

PROBLEMATIZATION OF RELIGIOUS THREATS IN THE MODERN SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF WESTERN COUNTRIES AND RUSSIA

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INTRODUCTION

Modern society, subject to globalization, is a space within which various social, ethnic, and religious groups interact in different ways. Their active and not always peaceful interaction is associated with the emergence in society of threat perceptions generated by religious associations. For example, one of them is the threat posed by religious extremism associated with some Muslim associations. Also of great concern is the threat posed by Protestant and new non-traditional religious associations. Equally important, however, is the threat of social persecution of individuals for their religious beliefs, as pointed out by some religious organizations whose representatives testify to the impairment of their right to freedom of religious choice. This proves the importance of conducting socio-philosophical analysis of religious threats, which have received insufficient attention in theological,

sociological, psychological, legal, and political studies devoted to the description of religious associations recognized in society as extremist and destructive.

The religious threat is a relevant subject of research studied by representatives of philosophy, religious studies, history, ethnography, anthropology, folklore studies, psychology, cultural studies, and sociology. In Western science, analysis of threats to society from religion conducted E. Barker (1984), K. Boa (1980), J. George and L. Wilcox (1992), Abdel-Samad H. (2013), S. Huntington (2004), M. Introvigne (2020), R. J. Lifton (1989), P. F. Lazarsfeld and E. Katz (2017), J. G. Melton et al. (2003), T. Patrick (1976), J. Post (1984), R. A. Sedler (2006), Z. Sejdini (2015), E. Troeltsch (2013), P. Wilkinson (2006), and L. Wright (2013). In Russia, studies of religious threats conduct E.G. Balagushkin (2014), A.V. Vozzhenikov (2007), A.L. Dvorkin (2012), A.N. Krasnikov (2007), V.A. Martinovich (2019), E.N. Pluzhnikov (2010), I.A. Tarasevich (2015), and A.S. Fetisov (2010). In general, they reflect the presence of contradictions between representatives of religious liberalism and the *anti-cult movement*, which in today's context proves the need to study the problem of religious threats in the most appropriate approaches to the current situation.

The study object is social security discourse. The subject of the study is religious threats in social security discourse. The purpose of the study is to problematize the essence and specificity of the religious threat concept in social security discourse. The research objective is a comparative analysis of the problems of religious threats in modern social security discourse in Western countries and Russia. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was formed by the socio-philosophical concepts of religious conflict, social adaptation of religion, and social security, which helped to interpret the material obtained from the social discourse studies of Western countries and Russia. The novelty of the study is to enrich social security theory with the idea that the Russian understanding of the essence of the religious threat lies in pointing to the metaphysical component of religious doctrine, which has an extremist nature and is the basis of the destructive behavior of believers, while modern Western society distinguishes between religious extremism and the doctrine of religious organizations arguing that the worldview alternative created by religions is not a threat to society.

KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The study showed that in the West in the second half of the 20th century the discussion of the influence of non-Western religions on society was initiated by denominational, legal, and psychological approaches, which gave assessments based on the appeal to the methodology premised on the discussion of the opposition of *their own* and *other people's* religions (BOA, 1980; LIFTON, 1989; MCDOWELL, 1996; SIEGELMAN, 1978 and PATRICK, 1976). However, criticism of their publications (BARKER, 1984; RICHARDSON, 2003; and STARK, 2014) has shown that when analyzing religious threats, it is necessary to distinguish between violent actions and religious doctrines. The reason is that the activities of extremist organizations are usually driven not by the content of religious doctrines but by political or economic objectives.

On the contrary, in Russia, the beginning of the 21st century opened with the approval of social discourse that divided religions into traditional and non-traditional, which became the basis for the a priori assumption of a confrontation between them. Therefore, here the social discourse reflecting the theme of interdenominational and religion-state relations was influenced by the concept that non-traditional religious associations were considered a source of threat simply because they were non-traditional. Representatives of anti-cult discourse in Russia (ASTAKHOVA, 2017; DVORKIN, 2012; MARTINOVICH, 2019; SILANTIEV, 2014; TARASEVICH, 2019 and KHVYLYA-OLINTER, 1999) publish materials that dethrone "destructive activities of totalitarian cults," which a priori include all types of non-traditional religious organizations, including radical Islamic fundamentalism and non-traditional religious movements.

