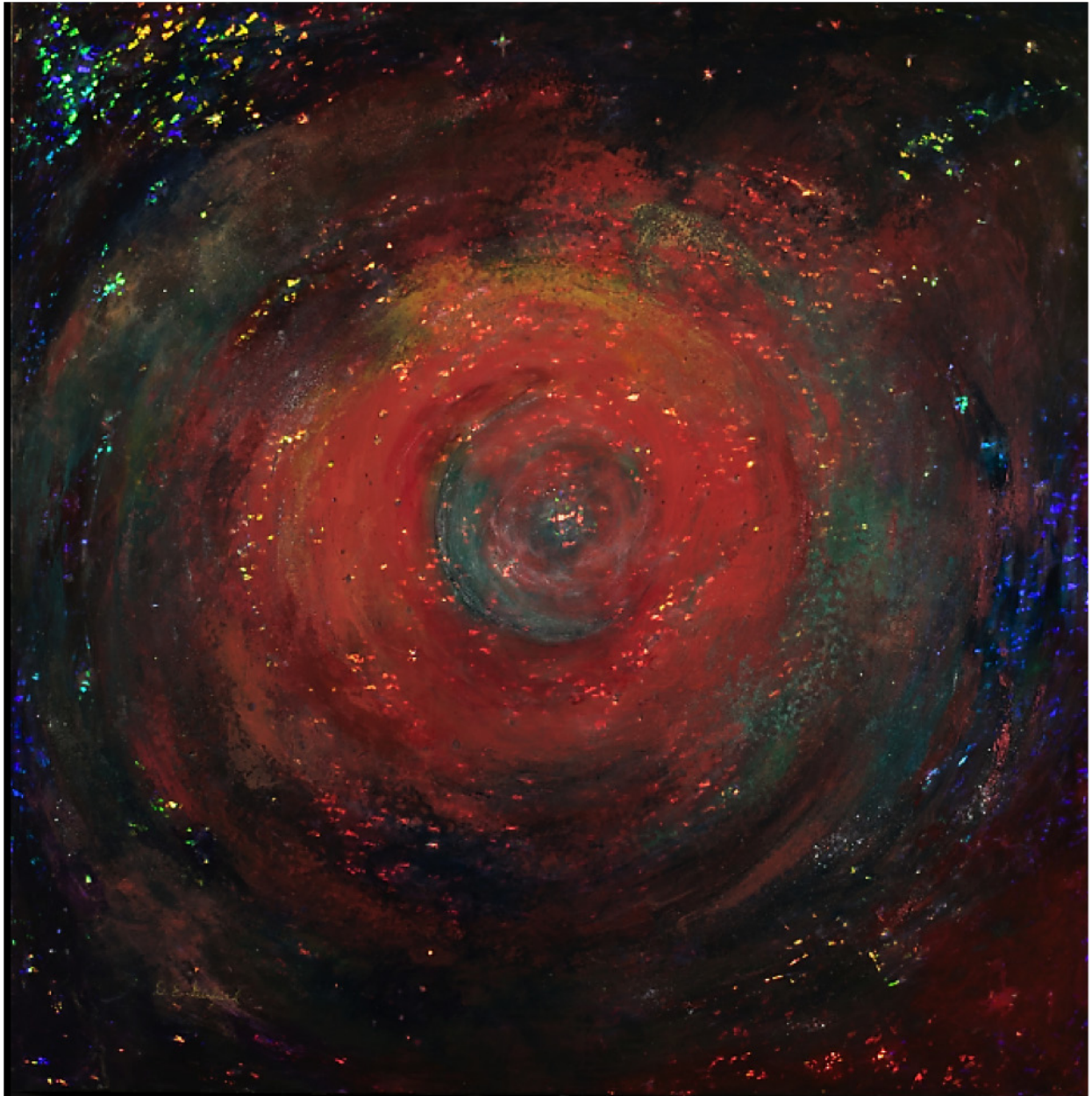
Psalm 97:2

Prenzlauer Berg, a meditative island of peace for harassed and stressed city people already exists (see stadtklostersegen.de).

**13. What would happen if, to a much greater extent than in the past, Christian therapists and counsellors carefully selected biblical texts as bibliotherapeutic recommendations for their clients and patients?**

The bibliotherapist Ella Berthoud at the London School of Life does not feel bound to any Christian concept of man or God, but does make a number of fascinating suggestions for the attentive reading of various literary genres. Christian readers can learn much from this and develop their own forms of attentive spiritual reading. One of the first steps towards this could be setting up a personal spiritual medicine cabinet.

**14. The Psalms as a spiritual medicine cabinet**
In my parents' old family Bible, there was an appendix with Bible verses suitable for various situations in life, for times of sadness and joy, but also for challenging and critical life events such as illness, unemployment, mental health crises, or the loss of a partner. Among them, references to the Psalms played a particularly important role

Regardless of whether in a digital or printed form, just try the experiment of using the Psalms as your own spiritual medicine cabinet by gradually accumulating a small repertoire of biblical affirmations. Hold firmly onto the Bible verses that have given you comfort and orientation in illness, phases of stress and times of crisis. Alongside that, you can use creative Bible art journaling techniques with which selected verses can be marked in colour, illustrated, or decorated with glued-on ornaments or pictures. You can also place these verses strategically around your department with Post-It adhesive labels or use them as screensavers. You can keep these verbal remedies in your spiritual medicine cabinet, but also simply learn them by memory and, as with the Prayer of the Heart, call them up inwardly and repeat them. These memorisation techniques help you to experience, in times of challenge, the salutary personal words and

gust Hermann Francke schon vor über 120 Jahren in seiner Anleitung zum Bibellesen das Ineinandergreifen eines achtsamen ruhigen betrachtenden Lesens und einer lebendige Gottesbeziehung:
Wo man über ein Kapitel hinrauschet, darnach die Bibel zuschlägt, und was man gelesen hat bald aus den Gedanken fahren lässt, so ist es kein Wunder, dass man die Bibel wohl durchlese und doch nicht frömmer und andächtiger werden. Das Gebet und die Betrachtung müssen einander stets die Hand bieten. Wenn es mit der Betrachtung nicht fortwill, so musst du beten; und wenn das Gebet nicht fließen will, so musst du die Worte ein wenig betrachten. Aus dem Gebet wird die Betrachtung entspringen und vermehret werden; und durch die Betrachtung wirst du zum Gebet erweckt werden (Francke, 1893, Seite 4).

Wie können diese Ratschläge zum geistlichen Lesen für die Gegenwart aktualisiert werden? Wie könnten erste Schritte bei der Etablierung einer geistlichen Tiefleserkultur aussehen?

Meine Vision und mein Wunsch sind es, dass private und öffentliche Zeiten und Orte etabliert werden, in und an denen tiefes geistliches Lesen praktiziert und eingeübt wird. Dazu drei Empfehlungen:

**11. Wie wäre es, tägliche persönliche Tieflesezeiten der Bibel auf die persönliche Agenda zu setzen? Sie könnten uns gestresste Menschen befähigen, aus dem Hamsterrad langer Arbeitszeiten oder unproduktiven Medienkonsums auszusteigen, um in meditativer Ruhe und Entspannung neu Gottesnähe zu erleben?**

Versuchen sie doch einmal, sich Zeit für 40 Tage regelmäßiges meditatives Bibellesen zu schenken, zum Beispiel mit den exzellenten Anleitungen zum meditativen Lesen von Harms & Doormann (2014) oder von Johnson (2016).

**12. Wie wäre es, für bibelmüde Gemeindemitglieder Lesezirkel oder Leseclubs zu gründen, in denen inspirierende geistliche Literatur langsam und laut gelesen wird? Wie wäre es, wenn Gemeinden und Klöster mehr als**

comfort of your faithful and loving heavenly Father.

If you succeed in gathering your own positive experiences with your spiritual medicine cabinet and if you are active in counselling or therapy, try, for example, to use Psalms as positive intervention in therapy and counselling. Further scientific evaluations of biblio-therapy are of course necessary in order to find out which bibliotherapeutic agent should be applied in which life situation. On the way to a personalised treatment with suitable literature, some further steps still remain to be taken (see Gualano et al., 2017 and Heimes, 2018). But there is nothing preventing us from responsibly carrying out tests. People are changed by reading the Bible – in character, soul and body. Psalms 1 and 92 illustrate this transformation with the picture of a tree in leaf which receives water through its roots and thus grows and flourishes. In a similar way, the believing reader of the Torah, who takes the time needed to meditate on the Word of God, also grows and flourishes.

The Anglican theologian N.T. Wright, already mentioned above, describes this miracle of growth appositely in his plea for the Psalms, phrased as follows in the German version: So if someone decides – in the language of the Psalms – to study the law of YHWH and to keep it wholeheartedly, then we should expect not only (as we call it) a moral or spiritual transformation, but a transformation of the entire person – in other words, the transformation of our material self. (Wright, 2013).

These outworkings of biblical texts have been experienced by spiritual readers across all the centuries of the history of Christendom. They are also confirmed by evidence-based findings from medicine, psychology and therapeutic research on the embodiment of reading. It is necessary, however, to conduct more focused research on the psychological effects of spiritual reading, particularly in the context of the new digital text formats of the future and eye-controlled, knowledge-based assistance technologies/augmented reading (see Haack, 2020). I am convinced that deep spiritual reading, even

**bisher ruhige meditative Andachtsformate anbieten, in denen meditative Leseformen im Mittelpunkt stehen?**

Inspirierende Anregungen dazu findet man in Bittner (2009), der auf der Grundlage jahrelanger Lehr- und Predigt-Erfahrungen praktische Hinweise zu Liturgie bibelzentrierter meditativer Andachten gibt. Vielleicht können dadurch sogar neue Formen der urbanen Spiritualität entstehen. Im Stadtkloster Segen, mitten im umtriebigen, kulturell-ambitionierten Berliner Bezirk Prenzlauer Berg, existiert schon so eine meditative Insel der Ruhe für gehetzte und gestresste Stadtmenschen (siehe stadtklostersegen.de).

**13. Wie wäre es, wenn christliche Therapeuten und Seelsorger mehr als bisher biblische Texte gezielt als bibliotherapeutische Empfehlungen an ihre Klienten und Patienten weitergeben?**

Die Bibliotherapeutin Ella Berthoud an der Londoner School of Life fühlt sich keinem christlichen Menschen- und Gottesbild verpflichtet, gibt aber eine Reihe reizender Anregungen zum achtsamen Lesen verschiedener literarischer Genres. Christliche Leser können viel davon lernen und eigene Formen achtsamen geistlichen Lesens entwickeln. Einer der ersten Schritte dazu könnte der Aufbau einer persönlichen geistlichen Hausapotheke sein.

**14. Die Psalmen als geistliche Hausapotheke**
In der alten Hausbibel meiner Eltern wurden im Anhang geeignete Bibelverse für verschiedene Lebenslagen empfohlen, für Zeiten der Trauer und der Freude, aber auch für herausfordernde kritische Lebensereignisse wie Krankheiten, Arbeitslosigkeit, seelische Krisen oder der Verlust eines Partners. Hinweise auf die Psalmen nahmen dabei eine besondere Rolle ein.

▷ Egal ob in digitaler oder in gedruckter Form: Versuchen sie doch einmal, die Psalmen als ihre eigene geistliche Hausapotheke einzusetzen, indem sie nach und nach ein kleines Repertoire von Bibelsprüchen aufbauen. Halten sie die Bibelverse fest, die ihnen in Krankheiten, Stressphasen und Krisenzeiten Trost und Orientie-

under these new conditions, will retain its central role in encounters with God, life transformation, and overcoming stress.

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rung gegeben haben. Sie können dazu kreative Bible-Art Journaling-Techniken einsetzen, mit denen sie ausgewählte Verse farbig markieren, illustrieren oder mit ausgeschnittenen Ornamenten oder Bildern bekleben. Sie können diese Verse auch auf Post-It-Klebezetteln in ihrer Wohnung strategisch platzieren oder als Bildschirmschoner verwenden. Sie können diese verbalen Heilmittel in ihrer geistlichen Hausapotheke aufbewahren aber auch schlicht auswendig lernen und wie beim Herzensgebet im Innern abrufen und wiederholen. Diese Memorierungstechniken helfen ihnen in herausfordernden Zeiten, den heilsamen Zuspruch und Trost ihres treuen und liebenden himmlischen Vaters zu erleben.

Wenn es ihnen gelungen ist, eigene positive Erfahrungen mit ihrer geistlichen Hausapotheke zu machen und sie seelsorgerlich oder therapeutisch tätig sind: Versuchen sie zum Beispiel Psalmen als positive Intervention in Therapie und Seelsorge einzusetzen. Weitere wissenschaftliche Evaluationen der Bibliotherapie sind sicher notwendig, um zu prüfen für welche Lebenslage welches Bibliotherapeutikum eingesetzt wird. Auf dem Weg zu einer personalisierten Behandlung mit passender Literatur sind noch einige Schritte zurückzulegen (siehe Gualano et al., 2017 und Heimes, 2018). Der eigenen verantwortungsvollen Erprobung steht aber nichts im Wege. Menschen werden durch das Lesen der Bibel verändert, - ihr Charakter, ihre Seele und ihr Leib. Die Psalmen 1 und 92 illustrieren diese Verwandlung mit dem Bild eines grünenden Baums, der durch seine Wurzeln Wasser erhält und dadurch wächst und gedeiht. Auf ähnliche Weise wächst und gedeiht auch der gläubige Leser der Tora, der sich Zeit schenkt für das Meditieren des göttlichen Wortes.

Der schon erwähnte anglikanische Theologe N.T. Wright beschreibt dieses Wunder des Wachstums treffend in seinem Plädoyer für die Psalmen: Wenn sich also jemand entschließt – in der Sprache der Psalmen -, das Gesetz JHWHs zu studieren und von ganzem Herzen einzuhalten, dann sollten wir nicht bloß eine (wie wir sagen) moralische oder geistliche Ver-

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wandlung erwarten, sondern eine Verwandlung der ganzen Person, - mit anderen Worten: eine Verwandlung unseres materiellen Selbst (Wright, 2013).

Diese Wirkungen biblischer Texte haben Tausende von geistlichen Lesern aus allen Jahrhunderten der Christentumsgeschichte erlebt. Sie werden auch durch evidenzbasierte Befunde zur Verkörperlichung (embodiment) des Lesens aus Medizin, Psychologie und Therapieforschung bestätigt. Es ist aber notwendig, die psychologischen Wirkungen des geistlichen Lesens gezielter zu erforschen, vor allem im Kontext zukünftiger neuer digitaler Textformate und blickgesteuerter wissensbasierter Assistenztechnologien/Augmented Reading (siehe Haack, 2020). Ich bin mir sicher, dass tiefes geistliches Lesen auch unter diesen neuen Bedingungen seine zentrale Rolle für Gottesbegegnung, Lebenstransformation und Stressbewältigung behalten wird.

**Kelvin Mutter (Canada)**

# Comment to "Deep Spiritual Reading in the Digital Age "

One of the fascinating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the way the world has progressively been forced to slow down. This temporary slower lifestyle has released some people to do things that had been crowded out because of the busy-ness of their lives; e.g., bake bread, garden, write letters, etc. Others, however, have chafed at the isolation and seeming lack of productivity. Meanwhile the response of the remaining population has been somewhere between these poles. It is against this background that I received and read Johannes Haack's article. While my first impulse was to read the article quickly appreciation for this multidisciplinary reflection on the practice of reading, and particularly spiritual reading deepened through the practice of slow reading.

Although the act of reading can sometimes be taken for granted, especially by those who read, the first theme introduced by Haack is that the simple act of reading is not straightforward. Haack draws on scientific research to illustrate the effects of reading on the brain; the reader's perception of self, others, and their context; and, the challenges posed by digital texts (sections 1, 4, 8, & 9). These insights invite the reader to reflect on the potential implications of this research for the act of spiritual reading.

Spiritual reading, the core theme for this essay, is introduced in section 2 and explored in sections 5—7. Through these reflections Haack highlights continuity and change in the practice of spiritual reading, and particularly the practice of Lectio Divina, from the 12th century to the present. His use of Johnson's six-step modified Lectio Divina highlights the importance of two historically implicit components of the practice of spiritual reading—withdrawal from distraction and action—that are easily lost on those who are focused on action and achievement.

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https://emcapp.ignis.de/7/#/72

The third theme, theological reflection, is introduced in the third section where the tone of his reflections establish that this article is about Christian Psychology rather than integrating psychology and theology or Biblical Counseling. Beginning with this section and running throughout the text Haack affirms that Christian spirituality is not defined in terms of either the individual or a set of rites but rather the relationship between the individual and God. This acknowledgement of relational spirituality is reflected in the author's reference to Bohren's concept of theonomous reciprocity. It also informs his comment that "The spiritual exercises are an internalised spiritual reality in which the inner attitude of the heart is much more important than the technique if we are to lead a truly spiritual life."

Haack's discussion of the practices of spiritual reading in general, and particularly the practice of deep spiritual reading in a digital age plaits the three themes identified above—i.e., the findings of neuroscience, the practice of Lectio Divina, and theological reflection—into a single braided argument. His description of the differences between reading a physical book and reading a digital text are thought provoking—particularly the danger of distraction when rea-

ding digital texts. Admittedly, I recognize one reason I am attracted to this suggestion is that I have an affinity towards physical books and reading scripture from a physical bible. However, I wonder if perhaps the medium is only part of the problem and that of deeper spiritual concern are cultural attitudes that value action and distraction as well as devalue slowing down and being with oneself, God, or another person?

On a practical note, I wonder if Haack may be biased towards what may be called 'text literacy?' Specifically, I find myself wondering if the deep benefits of spiritual reading are limited to those who are 'text literate'? The relevance of this question becomes evident when one considers those whose vision has become compromised and individuals with disabilities that interfere with text-based learning. Pastoral experience with older adults suggests that some individuals experience a depth of spiritual refreshment through the use of audiobooks. Towards the other end of the age spectrum I have observed that children with diagnosed learning disabilities are able to step aside from disruptive behavior, slow down, and meditate on an audio-visual version of a scriptural or a spiritual text in ways that are not possible when they are confined to the use of a printed text. These examples invite us to consider the possibility that as long as the combined act of audire-videre (i.e., hearing-seeing) is preceded by silencio that it may provide a suitable foundation for the remaining steps of the practice of Lectio Divina.

In conclusion, it is unfortunate that it has taken a pandemic to invite entire cultures, and especially the Christian community, to slow down and reflect. The fact that this is the case illustrates the necessity of Haack's core thesis; namely to invite Christians to find ways to experience the benefits of engaging the biblical text through relaxing, reading aloud (or listening), reflecting, answering (the Holy Spirit), resting, and embodying (incarnating) thus deepening their relationship with God.

