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**THE SACRED IN MODERN SOCIETY'S MENTALITY:  
PHILOSOPHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT**

**LO SAGRADO EN LA MENTALIDAD DE LA SOCIEDAD MODERNA:  
ASPECTO FILOSOFICO Y PEDAGOGICO**

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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the phenomenon of the sacred and its perspective in modern society's mentality. The authors raise the problem of the dominance of material and technical values over spiritual ones in modern society. It is further stated that the sacred plays an important role in religion and approaches to its interpretation are considered. Attention is paid to the role of the numinous in Orthodox pedagogy. The authors' understanding of the essence of the sacred is deduced. The problem of the sacralization of the Internet as a manifestation of the inversion of the sacred is considered.

**Keywords**

The sacred – Religion – Mentality – Spirituality – Internet

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## Introduction

The so-called Western civilization, i.e. those countries and peoples that make up the vanguard of economic growth and technological progress, being the first to have undergone modernization, has chosen transformation of the universe and continuous improvement of the material and technological environment in order to improve the comfort of human existence as the most advantageous way of development. In other words, the reform efforts of the most influential part of the earthly community are directed outwards, at the environment, not inside the person, not at the development of self-awareness, self-control, psychic and spiritual opportunities. This way, the scientific and philosophical foundations of which were laid by G. Galilei, I. Newton, R. Descartes, F. Bacon, and Ch. Darwin, is the way of man as the pinnacle of earthly evolution, the active subject endowed with reason and capable of cognizing, the conqueror of nature, the latter being an object of sensual and rational comprehension and transformation to meet the infinite needs of the world.

Another direction of the current civilization's development, which remained overshadowed by scientism, rationalism and the ideals of the classical scientific picture of the world, was the subject of spiritual quest within the framework of religious and philosophical systems. Thus, Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Gautama (Buddha), Jesus Christ, Plotinus, Mohammed and other sages, saints and prophets revealed certain ways to achieve harmony between the physical and spiritual, the inner self and the outside world, outlined the contours of self-improvement and tried to transfer their experience to others – their disciples and followers. Everything mentioned above resulted in the emergence of philosophical and religious teachings that retain their importance nowadays. They are all united by the fact that they focus on the spiritual growth of man. Despite the age-old dispute of “physicists” and “lyricists” and critical attacks against religion by atheism and positivism, being criticism for non-compliance with the modern reality, man does not live by mind alone.

And here one argument seems to be enough. Man has remained man for thousands of years, and his psychophysical structure has not changed much, and neither has scientists' search for hidden resources of the brain, the secret capabilities of the psyche in terms of body control and enhancement of physical and cognitive capabilities. Numerous ways of extending the ordinary limits of human capabilities have been found by religious systems, known since ancient times, and they are based primarily on the development of spirituality, control over mental states, self-restraint in bodily needs, etc.

Philosophical interest in religion is due to its everlasting role in the life of all mankind, and while theology is an introspective way of understanding God, the world and man through Revelation, the teachings of the Church Fathers, the lives of saints and other theological treatises, philosophy allows us to have an outside perspective of religion as a phenomenon of culture, a form of worldview, public consciousness, as a set of ethical norms and ideals, etc. in connection with other phenomena of human existence.

The pedagogical aspect of the sacred as a phenomenon of social consciousness consists, in our opinion, in considering its relationship with the processes of upbringing and personal development, the content of those higher values and boundary ideals that should be the basis for the implementation of these processes in society.

If we consider religion as an aspect of culture, and we understand culture as a specifically human way of life, which is not available in all other living beings, religion and all related phenomena also have their source in the human nature, namely the predisposition of man to religious feeling, to religious faith, to the expectation of a miracle, to the hope of salvation, on the one hand, sociality, inherent in human nature, and striving for collective forms of daily life organization, on the other hand.

