

The Rules of Functionalism in the Study of Religion

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Abstract

The functionalist approach to religion is among the approaches employed in the study and propagation of religion. The use of this approach can also be noted in religious sources. The important point, however, is what rules and criteria should govern this approach.

The proper use of this method can be instrumental in understanding religion and benefiting from, and propagating, religious teachings, whereas the arbitrary and improper use of this method can lead to misunderstanding religious teachings as well doctrinal and practical deviations in religious matters.

By reflecting on the verses and narrations that allude to the functions of religious teachings and by rational contemplation, we conclude in this study that employing the functionalist approach requires taking certain rules and criteria into consideration, which include simultaneous consideration of worldly and otherworldly functions, paying attention to the primacy of otherworldly functions and the marginality of worldly functions, and eschewing functionalism in the purely theoretical realms of religion.

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Introduction

The functions of some religious teachings have been alluded to in some verses and traditions of the Infallibles (a). Considering that according to our methodology of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Infallibles (including their conduct, sayings, and silent approval) are authoritative and can be cited and complied with, the propriety of employing the method of stating and expressing the functions can be deduced from the verses and narrations. Therefore, we can also make use of this method when propagating or defending the religion. That is, by propagating the various functions of religion and religious teachings in life, we can spread and promote religion.

However, this does not mean or suggest a lack of any criteria and absolute permissibility in the application of this method. The Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions can be explicit and implicit, and the implicit ones which are ambiguous in their purports should be interpreted in the light of the explicit ones (see Qur'ān 3:7). Paying attention to the definitive and basic principles of the Qur'ān and narrations such as God-centrism, the material world being a prelude to the Hereafter, and the originality of the afterlife as evidenced by this verse **“The life of this world is nothing but a diversion and play. Indeed, the everlasting residence is the Eternal Life, if they but knew.”**(29:64) as well as a careful look at the verses and traditions in how they utilize the method of mentioning the functions, help us understand the rules and criteria of functionalism.

It can be argued that a pragmatic view and attention to the functions are like a double-edged knife which, if used properly, entails important benefits that cannot be overlooked and disregarded. On the other hand, inappropriate use of it also may cause serious damage to religion and religiosity that cannot be ignored and must be avoided.

Hence, the discovery of the criterion and the scope of its use are of

particular importance, and in this study, we will elaborate on a few relevant points.

As for the background of this discussion, it is noteworthy that although the functionalist method has been used by Western thinkers such as William James and Durkheim and Islamic thinkers such as Dr. Pāk Nijād, Engineer Bāzargān, Dr. Shariatī, etc. and both functionalism and pragmatism have been criticized and assessed in modern theology sources, nothing was found in Western or Islamic thinkers' works on the rules of functionalism from a religious perspective nor was anything found on the criteria for making proper use of this method in religious research and propagation, which is the main focus of this study.

1. Rules and Criteria for Mentioning the Functions of Religious Doctrines

Having highlighted the subject and importance of this study, now we shall take up explaining the rules which should be taken into consideration in a functionalist view on religion.

1.1 Underscoring Doctrinal and Practical Functions

One of the criticisms facing the pragmatist view of some individuals on religion is furnishing a purely practical theory of religious doctrines while neglecting the epistemic aspects and scientific and epistemic functions of religion. Knowledge and faith are tantamount to the roots of religion. In principle, one of the principal duties and functions of religion in society is to spread knowledge and eradicate ignorance. Referring to this function of religion, the Holy Qur'ān says:

As We have sent among you a Messenger (Prophet Muḥammad) from yourselves, to recite to you Our verses and to purify you, who will teach you the Book and Wisdom, and teach you that of which you have no knowledge. (2:151)

If action is not based on sound knowledge and faith, it is either completely worthless or ineffective, or it will have little value and impact. In the traditions transmitted from the Infallible Imāms (a), a special emphasis has been placed on acquiring knowledge and wisdom.

