

Religious Syncretism: to the Origins of Culture-Creative Potential

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Svetlana A. Bezklubaya*

bezklubaya@email.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5713-9044>

The modern universal significance of the all-human creative experience updates the scientific interest in phenomena of culture which concentrate and disseminate the theories, ideas and beliefs that claim universal significance and cause epochal changes over vast territories. Religion, as a way of spiritual and practical mastery of the world by man, is that part of culture that constantly changes its forms, throws off some and clothes itself in others, fixing itself in cultural systems and actively influencing the processes of their self-organization and self-regulation. Therefore, the object of this study is religious syncretism as a way of transforming components of different order of being into a powerful culture-creative potential. The purpose of the work is to study religious syncretism as a complex multilevel process of mutual influence of various types of religions, sacred ideological images and cultural archetypes (ethical, aesthetic, artistic). The parameters of openness, and the mixing and blurring of boundaries make it possible to consider religious syncretism as a creative factor of culture, giving it the necessary integrity and actual meaning. Analysis of traditional forms of reflection and regulation of socio-cultural processes (myth, ritual, religion, art) reveals syncretism as a way of filling the sacred and religious with a powerful cultural-creative force. The author reveals the entropic essence of religious syncretism and its creative role in overcoming fragmentation, simplification and monism by culture (especially in the interpretation of the concepts of life and death, being and nothing, beautiful and ugly, space and time, virtue, soul, faith). The methodological basis of the research was formed by a transdisciplinary approach establishing a systemic life stance interaction of structurally functional and historical analysis with cultural and philosophical reflection. The theoretical conclusions contained in the work open up new opportunities for further

* Svetlana A. Bezklubaya, PhD, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Institute of Engineering Economics and Humanities at Moscow Aviation Institute (National Research University), A-80, ГСП-3, 4 Volokolamskoe shosse, 125993 Moscow, Russia.

study of the influence of religions on the creativity of cultural systems. The study of the culture-creative potential of religious syncretism clearly demonstrates the unity of the primary causes of being and thus allows one to practically reduce the degree of modern interfaith tension.

Key words: art, creativity, cultural system, culture-creative potential, entropy, myth, negentropy, religion, religious syncretism, sacred, syncretism, transdisciplinary.

Introduction

Today, when numerous religious wars exacerbate the conflict of civilizations, the study of religious syncretism as a way of accumulating the creative potential of culture for the tolerant coexistence of ethnic groups seems especially relevant. The complexity of the study of religious syncretism as a factor in the creativity of culture and the concentration of the entire potential variety of new qualities of its phenomena is associated with the contradictory interaction of syncretism with the traditional and creative. Revealing and researching the culture-creative role of religious syncretism in various spheres of social life requires a specific methodology – a transdisciplinary approach, which is associated with the use of general metaphors that have fundamental cognitive value, and based on the use of those basic ideological and methodological concepts that are fundamental for all disciplines and work for the creation of a shared outlook.¹ The transdisciplinary approach makes it possible to systematically trace the path of the birth of the idea of syncretism and religious syncretism, the mechanisms of their embodiment in culture, and the features of functional and ontological development. The scientific novelty of this work comes from the perspective of its research, where in the interpretation of creative images of the world, built with the help of religious syncretism, ontology and theory of knowledge, philosophy of creativity and theory of culture, cross-cultural studies and classical means of logical-dialectical analysis »converge«. This approach makes it possible to reveal the relationship between myth, rite, art, and religion as syncretic forms of creative implementation of the sacred with the general process of forming the systemic integrity of culture. The provisions of the research can be used in further analysis of the process of cultural creativity, in the creation of various concepts of social-cultural development.

¹ E. A. SOLODOVA, K voprosu o mezhdisciplinarnosti [Towards the Question of the Interdisciplinarity], *Human Capital*, 8 (2020) 116-125, 116.

1. *Religious syncretism and cultural creativity.*

The phenomenological essence of religious syncretism (from the Greek 'συγκρητισμός') is seen by modern science in the objectivity of the process of »a kind of unification of various religious elements, the fusion of heterogeneous irrational components into an integral worldview and cult system«. ² Researchers distinguish three types of religious syncretism:

- Primary or genetic (reflects the primitive fusion of worldview in protoreligions and mythological cultures);
- Secondary syncretism (a synthesis of two or three religious traditions that are different in level of development of as a result of ethnocultural interactions and conscious borrowing (for example, for political reasons). This takes place in the religions of ancient civilizations, in world religions, the philosophical and religious systems of the XIX-XX centuries, and in the New Age movement);
- Tertiary (postmodern, synergetic) syncretism (a product of globalism and universalism). This connects different areas of knowledge and culture (religion, philosophy, science, art); constructs a syncretic type of religious consciousness around man's personal experiences and emotions, on his own ideas and images of the divine forces that are independently formed). ³

This typology testifies to the reflection of religion about new meanings, senses, worldview images, ideals and its embodiment in socio-cultural changes. However, the concept of »religious syncretism« continues to retain both positive and negative culture-creative connotations in science. ⁴ The reason is in the historically contradictory scientific approach to syncretism and its forms (artistic, ethical, aesthetic, cultural, religious) and to the embodiment of simultaneously destructive archaic-rudimentary (initially integral, self-sufficiently non-segmented, not synthesized) and formative creative transformative principles. Most often, syncretism

»is interpreted as indivisibility, a characteristic of the initial, undeveloped state of some phenomenon, and the results of the manifestation of this fusion

² N. S. KAPUSTIN, *Osobennosti evoliutsii religii (na materialah drevnih verovanii i christianstva)* [Features of the Evolution of Religion (based on the materials of ancient beliefs and Christianity)], Moscow, Mysl, 1984, 4.

