

# Religion and sense of humor: An a priori incompatibility? Theoretical considerations from a psychological perspective

VASSILIS SAROGLOU

## *Abstract*

*Although humor is not absent from religion, one may wonder whether religion's historical mistrust of the comic is not accidental, but reflects a deeper reality. Based on theory and research on both psychology of humor and psychology of religion, as well as on the psychological anthropology of early Christianity, the present paper inspects the ways in which religion is related to personality traits, cognitive structures and social consequences associated with sense of humor. Not unexpectedly, the conclusion suggests, from a personality psychology perspective, an a priori negative association between religiousness and sense of humor.*

## **Introduction**

No doubt exists that humor is present in religion. Scholars from different fields have explored humor in Biblical texts (e.g., Jónson 1965; Radday and Brenner 1990), in the life of holy figures such as Christ and the saints (Jacques and Kervyn 1938; Leclerq 1959; Trueblood 1964), and in religions other than Christianity (e.g., Hyers 1974; see Gilhus 1997, for an historical overview). It has also been argued that comic and tragic views vary between religions (Morreall 1997).

Neither is there any doubt that the humor present in religion has specific functions, and some interesting work has recently been done on this from an anthropological (Apte 1985) and sociological (Davies 1998) perspective.

Interestingly, relationships between humor and religion have not been studied, either theoretically or empirically, from a psychological