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**ISSUES RELATED TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN MODERN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

The article deals with world-view, mental, ideological and political problems that arise when subjects devoted to the foundations of religious cultures are introduced in the curricula of modern secondary schools. Changes are examined that have taken place in the values of the majority of people who, after an era of monotheism, entered a new mental era of “scientific perception of the world”, and the processes that lead to religious extremism and terrorism are revealed. The author explains why every mental civilization is marked by its own values, picture of the world, norms and rules of behavior both in communities and in people relations with the external world. Specific examples are used involving such concepts as “friend,” “brother,” “neighbor,” and “enemy” to reveal the fundamental differences between the values of monotheism and the modern scientific perception of the world. The author demonstrates that the texts of the Scriptures belong to a different mental epoch and can only be applied with serious reservations in present-day conditions when people live according to the norms and rules generated by their independent intellectual activities and enshrined in the constitutions of modern states. The subject studied in the country’s secondary and higher education should be the Constitution. Let us not forget that it is not by chance that the Torah is also referred to as The Law (The Law of Moses), the Koran is unthinkable without the Sharia law and the New Testament in the minds of the vast majority of Christians is “the Law.”

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1. Introduction

Among the host of problems arising in connection with religious education in the contemporary secondary school I propose to dwell briefly, first, on those brought about by the change of some fundamental religious concepts and worldview values set forth in the Scriptures and second, the problems that create situations which generate religious extremism and terrorism among some religious people (Oganessian, 2017).

It has to be said that today the problem of religious education at school and religious enlightenment of the whole population has taken on a new relevance in many countries which in recent decades have been confronted with the problems of religious extremism and terrorism due to the massive migration and integration processes that have swept the whole planet (Oganessian, 2013; Ziebertz, Hgrs. Von, Simon, 1995; Englert, 2002); Englert, 2009; Isik-Yigit, 2011; Kunstmann, 2010; Lohrer, 2012).

As the author has pointed out in several publications, people's perception of the world and the norms and rules of their behavior by and large fit into three mental civilizations: Paganism, Monotheism and "the scientific perception of the world." The first two are religious civilizations. The last one is the product of active intellectual endeavors of humans. The peoples and ethnic groups in Europe, followed by all the other peoples, have been adopting a new civilization mentality of the "scientific perception of the world" beginning from the epochs of Renaissance, Enlightenment and Reformation (Fustel de Coulange, 2010).

2. Problem Statement

Each mental civilization is distinguished not only by its specific world view, but by its value world, its picture of the world, its norms and rules of behavior both in societies and in the relations of people with the external world (Fustel de Coulange, 2010).

Information about the three mental civilizations is more than clearly presented in the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran, the monotheistic Scriptures that have close and fundamental links with one another in terms of world view, mentality, ideology, episodes and narrative (Fustel de Coulange, 2010).

Thus under Paganism (polytheism) the norms and rules of people's activity deemed to have been bequeathed by the ancestors who have become gods after death, are usually confined to a single family, clan or tribe. They are obligatory for every member of the family, clan and tribe, ie for every descendant of the divine ancestor in the male line. "Ancestral traditions and customs" were not to be broken or modified on pain of expulsion from the family, clan and tribe and even death (Oganessian, 2016).

In Monotheism obligatory norms and rules, including people's moral principles and value world, are determined by the behests, laws and commandments bestowed by the single God to all the earth people irrespective of their racial, family or ethnic affiliation, as well as gender, age, social status and material position. Paganism, Monotheism and "the scientific world view" reflect distinct stages in the history of humanity's development (Fustel de Coulange, 2010).

3. Research Questions

However, just like Paganism did not yield its world-view, mental and ideological, moral and legal positions to Monotheism overnight, but over long “bloody” millennia, so Monotheism is gradually, but steadily losing ground to the scientific perception of the world in various countries and on various continents under the impact of new living conditions. That of course is accompanied by colossal psychological stress, mental shifts, wrenching change and excesses in world view and organization of life, armed conflicts, terrorist acts and wars in various parts of our planet.

The history of the human race amply demonstrates, on the one hand, inevitability of the change of mental civilizations, and on the other hand, fierce intolerance and rejection of the world perception of others by adherents of religious views. This is because religious thinking is defined by a total lack of hesitation or doubt concerning the righteousness of one’s own faith coupled with absolute intolerance of a different perception of the world and behavior norms (Fustel de Coulange, 2010).

The reason for this is that **doubt** and **faith** are incompatible. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (St.Luke 9:62), Jesus maintained. Therefore, the apostles echo their Teacher: “For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (Jacob 1:6,7). “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb. 11, 6); “For whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even **our faith** (1John 5:4).

The Koran issues a stern warning to the doubters and waverers that “Allah will neither forgive nor show the right way to those who believed, and then disbelieved” (Sura 4:137).