It is the sacred that forms the fundamental basis of religion, expressing the special attitude of man to certain objects existing in the empirical reality and symbolically expressing something absolute, ultimate, transcendent, as well as to ideal givens, sensually and rationally incomprehensible, and available for cognizing only in the act of deep and sincere faith. The sacred is the basis of religious feelings, but history presents some examples of intellectual and spiritual projects, where the object of sacralization was the mind (the Enlightenment movement), natural sciences (positivism by O. Comte and his followers), man (Renaissance humanism, anthropological materialism by L. Feuerbach), etc. Such narrowly rationalistic and scientific ideals as well as projects and movements ignited by them are clear evidence of the dominance of aggressive-fetishistic individualistic attitudes and the desire for maximum rationalization in the so-called industrial society followed by a post-industrial one in people's consciousness.

Here arises the question whether it is timely to say that things (commodity fetishism), gadgets and technologies, glamorous images of movie and music stars are now being sacralized. Does not this tendency drive man, especially young people, away from genuine spirituality, are not religious truths and ideals replaced by pseudo-ideals, idols of beauty, attractiveness, wealth, luxury, carelessness, empty spiritually but bright outside? Will the statement about the sacralization of technical devices, technology as a whole as a phenomenon, and people's admiration for modern gadgets be justified? After all, it can be considered a natural outcome of the choice made by Western civilization.

### **The nature of the sacred**

To find answers to these questions, we will consider a number of concepts of the sacred and deduct our own understanding of this category.

The representative of classical positivism E. Durkheim stated that "even the most outlandish rites or myths express some human need, aspect of life": religion has a social origin<sup>1</sup>. Religious beliefs and rites reflect the collective nature of man, and the sacred is the basis for maintaining the internal stability of society, it structures society's life. The division of the world into two completely opposite areas – the secular (worldly, profane) and sacred (sacramental, holy) lies at the heart of religious consciousness. The basis of such opposition is, according to Durkheim, the most important sign of the sacred, i.e. its collectively established separation from the profane and its forbidden nature. The approach by E. Durkheim was followed by Marcel Mauss, according to the his concept sacred phenomena are such social phenomena that due to their importance for the group are endowed with the status of inviolable and taboo ones. Mauss links the sacred with traditions of sacrifice and the gift (potlatch), which also makes society more stable and orderly<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Épinal: 1995).

<sup>2</sup> M. Moss, *Social functions of the sacred* (SPb: "Eurasia". 2000).

M. Mauss's follower R. Caillois writes that the sacred is something that is opposed to the profane<sup>3</sup>, it is a dangerous, incomprehensible, unmanageable, and highly efficient energy<sup>4</sup>. According to Caillois, the sacred is a special property, which can be peculiar to any object, place, time period, and after some time such an attribute can be lost, while its ascription has a collective social essence and expresses society's desire to organize, to institutionalize. The sacred is separated from the profane as a force that can bring both good and evil, depending on the circumstances, it differs from a thing whose nature is stable in the criteria of good and evil<sup>5</sup>. It is not just the opposite of the profane, it is dangerous because of its ambivalence, that is, the combination of two opposite sides, holiness and filth. But it is not only the dark side of the sacred that one is to beware of, but also the light one, as in the unskilled hands, without proper competence, the invasion of the forbidden territory in spite of the taboo can have terrible consequences for the frivolous layman.

Opposed to such an interpretation of the sacred, which we would call objective sociological one, is the subjective phenomenological concept by R. Otto, the starting point of which lies in Kant's apriorism and where the inner psychological side of the sacred is revealed. It is the a priori property that Otto ascribes to the sacred. He believes that a special, numinous in his terms, "aiming for spirit" and the intuition of the sacred are inherent in man. Further on he analyzes the main numinous (experience of the sacred, purified from all rationality) senses:

- "sense of creation";
- sense of *mysterium tremendum* (awe-inspiring sense of mystery – "Absolutely the Other");
- sense *fascinans* (from lat. *fascino* – enchant, fascinate) – the one arising at the moment of contact with the mystery, a positive experience of charm, admiration.

