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On the Good Faith

A fourfold discursive construction of Zoroastrianism in
contemporary Russia

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Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

Zoroastrianism, a religion originating in the ancient East and having survived to the present day, is currently being practiced on a very small scale throughout the whole world. Since the early 1990s there has been a gradually increasing public interest in Zoroastrianism in Russia and some of the former Soviet republics where small pockets of new non-ethnic Zoroastrians have sprung up. The purpose of the presented study is to explain what constitutes the Zoroastrian trend in the case of Russia from the perspective of contemporary Russian culture. This focus indicates a contextual, culture internal perspective. The collection of relevant texts building separate text corpora within societal systems with their own codes such as religion, science, new mass media and fiction begs the question of societal presence as well as cultural relevance of various discourses on Zoroastrianism. This text based study suggests transdisciplinary and transtextual approaches rooted in theories of discourse developed within humanities, in particular in linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) that both are well applicable in the study of religions. The analysis of four different text corpora with references to Zoroastrianism has shown certain patterns and mechanisms in the creating meaning on Zoroastrianism in contemporary Russia. As a result of the comparison, the Zoroastrian discourse within religious field is at high grade heterogeneous and polysemantic towards the journalistic and the literary, but does not so much exceed in its complexity the competing academic. As a further effect of the analysis is the presence of many elements within discourses on Zoroastrianism being absolutely foreign for their Iranian, Indian and various Diaspora counterparts and much depended on local history, context and language. Also perceptions of Zoroastrianism in contemporary popular culture including science, new mass media and fiction are formative towards religion, reflect at different degree either representations of Russian Zoroastrians or other new religious movements use own intern and extern resources which for their part, again have been quoted by the people personally interested in religion. All together should describe natural traces of a modern religious discourse, which derives from imaginative and communicative sources and contribute to the whole picture of the contemporary Russian mass culture.

Keywords

Zoroastrianism, Russia, new religious movement, mass culture, esotericism, discourse, science, new mass media, literature.

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