

Article

Instrumental Values as Predictors of Religious Experience in the Lives of Students of Pedagogy and of Philosophy

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Abstract: This article seeks to demonstrate the existence of a relationship between instrumental values and religious experience—in this instance, the experiences of God’s presence and of God’s absence in the lives of Polish students of pedagogy and of philosophy. The methods applied involved making use of the Scale of Religious Experience (SRE) of Glaz and the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS). The study was conducted in Krakow. The subjects included male students of pedagogy and of philosophy. It emerges that, compared to philosophy students, pedagogy students seem to have a higher level of religious experience of God’s presence and also prefer different instrumental values. There is a significant relationship between instrumental values and religious experience of God’s presence and God’s absence in the lives of students of pedagogy and of philosophy.

Keywords: religious experience; students; values

1. Introduction

A review of the relevant literature would seem to suggest that there is a correlation of some sort between values and religious experience [1–5], and this offers a motivation to pursue further empirical studies of a more detailed kind, such as may furnish additional knowledge regarding this matter. The aim of this article is to examine, with reference to Polish students of pedagogy and of philosophy, the relationship between religious experience of God’s presence or absence and instrumental values pertaining to moral character and competence.

1.1. Religious Experience

Given that religious experience is clearly an important element of the individual's religiosity, understanding its origin, structure, and impact on human life would seem to be of critical significance [6,7]. For James [8], religious experience is a direct and intuitive feeling of the presence of a divine person or existence, arrived at by some means other than the normal process of perception or understanding. According to Otto [9], religious experience is a person's contact with *sacrum*, with some supernatural causative force, which arouses feelings of fear and fascination. In Buber's [10] opinion, a human being hears no "You", but nevertheless feels possessed by a higher force: he responds by thinking, creating, and acting. At the same time, religious experience caused by a divinity includes at least two inseparable aspects: the cognitive aspect, which provides new truths, and the emotional one, which manifests itself in the form of joy and satisfaction [11]. Researchers have outlined many advantages of religious experience [12,13]: it is a source of feelings of confidence and courage, which foster personal resistance and endurance in the face of uncertainty [14], danger and suffering [15], and has a positive influence on the health and well-being of individuals [16,17]. Another point to note is that while many scientists hold that religious experience can be evoked by psychedelic substances [18–20], studies conducted by Kuczkowski [21] and Smith [19] indicate that experiences evoked by psychedelic substances are not as deep or significant as those caused by Transcendence.

Researchers' findings confirm the existence of two kinds of religious experience within Christianity: ordinary experience and mystical experience. Both refer to man's encounter with God, personified. However, in the mystical experience the relationship between man and God is much deeper than in the ordinary one. Researchers also point to other kinds of religious experiences, including experiences of God's presence and His absence, God's departure and His return, as well as God's sudden intervention. He or she can also experience God's actions, His attributes, and divine calling. There can be different consequences stemming from religious experiences of this kind: in the lives of some people they serve to initiate a process of sanctification and deepening of faith, whilst in the lives of others they may—at least sometimes— engender doubt and mistrust towards God [22,23].

Analysis of the historical development of Christian religious life points to God as the principal putative cause of the religious experiences of the Christian mystics. Experience of this kind would seem to share a specific structure, comprising the following elements: God, personified, a human being, and a religious relation. Moreover, God as a person possesses a value that is central here. For the mystics, part of this was an experience of God as corresponding to a mysterious and sacred reality, as someone close to and connected with their lives, and on other occasions as someone distant, who had left them and "moved out of" their lives. An autonomous, responsible person, we may suppose, is open to God, with whom he or she then establishes personal contact, but at the same time, we must note that a religious relation of this kind will always have a personal, two-way character: it pertains to a human being standing in a relation not only to himself or herself, but also to other people and to God, personified. Thus it was that the mystics experienced both God's presence and His absence, and they were evidently convinced that both kinds of experience could have a positive, life-enriching character—one which would take in both the individual and social dimensions of human life. The religious literature on this also indicates that religious experiences of God's presence and His absence held a cognitive significance for those who underwent them: a human being would experience something new in respect of himself or herself, in

respect of other people, and with regard to God. Mystical experiences were also accompanied by a variety of emotions: during religious experiences of God's presence, feelings such as contentment, joy, and happiness arose, whereas experiences of God's absence were dominated by anxiety and sadness. Religious experiences of this kind also exhibited a behavioral dimension: a person would tend to become more involved in social life and in the life of the religious community [22,24]. In response to these features, the author of this article, referring to the Christian understanding of religious experience [25–27], has devised a scale designed to measure experiences with a religious character [28]—one employed in the research to be presented here. This consists of a series of statements referring to the Christian religion that, together, take in all of the dimensions described above: namely, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral experiences of God's presence and God's absence.