MAJOR PART

Western social security discourse on the religious threat

The need to study the threats associated with the activities of religious associations was recognized in the Western world in the second half of the 20th century in connection with the discussion of the influence that religion had on human consciousness. The key issue to which social discourse reflecting the problem of religious threats in Western countries was devoted was the problem of religious extremism, the essence of which, as S. Huntington pointed out, was understood as an expression of the confrontation that exists between civilizations (HUNTINGTON, 2004). During this period, the issue of threats to social security became directly related to the aggravation of the ideological struggle and therefore took on political overtones. The reason was the aggravation in the relations of the world's largest countries, where special attention was paid to religions that were considered non-traditional in both Eastern and Western societies.

The ideological load of such religions and their undisguised ties to believers from a different civilization were factors that influenced their perception as a threat to social orders. The essential thing also was the competition between denominations, which, when fighting against their rivals, looked for arguments that pointed to not only real but also mystical threats on their part. That was when the stereotype of religious extremism was established, which was associated with various types of Neo-Nazism or National Socialism. Examples included the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Jewish Defense League, and Nation of Islam, as well as non-traditional religions who believed to be the executors of hostile political wills (GEORGE and WILCOX, 1992).

Since the 1970s, researchers such as C. Hovland (2017), H. Schiller (1976), M. McLuhan (1968), and P. Lasersfeld (2017) developed a concept in which religions were presented as a tool used by the enemy conducting an *information war*. This justified the organization of *counteractions* aimed at creating a system of information influence that would discredit the enemies through the dissemination of publications containing defamatory information about them. In particular, C. Hovland believed that at the root of the worldview of extremists there was a division of the world into spheres of *true* and *non-true* values, which served as a source for social strategy, which rejected the social norms, law, and morality accepted in Western society (HOVLAND et al., 2017).

Although many movements did not engage in illegal activities and rejected terrorism as a means to their goals, they were equated with Islamic fundamentalism and became a stereotype used to point to the need to protect Western traditional values. The most influential version

was the one that explained the presence of threats from non-traditional religions by the fact that they use specific methods of psychological impact, which completely subdue the psychic of the *victim*. In the works of psychologists A. Klein (2007) and J. Post (1984), it is pointed out that suppressed, frustrated, and inferior people become followers of the new religions and *victims* of destructive cults, whose organizers were considered guilty of launching hostilities against society. This concept has been used as a methodological approach in the publications of lawyers and journalists such as T. Gandow (1993), C. Giambalvo (1995), F. Conway with J. Siegleman (1978), and R. D. Lifton (1989), who have described a special technique aimed at turning believers into zombies.

A significant influence on the content of this discourse had the attitudes of such Protestant authors as J. McDowell (1996) and C. Boa (1980). The damage to the spirituality of Western society in the 1960s-70s by Protestants was associated with the penetration of religious cults, which were distorted by the Western youth consciousness. The threat involved both social activities aimed at enslaving the individual and the spiritual aggression of the new cults against traditional religious values. This discussion was given special emphasis by the influence of groups of practicing Anti-Cultists, who, believing that followers of non-traditional religions had been spiritually abused and brainwashed, began to forcibly remove them from the faith community and *deprogram* them. They justified their actions not only by the fact that they abduct people who have already been psychologically abused but also that these people can be used to spread *Communist ideology*, as T. Patrick did (1976).

In fact, the problem of the religious threat appeared to be much more complex than pointing out the presence of *outsiders* because the authors, who included representatives of non-traditional religions as well as Islam, declared a threat from the culture and religion of the West. A discourse was formed in which one of the most representative Muslim author, H. Abdel-Samad (2013), wrote that spreading the idea of freedom and equality has led the Western world to be influenced by sin and depravity. Justifying the critical attitude of Muslims to Western culture, he pointed out that extremism was no longer a necessary context of the geopolitics of the Islamic world, as the doctrine of Islam is not a source of terrorist threat (ABDEL-SAMAD, 2013).

Other religious associations defended their positions, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, Society for Krishna Consciousness, Unification Church of San Men Mun, and others, who held academic conferences and engaged in public debates, proving their right to the independent practice of their religious doctrine. Numerous lawsuits have been filed against the ideologues of the anti-cult movement and this has led to a large number of judicial proceedings involving representatives of the anti-cult movement and non-traditional religions (ZHUKOV & BERNYKEVICH, 2018).

Their viewpoint has influenced many Western authors to abandon religious threat analysis based on an approach opposing *their own* religions to *other people's* ones. They began to define the essence of the religious threat as religious extremism, described as a social strategy consisting in the desire to conduct a terrorist discourse in relations with the surrounding society, the threat to which is the possibility of using brutal violence with political objectives, most often related to the exercise of power. For example, P. Wilkinson reduced terrorism to activities aimed at changing the existing political and social foundations using violence directed against civilians [WILKINSON, 2006].

