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Combination of Scientific and Religious Worldviews in the Works of Christian and Muslim Thinkers of the 20th Century

20. Yüzyıl Hristiyan ve Müslüman Düşünürlerin Çalışmalarında Bilimsel ve Dini Görüşlerin Kaynaştırılması

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Abstract: The crisis of the positivist worldview in the twentieth century has caused attempts of combining scientific and religious paradigms. A number of authors from different religious backgrounds tried to put together scientific approaches on the technical level, and religious values on the spiritual level. The call for a combination of science and religion was an important feature of Western Christianity during the twentieth century, appearing even in pope`s encyclicals. Despite the secular Western worldview is rooted in Christianity, it withdrew far enough to see it as religiously neutral. Thus, Christian and Muslim thinkers, and Said Nursi among them, tried to renew a connection between religious values and scientific knowledge where the religion is responsible for grounding an ontological and epistemological context, and the science is a part of practical implementation of the worldview based on religion.

Keywords: Worldview, Science, Enlightenment, Secularism, Theology

20. Yüzyıl Hristiyan ve Müslüman Düşünürlerin Çalışmalarında Bilimsel ve Dini Görüşlerin Kaynaştırılması

Öz: 20. yüzyıldaki pozitivist dünya görüşünden ortaya çıkan bunalım bilimsel ve dini paradigmaların birleştirilmesi teşebbüslerine yol açtı. Farklı dini altyapısı olan birçok müellif teknik düzeyde bilimsel yaklaşımlar ve manevi düzeyde de dinî değerler oluşturmaya çalıştılar. Bilim ve dini birleştirme çağrısı 20. Yüzyıl Batı Hristiyanlığının önemli bir özelliği olarak ve hatta Papa'nın genelgelerinde yer aldı. Seküler Batı dünya görüşünün kökü Hristiyanlığa dayanmasına rağmen dinî olarak tarafsız görünemeyecek kadar kökeninden uzaklaştı. Böylece aralarında Said Nursi'nin de bulunduğu Hristiyan ve Müslüman ilahiyatçılar bilimsel bilgiye dinî değerler katmaya ve yeni bir evrensel sistem inşa etmeye çalıştılar ki bu düzende bilim yeni teknik icatlardan sorumlu iken dinin mesuliyet alanını da ahlak oluşturuyordu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dünya Görüşü, Bilim, Aydınlanma, Dünyevilik, İlahiyat

Introduction

Today, despite the dominance of the secular positivist paradigm in the intellectual (mainly Western or Westernized) environment, it is less and less able to respond to the challenges faced by humanity as the technological development of anthropogenic civilization accelerates. The intervention, often devastating, of humanity guided by a secular worldview, even allows researchers to define our historical era as an

"Anthropocene". The 21st century has proven the urgency of finding alternative ethical paradigms, and the problem of anthropogenic intervention to nature has already been recognized even by the UN, that has included several environmental items in the list of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and set an ambitious aim of achieving carbon neutrality and avoiding global warming. Therefore, the study of alternative religious ethical systems and the possibility of combining them with the scientific worldview is relevant to the study of religions. The purpose of the article is to identify the main ideas and ways of combining religious and scientific worldviews offered by Christian and Muslim theologians of the 20th century.

1. Natural sciences as the Modernity`s criteria of Truth. Since the secular worldview has been approved in modern Europe, science has gradually assumed the authority of the absolute criterion of truth, which in medieval society was religion. As P. Gaidenko writes, "From about the middle of the 16th to the end of the 17th century both the world picture that has existed with little change for almost two millennia and the principles of knowledge of this world are changing. Although a number of prerequisites for such a change were prepared during the late Middle Ages, it is nevertheless the 17th century that is rightly characterized as the century of the scientific revolution" (Gaidenko 1997, 44). Piama Gaidenko, Frances Yates and others note that scholars of early Modernity (Bacon, Kepler, Newton, and others) were inspired by religious and esoteric worldviews. In particular, they were influenced by Reformation Christianity, for which knowledge of the world by empirical methods was the optimal way of knowing the Creator. For, unlike speculative philosophical physics, where the successors bow to the predecessors (above all, Aristotle), here one can find each researcher's independent path to the knowledge of God's plan.

Ian Barbour emphasized that not all achievements of early modern science should be attributed to Protestantism, but the influence of Protestant consciousness not only on ethics but also on science was one of the factors in its development (Barbour 2000, 29-31). Of course, not only Protestants were among the believers interested in the scientific method. The famous eighteenth-century Catholic mystic Karl Eckartshausen called blind faith in the

authority one of the major obstacles in the way of understanding Natura: “Why do you have eyes? Why ears? Why hands? Is it not for you to see, hear, feel by yourself? What do you want to see with other people's eyes, hear with other people's ears and feel with other people's hands? Whoever understands this provision will be able to explain many phenomena in Natura” (Eckartshausen 1993, 19).

