

## RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AS THE PRINCIPLE OF CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION

*D.B. Byazrova*

*North Ossetian State University og K.L. Khetagurov, North Ossetia, Russia*  
[science-almanac@mail.ru](mailto:science-almanac@mail.ru)

The article is devoted to the most important issues to ensure inter-religious dialogue in modern Russia. The urgency of the problems dictated by a number of reasons: the need to find a basis of conjugation of religious differences in modern Russian society with the traditional multiethnic, multi-religious way of life, the need for social stability and social consensus in the horizontal and vertical sections of Russian society, the imperative of overcoming religious intolerance in society and on the orientation interfaith dialogue. The author notes that the dialogue between religions, contributing to the formation of the population of respect for religious pluralism and cultural diversity is possible under the condition of overcoming of mutual ignorance and prejudice. The process of forming a culture of tolerance should include a whole range of legal, civil, political, moral, cultural and educational imperatives. Forming of adequate state-confessional relations should be based on the fundamental principles of freedom of conscience, as well as Russian historical traditions and modern realities, including the specifics of inter-religious dialogue for each region, taking into account its socio-economic and cultural characteristics.

Key words: tolerance, intolerance, interfaith dialogue, multiethnic, multi-religious, ethno-confessional relations.

The most important feature of most states in recent history was the transition from cultural homogeneity to cultural pluralism, that along with the undoubted advantages generates negative consequences of social and cultural diversity. Thus, replicating of private interests in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious world order provokes situations of the inter-ethnic, inter-confessional tension and generates ethnocentrism and xenophobia – the evidence of serious problems in modern social relations. Since the interaction of different cultures tends to become more complicated and intensified, the category of tolerance is becoming more relevant. In a situation of an urgent need for a dialogue of cultures, tolerance represents an irreplaceable value for the ability and the skill of a person to build up his or her relationship with the world around and for the prospects of positive society organization. There is not and there will not peace and harmony where ones cannot achieve the ability to hear and respect others' views and to meet the otherness in a not hostile way. In the opinion of the famous German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, "if there is a conflict of fundamental opinions, if there is no common language for the political culture and any reasonable unity is not expected, not only the virtue of a civilized, civic relationship is needed, but tolerance is also in need– even if both forms of civilized relations are met. [9, c. 47].

The cross-culture activity on the formation of religious tolerance plays an important role in the elaboration and development of a culture of tolerance, which is an alternative to xenophobia and extremist policies. Religious intolerance, especially in terms of "religious renaissance" experienced today, is a major factor that sharpens social, ethno-national and political contradictions. It should be noted that the weakening of ethnic and religious intolerance, the intensification of the dialogue between faith-based communities is the priority task for modern society to handle problems of safety, stability and harmonious development. A wide range of legal, civil, political, moral, and other imperatives should be considered to form and develop a culture of tolerance aimed to remove social tension in confessional relationships. By its resolution "Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation" of 19 February 2004, The General Assembly of the United Nations not only expressed deep concern upon the fact that "serious instances of intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, including acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious intolerance, are on the increase in many parts of the world" but also emphasized that "combating hatred, prejudice, intolerance and stereotyping on the basis of religion or culture represents a significant global challenge" [1].

It is known that the concept of “tolerance” is a little more than three hundred years old, but the history of the issue dates back to the ancient times. As it is known, in the mighty empires there was an understanding that force can conquer peoples but to control these peoples only with the help of force is unpromising practice. It was necessary to consider the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of these peoples, their customs, traditions and their faith. Though it’s difficult to develop a strategy of tolerance, individual examples still exist. For example, come to the Kievan Rus Mongol conquerors, like many other adherents of tribal religions, did not encroach on their vassals’ beliefs. Moreover, as the well-known historian of Russian Orthodoxy noted, “having an opportunity to limit the freedom of the Russian Church, as the victors, they did not do because of their own principles... and gave even more civil rights to the Church than the previous national authorities did” [6, c. 286-287].

That's why tolerance as the strategy for society harmonization occurred specifically in a religious sphere and at first it was mostly understood as patience for other regions. In modern discourse the notion of religious tolerance has become wider and includes tolerant attitude to otherwise-minded people in general. Though religious and other lifestyle contradictions still exist, it stimulates to show respect to people of other faiths and states of mind and treat them as equal ones. However, it is well-known that tolerance in general, and religious tolerance in specific, is a hard thing to achieve.

Pretension to be unique is a characteristic feature of all the religions that actually provokes the situation of intolerance, conflict and hostility, settling disputes between “us” and “them”. As Ernst Troeltsch wrote, “all religions are born absolute, for without reflecting on the matter they simply obey a divine compulsion and proclaim a reality that demands acknowledgement and belief, not merely because of its actuality but more because of its validity” [5, c. 235].