A similar distinction between religion and extremism was made by the German politician O. Schilli who separated the concepts of Islam and Islamism. Speaking about the boundary between these phenomena, O. Schily pointed out that Islamism, trying to achieve its political goals, appeals not to religious grounds but to protest, i.e. social ones; thus, it is not a religion. Islamism, in his opinion, is a tool in the hands of political forces that use religious slogans to implement their plans at a time when there is an active integration process of Muslims into Western society (GRIESHABER, 2004). In particular, one of these challenges is the desire to transform Western culture, law, and social norms following Muslim values that are hardly ever may be perceived in the countries of Europe and America oriented to liberal standards. At the same time, as the Muslim scholar Z. Sejdini (2015) writes, it makes no sense to try to separate

Western society from the influence of political Islam, which has already become one of the characteristics of European reality and thus has the most significant influence on this society.

During the above judicial proceedings, which became the basis for a wide scientific discussion, the opponents of the anti-cult movement brought over representatives of secular social science, such as E. Barker (1984), J. Richardson and J. Melton (2003). According to their view, neither the social context nor the technologies used in the practices of non-traditional religions are related to the characteristics of the doctrine of non-traditional religions, which confirms the postulate that there is no religious composition in the threats that may come from them. Through a series of empirical investigations into the circumstances of believers, Western researchers of non-traditional religiosity have proven that followers of these religions are not damaged or misguided people. After joining an organization, no one attempts to restrict their freedom of communication or movement. None of the neophytes experienced pressure to change their way of life, which was practically the same as the socially accepted standards. Most importantly, no one was physically abused which proves that there was no destructive influence from *cultists*.

However, Western social science proved that neither the doctrine nor the social activity of non-traditional religions constitutes grounds for a priori accusations pointing to their threat to social security. As J. Yinger (1957), R. Stark (2014), and M. Introvigne (2020) wrote, in real life, all accusations against new religions are built on resistance to the idea that a normal person can participate in a denomination rejected by society. In this case, however, they argue that the task of scholarly research is not to identify the threats posed by religions but rather to try to understand how religion can give meaning to human existence. Using the methodology of E. Troeltsch (2013), they presented a scheme of the evolution of the religious movement, which, adapting to social conditions, goes through stages of transformation, including cult, church, and denomination, revised to describe the conditions of a modernizing society. From this point of view, no religious doctrine, even if it belongs to non-traditional religions or Islam, can be considered a threat to social security. The reason for this is that the idea that the content of religious doctrines affects the social actions of believers described in those doctrines is not evidence-based. As a worldview basis to justify this approach in the West, as a rule, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is usually used, whose interpretation states that "government cannot constitutionally punish abstract advocacy of force or law violation" (SEDLER, 2006, p. 184).

RUSSIAN SOCIAL SECURITY DISCOURSE ON THE RELIGIOUS THREAT

In Russia, as in the West, social discourse is unfolding regarding social security issues in which the concept of *religious threat* plays a significant role. It began in the 1990s when society freed itself from the influence of Communist ideology and opened the way for a faith-based search within the liberal doctrine, which included freedom of religious choice. This discourse, explored by I.N. Yablokov (1994) and A.N. Krasnikov (2007), supposed that different religions have equal opportunities to carry out their social practices and faith dissemination programs while believers are free to choose their religion within the development of a free competitive religious space (KRASNIKOV, 2007).

However, as a result of liberalization implemented at the state level at that time, Russia was subjected to the spread of many non-traditional religions. The consequences of this spread looked very frightening, as against the background of the collapse of communist ideology, changes in the social order, and the increasing influence of the religious factor, many compatriots changed their worldview and behavior, submitting to foreign authority figures. A negative reaction arose in society, supported by "patriotic" forces engaged in substantiating the social danger of representatives of non-traditional religiosity (ASTAKHOVA, 2017).

Today, the issue of *religious security* in Russia is represented by many concepts. One of them comes from the tradition of atheism, which considered any religious phenomenon a threat (BALAGUSHKIN, 2014). However, in the actual practice of regulating interdenominational relations in modern Russia, atheist criticism is not in demand, the same as liberal concepts of the 1990s. The reason is that in contemporary Russia, the concept of the influence of Orthodox values has gained priority. Orthodox discourse contains rigorous descriptions of the consequences of *other people's*, non-Orthodox religions. According to modern outlooks

reflected in works expressing a denominational viewpoint, non-traditional religions threaten because they are not Christianity and in no way related to God. For this reason, they are recognized as destructive and dangerous. On the contrary, traditional religions associated with God considered culture forming, perform a protective function (KRASNIKOV, 2007, p. 5).

