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The Relationship with Yourself when Praying to a Transcendent God and to an Immanent God

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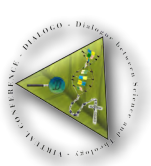
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The Relationship with Yourself when Praying to a Transcendent God and to an Immanent God

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we aim to discuss on prayer, trying to identify a kind of relationship with yourself during the praying to a transcendent God and an immanent God, according to the religious literature and the Romanian social reality. For this purpose, we have conducted an experimental research ascertaining the investigation based on interview and questionnaire aimed the relationship with yourself indirectly when praying to a transcendent God and an immanent God among the believers/faithful persons who pray (almost) daily.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally (from twenty centuries ago), the most of the people that consider themselves faithful, believe in a Transcendent God as a masculine authority ruling over everything /…/ who created heaven and earth and all living creatures '[1]. From this point of view, the prayer Our Father is the most representative and the most known among the Christians prayers. In the last years, after metaphysical experiences, after discovering Dead Sea Scrolls/ Qumran Cave Scrolls (after 1946) and as a consequence of some research in neuropsychology, when more and more intellectuals consider God as Immanent God, the prayers are reformulated alike „mantras" because if God is the creation, instead of above watching over the world and the whole reality is created by God, and a part of God [2], every human being seek for an inside/inner God.

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II. ON PRAYER

A. Prayer's Importance

The fact that "the need for prayer of the believer is beyond doubt"[3] is axiomatic. For the religious people, and "the prayer is the queen of all virtues, is the invisible staircase, which the soul ascends to God; Prayer plants in the soul those seeds from which the flowers of heaven flourish forever. If there is no prayer, the spirit of man is paralyzed, his spiritual life petrifies" [4], ", it is said in The Prologue to The Prayer by Saint Theophan the Recluse. At the same time, „The one who prays becomes aware of its roots in personal reality, in the infinite reality of God, and it is not allowed to surrender to the superficial waves of life, of life closed only in the earthly horizon. He can fill his life with infinite content." [5]

B. Perspectives on Prayer

There are many perspectives on prayer, starting with the definition of the term, the ways to pray, the types of prayer, prayer-related experiences. Not only theology focuses on prayer, but many other sciences, especially psychology.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae, in *The Jesus' Prayer and experience of the Holy Spirit*, tells: „words of Holy Scripture have power over us when we feel as the words of God that He addressed during the reading. / ... / So reading is joined with the prayer" [6].

In (the monk) Hrisostom (Chrysostom) Filipescu's point of view, „prayer is / ... / love" [7], but silence and obedience ("To pray means to be silent, to leave thoughts and let God speak into bottom of my heart"[8]), and Scripture is God's "love letter" [9].

Gregg Braden evoke the four ways prayer found predominantly in the Western world [10]: "Modern prayer researchers have identified four broad categories that are believed to encompass all the many ways that we pray. In no particular order, they are (1) colloquial, or informal, prayers; (2) petitionary prayers; (3) ritualistic prayers; and (4) meditative prayers. When we pray, the researchers suggest that we use one of these four modes - or a combination" [11].

Isaac of Nineveh/Saint Isaac the Syrian distinguishes between delight in prayer and contemplation in prayer [12], showing that the last of these is higher than the other one. Also, for the same Christian saint, the converse of the mind with God is the highest and the most important spiritual activity of a Christian, and cannot be compared with any other endeavor: 'Just as nothing resembles God, so there is no ministry or work which resembles converse with God in stillness.' [13]

In a taxonomy of religious people, operated by Osho, considering the degree of authenticity of their faith, one of the first category is the childish, immature, who "desires a God with a paternal figure", their religion being rather, a "branch of psychology", born out of necessity and fear, in this situation being 90 percent of the so-called religious people are [14]. A second category of religious people is characterized by the fact that their religion is born of intelligence, being "an abstract religion, a true intellectual masterpiece" [15], but nothing more authentic than the former, since "people believe, but faith does not transforms, does not change their lives" [16]. Only the third category of religious people is the authentic one, stating that "you can only address God in a personal manner" [17], experience with God is not "neutral and banal" but "passionate and alive" [18], even profoundly human, since "you feel that you love and hate Him simultaneously, that he is your friend, but also your enemy" [19]. Obviously, the initiate's option is heading for this last category, because "as long as it does not become personalized, individual, while it does not become real and does not affect you

to its roots, religion is useless" [20].