Part Two

# Stress and Mission

**Téo van der Weele**
**(Netherlands / Austria)**
# "The wall of Peace" (Philp. 4: 6-9). How this lead to the Founding of the School in Denmark and how this worked out in my personal life

Deacon Téo van der Weele (1937) went to Thailand as a missionary with the C. & M.A. from 1963 to 1975. He developed a gentle approach towards abuse survivors called Helping Through Blessing. After his M.A. studies at Fuller ('86), he joined with Dr. Vibeke Moeller to start an English-language summer school for counsellors (esarpac.com). He wrote From Shame to Peace: Counselling and Caring for the Sexually Abused, which encapsulates the basic philosophy of Helping Through Blessing. This has been translated into various European languages as well as Arabic. He converted to the RC church in 2011 and worked as permanent Deacon in the St. Stephan Church in Tulln, Austria and recently returned to the Netherlands and asked the Bishop for advice what he (83) still could do next.

**Former contributions in our eJournal by Téo you can see her:**

https://emcapp.ignis.de/5/#/74

A fifteen-year older missionary colleague told me: "Téo, I really have problems in understanding God". I replied: "What is it that you don´t understand"? His answer was shocking and hilarious. "I don´t understand why God uses you so much while you have so many problems". I laughed and said: "Have you ever heard of grace, brother"? He walked away, shaking his head…

Right from the beginning I worked hard to learn the language. In 1964 I gave my first sermon of twenty minutes in Thai, after three months language study (thanks to the extra help of my language teacher in memorizing the text). I amazed our Thai language missionary-supervisor with it.

The Thai opened their hearts for me and shared deep problems. The word about my sensitivity seemed to spread, as soon other missions also asked me to come to their yearly conferences, to share about how to reach the hearts of the Thai. I felt happy and fulfilled… but my colleague was right, I did have quite a few problems, some people did look through the surface. What was my struggle?

### The after-effects of WWII

Born in 1937, I was 8 when the war was over. My father had been a German-appointed mayor in a small town. In 1944 he sent my mother, my three-year older brother and me to Germany. He feared for our safety, due to an ever-increasing chance that people would take revenge on us. In Germany, we were `ínkwartiert´ in a farm. We were playing in the meadow, when a British plane saw us, and the crazy pilot shot at us. (I think now that he must have lost loved ones in the German bombings of London). My brother hid behind a tree that caught a row of bullets. I was a few meters away, stood frozen, he missed me. He came back again, then I found strength to run home, bullets flying around me. Mom opened the door and pulled me in, unharmed.

Soon we moved back to a town near the German border. One night we were woken up by the sound of air raid sirens. Airplanes bombed us, mistakenly thinking that they were already in Germany. Mom was ill, unable to get up to go to the safety bunker. She said: "Come and sit close to me: the bomb that is going to kill us, will kill all three of us". An intense fear came over me and I was shivering… She started to pray, (this was the first time that I remember her pray like that: "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be thy name…". After two or three sentences she just talked normal, pleading with the Lord for our safety. My shivering stopped as a deep inner calm came over me. I met for the first time

Vanaf het begin heb ik hard gewerkt om de taal te leren. In 1964 gaf ik mijn eerste preek van twintig minuten in het Thai, na drie maanden taalstudie (dankzij de extra hulp van mijn taaldocent bij het onthouden van de tekst). Hiermee verbaasde ik onze missionaris-supervisor in de Thaise taal.

De Thai openden hun hart voor mij en deelden diepe problemen. De kennis over mijn gevoeligheid leek zich te verspreiden, zodat weldra ook andere missies me vroegen om naar hun jaarlijkse conferenties te komen, om erover te delen hoe ze de harten van de Thai konden bereiken. Ik voelde me gelukkig en voldaan... maar mijn collega had gelijk, ik had nogal wat problemen en sommige mensen keken wel door die buitenkant. Wat was mijn innerlijke strijd?

### De naweeën van WOII

Ik ben geboren in 1937 en ik was 8 toen de oorlog voorbij was. Mijn vader was een door de Duitsers benoemde burgemeester geweest in een kleine stad. In 1944 stuurde hij mijn moeder, mijn drie jaar oudere broer en mij naar Duitsland. Hij vreesde voor onze veiligheid, omdat de kans dat mensen wraak op ons zouden nemen steeds groter werd. In Duitsland waren we `ingekwartierd´ op een boerderij. We waren aan het spelen in het weiland, toen een Brits vliegtuig ons zag en de piloot als een krankzinnige op ons schoot. (Ik denk nu dat hij geliefden moet hebben verloren bij de Duitse bombardementen op Londen). Mijn broer verstopte zich achter een boom die een rij kogels opving. Ik was een paar meter verderop, stond als verstijfd, hij miste me. Hij kwam weer terug en toen vond ik kracht om naar huis te rennen, terwijl de kogels om me heen vlogen. Mama opende de deur en trok me ongedeerd naar binnen.

Al snel verhuisden we terug naar een stad bij de Duitse grens. Op een nacht werden we gewekt door het geluid van luchtaanval sirenes. Vliegtuigen bombardeerden ons, ten onrechte denkend dat ze al in Duitsland waren. Mam was ziek, niet in staat om op te staan om naar de schuilkelder te gaan. Ze zei: „Kom dicht bij me zitten. De bom die ons gaat doden, zal ons alle drie doden." Er kwam een intense angst over me heen en ik begon te bibberen... Ze be-

in my life what I now call PowerfulPeace. That prepared me to survive later disasters.

> PowerfulPeace is the experience of the Presence of Jesus in whatever situation we find ourselves. It causes a deep inner quietness, alongside any emotional reactions a person may experience at the same time.

**Broken...**

In spring 1945, dad joined us in Hoogkerk, close by Groningen. In early May the war was over. A Dutch soldier saw me standing in front of our small house. He pulled a pistol, put it against my head and barked, "Tell me where your dad is, or I kill you…". I gave a deathly scream, Mom came running out of the house, pushed the fellow away with her hands, shaming him with "How dare you, such a small child" and a stream of ugly words followed. It had its effect. He walked away with his head bowed. A ´black veil´ came over me that lasted at for least 8 years. I suffered, looking back, from traumatic autism. Only later I found out that Dad had escaped to another town where an aunt lived. There he hid a week and when the first turmoil was past, he turned himself in. Soon my mom was also taken into a concentration camp and my brother and I were sent to a children's home. There I met a pedophile, I never forgot that man. In a few weeks I didn´t think any more about this soldier. It became hard for me to study. Turning 12, I prepared for high school and had to study 5 hours per day to get a B+. I had forgotten the whole story of the soldier, until 27 years later, when I was a missionary in Thailand, the facts came rushing back.

**"Learning to forgive"**

I was scared when meeting authority figures and showed it in my behavior, especially when I had to go through the customs. They always picked me out. It had never dawned on me that this might have anything to do with WWII until 1972. A book about emotional healing opened a can of worms. I cried through my youth for three days. The soldier stood real-to-life again next to me. I told the Lord. "Jesus, I know I am a missionary and I have to forgive, I decide to do that with my head, but I can´t do it with my

gon te bidden, (dit was de eerste keer dat ik me herinner haar zo te horen bidden : „Onze Vader die in de hemel is, geheiligd zij Uw naam..." Na twee of drie zinnen sprak ze gewoon normaal en smeekte ze de Heer om onze veiligheid. Mijn bibberen stopte, toen er een diepe innerlijke kalmte over me heen kwam. Ik ontmoette voor het eerst in mijn leven wat ik nu "PowerfulPeace" noem. Dat bereidde me voor op het overleven van latere rampen.

> Powerfulpeace is de ervaring van de Aanwezigheid van Jezus in welke situatie we ons ook bevinden. Het veroorzaakt een diepe innerlijke rust, naast alle emotionele reacties die een persoon op hetzelfde moment kan ervaren.

**Gebroken...**

In het voorjaar van 1945 voegde papa zich bij ons in Hoogkerk, vlakbij Groningen. Begin mei was de oorlog voorbij. Een Nederlandse soldaat zag mij voor ons huisje staan. Hij trok een pistool, zette het tegen mijn hoofd en blafte: „Zeg me waar je vader is, of ik vermoord je...".ik slaakte een doodskreet, mama kwam het huis uit rennen, duwde de kerel met haar handen weg en beschaamde hem met „Hoe durf je, zo'n klein kind!" waarna er een stroom van lelijke woorden volgde. Het had zijn effect. Hij liep weg met gebogen hoofd. Er kwam toen een ‚zwarte sluier' over me heen die minstens 8 jaar duurde. Ik leed, als ik nu terugkijk, aan traumatisch autisme. Pas later kwam ik erachter dat papa was ontsnapt naar een andere stad waar een tante woonde. Daar verstopte hij zich een week en toen de eerste onrust voorbij was, gaf hij zichzelf aan. Al snel werd mijn moeder ook naar een concentratiekamp gebracht en werden mijn broer en ik naar een kindertehuis gestuurd. Daar heb ik een pedofiel ontmoet. Ik ben die man nooit vergeten. In een paar weken tijd dacht ik niet meer aan deze soldaat. Het werd moeilijk voor me om te studeren. Toen ik 12 werd, bereidde ik me voor op de middelbare school en moest ik 5 uur per dag studeren om een B+ te krijgen. Ik was het hele verhaal van de soldaat vergeten, tot 27 jaar later, toen ik missionaris was in Thailand en de feiten in snel tempo terugkwamen.

heart". Then in the silence it seemed to me that God spoke something like: "That is O.K. Téo, come into the school of forgiving, I will teach you. When it is too hard to face something, you are allowed to leave the school and go into the playground. When you are ready to face another lesson, you can come back".

These words were balm for my heart and became a key sentence that I have used with hundreds of abuse survivors. These events were helpful in developing a counseling ministry with survivors of serious abuse.

My interest in counseling had been growing, especially in Thailand. In spite of – or because of – my post-war trauma, I developed quite a sensitivity in some areas, while I seemed to be like an "elephant" in other areas. This was only one of my problems. My anger could be so intense that people would get scared. This was one of the issues I had to face. It was not until I understood how the Lord could help us facing the chaos still present in some areas of my life that He gave me grace to bring order to those areas.

**The word of God, counseling and common sense.**

Often, reading the Bible, I would think: "In what counseling situation would this truth fit"? This gave me quite a reservoir of ideas how to help people.

I encountered the Biblical basis for sharing PowerfulPeace in Philippians 4:6-9, which I summarize as: "When we tell the Lord all our needs and concerns with thanksgiving, the peace of God will surround us like a wall". Also, the Old and New Testament teaching on Blessing had grown in my counseling ministry.

> Blessing is sharing God's good thoughts about people as a personal gift to them.

**Blessing**

We can bless each other with ´the peace of the Lord´. It is my impression that the more we live in this peace the more our blessings have power to enter the people we bless.

Traumas happen. The main question is how to face them. It is first necessary to allow God to decide if it is time to face something or if we can

Ik was bang als ik autoritaire figuren ontmoette en liet dat zien in mijn gedrag, vooral als ik langs de douane moes, pikten ze me er uit. Het was nooit bij me opgekomen dat dit misschien iets te maken had met de Tweede Wereldoorlog; tot in 1972…Na het lezen van een boek over emotionele genezing ging er als het ware een blikje met wormen bij mij open. Ik huilde drie dagen lang door de geschiedenis van mijn jeugd. De soldaat stond weer echt naast me. Ik zei tegen de Heer: „Jezus, ik weet dat ik een zendeling ben en ik moet vergeven, ik besluit dat met mijn hoofd te doen, maar ik kan het niet met mijn hart". Toen leek het dat God in de stilte zoiets zei: „Dat is oké Téo, kom naar de school van vergeving, ik zal het je leren. Als het te moeilijk is om iets onder ogen te zien, mag je de school verlaten en naar de speelplaats gaan. Als je klaar bent om een andere les onder ogen te zien, mag je terugkomen".

Deze woorden waren balsem voor mijn hart en werden een sleutelzin die ik bij honderden overlevers van misbruik heb gebruikt. Deze gebeurtenissen waren nuttig bij het ontwikkelen van een dienst van counseling aan degenen, die een ernstig misbruik hadden overleefd.

Mijn interesse in counseling was gaan groeien, vooral in Thailand. Ondanks - of dankzij- mijn naoorlogse trauma ontwikkelde ik op sommige terreinen een behoorlijke gevoeligheid, terwijl ik op andere terreinen net een „olifant" leek te zijn. Dit was slechts één van mijn problemen. Mijn woede kon zo intens zijn dat mensen bang werden. Dit was een van de problemen die ik onder ogen moest zien. Pas toen ik begreep hoe de Heer kan helpen om de chaos onder ogen te zien die in sommige delen van mijn leven nog steeds aanwezig was, gaf Hij me de genade om orde op zaken te stellen op die terreinen.

**Het woord van God, counseling en gezond verstand.**

Als ik de Bijbel las, dacht ik vaak: „In welke counseling-situatie zou deze waarheid passen"? Dit gaf me een heleboel ideeën om mensen te helpen.

Ik kwam de Bijbelse basis voor het delen van de PowerfulPeace tegen in Filippenzen 4:6-9, die

put it back into God's hands and choose to think of something else. Even when He does seem to say: "Yes, you can look at it", we may feel that it is still too much for us. God doesn´t want us to face anything that we decide we can´t handle. He will help us to find a way out of this situation (1 Cor.10 :13,14). The possibility of saying: "Lord, I find that this is too much, I give this back to you" helps a lot. This allows us to fine-tune the healing process, rather than having to shut down emotionally by whitewashing it or denying that anything bad has happened.

For me, thinking about emotional healing started in the early seventies. Luckily, I didn´t know that psychologists in those days said that it was entirely a question of the brain, you couldn´t change that. The Lord led me to bless brains especially and people commented that it helped them. The Lord led me also to bless "my internal children's home". He showed me that where I was wounded, I couldn´t grow, while other parts of my brain could mature. I discovered a 3, 5, 8, 12, 15 and 18-year old in me. I discovered also an ´old man´ inside my brain, talking way beyond my age. The more stressed I was, the lower my emotional-age reactions were.

Different ´emotional ages´ also affected my counseling work. Each age gave often their own comments on what a counselee would tell me, the young ones usually being more understanding, especially of the pain. The older ones were more critical. This caused a struggle in my mature mind to really hear my counselees. It required my utmost concentration to ignore these comments. God led me to ask the oldest one to help me. After some internal discussion, he agreed to take the whole internal family out for a walk, looking at the beauty of nature while I was counseling. I never forget the next counseling session that took place: it was so quiet in my brain. I could be there totally for this counselee, who left very grateful. Then I called the whole "internal family" back and thanked the 18- year one. He ultimately become a part of "my mature inner-team". Together we started to include the 15-year and so on. This process of healing took time! It wasn´t all done in one session.

ik samenvat als: „Als we de Heer al onze noden en zorgen met dankbaarheid vertellen, zal de vrede van God ons als een muur omringen". Ook de leer van het Oude en Nieuwe Testament over Zegening was in mijn dienst van counseling gegroeid.

> Zegening is het delen van Gods goede gedachten over mensen als een persoonlijk geschenk aan hen.

### Zegening

We kunnen elkaar zegenen met ‚de vrede van de Heer'. Ik heb de indruk dat hoe meer we in deze vrede leven, hoe meer onze zegeningen macht hebben om de mensen die we zegenen binnen te gaan.

Trauma's gebeuren. De belangrijkste vraag is hoe we ze onder ogen moeten zien. Het is allereerst nodig om God te laten beslissen of het tijd is om iets onder ogen te zien of om het weer in Gods handen te leggen en ervoor te kiezen om aan iets anders te denken. Zelfs als Hij lijkt te zeggen: „Ja, je kunt er naar kijken", kunnen we het gevoel hebben dat het nog steeds te veel voor ons is. God wil niet dat we iets onder ogen zien wat we niet aankunnen. Hij zal ons helpen een uitweg te vinden uit deze situatie (1 Kor.10 :13,14). De mogelijkheid om te zeggen: „Heer, ik vind dit te veel, ik geef dit terug" helpt veel. Dit stelt ons in staat om het genezingsproces te fine-tunen, in plaats van dat we het emotioneel moeten afsluiten door het wit te wassen of te ontkennen dat er iets ergs is gebeurd.

Voor mij begon het denken over emotionele genezing in het begin van de jaren zeventig. Gelukkig wist ik niet dat psychologen in die tijd zeiden dat het volledig een kwestie van de hersenen was, daar kon je niets aan veranderen. De Heer bracht me ertoe om vooral de hersenen te zegenen en de mensen merkten op dat het hen hielp. De Heer leidde me ook tot het zegenen van „mijn inwendige kindertehuis". Hij liet me zien dat waar ik gewond was, ik niet kon groeien, terwijl andere delen van mijn hersenen konden rijpen. Ik ontdekte een 3, 5, 8, 12, 15 en 18-jarige in mij. Ik ontdekte ook een ‚oude man' in mijn hersenen, die veel verder praatte

Once a pastor called me and asked me for advice for himself. "I have no problem reading the Bible as I prepare a sermon. When I want to read for myself, it just doesn't work. After reading one verse it seems as if ´my lights go out´". I found out that he had a serious accident when he was 5 years. That gave me an idea. I suggested the following: "Try to get Anne de Vries' book of Bible-stories book". I knew that it was a very blessed book, many children heard their parents reading these stories before they went to sleep. He replied: "We have one at home". I suggested that he ask his wife to read a story out of this Children´s Bible every evening and ‚to stop trying to have devotions alone'. He laughed and said that his wife would enjoy that. "She often makes comments that I act so childishly when I am stressed out". Three months later he called me again and told that now he could read his normal Bible on his own. His emotional age had grown as "he had learned to read".

Once I attended a service where someone gave a well-thought-through sermon. The picture in me grew that he had a very big head and that the rest of him was like a child. I took the courage to share that with him. The man burst out in tears: "That is me", he said. I was able encourage him with examples from my own life.

It was years later, in 2013 in Mumbai, India, that I passed by a Ferris-wheel offering a ´higher look` over the fairground. Unexpectedly, an internal voice said: "I want to get in there". I looked and noticed that it wasn´t in service. I told myself "No that isn´t possible, we won´t do that now". At once I felt a stamping right foot insisting. I realized it was again the eight-year old young boy in me. He was obviously not completely healed yet… He replied: "Then I want to go down the hill in a sleigh". I laughed out loud as it was close to 40°C, and told him that "As soon as I am back in Austria (where I lived at that time) and it has snowed, I will get a sleigh from somewhere and we go down the hill together". That happened 6 weeks later. It was such a joy to slide down that hill, big Téo with small Téo. I believe he has been healed more and now is older…

It was a shock for me to read in psychological magazines and books in the early nineties how dan mijn leeftijd. Hoe meer stress ik had, hoe lager mijn emotionele leeftijds-reacties waren.

