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The cross-confessional model for studying religiosity: elaboration and implementation in Belarus

АБСТРАКТ

To make studying religiosity of the poly-confessional Belarusian society constant and systematic, the model of research was elaborated based on the mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology, a wide (cross-confessional) concept of religion, a multi-dimensional model of religiosity, and a flexible scaling of parameters of individual religiosity in each dimension.

Religion is defined in the model as a sphere of society (individual) being an *institutionally* formed symbolical system of *beliefs* and *activity* focused on the meaning of the *transcendent* contents. The source and the channel for transmitting the transcendent meaning is religious experience understood in its both narrow the condition in which a person finds him/herself in a living and straight unity with the transcendent and broad any act of a person's participation in the life of religious tradition sense. The *transcendent* is also understood broadly - as the idea of self-sufficient and self-acting reality outstanding the actual world in its essence but appearing in it through actions symbolised as powers, spirits, demons, gods, God, world soul, etc. Thus, in the research, religion is modelled as a two-aspect phenomenon including religious experience (the inner, latent aspect) and a system of articulating and transmitting the contents of experience (the outer, measureable aspect). The outer system creates a unity of beliefs (expressing the idea of religion), activity (performs the religious ideal), institutes (fixes statuses and functions in the tradition of reconstructing the ideal). These dimensions may have different degrees of spreading in various religions, that's why religions are traditions or movements.

Religiosity is understood as the combination of degrees of *involvement* into each of the named dimensions of religion. For each dimension the empirical parameters of involvement are set. The sum of the parameters of each dimension gives the corresponding characteristic: the certainty of religious position; the degree of religious activity; the level of integration into community. The combination of intensity of each of the named characteristics gives the integral characteristic of religiosity for each respondent. The hypothesis is that the degrees of religiosity of the respondents form a range from *declarative* through *weak* and *moderate* to *deep* involvement.

Keywords: religiosity; multi-dimensional model for studying religiosity; cross-confessional concept of religiosity; dimensions of religiosity; parameters of religiosity; typology of religiosity; religiosity in Belarus.

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Кросс-конфессиональная модель изучения религиозности: разработка и применение в Беларуси

АННОТАЦИЯ

Для выяснения степеней религиозности белорусов была разработана модель исследования на основе: смешанной качественно-количественной методологии; широкой (кросс-конфессиональной) концепции религии; многомерной модели религиозности; гибкого шкалирования параметров индивидуальной религиозности по каждому измерению.

Религия определяется в программе как сфера жизни общества (индивида), представляющая собой институционально оформленную символическую систему представлений и деятельности, сфокусированных на смыслах предельного (трансцендентного) содержания. Источником и руслом передачи трансцендентных смыслов полагается религиозный опыт, трактуемый в узком (состояние, при котором человек обнаруживает себя пребывающим в живом и непосредственном единстве с трансцендентным) и широком (всякий акт участия человека в жизни религиозной традиции) смыслах. Трансцендентное также трактуется широко – как идея самодостаточной и самодействующей реальности, внеположной наличному миру по сути, но проявляющейся в нем через действия, символизируемы как силы, духи, демоны, боги, Бог, мировая душа, т.д. Таким образом, религия моделируется в исследовании как двухсоставный феномен, включающий религиозный опыт (внутренний, латентный аспект) и систему артикуляции и передачи содержания опыта (внешний, измеряемый аспект). Внешняя система образует единство представлений (выражают идею религии), деятельности (осуществляет религиозный идеал), институтов (закрепляет статусы и функции в традиции воссоздания идеала). В разных религиях эти измерения могут иметь разную степень развернутости, в силу чего религии выступают традициями либо движениями.

Религиозность трактуется как сочетание степеней вовлеченности в каждое из указанных измерений религии. Для каждого измерения задаются эмпирические параметры вовлеченности. Сумма параметров по каждому измерению дает соответствующую характеристику: определенность религиозной позиции; степень религиозной активности; уровень интегрированности в сообщество. Сочетание интенсивности каждой из указанных характеристик дает интегральную характеристику религиозности каждого респондента. Гипотеза состоит в том, что степени религиозности респондентов образуют спектр от декларативной (заявление о приверженности) через слабую (использование религии в житейских целях) и умеренную (ориентация на религиозные ценности в светской жизни) до глубокой (бескорыстное служение религиозному идеалу) вовлеченности.

