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**WHO IS WHO IN THE MODERN RELIGIOUS PICTURE OF THE  
WORLD**

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*Abstract*

The article represents an attempt to show that the religious picture of the world identifying people with various religions and confessions is inaccurate because sociologists have ignored the substantial semantic changes that have occurred in the meanings of the words “believer” and “religious person” which used to be full synonyms. The author argues that from the point of view of the Holy Scriptures what people living in modern secular states think about their religious affiliation does not correspond to reality. The reason for this is not only that people do not observe all the prescribed rituals of worship and veneration of God, but rather that they live not according to the norms and rules formulated in the Holy Scriptures but according to the norms of the state in which they reside or stay. Monotheism, of course, is not yielding its positions without colossal psychological strain, mental shifts, fractures and schisms inside societies down to family level and between ethnic groups and peoples. The process is accompanied by excesses and a matching of world perceptions and life-styles, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks and wars in various parts of our planet. The author supposes transition from monotheism to the “scientific perception of the world” to be by no means accidental.

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## 1. Introduction

The author argues that the religious picture of the world presented in many sociological studies is at odds with reality and regarding the trends and outlook for the development of various confessions, these studies mislead the world public with all the negative political and social consequences that entails.

## 2. Problem Statement

What are the grounds for such categorical statements? First, sociologists do not take into account the fact that today the word combinations “religious believer” and “religious person,” once used interchangeably, refer to people with different mentalities. Second, indiscriminate use of the concepts of “religious believer” and “religious person” in their modern meaning tends to distort the religious picture of the world. Third, the original meaning of the concept “religious person” as used in the texts of all the Scriptures is ignored.

Let us define the terms and concepts that are pivotal for our theme.

By “civilization” I mean a certain stage (level) of social consciousness and world perception of ethnic groups and peoples which has a decisive influence on all the spheres of their life activities at a certain period in their historical development.

“Mentality” means the specific features of people’s intellectual-spiritual qualities, with “spirituality” referring to the perception of the world that influences a person’s psychological (soul) reaction to the phenomena and events in the surrounding world and his/her stable behavior in various situations.

In the most general sense I identify three main types of civilization mentality in human history: paganism, monotheism and “scientific perception of the world.” Accordingly, we can speak of people with predominant features of the mentality of pagans, monotheism and “scientific perception” which predetermine their world of values and norms and rules of behavior.

This classification largely coincides with that contained in monotheistic Scriptures (the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran) about three mental types of people: 1) pagans (polytheistic and idolators), 2) monotheists (Judaists, Christians and Muslims) and 3) truly “God-like (Torah, Bereishit 2, Bereishit 7; the New Testament, John 10:37, Acts.17:30; Koran, Sura 33:33) (The Bible, 1995; The Koran, 2008; The Torah, 1993). St. Paul clearly refers to the latter type of people: “The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.” (1 Cor. 15: 45-52) (The Bible, 1995).

As for the word “religion,” like most dictionaries in the world, we define it as a certain perception of the world, a world view that predetermines both the mental-emotional state of a person and their behavior in various life situations based on faith in the existence of God or supernatural forces that govern the world. The above definition of “religion” is not in any essential way different from those contained in modern dictionaries (Yefremova, 2007; The New Philosophical Dictionary, 2001; Oxford Dictionaries, Focus Online, 2009; Diccionario CLAVE, 2014).

Sociology as a science does not merely explain social phenomena by studying and processing the information about them, but by forecasting the trends of their probable development makes it possible to control them. It is no accident that the findings of sociological surveys and forecasts are closely watched not only by the representatives of all branches of power and various political parties and movements, but

also by ordinary people in all countries. It is no secret that they are also used as an effective instrument to influence and often manipulate public consciousness.

These truisms bear repeating not so much in order to stress the role and significance of sociological studies in the life of modern societies, but to stress the responsibility of sociologists to society. Their professionalism and competence ensure not only an objective assessment of the processes going on in this or that sphere of being, but calm and security of people in concrete countries and indeed in all the countries of the world.

Thus, we have to question the objectivity of sociological studies not only regarding the “religious” affiliation of people in the modern world, but their forecasts concerning the future of various religions (Diccionario CLAVE, 2014; "The Future of World Religions", 2017; "World Religious Teachings", 2015; "Under What God", 2012). Many studies say that in the modern world out of the 7 billion people living on Earth, about 6 billion consider themselves to belong to this or that religion. About 2.3 billion (32% of the total population) preach Christianity; 1.6 billion (23%) preach Islam; 1 billion (15%) Hinduism, 500 million (7%) Buddhism; 14 million (0.2%) Judaism; about 400 million (6%) practice various traditional religions, and 58 million consider themselves to be adherents of relatively “young” confessions -- Shintoism, Sikhism, Bahaism and so on. Finally, more than a billion people, or 17% of the world population (the third largest group) say they do not belong to any religious confessions ("The Future of World Religions", 2017; "World Religious Teachings", 2015; "Under What God", 2012; "Sociologists have calculated", 2012).

