Article
Unveiling the Inner World: Exploring Emotional Intelligence, Faith, and Time Perspective among Italian Nuns

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to verify whether emotional intelligence and intrinsic religious orientation have a positive influence on a balanced time perspective (BTP) in the lives of Italian consecrated women. A positive, balanced time perspective, together with the ability to recognize one’s own emotions and those of others, is integral to people’s experience of religiosity in their lives. In this way, a balanced time perspective can open the experience of religiosity, contributing to a better world, along with all those who are engaged in a religious sentiment that is no longer limited to single segments of self-interest. In this study, we provided evidence that religious beliefs (not just participation in corporate religious life) can provide an alternative source of understanding emotions and perceiving time, for the religious people who live their consecrated life together. We tested whether this phenomenon was specific to the potential associations between various aspects of religious belief, emotional intelligence, and time perspective. This research was conducted on a sample of 283 Italian nuns, and it was verified that both emotional intelligence and intrinsic religiosity contribute significantly to a BTP. Furthermore, the fact that emotional intelligence is mediated by intrinsic religious orientation increases the benefits of emotional intelligence on the BTP of Italian nuns. Altogether, our results suggest that religiosity is linked to a balanced temporal profile and to a positive way of understanding emotions. More specifically, the pattern of relationships between religion, emotions, and time can influence and deepen both the individual and collective understanding of humanity among these religious women and create space for mutual engagement despite obvious differences. These results are in line with the requisites of Public Theology, as they allow us to specify selectively the developments on a more secure and empirical basis of how religiosity can affect the life of people, by exposing the submerged theological assumptions that characterize the internal beliefs of religiosity. Moreover, the research data indicate that the deep aspects of religiosity influence greatly the day-to-day living of religious women. This practical influence of religiosity confirms the urgency of opening up theological reflection in the public sphere of life. In fact, as long as the religiosity of the nuns is not reduced to private practice, theological reflection will also be opened to its public significance in the different fields of their apostolic mission.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; intrinsic religiosity; balanced time perspective (BTP); balanced time perspective scale (BTPS)

1. Introduction

For many people across the globe, one of the most important meaning-making systems is their religion (Park 2005), as it provides a clear existential frame that enhances sense and meaning in one’s life. There is growing evidence for the connection between many religious facets and psychological adjustment, such as self-reported emotional efficacy (Paek 2006; Liu 2010), or temporal categories that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to the events of life (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999).

In line with the recent magisterium of the Catholic Church (Vatican Council II 1965, nn. 12–17, 41; Paul 1979, n17; Francis 2013, n53), theological reflection is moving towards
an “outgoing” experienced theology (Francis 2013, n53), open to the new challenges of the modern world. This approach involves thinking of a theology that adheres to the reality of life, not as a one-way reflection, but as a multidisciplinary reflection that opens scientific investigations to the different realities of human experience in order to rediscover the constant presence and the plan of God, especially in those situations that seem to contradict the experience of the Gospel, such as injustice, war, and lack of human rights. This theology paves the way for a deeper reflection regarding our relationships, intercultural dialogue, respect for minorities and their beliefs and values, as well as religious pluralism, to name some of them (Pirner et al. 2018).

In the relationship between Public Theology and psychology, it is possible to recognize this enriching interconnection between human experience and theological reflection, especially when it refers to the way of translating theological principles into the practice of life (Paloutzian and Park 2005). The present study highlights this link by exploring the relationship between religious attitude and some personality characteristics which characterize the theology of consecrated life as a practical aspect of Public Theology, while anchoring it to the real life of people (Czerny 2021). The role of religion in recognizing one’s emotions and experiencing temporal orientations has been the subject of various investigations. It has also aroused certain interest in the field of theology and psychology (Emmons 2005; Łowicki and Zajenkowski 2017).

Exploring the relationship between religion, emotion and time perspective helps to understand better the role that these factors play in the interdisciplinary aspect of lived-religion, which bases its theological reflection on the religious, as well as the human experiences of people.

It has been found that religious belief has a significant impact on emotional regulation by influencing people’s goals, activating self-monitoring, and providing self-regulatory strength (Paek 2006; Liu 2010). At the same time, religiosity may also be connected with and reinforce the ability of people to balance their perception of time (Leach and Gore 2017).

