Explaining Role of Religious Education in the Face of New Millennium's Crises: Peace as a Method of Education in the Qur'an and New Testament

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

K E Y W O R D S

A B S T R A C T

Achieving peace is one of the constant human desires and one of the most important goals of religions. Contrary to this goal, many international conflicts in recent decades have had a religious aspect and have taken away peace from people around the world. In this situation, many theologians have tried to emphasize on commonalities of religions and focus their attention on a common understanding in matters such as peace and tranquility in religious sources. The present study also stems from the belief that the Abrahamic religions seek afterlife salvation and worldly peace for all humanity. The purpose of article is to explain role of religious education in the face of new millennium's crises by emphasizing peace as a method of education in two religious books of Muslims and Christians, the Qur'an and the New Testament**.** The research method is historical comparative and documentary method is used to collect data. The method of data analysis is qualitative content analysis with a concise approach. The research findings show that the most important common component in theistic religions is that belief in God and religious legitimacy automatically leads to peace. Another finding is that different interpretations of the content of religious books can turn concept of peace into a tool to justify violence. The final finding is that content of Qur'an and the New Testament show that both heavenly books seek peace of man in both worlds.

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1. Introduction

Human beings have naturally faced many worries and anxieties throughout their lives and always tried to overcome them. Of course, they have made great progress so far. Part of this advancement is due to technological innovations that have been invented, especially since the second half of the twentieth century. However, anxiety, stress, and many mental illnesses have not decreased (Harrison and Lucasen, 2019). Also, many parts of the world have become a scene for repression, violence, dictatorship, murder and fear (Banfield, 2014). All this reveals the failure of man to prepare for a peaceful life in this world. One of the reasons for this failure is religious conflicts that have plagued many communities over the past four decades (Pew Research Center, 2019). The end of the Cold War between the two superpowers of the United States and the former Soviet Union was a window of hope for beginning of world peace (Bradel, 1998). But this hope did not last long, and conflict between the two superpowers gave way to religious conflicts. During the Cold War, there was a fear of war between the armies, but in the new era, ordinary people also became active perpetrators of violence (Klerk, 2004).

Thus, in many parts of the world, we are witnessing bombings, suicide attacks, assassinations, captivity, forced migration and killing of ordinary people, women and children who have been unintentionally sacrificed. The result of this situation has been the spread of religious hatred's seeds among ordinary people (Al-Tayyib, 2008). Sad scenes under the shadow of attacks by people like Muslim ISIS in Iraq, Syria and Europe, Buddhist and Hindu religious extremists in India and Myanmar, and Christian religious fanatics in Europe and America. It is very difficult for many religious people to believe that many different atrocities have been committed under the banner of religion (Hassan, 2016). It is also much harder to believe that all this savagery is happening in the 21st century. But we face two realities: First that the majority of world's people - regardless of their religion - want to live in peace and tranquility (Blanco, Leva, Nicholas, & Winton, 2006). They have no extreme interest in politics and religion and avoid violence. They are ordinary people who go to mosques, churches, synagogues and temples without wishing to impose their religion on another. The second reality is existence of an extremist group who think God is alone with them, displays boundless cruelty (Bartov & Mack, 2001). What we are witnessing is the low power of majority of people compared to high power of non-violent minority. Why are people so caught up? There are many answers to this question. Some blame religious leaders, some believe that politicians are abusing religion for their own benefit, others are concerned with economic factors, and a few

believe that all religions are inherently violent (Tistlowayt & Stassen, 2008). Whatever the reason, many ordinary people - in the four corners of the world - believe that they and the religion they believe in want peace and tranquility.

In fact, a large part of religious teachings is dedicated to providing psychological and behavioral solutions to achieve peace. Modern psychotherapy schools also consider their main goal to be to get rid of anxiety and create a sense of security in human beings. Psychologists have also looked at effect of religion on mental health to prevent mental illness such as anxiety, stress, depression, and relaxation (Levin, 2010). This is an important common denominator between followers of religions and psychologists. From perspectives of both groups, religious faith has an infinite source of peace and spiritual power that removes any anxiety and worry from man and protects him against any internal and external pressure. Psychologists' views on effect of religious beliefs on mental health are based on this assumption that faith in God creates an extraordinary power in believer that helps him to endure hardships and avoid worries. For example, Mishra, Togneri, Tripathi, & Trikamji (2015) analyzed content of some research articles and found that there was much evidence to support positive effect of religion on treatment of diseases. They also found that treating illness and achieving peace has been one of the claims of religious leaders throughout history.