It was reported that one day the Messenger of Allah (s) saw two groups of people in a mosque: One group praying and beseeching Allah and the other one engaging in a scientific discussion and acquiring knowledge. He praised both of them but he preferred the knowledge-seekers and joined this group (Majlisī 1403 AH, 1:206).

The Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī (a) says:

The person whose worship (of God) is not based on understanding and knowledge is like a –mill-donkey that rotates around itself and does not move away from its starting place. Two Rak’ats of prayer performed by a wise person is better than seventy Rak’ats by the unwise one. Because, at the time of sedition and corruption, the wise will get out of it by his knowledge; but the ignorant will be misled and doomed because of his ignorance. Little work done with much knowledge is better than more work done with little knowledge, hesitation, and doubt in which case the truth resembles the falsehood. (Majlisī 1403 AH, 1:208)

In this valuable saying, Imām ‘Alī (a) has clearly stated the futility and worthlessness of an act of worship and a deed performed without knowledge and understanding. Therefore, when describing the functions of religion, especially the doctrinal tenets and precepts, the functions of religion should not be confined to practical matters while ignoring the epistemic aspects in areas such as:

1. Theology: Knowledge of God, the Exalted, is the highest and the most valuable gift that the true divine religion has conferred upon humanity; it is one of the most important functions of the religion, which the Qur‘ān has termed as the goal of the creation of the universe (Makārim Shīrāzī

1995, 24:263).

It is Allah who has created the seven heavens, and of the earth, their like, and the Command descends between them so that you know Allah is powerful over all things, and that Allah encompasses everything in knowledge. (65:12)

2. Ontology: The religion presents the correct image of the world and the hereafter and that the world is mortal and a place to pass to the Hereafter (Nahj al-balāgha, wisdom 133) and man has been created for the eternal life of the Hereafter (Tamīmī al-Āmidī 1410 AH, 267), and he should use this world and his life in it for that ultimate purpose.

3. Anthropology: It is important to gain knowledge of man and his status in the system of creation. As per the Qur‘ān, man is God’s vicegerent in the earth and he has been honored by God, the Exalted (17:70).

4. Eschatology: Religion presents the correct image of death and the ultimate destiny of humanity. Death according to the religion is not the end but only a transition from the material world, the world of duty, to the next world, the world of reckoning.

Furnishing a pure practical theory and excessive attention to the practical functions of religion and religious doctrines is a deviation on the part of some intellectuals. As a result, they have adopted the same outlook in their interpretation of religion, neglecting the epistemological domains.

1.2 Simultaneous Attention to Otherworldly and Worldly Functions

Religion and religious doctrines also impact worldly and material life. It has numerous important and unique functions not only in man’s material but also otherworldly life and spiritual matters. The Qur‘ān and narrations, transmitted from the Infallibles (a) have made mention of otherworldly and spiritual functions of religion and religious teachings as well as their worldly and material benefits.

The assumption that religion is to care for man's worldly affairs and meet his needs in this world is false, so is the assumption that religion is to take care of matters pertaining to the next world. In fact, religion covers both the material and otherworldly lives. When prescribing practical and moral obligations, it is heedful of what is in man's advantage or disadvantage in both this world and the hereafter. Referring to the same point, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī says:

Religion is a way of life which contains the good of this world in a manner that ensures perfection of the next life - the life that is the real and eternal one near to Allāh. It means that the Sharī'ah must contain the necessary laws for this worldly life and one's livelihood. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1417 AH, 2:130)

Some individuals explaining the functions of religion have focused on only the otherworldly functions of religion denying generally the religion's role in man's worldly life or reducing it to a minute extent. According to secularists, religion does not interfere with man's worldly affairs and that it seeks to reform otherworldly affairs only.

In the thoughts expressed during the last days of his life, Engineer Bāzargān says that those who subscribe to the interference of religion with the world and man's worldly life are flawed. He says:

What is not seen in any of the headlines, chapters, and other places (in religious literature) is that God sent them (the prophets) forth to teach government, economics, and management, or to reform the worldly and societal affairs. But there is a general notion of justice and charity, rendering services, and mending oneself. And insofar as you do not perform righteous deeds, faith will not lead you to heaven. (Bāzargān 1995, 52).

