RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM SALVATION OR A THREAT TO THE MODERN WORLD?

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to provide a philosophical analysis of the conceptual features of the ideology of religious fundamentalism and its functioning mechanism in the modern world. The methodological basis of the study sought to analyse fundamentalism as a scientific concept on the one hand and as a means of analysing a certain reality on the other hand. The authors exploit two groups of methods: those related to the development of the theoretical concept of religious fundamentalism and the ones used to collect empirical knowledge. All methods were used in the context of the principle of historicism. Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it was concluded that religious fundamentalism as an exclusion doctrine, a political program, and a cultural setting represents a special ideology that legitimizes the existing order. Fundamentalism is unjustly likened to traditionalism or conservatism. For some, fundamentalism is a positive sociocultural phenomenon that bears a strong spiritual message. It is a call for spiritual awakening and rebirth, caused by the rapid process of secularization of culture, the loss of traditional forms of lifestyle and values, the decline of interest in faith and religious lifestyle, and moral meltdown. Indeed, this kind of fundamentalism emerges primarily in societies that are on the verge of losing their own identity. For others, this is the so-called 'Western democracy', which has prevailed over the totalitarian ideologies and consigned them to the past, though in the modern globalizing world we still observe confrontations, fierce disputes, and armed clashes related to these ideologies.

Keywords: mass consciousness, Orthodoxy, Islam, globalization, spiritual culture

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1. Introduction

The society of the 21st century is distinguished by the fact that the confrontation of two ideological mind-sets gives way to a new social situation, characterized not only by the new challenges and threats but also by pluralism, the spirit of dialogue and free exchange of ideas. Fundamentalism, previously described as part of the earlier ideological stereotypes, must be viewed as part of the modern society and an equal partner in dialogue. This requires a deep and comprehensive analysis of both the methodological foundations acting as a basis for a critique of its theory and practice on the part of the secular community, as well as the critique of the theory and practice of the secular community on the part of religious fundamentalism.

Usually, the emergence and development of a new ideology soon led to the arrival of the opposite views. The ideas of progress, modernization and upgrading all aspects of life shaped the ideology of modernism in the Age of Enlightenment, which included the desire to modernize religion as well. The key message of the latter was the intention to cleanse religions from superstitions, focusing on the 'rationale' behind them, which primarily meant ethics. One shall note that religious modernization was not restricted to the Christian world: Islamic religious reformers like Muhammad Iqbal had a significant impact on modern society in the XIX century. The opposing trend, namely the intention to resist any changes in the religious life of the society and return to its hypothetical 'initial' state, was formed somewhat later.

Religious fundamentalism is often equated to traditionalism, which is completely wrong, despite some similarities between these two concepts. While traditionalism aims to preserve what already exists, fundamentalism is based on the yearning for what has already been lost and striving for renewal through a return to the origins.

In the modern globalizing society, religion is becoming an important aspect of social life. It can become an important factor of social integration based on some universal values [1]. (It can be argued that "the Judeo-Christian worldview that provided a comprehensive religious and philosophical framework for understanding the nature of the world and man's place in it" [1, p. 610] providing thereby fertile ground for common values to develop.) On the other hand, it can also become a destabilizing factor, acting as a powerful catalyst for all sorts of conflicts. One should note that religion is influencing society in an increasingly broader way, which is closely linked to the processes of globalization and modernization.

Religions today are one of the main forces in the world, which possess a unique capacity to effect 'systemic changes'. They inspire their followers and, acting as a key variable, allow new players to emerge on the world stage [2]. Any conflict on religious grounds that has occurred even in the most remote place of the planet can cause a huge resonance throughout the world. Issues related to the wave of violence and terrorism that have engulfed the modern world are being actively discussed both at the level of the most prominent

international forums and in each particular household since they are often substantiated by religious motifs. Religious extremism and fundamentalism as its ideological foundation continue to draw increasingly more attention.