Recent report by American Psychiatric Association, (2020) highlighted one in four people who seek help for mental health concerns turn to faith leaders before they seek help from clinical professionals. Redfern and Coles (2015) review recent research that investigates the effects of Parkinson's disease (PD) on religious faith and spirituality. Qualitative studies investigating religious and general coping in PD emphasize that religious faith remains important to patients. Cohen, and Koenig, (2013) indicated that there appears to be more widespread integration of religion into clinical practice, with therapists now utilizing patients' religious beliefs and social connections within the faith community to facilitate healing and recovery. Koenig, (2012) provides a concise but comprehensive review of research on religion/spirituality (R/S). He found that a large volume of research shows that people who are more R/S have better mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems compared to those who are less R/S. Bousso, Serafim, & Misko, (2010) indicated that Three dimensions of spirituality were related to illness and death in their life histories: a Higher Being with a healing power; Development and Maintenance of a Connection with God and Faith Encouraging Optimism.

In Iran, numerous studies have been conducted on the effect of religion on the treatment of diseases and gaining peace. For example, Safara, Khanbabaei, and Khanbabaei (2020) research

identify spiritual group-based group counseling as having a significant effect on increasing positive relationships with others and self-acceptance after parental divorce. Baljani, Khashabi, Amanpour and Azimi (2011) found that there is a significant relationship between existential health and religious health with life expectancy. Ajdar and Ahmadi Faraz (2013) concluded that believing in God and religious beliefs calms a person in difficult and unbearable periods - for example, when facing severe illnesses. Marashi (2008) showed that there is a significant relationship between students' religious attitudes and happiness. Also, a significant positive relationship was observed between religious attitude and their mental health. Golparvar (2009) confirms that there is a significant relationship between internal and external religious orientation with mental health. Hossein Sabet (2002) in the study "Effectiveness of Patience Training on Anxiety, Depression and Happiness" highlighted that patience and calmness reduce anxiety, depression and increase happiness. Shamshiri and Shirvani Shiri (2011) believe that peace is achieved through faith in God, believing in His promises, following the life-giving plans of Islam and taking steps towards divine satisfaction. Khoshhal Dastjerdi (2004) in his study entitled "The role of patience in spiritual development of man from perspective of mystics" states that any kind of perfection that arises within man or human societies - in the face of hardships and problems - is due to faith and patience. Therefore, religious faith is one of the most effective ways to gain peace (Azerbaijani 2008).

In view of the above, it should be noted about necessity of the present research that one of the commonalities of religions is hope that the day will come when peace and happiness will be bestowed on all human beings. Naturally, finding common concepts among religions can be basis of dialogue among their followers and create a good ground for resolving misunderstandings. The realization of this understanding is the cornerstone of joint effort of believers of divine religions to build a better world in which there is true peace and tranquility. In this way, present study aims to discover the common and controversial principles of Islam and Christianity in the light of examining meaning and concept of tranquility - as well as its related interpretations- in the Holy Quran and the New Testament.

2. Research Method

The method of study is historical comparative. The purpose of this type of research is to explain similarities and differences of views related to a subject or issue in original documents (Khalili Shoorini, 1996). The method of data collection is documentary based on study of primary and secondary sources. A qualitative content analysis method was used with a concise approach. In this

type of analysis, the focus is on discovering basic meanings of words or its contents. Researchers use this method to analyze various articles in scientific journals as well as reference books (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The research sample included 47 works.

3. Results

In this section, the results related to analysis of content of two holy books of Qur'an and New Testament is presented. Before presenting the results, it is necessary to explain definition and dimensions of peace with emphasis on religion. This section also concludes with a brief comparison between two books' views on peace.

