

## THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

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2. Tsaregorodtseva I.A., Gukezhev I.A., Chepaykina D.I. The Fatwas of Coronavirus Era: the Reaction of Islamic Legal Institutions on Changing Realities. HSE University, Russian Federation, Moscow // *Vostok. Afro-Aziatskie obshchestva: istoriya i sovremennost. 2021. №2. P. 69–82.*

DSc Telman Kafarov (Professor, Head of the Department of Philosophy and History, DSMU) examines the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Muslim religious life. The pandemic significantly changed the “technology” of most of the foundations of Islam - as a result, there was a temporary closure of mosques for the obligatory five-time prayer, including Friday;

the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca has become impossible or difficult; activities during the fasting month of Ramadan were minimized because it was recognized that extreme conditions associated with changes in daily routine and diet would increase the risk of infection; sharing an evening meal has become impossible due to the demands of social distancing.

The author notes that Muslims around the world are especially sensitive to the cancellation of the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam (Hajj). The experience of organizing the “Mecca 3D” project, which allows one to perform the Hajj in a virtual space, seems to be important in the current situation, although many authoritative organizations (for example, the Muslim Council of Great Britain) do not accept the virtual Hajj, believing that it should be associated with overcoming difficulties on the way to the sacred lands in real life. The Islamic world has been actively using modern communication tools for a long time, and why should this not concern the technology of pilgrimage, at least for a limited period of time?

The author notes that some representatives of the clergy show their “confessional vigilance” at the wrong time, defending the “purity” of Islam and arguing about the halal nature of medical antiviral drugs and vaccines. This issue is discussed in the media quite intensively, but it is not taken into account that the Quran and Sunnah unequivocally allow the use of non-halal products in extreme conditions that threaten the life and health of people. In fact, according to the Quran, a person, his physical and spiritual health is the highest value, and he is obliged to take care of preserving his life first of all. Telman Kafarov admits that these issues about the halal have a right to exist in normal conditions, but to raise them in the tense and uncertain conditions of a pandemic means to hinder the state policy of prevention and treatment of coronavirus.

The author raises another important topic about the cultural, regional and confessional specifics of the coronavirus pandemic. Nowadays, countries are already known that are

effectively confronting the pandemic – China, North Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam. The author asks why the regions with the highest population density, where the epidemic actually began, and without special spatial and geographical cordons that prevent the spread of the epidemic, are the most successful in combating the pandemic today. The author believes that the reasons are in the national mentality and the peculiarities of the social organization of the inhabitants of this region, to be more precise, in their discipline and law-abiding, which make it easier and with fewer losses to mobilize to achieve the set goals, as well as to restrict freedom during a pandemic.

There is almost no covid dissidence in these countries, which is quite common in European and other countries, whose supporters call for a boycott of government action in defense of the pandemic. Actions of covid dissidents are held all over the world on quite a regular basis. Only in January 2021, actions with thousands of participants demanding the rejection of anti-epidemic restrictions were held in many European cities. There are such dissident movements in Russia as well. It should be noted that Muslims are considerably less frequently getting involved in the covid-dissident movement, especially in relation to the strategy of self-isolation and distancing implemented by the state. But covid-dissidence among Muslims manifests itself in other forms, which were mentioned above in connection with the discussions about the halal nature of vaccines and antiviral drugs.

An important role in the successful address the pandemic is played by the phenomenon of social distancing, inherent in the inhabitants of Southeast Asia, where contact forms of communication, such as hugs and handshakes that exist in Islamic and Christian societies, are quite rare. Muslim etiquette is characterized by closer forms of communication where touching and hugging are a manifestation of respect.

Also, the author refers to the concept of “crowding”, i.e. an uncomfortable state of a person caused by a lack of personal space, when it seems to a person that there are too many people

around him. The author concludes that the epidemic situation will expand the boundaries of personal space in interpersonal and public communication of people of all faiths.

