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## RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM: ITS CREATION, PROBLEMS AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF INTERRELIGIOUS RAPPROCHEMENT

Aliya Mursalova\*

**Abstract.** Religious syncretism is a complex phenomenon characterized by the blending of various religious beliefs and practices, often resulting from cultural interactions and historical contexts. It manifests in multiple forms across the globe, reflecting the dynamic interplay between indigenous traditions and external religious influences. This synthesis of beliefs can be observed in numerous cultural settings, where local customs and global religious practices intertwine, creating unique spiritual expressions. Obviously, in terms of cultural transformations of the recent years, the interest in the phenomenon of syncretism has increased at the scientific level. From this point of view, investigating its emergence, forms, evolution, and role in society is deemed active. Theoretical work on this issue should consider not only interreligious interfaith relations, but also the social and cultural conditions. The study used a functional method for the analysis of historical regularities of religious syncretism. The analysis of the structure, characteristics, and functionality of historical forms of syncretism is mainly based on systematic and structural-functional approaches. Also, comparative-historical and observational methodologies were used in the study, which allowed tracing the stages of emergence and development of religious syncretism. The establishment of religious syncretism in the modern world is a complex and underexplored process. The study of this process can contribute to the correctly classify newly emerging religions in the future. We believe that the main reasons and conditions for the formation of religious syncretism are the beneficial historical-cultural relationships of mutual religious systems existing around the world. To demonstrate the foregoing, it is necessary to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of religious syncretism, analyze its evolution, and identify the broad motives and conditions for its emergence. Analyses of the problems of religious syncretism can be found in the studies of V.Cabot, E.Taylor, J.Fraser and contemporaries N.S.Kapustin, Y.V.Pedro, G.Goosen, H.Kreamer, K.Colpe, E.Maroni, C.Stewart, G.L.Richard.

**Keywords:** history of religions, religious syncretism, forms of syncretism, synthesis, interreligious dialogue

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## РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ СИНКРЕТИЗМ: ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ ЕГО ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЕ, ПРОБЛЕМ И МЕЖРЕЛИГИОЗНОГО СБЛИЖЕНИЯ

**Алия Мурсалова\***

**Абстракт.** Религиозный синкретизм - это сложное явление, характеризующееся смешением различных религиозных верований и практик, часто возникающее в результате культурных взаимодействий и исторических контекстов. Он проявляется в различных формах по всему миру, отражая динамическое взаимодействие между местными традициями и внешними религиозными влияниями. Этот синтез верований можно наблюдать в многочисленных культурных условиях, где местные обычаи и мировые религиозные практики переплетаются, создавая уникальные духовные выражения. Очевидно, что с точки зрения культурных трансформаций последних лет интерес к феномену синкретизма возрос на научном уровне. С этой точки зрения исследование его возникновения, форм, эволюции и роли в обществе считается активным. Теоретическая работа по этому вопросу должна учитывать не только межрелигиозные межконфессиональные отношения, но также социальные и культурные условия. В исследовании использован функциональный метод анализа исторических закономерностей религиозного синкретизма. Анализ структуры, характеристик и функциональности исторических форм синкретизма в основном базируется на системном и структурно-функциональном подходах. Также в исследовании использовались сравнительно-историческая и наблюдательная методологии, что позволило проследить этапы возникновения и развития религиозного синкретизма. Становление религиозного синкретизма в современном мире является сложным и малоизученным процессом. Изучение этого процесса может способствовать правильной классификации вновь возникающих религий в будущем. Мы считаем, что основными причинами и условиями формирования религиозного синкретизма являются выгодные историко-культурные связи общих религиозных систем, существующих по всему миру. Для демонстрации вышеизложенного необходимо исследовать теоретические основы религиозного синкретизма, проанализировать его эволюцию и выявить общие мотивы и условия его возникновения. Анализ проблем религиозного синкретизма можно найти в исследованиях В. Кэбота, Э. Тейлора, Дж. Фрейзера и современников Н.С. Капустин, Я.В. Педро, Г. Гусен, Х. Кремер, К. Колпе, Э. Марони, К. Стюарт, Г.Л. Ричард.