4. Purpose of the Study

Meanwhile modern scientific world perception and thought, unlike religious thought, cannot exist without doubt and wavering, without a critical analysis of established opinions and views. The value of scientific investigation lies above all in the novelty of its ideas, suppositions and propositions and in a ground-breaking approach to understanding the existing problems and their solution.

It is not by chance that one of the heralds of the nascent mental civilization Rene Descartes (1596–1650) at the start of the Enlightenment era advocated doubting everything. The founders of the new mental civilization of “the scientific world perception” (Voltaire, Goldbach, Diderot, Locke and others) undermined the age-old “blind faith” in God and the unassailable authority of the Scripture.

Hence it is clear why the will of a religious person owing to the specific perception of the world and thought is aimed above all at strictly observing all the prescriptions of his faith. It is another question that during the era of monotheism the Scriptures were differently interpreted to express the interests of individuals or political parties and movements.

The differences between the value world of the religious person oriented toward the categories of “good and evil” set forth in the monotheistic Scriptures (the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran) and the value world of the vast majority of our contemporaries are highlighted by the assessment of the episode in which Abraham sacrifices to God his son Isaac. This act, according to the Torah, the New

Testament and the Koran, was thought “righteous” by God who bestowed His benevolence, grace and total protection on him and all his progeny (Torah, Bereishit 22 Vayeira, 1-19; Koran, 2:124, 3:25)

The question suggests itself: is it permissible for our contemporary to demonstrate his adherence to the single God like Abraham did in his time? The answer is a categorical no. For in the overwhelming majority of the modern states Abraham’s action is considered a crime. In Russia, for example, Article 30 of the Constitution reads: “Preparation for a crime and attempted crime.”

On the other hand, does the commitment to sacrifice to God the most precious human possession, including life itself, influence a person’s attitude to the surrounding world if, in that person’s opinion, the world is categorically at odds with God’s prescription? Without any doubt it does. The most potent proof of this is the attitude of the people who sacrifice their lives to establish God’s world order by committing an act which is interpreted as a terrorist act under modern law.

5. Research Methods

The author uses the following research methods: analysis, generalisation, comparison, interpretation, systematization in analysis of the texts of the Scriptures and state laws and regulations.

6. Findings

Let us cite a striking example of people’s absolute dedication to God and their faith in “eternal life in heaven” characteristic of all religious people, and especially those who have embarked on the path of terrorism. In February 2017 extracts were published in the USA from an 18-page letter from Khalid Sheikh Mohammed whom the American authorities consider to be the mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The inmate of Guantanamo Prison wrote to Barack Obama in 2015 that he would be glad in his solitary cell to pray to Allah for the rest of his life and repent for all his sins. And if the American court sentenced him to death he would be glad to meet Allah and the prophets, his friends who have been wrongfully killed all over the world and see Sheikh Osama bin Laden (Media Publish Letter from Organizer of 9/11 Terrorist Attacks, 2017).

Over the millennia the state of “self-sacrifice” has been characteristic, as the history of humankind shows convincingly, of practically all people of the two previous religious mental civilizations. Paganism and Monotheism. That is why the endless wars between tribes, ethnic groups and peoples have always had religious implications (Dunn, 1995). Religious people were ready to give their lives not only in the name of the Almighty, but for “their neighbors and brothers-in-faith.”

Thus Jesus leaves not a shadow of a doubt as to how those who reject his teaching should be treated: “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown” (Matthew.11:32-36)

Of those who follow his teaching Jesus says that they are friends for whom one can lay down one’s life: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John. 15:13).

The Koran, which strictly adheres to the definitions of the concepts of “enemy,” “friend,” “neighbor and brother” given in the two preceding messages from the Single God, heralds that the Almighty Himself has punished the “infidels.” God has sealed their hearts and their hearing: : “Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will

not believe (in Allah).” “Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and a covering has fallen over their eyes. They deserve severe chastisement.” (Sura 2:6,7)

It is worth remembering that for those who preach Judaism, Christianity and Islam all enemies are divided into “external” and “internal” ones. “External enemies” are above all the Pagans as well as those who believed in one God, but then reverted to Paganism.

“Internal enemies” are those co-religionists who systematically stray from the norms and rules of behavior and relations with “brothers and neighbors” prescribed in the Scriptures. They include “sectarians” (proselytizers) who preach heresies (in Islam “heresy” is called *bida*). For religious extremists the enemies are all those, including clergy, who do not share their views of faith and do not observe what they consider to be obligatory rites of worship of the Almighty.

In the modern world extremists and terrorists also consider atheists to be bitter enemies of God and faith.

According to the Scriptures, the enemies of God are usually excluded from the category of people who possess “reason.” This automatically excludes moral regulations with regard to them. Destroying them is seen as a Godly deed. Hence the appallingly ruthless way in which religious terrorists treat the enemies of God.

