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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Hierarchical Rationality of Religious Beliefs System in Islamic and Christian Traditions

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Abstract: The rationality of religious belief systems indicates longitudinal relationships, so that each benefit from pertained rationality based on ontological place within the web of religious knowledge. Therefore, it can be possible to consider three layers of religious beliefs i.e. fundamental, middle, and marginal. Here fundamental beliefs are the most rational, followed by middle and finally marginal. Concerning Islamic and Christian traditions, there can be two beliefs, believing in one God and the hereafter, that are considered fundamental ones. There are also middle beliefs between the two mainstream religions that are about divine attributes, the relationship between God and human beings, and so on so forth. Finally, the level of marginal beliefs of two are about the sacredness of places, times, events, things, persons, situations etc. This research wants to show that although all religious beliefs have been expanded and changed under the influence of epistemic and non-epistemic factors, t fundamental beliefs have been more stable, immutable, universal, and compatible. Middle beliefs of Islam and Christianity, are generally based on believers' plural understandings of religious texts and under aforementioned factors. Thus, in order to study the rationality of religions and their traditions, it is necessary to pay closer attention to how and under what conditions (epistemic and non-epistemic) their web of beliefs are formed and shaped.

Keywords: Hierarchical Rationality; Islamic Theology; Christian Theology; Religious Belief.

Introduction

Recognizing the system of beliefs in many religious traditions is becoming increasingly important. This matter increases our knowledge of similarities and variations in religious beliefs among such theological traditions, as well as our ability to evaluate them. In this research, we try to use a suitable technique and perspective to compare Islamic and Christian theological traditions. Our recommended approach, which is called *Hierarchical Rationality,* is a longitudinal approach into the structure of religion, in the sense that there are some longitudinal relationships and causal dependencies among religious beliefs. This study attempts to explore and analyze the religious beliefs system of Islamic and Christian theologies in general using the variables of this technique. I want to emphasize the relevance of the diversity of Islamic and Christian perspectives. So, by studying Islamic and Christian theological traditions, it seems that some beliefs, like monotheism or believing in one God, and the Hereafter, can be considered as fundamental ones. Beliefs such as divine attributes, divine agency, the Prophet's properties,

characteristics of Jesus Christ, the teachings of trinity and incarnation, the doctrine of sacrifice, and so on in Christian tradition, and some beliefs like oldness or creation of the Quran, unity or separation of divine essence and attributes, Muslim Caliph and Imam's attributes, and so on can be considered as middle beliefs. Also, there are some pertaining to the sacredness of people, times, situations, spaces, events, and things that can be considered as marginal beliefs within both Islamic and Christian traditions.

Through more study on some virtues and external samples of three levels of fundamental, middle, and marginal beliefs in Islamic and Christian traditions, it is tried to show how their level of rationality are based on their different ontological position. First, it is necessary to review semantically and conceptually some virtues of hierarchical rationality and religious beliefs system. But, before focusing on our discussion regarding the semantics of hierarchical rationality of the religious beliefs system, it is necessary to note that this issue has some historical backgrounds. Some ancient philosophers like

Aristotle, middle age philosophers like Thomas Aquinas and modern philosophers like Clifford, Descartes, and Leibnitz, have propounded some theories regarding justification of the rationality of religious beliefs, that traditional fundamentalism and extreme rationalism can be considered as two main theories.

There are also some modern philosophers like Plantinga and Swinburne who try to defend the rationality of theism by using their own approach. Plantinga pays more attention to differences between basic and non-basic beliefs and argues for the existence of God as a basic belief based on human's common sense. Swinburne also defends the rationality of theism based on its more explanation and coherence. And some contemporary philosophers argue the rationality of religious beliefs based on their practical results.[1] Although our research has partly benefitted from such theories, but not imitated from them, since the significant our research is introducing a new approach through consolation and combining previous theories in order to reach to a mostly efficient one called the Hierarchical Rationality.

Hierarchical Rationality Semantics and Religious Beliefs System

Understanding the conception and meaning of rationality has special significance with regard to applying it in the phrase "Hierarchical Rationality" and assessing the measure of rationality of a religious belief system. There are different attitudes concerning the rationality in the humanities and social sciences. Also, plural divisions of it are rendered, such as theoretical, practical, instrumental, axiological, and deontological, which can help us recognize more fully the rationality of beliefs system. Rationality,

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[1] . Regarding mentioned theories, see as follow resources:

- Stenmark, Mikael (1995), Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life: A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality, University of Norte Dame, Indiana, USA.
- Swinburne, Richard (2001), Epistemic Justification, Oxford, Clarendon.

- Swinburne, Richards (1993), The Coherence of Theism, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Revised Edition.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1993), Warrant: the Current Debate, Oxford, and Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, Alvin (1979), What is Justified Beliefs? In: Justification and Knowledge, ed. G. Pappas, Dordrecht, Holland.

generally, is defined as the right argument, that is, whatever belief is compatible with a logical argument, is a rational belief and has its own required rationality. According to another definition, being rational means able to argue correctly. People always consider something rational that can be proved logically. Those arguments are rational if they are demonstrated logically, and those principles are called rational if they are right as the rules of logical arguments (Nickerson, 2008:13).