³ Eugenia A. KONTALEVA *Religiozniy syncretism v interpretacii rossiyskih i zarubezhnyh issledovateley* [Religious Syncretism in the Interpretation of Russian and Foreign Researchers], *Anthropology of Religion*, 4 (2017) 62-78.

⁴ PLUTARCH, *O bratskoy lyubvi* [Περὶ φιλαδελφίας], (18.03.2018), <http://simposium.ru/ru/node/14046>, (24.02.2021). Cf. Klemens LOFFLER, *Syncretism*, (1979), <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/syncretism>, (24.02.2021).

in specific areas of human activity, for example, the neutralization of opposites in linguistics; interaction between the arts (visual, sound, plastic) and its types (dance, music, drama) at the initial stages of culture; the unity of mental functions in the early stages of child development in psychology; eclecticism in philosophy, etc. Traditionally, syncretism is an indicator of the primitive underdevelopment of the individual, society, and artistic phenomenon.⁵

Creativity is a type of activity in which both the process and the result of the creation of qualitatively new unique material objects and spiritual values of culture are important. The progressive complexity of human activity forms multi-faceted semantics of the culture-creative potential as a way of forming, consolidating and translating the results of creativity in culture. Culture-creative potential, combining cumulative (universal, sustainable) and transforming (innovative) characteristics of culture, provides for overcoming the one-dimensional understanding of the principles of its development. The creative potential of culture, overcoming the boundaries of subjective assignment and updating new life-affirming meanings, provides a multi-vector development of culture. Creativity as the constructive potential of culture is vividly conceptualized in religious syncretism through the integration of the rational and the irrational, the scientific and the artistic, the reflexive and the intuitive. Religious syncretism sets creative thought in motion contextually – without selecting, but updating all the existing cultural potential (stable patterns, cognitive abilities, formed skills). Cultural creativity and traditional religious faith are not only interconnected (as initiators of new integrity and development), but also oppose each other (in mechanisms, attributes, goals). Reliance on: The idea of the mathematician R. Goot about creativity as the achievement of »a new result by resolving a certain contradiction«;⁶ The modern convergence of religion and science, the study of the problems of life outside the boundaries of »knowledge«, but in the »upper register of the Spirit«⁷ allows us to formulate several provisions that reveal the role of religious syncretism in cultural creation. The first proposition: religious syncretism is a way of transition from a creative idea to a creative event as a result of the transformative activity of a person as a 'Homo Creator' or creator of beings.

M. S. Gagan identified the necessary set of needs, abilities and skills of a person for culture-creation: Knowledge that mediates objective creativity; Value or »the meaning of an object for a person as a subject«, »a subjective object«; Anticipatory actions of the model; ideals created »on the basis of knowledge

⁵ S. A. BEZKLUBAYA, *Kul'tura kak sistema [Culture as a System]*, Moscow, MAI Publ., 2006, 55.

⁶ R. GOOT, O tvorchestve v nauke i tekhnike [On creativity in science and technology], *Voprosy psikhologii*, 2 (2007), 132.

⁷ M. S. KOZLOVA, *Filosofskie iskaniya L. Vitgenshteina [Philosophical searches of L. Wittgenstein]*, V. 1, Moscow, Gnozis, 1994, XV.

and under the guiding guidance of values«; »The need for another person as an accomplice of my being«.⁸

At the same time, »humanity cannot do without...« doubling »it's real being with an imaginary, illusory quasi-being«.⁹ The creative idea of doubling being is realized through a thought-experience-imagination-love syncretism. It is the love of this combined person and creator (for characters, images of things, for all humanity) that transforms his work into a kind of confession, endowing it with creative and constructive strength, and establishing a spiritual connection with the whole world.¹⁰

In the view of V. S. Solov'ev the substantial unity of creativity forms »integral creativity« or »free theurgy«¹¹ Creativity identifies theurgy (as a communication of sacred mystery with the world of the gods in the process of special ritual actions) with culture, and determines the path of spiritual self-improvement of a person and the construction of life according to the laws of social and moral harmony. In theurgy, as N. A. Berdyaev wrote, ends any division of creativity, as does traditional culture, being the work of human hands, also end in it, and »superculture« begins, for »theurgy is the action of man together with God – divine action, divine-human creativity«.¹²

Religious syncretism transforms the contradiction between the theurgic idea and everyday reality into an event of internal experience, personal in its essence and supra-personal in its content. The culture-creative potential of religious syncretism is a mechanism for the transformation of a sacred idea into a cultural event. Creativity as a creation of oneself, an idea as a breakthrough to the creation of an image, sense-making as the content of an image, freedom as an equivalent to action, form the force of translating syncretic religious ideas into a cultural event. The potential - the center of connection of all the above-described mental components - turns them from a possibility into real being.

The second position: through syncretism as a sway of the existence of religion, a way for borrowing in all areas of human activity was opened, primarily in the intellectual. This led to the syncretic interaction of not only religious systems (some cases of which were the well-known biconfessional and triconfessional periods), but also local cultures.

Mircea Eliade noted: »Alien to aging or sterility, syncretism in general seems to be a condition of all religious creativity«.¹³ Syncretism became the primary

⁸ M. S. KAGAN, *Filosofiya kul'tury [Philosophy of culture]*, St. Petersburg, Petropolis, 1996, 151.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹ V. S. SOLOV'EV, *Filosofskie nachala cel'nogo znaniya [Philosophical principles of integral knowledge]*, Moscow, Mysl, 1988, 152.