**Ключевые слова:** история религий, религиозный синкретизм, формы синкретизма, синтез, межрелигиозный диалог

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## DİNİ SİNKRETİZM: YARANMA ŞƏRTLƏRİ, PROBLEMLƏRİ VƏ DİNLƏRARASI RAZILAŞMA NƏTİCƏSİ KİMİ

**Aliyə Mürsəlova\***

**Abstrakt.** Dini sinkretizm müxtəlif dini inancların və təcrübələrin qarışması ilə səciyyələnən, çox vaxt mədəni qarşılıqlı təsirlər və tarixi kontekstlər nəticəsində yaranan mürəkkəb bir hadisədir. O, yerli ənənələr və xarici dini təsirlər arasında dinamik qarşılıqlı əlaqəni əks etdirən bütün dünyada müxtəlif formalarda özünü göstərir. İnancların bu sintezi yerli adət-ənənələrin və global dini təcrübələrin bir-birinə qarışdığı, özünəməxsus mənəvi ifadələr yaratdığı çoxsaylı mədəni məkanlarda müşahidə oluna bilər. Belə ki, son dövrün mədəni transformasiyaları baxımından elmi müstəvidə sinkretizm fenomeninə maraq artmışdır. Bu baxımından onun yaranmağını, formalarını və inkişafını və cəmiyyətdə rolunu araşdırmaq aktual hesab oluna bilər. Bu problemin nəzəri işi nəinki dinlərarası münasibətləri, habelə sosial-mədəni şəraiti də nəzərə almalıdır. Araşdırmada dini sinkretizmin tarixi qanunauyğunluqlarının analizi üçün funksional metod izlənməmişdir. Sinkretizmin tarixi formalarının quruluşunun, xüsusiyyətlərinin və funksionallığının təhlili əsasən sisteməlik və struktur-funksional yanaşmalara əsaslanır. Habelə, tədqiqat işində dini sinkretizmin yaranma və inkişaf mərhələlərini izləməyə imkan verən müqayisəli-tarixi və müşahidə metodlarından da istifadə edilmişdir. Müasir dünyada dini sinkretizmin formalaşması mürəkkəb və sonadək araşdırılmayan prosesdir. Həmin prosesin tədqiqi gələcəkdə yeni yaranan dinlərin düzgün şəkildə təsnifləndirilməsində öz töhfəsini verə bilər. Hesab edirik ki, dini sinkretizmin formalaşmasının əsas səbəb və şərtləri dünya şəraitində mövcud olan qarşılıqlı dini sistemlərin əlverişli tarixi-mədəni əlaqələrdir. Qeyd olunanları sübut etmək üçün dini sinkretizminin nəzəri əsaslarını tədqiq etmək, dini sinkretizmin təkamülünü təhlil etmək və onun meydana gəlməsinin ümumi səbəbləri və şərtləri aşkarlamaq lazımdır. Dini sinkretizmin problemlərinin təhlillərində V.Kabo, E.Teylor, C.Frezerin və müasirlərdən N.S.Kapustin, Y.V.Pedro, G.Qusen, H.Kremer, K.Kolpe, E.Maroni, Ç.Stiart, Q.L.Riçardın tədqiqatlarında rast gəlmək olar.

**Açar sözlər:** dinlər tarixi, dini sinkretizm, sinkretizmin formaları, sintez, dinlərarası dialoq

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## **1.Introduction**

The main features of religious life are the tendency of different religions to approach each other, their attempts at solidarity in solving urgent and primarily global political, social, ecological, and moral, etc. problems, on the one hand, and on the other hand, their rivalry in the sphere of influence and internal dislike for each other, which is sometimes reflected externally. History contains several examples of one religion supplanting another, the emergence of a new religion on top of the old religion and its subsequent separation, and the division of what was once a single religion into sects that did not accept each other and were in conflict. Thus, Buddhism evolved from Brahmanism, and Christianity from Judaism. Christianity was separated into Catholicism and Orthodoxy, followed by Protestantism, which was numerous of sects. Islam, on the other hand, was divided into Shiite and Sunni sects, each of which had several of subsects. It also facilitated the formation of religions such as Bahai. All these changes reflected complicated social processes that resulted from conflicts and reconciliations that occurred at various periods and conditions throughout human history. One of the most prominent outcomes was the phenomena of syncretism, which is an essential manifestation of new contemporary religions emerging within these various sacramental processes.

