Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

Svetlana Makhlina
(St. Petersburg University of Culture and Art, Russia)

Abstract: Religion gives the viewpoint associated with the idea of God. In the end, scrutinizing essential traits of the religious viewpoint, you come to the conclusion all religions come to an agreement concerning one fact that there is the One God. But every region, every national environment has its own way to come to it. In contemporary world the stereotype of Islam is that of terrorism, aggression and bellicosity. It is clear that this is a wrong and distorted image. No doubt every nation, every region developed their own symbolic definitions of these or those peculiarities of the surrounding reality. It was embodied in the art. Despite the differences we can feel internal commonality of Christian and Muslim codes. Commonality of the Christian and the Muslim arts prevails over the differences and it is this commonality that can become the stimulus for peaceful co-existence of all members of Christianity and Islam nowadays.

Key words: religion, Christian Art, Muslim Art, the light, symbols, Apophatic, Cataphatic

1. Introduction

Religion gives the viewpoint associated with the idea of God. In the end, scrutinizing essential traits of the religious viewpoint, you come to the conclusion David Kougoulitsin was talking about (and he was not the only one); all religions come to an agreement concerning one fact that there is the One God. But every region, every national environment has its own way to come to it.

1.1 Globalization in Modern World

Globalization is one of the significant features of the modern world. It bears many positive effects for perfecting human lives; it familiarizes different, sometimes far away cultural centres in the periphery with contemporary achievements of the science and technologies, encourages information exchange, quick communication among people. We could name more positive sides of globalization. However there are also negative elements to be present in it that not everyone likes. This is, firstly, bringing different cultures to some average level, and not the best one, forming mass culture everywhere that leads to disregarding of achievements of every national culture, etc. It is quite normal that these effects are intended to be removed. One of the ways out of this crisis is to turn to religion. But even in here there are obstacles to achieve peace and agreement between countries and people.

1.2 Religion in Contemporary World

The religion is intended to unite people. But contradictions between religions become a source of aggressive
incidents between representatives of different religious sects. It has always happened in the course of time. Unfortunately these conflicts are not harmless and may lead to the world catastrophe. In the meanwhile there are many bases for the dialogue and consensus to be achieved between modern Christians and Muslims.

In contemporary world the stereotype of Islam is that of terrorism, aggression and bellicosity. It is clear that this is a wrong and distorted image. No educated or thinking person could share this idea. In comparison to Christianity, Islam does not separate the secular from the spiritual. Then any piece of the artwork is defined by the religious viewpoint. Their sign peculiarities of representing essence of phenomena were reflected in Muslim art. By the way, both Judaism and Christianity transformed many pagan notions. Thus semiotic layer of these signs is rather diverse.

But Islam itself brought a lot of new elements that were reflected in character forms of artwork. And this is the second layer of sign concept of the language of the Muslim art.

2. Differences and Similarities of the Christian and Muslim Art Symbols

No doubt every nation, every region developed their own symbolic definitions of these or those peculiarities of the surrounding reality. It was embodied in the art. Besides developing synchronic symbolic means, there are diachronic changes interacting with them.

In 1099 Jerusalem was conquered by crusaders, and this fact essentially affected the art, as the objects of Christian and Muslim arts were made by the same craftsmen. In 711 arabo-berberian armies of the Umayyad Caliphs invaded the Pyrenean peninsula from the North of Africa and defeated Visigoth’ Kingdom. Spain became a province of Damaskus Caliphate. Then one of the Umayyads conquered all Muslim estates and founded The Caliphate of Córdoba with Cordoba as its centre. By X century Spain had become the centre of culture not for the East but for the West as well.

