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Some Aspects of the Idea of God in the World Religions: an Attempt to Make a Comparative Analysis

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This article discusses some aspects of the idea of God in the world religions – Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. It is shown that in Christianity God is presented as it follows from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and is revealed to humans through the system of His attributes by which He exposes Himself in the world. According to the religious doctrine of Islam, Allah is the one and indivisible, and it is possible to approach His understanding, among other things, through the study of the whole range of His attributes. The idea of God is presented in Buddhism – the third world religion – in a very special way. The given paper shows a comparative analysis of the properties of God (from the orthodox positions) and the attributes of Allah (from the position of classical Islam), and identifies a number of parallels that we offer students-theologians to study.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, properties of God, attributes of Allah.

Two world religions – Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions (*monotheism* is the recognition of one God), but the essence of monotheism is revealed in different ways. From the Orthodox Christian position, according to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: 1. God is triune, and this trinity is that God is a perichoresis of three persons or hypostases: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 2. Each Person of the Trinity is God, but He is not the essence of three Gods, but a single divine essence, being. 3. All the Persons of the Trinity are distinguished by personal properties.

In respect of God Christianity takes the view that He is not comprehensible for the humans to a full degree. However, it is possible

to form a concept of God based on the study of His properties by which He exposes Himself in the world. Properties of God are those properties that belong to God Himself, and distinguish Him from all other creatures. These properties belong to all integrated Persons of the Holy Trinity, so they are called common properties, in contrast to personal properties belonging individually to each person of God, and distinguishing them.

Orthodox Christianity theologizes God as the all-perfect being, free from defects and limitations. His general properties are the following: I. Boundless fullness of being and II. Spirituality. Properties of God applying to the perfection of His existence in general, are called the ontological properties, and properties of God

as the all-perfect Spirit are spiritual. Ontological properties of God are the following: 1. Uniqueness 2. Immutability 3. Eternity 4. Immensity and ubiquity.

On the basis of the New Testament, God is presented as the purest and all-perfect Spirit: "God is a spirit" (John 4:24). Orthodox Christianity specifies the following spiritual attributes of God: 1. Reason of God 2. Will of God 3. Senses or feelings of God.

The properties of the reason of God: 1) the omniscience of God, and 2) the wisdom of God. Properties of the will of God: 1) highly free 2) all-holy 3) omnipotent 4) all-sainly. Properties of the senses of God: 1) all-beatification of God, and 2) the infinite goodness or love for all living beings.

In addition to the general properties belonging to all persons of the Holy Trinity, each of Them has its own features that distinguish Them from each other. These features are called personal qualities of God. From the Orthodox position, the distinctive properties of the Holy Trinity are the following: Father is not born from anyone and does not descend from any other origin – He is absolutely without origin, but He is the origin Himself of the faith for the personal existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son – through the birth of His own Being, the Spirit – through the procession; the Son is always born from the Father and the Holy Spirit is always proceeded from the Father (Bible, 2006; Fakhrudin, 2011).

Now we will consider the interpretation of monotheism in classical Islam. According to Tawhid (the science of monotheism), the man himself cannot fully understand the Almighty Allah. It is believed that the awareness of the fact that humans cannot understand God fully and completely, is the beginning of knowing Him. As it follows from the doctrine of Islam, Allah is the Only One, "Allah – there is no God but He..." (Quran, 2/255), and approaching to

His understanding is possible through the study, including the whole range of His attributes that are owned by Him .

Attributes of Allah are classified into five categories: I. Personal attribute of existence (al-Wujud) II. Attributes that describe God and are necessarily inherited by Him are called mandatory (As-Subuti) III. Attributes denying the impossible that are extrinsic to the nature of Allah, are called denying unworthy (As-Selbi) IV. Attributes that describe the actions of Allah that are not necessary for Allah, that is, He can either have them or do not have, are called possible or attributes of God's deeds (Al-Dzhaizi) V. Attributes that are present in the Quran or Hadiths literally perception of which (based on the external form of the words), can provoke the delusion, for example, likening of Allah to the created, attribution of the body to Him, etc. There are informative attributes (Al-Khabar) (Gospel story, 2007).

