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## THE PHENOMENON OF RELIGIOUS FAITH: THEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES INTERPRETATIONS

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the phenomenon of faith addressed from the perspective of theology, philosophy and religious studies. The central role of faith in the Christian religion is highlighted, as well as the specifics of the phenomenon in the 20<sup>th</sup> – early 21<sup>st</sup> century Catholicism. The general theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of religious faith in the works by national and world philosophers, theologians and religious studies scholars are reviewed; the paper highlights the principles of their theories based on rational interpretation of the premises of faith, Christian virtues, which underlie moral, ethnic and social norms in particular.

**Keywords:** the phenomenon of religious faith, the Christian religion, doctrinal faith, aggiornamento, interpretation of faith from the perspective of theology and religious studies, social existence of faith.

The phenomenon of religious faith is a core concept in religious studies, philosophy and theology. For instance, in modern theology, the nature of Christian faith is regarded as a spiritual phenomenon closely related to human nature, to consciousness and spirituality in the first place; it transforms into world view and takes the form of social action in the course of religious and cult practices. Ye. Kononenko rightly states that religious faith as the central conceptual element of religious spirituality is a multifaceted notion, which resists unambiguous definition [11, p. 108].

According to Stephen Evans, an outstanding American Christian philosopher, a widely held view in theology, religious studies and philosophy is that the general framework of faith is based on personal preference and trust in something, which makes us reflect on the object of our analysis; reflection itself facilitates the building up of trust. The scholar states that faith we reflect on comprises certain prior convictions; devotion to the object of faith and trust in it, which are the result of such reflection, are actually our faith on which we reflect further [33, p. 214–215]. This line of reasoning allows of the conclusion that from methodological perspective, theological and philosophical interpretations of faith are close in spite of the difference between the subject matter of theology (God) and that of philosophy (the created world), since, as it is suggested by Edith Stein, a representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century German school of philosophy, ‘relies on cognition of the natural world and ... takes into consideration the truths of faith as a principle which gives it the right to criticize its own results’. In this way philosophy obliges theology providing it with conceptual and methodological apparatus, which the latter needs in order to describe the truths of faith; thus theology finds in philosophy ‘answers to

the questions which defeat its own means of cognition'; in terms of anthropology, this problem was also addressed by St. Thomas Aquinas [32, p. 21–22; see: 24, p. 39].

Thus philosophy extends its epistemological capacity offering theology help in rational cognition and substantiation of faith; according to Karl Rahner, it gives theology the necessary degree of reflection about faith; thus taking on intellectual responsibility, philosophy forms the scientific background of theology and provides intellectual justification of faith [20, p. 12–13]. K. Rahner uses the philosophical tool of transcendent reflection to prove that human nature is essentially spiritual; the philosopher believes that human nature is transcendent in the sense that humans are ready to accept Revelation as the primary source of faith [20, p.15]. The historical aspect of philosophical anthropology is related to theological-religious studies, which 'is based on the authority of the Holy Scriptures, on the belief that the Bible was inspired by God and the divine is incontestable' [29, p. 35, 37].

That is why, continues K. Pahner, there is no completely theology-free philosophy [20, p. 32–34]. This view is shared by a contemporary Russian philosopher S. Chernov, who calls philosophy 'two-faced Janus: one face looks in the direction of science, the other, of religion. Here, scientific passion for reflection is directed towards the absolute' [28, p. 21]. Thus research into the phenomenon of the Christian faith requires creative complementarity of two approaches, those applied by religious studies and philosophy.

The phenomenon of religious faith viewed from the perspectives of theology, theological-religious studies and philosophy is a major methodological scientific problem. Complex three-fold analysis of this phenomenon extends our knowledge of the principles and laws of human spiritual life – religious faith, religious truth [7, p. 94–95]. Gnoseologically speaking, faith in God as a source of religion is a common subject matter and a common object of theology, theological-religious studies and philosophy [2, p. 70].

The difference in the ways theology, religious studies and philosophy approach the religious faith phenomenon is rooted in their specific interpretations of the basic feature of religious faith, the concept of 'the sacred', 'the innermost', or 'hierophany', which has been proved by a number of researches [2, p. 59–60; 4, p. 465; 12, p. 92–95; 13, p. 40–46; 19, p. 462; 25, p. 22–23]. Religion is regarded as a result of interaction of several factors, the most important one being faith, which is the expression of spiritual state of an individual as a moral and social being; faith is realized as religious consciousness and religious experience.

