

The Quranic Classification of Human Religions: A Theological Review

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Abstract: The Quran clearly and evidently states that humans are created by Allah who has many attributes, such as the omnipotent, omniscient, alive, sustainer, eternal and provider. The Quran is believed by Muslims to be the words of Allah revealed to his last and final prophet Muhammad in the 7th century AC. The Quran explains how humans are created and they have attributes different from Allah's attributes. By using descriptive and deductive approaches based on some of the texts of the Quran, this study intends to classify and explain humans based on their beliefs or theological doctrines. Based on the Quran, this study also elaborates on the status of their beliefs and destinies of their adherents in this world as well as in the hereafter. This discovers that human beings are classified by the Quran into different religious adherents, such as Muslims, polytheists and the peoples of books since they have differences in their theological doctrines.

Key words: Human religions, Quranic classification, theology, religious beliefs, attributes

INTRODUCTION

The Quran has many themes and one of them is the theme on human beliefs. The human beliefs mentioned in the Quran sometimes in connection with the narratives and stories about the Prophets appointed by Allah to call humans to believe in Allah and worship him only. One of these narratives is about Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba who ruled Saba in Yemen. Her people worshipped the sun. The hoopoe discovered them and reported to Prophet Solomon about them. Prophet Solomon invited the Queen of Sheba to believe in Allah and to worship him alone. She accepted the invitation and become one of the followers of Prophet Solomon. The story about the Prophet Solomon, the hoopoe and the worshippers of the sun is found in the Quran (27: 20-44).

Allah sent many prophets for many human groups or races in many localities in this world before He sent the last and final Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the 7th century AC. The main duties of these prophets are to call humans to believe in Allah and to worship him only and to lead them into Allah's ways while they lived among their peoples. In few chapters and verses the Quran explain the duties of these prophets. The Quran (16: 36) indicates: For we assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger (with the command), Serve Allah and eschew evil. The Quran (21: 25) states, not a messenger did we send before thee without this inspiration sent by us to him that there is no God but I, therefore worship and serve me. The Quran (43: 45) explains and question thou the messengers whom we sent before thee; did we appoint any deities other than (Allah) most Gracious

to be worshipped? The Quran (11: 50) relates, to the ad people (we sent) Hud, one of their own brethren. He said:

O my people! Worship Allah! ye have no other God but him. Your other Gods; ye do nothing but invent!

The Quran (18: 110) elaborates, say:

I am but a man like yourselves but the inspiration has come to me that your God is one God: Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner.

Surely, not all the beliefs found among humans in the 21st century are found in the Quran because the Quran was revealed and completed in the 7th century. Some of the beliefs and their believers are mentioned in the Quran. Based on the beliefs, this study plans to classify them into Muslims and polytheists. A Muslim is a man or a woman who believes in Allah as the only God to be believed and worshipped. A polytheist is a man or a woman who believes in and worships more than one God. A polytheist is also a henotheist.

There are reasons for humans to believe in many Gods or in one God. Those who believe in many Gods are called polytheists or henotheists and their religious beliefs are called polytheism and henotheism, respectively. Humans who believe in one God are called monotheists and their religious beliefs are called monotheism. In the Quran, humans who believe in one God or Allah are called al-Muslimun because they believe in Islam, Allah's religion and al-Muminun because they believe in Islamic articles of faith.

Regarding the reasons for humans to believe in many Gods or in one God, sociobiology, popularized by Edward O. Wilson from Harvard University in 1975 has linked religious beliefs with genes in human biology. Complex interactions among numerous genes give us (humans) the capacity and inclination to develop into people who are either more or less violent, more or less altruistic, monogamous or polygamous, Muslim or Catholic or whatever depending on how the upbringing, experiences and the myriad influences on us of culture we are immersed in elicit the potentialities with those categories of genes (Hunt, 1999).

It's only human to believe in God. The report said; humans are naturally inclined to believe in Gods and an afterlife, according to a major 3 years study. The international study led by Oxford University academics, conducted in 20 countries, sought to discover whether beliefs in Gods and afterlife were learned or simply part of human nature. This study discovered that religion is a common fact of human nature across different societies and people from a variety of cultures believed that some part of their mind, soul or spirit lives on after death (New Sunday Times May 15, 2011). On the same page of this English news paper published in Malaysia, it listed the facts and figures for faiths and the faithful as follows: Christianity 2 billion, Islam 1.2 billion, Hinduism 785 million, Buddhism 360 million and Sikhism 16 million.

