IMPARTIALITY, EXTROVERSION, AND MENTAL HEALTH OF MODERN ISLAM IN THE LIGHT OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

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Abstract

This article contains some thoughts-questions, which have arisen with a view to an interactive discussion between (Orthodox) Christian Theology and Islam in the light of the Psychology of Religion. In this short invitation, four issues are briefly presented: (1) the revival of religions and in particular Islam, (2) openness, multi-dimensionality, and resilience of Islam, (3) interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Shi'itic Islam via the Psychology of Religion and the Cultural Psychology of Religion, and (4) the psychotherapeutic nature, and generally the coping, of the Iranian Religion.

Keywords: *righteousness*, *justice*, *Shi'itic Islam*, *Shari'a*.

Introduction

I applied the word *impartiality* in the title of this speaking because, theologically, that word refers to the concept of God's *righteousness*. And the righteousness of God imposes justice, namely mutual respect among all people, especially Christians, according to the Koran.

In this short invitation, I have chosen to briefly present four issues, which are personally intriguing, especially in the current crucial –from many views– period, that may seem quite interesting: (first) the revival of Religions, in particular Islam, (second) openness, multi-dimensionality, according to Abu-Raiya (2013), and resilience of Islam, (third) interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Shi'itic Islam via the Psychology of Religion and the Cultural Psychology of Religion, and (fourth) the psychotherapeutic nature, and generally the coping of the Iranian Religion.

All those who have long dealt with and study the eternal, and are not satisfied by the only things in this world will welcome, I think, the revival of Religions. This is especially seen after the emergence of the new wave of godlessness and the general impasse in general today in which modern man has come to the worship of Technology and the secular spirit of Consumerism. According to Armstrong (2000), about 50 years ago, popular opinion assumed that religion would become a weaker force and people would certainly become less zealous as the world became more modern and morals more relaxed. Seminal thinkers of the nineteenth century –Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim,

Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud– all predicted that religion would gradually fade in importance with the emergence of industrial society. The belief that religion was dying became the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century. However, according to Norris and Inglehart (2004), during the last decade, the secularization thesis has experienced the most sustained challenge in its long history. But the opposite has proven true. Theologian and author Karen Armstrong documents that Fundamentalism has taken root and grown in many of the world's major Religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Even Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism have developed fundamentalist factions. Reacting to a technologically driven world with liberal Western values, fundamentalists have not only increased in numbers, they have become more desperate, claims Armstrong (2000), who points to the Oklahoma City bombing, violent anti-abortion crusades, and the assassination of President Yitzak Rabin as evidence of dangerous extremes. This tendency of man shows that he has spiritual resistances to mass mechanization, and thus his brutalization, that is to say his dehumanization; If only this global religious revival does not lead —through the worship of partial modern messiahs and saviors, as is the case with the so-called *new religiousness* or the *new religious movements* in Christendom— to the greater splitting of humanity and to religious syncretism, namely the amalgamation of different Religions and cultures.

Levels of "tolerance" in Religions through the Psychology of Religion

As is well known, many major Religions, without falling into sects, possess on themselves and operate with an openness, polymorphism, and flexibility (expansive or systolic interpretation of their sacred texts – scriptures), either in individual (see *etic*), or in collective (see *emic*) socio-political and cultural levels. In other words, pre-Christian (for example, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, ancient Hellenism) and post-Christian Religions (for example, Christianity and Islam) see the gods, God, or his law now more strictly (see *Rigorism*) and inhuman, and now more tolerably and philanthropically by dispensation. There are many such examples. In Zoroastrianism, the god of good (Ormuzd) and the god of evil (Ahriman) were worshipped at the same time. In ancient pagan Greece, there was the Apollonian and Platonic spirit on the one hand and the inexorable god Zeus and the Dionysian spirit on the other. Besides, in Judaism, the jealous god Yahweh of the Old Testament was worshipped, and the legalistic *Secretaries* and nationalist *Pharisees* were along with the fanatical *Zealots*, while until today *Zionists* were, at the same times as the Jewish Prophets, who were more open and ecumenists, as well as the *Sadducees*, who were more "relaxed" religiously. Moreover, in Christianity, as well in Islam, there were the gentle and lamblike martyrs who sacrificed themselves. In contrast, there were also the rebellious Zealots of Thessalonica in Greece, the Crusaders of the West, the Calvinists in Europe, and later the so-called *Theology of the Revolution*. Eventually, in Islam, while there has been historically violent Islamization at almost the same time as the worship of Ali, alms for the poor, Sufiism, etcetera developed. Likewise, some of the great Religions or the same ones at different times, sometimes over-