This article explores the importance of emotional intelligence and religious orientation, especially intrinsic religious orientation, in developing a balanced time perspective (BTP). The initial premise is that when affective life (referring in particular to emotional intelligence) and spiritual life (referring in particular to religious orientation) of a consecrated person are coherent and gradually maturing, a balanced time perspective benefits them to such an extent that the consecrated person would possess a positive and reconciled view of their past life and a positive outlook on the future (Crea 2007; Stolarski et al. 2011; Coppa and Delle Fave 2009; Koenig 2012).

Conversely, the presence of significant problems related to affectivity and spiritual life can often be the reasons for the abandonment of one’s vocation (Rodriguez Carballo 2014), and for those who persevere despite these problems, these could become sources of suffering, dissatisfaction with life, mental distress, and a negative outlook on both the past and the future (Vicente-Galindo et al. 2017; Pegram 2018; Crea 2018; Isacco et al. 2016; Büssing et al. 2017; Francis and Crea 2016).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Emotional Intelligence: Bar-On’s Model

Bar-On’s theory of emotional intelligence has its roots in Darwin’s (Darwin 1878) work on the importance of emotional expression for the survival and adaptation of the species (Bar-On 2006, 2012). Other researchers who have influenced Bar-On’s thinking include Thorndike (1920), with his description of social intelligence and its significance for human performance, Wechsler, for his observations regarding the impact of non-cognitive factors, and Appelbaum, with his conceptualization of psychological mindset (Bar-On 2006).

Equally important are the studies on alexithymia that emerged in the late 1940s, particularly Sifneos’ description of it as the inability to recognize, understand, and describe emotions. This definition of alexithymia led Bar-On to consider whether it could represent the pathological extreme of emotional intelligence (Bar-On 2006, 2012). Moreover, Gardner’s
introduction of the concept of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence in 1984, within the framework of multiple intelligences, significantly influenced the development of the intrapersonal and interpersonal components of the Bar-On model (Gardner 1984).

2.1.1. The Concept of Emotional Intelligence According to Reuven Bar-On’s Model

Emotional intelligence, according to Bar-On’s theoretical model, is a complex interweaving of interconnected socio-emotional competences, skills, and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand ourselves and others, relate to them, and cope with daily life (Bar-On 2006). This theoretical model is primarily founded on the intrapersonal capacity to be self-aware, to understand one’s strengths and weaknesses, and to express one’s feelings and thoughts in a non-destructive manner.

At an interpersonal level, being emotionally and socially intelligent involves the ability to be aware of the emotions, feelings, and needs of others and to establish and maintain cooperative, constructive, and mutually satisfying relationships. In essence, being emotionally and socially intelligent means effectively managing personal, social, and environmental changes by realistically and flexibly addressing the immediate situation, solving problems, and making decisions.

2.1.2. Effects of Emotional Intelligence on Consecrated Life

Emotional intelligence assists a consecrated individual in living their life in a better manner by enabling the development of skills necessary for maintaining a healthy relationship with oneself (intrapersonal capacity), such as self-regard, assertiveness, self-awareness, independence, and self-actualization. It facilitates the acquisition of skills vital for fostering positive relationships with others (interpersonal capacity), such as empathy, interpersonal relationship, and social responsibility (Crea 2007; Ritan 2015). Emotional intelligence aids in cultivating skills that promote better adaptation to the environment, stress management, and mood regulation. These skills include flexibility, problem-solving, reality testing, stress management, impulse control, optimism, and happiness (Brondino and Marasca 2002).

Emotional intelligence directly influences a positive view of the past and shapes one’s projection into the future. Effective emotional management and impulse control enable a person to appreciate present gratifications while also envisioning a better future, leading to a balanced time perspective (Stolarski et al. 2011). In this regard, the study conducted by Toyota (2011) found that individuals with high emotional intelligence have a greater ability to project themselves into the future, while also seeing and recognizing the past as a source of growth and experience for a positive future.

Crea (2007) believes that for consecrated individuals, emotional intelligence is highly beneficial, as it helps them confront and overcome, in the present moment, those past negative emotions that inhibit their growth. It “can serve as a source of learning to exhibit different behaviours in the future and to proceed in a healthy manner towards fundamental choices for one’s life” (Crea 2007, p. 209). In this sense, a positive attitude towards both the past and the future could be the result of using effective emotional coping strategies in various life situations (Stolarski et al. 2011). Bar-On (2006) contends that when emotions are managed in such a manner that they work for us and not against us, it is possible to become optimistic, positive, and self-motivated.

