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THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION ON SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

This work contains a comprehensive overview of psychological research on religious conversion and spiritual transformation, which went through a remarkable growth in the past generation. The period from 1900 to the 1930s was marked by the work of James, Hall, Freud and their followers; subsequent restrictions stopped such work. In the 1960s, this area re-emerged; since then, it has significantly expanded. A new study examines the conversion to various religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. New religious movements and spirituality. Conversion is seen as a process varying in speed, motivation, context, and direction, including deconversion. World religions are similar in many ways; the scholar Stephen Prothero calls this resemblance a "family resemblance". All religions include rituals, scriptures, holy days and gathering places. Each religion gives its followers instructions concerning the way that people should deal with each other. In addition, the three world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – have a common origin: they all go back to the biblical figure of Abraham. The authors state that today there are few countries like Kazakhstan, which is setting an exemplary tolerance among multi-confessional, multi-nationalities with different ethnic and religious identities.

Key words: religious conversion, social identity, sociology of religion, religious affiliation, phenomenon.

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Қазақстан Республикасындағы діни конверсияның әлеуметтік бірегейлікке әсері

Мақалада XX ғасыр барысындағы діни конверсия үдерістері мен қоғамның діни-рухани саласындағы өзгерістерді түсіндірудің әртүрлі концепцияларын ұсынған психологиялық зерттеулерге салыстырмалы талдау жасалады. Діни конверсияның психологиялық себептері мен мотивациялары 1900-1930 жылдар аралығында У. Джеймстің, С. Холлдың, З. Фрейдтің және олардың осы бағыттағы интеллектуалды ізденістерін жалғастырған ізбасарларының еңбектерінде көрініс тапты, алайда кейінгі шектеулер мұндай жұмыстың тоқтатылуына әкелді. Дегенмен, 1960 жылдардағы қоғам өміріндегі діни үдерістердің қайта жандануына байланысты бұл мәселе қайта белең алды. Содан бері діни конверсияның қарқыны мен ауқымы айтарлықтай кеңейе түсті. Бұл бағыттағы жаңа зерттеулер христиан, ислам, иудаизм діндерімен қатар басқа да әртүрлі діндерге ауысуды қарастырады. Жаңа діни қозғалыстар аясындағы діни конверсия уақыты, мотивациясы, контексті және бағыты (соның ішінде, деконверсия құбылысы) бойынша өзгеретін процесс ретінде қарастырылады. Әлемдік діндердің сенім негіздерінің және т.б. компоненттерінің ұқсастығы Стивен Протероға бұл ұқсастықты «отбасылық ұқсастық» деп атауға мүмкіндік береді. «Барлық діндерге рәсімдер, жазбалар, қасиетті күндер мен жиналу орындары кіреді. Діндердің моральдық-этикалық қағидаттарының жалпыадамзаттық құндылықтарға үлкен мән беруі адамдардың бір-бірімен қарым-қатынасындағы ортақ ұстанымдардың орнығуына ықпал етеді. Ибраһимдік діндердің генетикалық жақындығы және жалпы адамзаттық сананың ортақ гуманистік құндылықтарға бағытталуы, діни таңдау құқының мойындалуы мен діни наным-сенім бостандығы қазіргі діни конверсия мен діни-рухани үдерістердің негізгі трендін айқындайды. Авторлар, бүгінде көпконфессиялық, әртүрлі этникалық және діни бірегейлікке ие көпұлттар арасында толеранттылықты орнатып отырған Қазақстан сияқты елдің саусақпен санарлық екенін айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: діни конверсия, әлеуметтік бірегейлік, дін социологиясы, діни қатыстылық, феномен.