The pattern “we-they” is particularly evident in the so-called Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Each of these religions claim to have absolute and universal meaning of their beliefs while using different means (up to violence) with the aim to be recognized in its uniqueness. A believer consciously or unconsciously judges by the principle “The true God is my God, your God is fake, and I have to fight against fake gods since my faith requires it”.

Pretensions of the religions to have the dogmas of unique nature are religious sanctions for the practice of intolerance and discrimination. Interfaith, inter-religious conflicts tend to have many reasons of socio-political, economic, cultural, ideological and legal nature. Many researchers find grounds of religious xenophobia in the very nature of religion. For example, the well-known Russian theologian Zabayako A.P., thinking about the spiritual content of religion, points out: “Anger, revenge, fear, terror, hatred –along with the notions of love, mercy and religious spirituality - reflect the very deep concept of religion. This side of side of the deep ideological and psychological content of religion serves as religions’ repressive origin that expresses itself in violence [4, c. 207]. The double origins of religion – its merciful and repressive nature – negatively influence the ability of a religion community to understand and recognize the right of another person to search for the truth and to find it. Such misunderstanding leads to enmity and then to repression, persecution and, finally, to religious wars where “we” and “they“ confront with each other, as It happened,, for example, in the times of the infamous “Crusades”.

It should be noted that situation of conflict can develop in interfaith circles as well as in inter-confessional ones (for example, the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis in Islam, Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians). Sometimes these conflicts even have the form of religious wars between states, as it happened in the war between Iraq and Iran in the twentieth century. In Europe the war between Catholics and Protestants lasted for 30 years in the seventeenth century.

In history of religions conflicts within the same denomination is also a frequent phenomenon when one of “ours” becomes “theirs”. The struggle of the Orthodox Church with the Old Believers and sects may be the example of inter-confessional conflicts. As Russian researcher Grigorenko A.U. states: “At the heart of this struggle there was the need for self-assertion, self-identification through demarcations with “others”, but with such close “others” who live nearby, in one town or in one country, who read the same Bible but make different conclusions out of it, who pray and bapt-

ize differently. At the same time these “others” were like “us” in all other respects and still they were “strangers”. The conflict was escalated by the accusations of each party in “apostasy”.

In modern Russia the background of religious xenophobia is connected with deep transformational processes taking place both in the world and in our country. The major reason for intolerance to grow here was the fall of the Soviet Union that led to the destruction of value-regulatory controls and the lack of ideological orientation based on the positive domestic, international and humanistic traditions.

Today in Russia the problem of inter-confessional tension is also increased because of many unsolved social problems. Some of them in particular are the question of illegal migration, upbringing and education of young people and their involvement into community service and many other issues that turn into different forms of social discontent. In Russia religious intolerance and xenophobia are also developing because of existing ignorance concerning religious doctrines. Therefore, to overcome religious xenophobia it needs to make comprehensive efforts in different spheres. It also needs to develop more sophisticated methods to optimize interethnic and inter-confessional relations promoting dialogue – that is an alternative to intolerance.

Tolerance in the Russian context has its own characteristics that are presented in its meaning and practical realization. On the one hand, understanding of tolerance in its Western liberal alternative as a strategy based on the concepts of civil rights and liberties cannot show the whole image of the situation in Russia. Thus, according to Sebentsov A.E., “the uniqueness of our religious tolerance is that it refers to the sphere of nations’ rights but not of a person’s ones. People estimate the relation of a particular person to religion with the help of ethnic and confessional contexts” [7, c.81]. On the other hand, tolerance as the principle of cross-culture interaction in its normative and value sense is recognized as a mean to overcome destructive phenomena concerning Russian political and confessional system and exacerbation of religion differences in its political notional senses. Many Russian researcher, in our view, rightly notice that while talking about Russia it makes more sense to consider tolerance as the traditions of intercultural and interconfessional cooperation that ensure the stability of the Russian civilization in the context of social solidarity between adherents of different denominations [3, c. 237; c. 58; c. 91].

It should be noted that while thinking about an ideological and value origin in the notion of tolerance it seems advisable to use the idea of the Russian civilization as a multi-confessional one having its own unique experience of coexistence of various denominations the main principle of which is peaceful cooperation and tolerance.

Besides, the common identification criterion is the state and civic identity, and the unity and common historical destiny of the past and the planned future are the major content of developing ideological discourse. That is why understanding of national and supra-national identity as the resource for developing has again become a topical issue for public debate. In a moment of a crisis for social practice in multi-culturalism risks of fragmentation for national-state communities increase. And it is noted that civil identity that is formed purely formal legal basis turns to be superficial and not strong enough for social consolidation [8, c. 43].

It seems also that the problem of inter-religious dialogue in Russia can be considered as one of the key issue at the center of both theoretical research and practical policy. Its topicality is determined by a number of reasons: the need to find a basis of conjugation of religious differences in the modern Russian society, the need for social stability and social consensus in both vertical and horizontal levels of Russian society, imperative overcoming of religious intolerance in society and commitment to inter-confessional dialogue. Dialogue between denominations stipulating people to show respect for religious pluralism and cultural diversity is possible if mutual ignorance and prejudices have been overcome.