Verschillende ´emotionele leeftijden´ hadden ook invloed op mijn counselingswerk. Elke leeftijd gaf vaak zijn eigen commentaar op wat een cliënt mij zou vertellen, waarbij de jongere leeftijden meestal meer begrip hadden voor de pijn. De ouderen waren kritischer. Dit veroorzaakte een worsteling in mijn volwassen geest om mijn cliënten echt te horen. Het vergde mijn uiterste concentratie om deze opmerkingen te negeren. God bracht me ertoe om de oudste te vragen me te helpen. Na wat interne discussie stemde hij ermee in om het hele interne gezin mee te nemen voor een wandeling, waarbij hij de schoonheid van de natuur bekeek terwijl ik counselde. Ik vergeet nooit de volgende counseling-sessie die plaatsvond: het was zo stil in mijn hersenen. Ik kon er helemaal bij zijn voor deze cliënt, die heel dankbaar vertrok. Toen riep ik de hele „interne familie" terug en bedankte de 18-jarige. Hij werd uiteindelijk een deel van „mijn volwassen inner-team". Samen zijn we begonnen met de 15 jaar en zo verder. Dit proces van genezing kostte tijd! Het werd niet allemaal in één sessie gedaan.

Ooit belde een predikant me en vroeg me om advies voor zichzelf. „Ik heb geen probleem met het lezen van de Bijbel terwijl ik een preek voorbereid. Als ik voor mezelf wil lezen, werkt het gewoon niet. Na het lezen van een vers lijkt het alsof ‚mijn lichten uit gaan'. Ik kwam er achter dat hij een ernstig ongeluk had toen hij 5 jaar oud was. Dat gaf me een idee. Ik stelde het volgende voor: „Probeer het bijbelverhalenboek van Anne de Vries te krijgen." Ik wist dat het een zeer gezegend boek was, veel kinderen hoorden hun ouders deze verhalen lezen voordat ze gingen slapen. Hij antwoordde: „We hebben er thuis een." Ik stelde voor dat hij zijn vrouw vroeg om elke avond een verhaal voor te lezen uit deze kinderbijbel en ‚te stoppen met het proberen om alleen maar devoties te hebben". Hij lachte en zei dat zijn vrouw dat leuk zou vinden. „Ze maakt vaak opmerkingen dat ik zo kinderachtig doe als ik gestrest ben". Drie maanden later belde hij me weer op en zei dat hij nu in zijn eentje zijn normale Bijbel kon le-

modern psychiatrists and psychologists like Bessel van der Kolk, Peter Levine and Barbara Rothschild were describing similar stories. They tell us that one doesn´t even have to know what has happened, we can just work in the here-and-now with what ´the body remembers`.

On March 3, 2019, I had an accident with my bike. I don´t remember anything what happened. I came to in the hospital, as they were working on a facial wound. My right upper arm was broken and they couldn´t put a cast on. I got heavy painkillers and seemed to be doing well. I discovered after a week that I got opiates to handle the pain. I didn´t want it and went in one day "cold turkey…".

The pain stayed. I could manage with 6-8 tablets Paracetamol per day. In June I visited a friend who had studied under Peter Levine. She asked me:" What is the last thing you remember before you woke up in the hospital"? I told her: "I have to cross the street and go to the left" … She asked me to do that again in my mind. I repeated that 4 times and felt the pain was somewhat less. The next morning, I woke up without pain. I forgot to take Paracetamol and haven´t taken one tablet since. There are many videos on the Internet from Dr. Peter Levine that explain what happened.

**Facing stress**

When we are stressed, we need to see if we react like a younger person. I have found that stress makes us in general react on a lower emotional age. I have observed that couples in stress often treat each other as small children. It is helpful to ask: "At what age do you sense you are now"? It is also possible that one much older internal person is talking to the `little child` in their partner. Or one may be blaming oneself for something that was done. We are adults, so we need to talk to that younger part of our brain and love it, rather than saying: for instance: "Stupid you, once again you just had to be sure that everyone knew that you were in the meeting". We need to tell the younger parts of ourselves that God loves them too and find out what makes them react. Then we can decide to function as an adult rather than as a child. I have often found that traumatic experiences

zen. Zijn emotionele leeftijd was gegroeid toen „hij had leren lezen".

Ik heb een keer een dienst bijgewoond waar iemand een goed doordachte preek hield. Het beeld in mij groeide dat hij een heel groot hoofd had en dat de rest van hem als een kind was. Ik nam de moed om dat met hem te delen. De man barstte in tranen uit: „Dat ben ik", zei hij. Ik kon hem aanmoedigen met voorbeelden uit mijn eigen leven.

Het was jaren later, in 2013 in Mumbai, India, dat ik langs een reuzenrad kwam dat een ‚hogere blik‘ op de kermis bood. Onverwacht zei een interne stem: „Ik wil daar naar binnen". Ik keek en merkte dat het niet in bedrijf was. Ik zei tegen mezelf: „Nee dat kan niet, dat doen we nu niet". Ik voelde meteen een stampende rechtervoet aandringen. Ik realiseerde me dat het weer de achtjarige jongen in mij was. Hij was duidelijk nog niet helemaal genezen… Hij antwoordde: „Dan wil ik in een slee de heuvel af". Ik lachte hardop, want het was bijna 40°C, en zei hem dat „Zodra ik terug ben in Oostenrijk (waar ik toen woonde) en het heeft gesneeuwd, ik ergens een slee vandaan zal halen en we samen de heuvel afgaan". Dat gebeurde 6 weken later. Het was zo'n vreugde om van die heuvel af te glijden, grote Téo met kleine Téo. Ik geloof dat hij meer genezen is en nu ouder is…

Het was voor mij een schok om begin jaren negentig in psychologische tijdschriften en boeken te lezen hoe moderne psychiaters en psychologen als Bessel van der Kolk, Peter Levine en Barbara Rothschild soortgelijke verhalen beschreven. Ze vertellen ons dat men niet eens hoeft te weten wat er is gebeurd, we kunnen gewoon in het hier en nu werken met wat ‚het lichaam zich herinnert‘.

Op 3 maart 2019 kreeg ik een ongeluk met mijn fiets. Ik herinner me niets meer van wat er is gebeurd. Ik kwam naar het ziekenhuis, omdat ze bezig waren met een gezichtswond. Mijn rechter bovenarm was gebroken en ze konden er geen gips op doen. Ik kreeg zware pijnstillers en leek het goed te doen. Ik ontdekte na een week dat ik opiaten kreeg om de pijn te behandelen. Ik wilde het niet en ging op een dag „cold tur-

are a major reason for the existence of a lower emotional age.

The opposite is also true. Once in Thailand, someone told me with appreciative about her sermon he had heard on a cassette-tape, given by my father… As I knew that he could speak only a few words of English, I asked him what the topic was. He shared the topic and I recognized it as one of my sermons. He exploded when I told him. He said: "That is impossible, the person I heard seemed to be at least 65…". It seems that the impulse to grow goes on: when it can't work in one area of our life, it seems to promote growth in other areas, even beyond our age…

### PowerfulPeace

We need to live in PowerfulPeace. Both to know and experience that Jesus is really there can have such a powerful impact upon one´s soul. This is what I have found in the RC Church, especially in the Eucharist. I meet the Living Jesus when I receive the bread and the wine. Mother Theresa of Calcutta knew the same, as she insisted that every one of her sisters joins her in one hour of worship before the Most Holy and partake of His life in the communion. For me, this beats every other form of seeking inner quietness.

### Blessing anger

The need for forgiveness is so great, but to truly forgive is often so hard, due to the locked-up anger about what people did to us. For many it has been such a difference to be allowed to be angry, but to ask Jesus to come into the anger and let him clean the sin out of it (Eph. 4:26).

### Gratefulness

As I look back at the opening of this article, I am grateful that the Lord has used me throughout the years, in spite of my failures and obvious problems (especially locked-up frozen anger). I am still in a process of healing. Gratefulness is thus my personal reaction to the many blessings God gave me I my life. About 20 years ago I met the first person who battled with pedophilia. I thank God that I could be of help for him as well. Ten years ago, I thanked God for the first time that He allowed this soldier to threaten me. Without it, I wouldn´t have had the ministry to the abused.

key…".

De pijn bleef. Ik kon het redden met 6-8 tabletten Paracetamol per dag. In juni bezocht ik een vriendin die onder Peter Levine had gestudeerd. Ze vroeg me: „Wat is het laatste wat je je herinnert voordat je wakker werd in het ziekenhuis"? Ik vertelde het haar: „Ik moet de straat oversteken en naar links gaan" ... Ze vroeg me dat nog eens in mijn hoofd te doen. Ik herhaalde dat 4 keer en voelde dat de pijn wat minder was. De volgende ochtend werd ik wakker zonder pijn. Ik vergat Paracetamol in te nemen en heb sindsdien geen enkel tablet meer genomen. Er zijn veel video's op het internet van Dr. Peter Levine die verklaren wat er is gebeurd.

### Geconfronteerd met stress

Als we gestrest zijn, moeten we kijken of we reageren als een jongere persoon. Ik heb gemerkt dat stress ons in het algemeen doet reageren op een lagere emotionele leeftijd. Ik heb geobserveerd dat stellen in stress elkaar vaak als kleine kinderen behandelen. Het is nuttig om te vragen: „Op welke leeftijd voel je dat je nu bent"? Het is ook mogelijk dat een veel oudere inwendige mens in gesprek is met het `kleine kind` in zijn partner. Of men kan zichzelf de schuld geven van iets dat gebeurd is. We zijn volwassen, dus we moeten met dat jongere deel van onze hersenen praten en er van houden, in plaats van te zeggen: bijvoorbeeld: „Domme jij, je moest weer eens zeker weten dat iedereen wist dat je in de vergadering zat." We moeten de jongere delen van onszelf vertellen dat God ook van hen houdt en uitzoeken waarom ze zo reageren. Dan kunnen we besluiten om als volwassene te functioneren in plaats van als kind. Ik heb vaak gemerkt dat traumatische ervaringen een belangrijke reden zijn voor het bestaan van een lagere emotionele leeftijd.

Het tegenovergestelde is ook waar. Eenmaal in Thailand sprak iemand mij met waardering over een preek die hij had gehoord op een cassettebandje, gegeven door mijn vader... Omdat ik wist dat hij maar een paar woorden Engels kon spreken, vroeg ik hem wat het onderwerp was. Hij deelde het onderwerp en ik herkende het als een van mijn preken. Hij ontplofte toen ik het hem vertelde. Hij zei: „Dat is onmogelijk,

**A growing rise in ministering to the abused**

As the reports about child abuse were coming more into focus in the eighties, I realized that we had to multiply this teaching about PowerfulPeace. In the late 1980ties I met Dr. Vibeke Möller. She heard me speak about Early Childhood Sexual Abuse. She became so angry about it. I told her: "Vibeke, I bless your anger, use it as a positive force to change". She did and with power she helped in setting up a Danish organization against sexual abuse, we organized a summer school together that grew into a program that took four years.

About 10 years ago I read that the Danish Psychotherapeutic Society was unhappy because they couldn´t help Muslims. ´We need Muslim therapists´ was their conclusion. I read that and said: "The same is the case for Christians". Research had shown that a counselor´s personal worldview tends to become the worldview of their clients. This made Christians also hesitant to go to a secular psychotherapist who believes in scientism (philosophical conclusions out of scientific facts in contrast with Biblical teaching). We asked the help of the Danish Psychotherapeutic Society and they gave us the requirements for upgrading our pastoral summer school. This enabled us to become members. We changed the name of our course into IPSICC: International Psychotherapeutic School in Christian Culture - ipsicc.org - This school flourishes now and became a way to share the PowerfulPeace concept in ministry, helping people to face what God wants them to remember. We need to empower counselees to be able to handle chaotic feelings and crazy realities before they actually surface. "Don´t dig into the past until the right time comes" is my mantra. One way to do this is by using the concept of PowerfulPeace. The arrows of the Enemy can still wound us, but the poison of bitterness is taken out of them as they pass through the invisible "Wall of Peace".

**Branching out**

At the request of Open Doors, there are plans to open an IPSICC school in Syria in 2021 with Vibeke plus teachers coming from Egypt. I was again in Egypt 2 years ago to celebrate their 10

de persoon die ik hoorde leek minstens 65 te zijn..." Het lijkt erop dat de impuls om te groeien doorgaat: als het niet kan werken op één gebied van ons leven, lijkt het de groei te bevorderen op andere gebieden, zelfs buiten onze leeftijd...

**Powerfulpeace**

We moeten in PowerfulPeace leven. Zowel om te weten als om te ervaren dat Jezus er echt is, kan zo'n krachtige invloed hebben op iemands ziel. Dit is wat ik in de RK kerk heb gevonden, vooral in de eucharistieviering. Ik ontmoet de Levende Jezus als ik het brood en de wijn ontvang. Moeder Theresa van Calcutta wist dat ook, want zij stond erop dat elk van haar zusters zich bij haar zou aansluiten in een uur van aanbidding voor het Allerheiligste en deel zou nemen aan Zijn leven in de communie. Voor mij is dit beter dan elke andere vorm van zoeken naar innerlijke rust.

**Zegenende woede**

De behoefte aan vergeving is zo groot, maar echt vergeven is vaak zo moeilijk, vanwege de opgesloten woede over wat de mensen ons hebben aangedaan. Voor velen maakte het zo'n verschil om boos te mogen zijn, maar om Jezus te vragen om in de woede te komen en Hem de zonde eruit te laten zuiveren (Ef. 4:26).

**Dankbaarheid**

Als ik terugkijk op de opening van dit artikel, ben ik dankbaar dat de Heer mij door de jaren heen heeft gebruikt, ondanks mijn mislukkingen en overduidelijke problemen (vooral opgesloten bevroren woede). Ik ben nog steeds in een proces van genezing. Dankbaarheid is dus mijn persoonlijke reactie op de vele zegeningen die God mij in mijn leven heeft gegeven. Ongeveer 20 jaar geleden ontmoette ik de eerste persoon die met pedofilie vocht. Ik dank God dat ik ook voor hem een hulp kon zijn. Tien jaar geleden dankte ik God voor het eerst dat Hij deze soldaat toestond mij te bedreigen. Zonder dat zou ik de dienst aan de misbruikten niet hebben gehad.

**Een groeiende toename in de dienst aan de misbruikten...**

Toen de berichten over kindermisbruik in de

years of existence. Dr. FetFet ElKharat told me that Muslim students wouldn´t join in the PowerfulPeace sessions. They got together to developed something that also works for them. An experience of inner peace is the key. God works also in Muslim culture.

It is exciting to see the Lord at work and more and more Christians who are not afraid of science but love it and know how to reply to scientism (philosophical conclusions out of scientific facts).

**The Corona Pandemic Crisis**

I am writing this story about PowerfulPeace while we are in the Netherlands, right in the midst of the Corona Pandemic Crisis. People are getting rather scared. We need now again this Wall of Peace around us, in order that no news, no death of people, even loved ones, will shake our faith. Suffering isn´t easy…To know that Jesus is with us and suffers with us sweetens the pain. Thank God that there is the Resurrection of the dead… That, one day, death and destruction will be overcome through the Final Victory of Jesus.
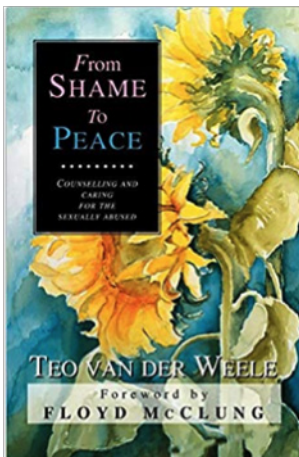
T.J. van der Weele

**From Shame to Peace**

Important Publishing, Dordrecht, Netherlands

jaren tachtig meer in de belangstelling kwamen, realiseerde ik me dat we dit onderricht over de Powerfulpeace moesten uitbreiden. Eind jaren tachtig ontmoette ik Dr. Vibeke Möller. Ze hoorde me spreken over seksueel misbruik in de vroege kinderjaren. Ze werd er zo boos over. Ik zei tegen haar: „Vibeke, ik zegen je boosheid, gebruik het als een positieve kracht om te veranderen." Dat deed ze en met kracht hielp ze bij het opzetten van een Deense organisatie tegen seksueel misbruik, we organiseerden samen een zomerschool die uitgroeide tot een programma dat vier jaar duurde.

Ongeveer 10 jaar geleden las ik dat de Deense Psychotherapeutische Vereniging ongelukkig was omdat ze geen moslims konden helpen. We hebben moslimtherapeuten nodig' was hun conclusie. Ik las dat en zei: „Hetzelfde geldt voor christenen." Onderzoek had aangetoond dat het persoonlijke wereldbeeld van een hulpverlener de neiging heeft om het wereldbeeld van zijn cliënten te worden. Dit maakte dat christenen ook aarzelden om naar een seculiere psychotherapeut te gaan die gelooft in scientisme (filosofische conclusies uit wetenschappelijke feiten die in gaan tegen de Bijbelse leer). We vroegen de hulp van de Deense Psychotherapeutische Vereniging en zij gaven ons de voorwaarden voor het opwaarderen van onze pastorale zomerschool. Dit stelde ons in staat om lid te worden. We veranderden de naam van onze cursus in IPSICC: International Psychotherapeutic School in Christian Culture - ipsicc.org - Deze school bloeit nu op en werd een manier om het PowerfulPeace concept te delen, in de dienst aan mensen om onder ogen te zien wat God wil dat ze zich herinneren. We moeten de cliënten in staat stellen om met chaotische gevoelens en gekke werkelijkheden om te gaan voordat ze daadwerkelijk aan de oppervlakte komen. „Graaf niet in het verleden tot het juiste moment" is mijn mantra. Een manier om dit te doen is door gebruik te maken van het concept van PowerfulPeace. De pijlen van de Vijand kunnen ons nog steeds verwonden, maar het gif van de bitterheid wordt er uit gehaald als ze door de onzichtbare „Muur van de Vrede" gaan.

