

## Orthodoxy and Attachment Theory

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### *Abstract*

John Bowlby defines the concept of attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.”<sup>1</sup> There is a possibility that the attachment style developed in relation to significant people from childhood influences the way that we perceive God's care towards us.

Our objective, in this research project, was to observe whether, for Orthodox Christians, there is a correlation between the attachment style to a romantic partner and the attachment style to God, and further, whether there are certain factors that might influence the attachment style to God.

As a working method, we applied an online questionnaire that measured anxiety and avoidance in the relationship with God and in the relationship with the romantic partner. The questionnaire was applied to 325 participants between August 9, 2022, and September 9, 2022, and utilized the adapted AGI (Attachment to God Inventory)<sup>2</sup> to measure avoidance and anxiety towards God and the ECR-R (Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised) translated into Romanian<sup>3</sup> to measure avoidance and anxiety towards the romantic partner.

Analysis of the data shows that there is a significant correlation between anxiety in the relationship with God and anxiety in the relationship with the partner. There is no significant correlation between avoidance in the relationship with God and avoidance in the relationship with the partner. The frequency of prayer can moderate the level of anxiety towards God and towards the partner. That is to say, frequent prayer seems to decrease the level of anxiety towards God. Through prayer the living presence of God is internalized.

Our research opens perspectives for future study of the Orthodox Christian population.

### *Introduction*

The writing on attachment most often centers on the parent (especially mother) – child relationship, since the attachment pattern is formed during childhood. From the attachment theory perspective, the Internal Working Model (IWM) developed in the attachment experiences with the parent influences the individual's further intimate relationships. As an example, the

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<sup>1</sup> John Bowlby. *Attachment*, 1. “Attachment and Loss.” (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Beck and Angie McDonald. “Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, And an Exploration of Faith Group Differences.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, No. 2 (2004): 92-103.

<sup>3</sup> Tudor-Ștefan Rotaru and Andrei Rusu, (2012). “Psychometric Properties of the Romanian Version of Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R),” *Psiworld 2012, Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 78 (2013): 51-55.

the person will use the IWM to “decode” the relationship with God. There are studies showing that the relationship with the primary caregiver from childhood influences the relationship with God.

The connection between a loving religious caregiver and the child is transferred later on to the connection with God, and individuals with religious parents and a secure attachment pattern will be more likely to adopt their parents’ religious beliefs.<sup>1,2</sup> When the result of the connection between the caregiver and the child results in insecure attachment, the relationship with God will also be an insecure attachment. That is to say, when the attachment style of the caregiver is an insecure one, this will impact the relationship with God, although religion can have, in certain situations, a compensatory role.<sup>3</sup>

Research has found that the attachment pattern of the romantic relationship usually was the same as the attachment style developed in childhood.<sup>4,5</sup> After over two decades of research, it is well known that long-term romantic relationship serves an attachment function.<sup>6</sup> Still, it is worth mentioning that the attachment style from childhood can also be changed in adulthood by the individual’s connection with other primary attachment figures.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron D. Cherniak, Mario Mikulincer, Philip R. Shaver, Pehr Gravquist. “Attachment Theory and Religion,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40, (2021): 126-130.

<sup>2</sup> Yaakov Greenwald, Mario Mikulincer, Pehr Gravquist, Philip R. Shaver. “Apostasy and Conversion: Attachment Orientations and Individual Differences in the Process of Religious Change,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 13 (2021).

<sup>3</sup> Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Phillip R. Shaver, “Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood Attachments, Religious Beliefs and Conversion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990): 315 – 334.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Friedlmeier and Pehr Granqvist, “Attachment Transfer Among Swedish and German Adolescents: A Prospective Longitudinal Study,” *Personal Relationships* 13 (2006): 261–279.

<sup>5</sup> Cindy Hazan and Debra Zeifman (1994), “Sex and the Psychological Tether”, in *Attachment Processes in Adulthood*, Advances in Personal Relationships, 5, Kim Bartholomew and Daniel Perlman eds. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1994), 151–177.