2.1 Muslim Art Symbols

Beauty in Muslim art is considered not aesthetically, but as an expression of perfection and a contrast to Pride and Ingratitude. The beauty is considered as an internal spiritual trait and not as an external physiological one. Regardless of interpretations, Muslim Art cannot but cause admiration by its aesthetical attractiveness, unearthly beauty. In Muslim art all-embracing wholeness of the Matter filled with beauty and perfection is presented in the macrocosm (the universe) and microcosm (the man). In Islam the whole world is identified with the body of the man. For example, the description of the world in the Sufi text “The mirror of exacting truths”: “The mountain is similar to the bone, the trees — to the hair on the head, smaller plants — to the floss on the body; there are 7 climatic zones on the Earth and there are 7 parts in the human body; the head, two arms, two legs, the back and the stomach; there is an earthquake, and there is sneezing in the body; there are springs in the earth, and there are blood vessels in the body. Comparison of bitter and salty sources and discharges (tears, saliva etc.). Comparison of the body with the sky; 12 Zodiac signs and 12 holes in the body, 28 stops of the Moon and 28 nerves; 360 degrees and 360 sinews, 7 planets and 7 managing organs, many stars and many ‘forces’ of the body, the sky is surrounded by the elements and the body is surrounded by 4 juices…Spring is similar to blood, Summer — to bile etc. (Bertels A. E., 1970, pp. 22–23). Even the human face was considered as a reflection of various ontological layers of the microcosm, and a mole on the face of a beloved was compared to the semantic centre, to the heart, thus becoming the symbolic equivalent of the World and the spiritual centre of the man. Thus the man would become the sign of the both worlds — the microcosm and the macrocosm. The book and the art are the
next level of the Divine creation. Sometimes books of fiction themselves would be compared to the beauty of the human body (for example about it: Braginskiy V. I., 1995, p. 17). But the following fact should be taken into consideration; compared to other religions, in Islam ‘there was no official contradiction between the secular and the spiritual, everything was subjected to the idea of prevalence of the spiritual in the life of the society’ (Braginskiy V. I., 1995, p. 30).

2.2 Christian Art Symbols

In Christianity the situation is completely different. Symbolism as an image of thought in the Middle Ages and as building form of the World according to hierarchical principle of the elements, caused the rise of the role of the sign in the art of this period. Even the organized space of the temple aiming at unity as a prototype of Divine Harmony, has symbolic meaning — architecture, music, liturgy, and plastic arts are merged there.

The portal in the temple acquires special symbolic meaning. A portal is a limit, border of the worlds — the earthly, the common, the sinful and the heavenly, the higher, the sacred. The portal was a sign of transformation of the man keeping his worries aside and hurrying for the temple. The temple expresses cosmological concept of the time, transmitting the model of the Universe by its structure. A. I. Komech defined the sacral of Christian temples in the following way; “Strict utility of the building is able to identify the plan of the Creator clearer than the surrounding world, whose diversity hides from perception the unity of the divine plan” (Komech A. I., 1978, p. 222). The temple is not only a model of the Universe, but an embodiment of the transcendental world. This is characteristic for Byzantine, as well as for the Western Europe and for orthodox churches and cathedrals. “A Byzantine dome above the temple represents the canopy of heaven to cover the earth. On the contrary, the gothic spire represents an irrepressible spirit of verticality to rise stone mass from the earth to the heaven. And besides our native ‘onion’ dome embodies the idea of profound devotional burning to the heaven, and our earthly world becomes involved in the beyond world treasure through it” (Troubetskoy E., 1991, p. 9). Each part of the temple emphasizes the unity of the heavenly and the earthly worlds, each one has its own meaning and symbol; the apse symbolizes Bethlehem cave and the “coffin” of Christ, vaults of altar and the temple are images of two levels of the heaven, lamps and candles are the image of the eternal light (Bychkov V., 1991, p. 210).

The semantics of the temple in Islam is represented in some other way. “Vertical structure of Muslim mosque includes three symbolic zones; tchetverik is the symbol the lower world, the dome — the higher world, and tholobate — a special transition zone from the earthly world to the heavenly world. The most significant signs from the religious point of view are inscribed on the tholobate, as they appear mostly in the transition zone, at the point disintegration and integration of the earthly and the heavenly, the lower and the higher worlds, the profane and the sacral” (Ardaban N., Bakhatiar L., 1975, p. 45). The horizontal structure of the mosque is built in the same way. The central entrance and the mihrab were decorated with graphic pictures by all means. The signs above the entrance doors are explained by symbolic meaning of the threshold the door of the Muslim culture, as doors for example, separate profane space from sacral one.