Analysis of the concept of Peace

Calm means lack of anxiety and existence of mental balance. Calmness is a state in which there is no anxiety, worry, anger, pain, or the like (Swift, Cyhlarova, Goldie, & O'Sullivan, 2014). Accuracy in the difference between peace and comfort is important to understand the meaning of peace. Comfort means rest, and ease in the face of suffering; a state in which a person enjoys material well-being or is free from suffering, hardship, worry, and anxiety (Hicks, 2013). Calmness is a state of the heart and a spiritual and mental attribute that is not visible and is internal. The consequence of peace is a rational encounter with the issues of life. Peace in its various forms (natural, psychological and religious) is one of the components of happiness that appears in two forms of peace of mind and social security. Religiously, the types of peace are:

- Peace of Belief: All Abrahamic religions firmly believe that there is real peace in the hereafter, not in this mortal world (Smock, 2006). For example, Prophet Ibrahim asked God to observe a small example of the resurrection to achieve religious peace,
- Peace of mind: Man always seeks to reach the stages of his existential perfection and because of this, he always changes from one state to another; but at no stage does it achieve its desired (Nasr, 1988). As a result, the human heart is always full of worry and anxiety until his desires are met to some extent,
- Natural peace: Some phenomena in this world have a calming nature, such as night, sleep, spouse and home (Mahmoudpour, 2015, p.8).

Peace in Quran

The Infallible Qur'an is full of verses that refer to different ways of dealing with life's crises and stresses. Followers of Islam believe that understanding and applying these methods can provide strong support for adapting to difficult living conditions. The first point that can be deduced from

the verses of the Qur'an is that in Islam, problems and issues of life are exams that God has provided to test the servants (Al-Shinawi, 2018). With this attitude, the Qur'an teaches people that when facing problems, instead of fear, should keep calm and seek appropriate solutions to come out of these trials proud. At the same time, God has promised them help (verses 111 and 116 of Surah Al-Baqarah) (Izadi Tamah, Borjali, Delavar & Vascandari, 2009). The second important result of analysis of verses is understands of this message that Islam introduces "God Almighty" as the only actual and main source of peace. In Surah Al-Fatah, God explicitly introduces Himself as the only one who brings peace to the hearts. According to the Qur'an, one who is calm does not fear reproaches, he trusts, if he loses something, he does not grieve, and if he gains something, he does not rebel and disobey (Behjatpour, Rezaei, Kalantari, and Nasiri, 2019). Therefore, the respect or disregard of the people, fame or anonymity, and poverty and wealth has no effect on him. Spiritual peace is achieved only in the shadow of divine grace and nothing else can replace it (Qaraati, 2006). The Qur'an also considers factors to be effective in creating peace. These factors include:

- Faith: The root of faith is derived from word "safe" and means to eliminate fear, anxiety and panic. The believer frees his belief from hypocrisy, anxiety and doubt - which is the decline of belief - and secures it (Javadi Amoli, 2012). The Qur'an considers faith as a factor of peace that is not tainted with polytheism (Surah An'am, 42). Shirk (sin of idolatry) has two types, overt and covert. An obvious example of the first type of polytheism is idolatry. Any worldliness - in the form of ambition, wealth and lust - falls into the second category. For example, the Qur'an considers obedience to lust as polytheism (Furqan / 43).
- Correcting insights about the world: One thing that is generally overlooked for relaxation is a correct understanding of world and life's conditions. According to Qur'an, believer knows that the world is a means, not an end.
- The world as fun and plays: The Qur'an introduces one of the prominent features of the world as its playfulness and uses the interpretation of fun and plays for it (An'am / 32 spiders / 64 and Muhammad 36). Playing means that the world is a childish, imaginative, and fleeting game, and human beings lose their peace of mind over things like property, spouses, children, positions, and servants.
- Suffering and inseparability are an integral part of worldly life: One of the best verses of Qur'an to show nature of world is fourth verse of Surah Balad, which completely relieves human imagination about its situation in the world. In this verse, God says that we have undoubtedly created man in suffering. It may be thought that man's encounter with this characteristic is itself a cause of anxiety and restlessness, while understanding this verse

makes man adjust his level of expectations to realities of the world and will be free from vain attempts to escape suffering and thus will find his peace (Basioni, 2012).

▪ Obliged to perform a task and not to achieve a result: A person has duties in the field of life, but he should always keep in mind the principle that his scope of action is only to perform tasks and duties. What the outcome will be is beyond his control, so he should not grieve for the world and lose his composure.

▪ The spirit of gratitude for blessings: Experience has shown that if a person is constantly worried about shortcomings in life, he will automatically become anxious and anxious. On the contrary, if a person looks at the blessings he has, he will find peace and be thankful to God (Surah Ibrahim / 7).