<sup>6</sup> See John Bowlby, *Loss*, 3, Attachment and Loss (New York: Basic Books, 1980), Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, “Attachments Beyond Infancy,” *American Psychology* 44, no. 4 (1989): 709 – 716, Cindy Hazan and Phillip R. Shaver, “Romantic Love Conceptualized as an Attachment Process,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52 (1987): 511 – 524, Judith A. Feeney, “Adult Romantic Attachment: Developments in the Study of Couple Relationships,” in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, 2nd ed., Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver eds. (New York: Guilford, 2008), 456-481, Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change* (New York: Guilford, 2007), and Debra Zeifman and Cindy Hazan, “Pair Bonds as Attachments: Reevaluating the Evidence,” in *Handbook of attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, 2nd ed., Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver eds. (New York: Guilford, 2008), 436-455.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Kobak, “The Emotional Dynamics of Disruptions in Attachment Relationships: Implications for Theory, Research, and Clinical Intervention,” *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver eds. (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 21-43.

<sup>8</sup> L. Alan Sroufe *et al.*, “Implications of Attachment Theory for Developmental Psychopathology,” *Development and Psychopathology* 11 (1999): 1–13, doi:10.1017/S0954579499001923.

<sup>9</sup> Vivian Zayas *et al.*, “Roots of Adult Attachment: Maternal Caregiving at 18 Months Predicts Adult Peer and Partner Attachment,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 2, no. 3 (2011): 289–297, doi:10.1177/1948550610389822.

In order to measure the attachment style of adults, a possibility is to measure the attachment style with their romantic partner. Studies have found that the adults' attachment style with the romantic partner (romantic attachment) is usually the same as the individuals' attachment to God.<sup>10,11</sup> For example, the romantic secure attachment style is correlated to a secure attachment style to God.

Gardner a reviewer of the literature on attachment theory and God, states there is empirical evidence that explicit knowledge of God consisting in person's theological set of beliefs and behaviors differs from the implicit perception of God as an attachment figure.<sup>12</sup> This difference explains the discrepancy between what is appropriate to religion and compensatory practices.

Studies have shown that individuals with a secure attachment to God have some benefits of this relationship: satisfaction in life,<sup>13</sup> less psychological distress and emotional problems in Christians,<sup>14</sup> good mental health, an increase in self-esteem, optimism,<sup>15</sup> and, over time, resilience and spiritual growth.<sup>16</sup> Monroe and Jankowski, in their research, found that through prayer the attachment to God increased resulting in improved health and mental state.<sup>17</sup>

All the studies on attachment to God referenced here deal with the Western Christian population which has a certain culture and understanding of God. There is a lack of knowledge of how the Eastern Orthodox Christian population relates to God from the attachment theory perspective. Obviously, there are similarities with Western Christians, but also differences related to the culture and understanding of God.

From the perspective of Eastern Orthodoxy Theology, God is completely immaterial, and

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<sup>10</sup> Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Phillip R. Shaver. "An Attachment-Theoretical Approach to Romantic Love and Religious Belief," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 18 (1992): 266 – 275.

<sup>11</sup> Diane P. F. Montague, Carol Magai, Nathan S. Consedine, and Michael Gillepsie. "Attachment in African American and European American Older Adults: The Roles of Early Life Socialization and Religiosity," *Attachment & Human Development* 5, no. 2 (June 2003): 188 – 214.

<sup>12</sup> Jodie Kathleen Gardner. "Attachment, Trauma, and Intimacy with God. Conversations: A Graduate Student Journal of the Humanities," *Social Sciences, and Theology* 1, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Kirkpatrick and Shaver, "An Attachment-Theoretical Approach to Romantic Love and Religious Belief."

<sup>14</sup> Michaela Hiebler-Ragger, Johanna Falthhansl-Scheinecker, Gerhard Birnhuber, Andreas Fink, and Human Friedrich Unterrainer. "Facets of Spirituality Diminish the Positive Relationship Between Insecure Attachment and Mood Pathology in Young Adults," *PLoS One*, June 23, 2016,.

<sup>15</sup> Matt Bradshaw and Blake Victor Kent. "Prayer, Attachment to God, and Changes in Psychological Well-Being in Later Life," *Journal of Aging and Health* 30, no. 5 (2017):1-25.