Syncretism (in Greek, *syncretismos* means “union, connection”) is a broad concept. It is the initial state of unity, the inseparable connection of something, the creator of a new phenomenon as a combination of differences. Its main feature is to harmonize not only the homogeneous, but also the incompatible, but also the contradictory. For the first time in history, the word syncretism was mentioned in Plutarch’s “Moralia” in the text “Brotherly Love” [Plutarch 1962, 246-235]. The ancient Greek philosopher used the word to describe the ability of the Cretans to unite in the face of danger despite their disagreements. In a religious context, the concept was used by Lutheran theologian Georg Calixtus at a church conference held in Thorn in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1965) to put an end to the disagreement between Protestant denominations. As a result, the concept remained a term that was not approved by the Catholic Church. In the 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historians evaluated syncretism as “religious misunderstanding”. In the 1970s-1990s, attempts were made to revive the term, clarify its boundaries, typology, and return it to the scientific vocabulary. In Western studies, religious syncretism is used alongside terms such as multiculturalism, inculturalism, doctrinal evolution, bricolage, and synthesis.

Since the mentioned process is evaluated in the context of the history of religions, the definitions of religious syncretism differ. Thus, according to N.S. Kapustin, this phenomenon, which ultimately emerges as a qualitatively new religious system, is evaluated as a specific process of limited historical

interaction of religious traditions with each other [Капустин 1984, 54]. According to the definition formed on the basis of his idea, religious syncretism is an objective process, a qualitatively new religious system arising from the compatibility of combinations of religious traditions during their historical interaction with each other. We are of the opinion that this type of mutual religious relation has the merit of donor-acceptor, that is, in many cases, ethnic religion is enriched with the ideas of a more developed religion. According to Y.V. Pedro, a representative of the modern school, religious syncretism is a universal [Pedro 2013, 294], historical regularity, and according to A.N. Dannenberg [Данненберг 2011, 34], it is a phenomenon of religious relations, which is a period of chaos of religious structures resulting from the collision of two or more religious systems.

The study mainly used historical-comparative and systematic methods that allow studying the stages of the formation and development of the subject object, distinguishing its features in historical dynamics. Socio-cultural, historical-cultural, and observational methods helped to analyze the socio-cultural transformation in society as determinants of various forms of religious syncretism.

## **2. History and conditions of the emergence of religious syncretism**

The concept of syncretism is also a universally problematic topic for such scientific fields as the history of religions, anthropology, and theology. The first theologian to study the problem of this term was the supporter of ecumenism, Henrik Kraemer. He proposed dividing syncretism into a phenomenological problem and a theological problem [Kraemer 1956, 392]. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the German researcher Karsten Colpe tried to build a typology of syncretism in his work “The History of Syncretism and the Compatibility of Structural Forms” [Colpe 1975]. He especially noted three laws of the syncretic structure:

1. The components of a syncretic form must exist independently and for a long time;
2. These components must create a balance between preserving and undermining their independent identity;
3. The combination of these components must reflect their vital capacity for renewal in history.

Religious syncretism, as a rule, is not only the union of two or more confessions but also the result of close relations or difficult, sometimes sharp, conflicts aimed at suppressing each other. It is the result of a society advocating and fighting with each other, adopting the values of the one that is closer to it than the other, alien or national, forced or voluntary confessions. Mircea Eliade already said that “Syncretism, alien to aging or eternity, seems to be the

condition of all religious creativity" [Eliade 2002, 126]. The historical roots of syncretism can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where cultural exchanges facilitated the blending of religious practices. For example, the interactions between Hellenistic and Eastern religions during the Greco-Roman period resulted in a rich syncretic landscape that influenced the development of early Christianity. This historical perspective is crucial for understanding the contemporary manifestations of syncretism, as it underscores the long-standing nature of cultural and religious exchanges [Solos, 2021].

Syncretism is the first cause and characteristic feature of the evolution of polytheistic and monotheistic beliefs. As a result, all small and large religions begin to form from syncretism in order to later establish themselves in a stronger and more solid ideological and effective sacral order [Crpic, Jukic 1998, 612]. The combination of different religious beliefs, cultures, and customs in one religious movement is usually characteristic of Christianity, less often observed in Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and almost never occurs in locally closed Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, and Taoism [Таевский 2001, 26]. In terms of the factors of the formation of religious syncretism, it is possible to group the initial conditions into three groups: socio-religious, doctrinal, and religious-political. Thus, through the influence of various destructive factors and conditions of religious "construction", one can obtain completely different syncretic reactions, either firmly based or stabilized at the level of syncretic religiosity, or quickly disintegrating from contact with the social environment [Лемашко 1971, 29-40].

