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# THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## Abstract

The article represents a summary and interpretation of the results obtained in the course of a comprehensive research carried out within the scientific and research work in the sphere of modelling intercultural communication in a global world. The article outlines and substantiates the forms and mechanisms of the impact exerted by religion on intercultural communication and international relations. The three systemic forms of interrelations between these social phenomena are described: two 'desirable', 'favourable' and one 'unfavourable'. The 'desirable', 'favourable' forms ensure positive relations between culture and religion, leading to the improvement of intercultural communication and international relations. On the other hand, the 'undesirable' factor of belonging to different confessions becomes an obstacle to effective international relations. Theoretical conclusions and their discussion are supported by the results of empirical research conducted on a representative basis. The work emphasizes the fact identified in the course of content analysis of scientific literature that the amount of empirical research into the impact of the religious factor on intercultural communication is much lower than that of theoretical research, which poses a scientific problem connected with substantiation of the accuracy of the latter. The article contains practical recommendations for international and in-country management in the sphere of organization of specialized scientific research into intercultural communication and international relations, improvement of the existing regulating structures applying to the examined social phenomenon in the system of international governance and establishment of new structures in this field.

*Keywords:* culture, religious, factor, conflicts, international relations

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of this research is to examine the religious factor in intercultural communication and international relations in a global world. The comprehensive research is open, descriptive and mainly performed in a qualitative methodology, and therefore does not contain hypotheses, but is structured based on the research question: how does the religious factor affect intercultural communication?

Results of practical observations and analysis of theories of the influence exercised by religion on intercultural communication and international relations show that the scientific community and international governance do not pay enough attention to this factor thereby promoting an ineffective model of intercultural communication.

It cannot be denied that religion remains the most important component that forms the systems of society. The religious factor influences various forms of participation in intercultural communication and international relations, but the mechanism of its influence remains insufficiently studied in the organization of public administration.

In the context of a growing number of economic, political, military and other conflicts, terrorist attacks, pandemics of different diseases and interethnic tensions, the religious factor should be the focus of scientific interest and subject to constant control, which explains the need for new or improved structures of international governance.

Examination of scientific works on religion, religious confessions, international relations, culture, governance and others, suggests that there are three main perspectives on the influence of the religious factor on intercultural communication. This fact of a triple division of the methods of considering the religious factor in intercultural communications has been substantiated in the works by T.S. Eliot [1], N.A. Berdyaev [2], M. Foucault [3], Lawrence E. Harrison [L.E. Harrison, *Kultura i ekonomicheskoe razvitie (Culture and economic development)*, Tsentr gumanitarnykh tekhnologii, August 10, 2009, <https://gtmarket.ru/laboratory/expertize/3506>] and V.M. Mezhuev [4] devoted to culture and intercultural communication. According to one of the opinions presented in the works by E. Husserl [5, 6] and E. Cassirer [7], culture is defined as an intersubjective phenomenon or world that does not belong to a specific subject, but is accessible to all subjects and they can all participate in it.

Also, the authors have analysed current works on intercultural communication as such. In particular, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* by Charles Taylor has been considered, where the author substantiates the need to recognize cultural diversity for various minority groups, including religious ones [8]. Based on the work of H.-G. Gadamer [9], C. Taylor argues that in dialogue, each partner carries his own basic understanding of human life, often formed from religious ideas, and a fruitful meeting with another expands the horizon of the knower, showing how something that we took for granted is only one of the possibilities. The works of L. Sklair [10], as

well as of domestic authors N.A. Orekhovskaya [11] and Y.P. Ten [12, 13], touching upon the crisis of national cultures, the impact on them of the religious factor and the peculiarities of intercultural communication in the post-Soviet space, are topical research on globalization issues in the context of economic formations.

## **2. Methods**

When studying the religious factor in intercultural communication and international relations, a set of theoretical methods was used, such as the analysis and synthesis of thematic literature, as well as empirical methods: the content analysis and sociological survey.

