

Extremism and “Variations in Vital Tone”

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Abstract: This article argues that extremism has its roots in a system of faith which is far from the one of the main culture, and it permits a reduced flexibility or tolerance towards other faiths. These faiths can be religious, political, or often a mixture of both. Even from ancient times religion was considered to be the source of extremism problem, the willingness to die for a cause being, perhaps, the most extreme characteristic of religious extremism. Extremism is an individual or group reaction against threat, even if it does not correspond to reality.

Keywords: *extremism, vital tone, radicalism, religion, fanaticism.*

The roots of extremism, which the ancients, starting with the historian Polybios (208-120 B.C.) and further, with the poet Titus Lucretius Carus (97-58 B.C.), identified in the naivety of human nature, have come to expand like an octopus over time, even reaching radicalism, the price paid by mankind always being the benevolent “price of credulity”. For “from all living beings, man, which believes is the most adroit, is the easiest to fool” (Polybios, 1966: V 75). The communities from the oldest times, “placed a high value on acquaintances, because they considered the one with the most people which respected and obeyed him as the one to fear” (Polybios, 1968, ll 17). Lucretius synthesised the impact of these anomalies from the natural existential conduct, blaming an inexplicable naivety: “Wretched man, what have you given to divine power / Such mighty deeds, such cruel wrath! / So much pain and groans you have caused yourself, man, alone, / Such sufferings for us, so many tears for our children” (Lucretius 1967, 33). Even more trenchant, in his *Stabbing of Iphigenia*, Lucretius highlighted the deep extremis character of the kings, as if anticipating the endless debates of our time: “Don’t you think that you now/Embrace an ungodly doctrine/ And follow the path of crime. On the contrary,/ Religion was that which/ Devised iniquity and blasphemous deeds”. (Lucretius 1967: 21).

So the ancients deciphered all roots of extremism, including asceticism and bigotry, both leading to the stigmatisation of the thinking creature, of some “religious people who have come to accept a degree of moderation which, without doubt, would have made them seem heretical in the eyes of many of their ancestors”, but also in the eyes of the bigots of the day, for the simple fact that

they "suggested that religion itself, the whole of religion, is the source of the extremism problem" (Kressel 2007: 24). There are, however, religious authors who support this idea, thrusting it into the religious beginnings of mankind, suggesting that "extremism is an ancient problem, dating back to idolatry... The Idolaters, whom Christians confronted in ancient times, argued that idols should be worshipped and honoured just like God. Those who didn't do this were severely punished" (Teodorescu 2014: 18). Though "Christianity and Islam appear as two forms of rejection of Judaism" (Barthelémy 2002: 212), it means that they still are extremists at the core, because even beliefs and practices are considered "extremist" when they are believed to be infallibly correct. Through extremist mythology, the complexity of the world is simplified, charismatic qualities are attributed to religious leaders, and a sharp separation is made between believers and unbelievers. The willingness to die for a cause is perhaps the most extreme characteristic of religious extremism." (Neale 2015: 4).

Essentially, in the "field of vitality" (Pătrașcu 2014: 207), "life, faith, death, love, adventure, tragedy, and fear make up the very metaphysical roots of man." (Popa 1937: 121), through weird, or maybe natural "variations in vital tone", the human being can detach himself from the usual rhythm and the average ambience of life. "These states of absolute lucidity or total deviation, of exaltation or collapse, represent a departure from the average way of life" (Biberi 1939: 39). More directly and simply put, the miraculous beauty of life and in general human happiness, perishable and fragile as a flower, has always been disliked, by ascetics and aggressive losers, as if predestined for the "ideology of hate" (Bin Ali 2016: 166), and which replaces joy, bliss, existential despair, taken to its extreme limits. Paraphrasing Grigore Popa, we could claim that not only philosophy, but also religion, as "existential thinking, has its source not in wonder, as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and with them the whole world said, but in despair", so in maladjustment and, as a consequence, in a despotism of the self, unconscious of itself, but assumed as a mythical scenario, by assuming beliefs and practices that are fanatical, and "beliefs are fanatical if they are held to be infallibly correct and if there is an organized attempt to impose them on the rest of society. This is associated with the intolerance of beliefs and moral convictions that differ strongly from one's own." (Neal 20217: 35).

