

**RELIGION AND STATE:  
INTERACTION AND  
SOCIOCULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS  
(THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC CASE STUDY)**

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**ABSTRACT**

**T**he authors discuss the phenomena of religion and state in the context of various models of their interaction: a tandem, in which they cooperate as social institutions, and the model, in which there is freedom of religion and a political and legal field of conflict resolution, in order to arrive

at the analysis of the problems created by the diversity of cultural and religious trends in the world today.

They rely on the sociological poll, taken in Chechnia and the Northern Caucasus as a whole to define the sources of religious information.

**KEYWORDS:** *religion, statehood, secularization, transformation, polarization, religious absolutism, religious relativism and religious dialog.*

## *Introduction*

The subject of our studies is highly topical, since globalization, rejected or even opposed, has become a reality to be dealt with. In the past, when social, cultural and informational interactions were slow, it was possible to separate the processes unfolding in different parts of the globe within the traditional dilemmas: East vs. West, North vs. South, tradition vs. civilization, and man vs. woman. The list can be even longer. Today we are witnessing the futile attempts to squeeze the variety of postmodernity into the frameworks of the traditional or civilizational thinking. The shifted borders of contemporaneity have given a rise to a new “world of the worlds,” interpreted as the co-existing cultural and political communities that pursue identical interests and clash in the limiting spaces of these interests.<sup>1</sup>

The world, in which we live, may be defined as globalized, multicultural, multiconfessional and, in the final analysis, pluralistic. According to the assessments supplied by the Stiftung Weltbevölkerung Fund, by 1 January, 2015, the world population (7,324,782,000 people) consisted of Europeans (about 10% of the total), people born or living in Africa (15%) and in Asia (60%). Eight out of ten people identify themselves with a religious confession or group.<sup>2</sup> About 2.2 billion (32% of the total Earth’s population) are Christians; 1.6 billion (23%) are Muslims; 1 billion (15%) are Hindu, 500 million (7%) are Buddhists, while 14 million (0.2%) are Jews.<sup>3</sup> These figures speak of a much higher than before level of religiosity of the contemporary people.

We have identified the human endeavor as the object of our studies, and the present and future of religions as our subject.

We have also identified the aim of our studies as registering the social and philosophical aspects and prospects of religion in the contemporary global environment and analyzed the sources of religious information of the respondents, using the Chechen Republic as the case study.

To achieve tangible results we have addressed the following tasks:

- (1) to analyze the role of religion in social life at the turn of the twenty-first century;
- (2) to explicate the attitude to the sources of religious information in the Chechen Republic as compared with other North Caucasian republics.

We have offered the following theses for further discussion of the status and role of religion in the modern state:

- (a) the place of religion in social life, described as secularization, transformation and polarization;

<sup>1</sup> A. Salgiriev, “Elity v politicheskom prostranstve Iuga Rossii,” *Nauka i biznes: puti razvitiia*, No. 9 (27), 2013, pp. 156-159.

<sup>2</sup> “Stiftung Weltbevölkerung Fund: By 1 January, 2015 There Will Be Nearly 7.3 Billion People Living on Earth,” available in Russian at [<http://tass.ru/obschestvo/1668253>], 22 June, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Sociologists Have Calculated the Number of the Faithful: A Third of Those Living on Earth are Christians, a Quarter are Muslims,” available in Russian at [[http://zn.ua/SOCIETY/sotsiologi\\_podschitali\\_kolichestvo\\_veruyuschih\\_na\\_zemle\\_bolshe\\_vsego\\_hristian\\_i\\_musulman.html](http://zn.ua/SOCIETY/sotsiologi_podschitali_kolichestvo_veruyuschih_na_zemle_bolshe_vsego_hristian_i_musulman.html)], 22 June, 2015.

- (b) interaction between religion and statehood as one of the two models:
  - (a) a tandem of religion and state as social institutions and
  - (b) freedom of religion and a political and legal field of conflict resolution;
- (c) there are three paradigms that reflect the religious picture of our days, shaped by the demands of religious identity: religious absolutism, religious relativism and religious dialog.

