

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

BACHEV, M., 2024. *Unity and Diversity of the Spirit: The Problem of Religious Pluralism*. Sofia, Propeller, ISBN: 978-954-392-769-8, 346 p.

Nikolai Mihailov

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Dr. Miroslav Bachev is a philosopher, scientific researcher and university lecturer who has been working successfully and deeply for a long time in the field of philosophy of religion, in the study of various religious doctrines, as well as their moral, social and humanitarian aspects. The new monograph of Dr. Miroslav Bachev is dedicated to religious diversity and explores some basic philosophical and religious-historical aspects of the topic. Mr. Bachev sets himself an ambitious task, but it is entirely within his capabilities - to place emphasis on the philosophical reflection of religion, striving to deduce the common principles that connect the various religious systems, and to offer a conceptual framework for analysing their differences. The important problem of religious diversity is not limited according to the author to a simple description of different religious practices or beliefs. It encompasses fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of religion and its function in the existence of man in the world. Religious diversity, according to Dr. Bachev, is not just a collection of different belief systems and religious convictions, but a place of coexistence, but also of contradictions between different metaphysical and ethical views of the world and the Divine. The author's aspiration is to argue the idea that religious differences are not incompatible with the possibility of religious unity, but in fact completely presuppose it. It is in the tension between these differences that the potential for philosophical understanding of universality in religious experience is discovered. Mr. Bachev assumes that in an era of global coexistence and cultural interaction, the issue of religious pluralism takes on new significance and relevance. His analysis is based on the premise that each religious system offers a unique answer to the fundamental questions about the meaning of human existence and the relationship between immanent being and the transcendently real.

The monograph is aptly structured with three chapters and a conclusion. It is extremely rich in content, presents different approaches, which the author confidently

and skilfully combines to prove his theses. As he himself notes, in the modern era of globalism, diversity and cultural interaction, the issue of religious pluralism acquires new significance and relevance. In this sense, the main research idea of Dr. Bachev carries an original research impulse, backed up by serious erudition and knowledge of the topic in detail. The author sets himself an ambitious but achievable goal: to propose a new philosophical approach to religious diversity, based on the critical understanding of religious phenomena, as well as the methods of comparative religious studies. The study is philosophical in its design, carried out mainly from the positions of the philosophy of religion, as it reaches important successful conceptualizations through the analysis of the differences in the various confessions and religious doctrines and their comparison. The researcher's conviction is that specific religions cannot and should not be reduced to something abstractly general, i.e. to something difficult or even impossible to define specifically in terms of content (or as Prof. Gradev wrote once, the observation that "just as there is no language at all, there is no religion at all"). Along with this, the researcher shares his idea of universal spiritual truths (according to Rudolf Otto, the divine is defined by predicates in which the spiritual is always present), to which various religious systems can lead. Which, in turn, is directly related to the emergence of the philosophical idea of universal truth.

The first chapter is devoted to a study of the history, methodology and functions of comparative religious studies, which as a method has serious potential and plays an important role in understanding different religious systems. The chapter is rich in comparative-historical expositions, and the main line of interpretation is through one of the most famous and large-scale scientific publications by Eric Sharp (*Comparative Religion. A History*, 1986), which claims that comparative religious studies should not be limited to one methodological approach and exclude other possible methods. Here, the idea is also defended that comparative religious studies not only provide research facts and data (social facts), but also serve as a basis for the philosophy of religion, which builds on this knowledge to explore more abstract questions about the meaning, essence and principles of religious phenomena. The author's high bibliographical awareness, excellent and extensive knowledge of theories, authors, his ability to compare and summarize them make a strong impression.

The second chapter examines the philosophical foundations of the idea of religious unity. It is evidence of the extremely deep philosophical erudition of Dr. Bachev, at least in my opinion, corresponding to and exceeding that required for the academic position he is applying for. He successfully thematises key topics for religious unity from the rich philosophical heritage of religious philosophy. The reading of Kant and his peculiar view of religion and faith (a priori religion), the interpretation of Schleiermacher, Ch. Taylor, W. James and a number of other authors is profound and detailed, and based on the conclusions in the chapter, the

author discusses the possibility of building a philosophical concept of religious unity, which would take into account both the differences and similarities between religious systems. I was strongly impressed by the author's reference to Bulgarian philosophers and their writings in an appropriate context and with skilful highlighting of important and significant ideas of theirs as part of the general philosophical view of the problems discussed in the monograph.

The third chapter of the monograph is dedicated to mysticism as a form of religious experience, which offers unity to religious traditions. Mysticism, considered in different religious contexts, manifests itself, according to Dr. Bachev, as a striving for a direct connection with the Divine. I would like to note that such a philosophical analysis of the problems of mysticism (the mystical) or, in philosophical terms, of pure consciousness, is an original and complex scientific task, which the candidate has coped with extremely convincingly. The publication "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" (1978) by Professor Stephen T. Katz, a specialist in Jewish religion and culture, is a classic study of mysticism. There he defends the thesis that no mystical experience in different religious traditions is the same or even similar to another. Dr. Bachev's approach is distinct, it is substantive and aimed at studying the mystical in the context of religious diversity. He very successfully analyses, typologies, makes distinctions and looks for differences in order to conceptualize this complex concept in the aspect in which he studies it. Following the tradition of Bergson, Dr. Bachev argues that the mystic strives for a direct experience of the Divine, revealing its nature through intuition, rather than through intellectual analysis. As some authors note, the (general) mystical and religious experience is often taken as the "heart" of religion and religious experience. I want to say that in the last chapter of his monograph, Dr. Bachev has discovered and defended an original approach, which on the one hand presents a detailed knowledge of the research topic, and on the other hand convincingly demonstrates his skills as an independent researcher with his own ideas and positions. If I try to summarize: in the monograph, the author very skilfully chooses and applies an interdisciplinary approach, in which, however, the philosophical attitude is evident. It appropriately and balanced combines philosophical, historical and religious studies methods for analysing the main subject of the candidate's scientific efforts: religious diversity and the search for unity, through which a multidimensional and, above all, effective model for understanding religious pluralism and, ultimately, the spiritual is created. "Comparative religious studies is a scientific method that not only analyses religions in their historical perspective, but also explores their role in the spiritual life of humanity" (p. 324).

Dr. Bachev's new book is undoubtedly an important intellectual event and will attract the attention of all those involved in the problems of philosophy, religious experience, and the search for dialogue and understanding between different religious communities.

REFERENCES

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Prof. Dr. Nikolai Mihailov

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-3020-7013

WoS ResearcherID: AAC-7996-2020

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"