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CHALLENGES FACING RELIGION AND THE CHURCH
IN POSTMODERN DIGITAL SOCIETY

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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CHALLENGES FACING RELIGION AND THE CHURCH IN POSTMODERN DIGITAL SOCIETY

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Silver Lake, Veliko Gradište, 5–6 September 2025

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS*

FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS ISSUES
OF THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**CHALLENGES FACING RELIGION AND THE CHURCH
IN POSTMODERN DIGITAL SOCIETY**

(Silver Lake, Veliko Gradište, Serbia)

Organized by

The Forum for Religious Issues and Centre for Sociological and Anthropological Research of the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade in co-organization with the Center for Empirical Research of Religion, Novi Sad.

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON LEADERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Although digital technology and digital media have penetrated every pore of society and business, and have become an inevitable factor in everyday life, they are still mostly associated with business processes. However, here the authors want to draw attention to the influence that digital technology and digital transformation have on religious communities, with a special focus on the practices of religious leadership and communication with believers. Religious communities are organizations with a specific structure and leadership that unite believers, and practice faith in everyday religious life. However, leadership in the religious communities is regulated and determined by the religious organizations themselves, and belongs to the domain of spiritual authority. In the effective exercise of spiritual authority today, digitalization and digital media that facilitate communication greatly help. In the past, church councils were places where, in addition to important decisions were being made, positions related to the society and the state were also adopted. The digitalization of religious groups and communities has introduced a host of opportunities, but also challenges for religious leadership. As digital technologies reshape and change society, appropriate and timely reactions are required from the leadership. Religious leaders and organizations should take into account the opportunities offered by digital technology and the internet in ministry practices, and adapt in such ways that balance tradition with modernity, while also addressing the spiritual, social, and practical

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needs of their congregations in a virtual space. This paper analyzes the application of digital technology for effective religious leadership and communication within religious communities in Serbia and Macedonia.

Key words: religious communities, religious leadership, digital technology, digital media and communication

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THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN AND THE DIGITAL CHALLENGE – PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The historical role of the Church of Sweden

The Lutheran State Church was founded in 1527/1536 by King Gustav Vasa, playing an important role during history. Local priests taught citizen to read and regularly checked their knowledge of Lutheran Catechism. Sweden was for centuries a mono-religious and monocultural society. Religious freedom was partially introduced in the 18th century, and formally in 1951. Baptism became a criterion for church membership only in 1996.

The role of the Church today

Since 2000, the church has not formally been a State Church. However, in a sense it has remained to be so, since the church seems to be ruled by political parties rather than bishops. The church has faced a continuous loss of membership, and there is a decline in religious rites like baptism, marriage, and funeral. Attendance of service is low and Sweden has become highly secularized. Since 2009, religious marriage has been open to couples of the same sex, which has affected relations with other churches.

The digital Church

A strong impetus for a digital church was the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis will provide an overview of the types of services appearing digitally in the 13 dioceses of the Church. On the one hand, the digital church provides the opportunity of participating in services via the internet, while on the other, there have been missionary efforts, combining the internet, actual gatherings, and introductory texts. A quantitative textual analysis of an introduction to Christianity will be performed.

Key words: Sweden, digital church, digital services, introducing Christianity, textual analysis

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND RELIGION – PRESENCE OF RELIGION IN VIRTUAL SPACE: THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATIONS ON THE YOUTUBE PLATFORM

In this paper, I would like to explore different forms of religious content that are present in the Serbian language. The subject of the research is Theological Conversations that bring together members of different religious traditions every Friday to discuss the same topics. The form of the dialogue and mutual respect supports a secular space in which groups are open and mixed. The CEIR Balkan channel was opened in 2013 and it has posted content promoting the magazine *Religion and Tolerance*. The promotional activities have been recorded live from year to year, and posted on the YouTube channel. In addition to the recordings, with the emergence of the Zoom platform during the period of the Coronavirus closures, live conversations have begun to be organised every Friday evening, which resulted in over 300 recorded conversations that are available to the public. The mutual exchange of knowledge about one's own and other religions, as well as the presentation of scientific research, have strengthened the culture of dialogue and religious tolerance. Although the goal was to get to know religion in its theoretical perspective by following religious scriptures, it contributed in the form of dialogue to the promotion of universal values. The paper will also briefly present another form of presence of religious communities and individuals who send their teachings, gatherings and messages into the virtual space through monologues from the perspective of their own religion, as well as those platforms that designate other people's teachings as erroneous.

Key words: CEIR Balkan, theological conversations, lay apostolate, missionary department of the Serbian Orthodox Church

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BELIEVERS ON (IN) SOCIAL MEDIA

In the information society of late modernity, religion and the church are faced with multiple challenges arising from rapid technological progress, changing cultural paradigms, and the increasing pluralism of belief systems. Church communities are called upon to respond to the challenges of the 21st century and the new habits of society that disrupt traditional structures of communication, decision-making, and belief. Social networks have an increasing influence on the creation of public opinion, communities, and society as a whole, which represents a kind of call for church communities to undertake adaptive transformations. This article explores the complex relationship between religion and media, focusing in particular on the impact of the digital and social media on the perceptions of religion and the church in contemporary society. As digital platforms have become ubiquitous, they play a key role in shaping public discourse and influencing the image of religious institutions and organizations. Social media, online communities, and digital content can contribute to creating the image of religious communities, and even challenge traditional power structures in religious organizations. By analyzing case studies and the available scientific literature, the article highlights the dual role of digital media as both a tool for religious expression and a platform for critique, ultimately shaping public understanding and engagement with religion. The findings suggest that, while digital media can enhance the visibility and accessibility of religious practices, they also pose significant challenges to the established perceptions of faith and institutional authority, prompting a reassessment of the role of religion in an increasingly digital world.

Key words: religion, authority, social networks, perception, impact

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RELIGION AND BELIEF IN THE DITAL AGE: TECHO-RELIGIOSITY AND NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOSITY

Among the most significant characteristics of the modern society that we live in are technological development and globalization of a diversified structure. These characteristics shape a dynamic structure and can be considered as the causes of numerous and rapid changes. The mass use of computers, smartphones, tablets and similar digital communication technologies in social life has contributed to the process of digitalization which is reflected in the economic, cultural and religious dimensions. As a result, it can be said that a new social system is being built that accelerates the change and transformation of traditional social structures and institutions. The development of communication technologies affects all areas of social life, including religion, which is also affected by the changes, while religious understanding and practice are beginning to take on new forms. The main goal of this paper is to analyze the state of religion in the digital age, the emergence of new (virtual) communities, the relationship between techno-culture and religion, and the phenomenon of media preachers.

Key words: digitalization, religion, virtual communities, techno-culture, belief, televangelism

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY: RE-EXAMINING FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHMIC CONTROL

Digital technologies significantly shape how individuals approach religious beliefs, providing unprecedented opportunities to explore various traditions. However, this approach presents paradoxical challenges, as digital platforms enable and shape religious freedom through algorithmic content filtering and personalized recommendations. In this context, the freedom of choice comes into question: to what extent is individual choice truly autonomous when faced with technologies that selectively shape one's worldview?

Given the ubiquity of online communities and content, religious identities are no longer exclusively formed within traditional institutions. They are increasingly influenced by algorithmic systems that reflect societal norms, values, and expectations. While it seems that the information society offers more choices, it often narrows down these options through personalized content, which can undermine autonomy in religious decision-making.

The issue of freedom of choice becomes particularly relevant in light of research into the behaviors and attitudes of digital platform users, whose findings demonstrate how these technologies impact the formation of religious beliefs and identities. In this regard, it is crucial to consider whether the information society truly supports religious pluralism or creates new forms of manipulation and digital determinism, redefining religious freedom and autonomy. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the redefinition of religious identity highlights the need for further research into the long-term implications of technological mediation in shaping personal and collective belief systems.

Key words: religious identity, digital technologies, autonomy, belief systems, institutional authority

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE CONDITIONS OF DIGITALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, which, in the context of digital culture, encounters new challenges and opportunities. The digital environment opens up unprecedented opportunities for believers to express their religious beliefs, disseminate spiritual ideas, and form online communities. However, questions simultaneously arise regarding the protection of religious freedom online, particularly concerning censorship and online discrimination. Algorithms of digital platforms can limit access to specific content, and there is also a risk of cyberattacks, persecution of religious groups, and the use of monitoring technologies to restrict religious activity.

Protecting religious freedom in the digital space requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing legal regulation, platform self-regulation, and development of digital literacy. Digitalization significantly affects the rights and freedoms of religious communities, especially under repressive political regimes. On one hand, digital technologies offer new avenues for religious freedom: believers can exchange ideas, conduct online worship services, create digital libraries, and maintain connections with their communities through social networks and mobile applications. This significantly expands access to religious knowledge and practices, particularly in countries with limited religious freedom. Conversely, the use of surveillance technologies enables the monitoring of communication, tracking of religious gatherings, and blocking of specific religious content. Algorithms of social platforms can censor or restrict the dissemination of religious information, which exacerbates the marginalization of certain religious groups. In some countries, digital passports are used, which can contain data on a person's religious beliefs, thereby becoming an instrument of discrimination. Digitalization is thus a dual phenomenon: it can promote religious freedom, but it can also threaten it under conditions of authoritarian control. Protecting religious rights in the digital environment requires international legal regulation, active participation of civil society, and transparency of digital platforms to prevent abuses and guarantee freedom of religion.

Key words: religious rights, transparency of digital platforms, marginalization of religious groups, online discrimination, monitoring of communication, blocking of religious content

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DIGITAL CULTURE AS (NOT QUITE) A PARADIGM SHIFT: JUDAISM'S ADAPTABILITY ON TRIAL

Judaism has long been characterized by its adaptability, navigating historical, technological, and cultural shifts, while maintaining its religious and ethical principles. However, the paradigm shift that arrived with digitality is not only a matter of technology, but also a matter of thought and action, transforming capacity that increasingly introduces network-like structures, dehierarchization, and anti-monumentality. As much as this opens some new potentials and interpretational possibilities in the field of Jewish religion and observance (often actually materializing the core religious ideas in a completely new way), it also profoundly challenges how the individual and/or a community is growing within their religious thought. Digital culture is also transforming interpersonal and communal organization and relationships, which can influence Jewish individuals and communities around the world. Furthermore, digital culture can also challenge traditionally learned values, but also renew, modernize, and integrate these values into contemporary living, enhancing cross-geographical and cross-generational communication. This may, on one hand, change the existing Jewish identities, while on the other, it may strengthen them and preserve them.

This paper will try to explore the impact of digital culture in the field of Judaism through the lens of halakhic discussions, as well as media and culture studies, while also examining how it reflects on Judaism's adaptability, contemporary Jewish identity, and religious expression.

Key words: digital culture, Judaism, adaptability, challenge

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TECHNOLOGY, (DE)SECULARIZATION AND NEW SPiritUALITY: A SYSTEM THEORY AND CYBERNETIC ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN INTERACTIONS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND BELIEVERS

This study investigates the dual role of technology in shaping secularization and fostering new spiritual paradigms, with a focus on challenges faced by traditional religious institutions. Drawing on sociological systems theory and social cybernetics, the research analyzes how digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and virtual communities in particular, reconfigure religious authority, participation, and creation of meaning in late modern societies. While technology accelerates secularization by displacing institutional control over moral narratives, it simultaneously revitalizes spirituality through decentralized, algorithmically mediated practices such as virtual worship, AI-driven spiritual guidance, and hybrid religious identities.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this paper combines quantitative analysis of digital engagement metrics (e.g., social media interactions, online religious participation rates) with systems-theoretical modeling, to map feedback loops between technological adoption and institutional adaptation. Key questions include: How do algorithmic systems influence the dissemination of religious content? What systemic tensions arise between traditional hierarchies and decentralized digital spirituality? We suggest that digital platforms create “cybernetic spirals”, where institutional rigidity clashes with adaptive, user-driven spiritual ecosystems, leading to both fragmentation and innovation.

