

# Religions for Peace or Religion of Peace? Some Reflections on the Trends in the Development of Inter-Religious Dialogue\*

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**Abstract.** In the increasingly entangled, interdependent, and digital world, religion is still of utmost importance, and for some societies worldwide, it plays a critical role. The new reality poses novel challenges: the issues we face today call for an investigation into current trends in the dialogue of religions. In this way, followers of various religions willing to cooperate to solve major problems of religious diversity would have reference points with which to compare themselves. Regarding the goals and objectives of social development, the conceptual foundations and the most effective strategies for inter-religious dialogue and communication need to be studied. This objective can best be served by conducting a case study of inter-religious contacts and the most recent trends in this area. This paper is devoted to studying the experience of a global inter-religious dialogue, the so-called religion of peace phenomenon, which emphasizes peace and prosperity. One of the most common practices of the religion of peace is joint prayers of members of different religions, which has entered the agenda of international forums on religion. An important source of information for the study was the author's first-hand experience participating in inter-religious events, including the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace – the largest inter-religious organization in the world – in Lindau, Germany, 2019. Four main types of interreligious dialogue are described – polemical, cognitive, peacemaking, and partnership. It is noted that partnership and peacemaking dominate modern intercultural dialogue: helping the underprivileged, maintaining moral values and justice, integrating migrants, protecting the environment, etc. At the same time, the significance of polemical and cognitive (theological) types fades. Thus, the author concludes that intercultural dialogue is becoming a tool for the increasingly peaceful coexistence of religions as social institutions and therefore increases their positive social influence.

**Keywords:** inter-religious dialogue, interfaith dialogue, religious cooperation, spirituality, peace-keeping, religion, interaction, post-secular

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## Types of Inter-Religious Dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue is a highly multifaceted phenomenon in which four main types can be distinguished: polemical dialogue, cognitive dialogue, peacemaking dialogue, and partnership dialogue (Melnik, 2018).

Polemical inter-religious dialogue encompasses the practice of public and indirect disputes, the creation of apologetic writings, etc. This type of dialogue was particularly prevalent among the Abrahamic religions until the 20th century. An example is a Dialogue with Trypho by Justin Martyr (2nd century AD) and the Disputation of Nachmanides (13th century AD). These works record a polemical dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, where each of the parties tries to demonstrate that their faith is truer while at the same time discrediting the arguments (and hence the religious views) of the other side. This type of communication could give rise to mutual resentment and enmity and is a reason why now, at the “official” level, participants typically refuse to engage in such a polemical model of dialogue and the desire for proselytism associated with it.

With the advent of the discipline of comparative religion in the latter half of the 19th century, cognitive inter-religious dialogue, which involves respectful acquaintance with other religions, gained significant popularity. The fixation on studying ideas that define “foreign” religious beliefs made it possible to shift the focus away from the issue of the truth of different religions, which is characteristic of polemical dialogue (and is often painful) (Clooney, 2013).

Cognitive inter-religious dialogue takes place in many forms. The Catholic classification, for example, typically highlights the “dialogue of theological exchange” and the “dialogue of religious experience” (“dialogue of spirituality”).<sup>1</sup> The dialogue of theological exchange aims to create an objective understanding of another religion, collect the information necessary for this, and eliminate the prejudices that exist about this religion in the mass consciousness (and sometimes in the minds of researchers themselves). This sub-type of dialogue also includes a comparison of religious views on various topics (ideas about God, the afterlife, sin, the soul, the meaning of sacred scriptures, etc.). Learning about another religion in this manner and comparing it with one’s own faith, as the Catholic classification indicates, is done with the “head,” that is, it is an entirely intellectual pursuit (Melnik, 2018: 94–97). Another sub-type of cognitive inter-religious dialogue – the dialogue of spirituality – involves the desire to experience what it is like to be a follower of another religion, sometimes even using the spiritual techniques of another tradition (Bethune, 2013: 34–50). The goal of spiritual

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1 Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 1991. Document of the Pontifical Council For Inter-Religious Dialogue. URL: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html) (accessed: 15.02.2021).

inter-religious dialogue is the "mutual enrichment" of participants and their "personal and spiritual growth" (Swidler, 2015: 3–17).

