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## RELIGIOUS MOTIFS IN LITERATURE

**Abstract:** *The article under discussion deals with the problems of interaction between the two fundamental spheres of human experience - religion and culture. The authors of the article consider that the Christian motifs to which twentieth-century literary artists turn are significant both for art and for humanity as a whole. The literature raises eternal questions of existence and attempts to make sense of modernity on the path of development.*

**Key words:** religion, Christianity, orthodox church, literature, dialogue, symbol, artistic image, culture.

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### Introduction

The culture of any society is a complex organism, all parts of which are in one way or another connected by links of different levels of evidence. Religion and literature, for all their essential differences, have traditionally been inextricably linked, clearly manifesting themselves within the boundaries of cultural space.

Religion is incomparable to the foundations of literature. The former, as a principle of worldview and attitude towards the world, is a powerful factor of cultural genesis, determining the logic of the development of a significant part of cultural phenomena: the main worldview principles of the religious system, the methods of existence of religious institutions, and the strategy of collective and individual behaviour of believers. Literature, on the other hand, was initially perceived as a sphere of creativity, ideologically dependent on the dominant worldview, which used all available means to represent the most significant images and ideas of the sacred, but did not leave them unchanged. The literary

form, based in all historical epochs on the principle of creativity, not being able to influence the religious canon, transforms the religious element in accordance with the chosen genre and in unison with the most urgent needs of perception of both God and the text.

### Main part

The etymology of the Latin word *religio* is derived from the verbs *religare* (to bind, to connect) or *relegere* (to gather again, to discuss again, to revisit, to gaze, to re-read, to ponder carefully). In the first case, the emphasis in the notion of "religion" is placed on "man's connection with that which is higher than man" [2, p.12]; in the second, on "man's ability to step back from vanity, to conscientiously and carefully ponder what is truly serious" [1, p.273]. Under culture, in the framework of this article, we will understand "the totality of absolute values created and created by mankind and constituting its spiritual and social being" [3, 43].

On the territory of the multinational Russian Empire there were many religious traditions, both

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pagan and monotheistic. The dominant position belonged to the Orthodox Church, which with the support of the state, not always exclusively by spiritual means, took care to maintain people's unity. Russian writers of the 19th century, owing both to their belonging to the Russian Empire and to the spirit of "universal responsiveness" evoked by F.M.Dostoevsky in his "Pushkin Speech", were interested in representing the religious experience of different peoples.

Islam, for example, was the focus of Pushkin's poetic attention in his cycle of nine poems 'Imitation of the Koran' (1824). The poet's interest in Islam is linked both with the Enlightenment tradition, which saw in idealized Islam a monotheism purged of European prejudice, and with Romanticism, which enthusiastically explored exotic national colours. Pushkin's acquaintance with Muslim culture, everyday life and customs of the peoples inhabiting the outskirts of the Russian Empire found reflection in his poems "The Captive of the Caucasus" (1820-1821) and "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" (1821-1823).

The fates of Mikhail Lermontov and Lev Tolstoy were linked to the Caucasus. The encounter with the Islamic world inspired Lermontov's Turkish fairytale "Ashik-Kerib" (1837), and poetic motifs of wandering, the East, destiny and books in his lyrical poems. The oath of the Demon from the poem The Demon (1839) is stylistically linked with the high rhetoric and inner power of the early Meccan revelations:

*Клянусь я первым днём творенья,  
Клянусь его последним днём,  
Клянусь позором преступленья  
И вечной правды торжеством [4, p.428].  
I swear by the first day of creation,  
I swear on his last day,  
I swear by the shame of crime  
And the triumph of eternal truth.*

The customs and habits of the highlanders were reflected in Tolstoy's autobiographical novel "The Cossacks" (1852), the stories "The Raid" (1852), "Felling of the Forest" (1853-1855), as well as in the later story "Hadji Murat" (1896-1904).

Tolstoy was very interested in Buddhism. He was not only familiar with the works of major Buddhist scholars of his time, but also himself became the author of translations of more than a hundred Buddhist parables and sayings. A short essay on the life of the Buddha "Siddhartha Gautama, Called Buddha", written by the writer, appeared in 1905. The features of the Buddhist worldview are inherent in the hero of the novel War and Peace (1863-1969), Platon Karataev: he is not attached to anything or anyone, does not feel any discomfort or suffering in captivity, is free from rationalistic schemes of thought: "He apparently never thought about what he said or what he would say..."; "Often he said the exact opposite of what he had said before, but both were true" [9,

p.p.49-50]. The heroes of "Anna Karenina" (1873-1877) either whirled in the endless wheel of samsara, the image of which in the novel is a race on the racetrack, or "stand on the very brink and see life clearly only because they look now in nirvana, in the infinity, the unknown, now in samsara, and this look into nirvana fortifies vision" [10, p.272].

Judaism was well known to Russian writers through the books of the Old Testament, which became part of the Christian Bible. The fiery speech of the prophets, especially Isaiah, inspired the Decembrist poets; the bitter wisdom of Ecclesiastes was repeatedly heard in the novels of Ivan S. Turgenev; the beauty and power of love, praised by the author of the Song of Songs, was translated into poetry by G. R. Derzhavin (Solomon and Sulamita). The beauty and power of love praised by the author of the "Song of Songs" has been summed up in poems by G. R. Derzhavin ("Solomon and Sulamita", 1808), A. S. Pushkin ("The Fire of Desire Burns in Blood...", "The Vertograd of My Sister", 1825), A. A. Fet ("Imitation of the Eastern", 1847), L. A. May ("Jewish Songs", 1849-1859) and others.