1.2. Values

Current research points to the idea that values perform an important function in relation to religious experience [28,29]. Rulla [30], for example, understands values as permanent abstract ideals which every person should strive for, while according to Schwartz [31,32], values are characterized by the following features: they are concepts or convictions that refer to goals one wishes to attain, that describe ultimate states of affairs or human behavior, and that go beyond the particular situations we find ourselves in—being structured as they are solely with reference to issues of value or rightness. Moreover, Oleś [33] claims that values can be discussed in terms of objectivism and subjectivism: they may be defined as objective qualities of existence which a human being can discover and get to know in a more or less accurate way, or they may be regarded as resulting from the activity of a person engaged in evaluating their surroundings, who thus makes them meaningful. Hence, we might say, a human being can be a creator of values. According to Rokeach's [34] conception, values are understood as what is precious and worth desiring, as standards of human behavior. Furthermore, Rokeach [35] also defines values as enduring convictions to the effect that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable relative to the opposing one. Values, in the sense of convictions referring to what is desirable and worthy of respect, are formed within a relatively permanent hierarchical system. Therefore, according to Rokeach, it is possible to identify those values that are most highly regarded, which will at the same time presumably occupy a central role in human life. Convictions, in this context, will correspond to both a value-defining category and one of the basic elements involved in personality descriptions themselves. Value preferences are typically relatively enduring, but in certain situations, as a result of particular circumstances, their importance can turn out to be overestimated. In Rokeach's [34,35] view, the list of values respected by human beings generally is not that long, as people tend to differ in terms of the hierarchy of their values rather than which values are included. In fact, he proposes a list of 36 values, half of which are terminal values and the other half instrumental ones. Terminal values capture the most important aims of human beings—those which lie beyond our more specific situational concerns, and which are personal and prosocial in their character—whereas instrumental values pertaining to morality and competence refer to the human modes of conduct through which the aims chosen by individuals can be attained. These latter have a relational character, which means they refer to someone or something. Personal values and values pertaining to competence are

brought into play relative to oneself, whereas moral and prosocial values are realized in the context of relations to others.

1.3. The Research Problem

Other related studies, we may point out, have tended to confirm the theoretical assumptions of the researchers mentioned above. Values perform an important function in the human being's individual and social life: they help define our lifestyle [36,37], create our identity [38], support our self-esteem [39], and strengthen our interpersonal relations [2]. They also perform a significant function in people's religious lives. For example, Rokeach [40] asked subjects to rank a number of values, and compared religious and non-religious subjects with respect to average order of ranking. He found that religious subjects rank certain values (e.g., salvation, forgiveness) higher, and other values (e.g., independence, pleasure) lower, than non-religious subjects. Indeed, most research into the religiosity-value relation has been inspired by just this approach. Shoemaker and Bolt have examined Christian students using the Rokeach Value Survey [41], and their findings demonstrate that religious people not only claim to value being forgiving more than less religious people, but also have a conscious sense that very religious people *should* value forgiveness highly. Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, Corveleyn and Hutsebaut [42] have shown that the value pattern associated with "exclusion" *versus* "inclusion" relates to the conflict between "hedonism" and "stimulation", on the one hand, and "tradition" and "conformity", on the other. Research by Soiński [43] shows that monastic clerics value "salvation" more, and the findings of the studies by Jaworski [44] conducted among young Christians indicate that as an instrumental value, "honesty" is most strongly related to religiosity in terms that refer to personal character. In turn, students of both personal and impersonal forms of religiosity seem to prioritize the same terminal value: namely, "wisdom". Meanwhile, the research team of Schwartz and Huisman [45] studied four religious groups (Spanish Roman Catholics, Dutch Calvinist Protestants, Greek Orthodox, and Israeli Jews). The findings demonstrated the existence of a positive relation between religion and values such as "tradition", "conformity", "security", and "kindness", and a negative relation with such values as "hedonism" and "stimulation". Studies conducted by means of the same Rokeach Value Survey amongst university students belonging to the Roman-Catholic church show that, from among the various possible terminal values, "a sense of accomplishment" is associated with the occurrence of religious experiences of God's presence in their lives, while a high level of empathy and "equality" contribute most to the occurrence of experiences of God's absence. Conversely, in the group of students with a low level of empathy, "social recognition" contributes most to the occurrence of religious experiences of God's presence, while "salvation" does so where experiences of God's absence are concerned [5]. Out of the various possible instrumental values, "helpfulness" contributes most to the occurrence of religious experiences of God's presence in the lives both of students of theology and of students of physics [46], and in the group of young university students with a high level of experience of God's presence terminal values seem to stand in a stronger relation to sensitivity of conscience than instrumental ones [47]. From amongst the terminal values available, university students both with a high and with a low level of religious experience of God's presence hold such values as "salvation" and "self-respect" in the highest regard. From among instrumental values, however, students with a high level of experience of God's presence respect "courage" and "helpfulness" the most, whereas students with a low level of that experience have the highest regard for "responsibility"

