
THEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MUSLIM YOUTH RELIGIOSITY

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Abstract

Young man living in the 21st century has many opportunities, but he is also exposed to countless threats. Often an attractive environment tempts you with a seemingly easy way of life, without strict moral standards, without restrictions, advertising yourself as full freedom and opposing the usual schemes. This misunderstood freedom is often a mere arbitrary, carrying many injustices to an inexperienced man. The question arises as to how young people deal with such problems, for whom religion is important and an integral part of everyday life. In this article, an analysis of contemporary problems of young people professing Islam will be undertaken. Current educational problems, attachment to religious values and their negation, education as well as ways of spending free time will be discussed.

Keywords: Islam, youth, faith, rebellion, modernity

1. Introduction

The world of the 21st century is undergoing intensive changes on many levels of human life. The progressing globalization processes have affected every social field on all continents of the world. These changes did not bypass the sphere of religion, including conservative and juridical Islam. The world of Islam, the behaviour of which is regulated by religious and moral norms, is changing more and more, becoming more similar to the Latin world. These transformations are a significant problem for imams responsible for shaping religious attitudes in the community of believers. Their primary task is to lead the community of believers, to communicate and interpret God's will, contained in the Qur'an.

Islam is now practiced in 170 countries around the world to varying degrees. The sheer number of countries where Muslims live shows the diversity of cultures and societies, and thus makes it clear that Islam is not homogeneous. The multitude of interpretations of regulations and customs makes it difficult to present the religious tradition. It is harmful to Muslims to standardize attitudes and behaviours, as this is how stereotypes are perpetuated, among which the predominant claim is that all Muslims are terrorists. Therefore, it is extremely

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important in the analysis of Islam to emphasize its diversity, which makes Islam an even more interesting research phenomenon, both for religious scholars and theologians.

Islam reached the farthest corners of the globe in specific historical epochs that had their own political conditions. At the same time, settling in the world, he imposed a certain religious rigor, but not always broke with the local cultural customs, which with time penetrated into the religious tradition. Europeans most often experience contacts with the Middle Eastern variant of Islam, connected with the Arab culture. This article is an identification of the problems faced by young Muslims, both living in Europe and those living in Muslim countries.

The aim of the article is to present the contemporary problems of young Muslims who, like all youth in the world, struggle with the hardships of everyday life, experiencing a period of rebellion against the rigid framework imposed by the family, environment and state structures. In addition, they must follow the religious system that determines the right path of life, pointing to the relationship of man to God, as well as conditioning human life in all its dimensions: spiritual, social, political and economic. The article analyses the problem from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining theological and cultural aspects.

The main research question of this article regards the attitudes of Muslim youth towards strict religious principles in force in Islam. The work on the topic of the article was inspired by works on secularization in Muslim circles: Jonathan Hauser, *Education, secularism and illiberalism: Marginalisation of Muslims by the French state* [1] and Mun'im Sirry, *Secularization in the mind of muslim reformists* [2], Aala Abdelgadir and Vasiliki Fouka, *Political Secularism and Muslim Integration in the West: Assessing the Effects of the French Headscarf Ban* [3] and Karin Flensner, *Secularized and Multi-Religious Classroom Practice-Discourses and Interactions* [4].

The article is a significant contribution to the development of theological sciences, especially the subdisciplines of religious education and pastoral care. The role of parents, teachers and religious guides is a challenge that will affect the development of young religiosity, as well as the future of religion itself. The important thing is whether Islam will be alive and true, or strongly fossilized and distorted, far removed from the Qur'an message.

The article consists of three parts. The first identifies the requirements of Islam towards believers and characterizes the demographics of Islam believers. The second is an analysis of the attitudes of young people. The third one is an exemplification of the manifestation of religiosity in contemporary youth culture.

2. Analysis

2.1. Islam - submission to the will of God

Islam literally means surrender, submission to God's will, and a Muslim is a person who unconditionally, even slavishly, submitted to this will. This complex dogmatic and moral system covers every area of human life, thus directing believers to the right conduct. There is no place in Islam to take any action that is inconsistent with religion. Whatever a man does, he must comply with the will of the One God - Allah, who is the source of all good, as well as the highest moral standard [5]. The law contained in Qur'an is an interpretation of religious law that often applies to civil matters because Islam does not distinguish between the spheres: sacred and secular [6]. Moreover, these principles are strengthened also by a family tradition that cannot be contradicted. Respect and obedience shown to the elders is one of the most important duties of the young generation of Muslims.