Given these definitions, some important virtues of rationality are introduced as follows: First, rationality is a normative conception, and the issue is what we have to do. It instructs us on how to articulate and manage whatever we do (Stenmark, 1995: 23). That is, rationality is related to whatever we should do and shouldn't do, as well as theoretical and practical norms. Therefore, a human being is a rational being if he/she applies his/her reason and epistemic faculties rightly and responsibly. Considering rationality as a normative value, indicates a humane obligation and duty regarding it. In other words, rationality is a kind of duty, responsibility, and commitment (Stenmark, 1995: 23). Second, rationality is

mostly a gradual, hierarchical, and relative reality, not a simple, and one-layered. When we say it is gradual and hierarchical, it means it depends on a human being's plural epistemic and practical abilities. Then there is no fixed and stable understanding of rationality among human beings. Meanwhile, a human being's rational responsibility is based on their level of understanding and rational abilities (Fanaei, 2005: 170; Mahmudkelayeh & others, 2017:43-44). Third, the criterion of rationality is justification, not argumentation in the Aristotelian sense. In fact, since a human being has reason, he/she needs reason regarding accepting whatever is seen, heard, and other information that is introduced to him/her. While reason's confirmation is dependent on a suitable and convincing argument regarding the truthiness of our information. The argument is, whatever justifies our claims concerning rationally, and leads to their confirmation in our mind, is rational (Fanaei, 2005: 189). Fourth, reason and being rational are required for us to be human. As a prominent virtue of human beings, we need enlightening to guide us in our lives. Reason is a human being's epistemic criterion and needs

clarification for arguing. So, without recognizing the credibility of a method and path, one can't have an argument for doing something (Brown, 1988: 36). Fifth, rationality has both universality, changeability, and stability; that is, while it has individual and social aspects, it is possible to consider stable and universal rationality for a society. In fact, those who have the same rational beliefs in common situations, can have the same rationality. Sixth, there are different methods and criteria for assessing rationality. Two samples of the criteria of internal rationality are as follows: 1. all accepted prepositions must be internally compatible, and 2. the logical consequences of whatever is accepted, must also be accepted (Stenmark, 1995: 227 & 70).

Therefore, we can say the rationality of religious beliefs has these virtues and criteria: 1. Based on argumentation and logical inferences; 2. Having internal coherency without any contradiction; 3. Acceptable by most people, especially wise scholars; 4. Correspondence with most circumstances and aims of people's lives; 5. Having an effective role related to improving mundane and spiritual life; 6. More corresponding to logical axioms and customary understanding; 7. Simplicity and the possibility to understand and explain by more people. Regarding mentioned virtues and criteria, it can be said that there some theories concerning rationality and justifiability of religious beliefs, like coherentism, fundamentalism, pragmatism, reliabilism and reformed epistemology which have tried to introduce some methods for rational justification of religious beliefs.[2] Our introduced criteria have tried to consulate and combine the merits of aforementioned theories and give mostly comprehensive criteria that can encompass most branches of religious rationality. It means, our understanding of

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[2]. Regarding justification theories, see as follow resources:

- Armstrong, William 91993), the Reliability of Sense Perception, Ithaca, NY: Cornel University.
- Bonjour, Laurence (1985), the Structure of Empirical Knowledge, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Lehrer, Keith (1992), Theory of Knowledge, London, Routledge.
- Shieber, Joseph, H. (2019), Theories of Knowledge; How to Think about what you know, USA, the Teaching Company Press.

rationality pays more attention to significant justifier like coherency, having pragmatic efficacy, being logical, getting through internal or external reliable process and other required standards.

So, considering different meanings and levels of rationality, takes some foundations for Hierarchical Rationality of Religious Beliefs System, as a philosophical study of the rationality of religion and religious beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to explain our definitions of religion, religious beliefs, and hierarchy. Here, our purpose and definition of religion are mostly divine and Abrahamic religions, then, are defined as a set of beliefs, morality, and social and religious practices (deeds) that can be called as religious traditions. In this definition, beliefs are the basis and foundation of morality and religious acts; that is, morality and legal deeds are originated from beliefs, and that reciprocal relations between religious beliefs and obligations of social life can form religious traditions. Our rational understanding of religious beliefs and traditions shows that religion is not comprised of interrupted and piecemeal beliefs, but it is constituted of a set

of beliefs that have vertical and horizontal epistemological and ontological relations so that some of them support and nourish others. So, we can consider the system of religious beliefs, and maybe religious traditions, to consist of three layers and stages, including fundamental, middle, and marginal beliefs, which internally have ontological and epistemological relationships, so that, if fundamental beliefs are subjected to challenge and are canceled, two middle and marginal beliefs that naturally are based on fundamental ones, are also subjected to challenge and cancel, but if marginal beliefs are subjected to challenge or cancel, this fact has no challenge toward middle and fundamental ones (See: Bonjour, 2009: 312; 1990: 41-42).

The expression "hierarchy" is also used concerning religious beliefs system. Like ontological hierarchy, it can at least clarify two ontological and epistemological virtues of that system. Hierarchy ontologically indicates fundamental beliefs in the first place, then middle beliefs in the second place, and finally marginal ones in the third place. These different places of religious beliefs show their ontological and epistemological perfections

and functions within a religion and the religious beliefs system. Hierarchical relations of beliefs, epistemologically, indicate their different participation of rationality. That is, all religious beliefs have no equal rationality, but based on their ontological place and level, the kind of their rationality is different, which can be called *Hierarchical Rationality of Religious Beliefs System*. Here it is necessary to notice that there is possible to consider the system of religious beliefs, not only hierarchically that have internal longitudinal relations, but also as transversely that have external relations, so that sometimes, not always, maybe marginal beliefs can affect and change the form and meaning of intermediate or fundamental ones. Meantime marginal beliefs have under influences of human beings' emotions and feeling that can affect the form and meaning of middle and fundamental beliefs.