According to Paul Kurtz, there are many reasons for humans to believe in religious beliefs and practices, such as the need for identity, ethnicity, the quest for community, the role of indoctrination, the power of tradition and the cognitive and non-cognitive tendencies and impulses. He focuses on the cognitive and non-cognitive tendencies. Human cognition performs a powerful role in human life through common sense, practical reason and critical thinking to deal with empirical subjects, to fulfill human needs and purposes, as well as to solve the problems faced by humans. Philosophy and science have emerged from human cognition and both have contributed to human understanding of themselves and the other created creatures or beings. Human cognition tends to a class of overbeliefs (sic over-beliefs) or transcendental beliefs, they are over or transcendental beliefs because they are over and beyond normal observations or rational coherence and they are enhanced by mystery and magic. The transcendental beliefs are explained by human cognition through transcendental explanations whose characteristics are non-natural and they cannot be confirmed experimentally, they cannot be corroborated objectively (Kurtz, 1999). The over or transcendental beliefs are found in many religions including Islam.

Human cognition also tends to what arouses awe and entices the passionate imagination called the transcendental temptation, leading or pushing humans to believe in things unseen because they satisfy felt needs and desires. Humans have resorted to the transcendental temptation in various dimensions and situations in their lives such as in unmitigated disasters, unbearable pain and sorrow, the dread of death and the evils and injustices of the world. Human emotive and intellectual desires submit to the transcendental temptation because it enables human beings to survive the often cruel trials and tribulations involving them. The transcendental temptation, thus can provide a powerful palliative enabling humans to cope with the unbearable, overcome mortality and finitude and it does so by creating fanciful systems of religious overbelief in which priests and prophets propitiate the unseen sources of power and thus shield us from the vicissitudes of fortune (Kurtz, 1999). The belief in the unseen things is found in many religions including Islam.

Human beings who believe in unseen myths and forces to whom they propitiated by ritual and prayer had a tendency to survive and to pass on this genetic predisposition to their offspring. Thus, religiosity is a heritable factor within the naked human ape (Kurtz, 1999).

From Islamic theological viewpoint, human beings have acknowledged the existence of one God or Allah before they are born into this world. This acknowledgment is found in the Quran (7: 172). However, this covenant between human beings and their creator Allah has been forgotten by some human beings due to human and non-human factors and they become polytheists, henotheists and atheists instead of monotheists.

THE MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN THE QURAN

The term al-Islam is mentioned six times or in six verses in the Quran (3: 19 and 85, 5: 3, 6: 125, 39: 22 and 61: 7). The Quran (3: 19) affirms the status of Islam as Allah's religion. Ali translates the Quran (3: 19) stating, the religion before Allah is Islam (submission to his will) (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). The Quran (3: 85) clearly rejects the religions other than Islam, even though humans embrace those religions. Allah will not accept their worship and they are losers. Ali translates the Quran (3: 85) stating:

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah) never will it be accepted of him and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good) (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

The Quran (5: 3) emphasizes that Islam is the perfect religion from Allah for humans. If they embrace Islam, Allah is content with them. The Quran (5: 3) is translated: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

In the Quran, the Arabic plural forms of Muslims for men and women are Muslimun, al-Muslimun, Muslimin, al-Muslimin, al-Muslimat, respectively and their singular forms are Muslim, al-Muslim and Muslimah, al-Muslimah. In the Quran, the active participles or the nomen agentis are less numerous than the nomen patientis (Wright, 1981) for the nouns Muslimun and al-Muslimun and Muslimin and al-Muslimin.

A Muslim is neither a Jew nor a Christian and he is not a polytheist. In other words, a Muslim is different from a Jew, a Christian or a polytheist. The affirmed differences between Muslims and three other religious believers namely Jews, Christians and polytheists are found in the Quran (3: 67). The Quran (3: 67) explains that Abraham, the Prophet, was not a Jew, a Christian or a polytheist but he was a Muslim. In other words, Abraham did not believe in Judaism, Christianity and polytheism. He believed in Islam. Islam is different from Judaism, Christianity and polytheism. The English translation by Arberry about Abraham is not a Jew is no; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian but he was a Muslim and one pure of faith, certainly he was never of the idolaters (Arberry, 1971).

The Quran (3: 84) explains what Muslims believe; Muslims believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to them and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their Lord and they do not make any distinction among the prophets.

The Quran (2: 285) mentions the four articles of faith for each Muslim or believer namely belief in Allah, his angels, his books and his messengers. The messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord and the believers, each one believes in God and his angels and in his books and his messengers (Arberry, 1971).

Muslims are also demanded to believe in the last day in addition to the belief in Allah, his angels, books and messengers. The Quran (2: 177) elaborates, it is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the last day and the angels and the book and the messengers (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). Arberry translates the term al-birr in the Quran (2: 177) into piety rather than righteousness as does Ali. It is not piety that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this, to believe in God and the last day, the angels, the book and the prophets (Arberry, 1971).