The study aims to contribute a framework for understanding religiosity in the information age, emphasizing the interdependence of technological affordances, cultural secularization, and emergent spiritual practices. Findings will inform debates on institutional resilience, the ethics of AI in religious contexts, and the redefinition of community in virtual spaces.

Key words: digital religion, secularization theory, systems theory, algorithmic governance, social cybernetics

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RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION AND DIGITAL SPACE – THREE OPEN QUESTIONS

Our presentation is a preliminary draft of the theoretical framework for a piece of research on digital space. We discuss three open questions about the digital space from the religious standpoint, in the perspective of some of the key properties of religious communication. First, we examine whether an axiological dimension in the digital space is necessary. If it is, does it bear intrinsic or instrumental value? Second, is the digital space transformative? Is it only the matter of sending, receiving and indicating information, or the deep (constructive or destructive) transformation of both the sender and the receiver? How can it lead to constructive expansion and development of human experience? Thirdly, is it essential to maintain a balance of public and personal levels of communication in the digital space? Are personal voices still necessary? Are they even possible? The aforementioned questions gain special value in the context of sociocultural constructivism, according to which communication acquires a developmental and transformative dimension in the dynamics of deeply personal interactions and engagement in the constitution of joint communication meanings. In the religious sense, communication is fundamentally incomplete without a personal dimension, and the publicity always carries a distinctly personal dimension of joint engagement. The assessment of the developmental and transformative dimension of the digital space can be sketched depending on the answers to the questions. In our opinion, experiences of religious communication that transcend simple transmission and exchange, and go beyond the impersonal public, can provide a key contribution to the axiological foundation of the digital space, if such foundation is among its priorities at all.

Key words: religion, communication, transformation, development, digital space

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DIGITAL GnosticISM, TECHNOFEUDALISM AND SPIRITUAL CULTURE IN THE THIRD MILENNIUM

Our paper explores the complex interplay between Digital Gnosticism and Technofeudalism, and their growing conflict with authentic Spiritual Culture, drawing on the insights of Nikolai Berdyaev, Yanis Varoufakis, Pope Francis, and Eric Voegelin. Digital Gnosticism, with its aspiration for disembodiment and escape into the “higher reality” of virtual worlds intended for a select elite, dominates the digital age. Technofeudalism, as described by Varoufakis, threatens to turn digital platforms into new feudal lords, and to bring a large part of humanity into a state of servitude. Berdyaev warns of technocracy and the loss of spiritual meaning and freedom, while Pope Francis criticizes the heresy of Digital Gnosticism, as a rejection of the sanctity of the body and matter and the dissolution of reality in virtual reality. According to Eric Voegelin, modern ideologies (communism, Nazism) have Gnostic roots – the desire for the “immanentization of the eschaton”, i.e., creation of paradise on earth through human power, which is precisely the key feature of the postmodern ideology of digital gnosticism and Technofeudalism, culminating in the hubris of transhumanism. Digital asceticism, which advocates moderate use of technology, along with its de-idolatrization and the discernment of spirits and judgment, is crucial for maintaining spiritual balance. Christian spiritual culture represents a counterweight to the digital escape from reality and technocratic slavery and dehumanization. In this light, the fight against Digital Gnosticism and Technofeudalism is not only theoretical but also existential, calling on man to regain his spiritual essence and preserve personal freedom in the face of the challenges of the digital age.

Key words: digital gnosticism, technofeudalism, transhumanism, spiritual culture, Berdyaev, Varoufakis, Pope Francis, Voegelin, Kasper-sky, Ashmanov, Kara-Murza

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FASTING IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

The subject of the presentation is fasting as a religious practice with similar characteristics across all monotheistic religions. Possible forms of fasting in digital churches will be presented, including digital fasting, fasting from negative content, fasting from digital noise, and fasting from certain digital activities. Additionally, virtual joint prayer and fasting via platforms such as Zoom, Discord, and others, where prayers and spiritual experiences are shared, will be discussed.

The focus of the presentation will be on the fact that the essence of fasting is not only abstaining from forbidden foods, as that is only a half of the practice. It must also include the other half: abstinence from sinful thoughts, actions, and desires. In this way, fasting, like humanity, has a dual nature, consisting of both the physical and the spiritual component. Only together do these two elements constitute true fasting, which benefits both the soul and the body. This religious practice is also an opportunity for more intense prayer and spiritual renewal.

Fasting plays an important role in the religious lives of many people. However, its application and understanding in the context of virtual communities and online churches present new challenges and opportunities. Virtual churches and online services represent a new form of religious gathering, allowing believers to participate in rituals, prayers, and spiritual activities without being physically present in a temple. Many churches and religious communities have adapted their approach by regularly broadcasting services through social media and platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Viber groups, and WhatsApp groups. This is a broad and dynamic phenomenon that demonstrates how technology can transform traditional religious forms and create new avenues for spiritual support in the modern world.

It is concluded that even traditional spiritual practices, such as fasting, can be transformed in the modern, digital context. Although challenges for authenticity and spiritual depth exist, new technologies enable people to connect and support each other in their spiritual journeys, making fasting accessible to a wider audience and diverse faith communities.

Key words: fasting, digital environment, online church, virtual communities

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ЖУРНАЛ «ФОМА» КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ВИРТУАЛЬНОЙ ДИСКУССИОННОЙ ПЛАТФОРМЫ ДЛЯ ВЕРУЮЩИХ И СОМНЕВАЮЩИХСЯ

Миссией основанного в 1996 году православного мультимедийного медиа-проекта «Фома» является рассказ о православной вере и Церкви в жизни современного человека независимо от его религиозных и иных взглядов. Хотя журнал не является официальным проектом Русской Православной Церкви, он активно сотрудничает с представителями духовенства и различными церковными структурами, предлагая контент в разных жанрах и на разных языках. Его многообразие позволяет освещать религиозные, культурные и социальные темы, представляющие интерес для широкого круга читателей, в том числе и тех, кто не всегда согласен с православным учением.

«Фома» представляет собой успешный пример применения цифровых информационных технологий в создании и функционировании виртуального сообщества, позволяющего пользователям участвовать в дискуссиях и обмениваться мнениями. Используя дискуссию как основной механизм, журнал активно работает над формированием конструкта личной идентичности как для верующих, так и для неверующих, ищущих ответы на религиозные вопросы. Также обсуждается проблема распространения фальсифицированной информации и неверных интерпретаций, что является одним из существенных вызовов современной цифровой эпохи. Рассматривался также вопрос о создании сербской версии журнала «Фома», что стало бы первым значительным шагом в расширении этого проекта на международную арену и сделало бы этот медиаресурс важной частью мирового православного дискурса.

Ключевые слова: журнал «Фома», православие, виртуальное сообщество, общественный диалог, фейки.

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PERSONALITY BETWEEN GOD AND THE ALGORITHM: THE RISE OF DIGITAL SPIRITUALITY IN THE AGE OF TRANSHUMANISM

In the contemporary world, the individual becomes a kind of *Locus Terra* where identity, religion, technology, and ideology intersect and clash. The individual is no longer a stable and clearly defined category, but a fluid form open to change and influence. Transhumanism, as a radical cultural-technological offering, introduces a new dynamic to understanding personhood. Instead of pathologizing multiple selves, transhumanism offers freedom of choice and personalization, shaping the subject as a continuously evolving figure. At the same time, transhumanism emerges as a competitor in the religious marketplace: it provides spiritual answers, visions of eternity, moral codes, and even rituals. Spiritual experiences – once rare, personal, and difficult to transmit – are now digitally distributed through algorithms, virtual guides, and neurotechnology. However, access to this digital spirituality is unequal: a global digital divide that creates new boundaries between the accessible and inaccessible sacred. Thus, transhumanism simultaneously accelerates secularization by offering technology in place of God and stimulates desecularization by renewing questions about eternity, the body, and consciousness. This dual movement conflicts with traditional religions, which see it as a threat and inspire new alternative forms of spirituality. The key challenge for conventional religious institutions lies in this paradox: how to respond to the new spirituality caused and enabled by technology, which blurs the boundaries between the sacred and the technical?

Key words: transhumanism, digital spirituality, desecularization, identity, technology and religion

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CONSTRUCTING THE MUSLIM “OTHER”: NATIONAL IDENTITY, HISTORICAL EXCLUSION AND DIGITAL DEMAGOGUERY IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN

This study interrogates the persistence of anti-Muslim sentiment in contemporary Spain through John A. Powell’s concept of **othering**, situating it within a broader historical and structural continuum. Moving beyond interpretations of Islamophobia as isolated prejudice, it argues that anti-Muslim xenophobia is rooted in enduring national narratives and identity anxieties. Muslims are constructed as the “Other within” – formally part of the nation yet symbolically excluded from the national imaginary. Through historical references such as the forced conversions, persecution, and expulsion of converted Muslims in the early 17th century, alongside the enduring mythologies of the Reconquista, the study demonstrates how Spanish national identity has long been predicated on religious and cultural exclusion. These legacies are not static; rather, they are continually reactivated in contemporary discourse, particularly within the digital sphere. Drawing on data from the OBERAXE and the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, the study shows how far-right actors strategically deploy historical memory online to portray Muslims as foreign, unassimilable, and threatening. This digital demagoguery – driven by nativist, racist, and xenophobic appeals – facilitates a process of strategic othering that combines symbolic exclusion with political instrumentalization. This process is further reinforced through institutional practices and legal frameworks that fail to fully address historical exclusions, contributing to the continued marginalization of descendants of the expelled Moriscos in civic and cultural terms. Ultimately, the paper contends that the production of the Muslim “Other” is not peripheral but central to contemporary Spanish identity politics – digitally rearticulated as cultural defense, yet structurally anchored in centuries-old patterns of exclusion.

Key words: Othering, John A. Powell, Spain, Muslims, national identity, digital demagoguery

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SOULS IN A DISCONNECTED WORLD: PEKIĆ'S ATLANTIS, DIGITAL DEHUMANIZATION AND SPIRITUAL MISSION OF RELIGION

This paper examines Borislav Pekić's novel *Atlantis* as a prophetic literary meditation on the spiritual crisis of modernity, anticipating many features of today's postmodern digital society. In the world of *Atlantis*, technological supremacy, rational efficiency, and data governance have supplanted memory, empathy, and transcendence. Humanity is gradually replaced by soulless entities – beings that function, consume, and obey, but do not feel, remember, or pray.

This fictional world mirrors what contemporary psychology defines as *mechanistic dehumanization* (Haslam, 2006), in which the human person is reduced to an object or machine. In response to this, the paper highlights the continuing relevance and countercultural potential of religion as a guardian of the human soul.

Religious traditions, far from being relics of a bygone age, emerge as vital sources of resistance to digital dehumanization. The voices of religious communities in Serbia (Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims) all point to a shared conviction: that the human being possesses inherent dignity not derived from productivity, visibility, or algorithmic value, but from being created in the image of God.