The anti-cultism methodology uses the concepts of *religious threat* and *religious security* to express its beliefs consisting in pointing to the results of so-called *totalitarian cults* engaged in *destructive activities* in our country. Authors like A.L. Dvorkin, who considers the anti-cult movement to be an adequate tool for reflecting current religious reality, are guided by this methodology. According to the concept of this author, all non-Orthodox religions are recognized as destructive cults, whose danger is that they subordinate the person to a strict hierarchy and authoritarian leader using mental violence that leads to the actual enslavement of believers (DVORKIN, 2012). A.L. Dvorkin substantiates the idea that the protection of society from threats posed by *totalitarian cults* can be organized as a system of information countermeasures. That is, society must be provided with full and trustworthy information about the doctrine and activities of these organizations, which will be a barrier to those who may become their *victims*. He argues that disseminating negative information about ideological opponents can not only prevent the numerical growth of these organizations but will also contribute to the release of members who have already joined them. He considers the threat to society that *totalitarian cults* are pursuing a policy aimed at gaining power over society through the control of believers, who become slaves of the leaders of these religious organizations. The system of slavery that exists within *totalitarian cults*, in his opinion, has grounds in hidden methods of attraction based on the use of psychotherapeutic, recreational, educational, scientific-cognitive, and cultural technologies (DVORKIN, 2012).

The theoretical approach proposed by A.L. Dvorkin is being developed in our country by many authors, such as A.I. Khvylya-Olinter (1999), A.V. Shipkov (2012), R.R. Garifullin (2001), N.V. Krivelskaya, R.A. (1999). Silantiev (2014), and V.A. Martinovich (2019), who defend theoretical positions that became the foundation of all anti-cult descriptions. Their provisions prove that non-traditional religious associations purposely recruit their followers and then use them to achieve the targets of Islamic fundamentalism and non-traditional religions referred to as the personification of destructiveness.

At the same time, there is a significant part of Russian society, which includes representatives of managerial, administrative, and law enforcement agencies, who positively perceive the conceptual provisions of the anti-cult concept. Many people consider the reference to the principles of the anti-cult movement as necessary in cases of scholarly and public discourse on the problems of religious threats within social security issues. The prevalence of the anti-cult movement influences the views expressed by politicians as well as representatives of the legal profession, such as A.V. Vozzhenikov (2007), who unambiguously admit the anti-cult thesis of the religious threat posed by non-traditional denominations.

The key issue considered in the legal religious security discourse is imperfect Russian legislation, which should, according to authors such as E.N. Pluzhnikov (2010), Yu.V. Slastilina (2006), and I.A. Tarasevich (2015), strictly control religious associations that have destructive potential, the basis of which is non-traditional religiosity. The content of legal publications concerning religious threats is the substantiation of the connection between religious doctrine and the destructive effects of non-traditional religions on a person, society, state, and nation. In particular, from I.A. Tarasevich's point of view, extremism, which he understands as proselytism, the possibility of losing the religious traditions of the Russian people, the spread of globalization, and the influence of non-traditional religious organizations should be considered as a religious threat (TARASEVICH, 2015). The above group of authors pays great attention to the problem of organizing counteraction to the spread of religious threats solved in the process of developing a system of social actions aimed at suppressing all activities of religions that they consider non-traditional.

Thus, the discussion of religious security in Russia, along with its general thrust and almost identical problems related to clarifying the role of other people's religions, differs significantly from the content of the discourse devoted to discussing religious threats in the West. Common problems for researchers are the identification of threats posed by the emergence of non-

traditional religions associated with the spread of new beliefs for society, as well as with activities of new religious formations different from ones established in society denominations. Almost all authors facing non-traditional religiosity, both in Western countries and in Russia, consider it necessary to reveal the problems of the destructive influence of the new religiosity on individuals and society and point to the need to organize a system of protection against non-traditional cults. In the West, researchers made conclusions about the need for a strict proof system of the degree of guilt of any organization in each specific case, which involves special attention to determining the degree of real responsibility for ongoing illegal activities, both by representatives of non-traditional religious movements and anti-cult groups that oppose them.

On the contrary, in the Russian Federation, studies on the problems of religious security are based on the a priori belief of most authors representing the anti-cult movement, who claim that the threat is the very presence of non-traditional religious associations on the territory of the country. This indicates the metaphysical component predominance of assessments of the consequences of religions as threats among authors whose publications are used as a basis for social and legal protection of society from threats from *religious cults*. Against this background, the opinion of secular authors such as N.S. Gordienko (1999), S.I. Ivanenko (2012), N.A. Mitrokhin (2003), R.N. Lunin (2013), and I.Y. Kanterov (2016), who publish materials trying to substantiate a research methodology based on the principles of objectivity used in social philosophical studies of the influence of religion on society in world science, is practically ignored. The methodology developed by these scholars differs in its requirement of an objective-scientific approach to identifying the criteria of threats, on the one hand, and attention to protecting the right of every believer to freely choose or not to choose a religious faith, on the other hand.