The total study of faith for Muslims in the Quran (2: 177 and 2: 285) are five altogether. The 6th article of faith for Muslims is known as al-qadar is stated in the prophetic tradition after the 5 articles of faith (El-Najjar, 2007).

The great majority of Muslims believe in the 6 articles of faith namely belief in Allah, his angels, books, messengers, the last day and al-qadar, the standard of good and evil is from Allah. Bowker (1998) comes up with the 7 articles of faith believed by Muslims because he distinguishes between the last day and the life after death. For him, the last day means the Doomsday not including the events after the Doomsday. The 7 articles of faith listed by Bowker are:

- The unity of the Godhead
- Belief in the angels
- Belief in the books, in all the revealed books, up to the Quran
- Belief in the prophets from Adam up to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on all of them)
- In Doomsday
- In what is called qadar that is on destiny determined by God with happiness and misery both coming from God and the seventh is life after death (Bowker, 1998)

Since, Muslims believe in the religion of Islam approved by Allah, they are promised by Allah to receive useful and beneficial rewards from Allah in this world and in the hereafter. Many verses in the Quran say about the good and useful rewards from Allah to Muslims. Some of them are cited here:

- The Quran (2: 62) promises, any who believe in Allah and the last day and work righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (Ali and Yusuf, 1996) whoso believes in God and the last day and works righteousness their wage awaits them with their Lord and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow (Arberry, 1971)
- The Quran (5: 69 and 6: 48) has the same promise for Muslims
- The Quran (18: 88) stresses but whoever believes and works righteousness, he shall have a goodly reward and easy will be his task as we order it by our command (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). Another translates but as for him who believes and does righteousness, he shall receive as recompense the reward most fair and we shall speak to him, of our command, easiness (Arberry, 1971)
- The Quran (4: 57 and 122) promises the eternal gardens in the paradises in the hereafter for Muslims

- The Quran (18: 107-108) promises the gardens in the Paradise for Muslims. But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness the Gardens of Paradise shall be their hospitality, there in to dwell forever, desiring no removal out of them (Arberry, 1971)

Another translates, as to those who believe and work righteous deeds, they have for their entertainment, the gardens of paradise wherein they shall dwell (For aye): No change will they wish for themselves (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

THE POLYTHEISTS AND POLYTHEISM IN THE QURAN

In the Quran, the terms for the polytheists are *mushrikun*, *al-mushrikun*, *mushrikin*, *al-mushrikin* and *mushrikat* in the plural forms and their singular forms are *mushrik* and *mushrikat*. A *mushrikat* is a female polytheist and a *mushrik* is a male polytheist. Many verses in the Quran explain about the polytheists because the majority of the Arabs in Mecca and Medina in the 7th century were the polytheists. The term *al-mushrikun* or *mushrikun* is found in the Quran in 6 verses only these verses are the Quran (6: 121, 9: 28 and 33, 12: 106, 16: 100 and 61: 9). The term *al-mushrikin* or *mushrikin* is found in the Quran more than the term *al-mushrikun* or *mushrikun*. There are about 36 verses in the Quran mention the term *al-mushrikin* or *mushrikin*. In other words, from the Arabic grammatical view, the *nomen patientis* of polytheists are more than the *nomen agentis* of the polytheists (Wright, 1981).

Ehrlich *et al.* (1980) state that polytheism is belief in or worship of more than one God. The terms polytheist and polytheistic are a noun and an adjective, respectively. According to Reese (1980), Polytheism stands in contrast to henotheism and monotheism. Based on this definition of polytheism, the great majority of Arabs in Arabia in 7th century AC were polytheists because they believed or worshipped more than one God. The Quran (53: 19-20) mentions three goddesses believed and worshipped by the Arabs; the goddesses were Lat, Uzza and Manat. According to Ali and Yusuf (1996), the three principal idols of Pagan Arab Idolatry were the goddesses Lat, Uzza and Manat. Opinions differ as to their exact forms; one version is that Lat was in human shape, Uzza had its origin in a sacred tree and Manat in a white stone.

The Quran explains that polytheists worship the visible and tangible objects as well as the invisible and intangible ones. The visible and tangible worshipped objects are idols (*awthan* in the Quran (29: 17)), idols (*asnam* in the Quran 14: 35 and 26: 71) and the sun

(in the Quran 27: 24). The invisible and intangible worshipped objects are the *jinn* (in the Quran 34: 41), the evils (*al-taghut* in the Quran 39: 17) and Satan (in the Quran 36: 60).

