



BIBLIOTHERAPY: THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF EGO DEFENSE MECHANISMS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BEATITUDES ATTRIBUTED TO JESUS CHRIST

BIBLIOTERAPIA: A TEORIA PSICANALÍTICA DOS MECANISMOS DE DEFESA DO EGO E RELAÇÃO COM AS BEM-AVENTURANÇAS ATRIBUÍDAS À JESUS CRISTO

BIBLIOTERAPIA: LA TEORÍA PSICOANALÍTICA DE LOS MECANISMOS DE DEFENSA DEL EGO Y SU RELACIÓN CON LAS BIENAVENTURANZAS ATRIBUIDAS A JESUCRISTO

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory and bibliographical article analyzes the intersection between the Ego Defense Mechanisms, as presented by psychoanalytic theories, and the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount of the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapters 5 to 7, of the Protestant Christian Bible. As a problem-question, it proposes to investigate: "How do the ego defense mechanisms, as described by psychoanalysis, relate to the teachings and guidelines present in the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ?" By examining these concepts, we seek to identify points of intersection that can offer insights into how religious teachings align with our internal coping mechanisms. As a result, this research presents a four-way relationship between the verses of the Beatitudes and the ego defense mechanism identified. The scientific contribution of this research focuses on the production of a reference tool with psychoanalytic bases, to be used in pastoral therapeutic counseling, also characterized as bibliotherapy.

KEYWORDS: Psychoanalysis. Defense Mechanisms. Jesus Christ. Christian Bible.

RESUMO

O presente artigo de caráter exploratório e bibliográfico, analisa a intersecção entre os Mecanismos de Defesa do Ego, conforme apresentados pelas teorias psicanalíticas, e as bem-aventuranças proclamadas por Jesus Cristo no Sermão da Montanha do livro do Evangelho Segundo Mateus Cap. 5 ao 7 da Bíblia Cristã Protestante. Como pergunta-problema, propõe-se investigar: "Como os mecanismos de defesa do ego, conforme descritos pela psicanálise, se relacionam com os ensinamentos e orientações presentes nas bem-aventuranças de Jesus Cristo?" Ao examinar estes conceitos, buscamos identificar pontos de intersecção que podem oferecer insights sobre a maneira como os ensinamentos religiosos se alinham com nossos mecanismos internos de enfrentamento. Como resultado, a presente pesquisa apresenta um quatro relacional entre as os versículos das bem-aventuranças, e o mecanismo de defesa do ego identificado. A contribuição científica dessa pesquisa foca na produção de uma ferramenta referencial com bases psicanalíticas, para ser utilizada na aconselhamento terapêutico pastoral, também caracterizado como biblioterapia (Rubin, 1978).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Psicanálise. Mecanismos de Defesa. Jesus Cristo. Bíblia Cristã.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo exploratorio y bibliográfico analiza la intersección entre los Mecanismos de Defensa del Ego, tal como los presentan las teorías psicoanalíticas, y las Bienaventuranzas proclamadas por Jesucristo en el Sermón de la Montaña del libro Evangelio según Mateo, capítulos 5 a 7 de la Biblia cristiana protestante. Como pregunta-problema, se propone indagar: "¿Cómo se relacionan los mecanismos de defensa del ego, tal como los describe el psicoanálisis, con las enseñanzas y orientaciones presentes en las bienaventuranzas de Jesucristo?" Al examinar estos conceptos, buscamos identificar puntos de intersección que puedan ofrecer información sobre la forma en que las enseñanzas religiosas se alinean con nuestros mecanismos internos de afrontamiento. Como resultado, la presente investigación presenta un cuadro relacional entre los versículos de las Bienaventuranzas y el mecanismo de defensa del ego identificado. El aporte científico de esta investigación se centra en la producción de una herramienta referencial con bases psicoanalíticas, para ser utilizada en la asesoría terapéutica pastoral, también caracterizada como biblioterapia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Psicoanálisis. Mecanismos de defensa. Dios mío. Biblia cristiana.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, humanity has sought to understand the human mind and its complex interplay with emotions, desires, and internal conflicts. Psychoanalysis, which emerged in the late 19th century with the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud, offers a systematic approach to deciphering this intricate web of feelings and behaviors. As Freud (1936) pointed out, "the human being is largely motivated by unconscious desires that have their roots in childhood." These desires, often in conflict with external demands and social norms, result in the formation of defense mechanisms. At the same time, religious traditions, rich in wisdom and moral guidance, have similarly guided human beings in the search for meaning, inner peace, and harmony.

The Beatitudes, a set of teachings given by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, are presented as a central pillar of Christian ethics, illuminating the path to a virtuous life aligned with divine principles. As noted by Angell (1910), many religious teachings, including the Beatitudes, contain principles that are consistent with modern therapeutic practices and can promote psychological well-being. These precepts, by emphasizing values such as humility, compassion, and justice, resonate with a promise of spiritual well-being and heavenly reward.

