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OVERCOMING THE IDEOLOGY OF EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM AMONG TODAY'S YOUTH



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Abstract

This paper attempts to substantiate the need to align the legal consciousness of the world community of nations with the norms of international law and existing legislation in each specific country. In tandem with this, this paper also emphasizes the need to develop scientific thinking and a scientific approach to solving social problems of being in teenagers and young people. Currently, the surge in extremism and terrorism among adolescents and young people is associated not only with the most powerful global integration and migration processes, but also with the transition of humanity from one civilizational mentality to another. In particular, it is connected with the mental transition from religious-based civilizations of paganism and monotheism to the scientific worldview, which is the result of the intellectual activity of people who consider themselves to be superior to religion. As previous norms of behavior become obsolete and irrevocably disappear, and new ones form, the role of all state and public organizations in personality development increases immeasurably, guided by the values of the scientific world and tolerance of diverse opinions, attitudes, behavior and organization of life and leisure. It is no less important that such development strictly follow the laws of each country. The latter applies in particular to migrants whose ideological and legal positions are often anchored in religion which may differ substantively from that of the host country leading to problems in integration.

Keywords: Civilizational mentality, extremism, terrorism, adolescents, youth

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1. Introduction

The constant stream of reports from all parts of the world about extremism and terrorist acts involving children, adolescents, young men and women is hard to ignore. Adolescent and youth extremism and terrorism are sweeping nations and continents, acquiring a planetary scale.

According to the Justice Ministry of Russia, internal affairs bodies in the Russian Federation have on record more than 450 extremist youth groups with about 20,000 members. Of these 147 groups claim to belong to the skinhead movement, 72 groups are football fans, 31 are members of Russian National Unity, 18 are rappers and 8 are members of the National-Bolshevik Party (Molodyozhniy, 2019; Sovremenniy ..., 2019).

As of March 2019, the federal list of organizations declared to be terrorist under the Russian law includes more than 30 religious organizations (Ofitsialnaya, 2019).

The total number of all underground extremist and terrorist religious organizations in Russia and the world is impossible to count. The wide spread of extremism and terrorism in the modern world is driven by the progress of ICT which make it possible, within minutes, not only to reach and mobilize like-minded adolescents in a common linguistic space, but to unite them in a coherent extremist and terrorist whole.

Indeed, modern scholars single out a variety of “adolescent youth extremism” expressing “the views and behaviors of young people based on the cultivation of the principle of force, aggression towards other people not stopping short of violence and murder” (Osobennosty, 2019).

Compounding the moral situation in the country is the spread of drug addiction, child and adolescent prostitution reaching catastrophic scale against the background of the demographic crisis (Demografiya, 2019; Tsyfra, 2019). The number of drug addicts in Russia is growing at the rate of 80,000 a year, and out of the total of more than 2 million drug addicts aged between 18 and 39 about 140,000 are adolescents (Osipova, 2011). Meanwhile, the birth rate in Russia in 2018 dropped by 5.2 percent from 2017. Thus, the natural population decline between January 2018 amounted to 173,000 compared to 106,000 in 2017 (Tsyfra, 2019).

While the spread of extremism and terrorism in the USSR after its collapse can be attributed to the loss of the ideological basis which under Soviet rule was systematically instilled into the minds of people at all the stages of the individual’s development (Octobrists, Young Pioneers, Young Communist League members, CPSU members) how does one account for the growth of extremism and terrorism in other countries?

A host of reasons have been given (Sovremennoye, 2019; Molodyozhniy, 2019; Ofitsialnaya, 2019).

2. Purpose of the Study

This article seeks to present a view of the sources of adolescent extremism and terrorism in the modern world and suggest ways of tackling the problem.

3. Research Question

This article posits the view that the main causes of modern adolescent and youth extremism and terrorism stem from the fact that the current generation of children and young people, as indeed their parents, lives in an era of humankind's transition from one stage of civilizational development to another. In particular, the juncture created between the era when life was circumscribed by canons of religious perception are receding into the past and the new norms of behaviour arising from the scientific perception of the world have yet to be shaped. What prompts this conclusion? First of all, the pattern of the history of the development of humanity's mentality. The comparative analysis undertaken by the author of the Holy Legends of paganism and the Holy Scriptures of monotheism (Torah, New Testament, Koran) and the trends of humanity's development suggests that in the process of their development, ethnic entities and peoples inevitably pass through the following main stages (epochs) of civilization mental development: paganism, monotheism and the scientific world perception. During the first two stages, mankind lived according to the norms and rules considered to be bestowed by external agencies: bequeathed by the ancestors under paganism and by the One God in monotheism (Oganesyan, 2016).

