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VALUE OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION IN THE METAPHORICAL
SYMBOLISM OF THE AKATHIST

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Abstract

At the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries, drastic socio-political changes revive the role of religion and the Church in social life. The religious style, which is part of the functional and stylistic paradigm of the modern Russian language, has been progressively studied. Religious consciousness is recognized as an important extralinguistic factor that forms the religious style. The religious consciousness tends to appeal to spiritual values and operate with abstract concepts. The need to convey transcendental meanings in an understandable verbal form determines such a stylistic feature of the religious style as symbolization. The allegorical method of explication of non-material religious phenomena is implemented in religious texts by certain language means. Cognitive metaphors, which allow replacing complex abstract spiritual concepts with descriptions of specific (familiar) material objects or phenomena, are of great importance. Symbolization is implemented in all genres of the religious style. This paper attempts to classify cognitive metaphors used to create a description of the spiritual perfection of a holy person, using the example of akathist texts dedicated to Orthodox saints. The analysis of texts has allowed allocating a few groups of metaphors that reflect the features of religious, including axiological, as well as heuristic and physiological perception of the world. Spiritual perfection as an abstract concept of religious consciousness acquires material outlines in the texts of akathists. Each group of metaphors reveals a specific aspect of the multifaceted phenomenon of the spiritual world.

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1. Introduction

Axiological assumptions of the akathist as a genre of religious style reflect the system of values of the religious worldview. The Gospel of Matthew says: "Be as perfect as your heavenly Father" (Matt, 5:48). Spiritual perfection becomes a conceptual value for a man of faith that is a way to save soul for eternal life. Craving for salvation, as well as the idea of duality (coexistence of two worlds – the sacred and the profane), inherent in religious consciousness (Itskovich, 2015), are projected on the constructive principle of religious style – "absolutism within the boundaries of the hierarchical dichotomy of the earth and the sky" (Kupina & Matveeva, 2017, p. 19). Proto-textuality, as a special constructive dominant of the religious style, determines "the continuity of methods of textual processing of the worldview concepts put forward" (Itskovich, 2018, p. 9).

The very first akathist was created as a unique hymn of praise to the most Holy Theotokos. Sanctity and spiritual perfection become the object of glorification of the original text. Subsequent texts retain their laudatory specificity. The fundamental intention of praise (Itskovich, 2018) is realized in the texts of akathists in accordance with the peculiar stylistic feature of the religious style – "symbolization of the sacred world and the spiritual state of man" (Kozhina, 2018, p. 134), which allows explaining the abstract through the specific by means of metaphors.

The effect of metaphor as a language means extends from the field of linguistics to the field of cognitive processes. In the texts of akathists, metaphors become "a means of cognizing reality" (Popova & Kurochkina, 2015) and ensure "the unity of cognitive schemes and verbal expression" (Fauconnier, 1994). Metaphorical structuring of "one concept in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), that is the concept of spiritual perfection in language means of subject-specific semantics, becomes a functional and stylistic feature of the akathist.

2. Problem Statement

The religious functional style has recently become the object of academic research. Not all genres of the religious style are completely described and analyzed. For example, the genre of akathist is poorly studied. The problem of the akathist's originality, associated with such stylistic feature of the religious style as symbolization of abstract religious concepts, was indicated as early as in the 19th century by the researcher of Church hymnography Popov (2013): "Church singer" <needs> "to express the spiritual in a material image that would not put bounds to the former, and once this tangible image shapes the spiritual, <...> it would disappear like husk together with its distinct physical features and limitations" (pp. 87-88). Authors of akathists actively use "metaphorical representations" (Gibbs, 2008) of abstract spiritual concepts. Studying the texts of akathists makes it necessary to classify metaphors into groups on the basis of their linguistic-mental correlation with a certain concept of religious consciousness. The present article attempts to describe spiritual perfection as a conceptual value of a holy person addressed by the akathists.

3. Research Questions

The research subject is represented with the metaphorical symbolism of akathists dedicated to Orthodox saints, which transmits the value of spiritual perfection of a holy person.

1. In akathists, metaphors do not serve as a figural means, but as a way of understanding an abstract concept. The research task assumes covering a number of important questions. How are metaphors used in the akathist genre? What metaphors perform the functions of "translators" from the abstract sphere to the material one?
2. If representation of a spiritual concept is expressed by different groups of metaphors, what features of an abstract concept does each group of metaphors reveal? Do groups of metaphors that provide understanding of the unfamiliar through the familiar relate to the peculiarities of perception of the surrounding world?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose consists in studying and describing the metaphorical symbolization of the value of spiritual perfection in the texts of the akathists dedicated to Orthodox saints. The following tasks have been set to achieve the purpose:

- description of the metaphors denoting the holy persons addressed by the akathists;
- classification of the metaphors according to the identified differential features;
- determining the conditionality of groups of metaphors by the peculiarities of human perception of the world.