However, the Enlightenment era did not provide a clear answer to key philosophical questions: is a man created by God or nature; for what purpose and whether he has a choice; whether a man has only the bodily nature or he is the repository of the soul during his earthly life; are ethical and aesthetic values universal, and therefore objective or they are relative and subjective. Famous philosophers – Hobbes, Helvetius, Golbach, Condorcet, Comte, and others have tried to answer these and other questions. Experimental research methods in the natural sciences could not be applied in the field of understanding the social processes. According to Isaiah Berlin, all that was needed for the humanities was "Newton, or series of Newtons" (Berlin 1999, 7). The imperfection of the linguistic constructs of that time made the consciousness boggling and was a kind of philosophical speculation. “Kant was the first to draw the crucial distinction between facts — the data of experience as it were, the things, persons, events, qualities, relations, that we observed or inferred or thought about — and the categories in terms of which we sensed and imagined and reflected about them. These were, for him, independent of the different cosmic attitudes — the religious or metaphysical frameworks that belonged to various ages and civilizations” (Berlin 1999, 7). Then the desire to resist modern secularism and at the same time to reconcile ones doctrine with the latest scientific discoveries deepened and culminated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

2. Attempts to combine religion and science by Christian thinkers. During the 20th century, the development of science reached a level where scientific inventions began to be used for killing a huge number of people, not to mention the harmful impact of science-based production on the environment. In such a situation the question naturally arises about the advisability of a worldview, in particular, ethics, based on scientific knowledge.

Notwithstanding the practical value of scientific inventions, theologians of different traditions began to offer variants of combining them with religious ethical principles. Often, such appeals are heard not only to the people with a positivist materialistic worldview but to fellow believers who are in a state of doubt and uncertainty about their own worldview. To some extent, the call for a combination of science and religion is at the same time missionary outside and pastoralism within the tradition.

In general, the second half of the 20th century is characterized by the revival of religious thought. Since the 1970s, sociologists have recorded an increase in religiosity in European society, the emergence of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic movements. They were united by the denial of a secular approach to life and the plans for social reorganization of the society, basing on the Scriptures. French sociologist Gilles Kepel even used the term "Revenge of God" to explain the formation of a new religious atmosphere after the collapse of communist ideology and the decline of adopted scientific truths associated with the advancements of scientific and technological progress (Kepel 1994).

More and more frequently, scholars have pointed to the compatibility of scientific thought with the theological systems of world religions and Christianity in particular. This conclusion was reached by the participants of the Conference "The Role of the Church in a Postmodern Age", held in New York and San Francisco in 1987. Summarizing the results of the discussion, Dr. L. Markova noted: “Awareness of the fact that Christianity is not outside the society when it comes to it as a whole and relates not only to our heart but also to our mind, is a major change in our cultural situation. The transition is not yet complete, but it is a perspective that opens up in the postmodern world» (Markova 1999, 117). Thus, the philosophical and scientific justifications that at one time excluded the existence of God and considered faith to be a private matter were exhausted. Increasingly, theology uses a variety of philosophical teachings in its own research. In general, the philosophy of religion, which has evolved into an independent philosophical discipline, is at the forefront of the sciences that study religion.

The idea, according to which religion and science should not oppose is a response to the secularist idea, according to which they

should oppose to one another. Whereas in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, people with a religious or esoteric worldview were engaged in science, then modern scholars have increasingly made natural science not only a profession but also a worldview, and in this very aspect religion and science have clashed. And when modern-day philosophers speak of the possibility of reconciling religion and science, they often propose to actually take away from the sciences the right of moral and metaphysical reflection and to deprive religion of the right to speak of the immanent world. Breeding the spheres of responsibility of religion and science should make impossible a clash between them and allow the representatives of each area to learn from each other. E.g., in his famous debate with the future Pope Joseph Ratzinger, J. Habermas suggested the secular philosophers to seek the advice of religious thinkers on ethics: «Something can remain intact in the communal life of the religious fellowships — provided of course they avoid dogmatism and the coercion of people's consciences — something that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by the professional knowledge of experts alone. I am referring to adequately differentiated possibilities of expression and to sensitivities with regard to lives that have gone astray, with regards to societal pathologies, with regard to the failure of individuals` plans for their lives, and with regard to the deformation and disfigurement of the lives that people share with one another. The asymmetry of the epistemological claims allows us to affirm that philosophy must be ready to learn from theology, not only for functional reasons, but also (when we recall philosophy`s successful "Hegelian" learning processes) for substantial reasons" (Habermas 2006, 43-44).