¹² N. A. BERDYAEV, *Smysl tvorchestva: Opyt opravdaniya cheloveka [The meaning of creativity: The experience of justifying a person]*, Paris, YMCA-Press, 1985, 283.

¹³ Mircea ELIADE, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses, tome 2: De Gautama Bouddha au triomphe du christianisme*, Moscow, Kriterion, 2002, 126.

cause and specific feature of the evolution of polytheistic and monotheistic beliefs (although monotheism strove to strictly observe dogma). »Finally, all large and small religions began and started their formation as syncretisms, to later establish themselves in a firmer ideological and effective sacral order.«¹⁴ The confusion of dissimilar religious rites, cults, beliefs in one religious movement is most widespread in Christianity and various near-Christian trends, much less common in Islam, Buddhism and Hindu beliefs, and practically did not spread in closed local religions like Confucianism, Zoroastrianism and Taoism.¹⁵ The entire history of the spread of Christianity indicates its reliance on traditional local beliefs, that is, on existence in syncretic forms. St. Augustine is known to point out that when the achievements of ancient cultures contain truths »useful for our faith, then these truths should not only not be shunned, but must be taken from illegal owners and used to our advantage.«¹⁶

Syncretism is the reason for the presence and preservation of the foundations of autochthonous religiosity and mentality of local cultures (in everyday life, folklore, ceremonies and rituals, church service, arts and crafts, architecture, music, literature, politics, economics) when they interact with other outlooks and cultures. For example, through syncretism, a dualistic (pagan-Christian) religious model was implemented in the cultural practice of Kievan Rus. This is evidenced by the ritual actions that existed among the inhabitants of the steppe territories (present-day Ukraine): in order to stop the thunderstorm, people were baptized, prayed to God and at the same time threateningly waved at the cloud with a bread shovel, or a tablecloth, or a consecrated willow (there is also information in Herodotus about fortune telling with the help of a willow twig, like the custom of the Scythians).¹⁷ D. S. Likhachyov categorically asserted: »There can be no dual faith at all: either there is only one faith or there is none.«¹⁸ Religious syncretism allows you to avoid the irreconcilability of cults, gives faith (as a personal experience of a secret inner life and confidential communication with God) inner integrity.

The third position: religious syncretism is a way to eliminate the very possibility of simplified monism in the analysis of such philosophical categories as life and death, being and nothing, beautiful and ugly, space and time, virtue,

¹⁴ G. ČRPIĆ, J. JUKIĆ, Alternativna religioznost, *Bogoslovska smotra*, 68 (1998) 4, 589-617, 612.

¹⁵ D. A. TAYEVSKIY, *Syncreticheskie religii i sekty [Syncretic religions and sects]*, Moscow, Intrad, 2001, 26.

¹⁶ Jacques LE GOFF, *La civilisation de l'Occident medieval*, Moscow, Progress, 1992, 107.

¹⁷ K. A. OKHOMUZH, A. T. SUZ'KO, *Archaichnye element narodnoy duhovnoy kul'tury stepony Ukrainy [Archaic elements of the folk spiritual culture of the steppe Ukraine]*, Dnepropetrovsk, 1992, 17.

¹⁸ D. S. LIKHACHYOV, Cerkov'. Khristianstvo v istorii Rossii [Church. Christianity in the history of Russia], in: D. S. BAKUN (comp.) *Izbrannoye: mysli o zhizni, istorii, kul'ture [Selected: thoughts about life, history, culture]*, Moscow, Russian Fund of Culture, 2006, 312.

soul, faith, etc. Religious syncretism is a natural way to discover and describe the general, universal principles of being.

When a person who has understood the world for himself blends integration of goal-setting, boundaries and ways of thinking, together with instrumental and semantic aspects of spiritual activity, this introduces that person into the world of syncretic values of religion. Syncretism forms the basis for combining the elements of religion into some logically homogeneous whole, but does not separate this whole from another, wider range of cultural phenomena. This allows you to comprehend and represent every thing, every event and phenomenon not only in its specificity, but also in its universality. Thus, the ancient Russian musical alphabets coded the ethical categories of Christianity as practical explanations of the principles of social life. The characteristics of the musical notes (hooks) carried the idea of moral self-improvement, which had no direct relation to professional performance:

»Culisma – to all people love unfeigned. Stopica – humility in wisdom. The Article – avoiding profanity and vain words. With a magpie's leg – avarice is true hatred. The hook – meekness of mind to keep from evils. The cutter – grace to the poor and mercy. Sedge – shoveling away from all evil with all my heart and mentally«. ¹⁹

Religious syncretism fixes the universal values of culture that have universal and supranational significance. The indivisibility of the cultural system based on the spirituality of religious syncretism gives a real opportunity to construct new processes, phenomena, qualities of spiritual culture and transfer them to the field of practice.

Syncretism itself is devoid of any meaningfulness, intentionality and is only a formula by means of which it is possible to construct the systemic integrity of culture. The genesis of the most ancient forms of syncretic generalization – artistic and religious – fills this formula with the high meaning of universal unity (of man, culture, society, nature). Formal language, themes of art and religion are born of and testify to spiritual truth. ²⁰

»In artistic and religious creativity, the material and the spiritual are mutually identified, and not simply combined or balanced, that is, they enter into a new kind of connection, in which new systemic properties are born«. ²¹

Art and religion represent the first syncretic conceptual and value components of culture, most fully reflecting the integrity of a person's creative ties with all that exists.

