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Spirituality as a form of constructing the axiological and normative order

Abstract: At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, religiosity in Poland varies so much that we can talk about the appearance of a new form of spirituality. It is a continuous process, but trying as an object of sociological research because of the diversity of attitudes towards institutionalized religion. We can formulate the assumption that both the process of secularisation and desecularisation are observed in the area of behaviour, emotions and aspirations to the knowledge of the order existing in the world surrounding the human.

Post-modern spirituality is a desire to know the truth in the reasons for the existence of reality, understood in a deterministic or indeterministic manner. Deterministic beliefs about governance in the world have religious dimension that has a direct relationship to faith in God or impersonal supernatural forces. The indeterministic conviction about the order existing in the world results from the assumption that it is humanity who establishes this order, and it is on its knowledge, inquisitiveness and wisdom based on experience that the discovery of objective truth depends. A discussion on these two forms of post-modern spirituality, referred to as *sophia* and *logos*, is the subject of the analysis contained in this paper. The entire analysis takes into account only the axiological and normative system of post-modern religiosity and spirituality.

Keywords: religion, spirituality, knowledge and faith, axiological and normative system.

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Introduction

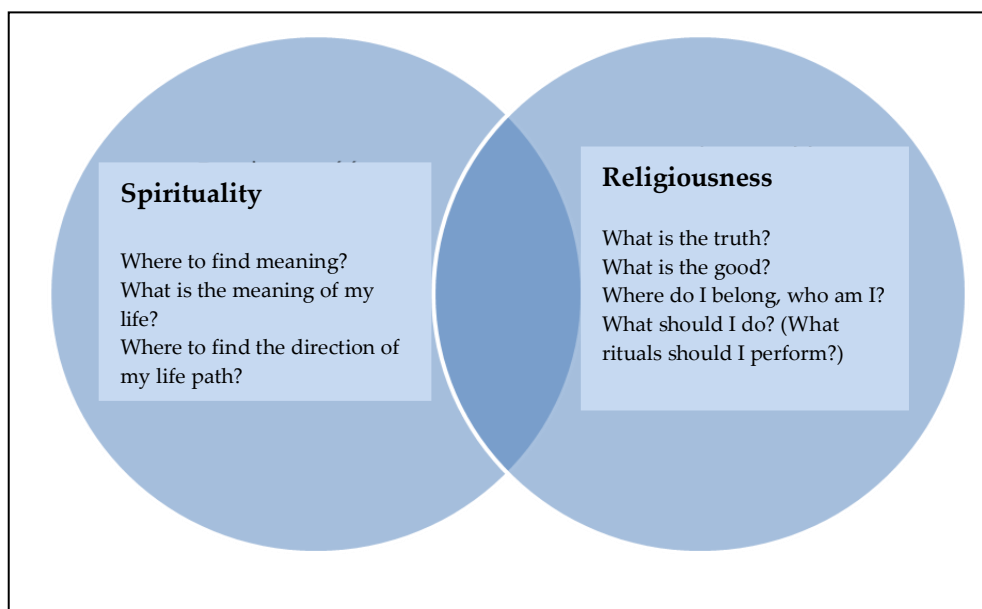
The first basic problem vital to be presented at the beginning of this paper is to clarify the concept of post-modern spirituality. The very phrase itself, which indicates the existence of some new social phenomenon that is difficult to grasp in research on religiousness, may raise doubts. It can be assumed that spirituality is a form of Christian cultural tradition, which has a direct connection with religiousness understood as deepened religious faith based on theological assumptions. However, it can also be assumed that spirituality is connected with a separate sphere of phenomena that have nothing to do with theology, and yet become a new form of religious faith, whose manifestations overlook the institutionalised Church. In colloquial opinion, spirituality is associated with religiousness, but what is considered a manifestation of religiousness is changing. This is related to the characteristics of post-modern society, which include: pluralisation of social structures and systems, dispersion of decision-making centres, high value of individuality and respect for cultural diversity combined with the right to freedom at all levels. These traits are the cause of the search for a new form of religion: universal yet individualised; based on the natural rights of humanity, yet relativist to situational and contextual ethical principles and holistically cosmic, yet finding the cosmos in every living being. Postmodernity does not exclude thinking about transcendence understood as a principle of transcending all micro and macro-scale conditions, and it does not preclude the search for supernaturalism in every fragment of the reality experienced by people and in every or almost every daily situation. So, can we talk about post-modern spirituality as a search for truth where one can find an answer to the order existing in such a diverse and chaotic modern world? It is difficult to answer this question, all the more so that it generates further questions.