The Quran (2: 221) prohibits Muslim men from marrying polytheist women and Muslim women from marrying polytheist men because the polytheist men and women do not believe in what Muslim men and women believe. Do not marry idolatresses, until they believe a believing slave girl is better than an idolatress, though you may admire her. And do not marry idolaters, until they believe. A believing slave is better than an idolater, though you may admire him (Arberry, 1971). Meanwhile, Ali translates the terms *mushrik* (a male polytheist) and *mushrikah* (a female polytheist) into an unbeliever and an unbelieving woman, respectively when he translates the Quran (2: 221) (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). In comparing the English translations by Arberry and Ali for the Arabic terms *mushrik* and *mushrikah*, I tend to think that Arberry's translation is more apparent since an idolater is a worshipper of an idol or idols, since he believes in idols as their Gods. A polytheist is indeed a believer in many Gods.

The Quran (2: 221) provides the reasons for Muslims not to marry polytheists, although they admire polytheists. The first reason is their difference in belief. Muslims believe in Allah alone while polytheists believe in many Gods or worship many idols. The second reason is the difference in destiny. The destiny of polytheists is the fire and the destiny of Muslims is the paradise.

The polytheists are unclean and they are prohibited from approaching the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. The Quran (9: 28) says:

O believers, the idolaters are indeed unclean so let them not come near the Holy Mosque after this year of theirs. If you fear poverty, God shall surely enrich you of his bounty, if he will; God is all-knowing, all-wise (Arberry, 1971).

Ali translates the term *al-mushrikun* in the Quran (9: 28) into the Pagans. He writes:

O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans are unclean so let them not after this year of their, approach the Sacred Mosque (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK IN THE QURAN

In the Quran, the Arabic noun *ahl al-kitab* is for the people of the book. The Quran (3: 64) calls upon the people of the book to believe in Allah alone and to worship him alone and to disbelieve in many Gods. The

people of the book are not Muslims because they do not believe in Allah and do not worship him alone. They are among the polytheists since they believe in many Gods. If the people of the book are not polytheists, they are henotheists, since henotheism is the belief in one supreme God and other Gods too. Henotheism is the idea, view or belief that one God is supreme while not denying the existence of other Gods. Often taken to be an intermediate stage between polytheism and monotheism (Reese, 1980).

The Jews and the Christians are the people of the book but they do not believe in Allah alone. The Quran (9: 30) explains that the Jews believe in Uzayr as son of God and the Christians believe in Christ as son of God. The Jews say, Ezra is the Son of God; the Christians say, the Messiah is the Son of God. That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted! (Arberry, 1971). The English translation from Ali for the Quran (9: 30) is the Jews call Uzayr a son of God and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the truth! (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). Both Arberry and Ali translate unbelievers for the Arabic term *al-ladhina kafaru* in the Quran (9: 30).

The Jews and Christians associate partners to Allah. They are similar to the polytheists because they believe in more than one God. Both the Jews and Christians take their religious scholars as their lords. The Quran (9: 31) says:

They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah and (they take as their Lord) Christ, the son of Mary, yet they were commanded to worship but one God: There is no God but he. Praise and glory to him (Far is he) from having the partners they associate (with him) (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

Arberry's translation for the Quran (9: 31) is they have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God and the Messiah, Mary's son and they were commanded to serve but one God; there is no God but he; glory be to him, above that they associate (Arberry, 1971).

The Quran (3: 70-71) explains that the people of the book rejected the signs of Allah and mixed up the truth with the falsehood and concealed the truth. In their theologies, the Jews and the Christians believe in God, as well as in Uzayr and Jesus, respectively as the sons of God as stated in the Quran (9: 30).

The Quran threatens the polytheists and the people of the book namely the Jews and the Christians with dire and severe punishments in the hereafter because they believe in polytheism and henotheism. They are considered as pagans, idolaters or unbelievers from Islamic theological perspective. The Quran (98: 6) explains about their punishment in the hell saying, those who reject (truth) among the people of the book and among the polytheists will be in hellfire, to dwell therein (for aye). They are the worst of creatures (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). Another translation for the Quran (98: 6) is the unbelievers of the people of the book and the idolaters shall be in the fire of Gehenna, therein dwelling forever; those are the worst of creatures (Arberry, 1971).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Quran divides or classifies human beings based on their beliefs or religions into two main categories only: Muslims or believers and non-Muslims or non-believers. The Muslims are promised with rewards in the hereafter because they accept Islam, Allah's religion, believe in Allah and other articles of Islamic faith and worship Allah alone. In other words, the Muslims are the monotheists in the Quran.

The non-Muslims are warned with the punishments in the hereafter because they believe in polytheism or henotheism and they also worship many Gods, although they claim they believe in one powerful God. In other words, the people of the book and the polytheists, idolaters and pagans are in the category of non-Muslims or unbelievers as prescribed by Allah in the Quran.

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