2.2. Theory of Religious Orientation According to Leslie Francis

Since the development of the Religious Orientation Scale (Allport and Ross 1967), there has been much discussion on the conceptualization and measurement of religious orientation. It is because of this conceptual and methodological problem that Francis (2007) examines the conceptual and empirical strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity outlined by Allport and Ross (1967) and the quest for meaning outlined by Batson and Ventis (1982). In response to perceived weaknesses in existing measures of religious orientation, Francis (2007) developed a new scale: New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO), which contains the three main variables of religious
orientation: intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and quest for meaning. In the following paragraphs, we shall explain these three variables in relation to consecrated life.

2.2.1. Intrinsic Religiosity

Fizzotti (2012) states that intrinsic religiosity, in the consecrated person, generates unity and makes her integrated, since her center is found in her relationship with God, and helps her open up to the future, characterized by trust in herself and in others. Poli and Crea (2014) believe that intrinsic orientation in consecrated life is a mature and propulsive religiosity, through which a consecrated person can integrate the hardships and difficulties of life, without losing sight of the values and motivations that underlie their vocational choice. This is due to the development of a growing trust in God and a constant internalization of values, together with the desire to evangelize and bear witness to God’s love.

These authors hold that intrinsic religiosity allows the consecrated person to integrate her convictions, as well as her actions, into her life experiences, thus becoming a more coherent and consistent person. Religiosity is lived deeply and is considered the main reason for existence. This religiosity, according to Poli and Crea (2014), has positive repercussions on the mental health of the consecrated person.

2.2.2. Extrinsic Religiosity

In general, several authors consider extrinsic religiosity as an immature religiosity that does not correspond to consecrated life. For Fizzotti (1992), extrinsic religiosity arises on the basis of childhood needs for defense, seeking comfort and security. The author views it as a form of religiosity that remains closed off from society. Speaking about its role in the life of a consecrated person, Poli and Crea (2014) believe that extrinsic religiosity is limited to an external practice, which does not change lives or awaken the need for communion with others. On the contrary, this type of religiosity generates apathy and indifference because it is based on superficial and ritualistic behaviors.

Crea and Mastrofini (2010) observe that religious people who experience this type of religiosity may be able to fulfil their religious practices punctually, but this does not make them consistent in their lives, a fact that becomes clearer when they have to deal with deep values such as justice, tolerance, compassion, respect, friendship, and communion. The inner inconsistencies of these people come to the surface when faced with such values. Evidently, if a religious person’s life is based on outward religiosity rather than progressing towards deeper spirituality, they risk becoming self-centered and living a mediocre life. This can lead to stereotypical behaviors, gradually generating dissatisfaction, which can compromise their vocation and potentially cause psychological distress.

2.2.3. Quest for Meaning

Poli and Crea (2014) consider this religious orientation, in which one experiences a fragile and ‘doubtful’ faith, important for spiritual growth because it allows one to deal with existential questions in a way that enables an ongoing dialogue between faith and life experience. For the authors, this orientation of ‘questioning meaning’ can lead to an increase in the faith of the consecrated person in its affective and experiential dimensions, which contributes to greater trust in God, especially in times of uncertainty.

The authors also believe, as Allport ([1950] 2017) had said referring to mature religious feeling, that those consecrated people who possess this religious orientation of quest for meaning can act generously, even if they are not absolutely certain about their faith. Indeed, this quest for meaning does not undermine their love for God; on the contrary, it helps it grow. Crea (2014) is convinced that the more a person’s faith grows, the greater their ability to deal with doubts that arise about religiosity. The experience of faith that includes questions is not a rigid faith; on the contrary, it becomes more solid and capable of sharing with others.

According to Crea (2015), although intrinsic religiosity is positive, it does not always help one to overcome the trials of life and face the challenges of the world. In consecrated
life, it is not uncommon that the occurrence of certain events can cause one’s deepest convictions to waver, which is why it is necessary to have a certain level of this quest for meaning in religiosity, which allows the consecrated person not to focus on rigid and routine convictions but to be open to the new opportunities that God offers. Crea argues that those who are very secure in their religious principles are not always able to accept the elements of doubt and precariousness that life presents. Sometimes, these people, who are somewhat “rigid in their convictions”, can feel very disoriented and even lose the sense of their vocation when they fail to integrate their convictions with the events of life.