On the other hand, as it is stated by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), it was philosophy and theology (thanks to Jesus Christ and his teaching) that gave the Christian faith its first imagery, concerning the fundamental question of death as the highest expression of existence in particular; it was philosophy and theology that provided its Christian interpretation. Thus the two sciences drew closer to each other and, according to the Cardinal, even merged together – 'the figure of the philosopher becomes the image of Christ', who in the episode of raising Lazarus from the dead is perceived as a philosopher; he gives the answers, changes death, thus changing life [21, p. 23–24]. That is why Justin Matyr, an early Christian philosopher, spoke of Christianity as of a true philosophy. His line of reasoning was based on the multi-level methodological connection between philosophy and theology. According to J. Ratzinger, firstly, the real connection between philosophy and faith is manifested in the fact that both answer two fundamental questions; what human existence is and how one should live to make it happen. Secondly, 'faith makes a philosophical and even an ontological statement about the existence of God; moreover, of God who dominates everything that exists', thus making 'statement about existence itself' [21, p. 33–34]. J. Ratzinger's first argument in favour of the relationship between philosophy and faith is his moral and philosophical characterization of Christianity: love is its basis, and it is related to 'the law and the Prophets'; at the same time, love is 'eros' for the truth and 'only in this way it remains undistorted, as agape for God and people'. That is why, states the Catholic theologian, we need gnosis, evidentiary knowledge to be more precise rather than theology [21, p. 38–39]; hence 'faith does not pose threat to philosophy, but protects it against any claims on the part of gnosis' because faith needs philosophy, it needs a keen truth seeker with broad world view; only in this way faith 'remains faithful to itself' [21, p. 40].

Thus philosophy plays an important role providing the basis for the acceptance of Revelation and in this way it is related to theological-religious studies. Thomas Aquinas defines philosophy as 'the preamble to faith', which explains the compatibility of philosophy and theology; human knowledge is assisted by the Revelation of grace. Being the preamble to faith, philosophy helps both theology and theological-religious studies in addressing such crucial issues as the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between Revelation and human conviction, historicity of Revelation, etc. [10, p. 59–60]. Furthermore, theology needs philosophy as a principle of regulation and comprehension of the act of faith, as the basis for research into the content of faith [16], which demonstrates the connection between philosophy and theology, as well as between philosophy and theological-religious studies [29, p. 37–38] on the basis of unity between faith and the primary reason for human existence. Faith needs nature as its basis and theology needs philosophy 'as a necessary infrastructure' [15, p. 41–43]; this idea remains popular with contemporary philosophers and theologians [3, p. 92].

Another tendency in contemporary religious studies and theology (in fundamental theology based on complex analysis of the phenomenon of faith in particular) is rational and scientific approach [7, p. 92]. That is why contemporary fundamental theology is regarded as a connecting link between theology proper and religious studies, mainly theological ones.

Undoubtedly, theology, religious studies and philosophy research into the problem of faith from different perspectives. As to substantiation of religious faith, theological-religious studies are a more flexible subsidiary and applied branch of theology. That is why theological-religious studies are a suitable academic discourse which highlights the differences in the ways different Christian Churches interpret the concept of religious faith.

According to John Collins, an American philosopher and theologian, the Christian faith is 'highly rational: if we take into account the nature of God and why we can trust Him, it is the lack of faith that is completely illogical'; the scholar relates the truthfulness of our knowledge of God to deep rational understanding of religious truths; he states that '... the basic content of faith does not depend on whether I believe in God's truth or consider it a stupid thing' [8, p. 41–43].

Modern philosophical definition of the concept of faith is deep and complex; faith is defined as a form of manifestation of spiritual life, as a special state of consciousness and world view. The problem of the rational was considered to be especially important in the 18th – 19th century philosophy; in the new European philosophy, the conventional approach was based on the principle of autonomy of the individual who takes cognizance of the phenomenon; the status of faith as a specific instrument, mode of cognition and a specific kind of knowledge was often questioned. The classical German philosophers G.W.F. Hegel and I. Kant approached the problem from a somewhat different perspective. They attempted at describing specifics of rational and abstract cognition of the 'scientific' ('intellectual') type, establishing its criteria for reliability and verification, its advantages and limits. According to Yu. Perov, this approach made it possible 'to interpret faith as a necessary and irreplaceable kind of knowledge which compensates for insufficiency of its rational forms. Compared to "the sober reasonableness" of Enlightenment, it was the philosophy of rehabilitation of faith' [17, p. 31].

