

THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

SERGEY MELNIK. JOINT RUSSIAN-IRANIAN COMMISSION
FOR THE DIALOGUE "ORTHODOXY-ISLAM": HISTORY AND
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION.

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Abstract. The article reviews the activities of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for the Dialogue "Orthodoxy-Islam". The Commission was established in 1997 with the direct participation of the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (the future His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia). The meetings of the Commission were held with a frequency of about once every two years alternately in Moscow and Tehran. The history of past meetings, the topics discussed are described, and excerpts from joint statements following the results of the meetings are given. The activities of the Commission are analyzed in the context of different types of interreligious dialogue.

1. History of the Commission

On September 4–8, 1995, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who at the time held the post of Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, visited Iran. In Tehran, he met with the head of the Organization for Culture and Islamic Relations, Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Tashiri. In 1997, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Tashiri visited Russia. As a result of the meetings, an agreement was reached to carry out interreligious contacts between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Islamic community of Iran on a regular basis. Representatives of the two religions formed the main principles of interreligious dialogue, which they decided to establish, as follows: "sincere faith in God, love for one's neighbor, mutual respect, clarity of purpose and fruitfulness" [1].

Metropolitan Kirill in this context noted: "As you know, Iran is a religious state, where the principles of faith are the basis for the development of society. On the other hand, Iran is a modern state that faces the same problems that any other country faces. And it was very interesting for us to understand the main ideas that Iranians are inspired by, connecting modern state life with religious principles" [3]. The format for interreligious relations was supposed as meetings at which they would get

acquainted with the ideas of the two religions, mainly as can be seen from the quote from Metropolitan Kirill, in the social sphere. In this regard, it was decided to create a Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for the Dialogue "Orthodoxy-Islam". The first meeting of the Joint Commission "Orthodoxy-Islam" was held in December 1997 in the capital of Iran. Within the framework of the Tehran meeting, "the participants presented reports on the issues of mission and proselytism, war and peace, the relationship between religion, state and society. The commission condemned proselytism – the spread of religion through violence and bribery, which destroys inter-religious peace and violates human freedom" [3]. The Iranian side was headed by the Deputy Chairman of the Organization for Culture and Islamic Relations Hojat-ol-Islam Nomani, the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church was headed by the Deputy Chairman of the DECR Archpriest Viktor Petlyuchenko. Subsequently, meetings of the bilateral commission were held with a frequency of about once every two years, alternately in Moscow and Tehran. The meetings of the Commission were devoted to the following topics: II "Peace and justice in theological, religious-social and international aspects" (May 4–7, 1999, Moscow); III "The Role of Interreligious Dialogue in International Relations" (January 24–25, 2001, Tehran) [4]; IV "The Attitude of the Two Great Religions to the Issues of Globalization from the Standpoint of Religious Morality, Culture and Religious Beliefs" (April 26–27, 2004, Moscow) [5]; V "Eschatology and its influence on modern life" (February 28 – March 4, 2006, Tehran) [6]; VI "Teaching about God and Man in Orthodoxy and Islam" (July 16–17, 2008, Moscow) [7]; VII "The role of religion in the life of man and society" (October 6–9, 2010, Tehran); VIII "Religion and Human Rights" (June 26–27, 2012, Moscow); IX "Importance and strengthening of cooperation and mutual understanding between Islam and Orthodoxy" (August 25–26, 2014, Tehran) [8]; X "Interreligious dialogue and cooperation as tools for achieving a lasting and just peace" (September 26–27, 2016, Moscow) [9],