We can describe the mechanism of formation of religious syncretism as a process of convergence-replacement of doctrinal traditions. At the first stage, it implies the replacement of the concept of "absolute being" with the emergence of progressive ideas [Kraelig, 33]. Religious syncretism is possible only if the system of interconnected religious traditions is deliberately brought into the coordinate system of their future development, which is considered common to them. The concept of "absolute being" is considered the basis for the construction of a new belief system. The next step is to determine the universal speed for the equal development of two or more interconnected traditions [Данненберг 2011, 34-36]. Only under these conditions is it possible to re-understand the concepts of salvation and truth. The important thing here is the similarity of the functions of the images and "absolute being", the fact of the connection between the socio-cultural development of religious systems, as well as the ratio of the religious policy of the state existing in the country and the religious lifestyle. For instance, this is the Cuban religion of Santeria, which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of a syncretic reaction

between two monotheistic religions, with the help of the god Oludumare and the Christian trinity [Peel 1968, 134-139].

### **3. Formation and types of religious syncretism**

As for the evolution of the features of the formation of religious syncretism, we can cite the synthesis of Buddhist-Manichean religions, as well as Gnostic traditions, as examples. The first example occurs either artificially through external influences (by the political elite) or naturally as a result of internal influences (with a crisis in the value system of a weaker religion). Here, the functionality of religious syncretism depended on the direct religious policy of the state. In the second example, the Gnostics resorted to the synthesis of ancient Eastern cults with the Christian tradition for the sake of preserving Persian beliefs. In the Middle Ages, the source of religious syncretism is considered to be the peripheral sphere of society, which underwent serious changes in religious policy. At this time, alternative sacred narratives and syncretization of ideas with the previous doctrines of orthodox religion took place [Cepreeв 2012, 73]. Thus, the re-understanding of Indian concepts such as samsara, dharma, moksha, and karma led to the bhakti movement and the formation of Vishnuism. In this case, the activity of religious syncretism was less dependent on the religious policy of the state due to the emergence of newly emerging values. We can observe in modern times that religious syncretism usually passes from external to internal influences, since syncretic traditions are formed in the consciousness of the individual [Баранников 2004, 99-105]. His consciousness is regulated less by spiritual needs than by worldly needs, which are filled with religious ideas. From this we can conclude that religious syncretism, which is a phenomenon of the religious lifestyle of a society completely independent of the state, is today not a natural, but rather an artificial and mechanical phenomenon. In essence, religious syncretism is a state of interreligious interaction in the process of forming concepts and basic concepts of a new religion in a unique coordinate system of values.

Researchers distinguish three types of religious syncretism [Конталева 2017, 67-68]:

1. Primitive or genetic – reflects a primitive unification of worldviews in proto-religions and mythological cultures.

2. Secondary syncretism – is a synthesis of two or three religious traditions that differ in their level of development as a result of ethnocultural connections and conscious borrowing (a case in point is political reasons). This type occurs in the religions of ancient civilizations, world religions, philosophical and religious systems of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as in the New Age movement.

3. Postmodern (synergetic) syncretism – is a product of globalism and universalism, combining various fields of knowledge (science) and culture (religion, philosophy, science, and art). It is a syncretic type of religious consciousness in which each individual independently forms images of his higher powers on the basis of his personal experiences and feelings.

#### **4. Problems of religious syncretism**

Religious syncretism has always been subject to criticism. The nature of religions contains the potential for syncretism, which is realized in certain social conditions. Because religion cannot remain without reacting to social changes. The object of criticism of syncretism is its pagan component, which has recently begun to occupy a wider place in the religious syncretic complex. In modern society, the syncretic element is mainly manifested in the addition of national and ethnic customs, which have pagan elements in their basis, to rituals and ceremonies. A case in point is the common games and dances organized during Christian holidays [Maslenitsa, Ivan Kupala, Halloween, etc.] that give the syncretic Christian church a different and more attractive appearance. Currently, such holidays are not fully religious but sometimes semi-religious, with secular content and national color. Christianity itself can be considered a syncretic religion. Thus, this religion is a mixture of the Old Testament and the New Testament with the stoicism of Seneca and elements of ancient cults. In addition, the Sikhism religion is also considered a syncretic religion because it emerged from a mixture of Islam and Hinduism. Scientology, which is considered a new religious movement, was also created from a mixture of Christianity, science, and Eastern mysticism. We can also cite the addition of forgotten ancient pagan rituals to the services of the Russian Orthodox Church as an example. For instance, the Robo Shinto religion, which carries elements of both Buddhism and Shinto, is also a good example.