Communicating messages, doing corrective work and perfecting the world at the people's level is unbecoming for God of humanity and the world as it amounts to degradation of the prophets and lowering their ranks

to those of the Marxists, Pasteurs, Gandhis, or Jamashīds, Buzurgmehrs and Hammurabīs. (Bāzargān 1995, 48).

Whereas reason and narration suggest the necessity of religious interference with the worldly affairs to the maximum level, a brief look at the verses of the Holy Qur‘ān and the normative conduct of the Prophet (s) also reveals the same assertion. For example, verse 282 of Chapter 2 of the Qur‘ān, which commands Muslims to put down their economic transactions and contracts such as loans in writing, has a social and worldly function. Indeed, all of this is a prelude to the reformation and improvement for the Hereafter. However, religion is not indifferent to the world of mankind, but it seeks to help improve livelihoods. According to some prominent scholars, the prophets have to teach people to earn their livelihood and achieve perfection for the hereafter. Defining *nabī* (prophet), Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī says: “He is the one who is in charge of improving the living conditions of the people in terms of livelihood and resurrection and is aware of doing it” (Baḥrānī 1406 AH, 122).

In contrast, some individuals consider the role of religion to be confined to its worldly functions. These people believe that the goal of religion is to secure the welfare of human beings and take care of their worldly affairs. As a result, the otherworldly commands and the acts of worship serve as a prelude to taking care of the worldly affairs and are intended to reassert it. Accordingly, the main goal of religion is to serve mankind in this world. Thus, paying attention to the Hereafter is a prelude to a better life in this world because a better life will be attainable only through believing in God. People who look at religion from a psychological or sociological point of view usually make this mistake and maintain, for example, that religion provides mental peace and creates social cohesion (see Durkheim 2004, 1:56-63).

The inaccuracy of the second view does not need much explanation.

According to religion, the real life begins in the Hereafter, and this world serves as the prelude to the Hereafter. Religion has come to ensure man's felicity and happiness through proximity to God and eternal life in the Hereafter. The most important function of religion is the happiness of the hereafter. Many of the functions alluded to in religious texts are otherworldly functions.

As a result, it is wrong to limit the functions of religion to otherworldly and spiritual affairs and to deny or ignore the functions of religion in worldly life and material matters. As well, limiting the functions to worldly affairs and ignoring the otherworldly functions are contrary to the logic of the Qur'ān and narrations. Obviously, in the real world, the second deviation or mistake, i.e. limiting the functions of religion to worldly matters, is more rampant.

2. Primacy of Otherworldly Functions and the Secondary Nature of Worldly Functions

In the religious culture derived from the Qur'an and narrations, the relationship between this world and the hereafter is one of the exterior and interior and a goal and something which serves as an overture to it. The world itself has no originality and independence in and of itself, but it is a prelude to attaining the world as well as to the determination of man's eternal life in the next abode.

According to some Qur'ānic verses and narrations, the world has been strongly censured whereas, in some other verses and traditions, it has been recommended to make use of the world and not to get carried away, distracted, and amused with its adornments. The world is a bridge to happiness in the next world, and as the Holy Prophet (s) has said, it is the plantation for the next life in which case not only this world is not reproached but it has also been recommended. The Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī (a) describes this world in the following words:

The world is the place of worship for the lovers of Allah; the place of praying for the angels of Allah; the place where the revelation of Allah descends; and the marketing place for those devoted to Allah. Herein they earned mercy and herein they acquired Paradise by way of profit. (Nahj al-balāgha, wisdom 131)

If the world is a means by which one can attain the next world, it has been praised. However, if the world is the real goal and purpose, it has been reproached: “But seek, in that which Allah has given you to attain the Everlasting residence. Do not forget your share in this world” (Qur’ān 28:77). Imām ‘Alī (a) says: “If one sees through it, it would bestow him sight, but if one has his eye on it, then it would blind him” (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 82).