Furthermore, many peripheral and marginalized communities around the Globe maintain social practices grounded in spiritual humility, mutual care, and reverence for life. These are today's "people with souls."

By interpreting *Atlantis* through a religious-humanistic lens, this paper argues that religion remains one of the last, and most necessary, sanctuaries of meaning, offering not only critique but also hope in the age of disembodied modernity.

Key words: religion, technology, dehumanization, Pekić's *Atlantis*, resistance

**VIRTUAL REALITY,
SOCIAL NETWORKS,
RELIGION AND
THE CHURCH**

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VIRTUAL CHURCH TOURS: PRESERVING SACRED HERITAGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Virtual tours of the interiors of Orthodox churches represent a unique tool for studying and preserving sacred heritage, especially in the context of the destruction of churches due to war. Modern technologies, including 3D scanning, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR), enable detailed reconstructions of church interiors, preserving them for future generations.

In Ukraine, many churches that have lost their architectural and artistic value can be restored in a virtual format. Moreover, virtual formats can aid in the real restoration of a church's interior. Such projects not only preserve the visual appearance of murals and iconographic scenes, but also provide access to these treasures to a broad audience, including researchers, students, and worshippers.

The author of the article shows how virtual tours contribute to a deeper understanding of sacred art. Interactive elements, such as explanations of murals, the history of a church's creation, and the symbolic meaning of its themes, make the educational process more engaging and accessible. Furthermore, digital reconstructions open new perspectives for analyzing artistic features, studying the evolution of styles, and interpreting symbolism.

The article answers the question of how these technologies help solve missionary purposes, allowing spiritual values to extend beyond the physical walls of churches. Thus, virtual tours not only preserve cultural heritage, but also become an essential tool for its popularization and study in the digital age.

Key words: virtual tours, Orthodox Church, sacred heritage, digital reconstruction, murals, cultural heritage preservation

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VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE IN THE INFORMATICS SOCIETY OF LATE MODERNITY

In this paper, we present some of the main debates among authors who have studied virtual pilgrimage, particularly regarding the authenticity of computer-based “experiences”. Virtual pilgrimage represents an innovative form of religious travel that is evolving in line with technological advancements and shifts in social norms, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This form of pilgrimage allows individuals to connect with sacred sites and rituals through digital platforms, overcoming physical barriers and opening new possibilities for spiritual experience. In the context of the digitalization of religious practices, Connie Hill-Smith has explored the phenomenon of cyberpilgrimage, emphasizing how online pilgrimages can provide authentic experiences similar to physical ones. Virtual pilgrimage represents a significant development in religious tourism, enabling people to connect with their faith in new ways. However, it is essential to recognize that, while virtual experiences can offer meaningful engagement, they may also lack certain elements of physical presence and community that traditional practices provide. Some authors consider that virtual services provided an alternative during the pandemic, but participants often felt a reduced sense of connection compared to traditional gatherings. In conclusion, virtual pilgrimage represents a significant evolution in how individuals engage with their spirituality and religious practices.

Key words: virtual pilgrimage, cyberpilgrimage, religious tourism, religious experience, informatics society

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THE VIRTUAL AS ERSATZ RELIGIOUS

The presentation analyzes the virtual reality as a rival, a competitor of religion in the time of Postmodernity. The informational, the emotional and communicative aspects of the virtual reality are emphasized and compared to the relevant aspects of religion. The transcendental position of the virtual reality in terms of human sensitivity is compared to the transcendental aspects of religion. The moral aspects of religion (ethical norms, moral imperatives, etc.) are compared to the spontaneous rule-making of the social networks.

The ersatz religious aspects of the virtual reality are commented within the framework of religion as “ideal type” (M. Weber). The conclusion is drawn that what is related to religion as a concrete social reality, its moral opposition with the virtual reality and social networks, is not so categorical (I. Kant, F. Nietzsche, E. Fromm, etc.).

Key words: religion, virtual reality, social networks, ersatz religious, moral aspects

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RELIGIOUS FAITH IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT OF VIRTUAL POSTCULTURE

For modern culture, religious faith remains one of the existential factors in the information space of postmodern society. If traditional culture translated stereotypes of meaning definition and adequate social behavior into the realm of personal culture, and it was enough to blindly copy or adhere to these stereotypes to receive social approval, then modern culture translates a multitude of contradictory values and behavioral stereotypes. This creates conditions for repeated social condemnation of previously approved actions. The latest technological equipment and ways of individual functioning in a virtual environment increasingly contribute to strengthening the effect of immersion and the perceived reality of occurring cult actions. The novelty of this culture, born through the mediation of advanced information and communication technologies, is so radical that it is rightly designated "postculture". It outlines the lines of synchronous transformation of the individual and society, aiming to realize its illogical image for a future outlook.

Unlike real life, the virtual environment does not threaten or punish with imprisonment. Understanding oneself and virtual reality is less dangerous than understanding a cruel reality. In the space of simulation, real time transitions into the category of hyperreality, and all objects become anti-representative, non-referential signs in artistic, axiological, religious, and ethical senses. The simulation of knowledge of reality and self-understanding in virtual reality should be considered as significant in structuring socio-cultural reality as the similar processes in the perception of religious and artistic sources that transmit value and semantic definitions. This, in turn, allows us to identify specific value orientations, norms, and rules of the virtual environment: replication of cultural and religious elements using modernized technical means; decreasing the importance of anthropomorphic images and humanistic principles; decreasing the level of understanding of socio-cultural works; and the transformation of spiritual culture and religious faith into an industry of mass consciousness.

Key words: religious faith, cult actions, religious and artistic sources, postculture, simulation of knowledge of reality

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CYBERRELIGION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYBERSPACE

New empires, new religions, new nations, new civilizations will be born in the world. The development of digital technologies and the global network has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon of cyber-religion in cyberspace. This is a form of religion that exists and functions in digital space, using Internet platforms, social networks, mobile applications, and virtual reality to conduct religious practices, communicate, and spread beliefs. The essence of such a religion and the reasons for its emergence would be well supported by a programmatic document, a kind of “Manifesto of Cyber Religion”. In the modern world, the guidelines set by God are once again changing. This can be stated not on the basis of naked philosophizing, but on the basis of analyzing the ways of civilization development. Man has embarked on the path of exploring cyberspace, and the phenomenon of the Cybergod has emerged. Religion, by definition, is virtuality itself: it is initially organized as a system of phenomena that stands in opposition to the spatial-temporal, sensory perceived existence of a human being. This spiritual tradition has always represented transcendence as the existence of the beyond, inherent in human consciousness. In cyberspace, there are virtual cemeteries and churches, resources that reflect the phenomena of the irrational and mystical in cyber reality.

A model of virtual religion can only emerge on the basis of an original creative project that is alternative to the “existing order” and is possible by going beyond it. It is virtual modeling that gives people the opportunity to be themselves, to form and declare their own unique worldview, different from the “real world”, which is overloaded with standards and conventions. There are several models of virtual religion: Complementary Model, where religious institutions use digital technologies to spread religion and organize online services; Digital Congregation, where believers create exclusively virtual communities that unite followers worldwide; Virtual Religions, which are new religious movements existing solely in the digital environment, based on technological concepts, fictional divine images, or the worship of artificial intelligence; and Immersive Religion, which aims to create

an interactive spiritual experience through virtual temples, VR rituals, and digital encounters with religious leaders.

Key words: cyber reality, cybergod, virtual religion, digital technologies, virtual modeling

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HATE SPEECH AND VIOLATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY OF RELIGIOUS FEELINGS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

With the development of digital technologies and social media, the need to implement effective content moderation mechanisms and develop ethical standards for online communication has increased. The lack of clear rules leads to the spread of hate speech, disinformation and cyberbullying. One of the key moderation mechanisms is a combination of automated algorithms and human control of the balance between freedom of speech and protection of users from harmful content. While artificial intelligence can quickly detect violations, it cannot always correctly assess the context of a message, which can lead to excessive censorship or, conversely, the omission of dangerous content. That is why it is important to supplement automatic moderation with expert opinion. The development of ethical standards for online communication involves the creation of clear language standards and ethical norms for all participants in the digital space that regulate acceptable forms of expression and responsibility for their consequences, which promotes mutual respect and tolerance in the expression of religious beliefs, but at the same time they pose challenges related to hate speech and violation of the confidentiality of religious feelings. The lack of proper regulation of online discussions leads to the spread of intolerance, discrimination and insults aimed at religious communities and individual believers. Social platform algorithms that amplify emotional and conflictual content contribute to inciting religious hatred, and the anonymity of users creates favorable conditions for offensive statements, disinformation, and the use of obscene words. Social media collects large amounts of personal data, including religious affiliation, which can be used for targeted advertising or even repression in countries with limited religious freedom. Effective content moderation mechanisms are needed, as well as the development of ethical standards for online communication to protect religious freedom in the digital space. It is important for social platforms to implement transparent algorithms that do not contribute to escalation of conflicts, enabling users to defend their religious beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution.

Key words: hate speech, cyberbullying, ridicule of religious beliefs, targeted advertising, ethical standards of online communication on religious topics

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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN ACTIVATING THE ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

In today's digital society, religious communities exist at the intersection of traditional values and technological progress. Their status is changing under the influence of digitalization, which opens up new opportunities for communication, interaction, and the dissemination of religious ideas. Social networks play a key role in modern religious life, contributing to the activation of the activities of religious communities. They are becoming an effective tool for spreading religious ideas and supporting relationships among believers. On digital platforms, communities can organize online services, hold spiritual seminars, and conduct charity events. One of the advantages of social networks is the ability to promptly inform about events, initiatives, and changes in the life of the community. This is especially important in crisis situations, when the rapid dissemination of information helps to mobilize assistance and support those in need. In addition, social platforms allow believers to find like-minded individuals and form communities based on shared religious values.

At the same time, digital transformation poses a number of challenges for religious communities. First, the risk of losing personal contact between spiritual leaders and believers is increasing. Second, there is a need to protect the confidentiality of personal data, which is especially relevant in the context of online confession and religious counseling. The digital environment also creates new threats, including disinformation, manipulation, and distortion of religious doctrines, as well as the threat of cyberbullying and radicalization. In addition, virtual activity cannot always replace traditional forms of communication, which can weaken the social cohesion of the community. An important aspect remains the legal status of religious communities in the digital space and the adaptation of legislation to new realities, which may cause legal difficulties related to content rights and the protection of freedom of religion on the internet. Thus, social networks are a powerful means of activating the activities of religious communities, but their effective use requires a responsible approach, digital literacy, and adaptation to modern communication realities.

Key words: social networks, online worship, disinformation, manipulation, online confession, virtual activity of spiritual leaders

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, RELIGION AND PERSONALITY

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ETHICS AND IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Rapid development in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) brings significant opportunities for society, prompting at the same time an exploration of its complex implications. Creating and using AI that mirrors human intelligence implies an associated responsibility. Ethical concerns about the impact of AI also include human autonomy, dignity, and justice, which underscores the need to cultivate responsible and ethical practices in its development and use. AI's impact on social structures, some of which are the labor markets and communication, underscores the need for developing modified, responsible regulation for the new circumstances. Additionally, its potential to amplify social inequalities due to the inherent biases and other reasons, indicates the importance of our thorough engagement that would ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability of AI systems. For a holistic understanding of AI's societal impact, a multidisciplinary approach is needed that implicates collaboration between IT experts, philosophers, sociologists, theologians and many others. Need for the ethical development and application of AI, calls for achieving the collaboration between governments, industries, civil society, and international organizations. It is a global issue, but the current practice shows no unity on this issue on a global scale. What's more, global race for AI dominance makes deep geopolitical ramifications. Having in mind all of the above, we assume that human-AI relations should be continuously reevaluated and controlled through the ongoing dialogue of multidisciplinary and multi-level character, based on considerations of ethical implications, where diverse national and cultural perspectives are being respected.

