
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN THE MORAL SELF-DETERMINATION OF BELIEVERS OF THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS USING THE EXAMPLE OF ISLAM AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

The religious worldview, religious values and religious ethics are an integral element of culture at all stages of its historical existence. Religiosity is one of the universal forms of motivating a person's moral choice. For a particular community or person – subjects of religious faith and practice – it is their religious traditions that appear as a kind of concentration of moral self-determination attitudes. The aim of the study is to generalize the role of religious traditions in the moral self-determination of believers of the Abrahamic religions (by the example of Islam and Orthodox Christianity). The article analyses the humanistic core of moral ideas of religious traditions of Islam and Orthodox Christianity. The possibilities of moral self-determination of believers at individual, cultural and community level are revealed. The article raises the question of individual responsibility of religious leaders for the moral vector of relevant practices not only at the centralized, but primarily at the local level of functioning of the religious communities.

Keywords: Islam, Bible, Koran, ideas, tradition

1. Introduction

In the context of the diversity and multicultural coexistence of the palette of religious doctrines, cults and ritual systems, the problem of both theoretical and practical explication of the humanistic core of the religious worldview, the disclosure of the factors of its moral constructive potential is becoming increasingly urgent. Modern challenges require searching for ways to overcome the mutual mental bias of representatives of different communities and identities. The dialogue between representatives of different religions should be aimed at

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overcoming mistrust and stereotypes and achieving unity in solving common problems [1].

So, it is important to identify in the resource of religions the values and examples of their practical realization, which offer a humanistic life program, encourage love, the willingness to understand, the priority of creative and dialogic self-realization in life, the synthesis of honouring national or cultural identity with the global consciousness of the cultural unity of humankind.

It is a fact that in planetary and local conflicts, sometimes religious impulses of social action still work destructively, ideologically sanctioning intolerance, confrontation, isolationist or expansionist actions contributing to totalitarian or authoritarian forms of building relations between the authorities and citizens. Taking into account these circumstances, the approach to crystallization in the heterogeneous resources of religions of the values of their practical actualization, which offer a high moral life and psychological program, is growing in importance and social significance.

Moral values in religions strongly encourage the socialization of the individuals, orient them to a meaningful life driven by the harmony ideals, motivate fundamental optimism and reverent attitude to the sacred in its ontological foundations and socio-cultural manifestations. At the same time, each religion is a conglomerate of moral values of different nature and different vector of regulation. There are moral values in religions that are directly related to the regulation of the search for mystical perspectives. There are values aimed at consecrating the corporate monolith of the respective communities; and there are also values that regulate interpersonal communication itself. Undoubtedly, these blocks of moral values do not function in isolation from each other, but are often specifically intertwined and mutually agreed upon.

Moral and ethical principles and worldview tendencies of Christianity (including Orthodoxy) are comprehended by such researchers as Stanley Samuel Harakas [1, 2], John T. Chirban [3], Vigen Guroian [4], A. Radetzka [5], A. Sorokin [6], M. Burley [7] and others. The Islamic moral and ethical priorities and their variations are analysed in the publications of such researchers as Kasetchai Laeheim [8], Maila Stevens [9], Muhammad Husayn Kashifu'l-Ghita' [10], O. Karabyiyka [11], V. Belokrenitsky [12], L. Efimova [13] and others.

The religious picture of the world is multiconfessional. Taking this into account, the need for humanistic interaction of constructive moral values of various religious traditions, as well as their coordination with humanistically significant moral values of secular nature is objective.

2. Method

The main method of the study is the analysis of the original research literature from the problem field of the study, which can be systematized in several blocks.

2.1. The doctrinal texts of Orthodox Christianity and Islam

There are the sacred texts that define the limit of horizontal and vertical dimensions of moral values most of all. This is where specific intertwining of moral sanctions with the justification of soteriological prospects is found. The sacred texts of Orthodoxy and Islam are quite heterogeneous in value vectors, in terms of the correlation of humanistic and authoritarian impulses in them. Considering the fact that even now for a huge segment of believers of both religious and non-religious networks, and often even for people who disbelieve, the Bible and the Koran are a sense-bearing resource of correction of their life-purpose, and sometimes practical ideas and orientations, the importance of semantic interpretation of their ideas is quite high.

2.2. The theological heritage

The theological heritage of religious moral and ethical ideas of Orthodoxy and Islam is valuable because its different layers visibly emphasize the ambiguity of the interpretation of the moral and ethical meaning of certain religious ideas, even within the same religion or even denomination.