The World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Kyoto in 1970 can be seen as marking the beginning of the development of peacemaking inter-religious dialogue as a social movement on a global scale. The conference resulted in establishing of an international organization of the same name. In the 1990s, it changed its name to Religions for Peace and is now the largest inter-faith organization in the world, with its headquarters at the United Nations in New York.<sup>2</sup> The Kyoto conference brought together hundreds of participants from all over the world, including a delegation of religious leaders from the Soviet Union. Interestingly, as Josep Guinovart-Pedescoll points out, the most commonly used words by speakers at the conference were "fear," "war" and "nuclear power" (Guinovart-Pedescoll, 2021: 226). The organizers intended to involve political and religious leaders in peace-building at the local, regional and global levels. The goal of inter-religious interaction within the framework of peacemaking dialogue is to harmonize inter-religious relations and strengthen peace and stability.

Moreover, interaction development as part of the peacemaking dialogue drew increasing attention to the cooperation of followers of different religions in the social sphere. This gave rise to a new type of inter-religious dialogue – partnership inter-religious dialogue. As Paul Knitter notes, such a "dialogue does not begin by looking within the religions, rather by looking beyond them to the interplanetary suffering that burns all around" (Knitter, 1995: 80). As part of a partnership dialogue, believers can cooperate in such areas as helping people who have fallen upon hard times (poverty, sickness, those seeking asylum, etc.). They focus on issues of the integration of migrants, the promotion of traditional values in society, the joint struggle for social justice, the environment, etc. (Orton, 2016; Knitter, 2013).

The peacemaking dialogue, especially at the level of communication between religious leaders, does not set such tasks as discussing the dogmatic ideas of their respective religions in order to "understand" one another, a meeting of the personalities of the I–You paradigm, leading to a change in the inner world of the participants. Here is an excerpt from the text of the joint Declaration following the meeting of His Holiness, Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow and All Russia and Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' Board, which took place in the capital of Azerbaijan in 2005:

An effective response to the challenges of our time is the inter-religious dialogue of representatives of various faiths. It allows us to debunk the myths about our religions, to jointly oppose militant secularism, pseudo-spirituality, human vices, and the separation of society from its spiritual and cultural roots [...] We are grateful to the governments of our countries for supporting inter-religious initiatives and express the hope that next year we will be able to achieve serious shifts in the dialogue between

<sup>2</sup> Religions for peace USA. Official site. URL: <https://rfpusa.org/> (accessed: 15.02.2021).

traditional religions, the purpose of which is to achieve peace between people, nations and civilizations.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up, the polemical dialogue involves disputes over whose faith is true and "better"; the cognitive type is about getting to know other religions or even studying them conscientiously. The peacemaking and partnership dialogues focus not on comparing different religions as different worldviews and value systems but rather on establishing relations between religions as social institutions, that is, on the issue of how to make relations between believers, bearers of these different worldviews, more harmonious and constructive (Melnik, 2020).

### **Modern Inter-Religious Dialogue: Cooperation in the Social Sphere and in International Relations**

It is generally accepted that the starting point of the modern stage of inter-religious dialogue was the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893 (Moyaert, 2013: 195). This stage is marked by the desire of followers of different religions to build positive, constructive, and harmonious relationships. Another feature is the intensification of inter-religious contacts and making them more frequent. For example, the main area in the development of inter-religious relations today is the dialogue in its peacemaking and partnership aspects. Discussions of comparative theological issues also occur, although the cognitive dialogue certainly takes a backseat. At the same time, numerous inter-religious conferences and projects involving religious leaders and high-level official representatives of religious communities are focused primarily on social issues (Melnik, 2021).

One of the most prominent platforms for inter-religious dialogue in Eurasia is the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, hosted by the capital of Kazakhstan. The event has been held regularly since 2003, with the support of the country's former president Nursultan Nazarbayev, about once every three years. The topics discussed at the Congress are reflected in their respective banners: "Religion, Society and International Security" (2006); "The Role of Religious Leaders in Building a World Based on Tolerance, Mutual Respect, and Cooperation" (2009); "Peace and Harmony as the Choice of Mankind" (the discussions "Religion and Women: Spiritual Values and Modern Challenges"; "The Role of Religious Leaders in Achieving Sustainable Development"; "Religion and Youth, Religion and Multiculturalism") (2012); "Dialogue of Religious Leaders and Politicians in the Name of Peace and Development" (2015); and "Religious Leaders for a Safe World" (2018).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Joint Declaration of the Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' Board Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh and His Holiness, Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow and All Russia. Official website of the Russian Orthodox Church. 2005. 15 September. URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/40248.html>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see the official website of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions: URL: <http://www.religions-congress.org/> (accessed: 15.02.2021).