Key words: artificial intelligence, society, ethics, danger, risks

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

The aim of the research is to show the relationship between the latest achievements of science (artificial intelligence) and the Christian understanding of human being. To this end, the author specifically presents and analyzes the document *Antiqua et nova* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Catholic Church, published in January 2025. The paper conducts a comparative analysis of Catholic and Orthodox anthropological assumptions and the challenges posed by the new scientific, sociological, economic, philosophical and theological phenomenon of artificial intelligence. One of the possible conclusions of the research, the author claims, would concern the urgent need to affirm the dignity of the person, a category that was discovered and brought to the world by the Christian faith and theology.

Key words: artificial intelligence, Christian anthropology, individual, person, privacy

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CHRISTIANITY FACING THE CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

The fundamental idea of the research is reflected in the answer to the question: what are the challenges faced by Christianity within the framework of contemporary technological trends – artificial intelligence? The primary assumption of the research is that the encounter between Christianity and artificial intelligence opens two essential questions: that of the creation of a new personality and that of freedom as responsibility. In this context, the first part of the presentation involves outlining the basic assumptions of the Christian view on the creation of the world and humanity. Based on these premises, the reception of this view within the contemporary discourse on artificial intelligence will be discussed. The second part of the research will be opened with a comparative analysis of the concept of freedom in Christianity and in artificial intelligence. All aspects of the presentation aim to answer the fundamental question: is artificial intelligence a result of the creative nature of modern humanity, or its attempt to elevate itself to the pedestal of divinity? The dual possibility of the answer opens up a perspective on the role of the Christian understanding of the world and humanity in dialogue with the contemporary world, more directly, with the latest scientific and technological achievements.

Key words: Christianity, artificial intelligence, creation, person, freedom, responsibility, religion, ethics

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR HUMAN PERSONALITY

In modern society, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly undertaking tasks once exclusive to humans. This paper explores the potential for AI to replace human personality by analyzing its capacity to mimic human consciousness, emotions, and identity. The focus is on the ethical and social implications of such a substitution, including potential dehumanization and loss of authenticity in interpersonal relationships. The aim is to understand the boundaries between beneficial AI assistance and the preservation of human essence.

Key words: artificial intelligence, human personality, consciousness, emotions, identity, ethics, dehumanization

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PROBLEMS OF ASSESSING ANTHROPOLOGICAL RISK OF USING MODERN BIOTECHNOLOGIES IN THE CONTEX OF INTERECTION BETWEEN SCIENCES AND THE CHURCH

Ethical assessment of modern biotechnologies – genetic engineering, genetic medicine, gene diagnostics, transplantology – as a problem of modern bioethics with the need for the presence of initial metatheoretical grounds for the implementation of assessment procedures. This, in turn, implies the need to involve all influential social institutions, including the institution of religion, in the processes and procedures for assessing this kind of phenomena that arise primarily within the framework of scientific and industrial activities. Today, in the era of late modernity (postmodernity), the processes of medicalization of society as a socio-cultural phenomenon that has captured the loci of assessment since the middle of the 19th century, due to the strengthening role of the Church, can be considered from a different angle – from the perspective of developing mechanisms for interaction between society, science and the Church as the main social forces in the development of society precisely in the context of assessing the anthropological and ethical risks of using biotechnologies. In our opinion, it is possible to create a paradigm of a comprehensive socio-humanitarian examination of the assessment of these risks. Development of precise, individualized and effective treatment approaches within the framework of gene therapy and gene diagnostics, transplantology, and on the other hand, the conventionality of existing concepts of morality, including in the theoretical field of the modern humanistic paradigm of bioethics (utilitarian, humanistic, etc.), allows us to turn to the universal principles of being as ontological foundations for general cultural narratives embodied in absolute moral assessments and regulators of human and social activity. The success of creating a general theoretical paradigm of morality can be associated, in our opinion, with the unification of the spiritual experience of the Church and the achievements of scientific, applied and philosophical research using an interdisciplinary approach. This paradigm can be used, including in the social concept of the Church in the context of late modernity.

Key words: assessment of anthropological risks, modern biotechnology, Church and science, ontology of morality

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RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN NEURAL NETWORKS AS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO HUMAN BEINGS

Many spheres of social life of modern man, including religious practices, are now facing a new digital reality, encountering not merely changes, but a real cultural and spiritual catastrophe, which transforms the role of religion as a social institution and the essence of religious practices. The mission of religious organizations, built over centuries on the transmission of faith and knowledge, which involves strengthening individuals in the existential-physical, existential-personal, and existential-communicative dimensions of being, was reflected in everyday, personal, and religious worldviews. It was realized through religious practices, shaping social skills and moral-ethical norms, which today are being eroded under the influence of forces increasingly driven by digital technologies. The adherents of digital technologies in all spheres of social life promise a person an individualized approach, versatility of information, mental comfort and the role of an observer, a caretaker of the world of machines. From the primary conduit of faith, the priest is turning into a missing link, while digital sectarians at all levels actively contribute to his swift removal from the chain. Before long, his place may be taken by the singers of God from the machine, while religious faith, along with the existential and spiritual aspects of human nature, will dissolve into technology – granting its creators and administrators near-absolute power over the minds of the new generation. A person addicted to digital gadgets and technologies may become a mere puppet in the hands of digital sectarians, whose worldview has no place for the “analog” God as a phenomenon of the pre-digital age. The spread of surrogate (“hybrid”) forms of communication in the digital space levels the spiritual-soul beginning, while the living connection in communication between people is lost, transforming the world of meanings, values and emotions.

Artificial intelligence, however perfect it may be, cannot replace the warmth of the human voice, the spark in the eyes that ignites interest, or the wisdom that is born of dialog. Religious knowledge and faith, in the eyes of digital technology adherents, appear as absolute archaism. In the spiritual and psychological dimension, this trend turns into a true catastrophe for all participants in the communicative process within

the space of a religious organization. Here, faith in oneself, in one's mission, and in the meaning of one's work in its Christian understanding is lost, giving rise to a sense of dependence on the digital space system, where knowledge, faith, spirituality, and humanity hold a different – and unfortunately, often lesser – value.

Key words: digital sectarians, religious faith, mission of religious organizations, existential dimension of being, digital reality

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HIGHER AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

This paper examines the relationship between “higher intelligence” primarily reflected through the concept of different religions and metaphysics, and artificial intelligence, as a specific phenomenon and tool of our time. The central aim is to understand relations between these two phenomena and to specify their relations, since between the higher and artificial intelligence stands a man as the creator of the latter, but creature of the former.

“Creation” is the key word in our research, because both artificial intelligence and man are in the relationship of the created and the creator, just as it is the case with man and higher intelligence. If we follow the teachings of religions and different metaphysics, man is the product of higher intelligence, just as artificial intelligence is the product of man. Therefore, the question should be asked whether and how much spirit there is in artificial intelligence, which is the product of man as a spiritual and intellectual being, who in turn is the product of some higher intelligence. Or maybe artificial intelligence develops only the intellectual and not the spiritual aspect of man and represents a simple tool? The answer to this question lies in looking at how creative artificial intelligence can be and whether it can be more creative than humans (i.e. geniuses like Leonardo Da Vinci), which would confirm it as an independent entity of existence.

Key words: higher intelligence, artificial intelligence, human being, creation, spirit

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CHRISTIAN REALISM OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR: INTERSECTION OF ETHICS, POLITICS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

In the current landscape of international politics, the question how to deal with the rising geopolitical tensions between leading great powers and raging wars in key geostrategic hotspots across the globe is of paramount importance. We argue that the political thought of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr presents a useful framework for approach to the aforementioned issues. In his crucial work *Moral Man and Immoral Society* Niebuhr offers a critical examination of the ethical dimensions of collective behaviour from the perspective of political realism. His central thesis is that social collectives exhibit lower moral capacity than individuals. Consequently, nations are fundamentally incapable of acting according to the ethical standards expected of individuals. While individuals may possess the capacity for contrition and empathy, such traits rarely scale up to the level of national policy, where group interests override moral universality. He critiques the romantic idealism of liberal internationalism and the belief that nations can be guided by pure reason or goodwill, as well as the hope that moral appeals, international law or rational diplomacy alone can overcome the intrinsic power dynamics that define international relations. According to Niebuhr, the structure of global politics is ultimately dictated by the distribution of power, making genuine ethical engagement between nations rare. For him, any realistic approach to international ethics must be grounded in an honest recognition of the limits of collective moral behaviour, thus reinforcing the necessity of a politically engaged ethics that accounts for coercion, interest, and the tragic dimensions of power.

Keywords: Reinhold Niebuhr, politics, ethics, realism, distribution of power

**RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES IN
THE CHALLENGES OF
LATE MODERNITY**

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TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS OF RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY: THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE CHALLENGES OF POSTMODERNITY

The relationship between Church and State extends beyond institutional frameworks, emerging from shared human and social experiences. Culture, religion, and politics are intrinsically linked, as they shape structures of meaning through which individuals interpret their existence. Time in religious diplomacy operates within both sacred and secular dimensions, influencing historical narratives, rituals, and ethical considerations. Unlike secular time, which is linear and quantitative, religious time is often cyclical and event-based, reenacting sacred moments from a mythical past. Religious diplomacy progresses at a more deliberate pace than its secular counterpart, operating within a long-term framework defined by religious traditions, hierarchical continuity, and deeply embedded theological principles, all shaped by its distinct perception of time. By acknowledging how this temporality influences decision-making and governance, we can better assess the evolving role of the Church in shaping political and societal dynamics. The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) employs its own temporality as a means of maintaining a unique position, ensuring both relevance and autonomy. By invoking sacred historical continuity, while adapting to changing political realities, the SOC secures its role as both a moral authority and a mediator. It leverages the long *durée* of religious time to claim continuity with the past, while carefully positioning itself in the present, allowing it to benefit from state support when advantageous, yet asserting independence when necessary. This ability to operate both within and beyond political cycles enables the Church to sustain its influence across shifting ideological landscapes, reinforcing its legitimacy as a guardian of tradition, while selectively engaging in modern political and societal dynamics. Understanding this temporal strategy provides insight into how the SOC continuously negotiates its role in shaping national identity, governance, and public life.

Key words: temporal dimensions, religious diplomacy, Serbian Orthodox Church, time, postmodernity

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COVERING WOMEN DURING THE ORTHODOX LITURGY: OBLIGATION OR CUSTOM?

In most Orthodox countries (Serbia, Russia, Greece), covering the head in church is a tradition, but not a social norm outside of worship. Covering women is a religious custom, but it is not a strict obligation in all Orthodox communities. In modern society, many women no longer practice this custom and in modern Orthodox communities it may be a matter of personal choice. Women in church usually wear a headscarf or a veil that covers their hair, but the face remains uncovered. There are no strict rules about the color or the material, but simple, modest clothing is often chosen. Covering the head is a sign of modesty, humility and respect for God and the church. The apostle Paul states in his epistle to the Corinthians: "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head." He explains that this is in accordance with the divine order and natural laws, because "a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man." In traditional Orthodoxy, which episcope Nikolay advocated, head covering for women was not just a mere custom, but an expression of inner piety, humility and respect for God. A shorn woman would be no exception and would also have to cover her head during the liturgy, suggesting that he supported this practice as part of spiritual discipline and church tradition.