In general, the study proves that the modern research area of the problems of religious threat in the Russian Federation needs the implementation of socio-philosophical analysis, based on the development of approaches that take into account the interests and perceptions of security of each individual, religious organization, society, and the state, participating in the process of religion-state relations.

CONCLUSION

The specificity of religious threat perceptions in modern conceptions of religious security lies in the contradiction among a group of authors propagating metaphysical views that reflect the provisions of the dominant ideology and pointing to any religious dissent as a threat. This view is challenged by representatives of the secular approach, who argue for the need to preserve equal rights of different religions and the state, which should guarantee equality as a basis for mutual co-existence and responsibility of different religions in a society that postulates the values of freedom to choose a religion. While in the West, a secular view has got priority, which implies the need to distinguish between religious doctrine and the consequences of extremist activity, in Russia, a metaphysical approach is more influential, assessing as a religious threat not only the destructive consequences of the activities of religious associations but also the content of their religious doctrine.

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Problematization of religious threats in the modern social discourse of Western countries and Russia

Problematização das ameaças religiosas no discurso social moderno dos países ocidentais e da Rússia

Problematización de las amenazas religiosas en el discurso social moderno de los países occidentales y Rusia

Resumo

O objetivo da pesquisa é uma análise comparativa dos problemas das ameaças religiosas no discurso moderno da seguridade social nos países ocidentais e na Rússia. A base metodológica do estudo é a abordagem fenomenológica utilizada no processo de explicação dos significados decorrentes da interação entre religião e sociedade e a abordagem comparativa destinada a analisar o impacto na consciência dos crentes nas religiões tradicionais e não tradicionais. O resultado do estudo é a prova da disposição de que o conteúdo do discurso social moderno sobre a ameaça religiosa no Ocidente está sob a influência de um conceito que separa as atividades de organizações religiosas reconhecidas como uma ameaça à segurança, e o conteúdo das doutrinas religiosas não reconhecidas como uma ameaça. Outro resultado é a afirmação de que, na Rússia, o conceito mais socialmente influente reflete o problema das ameaças religiosas no contexto da dicotomia amigo-inimigo, segundo a qual associações religiosas não tradicionais são consideradas a fonte de ameaças religiosas à seguridade social.

Palavras-chave: Seguridade Social. Ameaça religiosa. Discurso previdenciário. Discurso social. Religiões não tradicionais.

Abstract

The research objective is a comparative analysis of the problems of religious threats in modern social security discourse in Western countries and Russia. The methodological basis of the study is the phenomenological approach used in the process of explaining the meanings arising in the interaction of religion and society and the comparative approach aimed at analyzing the impact on the consciousness of believers in traditional and non-traditional religions. The result of the study is proof of the provision that the content of modern social discourse on the religious threat in the West is under the influence of a concept that separates the activities of religious organizations recognized as a security threat, and the content of religious doctrines not recognized as a threat. Another result is the statement that in Russia, the most socially influential concept reflects the problem of religious threats in the context of the friend-foe dichotomy, according to which non-traditional religious associations are considered to be the source of religious threats to social security.

Keywords: Social security. Religious threat. Social security discourse. Social discourse. Non-traditional religions.

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación es un análisis comparativo de los problemas de las amenazas religiosas en el discurso moderno de la seguridad social en los países occidentales y Rusia. La base metodológica del estudio es el enfoque fenomenológico utilizado en el proceso de explicar los significados que surgen en la interacción de la religión y la sociedad y el enfoque comparativo dirigido a analizar el impacto en la conciencia de los creyentes en las religiones tradicionales y no tradicionales. El resultado es que el contenido del discurso social moderno sobre la amenaza religiosa en Occidente está bajo la influencia de un concepto que separa las actividades de las organizaciones religiosas reconocidas como una amenaza a la seguridad, y el contenido de doctrinas religiosas no reconocidas como una amenaza. Otro resultado es la afirmación de que, en Rusia, el concepto socialmente más influyente refleja el problema de las amenazas religiosas en el contexto de la dicotomía amigo-enemigo, según la cual las asociaciones religiosas no tradicionales son consideradas la fuente de amenazas religiosas a la seguridad social.

Palabras-clave: Seguridad social. Amenaza religiosa. Discurso de la seguridad social. Discurso social. Religiones no tradicionales.