The question is: What are the sources of religious information and which of the paradigms is the most important for people living in the Chechen Republic?

### **Three Approaches to the Role of Religion in Contemporary Society**

There are three hypotheses related to the role of religion at the turn of the twenty-first century: secularization, transformation and polarization (cultural rupture). On the one hand, secularization limits the role of religion in contemporary society and, on the other, it demonstrates a transfer to a secular social model based on rational norms. It should be said that many authors do not perceive it as a general social trend.

Other authors have reassessed the theory of secularization to arrive at the religious transformation hypothesis<sup>4</sup> and pointed out that religion is gradually squeezed out of its intended space; this leads to religious and spiritual eclecticism rather than eliminating religion altogether.

Ronald Inglehart<sup>5</sup> used the results of sociological analysis to presuppose that people turn to religion partly because they need social and economic security. Economic development in the Western European countries raised the security level and removed many of the limitations in life styles and, consequently, promoted secularization and created demographic problems. In the developed countries, religion and family are not an absolute necessity; they are deprived of their axiological status as a guarantor of social success. On the other hand, in the developing countries, where the economic and social spheres are evolving and where the security level is dangerously low, people seek protection in their devotion to God. No wonder, religion is important in these societies; this also explains population growth and stronger family values.

A combination of a diminishing role of religion and decreasing population in the developed countries, and population growth, coupled with the high religious fervor, in developing countries, suggests a conclusion that at the turn of the twenty-first century the world has become more devout than before. According to Ronald Inglehart, this has caused a rift between secular and religious societies and provoked a stiff opposition from religious regions, in which domination by secular values is considered to represent a threat.

Religion, as a unique spiritual phenomenon, plays a certain social function, the importance of which may change.

In the last decade, the attempts to find a consensus within the two models of religion and state interaction described above have become obvious. On the one hand, harmonization of inter-ethnic

<sup>4</sup> K. Besecke, "Beyond Literalism: Reflexive Spirituality and Religious Meaning," in: N.T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 169-186, available at [[https://books.google.ru/books?id=DBGjoeHc\\_ZEC&pg=PA169lpg=PA169&dq=besecke+2007+beyond+literalism&q=&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ru/books?id=DBGjoeHc_ZEC&pg=PA169lpg=PA169&dq=besecke+2007+beyond+literalism&q=&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false)], 21 June, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> R. Inglehart, "Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies," available at [<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/5981.html>].

and inter-religious relationships might eliminate traditional (including religious) foundations of culture. Cultural diversity is responsible for the meanings of national traditions. This layer of religion and state interaction contains many problems, related to the inherent intentions of certain religions to dominate the political and legal arenas.

In this case, the sovereign state can be defined as the guarantor of continued cultural and national diversity. The national idea and ideology reveal their meaning in the context of the revived rejection of monoreligiosity for the sake of secular values. Contemporaneity is highly varied; the world's spatial and temporal variety cannot and should not be treated lightly by theologians, philosophers, religious and state leaders. It remains to be seen, whether they accept the diversity (religious diversity included), created by pluralism in the religious and other contexts of social life. Overall, contemporary pluralism includes three elements:

- (1) variety of groups, based on similar origins, statuses, interests and convictions;
- (2) interaction between these groups within the same society;
- (3) peaceful interaction between these groups.

This pluralist picture is not necessarily found in all societies; there are societies with homogeneous political ideologies or dominant religions.

There are countries described as "Islamic" because there Islam is the dominant religion, yet globalization challenges societies and its members with numerous alternatives; modernity offers alternatives as an inevitable and inescapable component. By no means (the use of force included) people can be deprived of the possibility to obtain knowledge about various lifestyles. They should be free in their choices and allowed to be guided by their convictions rather than submitting to force. The situation, however, remains tense. Each religion has its own requirements and confronts man with divine and inalienable truth. Each religion outlines the limits to be taken into account by its followers.