2. Research methodology

This research employs an interdisciplinary approach. Fundamentalism is viewed as a comprehensive phenomenon and is analysed as a generalized concept on the one hand, and as a way of processing a certain reality on the other hand. The authors assume the possibility to merge Philosophy, Anthropology, History, Cultural studies, Political science and Sociology for the analysis of religious fundamentalism in the context of globalization. The merging is possible primarily because the object of study is a matter of interest for all these disciplines. Taking into account the data of these specialized studies, the authors, nevertheless, do not deviate from the selected philosophical approach, analysing religious fundamentalism as a holistic phenomenon primarily from a philosophical perspective. Two groups of research methods were selected: 1) the method related to the development of the theoretical concept of religious fundamentalism, 2) the method related to obtaining empirical knowledge. All methods were used in the context of the principle of historicism, which bears an important meaning when analysing globalization processes.

3. Background

It is believed that the concept of 'fundamentalism' was born in the second half of the XIX century in American religious studies as a way to describe the stance of those members of evangelical churches who did not accept the liberal interpretation of the Bible and the modernization of Christian doctrine. American fundamentalists became widely known for their uncompromising campaign against the evolutionary theory, especially after the adoption of the Butler Act (1925, Tennessee, USA), which prohibited teaching any theory that denied the story of the creation of man as taught in the Bible, in particular, the theory of evolution, in schools and universities. What are then the key features of the fundamentalists that allow categorizing them as a distinct group?

First, they recognized the sacred texts as the source of absolute and infallible truth. In particular, fundamentalists insisted on a literal interpretation of Biblical miracles, believing that the sacred text contains the original truth interpreted literally. They did not accept allegorical interpretations of modernists [3].

Second, they supported a rigorous but simplified, 'black and white' view of the world, believing themselves to be participants in the struggle between good and evil in an entirely literal sense of the word. They also believed that the course of history was predicted in biblical prophecies [4].

Third, fundamentalists were extremely aggressive and hostile towards any attempts to modernize religion (both in terms of Theology and public life) and tended to demonize their opponents. They considered themselves 'true Christians of biblical faith'.

It should be noted that the anti-modernist sentiments of the American Evangelical churches had a significant impact on the entire Protestant community of American society (i.e. on almost all parts of society): "America is one of the most fundamentalist countries in the world, similar to Iran in this regard. I think, about 75% of the US population has a literal belief in the devil", concludes Noam Chomsky [4, p. 137].

Therefore, religious fundamentalism emerged in the United States as a reaction to the modernization of Theology and religious life by members of Evangelical churches, and this was not just an upsurge of traditionalism – fundamentalism shaped its own paradigm and identity [5]. The next milestone was the elevation of fundamentalism to the geopolitical arena as the official ideology of a large state. This happened after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1978. And here we can observe a new step in the development of fundamentalism, which has evolved from an ideological position on the interpretation of sacred texts into a strong political ideology. Starting from 1978, fundamentalism has been actively researched not only by religious scholars: political scientists from all corners of the world also focused on this phenomenon, which obviously does not fit into the positivistic framework of the evolution of society.

Usually, it is Islamic fundamentalism ('vusuliya') that dominates the common mind and scientific knowledge when it comes to discourse on fundamentalism in general. Religious scholars and political scientists are particularly interested in Salafism (in Arabic, 'al-salaf' means 'ancestors') as the ideological basis of the vast majority of modern Islamist movements and organizations. Salafism is not simply a theological school; it is a totalitarian political ideology of a theocratic state. The slogan 'al-Islam huwa al-hall' ('Islam is the solution') means that in order to restore order in the Muslim world, to eradicate social injustice, immorality and corruption, to eliminate 'unrighteous rulers' and shield against the detrimental effects of foreign cultural and behavioural models of the West, "Islam itself needs to be cleansed from harmful additions and return to the pure origins of this religion" [6]. Salafists are convinced that the Islamic world is currently in a state of decline caused by the rejection of traditional values and ethics of Islam, as well as the denial of the Sharia law, the ethical and legislative system of Islam. Fundamentalists seek to reinstitute the laws, norms, and values of Islam, thus building a state where justice would prevail. At the same time, fundamentalists advocate Pan-Islamism, i.e. the unity of different Muslims or even the entire Muslim community (ummah) under one Islamic country.