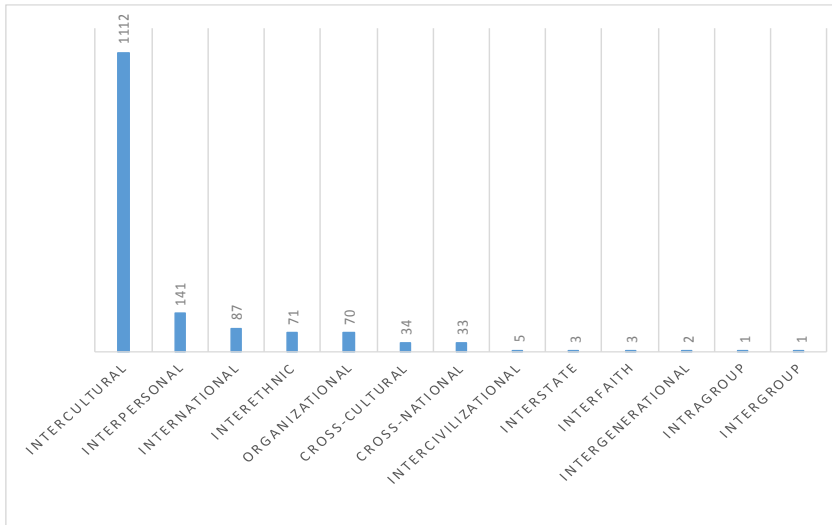
The objective of the empirical part of the work was to describe the relevance and degree of development of the issue of intercultural communication based on qualitative and quantitative content analysis of scientific publications (articles, monographs and theses) released from 2000 to 2019. The research was based on the classical methods of text and discourse analysis [14]. A specially developed list of communication types approved by experts and recognized as exhaustive was used as a category system. The documents were selected according to their relevance to the examined issue. All publications available for analysis in the selected databases that contain the research categories were counted. Selection of bibliographic and reference databases was carried out according to their volume. The largest Russian- and English-language databases were employed in the course of the research, such as the official website of the Russian State Library, Cyberleninka, E-library, Scopus and Web of Science. Selection of publications containing the targeted units of analysis in their titles was conducted with the help of automated search and filtering. To avoid double counting of duplicate documents, all publications were entered into a research database; additional control of repetitions was carried out manually. Thus, we selected and analysed documents in Russian and English related to intercultural communication judging by their titles.

At the second stage, categories of intercultural communication were identified and interpreted. For this purpose, we selected the scientific publications that contained the semantic unit 'intercultural communication' in their title and analysed them using the following scheme: title - code - category content. Two large clusters were identified within the category content: the areas of activity in the context of which intercultural communication is studied and different aspects of intercultural communication. These indicators were used to develop a toolkit for a survey of students of humanitarian universities in Moscow and a survey of experts.

1. Student survey: the general population was about 50,000 people; the sample was 398 people and the sampling error - 5%. The sample was representative and formed according to the following indicators: sex, age, type and level of education, region of residence.
2. Expert survey was attended by 216 people.

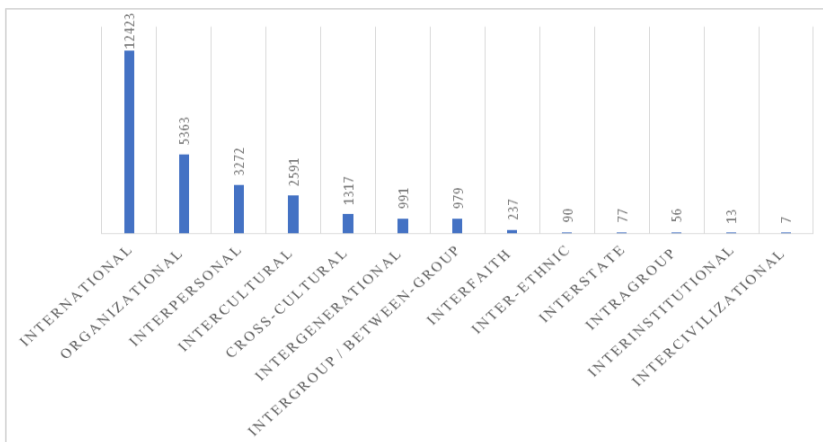
### 3. Results

The performed content analysis allowed selecting about 29,000 Russian and foreign scientific publications on various types of communication, as well as systematizing the data obtained. A detailed picture of quantitative distribution of documents by type of communication is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The thematic distribution of scientific publications according to communication types in the Russian language released from 2000 to 2019.

