

## The Power of Religious Faith as a Predictor of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity Ethical Values

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**Abstract:** *This article investigates the influence of religious faith on ethical values (autonomy, community, and divinity), and specifically considers the predictive role in shaping individuals' orientations toward autonomy, community, and divinity. Study examines the ways in which adherence to religious beliefs molds ethical perspectives. The research employs a multidimensional framework to assess the correlation between religious faith and values associated with personal autonomy, communal responsibility, and the sacred. Understanding the power of religious faith as a predictor of ethical values has implications for fostering a deeper comprehension of diverse moral frameworks and facilitating interfaith dialogue. The article underscores the importance of recognizing and respecting the role of religious beliefs in shaping ethical convictions, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and informed discourse on morality in a pluralistic society.*

**Keywords:** *power of religious faith, ethics of autonomy, ethics of community, ethics of divinity, EVA, SCSRFQ.*

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The power of religious faith is a complex and multifaceted concept that holds profound significance for individuals, communities, and societies. The impact of religious faith can be both personal and collective, influencing various aspects of human life, behavior, and culture. It's important to note that the power of religious faith is subjective and varies widely among individuals and communities (Maton & Pargament, 2014; Plante & Boccaccini, 1997a, 1997b). While it can bring about positive outcomes, it is not immune to potential negative consequences, such as conflict, intolerance, or exclusion. The interpretation and practice of religious faith are influenced by cultural, historical, and individual factors, making it a dynamic and evolving force in human societies (Galek et al., 2015; McKay & Whitehouse, 2015). Here are some dimensions of the power of religious faith:

- **Personal Meaning and Purpose:** Religious faith often provides individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. It offers a framework for understanding existence, answering existential questions, and providing a moral compass for decision-making (Galek et al., 2015).
- **Hope and Resilience:** Faith can be a source of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Believers often draw strength from their faith during challenging times, finding comfort and support in their religious convictions (Roland, 2022)
- **Community and Belonging:** Religious communities foster a sense of belonging and social support. Faith-based communities provide a network of relationships, a shared identity, and a sense of communal purpose that can contribute to emotional well-being (Stroope, 2011).
- **Moral and Ethical Guidance:** Religious faith often provides a moral and ethical foundation, guiding individuals in determining what is right and wrong. Sacred texts and teachings offer moral principles that shape personal conduct and social norms (Grenz, 2000).
- **Social Ethics and Values:** Religious faith contributes to the development of social ethics and values within societies. It can influence legal systems, societal norms, and cultural practices, shaping the moral fabric of communities (Molla & Dastagir, 2013).

The ethics of autonomy refers to the moral principles and considerations surrounding the concept of autonomy, which is the ability of individuals to make their own decisions and govern their own lives. Autonomy is often considered a fundamental value in various ethical frameworks and is closely tied to concepts like freedom, self-determination, and personal responsibility (Gylling, 2004). Here are some key ethical considerations related to autonomy:

- **Respect for Individual Freedom:** Autonomy emphasizes the importance of respecting individuals' freedom to make choices about their own lives. Ethical principles often dictate that individuals have the right to make decisions about their bodies, beliefs, and lifestyles without unwarranted interference (Mackenzie, 2014).
- **Informed Consent:** In medical and research contexts, the principle of informed consent is crucial. This means that individuals should be fully informed about the potential risks and benefits of a particular treatment or study before they can give their voluntary and informed consent (Crow et al., 2006).
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Autonomy can be influenced by cultural and social factors. Ethical considerations should consider the diversity of values and beliefs across different cultures. What may be considered an autonomous decision in one culture might be viewed differently in another (Fernández-Borrero et al., 2016).
- **End-of-life Decisions:** Autonomy is particularly relevant in discussions about end-of-life decisions, such as advance directives and euthanasia. Ethical considerations involve balancing the individual's right to make choices about their own death with concerns about the sanctity of life and societal values (Houska & Loučka, 2019).
- **Legal and Ethical Frameworks:** Autonomy is often enshrined in legal and ethical frameworks. Understanding and adhering to these frameworks is essential for professionals in various fields, including healthcare, law, and research (Rendtorff, 2002).

In summary, the ethics of autonomy involves navigating the complex interplay between individual freedom, societal values, cultural diversity, and the evolving landscape of technology and medicine. It requires careful consideration of competing ethical principles and an ongoing commitment to balancing the right of individuals to govern their own lives with the responsibility to protect and promote their well-being.

