

**FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS AS AN  
ANTIDOTE AGAINST EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM IN  
SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS (RELIGIOUS-  
PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS)**

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**Abstract:** *This article is devoted to the peculiarities of formation of religious beliefs as a preventive measure against extremism and radicalism. Based on the analysis of scientific literature and recent events in the US, Asia, and Europe, the author argues that the rapid growth of religious extremism threatens the preservation of established religious traditions. Active secular and civil resistance and countermeasures against extremism and radicalism can guarantee pluralism and preserve the ethnic and religious harmony. The author examines the requirements for the successful formation and development of religious consciousness in society in general and each individual in particular.*

**Keywords:** *extremism, radicalism, religion, society, individual.*

Cultural and economic globalization is the key feature of our time manifested in close intertwining of different cultural, ethnic, religious beliefs, customs and traditions. However, along with the positive effect of globalization such as the enrichment of the cultural heritage of each nation, the process also generates ethnic and religious conflicts. It is often blamed for the growth of extremist and radical activities in most multinational regions of the world (the Russian Federation, the United States, Europe and Central Asia), as well as countries close to the terrorist centers.

In this regard, the relevance of the issue explored in this article is beyond any doubt. The novelty of the study lies in the fact that religious extremism is viewed as the central threat to the global community and dealing with it calls for a coherent strategy supported by state powers, religious leaders, and every member of society. The outline of the anti-terrorist strategy begins with the detailed analysis of the concepts such „*extremism*” and „*radicalism*” and the examination of the underlining causes.

It is worth mentioning that the religious and philosophical analysis of extremism prevention involves a number of socio economic, social, political and legal factors. That is why local communities play an important role in the prevention of extremist behavior, confessional intolerance and aggression, xenophobia, nationalism and other similar biases.

The goal of the article is to present a new approach to address the above-identified problem. The article explores ways of preventing and fighting against various forms of extremism and radicalism by forming a religious consciousness.

To achieve the goal, the author sets the following objectives: 1) to examine features and origins of extremism and radicalism indifferent countries; 2) to identify possible conditions of the formation and development of religious thinking as an antidote against extremism and radicalism in society; 3) to examine the potential of anti-extremist and anti-radical religious individual beliefs. The methodology of the study includes:

- Textual analysis of relevant documents, including academic texts, analytical reports and media coverage;

- Statistical method to collect and analyze the data;

- Method of expert opinions to study the activities of international religious organizations;

- Socio cultural approach to examine the problem in its complexity at a current historical stage and to describe the sources of tension between individuals, groups and societies.

- Integrative approach to consider modern moral, religious and spiritual education as an antidote against extremism and radicalism and to identify major stakeholders on global, national and local levels.

### **The Problem of Extremism and Radicalism in Society: History, Causes, Modern Examples (Europe, CIS, Asia, US)**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 significantly changed the world order: the bipolar framework of two nuclear superpowers during the Cold War gave way to the multipolar world with its tensions and contradictions as sources of conflicts. As Samuel Huntington noted, for the first time in history global policy has become not only multi-polar, but also multi-civilizational.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it became evident that religion is an integral decisive component of conflicts. To describe the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, New York, Simon&Schuster, 1997, p. 18.

situation, W. and K. Jansen Notermans write, „*Europe was made by the encounter with and resistance to other religions*”<sup>2</sup>

The idea is not new. The researchers define civilization based on cultural elements such as language, traditions, morals, ethical norms and values, religion. Famous historian A. Toynbee classified Western, Islamic, Orthodox Christian, Hindu, Far Eastan do ther civilizations while S. Huntington single dout nine civilizations: Western, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese, Latin American, Orthodox, African and Buddhist.<sup>3</sup>

Both classifications are based on religion. Such classifications have a logical explanation because religion often determines the degree of tensionin inter-civilizational clashes.<sup>4</sup> It happens because religion is not only a set of beliefs and morals; it shapes the socio-political model of the state and prescribes a certain lifestyle to groups and individuals.