The figure shows that interconfessional communication is not a frequent subject of scientific analysis, i.e. it does not attract much research interest. Only three works out of 1,653 (about 0.2%) look at the problem of interfaith and interreligious interaction.



**Figure 2.** The thematic distribution of scientific publications according to communication types in the English language released from 2000 to 2019.

Figure 2 presents distribution of scientific publications in the English language written by representatives of different scientific schools. Here interfaith communication is the ninth most common topic and accounts for 0.08% of the total number of publications, which is four times higher than the share of such documents in the Russian language. However, this percentage does not correspond with the degree of relevance of the topic and the need for the development of a strategy for improvement of social relations by administrative bodies.

The second stage of the analysis of publications containing the category of 'intercultural communication' in the title allowed establishing that by the number of documents touching upon the issues of religion in intercultural communication, religion as a sphere of life held the 14<sup>th</sup> place out of 32 identified areas. In total, 1.1% of publications were devoted to intercultural communication related to religion.

#### **4. Interpretation of the obtained results**

The results of the conducted content analysis indicated an insufficient level of interest in the topic of interfaith communication in the modern human sciences despite the existing practical need. According to statistical data, in 2018, nearly in a quarter of the countries of the world, there were military conflicts, acts of violence and terrorist attacks motivated by religious hatred or connected with religion or harassment of women for violating religious codes [K. Kishi, *Key findings on the global rise in religious restrictions*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/21/key-findings-on-the-global-rise-in-religious-restrictions/>, accessed on 25.03.2020]. The most striking example of this is the Islamic State.

There are still latent religious restrictions in Russia. The influence of the religious component can be observed in all major conflicts both in Russia and its neighbour states. Besides, an interconfessional split has begun. For example, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has separated from the Russian Church. Therefore, contemporary challenges testify that interconfessional and interreligious communications lack proper scientific support despite their indisputable relevance.

It is equally important not only to substantiate the importance of the religious factor in intercultural communication, but also to understand how religion and culture are connected in scientific works. An in-depth analysis of the scientific literature in this area allows asserting that the studies of the religious factor in intercultural communication currently do not have a unified and justified conceptual and methodological base.

This is evidenced by the presence of at least three points of view in scientific studies of the religious factor. For example, T.S. Eliot argues that there is no such thing as culture without religion, and "according to the point of view of the observer the culture will appear to be the product of the religion, or the religion the product of the culture" [1, p. 74]. Russian philosopher N.A.

Berdyayev considered culture as cultic, symbolic and sacred [2, p. 270-271]. M. Foucault took the same theoretical stand, describing sociocultural practices based on “spirituality postulates” [3, p. 28]. Consequently, religion and culture have common grounds, ‘spirituality (subjectivity) practices’ play a major role in the production and reproduction of both culture and religion.

Another point of view is presented by L.E. Harrison, one of the authors of an international series of essays ‘Culture Matters’. He equates religious differences with cultural ones and views them as a type of cultural differences: “Protestant, Jewish, and Confucian societies do better than Catholic, Islamic, and Orthodox Christian societies because they substantially share the progress-prone <...> values of the typology whereas the lagging religions tend toward the progress-resistant values” [<https://gtmarket.ru/laboratory/expertize/3506>, p. 24].

The theory developed by V.M. Mezhuev illustrates the third point of view. On the one hand, his statement, according to which, culture should be “understood as existence of man as a subject” [4, p. 62] shows that his views are close to Foucault’s beliefs described above. However, Mezhuev argues that culture involves “discovery of a special type of being - neither divine nor natural but properly human, which is relatively independent and free with respect to the first two” [4, p. 44-45].