However, as distinct as these two domains may seem at first glance, an intriguing question arises: could the ego's defense mechanisms, so thoroughly analyzed by psychoanalysis, find parallels or even complementarity with the teachings contained in the Beatitudes? This question suggests a possible confluence between psychology and spirituality, two fields that, although different in their methods and approaches, seek the understanding and well-being of human beings.

The aim of this study is therefore to delve into this intersection, exploring how the principles of psychoanalysis and Christian teachings can intertwine, offering an enriching perspective on the human journey in search of balance, understanding and transcendence.



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General objectives:

- Analyze the relationship between the ego's defense mechanisms in psychoanalysis and the beatitudes as presented in the Sermon on the Mount.

Specific objectives:

- Describe and define the ego defense mechanisms as presented in the psychoanalytic literature.
- Analyze the Beatitudes in detail, focusing on their structure and meaning within the Christian tradition.
- Identify and discuss possible parallels and interactions between defense mechanisms and the beatitudes, considering both the psychoanalytic and religious contexts.

Problem Question:

- How do the ego's defense mechanisms, as described by psychoanalysis, relate to the teachings and guidance present in the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ego Defense Mechanisms

Ego defense mechanisms are unconscious mental processes used by the ego to protect itself from anxiety. These mechanisms were described by Sigmund Freud and are used to reduce internal stress (Freud, 1936). In addition to Freud, other psychoanalysts also contributed to the understanding of ego defense mechanisms. Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter, highlighted the importance of defense mechanisms in childhood and adolescence (Anna Freud, 1936).

The first defense mechanism is repression, which involves forgetting painful or traumatic events from the past. The second mechanism is operation, which is the transformation of an unacceptable desire into its opposite. The third mechanism is compartmentalization, which is the separation of conflicting thoughts and emotions into different mental compartments. The fourth mechanism is reverse action, which is the expression of a feeling opposite to what one feels. The fifth mechanism is displacement, which involves transferring unwanted feelings, desires, or impulses to a less threatening object or person (Freud, 1936).

The sixth mechanism is stabilization, which is the maintenance of a constant emotional state, even if it is negative. The seventh mechanism is regression, which is the return to a previous emotional state, usually infantile. The eighth mechanism is projection, which is the attribution of unwanted feelings or desires to another person. The ninth mechanism is introjection, which is the incorporation of another person's values or beliefs into oneself. The tenth mechanism is sublimation, which is the transformation of an unacceptable desire into a socially acceptable activity (Freud, 1936).

According to Freud (1936), defense mechanisms are important for psychoanalysis because they help to understand how the ego deals with anxiety and stress. They can also be useful for



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understanding human behavior and interpersonal relationships. However, it is important to remember that these mechanisms are unconscious and can be difficult to identify (Freud, 1936).

Therefore, as presented, each defense mechanism has a specific function and can be useful for understanding human behavior and interpersonal relationships, including in the religious context. However, it is important to remember that these mechanisms are unconscious and can be difficult to identify (Freud, 1936; Anna Freud, 1936), even more so when there is the attribute “faith”, the focus of this research, interfering in the object of analysis.

The Beatitudes of Jesus Christ

The Beatitudes are a set of blessings that Jesus declared for certain types of people, as reported in the book of Matthew, chapter 5. According to Jesus, blessed (happy, or blessed) are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the humble, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted (Matthew 5:3-12).

Each of these beatitudes has a deep meaning and can be interpreted in different ways. For example, the beatitude of the poor in spirit can be understood as the happiness of those who recognize their dependence on God and their need for salvation (Brasayoung, 2020). The beatitude of those who mourn can be seen as the happiness of those who repent of their sins and seek God's comfort (Biblical Answers, 2017).

The blessedness of the humble can be interpreted as the happiness of those who recognize their smallness before God and others, and who seek to serve rather than be served (Matthew 5:5). The blessedness of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness can be seen as the happiness of those who seek God's righteousness and fight against injustice in the world (Matthew 5:6).

The blessedness of the merciful can be interpreted as the happiness of those who show compassion and love to others, following the example of Jesus (Matthew 5:7). The blessedness of the pure in heart can be seen as the happiness of those who pursue holiness and purity of heart, and who are able to see God in their lives (Matthew 5:8).

The blessedness of the peacemakers can be interpreted as the happiness of those who seek peace and reconciliation among people, following the example of Jesus (Matthew 5:9). The blessedness of the persecuted can be seen as the happiness of those who suffer because of their faith in Jesus, for they will receive the heavenly reward (Matthew 5:10-12).

The Beatitudes of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the book of Matthew, chapter 5, are a program for life with the promise of heavenly reward (Wikipedia, 2006). Each Beatitude has a deep meaning and can be interpreted in different ways, but they all point to the happiness of those who follow Jesus and seek to live according to his teachings (Matthew 5:1-12).

It is important to emphasize that the Beatitudes are not just a set of beautiful words, but rather an invitation to a life of transformation and commitment to God. As the study of Matthew 5 highlights,



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Jesus Christ took every opportunity to minister the values and principles of his Kingdom to people's hearts (Online Study Bible, 2023).