III. YOURSELF WHEN PRAYING, IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Following a recommendation by St. Mark the Ascetic, to offer as a sacrifice to Christ the representation (or thought) of everything at the very moment when it appears in our thought, Father Dumitru Stăniloae understands this offering as an entrance to the innermost depth and The most sensitive of our being, where "Christ dwells in us since Baptism", as follows: „Our approach includes / ... / three aspects: thinking in a true manner and so disinterested to everything; our offering to Christ and, through him, to all those who love Him; and searching our inner center and updating it whenever we think of something, so basically without interruption" [21].

The same theologian states that "the man who prays has the feeling that he is lost in a personal infinite" [22] and during the prayer, the mind must descend into the heart, and "the mind lowered in the heart no longer meets God through the intercession of ideas, but by the presence of His presence" [23].

Saint Theophan the Recluse considers "Prayer without elevation of mind and heart to God is not prayer" [24] and "Living with God is unceasing prayer without words" [25].

Saint Isaac the Syrian/ Isaac of Nineveh shows that after the termination of his mouth, tongue, heart, and mind in prayer, pure prayer follows (to which few people have come), this being neither demand, nor prayer, nor thanksgiving nor glory, when the mind enters contemplation.[ ]

Through the above ideas, Father Dumitru Stăniloae and Saint Isaac the Syrian, although adhering to transcendent God, approach an immanent God, because they think the self, during prayer, merges into the Creation to which the Creator belongs. God was no longer perceived as above, but everywhere, especially in the depths of human being.

IV. RESEARCH REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF WHEN PRAYING TO A TRANSCENDENT GOD AND TO AN IMMANENT GOD

A. General coordinates

During March 2017, we have conducted an experimental research ascertaining the investigation based on interview[ ] and questionnaire aimed indirectly the relationship with yourself when praying to a transcendent God and to an immanent God among the believers/faithful persons who pray daily. This research is more a qualitative one.

Only the data given by subjects who answered affirmative to the first question (from only those who said they pray daily/ almost daily) were processed.

B. Purpose of study

The main objective of present study is to identify to the ordinary people (adults, none of them priest/monk/ spiritual teacher/guru) their relationship with yourself when praying to a transcendent God and to an immanent God (as the case).

C. Research Hypotheses

- It is assumed that people that usually pray to God are in a particular relation with Him/Her;
- It is supposed that people who pray (almost) every day strongly believe either in a transcendent God or in an immanent God;
- There is a different relationship with the self when people believe in a transcendent God vs. in an immanent God;
- During the practice of prayer, there

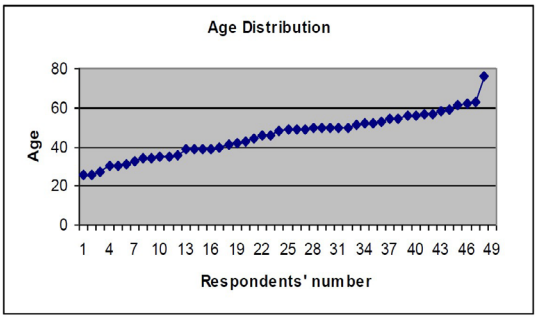
were subjects that experienced remarkable/ unusual results/things.

D. Respondents. Variables. Limits

The research group consists of a sample of 48 ordinary people (adults, none of them priest/monk/ spiritual teacher/ guru). There is an imbalance in the representation of respondents by sex (11 – male, 22.92%, and 37 – female, 77.08%).