Ключевые слова: религиозность; многомерная модель исследования религиозности; кросс-конфессиональный подход к исследованию религиозности; измерения (аспекты) религиозности; параметры религиозности; типология религиозности; религиозность в Беларуси.

Religious situation in Belarus is defined by a wide range of confessions significantly different from each other in the number of followers, in its doctrinal, cult and organisational features. So, it is timely for Belarus to elaborate the concept of religiosity which would allow studying its poly-confessional environment [1].

Researches in religiosity have been held since the 1920s [2; 3; 4; 5; 6] around the world, including the Soviet and post-Soviet environments [7; 8; 9]. The interpretation of the phenomenon has been changing with time. In the 1980s, the *multi-dimensional* approach to the study of religiosity [10; 11; 12; 13] received a wide distribution (its models started to develop in the 1960s): it not only represented religiosity in one of its manifestations (like going to the church, taking part in performing rituals, knowing sacred texts, etc.), but combined its different parameters as an *integral* value based on which the characterisation and comparison were made [2, p. 269-343].

The poly-confessional Belarusian society makes relevant the issue of searching the *universal characteristics of religiosity*, which could compare in intensity and would not depend on the confessional adherence of its carriers. Solving this problem is possible based on understanding religiosity as a *complex multi-dimensional phenomenon* which main aspects are universal for any religion yet expressed differently in each of them. In frames of this approach, it seems possible to create a *typology of universal cross-confessional religious positions*, which could help receive an understanding of not only the confessional saturation in Belarus, but also the intensity of religious situation in the country.

Building the *typology of religiosity* it is necessary to define the main concepts explaining this phenomenon. The key concept for this particular research is 'religiosity'. According to the earlier elaborated cross-confessional constructs (C. Glock, R. Stark, etc.), it is defined as '*involvement (of an individual, a group, the society) into religion formed (in a certain degree of intensity) into religious system existing in the form of religious tradition and religious movement*' [7, p. 18; 2, p. 269-343; 3].

This definition is disclosed through the concept of *religion* which, in this research, is

based on the concept of *the transcendent*. It is important for the cross-confessional research to interpret both this concepts as wide as possible.

Therefore, *religion* is defined as *the sphere of society's (individual's) life representing the institutionally formed symbolical system of beliefs and practices focused on the senses of the ultimate (transcendent) contents, which bear the status of the holy (sacred)*.

This definition interprets religion widely and includes the *monotheistic*, other *theistic (pantheistic, polytheistic), non-theistic (animatic, animistic)* systems [14]. Some of the assigned types of religiosity keep functioning in contemporary culture as the organised influential traditions (e.g. monotheistic religiosity of the world religions – Christianity, Islam), they form *confessional* religiosity of the modern society. Some of them stopped their existence as the organised traditions after the cultures by which they were created have crashed (e.g. the polytheistic religions of archaic societies) but their remains continue functioning in contemporary culture as the elements of old traditions and practices and sometimes get synthesized with each other or with the elements of other world-views (both religious and non-religious) into various models of *non-confessional* religiosity.

The contemporary Social science defines two types of «the ultimate world-view perspectives»: the *humanist* one, which recognizes material world in a whole and a human in particular as the ultimate reality and value, and *religious* one, which recognizes the *transcendent*¹ reality as the ultimate one [7, p. 5, 6, 10-12].

The term *transcendent* defines the reality exceeding the spatial and temporal limits and causal boundaries of the existing. An individual's conviction about this reality automatically sets the *transcendent sense* of his being, i.e. programming for all his decisions and actions in a life perspective exceeding the limits of the existing reality.