2.3 The Signs of the Light

A special place in the sign concept of Middle Age culture is occupied by symbolism of the light. A legendary abbot Suger from Saint-Denis abbey talked about idea of Divine Light a lot. The light becomes one of the key categories in XII-XIII centuries. In the 20–30s of our century this topic is discussed in the researches on symbolic iconography and metaphysics of light. On the tide of interest to the structural analysis this problem keeps becoming significant. The light is not just materialistic. There is no need in special efforts to perceive it — neither
Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

In the Middle Ages natural light in architecture was trans-substance — materialized image of Divine shining. This is where profound symbolic meaning of the lamps in the temples comes from, and interpretation of everything light and shining, or bearing light is interpreted as the light coming directly from Christ or God the Father, the candle was seen as an analogy of the body of Christ (voluntary self-destruction in the name of the light and the Truth). In that time the light symbolized not only God the Father but Christ and the Apostles and souls of the believers, virtues, words of the Bible, Divine grace of the saints, shining angels etc. The classical example of light to define and to form the structure of the inner space is the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople. In the Middle Age at the turn of XII-XIII century investigations on the theory of light of Judaic, Arabic, Greek texts were actualized and achieved a new level.

Such attitude towards the light defines the preference of these or those colors; the most favorite one is white as the lightest and the most light-bearing. It is associated with the color of purity, sincere belief and chastity. At the days of the biggest religious holidays priests wore white. The less light was in the color the less valuable was it in the Middle Age scale of values. Precious stones were valued the same way; as the sources of their own light, the precious stones were valued due to the amount of light they contained. This is why the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypses was a city of Light and was decorated with precious stones. Step by step ontology of light transformed into mysticism of light, and theory about it — into the theory of illumination. God is the higher light, the source of non-created light and simultaneously created derived from it. Forming of light is the same process both in natural and supernatural spheres. Responsive emanation from the Earth to the Heaven should go from the most enlightened souls, this was embodied fully in the concept of gothic choir.

Naturally attitude toward the light differed by enlightened people and not enlightened ones. Nevertheless understanding of Divine light was widely spread. In speeches, texts, sermons of different levels of that time the following word combinations were often met; “radiant passionate divine mercy”, “shining Christian belief lighted up all the things”, “joyful shining of all the saints”, “the sweetest shining light that twinkles and sparkles in pure souls with sweetest shining”. Christ was “full of light and beautiful”, Mary is “tender”, the saints shine, angels glitter, enlightened hearts of the believers emanate heavenly shining. “Light” as a synonym to everything beautiful, virtuous, saint — such understanding was widespread in different kinds of literature, such as: dogmatic, secular, court. This “love of light” is explained by permeable character of the gothic architecture which is filled with “unearthly” shining in its interiors, in the inner space. In comparison to Byzantine architecture, where light “floods” the space, the light in the gothic cathedrals is always mysterious, mystic and incomprehensible. For the Romanesque cathedral the key dynamics of indivisible mass is paralleled to the earthly surface, and in the gothic cathedrals which are oriented vertically, the man being inside it, is affected by the dramatic concept of its light.

The light in the gothic cathedral is always unnatural; it comes from painted stained-glass windows to create the impression of irrationality. Stained-glass windows look as if they do not transmit the light but generate it. It is in stained-glass windows where the very essence of concept of light as saint and beautiful is expressed, and it is in them that function of concordance (contradiction and comparison) keeps developing interactions of words and illustrations.

Divine light is embodied in Christian objects not in the way it is done in Islam. In Muslim world-view the light is considered as the sense of God presence, the symbol of Allah. The ray to have begun its way from the core of being of darkness, was the revealed being to create beautiful forms to light them up and to fill it with light from the inside. Noor (“light”) is a notion of divine light being an expression of divine truth, of religious knowledge,
Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

was borrowed by Islam from more ancient religions. In Koran it could be Allah itself, and the light of revelation to be sent by him through his prophet Muhammed (Islam; Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2001, p. 193). Thus the vessels of crystals of the Fatimid’s times give the notion of mysterious depths of knowledge by its very material. Lamps and numerous bronze items of the Mamluks were the art signs of its time. Mihrab niches where lamps were hung to remind of guiding star, were represented on numerous prayer carpets.

This light (in real mihrabs the symbolic light was supplemented by the lamp) was an illustration to Koran verses to praise the light.