Crea (2015) is convinced that the faith formation of consecrated persons should not only focus on the theoretical understanding of faith and its contents but also prepare them to face the uncertainty of faith. It must train them in such a way that the doubt and crises of faith are not perceived as dangers but as opportunities for growth. It is this kind of faith formation that will enable them to respond in a manner consistent with their vocation, especially when they go through difficult times.

Thus, Crea (2014) affirms that the quest for meaning is that type of religious orientation that orients the life of the consecrated person toward new horizons of meaning, often transcending their own psychological inconsistency. It is a religious orientation that allows an individual to live their life, always open to the signs of the times, even if they do not find answers that give security. Crea is also convinced that the experience of insecurity often allows the person to trust more in the mystery of God.

2.3. Theory of Balanced Time Perspective Scale (BTPS) by Webster

With his concept of ‘Time’, Webster (2013) holds that the past and the future are closely related. Therefore, remembering the past often triggers thoughts about the future, just as imagining the future can often stimulate memories of the past.

For Webster (2013), the “past” and the “future” have some characteristics in common that are distinct from the “present.” One such characteristic is that both the past and the future are infinite in terms of possibilities compared to the present, which is limited.

Another important property to mention is that both remembering the past and projecting into the future have a strong constructivist cognitive element. This means that, in remembering, we construct our memories, just as, in projecting into the future, we use patterns and prior knowledge that allow us to create possible future scenarios. The present, on the other hand, involves a more direct sensory experience.

Regarding this relationship between the past and future, several neurological studies have shown that the same neurological areas are activated when one remembers the past or projects into the future (Schacter et al. 2007; Spreng and Grady 2010). In addition to the above reflection on the past and future, Webster (2013) notes that, according to research using the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), having a positive frame of mind regarding the past and the future is associated with a number of positive mental health outcomes. Given this conceptual and empirical association between the past and the future and in light of their separate positive mental health outcomes, Webster believes that the combined effect of a positive past and a positive future can produce stronger mental health outcomes than from either one alone.

Webster terms this combination a ‘balanced temporal perspective’ and defines it as “a frequent and equal tendency to think about both one’s past and the future in positive ways” (Webster 2011, p. 112). This combination allows people to use both the past and the future as sources of understanding, strength, and happiness. The author believes that finding comfort, strength, and personal meaning from examining one’s personal past, as well as achieving a sense of optimism and clarity in future goals, is probably the most important factor in generating this balanced perspective.

To assess the balanced time perspective (BTP), Webster (2011) constructed a new instrument, called the Balanced Time Perspective Scale (BTPS), showing that people who remembered their past positively and had a positive view of their future scored higher on measures such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness (Webster 2011; Webster
and Ma 2013), exhibiting higher levels of mental health and wisdom (Webster et al. 2014; Webster 2016). Studies suggest that the new instrument is suitable for investigating the relationship between a BTP and positive psychological characteristics. However, it is important to remember that the BTPS was not created to replace the ZTPI, which is used to investigate a more comprehensive spectrum of time perspective, but as an alternative, to measure subjective perceptions of the BTP (Webster 2016).

In the new instrument, Webster (2011, 2013) deliberately omitted the present orientation subscale. In any case, the relationship between the past and future scales is designed as a resource for dealing with the present time (Barsics et al. 2017).

The initial results of this scale indicated that the BTPS has excellent psychometric properties. Cronbach’s alpha for the past and future subscales were 0.88 and 0.92, respectively. Webster (2011) noted that there are major individual differences between people in the way they experience time. To capture these differences, the past and future subscales of the BTPS were divided through a median, creating high and low scores for both the past and the future subscales. This generated the following four categories:

- **Time Restrictive**: refers to people who scored below the median on both the past and future subscales.
- **Reminiscers**: refers to people who scored below the median on the future, but above the median on the past subscale.
- **Futurists**: refers to people who scored above the median on the future, but below the median on the past subscale.
- **Time Expansive**: refers to people who scored above the median on both the future and the past subscales. These are those who possess a BTP.

In addition, Webster (2011) found that people in the *time expansive* category, i.e., those with a BTP, scored higher on self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness, which is consistent with the results reported using the ZTPI.