People are expected to live in harmony with the values of their religion; this means that each and every religion is not free from political dimensions.<sup>6</sup> This is also true of each and every man and society as a whole and is not limited to the lifestyle, defined by their faiths. This is related to their attitude to God, themselves and others. On the other hand, in contemporary society, tension is avoided if the lifestyle of individual members of society gears toward the multitude of its varied interests. Open societies of the present day rest on the variety of legally coexisting ideas, world outlooks and religions. In this case, variety is a positive feature, since there are no social norms that reject any deviation as alien.

## Three Paradigms of the Religious-Philosophical Discourse

All exclusions from the way of life and all bans should be well-founded and justified. This causes tension that should be defused. The question is: How? There are three different paradigms within the current religious philosophical discourse, their definitions being chosen by those who write about them. Here we have chosen the following: religious absolutism, religious relativism and religious dialog.

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<sup>6</sup> A. Salgiriev, "The Northern Caucasus: Tribal-Clan Structure of the Political Elites as a Factor of Political Tension," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2016, pp. 29-35.

Religious absolutism recognizes the only and final truth—the truth of its own doctrine—and dismisses others as brimming with errors and heresies. As can be expected, it recognizes only the transfer of people to the true religion, it endorses the possibility of this transfer and, quite logically, condemns the transfer from the true religion to other religions and world outlooks as treason.

Religious relativism accepts that other religions contain their own truths, that none of the religions occupy the center of the religious universe and that all of them are planets rotating around the sun of the absolute truth. This means that none of them can claim the monopoly on truth and that all of them have equal rights to it. There are no mistakes in religion in general. Islam insists that the truth belongs to it yet, as an Abrahamic religion, it recognizes and respects the prophets who figure in the Old and New Testaments. The negative feelings multiplying around Islam are engendered by all sorts of trends, determined to stir up extreme feelings of their followers.

Religious dialog, in its turn, accepts the claims for the truth of all religions; it relies on the absolute confidence of those who support the truth of their own religions, yet does not exclude a possibility of understanding the divine vision of other religions. The sides in the dialog do not try to remove the differences between the religions—they are merely inclined to discover possible truths in the beliefs of others.

This dialog does not avoid the ambiguous or even challenging issues: it treats them in the spirit of mutual compassion and respect. It admits religious freedom and relies on it. This means that the religious dialog, as a model of communication, points to the road along which contemporary societies will settle the problems taking account of religious diversity. Having lived through a long and painful process of learning the truth, the European societies arrived at an understanding that tolerance should complement religious freedom and that these ideas should become the values on the global scale. Such tolerance should not be construed to mean that each provision is right and that all of them should be accepted. Tolerance does not mean indifference: it is an active personal position that requires the widest possible analysis and the deepest of reflections.<sup>7</sup>

## **General Description of the Level of Religiosity in Modern Society (the Chechen Republic Case Study)**

Religion is one of the forms of spiritual culture, within which an individual finds the foundations of symbiotic interaction in the world vs. man system. Religiosity is a type of world outlook that reflects the specifics of faith and consciousness; it is a way faith manifests itself in everyday life as a method of interaction of a religious individual with the general social and cultural milieu. A large-scale investigation of the level of religiosity of the contemporary North Caucasian society was carried out by the North Caucasian research laboratories headed by Khasan Dzutsev.<sup>8</sup> The religious context of contemporary Russia is threatened by the extremist feelings of definite groups of people inside and outside the country. It needs close attention at all levels of state power to ensure Russia's security and

<sup>7</sup> M. Betilmerzaeva, "Tolerantnost i ksenofobia skvoz prizmu etnicheskoy mentalnosti," in: *Rossia: tendentsii i perspektivy razvitiia*, A yearbook, Issue 3, Part II, INION RAN, Moscow, 2008, pp. 156-158.