The state is interested in holding such inter-religious forums for at least two reasons. First, they allow them to regulate the “religious factor” in politics and use it in accordance with its goals and interests. As is known, religious associations perform various social functions, and religious leaders, thanks to the authority they enjoy, can influence the moods and behavior of millions of believers. A friendly and respectful meeting between religious leaders and their commitment to peacekeeping, solidarity on various social issues, and loyalty to the state serve as an example of sorts for believers. Inter-religious summits can help create a favorable social climate, promote good neighborliness, strengthen civil accord, contribute to conflict resolution, and prevent separatism and extremism.

Second, the main task of international inter-religious summits is to promote a positive image of the country. For example, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions mentioned earlier has become a kind of brand of Kazakhstan. Meetings of religious leaders are seen as a progressive activity, and in this context, Kazakhstan presented an image of itself as an adherent of high humanistic ideals. It demonstrated that it is concerned about global challenges (social, political, economic, environmental) and seeks to contribute to the search for joint answers to them and the well-being of humanity.

To give another example, the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace was held in the German town of Lindau. Sessions at the Assembly included: "Advancing Positive Peace,"; "Preventing and Transforming Conflicts,"; "Promoting Just and Harmonious Societies,"; "Working for Sustainable and Integral Human Development;" and "Protecting the Earth" (environmental issues). The last of these sessions was held in partnership with the United Nations on promoting religious communities in the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (the 17 goals include ending poverty, achieving gender equality, ensuring inclusive and equitable education, environmental protection, etc.).<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the struggle for a just world order based on a newly awakened “social conscience,” along with public service, is considered a proper religious activity and the duty of a believer.<sup>6</sup> A somewhat similar opinion is held by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who expressed this view at the opening of the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace. According to him, all parts of the world are inextricably linked

<sup>5</sup> Singh K., Clark J.S. (Eds.). 2016. *Voices from Religions on Sustainable Development*. Berlin: German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation. URL: [http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge\\_Center/Voices\\_from\\_Religions\\_on\\_Sustainable\\_Development\\_April2017\\_3rd\\_edition.pdf](http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/Voices_from_Religions_on_Sustainable_Development_April2017_3rd_edition.pdf). (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>6</sup> The most well-known example of this kind in Christianity is the “liberation theology” that emerged in Latin America in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Followers of “liberation theology” are convinced that the socially helpful activity of Christians (to fight poverty, social injustice, and oppression in its various forms) and their participation in political life to achieve these goals are charitable deeds, the fulfillment of evangelical ideals. Liberation theology is known to have led to the emergence of a social movement of adherents of this ideological concept. See: Deacon Vyshchanov I. 2003. Liberation Theology in the Roman Catholic Church. *Church and Time*. No. 2. P. 5–79.

and influence each other, not only at the social but also at the ontological level: "there could not be any sacrifice, any prayer, or any glorification of God if it did not include the whole cosmos." He then compared the whole cosmos to a symphony orchestra, in which "no human being, tree or animal" can be replaced, as they are all essential to the "magnificent harmony" of the music. He noted that the "mystics of all traditions understood these plain truths" and pointed to the parallels of this worldview in Western and Eastern Christianity, citing Seraphim of Sarov, "feeding the bear in the forest of the north," and Francis of Assisi, "addressing the elements of the universe as his 'brothers' and 'sisters.'" This worldview, he noted, can also be found in Rumi's poetry. According to Patriarch Bartholomew, "These connections are not merely emotional; they are profoundly spiritual, offering us a sense of continuity and community with all of God's creation while providing an expression of identity and compassion with the whole world. Therefore, love for God, love for man, and care for peace and creation cannot be disconnected. While there may be a hierarchy of priority, no sharp distinction exists between them. The truth is that we are all one family – human beings and the entire living world – and all of us look to God the Creator."<sup>7</sup>