It is important to mention that, at present, there is no translation of the BTPS in Italian; therefore, one contribution of this research is its translation, administration to a sample of Italian nuns, and validation of the BTPS in the Italian context. Thus, after performing a back translation, the Italian translation of the test was first administered to a pilot sample of 48 Italians. The results showed an excellent level of reliability, as shown by the Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94 for the overall test, 0.90 for the past subscale, and 0.95 for the future subscale.

The BTPS was then administered to Italian religious women, and it again demonstrated a high level of reliability, as seen in the Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94 on the overall test, 0.90 on the past subscale, and 0.92 on the future subscale.

The Italian sisters were also administered the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF), in which the BTPS was positively and significantly correlated with the MHC-SF ($r = 0.417 \text{ ** with } p < 0.01$), and also the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), in which the SWLS was positively and significantly correlated with the BTPS ($r = 0.345 \text{ ** with } p < 0.01$).

### 3. Method
#### 3.1. Objectives and Hypothesis of This Research

The aim of this research was to test whether emotional intelligence and intrinsic religiosity have a positive influence on the development of a balanced time perspective in a group of Italian religious women, thus confirming what was already highlighted by the studies of Stolarski et al. (2011), Łowicki et al. (2018), and Öner-Özkan (2007).

To this end, we formulated the following two hypotheses: the first is that emotional intelligence and intrinsic religious orientation are positively and significantly correlated with a BTP, and the second is that intrinsic religious orientation mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and a BTP, which, in turn, increases the benefits of emotional intelligence on the BTP in Italian religious women.
3.2. Sample

This research is based on a sample of 283 Italian nuns, aged 28–89 years (M = 52.29; SD = 13.77). The nuns come from different geographical areas of the peninsula. The responses to the questionnaire were anonymous and confidential.

3.3. Instruments Utilized

3.3.1. Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) of Reuven Bar-On

In Italy, Reuven Bar-On’s EQ-i was validated by Manuela Franco and Laura Tappatà in 2009. The test consists of 133 items, being divided into 15 subscales, grouped into five main scales, from which the overall score is obtained. The response scale is a Likert scale, graded from one to five points.

The test results provide an overall emotional coefficient score while offering a score for the five scales, as well as their respective subscales (Franco and Tappatà 2016).

3.3.2. New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO)

The New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO) created by Francis (2007) assesses three constructs that make up religious orientation: intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, and quest for meaning.

Each religious orientation is assessed by nine items that make up a 27-item questionnaire in its full form. The questions are answered on a five-point Likert scale.

In Italy, the NIRO was introduced by Francis and Crea (2016), who conducted research on a sample of 155 priests working in Italy.

3.3.3. Balanced Time Perspective Scale (BTPS)

This test consists of 28 items; the test questions are divided into 14 items that measure a past positive orientation (the odd-numbered items) and 14 items that correspond to a future positive orientation (the even-numbered items). The items are presented on a six-point Likert scale (Webster 2011).

For the classification of the BTPS categories, Webster’s (2011) method was used: “In terms of construct validity, four categories were created by crossing the two subscales (i.e., past and future) and performing a median split of each”. Thus, the BTPS categories in the sample of nuns were chosen by applying a median, so we can say that each category was chosen in relation to the overall score of the nuns.

3.4. The Statistical Methodology Used

Data analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Data Editor (version 26). Cronbach’s alpha was used to assess the reliability of the different instruments used in this research. To relate the BTPS categories to emotional intelligence, we used an analysis of variance (ANOVA). As for testing the first hypothesis, two statistical procedures, namely Pearson’s correlation and multiple linear regression were utilized. For the second hypothesis, the statistical process of mediation analysis was used.

3.5. The Analytical Design

First, the descriptive statistics of the BTPS in the group of Italian religious women will be described, followed by a description of the relationship between emotional intelligence and the BTPS categories, as well as the relationship between the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO) and the BTPS categories; finally, the research hypotheses will be discussed.

3.5.1. Descriptive Statistics of the BTPS

In Table 1, it can be observed that 100 Italian religious sisters, or 35.3% of the sample, belong to the restricted type; 44 Italian religious sisters, or 15.5% of the sample, belong to the reminiscent type; 49 Italian religious sisters, or 17.3% of the sample, belong
to the futuristic type; 90 Italian religious sisters, or 31.8% of the sample, belong to the expansive or balanced-time type.

