



The modern religious situation: Problems and ways to solve them

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Abstract

This study aims to identify ways to adapt religious practices and beliefs to meet the contemporary dynamics of society. For this purpose, the following methods of scientific cognition were used: analysis, comparison, synthesis, deduction, classification, as well as interdisciplinary and systemic approaches. In the course of the research, a comprehensive review of the contemporary religious situation was conducted. The following global trends were revealed and identified: secularism, non-traditional religious movements, demographic, political and economic changes. Through the literature review, the concept of religious variability was formulated, revealing the normativity of change and transformation of religious beliefs and traditions, and a detailed study of traditional and non-traditional movements revealed the relationship between the rise of non-traditional religious beliefs and crises. The study also explored the role and place of digital technologies in the context of religion. This made it possible to determine that traditional religious movements often do not fully utilize the full potential of social networks and the Internet, thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to communicate quickly and effectively with believers, as well as to engage in discussion with representatives of other religions and atheists. The interrelationships between religion, politics, and economics in modern society were identified and a number of problems that follow from these interrelationships were presented: the interference of religion in political processes, which can create divisions in society and undermine the secular principles of the state, while economic crises can cause upheavals in religious communities. Solutions to all the problems identified were proposed, which included educational programmes, digitalization of traditional religious organizations, and the development of effective interreligious dialogue.

Keywords: secularization, digitalization of the church, interfaith dialogue, atheism, crisis of faith, non-traditional movements.



Introduction

In the modern world, the religious situation is undergoing significant changes under the influence of various global trends that cover a wide range of aspects, including secularization, changes in the demographic structure of believers, as well as the impact of political and economic changes, which indicates the relevance of the research topic. The main problem in the context of researching this topic is the issue of the interaction between religion and modern society. Since sociocultural, technological, and global changes present challenges to traditional religious structures and their impact on the daily lives of believers, finding effective strategies for adapting and resolving conflicts arising from these interactions is an integral part of finding a sustainable balance between religion and modern society.

The problem of the interaction between religion and modern society has developed in the period from the mid-twentieth century to the present (Otonaya, 2020). The post-war decades have witnessed major socio-cultural changes, including the transition to more secularized societies (Schnell et al., 2023), technological revolutions and globalization, which have significantly affected religious movements. Thus, the present situation is characterized by a constant evolutionary process in which religion interacts with contemporary challenges and opportunities, shaping new trends and dynamics of the religious sphere. In Kazakhstan, as in other countries, the situation of religious interaction with modern society is diverse. Since Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic (Kazakhs, Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Uyghurs, Tatars, and Germans) and multi-confessional state with a share of Islam, Christianity and other religious traditions, conditions have been created in the country to maintain a peaceful neighbourhood of different religious communities and stimulate dialogue between them. However, as in any multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment, there are challenges in maintaining balance and respect between different religious groups (Verkuyten et al., 2022).

In the scientific article by Akhmejanova et al. (2021), the authors investigated the main principles and mechanisms of interaction between the state and religious organizations in Kazakhstan. The scientists concluded that compliance with constitutional and legal norms in relations between the state and religious associations is an important condition for ensuring peaceful coexistence and development of multinational society in the state. In the work of Zakhay et al. (2024), the authors revealed historical, cultural, and social factors influencing the formation of traditional views of Islam, as well as modern trends and challenges faced by the Islamic community in Kazakhstan, which revealed the need to revise traditional views of Islam considering modern realities. In the study by Azilkhanov and Zhalgas (2022), the authors analysed the situation in the religious sphere of Kazakhstan, considering the main trends, risks, and challenges. The scholars studied changes in religious practice and belief, the dynamics of the state's religious policy, as well as the relationship between religious communities and society as a whole, and identified key factors influencing the development of the religious sphere, including globalization, migration processes, and socio-cultural changes.