2.3. Philosophical discourse of moral and religious character

Since the methods of the study require a sufficiently important role of philosophical synthesis of moral and ethical ideas of religious traditions, the use of the heritage of philosophers of humanistic orientation who comprehended various vectors of moral and religious values is significant in the context of the work.

2.4. Moral and religious ideas in research publications

In the literature, the problems of religious ethics are highlighted; the views of certain denominations are compared.

3. Discussion

3.1. The role of Orthodox religious traditions in the moral self-determination of believers

Human life in Christianity is interpreted as a directed vector, and the intensity of efforts in faith, in opposition to sinfulness, in love, is the main guarantee of adequate orientation of this vector, that is, salvation in eternity and bliss. The New Testament gives clear instructions: “God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him!” (1 John 4.16) “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13.10) Therefore, Christianity is often called the

religion of love, where through a specific interpretation of the mission of Jesus Christ, the understanding of God, first of all as love, is affirmed.

Divine Revelation serves as the doctrinal basis of the Orthodox religious tradition. It includes not only the Holy Scriptures, but also other written and oral sources (creeds of Ecumenical and Local Councils, Liturgical Tradition, works of the Church Fathers and Teachers, 'symbolic books' of the Orthodox Church, and even works of modern Orthodox theologians, corresponding to the Orthodox canons and reflecting the patristic way of thinking united in the Holy Tradition. This makes it different from other branches of Christianity.

However, despite the ramified social and institutional forms established in Christianity, a detailed analysis of the differences, which is beyond the scope of this study, the idea of free choice of one's spiritual destiny is through the discovery of divine grace and acceptance of Jesus Christ, the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity as a personal Saviour.

However, in the tonality of the teachings of some Orthodox thinkers, the call for love acquires a predominantly vertical vector of love for God, which clearly or indirectly levels the importance of earthly manifestations of this feeling. In the minds of some believers, such ideas can take the garbled form and be transformed into religious fanaticism inspired by such 'love for God' on one hand, and emotional indifference to another person, on the other hand.

Consequently, one or another idea of Christianity (Orthodoxy) acquires a constructive or destructive vector also through the channel set by certain individuals and communities. The idea of the advantage of love for God over everything else can become the basis of kindness and responsiveness, and, on the contrary, form a life behavioural callousness, authoritarianism or passivity, isolationism depending on the semantic fullness of this concept in the practice of its carriers.

In Christian theology, philosophy and specific life choice, the problems of faith and reason, faith and grace, the ratio of individual and Church practices, on one hand, and ethical and active forms of receiving salvation, on the other hand, are important. John Chrysostom said about the moral formation of the personality, which would be based on the faith: "When an evil skill or the passion for greed will tempt you much, protect yourself against them by this opinion: ignoring a temporary pleasure I will receive a great reward... Instead of all other motives for us and thought about the purpose of the effort the same firm belief is enough that all this we bear for God." [14]

Any person, in accordance with the Christian beliefs, tends to sin, so readiness for repentance when one does sin is postulated by such an important aspect of self-determination of an Orthodox Christian. John Chrysostom emphasized that repentance could mitigate any shortcoming. From his point of view, even the one who realizes the amount of his sin must understand that all people are sinful. "You will say: I have sinned hard, more and worse than all men. But it is enough for you to make this sacrifice: set forth your case, that you may be proved right. Confess that you have sinned, and this will be the beginning of your correction." (Isaiah 43.26)

The motive of man's repentance through the practice of confession, to which he is encouraged in Orthodoxy, can, of course, be perceived by some researchers as disbelief in the autonomy of man's moral self-determination. However, it is necessary to see in it a realistic awareness of impossibility for a person, even with a fundamentally good will, to be fully and always equally corresponding to the norms of due. In the New Testament it is said: "Come unto Me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11.28). Therefore, in Orthodoxy, through the realization of the opening of one's heart to God and the orientation to its principled readiness to forgive, as well as through faith in the grains of good inherent in people conscious of their religiosity, a constructive motivation to improve morally can be formed, not to betray the impulses of trust received in the experience of confession and sincere repentance.

Orthodox Christians believe that repentance is the sacrament when a believer confessing his/her sins to a priest and hearing from his mouth manifestation of forgiveness, in fact, acquires, by the will of Jesus Christ Himself, the cut-off from all committed sins, as if acquiring the status of innocence, like after baptism (at least until he/she commits a new sin). At the same time, it is realized that "for the efficacy of the sacrament honest heartfelt remorse and a firm intention to correct one's life, faith in Jesus Christ, and hope for His mercy are required... The Gospel understands repentance not simply as penitence, but as a rebirth, a complete change of essence." [15]

Theologians emphasize the importance of not the fact of confession itself but repentance as inducement to confess the sins – confession without remorse – has no force. In particular, Archbishop Luka (Voyno-Yasenetsky) wrote: "And if you come for confessing not having prepared, if you only mechanically repeat: 'I'm sinful, father', this is not a confession, in this confession you will not receive remission of your sins. When confessing in such a way, very often they leave the heaviest, deepest, most shameful sins not spoken out..." [16]

It should be noted that despite certain glimpses of the idea of God who sacrificed Himself for the sake of people existing in a number of pre-Christian traditions, the idea of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ in its semantic completeness and ethical significance is unique and characteristic exclusively of Christianity [3].