Fundamental Beliefs

Fundamental beliefs are the basis and foundation of all religious beliefs and are the beginning of the chain of religious beliefs, so that other beliefs are, in many ways, derived from them. As a result, the first virtue of

fundamental beliefs is that they are limited and few in number. In this case, studying the traditions of Abrahamic religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Jews, clarifies this fact. In each of these religions, there are two fundamental beliefs, like believing in one God, and the Day of Judgment. Although there is not complete equality among these religions' believers regarding understanding of fundamental beliefs, these two beliefs are ontologically common (See: Javadi Amoli, 2008: 52). Among two fundamental beliefs, believing in God has the most common virtues regarding revealed religions; that is, all of them believe in the Almighty, Powerful, All-knowing, the Creator, and Absolute God.

The differences among believers appear when they are subjected to pluralism in trying to understand and interpret God's attributes and the quality of resurrection (See: Peterson, 2017: 11; Ratzinger, 2000: 54). The second virtue of fundamental beliefs is having the most rationality or being more rational. Since they are beliefs that constitute the basis of all other beliefs, and their validity depends on them. As a result, fundamental beliefs should be rationally acquired and understood by

believers. The third virtue of fundamental beliefs is their self-evidence and clarification for human innate; in other words, these are the beliefs that most people have more agreement on them (Ahmadi, 2005: 97). The fourth virtue of fundamental beliefs is their universality and comprehensiveness. Specifically, they are accepted in most divine or non-divine religious traditions, although maybe there are some different or partial interpretations. The fifth property of fundamental beliefs is that there is the least possibility of making a mistake concerning believing and accepting them. Because of their epistemic priority to subsequent beliefs, the primary application of reason for assessing and accepting them, as well as the participation of most people in their rational review, causes the possibility of error to be minimized. By considering the mentioned notes, the sixth virtue of fundamental beliefs is that their relations to next beliefs are hierarchical and vertical; that is, fundamental beliefs are the basis of next beliefs and are placed at a nobler and higher level than they exist, and they are the origin of next beliefs' epistemic and ontological validity. The seventh virtue of fundamental beliefs is their

less or non-impressionableness from believers' presuppositions and having the most stability, immutability, and universality within a religious theological tradition, or even some religious traditions. In other words, fundamental beliefs, due to their high rationality, compatibility with external facts, and human innate, have the least measures of changing among believers and are mostly without or a bit change in a religious theological tradition. The eight virtues of fundamental beliefs are that they do not rely on the validity of religious texts and do not imitate some irrational sources, such as ancient beliefs, and that they are mostly rational, self-evident, and compatible with human innate. In other words, the rationality of these beliefs not only negates any possibility of imitation but also denies relying on the validity of religious texts, and shows that the validity of some religious texts, like the Quran, the Bible, and religious narrations, is demonstrable only through the authority of fundamental beliefs. That is, they are the epistemic sources of other epistemic beliefs and religious sources.

Considering the introduced descriptions of fundamental beliefs, it seems there are only two

beliefs, including believing in one God and the Hereafter, that can be taken into account as two fundamental common beliefs within Islamic and Christian theological traditions. These two beliefs primarily possess all or most virtues of fundamental beliefs, such as stability, universality, compatibility with human beings' innate, rational principles, independency from religious texts' authority, less possibility of believers' errors for accepting them, and so on. Approximately all Muslims and Christians, with very few differences, have such beliefs. These two beliefs also link Islam and Christianity to each other as two main Abrahamic and monotheistic religions. Regarding common beliefs between Islam and Christianity, it is possible to speak about God who has all infinite attributes; that is, Muslims and Christians believe in omniscience, omnipotence, all benevolence, and the most merciful and personal God. According to the Corinthian treatise, there is no other god besides Him... because we have one God, namely, the Father, from whom all things are originated, and we exist for Him (Corinthian: 8, 4-6). It also is more emphasized in the Quran as a Muslim divine book and in Islamic

theology to believe in the oneness of God (Quran, 122, 1-4; Tabatabaei, 1975: 111-113). The doctrine of Hereafter also has a special significance in Islamic and Christian theological traditions, which shows their commonality concerning fundamental levels of beliefs.

It seems we can add one case to fundamental beliefs in Islamic and Christian theological traditions that although it is not considered as a fundamental belief, it is an essential and crucial outcome of believing in them. This case is doing good deeds, which is the main result of believing in one God and the hereafter. The reason for considering good deeds as a fundamental case is that if believing in one God and the hereafter has no basic results, our faith is incomplete and defective. While believing in the necessity of good deeds connects the two mentioned fundamental beliefs and makes sense of their relationship, particularly in our afterlife, in the sense that the requirement of immortal happiness is commitment to a good deed in mundane life. This matter has frequently been emphasized in the Bible, New Testament, and the Quran (Quran, 10, 44; 57, 25).

Middle Beliefs

Middle beliefs are placed between fundamental and marginal beliefs and have more rationality than marginal ones, but less rationality than fundamental ones. The first virtue of middle beliefs is their relative vertical and horizontal plurality in comparison with fundamental beliefs; that is, middle beliefs are not limited but are many in different religious traditions. The second virtue of them is that they depend on fundamental beliefs; namely, their epistemic and ontological validity are derived from fundamental beliefs. So, their ontological participation and hierarchical rationality are based on fundamental beliefs. The third virtues of middle beliefs is that they are directly related to how fundamental beliefs are understood and interpreted (Javadi Amoli, 2008, : 33-34, 175-177). The fourth feature of middle beliefs, which is related to the second, is their extensive impressionability of epistemic and non-epistemic factors, such as intuition, reason, experience, the way of reading religious texts, believers' presuppositions, preceding beliefs, and traditions; that is, mentioned epistemic and non-epistemic factors have more effective role in how principles of religion are

understood and interpreted that these factors are as its products. The fifth virtue of middle beliefs is the relative link between believing in them and believers' mundane life, acts, observations, and their results, believers' presuppositions, their practical confronting with external phenomena, that effects how to comprehend and explain religious beliefs. Therefore, middle beliefs are related to customary law and the way of people's lives and affect them gradually (Ahmadi, 2005: 220-221). Hence, we can conclude that the sixth virtue of middle beliefs, namely, their impressionableness of epistemic and non-epistemic factors, is caused to relatively reduce their rationality and increase the role of imitation, obedience, experience, intuition, and presupposition. This fact not only indicates the epistemic, but also the ontological hierarchy of middle beliefs in comparison to fundamental ones. The seventh property of middle beliefs is their more changeable and less stable nature, since they rely on multiple epistemic and non-epistemic factors that are not stable.

