

# CRIMINOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The article is devoted to the criminological study of religious extremism. Any manifestation of extremism is more or less inherent in the political content in the face of the confrontation of various social systems. This is unavoidable even when extremist leaders and others involved in illegal activities are unaware of the political implications of their actions. Therefore, the authors conduct a brief criminological analysis of criminal religious extremism, identify some facts of its formation and attempts to justify it theologically, reveal the anti-social content and techniques of criminogenic activity, and make some judgments about the prevention of this socially negative phenomenon. Religious extremism in Russia needs to be given constant and very close attention. What is this phenomenon? What are the factors that generate it? Who directs religious and extremist activities: foreign "conductors" or their leaders? By answering these questions, it is possible to understand this phenomenon and develop prevention measures.*

**Keywords:** *criminal religious extremism, extremist activity, crime, satanism, theological justification, eschatology, demonism, warning.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The historical development of religion is an independent process, reflecting the real process of social development with its complexities and contradictions. The main driving forces of the religion evolution and the reasons for its spread are probably located not in itself, but outside of it. Therefore, it is quite difficult to understand the changes taking place in the religious sphere without considering the objective (material, social, and spiritual) factors that generate and feed them.

Of course, such changes cannot but affect the activities of those religious entities that are characterized by religious extremist activity. Leaders of some of them seek to reconsider their views and find a compromise,

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some assume a wait-and-see attitude, and others try to ignore the processes taking place in the country or even express their rejection of them.

Religious extremism, expressing the interests of the most conservative and fanatical circles within certain faiths, sets primarily religious goals and rejects the methods of violence and terror in principle as a means of their implementation. At the same time, in some cases, religious fanatics "for the glory of God" are capable of committing violence or crime.

Religious extremism manifests itself in extreme religious zeal, violation of laws, and disobedience to authorities, striving for maximum isolation of co-religionists from the non-religious environment, inciting religious fanaticism and aggression, and instilling and defending beliefs. Despite the gross and sometimes demonstrative violation of legal and moral norms, modern religious extremism in most cases is primarily aimed at resolving issues of a religious nature.

Serious study of religious extremism in modern society was started in the 1960s. A significant contribution to the study of this phenomenon was made by well-known Russian sectarian scholars, such as A.I. Klibanov and L.N. Mitrokhin [1], I.I. Brazhnik [2], G.S. Lyalina [3], A.T. Moskalenko [4], and E.G. Filimonov [5]. Their scientific and popular scientific works reveal various aspects of religious and extremist activities.

Certain issues of combating this illegal activity are considered in the works of such authors as N.A. Reshetnikov [6], E.G. Filimonov [5, 7] Nikolskaya [8], and Parshukov [9].

## **II. METHODS**

In the process of the study, we were guided by the general scientific and special legal methods of cognition: analysis, generalization, selective observation, historical-comparative, comparative-legal, expert assessment, content analysis, etc. The main method used was the system-structural method, which revealed the legal nature of criminal religious extremism.

The combination of methods of contextual analysis, expert assessment, generalization, and comparative law revealed that the word "extremism" (from the Latin *extremus* – "extreme") is used to denote the manifestation of extreme views and actions (mainly in the political sphere), which can not be justified either in legal, moral, or ethical relations. At its core, extremism is an aggressive manifestation of nihilistic ideology "begotten by despair" that rejects any social norms. Extremism is possible based on nationalism, religion, and in some other areas where different views and points of view on solutions to various kinds of problems collide [7].

Any manifestation of extremism has a more or less political content in the context of the confrontation between different social systems. This is unavoidable even when extremist leaders and others involved in illegal activities are unaware of the political implications of their actions.

### **III. RESULTS**

The essence of religious extremism consists of attempts to achieve religious goals using non-religious ways of illegal activity. The goal of religious extremists is to achieve a constant influx of proselytes, especially at the expense of family members of believers, and to instill fanaticism in co-religionists.

Criminological understanding of religious extremism would be impossible without its ideological, or rather, theological justification. The doctrinal and theological basis of religious extremism is charismatic and theocratic ideas, concepts of demonology and satanism, eschatology and messianism.

Religious normativity has a certain influence on the behavior of any believer. Its specific weight in the structure of religious consciousness and behavior can be different depending on the nature of the creed and the degree of the religious conviction of the believer.

Any religion is based on dogmas or canons – provisions that have the force of law for believers. These religious attitudes are implemented by uniting believers in a special organization that uses its means of pressure on people and forcing them to strictly follow their orders. Religions are characterized by strictly regulated requirements, the fulfillment of which is ensured, first of all, by external motivation.

Religious domination is especially strong in sectarian communities. They regulate not only the religious behavior of believers, but also their entire life. Members of such communities are usually guided primarily by the requirements of the religious community and their obligations to society and the family are put on a back burner.