¹⁹ A. I. ROGOV (comp.), *Muzykal'naya estetika Rossii XI-XVIII vekov [Musical aesthetics of Russia in the XI-XVIII centuries]*, Moscow, Muzyka, 1973, 155-156.

²⁰ Titus BURCKHARDT. *Sacred Art in East and West. Its Principles and Methods*, London, Perennial Books, 1967.

²¹ Kagan, *Filosofiya kul'tury...*, 163.

Intensive formation of universal human integrity stimulated interest in syncretism as a determinant of the transformation of external stimuli by culture into internal systemic connections. The combination of the constants of culture (art, language, everyday life, traditions, faith, religion, practical and theoretical knowledge) into a systemic unity has become the subject of research by many authors.

Thus, the patriarch of Slavic studies, dialectologist, ethnographer, historian Pavel Josef Šafařík (Šafárik) in his book »Slovanské starožitnosti« (1837) described the polysemantic integrity of Slavic culture. To the treatise Slowanský národopis (1842), Šafařík attached a map of the Slavic world (Slovanský Zemévid) as a graphic symbol of his cultural unity.²² Croatian educator, theologian, philosopher, missionary priest Juraj Križanić, wrote his work Politics (1663-1666) in the »all-Slavic language« as a mixture of Church Slavonic, Croatian and Russian languages. Križanić stood for the union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, for the unity of the peoples of the Christian world in the name of resisting the Ottoman offensive. He saw the general happiness of the Slavs in the understanding and acceptance of the unity of all the good that was given to these peoples: from nature, from the blessings of the earth, from laws and customs, from church dispensation.²³ The largest Croatian expert in the field of Slavic linguistics Vatroslav Jagić pointed to the common origins of Old Slavonic, Old Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Old Bulgarian languages and literatures. Jagić noted:

»That all Russian dialects in relation to other Slavic languages (whoever does not like the expression 'adverb' can replace it with the word 'language' in science this is a secondary matter) constitute one whole, characterized by many remarkable features of internal unity, is for linguists not a controversial issue.«²⁴

The formation of religious syncretism reflected the stages of cultural development: from the initially undeveloped to the first cultural systems (local territorial groups, families, tribes). The founder of cultural studies L. A. White classified cultural systems as material ones, to which the laws and terminology of thermodynamics are applicable – »entropy« (a measure of disorder of energy), »negative entropy« or »negentropy« (a measure of energy orderliness). White formulated the law: »Culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is increased, or as the efficiency of the instrumental means of putting the energy to work is increased.«²⁵ Cultural systems develop in the

²² Pavel Josef ŠAFAŘÍK, *Slovanské starožitnosti, oddíl dějepisný. Okres 1, 2* (Chech), Prague, Bedřich Tempský, 1863.

²³ Juraj KRIŽANIĆ, *Politika* [Politics], http://hrono.ru/libris/lib_k/krizh.php, (24.02.2021).

²⁴ Archiv für Slavische Philologie, Bd. XX, 1, Berlin, 1898, 33.

²⁵ L. A. WHITE, *Energiya i evolyutsiya kul'tury* [Energy and Cultural Evolution] in: S. Ya. LEVIT et al. (ed.), *Antologiya issledovaniy kul'tury* [Anthology of cultural studies], St. Petersburg, Universitetskaya kniga, 1997, 444.

direction of concentration of energy and in complications of the ordering of structure, that is, in the mainstream of »negative entropy«.²⁶

Negentropy supports the vital activity of culture as an artificial system, distinguishing it from the chaos or equilibrium of the natural environment. As a result, the development of culture is forced to »slow down« by the increasingly complicated processes of systematization, structuring, and hierarchization. Negentropy creates and intensifies the gap (informational, bodily, mental, and spiritual) between the natural and the artificial, nature and culture. The cultural system is deprived of the grounds for unity with the environment as the possibility of manifesting its own semantic truth or falsity, complexity or simplicity, fragmentation or integrity.

The process of emasculation of the semantic content of culture can be stopped by the »entropic« content of religious syncretism. Religious syncretism preserves the »unity of diversity« ordered by tradition, variability (mythological, ceremonial, ethical, artistic, aesthetic, cultural, national, and ideological) that only grows over time. The increase in the entropy of religious syncretism brings the cultural situation closer to the natural at the deepest level of sensibility, thinking, consciousness, and creative activity. The archaic character of religious syncretism, due to the crises of culture and the unevenness of the historical process, is always »alive« and under the influence of traditional and modern impulses is ready to be activated – to return to the safe integrity of being. (Outwardly, this can be expressed in a sharp surge of eschatological experiences; the return of the primordial phenomena of the sacred, free, and value-based). Religious syncretism combined different quality cultural formations and processes into a single whole, reflected the cultural whole as an open system – ready for self-organization and self-development.

