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## **Religious prejudice as an initial form of religious pathology**

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**Abstract:** The article observes the prerequisites, essence, and mechanism of religious prejudices formation. The theory of social reflection is presented, within the framework of which religious prejudices are formed at individuals in the process of religious socialization. The role of religious prejudices in the socio-psychological space of young people is actualized, taking into account age-related susceptibility to negative influences, including “religiously colored”. A brief overview of a number of personal predispositions that influence the formation of religious prejudices is given.

**Keywords:** religion, religious faith, destructive religiosity, religious pathology, religious prejudices, attitude, stereotype, identity, religious socialization, imitation, suggestion, self-suggestion, youth, group consciousness, personal religiosity.

Religious situation in the world, expressed by the escalation of new religious movements, growth the number of non-traditional religions adherents and the problem of radical Islam, significantly increases the relevance of psychological understanding of paradoxes and destructive religiosity phenomenon, which are commonly called religious pathology. The largest number of studies of religiosity manifestation destructive forms were conducted within the framework of psychology, philosophy and medicine (C. Bauman, G. Blum, A.M. Dvoynin, J. James, N.M. Komlenok, E. Chris, M.N. Kuznetsova, H. Marcuse, V.D. Mendelevich, E. Mullen, T. Nelson, R.G. Sadykova, F. Salter, G. Sarver-Foner, J. Smelser, A. Freud and others).

Religious pathology can manifest itself in prejudice, intolerance, xenophobia, fundamentalism, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism. It should be noted that religious prejudice is the initial form of pathology, which over time can develop through other forms into religious extremism and terrorism. It is obvious that understanding the specificity of this problem and studying it by psychological science should be one of the main tasks of modern research. One of the factors that have accompanied humanity throughout a significant part of its history is religion - one of the forms of social consciousness, a set of spiritual ideas based on faith in supernatural powers. Religious faith can play both a constructive role in relation to the personality and psyche of a person, and a destructive one. The most sensible idea, brought to the point of absurdity, turns into its opposite and becomes dangerous for others.

The 21st century is a rapid flow of information, constant changes, a fast pace of life, economic crises, instability in the political arena. In the context of these factors people face various events and life situations that cause dissatisfaction with their lifestyle, value system and social orientations. Finding themselves in such a situation, they begin to turn to higher values and ideals of religion [1]. The rapid replenishment

of religious extremist organizations ranks on this background is quite understandable. After all, the ideology of such organizations offers a person what he lacks in a complex world - a sense of stability, the possibility of self-realization. In any concept that underlies the functioning of religious extremist organizations, there is always some kind of "truth". The word "truth" is deliberately put in quotation marks, because the conceptual idea used to replenish the ranks of radical groups, is not a true display of religious dogmas in fact. This "truth" is formulated so obviously and comprehensively that for the involved person it is simple, understandable and absolutely indisputable. On it, as on a foundation, an entire building of religious prejudices can be erected.

In modern social and psychological science, there is no unambiguous interpretation of the term "religious prejudice" [2]. The most complete definition of this term seems to us to be the attitude that includes negative judgments and stereotypes, a variety of negative emotional reactions (fear, hatred, hostility) and a behavioral component in the form of an intention to behave negatively towards "foreign" religious groups and individuals belonging to these groups.

If an individual begins to perceive the differences between "own" religious group and "foreign" religious groups as a problem, then representatives of the "Foreigners" are associated with a threat to his positive identity and usual way of life. Any threat causes fear, which, in turn, gives rise to hostility. Subsequently, hostility can develop into hatred and enmity. At this stage, the psychological mechanism "We – They" is fully activated and determines the formation of negative stereotypes and prejudices.

According to social reflection theory, individuals acquire religious prejudices through religious socialization. Little children do not initially have any prejudices; adults pass on to children attitudes and stereotypes that reflect not only the system of relations in society and the status of the group to which they belong, but also their own religious views, which may take the form of prejudice.

Religious prejudices can also be the result of hasty and unfounded conclusions based on subjective experience, as well as the result of uncritical assimilation of standardized judgments accepted in a particular religious group. Once formed, they can persist due to the inertia of conformity, when people align their behavior with a religious prejudice that is socially acceptable in their environment [3].