and “tolerance” [47]. From among terminal values pertaining to personal character, students with a high level of empathy prefer “wisdom” and “pleasure” above all [5]. In contrast, from among instrumental values, students of theology most enthusiastically endorse “helpfulness” and students of physics endorse “cleanliness” [46]. It must be added that the research findings do not indicate the existence of any coherent model of significant correlations between values and the experiences of God’s presence and of God’s absence.

Our analysis of the problem so far would seem to indicate that certain instrumental values occupy a central place in the lives of the students, while others remain on the periphery. Young people typically hold in high regard the kind of instrumental values they consider useful in their private and community-based lives, and which motivate their mode of conduct, but they also prefer the kind of instrumental values that perform an important function in the development of their religious lives. This refers to those instrumental values which facilitate them in strengthening both their relations with God and their involvement in their religious community, and which support the development of their moral life and their desire for perfection. The two key notions in play here—that of instrumental values and that of religious experiences of God’s presence and of God’s absence—are clearly related to each other. On the one hand, instrumental values contribute to the occurrence of religious experiences of God’s presence and God’s absence, but on the other hand, religious experiences of this kind provide a permanent foundation for the hierarchy of instrumental values, indicating which of them should be the basis for particular sorts of behavior or prosocial action. At the same time, this kind of analysis of the relationship between instrumental values and religious experience of God’s presence and God’s absence shows that the research findings in this field, to date, are by no means homogeneous. Hence a decision was made to conduct further investigations into the relationship between instrumental values and the experience of God’s presence and God’s absence, with the aim of demonstrating which preferred instrumental values are significantly associated with religious experience among young Roman Catholics engaged in university study in a range of fields.

There are many factors that young people take into consideration when choosing a subject to study at university. Some opt for the kind of studies that will guarantee future high earnings, social status, and positive career prospects, whereas others choose studies which will enable them to pursue their chosen careers in the future [48–50]. As an example, students of pedagogy, when asked about their motives for choosing their studies, claimed that they simply wanted to realize their potential in the future as pedagogues. Students of philosophy, in turn, emphasized their interest in the rational understanding of the world as a motivation for studying philosophy. It is surely to be expected that the students choosing a specific field of study pursued at university will modify both religious experiences of God’s presence and God’s absence, and perceptions of the instrumental values at work in the world, amongst the young. Both an overview of the literature and more specific empirical studies suggest the questions listed below as starting points for investigation: How far does the field of studies chosen by young people serve as a differentiating factor with respect to religious experiences of God’s presence and of His absence? Do students of different subjects also differ with regard to the hierarchy of instrumental values they go on to adopt? To what extent are the most favored instrumental values ones associated with religious experiences of God’s presence and God’s absence in the lives of students of different fields?