underlined God and over-reduced man, and sometimes extolled man, and underestimated God. But these differences mean either a bigger or a lesser subjugation of man to the law of God, respectively. Hence the various problems begin, particularly if we bring into account the diverse interpretations of *Qur'an* (namely the Word of Allah) or *Hadith*. For example, Shi'i Islam's teachings and norms have been subject to competing operations under different historical conditions, according to the research of Silberman, Higgins and Dweck (2005). Moreover, all these major Religions had and have the ability to adapt to all economic and political regimes, either left or right, either west or east, either socialist or capitalist. For example, the ideal world view that came about after the revolution in Iran appears to be highly resilient and survives among pious Iranians, despite widespread political dissatisfaction, according to Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008). Therefore, the whole psycho-sociological situation formed like this scale of Religions connects various grades of the vector between God and man, and by extension, people among themselves, both as in-groups and as outside groups. Agreeing to a survey by Adem Aygün (2013), Islamic religiousness in general can be subdivided into four types: traditional, ideological, laicist, and endo-psychic.

And so, the discipline of Psychology of Religion and/or Cultural Psychology of Religion as sciences tries to study Religions as objectively as possible, without bias, bigotry, or fanaticism, disclosing the similarities and differences between Religions. Above all, however, if we temporarily set aside all the other characteristic elements of a religion (Belief, Ritual, Ethics, muster or flock) and focus on its anthropological and psychological parts only, namely, on the mystical or transcendental (see *Numen*) experiences experienced by the believer, either in his prayer or during his *hajj* to Mecca or to Mashhad, then, perhaps surprisingly, we find that the gist or the core of each Religion, which is precisely the holistic experience of the *Sacred*, mobilizes any religious or spiritual manifestation or exposure, while this is moved on similar scales between believers of all Religions. Meanwhile, this *Numen* and its biome gives man a "creature-feeling", namely an emotion of a creature.

The Divine and the Human (e.g. Psychology) in Religions

Of course, in Islam and especially in Shi'ism, as in Christianity, but for different reasons, *secular* (or temporal and profane) cannot be distinguished from *sacred* (or spiritual), although in individual or/and collective – this social practice is being carried out. For example, religious citizens in Tehran make a distinction between the general principles of Islamic rule and the specific national government, as Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008) write; that is why these religions are facing the problem of secularization. "*Didn't you think that those in heaven and earth glorify God, along with the birds that spread their wings? All beings know their prayer and its glorification of God,*" the Koran quotes (Chapter 24, 41-42). However, that common and catholic element of Religions, namely, *Divine* and its human experience, if it set as the basis on interfaith dialogues, is certain to promote inter-religious mutual understanding, comprehension, and worldwide peace, as Seegobin (2014) suggests, as long as it is not in the hands