The perception, maintenance, and persistent reinforcement of religious prejudices are carried out through the psychological channels of imitation, suggestion, and self-hypnosis, bypassing criticism and one's own real experience. The individual is not subjectively aware of the fallacy of religious prejudices, despite their contradiction to reality, truths, real experience, knowledge and beliefs of the individual himself.

Throughout human history, virtually all wars, battles and other acts of group violence have been the result of various kinds of prejudices, stereotypes or discrimination. Prejudices have led to numerous human casualties, and in many cases the most intense intergroup hostility has been based precisely on differences in religious beliefs.

The very fact that religious attitudes can be associated with intolerance is in strong contradiction with intuitive ideas. It seems obvious that it is religious people who do not have religious prejudices, because the overwhelming majority of religions particularly emphasize compassion for one's neighbor, peace, tolerance and love for others.

However, one of the paradoxes is the positive correlation between greater religiosity, on the one hand, and less tolerance and more stereotypical attitudes towards others, on the other (T.W. Adorno, G.W. Allport, B.M. Kramer, C.D. Batson, P. Schoenrade, W.L. Ventis, A. Gough). German philosopher and social theorist T.W. Adorno suggests that the reason for this positive correlation is that firm adherence to the strict dogmas of religious scriptures (e.g., literally interpreted Koran, Bible, Torah) increases the tendency to think in rigid "either-or" terms that divide the world into "bad and good". Anything that inhibits thoughtful processing of information about others increases the likelihood that a person will rely on heuristics, such as prejudices, when evaluating them.

Any religious faith presupposes the unconditional acceptance of a system of doctrinal dogmas, illogical, obscure and contradictory provisions [4]. Uncritical acceptance of dogmatic ideas without sufficient justification, logical argumentation and empirical confirmation underlies both true religious faith and religious prejudice. Therefore, any religious dogmatic system allows for the possibility of transformation into an extremist form.

Religious prejudice, as a whole, is actually independent of those specific features of which it is a generalization. This concept means that representatives of "own" religious group, explaining their negative or hostile attitude towards phenomena within a "foreign" religious group, name some specific negative features that, in their opinion, are characteristic only of the "foreign" group. However, the same phenomena within "own" group do not cause a negative attitude, are assessed much more mildly or are accepted as a completely adequate or even desirable phenomenon.

The formation of religious prejudices among young people is especially dangerous because it is associated with the development of inadequate attitudes in the group consciousness of the younger generation, which affects the formation of personal religiosity. According to opinion of experts in the field of counteracting religious extremism and terrorism (A.V. Glazkov, M.S. Grigoriev, E.Y. Dyatlova, D.N. Zyablov, V.V. Kaftan, V.S. Ignatyev, A.A. Kozlov, V.M. Magerov, D.G. Mikhailichenko, T.K. Mukhina, D.V. Olshansky, A.V. Pavlinov, K.Y. Safronov, A.T. Sioridze, etc.), the leaders and ideologists of religious extremist organizations consider work among young people to be one of the main areas of their activity and strive to replenish their ranks with representatives of the younger generation. The analysis of the role of religious prejudices in the socio-psychological space of young people is of particular importance for psychological science due to the fact that at this age young people are susceptible to negative influences, including those "religiously colored."



In modern scientific literature in statistics and sociology this group usually includes people aged 15 to 30 years. Young people are considered as a large social group with specific social and psychological personalities, the presence of which is determined by the age characteristics of young people and the fact that their socio-economic and socio-political status, their spiritual world is in a state of formation.

The relevance of the study of religious prejudices is due to the fact that they often make a decisive contribution to the emergence of conflict situations associated with the religious factor. The obvious truth is that people are not born with a religious pathology, the initial form of which is religious prejudice.

Most studies support the hypothesis that children's religiosity is significantly influenced by the religious beliefs or prejudices of their parents, and that the primary family is the main agent of religious socialization.

The primary family plays an important role in religious socialization and the formation of any person's religious identity. Parents, brothers, sisters, and older relatives are the first agents of religious socialization [5]. They demonstrate certain religious practices, answer the child's questions about God, faith, and convey the rules and norms of everyday religious philosophy. At the same time, in almost all cases, the main influence on the emergence and development of religious identity, regardless of the gender of the children, is exerted by mothers due to the deepest emotional connection with their children.