### **"Religion for Peace"**

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) called this trend in the development of inter-religious dialogue, focusing on social rather than theological issues regnocentrism (from the Latin *regnum* – kingdom). According to this approach, writes Ratzinger, "There is thus no longer any reason to move them [religions – tr.] closer to one another in their essentials, in their moral and religious teachings," although they must be rebuilt into tools for the construction of the future "kingdom of universal welfare."<sup>8</sup>

The declared tasks of inter-religious dialogue – peace, harmony, security, stability, social justice, prosperity, and care for the environment – are certainly not contradictory to religious values and are in demand. At the same time, it is crucial to consider the worldview context in which inter-religious cooperation takes place, the discourse it is part of, and the principles it guides it to achieve these goals. It would appear that the so-called "liberal standard" considerably influences modern inter-religious relations at the international level. Furthermore, this, in turn, can cause a noticeable dissonance with conservative religious consciousness and values. For clarification, let us look at some examples.

One of the requirements of the "liberal standard" ideology is the recognition of the equality and dignity of all people, tolerance, respect for diversity, and rejection of

<sup>7</sup> Keynote Address by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace. 2019. 22 August. URL: <https://hyetert.org/2019/08/22/keynote-address-by-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-at-the-10th-world-assembly-of-religions-for-peace/>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger J. (Pope Benedict XVI). 2007. *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. Moscow: Biblical Theological Institute of St. Andrew the Apostle, 120 p. (In Russian).



exclusivity claims. Sometimes, the principle of equality is extrapolated to the sphere of inter-religious relations. For example, former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev noted at the II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana in 2006: "When religious leaders talk quite seriously about the advantages of one religion over another, it becomes clear that conflict has been laid down from the very beginning."<sup>9</sup> On 3 June 2020, Religions for Peace America stated the death of African American George Floyd while being detained by police.<sup>10</sup> The statement opens with the words: "We write together and in one voice, with urgency, as people of faith and as religious and spiritual leaders that represent the diverse faith traditions of the United States of America." A list of different religions follows this in alphabetical order. Listing religions alphabetically does not in any way reflect the quantitative indicators or historical and cultural role of the religious communities we have talked about in the life of the United States; rather, its purpose is to demonstrate the principle of "equality" in order to "not offend anyone." However, religions, in one way or another, insist on their uniqueness and exclusivity, and believers are usually convinced that "their" religion has an advantage over others. In this context, it is important to note that religious teachings, as a rule, do not come "from nowhere" – their founders often explicitly or implicitly polemicized with existing traditions and positioned themselves as more "perfect" in relation to them. Judaism places itself in sharp contrast with the beliefs of the pagans about the chosen people. Christianity offers its interpretation of the events and promises in the books of the Tanakh, which came to be referred to as the Old Testament, believing itself destined to bring it to pass. Islam claims to be the final and most complete revelation, presenting the correct interpretation of the events described in the Bible, which, according to its followers, is distorted by Jews and Christians (Ladouceur, 2017; Swamy, 2019; Kim, 2014). As the Catholic theologian Hans Waldenfels notes, "none of the world religions is able to recognize the 'equivalence' of all religions without damaging and destroying itself in its claims."<sup>11</sup>

What can serve as a basis for dialogue between followers of different faiths? The Catholic theologian Hans Küng (1928–2021) once put forward an approach to developing the conceptual foundations of a peacemaking dialogue as part of his "global ethics" project. His goal was to identify the totality of moral values common to different religions (Shokin, 2004; Avdeyeva, 2013; Swidler, Küng, 2021).

In the context of the present study, it would be useful to take a closer look at the document adopted at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, enti-

<sup>9</sup> Keynote Speech by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev at the II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, 12 September 2006. Metropolitan District in the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2006. 13 September. URL: <https://mitropolia.kz/news/president/213-vystuplenie-prezidenta-2006.html>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>10</sup> This Perilous Moment: A Statement from Religious Leaders and Communities on the Crisis of Racial Injustice and Inequity and the Current Protests. Religions for Peace. 2020. 3 June. URL: <https://www.rfp.org/this-perilous-moment-a-statement-from-religious-leaders-and-communities-on-the-crisis-of-racial-injustice-and-inequity-and-the-current-protests/>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>11</sup> Waldenfels H. 1992. *Encyclopedia of Religions: Phenomena, History, Ideas*. Freiburg: Herder. 558 p.