In the value-semantic and phenomenological plan, in the idea of the atoning sacrifice there is a note of great importance of mankind in the face of God, His love for it: "If all creation suffered from the Fall, all creation is also corrected in Christ", for "God so loved the world, that he gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3.16). Thus, the prospect of immortality is postulated not only and not so much as compensation of earthly burdens and imperfections, but as a sense-bearing call for meaningful confidence in the effectiveness of value ideals and motivation for the existence by these ideals. Deity in Christianity represented by the New Testament mission of Jesus Christ appears not only as a 'controller' and a harsh judge of human righteousness and sinfulness, but as the embodiment of

Holiness, divinity of ideals designed in a specific historicity of life and destiny. The Kingdom of salvation and the overcoming of sinfulness is, therefore, perceived not only as an otherworldly prospect dependent solely on God's promise and His incomprehensible judgment, this is also as a possible result of emulating a certain example of life in the unity of faith and practical piety [17].

That is why in Orthodoxy the motif of holy men, people with an ideal, perfect willingness for life with the devotion to the ideal, to life freed of the thirst for selfishness, revenge and avarice, acquires such importance. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to fully understand and distinguish the semantic context of the images of saints in its value-psychological and worldview significance and the historical aspect of the social life of persons proclaimed by the Christian Church as 'saints'. History shows that some of them may have been far from genuine humanity, and only at certain points they could turn to piety and mercy. However, the very idea of the saints gives a powerful sense-bearing motivation.

It should be understood that by giving the faithful the experience of the life practice of holy people, Orthodoxy lays down the format of faith in the indestructibility of the moral and spiritual principle in human essence, and, consequently, regardless of the specific content of the real or mythological life descriptions of saints, it yet instils in human consciousness faith in the moral potential of mankind prompting to look for positive examples in the everyday life. However, the worship saints may acquire a distorted ethical vector on the basis of false moral and psychological motivations (fall towards idolatry or paralysation of individual action in the excessive expectation of patronage of the saint). But with an adequate balance of religious piety and intellectual and moral reflection, the experience of holiness can give thinking believers a moral impulse.

Stories about the saints, with which the moral dominants of Orthodoxy are pervaded, as if warning against energetic immersion in the struggle against life passions, instead give the model of internal work on oneself through the practice of prayer as a way of uniting with God and providing oneself with grace. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) wrote that "a purpose of human life is to achieve the greatest fullness of becoming like God: man should become by grace that what God is by His nature, must partake of the perfection of God and possess God's qualities. Man must acquire God's qualities, make them 'his own'. It's one thing to get something as a gift, another – to learn how to use this gift as his property." [18]

The practices of prayer addressed to the saints and above all to God, also significant in Orthodoxy, can be considered a way of freeing the consciousness of the dominant of the pragmatic selfishness horizon, because every true prayer is postulated in Orthodoxy as valuable when it suggests the thought of spiritual good – not only of one's own, but certainly of other people, even those that showed hostility. This is rooted in one of the key calls of the New Testament to love also people prone to sin and intended to do evil. To love them and to forgive them means to believe in their fundamental right to find in themselves a

resource of distraction from evil and appeal to piety. Loving even ‘enemies’, according to the Orthodox idea, we do not immerse ourselves in the multiplication of evil and give enemies a chance to overcome the dominant moral negative motivation in themselves.

Of course, in traditional Orthodoxy, which cultivates piety mediated by the Church tradition and the care of canonically consecrated clergy, the moral self-realization is inseparable from the concern for preserving its doctrinal identity. The cohesion of Orthodox structures is one of the obligatory signs of morality.

The communal spirit of Orthodoxy and its ecclesiastical practices has several ethically positive potentials of manifestation at the personal-communicative and social levels. Great attention in the practice of community life is paid not only to rituals in their formal self-sufficiency, but to the word, the living perception of ethically and psychologically coloured legends about the spiritual path of Jesus Christ, the characters of the New Testament, saints and religious ascetics.

The presence in the New Testament and Church stories of significant proportion of parables, which in a symbolically concentrated, meaningful format give the moral conflicts of human life, makes the Christian teaching relevant to different periods, since the symbolism of the parables can be decoded during sermons with projection on the urgent problems of life of a particular community, nation, state and person in his/her current life situation.

The researcher Vladimir Lossky unfolds the thesis that in a historic time the formation of the Christian worldview as such urgently needed effective mechanisms for the establishment of new consciousness and self-determination for believers. And this prompted to find the optimally simple format for the promotion of the new worldview, as well as the development of fundamentally new communicative practices. “Hence, the parable appeared in the New Testament as a form, first of all – speaking in modern language – of ideological penetration into consciousness. But for this ‘penetration’ to be maximally perceived and effective, it was forced to ‘clothe’ in the appropriate form. This was the Biblical parable with the use of the artistic image system.” [19] In this way, Christianity to some extent actualizes the awareness of the constancy of the key ethical and spiritual problems of man, regardless of the era, and makes establishment for each new generation to solve these problems through its own participation in spiritual self-determination in the face of God.

In the practice of all Christian denominations, the ethical ideal is represented through a person’s willingness to cherish life simplicity, humility. N. Berdyaev, in particular, wrote: “Humility is manifestation of spiritual power in victory over personality... Humility in its ontological content is the heroic overcoming of egocentrism and heroic ascent to the height of theocentrism.” [20] At the same time, this religious philosopher makes a significant warning: humility by its essence does not appear as submission, but, on the contrary, as movement along the line of maximum resistance.

An important aspect of the ethical self-organization of a Christian (primarily, within the framework of the Orthodox faith) is also the observance of fasts and various prayer vows sanctioned by Church regulations. Of course, this aspect of Orthodoxy has different vectors of its realization depending on the value leitmotif, which a believer or community lays in their observance. Orthodox theologians and clergymen justify the opinion that fasting and other self-restrictive practices should not be perceived as a burden or a factor of exclusivity in piety, but should be a sincere moment of dedication to spiritual ideals.

The faith teaches an Orthodox Christian to work on such a spiritual ability as will. After all, in real life practice, the measure of faith is determined by the strength and intensity of the will concentration and the ethical vector of faith – by the direction of will. Since for an Orthodox Christian faith is recognized as a key factor of self-determination, the will in psychological terms in the life of an Orthodox Christian is almost a leading factor in the approval of morally positive behavioural patterns.

3.2. The role of Islamic religious traditions in the moral self-determination of believers

Among the religions of the Abrahamic tradition, a special place, historical role and significance, has been destined for Islam, which is one of the world's religions. Muslim theologians say: "Islam is an opportunity for people to live freely and happily on Earth and to find Paradise on the Judgement Day. All necessary and useful is on the path of Islam, because all visible and invisible beauty is taken from previous religions. Success and happiness can be achieved only through Islam, for a source of correct morality, the right path and reasonable actions are Islam." [21, p. 973]

Taking into account the value, mental and social specifics of the Islamic worldview and lifestyle, as well as migration trends of the present, the consciousness of people of the Western world often perceives this religion and its ethical postulates negatively. However, it should be emphasized that the Islamic communities are marked ethically and socially by a rich value palette of sentiments, beliefs and traditions.

There is no doubt that the Koran and other holy texts of Islam bear many traces of the era when the corresponding postulates were formed. On the one hand, one can find general instructions of humanity, warning against egoism, motivation for charity, for abstinence from excessive fascination with secular ambitions: "Sacrifice in the way of Allah, and do not go through your hands to destruction! And do good; verily Allah loves those who do good." (Koran 2: 195) There is also a whole range of restrictions and sanctions in relation to marital life, domestic conveniences, relationships between men and women. "And when you divorce your wives, and the time allotted to them expires, do not prevent them from marrying their former husbands, if they agreed between themselves according to custom... Mothers can feed their children with their

milk for two full years if they want to bring feeding to an end. The child's father must provide the child's mother with food and clothes, in accordance with custom." (Koran 2:232, 2:233)

At the same time, the aspect of emotional and moral rooting of the relevant value postulates, their reliance on the instructions of selfless love, humanity and mercy is often in Islam inferior to the instructions on the severity of possible punishment – both earthly and expected otherworldly: "And those who did not believe I will punish with cruel punishment, both in earthly life and the next life. And they will have no helpers!" (Koran 3:56) (It does not follow that these moral traits are not cultivated by Muslims, but when motivated by religious texts and institutions, they are involved less as leading factors of influence on the person). But if in Orthodoxy the severity of sanctions for immoral behaviour is regulated now mainly not by religious structures or customs, but by institutions of civil society and secular law, in several Islamic societies it is the religious sanction as the primary one (to a greater or lesser extent) that still retains the influence on these norms.