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Влияние религиозной конверсии в социальной идентичности в Республике Казахстан

В данной работе представлен всесторонний обзор психологических исследований по религиозному обращению и духовному преобразению, в которых заметный рост произошел в прошлом поколении. Период с 1900 по 1930-е

годы ознаменовался трудами Джеймса, Холла, Фрейда и их последователей; последующие ограничения привели к остановке такой работы. В 1960-е годы исследования в этой области вновь возобновились; с тех пор она значительно расширилась. Новое исследование рассматривает обращение к различным религиям, включая христианство, ислам, иудаизм, а также новые религиозные движения и духовность. Конверсия рассматривается как процесс, который варьируется по скорости, мотивации, контексту и направлению, включая деконверсию. Мировые религии во многом схожи; ученый Стивен Протеро называет это сходство «семейным сходством». Все религии включают в себя ритуалы, священные писания, священные дни и места сбора. Каждая религия дает своим последователям Инструкции о том, как люди должны поступать по отношению к друг другу. Кроме того, три мировые религии – иудаизм, христианство и ислам – имеют общее происхождение: все они восходят к библейской фигуре Авраама. Авторы констатируют, что сегодня мало таких стран, как Казахстан, показывающих пример толерантности среди многоконфессиональных, многонациональных народов с разной этнической и религиозной идентичностью.

Ключевые слова: религиозная конверсия, социальная идентичность, социология религии, религиозная принадлежность, феномен.

Introduction

In terms of religion, according to the population census of Kazakhstan (2022), about 70% of Kazakhstan's population is Muslim (Kazakhstan Population 2022 (Live)). By tradition, the Kazakhs are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School. The Kazakhs adopted Islam gradually, with significant conversion only at the beginning of the XIXth century. Slavs of Kazakhstan are traditionally Orthodox Christians, and the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest Christian denomination in the republic. The majority are Sunnis of the Hanafi School, including ethnic Kazakhs, who make up about 60% of the population, as well as ethnic Uzbeks, Uyghurs, and Tatars. Less than 1% is a part of the Sunni Shafi'i School (mostly Chechens). The southern region of the country has the highest concentration of self-identified practicing Muslims. In total, there are 2680 mosques in the country; all of them are connected with the "Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan" headed by the Supreme Mufti. Eid al-Adha is recognized as a national holiday. Less than 25% of Kazakhstan's population is Russian Orthodox, including ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Other Christian groups include Roman Catholics and Protestants. A total of 342 Orthodox churches, 86 Catholic and 595 Protestant churches and prayer houses are registered (Zhanat, 2020).

Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

The main purpose of this article is to study the transformation of the social identity of Muslim converts in the context of the religious conversion process.

To achieve this purpose, I have identified the following objectives:

1. Analysis of scientific literature and generalization of theoretical approaches to the problem of researches on social identity and to the issue of its formation;

2. Analysis of classical and modern theories, models of sociological explanation of religious conversion.

Religious conversion as a social and psychological process of increasing the religiosity level leads to changes in self-identification and life position at the level of various elements of social identity.

Scientific research methodology

The methods used to study the influence of religious conversion on social identity are based on the theoretical discoveries of domestic and foreign scientists. To achieve results on the topic, a general scientific summary was written, a system-structural, and a comparative analysis was carried out using logical-theoretical, historical methods, gradual, analytical, statistical analysis.

The main part

In modern Kazakh reality, the issue of religious identification is highly relevant. Currently, there is an increase in the degree of religiosity of the population, as well as a relative rejuvenation of the religious component. According to the study of Gaziz Telebaev, the following can be distinguished in the religious identification of Kazakh youth (Telebaev, 2006).

- progressive religiosity: year by year the number of young people converting to religion is growing;
- rejuvenated religiosity: the rejuvenation of the next generation compared to the previous generation;
- superficial religiosity: despite the innate religious identity, the attitude to religious life is formal and situational;

– differentiated religion: in this case, ethnic identity is a differentiating factor, and it determines the various degrees of religiosity (Isaeva, V. B. 2013: 28-36).

It is debatable whether there is a relationship between religious and national identities, which of them is dominant for the majority of the population or rather how positive or harmful is the tendency for an increase in the number of those who want to show themselves first of all as Muslims, and only then as Kazakhs (Martinovich, 2006: 2).