The latter explains the fact that the religious causes instigate the most violent conflicts including the Kashmir conflict, the Iran-Iraqwar, the conflict between Palestine and Israel, and the conflicts in Northern Ireland and some parts of former Yugoslavia. Many experts claim that the geopolitical reality of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is defined by Islamic religious extremism. They explain it by Islam attempts to resist globalization. In doing so Islam became an active political playerengaging with radical Islamic movements in Muslim countries for medin the 1960-1970 on the basis of Islamic fundamentalism, the Quranand the Sunnah.<sup>5</sup> At present, most terrorist groups target the United States and the European countries. Tragic 9/11 „Al-Qaeda” terrorist attacks in the United States were followed by major terrorist attacks in Yemen (2003), Spain (Madrid, 2004), and the UK (London, 2005).The well-planned terrorist attacks were carried out not only against governmental, political, industrial and commercial targets but also against peaceful civilians including attacks on tourists in Egyp t(the Russian passenger airliner Airbus A321-231 in 2015), Kenya, Indonesia, against businesses in the Middle East (Iraq) and in Asia (Pakistan, Indonesia), against Jewish non-governmental organizations (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey), against governments that terrorists believe are Washington’s puppets (Iraq,

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<sup>2</sup> W. Jansen, C. Notermans, *Gender, Nation and Religion in European Pilgrimage*, New York, Routledge/Taylor&Francis, 2012, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> S. S. Shirin, N. M. Bogolubova, J. V. Nikolaeva, „Application of David Easton’s Model of Political System to the World Wide Web”, in *World Applied Sciences Journal*, no. 30 (8), 2014, pp. 1083-1087.

<sup>5</sup> G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, 2002.

Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Pakistan), against the civilian population of the European countries that support US policy in the Middle East (terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, an explosion in Istanbul in 2016, a terrorist attack in Manchester in 2017, a terrorist attack in Nice in 2016 and Barcelona in 2017). In most cases, terrorist organization ISIL assumes responsibility for such attacks.

Radical Islam and traditional Islam are completely different. The radical version recognizes and encourages forceful aggression towards „infidels”, people who do not hold the same faith. The radicals aim to intimidate society and undermine confidence in the public authorities. Often they manage to seize power as they did in Algeria, Yemen or Syria. In spite of the fact that radicalism does not have a wide approval in the intellectual circles of the Muslim world, some Muslim diaspora intellectuals in Germany, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Great Britain support actions of extremist organizations and approve radical Islam. They claim that it draws attention to people from Muslim countries and makes Western governments to adopt laws favorable to the Muslim diaspora.<sup>6</sup>

Before delving into the discussion of the issue, let's define the concept of „*extremism*”. Extremism (from the Latin *extremus*-last) can be defined as a commitment to extreme views and extreme methods of their implementation. According to D. Malloy, Charles Montesquieu introduced the Latin word „*extremus*” into the political discourse during scientific revolution of the French Enlightenment to describe the atmosphere of fear in despotic states.<sup>7</sup>

P. Coleman and A. Bartoli understand extremism as „*activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary*”.<sup>8</sup> Theoretically, the problem of defining extremism depends on the socio-political system of a state with its norms and values. Thus, democratic countries define extremists as people or groups who call for the elimination of democracy in favor of totalitarianism while for authoritarian and totalitarian states its definition would be the opposite.

On June 15, 2001 when discussing the term „*extremism*” from a legal point of view, the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism,

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<sup>6</sup> S. Murshed, S. Pavan, *Identity and Islamic Radicalization in Western Europe*, Berlin, Economics of Security, 2009, pp. 17-30.

<sup>7</sup> D. Mulloy, *American Extremism: History, Politics and the Militia Movement*, Routledge, Taylor&Francis, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> P. Coleman, A. Bartoli, *Addressing Extremism*, retrieved from: [www.libertyunderattack.com](http://www.libertyunderattack.com), accessed on 22.I.2018

Separatism and Extremism defined extremism as any deed aimed at a violent seizure of power or violent holding of power, and at violent change of the constitutional order of the state, as well as a violent encroachment on public security, including the organization, for the above purposes, of illegal armed formations or participation in them.<sup>9</sup>

The term „*radicalism*” was originally used to describe the desire to get to the root causes of social problems. However, it is more often used to characterize a variety of political ideas and actions aimed at radical change of the existing social and political institutions.<sup>10</sup>

Quite often „*radicalism*” and „*extremism*” are used as synonym even though „*radicalism*” lacks negative connotations when used in scientific literature.