1.4. Hypotheses

The above-mentioned research questions suggest the following hypotheses:

- 1 Their chosen field of study at university serves as a differentiating factor amongst students as regards their religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence.
- 2 Students of pedagogy prefer different instrumental values to students of philosophy, relative to the hierarchy of chosen values in the Rokeach test.
- 3 In the lives of pedagogy students, the most favored instrumental values stand in the strongest relation to the religious experience of God's presence and God's absence.
- 4 In the lives of philosophy students, the most favored instrumental values stand in the strongest relation to the religious experience of God's presence and God's absence.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

The study reported here was conducted in Krakow in 2013–2014, amongst male students of pedagogy and of philosophy. There were no statistically significant differences in terms of the field of study between male students of these two disciplines. The age of the participants varied between 20 and 26 ($M = 23.18$, $SD = 2.012$). The subject group as a whole was drawn from several Catholic state universities. Both students of philosophy and students of pedagogy follow the curriculum outlined by the Ministry of Education. It is the university's aim to prepare its students of pedagogy for the profession of teachers, and students of philosophy for scholarly and research-based work. Both faculties also include, in addition to subjects related to pedagogy and philosophy, subjects of a religious nature, such as religious education, an introduction to Christianity, and Christian ethics. The study was conducted after their university lectures, with the students having been informed about the issues under investigation. The students voluntarily agreed to participate by completing anonymous questionnaires. All of the students professed to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, all declared themselves to be religious, and all had undergone religious experiences of God's presence and of God's absence. Moreover, all of the subjects questioned were native Poles. Several incorrectly completed sets of questionnaires, as well as three correctly completed sets, were randomly rejected, for the purpose of finally obtaining two groups with an equal number of students. One hundred properly filled questionnaires (50 by males studying pedagogy and 50 by males studying philosophy) were subjected to analysis.

2.2. Tools

The results were established using the methods and tools outlined below.

The present author's Scale of Religious Experience (SRE), for measuring the intensity of religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence, was employed. This comprises a set of 37 statements referring to the Christian religion, assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. For the interpretation of the results of factor analysis, only variables (statements) whose loadings exceeded 0.400 were taken into account. The scale has three sub-scales, with the first registering the intensity of the experience of God in general (DB), the second measuring the intensity of the experience of God's presence (OB), and the third

capturing the intensity of the experience of God's absence (NB). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency is high, and stands at 0.914 [28]. As regards the criterion of validity, Spearman's correlation between the SRE and Prężyna's Scale of Religious Attitude is 0.63.

The Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) was used in order to determine value preferences. It consists of two sub-scales, with each of these consisting of 18 values. One of the subscales is used to measure preference with respect to (personal and social) terminal values: *i.e.*, our most important goals and desires. Meanwhile, the other is used to order instrumental values (relating to morality and competence), corresponding to the most general modes of conduct. In the present paper, the author only used the scale of instrumental values pertaining to morality and competence. It may be helpful to list here the instrumental values involved: (1) Ambition: hardworking and aspiring; (2) Broad-minded: open-minded; (3) Capable: competent and effective; (4) Clean: neat and tidy; (5) Courageous: standing up for your beliefs; (6) Forgiving: willing to pardon others; (7) Helpful: working for the welfare of others; (8) Honest: sincere and truthful; (9) Imaginative: daring and creative; (10) Independent: self-reliant and self-sufficient; (11) Intellectual: intelligent and reflective; (12) Logical: consistent and rational; (13) Loving: affectionate and tender; (14) Loyal: faithful to friends or the group; (15) Obedient: dutiful and respectful; (16) Polite: courteous and well-mannered; (17) Responsible: dependable and reliable; and (18) Self-controlled: restrained and self-disciplined. Only instrumental values were used in the present analysis due to the methodology and the purpose of the study. We should add that the present article focuses on the question of the extent to which young people's modes of conduct or behavior—as defined by instrumental values (pertaining to general competence and to morality)—stand in a significant relation to religious experiences of God's presence and of God's absence. Terminal values, which define those human aims and aspirations that are most important, which go beyond merely situational considerations, and which are more similar to religious experiences in terms of their content, were not taken into consideration in the present analysis. The rank order correlation coefficients between the Polish and American versions of the value scales was 0.99. The (*r*) Pearson coefficients for individual positions equaled 0.79 on average for terminal values, and 0.68 on average for instrumental values [35]. The scale was adapted to Polish conditions by Brzozowski [51].

2.3. Statistical Analysis

The results for these groups of subjects obtained by means of the Scale of Religious Experience (SRE) and the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) were then further analyzed. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out, with the results subsequently interpreted on the basis of mean values (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*). Also, the procedure of multiple stepwise regression analysis was used. This type of method has several functions: it aims at finding significant predictors or independent variables; it describes the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable (raw regression coefficient—*B*); and it sets the percentage of variance accounted for in the dependent variable (R^2). It also shows the order in which independent variables are entered into the equation of the regression.