<sup>8</sup> Kh. Dzutsev, Z. Atabieva, S. Biragova, M. Betilmerzaeva, A. Dibirova, Z. Sultygova, L. Tutaeva, A. Khugaeva, B. Khubiev, T. Uzdenov, *The Current State of Studies of Religious Extremism, Main Trends of Studies in World Science: Sociological Analysis. Program and Materials of Mass Public Opinion Poll in the North Caucasian Republics, June 2015*, A monograph, ISPI RAN, Moscow; IPTs SOGU, Vladikavkaz, 2016, 467 pp. (in Russian).

territorial integrity, encountered by the post-Soviet alternative models of regional political systems and ideologies, aimed at the titular nations' monopoly in the process of building up bodies of power in the North Caucasian republics.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1990s, amid the widespread political, economic and cultural crisis in Russia, the ethnonational regions were plunged into a struggle of various groups of titular nations for power and property under the aegis of national and religious self-determination. As soon as the Soviet identity collapsed, the ethnonational and religious identities were revived, together with the old sores and old grudges, pushing the unsolved problems of the past into the new century. This caused a lot of discontent in the local communities. Much has been written<sup>10</sup> about Chechnia as one of the focal points of bloodshed in the destabilized country. Akhmat Kadyrov had the following to say about this: "We pushed the people to the brink of disaster by our militarist policies, our persistent refusal to march together with other peoples and by our clinging to the delusion that we were the chosen people."<sup>11</sup>

The events unfolding in the region in the 1990s were caused by the hitherto unknown political and religious disagreements among the Chechens. Political disagreements were settled due to the smart and skillful policies of Akhmat Kadyrov, the first President of the Chechen Republic, in close cooperation with Vladimir Putin. Religious disagreements, on the other hand, took hold in the spiritual practices and greatly affected the most vulnerable population groups, the younger generation in the first place. Today, the programs of spiritual, moral and religious education, designed to stem the extremist trends and prevent their spread, are actively realized in the Republic.

We carried out the above-mentioned public opinion poll to identify the place of the religious ideology and world outlook in contemporary Chechen society and establish the religiosity level of the Republic's population.

We relied on the materials obtained to identify the degree to which the religious feelings and religious ideas of the Republic's population and the vector of their development may stir up or contain religious extremism in the Republic. Our poll produced important results and led to important conclusions.

*Content of the poll:* identification of the sources of religious information in the Chechen Republic and the Northern Caucasus as a whole.

1. Many of us rely on different sources of information about religious beliefs and other issues (see Table 1). How frequently does the population of your republic use such sources as radio, TV, compact discs, audio cassettes, MP3 players, discs, printed sources, social networks, etc. to obtain this information: frequently, from time to time, rarely or never?
2. To which extent does the Republic's population trust religious information, supplied by family members, acquaintances, friends, religious leaders, scholars, journalists, radio and TV anchors, political leaders?

Table 2 shows that the majority of the polled respondents trust their families rather than friends, acquaintances and religious leaders when it comes to religious information; this is a very good sign. At the same time, the fact that the journalists, radio and TV anchors and bloggers are seen by 35.4 % of the polled as unreliable sources of religious information gives food for thought.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Sh. Gapurov, I. Baykhanov, U. Rassukhanov, "National Reconciliation in the Chechen Republic—a Great Achievement of Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov," in: *Peaceful Processes in the Caucasus (Fourth Kadyrov Readings). Collection of documents of the All-Russia scientific-practical conference with international participation dedicated to the 65th birth anniversary of First President of the Chechen Republic, Hero of Russia A.A. Kadyrov, Grozny, 8 September, 2016*, AN ChR Publishing House, Grozny, 2016, pp. 4-5 (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> A. Kadyrov, *Vybor puti*, Grozny, 2005, p. 167 (see also: Sh. Gapurov, I. Baykhanov, U. Rassukhanov, op. cit., p. 4).

Table 1

## Share of Respondents Who Rely on Different Sources of Religious Information, %

	Information Sources	Frequently	From Time to Time	Rarely	Never	Undecided	Refused to Answer
1.1.1.	Radio and TV	28.8	28.3	23.2	18.2	1.5	—
1.1.2.	Compact discs, audio cassettes, MP3 players, videos, DVDs	6.6	22.2	20.2	49.0	1.5	0.5
1.1.3.	Printed sources (journals, books, leaflets)	21.2	30.8	34.3	12.1	1.5	—
1.1.4.	SMS	11.6	24.7	20.2	41.4	0.5	1.5
1.1.5.	Social networks Facebook, Twitter, etc.	11.6	22.7	21.7	43.4	0.5	—
1.1.6.	Other Internet resources (blogs, sites, video-swapping sites)	15.7	21.2	20.7	40.9	1.5	—
1.1.7.	Religious services or group meetings	8.6	23.2	28.3	38.9	1.0	