The dialectical portrait of the extremist is very well represented by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who says that an individual behaves like an extremist "when he doesn't allow another point of view; when he claims his views as exclusive, when he doesn't permit the possibility of a difference". Extremism has its roots in a system of faith, which is far from the one of the main culture, and it "permits a reduced flexibility or tolerance towards other faiths. These faiths can be religious, political, or often a mixture of both" (Willis 2011: 14).

Unfortunately, intolerance towards dialogue exists in one form or another, more or less accepted, in almost each of us. The more "ideas" or "fantasies" (Eliade called myths, through a precise translation from Greek, "lies") are merely mimetic reproductions without any genuine existential imprint, without "any exercise of spiritual self-examination," the more the intolerance, and hence the extremism of each of us, is more definite. Extremism

can be defined, but doing this is an exercise of spiritual self-examination. "The definitions of extremism, from our perspective, are like looking at our own shadow... Extremism can only be fought, but it cannot be extirpated from planet Earth... Extremism is an individual or group reaction against threat. The feeling of threat does not correspond to reality. Extremism is an excessive response to the stimulus of the threatening agent. Extremism therefore symbolizes the distorted and infected personal needs of the extremist. Critical human issues and social needs are showcases of distorted and infected personal problems. The extremist must punish and be punished by those whom he opposes" (Oates 1966: 37).

Religious extremism cannot be mistaken for any of the fundamental astral themes of faith, because from ancient times and everywhere, starting from *Taoist texts*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Zend-Avesta (Vendîdâd)*, the *Voluspa*, the *Talmud*, the *Bible*, the *Quran*, and ending with Protestant and modern reinterpretations, the thread of knowledge remains the same, because as Augustin emphasized, even "the religion that we now call Christianity has always existed" (Augustin 1998: 113), because "when there is no true religion, there are no true virtues" (Augustine, 1998: 961). Subsequent detachments, each time "the Shepherd lost his flock," as some ancient demythologized profane songs say, have resulted not from a loss of faith but from the religious authority's deviations. The most serious and merciless occurred through the brutal imposition of urban Christianity on the traditionalist world of pagans (villages), around which, the "temples" of the sun and moon were burned and demolished, and the priests ("devils") were cruelly killed, while they murmured, "Why do you torment me? What harm have I done to you?". It is enough to read *The Tripod*, and you will see that every Christian "martyr" has a story, starting with Cyril (Cyrillus), Archbishop of Alexandria. In the year 412 AD, he personally killed Hypatia, the daughter of the mathematician and astronomer Theon, the leader of the Neoplatonic school. By that time, the library of Alexandria had already been set on fire in the year 391 when Cyril's uncle, "Theophilus, personally led Christians in the assault on the temple of Serapis, followed by the burning of the Library of Alexandria."¹ The Vatican condemns or rather soon regrets "those past realities" but still keeps Cyril as one of the four pillars of the Christian Church.

The majority of studies conducted and published in the last century on the topic of religious extremism primarily focus on Islamic extremism (Palmer, Monte, *Islamic Extremism: Causes, Diversity and Challenges*, New York, 2008; Kenney, Jeffrey T., *Muslim rebels: Kharijites and the politics of extremism in Egypt*, Oxford, 2006; Kundnani, Arrun, *The Muslims are coming!: Islamophobia, extremism and the domestic war terror*, London, 2014 etc.). However, within Islam, there is extremism among those who advocate following the example of Muhammad (who killed only the bearers of arms from a Jewish citadel that betrayed him in a decisive confrontation with idolatrous Arabs), while others are entirely peaceful, relying only on the teachings of Muhammad.

¹ The burning of the library in Alexandria also represented the loss of the largest archive of sources and knowledge from the ancient world.

In Christianity, there is also a millennial extremism between the "universals" (Catholics) and the "true" (Orthodox), as well as a devastating secular extremism between these two remnants of the "bride of Jesus" – the Church – and the Protestants. The wars between Catholics and Protestants have been so numerous and prolonged that they have thrown Europe somewhere near the beginnings of Latin civilization. Christian religious extremism, which has no connection to Christianity, just as Muslimism has nothing in common with factions of the Islamic religion, manifests itself covertly and hidden through relentless brainwashing and a gross violation of the covenant of faith, the Creed, in which "I believe in one God" turns to dust in the face of fanatical bigots who lose even the last shred of their identity.