3. Results

3.1. A Significant Difference in the Scale of Religious Experience; Variation in Median Rankings for Instrumental Values across Groups Consisting of Students of Pedagogy and of Students of Philosophy

Results obtained using the Scale of Religious Experience (SRE) indicate a significant difference in the sub-scale concerned with the experience of God’s presence: namely, that students of pedagogy exhibited a higher level of religious experience of God’s presence (OB) ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.321$) than students of philosophy ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.928$), $F(1,98) = 6.22, p < 0.01$). However, there was no significant difference in the sub-scale relating to the experience of God’s absence between students of pedagogy ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.029$) and students of philosophy ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.909$), $F(1,98) = 1.14, p > 0.05$.

In order to interpret the instrumental value preferences, the top four values with the highest median ranks (out of 18 values) were considered in accordance with the Rokeach theory. The results obtained in the Value Survey (RVS) concerning instrumental values demonstrate that out of the 18 values, students of pedagogy highly ranked (median rank across all students in a group shown in parentheses) such values as broad-mindedness (5.0), ambitiousness (5.0), helpfulness (6.0) and responsibility (6.0) in the highest regard (*i.e.*, one competence and three moral characterizations), whereas students of philosophy above all favored instrumental values such as responsibility (4.0), imaginativeness (5.0), logicity (5.0) and capableness (7.0) (*i.e.*, one moral characterization and three competences).

3.2. A Relation between Instrumental Values and Religious Experience in Groups Made up of Students of Pedagogy and of Students of Philosophy

The results of the multiple stepwise regression analysis are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The score assigned to a particular instrumental value for each participant was the rank order of that value within the participant’s hierarchy, with the highest priority value being given a score of 1. Hence, the positive sign of the regression coefficients (B) in Tables 1 and 2 indicates that the lower priority participants assigned that value, the higher their predicted score of the intensity of God’s presence or absence.

Table 1. Independent variables relating to instrumental values with a moral (m) and a competence (c) character explaining variance, in respect of experiences of God’s presence (OB), in groups of students of pedagogy and students of philosophy.

Groups	Variables Explaining Variance in Respect of OB	B	t	p	Multiple R	Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained by the Predictors Entered Thus Far
Students of pedagogy	Responsible (m) *	0.19	3.89	<0.001	0.54	29
	Helpful (m) *	0.31	2.88	<0.01	0.61	38
	Self-controlled (c)	0.13	2.26	<0.02	0.67	45
	Loving (m)	0.21	3.54	<0.01	0.68	47
	Polite (m)	0.27	2.01	<0.05	0.70	49
Students of philosophy	Intellectual (c)	0.31	3.32	<0.002	0.39	15
	Helpful (m) *	0.10	2.09	<0.05	0.50	25
	Logical (c) *	0.08	2.89	<0.01	0.53	28
	Ambitious (m) *	0.31	1.78	<0.05	0.55	30

* One of the four highest ranked values for the relevant group of students.

Table 2. Independent variables relating to instrumental values with a moral (m) and a competence (c) character explaining variance, in respect of experiences of God’s absence (NB), in groups of students of pedagogy and students of philosophy.

Groups	Variables Explaining the Variance of NB	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Multiple <i>R</i>	Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained by the Predictors Entered thus Far
Students of pedagogy	Self-controlled (c)	0.18	1.42	<0.01	0.32	10
	Helpful (m) *	0.31	1.31	<0.02	0.40	16
Students of philosophy	Polite (m)	0.28	2.24	<0.02	0.34	12
	Intellectual (c)	0.11	2.05	<0.05	0.41	17
	Obedient (m)	0.31	2.19	<0.02	0.43	19

* One of the four highest ranked values for the relevant group of students.