Religiousness and spirituality

According to Barbara Leonard and David Carlson, the differences between spirituality and religiousness can be made specific by the questions that people ask themselves when they reflect on the existence of some form of supernaturalism. For it is not important how they define what they consider supernatural, non-empirical and divine, i.e. belonging to the *sacrum* sphere, but it is important that they seek an answer to the question on the meaning of their own life. And thus, according to these authors, the questions about where to find that sense, what is the purpose of life, how to set the direction of one's own life, that is, what to strive for and what values to follow in life belong to spirituality. Religiousness, on the other hand, can be determined by questions about what is the truth, what is good, what is affiliation,

i.e. how social identity can be defined and what should be done, i.e. what rituals should be performed². The answers to these questions are individualised, yet within them, one can find common features that overlap (scheme 1), which include knowledge, thinking, feelings, convictions, awareness of existence, action and contemplation associated with reflectiveness.

Diagram 1. Spirituality and religiousness according to Barbara Leonard and David Carlson³



The concept by Barbara Leonard and David Carlson is in total consistent with the previously formulated religiousness parameters' concepts. Włodzimierz Piwowarski included religious knowledge, ideology defined through faith, religious experience, worship practices, membership in religious communities and religious morals including attitudes towards observing the commandments⁴. Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock assumed the existence of five dimensions of religiousness: ideological, religious practices, experiences, intellectual and consequential⁵. Deepening research on spirituality understood as a form of extra-ecclesial religiousness has made it possible to limit these parameters to the basic manifestations of faith in the existence

² B. Leonard, D. Carlson, *Introduction to Spirituality*, Touro Institute with the University of Minnesota, 2015, <https://pl.scribd.com/document/174071749/1/Introduction-to-Spirituality> [access: 28.03.2017], p. 26.

³ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴ Cf.: Wł. Piwowarski, *Religijność wiejska w warunkach urbanizacji*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warsaw 1971.

⁵ R. Stark, Ch. Y. Glock, *Wymiary zaangażowania religijnego*, in: *Socjologia religii. Anthology of texts*, W. Piwowarski (ed.), translation: B. Kruppik, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow, 1998, pp. 182-187.

of a non-empirical reality. Thus, Pierre Bréchon put forward the thesis that three basic parameters are important to define post-modern spirituality and religiousness: feelings, beliefs and faith in the supernatural and rituals that take the form of religious and parareligious practices⁶.

Feelings are demonstrated by sensitivity to all manifestations of goodness and beauty described as ideals, the manifestations of which become a kind of revelation that evokes emotional *catharsis*. Goodness is as surprising as ideal beauty, and the perception of manifestations of goodness and ideal beauty allows one to experience a state of elation comparable to the experience of the presence of God, so it can take the form of religious experience. Such an emotional state can be evoked by the good done by people, but also the beauty of the landscape, a work of art (including music), and even a utilitarian object. Similar feelings can be evoked by participating in mass events, even when they are not religious in nature.

Beliefs and faith give rise to formulating judgements about reality, whether or not they refer to religious doctrines. Beliefs make it possible to make the notion of reality more concrete, and thus impose a symbolic network of meanings on everything that matters to the individual and the community. Faith does not eliminate beliefs in the existence of supernatural forces, but pluralises what is considered the *sacrum*.

Rituals, which are considered to be spiritual practices, do not have to have religious meanings even if they belong to traditional forms of worship confirmed institutionally and recommended by the Church. Rituals can take the form of strictly magical practices when the goal is to achieve the desired goals (e.g. winning the lottery because of the belief in the strength of the prayer or passing an exam thanks to the ordered mass). Understood as the intentional performance of activities oriented towards an imaginary effect, which is not embedded in an empirically proven cause-effect relationship, rituals may take on a para-religious form when the belief in their effectiveness is a factor determining the individual behaviour. Thus, any behaviour that is daily and meaningful to an individual can become a ritual when the meanings assigned to it are associated with the supernatural. This can relate to culinary behaviour, daily ablutions, paying attention to what is described as superstitious (e.g. horoscopes) and the like.