Criminal religious extremism can be defined as a set of extreme anti-social views and needs and illegal actions aimed at achieving certain religious goals, which subsequently determine the mechanism and types of religious and criminal behavior. Such views and actions are accompanied by a partial departure from traditional religious beliefs, which is found in religious extremist groups of any kind: Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, or Jewish.

The theological substantiation of this situation is charisma – the doctrine, according to which, the church is a divine institution endowed with mystical and magical power commanding people. The extreme expression of this doctrine is a theocracy – a form of government in which the primacy of the laws of God over the laws of the state is asserted.

To improve the legislation, it should be noted that the logic of the development of public relations that ensure the security of the state determines the study of problems related to the development of extremism and its new forms, as well as the differentiation of responsibility for crimes of extremist orientation. Considering the definition of such clear criteria, the implementation of counteraction will be possible only within the framework of systematization and unification of existing criminal legislation. The relevance of these trends is determined by the emergence of new forms of extremist manifestations that are not regulated by law, which creates favorable conditions for their spread.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

What is the content of the concept of "criminal religious extremism"? There are several definitions of religious extremism.

The "Atheistic Dictionary" says that "religious extremism" refers to "ideology and the activity of extremely fanatical elements in religious organizations" [10]. According to the authors of the dictionary, in the conditions of modern society, this is, above all, the ideology and actions of those fanatical elements who have entered the path of antisocial activity to overcome the religious crisis that runs counter to the legislation on religious cults. Religious extremism is defined here as a religious phenomenon, even though it is supported by propaganda agencies and special services of foreign countries.

Some researchers believe that the essence of the issue in this definition is reduced to "purely religious aspects". It excludes the "purely religious aspect" from the concept of "religious extremism" and characterizes it as a political phenomenon, in which religion is no more than an ideological cover.

"Religious extremism should be understood as the activity of anti-social elements and individual religious fanatics who have covered up their religions to introduce bourgeois-clerical ideas into the minds of believers <...> manifested in anti-social views and actions" [11].

Theocratic sects demand complete subordination of believers to the community and completely deny state power. Such, for example, are some of the directions of the "Spiritual Christians" – scribes or "Nw Israel". Theocracy is at the core of the Jehovah's creed.

Demonology is a theological doctrine of demons, imps, devils, and other evil spirits led by Satan, the antipode of God, the influence of evil spirits on man, and the struggle between God and Satan. Non-believers, heretics, and atheists are "Satanists", that is, people endowed with the worst qualities, enemies of God and the "faithful", against whom hostility, hatred, and the use of any means of counteraction are justified.

Eschatology is an extremely pessimistic concept about the apocalyptic "last judgment", "end of the world", and universal death of people on Earth as a result of their sinfulness. Eschatological frightening attitudes cause believers to feel hopelessness and promote negativism to the surrounding world. Fanatics convince the believer, that it is this world that leads people to destruction by its "sinfulness", "satanism", and so on. Hence the rejection of everything "worldly", including state institutions.

Messianism – faith in the coming of the Messiah – the messenger of God who will save humanity "perishing from sinfulness".

Adherents of religious extremism are characterized by fanaticism as an extreme expression of religious conviction. "The fanatic curses in the name of salvation and rages in the name of bliss" noted G.V. Plekhanov [12]. Dr K. Pelman, who studied the influence of fanaticism on crime, pointed out that religious fanaticism always "incited the most animal instincts and the most unbridled extremes" among the masses.

These groups, as mentioned above, are formed based on enthusiasm for religious and mystical ideas and moods. Believers in these sects are united based on religious egoism and rejection of the legislation on religious cults. These include such sects as the "Society for Krishna", "White Brotherhood", "Church of the Prophet", "Christian Revival", and others, which are far from being righteous [13].

Thus, according to the Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Non-Traditional Religions in Memory of A.S. Khomyakov, the Temple of All Sorrowful Joys in Moscow associated with the White Brotherhood consists of up to 70% of minors and D. Berg's sect Berg "Children of the Gods" – 40% of minors. For example, the prostitution of girls is encouraged in these sects.

The "Satanists", where 80% are minors, cultivate "blood rites", abuse of saints, murder, violence against the individual. According to the "blood rite", teenagers slit their wrists for some incomprehensible high. Fatalities were recorded. This shows that the activity of sects is criminogenic [14].

One of the main tenets of these sects is "complete self-dissolution" and blind obeisance to the "guru" (teacher), that is, one does not need to think, it is necessary just to listen and perform. Believers come in a euphoric – aggressive state through prayer, often with the addition of drugs. An example of the criminal use of members of religious sects is the murder of the artist and athlete T. Nigmatullin [15].