These senses constitute the numinous value – *sanctum* (lat. sacred), in its extreme irrational aspect – *augustum* (lat. sublime, sacred)<sup>6</sup>.

The idea of apriorism in R. Otto's concept of the sacred overlaps Erich Fromm's concept, where he introduces the term "the system of guidance and worship." According to this humanist, psychoanalyst and philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century, man has a need to believe in such an object or a set of objects that perform a protective function and give a sense of stability. Fromm names such systems of belief systems of guidance and worship, and we can name the objects underlying them as sacred<sup>7</sup>. The need for guidance and worship is interpreted by him as a consequence of the disharmonic situation of man in the world, his isolation from the nature. Each of us strives for faith, the feeling of "rootedness" in the world, confidence in tomorrow. The objects of guidance and worship can be considered sacred.

Mircea Eliade represents the sacred as an absolute reality, the fullness of being. To sanctify a place or an object means to make it truly real. He also coined the term "hierophany" to refer to the act of discovering the sacred in a sensually accessible form.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kayua, *Myth and man. The Man and the Sacred* (Moscu: OGI, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> R. Kayua, *Myth and man. The Man and the Sacred...*

<sup>5</sup> R. Kayua, *Myth and man. The Man and the Sacred...*

<sup>6</sup> R. Otto, *Sacred: about the irrational in the idea of the divine and its relationship with the rational* (St. Petersburg: SPbSU Publishing, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> E. Fromm, *The Man for Himself* (Moscow: AST: AST Moscow: Storageer, 2006).

Thus, people find themselves in an intermediate position between the secular and the sacred<sup>8</sup>. Unlike R. Otto, M. Eliade's experience of the sacred (numinous experience) is not fear in the mode of horror or stupor, but a sense of fullness of being.

In the social phenomenological concept by P. Berger and T. Luckmann the sacred is considered in the context of the analysis of mythology and religion as conceptual mechanisms for maintaining symbolic universa, that is, ideological systems. They define mythology as a concept of reality that presupposes the continuous penetration of sacred forces into the world of everyday experience,<sup>9</sup> and theology as a more theoretical form of mythology, from which the sacred is not excluded, but where it is present to a lesser extent. Ideas about the sacred help to legitimize the existing social order.

Thus, the sacred is something that is the opposite of the profane (the secular) or that goes beyond it and causes certain senses, which R. Otto called numinous (numen – a deity). According to Durkheim, Mauss, Caillois the sacred is the result of the collective action, social conditions, according to Eliade it is real, absolutely true being.

In our opinion, the area of congruence between the objective sociological and subjective phenomenological approaches will be the idea of the sacred that takes into account the relationship and interaction of the individual and the social, subjective spirit and the objective, individual and common consciousness. It allows to see the foundations of the sacred, on the one hand, in the a priori sense of the numinous, predisposition to the sacred (according to Otto), the need for guidance and worship (according to Fromm), and on the other, in the collective nature of the ideas of the sacred and related norms of social life that determine the order in the society and establish the framework of acceptable behavior of its members.

### **Inversion of the sacred in modern society**

The sacred has always played an important role in the life of the traditional society, people saw the sacred in certain objects of nature, man-made things, religious buildings, etc. The main thing is that it was the sacredness that man linked with the true existence, and that, for example, for a house to become such a being, and therefore not to be ephemeral, but real and reliable, it was necessary to sanctify the house itself or the place of its alleged construction. In monotheistic religions, the center of the sacred realm, and thus the center of the universe is God, and everything that is endowed with this property, apart from God, be it a sacred place, a sacred object, an image, a part of a day, a week or a year, is associated with it within the theocentric picture of the world.