Table 1. Categories of BTP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BTPS</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansive/Time-Balanced time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>31.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.2. Relationship between Categories of BTPS and Emotional Intelligence

In Table 2, the ANOVA shows a significant effect between a balanced time perspective and emotional intelligence. Comparing the averages of the four groups, we observe that the expansive type has higher emotional intelligence than the restrictive, reminiscent, and futuristic types.

Table 2. Relationship between categories of BTPS and EQ-i.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Dev</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>418.780</td>
<td>45.37556</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>432.093</td>
<td>40.01036</td>
<td>3/279</td>
<td>8.260</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>427.102</td>
<td>35.53416</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>448.644</td>
<td>42.04233</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences among categories of the same factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean A</th>
<th>Mean B</th>
<th>Dif A-B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>418.780</td>
<td>448.644</td>
<td>−29.86444 *</td>
<td>6.09275</td>
<td>1/188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>432.093</td>
<td>448.644</td>
<td>−16.55354 *</td>
<td>7.71370</td>
<td>1/132</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>427.102</td>
<td>448.644</td>
<td>−21.54240 *</td>
<td>7.44468</td>
<td>1/137</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There is a significant effect.

3.5.3. Relationship between BTPS and NIRO Categories

In Table 3, the ANOVA shows a significant effect between a balanced time perspective and intrinsic religious orientation. Comparing the averages of the four groups, we see that the restrictive type has a lower intrinsic religious orientation compared to the other groups.

In Table 4, the ANOVA shows no significant effect between a balanced time perspective and extrinsic religious orientation. Comparing the averages of the four groups, we find that the restrictive and reminiscent groups have a significantly lower extrinsic religious orientation than the expansive group.

In Table 5, the ANOVA shows a significant effect between a balanced time perspective and religious meaning-seeking orientation. Comparing the averages of the four groups, it is observed that the restrictive group has a lower religious meaning-seeking orientation compared to the reminiscent group. Likewise, it is noted that the reminiscent group has a higher religious search orientation compared to the expansive group.
Table 3. Relationship between the categories of BTPS and intrinsic religious orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Dev</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Restrictive</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>35.3100</td>
<td>3.86353</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reminiscent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36.9773</td>
<td>3.45394</td>
<td>3/279</td>
<td>5.113</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Futuristic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36.7143</td>
<td>3.39730</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Expansive</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>37.2889</td>
<td>3.69404</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences among categories of the same factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean A</th>
<th>Mean B</th>
<th>Dif A-B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>35.3100</td>
<td>36.9773</td>
<td>−1.65727*</td>
<td>0.66405</td>
<td>1/142</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>35.3100</td>
<td>36.7143</td>
<td>−1.39429*</td>
<td>0.64009</td>
<td>1/147</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>35.3100</td>
<td>37.2889</td>
<td>−1.96889*</td>
<td>0.53334</td>
<td>1/188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference in the mean is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4. Relationship between the categories of the BTPS and extrinsic religious orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Dev</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Restrictive</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>21.4800</td>
<td>5.22906</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reminiscent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21.3636</td>
<td>4.50572</td>
<td>3/279</td>
<td>2.499</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Futuristic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22.5510</td>
<td>5.59412</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Expansive</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23.444</td>
<td>6.06169</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences among categories of the same factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean A</th>
<th>Mean B</th>
<th>Dif A-B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>21.4900</td>
<td>23.4444</td>
<td>−1.96444*</td>
<td>0.79874</td>
<td>1/188</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>21.3636</td>
<td>23.4444</td>
<td>−2.08081*</td>
<td>1.01124</td>
<td>1/132</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference in the mean is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Relationship between the categories of the BTPS and religious orientation and quest for meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Dev</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Restrictive</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29.2100</td>
<td>0.54259</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reminiscent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31.7500</td>
<td>0.79515</td>
<td>3/279</td>
<td>3.056</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Futuristic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>30.8571</td>
<td>0.61652</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Expansive</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>29.6889</td>
<td>0.54064</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences among categories of the same factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean A</th>
<th>Mean B</th>
<th>Dif A-B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>29.2100</td>
<td>31.7500</td>
<td>−2.5400</td>
<td>0.9803</td>
<td>1/142</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>29.2100</td>
<td>30.8571</td>
<td>−1.6471</td>
<td>0.6975</td>
<td>1/147</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>29.2100</td>
<td>29.6889</td>
<td>−0.4789</td>
<td>0.4683</td>
<td>1/188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference in the mean is significant at the 0.05 level.
Table 5. Cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean A</th>
<th>Mean B</th>
<th>Dif A-B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>G.L.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>29.2100</td>
<td>31.7500</td>
<td>−2.54000*</td>
<td>0.92829</td>
<td>1/140</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>432.0929</td>
<td>29.6889</td>
<td>−2.06111*</td>
<td>0.94391</td>
<td>1/132</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference in the mean is significant at the 0.05 level.