The ethics of community pertains to the moral principles and considerations surrounding the relationships, behaviours, and responsibilities of individuals within a community (Lomasky, 1987). Communities can take various forms, including local neighbourhoods, cultural or religious groups, online communities, and more. Here are key ethical considerations related to community:

- **Inclusivity:** Ethical communities value inclusivity, embracing diversity and fostering an environment where individuals of different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences feel welcome and respected (Pless & Maak, 2004).

- **Collaboration and Cooperation:** Ethical communities emphasize collaboration and cooperation over competition. Shared goals and collective well-being take precedence over individual interests (Adler & Heckscher, 2006).
- **Respect for Diversity:** Communities should respect and celebrate the diversity of their members. This includes acknowledging and appreciating differences in culture, beliefs, and lifestyles (Keele, n.d.).
- **Social Responsibility:** Ethical communities recognize their role in addressing social issues and contributing to the welfare of society. This may involve volunteering, philanthropy, or advocacy for social change (Windsor, 2006).

In summary, the ethics of community involve fostering a sense of shared responsibility, promoting inclusivity and social justice, and creating an environment that prioritizes the well-being of all its members. Ethical communities contribute not only to the welfare of their own members but also to the broader social fabric and the world at large.

The relationship between the ethics of autonomy and the ethics of community involves navigating the tension and harmony between individual freedom and the collective well-being of a community. Both ethical frameworks play crucial roles in shaping human interactions, societal norms, and moral considerations. Here are several key aspects that highlight the relationship between these two ethical dimensions: Balancing Individual Autonomy and Collective Interests (Pavlakos, 2011); Influence of Cultural and Social Norms (McDonald & Crandall, 2015); Community as a Supportive Environment for Autonomy (DeCaro & Stokes, 2008); Autonomous Decision-Making within Community Structures (Kalenka & Jennings, 1999); Respecting Diversity within the Community (Thai & Lien, 2019); Collective Responsibility for Autonomy (Wall, 2022).

The concept of the ethics of divinity involves exploring the moral principles and considerations associated with the divine, often within the context of religious beliefs and practices (Grenz, 2000). Different religious traditions have varying views on the nature of the divine and the ethical implications of human interaction with the divine. Here are some key aspects of the ethics of divinity:

- **Divine Commands:** In some religious traditions, ethical principles are derived directly from the commands or teachings of the divine. Adherents believe that morality is grounded in obedience to divine will, and ethical behavior is seen as aligning with the divine commandments (Porter, 2014).

- **Morality and the Nature of the Divine:** The nature of the divine, as understood within a particular religious framework, can influence ethical beliefs. For example, beliefs about God's benevolence, justice, and omniscience may shape moral values and expectations within a religious community (Rees, 1956).
- **Revelation and Sacred Texts:** Many religious traditions consider sacred texts or revelations as sources of ethical guidance. Adherents may turn to these texts to understand the moral principles, commandments, and narratives that inform their ethical behavior (Ward, 1994).
- **Interpersonal Ethics:** Ethical teachings within religious traditions often extend to interpersonal relationships. Believers may be guided by principles of compassion, love, justice, and forgiveness in their interactions with others, reflecting divine attributes (Swinton, 1997).
- **Ethical Community and Fellowship:** Many religious traditions emphasize the importance of ethical community life. Believers may be encouraged to support one another, engage in acts of charity, and collectively pursue ethical goals in alignment with the divine (Woodill, 1998).
- **Religious Tolerance and Pluralism:** The ethics of divinity also involve considerations related to religious tolerance and pluralism. Some traditions emphasize respect for the diversity of religious beliefs, recognizing the possibility of different paths to the divine (Hick, 1985).

It's important to note that interpretations of the ethics of divinity can vary significantly among different religious traditions and even within the same tradition. Additionally, individuals within a religious community may hold diverse perspectives on how to apply ethical principles in specific situations. The relationship between religious beliefs, ethical values, and cultural contexts contributes to the rich tapestry of ethical considerations within the realm of divinity.

Studying the relationship between the power of religious faith and the three ethics: autonomy, community and divinity is crucial for understanding the complex dynamics that shape individual beliefs, societal values, and moral frameworks. This intersection has profound implications for both individuals and communities. Examining the relationship between the power of religious faith and the ethics of autonomy, community and divinity is vital for fostering mutual understanding, promoting tolerance, and addressing the ethical challenges that arise in diverse and pluralistic societies.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of present paper is the study of the relationship between the power of religious faith and the three ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy and identifying the role of the power of religious belief as a predictor of an individual's personal ethical orientation (autonomy) and their perceptions of ethical behavior in various measured situations (community and divinity).

## **HYPOTHESES**

For the fulfilment of these objectives, the following hypotheses were developed:

I1 - There is a relationship between the strength of religious belief and the three ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy.