Therefore, the thesis that feelings, beliefs and faith, as well as everyday rituals belong to spirituality, becomes meaningful, but it is doubtful that this term includes occultism, parapsychology, faith in UFOs, Kabbalah and similar beliefs present in people's images. Everything seems to indicate that occultism and parapsychology are the forms of modern demonology mixed with magical thinking, which, while developing the imagination, does not create a system consistent enough to become

⁶ Cf.: P. Bréchon, *Cross-National Comparisons of Individual Religiosity*, in: J.A. Beckford, N. J. Demarath III (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Sage Publications, London 2007, pp. 465.

one of the spirituality paradigms. Admittedly, angelism⁷ is developing, but it is more related to the high value of good than to the tendency to develop ways to oppose the evil. Spirituality includes all the images that make absolute values concrete. As William S. Bainbridge accepts, parapsychology includes astrology, ufology, the occult, anthroposophy, demonology and other beliefs present in post-modern man's images which "become a form of experimentation with consciousness understood as a spiritual experience"⁸, but they belong to the para-religion, which is a para-interpretation of experiences. Spirituality understood as post-modern religiousness, on the other hand, is a deepened emotional state experienced by a person, a deepened morality that develops the ethical system and a developed sense of solidarity with others based on empathy.

The deterministic axio-normative order

"Experimenting with consciousness", as William S. Bainbridge quoted above, requires not only a reflexive insight into internal experiences, but also a reflection on emotional states that subjectify the view of reality. Deepened emotional states, a deepened morality that builds up the ethical system and a developed sense of solidarity with others based on empathy may raise questions about the reasons for the existence of this reality and not another one, and the search for answers about the consequences of events. In other words, it is a question not only about the meaning of life, but also about the course of life, the meanderings of which rather become evidence of its nonsense. Moreover, the high value of the freedom and right of every human being to self-determination and the ubiquitous conviction of individuals that they are responsible for their own lives becomes a reason for conflict, the core of which is the need to resolve rational or irrational ways of explaining life situations. As Michał Hempoliński writes, "the need for truth and rationality became urgent already when in our thoughts and perceptions there appeared (previously invisible) a moment of transcendence beyond our own subjective states (states of the psycho-physical organism), i.e. when we noticed that in our thoughts, statements, convictions we turn to something external, i.e. in some objective sense, i.e. independent of us as the subject of a given thought"⁹. The conviction that the course and meaning of life is independent of the individual's will and desire appears in the moments of experiencing not only the transgression of one's own mental and

⁷ Cf.: H. Mielicka, *Angelizm jako religia ponowoczesna*, in: *Folklor i folkloryzm w zglobalizowanym społeczeństwie polskim*, Halina Mielicka (ed.), Wydawnictwo PanZet, Kielce 2009, p. 80-89.

⁸ W.S. Bainbridge, *New Age Religion and Irreligion*, in: *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, J. A. Backford, N.J. Demerath III (eds.), Sage Publications, London 2007, pp. 249.

⁹ M. Hempoliński, *Racjonalność jako konstytutywna własność ludzkiego bytu*, in: *Oblicza nowej duchowości*, M. Gołaszewska (ed.), Jagiellonian University, Krakow 1995, p. 245.

physical nature, but also when emotional states annul or “suspend” the sense of subjectivity. The conviction that the course of life is conditioned externally is shaped internally, that is, only the individual’s own experiences can indicate to him or her which events in life he or she considers to be dependent on his or her choices, and to which he or she is condemned by the course of events beyond his or her control. As inner convictions based on experience and emotional involvement in the construction of one’s own biography, they can and probably become a factor shaping spirituality and thus developing personality with new interpretative dimensions. This is what increases the range of extra-national and irrational beliefs, which is a peculiar paradox of postmodernity that highly values science and the rationalism attributed to it. All beliefs coloured with emotionality are extravagant and those that have no basis to prove their legitimacy can be considered irrational. Thus, “in general, it can be said that these are beliefs which, because of their content and the way they are disseminated, are subject to the rules of rational motivation, but are deliberately protected from these rules, are neither subject to confirmation procedures nor refuted”¹⁰. They belong to the category of faith, and as such are dependent on the entity and constructed by it.