That is to say, if one’s view considers the world as an independent abode, it is a loss but if he considers it to be a means, it will be to his benefit. Basically, the Qur’ān censures those who think of nothing except bondage and servitude of this world: “And who do not desire anything except the worldly life” (53:29) “You want worldly gains but God wants the life hereafter for you” (8:67).

In the eye of religion, man’s real life is the life he lives in the Hereafter (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1417 AH, 16:149) and the Qur’ān clearly point to it in the following verses: “The life of this world is nothing but a diversion and play. Indeed, the Everlasting Residence is the Eternal Life, if they but knew” (29:64); “The Hereafter is better and more lasting” (8:17).

Insofar as the world is treated as a prelude and means for improving one’s life in the Hereafter, it is desirable and good. The religious sources are replete with narrations that point to the same meaning.

The Great Prophet (s) said: “The world has been created for you and you have been created for the world” (Warrām 1410 AH, 1:131).

‘Alī (a) says, “The next world is secured (by virtuous actions) in this world” (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 156). He also says, “This world has been created for other than itself and has not been created for itself” (Nahj al-balāgha, wisdom 463).

Concerning the verse 16 of surah 30 (“And how excellent is the home of the righteous”), Imām Bāqir (a) says, “The world is what people want” (‘Ayyāshī 1380 AH, 2:258).

Imām Ṣādiq (a) said, “The world is the best aid for the Hereafter” (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 5:72). Imām Hādī (a) said, “The world is a marketplace, in which some gain and others suffer loss” (Ḥarrānī 1404 AH, 483).

These narrations expressly indicate that one must use this world as a means to earn happiness and felicity for his home in the hereafter and not to consider it an independent abode.

Given the above, it can be concluded that it is a kind of departure from the logic of the Qur‘ān and narrations if the worldly functions of religion and religious doctrines are described and treated as independent and original. But if the worldly functions of religion and religious teachings are regarded as subservient to the next world, it is consistent with the religious culture. Verses and traditions also point to the worldly functions of religion but those functions have been proposed alongside the otherworldly functions so that no one gets the impression that those functions are independent.

3. Eschewing the Functionalist Approach in the Fundamental Issues of Religious Studies

In the field of religious studies, there are various issues that are not in the same category of importance. Some of them are theoretical and philosophical requiring a rational method as they proceed, some have a textual feature and others a practical one and hence studied experimentally. It is not, therefore, permissible to employ the method of explaining and

imputing functions to every religious field, especially in core issues such the rightfulness of the religion and the likes whereas this method, if employed according to the rules and criteria, is useful in matters such as the propagation and promotion of religiosity.

To clarify this issue, it is essential to look at various fields of religious studies in which the functionalist method can presumably be used.

3.1 Using Fundamentalism to Define Religion

Today, the definition of religion is one of the most important discussions in the field of religious studies. It can be argued that all religious studies are somehow based on or related to the definition of religion. Scholars define religion differently. The substantive, descriptive, moral or normative, consequentialist definitions are examples of different approaches in the definition of religion (Khosrow Panah 1379 Sh, 27).

One of the approaches in the definition of religion is the functionalist approach. That is a definition based on the functions that religion serves in individual and social arenas. For example, if religion is defined in a way in which it serves to bring or bind together the members of a community into one coherent whole, these definitions are functionalist as they operate by laying their stress on the functions rather than on the belief content. Psychologists and sociologists generally tend to define religion in terms of the role they play.

Émile Durkheim, a sociologist, defines religion as such: ‘A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, all those who adhere to them’ (Khosrow Panah 1379 Sh, 34).

Since this approach suffers from many shortcomings concerning the definition of religion, it is necessary to note that it is not permissible to

use the functionalist method to define religion as it could possibly mislead religious research and even cause deviation in the religiosity of people. The problems facing functionalism are detailed as under:

1. The definition of religion through its functions is circular because as per this approach, religion is to be known through the functions it serves. Therefore, the function of religions must be studied, and the prerequisite for this is to first distinguish religion from other similar institutions, and that too depends on the knowledge of religion. As a result, the knowledge of religion depends on the knowledge of religion and this is circular.