### Uitbreiding

Op verzoek van Open Doors zijn er plannen om in 2021 een IPSICC-school in Syrië te openen met Vibeke plus docenten uit Egypte. Ik was 2 jaar geleden opnieuw in Egypte om hun 10 jarig bestaan te vieren. Dr. FetFet ElKharat vertelde me dat er geen moslimstudenten zouden deelnemen aan de PowerfulPeace sessies. Ze kwamen samen om iets te ontwikkelen dat ook voor hen werkt. Een ervaring van innerlijke vrede is de sleutel. God werkt ook in de moslimcultuur. Het is spannend om de Heer aan het werk te zien en steeds meer christenen die niet bang zijn voor de wetenschap maar er wel van houden en weten hoe ze moeten reageren op het sciëntisme (filosofische conclusies uit wetenschappelijke feiten).

### De Corona Pandemie Crisis

Ik schrijf dit verhaal over PowerfulPeace terwijl we in Nederland zijn, midden in de Corona Pandemie Crisis. De mensen worden nogal bang. We hebben nu weer deze Muur van Vrede om ons heen nodig, zodat geen nieuws, geen dood van mensen, zelfs niet van geliefden, ons geloof aan het wankelen brengt. Lijden is niet gemakkelijk...Om te weten dat Jezus bij ons is en met ons lijdt, verzacht de pijn. Dank God dat de Opstanding van de doden er is... Dat op een dag de dood en de vernietiging zullen worden overwonnen door de Laatste Overwinning van Jezus.

## Peter Milnes (Australia)
# Comment to
# "The wall of Peace"

**PowerfulPeace**

In this article, Mr Teo van der Weele explained the basic premise to his ministry of Powerful-Peace (International Psychotherapeutic School in Christian Culture). During the harrowing years he spent in war-torn Germany, he experienced both trauma and peace. On one occasion when he was shivering in fear after narrowly surviving bullets in an air raid, the prayer of his mother brought him a profound experience of peace and the presence of Jesus. After the war, both his parents were interned and he and his brother were sent to a children's home where he suffered sexual abuse. These traumatic events had a profound effect on him. Although he became a completed theological training and became a missionary in Thailand, his past continued to haunt him.

My training as a Transactional Analyst found congruence in his description of the rage and anger that would erupt whenever he was stressed. Unconscious scripts containing decisions made during his difficult childhood would have been cathected at times of stress - the more stressed he felt, the lower he found his emotional and behavioural age. According to Transactional Analysis (McNeel, 2010; 2016), Mr van der Weele's unconscious script was formed during his boyhood trauma. The Injunctive messages ("believable falsehoods") had "limiting and prohibitive power" overt him that continued to inform his behaviour into adulthood - either as 'despairing' flight responses where he resigned, acquiesced and despaired, or as 'defiant' fight responses that were his best attempts at health and resilience at the time. These decisions appeared to work in the short-term but ultimately his unconscious anger was both self-limiting and self-destructive in his coping behaviours - ranging between resigned despair and anger. Mr van der Weele's redecision was "a new belief based on better data" that was rein-

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**Former contribution in our eJournal by Peter you can see her:**
https://emcapp.ignis.de/11/#p=35

forced through through resolving activity where he created new habits and new beliefs about himself (McNeel, 2016:65). The power of his unconscious script was broken by his conscious re-decision.

In Mr van der Weele's case, the re-decision process focused on learning to forgive – a process that reminded me of the Enright Forgiveness Paradigm (Enright, 2000; Sutton, 2014) of Uncovering, Deciding, Working and Deepening.
In the Uncovering Phase, Mr van der Weele was able to confront the offense (particularly the abuse) and through therapy was able to make an objective clarification of who did what to whom and to uncover the effect that it had on his life. He could not forgive if the offense had

not occurred or had been forgotten. In his case he needed to feel the pain of the event, acknowledge the layers of pain and anger caused by the offence (shame, guilt, obsessive thoughts, life changes, and changes in outlook) that had resulted from the abuse.

- His freely chosen Decision Phase required him to understand of the true nature of forgiveness and to make a commitment to forgive. This did not mean forgetting what had happened or saying that it was OK, but it was an active decision to begin a process of freeing himself of his liminal "prison of unforgiveness".
- The Work Phase required him to work on trying to understand the offender, himself and the nature of the relationship between them. This required a reframing the stories about the event so that he could see the offender in a new light. At the same time as seeing the abuse for what it was and realizing that he was not to blame, he came to a place where he was able to having empathy for the offender. Enright (2000) pointed out that thinking differently about the offender precedes feeling more positive and becoming more empathic and compassionate. This process of beneficence cannot be rushed.
- The Deepening Phase. In Mr van der Weele's case, he was able to use his experience positively in the final Deepening Phase when he realized that there was meaning in suffering. He felt more connected with others and gained a renewed purpose in life. Freed from the emotional prison of unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment and anger, his ability to forgive was deepened to the point that he was able to have empathic regard in helping another abuser through his ministry of blessing others. The ministry of PowerfulPeace is based on blessing others that brings to mind the powerful words of Christ:
- Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:28 KJV)
- This is a challenge to us all.

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Kelly O'Donnell, Heidi Pidcoke, Michèle Lewis O'Donnell (USA / Switzerland)

# Engaging in Humanity Care: Stress, Trauma, and Humanitarian Work

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Palestinian Refugees in Yarmouk, Syria (2014) UN Photo, UNRWA

"I used to think that I was kind of hardened to suffering and misery...You learn to deal with it and hold it at bay while you are working. It's when you're alone that it creeps up on you." Arès (2002, pp. 117)

In this article we focus on the wellbeing and effectiveness (WE) of staff in the humanitarian sector. More specifically, in Part One we highlight stress and trauma for humanitarian workers and in Part Two we share perspectives and resources to support humanitarian workers. We draw from our work as Christians in mental health and member care and in the context of our broad, multi-sectoral involvements for "engaging in humanity care." Keep in mind the personal and organizational benefits when everyone involved in the humanitarian sector stay resilient and healthy. This includes administrators, managers, leaders, volunteers, international and local/national staff, family members, teams, organizations, and the helpers themselves. This article is by no means comprehensive, so take a look at the resources at the end of the article for additional information (we especially recommend Helping the Helpers: 50 Resources for Humanitarian Workers and the many resources developed by the Headington Institute).

**Numbers at a Glance**

- 200+ million people needing humanitarian assistance (ALNAP)
- 25% of people in need from 3 countries: Yemen, Syria, Turkey (ALNAP)
- 70+ million people forcibly displaced with 25M+ international refugees (UNHCR)
- $40 billion needed in funding annually, $25+ billion received, short $15 billion (ALNAP)
- 570,000 humanitarian aid workers—over 90% are national staff (ALNAP)
- 14 million Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers worldwide (IFRC)

Despite its ubiquitous presence, whether in crisis zones such as Syria, Yemen or the Congo, or day-to-day existence in both the developing and industrialized worlds, stress and trauma take their toll on people's lives. It is the same in the humanitarian sector. As mental health professionals working for dozens of years in the mission and humanitarian sectors, we have observed our own vulnerability– and that of others—to the debilitating impacts of stress and trauma. One resource we regularly use and recommend is the CHOPS Inventory, a self-assessment tool which explores ten areas of stress in terms of struggles, successes and strategies (latest version, Tone et al., 2020).

Stress, of course, is an entirely normal daily experience. It can motivate us to develop new strengths and skills. We are reminded, for instance, of the relevance of the Peace Corps refrain: "This is the toughest job you will ever love."

For humanitarians, 'common stressors' arise from a wide array of conditions such as hazardous living environments, relationship or communication issues, family problems back home, lack of privacy, frequent transitions, work travel, and re-entry. Other typical stress factors are lack of leisure activities, boredom, uncertainty about work contracts, or having to deal with personal health problems. Humanitarian operations and organizations, large or small, all encounter such stressors.



Humanitarian Workers in Yemen, International Committee of the Red Cross

# PART ONE: TYPES OF STRESS
## 1. Cumulative Stress—Dealing with Ongoing Daily Realities

"What pushes me to act as a humanitarian?...It's possible [for people] to go two days without eating. But if you have water, you can survive." "Of course we feel homesick, we are away from our families. But this is the humanitarian world and we have to accept how it is." "Why would anyone kill a child?" "All these little girls [sexually abused] that came to us. And I have my own girl… [But helping] is the greatest joy that I can have." Voices from the Field, United Nations (August, 2014)

One of the most debilitating, prevalent, and often unrecognized types of stress in humanitarian work is 'cumulative stress'. It results from the prolonged exposure to work and non-work stressors, and is intensified when one feels unable to help (Carter, 1999). This type of stress is a core contributor to the following mental health issues commonly experienced by both international and national/local staff, at a much higher rate than in the general population: depression, generalized anxiety, substance dependence and abuse, and burnout. (e.g., Strohmeier, Scholte, and Ager, 2018).

In disasters and armed conflict, the impacts of stress can escalate quickly, exhausting one's normal

coping mechanisms. The physical symptoms can be overtiredness, diarrhea, constipation and head-aches. Some emotional results are anxiety, frustration, guilt, depression, and creeping cynicism. Cognitive impacts can affect one's job performance: forgetfulness or poor concentration. The results in personal relationships may be feeling isolated, resentful or intolerant of others. One common but serious result of incapacitating, cumulative stress is 'burnout', evidenced by severe emotional distress and behavioral dysfunction.

Unhealthy behavioral changes include increased intake of alcohol, caffeine, drugs, tobacco and addictions, as we have frequently observed. Some aid workers, for example, may drink coffee throughout the day and follow this with an extended "happy hour" into the night. This is typically "socially-acceptable" yet it is a warning of unacknowledged and mismanaged cumulative stress.

Stress can look different in everyone, and it is helpful to identify what circumstances in life can contribute to stress. How each individual responds to stress depends on his/her background, values, experiences and current level of perceived support. A large majority of those who work in humanitarian settings are able to eventually cope after violent traumatic events. At times it is the sense of betrayal from those that are meant to support and protect that leads to symptoms of ongoing emotional and mental distress.

One of the authors, working with victims of terrorist attacks, heard that after the shock had worn off, clients struggled with lingering feelings of resentment, hopelessness, apathy and anger. Oftentimes, these were caused not by the brutal attack but by the failure of their organizations and superiors to provide adequate support and follow-through.

## 2. Traumatic Stress: Managing Responses to Conflicts and Calamities

"I had been a reporter for nearly a dozen years when I met Sarajevo. Nothing could prepare me, really, for its deadly game of chance….no one ever spoke much about the personal armor needed to weather a war...the emotional risks writing about war…There was no time or place to tell the private battles waged to capture the trauma on paper." Spolar (2002, pp. 301-302)

'Traumatic stress' is caused by events that are shocking and emotionally overwhelming: the constant snipers targeting civilians in Sarajevo during the Bosnian war, the deliberate shelling of crowded market places in Somalia by rival combatants, managing nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, or dealing with trapped earthquake victims in Haiti or Mexico. These stressors can and often do lead to more serious psychological difficulties. Some of these emerge relatively promptly; but delayed expression can also appear years later.

For some, their responses to major stressors can be mild and manageable, as was the case of a team that two of the authors helped debrief who were held captive for weeks by a terrorist group. For others the impact can be extremely strong, even disabling. In one incident, a major international humanitarian organization in West Africa had to pull out an entire team because of severe psychological stress and secondary trauma brought about by dealing non-stop with brutally savaged victims of violence, including women who had been repeatedly raped.

### Single Incident Trauma or Critical Incident Trauma
People can often have strong reactions following a single traumatic event. These reactions are usually temporary. Some of the common reactions during the first hours after an event may be:
--Shock, disbelief, feeling of being overwhelmed

--Strong emotional reaction or detachment
--Confusion, difficulty in making decisions
--Physical reactions: nausea, dizziness, intense fatigue, sleeping difficulties, muscle tremors.

Additional reactions during the first days and weeks may be:
--Persistent, intrusive recollections (flashbacks) of the incident, nightmares
--Tendency to avoid certain aspects of the incident (places, thoughts, emotions, activities)
--Hyper-alertness accompanied by a startle re ex, quick temper and sleeping problems.

All these stress reactions, however worrying they may be, are normal consequences of a critical incident and a high stress level. Even the most robust, experienced humanitarian personnel can experience them. No one is immune to stress, no matter how resilient. However, if symptoms are particularly intense (acute) and persistent, or if suicidal thoughts and feelings are present, it is important to seek out professional help so that the symptoms don't worsen or develop into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
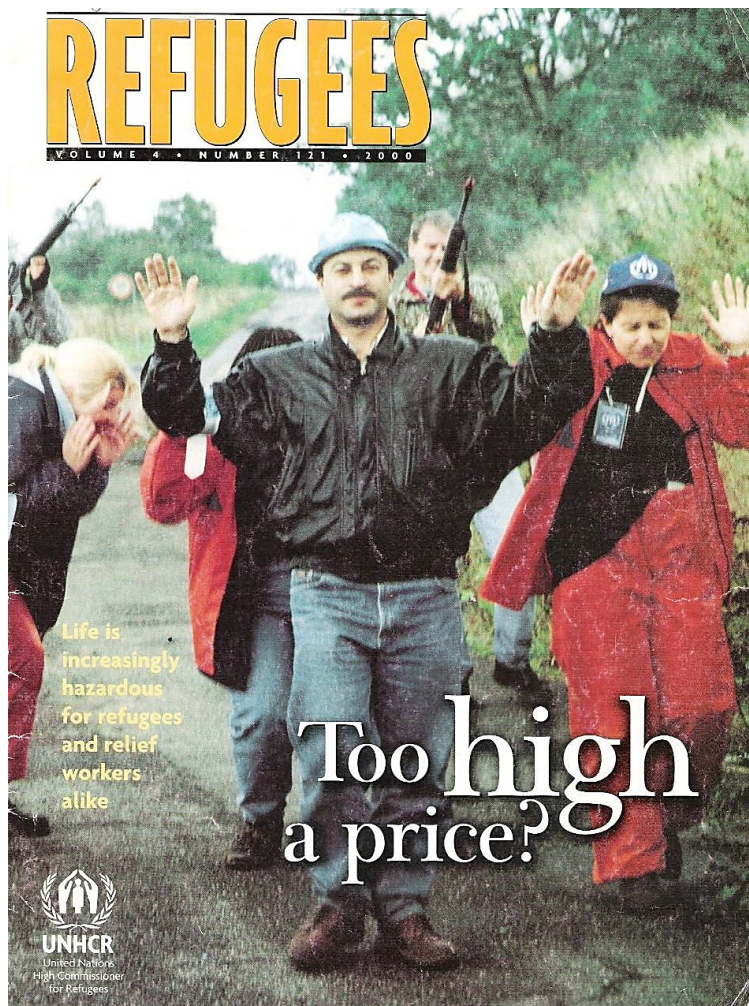


## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders

"When it happens to you there is no time for thinking, no time for praying. My brain went automatic, rewinding quickly the life I just left behind…Then a process of dehumanization started that day…317 days of captivity…23 hours and 45 minutes of darkness every day…" Cochetel (2014)
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can occur after exposure to extreme stressors (including on-

going or intermittent exposure) where there is the threat to oneself or others of death, serious injury or violence. It is accompanied by intense fear and feelings of helplessness, with distressing recollections, dreams or flashbacks along with hyper-vigilance and avoidance of anything that reminds one of the stressor. These symptoms usually occur within one month of experiencing the traumatic event, although 'delayed expression' of symptoms can also occur. PTSD is most often associated with at least one other major mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and alcohol or substance abuse.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the International Classification of Diseases-11 (ICD-11, 2018), "is a disorder that may develop following exposure to an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events. It is characterized by all of the following:

1. re-experiencing the traumatic event or events in the present in the form of vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks, or nightmares. These are typically accompanied by strong or overwhelming emotions, particularly fear or horror, and strong physical sensations;
2. avoidance of thoughts and memories of the event or events, or avoidance of activities, situations, or people reminiscent of the event or events; and
3. persistent perceptions of heightened current threat, for example as indicated by hypervigilance or an enhanced startle reaction to stimuli such as unexpected noises. The symptoms persist for at least several weeks and cause significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning."

Uncomplicated PTSD is sometimes used to describe PTSD that involves the above three symptom criteria. Co-morbid PTSD is a term used when PTSD is associated with at least one other major mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and alcohol or substance abuse.

**Vicarious or Secondary Trauma**
Humanitarian workers can predict to a certain degree that their role has inherent risks. However, the cumulative exposure to stories of unbearable pain and tragedy can have a profound impact on coping mechanisms. Vicarious trauma is caused by exposure to often large numbers of traumatized and vulnerable populations. Even when humanitarian personnel have had no direct exposure to traumatic events, there is a risk of vicarious trauma. Hearing detailed, and at times harrowing, stories can sometimes cause severe distress and disturbance that can impact daily functioning.

The humanitarian worker's sense of overwhelming helplessness can be compounded by moral injury when working with victims of war, torture, abuse and rape (for more information on moral injury see this presentation by Sonya Norman, US National Center for PTSD). Vicarious trauma is often linked with compassion fatigue and burnout. The latter is related to an accumulation of chronic, unresolved stress over time, from overwork, too high expectations/disappointments, exposure to problems, poor self-care and social support, etc. leading to incapacitating emotional distress and behavioral dysfunction.

Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, according to ICD-11, "is a disorder that may develop following exposure to an event or series of events of an extreme and prolonged or repetitive nature that is experienced as extremely threatening or horrific and from which escape is difficult or impossible (e.g., torture, slavery, genocide campaigns, prolonged domestic violence, repeated childhood sexual or physical abuse). The disorder is characterized by the core symptoms of PTSD; that is, all diagnostic requirements for PTSD have been met at some point during the course of the disorder. In addition, complex PTSD is characterized by:

1. severe and pervasive problems in affect regulation;
2. persistent beliefs about oneself as diminished, defeated or worthless, accompanied by deep and pervasive feelings of shame, guilt or failure related to the stressor; and
3. persistent difficulties in sustaining relationships and in feeling close to others. The disturbance causes significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning."

**Dissociation for Coping**

In the face of extreme emotional pain, a survival mechanism—dissociation—can be activated that shuts down the capacity to feel to varying degrees. Typical dissociative behaviors include emotional numbing, lack of awareness of or inability to connect with feelings/ emotions and/or sensations. As trauma symptoms become more widely understood, the role dissociation plays can sometimes be undetected. The function of dissociative behaviors is to allow a person to escape, avoid or even get rid of unpleasant personal experiences. These are often situations that would make an individual feel fear, anxiety, pain, disgust, shame and guilt, among others. Signs of dissociation include:

- Spacing out, day-dreaming
- Glazed look, staring
- Mind going blank
- Mind wandering
- Sense of world not being real
- Watching self from outside
- Detachment from self or identity
- Out of body experience
- Disconnected from surroundings
- Amnesia
- Inability to feel some part or parts of your body.