The role of religion in intercultural communication and international relations is also viewed controversially. On the one hand, historically religions have encouraged the integration of peoples. In particular, this way ‘the Islamic world’, ‘the Christian world’, ‘the Catholic world’ and ‘the Orthodox Christian world’ were created. Besides, religions have facilitated their peaceful coexistence without major conflicts (‘brotherly communication’ - fraternization/fraternity). On the other hand, relations between religions and even confessions have always been intolerant and antagonistic, up to wars and interethnic conflicts motivated by belonging to different confessions.

The results of analysis, generalization, modelling and comparison of theories looking at the influence of the religious factor on intercultural communication and international relations allow us to largely agree with the views on culture and religion shared by E. Husserl, E. Cassirer and their followers. Husserl wrote that the world “should be understood as intersubjectively constituted” [6, p. 111] and “concretely the world is given to me and to everyone only as a cultural world” [6, p. 169]. He argued that this world represents “a universal mental acquisition <...> the unity of a mental configuration (Gestalt) <...> a meaning-construct” [6, p. 455]. Similarly, Cassirer defined culture as “an intersubjective world; a world which does not exist in ‘me’ but which is accessible to all subjects and in which they should all participate” [7, p. 83]. These ideas were developed in a well-grounded way within the enactivist approach to culture, according to which, “the shared world is seen as something constituted by intersubjective understanding” [15].

Of particular interest is the interpretation of life worlds by J. Habermas. He considers this phenomenon in particular connection with communicative action. The life world is constituted by various “intersubjectively shared”

communication resources, which create “an intuitively understandable context of the situation” and, at the same time, represent “resources for the processes of interpretation, where participants of communication try to cover the arising need for mutual understanding that may arise in certain situations” [16].

In general, religion can be defined as a specific belief system. In this connection, the conclusions made by K. Marx seem very accurate and consistent with the results of this research: “Man is *the world of man* <...> Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form” [17]. In his works, Marx uses the term ‘compendium’ as a summary of the foundations of ‘the world of man’. Religion is a kind of explication that constitutes the world of intersubjectivity and transforms the ‘background’ into a belief system. As a system of views on Ontology, religion claims to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the essence of man and creates a space of ‘active intersubjectivity’ (this term has been borrowed from enactivism) as a sphere of common sense-making. For example, Christianity, having originated from the Jewish cultural and national environment, asserted itself as a universal religion and these aspirations were implemented through the transformation of early Christianity into the sphere of common active sense-making that has embraced the whole globe. It means that religion creates its own ‘supracultural’ sphere of intersubjectivity, and it cannot exist differently, claiming to represent people’s ontology of being.

All of the aforesaid can serve as a substantiation of the earlier statement that there are three forms of participation of religion in intercultural communication and international relations.

First, religion forms the highest level of intercultural communication as ‘brotherly communication’ (fraternization/fraternity) between culturally different peoples. Religion claims to create its own intersubjective unifying communication resources. In this sense, it is proper to speak of individual religious worlds: general Christian, Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic, etc. Second, being two constitutive spiritual practices, culture and religion are involved in complex interrelations, as a result of which, representatives of all cultures are characterized by different forms of subjectivity even in close interaction. Third, as a system of beliefs, religion is engaged in international relations as a form of searching for consensus and an essential foundation for making compromises.

The second form is the most interesting from theoretical and practical perspectives. Subjectivity is the ability to preserve one’s features in rapidly changing circumstances and to act in a new environment. On the one hand, each culture has its own interpretation of subjectivity and ways of its implementation. On the other hand, religion creates some universal forms of subjectivity and it is what represents man’s likeness to God [18]. However, these universal forms of subjectivity exist in each culture in a special unique way, which emerges in the intersubjectivity space of each life world. In this connection, C. Geertz argued, “we are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture - and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it: Dobuan and Javanese, Hopi and Italian” [19].