In the article by Baitenova et al. (2021), the authors studied the factors influencing the development of the religious situation in Kazakhstan in the context of a post-secular society, including political, socio-cultural and economic processes, which allowed them to argue about the strengthening of the role of religion in public life, increased interest in spiritual values and traditions, as well as the growing activity of religious communities in the political and social spheres. The main aspects of the culture, traditions, and customs of the peoples of the Fergana Valley were revealed in the work of Bekmirzaev (2021), including religious practices, symbols, and beliefs that have survived time and continue to influence the daily life of the local population. Contemporary art practices increasingly emphasize the integration of digital technologies, profoundly transforming traditional artistic expressions and audience engagement (Afonina & Karpov, 2023).

The reviewed studies have confirmed the interest of the scientific community in the issues of religion in the modern world, but the previous studies have not revealed the topic of ways of transformation of religious practices and organizations in accordance with the realities of modernity. In this regard,



the aim of the study is to identify effective strategies for adapting religion to the modern world in order to achieve sustainable and harmonious interaction.

Material and Methods

The study of the contemporary religious situation required the application of an interdisciplinary approach in the work. Due to the fact that religion is inherently connected with global social phenomena and personal aspects of each individual, the study required consideration of economic and social trends, as well as psychological aspects. The application of an interdisciplinary approach was aimed at achieving a fuller and deeper understanding of the interrelationships of religious processes with other spheres of people's lives, which allowed revealing socio-cultural trends and changes in religious preferences of modern society, identifying the reasons for the emergence and development of these changes. Thanks to this approach, socio-economic causes, such as globalization, which determine the role of religion in the formation of values aimed at the implementation of economic activities, were identified; the structures of religious communities and their interrelationship with social groups in modern society were examined, and the individual motivations and experiences of believers in response to religious changes were identified.

The method of analysis was used in the course of the work, which made it possible to study the impact of global crises on religious processes, including psychological, social, and ethical changes in religions during periods of instability and change. Using the method of analysis, it was revealed that global crises activate religious beliefs and practices, making them an integral part of coping strategies and the search for meaning in times of uncertainty and anxiety, and religious communities and their leaders face the challenge of adapting traditions and rituals, which revealed the need to find new forms of interaction with believers in the face of global challenges.

The application of the method of comparison allowed identifying differences and similarities in religious practices, reactions to the challenges of modernity and the impact of global crises in different cultural and social contexts. The comparison method was used to identify unique features of religious systems and common trends of adaptation. The method of synthesis was used as an auxiliary method of scientific cognition. It was used to integrate disparate fragments of data into a holistic picture of religious dynamics. The synthesis of various aspects allowed defining common patterns and trends in the response of religion to contemporary challenges. Using the method of classification, a variety of data on religious phenomena were structured. Using this method, the main types of religious reactions to the challenges of modernity were identified, which contributed to a deeper understanding of diversity in religious dynamics. The method of deduction was used to derive general principles and rules from specific observations and data. It was used to establish logical connections between phenomena in the religious sphere and to generalize the results of the research.

Results

In today's world, global trends have a profound impact on religious dynamics, shaping new contexts and challenges for believers and religious institutions. One of the key trends is the process of secularization. Secularization is the gradual separation of society from traditional religious norms and values, resulting in a decrease in the spread of religious practices and the influence of church institutions, which is reflected in the changing religious situation. However, along with the process of secularization, unique forms of religion have been observed: non-traditional religious movements, including new spiritual practices, eclectic beliefs, and alternative forms of spirituality, are becoming increasingly popular (Berry, 2022). These phenomena reflect believers' desire for more individualized and personal forms of religious experience, and are manifestations of their openness to a diversity of beliefs.

Changes in the demographic structure of believers also play an important role in religious dynamics. New multi-religious societies are emerging in the face of global migratory flows and cultural mixing, facilitating dialogue between different faiths, and leading to unique syncretic forms of religious



practice. Political and economic changes are also having an impact on the religious situation. Religious institutions can influence political processes, and politicians in turn influence religious communities. Economic transformations, including globalization, can create new challenges for religious leaders and believers, as well as foster new ethical approaches. Global trends in religious dynamics present a complex multi-component structure in which processes of secularization intertwine with a variety of new religious movements, demographic changes stimulate cultural exchange, and the impact of politics and economics shape unique contexts for religion. Identifying these trends allows not only understanding the current religious situation, but also anticipating possible future developments in the field. The concept of religious variability reveals a profound principle of the dynamics and evolution of faiths under the influence of change in sociocultural and historical contexts. Just as there have been shifts and transformations in the history of religion, including the transition from ancient pagan beliefs to Christianity and other world religions, contemporary non-traditional beliefs represent a new stage in this inevitable evolution.