In general, the media in the EU strive to balance between respecting religious freedoms and promoting secular values. Women's covering is often considered in the context of gender equality, integration and human rights. In the European Union, the attitude towards the veiling of Muslim women varies among member states, but France stands out as the country with the strictest laws and the most pronounced condemnation of the practice.

Key words: covering of women, Orthodox liturgy, modern times, custom, Apostle Paul, Episcope Nikolay, media in the European Union, distinction from the covering of Muslim women

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SOME PRESUPPOSITIONS ON DISABILITY THEOLOGY IN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The history of relationship between religion and mental health shows that religious organizations were often the first to offer compassionate care to vulnerable groups in society, including the medically ill, the elderly and the disabled. For example, the greatest and highly respected Hospital of the Pantokrator Monastery was established in 1136 in Constantinople, and among the many departments for general diseases, it also included service for neurological and psychiatric patients, while in addition to the physicians, the hospital employed a considerable number of nurses and clergy men. That spirit of compassionate care derives from the Church's approach to Eucharist: the authenticity of Eucharist is measured by inclusion of all members in the Eucharistic meal. There is no Eucharistic feast, if there is no love expressed in the relationship of the members of the church's body. Recently, there has been an attempt among orthodox theologians to develop disability theology – most notable among these is Petre Maican, who in his disability theology, is primarily concerned with persons with cognitive disabilities. In establishing the good Orthodox approach to persons with disabilities, Maican in his project uses, the term of *neputință* – powerlessness which is in a way equivalent to vulnerability, in order to lead to solidarity and inclusion of persons with disabilities in ecclesial communities, instead of dehumanization, and in order to prove that impairment is neither personal tragedy, nor reason for stigma, but a part of what it means to be a human. Therefore he develops notion of *nous* as spiritual intelligence that comes and connects human with God, helping them to develop their spiritual identity throughout history and to emphasize the importance of spirituality for person with disability. The main premise of such approach is that human beings are more than their cognitive disabilities or the web of social relationships throughout their lives; they are persons. He follows Maximus the Confessor with the position that *nous* is the highest part of the human soul, and the capacity of humans to recognize God and contemplate Him. The *nous* steps in to consolidate human spiritual development in the case of persons with *dementia* particularly when they receive the Eucharist, hear a certain hymn, or have to recite a certain prayer, or even a

poem. These are the moments when *nous* absorbs the outside stimuli in order to attempt to affect the movement of the body in the direction of the ultimate goal of the person: deification. Our true identity is found in God and it will be revealed to us only in eschaton. This spiritual identity endowed upon us is not lost in dementia: it continues to exist in God, long after our cognitive capabilities have been lost. Therefore, we will investigate the document *Disability and Communion by Assembly* of the Canonical Orthodox Bishop of the United States of America from 2009 that calls upon the inclusion of persons with disability and prolonging their more active participation in the life of the Church.

Key words: disability theology, powerlessness, vulnerability, *Nous*, spiritual intelligence, inclusion, orthodox theology, Body of Church

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POSSIBILITIES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF SPIRITUAL VALUES

A pressing planetary problem – the cause of socio-economic inequalities, the issue of distribution and redistribution of newly created value has accompanied the economy since its inception, reaching large proportions in the 21st century, especially in the developed countries where the world's financial and political centers of power are located.

The question is, what impact did the greatest (or, one of the greatest) civilizational breakthroughs have on this problem – the meeting of Jews and Greeks in ancient times? The direct proportion of economic inequalities and the control of capital by large corporations, raises the question: has the technical and technological progress throughout the twentieth century led to economic progress, or has it led to the creation of inequality?

Practice sees the state as the culprit, in the sense that the state does not function properly, allowing individuals to steal from others and create enormous wealth.

Does the use of the state by corporations open the door to Malthusian theory – the need for wars and natural disasters in the interests of big capital?

Inequalities as a consequence of corruption, or the non-functioning of the state, are the antithesis of the need and guidelines for the functioning of the state, explains Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Spiritual development, according to the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church (T. Shevkunov), takes human dignity as the basic, starting value of the overall development of society, as a value prerequisite for all other values, which is not the case with economic development.

Key words: world, spiritual values, economic development, dignity

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**MODERNIZATION OF THE ORTHODOXY:
NECESSITY, POSSIBILITY. REALITY
(on the example of the ROC and the UOC)**

Orthodoxy is considered to be the most conservative branch of Christianity. Should the Orthodox community be encouraged to modernize? Should modernization of the Orthodoxy be considered a positive phenomenon, a value? To what extent is it permissible to modernize Orthodoxy so that it does not lose its essence? Does the church ('heaven on earth', i.e. in a sinful fallen world) need a positive image in the society? These and other questions do not have an unambiguous answer and require careful research.

Recently, there has been a rethinking and adaptation by the Orthodox Church (ROC and UOC) of the existing social practices and perceptions, which is expressed in the following changes in the church life:

- service of the night liturgy from 31 December to 1 January (for an Orthodox person the best celebration of the New Year is not at the table in a drunken abandon, but at the church service);
- promoting the celebration of the memory of St. Spyridon of Trimiphunt (the service in his memory has recently been solemnly celebrated on the night of 25 December to prevent attempts by the Orthodox to celebrate Christmas according to the Gregorian calendar; or, alternatively, to in order for them to celebrate with the whole Christian world, but their own holiday);
- serving prayer services before the start of a new school year;
- relaxation of some fasting requirements;
- relaxation of the requirements for preparation for Communion;
- convergence of Orthodox and civil understanding of personal freedom and dignity;
- change of attitude towards wealth, etc.

Possible ways of further changes in Orthodoxy:

- overcoming in religious teaching the elements of the culture of the distant past of those countries and peoples where Christianity originated;
- adapting the images of the Gospel to modern realities (without losing the meaning of the messages) etc.

Key words: Orthodoxy, modernization of religion, modernization of Orthodoxy, Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Orthodox Church

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BIOETHICAL DILEMMAS AND RESPONSES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES

This paper presents the approaches of the Local Orthodox Churches regarding bioethical issues. The rapid development of biotechnology and the growing bioethical ambiguities are pressing concerns in contemporary society, demanding informed responses from churches and religious organizations. The research analyzes synodal teachings and official bioethical positions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as the Russian, Greek, and Romanian Orthodox Churches. The Local Orthodox Churches follow technological and medical advancements with concise attention, although a significant number of churches lack official positions on social teachings and bioethical responses. In the final part of the study, the author examines unofficial texts of the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose analytical structure and level of systematization point to a process of global unification of the Orthodox responses.

Key words: bioethics, Orthodoxy, sociology of religion, church-state law

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THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE USA IN SHAPING RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Analyzing Its Influence on Faith, Community Engagement, and Public Perception

This paper will explore how some key figures of the Catholic Church in America use social media platforms to engage with the followers, as well as to evangelize, and address relevant contemporary issues. It will also examine the Church's development of online communities and its influence on the public perception of various Christian practices, as well as the Catholic stance on relevant moral and political issues. Additionally, the paper will analyze the effectiveness of the strategies used by the Church to engage with different demographic groups and assess its impact on faith-based dialogue in the digital age. An effort will be made to identify both the advantages and the disadvantages of the Church's social media presence.

Key words: Catholic Church, USA, social media, culture, digital age

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PREPARATION AND QUALIFICATION OF RELIGION TEACHERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY BULGARIAN SCHOOL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH IN EDUCATION

Education in the contemporary socio-cultural context faces the complex task of responding to the evolving needs and expectations of society, while simultaneously generating new ideas and practical solutions aimed at elevating the quality of the educational process. This dual mission serves as a pathway for positive, evolutionary transformations within the broader educational system. Within this framework, teachers – along with their pedagogical skills, competencies, and professional-personal qualities – emerge as central figures, particularly when seeking effective managerial tools to achieve qualitative changes in teaching and upbringing. In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the place and role of religious education in Bulgarian schools. Our research is positioned within this field of inquiry, aiming to identify key issues, expectations, and trends that may reveal the current state and potential pathways for enhancing the training and qualification of religion teachers. In a world increasingly marked by unpredictability and uncertainty, there is a pressing need to explore models of interaction that foster a meaningful and systemic connection between two pivotal institutions – education and the church. It is within the synergy of the two that innovative ideas and practical strategies may emerge, offering valuable contributions to the moral and spiritual development of the younger generation in the 21st century.

Key words: religious education, competency-based approach, professional and personal qualities of religious education teacher, inter-institutional partnership

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МИСИОНЕРСТВО И ЮТУБ. ОТЕЦ ПРЕДРАГ ПОПОВИЧ И КАЧЕСТВО ПРИМЕРА

Информационное общество характеризуется новыми технологиями и, в связи с этим, новыми формами общения. Церковь как институт ставит перед собой задачу не только сохранить традиционные ценности, но и сохранить универсальные ценности, независимые от того времени, в котором мы живем. Поэтому даже церковь как институт не должна быть застрахована от применения новых технологий в целях своей миссионерской деятельности. Это приносит с собой новые испытания и проблемы, а также новые формы знакомства с христианскими ценностями. В последние годы Ютуб стал одним из основных источников информации в целом, а особенно у молодежи. Так и многие священники Сербской Православной Церкви приняли эту тенденцию. Отец Предраг Попович является одним из самых популярных и успешных в этой области уже несколько лет. Он является положительным примером успешной православной миссионерской работы через интернет. Этот священник харизматичен и остроумен, и это то, что необходимо для успеха на ютубе. Помимо того, что он интересен зрителям, его послания поучительны и мудры, и за это его любят все, как старые, так и молодые, как они, которым близкие религия и церковь, но также и они, которым они не совсем близкие. Величие отца Предрага отражается в том, что он может быть понятным и доступным для всех.

Ключевые слова: миссионерство, ютуб, сербская православная церковь, священник, отец Предраг Попович.

**LATE MODERNITY,
MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES**

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**RELIGIOUS CONTENT IM MODERN SECULAR,
RELIGIOUS AND MASS-MEDIA**

In this study, we will analyze the development of religious media on the example of France in from the 19th through to the 21st century in order to show the complex structure and versatility of the content that they somehow fill with religious (or religiously acceptable) content. At the turn of the 21st century, the religious phenomenon in modern society has undergone significant changes. It is not similar to what previously existed within traditional religions, even in the area of the traditional religions themselves. Today, the traditional criteria are obviously not enough for singling out religious beliefs and behaviors as a basis for appropriate definitions of content for research.

On the example of the history of the French media from the 19th-21st century, we have identified multiple strategies for the development of religious media, depending on political and social processes. At the same time, the actual declaration of the editorial board as "religious" may be an insufficient indicator, even if there are clerics and monastics in the editorial staff and among the journalists. Likewise, vice versa, media that declare themselves secular can consistently provide religious content that is in agreement with the creed of a particular church. The development of media within the digital environment and the discovery of UGC – user-generated content, not discussed in this article, further complicate the situation.

In the media of today, it is quite difficult to determine the degree of "religiousness" of content, since commonly used indicators, such as classifying the media itself as religious according to the founder, mentioning religious news or facts, etc. may be unreliable due to the diverse form of the relationship between religion and society. To analyze religious content in the current situation, it is necessary to identify new principles for classifying content as religious, as it becomes more and more diverse.