Based on a dogmatic perception of religious truth, fanatical believers are uncompromising in their desire to impose their faith on everyone. Their devotion to God often turns into hatred even towards their neighbors, if the views of the latter in some way do not correspond to their own.

One of the researchers of religious extremism is V.N. Arestov cites the memory of Pavel O. about his father – an extremist fanatic: "As far back as I can remember, it was always about God. We children were forced to pray all the time. You can't play football – it's a sin, you can't join the pioneers – God will curse, you can't be friends with unbelievers – God will punish". When Pavel decided to marry an unbeliever, the father rejected the son. He didn't come to see his son off to the army and gouged his eyes out in the soldier's photograph [11].

It follows from the above that the impact on its destructive power carries the behavior of fanatical believers.

The issues of countering criminal religious extremism imply the creation of a condemning public opinion around the leaders and fanatically religious extremists, and isolation from the main mass of believers. This is not a simple matter. Violators of the law on cults can not be approached with one measure, because their degree of guilt is different.

It is no secret that measures of administrative and power pressure in the 1960s and 80s were a common means of combating religious extremism. At the same time, atheistic propaganda was mainly expository; ordinary believers became a blind tool in the hands of extremist pastors.

A while back, A.V. Lunacharsky compared religion with a nail. The more one hits the nail with a hammer, the deeper one hammers it into the board and, in the end, it is possible to nail it up so that one can not pull it out with any pincers [16]. What is difficult for us to refuse is the ability to "nail" these very nails, instead of cleverly searching for the ways of the problems that arise.

As for the members of these groups, the main idea in their upbringing is to put forward not legal-atheistic, but legal work, which will undoubtedly contribute to the establishment of the activities of their religious organizations within the framework defined by law. This will develop the ability to arouse own thoughts about the loyalty of the path and show that no one is trying to encroach on their religious beliefs, but

that society is not indifferent to how they satisfy their religious needs – to the extent permitted by law or by violating it [17].

A serious disadvantage is a bias against members of unregistered religious groups. They are often denied recognition and are not involved in socially useful activities.

The ideological influence on believers involved in criminal activities depends largely on the content of educational work and methods of its implementation. Speaking of methods, it should be emphasized that conversations with believers should be friendly, open, and confidential.

Considering the fact that a large number of minors participate in criminal and religious groups, the question may naturally arise: "What about school?" The answer to this question can probably be seen in the following.

At the time, the "Science and Religion" magazine published an article by a former Adventist confession believer I. Karayanu. Recalling his school years, he wrote: "The community leaders began <...> to energetically involve us, teenagers, in its life. Our school teachers were not able to counter this with anything serious. Study clubs were organized in the religious community for children from religious families: music, singing, recitation, versification. And there were <...> conversations at school".

Further, I. Karayanu notes that he and his peers from religious families "didn't have strong religious convictions". They were at a crossroads between faith and unbelief and "each step in one direction or another was most often determined not so much by proving the correctness of one or the other side, but by those where we were interested". It was more interesting for them in the community [18].

It follows from the above that it is not enough to criticize religion; it is necessary to oppose the fullest possible satisfaction of the spiritual needs of believing children outside the community. To do this, it is necessary to form and develop their socially significant interests and needs and ensure that they become mining companies over time.

Thus, criminal religious extremism has an extremely conservative and anti-social character. Consideration of this phenomenon makes it possible to detect certain hidden processes occurring in it, as well as to anticipate the trends of its transformation.

Special attention is given to individual religious organizations of a satanic orientation, which are criminal.

Satan worship, known as Satanism, manifests itself in various forms. Black magic, satanic rites, some types of a subculture of drug addicts, blood sacrifices – all this is somehow connected with Satanism. Satanists use La Vey's Book of Satanic Rituals as one of the guidelines for conducting their rituals.

The basis of the Satanist cult is sacrifice. The real sacrifice for them is not murder per se, but the mortal torment of a living being. The choice of victim is simple. This is anyone of those who did wrong to the Satanists or seriously disturbed their calm from their point of view. Thus, they permitted their torment and death. Instead of a real victim, their image can sometimes be used: doll, photo, drawing, written or verbal description. For example, an image is destroyed by sticking needles or nails into it, describing the process of destruction, and so on.

Satanic cults are the most savage and criminogenic type of destructive cults, even against the background of other totalitarian organizations. Here, the molestation of adepts reaches a maximum and visible depth.

In earlier epochs, Satanism was more secret than it is now. Then it was dominated by anti-religious and godless aspects. Although this persists today, traditional Satanism is more associated with black magic and rituals. Traditionally, Satanism is considered as the worship of evil, a religion based on principles opposed to Christianity.