If a humanitarian worker is attending to vulnerable populations in a dissociated state, the possibility to cause further harm to self and others can be high. And yet, it is rare to find organizations that provide routine checks for symptoms of dissociation for staff working in vulnerable settings. A tool that is easily used to assess for dissociation is the Dissociative Experiences Scale (Carlson and Putnam, 1993).

One of the best interventions when working with dissociation is to provide assistance in staying in the present moment. Having the person who is experiencing dissociation smell something with a strong odor, such as coffee or mint; asking them to sing; or name a list of objects/colors they can see around them, all contribute to supporting the dissociated person in coming back to the here and now. Further resources are found also in providing safety and soothing. Encouraging the person to take off their shoes and feel their feet on the ground while placing a hand on their heart and abdomen is another very effective tool.

# PART TWO:
# PERSPECTIVES AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT
## 1. Resilience and Spirituality

"There will come a time, if you pursue this career for long, when a profound lack of understanding will threaten to sweep away your actions, beliefs, achievements, and even reason for being. Knowing this challenge will come, and ensuring that there are close friends who can hear your questions without harming you, is . . . essential." Fawcett (2003, cited in McKay, 2010, page 11)

Image source unknown

Resilience, the ability to engage with and grow through life's challenges and adversities, is necessary to maintain one's health and effectiveness while working in crisis situations. Eriksson et al. researched stress, trauma, and burnout for World Vision field staff from over 30 countries. Their findings emphasize the need for resilience:

"Staff need to have 'healthy personal resilience' in order to survive and in order to continue contributing to the critical work of their organizations... for each of the mental health risk adjustment measures (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and burnout) 30-50% of staff scored in the moderate to high-risk range. This is a significant number of people who are working and ‹surviving› while experiencing considerable emotional distress. These staff may not be incapacitated by these symptoms presently, but we cannot deny the effects that depression, burnout, and PTSD can have on relationships, work, and personal health. An NGO›s commitment to people includes the welfare of beneficiaries around the world, but it also includes the well-being of staff who commit their lives to serving and saving others." (p.95)

Fortunately, resilience can be developed. It is based on and supported by five key areas: personal character strengths; personal core beliefs/values including a sense of purpose/meaning and faith/God;

ongoing social support from family, friends, and colleagues; coping skills for self-care and work-life balance; and staff care/personnel programs. The mental health and resilience of personnel in humanitarian operations significantly impacts the effectiveness and success of their interventions, especially if their terms of reference include the protection of civilians. If humanitarian personnel themselves, as helpers, are chronically stressed and traumatized (often without being fully aware of their condition), their productivity and relationships will begin to decline, 'burnout' can develop, and, in some scenarios, abusive behaviors towards others can occur. People who are sent to do good can thus become people who do harm.

It is vital for all those in humanitarian work to be trained to develop and/or to maintain good social, coping, and helping skills before being deployed. Further, humanitarian personnel must learn to recognize early signs of stress and trauma, assess the severity of their own or their colleagues' symptoms, and be given a clear guide in how to proceed when follow-up is needed.

For people in humanitarian work, core beliefs and values (human worth and dignity, sense of duty) along with a strong personal faith and spirituality (transcendent purpose, meaning, hope) can be foundational to motivation ("calling") and resilience. Less discussed, but deeply impactful, are the thoughts and feelings which challenge one's spirituality or core beliefs about God, humans, and life. Humanitarian workers witness and wrestle with some of life's extremes—violence, death, misery, injustice—which can lead to disillusionment and shattered ideals.

Notice two factors in Fawcett's quote at the opening of Part Two, which are essential to a positive outcome when facing such anguish : 1) "knowing the challenge will come"—realizing it is inevitable, even normative, can help one begin to process the difficult emotions and 2) "close friends who can hear your questions without harming you". Investing in enduring friendships is one of the best ways to cope with the spiritual challenges of humanitarian work. One thing is certain, humanitarian work will change you on the inside and how you experience your faith and spirituality. "Humanitarian work is a profession that carries with it huge potential for spiritual disruption on the one hand and spiritual growth on the other." (McKay, 2010, page 7).

## 2. Care and Support of National Staff in Humanitarian Work

"A full local staff support program will need to consider the practical conditions of life—food, housing , job security, education, health, insurance, and so on. Psychological support may be required. Counseling services, based on local cultural practices, will almost certainly be needed. Spirituality, the need for a person to meet with God, must be central with understanding/respect being shown towards previous religious experiences." Fawcett (2002, page 285)

As the nature of international humanitarian work continues to change in the direction of more involvement and leadership by local partners, it is imperative that organizations work with national staff to co-create and develop culturally sensitive support programs. This means that those who will both implement and benefit from such programs need to design them from the outset. Most likely this requires a planned process to identify and define what is "stress"--or idioms of stress--and "psychological trauma" in the local culture, how it impacts local staff at a personal and organizational level, how it is typically addressed, what local resources are the available, and agreement regarding the individual and organizational responsibility for the resulting plan. This is followed by an ongoing phase that involves the plan's implementation and evaluation. World Vision has developed an assessment process that meets these criteria which Fawcett describes as an inexpensive, "technology-free...based on verbal conversations,...portable and applicable in a wide range of environments, ... with small or large numbers, for urban or rural programs." Fawcett (2002, page 283)
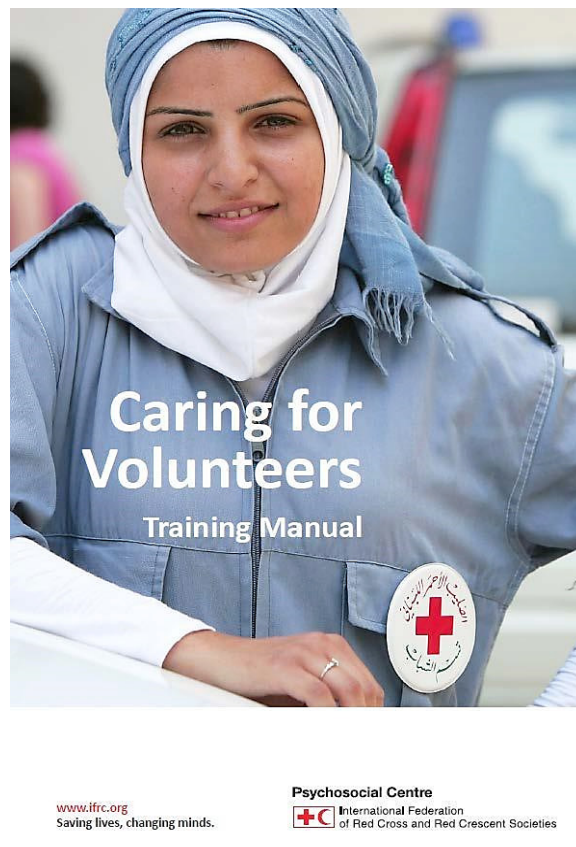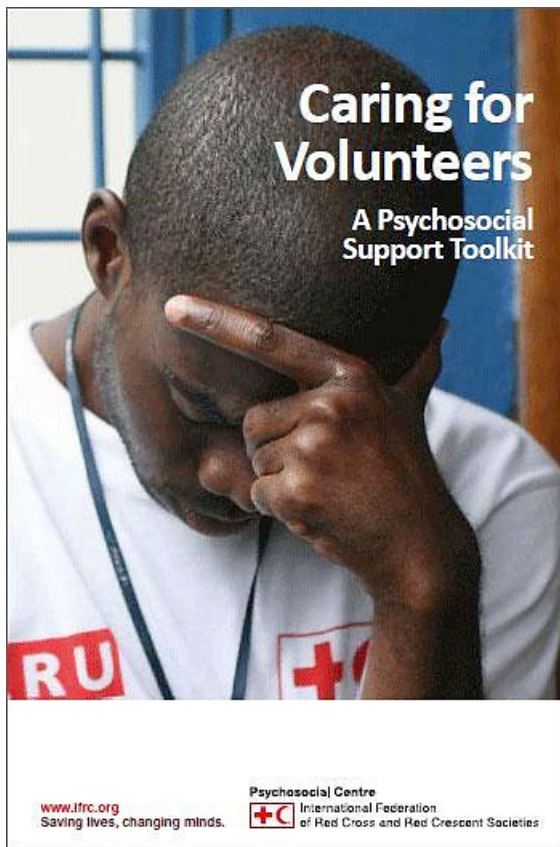
The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has developed a tool kit and a training manual entitled, *Caring for Volunteers*, to fulfill their commitment to ongoing staff psychosocial support. Included in the Tool Kit (2012) are chapters addressing, resilience and risk; self-care; peer support; "Psychosocial Support Before, During, and After" crises; Psychological First Aid; monitoring and evaluation of support. The Training Manual (2015) contains relevant resources to conduct a two or three-day workshop addressing the above topics and includes worksheets and activities adaptable for many contexts. These are available on-line in four languages from IFRC Psychosocial Support Resource Centre.

## 3. Barriers to Seeking Help: Internal Factors

"In the midst of emergencies, there is a sense that our personal wellbeing and mental health are not worth looking after, and we become ashamed of expressing our needs. A woman serving with refugees told me, "If you claim that you are too stressed, the organisation will maybe relocate you to a boring job, then it goes on your record...It's a taboo subject, you are seen as unstable, insecure...So it's best only to seek help when your contract comes to an end." A Syrian humanitarian officer added, "People either don't acknowledge that they have a problem or don't want to ask for help; sometimes we don't even realize we are not well, since the pressure is constant."" (Pigni, 2016, p. 42).

The barriers to receiving adequate mental and emotional care are not only external. Most humans will do anything, including suffering pain, in order to avoid diminished self-esteem and shame. This presents a significant problem when someone is experiencing burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or PTSD. The need to avoid being ashamed of oneself and feeling shamed by others keeps many from accessing the support they need to find relief and healing. Others may feel afraid of repercussions from either a perpetrator or a supervisor if they make known the abuse or violence they have endured.

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Those who are attracted to the field of humanitarian work are frequently adept at providing for the needs of others. When their own needs arise, it can be quite alluring to diminish or deny that they need time off for rest and recuperation. Instead, they push themselves past their own limitations, which leads to a cascade effect ending in resentment, cynicism, irritability, frequent illnesses and an 'us-them' mentality.

Furthermore, the widely held stigma that seeing a mental health professional means that one is 'crazy', keeps many people from seeking help. Additionally, those suffering from stress and trauma symptoms may not trust that the mental health professional will maintain confidentiality. One of the authors was contracted as an external mental health professional for volunteers in a large organization who were suffering from symptoms on a continuum from anxiety to trauma. She was consistently asked by each volunteer who came for therapy, if what they revealed in session would be shared with the organization.

Many who experience stress, burnout or trauma symptoms may nt be aware that there are tools that will effectively relieve the distress. Through the use of EMDR and stabilization techniques such as these taught by Capacitar International, one of the authors has witnessed numerous clients' deep sense of relief, soothing and safety after having suffered from nightmares, irritability, a constant sense of confusion or hypervigilance for months or sometimes years. Sadly, some organizations only respond when staff has reached a crisis level and can no longer perform their duties, leading to costly interventions such as evacuations and hospitalizations.

## 4. Organizational Culture and Management Practices

"[T]he most stressful events in humanitarian work have to do with the organizational culture, management style and operational objectives of an NGO or agency rather than external security risks or poor environmental factors. Aid workers, basically, have a pretty shrewd idea what they are getting into when they enter this career, and dirty clothes, gunshots at night and lack of electricity do not surprise them. Intra-and inter-agency politics, inconsistent management styles, lack of team work and unclear or conflicting organizational objectives, however, combine to create a background of chronic stress and pressure that over time wears people down and can lead to burnout and even physical collapse… Our findings suggest that strong relationships afford the best protection in traumatic and stressful environments." Fawcett (2003, page 6)

If poor management, lack of peer support and isolation are among the chief causes of stress for humanitarian workers, then building organizational capacity, trust, and increasing loyalty to those who are often putting their lives on the line would be some of the most critical strategies to increase both institutional and personal wellbeing.

The Antares Foundation has created a consensually-derived, core set of Guidelines to help organizations manage stress in humanitarian workers (eight principles; see the diagram below). The eight principles are:

1. Creating a clear policy of how to prevent and address stress
2. Regular screening and assessing, before, during and after placement
3. Adequate preparation and training
4. Ongoing monitoring
5. Ongoing support
6. Crisis support and management
7. Practical, emotional and culturally appropriate support at the end of assignment

8. Clear policies on post-assignment support
Although this information is widely available and understood, there is still a need for more organizations to provide sustainable financial and human resources to implement these practices focusing on prevention rather than costly crisis intervention.
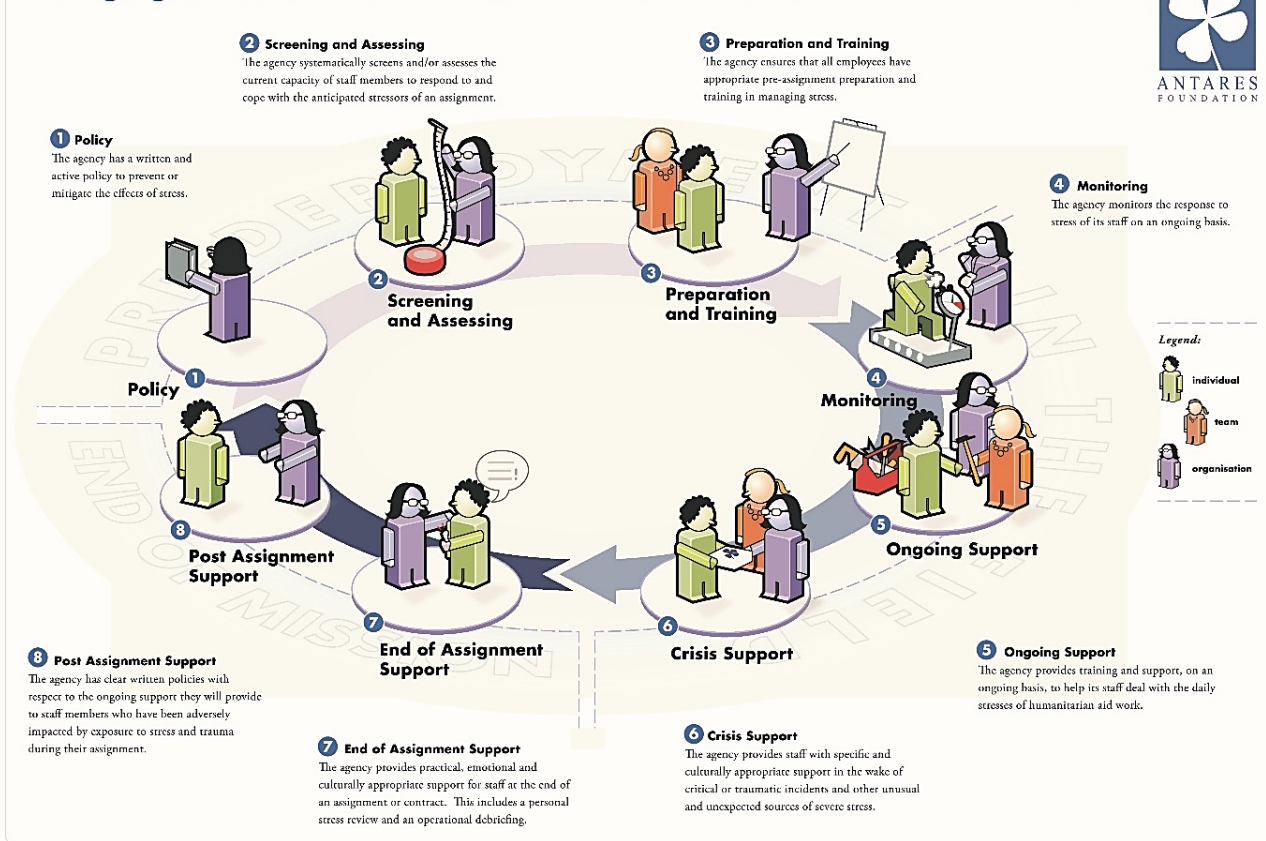


Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers (five languages), Antares Foundation

## SUMMARY: STRESS AND SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS
## Recognizing Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Resources

"Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers." Core Humanitarian Standard, Principle 8

1. Share the responsibility. **Managing stress and trauma are not just personal responsibilities.** Humanitarian organizations must also accept some major responsibilities, not the least of which are recognizing and treating stress and trauma, ensuring healthy organizational practices, and integrating stress management and resilience-building capacities across the organization and throughout all phases of humanitarian involvement.

2. Model health. In some humanitarian settings, the worst stressors have to do with the culture of the organization and management style rather than security risks or lifestyle demands. Hence field leaders and managers can support their teams through more effective leadership styles, management practices, and their own behavior.

3. Defuse stigma. Humanitarian workers can be reluctant to seek help. Both during deployments or

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even long afterwards, there may be a realistic fear that they will be seen as weak and inadequate for redeployment or promotion. Consequently they can often disconnect from their feelings and help perpetuate the "be-tough culture" that permeates the humanitarian sector.

4. Cultivate resilience in five areas: character strengths such as perseverance and integrity; coping skills for stress management, self-care, work-life balance, and interpersonal relationships; mutual support for colleagues, friends and family; staff support and wellbeing resources in one's organization; and a transcendent sense of purpose, meaning, and hope.

5. Stay aware, get help, and grow. Humanitarians are not unbreakable and it is important to remind them: "Don't overestimate your immunity; but don't underestimate your resilience. Stay in touch with the stressors in your life and their cumulative and possible delayed impacts. If you get stuck from stress s or trauma, get help. find safe places, safe people, and ways to help you grow through the challenges of humanitarian life—and beyond."

There are effective treatments for trauma, including the two therapies that the WHO has approved as evidence-based: EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) and TF-CBT, (trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy). Although the availability of these therapies has grown substantially in recent decades, not all humanitarian workers, and especially national/local staff have access to mental health workers who speak their languages or understand cultural practices that have historically helped mitigate the impact of trauma.