Another important feature of classical German philosophy was regarding faith as a subjective phenomenon; attention was turned mainly to outer sources of the borrowed content of faith, which the cognizer either produces directly or confirms [26, p. 109; 28, p. 12]. For I. Kant, the boundaries of knowledge were set by insuperable subjectivity which predetermined subjectivity of any knowledge separating it from faith; this was the core idea of his 'critique of practical reason' [18, p. 269–269]. Though, I. Kant believed that only pure religious faith was the faith of reason, 'which can be convincingly communicated to any individual'. It means, states Ye. Kononenko, that in Kant's theory, the content of religion was closely interwoven with morality [11, p. 115].

In Hegel's theory, faith in God was rationalized; religious feeling was regarded as a necessary, though insufficient, condition: for Hegel, any feeling was subjective and, as a result, accidental, while we should strive to know God in his entirety using intellect as a tool. That is why in many of Hegel's works, faith was treated as subjective reality necessary for both practical and theoretical spirit, which is the ultimate goal of philosophy. The philosopher discussed the problem of cognitive capacity of faith

(for instance, in his 'Science of Logic', 1812 – 1816) and specifics of philosophical knowledge. One of his central issues was the problems of faith, religious faith in particular. In his 'Phenomenology of Spirit', 1806, Hegel presented well-grounded criticism of 'distortion of faith by Enlightenment' contributing to 'philosophical rehabilitation of faith' [17, p. 35–39].

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hegel's ideas were approved of by Catholic philosophers, theologians and the Church, who paid special attention to the matters of human nature and intellect as a tool of cognition of faith phenomena [10, p. 60]. As a result, phenomenology (one of whose tasks was to research into the phenomena of religion and religious faith) started looking for an alternative to historicism which dominated the late 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Phenomenology criticized and searched for an alternative to one-sided genetic and evolutionary view of religion, to sociological and psychological reductionism (Émile Durkheim; Sigmund Freud); it also denied the normative philosophical approach to theology. Phenomenologists also pointed out isolationism and inadequate treatment of non-Christian religions by orientalists, whose choice of regional religions as an object of research was rather subjective, and the research itself was carried out mainly from literary perspective [1, p. 13–15].

The phenomenology of religion contributed greatly to researching the phenomenon of religious faith, chiefly thanks to Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), a German thinker, whose most important achievements were a detailed analysis of the category of 'the sacred' and phenomenological description of the universal role of religious experience in the structure of faith [12, p. 85-89]. The deep meaning of religion and faith, according to R. Otto, is experiencing the 'numinous' – the divine; the philosopher explains its nature as a correlation between rational and irrational which predetermines the value sphere; the mystery of existence reveals itself in religious traditions, ideas and beliefs [23, p. 69], in feelings and foresight as the numinous disposition of the soul, which is an important factor in faith and its function [2, p. 59-60]. Though experiencing the sacred is of irrational nature, R. Otto considers it as a complex of psychological states of religious consciousness when it faces the numinous [13, p. 46].

The phenomenology of religion is closely related to theological-religious studies and philosophical theology; this affinity is based on the common religious creed and on the correlation between religion and theological spiritual and scientific tradition [2, p. 10]. It is justified by the fact that Christian theology unambiguously interprets religion as a unity between God and people; in modern humanities this statement is perceived as self-evident. Still, modern religious studies admit that critical approach to religious phenomena in different subjects, in the philosophy of religion and theological-religious studies in particular, may be quite useful in terms of practical cognition.

Yu. Kimelyov, a well-known Russian philosopher, emphasizes a special cognitive value of religious phenomena; their conceptual analysis helps to comprehend various expressions of religious attitude and religious experience of an individual as part of religious knowledge [5, p. 150; 6, p. 14-15]. According to V. Shokhin, Yu. Kimelyov suggests that modern philosophy 'tries to create a purely philosophical' teaching about God since he believes that 'philosophical theology' is actually philosophical and religious theorizing, as well as 'natural theology', 'religious philosophy', 'religious metaphysics', 'Christian philosophy', 'Christian metaphysics', 'rational theology'; religious knowledge has to be the central issue for various branches of the philosophy of religion; it is this knowledge that it can research and produce [30, p. 15-88; 31, p. 17].