American researchers L. Wilcox and J. George defined two types of extremism: left and right. According to them, the left extremists declare their goal to restore social justice. They see themselves as fighters for the cause of the working masses, while the right-wing extremists adhere to the idea of struggle among nations, races, cultures and civilizations.<sup>11</sup> Some experts define the latter type of extremism as both non-nationalist and religious. However, S. S. Rausch suggests that it is more appropriate to differentiate between non-political, religious and political extremism since they reflect the specificity of the ideological and philosophical foundations and political goals.<sup>12</sup>

There are the following causes of extremism: 1) hatred, resentment and prejudice; 2) fear and helplessness; 3) aggression and domination; 4) injustice and suffering; 5) corruption and self-interest; 6) suppression and control; 7) dictatorship and totalitarianism; 8) debts, poverty and hunger; 9) frustration and defenselessness; 10) bias against the open society; 11) discrimination and Islamophobia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Shanghai Convention on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, retrieved from: [www.eurasiangroup.org](http://www.eurasiangroup.org), accessed on 21.XII.2017

<sup>10</sup> R. Cross, D. Snow, „Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types”, in *Journal of Strategic Security*, no. 4 (4), 2012, pp. 115-129.

<sup>11</sup> J. George, L. Wilcox, *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe: Political Extremism in America*, New York, Prometheus Books, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> C. C. Rausch, „Fundamentalism and Terrorism”, in *Journal of Terrorism Research*, no. 6 (2), 2015.

<sup>13</sup> A. Sajid, *The role of religion and belief in a democratic society: searching for ways to combat terrorism and extremism*, OSCE Conference On The Role of Freedom of Religion and Belief in a Democratic Society: Searching for Ways to Combat Terrorism and Extremism. Baku, Azerbaijan, 2002, pp. 10-11.

Many comprehensive studies explore and describe the origins and background of extremism and radicalism. They come to the conclusion that there are many factors that motivate a person to adopt extremist and radical views. The studies point out an individual disposition as the first factor. Psychologists and psychiatrists often view extremists, radicals and terrorists as individuals with mental disorders.<sup>14</sup> However, their opponents argue against such a blanket statement because psychologically troubled people are notable to organize, work together and adhere to the rules of conduct and discipline.

The theory of social deprivation explains the causes of terrorism by poverty as well as the unequal distribution of power and wealth. It posits that groups and individuals with no means of living and no access to power<sup>15</sup> are more likely to be comrades and extremists. Although such theory fits well into some cases (for example, the Palestinian extremism), it also contradicts the fact that leaders and activists of extremist and radical organizations are very wealthy and highly educated people.

The third theoretical and methodological framework for the study of extremism and radicalism are the theories of social networks<sup>16</sup> and social capital.<sup>17</sup> By social network the researchers understand a group of individuals with similar informal norms or values, and social capital is the ability of participants to gain the guaranteed benefits themselves by active participation in networks and other social structures. The benefits can be different—an emotional attachment, social and spiritual needs and so forth.

M. Sageman analyzed the biographies of the „Al Qaeda” terrorists to conclude that social networks have played a greater role in the emergence of terrorist structures than ideology, and global Salafi Jihadism is rather a self-organizing network characterized by greater resistance and mobility than the structure created by Ben Laden.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> P. Coleman, A. Bartoli, *Addressing Extremism*, retrieved from: [www.libertyunderattack.com](http://www.libertyunderattack.com), accessed on 22.I.2018

<sup>15</sup> C. Christmann, *Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*, Huddersfield, University of Huddersfield, 2012, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> R. S. Burt, *Toward a Structural Theory of Action: Network Models of Social Structure, Perspectives and Action*, New York, Academic Press, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> J. S. Coleman, „Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital Author”, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, no. 94, 1988, pp. 95-120.