As a result, there are some types of changeability and manifestations of plural

interpretations even within a religious tradition or one reading of it; that is, pluralism in understanding religion and religious beliefs manifests itself at the level of middle beliefs (See: Quine, 2002, P 18). The eight virtues of middle beliefs are their extensive relationship to believers' religious expectations since the nature of religious expectations forms the structure of middle beliefs. In fact, it can be said that the understanding of religious texts and the forming of middle beliefs are dependent on believers' presuppositions and expectations; these presuppositions, in their vast meaning, determine and reform believers' expectations of religion, in which is seen the role of epistemic and non-epistemic factors.

Considering some attributes of middle beliefs, it seems there are some common beliefs in Islamic and Christian theological traditions, as follows: divine attributes; differences between essence and attributes of God; God's relations with the world and human beings; human beings' freedom and freewill in relation to God; properties of paradise and hell; God's justice and wisdom; and so on. There are also some middle beliefs that are dedicated to the Christian theological tradition, such as the

divinity of Jesus Christ, God's incarnation in Jesus, the teaching of trinity, the doctrine of atonement, the teaching of believer's salvation through Jesus, the doctrine of Jesus's sacrificing, the doctrine of inherited sin, the doctrine of Jesus's resurrection, the teaching of justifying faith, the teaching of faith and divine grace, the teaching of the Bible as divine and revelation, and so on (McGrath, 2017, Ch. 9-15; Ratzinger, 2000: 106-122). Also, there are some samples of middle beliefs, particularly dedicated to Islamic tradition, as follows: union or separation of divine attributes and essence; virtues of the Prophet of Islam like his infallibility; the revelatory virtues of the Quran; the doctrine of Caliphate and Imamate; the infallibility of Shia Imams; the doctrine of Mahdaviate (the last savior); the doctrine of oldness or temporal creation of the Quran; and so on (Vaezi, 2004: 52-60; Pavlin, 1996: 209-211; Muhajirani, 1996: 233-239).

The difference between the first groups of middle beliefs and the second ones is that the first ones are common matters between Muslims and Christians, but the answers of Muslim and Christian theologians to such common questions are different. For example,

although both religious traditions believe in one God, they have not the same understandings of God. Christians emphasize on the fatherhood and childhood relationships between God and human beings. Muslims, however, believe in human beings' servitude role towards God and not in childhood (Ratzinger, 2000: 62). Regarding the doctrine of creation, although most Muslim and Christian theologians assert the creation from nothing, Muslim theologians emphasize on the direct creation from nothing by God. Christian theologians, however, believe in the significant role of Jesus Christ in the process of the creation of the world.

Concerning the doctrine of resurrection and the afterlife, both traditions believe in the apocalyptic return of the last savior to save humanity and establish the government of justice. Christian theologians, however, maintain that Jesus is the last savior, and his return will be to judge the people of the world and to establish the kingdom of God in the apocalypse on earth. On the contrary, Muslim theologians, especially those of the Shia denomination, emphasize the return of the promised Mehdi, that Jesus will accompany

him to establish the government of divine justice, and then the main resurrection will happen. Also, Muslims believe that all prophets after Ibrahim are from his generation and have a humanely nature, but Christian theologians, due to their belief in the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation, are generally separated from Muslims and Jews (McGrath, 2017, p 427-429).

In addition, Christians' beliefs concerning crucifying Jesus Christ, his dying and reviving after three days, and going to the heavens are not acceptable to Muslims. According to the Quran, they believe that Jesus ascended to the heavens before he died on the cross (Quran, 4, 157-158). We should add to the mentioned cases, those tendencies that are introduced by some Muslim and Christian theologians regarding divine attributes like a personal God or anthropomorphism of God, God as male or female or neutral, immutability of God, and its relation to suffering in Jesus, God's direct or indirect role in humankind's salvation, and the doctrine of the first sin, that their viewpoints, that is Muslim and Christian theologians, are not only different, but in some cases are opposite to each other. For example, while

both Muslim and Christian groups maintain that Adam and Eve had made a mistake and that the doctrine of the first sin resulted from this mistake, Christian theologians have concluded the doctrine of inherited sin due to their belief that Adam and Eve's sins were transferred to their generation, which, based on this doctrine, all human beings were born originally and primarily sinful, and that this sin can be removed only by faith in Jesus's sacrificing on the cross (Ratzinger, 2000: 97-104). Muslims, on the contrary, believe in forgiving Adam and Eve by God, and argue that their children and next generation were/are born innocent and without any inherited sin (Quran, 2, 36-37).

Regarding the New Testament and the Quran, also, there are different attitudes between Muslims and Christians. Muslims maintain that the Quran is God's direct revelation and words to Muslims. Christians, however, believe that the New Testaments are God's inspiration to human writers, so that they wrote them through divine inspiration and help. It seems most Christians consider Jesus Christ, not the New Testament, as the external object of divine revelation that was revealed in the Gospels.