I2 - The strength of religious belief is a predictor of an individual's personal ethical orientation (autonomy) and their perceptions of ethical behavior in various measured situations (community and divinity).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Design and participants**

The present study is descriptive, transversal. The main objective of the present study was to analyse the relationship between the power of religious faith and ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity among the population of Romania. The study was approved by the Ethics Commission of the Iuliu Hațieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy under number 163 / 2023, presenting the objectives of the study, the risks of participation, confidentiality being guaranteed, and participants were assured that they can withdraw from the study at any time they wish.

**Inclusion criteria:** the study included volunteer participants aged between 18 and 77 years without any psychiatric pathology.

**Exclusion criteria:** subjects under 18 years of age or over 77 years of age, or diagnosed with neurological and psychiatric disorder, terminal chronic diseases or those who refused participation were excluded from this study.

Statistical analysis was performed via SPSS version 25 for Windows (Released, 2013). Descriptive statistical analysis was used, and the distribution of data was verified, and Pearson's correlation. A multivariate regression model was performed to exam the association between the power of religious faith and ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

**Ethical values assessment questionnaire – EVA** (Padilla-Walker & Jensen, 2016) It is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure an individual's ethical values and attitudes. Its purpose is to assess an individual's personal ethical orientation and his perceptions of ethical behavior in various situations. EVA is available in both long and short versions. The questionnaire was translated and adapted on the Romanian population (Nicoara et al., 2023), in the present research was obtained a Cronbach Alpha coefficient  $\alpha=.97$ .

**The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire – SCSRFQ** (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997a, 1997b) is a self-assessment questionnaire with two versions, long version with 10-items version, and a short version with 5-items (SCSRFQ-SF). The rating on both versions is done on a Likert scale from 1 – strongly disagree to 4 strongly agree. The questionnaire was translated and adapted on the Romanian population (Nicoară et al., 2023) obtaining a Cronbach Alpha coefficient  $\alpha=.97$ .

## REZULTS

The study included 201 participants, aged 18 to 77 years (mean = 37.98,  $\sigma = 12.55$ ), men (53-26,4%) and women (148-73,6%), from rural areas (29-14,4%), from urban areas (172-85,6%). Marital status: unmarried (73-36.3%), married (117-58.2%), divorced (9-4.5%), widowed (2-1.0%). Regarding on the level of education: gymnasium level (1-0,5%), with high school level (35-17,4%), College level (14-7,0%), university studies (59-29,4%), master's postgraduate studies (84-41,8%), Doctoral studies (6-3,0%) with postdoctoral studies (2-1,0%).Socio-economic status: students (29-14.4%), employed (168-83.6%), without constant occupation (2-1.0%), pensioners (2-1%). By religion: Orthodox (115-57.2%), Catholics (5-2.5%), Pentecostal participants (65-32.3%), Baptists (11-5.5%), Reformed (5-2.5%). Regarding nationality: participants of Romanian nationality (199-99.0%) and participants of Hungarian nationality (2-1.0%).

**Table 1.** Pearson correlation coefficients between SCSRFQ and EVA

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. SCSRFQ	32.63	7.03	1			
2. Autonomy	25.84	2.63	.18**	1		
3. Community	25.57	3.04	<b>.40**</b>	<b>.78**</b>	1	
4. Divinity	24.68	5.43	<b>.88**</b>	.25**	<b>.43**</b>	1

authors' own conception

To test the first hypothesis of the study (I1 - There is a relationship between the strength of religious belief and the three ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy) was used Pearson correlation coefficients.

Thus, from data processing we identified correlations between the power of religious faith and the ethics of community and divinity. Statistically significant positive correlations were obtained between the strength of religious faith and community ( $r = 0.40, p < 0.001$ ), and divinity ( $r = 0.88, p < 0.001$ ). Statistically significant positive correlations between autonomy and community were also obtained ( $r = 0.78, p < 0.001$ ) but also between community and divinity ( $r = 0.43, p < 0.001$ ).

To test the second hypothesis (I2 - The strength of religious belief is a predictor of an individual's personal ethical orientation and their perceptions of ethical behavior in various measured situations), was used multiple linear regression analysis having as dependent variable the strength of religious beliefs measured using the SCSRFQ scale and as variable predictors: Gender, Age, Religion, and the Three Ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy.

In the first stage, age, and gender (Model 1) were introduced as predictors.

In the second stage (Model 2) were introduced as predictors: belonging to a religious confession and the three ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy.

In Table 2, we can see the  $R^2$  coefficients for determining the regression model in which gender, age and the three ethics were introduced as predictor variables, and which thus ends up explaining 88.7% of the variation in the dependent variable - the strength of religious belief measured using the SCSRFQ scale.