<sup>16</sup> Joshua A. Wilt, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Julie J. Exline. "The Transformative Power of the Sacred: Social, Personality, and Religious/Spiritual Antecedents and Consequents of Sacred Moments During a Religious/Spiritual Struggle," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (2019): 233-246. quoted in Aaron D. Cherniak et al., "Attachment Theory and Religion," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40, (2021): 126-130. >

<sup>17</sup> Natasha Monroe and Peter J. Jankowski. "The Effectiveness of a Prayer Intervention in Promoting Change in Perceived Attachment to God, Positive Affect, and Psychological Distress," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 3, no. 4 (2016): 237-249. Quoted in Aaron D. Cherniak et al., "Attachment Theory and Religion," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40, (2021): 126-130.

we should not anthropomorphize Him by human characteristics.<sup>18</sup> However, the Holy Fathers consider the use of the names for God<sup>19</sup> not as trying to anthropomorphize God or His Being but rather as giving the faithful a guide so that they can better grasp the things which are hidden.<sup>20</sup>

In the Orthodox Tradition God can be seen both as a caregiver (The Father) and as a romantic partner (Christ, The Bridegroom). It is important to notice with Christ as the Bridegroom that the Church is the bride. Christ appears as the Bridegroom in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Also, Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote to Olympias 15 homilies on *The Song of the Songs* where he described God as a Bridegroom and the soul of the person wanting God as the bride.<sup>21</sup>

Based on the teachings on uncreated energy, the “Orthodox” God, while still being immaterial and non-anthropomorphized, is tangible. He communicates with His creatures through the uncreated energies and this communication, from the Orthodox perspective, means relationship<sup>22</sup>. Within this relationship, God doesn’t change; only humans change by participating in the uncreated energies. Still, there is the risk of message’ distortion of how we see God caused by the human receiver’s IWM. In this context of distortion, there is a possibility that the attachment style developed in relation to significant people from childhood can influence the way that we perceive God's care towards us.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The present study aims to address the following questions:

Is there any correlation between the attachment style in relation to the romantic partner and the attachment style in relation to God in Romanian Orthodox Christian believers similar to that shown in studies done on believers of other confessions in the West?

Is there any correlation between the intellectual representation of God and the person's style of attachment to God?

Is it possible that the style of attachment to a romantic partner differs from the style of attachment to God for people who go to church often, confess often, pray regularly and frequently?

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<sup>18</sup> John S. Romanides. *The Ancestral Sin*, George S. Gabriel trans. (Ridgewood: Zephyr, 2008), 97.

<sup>19</sup> St Dionysius the Areopagite. “Despre Nimirile Dumnezeiești” (On the Divine Names) II.5, 6 in *Opere complete (Complete Works)*, Fr Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae trans. (Bucharest, Paideia, 1996), 141.

<sup>20</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book* III.2 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 5:265).

<sup>21</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa, “Homilies on The Song of Songs,” in *Writings from the Greco-Roman world* no 13, Richard A. Norris Jr. trans. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Nikolaos A. Matsoukas, *Demonologie (Demonology)*, 4, Teologie Dogmatică și Simbolică (Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology), Fr Prof. Ph.D. Constantin Coman and Fr. Cristian-Emil Chivu trans., (Bucharest: Bizantină, 2002), 22.

### *Methodology*

Participants in the study were 325 Romanians, Christian-Orthodox. Out of the total of 325 subjects, 266 go to church regularly (at least twice a month). 246 respondents have participated in the church's services for a period between 5 and 20 years. Regarding confession, 214 respondents confess regularly, 80 confess in the four fasts, and 50 people confess rarely and very rarely. Regarding prayer, 246 people have a regular prayer schedule. Regarding demographic factors, 294 respondents live in urban areas, and 31 in rural areas; 249 people have higher education, of which 43 have doctoral or postgraduate studies; 27 respondents have high school or technical school. The division by gender is 249 women and 76 men, which is to be expected considering that in Romania the vast majority of people who attend church are women.

### *Procedures*

The participants answered an online questionnaire between August 9, 2022, and September 9, 2022. Participation was voluntary, free and completely anonymous.