Thus, syncretism concentrates in religion a whole variety of regulators (adaptive, spiritual, aesthetic, artistic, social psychological) of human existence. The multidimensionality of religious syncretism demonstrates its total isomorphism to culture as a whole – ontological, anthropological, collective, individual, phenomenological, historical, axiological. Religious syncretism as the embodiment of spiritual goal-setting, the meanings of life, the rules of social community of subjects (an individual, groups of people) contributes to the search for new forms, patterns and methods of cultural development. Religious syncretism acts as a spiritual principle of integration of elements (ethical, aesthetic, artistic) of complex cultural systems. At each historical stage, it continues to form a new spiritual reality – thereby making it possible to build complex cultural processes, phenomena, qualities that are transferred into the practical area of social and cultural life. The entropic essence of religious syncretism plays an important role in overcoming cultural fragmentation,

²⁶ L. A. WHITE, *Culturology, Intern. Encycl. of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, N. Y., McMillan, 1968, 547-550.

oversimplification and monism. The culture-creative potential of religious syncretism is determined both by the creative transcendental nature of the human individuality itself, and by the reproductive nature of man as a social being. The need for individual creativity is revealed in the context of religious syncretism by the phenomenology of the formation of ideas and sense-making, reaching the level of cultural interpretation of meanings.

2. Forms of culture-creation of religious syncretism (from art to sacredness)

There is a question that every researcher of religious syncretism is puzzled by: what forms of culture allow this phenomenon to be filled with a powerful cultural-creative force, to fully accumulate and transmit it?

The genesis of syncretism gives an idea of this. The attention of science to syncretism, starting from the middle of the XVIII century, was due to the progress of natural knowledge, the growth of the role of the individual, and the nationalization of religions. Against the background of these processes, secularism, atheism, doubts about the idea of God, the objectivity of the cult spread in society and, as a result, the number of syncretic religious formations (various forms of mysticism, occultism, etc.) increased. The search for stable moral foundations led thinkers to primitiveness as a stage of culture less »spoiled« in all senses and to syncretism of early forms of art, religion, myth and ritual as the most open and effective way of expressing ideal cultural norms.

Syncretism as a way of mixing different types of primitive art (poetry, music, dance) was first considered by the English educator John Brown in his »Dissertation on the rise, union, and power, the progressions, separations, and corruptions, of poetry and music.« (1763).²⁷ John Brown's concept of syncretism was developed by his contemporaries: Adam Smith,²⁸ Wilhelm Scherer,²⁹ ethnopsychological (Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt; Johannes Volkelt) and historical-ethnographic (Karl Viktor Müllenhoff) schools.³⁰

The psychological synthesis of arts, the sensual integrity of the artistic image became the basis for understanding syncretism for Russian and Ukrainian scientists: the founder of cultural and historical literary criticism A. N. Veselovsky, Slavic philologist A. A. Potebnya and his followers in Kharkov, who were

²⁷ M. P. ALEKSEEV, *Iz istorii angliyskoy literatury [From the history of English literature]*, Moscow, State publishing house of fiction, 1960, 244.

²⁸ F. HUTCHESON, D. HUME, A. SMITH, *Estetika [Aesthetics]*, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1973, 175-190.

²⁹ W. SCHERER, *Poetik*, Berlin, Weidmann Buch., 1888.

³⁰ K. MÜLLENHOFF, *De antiquissima Germanorum poesia chorica*, Kiel, Schwerssche Buch., 1845.

part of the »Kharkov group« in 1907-1927 and were called »Kharkov Potebnians« (A. G. Gornfeld, B. A. Lezin, D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky), as well as for the historian M. S. Grushevsky.

Veselovsky in his work »Historical Poetics« (1899) defined syncretism as a way of transition of extra-aesthetic phenomena to aesthetic ones by bringing primitive poetic forms closer to primitive forms of consciousness. Therefore, he considered the formation of poetic language as a syncretic phenomenon in the form of a complex process of merging in the word of a religious animistic cult of rite and myth with the physiological syncretism of man – the unity of his perception and thinking.³¹ Potebnya studied the nature of literature from the point of view of the psychological laws of everyday and artistic perception and comprehension. With this approach, the sensory image in his work *Thought and Language* (1862) was an organic unity with another similar unit or a sensual whole, capable of self-development through the passage of stages of complication of meanings.³² Literary critic, »Kharkov Potebnian« Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky in his work »Theory of Poetry and Prose« (1908) called the main feature of lyrics the emotion that was born in a person from the unity of life rhythms: sounds, colors, lines and feelings.³³ Grushevsky saw ideological and artistic syncretism at the heart of the formation of the Ukrainian literary language – the fusion of poetic forms (mono and dialogical disclosure of the plot, collectivism and subjectivity, epicism and lyricism) with theatrical ritual actions (vocalization, instrumental music, rhythm, choreography).³⁴

The study of early art forms revealed syncretism as a phenomenon that unites knowledge not about individual elements of the world and human life, but about the variety of types of connections (ethical, aesthetic, artistic, religious, logical, empirical, dynamic, and cultural) between them. Art, as a middle area between thinking and sensuality, brought together feeling and thought in the form of an image, which means that it most fully implemented the fusion of natural, social and spiritual meanings of life. For a person, this influx poured out not into abstract, but into cultural entities. In art, syncretism acquired a cultural meaning, artistically combining different forms of objectification of consciousness. Syncretic consciousness reflected in art the indissolubility of a person's ideas about: living and dead, real and ideal, rational and emotional, personal and social, and play and work. The content of such consciousness embodied in art the unity of different forms of experience, generalization and

³¹ A. N. VESELOVSKY, *Istoricheskaya poetika* [Historical poetics], Moscow, Vyschaya shkola, 1989.

³² A. A. POTEBNYA, *Mysl' i yazyk* [Thought and language], in: A. A. POTEBNYA, *Slovo i mif* [Word and myth], Moscow, Pravda, 1989.

³³ D. N. OVSYANIKO-KULIKOVSKY, *Teoriya poezii i prozy* [The theory of poetry and prose], Moscow, Sytin Publ., 1908.

