
PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

ELENA DMITRIEVA. RELIGION IN RUSSIA IN THE ERA OF DIGITALIZATION (ON THE EXAMPLE OF ORTHODOXY AND ISLAM).

Keywords: religion; adaptation to digitalization; IT technologies; Internet space; religious practices; pandemic; digital religion; Russia; Orthodoxy; Islam.

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Abstract. The article analyzes the impact of digital technologies on religious institutions in Russia. Digitalization currently covers all spheres of human life and activity and its penetration into the religious sphere is a natural and necessary process. The introduction of religion to the digital environment has both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, religious figures begin to enter in dialogue with believers through information technology, as a result of which the religious audience

increases, new followers are attracted, and on the other hand, online communication can lead to the fact that believers will stop visiting temples, mosques and minimize their participation in the life of the religious community, a separation of believers will occur. To assess the new religious digital reality, it is necessary to analyze the ongoing processes from the theological and moral points of view, as well as to determine the permissible limits of the introduction of digital technologies into the religious sphere of human life. The article also examines the attitude of Orthodoxy and Islam to IT technologies.

Introduction

Currently, information technology has become a reality and changed the traditional way of life of people. The processes of digitalization covered not only the socio-economic sphere of human life, but also such, at first glance, an area that is far from the processes of modernization – a spiritual one and, in particular, religion. Religion is forced to adapt to the changing living conditions of society and come into digitalization so as not to lose its followers.

The process of adapting religion to the digital environment began to gain momentum in the late 1990s – early 2000s, when such a concept as the digital environment appeared, social networks began to develop actively as a new way of information and communication exchange, a large segment of Internet sites with religious themes arose. Dialogue between clergy and believers began to take place not only through traditional real life communication in places of worship (temple, mosque, etc.), but also in the Internet space. Religion thus began to adapt to the new needs and pace of life of a modern person. This process has both positive (access to the richest heritage of religious thought, popularization of the works of theologians, educational activities among young people, etc.) and negative points (the drop in attendance of places of worship, the separation of believers, propaganda of pseudo-religious directions and radical religious movements in online format, etc.). There is also a question about

the permissible limits and appropriateness of the use of digital technologies in religious practices (virtual prayer, pilgrimage, etc.), since the specific character of the digital environment does not always meet the moral and value criteria of various religions.

The virtualization of religious space gives more freedom to believers in the religious life of the community and allows them to do without the participation of clergy in some cases. For a certain part of believers, online communication inspires confidence more than visiting a temple or mosque and personal interaction with representatives of the clergy. The role of site administrators, who have an important function of moderating and controlling site content, steps forward. Thus, they, whether or no, can have a negative impact on the community of believers, establish any rules and boundaries of communication that do not comply with religious moral and ethical standards. This situation with the administration of sites raises some concerns among representatives of the clergy, given the high pace and scale of digitalization of the religious sphere, but, nevertheless, they recognize the importance and need to use digital technologies in the life of the church. Nowadays, the issues of censorship and regulation of Internet sites by representatives of the clergy are becoming more and more relevant. The problem is that clergymen do not always have sufficient technical knowledge to perform the functions of moderators.

The pandemic that began in 2020 changed the idea of the role of IT technologies in religion and posed many questions to representatives of the clergy about expanding the boundaries of the religious digital environment. During pandemic, the population faced quarantine measures, and the problem of holding those rituals in the virtual space that were previously possible only in full-time format became acute. The situation changed dramatically and what was previously considered unacceptable became a reality during this period. Believers lost the opportunity to attend religious institutions and events, the opportunity to join the sacraments of worship disappeared, religious traditions were broken in the minds of people. All these factors were a powerful impetus for the forced

acceptance of a new virtual reality, into which many traditional religious practices were transferred. Thus, during the pandemic period, there was a reinterpreting and expansion of the virtual religious space, believers had the opportunity not only to receive information from the Internet, but also to participate in online rituals and acts of worship. Interestingly, in the period after the pandemic, digital rituals did not leave the virtual field and continue to exist along with worship in churches.

Today, the widespread introduction of digital technologies into the religious life of society causes less criticism and rejection both from clergy and believers than it was at the initial stages of this process and in the period before the pandemic.

IT technologies in Orthodoxy and Islam

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) recognizes the need and importance of using digital technologies in the implementation of religious activities and communication with believers, but at the same time is wary of conducting religious ceremonies online. The Russian Orthodox Church believes that virtual communication with God does not replace the true communication of believers in the church at the sacred service, and some religious actions cannot take place in digital reality. Digitalization should not go beyond technology and affect human behavior, change its essence. The Russian Orthodox Church notes the importance of fidelity to tradition and considers it as the main condition for self-preservation and development of the believer's personality.