<sup>18</sup> M. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

## **The Principles and Possibilities of Religious Thinking as an Antidote against Extremism and Radicalism in Society**

In 1975 Declaration was signed in Helsinki to include the question of freedom of religion in the sphere of OSCE competence. Many international documents and charters recognize the human right to belief and the right of religious communities to act as legal entities. The concluding document of the Vienna Meeting 1986 pledges to take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, political, economic, social and cultural life, and to ensure the effective equality between believers and non-believers.<sup>19</sup>

Among other things, the OSCE members expressed commitment to foster the environment of tolerance and mutual respect among representatives of various religious denominations, among believers and non-believers. They also employed specific strategies to prevent the escalation of inter-ethnic, intercultural and inter-religious violence.

The development of religious thinking against extremism and radicalism in modern society is one of the most pressing issues.

In our opinion, a fundamental condition for the formation of religious thinking against extremism is to support and promote interreligious dialogues. As the famous Swiss theologian, President of the Foundation „For the Global Ethics Hans Küng states”: *„There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue”*.<sup>20</sup> Many interfaith organizations such as the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions,<sup>21</sup> the International Association for Religious Freedom,<sup>22</sup> the International Interfaith Center,<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Final document. Vienna meeting of 1986 representatives participants of the meeting on security and cooperation in Europe, based on provisions of the final act relevant for further steps after the meeting, retrieved from: [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org), accessed on 27.II.2018

<sup>20</sup> K. Küng, *Christianity and the world religions: paths of dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, New York, Doubleday, 2011, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> „How Garcinia Cambogia Can Help Anyone Lose Weight”, retrieved from: [www.cpwr.org](http://www.cpwr.org), accessed on 15.II.2018

<sup>22</sup> International Association for Religious Freedom, retrieved from: [www.iarf-religiousfreedom.net](http://www.iarf-religiousfreedom.net), accessed on 02.II.2018

<sup>23</sup> International Interfaith Center, retrieved from: [www.interfaith-center.org](http://www.interfaith-center.org), accessed on 19.I.2018

the United Religions Initiative<sup>24</sup> of ferpeaceful alternatives to war and conflict. The organizations work with religious leaders and activists in conflict zones in all parts of the world, arrange international meetings in order to establish mutual understanding and cooperation between religions for the sake of the world, and promote educational programs.

Democratic forces should pay attention and support religions with peaceful messages like „*Thou shalt not kill*”, „*Treat people like you would like them to treat you*” in the Scriptures. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Islamic scholar and philosopher Abu Hamidal-Ghazali noted that the purpose of the divine laws and prescriptions for people is to protect human faith in god and to preserve life, mankind, children and property. Anything that protects these five values is good, and anything that destroys these values is harmful. Any religion and any law have a duty to protect these values if they are installed for the welfare of people.<sup>25</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the importance of spiritual and moral education, which is a key factor in the formation of religious and civic identity. Society should not feel the lack of information about religion. A citizen will become a patriot of the country when brought up with true spiritual values that undermine religious fanaticism.

In September 2012, Russia introduced a new school subject „Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”. It consists of six modules: „1. *Fundamentals of Orthodox culture*; 2. *Fundamentals of Islamic culture*; 3. *Fundamentals of Buddhist culture*; 4. *Fundamentals of Jewish culture*; 5. *Basics of the world’s religious cultures*; 6. *Fundamentals of secular ethics*”.<sup>26</sup> It is an elective course and students can choose to study one of the modules. The modules introduce different cultures, religious and secular traditions to students. It is important to note that the course does not include critical views of any religions or secular views. The course implementation met with some challenges like the lack of prepared teachers, the negative bias of some parents, the limited choice of materials etc.<sup>27</sup>

In 2015, the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan introduced a similar subject, „History of Religious Culture”. In 2016, Tajikistan

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<sup>24</sup> United Religions Initiative, retrieved from: [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org), accessed 19.I.2018

<sup>25</sup> A. E. Mayer, *War and Peace in the Islamic Tradition and International Law. Just War and Jihad, Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1991, p. 195.