Therefore, the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism is fuelled by the drastic social injustice, which is inherent to the globalized world and which is gaining even more momentum in the high-consumption societies, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Russian history knows a similar process, which happened earlier, during the times of Raskol ('schism' in the mid-17th century). The Russian Orthodox Church faced the challenges of modernization and westernization, and the church hierarchs responded with active reforms aimed at the renewal of religious life through its rationalization, centralization, and significant investment in infrastructure, infusing it with new energy while fighting against 'disorder' and archaisms. The extremely dynamic reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681) caused a strong backlash from some parts of the society: the old believers responded to these changes by trying to escape them and fleeing into idyllic past. Russian Raskolniks (dissenters) were quite similar to religious fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism always means getting back to the 'roots'. What does Orthodox fundamentalism aim to bring us back to? First of all, it sends us back to the social-messianic concepts of monks Filofey and Danilevsky. Being deeply statist, Orthodox fundamentalism urges the Orthodox society to pursue an active role in political life. Political concepts are borrowed and woven into the fabric of a fundamentalist worldview. For example, according to Patriarch Kirill, "we advocate a multipolar world, by which we mean not only the centres of political power, as understood by many politicians, but also the coexistence of civilizational models" [Interfax, 2018, http://www.interfax-religion.ru/orthodoxy/index.php?act=news&div=21331].

4. Literature review

The term 'fundamentalism' currently stands not only for various Protestant movements and groups but is also used to refer to French Old Catholics, Iranian revolutionaries, ultra-orthodox Jews, militant Sikhs, Buddhist resistance fighters, etc. [7]. Fundamentalism also covers a wide range of various phenomena of social, economic, political, and cultural life ('gender fundamentalism', 'economic fundamentalism', 'ecological fundamentalism', 'liberal fundamentalism' etc.). Contemporary fundamentalism is thus diverse, multi-sided, and pervasive [2], which inevitably turns it into a publicist label and a tool of political and geopolitical struggle.

In general, if we try to summarize the concepts and interpretations of fundamentalism existing in the scientific sources, it can be defined as:
1) in a narrow sense, as a trend in Protestantism, which emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century in the United States, with supporters advocating a literal understanding of biblical teachings, proclaiming the infallible truth of the Bible and demanding its adherents to strengthen their faith and moral values [8].
2) in terms of Theology (in a broader religious sense), fundamentalism can be considered an ideological trend inherent to any religion, based on the

principle of returning to the foundations of the faith – sacred texts or theological basis of religious doctrine [S.E. Proletenkova, *Islamic fundamentalism: essence, trends, characteristics*, http://of-law.ru/stati/islamskij-fundamentalizm-sushchnost-tendentsii-osobennosti. html, accessed 27.03.2017].

3) in terms of ideology, fundamentalism is an approach to any religious concept, idea or value, which is provided with extensive protection in order to restore religious and civilizational unity and identity [9].

Professor P.S. Gurevich also believes that ambivalence is the key feature of religious fundamentalism. "On the one hand, fundamentalism appeals to the tradition, based on which one can critically examine and interpret the progressive ideas. On the other hand, it suggests not so much untying the historical knots, but rather striving for a new social ideal. It is here that the ideological nature of fundamentalism can be observed. If traditionalism advocates staying true to tradition, then fundamentalism shapes this tradition in the spirit of new social values." [10, p. 155]

In turn, this makes fundamentalists realize the importance of social and political activities. Professor of the University of Minnesota William Beeman rightly emphasized that the fundamentalist movement "came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice, which called for believers to extend action beyond religion into political and social life. Those four qualities – revivalism, orthodoxy, evangelism, and social action – are the basis for the discussion of fundamentalism." [11]