2.1.1. Demography and education of young people

There are 300 million people in the Middle East, of which 100 million are young people aged 15-24. Thus, dynamic demographic changes are taking place in the region due to the high birth rate. However, the young Muslim community demands different social and social conditions than the older generation, i.e. their parents and grandparents. A significant problem for young Muslims is the difficulties in accessing education, especially in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, where the issue of illiteracy is still present. The problem of illiteracy in the Middle East is large, and its intensity depends on the country and gender. The most difficult situation is in Afghanistan, where as many as 63% of people cannot read and write. By contrast, in Central and Southeast Asia, illiteracy affects up to 10% of the entire community of regions. Socio-economic changes in the Middle East forced the improvement of education among children and adolescents, which changed significantly at the end of the 20th century. Since then, the number of students in schools has been growing steadily, and hence, there has been a noticeable decline in illiteracy among children and adolescents. However, the changes for the better remain only partial, as the quality of education is still insufficient due to the low level of knowledge of the teachers themselves. The issues of inadequate education, especially in the Middle East, have further ramifications. Despite graduating from school, youth is characterized by a low level of knowledge, which is reflected in the continuation of education at higher education and in taking up employment. Typically, science focuses on eliminating illiteracy, rather than increasing general knowledge and arousing curiosity among children and adolescents [7].

Low quality of education causes numerous problems that affect young Muslims, such as the lack of work and the lack of improvement in their own lives. By contrast, growing frustration and discouragement often underlies radicalization of religious views.

2.2. Two currents of behaviour by young Muslims

Civilization changes and progressive globalization have not bypassed the youth professing Islam. The educational problems faced by Muslim families are not significantly different from those of Christian, Jewish or Buddhist parents. Ease of communication in the world of the 21st century, mobility and the possibility of almost unlimited travel around the world, make conservative views and behaviour imposed by Islam become a platform for the rebellion of the young generation. On this basis, two main trends in the behaviour of young people can be distinguished: conservative and liberal.

2.2.1. Religious conservatism

Conservative youth is characterized by attachment to family and religious traditions. The behaviour as well as the way of life is often much more radical than was present in the family environment. The foundation of such behaviour is religion and the resulting desire to emphasize separateness and attachment to the values it shapes. Orthodoxy in professing and practicing Islam is motivated by opposition to the secularized world that tends to throw God out of the way. For deeply religious Muslims, this situation is unacceptable. According to the teachings of Islam, God is the origin of all things, the cause and the fulfilment of all human life. Any success in mortality, as well as an eternal reward, depends on the zeal to fulfil God's commandments contained in the Qur'an and given in the Tradition of Muhammad [5].

However, a conservative attitude may evolve on two planes. The first one seeks to strengthen man in faith and to actually practice religion in accordance with God's plans, without seeking individual, often selfish goals. This attitude is exemplary and desirable. However, conservative beliefs also lead to misinterpretations of God's will. Islam does not have a central authority, both politically and religiously. While in politics, following the state's social and economic interests does not raise problems, in matters related to religion, the lack of supreme authority is a significant problem. Islam does not have a single, common and obligatory interpretation of the Qur'an for all believers. It also does not have a common teaching office. This results in a kind of freedom in teaching religion, as well as reading God's word [8]. The lack of authority over religious matters favours the radicalization of views among imams, i.e. Muslim religious guides. On the other hand, imams have a direct impact on the formation of consciences and shaping the attitudes of young people. For several years in Western Europe, there has been a continuous increase in the radicalization of young Muslims, often citizens of European countries in the second or even third

generation. This is due to clear generational differences. Young adherents of Islam are much more critical of liberal democracy than their parents and grandparents. Therefore, young people see a return to Muslim roots as a way to emphasize their distinctiveness, especially in the context of the lack of development and social advancement in the structures of Western communities [9]. The intensification of extreme attitudes among young people is favoured by conflicts with parents, as well as trips to the countries of their ancestors. Another reason for the radicalization of young Muslims is stereotypes. Europeans see Muslims as enemies of Christian-Western civilization, while radical Muslims see Europeans as godless. One should also pay attention to the historical events. For the radical part of Muslims, it is extremely important to rebuild the caliphate, the system of the Islamic state, headed by a caliph, which in Arabic means successor, governor [10] and regain those areas in Europe that belonged to Islam in the past. The Muslim territories in Europe were: Andalusia, Sicily, Bulgaria, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, France to Poitiers, and Austria to Vienna [11]. Thus, these territories become a space for jihad, and thus for Muslim struggle in the way of God.