An important characteristic of such a type of modern philosophy of religion, well-founded in terms of theology, (Russian philosophy in particular) is qualitative analysis of the nature of philosophical problems and of their impact on modern philosophy of religion; the presence of philosophical theism and natural theology in modern philosophy of religion is evidence of such influence and the affinity between philosophy and theology [30, p. 16–38]. It is realized, in particular, through the presence of mutual philosophical and religious cognitive tendency towards increasing authenticity of religious experience and religious knowledge, including 'pure Revelation knowledge'; it is tendency towards their merging, which is revealed in the presence of the Absolute [27].

The issues discussed above clearly indicate that in order to comprehend the phenomena of religion and religious faith, we have to adopt new approaches and, probably, apply the results obtained by

theology, religious studies, philosophy and anthropology, phenomenology to the phenomenon of faith. According to A. Kolodnyi, research on faith 'requires employment of specific scientific methods, introduction of special concepts and categories, cognitive devices which are probably used only by the philosophy of the irrational, the philosophy of intuitionism. It requires the creation of special conceptual categories; such categories are established for theology and the philosophy of the irrational, though they are not to be found in philosophical systems which are grounded on rational cognition and materialistic ideas' [9, p. 5].

In religion, states A. Kolodnyi, natural and historical objects become signs – human symbols and reference points for values; it gives an individual a feeling of involvement in Cosmic processes [9, p. 7]. So, researching into religious phenomena, we obviously have to take into account religious convictions and religious experience accessible, among other things, through the analysis of theological-religious studies. The latter, like theology, tries to adopt a complex, systemic approach relying upon the results obtained by different branches and employing different methods in order to substantiate religious experience and religious ideas, and to build up an integrated religious picture. Here the aim – to substantiate the phenomenon of religious faith – predetermines the choice of methods and information.

This complex systemic approach to substantiation of the phenomenon of religious faith is advocated by Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955); according to Fiorenzo Reati, they were 'the apostles of a more mature Christianity which rose to the challenge of the new knowledge'; they advise a Christian 'to breathe Christian faith as though their lungs were directed at both the Orthodox East and the Catholic West' [22, p. 9]. According to Fabio Montovani, an Italian philosopher, the views of the two thinkers on the phenomenon of faith have much in common and complement each other, 'Teilhard shows us the way to the Omega point through deification of the world, ... Florensky takes us back to striking contemplation of the transcendent in all the things in existence [14, p. 59-60]. In other words, both the philosophers and priests strive for mutual support and harmony between faith and mind, which ensures integrity in Christ and the central place for Christ in the heart of a Christian. The scholars also emphasized that love rather than world view is the major way of faith and our personal salvation.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of religious faith requires further research in the terms of theology, philosophy and religious studies. These sciences interpret the concept of religious faith differently, either as the state of acknowledging 'the sacred, the divine' or as a method of its acknowledgement which involves rational substantiation and even the possibility of questioning the phenomenon from the point of view of science. Catholic theology regards faith as the substance of things which a person hopes to acquire, as evidence of the invisible, the source of existence; it regards the expression of innate religiosity as craving faith, which is a skill of mind and its experience, the way to the truth, the basis of knowledge that makes us free. That is why faith does not oppose intellect but seeks its help and trusts it. Faith is synthesis of certain prior ontological and gnoseological convictions, devotion to the object of faith, trust in it and rational reflection. Thus theology and theological-religious studies use similar methodological approaches researching into the nature of faith. Theological-religious studies as well as philosophy rely on natural cognition, the truths of faith being the foundations of their creed; they provide theology with epistemological opportunity for rational cognition and substantiation of faith, which is the basis for its intellectual justification.

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У статті проаналізовано теологічне, філософське і релігієзнавче бачення феномену релігійної віри. Зокрема, з'ясовано роль віри як визначального ідентифікатора християнської релігії. Виявлено особливості інтерпретації віри в католицизмі ХХ – початку ХХІ століття. Проаналізовано домінантні тенденції бачення феномену релігійної віри в працях провідних вітчизняних і зарубіжних філософів, релігієзнавців і теологів та розкрито засади їх навчання віри, основу якого складає раціональне глумачення передумов віри, зокрема, універсальних християнських чеснот як морально-етичних домінант, що доповнюються їх актуальним соціальним трактуванням.

**Ключові слова:** феномен релігійної віри, християнська релігія, доктринальна віра, аджорнаменто, теологічна й релігієзнавча інтерпретація віри, суспільне буття віри.