The researcher of religious fundamentalism I.V. Kudryasheva concludes that the world is viewed by fundamentalists as "the most important field for the implementation of transcendental ideas. The lack of strict boundaries between the two 'mind-sets' allows for the interlacing of spiritual and the mundane and strips secularization of a direct anti-religious inclination, creating conditions for large-scale 'legal' fundamentalism. The contrast between the 'mindsets' (Catholicism and Orthodoxy) transforms the transcendental vision into the projects of revolutionary political reorganization." [12, p. 94]

When approaching Islamic fundamentalism, the first thing to do is to clarify the conceptual framework. Speaking about fundamentalism, the director of the Research Institute of Humanities of the Chechen Republic Vahid Akayev claims that this term is expressed in Islam by the notion of 'usul al-din' meaning 'roots', 'fundamentals', and 'foundation' [V. Akayev, *Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus: myth or reality, Central Asia and the Caucasus*, http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-09-2000/15.Akaev.shtml, accessed 12.10.2016].

The current rebirth of Islam is often linked to the concept of Islamic fundamentalism, which is considered a return to the religious, social and political experience of the early Islam of the times of Prophet Muhammad [13]. This means strict compliance with the postulates of the Qur'an and Sharia and the adoption of traditional Muslim mandates as obligatory norms of modern life [*Islamic fundamentalism*, in *Islamic Encyclopedia*, http://islamist.ru, accessed 30.10.2016]. The onset of Islamic fundamentalism in the modern Middle East is

linked to the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, founded by Hassan al-Banna in Cairo in 1928 [14].

Later, the ideas of fundamentalism were elaborated and radicalized by another representative of this organization, Sayyid Qutb [13, p. 42].

The processes unwrapping in the Islamic world also affected Russian Muslims, who made up 15% of the population of Russia in late 2016 [*How many Muslims live in different countries of the world?*, Muslim.ru., www.islam-portal.ru, accessed 27.09.2016]. Modern Russian Orthodoxy shares certain similarities with fundamentalism, like anti-ecumenism and extreme statism: the Russian Orthodox Church sets apart the Russian state identity from the abstract model of the 'sinful' West, and sets the general trend to oppose itself to the liberal socio-political model of a globalized society, especially the market economy and ensuing social injustice [15].

5. Results and discussion

Religious fundamentalism requires a balanced and well-thought-out state policy in terms of religion and communication with religious organizations. In particular, the important question is how fundamentalist ideas can be harmonized with liberal values? But the absence of any kind of productive socio-economic agenda in fundamentalist ideologies that goes beyond the redistribution of wealth actually allows integrating liberal values even into the consciousness of a religious person. Therefore, a balanced religious policy aimed to support moderate and undermine extremist religious movements allows channelling the social protest of the marginalized population to the traditional religious course, curbing dangerous extremist tendencies at the same time.

First, religious fundamentalism must not be equated with traditionalism. It is rather a political ideology, and an aggressive response to the modernization and rationalization of religious life and society. This response essentially claims that in a modern unbalanced society of risk, turbulence and an unclear future, religious fundamentalism is a simplified alternative which suggests rejecting modernization as such, seeking the ideal in an idyllic, simplified lifestyle that supposedly took place in the past. Instead of dealing with the range of complex socio-economic issues, fundamentalism proposes the idea of returning to the previous state of society, when these issues simply did not exist at all.

Second, the socio-psychological basis of fundamentalism is the reaction of the consciousness lost in the vast globalized world to an open world in a constant state of flux where open competition prevails, the risks are extreme and the entire responsibility for making a decision lies entirely with the man who made it.

In general, fundamentalism is a reaction to the processes of globalization and secularization brewing in a modern society. As a sociocultural phenomenon, modern fundamentalism is the flip side of globalization and westernization. The context of fundamentalism is secularization, i.e. when a man and society break free of the spiritual monopoly of the clergy and religious dogma, the religious

institutions decline, the traditional value systems fade and traditional ethical principles lose their dominant position in human socialization [16, 17]. In a globalized culture, religion is no longer a secluded realm; it shifts to the realm of personal experiences. Fundamentalism reinstates it as a social and political institution.