In modern Kazakhstan, there are a number of factors influencing religious identification, and we cannot say about their preconditions. In particular, these are false atheism inherent in Soviet ideology, excessive religiosity in the first years of independence, the absence of an “internal filter” for information waves, and other reasons, the most important of which is the missionary activities, which is the main reason for religious acceptance (Zholdasbekov, 2011).

Some scholars suggest that negative emotional states are the most common reason for religious conversion. Indeed, religion can provide solace in times of depression, anxiety, or hardship. The academic community is divided on this issue, with many arguing that we have a biological predisposition to religious belief that has nothing to do with the prior mood. The Dutch ethologist Nicholas Tinbergen came to the conclusion that the biological basis of human religiosity is: a tendency to dominance and hierarchy, respect for boundaries, the presence of significant, “sacred” places, the locality of the group, the ritualization of activities in general and the rituals of mourning and burial in particular; those features that which allow revealing the moments of origin, evolutionary transition and subsequent formation of human religious ideas. Thus, human ethology becomes the basis for explaining the biological nature of the genesis of religious ideas. The cognitive biases that shape this disposition have been explored in other works and include the need to attribute agents to certain types of events (e.g., gremlins in broken cars) as well as a curiosity about stories that violate our expectations of the world (e.g., gods who are everywhere at the same time).

However, if we have this predisposition, why do some people never convert? Why do some lose faith, while others gain it in adulthood? Obviously, there are individual differences that require explanation. With that in mind, we return to the consolation faith argument, not as a competing theory, but as an additional component, that explains the diversity of views on religion. Religious belief has many re-

wards to offer, including an afterlife, purpose, moral righteousness, the protection of a loving god, and a path to growth towards an ideal. These rewards might appeal to people with an increased fear of death, a sense of social ostracism, increased anxiety about danger or failure, or those who have no direction in life. These states of mind can be caused by any number of experiences, including bereavement, drug addiction, imprisonment, conflict, or unemployment. They can be caused by periods of vulnerability in our life cycle, such as youth, pregnancy, or old age; or genetic and developmental conditions such as anxiety or depressive tendencies. Indeed, women are known to be more religious than men, and this can be explained by intersexual risk and risk aversion characteristic of women.

Psychologically, we are attracted to the rewards that religion offers, and this attraction will intensify for specific people at particular times. As soon as we encounter a desirable religious position, we turn our attention to it and use preconceived reasoning to prove its truth. Those who crave reward the most show the greatest propensity for attention and motivation. With these ideas in mind, we will turn to the most common types of religious conversion.

Throughout Kazakhstan’s history, religious leaders have recognized the value of schools in spreading their faith. The child’s mind is often incapable of rationally examining religious claims, making it more receptive to magic and miracles in sacred books and to the explanations offered for so many unanswered questions about the world (Isaeva, 2013: 28-36). The human ideal, embodied in such figures as Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha, provides a formula for growth and maturation that has particular appeal to child psychology. Finally, having an overwhelming authority that rewards good deeds will satisfy need of a child for positive reinforcement and provide parental influence that some children may actually lack more than the others provide. In underdeveloped countries and in the poorer parts of developed countries, the level of education is low. This results in an inability to examine religious claims on a rational level. However, the most significant reason for conversion in Kazakhstan is lack of wealth. Cross-cultural studies have shown that countries that spend less on welfare will be more religious. Indeed, without protection from turbulent events such as redundancy, high levels of anxiety can cause people to become receptive to the comforts of religion. Missionaries recognize this pattern and go to poorer countries to convert people under the guise of charity (Bulanova, 2013: 132-138).

The next habitat to transform is the hospital bed. All living creatures on Earth share a fear of death that is temporarily heightened by illness or injury. This existential anxiety will prompt us to look for ways to support religious claims about an afterlife. Indeed, experiments with mortality show that the artificial stimulation of the fear of death causes a person to become more religious. Religious believers often take advantage of this temporary state of vulnerability by forcing their faith on the sick.

