



The Role of Education System in Counteracting and Preventing Extremism among Teenagers and Youth

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Abstract

The authors believe that to prevent and control extremism and terrorism among modern teenagers and youth it is necessary to purposefully and systemically form, first, their value world and legal consciousness; and second, to instill a scientific perception of the world and mode of thinking in order to address social, worldview political, economic and other problems of the country and the world. The current surge of extremism and terrorism in the teenage and youth milieu on religious, racial, ethnic and other grounds is connected, on the one hand with a low level of legal consciousness and with legal nihilism. On the other hand, it is a consequence of the historical processes of transition of the mass of the population from the religious perception of the world and life in it to a life according to the norms and rules that are the fruit of their own intellectual activity. They are not “given” or “vouchsafed” from outside by some “Forces.” That is why one of the main aims of education today is the study of the issues related to the value world of the modern man. The authors argue that in the period of the change of the civilization mentalities of ethnic groups and peoples the role of education systems of states in bringing up a personality with a high level of legal consciousness and law abidance increases immeasurably. The problem takes on added relevance, especially for the education systems of the community of nations, against the background of the unstoppable integration and migration processes characterizing the modern world.

Keywords: Civilizational mentality, Religious civilizations, Scientific world perception, Teenagers, Youth, Extremism, Terrorism

1 Introduction

In early 2020 the Federal Security Service (FSB) detained in Saratov two teenagers aged 14 and 15 who were planning a hate murder of at least forty pupils at their school (1). Earlier two teenagers in Kerch who were planning to blow up a school were detained (2). Their classmates and the people who knew them described them as quite “normal” guys. The same happens to teenagers not only in Russia but also elsewhere in the modern world. Data published by Russia’s Justice Ministry show that the phenomenon is not accidental and follows a pattern. According to the Justice Ministry, in Russia alone there are more than 450 diverse groups of teenagers and young people bent on extremism and terrorism who number close to 20,000 (3).

Besides, there are in this country more than 30 religious organizations considered to be terrorist by court decision. Many of their members are young people (4). One also has to bear in mind the overall moral situation in the country which in recent decades has seen a massive growth of drug addiction and child prostitution. All this against the background of the demographic crisis which the country is experiencing (4, 5). The statistics cited by sociologists are catastrophic: nearly 80,000 new drug addicts. Teenagers account for 140,000 out of the more than two million drug addicts in modern Russia. (6).

All these extremely negative phenomena in Russia are compounded by the drop of the birth rate.

Birth rate dropped by 5.2 percent between 2017 and 2018. According to demographers, the country’s population declined by 173,000 between January and September 2018. By way of comparison, in 2017 the population dropped by 106,000 (4). What are the sources of teenage and youth extremism and terrorism? How does one account for the extremely low moral level of teenagers and youth against the background of the current demographic crisis? A host of reasons is named (4). This article is devoted to the problem connected with the role of the country’s education system in tackling the problems of teenage and youth extremism and terrorism.

2 Problem Statement

Without dwelling on the existing views and positions, we propose to set forth our position on the sources of modern teenage extremism and terrorism before attempting to determine the role and place of the country’s education system in preventing teenage and youth extremism and terrorism.

3 Research Questions

To start with, let us state our position: the source of modern teenage and youth extremism and terrorism is that the present generation of teenagers and youth, like two or three preceding

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generations, have lived in a period of humankind's transition from epochs marked by predominance of the religious world view and corresponding norms and rules of behavior to the epoch of the scientific world perception mankind is destined to arrive at for all the diversity of its ethnic groups and peoples, with the excesses and extremes characteristic of transition periods.

As the whole history of the development of the human race convincingly shows, practically all the ethnic groups and peoples (with rare exceptions) have passed and are passing through three main stages of mental development. The first two are religious – pagan and monotheistic. But the third stage which humankind is inevitably entering today is the scientific perception of the world and of themselves (their special mental and biological nature and essence) and organization of all the spheres of their life and activities in accordance with the achievements of their reason.

This view is more than convincingly vindicated not only by a comparative analysis of the Holy Legends of paganism and the Holy Scriptures of monotheism (the Torah the New Testament and the Koran) but also by the trends in the development of humankind. It is no secret that at the stages of paganism and monotheism ethnic groups and peoples organize their life in strict accordance with the norms and rules of being introduced from outside: in polytheism, those “bequeathed” by the dead ancestors from the other world or vouchsafed (passed on through the prophets) by the One God Who, according to the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran, is the Creator of the Universe and of man created in His “image and likeness.” And the Creator “breathed into man’s nostrils the soul of man” whereon “man became a living soul” (7). The above-mentioned stages of the mental civilizational development of humankind (ethnic groups and peoples) are dwelt on in detail by one of the authors of this article (8).

4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to reveal the main motives and causes of extremism and terrorism among modern teenagers and youth and to formulate the tasks facing the modern education system in Russia in terms of preventing and counteracting extremism and terrorism.