4. Research Design and Methodology

The author uses comparative analysis method, specifically the monotheistic Holy Scriptures (the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran), as well as the holy legends of paganism. Other relevant sources of information like speeches and articles pertaining to the issues raised in this paper were also analysed.

Data is obtained by way of induction, deduction and generalization of the analysed materials which is then presented as findings.

5. Findings

As late as two or three hundred years ago, the mass of the world population was oriented toward religious-based norms and rules of behavior which were all-embracing and informed the entire way of life. It does not matter whether consciousness was pagan or monotheistic or combined elements of paganism (idol worship, polytheism), monotheistic mentality or even atheism (like in modern China).

The indisputable fact is that the values of people in all spheres of their lives were determined over millennia by religious consciousness. Likewise, nobody would dispute the fact that beginning from the eras of Renaissance, Enlightenment, Reformation in Europe and then on other continents, religious world perception with its dogmas and postulates that had been immutable for thousands of years started crumbling in face of a more scientific perception of the world.

The novelty of scientific perception of the world was that it was based on the results of independent (scientific) thinking of people themselves. Without delving into “the history of the issue”, two famous quotes of the great representatives of Enlightenment, Descartes and Voltaire are adequate to be cited here. Descartes (2019) urged the need “to doubt all things”, while Voltaire (2019) predicted: “A new generation is growing up which hates fanaticism. The day will come when philosophers will rule. The kingdom of reason is in the making”. A hundred years later, Immanuel Kant wrote: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This immaturity is self-imposed if its cause was not in lack of understanding, but in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance. This relates to the notion of “Supere aude” or dare to know. The motto of the Enlightenment was that people were exhorted to have the courage to use their own understanding (Kant, 2019). Two hundred years later, an outstanding Russian, Vernadsky (2019) predicted the inevitable advent of the “noosphere,” the era of reason when human reason becomes the powerful factor of transforming the surrounding world.

Thus, the pagans did not bring up their children to use their own mind, but in strict accordance with the behests, traditions and customs which were believed to have been bestowed by their “fathers” who had become gods after they died. Every child was well aware of the rules of communicating with the members of its family, its gens and its tribe as well as with representatives of other families and tribes. Pagan children (in accordance with traditions and usage of the ancestors) knew very well who were their “brothers and close ones,” and who were “enemies” and “non-friends.” A clear and insurmountable line was drawn between “us” and “them.” To “us”, one had to give every kind of support and come to their rescue when they

were in a difficult situation (Coulange, 2019). Toward “them” the enemies, one had to be intolerant and ruthless. Enemies had to be humiliated, insulted, destroyed, killed, finished off wherever they were encountered. Violation of the norms and rules was stopped and strictly punished by the elders of the family, gens and tribe (Coulange, 2019).

Because pagans lived in close-knit communities, expulsion from the family or tribe for violating tribal rules was naturally a severe punishment. Pagans who found themselves in a strange and alien world were doomed to perish. They were deeply conditioned to believe that being banished from family or tribe meant losing the patronage of their tribal gods. The outcast knew that an appeal for help from the forefathers would have no effect because he had broken the rules bequeathed by the ancestors (fathers). The gods of other families and tribes, their norms and rules were totally alien to pagans, had no power over them and could not patronize or protect them (Coulange, 2019).

While within a family, compliance with the rites and customs was closely watched by the father as head of the family, every tribe had its own chief who was the supreme judge, priest and military commander. He dispensed justice in strict accordance with the norms and rules bequeathed by the ancestors which were considered to be sacred, cherished and immutable, and which were carefully hidden from all other strange tribes to prevent them being used by strangers to harm the tribe. These norms and rules were to be obeyed by old and young alike, by men and women, chiefs and soldiers and all the other members of a gens or tribe. Everyone knew “their rights and their duties” in peacetime and in wartime (Coulange, 2019)

For example, the great Marcus Tullius Cicero, a true pagan, did not only condemn the moral degradation of his contemporaries with the famous words “O tempora! O mores!”, but repeated tirelessly that Rome would have stood eternal had everybody lived strictly according to the behests and customs of the fathers (Cicero, 2019).