### *Measurements*

*Demographic questionnaire.* Information was obtained about age, gender, educational level, environment (rural/urban), frequency of going to church, number of years of going to church regularly, frequency of confession, frequency of prayer, and if the person is going through a difficult period.

*Attachment to romantic partner.* To measure the attachment to the romantic partner, the ECR-R (Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised)<sup>23</sup> questionnaire translated into Romanian was used. The questionnaire is designed to measure avoidance and anxiety towards romantic partner.

*Attachment to God.* To measure attachment to God, a questionnaire inspired by the AGI (Attachment to God Inventory)<sup>24</sup> was used, which we adapted for practicing Orthodox Christians. The questionnaire is designed to measure the level of avoidance and anxiety in relation to God. The questionnaire used in this study has 8 statements to measure avoidance and 8 statements to measure anxiety. A six-point scale was used, to correspond with the Romanian version of the ECR-R.

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<sup>23</sup> Rotaru and Rusu, "Psychometric Properties of the Romanian Version of Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire" (ECR-R).

<sup>24</sup> Beck and McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, And an Exploration of Faith Group Differences."

**Data Analysis**

We examined whether the data approximated the normal distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test and visual inspection of stem-and-leaf plots. None of the four variables of interest approximated the normal distribution ( $p$ 's < .001, see Table 1). This was confirmed by the shapes of the stem-and-leaf plots. Therefore, we examined the data using Spearman nonparametric correlations.

*Table 1. Tests of Normality*

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Avoidance – God	.879	325	.000
Anxiety – God	.888	325	.000
Avoidance – Partner	.979	325	.000
Anxiety – Partner	.939	325	.000

The degree of avoidance in one's relationship with God was positively associated with the degree of avoidance in the relationship with one's partner ( $\rho = .24, p < .001$ ). Similarly, the degree of anxiety in the relationship with God ( $\rho = .33, p < .001$ ) correlated to the degree of anxiety in the couple's relationship ( $\rho = .27, p < .001$ ). Frequency of church attendance, confession, prayer, and the number of years of frequent church attendance were negatively associated with the degree of avoidant attachment towards God (all  $p$ 's < .001).

As stated, the degree of anxiety in one's relationship with God was positively correlated with the degree of anxiety in the relationship with one's partner ( $\rho = .46, p < .001$ ) and also with the degree of avoidance in the couple's relationship ( $\rho = .29, p < .001$ ). Only the frequency of prayer was significantly associated with the degree of anxiety in the attachment toward God ( $\rho = -.15, p = .005$ ).

*Table 2. Spearman zero-order correlations*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Avoidance – God	-						
2 Anxiety – God	.33**	-					
3 Avoidance – Partner	.24**	.29**	-				
4 Anxiety – Partner	.27**	.46**	.40**	-			
5 Frequency of church attendance	-.22**	.09	-.03	-.01	-		
6 Frequency of confession	-.22**	.05	-.05	.01	.48**	-	
7 Frequency of prayer	-.25**	-.15**	-.16**	-.13*	.07	.19**	
8 Years of frequent church attendance	-.24**	-.01	-.14*	-.04	.40**	.26**	.07

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Avoidance in attachment towards God was positively associated with learning in church that God always punishes one for their sins ( $\rho = .17, p = .001$ ), that God sometimes punishes and sometimes forgives sins ( $\rho = .16, p = .004$ ), that God punishes one according to the

gravity of their sins ( $\rho = .20, p < .001$ ), and that God forces one to do his will ( $\rho = .22, p < .001$ ). By contrast, avoidance in attachment towards God was negatively associated with learning in church that God helps one do good deeds even if one has sinned ( $\rho = -.18, p = .001$ ), that God constantly takes care of humans ( $\rho = -.23, p < .001$ ), that God allows one to freely choose between good and evil ( $\rho = -.17, p = .002$ ), and that God has absolute power and therefore good will triumph over evil ( $\rho = -.21, p < .001$ ). Anxious attachment towards God was positively associated with learning in the church that God always punishes one for their sins ( $\rho = .27, p = .001$ ), that God sometimes punishes and sometimes forgives sins ( $\rho = .19, p = .001$ ), that God punishes one according to the gravity of their sins ( $\rho = .21, p < .001$ ), and that God forces one to do his will ( $\rho = .19, p = .001$ ) and negatively associated with learning in church that God helps one do good deeds even if one has sinned ( $\rho = -.14, p = .011$ ) and that God constantly takes care of humans ( $\rho = -.16, p = .004$ ).