Undoubtedly, strict detailing of moral, etiquette and ritualistic regulation in Islam, penetration of sacralised intentions into the smallest spheres of life provided in the historical context and now provide the Islamic communities with internal integrity, structuring, stability, a high degree of implementation in real life of the elements of the social hierarchy and sanctification of family values. This provides believers with a kind of psychological balance considering that the sphere of moral choice gives little reason for the autonomy of self-determination in Islam. This, on the one hand, binds an ordinary believer to the social niche, humbles him/her, and on the other hand, warns him/her against the possible psychological consequences of the painful choice between ethical conflicts in comparison with the Orthodox Christians [22].

Islamic ideas about sin, gradations of sinfulness and ways to atone for sinfulness are also special. According to most Sunni theologians, a Muslim, even after committing a great sin, still retains the status and prerogative of the faithful. Correspondingly, they believe that in the other world, only a temporary punishment awaits him/her. And only the sin of apostasy from believing in a single God, and hence from the Islamic community, is perceived as a categorical denial of the chance of forgiveness. Therefore, the Islamic identity itself and its maintenance through participation in community and religious life are interpreted as an almost sufficient prerequisite for salvation [23].

The attitude towards women and the specificity of family and marriage in Islam have also a number of peculiarities, containing both universal human vectors and moral and ethical restrictions. Among the positive features, it is worth highlighting high respect for mother, the duty of family care of objectively stronger men for women, obligations to properly maintain a wife or wives [24]. "We have willed a man to treat his parents better. It is very hard for mother to carry a child, but she takes it away only when it is two years old. Thank Me and your parents for coming back to Me!" (Koran 31:14)

4. Conclusions

The powerful theological heritage of the Abrahamic religions, the spiritual and moral potential of each of them is one of the factors of the civilizational significance of religious traditions, their effective influence on the fates of believers.

The value spirit of Orthodoxy and its ecclesiastical practices has a few humanistically constructive, ethically positive manifestations at the personal-communicative and social levels. At the same time, a particular idea of Orthodoxy acquires a constructive or destructive vector due to the quality of the communicative channel set by certain individuals and communities. The idea of the advantage of love for God over everything can become a platform for unsurpassed kindness and responsiveness, but it can also be manipulated as a slogan to encourage fanaticism, authoritarianism or passivity, isolationism. This depends on the particular ethical and semantic accentuation of this idea in the real practice of the life of religious communities. Therefore, adequate moral outlook of religious leaders in the Orthodox Church (including at the local level), the presence or absence, in addition to ensuring the solidity of believers around the socio-religious identity, of humanistic focus on the real moral care for them in particular life are very important.

Islamic value resource has incorporated many elements of universal ethics. However, the greater degree of religious and social cohesion in most Islamic countries determines the greater proportion of traditionalist postulates in ethics and the significant impact of religious ethics on the moral self-determination of believers. However, it is not correct to extrapolate elements of religious fundamentalist radicalism and extremism of individual communities, certain movements acting under the flags of Islam, to religion as a whole. Humanism or, conversely, archaism and fundamentalism of specific forms of Islam are dictated by the political conditions of life of certain Islamic communities, but the letter of sacred texts is open to interpretation and variability of interpretation regarding the practical aspects of its application.

Therefore, in the Islamic value tradition there are many opportunities for constructive interaction with the value resource of Orthodoxy for the formation of a significant array of humanistic ideals and practices in the individual and public consciousness.

Orthodoxy and Islam are interrelated and arose, respectively, one by one, on the dogmatic principles of the predecessors – Orthodoxy, dating back to apostolic times, was based on Judaism, and Islam – on their common basis. The religious denominations corresponding to them existed for a long time and still exist on the territory of modern Russia, and therefore continue to be the ideological basis of the moral self-determination of believers within the framework of Russian society. Orthodoxy and Islam are acting now and affect the real behaviour, first of all, of believers, as well as those who are trying to gain the favour of believers and for this purpose outwardly reproduce patterns of behaviour that correspond to certain confessions. Both religions have a fairly

well developed social and ethical system. Given this, their commandments are the starting point for all further discussions about morality and related phenomena (personal freedom, sinfulness and repentance, the moral development of the personality). The origins of philosophical and scientific research on the issues of moral self-determination of personality are rooted primarily in monotheistic religious dogma – the Sacred Tradition, on the one hand, and the Divine Book of Muslims, the Sacred Koran and Sunnah, the practice of the Messenger of Allah, on the other, a more detailed analysis of which in the moral aspect of self-determination of an individual can be a promising subject for further research in this direction.

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