2.4 Symbols in the Christian and Muslim Arts

Koran condemns extra richness and luxury. But items of precious metals and stones did exist in Muslim everyday life. Their shining was associated with “shining of the beyond world” (Piotrovskiy M. B., 2001, p. 64). Different gold vessels, jewels, arms to be inlaid with precious stones were associated subconsciously with “heavenly treasures, with their light as reflection of divine light” (Piotrovskiy M. B., 2001, p. 61). Pictures in Christian temples were very important. It is widely considered after Gregory the Great that illustrations in the Middle Ages were “the Bible for the illiterate”. In fact the artist of that time meant different levels of perception. The meaning of the plot instructed like a sermon to encourage the righteous and to frighten the sinners. But to enlightened people — to wise men and monks — deeper meanings and many-sided symbolism of images were revealed — i.e., they were “the Bible for the illiterate” for some and the thing for thought for the others.

The icon is equally important in the Orthodox religion. It is definitely meant for contemplation, when the viewer does not enter actively the space of the picture, but on the contrary, is pushed out for prayerful contemplation to reveal the soul to accept the harmony and light which is emanated from the icon. It is contemplation that is the highest level of spiritual perfection. Icon always depicts the world where nothing mars the light to be symbolized by the gold background. The bright light and gold, they were considered as a sign of infinity in the Antique times, and the fire was a sign of eternity. In the temple an icon is lighted by lamps and candles. For the worshipper the gold backgrounds shone. That is why glittering colors of icons signified the world of the Absolute, the Eternal, of the beyond world to face it in front of God.

The book was not just a thing for specific use. It was an evidence of promised salvation. That is why it was a symbol even more powerful than Crest. Sometimes the book was kept not in the library, but right on the altar (ex. the Gospel of St. Augustine Canterbury in England), i.e., it was a part of church ceremonials. In the illustrations of the books, The Book of the Covenant and the Revelations are the most important among them, these or those items acquired symbolic meanings gradually.

Illustration of Architecture in book miniatures as a special building turns into Architecture-sign and symbol, as an equivalent of the Divine, the saint, the sacred. Sometimes architectural arch frame becomes a form of ritual introduction, something like: “Once upon a time… (happened this and that)” The Cathedral represented a grandiose embodiment of laws of the Universe, this is why the picture of its elements got specific semantic meanings which composed some text of the language of that epoch.

Such symbols — and the number of them is uncountable so it is impossible to list them all — represent harmonic accord of symbols to be read by a man in the Middle Ages and make one multi-time repeated Christological code. Separate elements equal to words to be recombined in different ways every time to combine new sign construction which bear incomparable charm and individual shades of meaning.

There is a widely spread stereotype that the Art of Islam did not use the opportunities of visual art. In fact it
is not true. The prophet fought against worshipping of idols. He kept demanding to destroy pictures in the houses of citizens of Medina and Mecca, as these were representations of worshipping the idols, of “satanic temptation”. This is to be easily explained by the fact that at the Judgment day the people the artist drew would come out of the picture and demand his soul. Then this person “moosavir” unable to give the soul to his creatures would be burnt in the eternal flame. That is why in Saint-Petersburg manuscript of the maqamat by al-Hariri on miniatures heads are “cut” by some sharp instrument. By this act some pious Muslim saved this picture from destruction. But pictorial character was allowed in pieces of luxury. The image of the man, despite the limits in addressing to it, was not excluded from the artist’s attention.

The image of the man we meet on the illustrations to the manuscripts, on the items of applied art, sometimes even on greater monuments. These could be images of the rule on the throne, the noble court, the lovers, the backgammon players, the polo players (the favorite game of the Muslim East), the hunters, the guests at the feast, the servants. All these pictures are often etiquette-like — the poses of the characters, compositional schemes of the battles and the feasts, the characters’ attributes (e.g., tiger costume of Rustam, sackcloth of Majnoon), the system of color and space composition. Sometimes the pictures of dancers, musicians with different musical instruments — tambourine, harp, the pipe etc., genre plots may include trees and animals. Iconographic scheme of Christian art, whose symbolic meaning was known to Muslim artists, often was borrowed. For example, Christian iconography of the picture “Christ’s Entrance to Jerusalem” was borrowed to illustrations to “Shahnameh” by Ferdowsi, or “Hamsa” by Nizami (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, pp. 206–212). In Muslim book miniature, whose flourishing period was associated with traditional attention to literature, flatness, shortness, ornamentality are prevailed. At the Abbassides the translation board “House of wisdom” was organized, and ancient Greek and Hellenistic texts were translated. We know the works of Antique authors through Arabic translations. In turn Arabic works were translated into Latin. And Arabic poetry influenced deeply the literature of the East as well as of the West.