tled "Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration" as an example of the implementation of Küng's ideas. The Declaration served as the final document of the 1993 conference, and Küng was its main author. It systematically sets forth the essence, main ideas, and ideals of Küng's approach. Significantly, the Declaration was adopted as the final statement of the Parliament of the World's Religions, which was attended by approximately 8000 followers of different faiths from all over the globe. In this case, we are not just talking about ideas unique to Hans Küng; instead, we are talking about his holistic concept in a form that followers of different religions agreed with. The Declaration contains a call to action and reads like a manifesto of sorts, reflecting rather closely Küng's intention to give "global ethics" a practical application and serve a useful purpose.

Global ethics includes four moral requirements that correlate with the commandments of the Bible regulating relations between people. Küng offers the following interpretation of the commandments: "You shall not kill! Alternatively, in positive terms: Have respect for life!" "You shall not steal! Alternatively, in positive terms: Deal honestly and fairly!" "You shall not lie! Or in positive terms: Speak and act truthfully!" and "You shall not commit sexual immorality! Or in positive terms: Respect and love one another!"<sup>12</sup>

In order to update these commandments for the modern world, the Declaration formulates four more moral principles of global ethics: "Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life," "Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order," "Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness," and "Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the correlation between the Ten Commandments of the Bible, as they are understood in the Jewish and Christian traditions, and their interpretation within the framework of global ethics is highly arbitrary. For example, the Bible does not prohibit outright the killing of a person in the spirit of "respect for life," unlike the principles outlined in the Declaration (Olyan, 2019; Appleby, 2015). The concept of "respect for life," as it is presented in the Declaration, is consonant with the ideas of Albert Schweitzer (Schweitzer, 1992).

In the Bible, God gives his blessing to particular wars, including the military campaigns carried out during the conquest of the land of Israel under the leadership of Joshua, which destroyed entire cities, killing all people and animals living there (Book of Joshua 5:16–6:20; 8:25–26; 10:34–35). Taking a person's life was permitted not only to "strangers" but also to "our people" if they violated the commandments (see, for example Numbers 15:32–36; 25:6–8). As for other religions, the main plot of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita comes to mind. Krishna, who is believed to be the incarnation of God, commands the warrior Arjuna, tormented as he is by doubts, to enter battle, despite

<sup>12</sup> Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration. Anthropology – web-department of Philosophical Anthropology. (In Russian). URL: <http://anthropology.ru/ru/text/dokumenty/deklaraciya-mirovogo-etosa> (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



the fact that his friends and family are fighting for the other side. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was not just a religious teacher; he also carried out numerous military campaigns during his lifetime (Rodionov, 2003: 39). Without going into detail, we can say that depriving another person of life is not an absolute prohibition in many religions. Also, the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery," for example, does not mention "a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women" because it is interpreted in global ethics. That is, the interpretation of the commandments proposed in the Declaration primarily reflects the influence of the "liberal standard" ideology, expressing the desire for global ethics to ensure peace and prosperity.

Common prayers have been used to promote principles of equality and respect for diversity. For example, before meetings commenced, a 15-minute "multi-religious prayer and meditation" was held each morning of the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace. The event opened with a slide show on a big screen depicting the problems of the modern world (starving children in Africa, men carrying machine guns in war, drought, etc.). The visuals were accompanied by classical music performed by several musicians on stage. Then a religious leader chosen to lead the proceedings of that day offered a prayer for peace and prosperity.

On the final day of the Assembly, before the plenary session on environmental issues, the multi-religious prayer was led by Grand-Father Dominique Rankin, an indigenous Canadian and representative of the "indigenous beliefs" of Canada. Rankin was dressed in ethnic garb, a headdress with long feathers on his head. After some introductory words about the importance of caring for "Mother Earth," he broke into song and started to beat the tambourine. He periodically asked those in the hall to turn in all four directions and pray, which everyone did. At the same time, Rankin, to the accompaniment of a tambourine, performed his ritual and sang prayers. All those present participated in the ceremony in the name of peace, environmental protection, and respect for diversity. A century ago, this kind of "joint prayer" would have been unacceptable to many believers, at least to Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Now, however, similar rituals are often included in the programs of inter-religious events.