Key words: religious content; religious media; secular media; media history; religion and society

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DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL POLIS

Digital media are a characteristic of an era of unification and globalization, but also an era of participation, fragmentation, and a disjointed virtual reality. The modern media user – whether a believer or not – is becoming an increasingly influential link in the information and communication system. By juxtaposing religion and media in the information society of the late modern era, we highlight the growing axiological relevance of this relationship and emphasize the importance of promoting heterogeneous, crucial religious principles (doctrines) through media channels that wield increasing power in the digital arena – that implies better media control, including democratic inter-religious understanding and dialogue. Thinking rightly entails sincerely expressing one's opinions and presenting verified views in accordance with the maxims of Kant's categorical imperative – opposed to promoting unfounded, a priori, biased, exclusionary, and conflict-driven perspectives. By critically (not cynically) influencing the views of the disoriented and uninformed (non)believing users in both offline and online contexts regarding traditional religious ethos, the negative impact of technology on religion – and vice versa – can be mitigated. Modern technology serves as a means for achieving religious goals; thus, this instrumental understanding of technology should encourage moral and cognitive efforts to ensure that the "late modern human" develops a proper ecclesiological, spiritual, and ontological relationship with technology. There is a significant risk that technology could escape human control and become an autonomous force resisting institutional, legal, ethical, or any other form of regulation. Simultaneously, there is a growing collective desire to master technology, ensuring its evolution toward humane usage (particularly in media).

Key words: new media, digital age, spirituality, church, religion

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SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS – INFLUENCE, ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS DURING STUDENT AND CIVIC PROTESTS IN SERBIA

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has long been a fundamental part of Serbian culture and identity, but its growing political ties with the government have raised concerns about its role in social movements, particularly during the contemporary student and civic protests. This paper seeks to examine the influence, attitudes, and actions of the SOC within the context of these protests, applying David Martin's theory of political religion, which explores how religious institutions can become politically engaged and align with those in power. The hypothesis guiding this paper is that the SOC's increasing cooperation with the government has compromised its traditional position as a moral and ethical authority, instead supporting the status quo and diminishing the legitimacy of the protest movement's calls for change. The central research question is: *How does the Serbian Orthodox Church's political alignment with the government affects its involvement in the student and civic protests, and what impact does this have on social movements in Serbia?* This research will analyze the public statements of church officials, actions taken by the Church, and responses from protestors to understand the Church's evolving role in political matters. By investigating the Church's ties with government, this paper aims to assess the consequences for social movements in Serbia and the ways in which the SOC's support of the government may have influenced the legitimacy of the protests demanding justice.

Key words: Serbian Orthodox Church; student and civic protests; Serbia; politics; religion; government

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NEW TERRORISM, RELIGION OF HUMANITY AND MORAL AUTONOMY

There should be no illusions. In the postmodern society terror will reign supreme. The terrorism of unprecedented scope will be distinctive from the old-fashioned terrorism of modernity. The proper definition of terrorism should be based on value relations rather than on any empirical qualifications of the violent act. Terrorism should not be defined as either an attack on civilians or violence of sub-state groups, although neither is excluded. The new terrorist is the one who has no other option but to terrorize, if only he/she should go berserk. The two basic characteristics of terrorism, which are destined to play decisive role in the condition of postmodernity are religious purpose and autonomous agency. The outbreak of new religiosity, starting from Aum Shinrikyo and dozens of new American cults indicate two common features of them all. These are self-proclaimed religions of humanity and they are going out of their way to save humanity from its plight. The only way to save humanity is to instill the due fear of God. The only way to instill the fear of God is to terrorize. Simultaneously the new terrorism is no longer a terrorism of political states, nor even of odious groups. This is the terrorism of autonomous individuals, as unpredictable as they are arbitrary. Autonomous Jihadism should be regarded as a starting point. Future terrorism will be even more autonomous, mobile and unpredictable. That is exactly what law enforcement agencies do not sufficiently take into account and the general public is not ready to face yet.

Key Words: postmodernity, terrorism, humanity, moral autonomy, terror

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THE ENGAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN NORT MACEDONIA ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In order to maintain connections with the believers, convey the teachings, and strengthen their societal presence, religious communities have historically relied on various forms of communication, such as oral traditions, written scriptures, sermons, and communal gatherings. These traditional methods have played a crucial role in fostering religious identity, ensuring doctrinal continuity, and facilitating social cohesion among adherents. With the rise of social media, these interactions have expanded into digital spaces, transforming the ways in which religious institutions connect with their followers. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube now serve as virtual spaces for religious discourse, outreach, and community building. This digital shift has enabled institutions to reach broader audiences, engage with younger generations, and provide real-time updates on religious events, teachings, and discussions.

This paper explores the engagement of religious communities in contemporary Macedonian society on social media platforms, focusing on their presence, activity, and the purposes behind their online interactions. Through the qualitative research approach, including content analysis of official social media accounts, as well as examination of the dynamics of use (posting, announcements, notifications) and communication with the followers, this paper explores how religious groups utilize digital platforms for religious education, community-building, and participation in public discourse. The findings reveal varying levels of engagement across different religious organizations, influenced by theological perspectives, institutional structures, and societal dynamics. Additionally, the research highlights the ways in which social media serves as a tool for fostering connection with fellow believers,

encouraging communal participation, shaping religious identities, and addressing contemporary social issues. By analyzing the role of digital platforms in the religious landscape of North Macedonia, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between religion and digital communication in the rapidly evolving media environment.

Key words: religious communities, social media, digital communication

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR THE POPULARIZATION OF BELIEFS AND COMMUNICATION IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

In modern society, digital and social media significantly influence the perception of religion and the church. They have become primary platforms for the dissemination of religious information, popularization of beliefs, and communication within religious communities, among both clergy and laity. Digital technologies enable religious institutions to broadcast information to a wide audience through websites, blogs, video hosting platforms, social networks, and mobile applications. One form of interaction is the real-time broadcasting of religious services, which makes religious life accessible to those who cannot attend churches in person. Through websites, blogs, video hosting platforms, social networks, and mobile applications, religious organizations are able not only to inform about their activities, but also attract new adherents. Official websites of churches and religious communities provide access to theological materials, service schedules, news, and contact information. Blogs serve as platforms for spiritual reflection, theological discussions, and dialogue with the society. Video hosting sites, such as YouTube, facilitate the broadcasting of sermons, educational lectures, and testimonies of believers, making religious content more accessible to younger generations and working professionals.

New opportunities for active interaction with believers, dissemination of religious teachings, spiritual practices, and organization of online communities are provided. Through comments, likes, and reposts, religious content spreads rapidly, reaching a broad audience. Mobile applications represent convenient tools for reading sacred texts, praying, receiving reminders of religious events, and making charitable donations. Thus, digital technologies help religious institutions effectively communicate with their followers, expand their influence, and adapt traditional practices to the needs of modern society. Social media play a crucial role in shaping modern religious discourse, and their effective use allows religious organizations and churches to adapt to new realities, ensuring the accessibility of faith to a wide audience and preserving religious traditions and spiritual practices.

Key words: digital technologies, church websites, online communities, distribution of religious content, video hosting of broadcast sermons

**RELIGIOSITY,
SPIRITUALITY
AND MODERN
INFORMATION
SOCIETY**

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SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE CONTEXT OF SERBIA

The international mobility of students at the global level has been on the rise in recent years. This phenomenon is observed in countries with different economic standards, but world's small and less developed countries are especially and increasingly looking for new models that would help them attract young, highly educated experts who would be attending the higher-education institutions within their borders. The IS who enroll in tertiary education programs outside their home country, or their country of residence, are at a great point of transition in their life – moving from one culture to another, and from youth to adulthood. Furthermore, with the end of their studies their student status ends and they become a part of (competitive) workforce. During the process of (academic) migration, regardless of whether it is permanent or temporary, new perceptions of the world and one's own role in it are often gained. The challenges that IS face during their stay outside their home country also affect their spiritual and religious world, as well as their spiritual practice. The aim of the paper is to examine the extent to which education abroad has influenced the spiritual among the IS who study in Serbia, as well as students from Serbia who have studied abroad. The paper uses a combined methods approach to analyze the data collected through all three phases of the research (focus group, survey method, and individual interviews). The sample includes IS of all levels of academic studies. The research was conducted from June 2023 to January 2024 within the ISMIGaIN project.

Key words: international students (IS), academic migration, spirituality, religiosity, Serbia

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HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOSITY OF MANKIND IN THE DIGITAL FORMAT OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The digital society is characterized by the emergence of new channels of media information transmission. The incredible flow of information that has descended on man provokes anxiety and confusion. A historical fact, which was until recently an immutable truth, can acquire features of relativity with the flow of diverse and often contradictory information. In different historical periods, fear has made people turn again and again to the experience of religiosity of the collective past. History has become an arena of struggle for identity, and an instrument of memory politics. The manipulation of memory is at the same time a manipulation of identity. The substitution of historical memory with collective quasi-memory opens the way to the construction of simulacra of social reality. Memory as a resource of social interaction feeds the simulacrum informationally, constructs meanings for the present, evokes emotions and empathy, and finally, provides social identification indirectly, through socio-political institutions. That is why the substitution of historical memory with collective memory is dangerous for future generations. Collective memory changes its forms synchronously with the evolution of power and its use of mass media. In our time, the changes in collective memory have become so tangible that scholars have talked about the emergence of a new virtually constructed identity. Collective memory preserves the experience of humanity's religiosity as an objective form of the spiritual sphere, historically emerging through the process of shared existence and activity.

Real human life is filled not only with happy moments. It is abundantly saturated with tragic phenomena and events. Loss, failure, trouble, drama, tragedy, illness, pain, fear, sorrow, despair, and death are common companions of human life. A number of high human feelings such as sadness, sorrow, heartache, compassion, mercy, sacrifice, compassion, and humanity are associated with the phenomenon of suffering. Virtual computer reality differs from reality in its ability to provide individuals with the opportunity to receive only positive emotions. Turning to virtual computer reality is often an attempt to quench this

thirst. However, the individual is looking for communication, and finds himself in a world of messages. By seeking to satisfy the need for communication through the virtual computer world, the individual often dooms himself to loneliness in the network.

Key words: religious experience, collective memory, identity, virtual reality, need for communication

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RELIGIOUS PRACTICE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND MEDITERRANEAN

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted almost every aspect of social life, including religious practice, ceremonies and services. In most Western Balkan countries, such as Serbia and Montenegro, religious institutions had to adapt to new circumstances in order to be able to continue providing spiritual support to their believers. In many churches, services continued without the presence of believers, and churches began to offer online liturgies and prayers to allow people to continue participating in religious practices, even in a virtual format. However, there were also situations where religious communities, despite health advice, continued gatherings, which caused controversy. At the same time, Malta also faced significant changes in religious practice. The government and church authorities imposed strict restrictions, including closing churches during the pandemic wave, and moving to online worship services. Traditional processions and celebrations of saints comprising an important part of Maltese religious and cultural heritage, were cancelled or organized in a very limited form. These changes showed the resilience and adaptability of the religious community while at the same time provoking discussions about the long-term consequences of the digitization of religion and the reduction of the physical presence of believers in churches.

The pandemic also caused changes in the religious practices of each individual. Closed churches, mosques and temples led to many believers practicing their faith inside their homes. Thus, participation in online prayers, virtual lectures, and spiritual conversations increased, while many re-examined their religious values and attitudes towards spiritual life. Individuals increasingly relied on technological platforms to maintain contact with their religious communities, which opened up new questions about the role of technology in religious life and practice.