The thesis presented above is that deterministic beliefs about the order existing in the world have a religious basis, which has a direct connection with faith in God or impersonal supernatural forces. Both religiousness and spirituality become irrational in the sense that they require some kind of faith in predestination. But there are two poles of this faith. As Michał Hempoliński writes, “in general, an irrationalist is either a dogmatist, i.e., the power with which he expresses his views does not remain with him in any proportion to the power of justification at his disposal (and usually exceeds that power), or a nihilist who disregards the argumentation at all, including underestimating the argumentation power of publicly available justifications and refrains from expressing the (inconvenient) conclusions that derive from these arguments”¹¹. Using polarity, one could also contrast dogmatic irrationalism with nihilistic irrationalism, i.e. religiousness and spirituality, but this is in no way possible. Spirituality is not nihilistic, and religiousness is dogmatic in the strict sense. On the other hand, faith in destiny is an important element of both religiousness and spirituality. The conviction that despite the right to self-determination and full responsibility of the post-modern human for the course of his own life, individualised life’s fate is independent of the individual’s will. This is an extremely important element of any faith that is embedded in external human conditions. In order to separate the notions of religiousness and spirituality, what is important is what this faith refers to, either to personal God or to the otherwise named supernatural forces responsible for the course of human life, or to the laws of nature understood

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 251.

¹¹ Ibidem., p. 252.

deterministically. The problem is that even declarations of belonging to the Catholic Church are not a guarantee of faith in God, and people who declare themselves to be religious do not believe in the existence of determinism caused by the laws of nature¹². What, then, is the deterministic belief in the existence of a higher and more powerful order than man, which is, however, rational and logical from the point of view of superior interpretative systems?

There is basically no answer to this question without in-depth studies on religious faith. One can only speculate more or less embedded in empirical findings. Probably the future and the results of research on religiousness and spirituality will allow to find answers to the questions that involuntarily appear in the analysis of phenomena in the field of religiousness. However, it can probably be assumed that the problem is to determine what *sophia* is for postmodern person, understood as the idea of wisdom exceeding the capacity of human cognition, i.e. divinity, regardless of whether it is attributed to personal God or vaguely defined supernatural forces ruling the world or to the laws of nature.

The concepts of Divine Wisdom contained in Christian theology and human wisdom are not contradictory. Yet, in the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 7- 8, 10- 15), as well as in the New Testament (e.g. Corinthians 1: 20–30), the Wisdom of God is juxtaposed with the wisdom of the world. In the Epistle of St. James, the wisdom “that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (3: 17). The wisdom of the world, and therefore of humans, is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (3:15). The human mind (the *logos*, reason, intellect) “can discover that there is God without transcendent help, and then analyse, verify, cognitively justify this truth”¹³. So the idea of *logos* does not contradict the idea of the *sophia*, but it can separate what a person can know and what is mysterious to him because of the limitations of the way to knowing the truth.

Deterministic concepts assume that a person has limited influence on the course of events. Regardless of what is the source of the limitations, whether the possibilities of his mind or the lack of knowledge to explain the consequences of the phenomena, the search for the truth about the reality belongs to reflective thinking and is a question. The most problematic are the answers given on the meaning of existence and the cause-effect relationship between the phenomena and events. On the one hand, mankind is convinced that everything depends on it, but on the other hand he is aware of the inevitability of the Thanatic end of its own existence. The most important thing is to seek answers, not to give them, because the truth is always relative and dependent on knowledge, and faith is always *blind* in the sense that it

¹² Cf.: R. Tyrała, *Bez Boga na co dzień. Socjologia ateizmu i niewiary*, Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2014, p. 251 *et seq.*

¹³ C. St. Bartnik, *Dogmatyka katolicka (Catholic Dogmatics)*, Editorial Office of Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin 1999, p. 97.

does not allow discussions that weaken the power of beliefs. Irrationality results from both the lack of knowledge and the relativity of interpretative systems. For this very reason, as Ferdinand Fellmann writes, "the world is experienced by the quintessence of the unreality in which we must live"¹⁴, and as such is irrational regardless of whether the explanation of reality is rational, based on the achievements of science, or irrational from the point of view of human intellectual capacity.