Table 3. Spearman correlation between attachment to God and people thinking of church precepts.

	Avoidance - God	Anxiety - God
I have learned at church that God always punishes me for my mistakes.	.170**	.270**
I have learned at church that God always forgives me for my mistakes.	-.008	-.013
I have learned at church that sometimes God punishes me, sometimes God forgives me.	.161**	.191**
I have learned at church that God only punishes me enough to help me and motivate me to straighten up. His punishment is pedagogical.	-.047	.087
I have learned at church that God loves me no matter what I do.	-.002	-.048
I have learned at church that God loves me only if I do what pleases Him.	.096	.089
I have learned at church that God helps me to do good even if I have wronged Him a lot.	-.177**	-.141*
I have learned at church that God punishes me according to how badly I have sinned against Him.	.201**	.211**
I have learned at church that God is always taking care of me.	-.225**	-.159**
I have learned at church that God gives me the freedom to choose between doing good and doing bad, and I decide to do what is good.	-.174**	.005

I have learned at church that God forces me to do what He wants.	.217**	.191**
I have learned at church that God has absolute power, so evil will always be overcome by good.	-.207**	-.048

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

A hierarchical regression was used to test if the degree of avoidance in attachment towards one’s partner is predictive of one’s avoidance in attachment towards God. In the first step of the regression, we introduced age, gender, educational level, environment (urban or rural), frequency of church attendance, confession, prayer, years of regular church attendance, and whether the person considers they are going through a difficult period. In the second step, we introduced the degree of anxiety in attachment to God. In the third step, we introduced anxiety and avoidance in attachment towards one’s partner.

The first model was statistically significant ( $F(9, 315) = 10.85, p < .001$ ) and explained 21% of the variance of avoidance in attachment towards God. Significant predictors were gender ( $B = -.36, SE = .09, p < .001$ ), frequency of confession ( $B = -.13, SE = .07, p = .049$ ), frequency of prayer ( $B = -.23, SE = .05, p < .001$ ) and years of regular church attendance ( $B = -.11, SE = .03, p < .001$ ). The second model was statistically significant ( $F(10, 314) = 20.24, p < .001$ ) and explained 37.3% of the criterion’s variance, the increase in predicted variance being statistically significant ( $F(1, 314) = 82.55, p < .001$ ). Anxiety in attachment towards God was a significant predictor ( $B = .33, SE = .04, p < .001$ ). The third model was statistically significant ( $F(12, 312) = 17.11, p < .001$ ) and explained 37.4% of the criterion’s variance, the increase in predicted variance was not statistically significant ( $F(2, 312) = 1.29, p = .278$ ). Neither avoidance ( $B = .04, SE = .04, p = .274$ ) nor anxiety ( $B = .03, SE = .03, p = .416$ ) in attachment towards one’s partner were predictive of avoidance in attachment towards God. In the final model, the predictors of avoidance in attachment towards God were age ( $B = .08, SE = .03, p = .015$ ), female gender ( $B = -.31, SE = .07, p < .001$ ), frequency of confession ( $B = -.16, SE = .06, p = .004$ ), frequency of prayer ( $B = -.14, SE = .04, p = .002$ ), number of years of frequent church attendance ( $B = -.10, SE = .03, p < .001$ ) and anxiety in attachment towards God ( $B = .30, SE = .04, p < .001$ ).