Same as for the term *religion*, the term *transcendent* is interpreted extremely widely. On the one hand, it is based on the explication of such characteristics of the transcendent objects of various religions, as *self-sufficiency*; on the other hand, it abstracts from the certain forms and images which in various cultures fix the

¹ Transcendent (from Latin *transcendens*) – bestriding, exceeding the limits.

presence or activity of the transcendent. By self-sufficiency the status of reality is understood, which needs nothing for its existence apart itself. Such reality is always transcendent in relation to anything existing due to other reasons – to the cause-and-effect relationships, spatial and temporal limits, – and depending on anything else. The synonyms for *self-sufficient* (being) may be the term *absolute*, and the term *self-acting* is used as the attributive definition.

The accepted here interpretation of the transcendent is based on the distinction of: 1) its *nature (substance)*, or the ontological source of the self-acting omnipresent forces (like *mana*), as well as of demons, deities, cosmic principles, etc., and 2) its *hierophanies* (manifestations) and *personifications* (agents). Nature (the substance) is external in relation to the structure of the existing reality – it is *transcendent*, and the manifestations, the personifications of this nature and its influence on the human are *immanent* for the world.

So, in the *vein of Philosophy and Religious Studies* the offered approach fixes the broad understanding of religion – as the ultimate world-view perspective appealing to the transcendent – and, correspondingly, the wide interpretation of the transcendent as the self-sufficient and self-acting reality.

In *sociological vein*, religion is understood here as a complex phenomenon which may be presented as the unity of the necessary aspects, or *dimensions*, which are not reduced to one another: *religious beliefs* (expressing the transcendent idea of religion), *religious activity* (realizing the principle and means of exercising the idea), *religious institutions* (organising the followers of the idea into a community). This complex unity functions as a *system* for preserving and reconstructing the religious sense which source is *religious experience* acting as the base for *religion* as a *system*.

Religious experience may be interpreted in two ways:

1) *narrowly* (going back to phenomenology of religion, psychology of religion, religious philosophy [15; 16; 17; 18]) as a state in which a man discovers himself being directly connected to the transcendent reality [19] (when the transcendent to the world living source becomes immanent for the personal experience [18, p. 12-

24]). This state has a revolutionary meaning for a person, transforms him into a being ultimately motivated by the transcendent goals;

2) *broadly* (elaborated in sociology and anthropology of religion [5; 6; 2]) as any act of person's participation in the life of religious tradition (movement) regardless to the nature of his belonging to religion.

In both cases religious experience is a *perfect state* for a particular religion; in the first case it is fully *felt* by the bearer(s) of the tradition, in the second – *desired*.

As long as the perfect example of experiencing the connection to the transcendent object is in demand, the religious system based on this example continues to be traditionalized and passed from one generation to another.

The contents of religious experience is formed into *religious system* constituted by the main (essential and not reducible to each other) aspects of religion – religious *beliefs*, religious *activity*, the organisational forms of religious community's life, i. e. *institutions* [21; 22]. Each of these aspects is characterized by certain parameters.

The *system of religious beliefs* is a system of symbolically shaped truths of the ultimate meanings which form an hierarchy of 1) the incontrovertible statements of religion considering the nature of the transcendent reality on which basis the 2) religious interpretation of the world and a man considering their origins, being and faith are elaborated, as well as 3) the system of piety regulations for a person.

The *system of religious activity* is a system of principles and forms organising the activity of the followers of a particular religion meeting its transcendent goals. It is divided into the ritual (cult) practices, the forms of daily and holiday piety, the missionary and/or socio-cultural activity.

The *system of religious institutions* is a system of principles and forms of organising the life of religious community.

The assigned components of religious system are represented in any religion, though in different degree of expansion. So, during the period of evolving and becoming, religious system is more of a *movement* than of a formed systematic formation, and after a while it becomes a *tradition* (gets passed from one generation to another).

Religious movement and religious tradition differ in the degree of elaboration and stability of their system components. *Religious movement* is a symbolic system of beliefs and practices of the ultimate (transcendent) contents which is either weakly organised or not organized yet and has a short period of traditionalization, or exists within the current generation. *Religious tradition* is an institutionalized symbolical system of meanings and practices of the ultimate (transcendent) contents which, due to the stable demand of its contents, is passed from one generation to another for a long time.