At the same time, if we talk about the numinous in Orthodox Christianity, here this sense is highly personalized, it accompanies dialogue, communication with the divine: with God, with Christ, with Angels and Archangels, with Saints. It is in this act of true faith that man attains the fullness of being, the integrity of personality, and self-actualization. A sincere prayer, participation in the divine liturgy, the Holy Communion, even a visit to the church can cause a similar sense – a sense of reverence, and it is essential, since, in our opinion, the true faith is initially an irrational phenomenon, it is a special mystical experience. And experiencing the senses of this kind strengthens the faith, gives peace of

<sup>8</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacred and Secular* (Moscow: MGU Publishing House, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> P. Berger y T. Lukman, *Social construction of reality. Treatise on the sociology of knowledge* (Londres: Medium, 1995).

mind, a sense of conciliation, that is, in psychological terms, has a psychotherapeutic effect. In addition, the sense of the sacred, strengthening us in faith, contributes to the spiritual development in terms of moral culture growth, more meaningful and responsible existence, awareness of being in the world.

In the context of Orthodox pedagogy, the sense of the numinous can also be presented as an important condition for the effectiveness of education and self-education, since the assimilation of obvious rationalized knowledge, provisions, norms and views of ideals is only one side of spiritual improvement and development of religious consciousness of the individual. The second side, which is no less important, is the implicit formation of faith and its strengthening at the supra-rational level through participation in church rites and religious activities, through the contact with the sacred. In the Orthodox pedagogical tradition, the very process of education, understood as the revelation of the image of God in man and thus the restoration of integrity lost due to the fall, is inextricably linked with the numinous, with the touch of the sacred. Indeed, according to Archpriest E. Shestun, spiritual education is the path of acquiring the Holy Spirit, the path of repentance, humility, and moral purification in the process of constant dialogue of the living soul with the living God<sup>10</sup>. Knowledge is revealed to man by God as far as man is ready for their comprehension.

As for secular education, then, despite its all its distance from religion, the moral potential of both Christian and a number of other religious denominations in the formation of students' moral consciousness (first of all, attributing themselves to their respective faith) does not lose its significance. Christianity teaches compassion, compassion, kindness, which is so lacking for humanity in this century.

Modern society's realities are full of contradictions and threats to the spiritual development of children, adolescents and young people. We will not show excessive pessimism, because the development of various spheres of society is always disproportionate, and against the background of material and technological progress, the spiritual sphere (not only religion, but also art, philosophy, moral sphere) definitely suffers some stagnation. There are many factors inducing this situation, for example, negative manifestations of mass culture and mass media, information pollution of consciousness of the whole society due to the accumulation of such information garbage in the global Internet, the conditions of market relations with all the ensuing consequences, global problems, etc.

The assumptions made at the beginning of the article will be justified when considering the sacred from sociological points of view. If we follow the phenomenological approach by R. Otto, it turns out that the concept of the sacred is not applicable here, or that the a priori aiming for the sacred has transformed so much that it manifests itself in regard to the false idols mentioned above.

If a person feels real only in the virtual space of the Internet, if being in the digital worlds seems more exciting and interesting, being integral and full, we can talk about the sacralization of the Internet. Of course, the Internet does not cause those subjective states of consciousness, which R. Otto describes, but the specified parameter of the sacred, highlighted by M. Eliade, is peculiar to the attitude of the young to the Internet in the XXI century society.

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<sup>10</sup> Archpriest Evgeny Shestun *Orthodox Pedagogy* (Moscow: Pro-Press, 2002).



The Internet in modern society acquires the status of one of the highest values, especially in the minds of the generation born in the current century and grown up in the conditions of intensive informatization, when computers or laptops existing in almost every home began to be supplemented with portable devices, i.e. tablet computers, readers, more and more advanced smartphones. Sometimes disconnection from the Internet is perceived as a tragedy, as all leisure, or most of it, is associated with it, and life-world includes not only physical space, but also virtual network space, i.e. game locations, accounts in games and social networks, online stores, music portals, video hosting sites, etc. Older generation may also experience difficulties due to problems with Internet connection, but most often it is difficulties in the field of professional activity, when it is impossible to carry it out without stable access to the global web, for example, to e-mail, Internet banks, e-wallets, etc. That is, in this case, the Internet has exclusively utilitarian value in these situations.