XI "Religions and the Environment" (May 5-7, 2018, Tehran) [10]. The next twelfth meeting of the Commission on the role of the media was supposed to be held in Russia in May 2020, but was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. So, social problems were discussed mainly within the framework of the meetings, although two meetings touched upon theological problems proper (the doctrine of God, eschatology). Approximately 4 to 8 people participated in the meetings from each side. For example, at the second meeting, held in Moscow in 1999, the delegations were headed by the chairman of the DECR, Metropolitan Kirill, and the chairman of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations of Iran, Ayatollah Tashiri. Bishop Alexander of Baku and the Caspian Sea, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, Professor of the Moscow Theological Academy A.I. Osipov (he repeatedly took part in the following meetings) DECR employee R.A. Silantiev. That is, representatives of the Department for External Church Relations, clergymen whose activities are carried out in Moslem countries and regions, as well as invited experts, who may or may not be in rank, took part in the meetings on the part of the ROC. During the meetings, the participants alternately made presentations on the topic of the meeting. For example, within the framework of the 5th meeting of the Joint Commission, dedicated to the problem of eschatology, reports were read on the following topics: "Introduction to eschatology: The Last Day from the point of view of Islam and Christianity" (Ayatollah Imami Kashani), "Comparative eschatology: Orthodox and Moslem view" (Archbishop Anastassy of Kazan and Tatarstan), "Orthodox Teaching on the Afterlife" (Professor A.I. Osipov), "The Teaching of the Quran on the Last Day" (Dr. Ansaripur), "Eschatology and Secularism" (G.E. Roshchin), "The Last Day in Islamic Philosophy and Theology" (Khojat-ol-Islam Jabrayili), "Eschatology and Politics" (priest Georgy Ryabykh).

2. Position of the Commission on topical social problems (communiqué).

As a result of the meetings, communiqués were adopted expressing a consolidated position on the topics considered at the last meeting. Here are some examples of such statements. The communiqué of the 2nd meeting (theme: “Peace and Justice”) stated: “the doctrinal foundations of both religions recognize the inseparable interconnectedness of peace and justice, morality and law, truth and love. Serving the eternal unchanging truth is our primary duty ... At the same time, such service is not complete if it is not combined with love and forgiveness, with the desire for harmony and reconciliation, with mercy for the fallen ... A fair attitude towards each person and each human community is seen by us closely interconnected with spiritual and moral values and constructive traditions... History shows that the destruction of moral foundations brings death to people, personality crisis, enmity and inner emptiness. That is why we see it as our sacred duty to fully promote moral values in our societies and around the world through education, mass media and the manifestation of the civic position of believers” [11]. In the statement, we see one of the key topics that is constantly touched upon by religious leaders during the dialogue – an indication of the closeness of understanding of moral values by traditional religions and the desire for cooperation in the name of their establishment in society. The communiqué also emphasizes the inextricable link between the categories of justice and morality, that is, it is indicated that a necessary condition for the well-being of society and social prosperity must be adherence to moral principles.

In a joint statement following the results of the third meeting, devoted to the problems of interreligious dialogue in the context of international relations, it was said: “Such a dialogue should develop equal and mutually respectful cooperation of nations in a multipolar world. Religious leaders together can and should guide politicians and societies to the path of peace and

harmony. They can and should also oppose attempts to build a new world order based on the dominance of one culture, civilization or political system. The wealth of this world, created by the Almighty, must be present at all levels of the world political system" [2]. The communiqué cites another topic of paramount importance for the agenda of interreligious relations - peacekeeping. It also emphasizes the idea that it is impossible to build a global world order according to one pattern, trying to level religious and cultural differences. Civilizational differences, the unique identity and originality of representatives of different ethno-confessional groups should be treated with respect.

In the communiqué following the results of the 6th meeting of the Commission in 2008 (the doctrine of God in two religions), it was noted: "The foundations of the teachings of both religions recognize the inseparable connection between the dignity of a person's personality and the fact that they were created in the image of God and is the crown of creation... The participants in the interviews recognize that that, despite the freedom of moral choice granted to man by the Creator, the sin generated by falling away from Him has no justification, and vices destroy not only public morality, but also the spiritual and physical health of a person, and ultimately his life... The parties expressed mutual conviction that the realization of human rights and freedoms must be harmonized with observance of moral norms and moral education. Condemning the desecration of religious values that make up an important part of the lives of many people, we call on states and the world community to prevent the desecration of shrines revered by believers and ensure their religious rights" [13]. The communiqué reflects the idea that believers are called by the Creator Himself to testify to the modern world about the existence of absolute moral standards and sin. In addition, the commission's statement comprehends the idea of freedom of choice, and argues that this gift of God requires a responsible attitude towards it from a person. Freedom should not be perceived as permissiveness, but it is necessary to correlate it

with moral standards, then the person himself and society as a whole will be prosperous. The communiqué also touched upon the topic of protecting religious shrines and the rights of believers as one of the possible tasks for cooperation between Orthodox and Moslems. The sixth meeting marked the tenth anniversary of the work of the Commission, in connection with which it was noted in the communiqué that the meetings contribute to the “development of an equal and mutually respectful dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations. Such an approach preserves and emphasizes the identity of each of the religions and does not lead to syncretism, revision of creeds, blurring of boundaries between spiritual traditions ... such meetings can make a real contribution to the peaceful coexistence of the Christian and Islamic communities in the modern world, set an example of fraternal interaction” [14]. The participants note that the very fact of a friendly meeting between representatives of Orthodoxy and Islam, their readiness to listen and hear each other, their respectful discussion of various problems that concern believers, contributes to the harmonization of relations between religious communities.