In miniature we observe the dynamics of development — from calligraphy to image of the Universe, firstly the man, and then the landscape. Sh. Shoukourov describes it in the following way: “Expansion of Iconosphere and abandoning of Logosphere of the manuscript page together with introduction of new metaphysic space brought about the image of landscape, regardless of the plot” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, pp. 195–196). In Arabo-Mesopotamic miniatures the following works are marked out; Maqamat by al-Hariri, illustrations to fables “Kalila and Dimna”. “Transmission of one sign system into the other sign system, or, in other words, of constant message into associative code, is made through reemphasis and regrouping of meaningful elements of illustrations, and as a result, pictorial composition to represent a completed image of form and meaning, got associativity and incompleteness not only on the meaning level but on the form level too” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 42). Earthly love was an substitute for “heavenly love”. Those were classical plots about Leila and Majnoon, Shirin and Farhad, Yusouf and Zuleyka.

An artist “to find sign in the texts which were addressed to a customer, was an interpreter of a text”, when “sacred knowledge, sign to have been sent to the customer, was ‘identified’ and considered on the level of illustrating by the artist who got this knowledge materialized in miniature” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 42). Thus miniature acquired double meaning when a literary plot became paradigmatic, and literary character represented the prototype of the historical one to demonstrate “the code system” with a vocabulary necessary for “translation” (Nazarli M. D., 1995, p. 152). Miniature contained different meaning levels, bore marks of cosmic harmony, had therapeutic effect, reflecting the perfection of the world polyinformationally, being an eulogy and a philosophical
Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

work and a theological text. (Nazarli M. D., 1995, p. 178). M. D. Nazarli mentions the coincidences of such phenomena with European Middle Ages. He quotes the words of A. Ya. Gourevich that “… it was possible, in addition to literal factual understanding of the phenomenon, to find a symbolic or mystic interpretation to reveal the mysteries of the belief” (Gourevich A. Ya, 1982, pp. 72–73).

In Muslim culture there was a specific difference between elite and mass culture. In the elite culture the faces were not destroyed, were emptied for those whose face should have been hidden according to religious canons; prophets, Muhammad, the members of his family, caliphs, some shahs, women. “Empty faces represented the principles Muslims addressed the problem of ontological and ethical significance of the man, his place in the world and its meaning in the world of forms and phenomena” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 117).

A similar phenomenon in the Christian art was “disc-like faces of characters in the Pieter Bruegel’s pictures when the man was considered as a part of the mass to be subjected to faceless laws” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 121). Artists of miniature art of the East sometimes addressed to a story of Yusuf (Yusouf)-Joseph the Beautiful. This story was included in Koran (sura 12). The story of Yusuf and Zuleyka was used widely in the Middle Age literature. The most popular were the poems by Ferdowsi, Rabguzi. Durbek but in particular, the most popular among them was the text by Abd ar-Rahman Jami, and it is the illustrations to this text that were commented by V. A. Nourmatova (1984, p. 140). The analysis indicates closeness and contact of religion and art. “Strategy of Muslim creative art was not to destruct the previous art, but to draw it into new syntactic contacts which led to semantic changes” (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 40). But the meaning of symbols was different. Sometimes there are nimbus above the heads of the people on the pictures and the nimbus was borrowed by the Muslim art from the Christian art. But it has different meaning, it was not a symbol of religion. However at this point, the cultural similarity to Christianity was expressed. One more example; in Christian art the image of a warrior on the horse to defeat a serpent was unconditionally identified as St. George. For the Muslim this is just another plot that can be judged only under the conditions of additional explanations (appearance of the text or verbal notes) (Shoukourov Sh., 1989, p. 113). When we look at a young man to spear the serpent, the meaning of this picture is completely different from the Christian one. It is not St. George but just a hunting of a king or a knight.