It is worth mentioning that these objections to functionalism come up in the definition of religion. The circularity of definition remains unsolved even in the case of general (indeterminate) knowledge (*‘ilm-i ijmālī*) of religion as opposed to detailed knowledge (*‘ilm-i itafṣīlī*) because religion must be defined through its effects even in the case of general knowledge.

2. Defining religion through its functions is essentially an evasion, not an answer to the question about the nature of religion. That is because even after mentioning the functions, the question remains: What is the religion that has these functions and effects? In other words, the definition of religion through its functions is tantamount to acknowledging one's inability to know the nature of religion.

3. Another drawback of the functional definition of religion is its excessive broadness. Given that many of the functions that are proposed for religion are not unique and exclusive to religion, and other institutions can also have them, this definition of religion is not exclusive and includes many quasi-religions or even issues unrelated to religion. Such definitions, according to Hamilton, make both frog-worship and monotheism simply a common denominator of religion. This can jeopardize the original subject-matter and result in its loss (Ḥaydarī 2009, 17).

4. The functional definition of religion leads to relativity in the definition

of religion because functions are usually relative things that change over time and space. People with experimental studies can describe the function of only a particular religion in a particular setting at a particular time, not the function of religion per se. Due to the above-mentioned problems, the functional method cannot be used to define religion. In fact, if one offers a comprehensive definition that identifies both the reality of religion and its functions at the same time, it can be a correct definition. The above problems arise when religion is defined through its functions only.

3.2 Using the Functionalist Approach to Prove the Truth of a Religion

Based on the principle of unity as per which there is one true religion at a time – contrary to pluralism – the functions of religion cannot be used to identify religion; because truth precedes the functions and comes before them. To prove the truth of religion, it is necessary to use a rational and textual method, epistemic principles, and explicit religious evidence. Khosrow Panah says: “The realist epistemologist tries, after proving the truth of the claim, to know and identify the true proposition but this stage comes after establishing the truth itself” (Khosrow Panah 1386 Sh, 69).

Given the fact that man naturally tends to be self-interested, he is usually short-sighted in distinguishing interests and prefers those which are ephemeral and transient. If the truth of something is to be proved based on functions and interests, it will turn religion into something through which he will pursue his interest. Perhaps everyday man will find something to be useful and then the next day he will find something else to be useful. Hence, when it comes to proving the truth of religion, the functionalist method will ultimately lead man to accept pluralism, because different religions can have benefits for different people at a time. Obviously, truth pluralism is invalid according to both reason and definitive textual proofs.

The functionalist definitions ignore the actual origin and ultimate end of religion. As a result, there would be no distinction between true and

false religions and it would mean that religions, true or false, play equal roles and that their truth and falsehood have no impact on their functions and the roles they play. This position often leads its followers to the abyss of denial of truth or relativity, just as Feuerbach, Marx, Durkheim, and Freud, who had a functionalist approach to religion, considered it as a human product (Ḥaydarī 2009, 17). It can be concluded, therefore that the functionalist method cannot be used to establish the truth of any faith or religion.

It is worth mentioning that some Muslim thinkers and scholars have made use of the method of stating the functions of religion to establish the truthfulness of religion in general i.e. the need for religion. For example, to prove the need for religion based on this function of religion, ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that religion provides social cohesion and helps settle differences. This is a summary of what he says:

Man is social by nature. Because people are dictated by nature to remain together, and as cooperation and sociability are their natural urge, they have to live together in a society. But this togetherness breeds differences and conflicts. That is why man stands in need of laws to reform his social life and remove his conflicts. These laws cannot be man-made because man naturally tends to pursue his own interests, not to mention the fact that his perceptive faculty and knowledge are limited. Therefore, such laws that could cut away all the roots of conflict should come from outside which is religion and revelation. The only way to reform is the same religion. (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1417 AH, 2:111-13)

As for such types of arguments, it is important to note that making use of the functionalist method can be justified if two conditions are fulfilled. First, a function that is unique and irreplaceable should serve as the middle term. Second, that function should be inevitable and necessary for mankind just as it is necessary in the foregoing argument.