<sup>26</sup>Complex course „Basis of religious cultures and lighthouse ethics”, Publishing house „Prosveshchenie”, retrieved from: [www.hold.prosv.ru](http://www.hold.prosv.ru), accessed on 19.I.2018.

<sup>27</sup> E. V. Pugach, „Familiarizing with the bases of religious cultures at school: approaches and problems”, in *Pedagogy*, no. 5, 2015, pp. 12-19.



authorities followed the lead and introduced the subject on history of Islam and the Hanafi with an emphasis on tolerance and peacefulness because they were seriously concerned that unemployed young people could become members of the ISIL.<sup>28</sup>

Similar courses are taught in many European schools. For example, the UK schools pay special attention to teaching about the confessions prevalent in a particular region. Norwegian schools work according to the principle of „*local differentiation*” in teaching a new program of religious education. German schools offer religious education to the groups of students of similar denomination. However, in Berlin and Brandenburg schools teach students all major religions. France and the United States have no national program of religious instruction except for the French province of Alsace where religious instruction is part of the school program.

There is a need for the development and support of religious education in many countries to fill in what A. M. Bean defined as the „*religious vacuum*”.<sup>29</sup> It is obvious that people lack the knowledge of religious norms and traditions. The researchers emphasize the danger of the religious vacuum because it can be easily filled with radical views, including Islam and Christian radicalism, and other totalitarian pseudo-religious organizations.<sup>30</sup> The overcoming religious vacuum may be one of the effective measures to fight against extremism.

At the same time, responsibility for the spiritual education of citizens should be divided between the state and religious leaders, who have great authority and power.

The role of religious leaders is to strengthen the state power through hits activities in the spiritual realm. The stable and strong power provides more opportunities for a decisive counteraction to extremism and guarantees freedom of religion and belief. However, such cooperation should not affect human rights and freedoms if the authority represents one of the parties. Its role should be to support and promote the world’s peace and prosperity.

In a democratic society, the government has to create equal conditions for all religions and beliefs. State authorities should not give preference to any religion. In our opinion, among the main reasons for a

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<sup>28</sup>Schools of Tajikistan offer to teach history of Islam of Khanaphitsky corporation, Kazislam.kz, retrieved from: [www.kazislam.kz](http://www.kazislam.kz), accessed on 10.II.2018.

<sup>29</sup> A. M. Bin, *Roots of Religious Extremism*, London, Imperial College Press, 2015, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> R. Aden-Thornwood, *The Religious Vacuum Threatening Peace in Europe, Middle East and Africa: a Comparative Study*, Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2013, p. 129.

failure of interfaith dialogues is often the fact that some denominations are seen as privileged and traditional while others are seen as non-traditional and destructive. Unfortunately, preferential treatment gives no hope for productive dialogue in such cases.

R. Aliyev expressed a valid opinion that every religion should be viewed in its potential to benefit or harm society. If a religion is harmful to society, the state must take measures to stop such activities, to prevent aggression in the name of religion. In such a case, it is not an infringement to freedom of religion.<sup>31</sup>

In democratic societies, the Constitution spells out the law required to be followed by all citizens regardless of their religion while the spiritual aspect of human life is guided by religious figures. By upholding high moral standards, religion encourages believers to below-abiding citizens. It acts are liable support to the state in this matter.

According to S. Fez, one of the main causes of extremism, including a religious one, is the absence of competent and qualified religious scholars.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, the European countries and post-Soviet countries have their own system of secular education. On the other hand, 1990-2000 pedophilia scandals involving Roman Catholic priests<sup>33</sup> and accusations of misconduct and abuse of power significantly discredited religious leaders. In addition, currently there are no recognized and prominent Christian, Islamic or Buddhist theologians in the field of secular and spiritual education.<sup>34</sup> It seems that all religions lack a creative representative who can speak with authority on any level. It takes time to foster such leaders. Such a leader would have to have an impeccable reputation, vast knowledge and irresistible charisma to inspire followers to learn more.

Conscientious religious leaders could prevent extreme fanatics from turning into religious extremists and make significant contribution to the security of society. In our opinion, only close cooperation between the religious and state authorities can deliver desired results.