The value of the beyond world is stated in Christianity as well as in Islam. It is obvious that Koran, this sacred book, became the essence of artistic ideas. Besides, sometimes it is also an object of artistic practice. Koran is a right Scripture sent by Allah. Muhammed, son of Abd Allah from Mecca, was a Messenger and a Sender of Allah. That is why Koran demanded and was in need of artistic practice to express abstract truths in form of symbols. Ornament was the most suitable expressive means of Muslim art. But the key symbol was calligraphy — the leading Muslim art. “Arabic writing was a sacred symbol of Islam more than the language” (Rouzental F., 1978, p. 135).

Indeed the prevalent expressive means of Muslim Art was ornament which was perceived as “music for the eye”. Its main goal is manifestation of Beauty. Ornament played “the role of the icon being the mediator between this world and the beyond world, the window in the space where is present in all His might” (Piotrovskiy M. B., 2001, p. 50). Shoukourov says the same thing; “…Muslim calligraphy as a graphic embodiment of the Word is similar to Christian icon, Arabic ligature was sacred itself, and it is so, even not being read” (Shoukourov Sh., 1995, p. 67).

Often ornament included so called epigraphic or calligraphic. The leading art in Arabic countries was calligraphy. Poems, wise sayings, wishes, quotes from Koran were used for writing. It is to be emphasized that the text of Koran includes different levels; from comprehensible to a common person through understanding the
Differences and Similarities of Christian and Muslim Arts

philosophical meaning to its profound understanding. This multilevel system of meanings is characteristic for artistic elements of the art and everyday used objects.

Ornamentality is the basis of all Muslim arts. The complicated ornamental rhythm and higher color sonority permeate all works of Muslim traditions. One and the same masters made the items for different customers — the Muslims and the Christians. Ceramics of Ottoman Turkey created “iznik” style of realistically drawn of carnations, hyacinths, tulips in red and blue colours.

As we see, despite the differences, internal similarity of Christian and Muslim codes is clear.

3. The Apophatic and the Cataphatic in Christian and Muslim Arts

In the Middle Ages the Christian culture was dual, the world was divided into two spheres; the primary, the Absolute, and the other reflected in material images — the real. The real life was considered as defective, sinful. Thus in the art, in the artistic culture there was an intention to reflect the spiritual world through “cleaned” state of the substance. That is why image of objects of surrounding reality bore artistic-symbolic figurativeness. But the level of symbolism depended on gnoseological theory. At the early level of development gnoseology of the Middle Ages developed two contrary types of understanding the Absolute. One of it is cataphatic, positive, but leading to limited understanding and that is why imperfect. The other one is apophatic, negative. It is based on excluding all definitions of the Absolute, the way of mystic intuition. This is a perfect way, as it is the only suitable one concerning the Absolute that is incomprehensible by its very nature, and it helps the man to rise from the lower level of being to spiritual purification. Definite violation of ‘laws of drawing’ emphasizes the exceptionality of an event (Raushenbakh B. V., 1985).

3.1 Apophatic Theology

Apophatic theology and artistic practice led to iconoclasm. Apophatism intended to make forms of reality “alien” and thus aggravating “ideal-real” opposition to rise to the level where the opposition disappeared paradoxically. In the art this transformation was expressed in such forming elements, as movement, substance, light. Intention to reflect hypermovement in the Art — superbeing movement — leads to intention to remove of artistic “movement-peace” opposition, as movement beyond real time and space turns to be ontologically equal to maximum of peace. An example of removal “movement-peace” is “the Trinity” by Andrei Rublev. The light in the icon is not just “light”, but “light space”. There is no the real, but metaphysical deepness, where light does not change without beginning or end, being its own opposite, when “divine darkness” and “divine light” are identical.

In early Rus the turn to apophatic art was characteristic for XVI century in connection with Hesychasm. The works that were the closest to ideas of apophatism, are typical for mystically deeper and ascetically stern spirit.