Let us cite just one of the many episodes in the Torah which vividly portrays the attitude to enemies, and what is more, enemies from amongst the children of Israel:

“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Who is on Lord’s side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel. Put every man his sword by his side and go in and out from the gate to gate throughout the camp and slay every man his brother and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses and here fell for the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the Lord even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.” (Shemot 32 Tisa; 26 – 29)

This episode shows clearly that it was not until the children of Israel killed the people among themselves who were not faithful to the Lord God that Moses could tell his people “Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord.” Jesus likened the people who rejected His teaching bestowed through Him by the Lord God to dry vine branches which bring no fruit and should therefore be cut and burned: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned (John.15:5,6). A man’s dedication to the Lord God and his sincere faith in Him is measured by his readiness to sacrifice to God one’s own life and the most precious possessions a man has in life (The Bible; The Koran; The Torah).

One can trace in the texts of the New Testament and especially the Koran how God’s attitude to “enemies” changed over time becoming more tolerant than in the Torah.

Thus, Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the words from the Book of the Prophet Hosea which reproach Him for experiencing together with the Pharisees and Publicans the truth of the Scripture: “For **I desire mercy, not sacrifice**, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” (6:6). Jesus tells the Pharisees: “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’”. (Matthew.9:12-13)

The Koran, the latest missive from the Lord God, tells its followers that a man is punished for disbelief or failing to fulfill the will of the Almighty by God himself, and not by man, even though he may be a prophet. Muhammad is reminded in the Koran: “You are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller. However, he who turns away and disbelieves Then Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment. Indeed to Us is their return. Then indeed upon Us is their account (Sura 88:21-26). Moreover, the Koran categorically forbids coercion into faith (Sura 2:256). According to the Scriptures man should fear not punishment by another man but solely by God because no one can compare to him in power and might, nor in mercy and clemency.

Those who advocate the introduction of religions in secondary schools should keep in mind that religious perception of the world is responsible for the destruction of cultural landmarks belonging to other faiths. For example, the destruction of antique cultural monuments by Islamic extremists in the territories they control. Not only priceless books and artifacts are destroyed, but also architectural monuments (for example, Palmyra) and other material values belonging to other religions. The world view and ideology behind the destruction are set forth in the Torah, and later in the New Testament and the Koran which categorically forbid the worship of the objects of alien faiths [Torah, Devarim 27 Tavo; New Testament, Matthew.6:4-6; Koran, Sura 2:2,3 etc.].

Without pursuing the topic of the world view expressed in the Scriptures which runs counter to the principles of modern states, let us note that on the one hand there would seem to be nothing wrong with introducing, for example, the subject of The Foundations of Orthodox Culture in the curricula of the country’s secondary schools, or, for that matter, the fundamentals of Muslim, Buddhist and other cultures.

But on the other hand those who teach these courses and write corresponding text books should clearly answer the question, is a school student who is an ardent Orthodox believer “close” in spirit to his classmate who considers himself to be a Muslim or a Buddhist? Or whether a schoolchild following the teachings of Krishna or is an atheist should regard an Orthodox believer to be his “neighbor and brother.” And should the ideas set forth in the Scriptures be reason for him to sacrifice his own life and the lives of others who are not his “neighbors or brothers” in faith?

Thus, one should bear in mind that if these courses are meant to introduce the students to the “basic principles of faith” and bring up religious believers, this means introducing them to a special psychological perception of the world, thought and behavior and unreserved and unconditional belief in God. And what is more it is faith “in the simplicity of the heart”, without any doubt or critical analysis of the teaching preached. It also implies unquestioning adoption of the faith dogma as well as the norms and rules of behavior preached by the clergy who interpret them.

Nor should one ignore the fact that the characteristics of the world perception and behavior of religious people are often used for political, corporate, state and other purposes and interests by certain individuals, parties and government structures which are usually far removed from the spiritual ideals and principles set out in the Scriptures (Oganessian, 2017).

It has to be borne in mind that the cause of religious extremism and the motive for destructive actions of religious extremists and terrorists is the nature of religious mentality as a historically determined form of social consciousness which has for millennia dominated the whole mankind. Religious extremists and terrorists are not individuals who deviate from the norms of “tolerance”

prevailing in the modern world, but are rudiments of the world perception and behavior inherited from the past.

7. Conclusion

Thus, even a brief look at the world view, mental and ideological as well as the narrative character of the Scriptures provides a potent reason for being very careful in introducing them in the country's schools.

In conclusion it would not be irrelevant to quote the words of Jesus Christ addressed to Jewish priests who refused to notice the "signs" of the new times: "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye discern the signs of the times?" (Matthew. 16:3).

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