of various governments and their political interests. Furthermore, the word *Islam* etymologically comes from the word *Salam*, the main meaning of which is peace and the secondary surrender to Allah and subjugation. The Orthodox Church has always believed in freedom and dialogue, which is why it has never organized crusades or inquisitions. Modern relevant research shows that after September ninth of two thousand one, American Protestant Christians treat Islam in four ways: Apologetically (namely that Christianity is superior or better), eschatologically (namely that Islam will hasten the end of humanity), empirically (namely through psycho-spiritual mutual understanding) and spiritually (namely that Christians with spiritual weapons must subjugate Islam). In fact, intratextual or intertextual Fundamentalism can be further deadened when we take into account the cultural differences of each person: topography, history, traditions, morals and customs, educational level, etc. Islamic Psychology is an emerging area of cross/inter-disciplinary scholarship that brings together numerous professional fields from Psychology, Counseling, Psychiatry, social work, public health, pastoral care, and Islamic Studies to various subspecialties of Psychology such as Clinical/Counseling, Forensic, Industrial/Organization, Health, and Positive Psychology, to name a few. Also included are areas of the Islamic Sciences related to Ilm Al-Nafs (Science of the Self) and topics related to the nature of the human being. As such, in its current state of becoming, Islamic Psychology could be loosely defined as "*the space where Psychology and related disciplines engage scientifically with Islam*", Al-Karam (2016) writes.

Finally, in our time among religious psychologists, it is commonplace that "being religious" functions comfortingly, palliatively, remedially, beneficially, and therapeutically, Al-Karam and Haque (2015) say. Especially in cases of depression and somatization, according to Hedayat-Diba (1999), when, of course, it is not deformed and stretched (intensified) into absurd and bizarre extremes, what we theologically call heresies and sects, caused usually by megalomania, phylarchy, ambition, authoritarianism and the supposed omniscience of the leader. Islam holds a long tradition of interest in mental wellness. The earliest recorded psychiatric institutions —established over a thousand years ago— were in Muslim countries (Loewenthal, 2000, p. 22).

Recapitulation

To sum up, as believers, we welcome the revival of faith (see *amn > iman*) in God, since it provides security and trust of a holy mission, namely the existential meaning, into the life of every believer, as Woodberry (1992) says. Indeed, psychologists Hood, Hill and, Williamson (2005) write that as we conclude from the revelation of Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in the *Qur'an*, every man's life is imbued with meaning.

All major and historical Religions, such as Islam, operate more strictly, narrowly, and restrictively, and now more open and liberally in varying degrees with regard to ritual, moral, social, political issues, as rational beings, endowed by God. We must, therefore, be tolerated, long-suffering, lowly, moderate, temperate, patient and forgiving in the face of everything different culturally and

religiously. In this way, we honor and respect the human *person* in the best possible way, imitating God, whom His actions in the world are diverse and also, He has given us the freedom of the will.

After all, since sacredness, as Christianity and Islamism accept, overwhelms all the aspects of our life (social, political, economic), we must, living in multicultural societies, focus our interfaith dialogues on this. Research by Güneş Murat Tezcür and Taghi Azadarmaki (2008) in Iran shows that Friday prayers have potentially gained a new meaning among Iranian citizens because of the politicization of religion under theocratic rule (see *Shari'a*). Still, because this is the cultural and religious idiosyncrasy of Islam or of each person separately and each self-identity, we Westerners must respect it, because, if you sever from it, then you will rightly think that via Secularism, you will westernize or/and Christianize. Subsequently, as Gwoffrey Scobie (1975, p. 70) remarks, "*very conservative beliefs can be held in a non-dogmatic way*". Authentic and healthy religious (or spiritual) experiences, either of the faithful Christian (experiencing an empathy with Christ or Divine Grace), or of the faithful Muslim (experiencing an empathy with Muhammad or Allah), create psychological euphoria and spiritual wellbeing to every believer, and loving and peaceful behavior in his outward social and political relations.

Ultimately, since the healthy, namely intrinsic, religiosity and not extrinsic, neurotic and compulsive one, has been shown by extensive psychological empirical research to contribute positively to both mental, as well as in (psychogenic) biological diseases, we must join forces, and indeed we therapists of the Psychology of Religion, in the direction of spiritual, psychotherapy in general.

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