Satanic cults are especially common in the United States, Western Europe (Norway, Sweden), and Romania. The world centers of Satanism are currently located in the US and the UK.

Satanic sects in Italy are mostly spread in the northeast of the country and include approximately 3,000 adherents, but their number is growing.

In Romania, Satanist cells already exist in almost all counties of the country.

In the USSR, the earliest Satanist groups were noted in the early 1970s in the cities of Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa, but they were few in number. Gradually, Satanism is spreading to all major cities of the former USSR. Larger Satanist groups began to appear in the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. It can be assumed that a kind of fashion for Satanism in certain circles of the informal youth environment appeared after the beginning of perestroika and subsequently the number of such groups increased.

Currently, no one has accurate data on the number of adepts and interested, but according to experts, the number of adepts of Satanism in Russia is determined with all sorts of wizards, etc. (excluding ordinary scammers) no less than a few thousand, it is even possible that the number has exceeded 10 thousand.

Today, there are about 20 directions of Satanist sects in Moscow alone, including, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, a total of more than 30 organized groups of Satanists, with a total of about 2,379 thousand members. The largest of them are: "Black Angel", Black Countess Group, "Russian Church of Satan", "Black Dragon", "Southern Cross".

In addition to the Russian Federation, Satanist sects are very widespread and active in the Republic of Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic States.

At their core, Satanist groups are built on the principle of a strict hierarchy. They involve a large number of drug addicts and many people from all sections of society, ages, occupations, and levels of education.

The ideological inspiration of modern Satanists is considered to be a graduate of the University of Cambridge, an occultist, and author of several "magic" books Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). He used the practice of yoga and Buddhist tantric rituals and visited China and the Himalayas. The works of this English mystic, who was sympathetic to Hitler, formed the basis of satanic cults, including the largest organization – the "Church of Satan".

A. Crowley was generally sympathetic to nationalism and fascism. He had many followers and students, among whom a special place was occupied by the medium and sorceress Violet Mary (1891-1946), known under the pseudonym "God Not Fate". Crowley often attracted her to participate in the "mysteries of Isis and Adonis," as he called his sex-magic orgies.

Ron Hubbard became later his other famous student, creator of the Church of Scientology.

Satanist sects are dangerous because of lawlessness in the choice of means to achieve their selfish goals, cynical obscurantism, open abuse of traditional faiths, links with drug mafia and organized crime, which controls the shadow market for weapons. Leaders of Satanists are repeatedly characterized by the press as extremely dissolute sadists and masochists.

The danger of these sects stems from the criminal tendencies of their inner life, the zombification of their members, forms of action against traditional religions and other sects, and methods of recruiting converts. The criminal activity of sects follows from the fanaticism and deformation of the understanding of the division of life, the permissiveness of the choice of means to achieve it, as well as blind subordination to one's higher leadership.

In addition to ritual crimes, they often commit "ordinary" crimes. For example, money is extorted from the adolescents involved, pushing them to commit thefts; forcing to buy housing and drawing up a will for the sect; attacking people who are objectionable to them.

According to experts from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Satanists are carefully studying the criminal and other legislation of the Russian Federation, preparing in advance for opposition to law enforcement agencies. Satanists often frame up mentally ill people to commit serious crimes.

Some crimes committed by members of Satanist sects include:

- ritual murder of a 16-year-old girl in Kansk, Krasnoyarsk territory in 1995;
- brutal ritual murder – a sacrifice to Satan – in the military town of Dyagilevo near Ryazan by a local "psychic healer" Arina Zabrodina, the wife of an officer, of her own son – second-grader Kolya, whom she specially prepared for the sacrifice to Satan for several days, feeding him special food;
- ritual murder of three Orthodox monks in the Optina Monastery of the Kaluga region;
- ritual murder of two or more people in Severo-Zadonsk, Tula region in 1999;
- rape of adept girls in one of the parishes in the Leningrad region in 2006;
- desecration of graves in cemeteries of the Smolensk and Tver regions in 2009.

Analysis of the essence of Satanism and criminal activities of Satanist groups in Russia allows concluding that these groups commit the following offenses:

- ritual murders of people, including children and suicides;
- kidnappings of people, including children;
- rape;
- sexual orgies and forced homosexuality;
- grave desecration and grave-digging;
- abuse of animals, such as skinning animals alive and ritual killing of animals;
- desecration of temples and other places of worship of traditional religions and faiths;



- drug use and distribution.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the analysis shows that at present, there is a serious and extreme danger associated with this phenomenon in Russia. The links between religious extremism and crime are not limited to cause-and-effect relationships and their subjective component of criminal motivation. There are other types of relationships and dependencies, such as correlation, functional, and state relationships.

This makes it possible to consider religious extremism as several socially negative phenomena that are causally and otherwise associated with crime.

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