Philosophers, scientists and publicists increasingly compare modern media, including digital media, with the Church in the sense that their impact on society's consciousness is equally enormous. A large part of society is fascinated by listening to media personalities, famous TV presenters, newscasters rather than church sermons. Thus, with the spread of television, society has become "TV parishioners," and now, in the digital age, the Internet parishioners. While the cathedral was the central embodiment of culture in the medieval era, as noted by U. Eco, nowadays it is the screen that attracts the eyes of many millions of viewers around the globe<sup>11</sup>. Electronic mass media have become the same socialization agent as family, church, school.

If the true real being is identified with the Internet and digital media in the individual consciousness, we can talk about the attitude towards them as something sacred (here we can draw an analogy with the perception of a certain building, structure, temple as sacred, that is, a truly real place). Posting photos on social networks, likes, viewing news and posts, ratings, comments can be interpreted as new rituals. If disconnection from the Internet causes a sense of helplessness, deprivation of something important, without which life loses its full value, it can serve as evidence of the sacralization of the global digital web in the minds of society, and especially young people.

The sacralization of the Internet creates the risk of losing the integrity of the person, the Integrity of the Ego can be broken, as along with the real Ego a virtual Ego or several such Egos are being formed, in every of which individuals identify themselves with their game characters, avatars in the social network, nicknames in the blog, etc. Each of us can have a set of identities defined by conceptions of ourselves formed in self-consciousness, which are called conceptual characters in postmodern philosophy, but psychoemotional and social well-being demands maintaining a balance between the social identities caused by the individual's social roles and one's personal identity where the individual is identified not with a social role, a status, property and similar external attributes, but with himself / herself. Immersion in the virtual space of the global network can contribute to the gradual erosion of the Ego-concept of the individual between the virtual Egos, thus leading to the violation of the integrity of personal identity, as well as the weakening of social identities and defects in socialization.

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<sup>11</sup> W. Eco, "The Middle Ages have already begun", *Foreign Literature* num 4 (1994): 258-267.

## Results

The sacred in the modern conditions of rapid absorption of society's spiritual life by virtual spaces generated by digital communication technologies is subject to increasing inversion. The true sacred and religious values based on it are replaced by materialistic scientific ideals, worship of the digital technology, their sacralisation being identified by certain manifestations. If from time immemorial the sacred in our society was closely associated with the Orthodox faith, Christian values, the knowledge of God, the desire for spiritual growth and the attainment of harmonious integrity of spirit, soul and body, nowadays this is all replaced by pseudo values and false ideals.

## Conclusion

Thus, we understand the sacred as a special area of reality, which is clearly separated from the profane in the consciousness, penetration into which is possible only under the condition of special preparedness of interaction with it, this is an area that causes special numinous senses, first of all, a sense of fullness of being, predisposition to which is a priori. Religious concepts of the sacred, that existed before and do now, are based on the collective spiritual experience of contact between a person and a sacred, rooted in protoplignious phenomena and truly developed in Christianity. The notions of the sacred and the collective rites, traditions and norms of vital activity caused by them contributed to the streamlining of public life.

In our time, we can talk if not about the sacralization of the Internet and other digital technologies and devices, then at least the substitution of true Christian values by technocratic and atheistic ones. The ideals of spiritual self-perfection, equality, genuine love and humanity, sincerity and openness in the consciousness of the younger generation are replaced by values that are transmitted through electronic media, and these are, above all, the values of material success and wealth, technical progress, individualism, comfort, etc. The measure of personal significance is often not the level of spiritual maturity, but the level of income, the cost of clothes, car, used gadgets. All this negatively affects the spiritual development of a young man, leading to deformations of the personality.

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