In addition, the fear of what niche the afterlife a person will take can serve as a motivation for subsequent worship after the wounds are healed. There are many causes of depression that can be relieved with help of religious beliefs. Bereavement can cause people to seek the advice of a priest. The loss of a loved one creates anxiety about the whereabouts of their life essence and reminds us of the fickleness of our existence. As with illness, there is great motivation to believe in an afterlife. However, depression has many causes that can subsequently motivate religious belief. Depression associated with failure can cause people to rethink their methods of achieving success in life. It may be much easier to follow the teachings of a religious prophet if one can be sure of the reality of the rewards. Depression associated with apathy or aimlessness can motivate belief in a goal supported by religion. In addition, the sociality of religious communities may be sufficient to provide a network of support for coping with depression, making it more receptive to the claims of those in that network (Zholdasbekov, 2011).

Prisoners will be aware of their exclusion from society, motivating the search for moral and social norms that could mend relationships. The moral reputation and self-discipline attributed to the pious ones demonstrate the usefulness of religion for this purpose. Thus, those prisoners who recognize the need for change will be drawn to religion. In addition, fear of other prisoners can increase anxiety levels, making the person equally receptive to the comforts of faith. The low level of education of prisoners provides a third route for religious conversion. There are two general types of spiritual experience. The first involves observing beauty on a scale unparalleled in previous experience. The source is seen as superbly benevolent or complex, such that it can only be attributed to a being who shares this absoluteness.

The type of spiritual experience is associated with communion with the divine. This can be caused by feelings of loneliness, although it most likely comes from a desire to feel special and important.

Prophets increase their social and personal importance by telling others that they are divine messengers. Those who most need to feel special will be those who are unable to draw that feeling out of everyday life. In addition, divine communication often includes guidance, and this postponement of decision making can be caused by a lack of confidence in one's own ability to make decisions. Both theories suggest the depressed or anxious state of mind that is characteristic of those who are receptive to religion.

Non-believers are often told to convert otherwise they risk to be eternally tortured in hell.

The human mind is skeptical of what is too good to be true. What threatens us is subject to much less investigative control. Fear of hell is a common motivation for religious conversion that can be especially effective in children and agnostics. However, faith is a spectrum of perceived probability, in which belief is one of the extremes. Since there is no way to disprove the existence of most deities, even the most adamant atheist is somewhat of an agnostic. The rational mind must consider all possibilities and give some value to the words of billions of believers. It is difficult to justify the believer's intentions, but it can be assumed that an absolute faith makes it a suitable method of conversion. However, the instruction to convert when threatened with pain and suffering will only arouse antipathy in a strong mind. Indeed, an imperfect god could only approve this hideous conversion technique. Given that murderers can go to heaven and doctors can go to hell, depending on whether they accept Jesus, perhaps the Christian god is amoral. The irrelevance of previous deeds and the ease of divine accomplishment expose Christianity as the polar opposite of Darwinism and a bulwark for the weak, the sick, and the depraved. Religious texts are full of instructions to fear gods, hell, and prophecies. This creates a desire to please the gods by imitating their actions. Given death, rape, genocide, war, and incest in these texts, this can lead to justifications for atrocities. The problem lies in the undisclosed location of hell: how can one know what is right when it is not clear who is punished in the afterlife? Did the crusaders and inquisitors really go to heaven?

Believers see themselves in helping hell-bound souls get to heaven, and if they are true to their beliefs, we cannot dispute their intentions. However, will a regular addict ever give up the drug? When St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, perhaps he meant it. While we cannot dispute their intentions, it is clear

that believers are looking for people who are vulnerable to their claims. Depending on your point of view, this could be interpreted as preying on the weak or helping those in need (Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan: № 483-IV RK).