Key words: religion, pandemic, COVID-19, online prayers, virtual services, religious practices

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RELIGIOSITY, INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE ARAB WORLD

The rapid expansion of the internet and social media usage has transformed communication, information consumption, and social interactions globally. However, the impact of digital engagement on religiosity and religious practices remains a topic of ongoing debate, particularly in regions with strong religious traditions. This study examines the relationship between religiosity, engagement in religious practices – specifically prayer – and internet and social media use in the Arab world, using data from the Arab Barometer survey. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from secularization theory and media effects research, the study investigates whether higher religiosity correlates with lower levels of internet and social media use, or religious individuals integrate digital platforms into their spiritual lives. The analysis explores potential generational, gender, and socio-economic differences in digital behavior among religious and less religious individuals. The findings contribute to understanding the evolving role of digital media in shaping religious engagement, offering insights into the intersection of faith and technology in contemporary Arab societies.

Key words: religiosity, internet, social media, Arab Barometer, Arab world

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EXPLORING IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG MALTESE ADOLESCENTS THROUGH GAMING-BASED INTERVIEWS

This qualitative study conducted among 27 Maltese 14-year-olds explores the multifaceted experiences and perspectives of Maltese Gen Z, revealing six overarching organising themes, surrounding the global theme of 'Challenges faced in Digital Culture'. Firstly, "Personal Challenges and Growth" discusses concerns such as academic pressures, self-expression, bullying, mental health struggles, and the quest for individuality. Secondly, "Societal Dynamics and Relationships" highlights the web of friendships, role models, family dynamics, and games as an exploration of the self. Thirdly, "Z's Self-description" offers insights into their perceptions of simplicity, boredom, fun, immaturity, imperfections, laziness, and music preferences. Fourthly, "A Spiritual Generation" explores the respondents' spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences in Catholic post-secular Malta. Fifthly, "Technology and Digital Life" explores online communities, gaming culture, digital device usage, and attitudes towards platforms like TikTok. Sixthly, "Societal and Environmental Concerns" highlights their activism, concerns, and aspirations for a more just, sustainable, and inclusive future. Lastly, in "Future Outlooks and Concerns", future-oriented worries were discussed while highlighting the journey towards embracing the respondents' insecurities as a central part of their identity.

Key words: avatar based research, thematic analysis, youth studies, gaming generation

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RELIGION, SCIENCE AND DIGITAL SOCIETY

There are at least three different definitions of religion and religious sciences. The first definition implies that science can be religious only if it serves the believing people, but its nature will not have any points of contact with religion. In this definition science cannot be essentially religious. According to the second model and definition, religion influences the way of understanding the universal and general characteristics of objects that explain different scientific disciplines, and nothing more than that. Therefore, religion shows us the relations between metaphysical and natural beings, and after that it looks only at metaphysical phenomena, but not at natural ones. Therefore, even according to this model, most sciences will not be essentially connected with religion. And finally, the third model, which we call the maximalist definition of religious sciences, implies that religion does not only refer to tradition and sacred literature. The cognitive elements of religion leave a deep and very strong mark on human reason, canceling the clear boundaries between the metaphysical and the natural. In this way, religion actually encompasses all existing sciences, growing into a model of living, thinking and acting. Thus, in continuation of basic religious metaphysical principles, all methods of natural, mathematical, and later technical sciences are also accepted.

According to this understanding of religion, all sciences can take on a religious nature. What we have observed throughout history on the examples of many representatives of religious thought in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, including Thomas Aquinas, Avicenna, Abu Rayhan Biruni and many others, clearly confirms this view on religion. And such a religion, most certainly, will not have any difficulty in dealing with the information society in the last periods of human history.

Key words: religion, science, methodology, digital society, knowledge

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UNDERSTANDING TRUTH AND RELIGION IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

When a modern thinker and a Muslim philosopher talk about religion, they will most likely not talk about the same phenomenon at all. The first speaks of religion as a social phenomenon (we see such an attitude, for example, among many French sociologists who were influenced by positivism), but the Muslim philosopher understands religion as the source of his certain knowledge.

Many different definitions of religion are offered today. Analysts sometimes disagree when explaining the essence of religion – some believe that it is divine, others believe that it is a human phenomenon. Sometimes it is a matter of difference in attitudes about the scope of religion – while some claim that it includes only normative recommendations, others point out that it has a very objective ontological side. And sometimes there are differences in opinion about how the context of religion reaches people – the majority of religious people point out that it is either direct or indirect, but completely authentic connection of the prophet with God, one group believes that the content of the message is from God while the words are the prophet's, and some modern sociologists claim that it is not actually about the objective relationship of the prophet with God, or some divine being, but rather that the prophet comes to certain knowledge that other members of a community are not able to reach.

In my presentation, I will try to explain that the understanding of truth in the postmodern era not only causes certain ambiguities in the understanding of religion, but also does not allow religion to show its full potential in dealing with some contemporary phenomena in the information society.

Key words: definition, religion, truth, secularism, tradition, relativism

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ОЦЕНКА МОЛОДОЖУ ФУНКЦИЙ РЕЛИГИИ И ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ В РОССИИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ГЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ТУРБУЛЕТНОСТИ

Результаты социологического мониторинга, проводимого в ИДИ ФНИСЦ РАН, показывают направленность секуляризационного процесса среди населения и молодежи в Москве (многонациональной и поликонфессиональной) и Белгородской области (моноэтнической и моноконфессиональной) в условиях геополитической турбулентности. Можно фиксировать «стабилизацию» религиозности в Москве. К 2024 году уровень религиозности населения вернулся к показателям тридцатилетней давности – 46% (1996 г. - 50%). Степень воцерковленности (частота и религиозная мотивация участия в религиозных ритуалах, обрядах) москвичей сократилась в 2 раза. А нерелигиозное население мегаполиса увеличилось до 28% за счет роста группы атеистов. Население «Белгородчины» менее подвержено секуляризационным процессам. За последние 7 лет уровень религиозности населения не изменился и составил 56%, как и уровень атеистичности - 16%.

Тем не менее, за 10-15 лет уровень религиозности молодежи упал на столько, на сколько процентов «выросла» нерелигиозная молодежная среда. Так, в Москве религиозная молодежь составила 38% и 38% – нерелигиозная молодежь, в «Белгородчине» соотношение религиозных и нерелигиозных молодых людей – 43% и 23% соответственно. *Можно фиксировать, что в московском мегаполисе продолжает восстанавливаться процесс секуляризации молодежи и населения. В Белгородской области – тенденция к повышению уровня секуляризации, но только в молодежной среде.*

Возрастающая «клерикализация» общественных отношений оценивается как нерелигиозной, так и религиозной молодежью Москвы: 73% и 60% соответственно считают, что «РПЦ частично берет на себя функции государственных структур власти (политические, образовательные, пропагандистские и т.п.)». Более трети верующих и половина нерелигиозных молодых москвичей считают, что «некоторые действия РПЦ способствуют разжиганию

межнациональной или межрелигиозной розни». А 40% молодых людей столицы независимо от мировоззренческих позиций по отношению к религии и атеизму указывают, что «некоторые российские мусульманские общины способствуют разжиганию межнациональной или межрелигиозной розни». В то же время оценка возрастающей тенденции клерикализации не находит значительной поддержки у молодежи Белгородской области. Возможно, скептицизм к действиям РПЦ связан не столько из-за клерикализации, сколько из-за роста прозелитизма некоторых религиозных организаций и политической ангажированности ряда религиозных лидеров.

Молодое поколение (независимо от религиозного или атеистического мировоззрений) продолжают в своем большинстве (до 75%) считать, что главная ценность религии – в сохранении традиций национальной культуры, воспитании нравственности, психологической и духовной компенсаторной функции религии. Кроме того, среди религиозной молодежи 26% москвичей и 32% белгородцев указали на религиозную веру, как самую важную ценность в их жизни.

Многоплановость интересов различных религий их социальных институтов приводят к диаметрально противоположным стремлениям: от толерантности и экуменизма до клерикально-прозелитической активности, провоцирующей возникновение конфликтов в этноконфессиональном взаимодействии. Подобная деятельность религиозных организаций подтверждается оценками молодежных типологических групп изучаемых субъектов России.

Ключевые слова: социологический мониторинг, процесс секуляризации, молодежь, Москва, Белгородская область.

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ИНТЕРНЕТ В ПОВСЕДНЕВНОЙ ЖИЗНИ БЕЛГОРОДСКОГО СТУДЕНЧЕСТВА С НЕТРАДИЦИОННЫМИ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫМИ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЯМИ (В УСЛОВИХ ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫХ ПРОЦЕССОВ НА ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ)

В 2022 году сотрудниками Отдела этнодемографических, религиозных и интеграционных процессов ИДИ ФНИСЦ РАН проведено социологическое исследование в Белгородской области. На основе показателей религиозного сознания и религиозного поведения были сформированы две типологические группы: «практикующие» и «непрактикующие».

Первая типологическая группа с нетрадиционной религиозностью построена по индикаторам и показателям нетрадиционного религиозного сознания и культового поведения («практикующие»).

Вторая типологическая группа построена только по индикаторам и показателям нетрадиционного религиозного сознания («непрактикующие»).

Данные исследования при анализе типологических групп зафиксировали определенное воздействие нетрадиционной религиозности на направленность предпочтений студенчества в цифровой среде:

1. Выявлена разница в предпочтениях цифровых платформ в типологических группах. В группе «практикующие» информанты проводят больше времени в сети интернет, социальных сетях: «Одноклассники» и «ВКонтакте», в мессенджерах. В группе «непрактикующие» наоборот более предпочтительны социальные сети: «Instagram»*, «TikTok», видео платформа YouTube. Большинство студентов в обеих группах смотрит телевидение менее одного часа в день.

* Meta на территории России признана экстремистской организацией и её деятельность запрещена

2. Следует отметить, что цели использования цифровых платформ в типологических группах разные. В группе «практикующие» респонденты используют интернет больше в образовательных целях (читают литературу, посещают интернет – занятия и лекции) и заработка (продажа/покупка вещей). В группе «непрактикующие» респонденты используют интернет больше для досуга (просмотр фильмов, слушают музыку, играют в онлайн – игры).

Мониторинговое исследование показывает, что студенты с нетрадиционными религиозными представлениями – это, молодежь, активно пользующаяся цифровыми технологиями, интересующаяся появлением новых технологий (голосовые помощники, умный дом, искусственный интеллект и др.) и активно использующая их в повседневной жизнедеятельности.

Ключевые слова: нетрадиционная религиозность, религия, студенты, интернет.

**OTHER
TOPICS**

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TRENDS OF SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY ACROSS EUROPE

In this paper, we explore trends in the social acceptance of homosexuality across European countries. We analyze the direction of these changes and the differences in trends between countries. This topic is crucial in current political, societal, and scientific debates concerning the rights of sexual minorities across Europe. Additionally, such attitudes may influence various discriminatory and even aggressive behaviors, and consequently, largely impact the well-being of members of these minorities. We use data from the European Social Survey (ESS), covering 17 countries (with more than 350,000 respondents) and eleven time points between 2002 and 2023. During this period, countries were affected to varying degrees by economic downturns, increasing inequalities and insecurities, the refugee crisis, and the rise of far-right movements, and it has been expected that such changes would be reflected in the attitudes toward sexual minorities. Social acceptance of homosexuality in the ESS is measured through agreement with the attitude that “Gays and lesbians should be free to live life as they wish.” The results of the latent growth curve modeling indicate that social acceptance of homosexuality clearly increases across Europe – the linear component of the trend is significant and positive (.051, $p < .001$.), while the quadratic component is not significant. Additionally, only Hungary and the Czech Republic deviate from the observed positive trend. Finally, the acceptance of homosexuality was consistently lower in Eastern European countries compared to the Western during the entire observed period.