The second group of middle beliefs, however, can only belong to one of two groups of Muslims or Christians. For example, different understandings of some Christian doctrines, like the trinity, incarnation, sacrificing, or atonement, are considered only for Christians, not for Muslims. Also, some Islamic teachings like the infallibility of the Prophet of Islam or Shia Imams and the religious authority of Muslim Caliphs belong to Muslims alone, and Christians don't have such teachings. To begin explaining this issue, first I will concentrate on the Christian theological tradition, then I will discuss Muslim theology. As previously stated, Christian belief in doctrines such as trinity, incarnation, atonement, inherited sin, Jesus' divinity and resurrection, Jesus' sacrificing, faith and divine grace, church, and so on generally belong to Christian theological tradition, and are not as theological and creedal beliefs of Muslims.

However, it is important to note that Christian interpretations of these mentioned teachings are not always the same, but have

been altered and changed throughout the long history of Christian theology. Some teachings, for instance, are explained. Although most Christians have maintained the doctrine of trinity, different understandings of it have been rendered throughout the history of Christian theology, ranging from complete confirmation to total rejection. Christian theologians' struggling to give the same divine dignity to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit has led to many problems in Christian theology, especially this question: how can there be one God in three gods while Christians believe in monotheism? Because the doctrine of the trinity appears to be meta-rational or irrational, some Christian theologians have attempted to logically and rationally justify it. They also benefited from allegorical, symbolic, and metaphorical language and other methods to give a justifiable understanding of it and sometimes introduced it as a meta-rational and divine mystery in which we should have faith. The complexity of understanding this teaching is increased when it is linked with the doctrine of incarnation. According to this doctrine, God had incarnated in the body of Jesus in order to save humankind. That is, God has accepted the

corporeal attributes of Jesus and his sacrificing to be the background of human salvation.

The challenge for Christian theology is that if God is a transcendent being from the mundane universe, namely the Otherness, how can he accept corporeal attributes? And how can it be possible to speak of the same divine dignity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? Many Christian theologians' struggles concerning answering such questions have led to the emergence of many attitudes, some of which are the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine of Hippo, the fideism of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, and John Macquarrie (McGrath, 2017, 311-317). Meanwhile, within three Christian denominations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, there are differences regarding understanding and interpreting of the teachings of the trinity and incarnation. Concerning some other Christian doctrines, we see the situation is similar; that is, there are significant different viewpoints. For example, numerous questions concerning the doctrine of Jesus Christ's personality, specifically the relationship between his divine and human nature, his role in salvation, how his birth and

creation occurred, the nature of his death and sacrificing, his suffering, and resurrection. The most difficult question appears to be: how can be endowed Jesus both divine and human qualities? Christian theologians also assert the crucial role of Jesus regarding the problem of salvation in the sense that he is the basis, criterion, and path of human beings' salvation, which matters have caused the appearance of many viewpoints pertaining to salvation among Christian theologians (McGrath, 2017: 208, Ratzinger, 2000: 108-121, Davis, 2006: 61-70). The plurality of such viewpoints about other Christian teachings, like the infallibility of the Bible, the doctrine of the Church, the doctrines of faith and divine grace, the doctrine of infallibility of Pop, and so forth, have expanded until now due to the historical expansion of Christian theology and the appearance and growth of Christian denominations like Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, each of which has their own internal varieties.

There is a similar situation regarding Islamic theological traditions. For instance, two significant theological tendencies, including Shia and Sunni and their branches,

have different approaches concerning some significant theological teachings like union and separation of divine essence and attributes, freedom and compulsion, destiny and providence, oldness and creation of the Quran as God's word, corporeal and spiritual resurrection, the relationship between faith and disbelief, the position and infallibility of the Prophet of Islam, the virtues of Imams of Shia and Caliphs of Sunni, the doctrine of last savior (Mahdaviat), the differences between clear and allegorical verses of the Quran, and so on. It is necessary to say that regarding the mentioned teachings, not only Muslim denominations' understanding were not the same, but their understanding have been expanded and changed during the next centuries. Now some of them are reviewed.

One of the most important differences within Islamic tradition is the Ash'arite, Mu'atazelite, and Shia groups' understanding of divine essence and attributes. Some groups, like Shia and Mu'atazelite, emphasize the union of divine essence and attributes. The Ash'arite group, on the contrary, consider them separated from each other. Pertaining to freedom and compulsion, the Mu'atazelite

assert on absolute freedom of human beings, the Ash'arite maintain absolute compulsion without any freedom for humankind, and the Shia group believe in a combination of freedom and compulsion. There are also significant differences between Muslim theologians regarding divine justice. Shia and Mu'atazelite theologians emphasize that God has to act justly since oppression is opposite to divine dignity and attributes. On the contrary, Ash'arite theologians, by faith in divine justice, maintain that if God wants to do oppression, He can do everything since He is omnipotent. Another disagreement between Muslim theologians is about the oldness or temporal creation of the Quran. Some Ash'arite theologians emphasize the oldness of the Quran as a divine word, since the attribute of Kalam (word) is one of God's old attributes. Some Shia and Mua'tazelite theologians, on the contrary, assert the temporal creation of the Quran. Regarding the relationship between faith and infidelity, some Muslim theologians believe that those who have committed great sins are infidels and will go to the fire of hell, but some other theologians think that great

sins do not annihilate a believer's faith, and some others have moderate viewpoints.