Final Thoughts

**Tools for Helping Ourselves and Others**

--Alternatives to violence program (website)

--Anxiety BC. Self-help strategies for PTSD
--Breathing Exercises, Dr. Andrew Weil
--DisasterReady, Cornerstone on Demand Foundation. (free online courses for humanitarian action)
--EMDR International Association: Creating global healing, health and hope.
--Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (self-measure for trauma events and emotional symptoms
--Hidden Hurt. (2015). Self-care following trauma. Hidden Hurt: Domestic Abuse Information

--Johnstone, M. (2012). I Had a Black Dog (short video about depression and recovery)

--Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (self-measure of anxiety and depression)
--Moodjuice. Post-traumatic stress: Moodjuice self-help guide

--Non Violent Communication (website)

--O'Donnell, K. (2010). Team building and resiliency (short course and tools)

--ProQOL 5 (self-measure for the negative/positive affects of helping others who experience suffering and trauma, available in 26 languages
--PTSD Association of Canada. (2016). Various resources for growth and recovery

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*„...humanitarian work is, after all, a celebration of life, not homage to death and despair." Fawcett (2003, page 1)*

It has been an honor and inspiration to work in the humanitarian sector, meeting and supporting such a variety of dedicated and compassionate people. In the most difficult contexts they bear witness, sow seeds of hope, and give dignity to those who struggle, while they themselves may be facing similar adversity and challenges just like the people they are helping. We are also mindful of our own limitations and vulnerabilities--our breakable humanity—in the face of unspeakable tragedy and injustice and the ongoing, cumulative grind of "engaging in humanity care." Nonetheless, we consider ourselves blessed to follow and serve Jesus in this way as mental health professionals (John 12:26)!

**Notes**

**1. This article includes materials and perspectives from these primary sources:**

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**2. Disclaimer.**

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# Stress Perception and Measurement in Missionary Populations

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## Abstract

Christian missionaries experience numerous stressors across multiple domains. To understand their unique experiences, a targeted assessment is required. There is no known psychometrically tested measure that captures the nuances of stress for this population. To that end, as part of a larger study, the quantitative CHOPS Stress Inventory, a new tool for measuring missionary stress was developed and showed good initial psychometric qualities when compared to an established stress measure. Furthermore, the Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of survey findings on 267 cross-cultural evangelical missionaries noted that both age and sex demonstrated significant effects on perceived stress scores. Implications for missionary member care services and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: stress perception, missionary member care, cross-cultural stress measurement

## Stress Perception and Measurement in Missionary Populations

Serving as a missionary can be one of the most enriching (Foyle, 2001) and life-shaping experiences (Eenigenburg & Bliss, 2010), bringing great joy and rewards along with accelerated spiritual growth, deepening of faith, and an increased dependence on God. Yet, those who respond to this call and go into cross-cultural contexts often encounter extraordinarily difficult and stressful circumstances (O'Donnell & Lewis -O'Donnell, 1988, 1992, 2009, 2012). Schaefer et al. (2007) report that while pursuing purposes they strongly believe in, missionaries and aid workers expose themselves to adjustment challenges, health risks, and increased risks of trauma.

## Missionary Stressors and Member Care Services

A number of researchers have identified the high degree and types of stressors missionaries encounter (Bagley, 2003; Carter, 1999; Gish, 1983; Foyle, 1987, 2001; Irvine, Armentrout, & Miner, 2006). This stress can exist on a continuum from mild to severe and from normative to non-normative across the lifespan of the missionary. Due to the nature of cross-cultural service, missionaries often encounter both internal and external stressors across several domains simultaneously. Too much stress over an extended period of time can lead to a number of negative health and interpersonal consequences (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007; Cozolino, 2010; Gurung, 2014; Jennings, 2007) and it is typically the accumulation of stressors that impair missionary service (Befus, 2018; Chester, 1983; Schwandt & Moriarty, 2008).

Despite the number of stressors, numerous studies suggest that missionaries may be reluctant to share their vulnerabilities (Eenigenburg & Bliss, 2010; Mills, 2008; Strand, Pinkston, Chen, & Richardson, 2015, Vanderpol, 1994). Chester

(1983) suggests they are under no more stress than others in the helping professions but may be unaware or unwilling to report the level of stress and may under report it (Carter, 1999). Consistent with studies on stress-related growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), missionaries may report positive changes as a result of the stress even when the stress is trauma-related (Irvine et al., 2006). In fact, missionaries appear to have a high degree of resilience and may expect stress as part of their calling (Bagley, 2003, Schaefer et al., 2007). This resilience may in turn buffer the amount of perceived stress (Alim, Feder, Graves, Wang, Weaver, Westphal, & Charney, 2008), allowing missionaries to continue being effective in their ministries despite the difficulties. Resiliency factors may also be implicated in the underreporting of stress in this population. Notwithstanding, all of these factors must be taken into consideration in evaluating and interpreting stress in missionary populations.

In response to the high degree of stressors reported, mission agencies have made a concerted effort to both assess the stress and provide targeted interventions across the life span of the missionary. This care referred to as member care, which is now a global effort, is described by O'Donnell and Lewis -O'Donnell (2016) as an interdisciplinary, international, and multisectoral field that focuses on supporting the diversity of mission/aid personnel and sending groups. This care involves the provision and development of quality resources to promote wellbeing, resiliency, and effectiveness. It includes pre-field training, field coaching, personnel departments, pastoral counselors, crisis support, and reentry preparation (O'Donnell & Lewis-O'Donnell, 2016).

**Stress Measurement Tools for Missionary Populations**
Numerous studies have been conducted to measure the types of stressors missionaries encounter with a variety of different measures. Gish (1983) developed a 65-item scale, which was replicated in Carter's study (1999). Bosch (2014) created a comprehensive survey tool with over one hundred multiple categories of stress, areas of need, member care concerns

or factors contributing to attrition. Dodds and Dodds (1993; 1997) implemented a modified version of the Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) called a 'stress-event scale' to accommodate for cross-cultural realities. Studies have also included other stress-related tools that directly or indirectly measure stress, components of stress or related factors such as burnout (Chester, 1983), trauma or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bagley, 2003; Schaefer et al., 2007); hassles (Navarra & James, 2002); hostility (Taylor & Maloney, 1983); or well-being (Keckler, Moriarty & Blagen, 2008). Many studies focus on cross-cultural adjustment stressors (Cerny Smith Assessment, 2018) while others address depression, anxiety or other psychological components (Pinkston, Chen & Richardson, 2015; Strand et al., 2015). Many of these studies used multiple assessment tools concurrently. In addition to these stress measures, several researchers have used case studies (Gardner, 1987) self-reports and mixed methods (Bikos, et al., 2009) that yield rich data from which to examine the types and severity of reported stressors.

Despite the number of stress measures and studies evaluating missionary stress to date no research could be located where a measurement tool specific for missionary stressors had been tested and statistically compared to existing measures. One purpose of the present study was to test a newly designed quantitative instrument, the CHOPS Stress Inventory, developed to assess missionary stress and compare it to the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS, Cohen, Karmarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), that has established psychometric qualities.

**CHOPS Stress Inventory**
O'Donnell and Lewis O'Donnell (2009, 2012) have identified 10 common areas of stress cross-cultural workers encounter. These 10 overlapping areas, that bear research support are represented by the acronym CHOPS, include Cultural, described as getting one's needs met in unfamiliar ways; Crises, potentially traumatic events; Human, relationships; Historical, unresolved past areas of personal or social struggles; Occupational, related to job specific challenges and stressors; Organizational, governance and

management; Physical, the overall health and factors that affect it ; Psychological, the overall emotional stability and self-esteem; Support, the resources to sustain one's work and Spiritual relationship with the Lord. The research literature well-supports each of these areas as critical missionary stressor domains; Cultural (Foyle, 2001); Crises (Bagley, 2003; Human (Ritchey & Rosik, 1993); Historical (Schubert, 1992); Occupational (Vander Pol, 1994); Organizational (Carter, 1999); Physical (Lindquist, 1997); Psychological (Barnett, Duvall, Edwards, & Lewis Hall, 2005); Support (Taylor & Maloney,1983); and Spiritual (Parshall, 1987).

The CHOPS Stress Inventory helps missionaries and humanitarian -aid workers assess themselves across the 10 areas of stress. The inventory also provides a reflective section where workers can identify struggles, successes and strategies (O'Donnell & Lewis -O'Donnell, 2009). The 2009 version of CHOPS assessment was updated in 2012 to include areas of stress identified in the A4 regions: America-Latina, Arabic-Turkic, Africa, and Asia (O'Donnell & Lewis O'Donnell, 2012).A quantitative version of the 2012 CHOPS Stress Inventory (Tone, 2015) was developed for the present study and is described in the Methods section.

**Stress and Coping**

There are several theories identifying the stress response in humans, including the models first proposed by Cannon (1914) and the Selye's (1956) General Adaptation Syndrome. Both of these theories involve the physiological stress responses of the nervous and endocrine systems. For the purposes of this study, we will consider the psychological model proposed by Lazarus (1966) involving the cognitive appraisal systems. Lazarus saw stress as the imbalance between the demands placed on the individual and their resources to cope. The experience of stress differs significantly depending on how the stress is interpreted (Gurung, 2014). In other words, it is rarely the stressor itself but rather the perception of stress that can lead to negative results (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

A review of the literature on missionary populations reveals that what may be stressful for one missionary may be considered a challenge to another, which largely depends on the perception (Gish, 1983; Huff, 2001). Gish (1983) points out that stress depends in part on whether or not the missionary appraises a given situation as benign, neutral, or stressful and adds that even if the situation is appraised as stressful, it may not result in distress, as some may view it as a challenge. Gish (1983) notes that if a person does see harm, loss, or threat in the stress, the result may be different.

**Perception of Stress**

Generally speaking, the perception of stress, as a construct, is found within the framework of the appraisal and coping literature. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described stress as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. The cognitive appraisal process includes a primary appraisal in which the person evaluates potential harm or benefit to self or loved ones, goals, values, or commitments. In a secondary appraisal, the person evaluates what can be done to prevent harm or improve benefits, and what coping options are available (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). How well a person copes with stress depends on a variety of factors such as the internal resources of mastery, self-esteem, and external resources such as social support (Bovier, Chamot, & Perneger, 2004). Notwithstanding, any one of these internal and external support networks may be disrupted in a cross-cultural experience (Dodds & Dodds, 2003; Sweatman, 1999), leaving the missionary vulnerable to ineffective or maladaptive coping mechanisms and negative sequelae.

Perception of stress, however, is not a monolithic construct. Multiple confluent factors can influence how stress is both perceived and how one chooses to cope. This delicate balance can make the difference between a positive and negative sojourn for the missionary worker. Identifying and understanding the amount of and types of stress can be the first step in stress management and coping initiatives. This study aimed to evaluate the perception of stress in a population known to experience a high degree

of stressors by evaluating the utility of a new measure for missionary stress and comparing it to an established stress measure.

## Methods

In a survey-based cross-sectional design conducted via the internet, a newly adapted stress measure specific for this population was compared to a known stress perception instrument.

## Participants

Missionaries meeting the following criteria were included in the sampling: Evangelical missionaries currently serving cross-culturally with at least three months of service outside their home or passport country and who were at least 18 years of age at the time of the study. Three main methods of selection were employed. Several evangelical missionary organizations granted permission and agreed to send the link to their constituents. Secondly, snowball sampling was employed. The researcher forwarded the email link to known missionaries serving in cross-cultural settings and asked participants to complete the survey and forward it to others in their organizations. Additionally, the request with the link to the survey was sent to several list serves including Brigada Today and Member Care Associates. In an effort to protect participants who may serve in restricted countries, the wording on all correspondence and surveys was changed from "missionary" to "cross-cultural worker." Participants who received the survey through multiple sources were asked to complete it only one time. Participants were provided a time-sensitive link (30 days) to complete the anonymous survey through the Survey Monkey website. Their responses remained anonymous, data was not linked to the email addresses and results were only viewed by the principal researcher and statistics consultant. Participants were given an opportunity to win one of ten gift cards. Winners were chosen by random selection and notified.

## Instruments

Perception of Stress Scale. Stress perception was measured using the 10-item Perception of Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983). Items are designed to tap into how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month, and respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way in each situation (Cohen et al., 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988). For example, one question asks, "In the last month how often have you felt nervous or 'stressed?'" Respondents can report 0 as "never" up to 4 "very often." In a survey study conducted by Cohen and Janicki-Deverts (2012), psychological stress was assessed in three national surveys, the 1983 Harris Poll and the 2006 and 2009 eNation Surveys. Internal reliabilities for the Chronbach's alphas for the PSS-10 were .78 in the Harris Poll sample, and .91 in both the 2006 and 2009 eNation samples.

Quantitative Stress Inventory. Stress perception was concurrently measured using the 17-item CHOPS Stress Inventory (O'Donnell, Lewis-O'Donnell, & Tone, 2015), an adapted stress measurement tool designed for the study and specific for the population of interest. The newly adapted CHOPS Stress Inventory (2015) is based on findings by O'Donnell and Lewis -O'Donnell's (2012) inventory that identifies 10 areas of stress known to be an issue with cross cultural workers. The inventory provides a convenient checklist to identify the level of stress in each of the 10 areas along with possible experiences related to that area (see Appendix A). In the quantitative version, participants are asked to rate their level of stress over the past month in the 10 categories along with an overall summary of stress in a Likert-style rating system from 1 "minimal" to 5 "extreme." There is an additional question to rate the top three stressors as well as write in 3-5 specific stressors that caused distress regardless of being one of the 10. The new quantitative measure designed with permission and consultation with the O'Donnells (personal communication August 6, 2014), lacked psychometric testing, therefore it was analyzed alongside the psychometrically supported PSS (Cohen et al., 1983) instrument. Marlowe -Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Previous research suggests that missionaries are reluctant to share vulnerabilities (Chester, 1983; Eenigenburg & Bliss, 2010; Mills, 2008). Therefore, a social desirability scale was utilized to

explore response bias. Social desirability factors were examined using the 13-item Short Form C of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Reynolds, 1982). This shortened -version in a true/false response format provides the closest language to missionary populations and was found in studies by Reynolds (1982) to be reliable and valid.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University approved this study prior to its initiation. Participants' data was collected through the Survey Monkey website, downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet, and analyzed using Systat statistical software.

## Results
### Participant Characteristics
During the one-month time frame, 361 participants accessed the survey via the internet. Of those, 94 were eliminated due to incomplete responses or they did not meet eligibility for the study. This resulted in 267 valid surveys. The majority (70%) of the study sample were females. Individuals between the ages of 31 to 40 comprised the largest age group of the sample (31%). Seventy percent (70%) of the sample reported being currently married with 80% reporting their spouse was from the same country of origin. The sample was homogenous in

terms of ethnicity, with 93% reporting white non-Hispanic. The majority (82%) of the sample reported the United States of America as their home or passport country. The countries or geographical areas of service span the globe with 92% of respondents reporting that their country of service felt relatively stable and safe, or if unstable still felt relatively safe. Only 28% reported language proficiency as either poor or beginner/survivor level.

There was a wide range of previous cross-cultural experience before the current term. This range varied from 0-3 months (25%) up to more than 20 years (11%). There was also a wide range of time frames in the current assignment with the most frequent response of 3-5 years (27%).

In this sample 82% reported having member care services available or available upon request. In this sample the following percentages were reported as agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt supported by family back home (82%), friends (73%), and by their organization (73%). Based on scales used to measure response bias, the participants answered the questionnaire in an unbiased fashion.

### Perception of Stress
Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) noted that
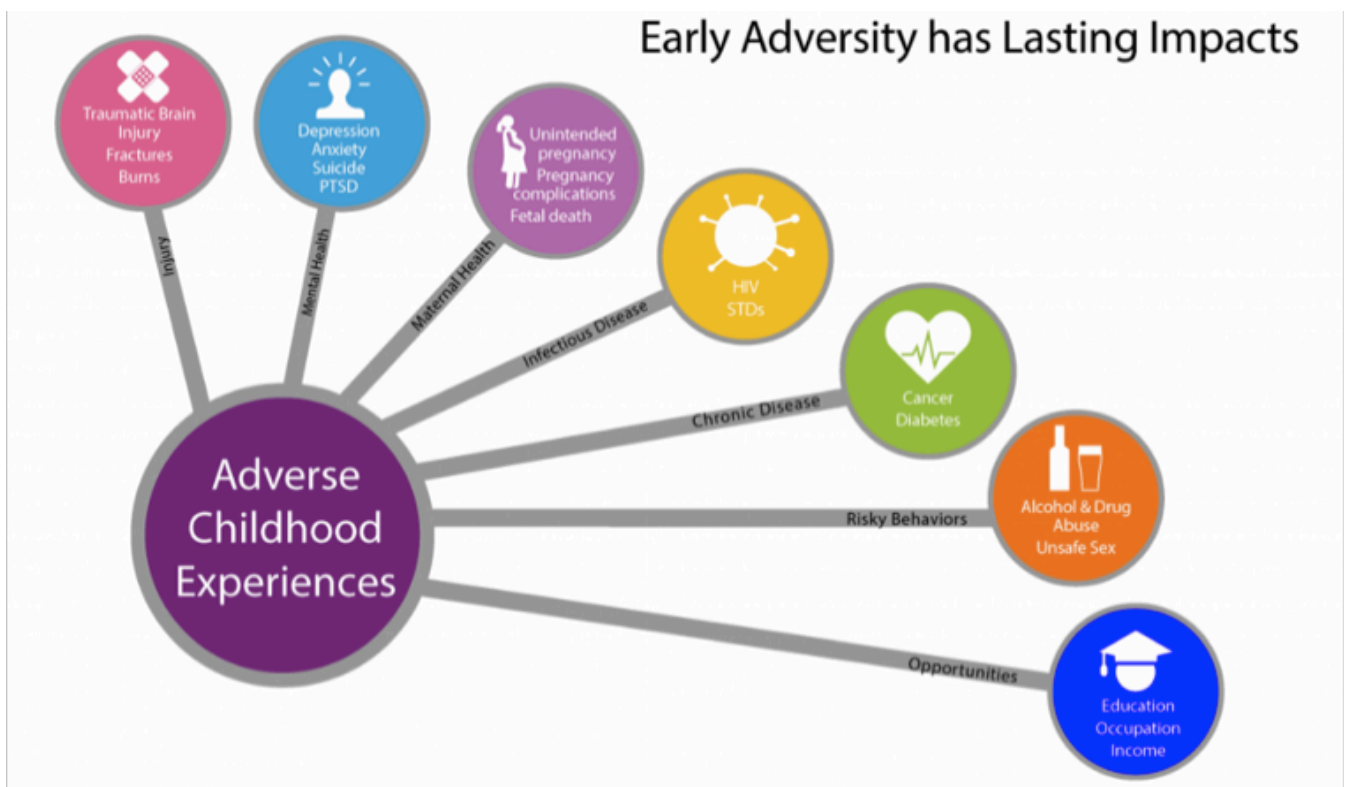
both age and sex demonstrated significant effects on PSS total score (Age: F = 2.46, df (7,186), p = 0.02; Gender: F = 6.05, df (1,186), p = 0.02). For sex females (M = 17.88, SD = 5.30) had significantly higher PSS total scores than males (M = 15.77, SD = 5.25) t = 2.98, df (265), p = 0.003, d = 0.59). There was no significant difference between married females and single females on perceived stress scores (p = 0.89). For age, the 26 to 30 group had significantly higher PSS total scores than the 51 to 60 (p = 0.008), 61 to 65 (p = 0.04), and 66 to 80 (p = 0.02) age groups.
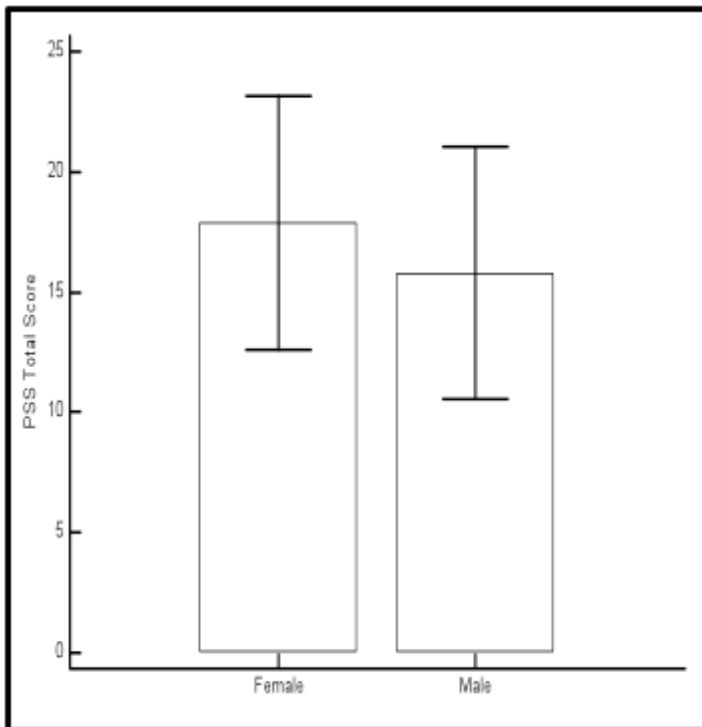