The results of the study show that religion is a universal phenomenon. However, it cannot claim the primacy in intercultural communication and an irreplaceable role in the organization of positive universal international relations due to the presence of sociocultural features. For instance, Russian Orthodox Christianity viewed as a spiritual form of life rather than a religious doctrine is not identical to Greek Orthodox Christianity. It contains many cultural elements assimilated from Russian paganism. This is what allowed V.A. Zhukovsky to speak of 'Russian God' in a convinced and well-grounded way [V.A. Zhukovsky, *Svyataya Rus: Pismo knyazyu P. A. Vyazemskomu 23-go iyulya (5-go avgusta) 1848g (Holy Rus. The letter to Count P.A. Vyazemsky of 23 July (5 August), 1848)*, <http://www.gosudarstvo.voskres.ru/zhukovsk.htm>]. In this sense, culture is "the path of the soul to itself" [20]. After all, religion assimilated on certain grounds develops certain qualities in a person that allow them to work out a way of achieving some kind of perfection. A strong (perfect in terms of their development) person tends to establish positive intercultural communication and aspires for ensuring stable relations with other confessions, nationalities and neighbours.

In intercultural communication, people who belong to different worlds and possess specific socio-psychological resources come into objective conflicts with each other, become opponents and strive for leadership and power. In its turn, religion as a social phenomenon aspiring to reach the ideal of human perfection can draw opponents' positions closer, reconcile their interests and lower the extent of conflicts. In this sense, taking into account the religious factor in international relations is objective and necessary.

Intercultural communication cannot be free of religious conflicts that also involve subjects of international relations. Practice shows that in the course of intercultural communication, religious peculiarities might not be noticed or recognized if economic, political, demographic or other interests prevail. If there is a conflict of such interests, the religious factor causes clashes between subjects that lead to destructive consequences in international relations.

Surely, religious impacts take place in the sphere of individual or public consciousness, so special methods and means are used here, which as a rule are supported by hidden powers of influence. As a result, a subject belonging to one culture might not understand the meaning of influence exercised by their opponent who belongs to a different faith. There are also instances when methods of influence used by representatives of a certain culture do not work on supporters of a different culture or can be interpreted in the wrong way. For example, such a situation can be observed in the course of identification of the national and cultural identities of Chinese and Russian people. The highest degree of a subject's culture in China is Tao, while in the Russian Orthodox tradition it is 'faith that acts using the power of love'. The practices of comprehending Tao and the 'Russian God' described by V.A. Zhukovsky are significantly different in terms of their content and interpretation. It is a well-known fact illustrated by the attempts to translate the Gospel of John into Chinese: translation of the word 'logos' into 'Tao' is inadequate at least because



‘logos’ means ‘word’ while Tao cannot be expressed with words. Christian preachers who work in China know that such translation leads to total nonsense. Another example is the following: to give a Korean person white flowers means to wish them death. The article ‘Did I do them any harm? - why flowers from Russian students upset a Korean teacher’ describes a real situation that portrays this difference [March 24, 2020, INNARORY, <https://zen.yandex.ru/media/innafory/cto-plohogo-ia-sdelala-im--pochemu-cvety-ot-uchenikov-iz-rossii-rasstroili-koreianku-5e78bd191fc43a6e9fc692cf>]. When students were giving flowers to their Korean teacher, they thought that it would make a good impression on her, as it happens in the Russian culture, but their gift caused a misunderstanding.