The adherence of a person to a certain religion – tradition or movement – is reflected in their *religiosity* which means the *involvement* (of an individual, a group, the society) *into religious system or religious movement* [3; 7, p. 18].

Considering the described aspects of religious system, religiosity appears as an *integral value* which consists of the *combination of the degrees of involvement* of the follower into each dimension of religion.

Inside oneself, a person feels the state of involvement as *devotion* which means readiness to follow its transcendent idea or transcendent sense. Following the sense is based on accepting it as an absolute, ultimate and at the same time self-obvious truth, i.e. on accepting it, regardless to the factual and logical proofs, directly to the structure of personality as a basic motive (principle) of life behaviour. Such way of accepting the truth is called *faith* [23, p. 26].

Thus, the construction of the typology of religiosity takes a complex structure of religion into consideration, when the *type of religiosity* is defined as the *combination of the degree of involvement into the universal dimensions of religion*, namely:

1) a certain religious idea and the system of beliefs expressing it (the system of ‘the truth of faith’); in this case the devotion is expressed through religious faith;

2) a definite system of religious activity, based on a certain system of beliefs; in this case the devotion is expressed through performing rituals, obeying the piety norms and forms, holidays (and holiday periods), as well as through participation in (missionary and) socio-cultural activity of religious society;

3) a certain, more or less organised religious community consolidated by the common aim of maintaining connectivity with the religious object by worshipping and serving it; in this case the devotion is expressed through being a member or a participant of the cult and/or socio-cultural life of the community.

The elaboration of the typology of religiosity demands building a system of empiric indicators which would fix certain forms of expression of individual’s devotion to the certain dimensions of religion.

The devotion to religious idea may be fixed by a set of such characteristics, as: a person declaring their religious position themselves; the actual knowledge of its contents; the individual’s statement of their willingness to sacrifice something for their religious position; self-estimation of faith’s value in life. In total, these indicators form the characterization of religiosity which reflects the *certainty* (or uncertainty) *of religious position (faith)*.

The devotion to the principles and forms of religious activity is defined based on how regularly the person performs individual practices (which basic forms are prayer, meditation), participates in collective rituals (commonly performed ritual acts and rites, which basic forms are common prayer, meditation, mystery, sacrament), how the person widens his/her knowledge about the religion he is adherent to, obeys the norms of civil piety, how regularly the person participates in religious holidays and in social and cultural life of the community. The complex of the named indicators forms such characteristic of religiosity, as *the degree of religious activity*.

The devotion to a more or less organised religious community is detected based on the individual’s declaration of his/her adherence to it, indication of his/her status or function in this community or the lack of those, as well as the individual’s report on his/her free participation in social and cultural activity of religious community. The set of the named indicators forms such characteristic of religiosity, as *the level of integration into community*.

Apart from the named attributive features of religiosity, the characteristics having no straight relation to religiosity but connected with it as its causes or effects may also be used to clarify the

features of religiosity. Such factors are meant as the reasons of a person's religious choice (personal motives or outer circumstances) and the results of this choice for one's life (the depth of religiosity's impact on lifestyle).

Studying the expression of the named indicators altogether allows creating an integral description of each individual's religiosity, which is expressed through the certainty of religious position, the degree of religious activity, and the level of integration into religious community. Comparing the descriptions of individual's religiosity distributes them into religious groups. The list of groups formed depending on the degree of individuals' involvement into religion builds the typology of religious positions varying

from *declaratively* involved through *weak* and *moderate* to *deeply* involved.

Thus, the presented concept allows identifying the quantitative indicators of religiosity regardless to the confessional adherence of the subjects of religious field and, correspondingly, defining the specifics of religious situation in Belarus at the present stage. Above all, adding some qualitative features of the types of religiosity to the named characteristics makes it possible to identify their individual expression (the nature of motivation, effect on the lifestyle) and confessional peculiarities (specifics of understanding the transcendent, ways of serving and worshiping it).

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