3.5.4. Emotional Intelligence and Intrinsic Religious Orientation Are Positively and Significantly Correlated with a Balanced Time Perspective

To test this hypothesis, we first confirmed that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the balanced time perspective \((r = 0.271 ** \text{ with } p < 0.01)\), then we confirmed that there is a significant positive correlation between intrinsic religious orientation (ORI) and balanced time perspective \((r = 0.280 ** \text{ with } p < 0.01)\). Finally, we performed a multiple regression between emotional intelligence and intrinsic religious orientation with balanced time perspective. Thus, we were able to conclude that emotional intelligence \((\beta = 0.234)\) and intrinsic religious orientation \((\beta = 0.245)\) contribute significantly to the balanced time perspective. Together, these two variables explain 13.2% of the balanced time perspective. Emotional intelligence explains 7.3%, and intrinsic religious orientation 5.9%.

3.5.5. Intrinsic Religious Orientation Mediates the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Balanced Time Perspective

Figure 1 shows that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of intrinsic religious orientation, \(\beta = 0.15, t(2.58) = 0.0102, p < 0.01\) (path as shown in Figure 1) and that intrinsic religious orientation is a significant predictor of balanced time perspective \(\beta = 0.24, t(4.34) = 0.0000, p < 0.001\) (path b). Similarly, emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of the balanced temporal perspective \(\beta = 0.27, t(4.71) = 0.000, p < 0.001\) (path c). The direct effect of emotional intelligence on the balanced time perspective after controlling for intrinsic religious orientation was significant \(\beta = 0.23, t(4.14) = 0.0001, p < 0.001\) (path c’). The mean estimate of the indirect effect adjusted for a 95% confidence interval based on 5000 samples excluded zero \((0.0021–0.0328)\), indicating that the indirect effect was significant. That is, we can conclude that emotional intelligence positively influences a balanced time perspective when it intervenes or mediates intrinsic religious orientation.

![Diagram](image-url)

Figure 1. Partial mediation of intrinsic religious orientation between emotional intelligence and balanced time perspective. * \(p < 0.01\), ** \(p < 0.001\).
4. Discussion

As it was said in the introduction of this study, Public Theology and psychological aspects of religious beliefs intertwine to form a unique spiritual and social challenge for those who belong to consecrated life. Public Theology refers to the manner in which the Church engages with the world, articulating its teachings and values in the public sphere. It seeks to address societal issues through the lens of faith, promoting justice, peace, and the common good.

The psychological aspects of religious conviction, on the other hand, refer to the specific spiritual belief guiding religious people in their mission in the practical life. It is expressed through various forms of apostolic service, prayer, and communal living, but above all, it is lived through the way they live their emotions and the way they balance their time perspective, especially in their interactions with society.

In this study, it has been verified that among consecrated women in Italy, as emotional intelligence increases, so does the balanced time perspective, and vice versa. This is in agreement with research conducted by Matthews and Stolarski (2015) and Stolarski et al. (2011). It was also found that, as intrinsic religious orientation increases, the balanced time perspective increases, and vice versa. This concurs with several studies, where it has been verified that there is a significant positive correlation between a positive past, positive present, and positive future and intrinsic religious orientation (Łowicki et al. 2018; Öner-Özkan 2007; Zimbardo and Boyd 2009).

Another result obtained from this study is that emotional intelligence, together with intrinsic religiosity, contribute more or less harmoniously to the explanation of the variance in the BTP. It has also been verified that emotional intelligence has a more positive influence on the BTP when intrinsic religious orientation intervenes or mediates. This finding corresponds with previous research findings that explain how self-control and self-regulation, which are characteristics of religion, influence the perception of time (Łowicki et al. 2018; Öner-Ozkan 2007). This means that self-control and self-regulation, which also belong to emotional intelligence, can be enhanced by the presence of intrinsic religiosity, which, in turn, will have an impact on promoting a BTP.

