

# **Influence of spirituality, personality traits and burnout symptoms on Catholic Priests' Compassion and Altruism**

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Background: Catholic priests live a life of dedication to God. Their spirituality is assumed to have an effect on their interactions with others, particularly charitable acts of helping. However, the general ability to have feelings of compassion will not necessarily result in concrete altruistic behavior.

Aim: Analyze (1) whether or not Catholic priests' spirituality is related to compassion (as an ability) and altruism (as a behavior), (2) the impact of underlying personality traits (Big Five), and (3) stress/burnout symptoms which may hinder their prosocial behavior. Methods: Cross sectional survey among Catholic priests (n=435) from the archdiocese of Vienna with standardized questionnaires. We performed first order correlation and regression analyses.

Results: Both, Transcendence perception (DSES) and different forms of spiritual-religious practices (SpREUK-P) were only weakly ( $r < .30$ ) related to Compassion or Altruism (C/A), which both were strongly interrelated ( $r = .50$ ). Gratitude/Awe was weakly to moderately related to C/A ( $r = .32$  and  $.28$ , respectively), while Prosocial-humanistic practices were strongly related ( $r = .52$  and  $.55$ , respectively). Personality traits (Big Five) and also indicators of stress (PSS) or burnout (MBI) were marginally to weakly related to C/A ( $r < .30$ ). Stepwise regression models with Compassion and Altruism as dependent variables started (1) with the inclusion of indicators of spirituality, (2) adding personality traits, and (3) burnout symptoms. Finally, Compassion was predicted ( $R^2 = .30$ ) positively by Prosocial-humanistic practices (Beta = .41,  $T = 7.9$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and negatively by the Depersonalization component of burnout (Beta = -.11,  $T = -2.2$ ,  $p = .029$ ). The weak positive influence of Agreeableness disappeared with the addition of burnout symptoms. Altruism was predicted ( $R^2 = .35$ ) positively by Prosocial-humanistic practices (Beta = .49,  $T = 9.3$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), Religious practices (Beta = .15,  $T = 3.3$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and Openness (Beta = .11,  $T = 2.2$ ,  $p < .028$ ), while burnout symptoms had no relevant influence. Transcendence perception had no significant influence in any tested model.

Conclusion: Catholic priests' spirituality showed weak associations with C/A. For Compassion as an intentional ability, their underlying spirituality was not among the relevant predictors, while altruistic behavior was influenced by their religious practice.