For their part, Catholic theologians have also repeatedly expressed support for science. The great Christian evolutionist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who developed the evolution theory of human and the universe as a whole, aimed not only at interpreting biblical history in the light of recent scientific discoveries, but also at the catechization of the scientific worldview, basing on the Christian doctrines. Addressing to fellow theologians who must find ways of preaching in the conditions of the victorious march of positivism and secularism, Teilhard de Chardin wrote in the article "Christ the Evolver" (1942): «If the theoreticians of Christianity wish to use language that is intelligible and (what is even more

important) convincing to our contemporaries, one thing, above all, is indispensable: they must understand and accept with real sympathy, the new ideas of himself which modern man has been scientifically obliged to develop» (Teilhard de Chardin 2002, 139). Pope Paul VI writes in encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (1964): «We are most keenly interested in science, technology, and especially in work. The bread which they produce is sacred, whether destined for the table or the altar» (Chapter *No Conflict with Economic Realities*). Although in the same text pope strongly criticizes atheism as a misconception that humankind should emancipate itself from obsolete and erroneous religious beliefs about the world and life, to build a new worldview based on science (Chapter *Atheism a Growing Evil*), he still calls for search a common language even with atheists, at least through the search for common values, such as peace in society.

The entire paragraphs of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965), published during the Second Vatican Council, are dedicated to the claims of an atheistic scientific worldview for domination in public life. In particular, the authors of this constitution give a classic understanding of the confrontation between science and religion for Christians: «Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of the faith derive from the same God» (Gaudium et Spes, III, 36). That is, science naturally answers the questions about this world created by God, but the attempt to build a worldview on scientific discoveries is a mistake. Analyzing the views of theologians who support such a position, the researcher should note that only the right science will never contradict the faith, while the science of atheists confronts the religious conclusions about the Universe, that`s why it is evil and error.

3. The idea of correspondence between religion and science in Muslim world. Since the significant areas of the Muslim world at the turn of the XIXth and XXth centuries were in political and intellectual dependence on the West, Muslim intellectuals expressed their claims mostly to Western science, which at that time had transformed from an approach of seeking knowledge into a secular worldview. Criticism of secularism was based on the fact

that science moved from particular practice to an unusual task of building a holistic worldview, more precisely, to limiting the worldview only to those views that correspond to scientific knowledge.

According to the prominent figure of the Islamic revival in that period, Muhammad Iqbal, some self-restraint in the subject was a feature of Western thought since the time of Socrates.

> "Socrates concentrated his attention on the human world alone. To him the proper study of man was man and not the world of plants, insects, and stars. How unlike the spirit of the Qur'an, which sees in the humble bee a recipient of Divine inspiration and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alteration of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space" (Iqbal 2013, 3).

Having taken over the primacy in scientific development from the Muslim civilization in the Middle Ages, the West has gradually brought into science its secular, post-Christian, and at the same time human-centered approach. In this regard, according to Iqbal, the revival of Islamic thought should be accompanied with rethinking of European science, which developed many of the scientific ideas of the Islamic world, which after the fall of Baghdad in the XIIIth century was in decline. Therefore, the achievements of European thought should be taken into account during the revival of Islamic thought, however, this is not about blind copying, but about examining "in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help us" (Iqbal 2013, 6). Thus, we are talking about the worldview`s decolonization, not about the rejection of Western scientific achievements.

Another prominent Muslim polemicist of the mid- XXth century, Sayyid Qutb, also paid considerable attention to the subordination of scientific practices to religious worldview. Sayyid Qutb's call to replace the values of Western civilization with Islamic ones was combined with a call not to abandon the technical achievements of Western civilization. Readiness of using the technical achievements of the West, whether they are scientific and technical inventions, or the media, or weapons, was generally spread among Islamic modernists. Due to the fact that even the Europeans themselves did not consider the technical and

methodological achievements of the West to be inextricably linked with post-Christian Western civilization and its values, Muslim thinkers also separated the value matrix of the Enlightenment West (which they considered erroneous) from the technical means (which they were willing to use).

On the other hand, harmony between religion and science at the turn of the XIXth and XXth centuries was not always interpreted by Muslim intellectuals as the revival of faith and the subordination of scientific research to it. A number of thinkers were more inclined to believe that religion should be rethought based on scientific discoveries, including the achievements of Western science. Some Islamic modernists, in particular, one of the founders of this trend, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, held this view.

> "In his lecture in Calcutta, "On Teaching and Learning," … Afghānī`s main stress was on the importance of modern science and philosophy… Afghānī states: 'If someone looks deeply into the question, he will see that science rules the world, there was, is, and will be no ruler in the world but science… The strangest thing of all is that our ulama these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation and is not distinguished by anything by itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science' " (Keddie, 60-62).