The team of authors led by PhD Irina Tsaregorodtseva (Associate Professor, HSE University) analyzes the relationship between religious, legal and government institutions in the Muslim world during the coronavirus pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic has become the next most important topic of discussion in the Muslim world after the end of the active phase of the “Arab Spring” with a wave of anti-government coups and discussion of their legality from the point of view of Islamic tradition.

In the spring of 2020, during the month of Ramadan, the largest number of coronavirus fatwas was issued. Believers wondered how the pandemic would affect traditional religious practices and rituals. The recommendations of the theologians of al-Azhar were actively disseminated, and first of all, through social networks, where rather detailed decrees were published, which contained the following prescriptions: believers were to observe fasting in the coming month of Ramadan, despite the pandemic; believers had to comply with all quarantine precautions, including attending and organizing mass gatherings, which also include Friday prayers in mosques; believers should not allow the spread of false information and unverified rumors about the coronavirus, and a ban was imposed to spread panic among the population; a ban was imposed on speculation in the prices of relevant goods and services during a pandemic; in everything related to the fight against the epidemic, the authorities and doctors had to be fully obeyed; it was recommended to accelerate the centralized collection of alms, obligatory according to the laws of Islam, in order to send the proceeds to help those in need and those affected during the coronavirus; it was allowed to use alcohol-containing agents for disinfection; it was allowed to bury several deceased in one grave if it was necessary during a pandemic. The above texts of fatwas

contained references to fragments from Scripture, prophetic traditions and historical chronicles of early Islam.

The recommendations of another Egyptian center, the House of Fatwas, generally coincided with the published instructions of the scholars of al-Azhar. A fatwa was also issued on the inadmissibility of organizing remote Friday prayers, since the true meaning of the face-to-face prayer action of believers led by the imam is lost. There were also very unusual decrees, which said that death from the coronavirus could serve as the basis for declaring a person a martyr.

The Fatwa Council of the United Arab Emirates on the official website also published the text of the fatwa on coronavirus-related issues. A feature of this document is the abundance of legal terms and references to the Holy Scriptures.

The content of the decisions of the European Council on Fatwas and Research in some moments had a specific shade for non-Muslim countries, although in the main part it coincided with those written by Arab institutions. The European muftis were concerned, in particular, about issues that were not particularly relevant for the Arab countries in the spring of 2020. First of all, it was about the cremation of the bodies of those who died from the coronavirus, and about the admissibility of such a procedure in relation to the deceased Muslims. Another new topic concerning fatwas of Arab institutions was the discussion of the question of one of the believers about the possibility for Muslims to take loans from European banks if the companies in which they worked were on the verge of bankruptcy due to the pandemic. The Muftis decided that such options were acceptable for European Muslims who were in a difficult situation.

A review of the available fragments of fatwas of the Council of Supreme Theologians of Saudi Arabia showed that their main topics are: justification of the need to suspend all types of pilgrimages to the sacred land of Muslims, compliance with all precautions that are recommended by doctors and prescribed by the authorities, as well as religious and psychological support of

believers during a period of violation their usual way of life. Also, Muslim scholars of Saudi Arabia quite often refer to the Quran and Sunnah when justifying the need for the prevention of coronavirus, insisting that the prevention of diseases is mentioned in the texts of revelation, and that Islam heals not only the soul, but also the body.

The French Council of the Muslim Faith has issued only one short resolution, which contains the simplest recommendations for hygiene in the conditions of the spread of the coronavirus.

The only resolution of the Muslim Council of Great Britain can hardly be called a fatwa; it resembles an appeal to believers and leaders of the Muslim community of the country in form – not to gather for mass events and limit social contacts.

The Council of Supreme Theologians of Saudi Arabia also recommended adherence to the prescriptions of the authorities and doctors; but the main focus of these decrees was on the annual pilgrimage to the Kaaba at the end of July, as well as fasting, which just fell on the spring time of the pandemic. According to the members of the Council, various types of pilgrimages to Muslim shrines should be suspended, but this is not a disaster, because the main thing is to prevent even greater harm.

The authors conclude that the coronavirus pandemic as a whole did not cause controversy in the positions of Islamic institutions both in the Arab world and in Western Europe.