One of the most illustrative examples of religious syncretism can be found in the context of Latin America, particularly in the development of Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda. These religions emerged from the fusion of African traditional religions brought by enslaved peoples and the Catholicism imposed by European colonizers. Oosterbaan discusses how syncretism in Brazil has led to the creation of new religious practices that incorporate elements from both African and Christian traditions, demonstrating how cultural and religious identities can coexist and evolve over time [Oosterbaan, 2021]. This blending is not merely a superficial amalgamation; it represents a profound negotiation of identity and spirituality, as communities seek to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to new religious landscapes. In Indonesia, the Towani Tolotang community exemplifies another form of religious syncretism, where local beliefs and

Islamic practices coexist. Tahara highlights how this community navigates its religious identity amidst the broader Indonesian religious landscape, showcasing resilience and adaptability in the face of external pressures [Tahara, 2023]. The syncretic practices observed in this community reflect a broader trend in Indonesia, where Islam has often been integrated with local customs, resulting in a rich tapestry of religious expression that challenges rigid doctrinal boundaries. In the context of African traditional religions, syncretism often manifests in the incorporation of Christian elements into indigenous practices. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the New Prophetic Churches in South Africa, which blend Pentecostalism with African Traditional Religion (ATR). Matshobane argues that this syncretism is a response to the spiritual needs of the community, providing a framework for understanding and addressing contemporary challenges while honoring ancestral traditions [Matshobane, 2023]. Such syncretic practices highlight the fluidity of religious identities and the ways in which communities adapt their beliefs to meet the demands of modern life. As for our country Azerbaijan, examples include the addition of Indian concepts such as karma cleansing, chakra opening, reincarnation, etc. to Islamic beliefs, the maintenance of diets based on the lunar calendar, the increase in the tendency towards meditation, "retreat" events held during Ramadan, etc.

When we study religious syncretism, according to the views of scholars such as N.M. Matorin, G.E. Kudryashov and N.S. Kapustin, society plays a key role in the relationship between syncretic religions and society. Because syncretic religions must adapt to social conditions but do not change them. According to Kapustin, religion, within its goals, uses political, legal, and moral ideologies to specifically analyze the reflected reality but is not always able to subordinate rational moments (parts) of dynamic consciousness to itself [Kapustin 1984, 37]. When Western researchers analyzed the social role of syncretism, they came to the conclusion that it is a factor that builds and improves society. It should be noted that according to A.Toynbee, M.Weber, H.Ringgren and others, religious syncretism determines socio-historical progress by influencing society [Вебер 1990; Тойнби 1991; Ringgren 1973]. It should also be taken into account that, in our opinion, syncretic religions that affect the individual and society are not always positive; they also have negative effects. Thus, the religious scholar Gideon Goosen, in his article "Syncretism and the development of doctrine," noted the positive, neutral, and negative aspects of syncretism [Goosen 2000]. Compensatory and functional styles can be used to analyze this. The analysis of religious syncretism and the systematization of its mechanisms can show its power to influence modern society.

The dissolution of traditional moral values and ideological stereotypes of the ethnos in a diverse confessional and multicultural environment can lead to a moral crisis by changing the individual content and public consciousness. The crisis in the moral sphere usually manifests itself in its socio-experimental reflection (description) in deviant morality or in the emergence of national egoism supported by religious fanaticism. This shows that on the one hand, religious syncretism can cause a nation living in multicultural conditions to forget its cultural heritage and lead to a conservative-conservative tendency, creating long-term national-religious confrontation and conflict. The problems that arise in society as a result of this are considered a source of public danger. That is why the concept of syncretism is not without its controversies. Critics often argue that syncretism dilutes the purity of religious traditions, leading to a loss of authenticity. For instance, Marisi emphasizes the need for religious institutions to guide their congregations in understanding the implications of syncretic practices, particularly when these practices conflict with established religious teachings [Marisi, 2023]. This tension between maintaining doctrinal purity and embracing cultural diversity is a recurring theme in discussions of syncretism, as seen in the reactions of various religious communities to the blending of beliefs. Moreover, the role of migration in fostering syncretism cannot be overlooked. Immigrant communities often bring their religious traditions into new contexts, leading to the creation of hybrid religious practices. Sharaby discusses how immigrant leaders navigate their identities through syncretic practices, blending elements from their heritage with those of their new environment [Sharaby 2022, 112-129]. This process of cultural negotiation is essential for maintaining a sense of belonging and identity in a multicultural landscape.