The process of forming a tolerant culture, as it was noted above, must be included the whole complex of legal, civil, political, moral, cultural and educational imperatives.

Well-functioning work and cooperation of government and religious institutions are also important to ensure potential tolerance. It requires public support for constitutional principles of freedom of conscience and religion with the help of what it becomes possible to invalidate the esca-

tion of religious intolerance. What else can be found here is the current problem to develop adequate relations between the government and the confessions. These relations are supposed to be based on the fundamental principles of freedom of conscience as well as on Russian historical traditions and modern realities and at the same time it requires to consider the specifics of inter-religious dialogue for a particular region taking into account socio-economic and cultural characteristics.

#### References

1. The General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution "Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation" of 19 February 2004.
2. *Grigorenko A.U.* Problem of tolerance through a prism of cultural anthropology and sociology // Religious tolerance. Historical and political measurements / The composer of the general edition A.A. Krasikova and E.S. Tokarevoj. M., 2006.
3. *Drobizheva L.M., Arutyunov E.M., Loginov A.V., Mchedlva M.M., Ryzhov S.V., Shevchenko A.G., Schegolkova E.Y.* Tolerance and inter-confessional dialogue // Tolerance as the factor for counteracting and xenophobia ed. Zinchenko Y.P., Loginov A.V. M., 2011; *Byazrova D.B.* Modern interpretations of the theory of social progress. Ph.D. thesis in Philosophical Sciences – M., 1999; *Byazrova D.B., Maliyev T.I.* On the specifics of historical fact // Modern science: current problems and solutions. Lipetsk, 2016. №3 (25).
4. *Zabiyako A.P.* Religion, right for violence and religious extremism // The dialogue of religious culture as a factor of security and stability: problems and solutions. Materials of the II Regional scientific-practical conference, Vladikavkaz, 2012.
5. *Zabiyako A.P.* Ethnic groups and religion. The dialogue of religious cultures as a factor of security and stability: problems and solutions. Materials II of the Regional scientific-practical conference. Vladikavkaz, 2012.
6. *Kartashov A.V.* Collected edition in 2 books. Book 1. Moscow, 1992.
7. *Sebentsov A.E.* The development of the religious situation in modern Russia // the Power. 2009. No 7.
8. *Semenenko I.S., Lapkin V.V., Pantin V.I.* Identity in the coordinate system of the world development // POLIS. Political studies. 2010. No 3.
9. *Habermas J.* When should we be tolerant? On competition of the world visions, values and theories // Sociological studies. 2006. No 1.

#### Литература

1. Генеральная Ассамблея Организации Объединенных Наций в своей резолюции «Поощрение религиозного и культурного взаимопонимания, гармонии и сотрудничества» от 19 февраля 2004 г.
2. *Григоренко А.Ю.* Проблема толерантности сквозь призму культурной антропологии и социологии // Религиозная толерантность. Историческое и политическое измерения / Сост. и общ. ред. А.А. Красикова и Е.С.Токаревой. М., 2006.
3. *Дробизжева Л.М, Арутюнова Е.М., Логинов А.В., Мчедлва М.М., Рыжова С.В., Шевченко А.Г., Щеголькова Е.Ю.* Толерантность и межконфессиональный диалог // Толерантность как фактор противодействия и ксенофобии: управление рисками ксенофобии в обществе риска/ под ред. Зинченко Ю.П., Логинов А.В. М., 2011. С. 237; *Бязрова Д.Б.* Современные интерпретации теории общественного прогресса. Диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата философских наук. М., 1999; *Бязрова Д.Б., Малиева Т.И.* О специфике исторического факта // Современная наука: актуальные проблемы и пути их решения. Липецк, 2016. №3 (25).
4. *Забияко А.П.* Религия, право на насилие и религиозный экстремизм // Диалог религиозных культур как фактор безопасности и стабильности: проблемы и решения. Материалы II Региональной научно-практической конференции. Владикавказ, 2012.

5. *Забияко А.П.* Этнос и религия. Диалог религиозных культур как фактор безопасности и стабильности: проблемы и решения. Материалы II Региональной научно-практической конференции. Владикавказ, 2012.
6. *Карташев А.В.* Собрание сочинений в 2-х т. Т. 1. М., 1992.
7. *Себенцов А.Е.* Развитие религиозной ситуации в современной России // Власть. 2009. № 7.
8. *Семенов И.С., Лапкин В.В., Пантин В.И.* Идентичность в системе координат мирового развития // ПОЛИС. Политические исследования. 2010. №3.
9. *Хабермас Ю.* Когда мы должны быть толерантными? О конкуренции видения мира, ценностей и теорий // Социологические исследования. 2006. № 1.

---

*April, 19, 2016*