Eight different instrumental values stand in a significant relationship to the religious experience of God’s presence (OB) (Table 1). In the group of students of pedagogy these include: responsibility, helpfulness, self-control, being loving, and politeness. The first variable, namely responsibility, explains 29% of the variance in respect of the experience of God’s presence (OB) ($R = 0.54$), and together all the values explain 49% of the variance in respect of that experience (OB) ($R = 0.70$). The test of the final stepwise regression equation proved highly significant here ($F(5,44) = 9.56, p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, in the group of students of philosophy four instrumental values count: being intellectual, helpfulness, logicity, and being ambitious. The first—being intellectual—explains 15% of the variance in respect of the experience of God’s presence (OB) ($R = 0.39$). Together, all the values explain 30% of the variance of in respect of that experience (OB) ($R = 0.55$). The test of the final stepwise regression equation was again significant ($F(4,45) = 6.12, p = 0.01$).

Five different instrumental values stand in a significant relationship to the experience of God’s absence (NB) (Table 2). In the group of pedagogy students, the instrumental values of being self-controlled and helpful turned out to be significant variables. The first variable—being self-controlled—explains 10% of the variance in respect of the experience of God’s absence (NB) ($R = 0.32$), while both values, in turn, explain 16% of the variance in respect of that experience (NB) ($R = 0.40$). The goodness of fit of the stepwise regression equation obtained was significant $F(2,47) = 4.01, p < 0.01$. Meanwhile, in the group of philosophy students, three instrumental values were found to count: politeness, being intellectual, and obedience. The first value—politeness—explains 12% of the variance in respect of the experience of God’s absence (NB) ($R = 0.34$), whereas all of them together explain 19% of the variance in respect of that experience (NB) ($R = 0.43$). The goodness of fit of the stepwise regression equation obtained was significant $F(3,46) = 7.02, p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

The present article aims to examine the relationship between both morally-oriented and competence-related instrumental values on the one hand, and religious experiences of God’s presence and God’s absence on the other, in the lives of students of pedagogy and students of philosophy. With this in mind, we opted to focus on the four values with the highest rankings when seeking to interpret the significance of the subjects’ preferences with respect to instrumental values.

The first hypothesis addressed the issue of whether the field of study pursued at university functions as a differentiating factor when it comes to religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence amongst students, and was only partially supported by our findings: students of pedagogy do have a higher level of religious experience of God's presence than students of philosophy, but students of both groups turn out to be on very much the same level as regards the experience of God's absence. This would suggest that students of pedagogy are more prone to religious experiences of God's presence than students of philosophy. In contrast, students of philosophy, perhaps due to the specific nature of philosophical studies, seem to find answers to religious questions through a rational analysis of reality.

The second hypothesis, which examined whether students of pedagogy—owing to the fact that they have chosen a different field of study—prefer different instrumental values to students of philosophy, was almost fully supported, albeit with one exception: the two groups of students converge in respect one particular instrumental moral value which they both favor—responsibility. This would suggest that this value plays a central role in the lives of both students of pedagogy and students of philosophy, and performs an important regulative function. Students are certainly aware of the consequences stemming from the decisions they take. Moreover, it must be added that out of the four most highly-regarded instrumental values, pedagogy students prefer one competence-related value and three moral values, whereas philosophy students prefer one moral value and three competence-related values. Two tendencies are noticeable here. Firstly, it suggests that in the lives of pedagogy students, who typically believe that they will one day fulfill their career potential as pedagogues, morally-oriented instrumental values, whose realization necessarily bears on their involvement with other persons, are central. But secondly, it suggests that in the lives of philosophy students interested in a rational understanding of the world, a central place is occupied by competence-related instrumental values, which concern self-perfection. It was our expectation that—in accordance with the theories of Rokeach [34] and Rulla [30], according to which values differ between particular social groups and cultures, but for whom it is also possible to discuss intercultural similarities within a more general structure of values—students of pedagogy have a different hierarchy of values than students of philosophy.

Our third hypothesis sought to address the issue of whether, in the lives of pedagogy students, the instrumental values most favored also exhibit the strongest relation to religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence. This, it turned out, was only to some extent supported. As far as the group of pedagogy students was concerned, two morally-oriented instrumental values (responsibility and helpfulness) did turn out to be significantly related to the experience of God's presence. Of these two, one instrumental value—helpfulness—also exhibited a significant relation to the experience of God's absence. The findings of the present study are, thus, only partially consistent with those obtained using other groups of young people engaged in study, in that out of the most favored instrumental values, "helpful" emerged as most strongly related to religious experiences of God's presence in the lives of both students of theology and students of physics [46].