Let us stress that we do not question the technique of conducting sociological surveys, but we categorically reject the interpretation of the essence of the phenomena that have been targeted by sociological studies and accordingly question the authenticity of the findings and conclusions of these studies.

Indeed, is it correct to regard as Christians or Muslims people who, living in different countries not with canonical (religious) law, but in secular states, do not only ignore the norms and rules of the religion with which they claim to be affiliated, but are totally ignorant of the foundations of these religions?

### **3. Research Questions**

This research attempts to answer the question of how the meanings of the words “believer” and “religious person” of various religions have undergone significant semantic transformations.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The author attempts to show that the religious picture of the world identifying people with various religions and confessions is inaccurate. Sociologists ignore the substantial semantic changes that have occurred in the meanings of the words “believer” and “religious person” which used to be full synonyms. Nowadays it is important to understand significance and value of the Scriptures for the life activities of the whole mankind.

## 5. Research Methods

The research was qualitative in nature based on a comparative analysis of the Holy Texts.

## 6. Findings

If we look at the general and specialized dictionaries (philosophical, theological, etc.) they all say that the word “religion” implies not only a certain perception of the world, but also, equally important, a way of life corresponding to this perception. Religiously minded people are convinced, first, that their perception of the world has been bestowed on them from outside by a concrete Personality (Person, Force, God), or by deceased ancestors who have become gods or spirits. Second, they recognize the existence of a Force (the one God and the like) or some forces (geniuses, demons, etc.) that control the surrounding world and predetermine the life and day-to-day practices of each and every one on Earth and in the Universe. Third, they are convinced that the religious world view is directly linked with certain norms and rules of behavior fixed in the Scriptures and which have to be accepted and unconditionally abided by. Fourth, they have no doubt that they can only be protected from on high and be happy in life on earth and in the other world if they observe the rituals of worship and veneration of God (or gods) (Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2017; Coulange, 2010).

By the same token religious people are totally devoid of tolerance of other views, norms and behaviors and rules of worshipping God (or gods). For example, according to the world perception set forth in the Scriptures of monotheism (the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran) all the pagan views are inventions of ignorant people and the pagan rituals are false and sinful. Moreover, the pagan prayer houses, their shrines, idols, images, holy trees and other religious paraphernalia are considered to be foul and subject to destruction.

It has to be said that the word combination “belief in the supernatural” can only be found in modern dictionaries because for true believers none of the phenomena they worship are mystical or supernatural. They are quite natural and real even though they have powers and capacities ordinary people do not have. “The supernatural forces”, according to religious people, usually exist in a state that cannot be seen, heard or perceived by other human senses (Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2017).

The above proves beyond doubt the fallacy of defining the place of religions in people’s life activities solely on the basis of their “faith” in the existence of a “supernatural and mystical force” without observing the norms and rules of their faith as well as the rituals worshipping “the higher forces” according to the Scriptures. For example, those who consider themselves to be Christians, Muslims or Judaists living in secular countries do not only share their faith in the existence of a “supernatural force” (i.e. are spiritually united), but are obliged to strictly comply with the Constitution and laws of the country in which they live or stay.

Thus, the citizens of secular states who consider themselves to be Judaists, Christians and Muslims are not only one in their faith in the existence of One God, but also live according to secular laws and not according to the norms and rules set forth in the Scriptures.

The question suggests itself: is it right, not only in terms of the Scriptures, but in terms of the historically established religious denominations, to define a person as religious only on the basis of their faith in the One God (or gods)? The answer is certainly not.

It is no secret, for example, that Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant priests, although they worship Jesus Christ as God and teach morality and ethics according to the same New Testament books, nevertheless, even centuries after the Schism, continue to quarrel over the “interpretations” of certain tenets of their faith. For example, they differ on the structural unity of the Church. On the “procession” of the Holy Ghost (from the Father or the Son), “filioque;” on the existence or non-existence of the purgatory for the souls destined after death for paradise but not yet ready for it; on the “sacraments” of marriage and divorce.

They also differ on the worship rituals. For all that, Christian priests miss no chance of opposing Christianity to other religions, for example, Islam while talking about a single “Christian world” and common “Christian values.” Moreover, they are one in considering Islam to be a religion hostile to Christianity (Slobodsky, 2007). Meanwhile, the Christian “values” that have to do with the attitude to man and the world, do not differ in any basic way from the “values” set forth in the Koran because Koran considers the Torah and the News Testament to be authentic Scriptures bequeathed by One God to the peoples who matured to accept one god before the Arabs (Suras 2:136,137; 6: 155-157; 22:34 and others).