Table 4. Hierarchical regression predicting avoidance in attachment towards God

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	B	B	$\beta$	B	B
Constant	3.25**		2.30**		2.16	
Age	.04	.06	.08*	.12	.08*	.12
Gender (Male = 0)	-.36**	-.22	-.30**	-.19	-.31**	-.19
Education	-.04	-.03	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.02
Environment (Urban = 0)	.14	-.06	-.12	-.05	-.12	-.05
Church attendance	.01	.01	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.02



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Confession frequency	-.13*	-.13	-.17*	-.17	-.16*	-.16
Prayer frequency	-.23**	-.25	-.14*	-.15	-.14*	-.15
Difficult time	.08	.05	-.04	-.03	-.05	-.04
Years of frequent church attendance	-.11**	-.24	-.10**	-.21	-.10**	-.20
Anxiety in attachment to God			.33**	.43	.30**	.39
Avoidance in attachment to partner					.04	.05
Anxiety in attachment to partner					.03	.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.23		.39		.40
<i>F</i>		1.58**		2.24**		17.11**
$\Delta R^2$		.23		.16		.01
$\Delta F$		1.58**		82.55**		1.29

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Similarly, a hierarchical regression was used to test if the degree of anxiety in attachment towards one's partner is predictive of anxiety in attachment towards God. In the first step of the regression, we introduced age, gender, educational level, environment (urban or rural), frequency of church attendance, confession, prayer, length of regular church attendance, and whether the person considers they are going through a difficult period. In the second step, we introduced the degree of avoidance in attachment to God. In the third step, we introduced anxiety and avoidance in attachment towards one's partner.

The first model was statistically significant ( $F(9, 315) = 4.88, p < .001$ ) and explained 12.3% of the variance of avoidance in attachment towards God. Significant predictors were age ( $B = -.12, SE = .05, p = .013$ ), frequency of prayer ( $B = -.26, SE = .07, p < .001$ ) and being in a difficult time of life ( $B = .35, SE = .15, p = .001$ ). The second model was statistically significant ( $F(10, 314) = 13.79, p < .001$ ) and explained 28.3% of the criterion's variance, the increase in predicted variance being statistically significant ( $F(1, 314) = 82.55, p < .001$ ). Avoidance in attachment towards God was a significant predictor ( $B = .63, SE = .07, p < .001$ ). The third model was statistically significant ( $F(12, 312) = 186.06, p < .001$ ) and explained 41% of the criterion's variance, the increase in predicted variance was statistically significant ( $F(2, 312) = 27.66, p < .001$ ). Anxiety in attachment towards one's partner was predictive of anxiety in attachment towards God ( $B = .25, SE = .04, p < .001$ ). Additional significant predictors were age ( $B = -.12, SE = .04, p = .004$ ), frequency of confession ( $B = .17, SE = .07, p = .019$ ) and avoidance in attachment to God ( $B = .50, SE = .07, p < .001$ ).

Table 15. Hierarchical regression predicting anxiety in attachment towards God

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	B
Constant	2.89**		.83*		.10	
Age	-.12*	-.14	-.14*	-.17	-.12*	-.14
Gender (Male = 0)	-.17	-.08	.06	.03	.02	.01
Education	.00	.00	.02	.01	.04	.03
Environment (Urban = 0)	-.04	-.01	.05	.02	.01	.00

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Church attendance	.09	.06	.08	.06	.07	.05
Confession frequency	.13	.10	.21*	.16	.17*	.13
Prayer frequency	-.26**	-.22	-.12*	-.10	-.08	-.07
Difficult time	.35*	.18	.30*	.16	.17	.09
Years of frequent church attendance	-.03	-.06	.04	.06	.04	.06
Avoidance in attachment to God			.63**	.49	.50**	.38
Avoidance in attachment to partner					.09	.09
Anxiety in attachment to partner					.25**	.31
$R^2$	.12		.31		.41	
$F$	4.49**		13.79**		18.06**	
$\Delta R^2$	.12		.18		.11	
$\Delta F$	4.89**		82.56**		27.66**	