One of the important contributions of this research is its validation of the BTPS in a sample of Italian consecrated women. This test has been administered to several samples of people, but this is the first time it has been administered to a special sample such as Italian religious women.

The results from this study, especially in relation to the balanced time perspective of Italian consecrated women, show that more than one-third of the sample of religious Italian women belongs to the restrictive type; that is, they are people who tend to look at their past and their future negatively. Likewise, nearly one-third of the sample belongs to the expansive or time-balanced type; that is, they are people who look at their past and their future positively. A smaller group belongs to the reminiscent type; that is, they are the people who tend to look positively at their past and negatively at their future. Similarly, a small group belongs to the futuristic type; that is, they look positively at their future but negatively at their past.

This research has also shown that in this sample of Italian religious women, the time-balanced type is more positively related to emotional intelligence than the other three types of temporal categories. This result is in line with previous research which showed that a time-balanced perspective is correlated with greater positive life outcomes (Tomich and Tolich 2021; Wiesmann et al. 2018).

From a larger perspective, it can be ascertained that the current investigation contributes substantially to a better understanding of the relationship between psychological adjustment and religiosity, in the effort to develop a comprehensive, integrated understanding of the life of faith in contemporary society. Our findings suggest that intrinsic religiosity may be essential for promoting emotion self-regulation abilities, which in turn foster people’s psychological adaptation and their ability to balance their approach to temporal categories.
These results are very important in terms of interdisciplinarity, as they highlight the dynamic characteristics of the factors examined. This may have two important consequences from the point of view of practical theology. First, religiosity is not a static factor, but rather a dynamic dimension of human life (Francis 2010). It may vary both according to the form of religiosity assessed and according to the samples being studied. Second, religiosity is an important educational element in the growth of both the individual and the social environment. It means that religious belief, involvement, and practice contribute to the growth of each individual and that of the society (Day 2017).

Religion is a particularly strong source of support in this process of development, especially when it is it is associated with positive and practical dimensions of human experience, such as emotional self-regulation and a balanced time perspective.

5. Some Practical Implications

The present study showed that intrinsic religiosity is associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence and a balanced time perspective in a sample of Italian religious women. This key finding has both theoretical and practical applications within practical theology and pastoral involvement.

At a theoretical level, in line with the literature (Piedmont 1999; Henningsgaard and Arnau 2008), the data confirm that religiosity is not separated from the different dimensions of personality: the way people live their religiosity is correlated to their understanding of the time perspective and to the way they regulate their emotions (Łowicki et al. 2018; Paek 2006).

From a practical perspective, this empirical study supports the need for a balanced way of living the time perspective, through a deep spiritual motivation, which can be influenced by the way people experience a positive adjustment of their emotions, especially among women (Danner et al. 2001), and particularly religious women (Francis and Wilcox 1998).

This tendency will have a distinctive effect on the endurance of their vocational project in Catholic institutions. In fact, the empirical data of the present research show that high levels of intrinsic experience of religiosity will influence positively their capacity to look at their past as a time of enrichment and also to have a positive regard for their future as a time of concrete involvement that bears witness to their beliefs.

In other words, their intrinsic religiosity is not a passive but a demanding way to put their theological convictions into practice, in order to be really “women in exit” rather than people preoccupied with defending their faith from the danger of the outside world.

Moreover, this perspective may provide encouragement for female religious congregations engaged in pastoral actions to take the first step in becoming involved and supportive in situations where there is a need for hope. In this way, they can feel part of a Church which “goes forth” (Pope Francis 2013, n24) and learn to live Practical Theology in their day-to-day lives, starting from the existential peripheries, which will require their doors to always be wide open to welcome all those who are looking for God.

6. Limitations and Future Prospects

One contribution of this research was the validation of the BTPS test in a sample of Italian consecrated women. However, we believe that the validation of this test with a larger and more heterogeneous sample would be a valuable aid for the future use of this scale.

As we have seen, about one-third of the Italian consecrated women have a negative view of their past and future. In this regard, emotional intelligence has much to offer them, as it can provide them with emotional coping strategies. Therefore, focusing on the development of emotional intelligence will help these consecrated women to have a more positive view of their past and future.
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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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