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THE FORMATION OF THE IRRATIONAL BELIEFS TO  
CATASTROPHIZATION AS A SIGN OF THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF  
RELIGIOUS CULT

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**Abstract**

The article presents a comparative analysis of the question of the catastrophe of mankind in traditional and pseudo-religious, totalitarian, non-traditional religious teachings. It has been shown that the attitude to catastrophe is typical for both traditional and non-traditional religious trends, but in the latter the main way of salvation is often considered to be the way of change in the outside world or self-denial, while traditional religious teachings see salvation in the improvement of the individual, first of all, itself.

**Keywords**

irrational beliefs, catastrophization, religious doctrine, salvation, totalitarian sect, differentiation.

The religious factor in the life of society and the individual has been discussed quite a bit lately. It is sad to admit, but the reality is that the surge of interest in this topic is often a reaction to another wave of dramatic events, very skillfully and harshly intertwined with religious prejudices and occult beliefs [9, p. 105]. It must be admitted that science, in particular the psychology of religion, is greatly lagging behind in studying the destructive forms of reflection of religious concepts and images, postulates and ideas.

Due to the transformation of religious ideas often into a powerful means of psychological manipulation with hidden politicized and monetized goals, which is achieved primarily through the prism of psychological characteristics of a person, there are enough acute questions addressed to the psychology of religions [10, p. 267]. Of course, one direction of these questions is related to the problem of involving a person in religious organizations and movements. Without simplifying the problem, it must be recognized that the psychological root cause of this is the blockage during the period of militant atheism, and this is rather the acuteness of the religious needs of the individual, on the one hand, and its absolute unpreparedness to critically rethink the religious points of view offered to it, on the other hand. With this understanding of the problem, the main fault of science can



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be imputed to the fact that it did not give this person - a potential victim of any theoretically and empirically substantiated criteria for filtering the religious views offered to it. This article attempts to describe one of such possible criteria within the framework of scientific ideas about the irrational attitude to catastrophization.

According to the theoretical principles of Albert Ellis' rational therapy, one of the irrational attitudes - inconsistent with reality, contradicting objective conditions and leading to maladaptation of the individual - is the attitude of catastrophization [1, p. 118]. The attitude of catastrophization is considered as a tendency to exaggerate the degree of negativity of a phenomenon or situation [5, p. 65]. People with an attitude of catastrophization are characterized by the assessment of unpleasant events as something inevitable, monstrous, destructive, life's troubles and difficulties are assessed by them as a catastrophe of a universal scale [6, p. 47].

According to A. Ellis, disappointment and irritation are a normal part of human existence, but when people interpret these simple irritants as catastrophic and terrible, the emotion and behavior of excitement arise [8, p. 355]. It is believed that all irrational attitudes are based on rigid emotional-cognitive connections that are in the nature of absolutized prescriptions, demands, and orders [1, p. 118]. If we analyze in more detail the essence of many totalitarian sects, various non-traditional cults, we cannot help but notice that they are characterized by the absolutization of catastrophic phenomena. Thus, it has been noted that no matter what the teachers of new cults talk about, their sermons ultimately boil down to predictions of an imminent universal catastrophe, and an assessment of the modern era as the "iron age" (Hare Krishna), the "age of ignorance" (Traditional Meditation Society), the "period of great torment" (Corpus Christi Church). In this context, it can be noted that, for example, the so-called sect of survivalists is based on a panic fear of the nuclear end of the world, the main place in the sermon of the Japanese sect "Ma Hikari" is occupied by a prophecy about a coming world catastrophe, in which only the adherents of the sect will be saved [7]. It is known that the so-called sect of Vissarion - "The Church of the Last Testament" tries to convince about the beginning of a time of great upheavals and cataclysms that will sweep away most of humanity [3]. In general, there is no need to particularly prove why in leaflets that are distributed to schoolchildren in Germany, one of the signs of totalitarian sects is indicated that in their concepts the world is heading for a catastrophe, and only the group knows how to save it [3].