The joint communiqué of the 7th meeting of the Commission (2010) noted: “... the participants presented reports on the influence of religion on the spiritual health of society, the role of religion in strengthening the institution of the family and family values, the problems of relations between religious and secular communities, the relationship between religious tradition and doctrine human rights and freedoms, the influence of religious tradition on the morality of the individual...During the dialogue, many times the danger of aggressive secularism, which views religion as a source of violence and conflicts, and also insists on its exclusion from public life, was spoken about...The participants of the meeting noted the atmosphere of cordiality and openness, in which the discussion took place” [15]. Here we again see a number of key topics that are typical for the agenda of interreligious relations at the present stage: the danger of erosion

of traditional family values, the threat of destruction of public morality as a result of the spread of the ideology of secularism, understanding the concept of human rights and freedoms, the place of religion in the life of society.

Representatives of different religious communities in the framework of interreligious dialogue often claim that they are all adherents of the so-called traditional moral values, and this is what brings them together. However, often the concept of traditional values is understood rather intuitively and it is not clear what exactly it includes. In this context, the wording of the concept of "traditional values", which was developed by the participants of the 7th meeting of the Commission and reflected in the final communiqué, is of interest: "It was recognized as necessary to unite the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moslem community of Iran to form the concept of "traditional values", its recognition in international law and consolidation in the activities of international organizations. Traditional values refer to the important role of religion in public and private life; human desire for moral perfection; the preservation of the sanctity of family life as a union of a man and a woman; respect for elders; diligence; helping the poor and protecting the weak" [16]. So, the participants of the meeting singled out as traditional moral values shared by followers of Orthodoxy and Islam, two commandments from the biblical decalogue – the fifth and seventh – prescribing to honor parents (elders) and forbidding adultery. The communiqué also speaks of the most important principles of compassion and mercy for religions, which were expressed in the document mainly in a practical aspect – as helping the needy and supporting people who cannot protect themselves. The statement also reflects the fact that religion is not just a system of views and norms, but involves activity, dynamics, the process of internal transformation, change of the believer (self-improvement). In addition, the participants suggested that work and the conviction of believers that religion should not be driven into a kind of ghetto, but religious

communities should have every right to actively participate in social life, be attributed to traditional moral values.

It should be added that during the visit of the church delegation as part of the seventh meeting of the Commission, Tehran University hosted a presentation of the Farsi translation of the Fundamentals of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church.

These are, in general terms, the main ideas that were expressed by the members of the Joint Commission "Orthodoxy-Islam". More details on the texts of the communiqué and the list of participants in the meetings can be found in the public domain on the Internet at the links indicated in the notes to this article.

3. Analysis of the activities of the Commission for Dialogue "Orthodoxy-Islam" in the context of types of interreligious relations: specifics and limitations

Having considered the history and conceptual foundations of the Commission's work, let's move on to analyzing its activities in a broader context – as one of the possible approaches to interreligious dialogue.

According to the author, speaking of interreligious dialogue, four main types of the latter should be distinguished: "polemical", "cognitive", "peacemaking" and "partnership". The listed types of dialogue pursue different goals and, accordingly, are based on different principles and are expressed in different forms. These types of dialogue can be compared with the following questions that determine the content and nature of interreligious relations: "Which of us is right, whose faith is better?" (polemical dialogue), "who are you, what beliefs do you adhere to?" (cognitive dialogue), "how can we ensure the harmonious coexistence of followers of different religions and help strengthen harmony?" (peacemaking dialogue) and "what can we do together to improve the world, in what areas can we cooperate?" (partner dialogue). In the polemical and cognitive types of dialogue, it is mainly about theological problems,

understanding the relationship between the ideas of religions as worldview systems. Peacemaking and partnership types of dialogue are built around ensuring harmonious coexistence and cooperation of religious communities as social institutions. In each of these types of dialogue, one can distinguish their various subspecies [17].