The rise of monotheism dramatically altered the definition and context of who was “kin and brother” and who was “a stranger and an enemy” and most importantly, how they were to be treated and how members of alien tribes and members of the “human race” in general were to be treated. Now the norms and rules were determined not by custom bequeathed by the deceased ancestors who protected their descendants from the other world, but by the true and One God regardless of one’s tribal background. What mattered was that the One God presented himself as the sole true Creator of man noting that He created the first man (Adam) from “earth” and “in His own image and likeness” from Adam was produced his wife (Eve) and all their progeny in the diversity of their tribes. It was to Adam, according to the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran, that the One God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and

“man became a living soul” with all the consequences that entailed for his further life on Earth and away from the earth (Bibliya, 1995; The Koran, 2008; The Torah, 1993).

According to the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran, it was not until individual ethnic groups and peoples matured to attain a certain socio-economic and mental level that the One God through His apostles let them know how they should organize their life under new historical conditions. This is abundantly clear from the appearance of Jesus Christ’s New Testament after the Torah and then the Koran which proclaimed that “Allah eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with him is the Mother of the Book. And whether We show you part of what We promise them or take you in death, upon you is only the (duty of) notification, and upon Us is the account” (The Koran, Sura 13:39).

In monotheism, what was extremely important in shaping the norms and behaviors of all people, including adolescents and youth, was the fact that the Scriptures drove home the message that no one can avoid the Creator’s retribution for violating the commandments, laws and statutes bestowed. For the Most High is not only impartial, but He is not forgetful. He is omniscient. He remembers everything and knows about everything that is happening in the world He has created. For He is eternal and immortal. Thus, there shall be no forgiveness for those who violate the statutes, laws and commandments He has bestowed (Bibliya 1995; The Koran, 2008; The Tora, 2008)

The Most High imposed submission to His will by instilling in people’s minds that He has created all the natural phenomena and elements which obey Him alone. He unlooses on the people who have strayed from the straight and narrow path droughts and floods, earthquakes and epidemics, crop failures, plague and other woes. He convinced people that their well-being in this and in the other world depended on Him. It has to be said that people belonging to religious mental civilizations were more suggestible and credulous “in the simplicity of their hearts.” Suffice it to recall Jesus Christ’s admonitions pitched to the mentality of his contemporaries: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark. 9:23). "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would" (Matthew. 8:13). “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark, 4:40)

Besides, people were supposed to have (and did have, considering their mentality), fear of God’s inevitable punishment. For example, even the most powerful rulers remembered the commandment: “And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes.” (The Bible 2 Kings. 23: 3) The Koran calls on everyone to remember that “whoever obeys

Allah and His Messenger and fears Allah and is conscious of Him - it is those who are the attainers” (The Koran, Sura 24:52).

It has to be said that the commandments and statutes were bestowed by the Most High on all and peoples, regardless of their ethnicity. At the time, the Scriptures were vouchsafed the commandments, laws and statutes set forth in them covered practically all the spheres of people’s lives and their relationships with the surrounding world. Incidentally, the “behests” of pagan fathers also applied to every aspect of daily life.

However, over time, conditions changed. Paganism was replaced by monotheism and today, the whole world is in a state of transition from monotheism to the scientific world view and to life according to that view. It is not only young people who have lost their social and moral bearings that are in step with the new times, but also the majority of the adult population have been left without clear criteria of what constitutes life in keeping with the new times.

Thus, having jettisoned the religious perception of the world which lent meaning to man’s life on earth by the promise of Paradise for the righteous in the afterlife, a sizeable part of the world’s population has been consigned to “aimless, meaningless and purposeless” existence in a spiritually bereft, amoral, permissive atmosphere, especially with regard to the crux of existence for many today. And yet more than three and a half thousand years ago, the Torah and thousands of years later, the New Testament and the Koran conveyed the message that man has a fundamentally different mental nature than the rest of our planet’s “wildlife” and that “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (The Bible, Matthew 4:4; The Torah, 2008, Dvarim 8 Eykev,3,6; The Koran, Sura 20:129).