5 Research Methods

The study uses traditional methods and devices of human sciences: comparative analysis, deduction and generalization of the results obtained. In particular, a comparative analysis is made of the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran as well as the holy legends of paganism.

6 Findings

Let us start the presentation of our position by quoting the outstanding representatives of the Enlightenment era which in our opinion marked the transition from the religious to the scientific perception of the world. In particular, Rene Descartes and Francois Voltaire. Rene Descartes wrote: “Doubt everything” (9). This utterance is a direct challenge to the religious world perception based on the mental formula: “as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” This call of Jesus Christ was addressed to the mentality of His contemporaries (10). “Everything is possible to the man who believes” (10). Francois Voltaire maintained: “A new generation is rising that hates fanaticism. The day will come when philosophers will rule. The kingdom of reason is being prepared” (11).

A hundred years after Voltaire, another great humanist philosopher, I. Kant (12), wrote: “Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. This

nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. *Dare to know! (Sapere aude.)* ‘Have the courage to use your own understanding,’ is therefore the motto of the enlightenment” (12).

And finally, two centuries after the declarations of Rene Descartes and Francois Voltaire an outstanding Russian, V.I. Vernadsky, predicted the inevitable advent of the “noosphere,” that is, an era of reason when human intellect (reason) would become the most powerful instrument not only of cognizing but also of transforming the world (13).

Casting a retrospective look at the past we see a clear picture of the pagans bringing up their young proceeding not from their own wishes and aspirations, but strictly following the traditions and customs bequeathed to them by their “fathers and grandfathers” who had become gods in the nether world and were helping their ancestors in their earthly life. The children of pagans knew exactly not only the norms and behavior rules of their community (family, *gens*, tribe), but also how to behave when encountering members of other families and tribes and especially alien tribes. They knew who is “one of them” and “a close one” and who should be seen as “an alien, “an enemy and foe.” They were convinced that there was an insuperable barrier between “one of them” and “the others. “Their own” had to be supported everywhere and always showing mercy and compassion for them (14). One should be ruthless and merciless with regard to “aliens.” Because they had alien gods who were the enemies of the pagan’s own gods all aliens were considered to be enemies. Enemies had to be destroyed everywhere and always unless peace had been concluded with their tribe (14). Observance of the norms and rules established in a family, *gens* or tribe was strictly controlled by the elders of the family or *gens*. Offenders were mercilessly punished, sometimes by death (14).

One of the greatest and most brilliant representatives of the pagan world, Marcus Tullius Cicero, reproached his kin who had diverged from the behests of their forefathers, with the words, “O tempora! O mores!” (“Oh what times, oh what customs!”). He asserted that “The Roman state could have been eternal if everyone had lived strictly according to the behests and customs of the fathers” (15). Cicero did not introduce any novelties to the norms and rules established by the ancestors.

The situation in terms of norms and rules of behavior and the attitude toward the surrounding world, including toward representatives of alien tribes, began to change in the era of monotheism. The norms and rules of being came to be associated not with the behests of the forefathers, but with the prescriptions handed down by the One God to all the earth people.

As regards unconditional acceptance and strict adherence to the fundamentally new norms and rules of behavior, it is important that the One God was the sole Creator of mankind pointing out that it was He who had formed the first man (Adam) “of dust from the ground “in His own image and likeness” and then his wife (Eve), was created out Adam’s rib and then all the descendants of Adam and Eve were formed in all the diversity of tribes inhabiting the Earth (7, 10, 16).

According to the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran, it was not until some of the ethnic groups and peoples had reached a certain level of mental development that the One God vouchsafed them the knowledge of how to properly organize their life in order to be righteous before the Almighty and not to be punished by Him. This is the clear message of the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran. The Koran furthermore announced that the time of prophets was over and that it was the One God’s last message to humankind (16).

In monotheism, it was exceedingly important for the establishment of the norms and rules of the behavior of people, including the young generation, that the Holy Scriptures hammered home the message that no one could anywhere or at any time hide from the Creator's retribution for violating the bequeathed commandments, laws and prescriptions. For the Almighty is omnipresent. He is impartial, eternal and immortal. He knows about all the sins of all people and He has no forgiveness for law breakers (7, 10, 16).

All people, wherever and under whatever conditions they live, were to have "fear of God." Fear of inevitable punishment by God. People with the civilizational mentality of monotheism had the fear of God and His inescapable retribution (7, 10, 16).