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<sup>31</sup> R. Aliyev, *Religion and the state: principles of autonomous co-existence*, OSCE Conference On The Role of Freedom of Religion and Belief in a Democratic Society: Searching for Ways to Combat Terrorism and Extremism. Baku, Azerbaijan, 2002, pp. 32-34.

<sup>32</sup> S. Fez, *The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Incitement that could lead to Extremism. Insights on Religious Leadership through the ages*, New York, Free Press, 2015, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, retrieved from: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), accessed on 10.II.2018.

<sup>34</sup> T. Hiroko, „The Role of Religious Leaders in Extremism Prevention”, in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 58, 2016, p. 227.

## **The Principles and Possibilities of Religious Thinking as an Antidote against Extremism and Radicalism in the Individual**

Every religion asserts belief in God and the divine as a foundation, meaning and purpose of existence of mankind. Thus, human soul is seen as part of the divine, making people one big family. The imam of the Bright on Islamic Mission A. Sajid remarks that actions towards the resolution of conflicts and the prevention of terrorism and extremism should adhere to the principle of „*think globally, act locally*”.<sup>35</sup> The world will change for the better if everyone would live in good conscience.

The problem of extremism is especially pressing in the last few years, when young people around the world face new socio-economic and political conditions and lack reliable spiritual and moral guidelines and values. They are left defenseless against ideological aggression and violence propagated by such radical organizations as the ISIL.

According to the recent reports, the ISIL has about 30-32 thousand members in its ranks. There are mercenaries from 86 countries, including citizens of Arab countries, the Russian Federation (2 thousand persons), Kyrgyzstan (500 persons), Uzbekistan (600 persons), Tajikistan (250 persons), Kazakhstan (250 persons), people from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (900 persons), China (300 persons) etc.<sup>36</sup>

The ISIL propaganda targets both men and women between ages of 17 to 40 years. The average age of a recruit is 23 years.<sup>37</sup> Professional recruiters actively employ social networks as one of the most affordable and effective tools. According to the reports of Uzbek authorities, the ISIL recruited 80% of its supporters online.<sup>38</sup> Recruiters examine the user's profile with photos and comments and compile a psychological portrait of a user for subsequent interaction and contact.

Jonathan Rae described a psychological portrait of an extremist as follows. Firstly, it is an individual with low self-esteem and some elements of the split personality. Secondly, because of the gaps in

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<sup>35</sup> A. Sajid, *Fighting intolerance and discrimination against Muslims-Islamophobia: facilitating integration and respecting cultural diversity: Islamophobia: A new word for an old fear*, OSCE Conference On Anti-Semitism And On Other Forms Of Intolerance, Cordoba, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> „Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq”, in *Soufan Group Research*, 2016, pp. 12-19.

<sup>37</sup> D. Gartenstein-Ross, N. Barr, B. Moreng, *The Islamic State's Global Propaganda Strategy*, Hague, International Center for Counter-Terrorism, 2016, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Terrorism and extremism in Uzbekistan, Issues of Religion or Belief in Central Asian Countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) and Russia in Media*. Bishkek, 2017, 36.

personal identity, he or she feels a strong need to join the group for group identity or affiliation. He or she has a heightened experience of social injustice and is inclined to blame the public for his or her failures. Thirdly, a potential extremist feels his or her social isolation and detachment, has no perspectives in life, and acts in an aggressive-defensive way toward society.<sup>39</sup> R. Borum adds to the portrait of a potential extremist such characteristics as aggressiveness, depression, guilt, blaming, a lack of masculinity, self-centeredness, extreme extroversion, the need for risk and belonging to a group, a search for thrills.<sup>40</sup>

There must be a way to reach out and work with young marginalized people to prevent their turning to extremist and radical views. The problem of radicalization of young people is becoming increasingly urgent. The radicalization of youth does not happen over night but takes place over decades. Unfortunately, the number of supporters of radical movement sincreased among representatives of different ethnic groups. Despite the severity of the problem, there is no organized comprehensive „proactive opposition” to the process of radicalization, and antiradicalactors are disunited and disorganized while radical structures demonstrate a united front.