Modern religion can provide a spectrum of non-traditional religious movements including new spiritual teachings, eclectic and syncretic practices, esoteric teachings, and religious movements that interact with elements of secular philosophy (Ari, 2023). There are both destructive (e.g., the White Brotherhood sect or other groups representing New Age religious movements) and non-destructive (e.g. Modern/Contemporary Paganism) representatives of non-traditional religious movements. The growth of these movements is related to the process of individualization of religion, when modern people seek to find unique ways of spiritual expression, moving away from traditional religious frameworks and manifesting their desire to find more personalized and relevant answers to questions about the meaning of life and spirituality. In addition, non-traditional religious movements offer new interpretations of spiritual practices that are adapted to modern living conditions. This adaptive approach may involve synthesizing traditional religious elements with modern science, psychology, and philosophy, providing believers with more flexible and contemporary expressions of their spirituality. The development of non-traditional movements can also be seen as a response to the crisis of institutional forms of religion: sociocultural changes, including changes in values, the role of women in society, and social relations, which can trigger a search for new forms of spirituality that are more responsive to contemporary challenges (Makhmudova et al., 2023).

Modern technology and social media play an important role in the spread of non-traditional religious movements, as they provide platforms for the exchange of ideas, the creation of virtual religious communities and the formation of collective practices (Wilfred, 2021). This accessibility enhances the appeal of non-traditional movements to a new generation, indicating the significance of social media and collective practices in contemporary religious experience. Overall, in the digital age, the Internet and social media have become an important factor in the formation and transformation of the religious sphere, influencing the dissemination of religious ideas, the formation of virtual religious communities, and influencing traditional religious structures. The virtual space of the Internet provides a unique platform for the dissemination of religious messages on a global scale. Through the Internet, religious messages and teachings can reach audiences that were previously inaccessible to them (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022; Evolvi, 2022), creating new opportunities for missionary endeavours and the widespread dissemination of religious texts, sermons, and rituals. Social media, in turn, play a key role in the formation of virtual religious communities: groups and pages on social media allow believers to unite around common beliefs, share experiences and create digital communities. This process not only reinforces the social dimension of religious practice, but also facilitates the formation of new forms of religious identity.

An important aspect of the Internet's impact on the religious sphere is its ability to generate discussion and debate within religious communities (Evolvi, 2022). The virtual space becomes a platform for discussing theological issues, interpreting sacred texts, and expressing different points of view, thus promoting a diversity of opinions within religious communities and a more flexible and open nature of discussions. At the same time, the Internet challenges traditional religious structures, as virtual religious communities, sometimes independent of institutional churches or mosques, can provide alternative forms of organizing believers, which requires rethinking the role of traditional religious leaders as well as their adaptation to the new realities of the digital age (Kim et al., 2022).



The Internet and social media are significantly impacting the religious sphere, creating new opportunities for the dissemination and discussion of religious ideas, the formation of virtual communities, and changes in traditional religious structures. This process is a complex interaction between technological innovations and the evolution of religious practice in modern society, which regularly faces other transformations, and the Internet with its social media is becoming a powerful catalyst for these changes in the religious sphere (Horbatiuk, 2023). Traditional religious structures have been influenced by the Internet and have launched electronic religious resources and online services, allowing believers to participate in religious practices without leaving their homes. For instance, 27% of Americans participate in religious services online, according to a Pew Research Centre (2023) research, mostly because attending virtually is more convenient. This trend demonstrates how religious groups are coming to accept and depend more on digital platforms to meet the requirements of a broad range of people and uphold their spiritual traditions. In this context, the Internet has acted as a tool to facilitate the adaptation of traditional forms of religion to modern lifestyles.