3.3 Using the Functionalist Method to Promulgate and Promote Religion in Society

The identification of appropriate methods to promote and propagate religion and to create enthusiasm and motivation in the masses to adhere to religion is one of the topics in the field of religious studies. We know that people are at different levels of faith and fidelity, and the type of motivation also varies at different levels.

In a tradition narrated from Imām Ṣādiq (a), people have been divided into three categories in terms of their motives. Some worship God to attain Paradise, some worship Him out of fear of Hell and others worship Him out of true love (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 2:84). Naturally, the stimulus in every category differs from the stimuli in the other categories.

The Qur'ān also warns some people of punishment in the Hellfire to motivate them to remain on the path of guidance:

Believers, guard yourselves and your families against the Fire the fuel of which is people and stones, over which there are harsh, and stern angels who never disobey Allah in that which He orders and do what they are ordered. (66:6)

Some others are promised with divine bounties bestowed upon them: “They shall be reclining on couches ranged in rows and We shall wed them to houris (virgins of Paradise) with large wide eyes” (52:20). Some others are promised with a place in close proximity to Allah enjoying the divine pleasure:

Indeed, the cautious shall live amid gardens and a river, in a secure abode, in the presence of the Powerful King. (Qur'ān 54: 54-55) Allah has promised the believing men and women gardens underneath which rivers flow, in which they shall live forever. Goodly mansions in the Gardens of Eden, and the pleasure from Allah which is greater. That is the greatest

winning. (9:72)

Understanding the audience and using an appropriate method to generate motivation in them are an important propagation technique underscored by the Qur'ānic verses and narrations (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 1:23). The fact that sometimes the Infallible Imāms (a) gave different people different answers to the same question is because of the same reason.

One of the highly effective methods in generating motivation in the general public toward religion and religiosity is to mention the functions of religion and its impacts on one's life in this world and the Hereafter. Many people are further motivated to abide by religious instructions upon hearing the functions that they have in their lives. That is why the Qur'ān and prophetic traditions point to those functions as they direct instructions to people. Here is one example:

Then I said, ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the Most Forgiving. He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain. And help you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers. (Qur'ān 71:10-12)

This holy verse points to a relationship between seeking divine forgiveness and material and worldly abundance in human societies. In fact, the abundance of worldly bounties is one of the functions of asking for forgiveness and turning in repentance to Allah, the Exalted.

To encourage and persuade his people to mend their behavior, do good deeds, and return to the right path of servitude to God, Prophet Noah asked them to ask God for forgiveness. He also points to a spiritual and several material effects of seeking divine forgiveness. The spiritual effect is the forgiveness that is achieved and the material impact is the precipitation or rainfall and abundance of wealth, children, orchards, and rivers.

It becomes clear therefore that seeking divine forgiveness has an

immediate impact on the removal of miseries and problems and it opens the gate of heavenly and worldly bounties. It indicates that there is a relationship between what is in the interest of human society and what is in its disinterest and the general condition of the world. If human societies mend themselves, they will live a clean and pleasant life. If they act the other way round, they will obtain reverse results (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1417 AH, 20:30).

We know that in this verse, a moral obligation is issued and directed to the general people in society but the spiritual and material functions of the obligation have also been mentioned to motivate people to carry out the obligation.

Certainly, mentioning the functions not only generates motivation but it also entails other benefits such as creating a sense of appreciation and gratitude to religion, because by hearing the blessings and the impacts that religion has on their lives, people will further try to defend and preserve the religion. So, insofar as the rules and conditions are fulfilled, not only is there no problem in making use of the functionalist method to propagate and promote religion but it is also useful.

3.4 Using the Functionalist Method in Disputation and Debate with Opponents

One of the principles of disputation and debate is to use generally accepted and undisputed opinions (Muḥaffar 1400 AH, 338). In other words, creating a common ground to advance the debate and achieve a more important goal sometimes requires one to offer a compromise on his position to appease the other party. Where in the religious debates the other side has a negative position on religion, one can use that party's accepted and established principles to find a common ground and start a useful discussion and bring the other side to the desired point.