However, there can be no return to the former mentality. For instance, the overwhelming majority of those who profess Christian beliefs can only smile at the following recipe: “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the others I give this command (not the Lord: if a brother has a wife who does not believe and she agrees to live with him, he must not leave her; and the wife who has an infidel husband, and he agrees to live with her, must not leave him (The Bible 1995, 1 Cor,7:10-11)

And in his letter to the Ephesians St. Paul writes: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church,

his body, and is himself its Saviour” (The Bible, 1995, Ephes, 5:22,23). One can easily guess the reaction these words of Christ’s apostle would elicit from a modern emancipated woman.

And take such widespread modern phenomena as extramarital sex, homosexuality, formerly religious “sins” punishable by death (“the sin of Sodomy” according to the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran) which have become not only permissible, but have become legal through divorce and same-sex marriages in dozens of countries across the world.

What does one make of these characteristic phenomena of modern life? Should they be treated as deviations from God’s commandments, laws and statutes or as logical and inevitable phenomena on the path of human development ordained by the Most High and clearly set forth in the Holy Scriptures?

If so, by what norms and rules should modern youth live? What should their values and their moral compass be like? The answers to these questions are not as simple as they may appear to be at first sight.

Some believe that people should live according to all the norms of the Holy Scriptures because they are intransigent (Vystupleniye, 2019). Others, including this writer, propose to stick to the norms spelled out in legislative acts which are the products of the most “God-like” intellectual people because changed living conditions have once more propelled humankind into a fundamentally new era of their mental existence. But the decision should not come from on high, but should be prompted by human reason. The Koran says, for example, that it is the final Message to mankind and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets” (The Koran, 2008, Sura, 33:40).

It is worth remembering how Jesus Christ admonished his kinsmen: “And the Pharisees and Sadducees came and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the evening, ‘It will be stormy today for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Johah (Matthew, 16:1-6)

One should not forget, however, that the prophets referred to above conveyed to people not only the principles of their life in accordance with monotheism, but also offered a moral formula that distilled the essence of proper behavior of people for all time: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew, 7:12)

In one of the Prophet Muhammad’s Hadith we read: “Do unto all people as you would like them to do unto you and do not do unto others what you would not wish unto yourself”

(Hadith, 2019). These dictums of Jesus and Muhammad are still considered to be the golden moral rule today!

Needless to say, on the one hand, this moral formula must be followed by law-makers at all levels and by every country beginning from the drafting of national laws and ending with international legal acts. On the other hand, scrupulous adherence to this rule and the laws developed on its basis should become the norm for everyone regardless of their ethnicity. For it is well known that the Holy Scriptures of monotheism and the Holy Legends of the pagans set forth not only a perception of the world that matched the socio-economic and mental development level of all ethnic entities, but also the norms and rules (law systems) adapted to the specific historical conditions in which people lived at the time.

This is clearly demonstrated in the holy Books of the monotheistic religions. The Torah is still perceived and referred to as The Law (“The Law of Moses”). For God presented himself to the children of Israel with a “fiery law” for them: “And this is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death. He said: ‘The Lord came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir to them, He appeared from Mount Paran and came with some of the holy myriads, from His right hand was a fiery law for them (The Torah, 1993, Devarim 33 Braha, 1-2)

The Koran is considered by Muslims to be “the law book” and is therefore unthinkable without Sharia, i.e. a civil, criminal and religious legal system. The Koran expounds clearly: “And it is with the same directive that We revealed to you this Arabic Writ” (The Koran, 2008, Sura 13:37). And it goes on: “And then we set you (O Prophet) on a clear high road in religious matters. So, follow that and do not follow the desires of those who do not know” (The Koran, 2008, Sura 45:18)

These dictums clearly laid out the norms of behaviour for all followers, where nothing was uncertain or fluid. However, in these morally uncertain times, it appears then that the key task of all the state and social institutions, including in Russia, should be to foster legal consciousness and law abidance of citizens, to ensure that adolescents and youth strictly observe the laws of the country. For it is the teens and youth, owing to their immanent mental, physiological, psychological and behavioral features, who are most in need of purposeful shaping of personal and social qualities that match the bidding of the new stage in human development.