One of the most important aspects that stands out in contemporary religious dynamics has been the phenomenon of religious conversions and their impact on interactions between religious communities. Religious conversions represent a unique type of transformation in which a person moves from one religious tradition to another. This process is rich in numerous parameters that go beyond a simple change of religion, but includes a search for a new meaning of life, a response to sociocultural changes, and the impact of interactions between different religious communities. Religious journey is greatly influenced by social movements, technology breakthroughs, globalisation, and economic fluctuations. These modifications bring in fresh perspectives, cast doubt on long-held notions, and foster settings where individuals look for religions that support their own moral principles and the realities of their social and political situations. The pursuit of a deeper purpose in life and the relationships between religious groups take on complexity and include wider social and cultural changes. The process of conversion does not simply reflect a change in personal preferences; it is the result of complex interactions between individuals and their socio-cultural environment, becomes a reaction to the challenges of the times and, consequently, shapes trends in the religious practices of a society. Interreligious interactions play a key role in the context of religious formation. They provide not just a means of dialogue and understanding, but a unique opportunity for the exchange of issue of various faiths, creating harmonious relations between believers of different traditions, while contributing to social stability and promoting harmony and tolerance in society.

Attention to the relationship between religious processes and politics in contemporary society is an important aspect for understanding the complex dynamics in the religious and political spheres. Religious beliefs are often significant determinants of an individual's political preferences (Kumar, 2023; Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2021), as values and norms derived from religious traditions shape views on social issues, moral standards, and attitudes towards political events. Religious beliefs can stimulate political activity by influencing the choice of candidates and support for certain political positions. However, the influence of religion on politics also depends on the context and how religious texts and teachings are interpreted: a variety of interpretations of religious doctrines can lead to the formation of different political currents within the same religious community. Religious leaders, in turn, play a significant role in political activism. They can be sources of influence on their followers, guiding their political views and actions. The participation of religious leaders in politics can manifest itself in various forms: from voicing public opinions to actively participating in political campaigns, actively shaping political agendas, and sometimes even determining key political decisions.

Atheism and secularism are phenomena stemming from the search for alternative belief systems and the establishment of secular social norms (Copson, 2019). Atheist movements, at their core, reflect an aspiration for rational thinking centred on empirical evidence and the scientific method. Secularism, while it may retain some aspects of an ethical system, seeks to separate religion and the state, affirming the principle of secularism in public life (State of the Secular States Report, 2024). The process of secularization that accompanies the growth of these movements is due to changing



lifestyles, increasing education and the expansion of individual freedoms (Podoprigora et al., 2019). Atheist and secular groups emphasize the importance of a scientific approach to understanding the world and provide alternative forms of social interaction outside the religious framework. The growth of atheist and secular movements affects modern religion, forming not only challenges, but also demanding reactions from traditional faiths in the form of revision of religious doctrines, striving for dialogue between religious and secular societies, and searching for new forms of missionary activity. It is important to note that atheism and secularism are not homogeneous in their beliefs and goals: within these movements there is a diversity of views on religion, society, and ethical issues. This diversity presents a challenge to religious leaders and practitioners, encouraging reflection and adaptation to a changing socio-cultural environment.

In today's world, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental upheaval and socio-economic unrest have a significant impact on religious processes (Banks, 2021). In crises, religious beliefs and practices become an integral part of coping strategies and the search for meaning. In times of uncertainty and anxiety, people may turn to their religious faith in search of comfort and hope, which may manifest itself in increased prayer activity, seeking spiritual support and rethinking life priorities. At the same time, crises can challenge religious communities and their leaders, as religious institutions may face the need to adapt their rites, rituals, and public services amid global challenges, which may lead to a rethinking of traditions and a search for new forms of interaction with believers. Global crises may also activate the social and moral dimensions of religion. In a changing world order, believers may turn to their religious beliefs to find answers to ethical questions and to resolve moral dilemmas. In this way, religion can become a platform for discussing social challenges and finding ways towards solidarity and mutual aid. However, it should also be recognized that crises can raise questions and doubts about religious beliefs. Some people may reconsider their faith in the light of tragic events, and secularization may take on new connotations in the face of fluctuations and upheavals. Global crises have a complex and multidimensional impact on religious processes, encompassing psychological, social, and ethical changes in belief in times of instability and change. A review of the contemporary religious situation has highlighted five aspects that warrant attention to the issues involved (Table 1).

Table 1. Problems and ways to solve them in the context of the modern religious situation.

Aspects of the modern religious situation	Related Issues	Solutions
Rise of non-traditional religious movements	The increasing popularity of non-traditional religious movements may cause tension among traditional religious communities and lead to sociocultural conflicts	Emphasis on interreligious dialogue and understanding, stimulating open discussions between people of different faiths
Interaction of religion and politics	The intervention of religion in political processes can create division in society and undermine the principle of a secular state	Development of educational programs aimed at understanding secular principles and mutual respect of religions, discussing the role of religion in politics
The influence of the Internet on religious processes	Virtualization of religious practices can cause disintegration of traditional communities and increased individualization of religion	Promoting online platforms for constructive discussion, supporting the development of digital resources for traditional religious organizations
Religious conversions and interreligious interactions	Religious conversions can cause tension between believers of different traditions	Promoting education about the diversity of religions, supporting dialogue, and understanding between different faiths
The impact of global crises on religious processes	Crises can cause internal turmoil in religious communities and lead to a search for new meaning and answers to tragedies	Providing spiritual support in times of crisis, creating platforms for discussing religious aspects of modern challenges



Source: compiled by the authors.

Addressing the challenges posed by the current religious situation is key to ensuring stability and harmony in society. Above all, a focus on interreligious dialogue and understanding will help reduce tensions and conflicts between believers of different traditions, contributing to a more tolerant environment. The development of educational programmes and digital resources will also strengthen a culture of mutual respect and communication, while supporting dialogue on religious diversity will help create a more inclusive and coherent society.

Discussion

The realities of contemporary religion with its traditional and non-traditional religious movements, secularization and atheism, digitalization and globalization revealed in the study demonstrated that without an effective response to the challenges faced, modern society risks losing balance and mutual understanding between believers and non-believers, between traditional and non-traditional faiths. To make sense of the findings, studies by other authors were considered.

Various aspects of social and cultural phenomena related to religious movements were examined by Bainbridge (2021). Different types of religious movements, their social functions and their impact on society were highlighted in terms of the factors contributing to the emergence and development of religious movements, as well as their relationship with other social institutions. It was found that religious movements can play a significant role in the formation of social identities, affirmation of values and norms of behaviour in society, which confirms the findings of this study. The role of religious movements in the political and economic context, their influence on the processes of social mobilization and conflict resolution is significant in the development of effective strategies for managing social processes and for solving social problems (Sentamba, 2023). Religious movements are complex socio-cultural phenomena that affect various spheres of society, and trends in the development of religious movements in the modern world include their adaptation to changing social and cultural conditions, productive interaction with secular institutions.

An extensive analysis of the differences in religious practices, beliefs, and sociocultural aspects between the USA and Europe was conducted by Berger et al. (2021). The United States of America and Europe show significant differences in attitudes towards religion, including a high level of religiosity and the importance of religious institutions in American society on the one hand, and a more pronounced secularization and loss of church influence on social processes in European countries on the other. Differences in religious traditions, historical factors and political contexts between the United States and Europe have deep historical and cultural roots that continue to influence socio-cultural processes in the modern world, but there are also some common trends, such as the impact of globalization on religious practices and the perception of religion as part of cultural heritage (Doszhan, 2023). Against the background of the analysis of global challenges and the dynamics of religious processes, the impact of globalization seems particularly relevant, which activates religious beliefs and practices, integrating them into coping strategies and the search for meaning in times of uncertainty and anxiety. The impact of global crises revealed in the course of the work on religious communities and their leaders, challenging them to adapt traditions and rituals, harmoniously complements the findings of Berger et al., in which religious movements were considered as key socio-cultural phenomena that influence various aspects of society.

The main focus of the study by Kaden et al. (2023) was made on identifying and interpreting the role of religious factors in modern society in the context of increasing secularization and changing religious practices. In modern society, religion can manifest itself not only through traditional religious institutions, but also through new forms of worship, symbolism, and practices, which confirms the findings about the rethinking and expansion of the role of religion in modern society. The socio-cultural changes that contribute to the formation of “invisible religion” (e.g., the increasing role of personal spirituality, the growing interest in mysticism and esoteric teachings, as well as the transformation of religious symbols in modern culture) also confirmed the trends of changes in religious practices. Understanding the “invisible religion” is important for analysing and



understanding contemporary socio-cultural dynamics and the development of religious trends in modern society.

The factors determining the diversity of believers' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, including their faith, religious practices, world-view, and cultural context, have been highlighted in the research paper by Beyerlein et al. (2021). As identified in their study, global crises activate religious beliefs and can lead to a variety of reactions from believers; how believers explained the emergence and spread of the pandemic, as well as what religious rituals and practices they used to cope with the crisis and maintain their faith was a meaningful addition to the findings of their study. Also, the researchers examined various theodicies – theological explanations for the problem of evil and suffering in the world – and their impact on believers' religious beliefs and practices in the context of the pandemic, their faith and spiritual state, and found that some believers turn to religious explanations to alleviate heartache and find meaning in suffering, while others may experience a crisis of faith and doubt. These results support the findings of the study that there is significant variation in the religious responses of believers to crises.

The impact of technological change on religious practices, beliefs and public perception of religion has been examined by Andika (2022). With the development of technology, religious communities and believers face new challenges and opportunities, and technological innovations such as the internet, social media, virtual reality, and mobile applications have a significant impact on the dissemination of religious information, the organization of religious communities and the public perception of religion, which confirms the relevance of the findings of this study. Aspects of the interaction between religion and technological progress include ethical issues related to the use of technology in religious practices, the impact of the digital environment on religious beliefs and identity. Technological advances have a significant impact on contemporary religiosity, changing religious practices, communication among believers and perceptions of religious traditions; in some cases, technology can be a means to strengthen religious beliefs and attract new adherents, while in other cases it can create existential challenges and changes in the religious sphere.

All the studies reviewed demonstrated the deep interest of the scholarly community in a variety of aspects of contemporary religious dynamics. Scholars, such as for example, Kaden et al. (2023), have interpreted such important trends as increasing secularization, Andika (2022) studied changes in religious practices under the influence of technological progress, and Berger et al. (2021) analysed globalization. The reviewed works confirmed such aspects as the role of religion in the formation of socio-cultural identities, the influence of religious leaders and movements on global political and economic processes, the changeability of religion, its active role in modern society, and the diversity of believers' reactions to the challenges of the modern era.

Conclusions

The religious conversions and interreligious interactions examined in this paper have revealed the dynamics of the religious sphere, which is being transformed according to the diversity of faiths and influenced by the development of tolerance in modern society. The influence of the internet and social media on the religious sphere has also been examined in terms of an important strand of contemporary religious dynamics. The virtualization of religious practice, the formation of virtual communities and the impact on traditional structures have necessitated the search for new adaptation strategies to maintain the relevance of religion in the digital age. The study also unravelled the relationship between religion and politics. It was found that these two spheres demonstrate a strong interconnection, influencing both the political preferences of believers and the religious activity of voters. In the face of global crises, religion remains a significant source of meaning and support for a significant proportion of humanity, but events such as COVID-19 or wars bring into focus the need to regularly review religious beliefs and practices, due to the significant role of religion in helping society to effectively cope with the challenges of uncertainty and change.

Thus, the study of the contemporary religious situation has revealed that religion continues to occupy an important place in people's lives, and its dynamics are becoming a reflection of complex socio-



cultural and technological processes. Creating productive strategies for adapting religious traditions to the modern context requires not only an understanding of these processes, but also a flexible approach to maintaining the relevance of religion in the conditions of modern society. In this regard, it is recommended to focus further research on the impact of virtual religious communities on traditional social structures and the spiritual experience of believers, which in the long term will make it possible to understand how and what technological innovations are shaping new aspects of religious practice, including virtual communities, online rituals and spiritual accompaniment via the Internet.

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