**Table 2** Description of the regression model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.037 <sup>a</sup>	.001	-.009	7.06517	.001	.133	2	198	.876
2	.361 <sup>b</sup>	.130	.117	6.61083	.129	29.151	1	197	.000
3	.887 <sup>c</sup>	.786	.780	3.30085	.656	198.727	3	194	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age

b. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age, religion

c. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age, religion, Community, divinity, autonomy

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In Table 3, the result of the variance analysis is presented and a statistically significant coefficient  $F(3.194) = 198.73, p < .001$  can be



observed in the regression model, indicating that the entire regression model is acceptable.

**Table 3** Analysis of variance ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.260	2	6.630	.133	.876 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	9883.496	198	49.917		
	Total	9896.756	200			
2	Regression	1287.252	3	429.084	9.818	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	8609.504	197	43.703		
	Total	9896.756	200			
3	Regression	7783.012	6	1297.169	119.054	.000 <sup>d</sup>
	Residual	2113.744	194	10.896		
	Total	9896.756	200			

a. Dependent Variable: SCSRFQ

b. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age

c. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age, religion

d. Predictors: (Constant), gender, age, religion, Community, divinity, autonomy

authors' own conception

**Table 4** Regression model coefficients for the prediction of the power of religious belief by autonomy, community, and divinity

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	33.854	2.493		13.579	.000
	Age	-.016	.040	-.028	-.397	.692
	gender	-.358	1.131	-.022	-.317	.752
2	(Constant)	27.200	2.638		10.309	.000
	Age	.033	.038	.058	.851	.396
	gender	-.088	1.060	-.006	-.083	.934
3	Religion	2.245	.416	.370	5.399	.000
	(Constant)	5.044	2.835		1.779	.077
	Age	.024	.020	.043	1.230	.220
	Gender	.031	.530	.002	.059	.953
	Religion	-.076	.229	-.013	-.333	.740
	Autonomy	-.321	.145	-.120	-2.222	.027
	Community	.288	.133	.125	2.170	.031
	Divinity	1.123	.052	.867	21.451	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SCSRFQ

authors' own conception

The regression analysis revealed that the strength of religious belief is statistically significantly influenced by autonomy ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $t = -2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ), community ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $t = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and divinity ( $\beta = 1.12$ ,  $t = 21.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSIONS

In the first objective of this study, we intend to analyse the relationship between the strength of religious belief and the three ethics: Community, Divinity, Autonomy.

The results obtained for hypothesis 1 showed that there is a relationship statistically significant positive correlations between the strength of religious faith and community ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and divinity ( $r = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the hypothesis is partially confirmed. There are also statistically significant positive correlations between autonomy and community ( $r = 0.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and between community and divinity ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Our results are similar to other studies on the relationship between religion and morality who demonstrate that they are complimentary in forging a better community and if they synergize their efforts the world will be a better community. (Iwuagwu, 2018).

Regarding the results obtained for hypothesis 2, we found that the strength of religious belief is statistically significantly influenced by autonomy ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $t = -2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ), community ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $t = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and divinity ( $\beta = 1.12$ ,  $t = 21.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus the second hypothesis being confirmed.

The limits of research are theoretical and methodological. A first limit arises from the tools used: self-assessment scales at which results depend on the honesty and reflective capacity of respondents. A second limit arises from the selection of convenience of the participants and from the characteristics of the investigated population: the volume of the research group and the fact that the patients are from a single geographical area.

The study provides knowledge about relationships between the strength of religious faith and three ethics: autonomy, community, and divinity but we emphasize the need to conduct other studies on a larger group of participants from different geographical areas of the country. Theoretically, this research is among the few attempts in Romania to analyse the relationship between the strength of religious faith and three ethics: autonomy, community, and divinity.

## CONCLUSIONS

Relationship between the ethics of community and the ethics of divinity involves the interplay between moral principles that guide human relationships within a community and the religious or spiritual beliefs that shape those ethical values. The relationship between the ethics of community and the ethics of divinity is characterized by a mutual influence. The ethics of divinity provide the moral foundation and principles that shape the ethical norms within a community, while the community serves as a context for expressing and living out those ethical principles derived from religious teachings. This interconnection contributes to the formation of a shared ethical identity and a sense of collective responsibility within the community.

The power of religious faith influences the ethical identity of the community, shaping the way its members interact, support one another, and engage (autonomy) with the broader society (community). The collective expression of faith contributes to the ethical cohesion and purpose of the community. The strength of this relationship is evident in the ways individuals and communities integrate their beliefs into their ethical conduct, seeking to live in accordance with their understanding of the divine will.

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