The Russian Orthodox Church does not reject the very use of IT technologies in the field of religious education, missionary activities, organization of communication and discussions, although at the initial stage of digitalization the Orthodox Church was wary of this phenomenon (there were even warnings against using the Internet). But with the development of digital technologies and their active implementation into the life of society, there was a change in the church position, since it was

impossible to ignore the emergence of new technologies and their inclusion in various spheres of society.

To adapt to the new digital reality, rules were developed that regulated the church's relationship to IT - technologies that allow Orthodox religious ceremonies not only in churches, but also in the online environment. Some rites can be held online, for example, light a candle, order a prayer service, and talk with a priest. Such services are popular among believers and there are already many sites where this can be done when there is no possibility to visit the temple. Believers positively perceive such a practice of digitalization of rituals, especially the younger generation, for which digital reality is a usual practice already.

In modern conditions, it is impossible to turn a blind eye to achievements in the field of digital technologies, so the process of involving the Russian Orthodox Church in the digital environment is actively gaining momentum. A large number of Orthodox bloggers appeared, including many representatives of the clergy. The number of educational Orthodox sites is growing. Modern Orthodox youth took an active position on the Internet and has their own pages on social networks and blogs (Odnoklassniki, V Kontakte, LJ, etc.). The negative side of Internet communication was the appearance on the network of false priests, bloggers-fraudsters, with whom the Russian Orthodox Church has to fight actively (lists of sites of false priests, resources, blogs that are not related to official Orthodoxy are constantly monitored and published).

The introduction of new digital technologies in the life of Muslims in Russia also leads to the emergence of new forms of communication, products and services. The Council of Muftis of Russia advocates the widespread use of IT technologies and welcomes the use of social networks and other Internet platforms to promote the ideas of Islam, to discuss religious topics, to communicate between ethnic and religious communities, as well as to overturn a wrong impression of Islam. Digital technologies are seen in Islam as neutral in nature, man can use them either for good or for evil, and ignoring the digital environment will lead to

the isolation of the religious community from the world. It must be recognized that among the Muslims of Russia there are some believers who take a negative position towards digital technologies and call for the rejection of their use, explaining this by the desire to preserve traditions, but the paradox is that even they have to use the Internet space to broadcast their point of view.

One of the main sources of modernization of Islamic religious practice is the Internet. With its help today you can make a virtual hajj by going to the site to visit Mecca, listen to a religious sermon by videoconference, even a sheep sacrifice is available (buying and slaughtering an animal online). On the Internet for Muslims there are dating sites that operate strictly according to the norms of Islam, services for donating money for charity, specialized Islamic online stores with halal products, which have recently been appearing and functioning on the network.

A huge number of various applications for smartphones have been developed for Muslims to follow the religious practices of Islam, and a large number of electronic devices have hit the market (watches with intervals for prayers, electronic rosary in the form of a sensor on the hand's finger, an electronic prayer mat). Electronic devices that are not related to gambling, drug use, alcohol and tobacco smoking are considered halal.

It should be noted that the digital religious platform in Russia is not fully filled yet and therefore its Orthodox and Islamic segments have good prospects for growth.

Conclusion

As information technologies develop in Russia, the process of modernizing the religious sphere continues. Religion was able to overcome the difficulties associated with the need to preserve traditional spiritual and moral values and adapted to the new digital reality. Omission of the digital environment in the religious life of society would mean the loss of a huge proportion of its followers and actual isolation from the world.

The Internet, as an important source of religious knowledge, has priority among believing youth. It should also be noted that with the common preference of traditional religious practices, their digital counterparts are gradually increasing the number of their adherents from the total number of believers. This is due to the increased penetration of modern information technologies into the daily life of people, a change in the rhythm of life, an increase in comfort, as well as compliance with the security regime in certain conditions. It should be noted that the processes of digitalization, unfortunately, both in religious and in other spheres of human life lead to the isolation and separation of people, to the transition from personal communication to impersonal contacts in virtual space, which cannot but affect the psychological and mental state of a person.

The weak point in the religious digital environment is still cybersecurity issues. There is still no complete protection against the actions of cybercriminals on the network (hacking sites and dissemination of deliberately false information, replacing site content, illegal use of users' personal data, etc.).

For a long time, religion has remained a fairly conservative institution, but with the development of digital technologies, what previously seemed impossible to implement religious practices has become a reality today.

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KANYBEK KUDAYAROV. KYRGYZ-TURKISH COOPERATION IN THE MILITARY SPHERE

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