The imams of mosques play an important role in the process of radicalization among young people. First of all, because it is up to the imam to interpret the principles written in the Koran. It is the imam who is responsible for the message and the tone of the teaching resulting from the principles of Islam. Religious education conducted in mosques is closely connected with the views of sponsors of these mosques. Institutions financed by members and supporters of terrorist organizations are becoming incubators for potential attackers. They are also places of radicalization of the views of the Muslim community. This problem does not only concern the Middle East, but also all regions of the modern world where the Muslim diaspora lives. Recently, the problem of radicalization of views has been particularly noticeable in Western Europe, especially in Great Britain, France, Spain and Germany. The formation of terrorist attitudes is influenced by Friday sermons preached in mosques by radical imams. The guiding principle in teaching is the enemy personified with Western civilization wishing to dominate and possibly destroy the order of the Islamic world. Therefore, it is important to wage war against him in the way of God, and therefore jihad [12]. In addition, mosques glorify suicide attacks committed in the name of God by members of the umma. Often, photos of the bombers are placed in a kind of hall of fame, so that they can be honoured, and at the same time encourage them to follow.

2.2.2. Liberalism

On the other hand, the second group of young Muslims, identifying themselves with modernity, exhibit liberal attitudes. Their way of life and way of life are confusingly similar to the lives of Europeans. It is mainly in this part of the youth that rebellious behaviour is observed, which is an expression of opposition to parents, and often also to the strict standards imposed by religion.

The most common manifestation of the rebellion of young people showing liberal attitudes is a departure from religious practices, as well as attempts to break ties with the ossified - in their opinion - system of practices and rituals. The most visible stage is not going to the mosque for the common Friday prayer. Religious law does not require only a mosque to be the place for daily prayer because "all the Earth was made up for a mosque" [13]. There is also no obligation to participate in the Friday community prayer in the mosque, but every devout Muslim goes to the mosque for the main weekly prayer, because in this way a sense of community of believers is built. Therefore, the cessation of religious practices by rebellious children is the cause of numerous conflicts, not only in family, but often also in society. Disobedience to the elders in the family is an expression of the young generation's disrespect for the values and customs of the generations. On the other hand, in social relations it is perceived as a dishonour with which the head of the family covers.

It should be emphasized, however, that the liberal attitudes of Muslim youth are not just an ordinary whim of a young man looking for his own way of life. 21st century families, irrespective of their culture and religion, are exposed to many unfavourable factors that penetrate their structure, which has been organized for centuries. Progressive secularization, changes in worldview, liberal state policy, the influence of the media on the creation of the modern world and education in schools mean that the family is treated without due respect. And marriage is presented as a social contract that can be withdrawn or terminated at any time. All these factors negatively affect the young generation, regardless of their faith. The dominant liberalism in many areas of life causes that young Muslims also succumb to the vision of a hedonistic life, dominated by material goods, obtained from selfish motives and the superiority of 'having' over 'being'. Such behaviour more and more often distances the young generation from religious and moral values resulting from their religion. Young people from countries rich in oil and natural gas resources are often brought up with a sense of superiority and unlimited possibilities. It should be noted that not the entire community of oil states is very wealthy. The belief that money can take care of everything sometimes also touches the religious sphere. Financial attempts to buy moral offenses are a practice used in the ruling families of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The process of upbringing in the family is more and more often disturbed. Civilization changes force the separation of families due to work in another city, and often also in another country. Therefore, economic emigration appears to be a serious threat to the stability of the family, not only in the social, but above all in the spiritual dimension. The lack of appropriate proportions in the educational process of children's spending time with their mother and father causes the disturbance of proper social relations. Children are more and more often forced to raise independently, and such action causes the greatest misfortune for families, namely - selfishness [14].