- Respondents' Distribution by Age

The age of three respondents (6.25%) is between 26 and 27 (years old), thirteen respondents (27.08%) are between 30 and 39 (years old), eleven respondents (22.92%) are between 40 and 49 (years old), seventeen respondents (35.42%) are between 50 and 59 (years old), three respondents (6.25%)

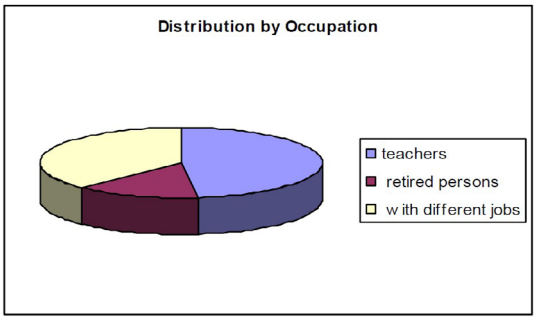


are between 61 and 63 (years old) and one respondent (2.08%) is 76 (years old). So, there is a preponderance of subjects aged over 40 years (32 respondents/ 66.67%).

Figure 1. Respondents' Age Distribution

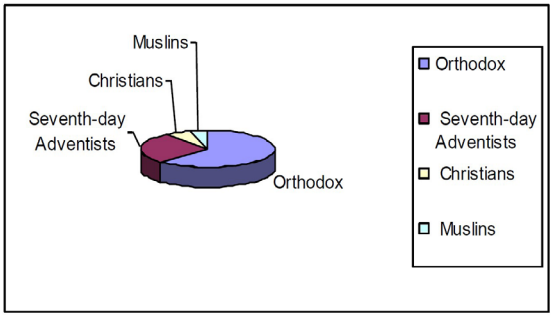
- Respondents' Distribution by Jobs/ Occupation

Among respondents, there are twenty-three (47.92%) teachers, seven (14.58%) are retired persons and eighteen (37.5%) have different jobs (analyst, accountant, bookseller and secretary, caretaker in



kindergarten, commercial worker, cook, inspector, IT specialist, nurse, optometrist, school counselor, store manager, soldiers).

Figure 2. Respondents' Distribution by Occupation



- Respondents' Religion

From forty-eight respondents, thirty (62.5%) are orthodox, thirteen (27.08%) are Seventh-day Adventists, three (6.25%) are Christians, and two (4.17%) are muslins.

Figure 3. Respondents' Distribution by Religion/ Faith

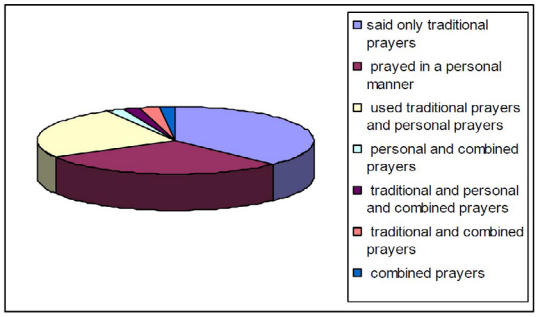
E. Results of the Research

As we said earlier, we only processed the questionnaires with an affirmative answer to the first question.

Respondents declare as follows:

To the second question (What kind of

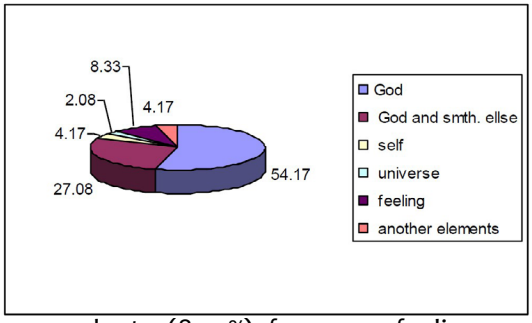
prayer do you say?), eighteen respondents (37.5%) affirmed that they use to said only traditional prayers (already formulated/ from religious books), fourteen respondents (29.17%) affirmed that they prayed in a personal manner/ through personally formulated prayers, twelve respondents (25%) declared they used traditional prayers and personal prayers, one respondent (2.08%) declared that said personal and combined prayers, one respondent (2.08%) declared that said traditional and personal and combined prayers, one respondent (2.08%) declared that said traditional and combined prayers and one respondent



(2.08%) declared that said combined prayers. None of the respondents declared using as modern prayers like "mantras" or another situation.