Awareness of inevitable transition to living conditions with an entirely new mentality is particularly important for polyethnic countries. Russia, for instance, is inhabited by more than 190 ethnic entities which are not at the same mental civilizational level. Some ethnic communities still largely live according to pagan notions, continue to worship their tribal gods,

revering and being guided in their daily life by the traditions and customs of their ancestors. This is characteristic of some small peoples in Russia's Far North.

Some ethnic communities living in Russia are in a period of transition from polytheism to monotheism. The mentality of some ethnic communities in the North Caucasus is still dominated by tribal relations (living according to the interests and traditions of their "teip" (clan) whereas the norms and rules of monotheism (notably Islam) are fiercely opposed to this historically outdated phenomenon. Some ethnic communities adhere firmly to monotheism or are in a period of transition from monotheism to the scientific world view.

Without a doubt, all the above-mentioned circumstances make an imprint on the world view and behavior of people in various daily situations making life more diverse, but also more complicated within the boundaries of a single state. All this need to be considered and addressed holistically by the educational system beginning from the shaping of a child's mentality in the family and ending with university education. It has to be kept in mind that in spite of ethnic diversity and the specific features of each ethnic group, they are all citizens of a single state with one Constitution and legal system which is applicable to and must be obeyed by everyone, from the clergy of diverse denominations and ending with the country's president.

6. Conclusion

For all the above reasons, it is posited that the challenge facing the education system in Russia and indeed in the whole world is, on the one hand, to shape legal consciousness and produce a law-abiding individual in order to overcome "legal nihilism" one of whose main causes is the transition from one civilizational mentality to another. On the other hand, all government and social institutions face the imperative of explaining the features of a fundamentally new mental era brought about by the scientific world view which prizes tolerance of various views, opinions and positions, ways of thinking and living, tastes and preferences of people which may be diametrically opposed to ours. The scientific world perception cannot exist without discussions, arguments, brainstorming, pluralism of opinions and positions; basically, an understanding of the fact that "the ultimate truth" does not exist, that the process of cognition of the world is endlessly in flux, that a peaceful social life of modern people is impossible without the supremacy of international law and constant renewal of legal acts that have outlived themselves. One needs hardly go to any lengths to prove that all modern achievements, be they medical, industrial, agricultural, mechanical and

technological, owe their existence to a scientific- based intellectual pursuits, activities and scientifically-oriented cognition of the world.

It is no secret that religious zealots and fundamentalists abhor dissent, and are fanatical and aggressive in upholding their convictions, thus reverting to terrorist acts to justify their convictions. They are convinced that they possess the absolute, one and final truth; they believe that it is their mission to save their own society (ethnos) and the whole mankind through their self-manufactured world view. In fact, the type of mentality fostered by the fundamentalist religious view of the world rules out critical thought, freedom of choice, pluralism and alternatives to the “One Truth”. Concepts like multiculturalism and liberalism are anathema to this group of people.

The conclusion that suggests itself here is that to prevent and counteract religious and all other types of extremism and terrorism, the following tasks must be tackled. First, it is necessary to instill into adolescents a historical way of thinking explaining (drawing, among other things, on the Holy Scriptures) the inevitable passage of mankind from the religious view of the world to the scientific view which is the product of intellectual activity of people themselves. Secondly, a concerted effort is needed to instill not only the values, but also legal consciousness and law abidance in children, teens and youth with emphasis on the study of the fundamental laws of their own countries and the basics of international law. To this end, it is necessary to introduce in the education systems of all countries a course in law history based on the widely known pedagogical complex-concentric method which demonstrates in ways suitable for every age group, the idea of inevitable transition from pagan to canonical law, and then to modern law, including international law. Legal awareness should be instilled beginning from primary school to university.

Admittedly, instilling the consciousness of law is a problem not only in Russia, but in every country which has to accept immigrants who are usually at various stages of mental civilizational development.

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