3.2 Cataphatic Theology

Cataphatic approach became prevalent (though it was present all the time) at the half of XV — at the beginning of XVI century. Both Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev were apophatics, but they went from the cataphatic to apophatic understanding of beauty by different ways. In Rublev’s icon there is no meal of Abraham and Sarah, it is not a joint meal, but the Eucharist. Rublev managed to reflect complete trinity doctrine. The sanctity of the Trinity is emphasized by the nimbes, the oak from just a common detail to define the point where Abraham and Sarah fed the God, turns into the symbol to depict the beyond world to show the Holy Trinity. The angels talk silently, and the talk lasts “for ever”. They are beyond the human time, in the Eternity, where the
time does not pass, but is situated in it. There is a symbiosis of cataphatic and apophatic understandings of the Beauty, with an emphasis to cataphatic, in the creative activity of Rublev (Malkov Ju. G., 1977-2, 1978). As the artist expresses the inexpressible, the inner world of characters, the eyes are the point of expression of the personality, the window on the moral world. That is why the eyes, as a rule, are bigger, the proportions of the body are extended, the world is built on the principle of holism — the whole is bigger than the parts, the whole gives the meaning and the life to the parts. On the Rublev’s works the proportions of the human body are the same as the proportions on Leonardo da Vinci works (1:9). Later this steadiness and quietness are forgotten. The higher expression of all the peculiarities of icon painting was reflected in “the Trinity”, where we observe synthesis of gnoseological, esthetical, theological principles of the Christian Thought. “An icon painter expresses Christian ontology without reminding the doctrine, but philosophizing with the brush” (Florenskiy P. A., 1972, p. 142).

3.3 The Apophatic and the Cataphatic in the Religious Arts

The development of the world art can be estimated in different ways. Academician B. V. Raushenbach estimated the Middle Age art as the highest. In his opinion the art of that time addressed to the mind, and the art of Renaissance — to the feeling; abstract art to have been derived from it — to the subconscious. “This is a clear movement from the man to the monkey” (Raushenbakh B. V., 1986). Here the intention to rehabilitate the Middle Ages, that was considered in our country as an epoch of the failure in the history of culture. Shying from one extreme to the other is evident. In fact the reconsidering of the Middle Ages has different reasons. One of them — though it may sound paradoxical — is the closeness of mentality of the modern people and the Middle Age people. In the both epochs the dependence of the man on unknown laws (in the Middle Ages — on the Divine revelation, now — on the historical laws). The second reason is common philosophical level of perception. S. Averintsev explains this in the following way; there are three attitudes toward the surrounding world; observation, notice and tion. The first approach is typical for New European Culture; the second — for the pagan, ancient Greek culture; the third — for the Middle Ages. This type of attitude includes synthesis of observation and notice. It was typical for the Middle Ages mind as well as for the totalitarianism of XX century (Averintsev S., 1979).

In Islam we see similar tendencies. All art of Islam was oriented at different social layers. There were elite and mass works. But the language the Muslim works “speak”, “was close and understandable for the majority of people” of the Muslim world. (Piotrovckiy M. B., p. 74). In Muslim Art there are cataphatic means of depiction, based on visual resemblance, and apophatic ones to contradict naturalistic reproduction. As a rule, depiction of man is apophatic, in comparison to an animal to reproduce feeling of transcendental and immanent perception – the dominants of Muslim Middle Age mind. For example, image of Muhammed is often built on combinations of the both methods. Veil on the face or his multi-face represents incompleteness of his image to point at existence of his more perfect look. The term of M. Eliade — “nostalgia for the paradise” — is applicable to Muslim art as its key motif. One of the main topics of the Muslim art — garden — is a motif of “nostalgia for the Paradise”. Thus despite clear differences, semantic of Christian and Muslim arts are rather close and similar.

Of all above said, it is getting clear that in the Christian and in the Muslim Arts the apophatic and the cataphatic are present in interaction. This feature makes their semantic codes similar.

4. Conclusion

As we see the commonality of the Christian and the Muslim arts prevails over the differences and it is this similarity that can become the stimulus for peaceful co-existence of members of Christianity and Islam nowadays.
It is extremely important to have such a vision of the semantics of the arts in our time full of aggressive tendencies that are strengthening due to crisis effects. As a rule it is mere ignorance that provokes rejecting of the alien in the art. It is necessary to state as firm as possible that the art in its foundation calls to the kindest feelings to awake humanism.

**References**