5. Research Methods

The analysis is based on the material of akathist texts dedicated to Orthodox saints. About 150 texts have been studied. The research methods include continuous sampling, taxonomic description, linguistic and cultural analysis.

6. Findings

Let us turn to research results. Comprehension of spiritual perfection in the texts of the akathists is based on metaphors that are as close as possible to material perception. People cognize the world using various senses. In accordance with the specifics of sensory perception, the following types of metaphors are used in akathist texts: metaphors of visual perception; metaphors of auditory perception; metaphors reflecting the olfactory way of perception, metaphors of taste perception and metaphors of tactile perception.

Visual perception is represented with the metaphors of light: *sacred lamps shining with the light of faith and virtues* (Akathist to All the Holy who shone forth in the land of Russia); *light lit in prayers to God* (Akathist to the Holy Martyr Galaktion of Vologda); *light of mercy* (Akathist to the Holy Martyr Grand Duchess Elisaveta Feodorovna). "Light" metaphors also include the metaphors of fire (flame):

filled with all the **fire** of divine love (Akathist to Blessed Ambrose of Optina); **flame** burning heresy (Akathist to St. Demetrius of Rostov); **flame-shaped pillar** (Akathist to St. Basil the Great).

The metaphors of fire can also be referred to the group of tactile perception metaphors, since they most often contain the sense of heat: **heartwarming** zealous person of God's glory (Akathist to Blessed Moses the Hungarian); **heartwarming** Consoler of all troubled and burdened with grief (Akathist to the Martyr Hermogenes, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia).

Another group is represented with the metaphors of auditory perception, which convey a state of spiritual perfection through sounds. "Sound" metaphors include descriptions of musical instruments: **dulcimer**, mellifluous sermon of salvation (Akathist to St. Cyril and St. Methodius); **horn** proclaiming Christ to the infidel (Akathist to the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki); **blessed sifflot** giving spiritual joy to the soul (Akathist to Blessed Ephimius of Suzdal). The metaphors denoting the sound of human voice or bird singing are also used: **sweet-voiced** delight of virgin life (Akathist to St. John Chrysostom); **sweet-song gussets** filling the desert of Athos with prayer songs (Akathist to the Blessed Fathers, Shone on the Holy Mount of Athos).

Metaphors that reflect the olfactory features of perception are explicated through the description of a special fragrance and its source: **incense** offered to God (Akathist to St. Xenia of Saint Petersburg, fool-for-Christ); **the most precious fragrance** of the desert lily (Akathist to St. Seraphim of Sarov); **fragrance** of the Holy place from the Archangel **ennobled** (Akathist to the Blessed Grand Duchess Euphrosyne of Moscow).

Metaphors that symbolically transform taste perception are represented by two types. Some autonomous metaphors based on tactile features are also used: **sweetness** of the Church being cognized (Akathist to Blessed Arsenius of Novgorod); **sweet wine**, pressed in the grindstone of Jesus (Akathist to Saint Alexy, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia). There are also complex metaphors that combine associations based on synchronous tactile-auditory perception: **sweet-cut organ** of psalmody (Akathist to St. Daniel the Stylite); **sweet-sounding pipe** (Akathist to St. Nina, Enlightener of Georgia).

The group of metaphors based on sensory perception is supplemented by metaphors from the world of living and inanimate nature, which are represented as objects of perceptual knowledge. Let us consider a group of metaphors from the world of living nature. Saints are compared to birds: **bird** soaring to heaven (Akathist to the Holy Martyr Tatiana); **immaculate dove** (Akathist to Blessed Euphrosyne of Polotsk); **sweet-song nightingales** proclaiming the spring of eternal bliss (Akathist to All the Saints pleasing God from everlasting). Saints are compared to plants: **flowers** of Christ's Paradise (Akathist to the Holy Martyrs Florus and Laurus); **blessed tree** (Akathist to Blessed Tikhon of Kaluga); **lily** divine and growing in the earthly garden of Christ (Akathist to the Holy Cathedral of the Kiev-Pechersk's Saints). A Saint, a spiritually perfect man is described using the metaphors of a bee: **Eden bee** giving us the honey of theology (Akathist to St. Nektarios of Aegina); **hard-working bee** that wisely found flowers with the honey of truth and salvation (Akathist to St. Great Prince Vladimir).