Figure 1. Gender Difference for PSS Total Score. Error bars are standard deviation.
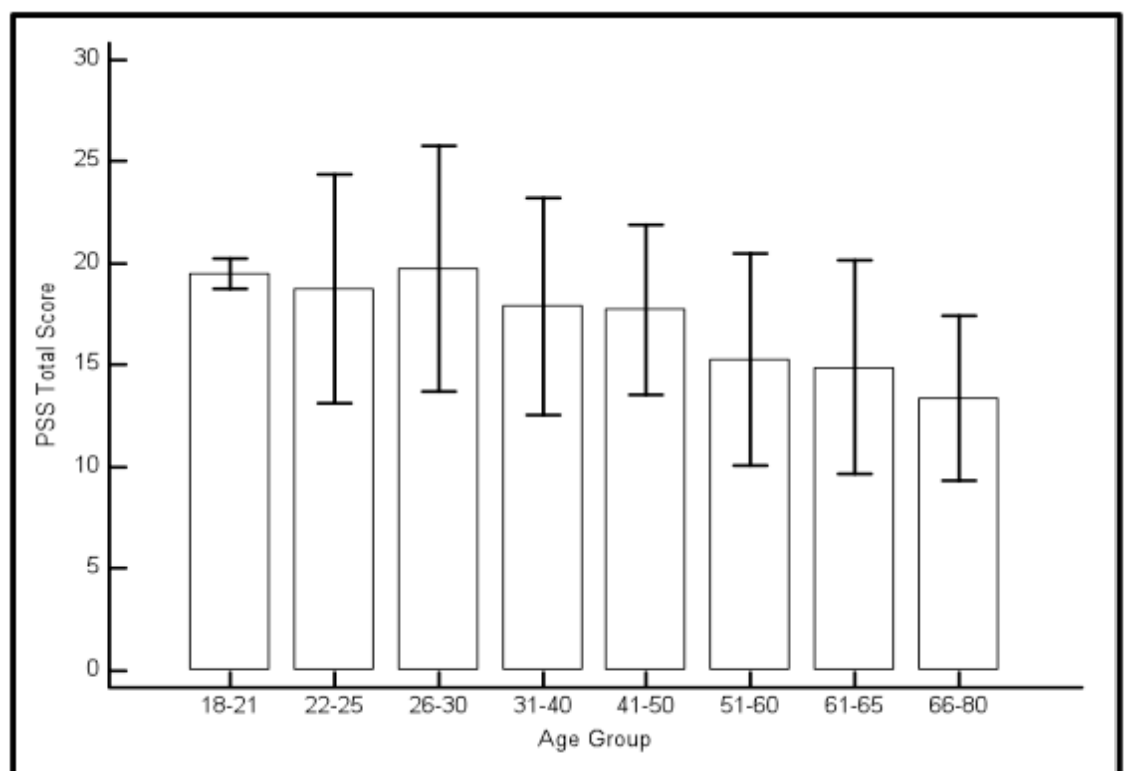
Figure 2. Age-Group Difference for PSS Total Score. Error bars are standard deviation.

## Exploratory Analysis of the CHOPS Stress Inventory

The analyses of the CHOPS Stress Inventory (O'Donnell et al., 2015) were aimed at assessing its initial psychometric support. Internal consistency was good (Cronbach's α = 0.82), and correlation with PSS total score was moderate (r = 0.62, p<0.001).
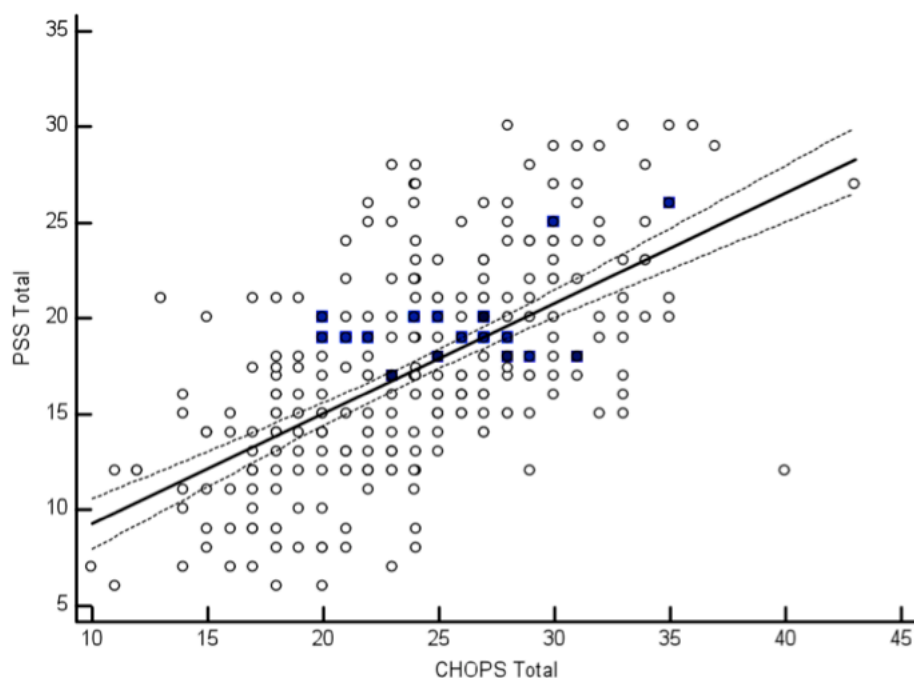


Figure 3. Scatterplot of CHOPS Stress Inventory with PSS Total Score. r = 0.62, p < 0.001

The categories of the CHOPS Stress Inventory were assessed as to which of the ten categories representing various stressors (Cultural, Crises, Historical, Human, Occupational, Organizational, Physical, Psychological, Support, and Spiritual) were rated to be most stressful. The participants were also asked to rate their overall level of stress over the past month in a summary question. In each of the categories, the participants were asked to rate the level over the past month as minimal, low, moderate, high, or extremely high. The rounded-off percentages of the moderate, high, and extremely high ratings of stress indicate the top categories for this sample were: Occupational (72%), Human /Interpersonal (65%), Psychological (57%), Cultural (52%), and Spiritual (46%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the sample rated the overall stress of the past month as moderate, high, and extre-

mely high. In the comments section, 294 of the respondents provided specific stressors. These were not categorized or rated according to the ten areas, but some of the stressors listed include weather-related stressors such as oppressive heat and tornadoes, daily hassles, government red tape, visa issues, addictions, friends dying while on the field, deaths in close family members or friends back home, missing events back home, serious health issues, work issues, re-entry issues, financial problems, marriage problems, problems child-rearing or schooling, aging parents, corruption, loneliness, depression, other mental health issues, power outages, dangerous traffic, safety in country, sexual assault, assaults, interpersonal and team conflicts, conflicts with leaders, spiritual warfare, armed conflict, political or military conflict, terrorism and terrorist attacks.

## Validity of Survey Responses

In order to determine the extent to which respondents' answers may have been driven by social desirability, the Short form C Marlowe-Crowne scale (Reynolds, 1982) was embedded into the survey questions. The Marlowe-Crowne scale showed weak correlations with the PSS (r = 0.25, p<0.001) and the CHOPS (r = 0.21, p = 0.003).

## Discussion

This study found that both age and sex demonstrated significant effects on the perception of stress in the missionary population. In addition, the newly developed quantitative CHOPS Stress Inventory demonstrated good initial psychometric features when compared to an established stress measure (the PSS), which makes it a potential instrument to use in cross-cultural missionary populations. The results of the CHOPS Stress Inventory suggested that work-

related (occupational) stress and interpersonal stress were the highest endorsed categories for stress in this sample. These findings will be discussed in further detail below.

## Occupational and Spiritual Stress

Seventy two percent (72%) of this sample reported moderate, high, or extremely high work-related or occupational stress. Forty-six (46%) of the sample rated spiritual stress as moderate, high or extremely high. Based on the spiritual nature of this occupation, these results will be discussed concurrently. The findings are congruent to many studies on missionary stress (O'Donnell, 1995). The high volume of work and limited resources most missionaries experience make this a reasonable stressor to endorse. Several authors also note a greater sense of "spiritual warfare" around this occupation (Anyomi, 1997; Kim, 2009; Ng, 1997; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 1992, 2009, 2012; Taylor, 1997). Missionaries may experience doubts, disappointments, and disillusionments, and have unmet expectations of God (Eenigenburg & Bliss, 2010). Moreover, missionaries often live in a "fishbowl" (Eenigenburg & Bliss, 2010; Foyle, 2001) in which their lives are continually in view of others. They are expected to be "spiritual giants"; therefore, some of their own spiritual needs may go unrecognized or unmet (Ng, 1997).

## Interpersonal Stress

Sixty-five percent (65%) of the sample reported moderate, high or extremely high levels of interpersonal stress over the previous month. The men and women in this sample were consistent with other studies in this finding (Foyle, 1987). In fact, a central factor in studies of intercultural effectiveness/competence and adjustment of expatriates is the development of appropriate interpersonal relationships (Cerny, Smith, Ritchard, & Dodd, 2007).

Missionaries are surrounded by a web of relationships (Ritchey & Rosik, 1993). These relationships hold the power to promote health and wellness or sickness and stress for the missionary. If the relationships are positive in nature, then they provide a major source of support and care that sustains missionaries throughout their careers. However, if these relationships are conflict-ridden and draining, then their impact contributes to the stress experienced by missionaries (Ritchey & Rosik, 1993). Such stressors may contribute to early departure from the mission field (Allen, 1986; Taylor, 1997; Trimble, 2006). Therefore, the results of this study indicate this continues to be an area needing attention.

## Perception of Stress: Age and Sex

Women (married and unmarried) reported higher levels of stress than men in this sample. The lack of significant difference based on marital status warrants further exploration. Sweatman (1999) suggests that in this population marriage may serve as a buffer for stress or exacerbate stress depending on the quality of the relationship. Since marital quality was not assessed in this study, further interpretation of this finding is limited. Overall, the results on this sample related to sex and perceived stress are consistent with the literature and invite further inquiry into the role of the marital relationship in perceived stress.

Younger missionaries may be more susceptible to stress. The 26 to 30 age group had significantly higher PSS total scores compared to missionaries in the 51-80 range. In fact, others that have suggested that age may be an important factor in determining the magnitude of the stress response (Carpenter, Tyrka, Ross, Khoury, Anderson, & Price, 2009; Kidd, Hamer, & Steptoe, 2011; Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009). Therefore, the current study is congruent with other research that has suggested that both age and sex are important factors in the perception of stress.

## CHOPS Stress Inventory

This newly adapted stress measurement tool for missionary populations shows good initial psychometric qualities. It is the first quantitative stress measure targeted specifically for missionaries. It is brief in its scope with only 17 items and has the potential to be readily accessible in that both member care and missionaries can utilize it free of charge. As more psychometric research is done on the CHOPS, it may eventually be used as an outcomes measure during

checkups to gauge growth or implement changes. Further studies can help determine the clinical utility of this tool.

## Implications for Member Care
### Age and Sex Considerations in Member Care
### Age.
Given that age was a significant factor in the perception of stress, member care initiatives focused on better preparing the younger workers for the realities of cross-cultural service may be warranted. With increasing volatility worldwide, younger workers will be exposed to more traumatic stressors while serving overseas (Bagley, 2003). Younger workers are more vulnerable to permanent negative change due to traumatic stress (Irvine et al., 2006). Member care workers are reporting that the newer generation of missionary candidates (Donovan & Myors, 1997) are coming to the field more "bruised" with unresolved family of origin issues (Schubert, 1992). This can lead to emotion regulation problems, which can be a determining factor in overall success in missionary service (Cousineau, Hall, Rosik, & Hall, 2010). Younger generation missionaries may not have honed the necessary emotional regulation skills to mitigate fluctuating stress reactions. Therefore, member care should focus more on this area. Coping practices that include relaxation practices (see Befus, 2018), Scripture -based meditation techniques (Garzon, 2005), Christian Mindfulness Techniques (Ford & Garzon, 2017; Garzon & Ford, 2016), and other emotion regulation interventions (see Kring & Sloan, 2010) may be beneficial.

### Sex.
Given the observed sex differences in the experience of stress on the mission field, member care should continue to address the specific needs of female missionaries. Member care may provide additional resources for women on relationships and specifically for coping with the realities of missionary life. In addition, member care services would benefit to recognize the overall lack of recognition for women on the mission field (Bowers, 1984, 1985; Crawford & DeVries, 2005). This may add to their stress. For example, Crawford and DeVries (2005) observe that women face difficulties in child rearing,

resistance from men and other women on the field, differing expectations, and role ambiguity. These factors can reduce the amount of positive recognition received. Mission agencies should create an "ethos" whereby women's choices in the roles they have on the mission field are recognized and honored (Crawford & DeVries, 2005). This idea is consistent with Hall and Duvall's (2003) findings that women with the freedom to choose their own role in missionary work had a greater sense of well-being. Therefore, member care initiatives could ensure roles are clearly defined, match the spiritual gifting of the missionary, and are recognized.

## Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research
A large percentage of respondents (93%) reported their ethnicity as white, non- Hispanic, and eighty-two percent were sent out from the United States of America, so surveys with a more diverse population and with a population sent out by other countries are necessary. Another limitation is that 70% of the respondents were female and another 70% married. Self-reports, the most commonly used measures, have inherent limitations (Kazdin, 2003; Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005). However, the inclusion of a social desirability scale was helpful to establish the results were not significantly influenced by social desirability bias.

Overall, large gaps exist in the research on missionary populations (Hawley, 2004; Keckler et al., 2008; Kim, 2009; Navara & James, 2002, 2005; O'Donnell, 1995). Current trends for mission work are for shorter terms (Tennett, 2003) and younger workers (Donovan & Myors,1997). A large percentage of females are in the mission work force, so targeted attention should be given to the younger missionaries and women in future studies.

The CHOPS Stress Inventory is one of the first tools to provide a quantitative scale with stressors specific to cross-cultural workers and has a total of 17 items. It demonstrated good preliminary psychometric qualities so further psychometric evaluations should be done. These could solidify the measure as a key resource for future research and missionary stress assessment in member care.

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Appendix

# CHOPS Stress Inventory©

The following 10 categories list areas of stress that are often experienced by humanitarian, mission, and development workers. Using the scales below please rate how stressful each of the following areas were/are during the past month. Consider the examples of possible experiences to guide your responses. Note that many of these stressors can be both a source of stress and/or a symptom of stress.

| Area | Possible Experiences | Level of Stress During Past Month | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Minimal | Low | Moderate | High | Extreme |
| **1. Cultural** | **Getting needs met in unfamiliar ways:** Housing, food, transportation, etc. language learning, culture shock, reentry, feeling rejected, overlooked, or undervalued by the dominant international culture, gender bias, prejudice, lack of opportunity/freedom… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **2. Crises** | **Potentially traumatic events:** Natural disasters, wars, accidents, evacuations, disease outbreaks, death of someone close to you, political instability, protracted armed conflicts and physical threats, one's own community and/or country affected… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **3. Historical** | **Unresolved past areas of personal and social struggle:** Family of origin issues, personal weaknesses, lack of educational, health, economic opportunities… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **4. Human** | **Relationships:** With family members, colleagues, nationals, raising children, couple conflict, struggles with team members, social opposition, caring for aging parents, few school options, human rights violations, harassment, persecution, discrimination, stigma… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **5. Occupational** | **Job-specific challenges and pressures:** Work load, travel schedule, exposure to people with problems, job satisfaction, more training, government "red tape", job insecurity, short-term contracts, work not understood or respected, seeing problems that are complex/that I can't help… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **6. Organizational** | **Governance and management:** Incongruence between one's background and the organizational ethos, policies, work style, management practices, expectations, incompetence, corruption, abusive leadership, dysfunction, disability practices, legal protection, training… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **7. Physical** | **Overall health and factors that affect it:** Nutrition, climate, illness, aging, environment, no medical resources/insurance and inadequate nutritional options, injuries/road traffic accidents… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **8. Psychological** | **Overall emotional stability and self-esteem:** Loneliness, frustration, depression, unwanted habits, developmental issues/stage of life issues, transition, grief, loss, cumulative impact of "adverse life events"… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **9. Support** | **Resources to sustain one's work:** Finances, housing, clerical/technical help, donor contact, minimum pay and/or financial support, finances used for survival and not just for one's work… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **10. Spiritual** | **Relationship with the Lord:** Devotional life, temptations, time with other believers, spiritual warfare, finding meaning, evil, inner growth, practices/disciplines, lack of trust/respect for spiritual leaders… | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Summary** | How would you rate your overall level of stress over the past month? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Please mark the 3 categories that were/are the most stress producing over the last month.