The Scriptures (The Bible, 1995; The Koran, 2008; The Torah, 1993) are still more convincing in bringing home the message that a man’s religious affiliation and, accordingly, the role and place of religions in the life of past and present societies (families, tribes, ethnic groups and peoples) can only be determined on the basis of all the above-mentioned components (elements).

Thus, the Torah (the Five Books of Moses in the Old Testament), regarded as the Scripture not only by Judaists, but also by Christians and Muslims, treats as inseparable faith in One God and the need to strictly abide by the laws and rituals of worshiping the Almighty God. It is not for nothing that the Torah is referred to as the Law of Moses or simply the Law, ie. the legal system set forth in the Torah. The Torah gives all the commandments, laws and canons to the sons of Israel for eternity (Dvarim 29, Nitzavim 28). Likewise, the Torah stresses that those who do not observe all that has been bequeathed through Moses, cannot be considered to be true believers in the One God and are therefore under the curse of the Almighty (Torah, Dvarim 11, Beit Halle 11, 26-28; Dvarim 12 Beit Halle 1-7, etc.)

Jesus Christ too stresses the need to abide unconditionally by the commandments, laws and canons of the One God: “Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do. When the Judgment Day comes, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles. Then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!’” (New Testament, Matt. 7:21-23)

St. James, an Apostle of Jesus, scrupulously following the instructions of his Teacher, says: “My brothers, what good is it for someone to say that he has faith if his actions do not prove it? Can that faith save him? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don’t have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, ‘God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!’ if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So, it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. But someone

will say, 'One person has faith, another has actions.' My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions. 'Do you believe that there is only one God? Good. The demons also believe – and tremble with fear. You fool! Do you want to be shown that faith without actions is useless?... You see then that it is by his actions that a person is put right with God, not by his faith alone... So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, also faith without actions is dead" (New Testament, James. 2:20, 26).

Need one say that a person can consider himself to be a Muslim only by his faith in the existence of one God (Allah) and recognition of Muhammed as his prophet, without observing Sharia law, ie. the legal system set forth in the Koran? Because the very first Sura in the Koran proclaims: "In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. Praise is to Allah, Lord of the worlds. The Entirely Merciful, the Especially merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Recompense. It is you we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray." (Sura 1:1-7)

Indeed, is it permissible for sociologists to consider a person to be a Christian if he does not follow the "commandments" (norms and rules of behavior) in his daily life even though he claims to believe in the Holy Trinity? Is it permissible to consider a person to be a Christian if he does not only tolerate marital infidelity and "casual sex" with a variety of "partners" (adultery), but, being tolerant of the sin of Sodom has a benign attitude to gays and lesbians, same-sex marriages even though he wears a cross and regularly goes to church? Of course not; because they are complicit in the sin of Sodom which is a mortal sin in the Old and New Testaments alike. These people are undoubtedly destined for anathema. And so are those who show tolerance toward them.

As of May 2017, in the "Christian world", according to sociologists, same-sex marriages were allowed in more than 120 countries ("Divorce Statistics in the World", 2013), which means that the overwhelming majority in these countries approve of the sin for which the One God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Torah, Bereishit 19:4-11; Old Testament, Genesis. 19:24-25). Let us add also those who have extramarital relations or divorce with ease "not over the sin of adultery" as Jesus commands, but on other grounds. Jesus put it more than succinctly: "If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again and the man who marries her commits adultery also" (New Testament, Matt, 5, p. 31-32)

For example, the official divorce statistics in Russia where nearly 70% of the population consider themselves to be Orthodox, topped 60% in 2016. The rate is similar in the USA and in many other countries that consider themselves Christian.

Did the sociologists keep all these things in mind when qualifying people as Christians? Certainly not. Nor did they take into account the character of "modern faith" in determining the place and role of other religions in the modern world.

Sociologists, in my opinion, overlook the most important thing: beginning from the epoch of Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Reformation in Europe, the religious world view has been progressively cast aside. A new perception of the world that began to be formed saw not only people setting rules themselves, but becoming convinced of the infinite human potential for cognition.

Over the past centuries a significant number of ethnic groups and peoples of the world adopted a life-style characteristic of civilized mentality marked by “scientific perception of the world” while the others are in the process of transition. Hence the struggle and clash of civilizations. But not of the Western and Eastern ones (Musaev & Musaev, 2013). It is a clash between the religious monotheistic mentality which is leaving the historical stage and the nascent mentality of scientific perception of the world. It is no secret that monotheism has been inculcated to various ethnic entities and peoples over millennia in ways that were anything but peaceful (Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2013).