2.2.3. Religious authority

The religious rigorism in force in Islam is often a challenge for a young person, who should bear witness to his faith, while the modern world tempts with many attractions. Therefore, the spiritual leaders of Islam have an important task to fulfil for the youth. It has been mentioned above that imams are authorities for religious conservatives, but we should not forget about people less connected with religion. The spiritual guides of the Muslim community know this very well. Probably for this reason, various meetings are organized for young people, in order to prevent young people from falling into inappropriate passions, and often also into a destructive environment, the consequence of which may be, for example, drug addiction or a young person's moral decline.

Religious authority is especially important in the diaspora and in small Islamic communities surrounded by Christians. This is the case in Central and Eastern European countries, where the Muslim community has been present for 600 years, but is small: Estonia (0.2%), Lithuania (0.09%), Latvia (0.01%), Poland (0.07%), Belarus (0.6%), Ukraine (1.0%), the Czech Republic (0.1%), Slovakia (0.09%), Romania (0.3%) and Hungary (0.06 %) [15].

The small community professing Islam in these countries is under the special care of theologians responsible for shaping religious attitudes. They make every effort to spread religion, especially among the young. For this reason, meetings are organized, known as conventions, during which it is possible to integrate the Muslim community, as well as participate in lectures and workshops on religion. Such activities are extremely important because Muslims living in small communities are widely scattered across countries and have few opportunities to meet together.

Muslim organizations and associations operating in Central and Eastern Europe actively work to strengthen faith among young followers of Islam. They prepare meetings and conventions addressed to young people, the main topics of which are current problems that appear in the life of young people, which are challenges on the path of a young Muslim. The Muslim community not only cares about the strengthening and preservation of religious values by young people, but also makes every effort to ensure that future marriages are endogamous, i.e. concluded within their own ethnic group. This practice is promoted especially among the Tatar community. Tatar balls, organized on the occasion of religious holidays, contribute to this [10, p. 450].

2.3. Youth fashion - an expression of rebellion and religiosity

The outward manifestation of changes and a manifestation of the rebellion of young people is clothing. The Muslim dress code has been changing and constantly causing controversy, especially in Europe. The Afghan burqa has become a symbol of the enslavement of Muslim women, i.e. a loose dress, often sleeveless, covering the entire figure from head to toe, with a dense mesh at the eyes. This costume is identified in Europe with the Qur'anic regime. However, it

should be clearly emphasized that such perception of Muslim fashion is not objective, as it refers to selected countries with dominance of Islam.

Contrary to a common concept in Europe, the principles of the hijab, and thus the way Muslims dress, do not express the restriction of civil liberties. Muslims, and especially young women, believe that applying a certain dress code in moderation is positive. There is no doubt that hijab is a protection against sexual harassment. Moreover, it should be remembered that Muslim women are brought up in the belief about the properties and appropriateness of such clothes. And keeping modesty along with restraint is proper for a woman who cares for her and her family's honour. Therefore, it is difficult to require them to change their beliefs and demand a re-evaluation of their worldview. For a Muslim, hiding behind a long and flowing robe is not a punishment or a bondage. Among young Muslim women, a saying that captures the essence of the recommended outfit is popular: "I am a respected woman. I'm not for every man to watch, touch or talk to. I am protected like a precious pearl that becomes black and dirty when touched by everyone." [10, p. 272] The customary covering does not emphasize the attractiveness of a woman and at the same time becomes a protection against possible rape, which is rare in Muslim countries.

The changes forced by modernity are also subject to youth fashion, which is shaped by Western trends and the influence of global TV channels. The mixed style, i.e. the combination of tradition and modernity, is becoming more and more popular. This way of dressing is preferred by the youngest Muslim generation. Girls are increasingly wearing denim pants, but in combination with a long, knee-length tunic and a colourful headscarf covering their hair. Long skirts are also fashionable among female youth.

On the other hand, young Muslims also increasingly compile traditional and modern styles. Men like to wear denim trousers and shirts or a T-shirt with short sleeves, although among people strongly associated with tradition, short sleeves are considered inappropriate. Moreover, no Muslim will wear short pants as they are not completely accepted. In turn, accessories, such as sunglasses and watches, are becoming more and more popular [16].