Third, the cultural component of fundamentalism is of crucial importance. "Therefore, the cultural nature of fundamentalism lies in resisting the increasing complexity of life and its renewal. From this point of view, it is quite possible that cultural tendencies of fundamentalism are inspired by a different extreme. Without the culture of an inescapable, desperate pursuit of innovations, there would be no fundamentalism with its imposing and prescriptive forms. To the same extent, modernism draws its strength in opposition to all orthodoxy, traditionalism and social statics." [10, p. 159]

Fourth, the attitude of fundamentalism to Science in general and scientific and technological progress, in particular, turns out to be surprisingly flexible. On the one hand, fundamentalism openly opposes scientism and many fundamental scientific theories, such as the theory of evolution, but, on the other hand, it has no issues with other achievements of scientific and technological progress.

Fifth, fundamentalism does not simply claim to be a 'return to roots' in religious tradition, it is a return to the pre-modern, syncretic way of thinking, where various aspects of public life - politics and religion, private and public life, faith and reason - often had no clear boundaries. That is why a fundamentalist does not imagine himself being on the side-lines of social and political life and often believes that all facets of society need restructuring based on the ideal of his tradition. Modernization has consistently desacralized almost all spheres of life, attempting, nevertheless, to grant human rights and freedoms a sacred status in return, but it is not yet clear whether this replacement is a success [1]. A fundamentalist often perceives desacralization as defilement and demands that the things that were sacred in the past regain their status once again. "The main line of confrontation between the influence of Western modernism and Islamic anti-modernism lies along the axis of 'secularization (profanization)' – resacralization of society." [18]

In the modern globalized world, fundamentalism is not an anachronism - on the contrary, it is one of the ways the society adapts to the rapidly changing conditions of social life. Fundamentalism will probably always be the 'flip side' of globalization, and without studying and understanding it, the comprehensive picture of the world will never be complete.

6. Conclusions

This research showed that in a broad sense fundamentalism means loyalty to certain principles that are fundamental, true and incontestable for a certain social group or organization. "Although religion is usually associated with fundamentalism, traces of it can also be observed in various political, economic, and social doctrines." [M.E. Amani, Religious fundamentalism: Islamic and

Christian, Top Chubashov Center, top-center.org/essays/147-religious-fundamentalism-islamic-and-christian.html, accessed 27.09.2018] Even liberal scepticism can show signs of fundamentalism since it asserts that all theories must necessarily be questioned (except for its own).

There are different types of fundamentalism: religious, state, nationalistic, market, feminist, environmental etc. At the same time, certain varieties of fundamentalism have very little in common, except for the fact that their supporters are always too eager to prove their point because they are absolutely certain they are right [19]. Although the term is often used in a derogatory way to imply relentlessness, dogmatism, and authoritarianism, fundamentalism can also stand for dedication and commitment to principles.

To date, religious fundamentalism, being neutral both in theological and scientific senses, is used to serve the interests of both progressive and conservative, and sometimes even reactionary forces.

For the first group, fundamentalism is a positive sociocultural phenomenon that bears strong spiritual content. This is a call for spiritual awakening and rebirth, caused by the rapid process of secularization of culture, the loss of traditional forms of lifestyle and values, the decline of interest in faith and religious lifestyle, and moral meltdown. Indeed, this kind of fundamentalism emerges, first of all, in societies that are on the verge of losing their own identity.

The second group believes that the modern nation-state is a failure. The weakness and subordinate status of the Muslim states is seen as a result of the rejection of God by the Muslims who deviated from the path set by God and preferred secular, materialistic ideologies and values of the West. Therefore, one can only revive the Muslim governing institutions and society by reintroducing Islamic law, making it the basis of the state and society, which should be guided by Islam and rely on social justice [20, 21].

Indeed, the ideology of the 'Western liberal democracy' with its focus on the dignity of each individual human person [22-25] actually prevailed over the totalitarian ideologies that in fact have been consigned to the past (orthodox Marxism, fascism or racism). However, in the modern globalizing world, we still observe confrontations, fierce disputes, and armed clashes.

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