RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE DURING RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: FEATURES AND CHALLENGES

Kulahina-Stadnichenko Hanna
Candidate of Philosophical Sciences (PhD)
Senior Research Fellow
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine

Department of religious studies
H.S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, Ukraine

Summary. In this article, the author raises the important question of the possibility of religious dialogue in times of war. Particular emphasis is placed on such a form of religious dialogue as social dialogue, its features and types. According to the author, religious dialogue in time of war does not lose its relevance, but religions are facing new challenges, transformational processes in theological thought, and need to demonstrate not only a confessional but also a civic position.

Key words: religious dialogue, social dialogue, interfaith dialogue, ambivalence of the sacred, civic position of religions.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of religion on society: it is an important institutional resource of world politics, a “center of power”, formulates the “agenda” of regional and international relations, influences the solution of global problems, and the spiritual potential of humanity. The powerful symbolism of religious systems motivates, legitimizes the activities of subjects and entire communities, establishes lines of division between them, and deals with the ultimate meanings of human existence.

At the same time, the functionality of religion is not limited to conflict resolution or participation in political processes. The role of religion as a social communicator, a subject of social dialogue, a civic regulator, and a social actor seems undeniable. Dialogue is becoming a way for religion to exist in societies with a high level of religious freedom, can take the form of interreligious (interfaith) dialogue, and can be an important factor in the communication of religions and the non-denominational world.

We view religious dialogue as a broad, multilevel communication phenomenon with certain structural components, including external (religion-society, religion-society) and internal (specifically religious) communication dimensions. The current Ukrainian realities, the military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, the active participation of politicized Russian Orthodoxy in it, and, as a result, the significant complication and sometimes impossibility of dialogue between the two
Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, prompted us to pay attention to two structural components of external religious communication, which involve the interaction of religions with each other (interreligious, interfaith dialogue) and communication between religion and society (religious and social dialogue) on important issues of the day, reaction to them, in order to reach an understanding of the most important values [1].

Traditionally, two constructive types of interreligious communication are distinguished, namely interreligious and interfaith dialogue. They are recognized as the leading areas of “cultural diplomacy” and are considered to serve as catalysts for conflict resolution. Both not only serve as a way of communicating with other faiths, but also confirm the integrity of a particular religion, pointing to its “asymmetric power” in solving common complex, global problems when differences in social status, language, and nation are not influential or decisive.

The axiological value of social dialogue and the role of religious institutions in it is so significant that it is consistent with the concepts of freedom, democracy, equality, and equity [5]. As a result, there is a need to reveal the content of religious-social dialogue, which has certain features, namely

- “unlike interfaith (interreligious) dialogue, there is always a third party”, which is the state and its official representatives. Such a process of cooperation, communication, and negotiation includes tripartite relations, which in the specialized literature are called “tripartism”.

- the goal of religious-social dialogue is the conclusion of a collective agreement or consultations between the parties to social partnership, including the state and religious organizations;

- the main idea of religious-social dialogue is that fundamental socio-political, social and economic goals are recognized by all involved subjects. At the same time, the participants in the dialogue understand that through cooperation and coordinated actions, these goals are more achievable than through open conflict;

- religious-social dialogue can take place at the level of individual religious institutions, between religious organizations, include a regional, national or European context, and, ideally, should represent the interests of society as a whole.

Religious organizations of Ukraine constantly demonstrate participation in social dialogue in the life space of their existence. At the same time, they also act as actors of civil dialogue, where they make public their own position on the values and current challenges of the Ukrainian state. It is worth noting that the concept of “civil dialogue” was introduced in 2004 by the University of Arizona to study civic response to political rhetoric.

At the same time, the war launched by Russia against Ukraine has placed new emphasis on the communication between religions and society as a whole, exacerbated the long-standing problems in the religious sphere of the Ukrainian state, but at the same time created new opportunities for churches, convincingly proving that it is now impossible to live in the interests of one’s own community or denomination. At the personal and community levels, religion is freely or unwillingly, directly or indirectly, included in intercultural, international, and interstate communication, and is constantly in conversation with the world around us, other spiritual traditions, and religious preferences. This dialog goes beyond relations...
within churches, interfaith interests, and even more so beyond the borders of one country. With all the focus on problems within the denominations, the churches are forced to abandon the policy of isolationism and seek a model of relations with “non-Christians” and “non-Orthodox” that would be consistent with their own doctrine and the challenges of the times [2].

Historically, Ukraine has had a high level of interfaith communication recognized by the international community. However, as a result of the direct aggression of not only the Russian Federation, but also the Orthodox Church of the Russian state against Ukraine, the question arose of the expediency of religious dialogue with those faiths, denominations, and religious organizations that openly or illegally support the aggressor state's aggressive policy, inhumane worldview, war, and barbaric methods [4].

In the context of Russian aggression, the issue of understanding war and peace in religious doctrines has become particularly relevant given that Russia's military actions against Ukraine are actively supported and sanctified by the Russian Orthodox Church. Manipulative accusations by Russian Orthodoxy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of being “non-canonical” have become one of the arguments for waging a “holy war” - Russia's aggressive policy of taking Ukrainian territories in its favor.

Currently, believers of the same Orthodox religion are on both sides of the military conflict. The impossibility of conducting a dialogue between Orthodox churches in the Ukrainian context and the overly complicated communications between them only confirm the thesis of the ambivalence of the sacred, which was proposed in the book of the same name by Scott Appleby, director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and professor of history at the University of Notre Dame [3]. According to the scholar, the ambivalence of the sacred means that the same religion can promote political violence and conflict, and on the other hand, produce non-violent civic activism.

All of the above leads to very specific conclusions. First of all, religion should be perceived as a social integrator, a mechanism for consolidating society, as it proclaims its own system of values and ethical guidelines. As one of the social institutions, religion, through the system of its social functions, is actively involved in social processes in the form of various models of social service. Only with mutual understanding in the religious environment is social stability possible. The functioning and intensification of the social activity of churches as a guarantor of social unity is possible as a result of the establishment of parity partnerships between the state and the church.

In the context of the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, religious dialogue does not cease to be a way for religions to exist. At the same time, religions are facing urgent challenges to which it is vital to find constructive answers. The "war of civilizations" launched by the Russian Federation in Ukraine brings the dialogue of religions to a new level, namely:

- it requires a revision of certain theological theories and the formation of new theological visions;
- significantly actualizes the issues of justice, heroism, good and evil, the impossibility of violence, ethical problems and their reflection in theological thought;
- requires religions to take a civic stance, where it is no longer possible to speak of secularization in the sense of separating religion from politics;
- exacerbates and problematizes the attitude of religions to the national question as a result of the Russian Federation's provoked terrorist methods of warfare, and thus the threat of genocide on a national basis;
- raises the issue of universal values, the humanistic paradigm and personal responsibility, which brings all religious systems closer together;
- meta-anthropologizes religion, absolutizes humanism as a value when a believer “goes beyond” mere existence to approach eternal truths, where the concept of “salvation” loses its narrowly individualistic character.

References: