Philosophical-anthropological Grounds of Self and God (as Other) Relationship in Christian and Islam Discourses

In the Context of Interreligious Communications

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Abstract—**The article introduces a philosophical examination of the dichotomy of Self and Other in the contemporary analysis of Christianity and Islam. Reviewing the phenomenon of the Other, the author refers to God as an object and subject of the relationship *Human — Absolution* at the same time. The relationship of an individual and God is viewed as grounds for the positive flow of the interreligious communications of the two major religions. The author reveals philosophical and religious ideas of the two world religions in the context of the historical development of their theological doctrines. The author discusses shared and specific religious ideas in the religious anthropology and epistemology of Islam and Christianity. Special attention is paid to religious ideas that contribute to the relationship of man and God in the individual's strive to achieve the unity with the Absolution. Moral categories of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, mutual understanding, are presented as the linking stages among the subject, Self, God, and the Other. The author emphasizes the philosophical-anthropological ideas, reflecting the fine line of the relations between the divine and human, when the Other becomes internally inherent, personal, spiritually enlightening the individual Self.**

Keywords—interreligious relations; religious anthropology; God as Other; Islam; Christianity; cognition of God; human and God in Islam and Christianity

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern-day global world is culturally, ethnically and religiously pluralistic. The subjective inner world is filled with circumstances and values of other cultures and societies that are being individualized, transforming either into own, original, or alien, rejected ones. Since the communications in a globalizing world have the intercultural character, they will always show the traits of the otherness, have the perspective of rejection and unity. Religions, in this respect, offer the

modern people the idea of the Other. The Other in the religious relations is an individual of not only another culture but also of another understanding of God, creed [1]. In the religious Weltanschauung, the Other is God for an individual. That is why, despite the strengthening of the post-secular processes, it is extremely important to comprehend the influence of religion on every individual and society as a whole considering multi-religious nature of modern societies. Particularly interesting for a philosophical analysis is an exploration of the specifics of a moral and spiritual perfection of an individual, not excluding God and the direct relationship with the Church from his own life.

II. EXISTENTIAL CONCEPTS OF SELF AND GOD (OTHER) AS GROUNDS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

The author of the article believes that religion helps to overcome the alienation of a human from the Other (subject) in their interactions because the idea of God is a priori aimed at bringing people together. Due to the religious communications, intercultural and behavioral differences of people, their lack of understanding and alienation, may be overcome.

The prominent Spanish philosopher of the late 19th – early 20th centuries D. Miguel de Unamuno pointed out that the process of self-realization requires the profound comprehension of God. God is an idea that helps to universalize the world and to understand ourselves. God is the Other, without whom an individual is not able to have knowledge of Self. Without an understanding of the Other existence, its otherness, there can't be a human consciousness, and without the comprehension (faith) of a human, there can't be an understanding of God. God pervades the material world and brings together two worlds – the sensual and the Divine (Self and the Other) ones – into a whole ontological concept of love. Love is the foundation for Self and the Other. "Love is a contradiction if there is no God" [2].

Religion, possessing an anthropological essence, broadcasts the sacred information to the societies, establishing thus a specific kind of interaction between a human and God (Self and Other in the philosophical discourse). However, despite the overall spiritual and rational grounds, the theological systems of various religions offer their specific vision of the mentioned relationship. The justification of an individual's quest for God in world religions inevitably led to the corresponding philosophical-anthropological reflection with the elaboration of moral principles and concepts need to achieve the highest goal of the cognition of Absolution. So, the religious scholars of Christianity and Islam developed comprehensive moral doctrines, using philosophical reflexive abilities and logical-categorical apparatus. Such concepts as compassion, mercy, pity, sympathy, love, are derived as primal in these moral-conceptual grounds. However, dominant in the relationship between Self and God (Other) in both religions are the existential feelings of love and compassion.

The Scottish philosopher A. Smith in his "Theory of Moral Sentiments" viewed moral categories of sympathy and compassion as some kind of mediums, mediators in the relationship between Self and Other. By the means of imagination, a subject (Self) may put himself in the shoes of the Other and bear the Other's burden: to endure the same pain, anguish, suffering, felt by the Other, found in interaction, even the situational one, with Self. Yet, following A. Smith's further reflections, no one may become the Other, merge with him, comprehend and fully feel his pains [3]. Let us add that this A. Smith's statement is even more true if by the Other we mean God. The relationship between Self and God inevitably produces moral norms and values, determining not only a cognitive relation of a subject to God but also defining interactions among people in societies and collectives. We would also like to add that in the "human — God" relationship there will always exist certain moral dominants, performing as special communicators, spiritual mediators, transmitting to society absolute morality and exalted behavioral imperatives. If this specific communication is established and sought-after in a society, then the former has a spiritual balance and moral-cultural harmony.

III. SELF AND OTHER IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM AS GROUNDS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN TWO RELIGIONS

Let us now analyze, how occurs the relationship between Self and Other (God) on the grounds of moral principles in Islam and Christianity in comparison of their theological reasoning.

Christianity and Islam share some of the philosophical and religious ideas, having not only theocentric but also anthropologic character. These ideas deal with the relationship among a subject, God, and world with a holistic conceptual understanding of an individual being a crown of God's creation on Earth with the justification of eschatological perspectives of his life. Speaking about Christianity, its soteriology is deeply anthropological, as it outlines a way of a human salvation for the eternal spiritual life in the divine world. In other words, soteriology deals with the earthly life of a human, lighting the path that will lead to God granting the fulfillment of certain moral imperatives and spiritual practices (for monks). Soteriology and eschatology explain the duality of human nature, that leads the individual away from the Creator if human abuses the freedom of choice and rejects the idea of deification. The ideas of Christian soteriology, as well as Christian anthropology on the essence of human nature as the image and likeness of God, receiving the divine grace for the creation of good, cognition of higher values, performing noble deeds, have many similarities to the theology of Islam, its arguments about man's place in the Universe.

In Islam a person, as the perfect model of God's creation, is also dual in his essence, he is the bond between light and darkness, good and evil, choosing his own way according to the freedom, originally given to him by Allah. In both religions, an individual is responsible for the way he chooses, and for the "eternal abode" after death, to which he had been moving the entire mortal earthly life.

In the anthropological context, the philosophical and religious ideas of Christianity and Islam may be considered as interreligious and intercultural, bringing together people of different religions based on the significance of a human in his relationship to God (or the denial of Him).

In the traditional Islamic theology (Kalam), the purpose of the creation of man is viewed as the creation of God's vicar on Earth. Created by God (Allah) "institution" of vicariate exalts man and makes him the pinnacle of all creation. Yet, as noted by the researcher of Islam from Islamabad S. Zaman, bestowed upon man the honor of being created in the image of God and the vicariate on Earth have a flipside and are subject to the fulfillment of one comprehensive condition – each and every human must be sincere and obedient servant of God, the Creator. This qualitative relation of an individual (Self) to God is expressed by the Arabic word "Abd", having no visible equivalents in other languages [4]. In fact, Abd is the attribute of Ubudiyyah, the concept, describing the essence of human superiority over all living creatures but at the same time the constant service and worship to Allah. If a person falls from grace from Ubudiyyah, he immediately deprives himself of "the title of the crown of the Universe" [4].

In the context of this article, the concept of Ubudiyyah defines the relationship of a human and God, Self and Other in Islam. If a subject of the said relationship is aware of his dignity as the vicar of God on Earth, then he is obliged to give an appropriate answer to the Creator, which consists of constant worship and religious service to God. Through Ubudiyyah and Ibadah (the worship, manifested in the observance of ritual, rites), an individual perceives God, borrowing His omnipotence. The unique concept of Ibadah means the encounter with God, opportunity to achieve unity with Him. Once again, we may draw lines with the Christian vision of a human, who is trying to comprehend God and to experience spiritual communion with Him. It is known as the way of deification in the Christian theology, i.e. the perception of the best divine qualities, allowing during or at

the end of the life (depending on the concepts, describing the methods of deification – from conceptual theological gnosis to Hesychasm) to enter the religious union with God, to feel the involvement in the divine life.

According to S. Zaman, Ibadah, one of the central concepts of the Islam theology, meaning profound religious ministry in the tide of life, not only stresses the supreme role of a human in the sensory world, but also exalts him to the peak of divine glory, which is gifted to a man as a vicar of Allah [4]. All other conceptual considerations of the relationship between a human and God, from the Pakistani philosopher's standpoint, are somewhat unilateral and are not quite right in expressing the anthropological ideas of The Quran.

However, Islam's anthropology has differences with the Christian one, namely, in its understanding of asceticism and monasticism. In Islam, there is no monasticism in the form it's found in Christianity. The Idabah concept interprets asceticism as a constant worship to Allah and the desire of a Muslim to reach a high spiritual position (Ibadah), which defines the relationship between the believer and the Creator. The main thing in this relationship is obedience to Go. The ideals of Ibadah suppose that asceticism in Islam doesn't mean withdrawal from the social world for the life in the spiritual one, as does seclusion. On the contrary, a Muslim shall lead a public life, but wherever he lives, he should remember about the worship and service to God, doing the will of God, the observance of the necessary rituals and then the comprehensive faith and love for God will help to reach the heights of Ibadah.

The rather complicated religious doctrine of Ubudiyyah and psychologically loaded practice of Ibadah is no less easy than the Christian ideas of asceticism and monasticism, and allow to constantly feel the presence of God (the Other) in the everyday life of every adherent of Islam. The main goal of a Muslim is the achieving of a specific spiritual level, when God, once the Other, becomes a kin to a believer, feeling God's presence as own identity.

IV. HUMAN AND GOD RELATIONSHIP IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: MODERN APPROACH

It is interesting to trace the development of the ideals of monasticism and asceticism in the historical development of Christianity and Islam in the view of the dichotomy of the human - God relationship. The idea of asceticism in Christianity begins with the early Byzantine era. The Christian culture of the time not only created the new spiritual ideals (e.g., martyrdom, ascetic hermit, hero and heroism) bringing a person closer to Christ but also marked the way of individual existence, by which the believer might reach the pinnacle of a virtuous life and spiritual unity with God.

To establish relations with God, a person should learn how to manage his body and mind, abandon material wealth in the name of the spirituality, have virtues, patience, be able to give his life for Christian ideals. In fact, the cultural and individual methods and tools of God-knowing, the communion of Self and Other, ontologically unattainable but

phenomenally knowable, were substantiated. God becomes closer to human, and, according to the concepts of the divine light (Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas), literally "comes" to a pious Christian, following moral, psychological and practical imperatives. The feeling of communion with God is described as the visitation of Jesus Christ to a man of faith in a special mystical divine light [5].

Normal psychological state of a person of that era was a tense struggle with himself and stoic suffering for the others. Broken-hearted prayer, "joyous cry", "piteous heart", self-judgment and confession, silence, preaching love for neighbors — these were in the essence of a spiritual and ethnic life of a Christian. The material plane of existence was "outside", alienated, confronting a righteous feeling of "anti-world", for which a person leaves his worldly life.

The ascetic ideas were transformed into a religious-philosophical system by the famous "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" by John Climacus (6th century), outlining speculative as well as practical steps of the monastic way of spiritual development. St John's work substantiated thirty steps of ascent to the Foretype (God), which begins with the idea of free and conscious renunciation of everything worldly, sensual, material.

Monastic ideals were the intellectual reflection of the spiritual culture of the mentioned era. The rejection of the world, unaccountable longing for leaving the own flesh, escapism – that was the general cultural atmosphere of the early Byzantine and the principle of the early Medieval worldview [6]. In this respect, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" is a demonstration work, concentrating the ideals of monks and the social norms of being. The peculiarities of asceticism were in a specific, conscious activities of a monk, striving to overcome the negative aspects of worldly life (the so-called "tacit prayer"). Maximus the Confessor (the 6th – 7th centuries) elaborated the category of "spiritual perfection" of a human, which is in the unity of "doing" (practice) and "contemplation" (theory).

The ascetic style of "tacit prayer", expressed in the intensive psychological activity of a subject, shall lead to dispassion, which is the top of the Ladder and the knowledge of God. The paradox of Eastern Christian asceticism consisted in the fact that complete dispassion is achieved with the help of the feeling of "love", which is the criteria of an individual's spirituality, the restoration of unity in the "image and likeness", the harmony of body and soul, the culmination of mystical exaltation [7].

The moral paradigm entered the culture along with the Christian ascetic notion of love, according to which every individuality may find the own perfection, but it should be in the unity of human nature. Love for neighbor brings a person closer to God, allowing to connect the individual Self with the Absolute Other. In the highest concept of love, the subject is almost united with God; the Other and Self coexist in the spiritual religious unity, which is the culmination of the Christian gnosis. John Climacus wrote, "Love in its quality is likening to God, that people may achieve" [8]. Yet the possession of secrets of God's existence in Eastern Christian asceticism (later becoming the Orthodox) didn't

mean the evening out of personality, its exclusion from the divine-human relationship. It is mystical (i.e. deeply personal) communication between a subject and God at a constant consciousness of the differences between the finite Self of a person and the infinity of God.