All beliefs, especially religious ones, must be either a psychological crutch or a creation in a moment of vulnerability such as alcoholism or mental illness. As someone who grew up in a secular liberal family and is now a Lutheran, this is always the most offensive statement. This last point is related to the second idea, which is that a religious belief is never a philosophical statement. Ask any serious Christian scholar about their faith and he will give you plenty of reasons why they hold to their beliefs. "I think it's just a matter of faith" is not the answer you'll hear from most Christians. People blindly follow faith (and many to the extreme) that has no logical basis: a religion that has many good values often leads to violence.

What I want to call for in this paper is that scholars actually talk to religious people and ask how they became converted. Those who are not converted in their youth almost always have some kind of disastrous experience that hastened their conversion. A significant amount of studies has been done on patterns of conversion to "alternative religions" or "new religious movements" (Yablokov, 1994: 368). A disproportionate amount of these studies and related theorizing involved the claim that recruitment to certain "cults" was essentially involuntary in the sense that powerful methods of "brainwashing", "mind control" or "coercive persuasion" made the processes of conversion and commitment psychologically coercive and non-consensual, despite their formally voluntary status.

Although various forms of the mind control thesis have received support from self-proclaimed "cult experts", most scientists who have actually done research on the topic view their results as contradicting the thesis. A proponent of the "brainwashing thesis" notes that brainwashing entails "a useful, but scientifically inaccurate concept that refers to a variety of complex phenomena resulting in impairment of an individual's cognitive and social functioning". According to Enroth, scientists have found extremist cult recruitment and indoctrination procedures that are effective in inducing behavioral changes in recruits. Such changes are usually described as relatively sudden and dramatic, resulting in reduced personal autonomy, increased dependency, and the adoption of a new identity. The psycho-spiritual conditioning mechanisms used by cults are reported

to affect the ability of cult members to remember, concentrate, and exercise full independent judgment. Members of the group are subjected to intense ideological pressure, which includes the manipulation of commitment mechanisms, so that recruits adopt a position of rigid loyalty and unquestioning obedience to the leadership.

In this regard, contemporary writers have previously identified what they see as a detrimental "external model" for addressing conflicting movements. "There seems to be an operational model in which the alleged cultist psychological coercion is seen as fully equivalent to physical coercion, so that the "psychologically coerced" individual is just as unequivocally under someone's control as the physical prisoner..."

The main elements of the model include:

1) the idea of the complete submission of the victim, who loses the ability to show free will;

2) the rejection of the idea that converts are drawn to cults because of motivations and orientations that make them predisposed to being attracted to a particular type of movement (to the extent that such predisposing motives are acknowledged, they tend to be downplayed or trivialized and discarded as independent variables);

3) an emphasis on alleged hypnotic processes and induced trance states and their consequences in terms of suggestibility, dissociation and disorientation;

4) a statement about conditioning processes or other supposedly deterministic processes of influence that allegedly suppress free will;

5) the specification of impaired cognition or defective way of thinking patterns that are allegedly the result of conditioning, hyperemotionality, and/or trance states;

6) the process of hypnotic conditioning – indoctrination – is seen as an operation to introduce false ideas into the consciousness of the victim;

7) finally, brainwashing is seen as the creation of a false self or cult identity that is superimposed on a person's true identity.

Thus, brainwashing claims entail a conversion/commitment pattern dominated by external forces (as opposed to internal or authentic self-related forces) that determine religious choice.

In essence, it is argued that the brainwashed religious choice is irrational, that is, based on emotion, instinct, exhaustion, and automatic conditioning rather than reason and conscious consideration. As one eminent psychiatrist once argued, conversion to "cults" does not entail true conversion, but rather a

“pseudo-conversion” that involves “mindless participation in group activities, a schedule designed to deprive followers of sleep, and a conditioned reflex that is reinforced by group interaction”. Other formulations include references to “disorientation”, “hypnotic trance”, “click”, etc (Bulanova, 2013: 132-138). Essentially, traditional utilitarian individualism and instrumental rationality are prioritized at the expense of intuition, insight, mystical gnosis and the intense emotion of the crusaders against cult brainwashing. Choices based on non-rational factors such as emotions, intuition, or unspeakable mystical experiences are implicitly dismissed as regressive primitive responses.