Figure 4. Respondents' Distribution by Prayers' Type

To the third question (When you pray, whose aspect focus on?), most respondents (twenty-six, it means 54.17%) declared that was focused only on God/ divinity, and another thirteen respondents (27.08%) focused both on God/divinity and another aspect(s)/element(s) (myself/my inside, feeling, language; relationship/ the neighbor/ short prayer). Two respondents (4.17%) focus on the self, one respondent (2.08%) focuses on the universe, four



respondents (8.33%) focus on feeling, no respondent focuses only on language and two respondents (4.17%) focus only on other elements.

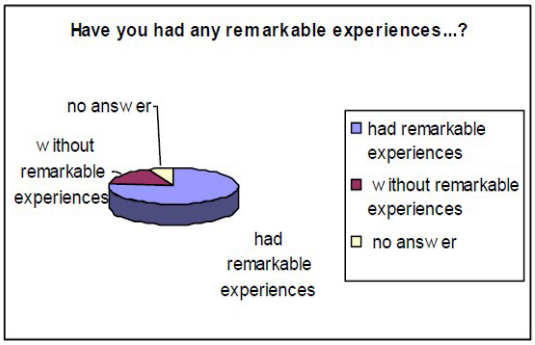
Figure 5. Respondents' Distribution by Focusing

To the fourth item (In your opinion, God is…), for eighteen respondents (37.5%) God is "a male authority omnipotent, omniscient, governing everything", for another sixteen respondents (33.33%), God is very similar seen, but "no male" or described in more detail. For two respondents (4.17%), God is "a part of creation (which He/She created)". Two respondents (4.17%) answered metaphorically: God is " Hope, faith, love, life" and "Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Lifesaver, My Father", and one respondent (2.08%) gave only a synonymous (Divinity). For one respondent (2.08%), God is both "a part of creation (which He/She created)" and "something above his/her ability to comprehend, an entity I can not imagine at its full and real dimension, but which directs the positive energy". For eight respondents (16.67%), God is something else, but some explanations are very similar with the first and second situations.

Thus, for more than 70,83% of respondents, God is perceived as transcendent, and more than 8.33% of respondents perceived God as immanent, but there are two respondents (2.08%) for which God is both transcendent and

immanent, the rest being irrelevant.

At the fifth item 37 respondents (77.08%) declared they had remarkable experiences regarding the prayer and only 17 (35.42%) of them have told us in detail about their experience. Because some of the answers



exceed the space allocated to our article, we marked with a "plus" where we received explanations, giving examples in the following. Eight respondents (16.67%) gave us a negative answer and three respondents (6.25%) did not answer.

Figure 6. Respondents' Distribution by Declared Experiences

F. Interpretation. Case study - remarkable experience during/regarding the prayer practice

Because 'a case study provides more realistic responses than a purely statistical survey' [26], and because we have not very relevant answers at the fifth question/item, we consider necessary to present some testimonials in this sense.

Most of the people who affirmed that they had no any remarkable experience during/regarding the prayer practice, following an exhortation that I found at Saint Theophan the Recluse: "If you can, hide as much as possible your acts of spiritual life, neither in sight, nor in conversation, nor in other circumstances, to discover them, but to work as simple as possible" [27].

Some people gave an affirmative answer, without exemplification (14 respondents/ 29.17%) or in a vague way (6 persons/ 12.5%).

There are also respondents who shared their experiences with us in detail, in a very expressive and interesting way (17 respondents/ 35.42%). For instance, O.A. told us that she used to pray in front of a Christian icon of Virgin Mary (at home, in a small town) in order to succeed engaging as teacher in a good school in Bucharest, and that, after this thing happened, she discovered in the secretariat of that school an identical icon to hers.

N.O.A. (51 years old) told us after praying, she no longer feels the worldly need to eat, feeling "fulfilled" until the evening.

In her childhood, V.M. (42 years old) had a kind of covenant with the Divinity and what prayed was fulfilled, as long as no one knew about this pact. When she "betrayed", it never happened.

D.M. (40 years old) told us she suffered a lot of complicated surgery and during his prayers, she heard voices encouraging her, feeling close to God and the Virgin Mary.