Some psychologists in the field of religion note that it is the norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted. Other researchers believe that children inherit social status from their parents, which contributes to the emergence of the same conditions and experiences in the child's life as those of the parents, which forms his worldview, close to the worldview of the parents, including the religious component.

D.M. Ugrinovich in his work "Psychology of Religion" points out the most important role of a religious family in the formation and development of religiosity. "A child, unconsciously imitating the actions and behavior of religious parents, assimilates religious patterns of behavior, religious norms and values. Religiosity is formed with a greater degree of intensity in those families in which parents consciously use methods of religious education of children" [6].

S.D. Batson also notes that the formation and development of religiosity is associated with the religiosity of parents, as "translators" of religious meanings and behavior. The scientist identified a pattern that the more a child loves and identifies with his parents and has a close connection with them, the higher the influence of the parents' religion [7]. The high positive correlation with the religion of parents is easily explained from the point of view of social influence. Parents are the main source of social rewards and punishments, they are also the main reference group.

Over the course of many years of research, various scientific approaches have examined the question of whether there are individuals prone to the formation of religious prejudices, distortion of confessional religiosity, or its relatively rapid transformation into a destructive (sectarian, fanatical, xenophobic, or extremist) version. Regardless of the conceptual approach to studying this issue, researchers believed that the personality traits of some people make them predisposed to

prejudice. Moreover, the younger a person is, the more susceptible he is to indoctrination influences, that is, the perception of dogmas and teachings, including religious ones [8]. This is due to the fact that young people associate the environment with a learning environment. In addition, adolescence is characterized by an active focus on adapting to communication patterns in a small group, that is, the perception of the “rules of the game” in a collective. Young people are most vulnerable in terms of increased susceptibility to the proposed patterns of behavior in a group.

Psychologists identify a number of personal predispositions that influence the formation of religious prejudices and subsequently become the motivating motives for a person to embark on the path of religious pathology.

One of these personal factors is a hyper-emphasis on protecting the own "I". This is the transfer of responsibility for personal problems to other people or external circumstances with a constant aggressive-defensive readiness to protect oneself from often imaginary attacks. Insufficient social identity is also a factor that contributes to the implantation of distorted religious dogmas with the aim of forming false beliefs. Initially, the concept of “social identity” was interpreted by H. Tajfel as “an individual’s idea of himself, the origin of which is conditioned by his knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups), as well as the value and emotional significance attached to this membership” [9]. A person always needs to feel himself as a part of society, a certain group in which he can identify himself in general terms with the members of this group and in contrast to the members of another group.

Inadequate self-esteem (overestimated or underestimated) is another personal parameter on the basis of which all forms of religious pathology are formed, including religious prejudices. The nature of person’s relationships with others, the effectiveness of his activities, and thus the further development of his personality depend on how a person perceives himself, what assessments he makes of his qualities and abilities.

Another powerful factor influencing the formation of religious prejudices is the loss of life perspective. A person’s desire for religion in critical life situations is a completely natural phenomenon, because faith helps to solve the problems of existence and understand the meaning of life. As V. Frankl notes, questions about the meaning of life arise in a person throughout his life, including at the moment of mental shock and mental suffering [10]. When a person is on the verge of losing life prospects, turning to religion is virtually inevitable.

In the context of the problem under consideration it is necessary to especially emphasize that the norms and prescriptions of any religion do not call for violence or mass murder. The main function of all denominations is to preach common to all mankind, humanistic norms and values, accentuate the strict prohibition of murder, acceptance other faiths, and religious tolerance.

We would like to highlight that religious prejudices, which subsequently lead young people into the ranks of religious extremists, are not a fatally inevitable aspect. An important factor in the fight against religious extremism is the destruction of the cause-and-effect relationship, where the cause is religious prejudice, and the

consequence is illegal anti-constitutional activity within religious extremist organizations.

At the present stage, it is extremely important to develop religious studies and legal literacy of young people, a sense of rejection of violence as a method of political struggle, as well as an understanding of the need to counter violence. In our opinion the solution to the problem of religious pathology lies not only in the liquidation of any religious extremist or terrorist organization, but also in the prevention of the formation of religious prejudices of young people with an unformed life position.

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