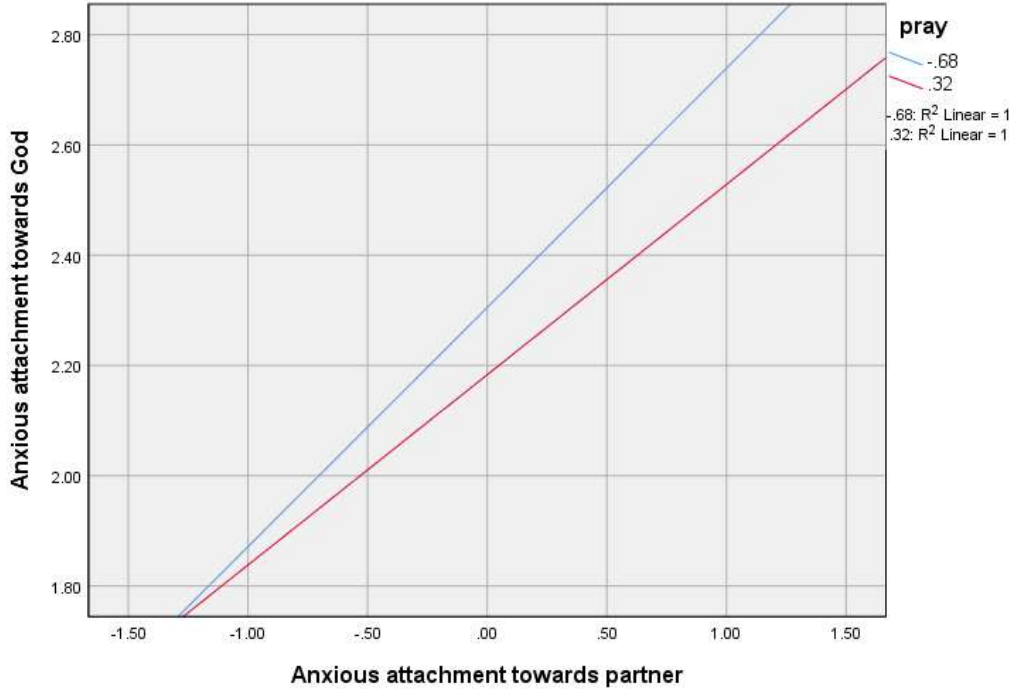
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Finally, we tested whether the frequency of prayer moderates the relationship between anxiety in partner attachment and anxiety in attachment to God. The model was statistically significant ( $F(3, 321) = 37.88, p < .001$ ) and explained 26.15% of the variance of anxiety in attachment towards God. Anxiety in partner attachment ( $B = .37, SE = .04, p < .001$ ), prayer frequency ( $B = -.12, SE = .06, p = .048$ ) and their interaction ( $B = -.08, SE = .05, p = .049$ ) significantly predicted anxiety in attachment towards God.

### ***Discussion***

In the attachment theory literature, avoidance corresponds to a negative view of others, caregivers, and romantic partners. In this study, anxiety represents the fear of potential abandonment and the person feeling that he is unlovable and that he does not deserve to be loved.

Referring to feelings towards God, it is hard to believe that avoidant behavior in relating to God can mean a negative view of him as a whole, especially for people who attend church. We expect that this way of relating to God in an avoidant way manifests itself mainly by avoiding intimacy with God, by the person's distrust of showing their emotions towards God, and the compulsive trust in their own powers. These people will not feel comfortable with God taking "control" of their lives and involving God in their daily activities. Even if they are wrong, these people will not ask themselves whether God would be pleased with them. By asking this question and understanding the implications, in time, these people would end up opening up emotionally to God.



**Figure 1.** The moderating effect of prayer in the relationship between anxiety in partner attachment and anxiety in attachment towards God.

Anxiety in the relationship with God manifests itself in the person believing that God loves him less than others, that God helps others and kind of forgets about them. These persons will constantly be waiting for signs and answers from God, reassurances from God that they are loved, and when they don't get them, they will get angry and jealous because they will live all the time in fear that God might abandon them.

***Avoidance in Relationship with God***

The data suggest that *older people are more avoidant and less anxious in their attachment to God*. This could be explained by the fact that older people grew up in the communist era when a relationship with God was, at best, tolerated. There was no question of a deeper relationship with God, just as there was no question of emotional expression in general.

Statistical data also suggested that *women have less avoidance in attachment to God than men*. That finding can be explained if we think about the popular culture that allows women to express themselves emotionally. Men are not really allowed to express themselves emotionally with such expression being considered a sign of weakness.

It appears that *the level of avoidance of God decreases when the frequency of confession, the frequency of prayer, or the length of time a person attends church frequently increases*. That finding is to be expected, because all these activities have the role of helping the person to have an even closer relationship with God.