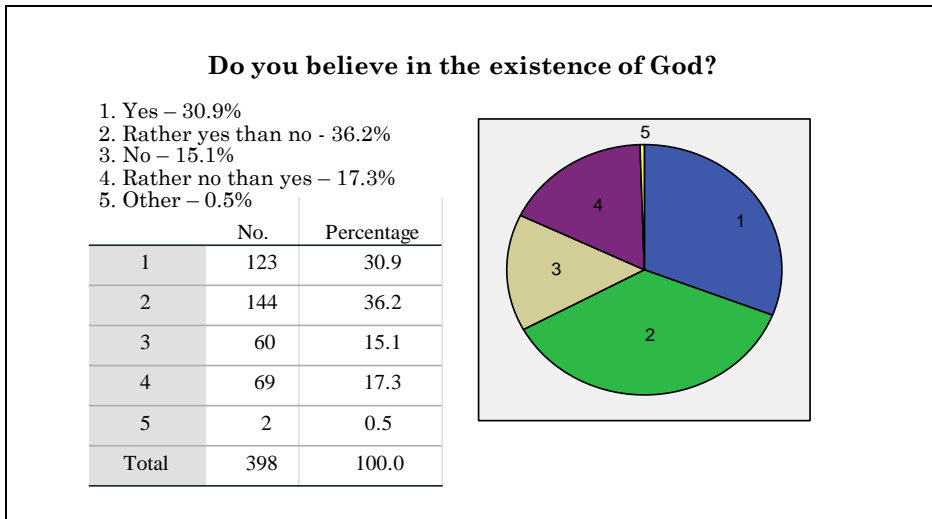
Judging by the results of the analysis of scientific literature, the third form of participation of religion in intercultural communication is the following: in the course of confrontation between peoples and religions, it is employed as a way of converting adherents of a different faith to the faith in question and extending the space of a certain confession. This way, it is used by secular authorities in international relations as a component of strategic management aimed at the expansion of their political and economic influence. The results of the retrospective analysis show that when subjects of religion are trying to achieve their mission, they become uncompromising and relentless. “The faith that acts using the power of love’ transforms into religious fundamentalism that can break existing intercultural communications and create new ones with the secular political organization of a similar orientation. As a rule, such religions and secular political societies cooperating with them cannot establish stable long-term communications. Traditional religions remain conservative. This trend was identified and described by V.S. Solovyov. In response to Marxists who pointed out some similarity between the socialist theory and Christianity, the researcher argued, ‘there is only one small distinction between Christianity and socialism <...> the thing is that Christianity requires giving away your own, and socialism demands taking possession of other people’s things’.” [21]

For the improvement of intercultural communication and international relations, it is important to study the specific features of relevant religious factors and traditional national knowledge. According to Chinese wisdom, “When Tao is lost, there is goodness. When goodness is lost, there is kindness. When kindness is lost, there is justice. When justice is lost, there is ritual. Now ritual is the husk of faith and loyalty, the beginning of confusion.” [22]

Such an algorithm of changing values can also be applied to Christianity: when love is lost, there are Christian virtues; when virtues are lost, there is kindness; when kindness is lost, there is justice. Justice cannot be universal and essentially represents only a dream.

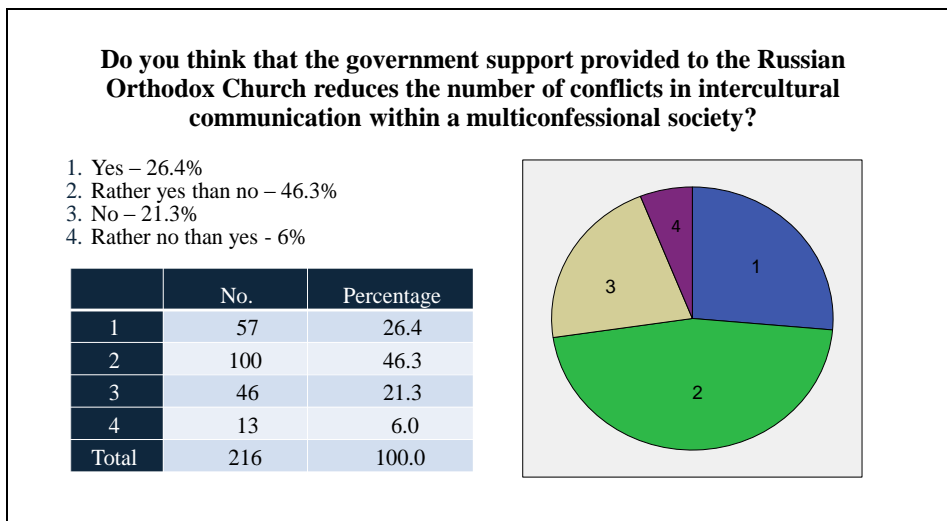
The questionnaire-based and expert surveys in the context of certain sociological research aimed at qualification of the content of the third form of participation of religion in intercultural communication as ‘undesirable’ indirectly proved the results of theoretical discussion. Research showed that the

majority of young people did not consider themselves to be convinced believers and over 32% had doubts about the existence of God (Figure 3).