Religions for peace pays excellent attention to gender equality. A special session was held at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace entitled "Women as Peacemakers," which was moderated by Reverend Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber of the Evangelical Church in Germany. On one of the days of the Assembly, the "honorary right" to lead the joint multi-religious prayer was afforded to a representative of Reform Judaism – a female rabbi from the United Kingdom, who led the proceedings wearing a kippah and a prayer veil. It should be noted here that the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace program allotted time each morning before the joint multi-religious prayer for "optional religious services," where followers of each religion were allocated a separate space to pray with fellow believers. Christians of different denominations were invited to pray at the Cathedral of Our Lady in Lindau in the morning. One of these prayers was led by a Catholic priest and a female Protestant pastor, who stood next to each other at the end of the service and simultaneously blessed (with the sign

of the cross) all those present. The sermon delivered by a Catholic priest on the final day of the Assembly following the joint multi-religious prayer was devoted to the Lord's Prayer, specifically an interpretation of the fourth line: "Give us this day our daily bread." In Christianity, this verse is traditionally believed to be a reference both to the request to be given everything needed for life and to the sacrament of the Eucharist and communion with Christ, who called Himself "the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51). However, the Catholic priest did not touch upon the theme of Jesus Christ as the God-man and Saviour of the world. He said that this prayer line contains a petition for peace and prosperity and expressed the hope that everyone at the Assembly, regardless of religion, will be able to take this "bread from God" to their respective countries after returning from Lindau.

One of the six priority areas of activity of Religions for Peace is the affirmation of the principle of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.<sup>14</sup> It is telling that, in her inaugural speech at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, the new Secretary General of Religions for Peace, Prof. Azza Karam, emphasized the principle of religious freedom, respect for the right of everyone to believe as they see fit, as well as the values of mercy, compassion and love as the basis for cooperation. The credo of "live and let live" was thus proclaimed as a kind of religious neutrality of participants in inter-religious relations.<sup>15</sup>

We can thus state that a specific value and ideological context that contains a framework for modern forms of inter-religious interaction at the international level has formed. The "liberal standard" greatly influences this context. Religions for peace is not the only organization here. Similar trends can be seen in the activities of the Parliament of the World's Religions and many other inter-religious projects. This standard that is taking shape before our eyes can be described as a "religion of peace." In this case, religions do not just advocate peace, and peace (understood not only as the absence of war but in the broader sense of well-being and prosperity) becomes a value of paramount importance. Thus, all religions – the most ancient and the fledgling, the global and the national, the largest and the smallest – are invited to cooperate within the framework of inter-religious dialogue. Moreover, none of these religions is singled out in any way; they are all respected equally, and emphasis is placed on the "common cause," regardless of the degree of influence that any given religion may have and its contribution. At the same time, several authors stress that the "religion of peace" should not be identified with syncretism, the idea of the equivalence of different religions (Chaturvedi, 2016; Barua, 2015). The theological features of a particular religious tradition are thus removed from brackets in this case since the emphasis is

<sup>14</sup> Religions for Peace. Official site. URL: [www.rfp.org](http://www.rfp.org). (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>15</sup> More indirect evidence that the principle of religious freedom dominates the Association's thought is the food provided at the Assembly. Both meat and beer were available at communal dining tables. That is, the organizers opted for religious freedom over the feelings of Muslims and Hindus, for example, thus emphasizing the fact that dietary preferences are a private matter; each person is free to do as he or she pleases and not impose their views onto others.

on joint activities in the social sphere. Joint statements are often adopted at the end of inter-religious forums. In this respect, we cannot single out any of these religions for making a unique contribution – they all stand for peace, environmental protection, and mutual respect while at the same time appealing to sacred texts and the values of their tradition.

Thus, in the “religion of peace,” a person's beliefs, and the values they adhere to, do not determine their behavior in inter-religious interaction. The most important thing is respect for the principles of equality, freedom, tolerance, respect for differences and minorities, and a readiness to cooperate with brothers and sisters from other religions in the name of common well-being.

Specific practices start to appear within this new “religion of peace.” One example here is common prayers, yet here, too, new moral imperatives arise. For instance, during a meeting held as part of the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, participants were asked to read together a “pledge of commitment to multi-religious cooperation.” At the same time, it was stated that they respect others and are guided, in this instance, by their own religious beliefs.