Polemic inter-religious dialogue, involving a dispute about the truth of religious worldviews, can lead to antagonism and enmity. In many respects, this is precisely the reason why today, at the official level, they tend to refuse this type of interreligious relations. The members of the Joint Commission, as it was noted, at the first meeting condemned proselytism in this sense: "the spread of religion through violence and bribery, which destroys inter-religious peace and tramples on human freedom." That is, in fact, the principle of religious freedom is affirmed here – the rejection of forcible compulsion to believe and the refusal of participants to build an interreligious dialogue within the framework of a polemical model.

Within the framework of the Commission's activities, interreligious dialogue aimed not at persuading an opponent and demonstrating the advantages of one's religion, as is the case in a polemical dialogue, but at getting to know the views of a dialogic partner and comparing them with one's own religious worldview. Focusing at the understanding of other religions allows us to shift the emphasis from the problematic and often painful question of the salvation and truth of different religions, in a sense, to put it out of brackets [18]. That is, in the course of interreligious interaction, cognitive dialogue was of considerable importance [19].

Cognitive interreligious dialogue has different types. The most characteristic of them are those that in the Catholic classification are designated as "dialogue of theological exchange" (the terms "theological dialogue", "dialogue of study" are also used) and "dialogue of religious experience" ("dialogue of spirituality", "spiritual dialogue"). The "theological dialogue" aims at forming an objective idea of another religion, obtaining the necessary information for this, eliminating false stereotypes

and prejudices. The "dialogue of theological exchange" also includes a comparison of the views of religions on various issues (ideas about God, the afterlife, sin, the soul, the meaning of the scriptures, etc.). At the same time, such acquaintance with another religion and comparison with one's faith, in terms of the Catholic approach, is realized at the level of the "head", that is, it has an intellectual character. The "heart" should also be involved in the spiritual dialogue, that is, the participants strive to feel, to enter deeply into the perspective of the experience of another religion, up to the use of its spiritual practices. The purpose of the spiritual interreligious dialogue is considered to be the "mutual enrichment" of the participants, their "personal and spiritual growth" [20].

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Islamic community of Iran are characterized by the desire to preserve the sacred sphere intact, to protect it from attempts to invade from outside, to refuse any compromises in matters of faith and the fusion of religious worldviews. In this regard, the development of relations corresponding to the paradigm of spiritual dialogue was not discussed during the work of the Commission.

Considering the experience of the Russian-Iranian commission, we can see in it the features of a theological dialogue. It is noteworthy that only two sessions – the fifth and sixth – were devoted to theological issues proper: the analysis of the doctrine of God in two religions and eschatological ideas. Such a model of relations, when Orthodox and Moslems told each other about their religion's idea of God, can be characterized as a theological dialogue. At the same time, in the communiqué of the seventh session on the topic of ideas about God, an excerpt from which was given above, the emphasis was not on theological problems (the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and monotheism, the possibility of God incarnation, etc.), but on moral aspects. That is, it was noted that God acts as a source of eternal and unchangeable moral norms, according to which personal and social life should be built, the emphasis was placed on what consequences ideas about God have in the social

dimension. In this regard, it was said about the fallacy from the point of view of religious consciousness of the idea that human freedom should be limited only by the freedom of another person. But it is necessary, including when formulating the concept of human rights and freedoms, to take into account the concept of sin and moral principles, so that freedom is not understood as permissiveness. While at all other meetings, except for the two mentioned, issues related to the harmonious coexistence of believers in the conditions of the modern world and their possible positive contribution to the life of society were discussed. That is, in fact, various aspects of the peacemaking dialogue and possible areas of cooperation of religious communities within the framework of the partnership dialogue were conceptualized.

Generally speaking, for believers of different religions who have decided to actually start building a dialogue from scratch, it is appropriate and logical to offer to get acquainted with the views and values of their religious traditions. For example, the beginning of the modern Catholic-Christian dialogue is considered to be the international conferences held in 1988 in Hong Kong and in 1991 in Berkeley. These interreligious meetings were attended by prominent Christian and Confucian experts who discussed three main topics. First, it is the relationship between God and the world. In Confucianism, this problem is considered in the context of the categories of interaction between "heaven" ("chan") or "tao" and humanity ("ren"). The second topic was related to the study of the ethics of Christianity and Confucianism, including the problems of the correlation of personal and public morality. The third topic was the understanding in the two religions of the relationship between man and wildlife [21]. Another question raised during the interreligious meetings was whether Confucianism could be considered a religion. Following the results of these two conferences, collections of reports were published.