In stating the tendency of various non-traditional religious movements to catastrophize and apocalyptic scenarios for the future of humanity, it is necessary to note that the theme of the "end of the world", "judgment day" is also present in one way or another in many traditional teachings, in all world religions. For example, in the sura "Judgment Day" of the Holy Quran it is directly stated: "And



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when suddenly the sound of the trumpet is heard, and when the earth and the mountains rise up, and immediately crumble into dust, it will happen on the day that must happen - the sky will open up, for on that day it will be weak" (sura 69, ayat 13, 14, 15, 16) [4, p. 580]. In the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament, the words of Jesus are quoted: "You will hear of wars near and far - see that you are not afraid. This is how it must be, but this is not the end yet. "Nations and kingdoms will rise up, there will be famine and earthquakes in many places, but all this is only labor pains" (Matthew 24: 6,7, 8) [2, p.1088].

Thus, as can be seen from the examples, the idea of a universal catastrophe is characteristic of many religious and pseudo-religious teachings. At the level of stating the phenomena that provoke apocalyptic events, perhaps the fundamental difference between official and unofficial, and as practice shows, often quite destructive religious teachings is not so clearly manifested. In our opinion, in the issue of addressing the topic of the finiteness of being, obvious differences are more evident in what must be done for salvation and how this must be done. Thus, official teachings incline a person's thought to the possibility of salvation through self-improvement, raising, first of all, oneself to a higher level of spiritual development. In particular, the Bible teaches that "Many will then abandon the faith and will betray and hate one another... Because evil will increase, the love of many will grow cold. But whoever endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24: 10, 12, 13) [2, p. 1088]. In the Surah "Al-Hud" of the Holy Quran it is said: "The Lord will save the righteous and admit them to the abode of prosperity. No misfortune will befall them, nor will they know grief" (Surah 39, ayat 61) [4, p. 478], in the Surah "Hud" it is said: "Your Lord will not destroy the unjust inhabitants of the cities if they are virtuous" (Surah 11, ayat 117) [4, p. 247]. In other words, firstly, traditional religious teachings, as a rule, call for changing ourselves, and secondly, for changing towards greater conformity with eternal values. It turns out that traditional beliefs, indicating the path to salvation, answer the first question "What to do?" with "Change yourself", and answer the second question "In what way?" with "Changing for the better". At the same time, various totalitarian and sectarian teachings call for certain radical changes in the socio-cultural space or living environment in order to save oneself from catastrophic events. Even if a totalitarian teaching calls on its adherents to change themselves, this usually does not imply a renunciation of their negative qualities, but a renunciation of oneself as a whole. In particular, in order to achieve the highest degree of salvation, Mormons practice marriages with the dead, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that salvation depends only on a person's participation in the affairs of the Watchtower Society (a Jehovah's Witness publication - authors' note) [3]. The Innokentyevtsy sect calls for abandoning everything in the name of salvation - homes, property, children,



families, and considers self-mortification to be the greatest feat in the name of saving the soul [7].

Thus, addressing questions of the existential level, religious teachings inevitably direct a person's attention to the fundamental problem of the meaning of life. The relevance of this problem is clearly manifested in the light of the possible end of everything and universal catastrophe. A comparative analysis of the formulation of this question in traditional and non-traditional, totalitarian religious teachings allows us to highlight the following specifics:

1. In many religious schools, the attitude towards catastrophization manifests itself as a significant argument for the beginning of active actions for salvation.

2. In traditional religious teachings, when there is an attitude towards catastrophization, self-improvement is considered the main method and path to salvation.

3. Non-traditional and totalitarian religious teachings, in most cases, forming an attitude towards catastrophization, see the solution to the problem in self-denial in the sense of unconditional service to utopian ideas (e.g., the creation of a caliphate) or in terms of betraying one's adequate interests (e.g., ritual suicides).

It must be assumed that the definition of specific criteria that distinguish constructive and destructive directions in religious teachings should help modern man better navigate the increasingly complex religious picture of the world.

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