In our work, we performed a comparative analysis of the properties of God in Orthodox Christianity (Bible, 2006; Fakhrudin, 2011), and attributes of Allah in classical Islam (Gospel story, 2007; Kylvavuz, 2010; Maksimov, 2005), and have found a number of similarities. There are the results of our study below.

1. In Christianity, the "uniqueness" property of God means that God does not descend from anything else, does not depend by His own existence on any other being, He has the reason of His existence and the conditions of His existence only in Himself, and He is the first and only single reason for all existing things. God Himself defines His existence as the unique existence, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14).

In Islam, the closest attribute to the Christian property of "uniqueness" is the attribute of "existence" (attribute of being), the meaning of which is that Allah exists and His existence is different from the others. The attribute of

existence – the existence of Allah – is eternal attribute without beginning describing His essence. The attribute of being is the fundamental and essence of all of the attributes of Allah. Being is not the descriptive attribute, but own attribute of Allah essence. “(All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) --the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal...” (Qur’an, 20/111).

2. “Immutability” of God is His property by which He is always constant in his powers, perfections and definitions. This property is inseparably combined in God with His uniqueness, i.e. independence from any other factors. God says about Himself: “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). It is clearly seen that God is always the same, or unchanged, whereas, on the contrary, the sky and the earth, the creation of His hands, are changeable, transient, temporary, finite.

In Islam, the closest attribute to Christian property of immutability can be called “life essence” (“life”), which means that Allah is eternally alive, that He has no beginning and no end, He does not inherent youth or old age. Time does not change Him, and time does not change for Him. All the attributes of Allah, as He Himself, have no beginning and no end.

3. Christianity calls the “omniscience” as the property of reason of God, implying that God knows all things in the best, most perfect way. He knows everything external: the actual and the possible, necessary and accidental, past, present and future. God knows the order of the physical world and the world of morality. God knows the inner being and life of every person. God knows the reasons unknown to human, and therefore all the unexpected phenomena for Him seems sudden, random just for Him, but in reality there are not accidental, but appears on the predestination of God. God foresees free human actions and predicts them as known for Him, because there is no time for God, and for Him the

future is the same as the present. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him” (Hebrew 4:13).

Similar to Christian property of “omniscience” in Islam is an attribute of Allah “omniscience”, meaning that Allah is the One who knows absolutely everything. He knows the past and the future, the hidden and explicit. He knows everything that is necessary, possible, and even absurd. Knowledge of God does not change and is not updated. It is constant and everlasting. “With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge” (Qur’an, 6/59).

4. Christianity says about the “will” of God that it is: 1) highly free (relating to its essence), 2) all-holy (relating to its moral direction), 3) omnipotent (relating to the force or power), 4) all-sainly (relating to the freely reasonable creatures – requiring from them holiness, and therefore punishing evil and rewarding the good.) “The truth of the will” of God is manifested in two activities: the truth, providing the law of holiness (legal truth), and the truth, rendering moral beings – everyone gets his just deserts (rewarding truth or justice).

Islamic doctrine also speaks about the “will” of God, specifying two types of His will: 1) creating will and 2) legislature will. The creating will bears the relation to the good and evil, obedience and disobedience. Legislature will applies only to the good and obedience.

5. Christianity defines the “omnipotence” of God’s will as a property by which God carries out everything acceptable for Him, without any difficulties and obstacles, so that any extraneous force cannot hold or constrain His actions. In the Old Testament we can find the following words: “I am the Almighty God” (Genesis 17:1).

“Omnipotence” is also one of the attributes of Allah. He is not overtaken by any weaknesses or difficulties, He does not inherent any weakness in committing anything. He is the one and unique in creation. He has created this world, humans and their deeds and thoughts, predestined their fates. “...for verily Allah has power over all things” (Quran 24/44-45).