Key words: trends, homosexuality, European Social Survey

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CONFESSIONAL AFFILIATION AS A PREDICTOR OF VALUE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES IN EUROPE: THE IMPACT ON POLITICAL CULTURE AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

This study explores the impact of religious affiliation on value orientations in Europe, focusing on the cultural and contextual influences on political behavior. Specifically, it examines how confessional identity shapes value systems and, consequently, political attitudes across European societies. Utilizing data from the European Values Study (EVS) 2017, the research tests the hypothesis that religious affiliation significantly predicts variations in individual value orientations, including political trust, democratic orientation, nationalism, and materialism. The study employs multivariate regression analysis to evaluate how these orientations differ between religious groups (Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims) compared to non-religious individuals (atheists). The results suggest that religious groups exhibit distinct value patterns, particularly regarding trust and national identity, which influence political behavior such as voting tendencies and civic participation. The study highlights the importance of religious affiliation as a factor in shaping socio-political dynamics, with implications for understanding the role of social identity in political engagement. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on the relationship between religion, culture, and political behavior in Europe, emphasizing the need for further exploration of the intersection between religion and values in political science.

Keywords: religious affiliation, value orientations, political behavior, Europe, cultural context

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COMMUNITY AND COMMUNION SINCE THE TIME OF COVID-19

This paper will strive to examine some aspects of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the construction of identity and community within the Serbian Orthodox Church, particularly as this pertains to the theological and societal conundrums about the digital and the bodily. Special attention will be afforded to the distinctive facets of Orthodox ecclesiastic theology and praxis that distinguish it from other branches of Christianity.

Key words: community, identity, the digital, the bodily, COVID-19.

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ЗАПРЕТ БОГОСЛУЖЕНИЙ ИЗ-ЗА ЭПИДЕМИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ МЕР: БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬ И ЮРИДЕЧЕСКИЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ

Основная проблема, исследуемая в данной статье, – это столкновение государственно-правовых мер и религиозных свобод в условиях пандемии. Особую проблему представляет собой дезинформация и манипуляции в СМИ, связанные с пандемией и религией. Временное определение исследования относилось к продолжительности пандемии COVID-19, а пространственное – к территории Республики Сербия. На основе сформулированной таким образом исследовательской задачи мы определили предмет исследования, а именно: «Запрет богослужений на основе эпидемиологических мер и его правовые последствия». Научной целью было сделать выводы об оправданности таких мер с точки зрения теологии и медицины. Профессиональная цель – социологический анализ последствий введенных мер на свободу вероисповедания. Таким образом, в статье научно обосновано предположение, что если воспрепятствовать совершению религиозных обрядов или изменить их форму, то религиозные свободы граждан окажутся под угрозой. Методы, применяемые в исследовании, соответствуют предмету и целям исследования, а именно: основные методы познания и формирования мнений, общенаучные методы, методы сбора данных и тематические исследования. Научная значимость данной работы отражена в исследовании аспектов безопасности, правовых и теологических аспектов выражения религии в условиях чрезвычайных ситуаций. Научный вклад – выявлена необходимость междисциплинарного подхода в дальнейших исследованиях столкновения свободы вероисповедания и государственных эпидемиологических мер.

Ключевые слова: пандемия, религия, правовые меры, свобода вероисповедания, цифровое богослужение.

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COMMODIFICATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN SERBIA – CAPITAL AS AN AXIOM IN THE REPURPOSING OF URBAN PUBLIC AREAS: The Case of Serbian Orthodox Church and Investor Urbanism

This paper arises from the authors' interest in the growing phenomenon of investor urbanism, which has become a prevalent approach to occupying urban public spaces in Serbia over the past decade. Notably, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) increasingly appears to be one of the investors in such projects. The foundational axiom of investor urbanism is the influence of capital, serving as both the means and the end of this type of development, often proceeding without the involvement of broader communities, public policy considerations, or expert consultation throughout the process.

Investor urbanism is a phenomenon characteristic of global economic practices driven by a neoliberal logic that prioritizes profit above all else, even to the extent of assimilating spirituality within this late-capitalist cultural milieu.

This paper aims to investigate the position of the SOC and how the Church engages with contemporary construction concepts and real estate markets, primarily in New Belgrade – an urban entity developed during the socialist era that has increasingly become a focus of public interest and civic protest against such approaches. The exploitation of public areas for the construction of residential and commercial buildings often occurs at the expense of the wider community and involves the integration of new structures into an already aging and overburdened urban infrastructure without any obligatory investment in improvements.

Key words: Serbian Orthodox Church, investor urbanism, public spaces, commodification

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ON THE CHARACTER OF THE STUDENT BLOCKADES: MILLENARIANISM OF A MYTHICAL NATION

The presentation aims to examine current processes in the public sphere from a perspective offered by the historical patterns of the Orthodox faith, particularly. Apocalypticism, which is reflected in millenarian movements taking on quite often enormous magnitudes. Millenarianism refers to long-term patterns configuring the course of a mythical reality. Its action onto critical hotspots concerns not only the management but also an inflammation aimed at apocalyptic formation of the New World, or at least a novel pattern, such as communism. The phenomenon was explored over half a century ago by Trajan Stojanović, and addressed as well by Sima Ćirković and Đorđe Sp. Radojičić. Zoran Ćirjaković has provided an insight into its relevance to the current events regarding the student blockades. The presentation should contextualize such events with respect to mythical reality which turns out to be an appropriate language considering long-term patterns.

The issue arises concerning a subject that continues the mythical reality, which is a definition of nation opposite to the modernist one that has become inappropriate. Nikolaj Velimirović has defined Saint-Savaism (светосавље) to be an Orthodoxy of the Serbian style, which is a cyclical definition making any sense in relation to hesychasm only. The hesychast tradition is a conception of time aligned to the Passover rule, which implements a millennial pattern formatting the modern epoch. It manifests in the Kosovo myth, whose progression might be traced from the beginning to the end of the 20th century. The application of such a perspective to current events should offer crucial guidance for managing the crisis and discerning its outcomes.

Key words: millenarian movements, time, hesychasm, Saint-Sabbatism, Kosovo myth

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HANDLE WITH CARE: STUDENTS' PROTESTS OF 2024/25 AS THEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL AND IDENTITY ISSUES

Analyzing iconography and messages of students' protests that started in the Autumn of 2024 enables insights into the attitude contemporary Serbian youth assumed toward religion, and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in particular. It will be investigated how that same youth is being understood and portrayed within the SOC official structures. Furthermore, to what aim and with which methods do its officials try to address both students and the general public concerning the rebellion? Materials include formal communiques, texts that appear on SOC official internet sites, certain actions that members and representatives of the SOC undertook during the students' uprising and, more generally, various poignant commentaries on social media. Formal communication between the SOC and students who are protesting does exist, although on a minimal level. Still, it will be proposed that both SOC and protesters hold one another with very high regard, albeit with extreme caution. The nature of that mutuality will be described in its theological significance. Since the Church understands itself as the living social organism, the boundaries it poses around its identity define and influence every aspect of its functioning. Thus, at the same time, it influences the society at large. Orthodox Christian theology inescapably blends into contemporary politics and applied sociology, making the three either agents of social manipulation and theological estrangement or a solid base for making responsible, beneficent personal and communal actor(s).

Key words: students' protests, Serbian Orthodox Church, political theology, religiosity, identity

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ВОЗМОЖНО ПОНТИЙ ПИЛАТ ПОБЕДИТ ИИСУСА ХРИСТА В ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

Образ Понтия Пилата неоднозначен как в христианстве, так и в европейской культуре. Наряду с культовым романом Михаила Булгакова «Мастер и Маргарита» можно указать на рассказ Анатolia Франса «Прокуратор Иудеи» и на фильм Дж. П. Каллегари и И. Раппера «Понтий Пилат». В каждом из этих произведений образ прокуратора Иудеи многомерен, его авторские трактовки довольно неожиданны. Но мы хотели бы обратить внимание на ещё более необычный аспект противостояния Спасителя с римским чиновником. А. Дж. Тойнби показывает глубинное противоречие в сердцевине иудаизма. В образе Яхве сохранились архаичные черты племенного Бога, но на них наложились универалистские черты Всевышнего как создателя и господина Вселенной. Но Бог как создатель Вселенной не может быть национальным Богом «избранного народа». Тойнби обозначает два пути развития религиозных смыслов, заложенных в Библии: 1) путь евреев – настаивать на национально-этнической эксклюзивности отношений с Богом; 2) путь римлян – отказ от первоначальной общинной идентичности и включение в имперскую общность всех покорённых народов и их верований. По мнению Тойнби, если в наше время возможно возникновение новой великой веры, то она может быть только космополитичной. Но дело не только в противопоставлении национализма и универсализма. Вспомним, что в фильме Каллегари и Раппера едва ли не основной причиной конфликта между прокуратором и иудейскими священниками оказывается стремление Пилата построить акведук для снабжения Иерусалима водой. В этом аспекте противостояние Христа и Пилата приобретает черты противостояния иррациональной духовности светскому научно-техническому рационализму.

Ключевые слова: иудаизм, Пилат, А. Дж. Тойнби, религиозный эксклюзивизм, религиозный универсализм.

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«КНИГА СТРАННЫХ НОВЫХ ВЕЩЕЙ» КАК ОТВЕТ НОМО FABER НА ВЫЗОВЫ СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ

... имя твое бессмертно будет
по этой одной пьесе.

Г. Потемкин (?) – Д. Фонвизину
после премьеры пьесы «Недоросль» (1782).

Ставшая бестселлером и «Книгой года» «Книга странных новых вещей» может оказаться последним романом М. Фабера для взрослых не только хронологически.* Пугающе быстрое развитие Искусственного Интеллекта (уже обыгравшего лучших из homo ludens не только в шахматы, где все «прозрачно», но и в покер, где почти все «призрачно»), эпидемии СПИДа и КОВИДа, а также эпистемологический, экологический и геополитический кризисы, почти одновременно ударившие по человечеству, заставляют задуматься не только о том, что это, возможно, звенья одной цепи, но и о том, что точка невозврата уже пройдена. «Что нам делать, мужи братья?»

Похоронив умершую от рака жену Еву и выпустив в свет в том же 2014-м году посвященный ей роман, Ми-к'эль Фабер (Кто как Бог Творящий – иврит, лат.) признался в интервью, что завершил то, для чего, собственно, и был послан в этот мир.** «Книга странных новых вещей» – вероятно, первый в истории литературы фантастический роман, натуралистично описывающий при- и зло-ключения протестантского пастора, ультимативно затребованного у землян жителями колонизируемой землянами планеты. Оказалось, что самое ценное, что есть на Земле – не диалоги Платона, не дневники Леонардо и не музыка Баха, а «Книга странных новых вещей» (как Оазяне называют Библию) и ее экзегетика. Теологическая проблема восхищения (1 Фес. 4:17) может быть делом техники. И «техники Иисуса».**

Ключевые слова: восхищение, миссионерская деятельность в литературе, Библия и фантастика, М. Фабер.

* Michel Faber, *The Book of Strange New Things* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014).

** "I think I have written the things I was put to earth to write. I think I've reached the limit."

*** "The Technique of Jesus." *The Book of Strange New Things*, chapter 24.

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