Our fourth hypothesis examined whether, in the lives of philosophy students, the instrumental values most favored also stand in the strongest relation to religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence, and this was not fully supported. Only one of the four values most favored by philosophers—logicality—exhibited a significant relationship to the experience of God's presence, while not one of them exhibited any such link to the experience of God's absence. What emerges in this instance from our analysis of the results is incompatible with the findings obtained elsewhere from a

different group of philosophy students, where a significant relation between the most highly regarded instrumental values and religious experience was indeed observed [28].

Instrumental values, according to Rokeach [34], play a central role in religious life, so it was perhaps reasonable to expect that of them, those most favored by students of pedagogy and of philosophy would turn out to be strongly related to the having of religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence, and that they would also contribute—in large measure—to the latter's occurrence. Yet what the present study shows is that only in the lives of students of pedagogy do the preferred (morally-oriented) instrumental values perform an important function when it comes to the occurrence of religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence. The fact that they do not determine the religious experience of God's presence and His absence in the lives of students of philosophy may indicate—at least according to the cognitive theories of Piaget [52] and Rulla [30]—a lack of internalization of values such as only takes place when such values have been properly recognized, understood, and accepted.

In the case of the group of pedagogues, the contribution of instrumental values to explaining the variance in respect of experiences of God's presence ranges between 29% and 49%, while for experiences of God's absence their contribution to explaining it ranges between 10% and 16%. In the lives of students of philosophy, however, the contribution of instrumental values to explaining the variance in respect of experiences of God's presence is between 15% and 30%, while for experiences of God's absence it runs from 12% to 19%. This suggests that, in the present case, instrumental values, which define students' standards of behavior, more strongly imply experiences of God's presence than experiences of God's absence, in the lives of both students of pedagogy and students of philosophy. In this regard, our analysis of the issue confirms the findings of certain other studies, which had indicated that instrumental values would contribute more to the occurrence of religious experiences of God's presence than to those of God's absence [5,46].

Out of many possible instrumental values, helpfulness, a morally-oriented value, turned out on analysis to be the strongest. That suggests that giving lower priority to this particular value, which pertains to the selfless giving of help, is associated with the experience both of God's presence and of His absence in the lives of young university students.

It was to be expected—at least according to the theory of Rokeach [40]—that a greater number of favored instrumental values occupying a central place in the lives of students would contribute to explaining the variance in respect of religious experiences of God's presence and God's absence. However, what we actually found in this case is that few of the most highly-regarded instrumental values contribute to explaining the variance in respect of such experiences. That may point to one, or more, of several deficiencies: for example, insufficient reflection on the practical significance of instrumental values as this pertains to the proper unfolding of their religious lives, a lack of cognitive and emotional justification with regard to the need to develop one's religiosity, or a failure to embark on the more advanced stages of spiritual life [28,30,53].

5. Conclusions

Taking their aims and patterns of action and behavior at face value, there exists a clearly-observable relationship between values and the religious dimension of young people's lives that constitutes one of

the primary categories of their mental functioning. A human being arrives at judgments regarding their development and degree of satisfaction with life, not only on the basis of religious experience, but also with reference to those values and tasks that they are already familiar with, that they regard as important, and that they continue to be engaged with.

Instrumental values define students' modes of conduct and actions in relation to individual and social life, and simultaneously direct them towards an aim in life that is relevant to each and every human being's integral development and self-actualization. This aim, I would venture to say, is revealed in one's attempts to achieve perfection and rectify one's relations with others, in one's active concern for the latter's welfare, and in one's deepening relation to God.

Our study was conducted within the terms of the Christian religion, in a country where the majority of inhabitants are Roman Catholic. This denomination adopts the concept of a personified God and commits one to the existence of a two-way, personal relationship between man and God. Our analysis, then, is necessarily limited to those possibilities of interpretation that lie within the scope of the Christian religion and the Roman Catholic denomination. Nevertheless, it may also serve as a model to prompt others to undertake further research of this kind—for example, amongst other Christian denominations.

It seems fair to assert that the results obtained here do shed some new light on the function of instrumental values and their relation to religious experiences of God's presence and of God's absence in the lives of male students of philosophy and of pedagogy. The issues and problems discussed also speak to the importance of pursuing such studies: we are brought to see how essential it is to identify any factors responsible for facilitating and hindering such experiences. An especially important aspect of such research, this author believes, lies in its potential for informing us about the predictors of religious experience amongst college students.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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