### **5.The role of religious syncretism in interreligious agreement**

In the context of ensuring social security, syncretism as a “special” worldview allows us to talk about the prospects for the formation of a single global sphere, built on “humanistic values” as the only axiological basis inherent in the primitive structure. It is for this reason that syncretism acts as one of the methods of analyzing the realities of contemporary culture. Cultures can exist in an environment of dialogue that “accepts the existence of a center of values and whether each individual or nation worships it in the form it wants” [Силантьева 2009, 84-85]. In short, syncretism forms an environment for intercultural dialogue. However, the syncretism of religions does not lead to the emergence of new forms; its product is either the transformation or emergence of elements of already existing religious consciousness. Because modern syncretism usually does not mean a complete unification but rather a combination of separate segments [Imbach 1984, 1062-1063], providing a

combination of heterogeneous and multifunctional religious components and religions into stable structural systems [Гаврилова 2019, 73-80]. Thus, the position of religion in the modern world is strengthened, and its deep merits are distinguished by its syncretic layers and mixed secular-religious features. Such strong functions are explained by the ability of religion to establish mutual relations among itself and with other faiths, to unite and mix, the flexibility of its components, and the adaptation of religions to constantly changing conditions. In examining the implications of syncretism, it is essential to consider its impact on social cohesion and community identity. Syncretic practices can serve as a unifying force, bringing together diverse groups within a society. For instance, the blending of Christian and indigenous beliefs in the context of the Heraka community in Northeast India illustrates how syncretism can foster a sense of belonging and shared identity among its members [Atungbou, 2022]. This communal aspect of syncretism highlights its potential to bridge divides and promote understanding among different cultural and religious groups.

In Pye's 1997 article, [Pye, 1997] reflects on the inherent tensions and relationships that arise from the recognition of a plurality of religions. He posits that the academic study of religions can indeed play a pivotal role in promoting interfaith relations, contingent on how this plurality is approached highlights the potential for an underlying coherence among different religious traditions, suggesting that a generous spirit from various religious groups can facilitate positive interactions. This foundational perspective sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of religious syncretism in fostering dialogue and cooperation among diverse faiths. Building on this discourse, Leopold M. [Leopold, 2002] delves into the complexities of syncretism, particularly within the historical context of Christian missions. She highlights syncretism as a contentious yet illuminating concept that allows for the analysis of new religious identities formed through cultural encounters. By applying Harvey Whitehouse's theory of distinct modes of religiosity - imagistic and doctrinal - illustrates how these modes influence the codification and innovation of religious identities. This perspective is crucial for understanding how syncretism not only represents a blending of beliefs but also serves as a dynamic process that can foster interreligious understanding and agreement. Obadia's 2017 work [Obadia, 2017] further expands on the discourse surrounding religious diversity, advocating for a comparative methodology to understand the variations in forms and contexts of diversity. He asserts that the recognition of cultural influences, particularly in the wake of globalization, has led to a revival of local cultures and religions, often manifesting in hybridization processes. This recognition of diversity,

according to, is crucial for the development of multicultural societies and is central to public debates on cultural and religious *métissages*. His insights highlight the importance of acknowledging the complexities of religious diversity in fostering interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

However, the dynamics of power and resistance also play a significant role in the discourse surrounding syncretism. The perception of syncretism as a threat to religious purity often leads to tensions between conservative factions and those advocating for a more inclusive understanding of faith. This conflict underscores the need for ongoing dialogue and engagement among religious communities to navigate the complexities of syncretism in a way that honors both tradition and innovation.