Radicals and extremists employ ideology and exploit youth by developing a straight forward program of actions based on positing „problematic” issues and providing simplistic answers to young people. Active recruiting contributes to the spread of radical movements among youth. It can be viewed as a fierce attack on traditional religion that plays an important role in the lives of people. The erosion of traditions and the introduction of new values leads to radicalization. The destruction of traditional religious values makes people suggestible. It undermines society, the state and identity.

In this case, every member of society can take a stand and oppose extremism and radicalism. All monotheistic religions are based on the belief in the divine being that created life on Earth. The core of all religions is based on respect, tolerance and love for all living things.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, a religious person must respect everyone’s freedom to express his or her beliefs and convictions. Religious follower shave to

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<sup>39</sup> J. Rae, „Will it Ever be Possible to Profile the Terrorist?”, in *Journal of Terrorism Research. Autumn*, no. 3 (2), 2012, pp. 64-74.

<sup>40</sup> R. Borum, *Understanding Terrorist Psychology. The Psychology of Counter-terrorism (Forthcoming)*, Oxon, Routledge, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> M. S. Tranko, *Terrorism in the 21st century*, St. Petersburg, Willis, 2013, p. 98.

understand the faith of others and their values and let them express their own convictions. They have to respect different religious traditions in view of food, clothing and etiquette, and behave respectfully. Everybody should admit his or her own flaws and limitations and not claim to be perfect and ideal. They should not let disagreements escalate into conflicts and should avoid physical and psychological violence towards people of different faith.

It is a wrong way to persuade other people to understand and respect their view claiming that one faith is the only true and correct. Any attempts to convert the „infidels” must be restrained without obvious infringement on anyone’s freedom and dignity. In a global world, the change of religion is a usual thing. According to the forecasts of the Pew Research Center, by 2050 the number of Muslims will reach 2.8 billion or 30% of the population. It will equal the number of Christians (2.9 billion or 31%) that is currently the largest religious group. Such growth of Muslims will be sustained by high birth rates in Muslim countries and by new converts to this religion<sup>42</sup>.

Fostering individual religious views against extremism and radicalism should avoid imposition and forcing, especially if individuals are vulnerable in anyway. It is necessary to avoid crude force, threats, manipulation, coercion and abuse of power in attempts to foster individual views directed against extremist and radical ideas.

At the moment, it is each person’s responsibility to prevent the spread of extremism and radicalism. Everybody should start from himself or herself and remember that following one’s faith does not mean rejecting other people’s faith.

## Conclusion

The study of the possibility of forming religious thinking as an antidote against extremism and radicalism is of great social importance. It is important for the development of contemporary inter-religious relations and dialogue between cultures<sup>43</sup>.

It should be noted that modern science understands „extremism” as aggressive beliefs and activities against society and government. The

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<sup>42</sup> The Future of World Religions: Growth Projections, 2010-2050, 2015, retrieved from: [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org), accessed on 27.XII.2018

<sup>43</sup> V. I. Fokin, S. S. Shirin, J. V. Nikolaeva, N. M. Bogolubova, E. E. Elts, V. N. Baryshnikov, „Interaction of cultures and diplomacy of states”, in *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 38 (1), 2017, pp. 45-49.

concept of „radicalism” stands for a variety of political ideas and actions aimed at a fundamental change or destruction of all the institutions that ensure a stable socio-political functioning of the state. Scientists classify extremism in to left, right, religious and ethno-nationalist.

The formation and development of religious thinking can become an important preventive measure to counteract and prevent extremism and radicalism. There are several areas of application. First, the global inter-religious dialogue has to offer an alternative to conflicts and closely cooperate in matters of culture, education, health, and social issues. Secondly, there should be a way to provide spiritual and moral education to the younger generation and adults. People are left in the „religious vacuum” with vague ideas about their religious traditions and customs, becoming an easy target for the ISIL recruiters. Young people aged 17 to 40 years are especially vulnerable. Thirdly, the state institution have to cooperate with religious leaders to implement a comprehensive strategy in forming religious thinking as an antidote against extremism and radicalism.