Religious conversion can be seen as the achievement of a new (religious) self. In this sense, conversion overlaps with brainwashing, which also entails the acquisition of a new, although imaginary, false and inauthentic “self”. Thus, both concepts – conversion and brainwashing – can be associated with the so-called “self-alienation theory”. Starting from the “Axial Age”, about 1000 BC to 1000 AD, the great religions of salvation had as their basic concept the duality of the ‘true’ and the ‘false’ self. As Weber notes, all historical religions of salvation have shared the notion of a false phenomenal or natural self that the new convert must overcome through pain or some kind of torment, suffering, or endless malaise. The adherent of religion of salvation is stimulated to achieve a “new self” that is often seen as embodying values that challenge the instrumental, utilitarian, or legalistic rationality that Jesus attributes to the Scribes and Pharisees in the New Testament.

Thus, the main spiritual movements of the self-alienation theory have rejected utilitarian instrumental rationality in favor of irrational or non-rational experience, which is reduced to interaction with the hidden self at a deeper level. A number of fundamental conceptualizations of the stages of socio-cultural and religious evolution in the world and in Kazakhstan have highlighted the growing structural differentiation of socio-cultural spheres (including the growing “separation of church and state”) and the subsequent emphasis on individual autonomy and the ability and significance of social and religious choice. Transition points between stages of development often witnessed the emergence of dynamic and controversial religious movements in Kazakhstan, whose prophets formulated new concepts of religious identity and spiritual self-transformation. Such movements tend to develop in an environment riddled with anomie while the institutionalized cul-

tural model dissolves. These transition points emphasize religious conflict and controversy.

Medieval society and its established Church (Christendom) entailed an “organic social ethic” that blunted the power of Christianity as a radical religion of salvation. Salvation was based on a sacramental system and was not considered problematic by the respective participants. Powerful self-transformation and emotional intensity were unnecessary. Some of the dissident, reformist, or pietist movements that emerged during the transition to capitalist modernity have been called “religions of the heart”, which focused on inner spiritual apotheosis and rejected traditional selves with no concern for radical salvation.

A lot of these movements originally developed as reform or “enthusiastic” movements, either in Catholicism or in the established Protestant Church; however they were branded as heresies or other odious aberrations and were more or less forced to develop their own distinctive doctrines and organizations; consequently, assimilation into such groups became a form of religious switching or conversion to a new independent church or sect. Inconclusive “religious wars” raged, which eventually led to support for “religious tolerance” and the concept of “separation of church and state” in terms of governmental neutrality between competing denominations (Vasilev, 2014: 379).

Many Muslims around the world choose not to join a particular sect, but voluntarily declare that they are “just Muslims”. This affiliation is most common in Central Asia, as well as in Southern and Eastern Europe; in both regions, the average percentage of those who say they are just Muslim is half or more. In Kazakhstan, almost three-quarters (74%) of Muslims voluntarily give this answer, as do more than six out of ten Muslims in Albania (65%) and Kyrgyzstan (64%). The classical religious paradigm of conversion is heavily influenced by the idea of sudden conversion. The prototype of the sudden conversion is the biblical case of conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. Sudden transformations are very emotional, but not necessarily rational. In these cases, the convert is a passive agent who is acted upon by external forces, and the conversion entails a dramatic transformation of self. Emotion dominates this dramatic, irrational transformation leading to a shift in self and belief, followed by a change in behavior (Platonov, 1971: 89).