☐ Cultural    ☐ Organizational
☐ Crises    ☐ Physical
☐ Historical    ☐ Psychological
☐ Human    ☐ Support
☐ Occupational    ☐ Spiritual

Please identify 3-5 specific stressors that caused distress over the past month. They may or may not be listed in the possible experiences or 10 categories.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Reference: CHOPS Stress Inventory ©Adapted from O'Donnell, K. & Lewis O'Donnell, M. (2012) CHOPS.
Retrieval from http://coremembercare.blogspot.fr/search/label/CHOPS.
Used with permission and adapted in consultation with the O'Donnells by Dr. Laurie A. Tone, 2015.
Note: You can also use the results of this inventory to discuss how you are successfully managing stress now and your strategies for dealing with stress in the future. It can thus be a tool to explore struggles, successes, and strategies related to your adjustment/growth.

**Ullah Dahlen (Finland)**

# Comment to "Stress Perception and Measurement in Missionary Populations"

Ulla Dahlen is from a small town in Finland. Her educational background includes an MA in Counseling (Columbia International University, SC) and a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision (Regent University, VA). While she lived and studied in the United States for over seven years, she worked and did clinical counseling internships at Christian Counseling Centers, at a local Church as well as a one year internship at a city hospital. Currently Ulla lives in Finland with her husband David. There she teaches counseling courses at Iso Kirja College and offers counseling workshops for local churches. In addition, Ulla and David serve part-time with a Mission Organization, Fida International. Ulla's responsibilities include member care for missionaries as well as teaching, training and consultation, mainly in various countries in Asia.

Missionaries and cross-cultural workers undergo multiple, high degree stress. The authors of this study addressed the need for a measurement instrument specific for missionary stressors that would also be statistically compared with an existing, psychometrically tested measure.

The authors adapted a quantitative version of the qualitative CHOPS Stress Inventory (O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 2012) to measure stress among cross-cultural workers. The quantitative inventory included ten categories regularly reported by cross-cultural workers as areas causing stress. A Likert-style rating scale (1 = minimal, 5 = extreme) was used to describe experiences of stress with each category. Because this new quantitative measurement (CHOPS) lacked psychometric testing, it was analyzed along with a validated stress measurement tool, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983). To strengthen the study, the authors assessed respondent bias utilizing a Marlowe-Crone Social Desirability Scale (Reynolds, 1982) as prior research has indicated reluctance among missionaries to share vulnerabilities (Strand, Pinkston, Chen, & Richardson, 2015).

**Former contributions in our eJournal by Ulla you can see her:**

The researchers also addressed the limitations of the study, one of which was the nonrepresentative nature of the sample. The study sample consisted of 267 participants, of whom 93% were white, non-Hispanic. Besides ethnicity bias, 70% of the participants were women. As the researchers stated, further research with a more diverse sample is needed. A random sample would better enable the researchers to generalize from future research, since sampling bias is not compensated even by a larger sample (Pryczak, 2005).

This research suggests stress-related vulnerability among younger missionaries and women. The former reported higher susceptibility to stress, with significantly higher PSS total scores, while the latter reported higher stress levels than their male counterparts. I second the researchers' recommendation that future research on missionary stress focus on younger cross-cultural workers as well as on women.

In a summary of the CHOPS inventory (Tone, 2015), the principal researcher stated how the preliminary statistics showed the adapted stress inventory to indicate good psychometric qualities with the PSS-10 (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = 0.82). The correlation with the PSS total score was moderate (r = 0.62, p<0.001). In concert with the researches desire, hopefully further evaluations of this quantitative measurement will be conducted, and it will be utilized to help identify and understand stress among missionaries.

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Part Three

# Further information

**Nathaniel Marino, M.A.**

# Living in the Larger Story: The Christian Psychology of Larry Crabb

One of the giants of Christian psychology is the author, speaker, and spiritual director, Larry Crabb. On May 16-17, 2019, family, friends, colleagues, and admirers gathered in Houston, Texas at Houston Baptist University to celebrate Larry's life and works. The conference was hosted by the recently formed Gideon Institute of Christian Psychology and Counseling to celebrate the work of Larry Crabb in light of his development over the years of a practical Christian psychology that addresses everyday Christiana living.

The conference opened with Jason Kanz, a practicing clinical neuropsychologist from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, welcoming all the attendees and participants, including Larry and his wife, Rachel, and son, Kep. Eric Johnson, Professor of Christian Psychology at Houston Baptist University and Director of the Gideon Institute, outlined its vision to further the development and establishment of Christian psychology as a Christ-centered, biblically-rooted, and scientifically informed field of research and clinical practice. One of its tasks is to hold public educational events and conferences on topics related to Christian psychology, of which this is the first, and he suggested that Larry Crabb's career increasingly demonstrated a Christian psychology orientation across the decades.

A number of the speakers were professionals in the field who spoke on various aspects of Larry's contributions, and most of them would count Larry a close friend. The first speaker of the event was Gary Moon, was the executive director of the Martin Institute for Christianity and Culture and the Dallas Willard Center for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College from 2011 to 2018, and continues in leadership. He served as the founding director of the Renovaré International Institute for Christian Spiri-

tual Formation; and as a founding co-editor of the Conversations Journal (together with Larry Crabb and David Benner). Gary had some fun with Larry, highlighting Larry's lively and contagious spirit, as well as his love for Elvis. More than anything else, Gary praised Larry for his consistent tendency to promote change in the Christian community, and thanked him for his transparency, authenticity, insight, bluntness, and loyalty. Gary's message was only the first to bless Larry's heart. Miriam "Mimi" Dixon was the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Golden, CO, and the Crabbs' pastor for the years they lived in Colorado. Mimi delivered an eloquent message in which she compared the themes throughout Larry's writings and examples of the way he has lived his life to the themes and illustrations in John Bunyan's classic Pilgrim's Progress. Ed Welch, biblical counseling leader and faculty member at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reflected on the many themes throughout Larry's seminal book 66 Love Letters. Finally, Siang-Yang Tan, Professor of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary and senior pastor of First Evangelical

Church Glendale in California, spoke of Larry's dedication and immense love for God's Holy Word, calling Larry "biblically charismatic," while gently questioning the tendency he has observed in Larry's writings to focus more on the negative in the Christian life and community, rather than the positive, given the overall positive trajectory of Christ's redemption.

There was also an opportunity for those in attendance to say a few words about how Larry has impacted their life. One gentlemen stood up and shared with Larry how he was led to the Lord through Larry's singing at a Spanish-Presbyterian church many years ago. Converted from Islam, his family shunned him when they learned of his newfound faith in Jesus, but all have now come to know Him as their Savior and Lord. Larry, was so touched by this man's

testimony that embraced his newly-discovered brother in Christ. The conference concluded with a message from Larry himself, in which he shared several "landmark" moments in his life and principles he's learned. One the most notable pieces of wisdom Larry shared was the growing realization that "love teaches the soul more deeply than evil."

Larry Crabb has impacted countless people over the decades in his pursuit of a Christian psychology. As such, he is a role model for others in the field, to whom we should listen and emulate. As he said at the conference, „My focus is not to live between my birth and my death, but between the cross and the coming." May we all follow him in that redemptive framing of our lives.



Gideon Institute of Christian Psychology and Counseling

**Werner May (Germany)**

# Barcelona 2019: An Interview with Friedemann Alsdorf (Germany)

The invitation sent out by the organisers, the Catholic University Abat Oliba CEU www.uao-ceu.es in Barcelona, to this conference last September, 2019, included these words:
"Does Christian anthropology have anything to contribute to the health sciences? And can psychology or psychiatry alone understand the inner phenomena which appear in the patient?

The separation of health sciences and Christian anthropology has led to an impoverishment of the public dialogue. Christian anthropology has suppressed personal experience, while psychology has often become a science based only on what can be quantified. The result of this is that inner life phenomena are considered only from a psychological point of view. Psychiatrists are then forced to separate their Christian sensitivity from their analytical thinking. This prevents them from achieving a deeper understanding of their patients' reality. It also has negative effects on many religious patients, who encounter no sound arguments to bring themselves into harmony with their inner experience.

In addition, there is need for reflection within psychotherapy on the significance of openness for transcendence in the process of personal growth by means of the cultivation of specific virtues.

Friedemann Alsdorf, Graduate in psychology, psychotherapist and supervisor. After short periods of work in psychiatry and a special needs school there followed eight-and-a-half years of responsibility in addiction therapy as part of Teen Challenge. Since 1997 at the IGNIS Academy, leader of the social therapy area (offering addiction counselling, group therapy, social work and supervision) and contact person for the icp, the Institute for Christian Psychology, Therapy and Pedagogics in Switzerland. Now head of the IGNIS-Academy.



13-14th SEPTEMBER 2019

I EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND MENTAL HEALTH SCIENCES

Universitat Abat Oliba CEU - BARCELONA

Auf dem Einladungstext des Veranstalters, der katholischen Universität Abat Oliba CEU www.uaoceu.es in Barcelona, zu dieser Konferenzen im letzten September, 2019, war zu lesen:
Hat die christliche Anthropologie irgendetwas zu den Gesundheitswissenschaften beizutragen? Und kann Psychologie oder Psychiatrie allein die inneren Phänomene verstehen, die in der kranken Person auftreten?
Die Trennung von Gesundheitswissenschaften und christlicher Anthropologie hat zu einer Verarmung des Dialogs im öffentlichen Raum geführt. Die christliche Anthropologie hat die persönliche Erfahrung unterdrückt, während die Psychologie häufig zu einer Wissenschaft geworden ist, die nur auf dem basiert, was quantifiziert werden kann. Dies hat dazu geführt, innere Lebensphänomene nur aus psychologischer Sicht zu betrachten. Psychiater sind dann

In view of this reality, this Congress has been organised with the main aim of strengthening the dialogue, reflection and interdisciplinary research taking place between Christian anthropology and the health sciences. In order to enrich both disciplines, we hope to strengthen the cooperation between psychologists/psychiatrists, philosophers and theologians."

**Friedemann, what persuaded you to travel to this conference?**

Friedemann Alsdorf:
First of all, I was very glad to meet again many colleagues with whom I have shared EMCAPP experience over the years, and to meet new ones. Then there were the interesting speakers already known to me, and some previously unknown, who had been engaged for the main lectures and whose themes I found fascinating. And there was the additional attraction of Barcelona as a conference location.
Did one or other of the lectures provide you with content which you would like to continue to think about and which has significance for your own teaching tasks?
Friedemann Alsdorf:
I can name a good number right away: In a very simple, clear Christian meta-model of the person, Paul Vitz from New York set up a framework of three theological, three philosophical

gezwungen, ihre christliche Sensibilität von ihrem analytischen Denken zu trennen. Dies verhindert, dass sie ein tieferes Verständnis für die Realität der Patienten erlangen. Es hat auch negative Auswirkungen auf viele religiöse Patienten, die keine stichhaltigen Argumente finden, um ihre innere Erfahrung in Einklang zu bringen.
Darüber hinaus muss über die Bedeutung der Offenheit für Transzendenz im Prozess des persönlichen Wachstums durch die Kultivierung spezifischer Tugenden in der Psychotherapie nachgedacht werden.
Angesichts dieser Realität wurde dieser Kongress mit dem Hauptziel organisiert, den Dialog, die Reflexion und die interdisziplinäre Forschung zwischen der christlichen Anthropologie und den Gesundheitswissenschaften zu fördern. Um beide Disziplinen zu bereichern, hoffen wir, die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Psychologen / Psychiatern, Philosophen und Theologen zu fördern.

**Friedemann, was hat dich gereizt, zu dieser Tagung zu fahren?**

Erstens habe ich mich gefreut, viele langjährige EMCAPP Mitstreiter wiederzutreffen und neue kennenzulernen. Dann hatten interessante bekannte und mir noch nicht bekannte internationale Referenten zu Hauptvorträgen zugesagt,

and five psychological principles, a framework which is wide and provides good orientation, and is in my opinion very suitable for our way of thinking in IGNIS www.ignis.de. In her lecture, "Neurosciences and religious faith", Sarah Lane Ritchie from Edinburgh, made me very appreciative of the changes in our brains which can result from regular spiritual practice (prayer life, reading the Bible, songs, everyday spiritual rituals). Here I also see a possible answer to a what has always been a difficult question regarding my clients, namely what can one do if, despite seeking God, one cannot sense or experience him (here I'm not talking about the phenomenon of the "night of the soul"). The second day was full of inspiring examples from Christian therapeutic practice.

**Where there special encounters with people who impressed or motivated you, and whom you wish to keep fresh in your memory?**

Friedemann Alsdorf:
I had valuable conversations with a number of participants whom I have known for a long time already: Nicolene and Willem Joubert (South Africa), Anna Ostaszewska (Poland) and Trevor Griffiths (England). Among those whom I met for the first time, two have remained particularly present in my memory: Pavel Velikanov, archpriest and professor at the Moscow Orthodox Theological Academy. Right at the beginning of our conversation, he admitted quite openly that the topic "Faith and psychology" was still at a very undeveloped stage in the circles he moves in. And yet he had already formed many thoughts about it and posed good, inspiring questions. One result was for me a feeling of great gratitude for the political and intellectual freedom we have enjoyed, and continued to enjoy, here in Germany, creating the preconditions for developing and disseminating completely openly so much fundamental and specialist knowledge.
The other encounter was with Danielle Phillips-Koning, guest professor at the Center of Theology of Migration at the Free University, Amsterdam. To my great astonishment, she told me that studying the writings of one of the most important (and at the same time most

deren Themen ich sehr spannend fand. Und als Tagungsort hatte Barcelona noch einen zusätzlichen Reiz.

Gibt es den einen oder anderen Inhalt der Vorträge, den du gerne weiter denken würdest oder der Bedeutung für deine eigenen Lehraufträge hat?
Da gibt es gleich mehreres: Paul Vitz aus New York hat in einem sehr einfachen, klaren christlichen Metamodell der Person aus drei theologischen, drei philosophischen und fünf psychologischen Prinzipien einen Rahmen abgesteckt, der zugleich weit ist und gute Orientierung bietet, ein Rahmen, der zu unserer IGNIS Denkweise m.E. sehr gut passt. Sarah Lane Ritchie aus Edinburgh hat mir in ihrem Vortrag „Neurowissenschaften und religiöser Glaube" eine hohe Wertschätzung dessen vermittelt, welche Veränderungen regelmäßige geistliche Praxis (Gebetsleben, Bibellesen, Lieder, geistliche Alltagsrituale) in unserem Gehirn hervorrufen. Ich sehe hier auch eine Antwortmöglichkeit auf eine für mich bisher schwierige Klientenfrage, was getan werden könnte, wenn man Gott zwar sucht, aber ihn nicht spüren und erfahren kann (hier meine ich nicht das Phänomen der „Nacht des Geistes").
Der zweite Tag war gefüllt mit inspirierenden Beispielen aus der christlich-therapeutischen Praxis.

**Gab es besondere Begegnungen mit Menschen, die dich beeindruckt haben motiviert haben und die du nicht gerne wieder vergessen möchtest?**

Ich hatte wertvolle Gespräche mit manchen Teilnehmern, die ich schon lange kenne: Nicolene und Willem Joubert (Südafrika), Anna Ostaszewska (Polen) und Trevor Griffiths (England). Unter denen, die ich neu kennengelernt habe, sind mir zwei besonders im Gedächtnis geblieben: Pavel Velikanov, Erzpriester und Professor an der Moskauer Orthodoxen Theologischen Akademie. Er gab gleich am Anfang unseres Gespräches unumwunden zu, dass das Thema „Glaube und Psychologie" in seinem Wirkungskreis noch sehr in den Anfängen stecke. Und doch hatte er sich schon viele Gedanken hier-

challenging) philosophers of this university, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), had been an essential building block in her personal conversion to Jesus. A Christian and philosopher, Dooyeweerd is also a very important source of inspiration for Dr. Roland Mahler, for many years now in charge of our partner institute icp Schweiz, and has left his imprint on the basic concepts of our social pedagogy training. That such results can come when someone builds bridges between specialist knowledge and faith and opens up new possibilities in thought – I had hardly expected it, and this gives great encouragement to remain on the ball.

zu gemacht und stellte gute, inspirierende Fragen. Mir hat es eine große Dankbarkeit dafür gegeben, welche politische und geistige Freiheit wir hier in Deutschland genießen durften und dürfen, die es ermöglicht hat, so viele Grundlagen und Inhalte in aller Offenheit zu entwickeln und zu verbreiten.

Die andere Begegnung war mit Danielle Phillips-Koning, Gastprofessorin am Center of Theology of Migration der Freien Universität Amsterdam. Sie erzählte zu meinem großen Erstaunen, dass das Studium der Schriften eines der wichtigsten (und zugleich anspruchsvollsten) Philosophen dieser Universität, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) ein wesentlicher Baustein ihrer persönlichen Bekehrung zu Jesus gewesen seien. Der Christ und Philosoph Dooyeweerd ist auch für Dr. Roland Mahler, langjähriger Leiter unseres Partnerinstituts icp Schweiz, eine ganz wichtige Inspirationsquelle und prägt mit das Grundverständnis unserer Sozialpädagogik-Ausbildung. Dass es solche Auswirkungen haben kann, wenn jemand Brücken zwischen Fachlichkeit und Glauben baut und denkerische Möglichkeiten erschließt, hätte ich kaum erwartet, ist aber sehr ermutigend, darin am Ball zu bleiben.

# Next Number

**The topic is not fixed yet.**

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## About Us

This journal is published by the European Movement for Christian Anthropology, Psychology and Psychotherapy in cooperation with the IGNIS-Academy, Kanzler-Stürtzel-Str.2, D-97318 Kitzingen. EMCAPP as a non-institutional movement enjoys meeting Christian scholars and practitioner in the field of Christian anthropology, psychology, psychotherapy and counseling from all over the world and from most Christian traditions. We are focused on bringing together key persons from different countries. The richness of experience and background always stimulates and refreshes us.

This magazine is free and can be downloaded from our website. We appreciate everyone who recommends it.

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# Seven statements of EMCAPP

**1. EMCAPP is based on the faith that there is a God who is actively maintaining this world, so when we talk about Man we should also talk about God.**

**2. EMCAPP acknowledges the limitations of all human knowledge and therefore appreciates the attempts of the various Christian denominations to describe God and their faith.**

**3. EMCAPP brings together international leaders and pioneers in the field of Christian psychology and psychotherapy and its underlying anthropology.**

**4. EMCAPP appreciates the cultural and linguistic diversity of backgrounds of its members.**

**5. EMCAPP wants its members to learn recognizing each other as friends, brothers and sisters.**

**6. EMCAPP encourages its members in their national challenges and responsibilities.**

**7. EMCAPP has a global future and it is open to discourse and joined research opportunities round the world (World Movement).**

For more detailed version of statements: see www.emcapp.eu.