The Beatitudes are also an invitation to a life of service and love for others. As the study of Matthew 5:5 highlights, the blessedness of the humble is the happiness of those who recognize their smallness before God and others, and who seek to serve rather than be served. This means that, as Christians, we should seek humility and service to others in our lives (Christian Stigmatine, 2020).

Furthermore, the Beatitudes also invite us to seek justice and peace in our interpersonal relationships. As the study of Matthew 5:9 highlights, the blessedness of the peacemakers is the happiness of those who seek peace and reconciliation among people, following the example of Jesus. This means that, as Christians, we should seek peace and reconciliation in our interpersonal relationships, even in the face of conflict and disagreements (Biblical Answers, 2017).

In short, the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ, as reported in the book of Matthew, chapter 5, are an invitation to a life of transformation, commitment to God, service and love for others, and the pursuit of justice and peace in our interpersonal relationships. Each Beatitude has a deep meaning and can be interpreted in different ways, but they all point to the happiness of those who follow Jesus and seek to live according to his teachings (Matthew 5:1-12).

METHODOLOGY

For this research, exploratory research is useful to gather information about the psychoanalytic theory of ego defense mechanisms and the beatitudes attributed to Jesus Christ. This research is also characterized as a bibliographic study, as it is used to seek information about the origin and meaning of the beatitudes, as reported in the Gospel according to Matthew. In addition, the bibliographic study can be used to seek information about the psychoanalytic theory of ego defense mechanisms, as described by Sigmund Freud (APVP, 2023).

For the analysis and presentation of the results of this research, the methodology will be focused on "Bibliotherapy", which according to Rubin (1978), refers to the use of selected literature as a therapeutic instrument in medicine and psychiatry. It involves the dynamic identification between a patient's thoughts and feelings and the content of the material read.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Once the defense mechanisms and the beatitudes spoken by Jesus Christ are understood, Table 1 presents the relational and justified proposition of the concepts explored.

Table 1 – The Relationship Between the Ego's Defense Mechanisms and the Beatitudes of Christ

Beatitudes (of Jesus Christ)	Defense Mechanism (Identified in research)	Psychoanalytic Analysis (from the author)
"Blessed are the poor in	Denial	Denial involves refusing to



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spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)		accept reality. Those who are "poor in spirit" may be denying self-sufficiency and instead acknowledging their total dependence on God.
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4)	Displacement	Displacement occurs when feelings or impulses are transferred to another object. Those who mourn loss or injustice may shift their hope and focus to the promise of divine comfort.
"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5)	Regression	Gentleness can be seen as a form of regression, in which one returns to a state of humility and trust, similar to that of a child.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6)	Repression	The intense desire for justice can be interpreted as a way of repressing or suppressing the injustices and evils present in the world.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)	Projection	Mercy can be seen as an act of projection, where one reflects one's own need for compassion and grace toward others.
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)	Isolation	Purity of heart can represent a form of isolation, separating oneself from worldly impurities to seek a clearer connection with the divine.
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)	Sublimation	Creating peace and harmony can be a form of sublimation, transforming internal conflicts and tensions into



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		positive and constructive actions.
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10)	Reactive Formation	Steadfastness in the face of persecution can be seen as reaction formation, where repression and external attacks lead to a stronger reaffirmation of values and beliefs.
"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, because of Me." (Matthew 5:11)	Rationalization	Those who are reviled because of their faith can rationalize their experiences by staying focused on the heavenly reward and the greater purpose of their faith.

Source: the author

9 (nine) relationships were identified between the verses of the Beatitudes present in the book of Matthew chapter 5, between verses 1 to 11, and for each saying of Jesus Christ they are related to 1 (one) identified defense mechanism. The psychoanalytic analyses are subjectivized by the analyst having as their main basis the bibliography of the Gospel According to the Book of Matthew, and that of the Defense Mechanism of the EGO.

Obviously, in a pastoral counseling session, other relational variations that a counselee is experiencing can be identified, however, the example contained in table 1 serves as a theological study to better understand what Jesus Christ wanted to transmit to the unconscious of the listeners during the Sermon on the Mount, as well as a new psychoanalytic tool to improve pastoral counseling.

CONSIDERATIONS

By seeking parallels between the Beatitudes and the ego's defense mechanisms, we confront ancient wisdom with modern psychoanalytic concepts, revealing the richness and depth of human perspectives on suffering, resilience, and self-understanding. The Beatitudes, spoken by Jesus in Matthew, offer divine solace and promise for various facets of human experience, while the ego's defense mechanisms provide insight into how individuals protect their psyches from distress and conflict. By juxtaposing these two systems of thought, we are reminded that the search for meaning and understanding is a constant in human history. Furthermore, it is evident that the Scriptures are adaptable and continue to be relevant, finding resonance and new interpretations in dialogue with contemporary discoveries even after centuries.



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