Neither avoidance nor anxiety in the attachment to the partner could predict the degree of avoidance in the relationship with God, this being in addition to the study of Beck and McDonald.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Anxiety About Relationship with God***

The data from this study show that people who confess more often have more anxiety in their attachment to God. It is possible that these people find in confession a coping mechanism, thus dealing with the anxiety raised in the relationship with God.

The statistical processing also says that *if the anxiety in the relationship with the partner increases by 1 point, the anxiety in the relationship with God increases by 0.25 points*. Anxiety in the relationship with the partner may be closely related to anxiety in the relationship with God, confirming the findings of similar studies on this topic.

The data also suggest that prayer frequency moderates the relationship between partner attachment anxiety and God attachment anxiety. Generally speaking, when the level of anxiety in the relationship with the partner is low, the level of anxiety in the relationship with God is also low. Moreover, the more frequent the prayer, the less anxiety in the relationship with God. But as the anxiety in the relationship with the partner increases, the anxiety in the relationship with God changes differently according to the frequency of prayer. As partner anxiety increases, people who pray less are more anxious about their relationship with God than people who pray more. We could assume that the frequency of prayer is a protective factor that protects the type of attachment in the relationship with God from the attachment that the person has with the partner.

Although longitudinal studies are needed, statistical analysis suggests that prayer frequency may lead to less anxiety in the relationship with God, although anxiety in the relationship with the partner may be unaffected. Practically, through prayer, the Orthodox Christian's relationship with God becomes individualized with God being perceived more as a different person than the partner.

### ***The Orthodox Christian's Need for God***

Two interesting observations emerge from this data: *if the anxiety manifested towards God increases by one point, then the degree of avoidance in the relationship with God increases by 0.30 points. On the other hand, if the degree of avoidance of God increases by one point, the anxiety with God increases by 0.5 points*. So, the measure of avoidant behavior and the level of anxiety towards God are closely related.

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<sup>25</sup> Beck and McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, And an Exploration of Faith Group Differences."

If the person feels more strongly the fear of being abandoned by God, they will more intensely fear opening up emotionally to God and involving him in their daily life. If their fear of being abandoned by him increases, they compensate for the perceived lack of support they expect from him which they believe they do not receive by opting to manage on their own.

But if the person turns away from God, not considering that God can be a reliable partner in everyday life and that he can support them emotionally, they will feel more strongly the fear that God might abandon them. A circle is created similar to the circle of pleasure-pain of which the Holy Fathers speak. If the person becomes more afraid that God may abandon them, they will tend to avoid him more, but if they avoid him more, their fear that God may abandon them will also increase. This complicated relationship suggests that a practicing Orthodox Christian believes that he has an imperative need for God in his life, just as Orthodox theology suggests.

### *Intellectual Representation of God*

Following the analysis, we obtained weak correlations between the person's relationship with God and their intellectual representations of God. It is possible that the wording of the statements beginning with "I learned at church that..." may have misled some people, who had these representations of God from family rather than from church. However, the data suggest that it is not only the intellectual representation of God that is relevant in the relationship with God, but the internalization of the experiences that the person has, his need to feel a living presence of God. Further research is needed to study if, besides the intellectual representation of God, an Eastern Orthodox Christian needs to ensure a good relationship with God by working with his passions in order to be illuminated through God's grace and have a correct perception of God, as the Holy Fathers have said.

### *Limitations and Conclusions*

The conclusions of this study: there is no significant correlation between the degree of avoidance towards God and the degree of avoidance towards the partner. By contrast, there is a significant correlation between the level of anxiety in the relationship with God and the level of anxiety in the relationship with the partner, confirming the study of Beck and McDonald.<sup>26</sup>

There is no significant correlation between the intellectual representation of God and the attachment to God, so conclusions related to the intellectual representation of God must be treated with caution.

There is one significant factor that seems to moderate anxiety towards God and the partner, namely, the frequency of prayer. The more frequently the person prays, the relationship with God seems to become more and more differentiated from the relationship with the partner in terms of anxiety level. However, longitudinal studies are needed for clearer confirmation and better interpretation.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

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