

COPING STRATEGY? RELIGIOUS VALUES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Joana Proença Becker

Trauma Centre of the Centre for Social Studies (CES)
University of Coimbra, Portugal

In the face of growing concern about violence, this study takes interest in understanding the causes of the establishment of psychological trauma. Through historical construction, based on social, anthropological and psychoanalytic studies, the relationship between trauma and religion is highlighted

Trauma is understood as an inability to cope with an unexpected and unwanted situation, when the psyche is invaded by an external impact. However, when the subject is faced with a violent event, it is not only the physical and verbal aggression that interfere in the establishment of trauma, but also the representation of what happened. This representation depends, primarily, on how the social environment translates the tragedy – which can soften or intensify the suffering even more. As Cyrulnik states:

The cause of a feeling of shame or pride is not the fact, it's the way the events are reported in the subject's surroundings, and how these reports converge to organize the rhetoric in which the child [or adult] is in (2009:156).

In this sense, and considering the **Catholic religion** as a tool of social organisation by participating in scientific, political and cultural development, this religion is presented as an important influence on the way in which the person represents and deals with adversities. Starting from the psychoanalytic concept about the beginning of the basis of religion, children's helplessness is introduced as the main motivation for religious belief. As Freud highlights:

The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate (1930, p. 72).

Understanding that the religious concepts of sin and transgressions provoke "moral suffering" and may lead to the feeling of blame, the influence of the Catholic religion in the establishment of the psychological trauma is questioned. We know that when the subject is confronted with a violent situation, he seeks to understand what happened and, many times, how he could avoid it. Consequently, if his family and social environment are organised through Catholic teaching, his representation of the trauma can be affected by its discourses, intensifying the emotional and symptomatic effects.



Nevertheless, the acquisition of affective and behavioural resources during the first years of life directly influences the way we think about adversity. Our behaviour, how we interpret the world, is the result of learning styles of affection acquired during childhood - every gesture, every word permeates our memory and teaches us how to react in different contexts. Thus, this study approaches the introduction of religious teaching at an early age, because although the tendency of children is to doubt and to ask for evidence, religious ideas can confuse their sense of reality.

Taking all these factors into account, this study intends to incite the reflection on power of religion in our society, especially in the development of children, since they live in accordance with the environment which they form part of. Thus, as Cyrulnik points out:

We can only be touched by objects to which our development and history make us susceptible, because we give them special meaning (2009: 156).

References:

Castel, Pierre-Henri (2013). "Uma história moral da neurose obsessiva", in Marques, Tiago Peres (org), *Experiências à deriva: paixões religiosas e psiquiatria na Europa – séculos XV a XXI*. Lousã: Cavalo de Ferro, 299-318.

Cyrulnik, Boris (2009), *Autobiografia de um Espantalho: Histórias de Resiliência: o retorno à vida*. Translation by Claudia Berliner. [1ª ed.] São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Freud, Sigmund (2010), *O mal-estar na cultura*. Porto Alegre: L&PM. Tradução de Renato Zwick. [orig. 1930].

Hobbes, Thomas (2004) *Leviatã*. São Paulo: Martin Claret. Tradução de Alex Martins [orig. 1651].