The group of metaphors representing edible fruits of the plant world is close to the group of metaphors of nature (and implicitly correlates with the group of metaphors of sensory perception): **bunches of grapes** of Christ (Akathist to All the Saints pleasing God from everlasting); **wheat** of Christ's threshing floor (Akathist to the Holy Cathedral of the Kiev-Pechersk Saints). The attributive sign of

Christ assigns to the metaphor the meaning of spiritual food, useful and necessary for nourishment of the soul, and taking origin in the perfection of a Holy person. The assumption is supported by a group of metaphors associated with the designation of food and drinks, which allegorically denote the Saint: *bread everlasting for the thirsty* (Akathist to St. Nicholas of Myra); *sweet drink of the thirsty for eternal life* (Akathist to Blessed Arsenius of Novgorod).

Metaphors of objects and phenomena from the world of inanimate nature reveal hidden transcendental meanings through the material expression of the comprehensible and recognizable. Thus, the akathists to saints contain the metaphors associated with understanding of the essence of "beginning". The beginning of the day is mentioned: *morning, virtuously ennobled* (Akathist to St. Joasaph of Belgorod); *dawn of immortality* (Akathist to Blessed Alexander of Svir). The beginning of a new (after the winter period) natural cycle is also mentioned: *spring of the Lord* (Akathist to St. Charalambos). The metaphors of the *beginning* construct a latent allusion to the Gospel Revelation, in which the Lord speaks about himself: "I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 1:8). The divine property of the "beginning" can be understood as the starting point of a person's spiritual development.

Metaphors from the world of inanimate nature are represented by several subgroups. Subgroup of metaphors, denoting the phenomena of nature: *spiritual winds, sending away the winter despair from our hearts* (Akathist to All the Saints pleasing God from everlasting); *thunder, scaring those living in iniquity* (Akathist to St. Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky) of Simferopol); *three jets of lightning* (Akathist to the Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope and Charity and their mother Sophia); *clouds, shedding the dew of teaching* (Akathist to Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom); *rain of charity and assistance* (Akathist to the Holy Grand Duchess Anna Kashinskaya); *dew of grace, irrigating and warming our hearts* (Akathist to St. Arsenius of Tver).

The following subgroup of metaphors of the natural world is associated with the metaphors of celestial bodies: *new sun of the frigid North* (Akathist to Blessed Arsenius of Novgorod); *conscious sun* (Akathist to the Holy forty Martyrs of Sebaste); *star, shone wonderfully in Sibir* (Akathist to St. Simeon of Verkhoturye); *perfect moon* (Akathist to St. Martyr Catherine).

Metaphors for objects of the world of inanimate nature include:

- metaphors of ground (land): *holy ground bringing up the seed of the God's word* (Akathist to St. Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia); *field plowed to spiritual fertility* (Akathist to St. Barsanuphius of Tver); *holy pasture of Cypriots* (Akathist to St. Spyridon, Bishop of Trimythous);
- metaphors of water: *river, filled with the grace of God's waters* (Akathist to the Holy great Martyr Paraskeva); *multi-healing inexhaustible treasure* (Akathist to Blessed Sergius of Radonezh); *life-giving source, pouring out the grace of healing* (Akathist to St. Tikhon of Zadonsk);
- metaphors of stone: *stone of hope of life* (Akathist to Blessed Ambrose of Optina).

Metaphors from the world of inanimate nature are considered as particular manifestations of "pre-understanding" (Demyankov, 2005) of one or another aspect of spiritual perfection. Each image of the surrounding world is assigned a semantically differential feature that correlates with the inner state or actions of a holy person. For example, metaphors of a non-man-made object or phenomenon often include

an adjectival index that has converging (often axiological) characteristics: *perfect moon*, *gracious dew*, *holy ground*.

Axiological component in the structure of metaphors is manifested through denoting the objects having a material value or using the lexeme 'treasure': *precious beads of the Church of Christ* (Akathist to the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki); *gold, shining all around*; *silver, cleansed of sinful wickedness* (Akathist to St. Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia); *precious adamant* (Akathist to St. John of Korma); *valuable treasure* (Akathist to St. Andrew the Apostle); *desert treasure, hidden from the world* (Akathist to St. Mary of Egypt).