Due to bigotry, as an individual extremist phenomenon, in which fanaticism substitutes real accomplishments in life, where divinity is part of everything and all, the "ideology of hate," conditioned and imposed by the secret impulses of ascetics who assail divinity, operates through exhausting self-censorship, limiting all productive and creative capacities of humanity. Bigotry manifests itself in all religions and factions, although, at the level of belief, truth is one and unique. Its honouring is formulated, as a prophecy mostly already confirmed, by a "pagan" virgin born in a village in Zarand, and therefore called Sibylla Zarandyna from Eritrea. The mastermind of the acrostic "Jésus Christus Dei Filius Salvator" (written with the first letter of each new word), an acrostic with which I believe it is appropriate to conclude, conclusively, not moralising, this barely outlined "offence" of opinion, confirmed by others but not explicitly formulated as such²:

² The text we refer to is an acrostic in Romanian (the original text consulted):

*I*vită e prorocirea hotărâtă în umedul pământ.
*E*l, Regele Cerurilor, va veni în veacurile următoare:
*S*e va încarna în trup ca să judece lumea.
*U*manitatea va crede în El, crezând în Dumnezeu
*C*u sfinții se va înălța lumea, căci deja s-a sfârșit.
*S*e vor înfățișa judecării lui drepte și sufletul, și carnea:

*C*a tufișurile de pe ogorul necultivat arată leagănul lumii.
*R*enunța-vor oamenii la idoli și vor primi comoara Lui:
*E*l va fi focul care arde pământul, marea și cerul
*I*ar gloatele îl vor căuta, înspăimântate de porțile iadului.
*S*fânta iluminare va elibera carnea de frică,
*T*oți cei vinovați vor arde în focul veșnic.
*O*culte fapte le va dezvălui, fiecare va ști
*S*ecretele timpului și lumina lui Dumnezeu va pătrunde în inimi.
*D*ureroase vor fi plânsul și jalea, și scrâșnirea dinților.
*E*i nu vor mai vedea razele soarelui,
*I*ar pleiada de stele nu le va mai auzi plânsul în cor.

*F*i-va Coroana Cerului, în splendoarea luminii lumii.
*I*lumina-va în văi și în profunzimi ignorate.
*L*ui i se va adresa omul, înălțându-se prin el.
*I*ar munții înalți și marea albastră vor fi asemeni
*U*rmându-l
*S*au vor crăpa sub lavă vulcanică.

Presented is the determined prophecy
He, the King of the Heavens, will come in the forthcoming ages:
He will incarnate in the flesh to judge the people.
Humanity will believe in Him, believing in God
With the saints, the world will rise, because it has already ended.
Both soul and flesh will face His righteous judgment:

Like the bushes in the untilled field, looks the cradle of the world.
The people will disavow idols and receive His treasure:
He will be the fire that burns the earth, the sea and the sky
And the mobs will seek him, frightened by the gates of hell.
The holy illumination will free the flesh from fear,
All those culpable will burn in the eternal fire.
He will reveal hidden deeds; everyone will know,
The secrets of time and the light of God will permeate hearts.
Painful will be the weeping and mourning, and the gnashing of teeth.
The rays of the sun they will not see,
And the Pleiades of stars will no longer hear their collective lament.

The Crown of the Heavens will be, in the splendour of the moonlight.
It will illuminate valleys and neglected depths.
Man will address Him, rising through him.
The lofty mountains and the azure sea will be alike
Following Him
Or they will burst under volcanic lava.

A trumpet-like sound will then be heard
Covering with a peal what is under the sky.
World, you will get weary of sighs
You will regret your many sins:
Then chaos and hell.
Tragically, they will open the Earth.
People will be equal before the Heavenly Emperor.
Struck by the fire and the brimstone that will fall from the sky. (*n.t.*)

Augustine 1998: 113)

*Se va auzi apoi un sunet ca de trompetă
Acoperind cu un hohot ceea ce este sub cer.
Lume, vei osteni de suspine
Vei regreta multele tale păcate:
Apoi haos și iad
Tragic vor deschide Pământul.
Oamenii vor fi egali înaintea Împăratului Ceres
Răpuși de focul și pucioasa ce se vor năruia din cer.*

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