For sudden converts, conversion is not a prolonged process, but rather happens on a single occasion and is permanent thereafter. As a rule, sudden

conversions occur in childhood and are purely emotional experiences. Often, sudden conversions are the result of overwhelming anxiety and guilt over sin that become unbearable, making conversion a functional solution to alleviate these emotions. Emotional factors have been found to correlate with sudden conversions; these correlations appear to suggest a causal relationship, citing work in which 17 sudden converts had dominant emotional factors influencing their conversion. Sudden converts only score high on emotionality after conversion, not before. Neither experimental nor longitudinal studies have shown a true causality between emotions and sudden conversion.

Results and discussion

In the modern conversion paradigm, we consider the conversion process as a highly intelligent, cautious, gradual process. This modern model is the opposite of the classical model, and Strickland as a contrast to sudden transformation defined gradual transformation. As a rule, gradual transformations do not occur after a single significant event, but rather differ empirically and proceed thoughtfully over a long time. Gradual conversion can be identified by a conscious pursuit of a goal without any decisive point where the conversion is initiated or transformed. The process takes place cognitively and much less emotionally, without emotional crisis, guilt or sin. The median age at presentation was studied by Johnson (Platonov, 1971: 89) Roberts (Stetskevich, 2006: 299) and Gillespie and was found to be between 15 and 16 years of age, corresponding to over 40 years. These results are consistent with the conclusion of Erikson (Platonov, 1971: 89) that it is at this age that people explore the world around them and form their identity. However, Silverstein (Isaeva, 2013: 28-36) pointed out that the sample tends to be biased, as participants are rarely older than 20 years of age. Conversion studies are, to a lesser extent, parallel to deconversion studies. Studies on deconversion have been divided into two subgroups: new religious movements and major groups (Liýtova, 2007: 305).

There are many reasons why people reject new religious movements. The key factor to consider is that many times this happens in isolation from the outside world; when this isolation is broken, deconversion can occur. Followers may become frustrated when their efforts do not bring success or social change and eventually abandon the movement. Finally, followers may become disillusioned with the movement or its leader and leave the movement. De-

conversion can happen suddenly or be a gradual process. However, those who have been a follower for more than a year tend to go through confrontational, emotional, and dramatic processes of deconversion. A minority of mainstream religion followers does reject their faith and deconvert. Apostates make up only 7% of the deconversion from the mainstream religion. However, 80% will leave and return later.

Generally, there are two measures of separation for the dominant religion. In the first, behavioral type, followers will follow one month or longer without attending a religious service. The second type of separation, faith, involves followers going away for a year or more without religion as a part of their lives. Apostasy is the renunciation of a person's religious obligations and the adoption of a non-religious lifestyle or joining another faith movement. Deconversion is the process by which new converts leave their faith. Revived commitment to religion. It may be a religion in which a person was brought up or followed by accident. Also referred to as "born again" or "rebirth". In some religions, believers follow procedures designed to induce intensification experiences (Yablokov, 1994: 368). A change in the religious identity of a group without a radical change as an individual. An example is the change of religious denomination. Different religious involvement throughout an individual's life. An individual may fall away from a religion only to return later, or periodically fall away from the faith.

Religious conversion is one of the most significant and important factors in the dynamics of religiosity. Believers who have experienced a religious conversion have a higher level of religiosity. In addition, the signs of religious conversion are significantly associated with such components of religiosity as behavioral and cognitive.

Conclusion

Religious conversion has long played a major role in the transformation of people, societies, and cultures worldwide. However, in recent decades, academic and personal interest in religious conversion has burgeoned, along with increasing controversy about its ethics, direction, and social, cultural, political consequences. Religious identity is a deeply political fact that takes different shapes in different political configurations. Conversions are therefore suspect and dangerous border crossings, since the converts move from one political category to the other. This is not only true for Christianity, but also for Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and most other ex-

panding religions. "Conversion", as well as "brain-washing", is usually seen as having to do with the emergence (or re-establishment) of a religious self that breaks with pre-conversion personal or group

identity. However, from a (specific) religious point of view, this is indeed a good thing, not a bad one. Both cult and anti-cult perspectives are subvarieties of the all-pervading "self-alienation theory".

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