The concepts of Ubudiyyah and Ibadah, with all the differences with the Christian idea of asceticism and monasticism, share the desire for spiritual unity of the individual with God based on specific practices, that should be performed by a Christian or a Muslim, consciously striving for the attainment of the Absolution at the top of religious gnosis. In Christianity, multiple ways lead to the highest unity of a human and God: the aforementioned mystical-aesthetic, apophatic, cataphatic, symbolic and figurative God-knowing through religious art, etc. The Islamic theology for the ascent to the unity with Allah elaborated ninety-nine "the most beautiful names of God", directly correlating with human activity. These names can be considered as a certain kind of intermediaries between the knowing subject and Allah. Here a human Self relates to the Other through gnoseological categories, which a Muslim should be comprehending throughout the life. The Islamic theology (Kalam) and the Islamic gnosticism (Sufism) reveal the significance of the names through Allah's relation to the world and to the individual human life.

In our opinion, "the beautiful names of Allah" gnoseologically and morally are represented through two main qualities – grace and mercy, theologically designated by the concepts of ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim. Additionally, these names have a practical expression in every Muslim's everyday practice. Beginning any activity, the believers turn to God with the words "B-Ismi-Llahi r-Rahman-i r-Rahim", which means "in the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful". A Muslim refers to the compassion and mercy of the Almighty to help in his acts. Among all the names of God, the name ar-Rahman, the Gracious, is the most unique. Not only because it repeats itself with ar-Rahim, the Merciful, but also because it corresponds to the concept of "Allah", meaning, that a believer may turn to God by any name. Moreover, the grace and mercy of Allah are compared in The Quran with the same feelings of people, yet stressing that grace and mercy of the Almighty are the most perfect, absolute, and supreme. "Rahman" as the religious-philosophical concept is very complex and involves the understanding of many virtues such as forgiveness, spiritual support, kindness, pity, compassion, mercy, etc. In this context ar-Rahman is the essence of all the sacred Islamic texts, determining the nature of the prophets [9].

In Islam, an almost invisible distinction between ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim, substantiating, in fact, the spiritual unity of a human and God, plays an important role in the establishment of the relationship between Self and God (Allah). The distinction is so subtle, it begets many interpretations of the said concepts. Let us note the most common one. Ar-Rahman means, that God is the most gracious to all parts of the world and especially to the people, regardless of their race, creed, culture, gender, etc. In contrast, ar-Rahim defines the all-encompassing mercy of Allah just towards the people, believing in Allah and the

Prophet. Thus, ar-Rahman is treated as a universal category with the graceful and compassionate attitude of God to every person on Earth, with ar-Rahim adding the mercy towards the brothers in faith. Every person, as a creature of God, for his piety and humanity receives an equal share of God's compassion, and only upon entering the faith of Islam, a person is given the supreme gift – mercy of the Creator. The mankind is the object of Allah's grace and compassion, and the object of mercy is faith. Therefore, the path to God lies within the purely religious sphere of a Muslim, sanctified by the mercy and grace of Allah.

Once again, we may trace some similarity with Christianity: the uplifting path to God is ambivalent and depends on a person, his self-improvement, self-knowledge, virtuous life in accordance with the religious principles, and depends also on the mercy and grace of God. Life goals of a Christian and a Muslim, sharing the axiological and cognitive basis, are also similar: to reach a state of mutual communion with God, to attain the beautiful names of Allah, or the moral-spiritual values – the steps – that separate a Christian from God ("The Ladder of Divine Ascent"), to make the absolute traits of God own, internal, personal, giving a hand in day-to-day life. If an individual succeeds in some degree in realizing the spiritual goal, then God, despite the religious interpretation (Allah, ar-Rahman, the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ), becomes the center of personal Self. Diverse religious paths assume the same goal – the spiritual and moral ascent to the unity of Self and the Other through the acquisition of high values and religious transcendental experience.

This is the psychological state, that William James called "mental health", achievable only by the "once born" people. In contrast to the duality of the "twice-born", in the views of the "once born" happiness and religious satisfaction mean living the positive elements of the world [10]. Peace of mind is achieved by life in the spirit, God, and the negative factors are discarded; the world appears to be holistic as a person.

V. CONCLUSION

Concluding, we shall note, that in our diverse world, we're all Others to everyone and even for ourselves, we're all wanderers and strangers. Nevertheless, in the apprehension of the Other, an individual is able to understand his life and to perpetuate it, leaving the unique mark. Mutual spiritual enrichment in the relationship of Self and Other allows to accept the Other through dialogue and understanding. We may consider as interreligious, intercultural the philosophical-anthropological ideas of the world religions in their reflection of human destiny in this world, his cognitive capabilities and moral improvement, dealing with the role of a subject in the relationship between personality and Absolution. Isn't that what the modern world, embraced by globalized differences and contradictions, demands?

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