

1. Western Religious Scholars' Approach

Various arguments have been presented to prove the logical necessity of returning to religion and adhering to it. It is different from concepts such as the various aspects of "religious need" often used in Western books on religious studies as a mundane need and function rather than having otherworldly consequences.

Even in this respect, what is meant at times, is merely an individual psychological need rather than the limitations of the human intellect (epistemic needs). But the necessity of religion denotes the necessity which arises from worldly and otherworldly needs, as well as its psychological, intellectual, individual, and social functions.

This necessity is closely related to "the necessity of the prophetic Divine missions," since the most important argument mentioned as proof reveals a kind of shortcoming in human epistemic means. The same shortcoming necessitates turning to a more perfect means, and thus, the need for it.

The need for Divine revelation is a prerequisite for such prophetic missions and so, the former precedes the latter. Since man needs Divine revelation, it is necessary that God appoint prophets to serve as a medium of imparting it to man.

It is necessary to pay attention to the practical distinction between the necessity of religion and the need for it, despite the conceptual proximity between the two. This is because, many a time, Western scholars discuss "religious need," by expounding it through sociological and psychological approaches and concentrate on its specific functions.

This began because of the transformation that took place in the religious approach of Western thinkers during the preceding centuries. Formerly, they devoted most of their discussions to theology, proving God's existence, and the veracity of religious beliefs.¹

Today, religious studies have substituted theology, and attention is being paid to the functions of religion and its psychological effects. For instance, Hick's words are quoted in this regard: "There is a kind of transformation and substitution made in the term *God* as the key word in a series of terms concerning

“religion”, since they are related to the same linguistic family.”²

Formerly, the existence of God, His attributes and the ends of His acts, were the topics of discussions and inquiries. “Nowadays, for instance, the same topics and questions are related to religion, its nature, forms and practical value.”³

In modern times, from an academic point of view, a discussion regarding God is presented as secondary in nature, an extended topic of religion. Other discussions concern the history of religion, its various forms, and its role in culture, assisting individuals to achieve internal accord and harmony and relate to the environment.

The usual question regarding God is the non-existence of God. No question concerning the existence of religion is raised, since it is obvious that religion exists. The main questions concern the consequences of religion in man’s life. Questions regarding religious truths have been marginalized and the center of attention is devoted to the practical advantage of such beliefs.⁴

Is seeking such substitutes for the concrete realities of religion natural in an age in which religion is on the decline?

Hick maintains that Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell were not satisfied with the utilitarian method employed to prove the existence of God. They emphasized that the importance lay in proving the veracity and fallacy of the truths as admitted by believers.⁵

Such anti-religious trends, have been severely challenged in recent decades by deadlocks resulting from thoughts generated in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the trend of turning to religion has begun.

A number of issues, on the basis of which Western scholars justify turning to religion, concern individual and social functions. The former include: giving meaning to life; curing feelings of loneliness; admitting ethical, spiritual, and psychological emptiness; preventing man’s metamorphosis into a machine; organizing an individual’s life; and, solving existential dilemmas.

The latter include: creating unity and solidarity; controlling and checking social adverse effects and criminal acts resulting from weak faith.⁶ Western views concerning the functions of religion are presented in utilitarian terms, since most of the definitions presented in the field of religion are of this type.

¹. For further information concerning the viewpoints of Western scholars in the field of religious studies regarding God, see H.P. Awn, *Didgah-ha dar bare-ye khoda* [“Viewpoints concerning God”], translated by Hamid Bakhshande.

². John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 91.

³. *Ibid.*

⁴. *Ibid.* pp. 90-91.

⁵. *Ibid.* p. 92.

⁶. For instance, see: Jean Paul Wilhelm, *Jame’e-shenasi-ye Adyan* [“Sociology of Religions”], p. 168; Din-pazhuhi [“Religious Studies”], vol. 1, p. 359; Nicholas Abercrombie, *Farhang-e Jame’e Shenasi* [“Dictionary of Sociology”],

translated by Hasan puya, p. 320.

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