In the group of metaphors of non-natural material objects, the value of spiritual perfection is communicated through metaphorical interpretations of sacred objects: *altar, consecrated to sanctified service to the Lord* (Akathist to St. John Chrysostom); *animated tablets of the law of the Lord* (Akathist to Blessed Alexander of Svir); *bounteous bowl of the God's gifts* (Akathist to the Holy Great Martyr Anastasia of Sirmium); *charter inspired with fire writings of the God's word* (Akathist to Preeminent Apostles Peter and Paul).

The texts of akathists also contain the metaphors of everyday material objects: *wall indestructible in the midst of the storm of pagan passions* (Akathist to St. Great Prince Vladimir); *open gate* (Akathist to St. Joasaph of Belgorod); *key of prayer* (Akathist to St. Nektarios of Aegina); *ladder, bringing up reverend monks* (Akathist of St. Arsenius of Tver); *holy icons of the Theotokos chariot* (Akathist to Blessed Arsenius of Novgorod); *vessel of grace* (Akathist to Blessed Varnava Gefsimanski). Precedence is the key peculiarity of these metaphors. Many metaphors of everyday material objects are used in the primary source – the first "Akathist to the most Holy Theotokos" as an understanding of the spiritual perfection of the Mother of God. It should be noted that description of the system of metaphors used in the "Akathist to the most Holy Theotokos" is not covered by the present research). Precedence complements the cognitive perception of the metaphor by indicating a continuity with the primary text.

Akathists to God's saints contain the metaphors related to socially significant human activities: *a good soldier of Christ* (Akathist to St. Tikhon of Zadonsk); *ever-vigilant guardian of Orthodoxy* (Akathist to St. Theodosius of Chernigov); *humble mentor* (Akathist to St. George of Danilovsk); *wise leader of your helpers* (Akathist to St. Gury of Kazan); *kind helmsman of those overwhelmed with passion* (Akathist to St. Kornelius of the Pskov Caves); *teacher of piety* (Akathist to Blessed Matrona of Moscow); *wise sower of piety* (Akathist to the Holy Great Martyr and healer Panteleimon); *blessed and tireless maker of the Christ's wine* (Akathist to the Martyr Joseph, Metropolitan of Astrakhan); *healer of the weak* (Akathist to the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious).

Metaphorical description of a holy man's actions is most often based on the designation of those types of work that are mentioned in the Gospels in relation to the earthly life of Christ (cf.: *Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and he healed them* (Matt 15:30)) or to a mention of a kind of activity in the parables of Christ (cf.: *a man, planting vineyard, is notable <...>* (Matt 21:33–42)). Genesis of this group of metaphors is largely determined by the constructive principle of the religious style – proto-textuality, that is continuity with the Holy Scripture as the "canonical text that conveys the thoughts of God" (Itskovich, 2018).

The principle of proto-textuality is explicitly expressed in a group of metaphors based on the precedence of proper names. The names of Saints known from the Holy Scriptures are perceived as attribution of spiritual perfection: *Abel, sprinkled with the blood of Christ* (Akathist to St. Alexius, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia); *new Job* (Akathist to St. Daniel the Stylite); *Abraham, who obeyed the Voice of God and left his Fatherland, Nizhny Novgorod, the monastery and the people* (Akathist to Blessed Euthymius of Suzdal).

Understanding of spiritual perfection based on the principle of proto-textuality is manifested in the use of allusions to quotations from the Gospels when designating a saint: *spiritual salt of the earth* (Akathist to the Blessed Fathers, Shone on the Holy Mount of Athos) (cf.: *You are the salt of the earth.* (Matt 5:13)); *Caesar deserves only the Caesarean* (Akathist to St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia) (cf.: *and having answered, Jesus said to them: render unto Caesar the Caesar's, and the God the God's.* (Mark 12: 17)); *having no place to bend heads* (Akathist to the Holy King Constantine and Queen Elena) (cf.: *the Son of Man does not have place where to bend the head* (Matt 8:21)).

7. Conclusion

The analysis of texts shows that the akathist as the genre of religious style is characterized by a high level of metaphoricity due to the specifics of religious consciousness. The proposed classification demonstrates the ability of cognitive metaphors to act as verbal-mental vehicles of transcendental meanings. The concept of perfection (holiness), which represents a conceptual spiritual value for a religious person, is represented in the texts of the akathists by several groups of metaphors. Each group of metaphors reflects a certain way of cognizing the world, related to both the features of physiological perception, and the general moral and spiritual state of a person, with the level of their erudition, knowledge of the proto-text of the Holy Scripture and the primary source. The study of the possibility of metaphorical understanding of important conceptual notions in the texts of akathists seems to be promising.

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