Monotheism, of course, is not yielding its positions without colossal psychological strain, mental shifts, fractures and schisms inside societies down to family level and between ethnic groups and peoples. The process is accompanied by excesses and a matching of world perceptions and life-styles, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks and wars in various parts of our planet.

It would not be irrelevant to recall the words of Jesus Christ who brought God’s New Testament about the mental wrench in adopting a new world perception and way of life even at the level of individual families: “If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven. But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughter-in-law against their mothers-in-law, a man’s worst enemies will be the members of his own family (New Testament, Matt. 11:32-36)

For example, about 16% of the people of Russia are thought to be Muslim (Koryagin, 2015). But do they live according to Sharia law envisaged by the Koran and Hadiths? Certainly not. Because they are obliged to live according to the legal norms of the Russian Federation. Similarly, “Muslims” not only in the European countries, but in all the other countries on other continents live according to the laws of their states.

Moreover, even the countries that claim to live according to the Koranic legal system (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan, etc.) are harmonizing their laws with the existing international norms and rules. They do so not only because they are members of the UN, but also because the Koran does not prescribe, for example, the structure of the Muslim Ummah (community). Thus it does not say anything about the division of the “community” into branches of power, regional structures, the relationship with banking structures in other (non-Muslim) countries, etc.

Besides, a considerable part of the 300 million registered migrants come from the Arab countries ("UN: In 2017 the Number of Migrants", 2017). They all have to obey the laws of the host countries, and not Sharia law. Indeed, they miss no opportunity to partake of the “boons” of European civilizations thus breaking the behavior norms prescribed by Sharia law. For example, the Koran forbids usury, which means that any term or indefinite deposit with interest is taboo for a true Muslim. However, do many people calling themselves Muslims and living in Western countries follow this fundamental rule of the Koran? It would be interesting to know the findings of sociologists who study the issue. What are the answers to the questions on compliance with the canonical law by Judaists? It is not the question of whether or not those who call themselves Judaists eat kosher food. After all, in the modern world that question is within the competence of gastroenterologists and dieticians whose services are sought all the time, including by Judaist clergy of various persuasions. However, do self-proclaimed Judaists living in Britain, the USA, Russia and

in Israel comply with the rule set “for eternity” whereby someone must kill the murderer of a relative? (Torah, Dvarim 19 Shoftim, 1-13). Certainly they do not.

There is nothing strange or surprising about the fact that the majority of our contemporaries do not live according to the norms and rules set forth in the Holy Scriptures, but according to the laws that are the result of their own intellectual activities. On the contrary, the Scriptures are very clear in stating that man will inevitably create his own norms and principles of world view and ideology. This circumstance is totally ignored by sociologists owing to their religious incompetence, a feature they share with many other contemporaries, in trying to present the public with a modern religious picture of the world which is far removed from reality.

Thus, practice shows more than convincingly that sociology ignores the transition of the bulk of modern humanity from the religious perception of the world and norms and behaviors characteristic of religious consciousness, to independent norm-setting. It does not take into account the differentiation of the concepts of “believer” and “religious person,” a distinction which has already become established (Oganessian, 2017). The fact is that many people call themselves Judaists, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus rather in memory of the religion of their ancestors rather than on the basis of their perception of the world and activities in real life. That is why I dare call into question not only the religious pictures of the world painted by sociologists who have a vague knowledge of the foundations of religious teachings and the prescriptions of the Holy Scriptures, but even their sociological forecasts. For example, the forecast published in July 2017 to the effect that by the mid-century one in every four Russians will be a Muslim (“Classified data on ethnic composition”, 2015).

This forecast is dubious not only because the Koran and other Scriptures make a vastly smaller impact on the daily life of citizens than secular laws, but also because under the Russian Constitution all the Russian citizens, including the clergy of all the religions, have to comply with the Constitution.

## **7. Conclusion**

Let us stress that the transition from monotheism to the “scientific perception of the world” is by no means accidental. It is envisaged by the fundamental view of the world and the content of such Scriptures as the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran which set them forth with the utmost clarity (Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2013; Oganessian, 2017). It is no accident that the moral basis for the drafting and adoption of laws for all the law-making bodies of modern states remains the norm set by Jesus Christ: “Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets (Matt. 7:12). This was the world view and ideological norm known in the modern world as “the golden rule of morality” that not only the New Testament and the Koran, but also Buddha’s teaching inculcated to people. However, this fact is further proof of the intransient significance and value of the Scriptures for the life activities of the whole mankind, but it does not have anything to do with the religious picture of the world modern sociology is trying to foist on us laboring under the historical influence of outdated attitudes and categories.

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