³⁴ M. S. GRUSHEVSKY, *Istoriya ukrainskoy literatury* [History of Ukrainian Literature], Vol. 1, Kiev, Lybid', 1993.

communication: artistic-figurative, emotional-sensual, aesthetic, religious, and ethical. The reality of culture became the content of art, refracted through an aesthetically holistic attitude towards it. The syncretic nature of art and the versatility of human creative activity have marked the way for culture to acquire consistency. As a force that spiritually connects the constant of culture from within, syncretic art has affirmed sacredness (Latin 'sacrum' – sacred) as the threshold of religious feeling and religious faith.

The core of the sacred is the supernatural, as supernatural and transcendental.³⁵ Belief in the supernatural is inherent in human nature as a source of knowledge of reality, positive emotions, psychological comfort and new meaning. The sacred is »a defining sign of a supernatural power that stands above people, dominates in relation to them and directs the course of social life and the life of individuals«. ³⁶

For images of art, to be sacred meant to exist before the beginning of all human activity as its guidelines. And only in the background was the ability of the oldest poetry, music, painting, sculpture to be objects of art, that is, to play a profane (Latin 'profanes' - devoid of holiness, impious) role.³⁷ The sacred image captured in art has always existed as a unity of life's realities and a form of man's assimilation with nature. Syncretic forms of art testified to the beginning of a person's movement towards a mystical meeting through the sacred with God in religion.

In religion, everything that comes from God or is directed at Him will be recognized as sacred, will become an object of veneration, and acquire a special spiritual meaning in the eyes of the believer. Syncretic allegories, metaphors, symbols and images will acquire internal integrity, will form the basis of verbal (sacred linguistic tools, phraseology – expressing all kinds of instructions, warnings, prohibitions, prescriptions, wishes) and non-verbal (reliquiae, relics of saints, elements of church services, church attributes, architecture and other forms of art, church holidays, rituals, numbers, colors, ritual gestures and postures) ways of expressing the sacred. However, in early art forms the theological understanding of the sacred, where the sacred – derived from God – was absent.

Syncretic art fixed the metaphysical meaning of transcendental being, in which natural things were not thought of as animate, but divinely felt. The experience of the sacred in art was identified with the experience of being,

³⁵ A. V. SOROKINA, Svyatoye i sverhestestvennoye: ponyatie i ponimanie [Sacred and Supernatural: Concepts and Understanding], *Bulletin of the Nizhny Novgorod University*, 3 (2007) 210-213.

³⁶ A. V. MEDVEDEV, *Sakral'noye kak prichastnost' k absolyutnomu* [The sacred as participation in the absolute], Ekaterinburg, Bank kul'turnoy informatsii, 1999, 14.

³⁷ Mircea ELIADE, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, N.Y., The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986.

thus the sacred acquired an inner syncretic and philosophical character. Something was sacred only because it, as the philosopher of culture Eliade wrote, »existed«, had an ontological status. In this sense, all parts of a single being possessed a real sacred existence: space, time, number, object, word, text.³⁸ This idea is complemented by the interpretation of the sacred by the founder of the phenomenology of religion Rudolf Otto as a fusion (transcendental, spiritual, perfection, integrity, highest value, eternity, not reducible to morality and rationality) with aspects of the numinous (Latin 'numen' – divine principle) – a sense of creation; awe-inspiring mystery; admiration; unconditional value.³⁹ The idea of the sacred in a certain sense was a sublimation of the original concern for the maintenance of life, given to a person in experience to be part of the flesh of a single nature. The embodiment of sacredness in artistic images contributed to a person's discovery of his own openness to the totality of being, the ability to empathize with all living things and the need to take responsible care of them. In Christian theology, the sacred is fully revealed in the gospel »good news« about the incessant growth of life from a mustard seed to the Kingdom of Heaven through the idea of utmost, ultimate care for eternal and indestructible life. Life will appear as capable of endless pity, indulgence and tenderness, that is, the comprehension of strength in the weak, greatness in the little, grace in the humiliated. The life of the living will not be reduced to the strength of the strong and the weakness of the weak, but, on the contrary, will affirm the weakest as the strongest, crying comforted, »poor in spirit« who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. As Paul Tillich wrote:

»The sacred is the quality of what a person cares about. Only that which is sacred can become for a person his ultimate concern, and only that which becomes an ultimate concern for a person has the quality of the sacred.«⁴⁰

Thus, the source of the sacred, before being endowed and possessing transcendental power, is found in art as immanent in life itself, experienced as the highest value. The singularity of the images of the sacred in syncretic art allowed them to become objects of religious faith in the future. Syncretic art, manifesting the sacred, determined the syncretic nature of the religious content of the mythological-ritual complex, and then of religion itself.

Myths are always supernatural in origin, and belief in myth is always supernatural. Through performance, rite propagates the connection between the sacred and the profane sections of genesis. Myth, reflecting the syncretism of

³⁸ Mircea ELIADE, *Svyashchennoye i mirskoye [Le sacre et le profane]*, Moscow, MGU Publ., 1994, 17.

³⁹ R. OTTO, *Svyashchennoye. Ob irratsional'nom v ideye bozhestvennogo i yego sootnoshenii s ratsional'nym [Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen]*, St. Petersburg, SPbGU Publ., 2008.

⁴⁰ P. TILLICH *Sistematičeskaya teologiya [Systematic theology]*, Vol. 1, St. Petersburg, Center gumanitarnyh initsiativ, 2017, 37.

thinking and consciousness, syncretizes its own sacredness, asserts religious syncretism.