As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted in one of his speeches: "A trusting, balanced system working according to the

correct methodology can lead to remarkable results, namely: interreligious dialogue should give a meaningful spiritual intellectual product" [22]. The meetings of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission on Dialogue "Orthodoxy-Islam" have not always been in the nature of deep theological, scientific discussions aimed at a comprehensive analysis of the positions of religions on various issues, as was the case at the aforementioned Christian-Confucian conferences. In this context, it is significant that in Russia, conference materials and speakers' speeches were not published at all.

At the same time, it seems wrong to believe that the meetings of the Russian-Iranian commission were only an imitation of a genuine theological dialogue. Indeed, the very ideological, conceptual content of the meetings was partly of a secondary, auxiliary nature, was considered only as a means. The activities of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission can be characterized mainly as one of the forms of peacemaking interreligious dialogue – as a diplomatic dialogue. The participants did not have the goal of a thorough study and theological understanding of the relationship between the views of Christianity and Islam (cognitive dialogue). Also, the members of the Joint Commission did not seek to organize specific practical activities of believers, which is typical for a partnership dialogue (one example of such a dialogue is the work of the Interreligious Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance to the Residents of Syria, which operates under the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation).

At the same time, the main task of the Commission was not so much to study the topics discussed with academic thoroughness, as to establish and maintain communication between the two religious communities. And this goal was achieved: thanks to the activities of this platform, it was possible to establish strong diplomatic contacts and benevolent, trusting relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Islamic community of Iran, to discuss many problems of concern to

believers. On this basis, if desired, religious communities have the opportunity to develop interreligious dialogue in any spheres: to implement scientific theological interreligious research, to carry out academic exchange of students, to make joint peacemaking statements on the current agenda of international relations, to organize joint practical activities of believers.

The communiqué of the sixth session stated that thanks to the Joint Commission, it was possible to “show an example of fraternal cooperation for other religions and the whole society.” That is, an important aspect of the commission's activities was to demonstrate to ordinary believers an example of good, respectful interreligious relations, the fact that differences in religious beliefs should not lead to antagonism and hostility. Moreover, the proximity of the position of Islam and Christianity on various moral and social issues allows believers to be “in the same camp”, to cooperate in areas of common interest. The very fact of having the same benevolent meetings has an important symbolic meaning.

Of course, the relations between the two religious communities were not limited only to meetings once every two years, other contacts and mutual visits took place. For example, the author accompanied a delegation from the University of Religions and Confessions of the city of Kuma consisting of more than twenty people (teachers and students of postgraduate and doctoral studies) during a tour of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra in August 2017. From July 14 to 18, 2019, the head of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue of the Organization for Culture and Islamic Relations of Iran, Khojat-ul-Islam M. Tashiri, visited Moscow. During the visit for M. The Tahsiri Department for External Church Relations organized the following events: a meeting with the DECR Chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, an excursion to the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, a visit to the Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, a visit to the residence of the Spiritual Assembly of Moslems of Russia, a visit to the Novospassky Stauropelial Monastery, a meeting in the Public Chamber of the

Russian Federation with the Chairman of the Commission for the Harmonization of Interethnic and Interreligious Relations I.E. Diskin, a meeting with Metropolitan Feofan of Kazan and Tatarstan in the plenipotentiary mission of Tatarstan in Moscow [23].

In general, the experience of the Commission, within which bilateral cooperation between representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and Moslems of Iran was carried out on a regular basis, can be called unique for the history of religious communities of the two countries. More than twenty years of work of the commission has allowed to establish strong and friendly relations between the two religious communities, which can serve as a foundation for further development of interreligious dialogue in various fields.

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OLGA CHIKRIZOVA, YURII LASHKHIA. RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN WORLD POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract. The article is dedicated to identifying the key features of the influence of the religious factor on world politics in the light of the traditional science of international relations ignoring religion and defending the position on the separation of “secular” and “spiritual” in the studies of international relations.