As well, this method can be used to silence the opponent in a dispute.

For example, if a person wants to get into a debate with a functionalist sociologist who rejects religion as the opiate of the masses with no positive function, he should use the same principle that he subscribes to. Thus, he should let him know the positive functions of religion and convince him to accept that religion has numerous positive functions. In the next stage, he is led to the position that this principle i.e. proving the truth of religion through the functionalist method is not a correct basis and that the truth and veracity of religion should be established by theoretical means and intellectual foundations.

4. Not Contenting Oneself with Experimental Studies in Discovering the Functions of Religion and Religious Doctrines

The effects and functions of religion can be discovered mainly in three ways:

1. Rational thinking
2. Explicit religious texts
3. Field and experimental studies

Generally, those with a functionalist perspective toward religion, content themselves with the third method to discover the functions. This in itself is influenced by their positivist roots and paradigms. Those who ignore or sever the relationship between religion and its divine origin and consider scientific issues to be exclusively experimental, tend to use experimental methods to discover the functions.

However, if we accept that experiments are limited in scope and that religion has a divine source, then contenting ourselves with the experimental method to explore the functions will not lead us to a reasonable conclusion.

Ancient theology has mentioned the benefits of faith and religiosity using, mostly, rational and scriptural methods. Sometimes, references have been made to those benefits using experiments but Muslim scholars do not

content themselves with experimental methods to discover the functions because the experimental method is characterized by many temporal, spatial, and epistemic limitations. More importantly, when it comes to outlining and explaining the functions, the best source is the legislator of religion.

Ignoring this criterion will lead some people to fall in the trap of interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses or narrations and religious doctrines based on personal opinion (*tafsīr bil ra'y*). The fact that some people try to mention material functions for devotional practices like the ritual bathing, ablution, tayammum, and prayer, emanates from the same deviation. For example, Engineer Bāzargān says that the function of minor and major ablution (*wuḍū* and *ghusl*) is to stay clean and observe hygiene and that the Legislator's intention of the laws regarding ritual purity and impurity is to maintain the cleanliness of the body, clothe, house and roads (see Bāzargān 2000, 7:111) whereas Imām al-Riḍā (a) mentions humility and submission to God as the wisdom behind the minor ablution which is a form of inner purity.

Muḥammad bin 'Alī Mājīlwayah narrates from his uncle Muḥammad bin Abū al-Qāsim from Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Kūfī from Muḥammad bin Sinān that Imām al-Riḍā gave the following response to his letter:

The reason why washing the face and the forearms and wiping the head and neck have become obligatory during *Wuḍū* is the fact that God's servant wants to stand before Allah and meet Him with the external organs. That is why washing the face has become mandatory because of prostration and humility and washing the two hands is mandatory because they are means by whose movement one's desire, willingness, fear, cutting and severing take place. And wiping the head and feet is necessary because they are the external parts by which one faces another person under all circumstances and the humility and humbleness which is visible with the face and the forearms are not with the forehead and the feet (Ibn Bābawayh 2005, 1:280).

Conclusion

Given the issues raised and discussed in this study, we can come to the following conclusion:

1. The pragmatic view and reliance on the functions of religion can be used as a method.
2. Using this method in the entirely theoretical areas of a religion such as defining the religion or validating and establishing the truth of the religion is wrong and may lead to deviation from the right path in the study of religion.
3. The use of the functionalist method in all areas, where it is permissible to use as mentioned in the foregoing article, must be in accordance with the rules and criteria.

These rules are the outcome of the use of this method in religious texts as well as of intellectual reflections. They are rules such as:

- Attention should be paid to all the functions of religion, worldly and otherworldly, material and spiritual, practical, and cognitive.
- The originality of the otherworldly functions and the subservience of the worldly functions to the otherworldly functions should be borne in mind.
- One should not content himself with the experimental method to determine the functions of religion; rather he should also make use of the explicit religious texts.

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