S.N. (62 years old) told us he has survived a serious accident due to prayer.

After a year of inactivity, L.M.V. (63 years old) was treated by the "writer's cramp", an incurable disease due to prayer.

R.R. (26 years old) and P.L. (57 years old) solve different problems only with the power of collective prayer.

Those who share their remarkable experiences of prayer practice and in a persuasive manner are mostly among the respondents who believe in a transcendent God, some of them describing "Him" a little bit different from our definition (item 4. a), but also that believe in an immanent God, and even in both transcendent and

immanent (!).

The writing style of all respondents that shared with us their experiences demonstrates good skills and abilities in communication, correctness and even artistic talent (in telling the stories). The accuracy of writing has often been related to the truth expressed, which is why we believe in the authenticity of the answers formulated by the respondents, even though they sometimes refer to unusual facts.

V. CONCLUSIONS

There is a great variety of experiences regarding the practice of prayer. They are neither conditioned by religion nor by the respondents' opinion / perspective on God.

The first research hypothesis (It is assumed that people that usually pray to God are in a particular relation with Him/ Her) is validated, and the second one (It is supposed that people who pray every day/almost daily strongly believe either in a transcendent God or in an immanent God) is only partially validated, because we identify some undecided subjects, two of them believing in God both transcendent and immanent. The third hypothesis (There is a different relationship with the self when people believe in a transcendent God vs. in an immanent God) was not validated in our research, while the fourth hypothesis has been validated in most cases.

While Orthodox people are reluctant to confess their faith and religious practices, Seventh-day Adventists are eager to share both beliefs and experiences.

We believe that an extensive research with the same objectives as we have proposed should bring out more relevant results if the subjects would show more openness in answering.

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BIOGRAPHY

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She graduate Faculty of Letters from Ovidius University of Constanța (1997) and has a PhD in the field of Philology Cum laude (from University of Bucharest, 2002).

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ANNEXES

A. Questionnaire regarding the relationship with yourself when praying to a transcendent God and to an immanent God

Initials:……

Age:…. years

Sex …M / F…..

Occupation: ……

Religion/ Confession ……..

Specification: multiple responses are allowed!

1. Do you pray (almost) every day?

……

2. What kind of prayer do you say (known / traditional, made by your own etc.)?

a) known / traditional/ (already formulated / from religious books (e.g..: *Our Father*)

b) Modern like "mantras"

c) formulated personally (application, thanksgiving, of praise, ...)

d) combined: ……

e) another situation: ……

3. When you pray, whose aspect focus on?...

a) divinity

b) myself / my inside (self)

c) universe

d) feeling

e) language

f) another situation:……

4. In your opinion, God is:

a) A male authority omnipotent, omniscient, governing everything

b) A part of creation (which He/She created)

c) another situation: ……

5. Have you had any remarkable experience that you can share, related to the practice of prayer?

…… ……

Thank you very much for the answer!

Respondents' Data						Item no. ….				
No.	Initials	Age	Sex	Occupation	Religion	1.	2.	3.	4.	
1.	TMF	39	F	Teacher/ School director	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	a) +We believe in a True God, discovered in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, called the Holy Trinity or The Trinity. God-Father is a personal and spiritual being: Almighty, All-knowing and Omnipresent, Infinite in wisdom and love, Creator of all things and order in the Universe.	yes +
2.	EMI	49	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a)	a)	a) + Father, Son and Holy Spirit	yes
3.	IL	54	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a) + c)	a), b), d)	b) + Above my ability to comprehend, an entity I cannot imagine at its full and real dimension, but which directs the positive energy	yes
4.	RP	39	F	Teacher	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	a) A Person with supernatural attributes (creative, omnipotent, all-knowing capacity) who loves us and is concerned about our wellness	yes
5.	*UN*	52	F	inspector	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	c) Creator governing everything	yes
6.	MC	59	M	retired	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	a) without "male"; creator	yes
7.	MB	61	M	retired	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	a)	yes
8.	BC	31	M	Teacher	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	a)	yes
9.	PM	53	F	Bookseller, Secretary	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Lifesaver, My Father	yes
10.	KD	52	F	Nurse	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)+ relationship	Divine authority	yes
11.	AD	41	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a) + c)	a)	c)The Creator of heaven and earth	-
12.	PS	57	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a)	a), d)	a)	-
13.	A.S.	30	F	Optometrist	Orthodox	Yes	a)	b)	a)	no
14.	MG	44	F	store manager	Orthodox	Yes	a)	d)	a)	no
15.	FC	35	F	analyst	Orthodox	Yes	a)	d)	a)	no
16.	TM	49	F	Commercial worker	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c)	a)+ b)	a)	no
17.	PB	26	F	Optometrist	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c)	a)+ b)+ d)	b)	no
18.	PG	48	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c	a)	a) without "male"	yes