## **6. Conclusion**

To sum up, it became clear from our study that religious syncretism does not occur suddenly. Famous researchers studying the evolution of religions, such as M. Eliade, E. Taylor, S.A. Tokarev, etc., have proven this on the basis of historical materials. Primitive beliefs slowly changed their content over large periods of time. For example, M. Eliade notes that fetishism, magic, animism, and totemism, which are studied by religious scholars and ethnographers, are the products of long-term historical development [Элиаде 2001]. Proceeding from this position, we can say that religious syncretism does not have an unambiguous role within the modern conditions of society. On the one hand, if it can bring the development of cultures, peace, and tranquility to ethnic groups, on the other hand, it can lead to wars and conflicts, erase ethno-cultural customs, and destroy cultural layers. The role of religious syncretism in modern society is that it changes some practices, leading to the process of evolution and transformation of reality.

Throughout history, religion has transformed from primitive beliefs into a systematic form with a complex structure. At the modern stage of evolution, religion, on the one hand, changes its ontological foundations - the idea of God, supernatural and transcendent concepts, and rituals are replaced by introspective psychotechnics, cult objects become interior decorations, etc. On the other hand, religion strengthens its position - the number of adepts of both national and new religions is increasing, religious seminaries, departments, faculties, and universities are opened in secular educational institutions, cyber religion is expanding its sphere, etc. In the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious-esoteric teachings were modified, and movements and associations that considered themselves not “religious” but “spiritual” such as Blavatsky’s Theosophy, Agni Yoga, Integral Yoga, etc., were created; religious-esoteric and religious-philosophical teachings increased. As a result, religions entered the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of life. In condition, it can

be said that, of the activity of religious syncretism, a new, free-from-doctrines, independent, adopting secular characteristics, without limitations and exclusivity, “personal religion” began to form.

Furthermore, religious syncretism is capable of “distorting” and changing religious ideas, rituals, customs, and traditions that are considered alien to certain social groups. In this case, as a result, religious and even national-cultural misunderstandings and social conflicts can arise. As the American researcher R. Sellers notes, the coexistence of groups of different confessions sometimes leads to understanding and tolerance, but more often to conflicts. Immigrants usually more easily assimilate the new language and culture than give up their beliefs [Sellers 1998, 23]. In such conditions, the compensatory function of syncretic religious systems loses its power either partially or completely. This depends on the level of influence of syncretism on the religious consciousness of the individual, especially in the “phenomenal” sphere. However, we should not forget that the vector of influence of religious syncretism on the individual and society can be not only negative but also positive. Under certain conditions, the interaction of religious systems of different nations leads to stable processes in society, the enrichment and development of individual and social consciousness. That is why, in order to protect cultural, national, and spiritual security, it is important to study and reveal the features of the modern activity of syncretic religious systems. This can be done through the functional analysis of religious systems. It should be borne in mind that the social functions of different religious systems are not the same but have their own unique features and characteristics.

Religious syncretism encompasses universal values that transcend national boundaries and have such exceptional cultural significance that they are of global value for present and future generations of all humanity. Thus, religious syncretism manifests itself in various forms with certain characteristics and defining social realities in the process of the evolution of religions. Due to transformation processes in the socio-cultural sphere, the syncretism of religions “enriches” its content, and its forms evolve and acquire specific features. At the same time, the material and spiritual characteristics of existence cannot be described without the comprehensive and rich historical syncretization processes of religion, determined in different periods of time. The study of syncretism also raises important questions about the nature of religious belief itself. As scholars like Frankfurter suggest, the term “syncretism” can be problematic, as it implies a dichotomy between distinct religious systems that may not accurately reflect the lived experiences of practitioners [Frankfurter, 2021, 130-135]. This perspective encourages a

reevaluation of how we conceptualize religious identity and the ways in which individuals draw upon multiple traditions to inform their spiritual practices.

The sum up everything that has been stated so for religious syncretism is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the complexities of cultural and religious interactions throughout history. It serves as a testament to the resilience of communities as they navigate the challenges of maintaining their identities in an increasingly interconnected world. By examining the diverse expressions of syncretism across different cultural contexts, we gain valuable insights into the dynamic nature of faith and the ongoing evolution of religious practices. This study can be considered relevant because it is related to the resolution of interreligious conflicts. Taking everything into account, we can say that religious syncretism and interfaith dialogues can, in some cases, reduce the tension of religious conflict in society.

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