Over time, after millennia of maturing within paganism and monotheism, beginning from the eras of Renaissance, Enlightenment and Reformation, the mentally "grown up" mankind began the transition to the scientific world perception. It was at the transitional stage when the attitudes and values of the monotheist era were becoming obsolete and the new ones were still evolving that the violations of the established norms and rules of behavior characteristic of the modern teenagers and youth became widespread. It has to be noted that today the whole world is in a state of transition, logical from the perspective of the Holy Scripture, from monotheism to the scientific perception of the world and life in it. Not only teenagers and young people who have no clear value orientation corresponding to the bidding of the "new times" but the overwhelming majority of grown-ups in practically all countries were left without clear benchmarks concerning "good and evil, life and death."

Moreover, by abandoning the world perception and the norms and rules characteristic of monotheism, which lent meaning to human life on earth by promising paradise in heaven, many of our contemporaries found themselves in a situation of "purposeless, meaningless, dead-end existence" limited to "carnal passions, goals and concerns."

Hence, in our opinion, the loss of so-called "spirituality" and the emergence of moral "permissiveness." This is logical. If all human orientations are focused on earthly existence, then gratification of one's intentions and desires inevitably becomes the purpose of man's existence on earth.

Needless to say, there can be no return to the former worldview, behaviors and values. As for example St. Paul's precept: "The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church people. The church is his body and he saved it. Wives should obey their husbands ..." (10).

Such phenomena as extra-marital sex, homosexuality, lesbianism and other "deadly sins" are today allowed under the law in the shape of divorce and same-sex marriages in dozens of countries. All this confronts us with the vital questions of what norms and rules modern teenagers and youth should live by. What should determine their values and accordingly, their moral world? What should be the relationships between children and parents, husband and wife, man and woman, among peers and with elders, etc. The answers to these questions are not as easy as they may appear to be.

Some (above all the clergy) believe that the norms and rules should be determined strictly in accordance with those set forth in the Holy Scriptures. (17). Others, including the authors of this study, suggest that it should be the norms enshrined in the legal systems of modern states. These norms are the products of intellectual activities of people who become mature enough, as the Holy Scriptures predicted, to make their own laws (8).

That is why, in our opinion, the key task of state and private education institutions in the country should be the shaping of legal awareness and law abidance of all citizens, instilling in

teenagers and youth the need for unconditional and unstinting compliance with national legislation.

Because teenagers and youth, owing to their physiological, psychological and behavioral features, are more aware of the need to shape personal and social qualities that correspond to the fundamentally new stage in the development of humanity marked by the scientific perception of the world and the corresponding life activity.

Let us not forget that the main purpose of the Holy Legends of paganism and the Holy Scriptures of monotheism was to introduce the norms and rules of behavior into the life and daily practices of people. These have successfully performed their functions over millennia.

7 Conclusion

Thus it follows from the above that promoting legal consciousness and law abidance is one of the most important tasks facing the modern system of education in our country. Especially against the background of legal nihilism existing in our country. Hence for all the state and social institutions in our country the paramount task is to explain the features of the fundamentally new mental era which mankind has entered. To explain that tolerance of diverse views, opinions and positions, modes of thinking, way of life, tastes and preferences of other people, ethnic groups and peoples is of paramount importance. For the scientific world perception, unlike the religious world perception with its dogmas, cannot exist without constant discussions, arguments, "brain storming," pluralism of opinions and positions, and awareness that "the final truth" does not exist and that the process of cognizing the world is infinite, that the social life of modern people cannot exist without the supremacy of the law, with constant renewal of outdated legislative acts. One need hardly argue that practically all the achievements of modern people in all the spheres of life are the products above all of their intellectual activity beginning from achievements in the field of medicine and technology and ending with sports, the arts and culture.

That is why we are convinced that it is necessary to explain to teenagers and young people that a transition of mankind from the religious world perception and life according to the Scriptures to a scientific perception of the world and compliance with secular laws of their home country or the country of residence is inevitable. In addition, one should work tirelessly to shape law awareness and law abidance of children, teenagers and young people stressing the study of the basics of the laws of their country and international law. To this end, we believe that the curricula of all the countries in the world should include as a separate discipline, the history of law, which, adapted to the age of children, teenagers and young people, would reveal the logical nature of the transition of ethnic groups and peoples from pagan mentality and law to canonical law and from there to the modern secular legislation and human law making.

It has to be stressed that the relentless integration and migration processes unfolding in recent decades make the problem particularly urgent for all countries. For it involves an inevitable clash between representatives of different ethnic groups and peoples which not only have their peculiarities but find themselves at different civilizational stages.

As for concrete ways and methods and means by which our education institutions can form legal consciousness and law abidance among teenagers and youth in our country this, we are convinced, merits a separate publication.

Ethical issue

Authors are aware of, and comply with, best practice in publication ethics specifically with regard to authorship

(avoidance of guest authorship), dual submission, manipulation of figures, competing interests and compliance with policies on research ethics. Authors adhere to publication requirements that submitted work is original and has not been published elsewhere in any language.

Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that would prejudice the impartiality of this scientific work.

Authors' contribution

All authors of this study have a complete contribution for data collection, data analyses and manuscript writing.

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