There is no general model of mythological thinking and consciousness in science. The discovery in the twentieth century of cognitive types of thinking (logical-verbal or sign-symbolic and spatial-figurative) presented the cognitive, mental, genetic and cultural evolution as a single process. This is proven in: The congenital predisposition of people to live in groups of close relatives; Children's food preferences, which influence the cuisine of adults; An innate human predisposition to think in oppositions, expressed at the physiological level in extreme forms of disease-phobias (fear of crowds, heights, loneliness, closed space); The presence of chromosomal changes leading to defects in intelligence (for example, Turner syndrome - disorders associated with the perception of space). If genetic mechanisms provide the formation of human consciousness and thinking, then their development is determined by culture-fixation in the long-term (figurative, semantic) memory of the individual and society.⁴¹

Archaic thinking began to be defined as right-brain, figurative and was characterized by: Operating with samples, categories; Indifference to logical contradictions and the establishment of supernatural connections between objects; The widespread use of oppositions (first of all, sacred-secular) and myth as a means of resolving contradictions; Syncretism as the unity of the natural and the supernatural, things and ideas, goals and actions. Primitive thinking as right-brain is less subject to conscious control, less organized in the connections between images and words denoting them, and therefore require less brain activity. Right-brain information processing coincides with the »logic« of the myth.⁴²

Ethnologist and sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss presented the logic of myth as the possibility of separating the »general« from the »special«. This possibility is formed at the collective level, and is reproduced in the symbolic space on the »nature-culture« axis. In this case, the structural unit of the archaic mentality is the polarization of qualities: wet-dry, raw-boiled, moderate-immoderate. Archaic thinking operates with a set of oppositions, the foundations of which are real. These are images of animals, objects, celestial bodies that are rooted in ancient magic. The hierarchy of such oppositions is a specifically organized fund of collective reason (logical thinking) – myth. The myth is generated by thinking and has an unconscious structure, the differences of which are associated with the images used. Conceptual thought is rational at the level of the collective and its system of myths. The collective is responsible for changing

⁴¹ I. P. MERKULOV, Arkhacheskoye myshleniye: vera, mif, poznaniye [Archaic thinking: faith, myth, knowledge], in: I. P. MERKULOV (ed.), *Evolutsiya, kul'tura, poznaniye* [Evolution, culture, knowledge], Moscow, IFRAN, 1996, 14-16.

⁴² Ibid., 19.

the mythological semantics.⁴³ The purpose of the myth is to provide a logical model for resolving contradictions (which is impossible if the contradiction is real). Variants of combining oppositions lead to the development of the myth in a spiral until »the moment at which the intellectual impulse that gave rise to this myth is exhausted and oppositions are overcome.«⁴⁴ The final overcoming of oppositions is carried out as a result of the introduction of a symbolic mediator – a deity or hero. Their images were what the philologist and cultural historian Meletinsky called »ancestor-demiurge-cultural heroes« and are designated as syncretic, combining ideas about zoomorphic ancestors, supernatural beings (spirits, gods) and people-heroes of historical legends.⁴⁵

Eliade noted that in archaic thinking, the meaning and significance of the actions of people and natural objects acquire a supernatural force, which separates them from the environment only through hierophany – a direct manifestation of supernatural power or indirectly, through a ritual. For example, a stone is recognized by people as sacred if the soul of their ancestors »lives« in it, or if its shape is a symbolic reflection of a mythical act. In the structure of archaic consciousness, the world for a person has extraterrestrial archetypes as »role models«, »a plan«, »a form«, »a double«.⁴⁶

Everything that did not have a sacred prototype (desert areas, unknown seas) in the archaic consciousness was likened to primary chaos or a state that preceded creation and required the action of consecration. The celestial archetypes of territories, temples and cities, expressed in the symbolism of the center, became the most important for ancient man. The sacred center could be: The sacred mountain (Gerizim or »the navel of the earth« in Palestine, Golgotha among Christians – the place of birth and burial of the first man, Adam); A temple as an imitation of a sacred mountain (Babylonian temples, Borobudur).

The sacred city or temple was the Axis of the World (Axis Mundi) and the point of contact of Heaven, Earth, and Hell. The road to the center is a ritual of transition from the mundane to the sacred. In addition, reaching the center is always tantamount to immersion in absolute reality and contact with the beginning of the creation of the world.⁴⁷

Eliade defined the sacred (manifested primarily in non-verbalized forms) as syncretic, neutral to good and evil, the dialectic of the sacred and the pro-

⁴³ C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Pervobytnoye myshleniye [Primitive thinking]*, Moscow, Respublika, 1999.

⁴⁴ C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Strukturnaya antropologiya [Anthropologie structurale]*, Moscow, Nauka, 1985, 201-206.

⁴⁵ E. M. MELETINSKY, Obshcheye ponyatiye mifa i mifologii [General concept of myth and mythology], in: E. M. MELETINSKY (ed.), *Mifologicheskii slovar' [Mythological dictionary]*, Moscow, Soviet Encyclopedia, 1991, 653-656.

