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HISTORY AND TRENDS OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM, RADICALISM, AND TERRORISM

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Annotation. This article analyzes the content, historical formation process, socio-political roots and modern trends of the concepts of religious fundamentalism, radicalism and terrorism from a scientific and theoretical perspective. The article argues that although these phenomena are interconnected, it is incorrect to interpret them as the same concept. While fundamentalism is primarily manifested as the idea of a strict return to religious texts and values, radicalism is a system of views that seeks to drastically change the existing socio-political order. Terrorism is a form of illegal action aimed at achieving a goal through violence, intimidation and political pressure. The article shows that it is not the religious factor itself that is dangerous, but its use for political, ideological and extremist purposes.

Keywords: religious fundamentalism, radicalism, terrorism, extremism, ideology, religious consciousness, security, tolerance, prevention, society.

Introduction

In the context of today's globalization, human progress faces not only economic and technological achievements but also complex ideological threats. Among these, religious fundamentalism, radicalism, and terrorism occupy a significant place. While these phenomena have manifested in various forms throughout different eras, they all share a common intent: to influence the human mind, disrupt social equilibrium, and achieve political objectives. Throughout human history, religious faith has served as a vital source for fostering spiritual development, moral values, compassion, justice, patience, and humanism. However, history demonstrates that certain forces have sought to exploit religious sentiments—not for purely spiritual purposes, but as tools for political struggle, the pursuit of power, or the fragmentation of society. It is precisely here that one must clearly distinguish between genuine religious faith and radical ideology masquerading under a religious guise. The relevance of this subject lies in the fact that religious fundamentalism and radicalism are not merely religious issues; rather, they are complex phenomena deeply intertwined with social, political, psychological, legal, and cultural processes. Terrorism manifests as the most dangerous and violence-based stage of these processes. UN documents also note that while establishing a single, universal definition of terrorism is complex, it is frequently associated with the use of intimidation, coercion, and violence against a population or government to achieve political objectives [1].

Main Body

The concept of religious fundamentalism originally emerged in connection with the literal interpretation of religious texts, the preservation of traditional doctrines in their "original form," and resistance to modern secular changes. Fundamentalism does not always equate to violence. At times, it manifests simply as the defense of conservative religious views, strict moral standards, or a traditional way of life. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines fundamentalism as a conservative religious movement that demands strict adherence to sacred texts [2]. However, when

fundamentalist views evolve into a rigid stance—rejecting alternative perspectives within society, spurning religious tolerance, and asserting that "only my interpretation is correct"—it can lead to social conflict. The issue here lies not in religion itself, but in a narrow, one-sided, and politicized interpretation of religious knowledge. This is because the humanistic essence of any religion is rooted in peace, goodness, and moral purity; an extremist interpretation, by contrast, distorts this essence, transforming it into a tool for conflict and hostility. Radicalism, meanwhile, is a broader concept than fundamentalism, signifying an advocacy for the sharp and radical transformation of the existing social, political, or cultural order. Radical thought in itself is not always synonymous with crime or terrorism. Throughout history, there have been instances where certain radical ideas served to reform society, combat injustice, or revitalize outdated systems. However, radicalism becomes dangerous when it is coupled with violence, intolerance, the suppression of opposing views, and the rejection of the legal order.

A defining characteristic of religious radicalism is the use of religious slogans to create sharp divisions within society, categorizing people into artificial groups—"us" versus "them." Radical groups often target the emotions of young people, exploiting their personal hardships, grievances regarding injustice, or a sense of spiritual emptiness. Consequently, the fight against radicalism should not rely solely on punitive measures; rather, it must encompass education, upbringing, employment opportunities, social justice, the promotion of a legal culture, and the strengthening of "spiritual immunity." Terrorism, meanwhile, represents the most dangerous, violent, and criminal manifestation of radicalism. Its primary tools include instilling fear, threatening the civilian population, and exerting pressure on the state and society. The objective of a terrorist act is not merely to inflict physical harm, but to achieve a specific political or ideological outcome by fostering an environment of widespread fear. In this regard, terrorism constitutes a grave threat to human rights, peace, social stability, and state security. Historically, the concept of terrorism has taken on different meanings across various eras. Its initial use as a political term is linked to the "Reign of Terror" during the French Revolution in the late 18th century. Subsequently, the term has been associated with state violence, political assassinations, the activities of revolutionary groups, nationalist movements, and religious extremist groups [3].

It is scientifically inaccurate to attribute the historical roots of religious fundamentalism and radicalism to a single religion or region, as fundamentalist and radical currents have emerged across diverse religions, civilizations, and political contexts. Their emergence is frequently driven by factors such as social inequality, political instability, illiteracy, a superficial understanding of religion, the influence of external forces, wars, migration, cultural crises, and individual psychological issues. In particular, the processes of globalization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have given rise to new forms of religious radicalism. The Internet, social media, and digital communication tools have facilitated the rapid dissemination of extremist ideologies. While radical groups previously operated primarily within specific geographic areas, today the virtual space provides them with the opportunity to influence the minds of young people across various countries. UNODC materials indicate that extremist and terrorist groups may employ methods such as propaganda, psychological manipulation, and a gradual recruitment process [4]. The various forms of religious radicalism can be categorized into several groups. The first is ideological radicalism, which focuses primarily on capturing the human mind.

Proponents of ideological radicalism reject existing societal values, interpret religious texts to suit their own agendas, and seek to strip young people of their capacity for critical thinking. This form often precedes overt violence, as any dangerous action begins first with a flawed idea in the mind. The second form is political radicalism, in which religious slogans are transformed into tools

for seizing power, altering the state structure, or subordinating society to a specific ideology. In political radicalism, religious concepts are stripped of their original spiritual essence and repurposed as instruments of political struggle.

Conclusion

In summary, religious fundamentalism, radicalism, and terrorism are interconnected yet distinct phenomena. While fundamentalism emerges as an idea centered on a strict return to religious texts and traditions, radicalism represents a system of views that seeks a radical transformation of the existing order. Terrorism, meanwhile, is a criminal activity aimed at achieving political or ideological objectives through violence and intimidation. The roots of these phenomena extend beyond mere religious factors; their emergence is influenced by social injustice, political instability, illiteracy, psychological voids, the manipulation of information, economic challenges, and the spiritual needs of the youth. Consequently, the response to these issues must be comprehensive. The most effective approach involves strengthening education, fostering critical thinking among the youth, enhancing religious and educational literacy, reinforcing family upbringing, building immunity against harmful online content, and cultivating an environment of justice and tolerance within society. An individual who possesses a sound understanding of religious values, a high level of spiritual maturity, and a strong legal culture will never be swayed by destructive ideologies.

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