The idea of a “religion of peace” has found an embodiment in the project to build a place of worship called the House of One, the first stone of which was laid on 27 May 2021 in the historic center of Berlin on Petriplatz Square. The building will house a functioning Protestant temple, mosque, and synagogue under a single roof.<sup>16</sup> The Christian (Lutheran), Islamic and Jewish communities of Berlin are behind the idea of building the place of worship. The construction of the building is being financed by donations, although it has the backing of the Federal Ministry of the Interior of Germany and other structures.<sup>17</sup>

The formation of what has been labeled the “religion of peace” is but one, albeit very noticeable, a trend in the development of inter-religious dialogue at the international level. Of course, the desire of followers of different religions to cooperate in the name of peace and tackle social and environmental issues should be welcomed and encouraged in every possible way. The problem is that inter-religious interaction in the framework of the “religion of peace” in the name of common well-being takes on forms and is based on unacceptable attitudes to many believers. One practice that many believers are incredibly wary of, for example, is joint prayers (Çatalbaş, Çetinkaya, 2015).

Joint prayer for the environment can be used in addition to specific work in this area (activities to raise environmental awareness and promote environmental ethics, the participation of religious people in specific environmental projects, etc.) (Palm-

<sup>16</sup> Yuriev E.V. First Stone of House of One Ecumenical Church Laid in Berlin. Union of Orthodox Journalists. 2021. 27 May. (In Russian). URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/80224-v-berline-zalozhili-ekumenicheskuyu-cerkovny-dom-jedinogo>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

<sup>17</sup> House of One. Official site. URL: <https://house-of-one.org/en/sponsors>. (accessed: 15.02.2021).

er, McShane, Sandler, 2014; Schalkwyk, 2013; Hartman, 2018). However, within the framework of the "religion of peace," multi-religious prayers are framed as an integral part of the interaction between believers in this area, and they have become a fixture on the agenda of a number of major inter-religious summits.

Believers may also reject the idea because they disagree with the "religion of peace" tendency to ignore issues of doctrine and promote the notion of religious equality. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) writes: "The notion that all religions are ultimately equivalent appears as a commandment of tolerance and respect for others."<sup>18</sup> At the same time, a Christian "has to resist this ideology of equality"<sup>19</sup> And should not give up the "impudence" to claim that the highest truth has been revealed to him in Christ.

A legitimate question thus arises in connection with this: Is there an alternative to the "religion of peace" as the emerging standard of international inter-religious relations? And further, can Russia offer anything in this respect, given its experience of ethno-confessional relations?

In 1982, Moscow hosted the World Conference "Religious Figures for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe." This major inter-faith summit resulted in the adoption of a joint statement that confirmed, among other things, "We do not seek to merge our worldviews. Our perspectives on reality remain distinct from one another. We uncompromisingly adhere to our various religious beliefs. Despite these differences, we can jointly affirm much that is dear to us all."<sup>20</sup> This principle underlies the practice of inter-religious dialogue in Russia today. The aim is not to invade the sacred sphere while at the same time respecting each other's unique religious identity and religious and cultural traditions, valuing good neighborliness and cooperation in areas of common interest.

## Conclusion

To sum up, our analysis of the prevailing trends in the development of modern inter-religious dialogue revealed that a new form of this dialogue gradually took shape under the influence of the "liberal standard" and with the assistance of leading philosophers and scientists of the 20th–21st centuries. This new dialogue can be called the "world religion." It is gaining strength. In addition to joining the partnership and peacemaking dialogues, it combines liturgical practices in a format that does not suit its more conservative participants. In addition, Russia's experience demonstrates the possibility of taking a different approach to the problem of inter-religious cooperation,

<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger J. (Pope Benedict XVI). 2007. *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. Moscow: Biblical Theological Institute of St. Andrew the Apostle. 163 p. (In Russian).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> World Conference "Religious Figures for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe, Moscow, May 10–14, 1982. *Final Documents*. Moscow: Novosti, 1982..

which does not compel believers to worship together. I believe that promoting such an approach to inter-religious dialogue, the rejection of the trend to liberalize worship while maintaining the positive content of the partnership and peacemaking dialogues would be welcomed and supported by many followers of different religions around the world.

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### Conflicts of interest.

The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interest.

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