Regarding the position and infallibility of the Prophet, there are different tendencies among Muslim theologians. Some, like Shia, maintain that the Prophet has to be infallible in all religious and mundane affairs, both before and after his mission. Some theologians, like Ash'arite and Mua'tazelite, believe that the Prophet has infallibility only in religious affairs, such as reciting revelation, and only after his mission, not before it. In relation to the issue of religious and political leadership in Muslim society, Muslims are divided into two groups: Shia and Sunni. Sunni Muslims believe that deciding and determining the nature of Muslim leadership after the demise of the Prophet of Islam has been left to Muslims themselves, since the Prophet had made no decision. On the contrary, Shia maintain that the Prophet had determined his prominent household and that Ali Ibn Abi Taleb was the first one, as for the religious leadership of the Muslim community. They also dispute regarding who is the last savior of the apocalypse, while they agree about the teaching of the last savior according to Islamic

doctrines. The Shia and Sunni theologians have many different understandings regarding most issues introduced in the Quran, in particular pertaining to allegorical verses (See; Pavlin, 1996: 217; Muhajirani, 1996: 236-242; Tabatabaei, 1975, p 34-49).

The qualitative and quantitative diversity of middle beliefs between two Islamic and Christian theological traditions indicates the plurality of believers' different understanding of sacred texts of their religions and their historical expansion during past centuries. It means, regarding the early centuries of Islam or Christianity, the quantity and diversity of middle beliefs were very small and had not formed Islamic or Christian denominations, but after 20 of Christian and 14 of Islamic centuries and the very broad expansion of Islamic and Christian denominations in different lands, we are witnessed to a great diversity of middle levels of religious beliefs. Such a diversity raises this crucial question: what epistemic and non-epistemic factors have affected such a qualitative and quantitative diversity of Islamic and Christian beliefs?

Marginal Beliefs

Marginal beliefs are the third and last stage of religious beliefs that have the least rationality and the most measure of impressionableness under epistemic and non-epistemic factors like imitation of the validity of other sources, circumstances of social community, and people's lives. There are some significant virtues related to these beliefs. The first virtue of marginal beliefs is their horizontal and transversal plurality; that is, they are extremely popular among believers even as their numbers are increased. Therefore, in comparison to prior beliefs, these beliefs are mostly uncountable and unlimited. The second characteristic of marginal beliefs is their exact and deep link and relation to the style of people's lives and livelihoods; that is, these beliefs are essentially dependent on environmental circumstances and people's ordinary living. The third virtue of marginal beliefs is reducing their rationality and increasing the role of imitation, obedience, experience, and intuition.

Specifically, their extremely impressionableness of environmental circumstances causes them to mostly reduce

their rationality in comparison to two previous beliefs, and replace it with an increased role of environmental factors and imitation. The fourth property of marginal beliefs is their extensive changeability and dependency on changeable epistemic and non-epistemic factors in different societies. Most people are interested in the fifth virtue in relation to these beliefs; that is, they are primary and preceding beliefs because of their close relationship to people's ordinary lives and the case with which they can be conceived and understood. Thus, there are people who ignore two previous beliefs due to their mental concern for marginal beliefs; then they understand and rethink religion through marginal beliefs. The sixth virtue of marginal beliefs is that they have a weaker relationship to fundamental beliefs, and have less chance of referencing to the authentic religious texts and introducing rational arguments for them, and there is more possibility of the role of local beliefs, customs, and norms in forming them.

In fact, marginal beliefs are not merely beliefs that originated from fundamental beliefs and the result of the interpretation of religious texts, but they can be considered as historical expansion of fundamental and middle beliefs under the influences of people's presuppositions, habits, morals, local cultures, customs, and obligations of mundane life. Considering mentioned notes, marginal beliefs include the sacredness of places like mosques and churches, as well as holy shrines of some religious saints, the sacredness of people like Pops, pastors, and Shia Imams and their children, the sacredness of times like the sacrament of Easter, Muslim Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage), Jesus crucifying day, Ashura day, Sacrificial day, and Eid-al Fitr day, and the sacredness of events like the Eucharist, baptism, and marriage ceremony. It is possible to take into account some religious practices like individual and collective blessing, pilgrimage to holy shrines of Shia Imams and saints' graves, and so on, as examples of marginal beliefs. The reasons and factors that have led us to regard such beliefs as marginal, are that their examples are increasing on a daily basis; that is, since the advent of Islam and Christianity, the samples of sacred places, things, people, times, events, and so on have been/are increasing. For example, mosques and churches are reproducing. We can also see

the increasing number of religious leaders and pops. Religious things are gradually made, and due to their application in religious spaces, they gain holiness for themselves.

New events and times are created that gain sacred meaning for themselves. The gradual increasing and reproducing of such sacred examples is not necessarily rooted in the credibility of religious texts but mostly depended on how believers understand religion in different times and places. For example, according to Christian teaching, the church is a sacred place as the community of believers, but Christians of different nations usually have more faith in the main church of their denomination or in the church of their country, city, or village not all churches in the world. Such a virtue is applicable to Christian pastors and pops. That is, it is possible for some Christians that their local pastor has more significant than other ones, and also more sacredness than them. Regarding the sacrament of Eucharist, baptism, and marriage ceremony in church, Christian thanksgiving ceremony, anointment, and instructions for repentance, and so on, there are certainly some different styles and manners among Christians

of different traditions. The variety of hymns and prayers recited by different Christian churches and the plurality of their languages that are used for preaching, shows that such sacraments or rituals have their significance as marginal beliefs and deeds (Ratzinger, 2000: 357-420; McGrath, 2017: 380-389, Davis, 2006: 265-270; Rasoulipour, 2021:50).