Table 2

## Share of Respondents Who Trust, to Different Degrees, People as Information Sources, %

	Information Sources	Most Unreliable	2	3	4	Most Reliable	Undecided	Refused to Answer
1.1.8.	Family members	6.1	6.1	9.1	16.2	61.6	0.5	0.5
1.1.9.	Acquaintances, friends	6.6	19.7	28.3	23.2	20.2	1.0	1.0
1.1.10.	Religious leaders	9.1	9.1	19.7	20.7	34.8	5.1	1.5
1.1.11.	Scholars	8.3	7.3	21.2	39.9	1.6	1.6	0.5
1.1.12.	Group/political/community leaders	28.8	18.7	14.6	14.6	19.2	3.0	1.0
1.1.13.	Journalists, radio and TV anchors, bloggers	35.4	14.6	16.2	13.1	15.7	3.0	2.0

3. Please indicate to which extent you agree/disagree with the following: “I depend on people, who closely follow what the media say about religion to understand what is important and what is trivial.”

It turned out that the polled respondents relied on their own opinion when dealing with religious issues: 49% of negative answers to the above statement (see Table 3).

*Table 3*

**Share of Respondents Who Rely on the Opinion of People Who Follow the Media for their own Opinions about the Importance of Information, %**

<b>Agree</b>	<b>18.2</b>
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>21.7</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>49.0</b>
<b>Undecided</b>	<b>7.6</b>
<b>Refused to answer</b>	<b>3.5</b>

Table 4 demonstrates to which extent the North Caucasian nations accept radio and TV as sources of religious information. It turned out that the respondents in the Chechen Republic trust radio and TV to a much greater extent than their neighbors, while the respondents in Karachaevo-Cherkessia are least of all inclined to trust these information sources. However, the respondents, on average, are inclined to trust this information source.

*Table 4*

**Share of Respondents Inclined to Trust Radio and TV by Different North Caucasian Ethnic Groups, %**

	Nationality						
	Russians and Russian speakers	Kabardians and Balkars	Karachays and Circassians	Peoples of Daghestan	Ingushes	Ossets	Chechens
<b>Often</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>28.8</b>
<b>From time to time</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>28.3</b>
<b>Rarely</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>40.9</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>23.2</b>
<b>Never</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>18.2</b>
<b>Undecided</b>	<b>1.1</b>					<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<b>Refused to answer</b>							

### *Conclusion*

The two models of interaction between religion and state demonstrate an active cooperation of the religious and state institutions in some countries, on the one hand, and, on the other, an absolutely independent functioning of religious and state institutions in the legal venues of other countries.



Globalization and radicalization of the religious institutes threaten cultural diversity. The tension, which is very obvious at the world level and in certain countries, can be removed only through a dialog between state and society within the legal domain. We should study the world outlook of a contemporary man and create a legal environment that needs a civil society to become real.

Our poll was intended to clarify the place of religious ideology in the world outlook of contemporary Chechen society and the level of religiosity of the Republic's population.

The poll's results led us to identify the extent of the religious feelings and principles of the Republic's population and their developmental vectors, and establish whether they can stir up or contain religious extremism in Chechnia.

The results of the public opinion poll suggested the following: among the Chechens, 28.8% believe radio and TV to be the most trusted sources of religious information (see Table 1), that is, slightly more than a quarter of the Republic's population. Only 6.6% turn to compact discs, audio cassettes, MP3 players, videos and DVDs in search of religious information, while 49.0% does not trust them at all. The majority of the polled turn, from time to time, to printed media, books and leaflets, while the social networks on the Internet (Facebook, Twitter) and other Internet resources (blogs, Internet sites and video-swapping sites) are not that popular. Strange as it may seem, only 40% of the respondents treated religious services and group meetings as the source of information.

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