							)			
19.	IM	50	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c)	a)	a) without "male", c)	yes
20.	D. C.	34	F	Teacher	Christian	Yes	c), d)	a)	b) + Divine Trinity	yes
21.	O. A.	35	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a)	d)	b)+ energy	Yes +
22.	GM	56	F	Teacher in school	Orthodox	Yes	a)	a)	b)	no
23.	N.O.A.	51	F	Secretary	Orthodox	Yes	a)	a) + d)	a) Pantocrator	yes ++
24.	T.L.	34	F	Teacher	Christian	Yes	c)	a)+ b)+ d)+ f)- The nei ghb or	c) An all-powerful, all-knowing energy that generates everything	yes
25.	DM	46	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a)	a)+ b)+ e)+ f)-o Sho rt pra yer	a), b)	yes
26.	VM	42	F	Teacher in school	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c)+ d)	a) + d)	a)	yes ++
27.	NS	50	F	School counselor	Orthodox	Yes	a) +c)	a)	Divinity	yes
28.	RCT	39	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a)	b)	c)	no
29.	D.K.	76	F	retired	Orthodox	yes	a)	f): Hea lth, prot ecti on/ car e	c) Protective energy	yes +
30.	B.M.	50	F	caretaker in kindergarten	Christian	yes	a), d)	a), e)	a)	yes
31.	DM	40	F	Teacher	Orthodox	Yes	a), c)	a)	a) without "male"	yes ++
32.	VG	58	F	retired	Orthodox	yes	a), c)	a)	a)	yes +
33.	M.E.	56	F	cook	Orthodox	yes	a), c)	a), d)	a), b)	yes
34.	BN	54	M	Retired	Orthodox	yes	a)	a), b)	a)	no
35.	P.C.V.	50	M	retired	Orthodox	yes	a)	a)	a)	-
36.	C.A.	27	M	IT specialist	Orthodox	yes	a)	a)	a)	yes +

37.	A.C.	30	M	soldier	Orthodox	yes	c)	f) on the required help	a) /c) Our Father The Creator	yes +
38.	C.V.	43	M	social worker	Orthodox	yes	d)	a)	Hope, faith, love, life	yes +
39.	S.N.	62	M	teacher	Orthodox	yes	a)	a)	a)	yes +
40.	LMV	63	F	retired	Seventh-day Adventist	yes	c)	a)	a)	yes ++
41.	R.R.	26	F	Teacher in school	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	c) An omnipotent, all-knowing authority that governs everything, but which is also practically involved in the smallest detail of our lives	yes +
42.	P.L.	57	F	Teacher	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a), b)	a)	yes +
43.	C.M.	49	M	teacher	Seventh-day Adventist	Yes	c)	a)	c)	yes
44.	A.M.	36	F	Teacher in school	Muslim	yes	a), c)	a)	a)	yes +
45.	N.T.	39	F	Teacher	Muslim	yes	a)	a)	c) An authority, an Creator (male/female)	yes
46.	F.S.	50	M	soldier	orthodox	yes	a)	d)	a)	yes +
47.	G.T.	46	F	counselor	orthodox	yes	a), c)	a)	a) without "male"	yes ++
48.	B.A.	33	F	accountant	Seventh-day Adventist	yes	a)	c)	a) reformulated: A authority omnipotent, omniscient, governing with love what he created	Yes +