6. The meaning of “the highest free of will” of God is that it is determined solely by the ideas of the all-perfect reason of God. Here’s how this idea is expressed by the Psalmist: “Our God is on heaven [and earth], does whatever he wants” (Psalms 113:11).

Allah has the attribute of “creation”. In the Quran it is said: “Allah createth what He willeth” (Qur’an, 3/47).

7. The property of God “ubiquity” means that God is omnipresent, that is, He is everywhere, always and entirely. There is no place, no creature, and no condition or the forces in all beings in the world, where God is not present. “ Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? said the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:24).

The closest attributes to Christian property of “ubiquity” of God in the Islamic doctrine are two attributes – “all-hearing” and “all-seeing” of Allah. “(Allah) knows of (the tricks) that deceive with the eyes, and all that the hearts (of men) conceal... Verily it is Allah (alone) Who hears and sees (all things).” (Quran 40/19-20).

8. “Eternity” is one of the properties of God in Christianity. Since God is immutable, so He is not dependent on time. For God there is no beginning and no end, no past, no future. The thought of God’s eternity expresses the words of the Psalmist addressed to God: “Before the mountains were born, and you created the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou you are God” (Psalms 89:3).

Similar attributes of Allah are “eternity without beginning” and “eternity without end”. Eternal existence of the Almighty means that Allah is the One who has no beginning. He is eternal. The meaning of the attribute “eternity without end” is that for God there is no death, disappearance, He remains forever, for Him there is no end. “He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent...” (Qur’an, 57/3), “All that is on earth will perish... But will abide (forever) the Face of thy Lord”(Quran 55/26-27).

9. “Wisdom” of God means such His property, which shows that God has the knowledge of the most perfect goals and the best means of achievement of these goals. God’s wisdom is also reflected in the ability to use the necessary means to the set goals in the most perfect way, and is found in the works of creation and support. Actions of God’s wisdom are manifested in time. The Psalmist David, looking at the wise arrangement of the world, has said, “How many are your works, O Lord! All wisdom hast thou made “(Psalms 103:24).

In Islam, one of the essential attributes of Allah is an attribute of “creation”, which implies that He is the only one Creator. There is nothing in the world that has not been created by Him. Having this attribute, God creates, shapes, gives food, mercy and goods, gives and takes life, sends suffering. – “He is Allah, the creator, the Evolver...” (Qur’an, 59/24).

In addition to the attributes mentioned above, the classical Islam endows Allah with other attributes, and Orthodox Christianity points to the other properties of God that we present separately, without comparison with each other.

Islam. “Speech” of Allah does not have the start, it does not look like the speech of His creations. It is believed that all the sacred Scriptures – Gospel (Injil), Torah (Tavrat), Psalms (Zabur), the Quran, and others are the speech

of Allah. They are eternal. In other words, the speech of the Almighty is uncreated and eternal.

The attribute of Allah “incomparability” means that God does not resemble any of His creatures, and nothing of the things created by Him do not resemble Him. Likening of Allah to anything is disbelief.

Islam understands “self-sufficiency” as the situation when the Almighty Allah is self-reliant, independent. It means that everybody needs Him, while He does not need anybody and anything.

And finally, one more attribute is “unicity”. It means that Allah is the one and indivisible and has no associates. – “He is Allah. the One and Only. Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten”(Quran, 112/1-4) “No son did Allah begat, nor is there any god along with Him...”(Qur’an, 23/91).

As for Christianity, in addition to those properties that have been mentioned before, God is enjoined several more special, spiritual properties. “Holiness of will” of God is that in Revelation God appears to us as the all-holy being. He says about Himself: “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2), “because it is written, “You shall be holy; for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16).