According to the deterministic concept, individuals have little or no influence on their own lives and life choices. After all, there is a "higher" order that restricts freedom and requires the acceptance of humility in the face of events that are independent of the will and intentions of individuals. Restrictions that are social in nature are of particular importance. For an individual, they are found in the sense that they are established by others and legitimised by social institutions. While the value systems in force are of a generational nature, their implementation is environmental. The internalisation of the hierarchy of values, which are generally considered to be the most important, does not require reflection, yet is relative in terms of situation and environment. Hence, the obliging nature of the norms, which are confirmed by the actions taken on a daily basis in social contacts, is both problematic from the point of view of the high value of the right to self-determination, and deterministic in force in society. Another problem is to see how far these norms can be exceeded, i.e. to adopt an attitude of moral permissiveness.

Indeterministic axio-normative order

The basic principle that makes it possible to specify the content attributed to spirituality, is the conviction that the pursuit in discovery of the truth is compatible with human nature. The source of this truth is knowledge that evokes reflection and allows conclusions to be drawn about the relationships existing between everyday phenomena and events. However, this is not about knowledge acquired through education, but about the wisdom of life, the possession of which is related to the experience gained. In particular, the experience of suffering, harm and social injustice, can lead to self-reflection, which allows us to understand not only ourselves but also the situations in which other people find themselves. In this way, the experience gained contributes to spirituality development and deepens sensitivity to moral norms. On the other hand, these experiences can lead to social isolation and loss of interest in other people. This is then something else after all,

¹⁴ F. Fellmann, *Świat przeżywany i świat duchowy. Fenomenologiczne pojęcie świata a protestancka filozofia kultury*, trans Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, in: *Świat przeżywany. Fenomenologia i nauki społeczne*, compilation and introduction by Z. Krasnodębski, K. Nellen, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1993, p. 59.

something that can be described as a subjective conviction that there are universal ethical principles that are associated with the conviction of the individual's right to assert their own morality and adopt an extremely subjective attitude towards what is considered truth. Individualism "multiplies the truths", and moral permissiveness based on one's own experience undermines the validity of the existence of universal moral norms. As Janusz Mariański writes, "the world of values and norms is clearly fuzzy and opaque. If the individual *I* becomes a source of moral indications, then easily usefulness replaces duty, and self-expression, authority"¹⁵.

The experience gained during one's life makes one "wise", so not only do we know the rules that must not be broken, but also which rules should we break or circumvent in order to achieve the desired goal considered a value. As a feature of post-modern society, moral relativism makes individually recognised ethical principles as important as those that are socially formulated as strict prohibitions. The only limit to compliance with the standards is the compliance with the conscience of an individual who is convinced that the truths he or she has established are objective in nature. This does not mean immorality at all, because "it may involve a moral sensitivity. Moral permissiveness cannot be equated with moral relativism, although it can lead to it"¹⁶. It is precisely this moral awareness that changes socially accepted ethical principles and becomes the binding normative order, which is the overriding criterion for ordering values considered autotelic. The "fuzzy" world of values and norms does not stand in the way, because life's wisdom allows one to make choices that contribute to the existence of good. The assumption that every human being is inherently good eliminates the intentional doing of evil, and sensitivity to every manifestation of evil becomes a feature of spirituality understood as an empathic attitude towards others and their life situation.

Many people are convinced that sensitivity to the wrongdoing unto others is part of both the terms "religiousness" and "spirituality". This is evidenced by research conducted by CBOS. Thus, in 2016, the majority of respondents (57%) believe that "deciding about good and evil should be primarily an internal matter for every human being" and "almost three quarters of Poles believe that religion does not have to justify legitimate moral precepts. The conviction that only religion can provide the basis for proper morality is expressed only by one in six respondents"¹⁷. The subjectivisation of moral norms is primarily characteristic for people who rarely practice religion (67%). However, only 39% of those who declare themselves very moral are also convinced of their profound religiousness¹⁸. Thus, although religiousness and morality are highly correlated (Pearson's *r* coefficient = 0.33; $p < 0.001$;

¹⁵ J. Mariański, *moral permissiveness*, in: *Leksykon socjologii moralności*, Janusz Mariański (ed.), Zakład Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2015, pp 561.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 562.

¹⁷ R. Boguszewski, *Religijność a zasady moralne*, CBOS research report 15/2015, www.cbos.pl, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 10.