Accordance of religion and science has become one of the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith, a religion that emerged in modern times within Muslim civilization. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have repeatedly emphasized in their speeches and texts the need to correlate faith with scientific discoveries in order to avoid superstitions. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, speaking at Home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Parsons (Washington, D.C., United States) in 1912, claimed: "Every religion which is not in accordance with established science is superstition. Religion must be reasonable. If it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation". Like other religious figures of the time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepts the scientific discoveries but denies the materialistic worldview.

4. Said Nursi`s idea of combining religion and science. Said Nursi, who has fought against Turkish secularism, repeatedly stated on the confrontation between science and religion and pointed out that the scientific mind must never resist the Qur'anic revelation. In particular, in his famous *Damascus Sermon* in 1911, Said Nursi emphasized that in the future Islam should be combined with science and become the key to true enlightenment. After Ataturk came to power, *The Twenty-Third Flash: On Nature* was published and became a part of the *Risale-i Nur* collection. This treatise is entirely dedicated to a discussion with proponents of an atheistic worldview who seek to build it on the scientific basement.

Said Nursi, like many other representatives of the Islamic modernism, has not urged to reject completely the scientific knowledge, moreover, he tried to combine religion and science. In this combination, the science should stop its attempts of domination in the worldview issues, concentrate on the practice and give ethics and metaphysics back to religion. According to his biographers, the idea of turning to the natural sciences came to Nursi due to the necessity of polemics and mission among the representatives of the Western-style elite:

> "Staying at the governor`s residence, Bediuzzaman had the opportunity to mix with the government officials and took up reading the newspapers and journals provided for the governor`s office. As he gained more knowledge of the broader issues and problems facing Ottoman society and the Islamic world generally, he realized that the traditional form of Islamic theology was inadequate for answering the doubts that had been raised concerning Islam and that study of modern science was also necessary. Therefore, taking advantage of the facilities, he himself took up the study of the modern sciences, including history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy and philosophy. Said did not have a teacher for these subjects; studying books he taught himself. For example, on one occasion he got into a discussion on geography with the teacher of that subject. The discussion became prolonged and they decided to continue the following day. Within twenty-four hours, therefore, Mullah Said memorized a geography book he was able to obtain, and when they met again, silenced the geography teacher in his own subject … It was during his stay in Van that Bediuzzaman developed his ideas on educational reform and created his own particular method of teaching. He developed this through examining the principles of all

> he had studied together with his experience of teaching religious and scientific subjects, then considering them in relation to the needs of the times. The basis of this method was to "combine" religious sciences and modern sciences, with the result that the positive sciences would corroborate and strengthen the truth of religion" (Vahide 2019, 29-31).

Said Nursi tried to implement those principles in his own new type of educational center. The idea of establishing his own educational center has been formulated by Said Nursi also during his Van period, and the main feature of that kind of education was in attempt of combination science and religion, this time in the educational system. I. Markham and S. Pirim describe the situation in the Ottoman education of that times with the next passage:

> "During this time there was no system of education in the country offering both scientific and religious training. Indeed, *Mekātib and medāris*, as the places of popular education of the time, seemed to carry pride in their separate curricula, each being critical of the other. Nursi was deeply troubled with this schism. While developing his knowledge in these two essential areas, he formed his ideal system of education. Rooted as teaching scholar in the field of religion Nursi composed a proposal for a university to be established in eastern Anatolia offering a joint education in religion and the sciences" (Markham and Pirim 2011, 10).

That educational complex has to be named Madrasah al-Zahra, and both scientific and religious education have to receive an impulse to growth because of their combination.

> "Nursi promoted the utilization of modern scientific findings, especially the use of modern innovations in interpreting the religious texts that is useful for renewal of Islamic teaching. Nursi believes that modern science as motivating factor of developing a human civilization in the Western world as well as of reviving Islamic civilization in the Muslim world" (Embong 2017, 923).

Unfortunately, due to the dramatic governmental changes, armed conflicts and forced secularization of Turkey, the project has not been implemented, but it still inspires Muslim scholars.

Conclusion

Consequently, the idea of combining science and religion has

become quite widespread among religious thinkers during the XX-th century. The science should be responsible for new technical inventions, and the area of the religion`s responsibility is an area of ethics, values. This idea has been claimed by Christian and Muslim theologians of the XX-th century, and today it is spread also in the secular circles. Each person, according to that view, may be at the same time a scientist and a believer that contradicts to the Enlightenment secularism. In the works of Said Nursi and other Muslim theologians of the mid-twentieth century, the call to replace the Western values with Islamic ones was combined with the call not to abandon the technical achievements of Western civilization. Consent to use the technical inventions of Western civilization is inherent in Islamic modernist thought, as well as in the Christian one. Due to the fact that even the Europeans did not consider the technical and methodological approaches of the West to be inextricably linked to the Christian Western civilization and its values, the representatives of the Muslim world have also separated the value matrix of the Enlightenment West (which they thought was false) from the technical approaches (which they were ready to use).

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