Such a situation also is in progress in Islamic tradition. In Islamic tradition, there are different attitudes toward the measure of religious leaders' sacredness and religious places like mosques and shrines of saints or Imams that show gradual varieties of such attitudes and beliefs among religious people and denominations. For example, Shia and Sunni Muslims have different approaches to the sacredness of shrines of religious leaders, Imams, and Caliphs, but Shia pay more sanctity to Imams and their progeny, as the members of the Prophet's household, than Sunni people. In short, some Islamic and Christian doctrines determine the place and value of related religious rituals and rites. In fact, the quality of Muslims' and Christians' attitudes toward their main religious beliefs makes and originates some religious rites and

rituals that have marginal significance. Based on this fact, it seems some Christian rituals like the Eucharist, baptism ceremony, marriage ceremony in church, Christian thanksgiving ceremony, anointment, instructions for repentance, mourning for the dead, blessing and singing in church, confession ceremony, reception of priests' positions, pilgrimage, prayer, appealing to Christ and saints, and the like have generally marginal and secondary significance in the Church's tradition. Because such rituals are not fundamentally confirmed by the Bible and Gospel, but are only mentioned as the secondary matters in them, they are not necessary. Throughout the history of Christianity, such rituals have been mostly altered and changed based on the geographical, cultural, political, economic, and other circumstances of many Christians from various nations.

In the Islamic tradition, there are many rituals and rites having marginal and secondary values, such as pilgrimage to sacred places, religious blessings, recommended prayers, mourning for religious leaders and martyrs, religious celebrations, religious deeds such as Arbaeein Walking of Shia Groups, and

so on. Since the quality of practicing such rituals is not the main goal of the sacred texts like the Qur'an, and the quality of their practice has been altered and changed during past Islamic centuries in different Muslim lands.

Causal Analysis of Hierarchical Relationship Religious Beliefs' System

Our research and investigation into the hierarchical web of religious beliefs in Islamic and Christian theological traditions, raises some critical questions. One of them is that if the message of a religion, like Islam and Christianity, is inviting to one God or monotheism, why is it that such a message, in order to be recited to believers and to be understood by them and practiced by their results, has been diversified and differentiated, so that not only it has been changed into a web of beliefs and doctrines, but due to the historical expansion of a religious tradition, that web has been increased and reproduced longitudinally and transversely? This process leads to making and reproducing some new beliefs within the web of religious tradition that sometimes have coherency and compatibility with each other, and sometimes have explicit

or implicit contradictions. So, analyzing how such a web is growing has two important dimensions: First, what causes have led to the emergence of such a web of beliefs? Second, what goals does the growth of such a web of beliefs have? In fact, recognizing the causes and factors of the emerging web of beliefs, helps us to recognize the structure of the hierarchical rationality of religious beliefs system.

In this research, without judging the truthfulness or falsity of Christian or Islamic theological beliefs, our goal is to demonstrate that there are two types of causes and factors that have influenced the historical growth of such beliefs. The first of them are epistemic factors, and the second ones are non-epistemic factors, so that under their influences, the system of religious beliefs has been expanded qualitatively and quantitatively, and has been shaped as the vast web of religious creeds, longitudinally and transversely, during the history of a religion.

By epistemic factors, I mean people's plural understandings of epistemic faculties and sources such as reason, experience, intuition, induction, imitation, authorities of others, nature, history, and so on, and how they affect our perceptions of religious beliefs. It is seen that, in this case, those who are more rational, have a religious understanding different from those who are more empirical, and those who are more intuitive and are interested in spiritual experiences have a religious understanding different from the two mentioned cases. In fact, the quality of people's approaches to cited epistemic factors and how they apply them, have stronger influences on the growth of their system of religious and theological beliefs. Non-epistemic factors also are referred to some factors like race, ethnicity, language, habits and customs, geographical differences, nationality, professions, foods, social class, professional position, individual and collective interests, and so forth, which make and shape and change believers' understanding of religion and reform or reshape the web of religious knowledge and the system of theological beliefs. It is remarkable that the effective role of the mentioned factors and their plurality in different nations of the world have led to the appearance and emergence of numerous understandings of religions and their beliefs and rituals.

Now, considering the stronger effects of cited epistemic and non-epistemic factors, when we see the history of the appearance of Islam and Christianity and their historical expansion, it helps us to better understand the causes and reasons for the qualitative and quantitative plurality of their theological teachings. For example, as we know, Christianity first appeared in Palestine and then spread in some neighboring lands like Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Rome, and Syria in the early centuries. During the next centuries, most parts of Europe, the Middle East, Russia, and finally America and some parts of Africa gradually accepted Christianity. It is certainly a fact that the early Christianity encountered with the people of Palestine, then with the people of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Rome, and Syria, and its confrontation with Greek philosophy and Roman civilization, have been influenced by the people of cited lands and civilizations. The influences that Christianity has received are because of the approaches of the mentioned land's people to epistemic and non-epistemic factors.

As a result, not only did Christianity has faced with significant problems and challenges in the early centuries of its appearance and expansion in neighboring lands concerning some Christian teachings such as the trinity and incarnation, but after becoming the official religion of the cited lands, particularly Rome and its spreading to European nations, it caused different understandings and attitudes toward it to emerge, eventually leading to the separation of the Catholic Church. Do we deny the stronger role of epistemic and non-epistemic factors regarding the separation of the two East and West churches, in which there have been both political disputes and religious understandings? In any case, it seems there were some factors, like historical, theological, and scientific developments during the Middle Ages and then Renaissance, and the appearing reformism movement that led to shaping Protestant denomination and the European enlightenment, that all of them led to emerging new beliefs in Christian theology.

In short, the expansion of Christianity in new lands, like Egypt, modern Turkey, Syria, Russia, Rome, Western and Eastern Europe, and America, and introducing it to new

nations having their own thoughts, gradually led them to understand and interpret it in the form and light of the Egyptian, Russian, Roman, European, Syrian, Turkish, and so on attitude towards it. This redefinition was under the influence of the people of the cited nations' approaches to epistemic and non-epistemic factors.