⁴⁶ Mircea ELIADE, Mif o vechnom vozvrashchenii. Arkhetipy i povtoreniya [Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétitions], in: Mircea ELIADE, *Kosmos i istoriya [Space and history]*, Moscow, Progress, 1987, 27-145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33-55.

fane (the profane becomes sacred through hierophany, the sacral desacralizing – profane) allowed him to draw a conclusion about the manifestation of the sacred (through hierophany) in the real world, and hence the possibility of knowing the sacred. Eliade connected the sacred with mythological time, the profane with history, temporary irreversibility, which is destroyed in mythical time. The archetype of the beginning of time is the sacred, having a supernatural transcendental source. Therefore, it is a myth that sets out a sacred story, tells about the beginning of all beginnings.⁴⁸

So, religious syncretism concentrated in art, myth and ritual is a powerful semantic resource for cultural creativity. The syncretism of the sacred semantic resource of myth made it possible to prove the relativity of opposites (things and ideas, goals and actions), natural (nature) and artificial (culture)) and, ultimately, built an integral, consistent, logically correct unity of the natural and the supernatural, the sacred and the profane. The evolution of syncretic images led to the dominance of metaphor and to the opposition of the natural to the supernatural, to the realization of faith in a propitious cult and in prayers, to the transformation of the sacred component of the mythological-ritual complex into religious syncretism as an independent sociocultural phenomenon. Art and myth turned out to be the most important syncretic forms of universalization of the sacred and of its entrenchment in the emergence of generic human nature and in socio-cultural dynamics. Syncretism of the sacred has led to the fact that to this day »the most mundane existence retains traces of religious evaluations of the World«.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Religious syncretism is an institutional way of regulating sociocultural processes aimed at consolidating and transmitting creativity in culture. The meaning of the cultural-creative ideas of religious syncretism contributes to the definition not of the final rationalized concepts, but of the general goal-setting (ethical, aesthetic, artistic), which forms the idea of the dynamic integrity of culture. Religious syncretism as a method performs the function of entropy within any cultural phenomena, leaving them no opportunity to turn into dead formulas far from life. This is a kind of attempt to eliminate the possibility of a simplified understanding of human existence due to a transcendental change in value-focused intentions, boundaries and way of thinking, and instrumental and semantic aspects of activity. Religious syncretism fixes the inextricable link between the material and the spiritual as the creative principle of culture. The experience of a person's meeting with the sacred in syncretic forms of cul-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁹ Eliade, *Svyashchennoye i mirskoye...*, 6.

ture (myth, art, religion) is a kind of »challenge« that allows you to generate »reciprocal« spiritual phenomena not only in the field of religion (symbol, cult, community, Church, sacred word and text), but also in other spheres of culture (in politics, economics and science). Religious syncretism captures universal values, that is, those that have a cultural significance that is so exclusive that it transcends national boundaries and is of universal value for present and future generations of all mankind.

Svetlana A. Bezklubaya*

Religijski sinkretizam: do podrijetla kulturno-kreativnog potencijala

Sažetak

Suvremeno univerzalno značenje cjelokupnog ljudskog stvaralačkog iskustva potiče znanstveni interes za fenomene kulture koji koncentriraju i šire teorije, ideje i vjerovanja koja imaju univerzalno značenje i uzrokuju epohalne promjene na ogromnim prostorima. Religija, kao način čovjekova duhovnog i praktičnog ovladavanja svijetom, dio je kulture koji neprestano mijenja svoje oblike, odbacuje neke i odijeva se drugima, učvršćujući se u kulturne sustave i aktivno utječući na procese njihova samoorganiziranja i samoregulacije. Ovom se studijom istražuje religijski sinkretizam kao način pretvaranja komponenata različitog reda postojanja u snažan kulturno-kreativni potencijal. Svrha rada je proučiti religijski sinkretizam kao složeni višerazinski proces uzajamnog utjecaja različitih vrsta religija, svetih ideoloških slika i kulturnih arhetipova (etičkih, estetskih, umjetničkih). Parametri otvorenosti, miješanje i zamućivanje granica omogućuju da se religiozni sinkretizam smatra kreativnim čimbenikom kulture, dajući mu potreban integritet i stvarno značenje. Analiza tradicionalnih oblika refleksije i regulacije društveno-kulturnih procesa (mit, ritual, religija, umjetnost) otkriva sinkretizam kao način ispunjavanja svetog i religioznog snažnom kulturno-kreativnom snagom. Autorica otkriva entropijsku bit religioznog sinkretizma i njegovu stvaralačku ulogu u svladavanju fragmentacije, pojednostavljenja i monizma kulturom (posebno u tumačenju pojmova života i smrti, bića i ničega, lijepog i ružnog, prostora i vremena, vrline, duše, vjere). Metodološka osnova istraživanja oblikovana je transdisciplinarnim pristupom uspostavljanju sustavne interakcije životnog stava strukturno funkcionalne i povijesne analize s kulturnim i filozofskim promišljanjem. Teorijski zaključci sadržani u radu otvaraju nove mogućnosti za daljnje proučavanje utjecaja religija na kreativnost kulturnih sustava. Proučavanje kulturno-kreativnog potencijala religijskog sinkretizma jasno pokazuje jedinstvo primarnih uzroka bića i tako omogućuje praktično smanjenje stupnja suvremene međuvjerske napetosti.

Ključne riječi: entropija, kreativnost, kulturni sustav, kulturno-kreativni potencijal, mit, negentropija, religija, religijski sinkretizam, sinkretizam, sveto, transdisciplinarnost, umjetnost.

(s engl. prev. Georgy Tananykin)

* Izv. prof. dr. sc. Svetlana A. Bezklubaya, Nacionalno istraživačko sveučilište, Institut za inženjerstvo, ekonomiju i humanističke znanosti Moskovskoga zrakoplovnog instituta, Odsjek za filozofiju; A-80, ГСПИ-3, 4 Volokolamskoe shosse, RU-125993 Moscow, Russia; e-mail: bezkluba@email.com.