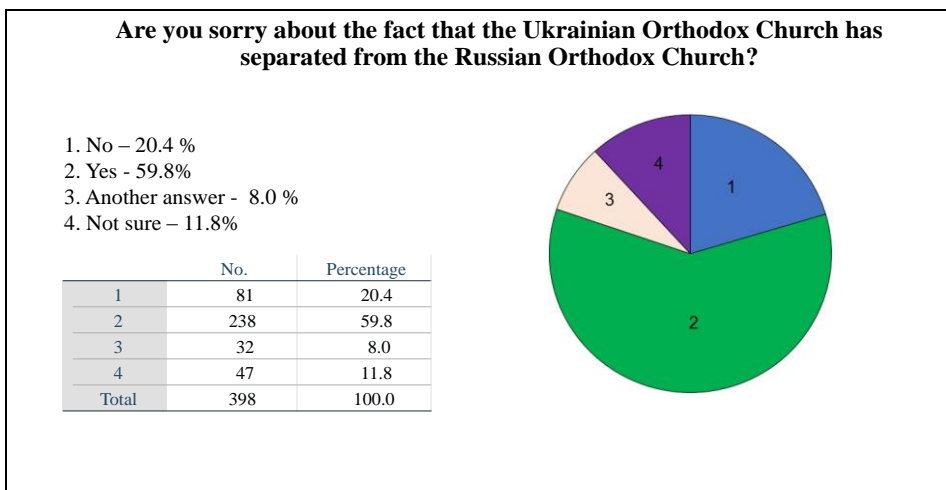
**Figure 3.** The attitude of the respondents to the existence of God.

However, over 70% of experts tended to support the Russian Orthodox Church since it reduces the number of conflicts in intercultural communication within a multiconfessional society (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** The opinion of the experts about supporting the Russian Orthodox Church.

It should be noted that over 50% of the respondents were sorry about the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had separated from the Russian Orthodox Church (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** The attitude of the respondents to the separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Probably, disbelief in God does not imply the denial of culture based on Orthodox Christianity. This is why the experts were sorry about the split between the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, which has had a direct impact on the general cultural communication and the Russian-Ukrainian relations. Thus, even people who do not define themselves as religious, tend to notice the importance of religion in intercultural communication and define it as peace-making, reducing the level of conflict. At the same time, the identified set of indicators testifies that in the mass consciousness of Orthodox Christianity ‘only justice is left’, while faith and love are not in much demand.

## 5. Conclusions

Thus, the research has allowed assessing the coverage of the religious factor in intercultural communication and intercultural relations by scientific works. The results of content analysis have shown that Science does not pay enough attention to studies of the religious factor, which leads to deficiencies in the organization of an effective model of intercultural communication and international relations.

It has been shown that the religious factor is in a complex relationship with intercultural communication and can influence it in different ways depending on the context. Theoretically, there are three forms of participation of the religious factor in intercultural communication and international relations: two of them have favourable impact and one produces a negative effect.

There is little research regarding the impact of the religious factor on intercultural communication and international relations, which has negative consequences for global social practices where there are civilization fractures based on different confessions.

In the context of the growing number of regional political, economic, military and other conflicts, terrorism and interethnic tension, the religious factor in intercultural communication and international relations should always be in the focus of science and social control. Both international and state governance structures should have an increased focus on the religious factor. In this connection, it is necessary to initiate specialized scientific research and sociological support of the process of organization of intercultural communication and international relations.

It is also important to improve the existing structures regulating the examined social phenomenon in the system of international governance and establish new structures in this field.

In the context of the growing number of challenges and military threats, as well as new pandemics spreading among the global population, scientific and educational structures should provide scientific support to the organization of effective intercultural communication and international relations to improve them, reduce the degree of conflicts and enhance international security. In the course of organization of research and practical programs, it is necessary to ensure international cooperation in the sphere of research into the impact of the religious factor on modern intercultural communication in the globalizing world.

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