There is a similar situation regarding the web of religious beliefs in the Islamic theological tradition. As we know, Islam first appeared in Saudi Arabia in Makkah and expanded in Madinah. From the beginning, the direct message of revelation that was recited by the Prophet of Islam was understood and interpreted differently and led to diverse reactions either in Madinah or Makkah, based on the different mentalities of its audiences. Then, Islam was spread in nations like Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Pakistan and Jordan. The expansion of Islam in neighboring lands has been caused by the early Islamic worldview facing with the thinkers of new nations that have their own worldview, civilization, and culture. Consequently, Islamic theological beliefs have been understood and reinterpreted in the light of their mental, social,

cultural, and metaphysical presuppositions. So now we can speak of Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, Egyptian, Turkish, Arabian, Jordanian, and Pakistani Islam and so on. Since the culture and worldview of different nations were/are able to rethink and redefine the teachings of a religion within their web of thoughts.

Conclusion

At least concerning Abrahamic religions, the message of a religion is simple and limited, that is, an invitation to monotheism and its essential and primary requirements. This message, however, is understood in the light of different epistemological and non-epistemological capabilities of its audiences, so that its outcome is the plurality of believers' understanding of the simple message. Believers' diverse understanding of religion's primary simple message led to the growth of the first groups of religious teachings and doctrines, which although there are not many, have been increased longitudinally and transversely under the influences of epistemic and non-epistemic factors, the historical and geographical expansion of religion, and its contact with different cultures and

civilizations, that finally changed it into a web of religious beliefs.

Regarding this web of religious beliefs, reshaping and reproducing religious doctrines are under the influence of both believers' understanding of religious texts and their mental presuppositions. So whatever religious beliefs are posited at a high level, they have a high level of rationality. It seems such a process can be found in Islam and Christianity. That is, although their primary messages were limited to some authentic teachings, but due to the influences of epistemological and non-epistemological factors, the different capabilities of their audiences in the context of history, time, geography, and culture, led to the growth of the Islamic and Christian web of religious beliefs. In this web, whatever belief has more compatibility with rational principles and the main texts of religion, has more rationality. Although we should not expect

more rigidity concerning the rationality of the next levels of beliefs, since whether or not this is the essential characteristic of the natural world, that every religion within it, is expanded within its context and under its natural circumstances.

Finally noticing many effects of epistemic and non-epistemic factors on the shaping the web of religious beliefs, I think we should invite believers of different theological traditions to interfaith dialogue in order to get reciprocal understanding of each other. This invitation helps us to rely on our common religious beliefs regarding coexistence and peaceful life, and try to exactly understand what does the religious other thinks through his/her theological framework without any presuppositions. Maybe such approaches help us to use the rationality of other theologies in order to reform our theology of religion.

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عقلانیت تشکیکی نظام باورهای دینی در سنت اسلامی و مسیحی

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چکیده: عقلانیت تشکیکی نظام باورهای دینی نشان‌دهنده رابطه طولی میان آنهاست، به‌طوری‌که هر باور متناسب با جایگاه وجودی که در سلسله باورهای دینی دارد از عقلانیت مربوطه بهره‌مند است. بر این اساس می‌توان سه سطح از باورهای دینی را در نظر گرفت که عبارت‌اند از باورهای بنیادی، میانی و حاشیه‌ای. در این سلسله، باورهای بنیادی واجد حداکثر عقلانیت، سپس باورهای میانی و در آخر باورهای حاشیه‌ای هستند که از کمترین سطح عقلانیت در مقایسه با باورهای سطح بالا بهره‌مند هستند. با ملاحظه این سطوح باورها، به‌نظر می‌رسد در الهیات اسلامی و مسیحی، دو باور ایمان به خدای واحد و جهان آخرت وجود دارد. همچنین باورهای مشترک میانی دو سنت عمدتا درباره صفات خدا، رابطه انسان و خدا، آموزه آفرینش و نظایر آن هستند. ضمن اینکه می‌توان باورهای میانی خاص سنت کلامی مسیحی، مانند آموزه تثلیث، تجسد، کفاره، گناه موروثی و نظایر آن و مختص سنت کلامی اسلامی مانند رابطه صفات و ذات الهی، حدوث و قدم قرآن و مسئله امامت و خلافت را ملاحظه کرد. درنهایت اینکه سطح باورهای حاشیه‌ای در هر دو سنت درباره تقدس مکان‌ها، زمان‌ها، رویدادها، اشیاء، اشخاص، موقعیت‌ها و نظایر آن است. این تحقیق نشان می‌دهد که اگرچه همه باورهای دینی تحت تأثیر عوامل معرفتی و غیرمعرفتی و در بستر تاریخی دچار قبض و بسط می‌گردند، باورهای بنیادی این دو سنت دینی دارای ثبات، کلیت و مطابقت بیشتری با فطرت بشری دارند و کمتر تحت تأثیر عوامل مذکور هستند، به همین دلیل دارای عقلانیت بیشتری هستند. باورهای میانی اسلامی و مسیحی عمدتاً تحت تأثیر عوامل مزبور و حاصل خوانش‌های مختلف دینداران از متون مقدس است، درحالی‌که باورهای حاشیه‌ای به عوامل متعددی وابسته بوده و تغییرپذیری بیشتری دارند. پس حاصل تحقیق اینکه، عقلانیت نظام باورهای دینی اسلامی و مسیحی، از سطح بنیادی به حاشیه‌ای کاهش می‌یابد و تحت تأثیر عوامل متعددی در قبض و بسط مدام است. بنابراین راه مواجهه با عقلانیت ادیان، توجه به این نکته مهم است که شبکه باورهای دینی آنها چگونه و تحت تأثیر چه عواملی تکون یافته است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: عقلانیت تشکیکی، الهیات اسلامی، الهیات مسیحی، باور دینی.