N=849), there is a gap between the declarations and the observance of moral norms. This becomes an indicator of perhaps not so much religiousness as of spirituality, understood as a moral sensitivity to the harm done to others. Thus, the existence of spirituality is attested to by the emotionality of attitudes towards the surrounding reality, the emotion caused by unusual events and the willingness to take action oriented towards doing good. However, this does not mean that religiousness is deprived of these elements.

The right to manifest one's individuality seems to be a fundamental principle to order people's behaviour in the post-modern society. One can suppose that there is a selfish attitude behind it, which makes every ethical principle relative and subordinate to individual beliefs based on one's own experiences. This is not the case, however, because sensitivity to others and their life situations is mitigated by selfishness, and this is manifested by high appreciation of empathy. It is for this reason that the axio-normative order is the result of an emotional attitude towards the world, and the principle that one should develop one's psyche in such a way as to avoid doing evil becomes a dominant value leading to perfection. The right to freedom, self-determination based on drawing conclusions from life's experiences, faith in one's own ability to change the world and the struggle for the domination of the common good, not only belong to post-modern spirituality, but also have references to the ideal of religiousness understood as the realization of the moral model of the good person and taking action to eliminate evil.

Wisdom based on one's own experience allows one to understand others and adopt an empathic attitude towards them. This is the kind of knowledge that is translated into the action taken. Spirituality is the result of experience and knowledge gained, and as such it leads to becoming a good person and eliminating evil as much as possible. The Greek concept of *logos* was understood differently in philosophical writings, but what is important is that the meanings attributed to it referred to reason as opposed to the "sensory-based experience" (Parmenides) and "acting wisely in the world" (Plato), and finally the manifestation of human wisdom (Hegel) contained in human activity. Mircea Eliade assumed that the concept of *logos* meant the common law, which is everything that permeates the common sense¹⁹, and the creative power of thoughts and words²⁰. According to the Christian philosophy, "the act of creation, man has his own *logos*, which is his reason limited to the possibility of acquiring knowledge leading to the knowledge of God²¹". Thus, although the human capacity to know the truth is limited, the ability to think and draw

¹⁹ M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, vol.2, *Od Gautamy Buddy do początków chrześcijaństwa*, transl. by Stanisław Tokarski, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warsaw 1994, p. 173.

²⁰ M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, vol. 1, *Od epoki kamiennej do misteriów eleuzyjskich*, translated by Stanisław Tokarski, PAX Publishing Institute, Warsaw 1988, p. 64.

²¹ M. Osmański, *Logos*, in: *Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*, vol. 6, T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (eds.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2002, pp. 290-291.

conclusions from one's own experience becomes an obligation and, at the same time, a guarantee of knowledge leading to the deepening of spirituality and religiousness based on reason in the sense that it is ordered by ethical principles. Furthermore, this knowledge gives an opportunity not only to know, but also to understand the order existing in the world. Knowledge gives freedom, but limits moral permissiveness to choices that are rational. This is what makes an individual able to answer the most difficult questions, i.e. about the meaning and purpose of his/her own life. In turn, finding an answer deepens freedom and gives an inner joy that "radiates unto others". This becomes evidence of the existence of spirituality regardless of whether it is associated with religiousness or not. Understanding yourself, other people and the order that exists in the universe is a result of the life wisdom you have acquired, which allows you to discover the meaning of everything.

Conclusion

It is the nature of people not only to think, but to draw conclusions from one's own experience, which strengthens the awareness of individuality. High appreciation of the inner experience makes the emotional attitude towards the world and other people superior, and it is this attitude that determines the individual's beliefs. Paying attention first and foremost to subjective judgements, which individualism designs on an objectively existing reality outside, becomes a principle that organizes above all the internal world, which is associated not so much with the "soul" but with the uniqueness of each person's psyche and their right to self-determination. The construction of the axio-normative order is directly related to beliefs based on the experience acquired during life. They are the ones that direct the thinking and colour the emotional view of reality. The result is that an individual adopts a dogmatic or polarly different, nihilistic point of view, i.e. the willingness to challenge, discuss or reject authority as imposed and limiting the sense of freedom. However, neither spirituality nor religiousness is nihilistic, and the dogmatic form of irrationality that appears in people's thinking stems from the conviction that every person has the right to choose his or her own path in life, but that everyone is also subject to deterministic causality.