Very popular in the community of young Muslims are T-shirts modelled on Euro-American-style graphics, but with content strictly related to and referring to Islam. The inscriptions on the T-shirts remind us of the Last Judgment, Mecca, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community around the world. Modern clothes of young people, despite their different form, still carry a religious message, for example in admonishing the faithful what should not be done during Ramadan or reminding about the necessity to perform ablution. The message on the t-shirts is also a manifestation of one's own religious beliefs, and is often also directed at Christians. Popular prints on clothes are the texts: 'We also love Jesus' or 'I'm a Muslim, search me'. Muslim motives used in clothing carry a message that is often hidden and understandable to religiously committed people. The inscriptions used on hoodies and baseball caps are subtle, but deep in content, such as the number five, referring to the five pillars of Islam, or the inscription Ramadan made with

the use of Arabic calligraphy. Clothing manufacturers also use world-wide, well-known motifs, thus obtaining a comic element, while at the same time giving a deeper message to the entire fashion line. This group includes: *iPray* - a reference to a popular brand of electronic devices, as well as *Baklava not Bombs* slogans. Fashion trends are also a way to put political messages, the most popular of which is *Free Palestine* [17].

2.3.1. Free time

The cultural, demographic and material diversity of the followers of Islam in the world has a significant impact on the attitudes of young followers of religion. Moral norms, resulting from the principles of religion, in many places of the Muslim world, prevent the use of entertainment known from Europe. Due to the lack of a single interpretation of the provisions of the Holy Book, the imams interpret it differently. In the interest of preserving the tradition and culture of Islam, foreign influences, for example from European culture, and penetrating into the Muslim world are usually rejected. Examples include Western music and discos, often seen by the older generation of Muslims as the source of evil and corruption. In order to bypass the ban on the operation of discos in some Muslim countries, they are placed on ships sailing on the Nile in Egypt or moored off the coast of Beirut. In mobile discos, young people dressed in accordance with the latest fashion trends in Rome, Paris and London, drink alcohol and dance to the greatest hits of the charts [18].

In the last dozen or so years, Muslims have come to love shopping malls, and shopping in them has become almost a family ritual, especially in the rich countries of the Persian Gulf. Moreover, in conservative Muslim countries, going shopping is a form of a social gathering, because it must be remembered that joint male and female outings are still unacceptable.

Among scholars, opinions on the concept of free time are divided. Opponents point to the excessive Westernization of Muslim behaviour, reinforcing their opposition with questions about the purpose of establishing non-working days. Relaxation, staying healthy, and deepening your relationship with God are justified even by critics. However, sceptics more often see in their spare time the causes of the moral decline of society, especially the young. In their opinion, the lack of a systematic occupation causes them to look for entertainment, which include drinking wine, gambling forbidden for Muslims, and in conservative circles also sinful dance and music [5, p. 107].

The religious principles of Islam prohibit the use of alcohol and drugs, and in very orthodox circles this prohibition has been extended to almost all drugs that impair the clarity of thinking and behaviour. However, the intensive development of Muslim countries and following the trends prevailing all over the world meant that drugs are present in the lives of the followers of Islam. The so-called weaker drugs, so hashish and opiates. The societies that use the highest amount of psychoactive substances are: Lebanese, Kuwaitians, Syrians and Jordanians, as well as people from Bahrain and Egypt [19].

3. Conclusions

Despite the efforts of people responsible for the proper education of the young generation, the modern Muslim community is struggling with problems related to young people. Globalization, intensive civilization development, ubiquitous Internet, commonness and relatively easy access to forbidden materials, such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, make parents of young people struggle with this problem, regardless of their religion. People are responsible for building civilization and maintaining proper social relations. It depends on man how his family will be shaped. Parents are the first authorities in a young person's life. It is their attitude and commitment to religion that will determine the respect of children's values. Religious education provided by the mosque is also equally important, because young people need moral authority. It is also important for modern man to constantly believe and hope that it is possible to change the world. If the learning of the rules begins in the family, it continues in religious institutions, it will consequently extend to the whole world. Muslims, regardless of their place of residence, usually do not differ in their customs from their Christian peers. Opposition to the will of parents is becoming more and more often the cessation of attending the mosque for prayers, as well as the resignation from attending religion lessons.

The challenge for parents and teachers is to guide young people so that they desire a good life in accordance with the principles of ethics, morality and religion. Contemporary young people cannot be addressed only with bans, because they will rebel against them in a natural, youthful way. Young people need good models that can be found in their close surroundings.

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