Russia's proximity to Europe determined the appearance of images of Western Christian denominations in Russian literature: Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, Pushkin's portrayal of the Polish neighbours (Boris Godunov, 1824-1825) or Gogol's (Taras Bulba, 1833-1942) inevitably posed a question of the attraction and repulsion of the Western Catholic and Orthodox Russian worlds. The Catholic enthusiasm for the Virgin Mary in Pushkin's ballad The Poor Knight was carried over into Dostoevskiy's novel The Idiot (1867-1869). Schiller and Goethe, and through them the entire culture of Lutheran Germany, became a lasting pretext for 19th-century Russian literature.

Through the mediation of Western European literatures, Russian writers were inoculated with the noble paganism of antiquity. Russian literature not only absorbed the forms of ancient literature, but with them absorbed and some religious ideas of the ancient world: the conflict of personality with the forces of Fate, the dichotomy of Cosmos and Chaos, the Dionysian and Apollonian principles, the idea of harmony, proportion and number.

The diversity of religious experiences within the sphere of imaginative attention of Russian writers, however, was still determined by Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the basic culture-forming power for the Russian literature of the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century literary artists' interest in Christianity continued in different literary works. Without moral guidance, it is difficult for modern man to find a way out of the vicious circle of existence. Man is becoming more and more aware of the importance of spiritual values and is not satisfied with material ones. We also find evidence of this in fiction. Russia, which was an Orthodox state until the

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beginning of the twentieth century, is now returning to its spiritual roots. At the same time, the modern world offers different variants of spirituality - these include Eastern cults, neo-paganism, and all kinds of sects. Under such conditions it is much more difficult to make the only right choice. The biblical apostles and later the Fathers warned about this. What the Church calls for is particularly relevant today. In contemporary theological writings the question of the tragic consequences of the loss of morality and spiritual culture is most acutely raised today.

The religious quests in a wide range from the upsurge of a truly Christian feeling, embodied, for example, in the mature poetry of A. Akhmatova, the prose of I. Shmelev, B. Zaitsev, and V. Rasputin, and religious-philosophical thought in Russian literature between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to God-fearing tendencies, often aimed at constructing a religion of "human deity". However in the twentieth century, directly or indirectly, consciously or spontaneously for the authors themselves, the Christian worldview continued to have a significant impact on Russian literature and culture. Outside a Christian worldview and imagery context, it is impossible to comprehend fully such phenomena as Dmitriy Merezhkovsky's historiosophic novelism and the whole neo-Christian ideas of the Silver Age, M. Gorkiy's 'God-building' aspirations in his works, and the influence of the Christian imagery on Russian culture. Gorkiy (The Confession); religious quests, struggles, and "experiments" in the prose and drama of Leonid Andreev; the construction of a "god-human" utopia in the lyrical and poetic works of Vladimir Mayakovskiy ("Cloud in Pants", "Man"), Sergey Esenin ("Octoech", "Advent", "Transfiguration", "Comrade", "Inonia"); the transformation of the hagiographic genre in socialist realism literature ("How the Steel Was Tempered" by N. Ostrovskiy); religious and philosophical aspects of the content of the "Master and Margarita" by M. Bulgakov. Many works by "redneck writers" are filled with implicit religious meaning. This is the case, for example, in the refutation of the materialistic worldview and atheistic ideology in the

story Farewell to Matyora by Vladimir Rasputin about the inevitable afterlife in the face of the ancestors. The Orthodox worldview also had a significant influence on the artistic world of A. Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn's aesthetic credo expressed in his journalistic works.

The fact that twentieth-century writers have turned to eternal spiritual values is already an aspiration to escape from spirituality and atheism. On the other hand, the use of gospel themes is a dangerous and controversial topic in literature. We should not forget that the writer is responsible for his work. This is especially true of 'works which are situated on the borderline between art and religion' [7, p.56].

By creating literary Apocrypha, the authors force the reader to reflect on the biblical commandments and to look at their lives and surrounding reality from this perspective. On the other hand, the use of gospel motifs in literature is an ambiguous subject. The freedom of the writer must not be restricted, but the writer must set for himself or herself the boundaries of what is permissible. Theologians warn of the danger to the reader. Writers also use biblical images and stories to remind people that there are higher moral and ethical laws. This very reminder, an attempt of artists to distract the average man from the immediate needs and requirements of the body, is already sowing the seeds of grace in the souls of readers - reflection on the high, spiritual and divine. Only the inner, moral development of a person depends on what reading this kind of literature will lead to. Writers raise meaningful questions of existence, and the extent to which each of them comes closer to the truth in their reflections depends on the talent given by God.

### Conclusion

Different views of scholars and critics on works based on the Bible show that Orthodox spiritual values are of great importance for modern society. The Christian motifs to which twentieth-century literary artists turn are significant both for art and for humanity as a whole. The literature raises eternal questions of existence and attempts to make sense of modernity on the path of development.

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