“All-beatitude” of God means love for His own good and the feeling of beatitude felt because of the possession of this good that do not match in humans, but in God. The fact that this property is inherent by God, follows from the Holy Scriptures, God is called the blessed (1 Timothy 1:11, 6:15), “... the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11), “blessed ... the Lord “(1 Timothy 6:15), etc.

“Infinite goodness” or “God’s love for all living beings” means that being the all-blessed Being, i.e. loving supreme good and possessing it, God reveals Himself as the all-loving and all-merciful Being, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), “ God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.” (1 John 4:16). But

the most supreme manifestation and evidence of the infinite goodness of God to human is presented in the Scriptures by our redemption of the only begotten Son of God: “ For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”(John 3:16). This fact is explained by the apostle John as follows: “ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10).

Now we will consider the idea of God in the third world religion, Buddhism. First, it should be noted that Buddhism is historically represented as various trends and directions that are very different from each other. Nevertheless, their rallying point is a set of provisions that, anyway, are presented in all branches of Buddhism. These are the following: the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of cause and dependent origination and karma, the doctrine anatmavada (“not soul”) and kshanikavada (doctrine of momentariness), and Buddhist cosmology. All Buddhists hold the opinion that these ideas have been proclaimed by Buddha himself.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, scientists do not have the common opinion about the essence of Buddhism: is it the religion, philosophical system or ethical teaching built on psychophysical practices. The complexity of Buddhism correlation to religion is that Buddhism in general has no idea of the Uncreated Divinity. However, at the same time, because of its tolerance, Buddhism easily fit into their teaching of various deities from the territories where it has been penetrated. Due to its flexibility and ability to adapt to cults and customs of the local population, it processed teachings inherent in a particular region according to its core provisions and declared local gods as incarnations or manifestations of the Buddhas forces. The unique feature of such deities’ fate is their susceptibility to the cause-

effect cycling, so they have to be born and die, like other living things. As for the reverence of Buddha, this phenomenon can be called as an exceptionally religious reverence, because Buddha is considered, above all, as a teacher who showed a way out of suffering.

The idea of God in Buddhism is rather speculative idea of the Supreme Being who created the external world that includes humans who are the subject of Buddhism adept experience. Buddhists say that they cannot say with precision what is beyond their perception. For Buddhists, God, who is outside of their being, is not the subject of their experience (Quran, 1986).

In conclusion, we will summarize our research relating to the interpretation of the idea of God in world religions. Monotheism is the guiding principle of the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Islam. We have found, firstly, that

these religions do not only qualitatively proclaim the idea of monotheism, but reveal it in different ways. In Christianity, we can tell about God, relying on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity that is based on the statement that God is the one in His essence and ternary in Persons. According to Islamic teachings, Allah is the One, He has no similarity and no associate, He is indivisible. Secondly, each of these religions endows God (Christianity) and Allah (in Islam) as a unique being, with a complex of special properties (attributes). Taking the example of Orthodox Christianity and classical Islam, we have compared them, and identified a number of parallels. As for Buddhism, it occupies a special place among the world's religions, as having its own attitude to the idea of God. In order to gain nirvana that is the key goal of the Buddhist program, the existence of God is not of decisive importance.

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Некоторые аспекты идеи Бога в мировых религиях: попытка сравнительного анализа

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В статье рассматриваются некоторые аспекты идеи Бога в мировых религиях. Показано, что Единобожие является ведущим принципом христианства и ислама, которые хоть и провозглашают идею монотеизма, но при этом раскрывают ее по-разному. Кроме того, каждая из них наделяет Бога (в христианстве) и Аллаха (в исламе), как уникального существа, комплексом особых свойств (атрибутов). В третьей мировой религии - буддизме существование Бога не имеет решающего значения. В работе сделан сравнительный анализ свойств Бога (с православных позиций) и атрибутов Аллаха (с позиций классического ислама) и выявлен ряд соответствий, которые мы предлагаем для изучения студентам-религиоведам.

Ключевые слова: христианство, ислам, буддизм, свойства Бога, атрибуты Аллаха.