▪ Worldly and otherworldly peace: The real peace according to Islam is the hereafter peace based on faith in God. Faith, as the most comprehensive religious concept in Islam, from the root of "safe" means peace of mind and liberation from any fear and sorrow (Qaraati, 2006). The word Islam also means the pure submission of man to God, the consequences of which are the feeling of security and peace (An'am / 82, Baqara / 112). Therefore, man must seek peace in the eternal world.

Peace in the New Testament

Each of the two holy books of Old and New Testaments is full of efforts of God's messengers to free mankind from pain and sorrow and to achieve eternal peace and happiness in both worlds. Evangelism and salvation have always been an important part of the teachings of prophets of Israel to get rid of personal and social suffering and anxiety (Davis and Tate, 2017). In the New Testament, the phenomenon of the wickedness of world and beginning of sorrow start with the sin and fall of the angels. According to this view, the angels were originally perfect beings, but for some reason they disobeyed God's command, and this rebellion led to their downfall. However, if we pass by the story of the angels, we can understand from the analysis of New Testament's content the factors that have caused growth or cessation of peace and happiness in human beings. These factors mainly emphasize the prominent role of Jesus Christ:

• Inherent sin of man: In the New Testament, one of the most important and fundamental issues is subject of error and inherent sin of man. When God created Adam and Eve, they were not infected with sin, but later committed it (Bestress, 1989). This sin was then passed on to the human race. The consequence of man's sin, hatred and separation from God,

people and even of himself, and caught him in the grip of anxiety, deprivation, fear and despair (Parcham, 2003). In Christian thought, the sin of Adam and Eve brought a mountain of sorrow to man and replaced it with any joy or happiness. Therefore, human life was accompanied by depression, regret and sorrow until the birth of Christ, the ransom of Christ and the resurrection of Christ and the entry into the kingdom, opened the doors of joy and peace to man.

- Advent of Christ: Content analysis of the New Testament shows that birth of Christ was joyful for people and for who met him. Jesus was also happy to meet people (John the Apostle 15). Therefore, faith in Christ fills man with joy (John the Apostle, 40) and those who believe are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (Group of Writers, 1981).

- Redemption of Christ: According to the New Testament, concept of redemption of Christ is that God, by His love and grace, sends His only begotten Son to the world to be crucified to save people and to atone for sins (Parcham and Rajaei, 2015)). The New Testament declares that death of Christ relieves the wrath of God (John the Apostle 9) and reconciles man to God. This ransom removes the inherent sin of man - which was the cause of sorrow and unhappiness - and opens the doors of joy and passion to man. This event was joyful for both Christ and those who believed in him and even for his enemies (McCrath, 2006). With the ransom of Christ, their sorrow becomes joy and perfection, and no one can take that joy away from them (John the Apostle, 41).

- Calming the hardships of world: In the New Testament, hardships and afflictions are always the cause of joy for a Christian and solution to worldly problems is not sorrow. Christ taught His disciples that poverty is not a bad thing, but the kingdom of heaven for the poor, and that persecution keeps them in their faith, and that the effect of such hardships is to increase their ultimate joy (Mark the Evangelist, 4).

Comparison of peace in Qur'an and the New Testament

All Abrahamic religions simultaneously pursue two goals: First, self-expansion and Second, removing obstacles to this expansion (Davis and Tate, 2017). The first goal, along with the good news and rewards, is for the followers. Analysis of the content of the Qur'an and the New Testament shows that in different parts of these two holy books, believers are given the good news of victory, happiness and peace. The second goal requires the destruction of enemies. For this reason, numerous chapters and verses emphasize the war against those who do not believe (Tistelweit and Stassen, 2008). The natural consequence of these wars and struggles is the killing of

both groups of opposition and followers of religions. Opponents will be punished in hell and will lose their peace forever. On the contrary, the followers who are killed in the way of God are called martyrs and their place in heaven will be with eternal happiness and peace. Thus, it can be said that the first way in which the Qur'an and the New Testament share is to gain peace through martyrdom in the way of God and jihad.

The second common point between the two scriptures is the emphasis on the role of God in human destiny. This commonality, of course, is associated with different interpretations of human free will. Some consider man to have authority and some consider him to be only a servant of God who lacks any will of his own.

The third common denominator of both books is the division of human peace into two types of peace in this world and peace in the hereafter. The Qur'an explicitly mentions the lack of lasting peace in this world, while both books promise eternal peace in Paradise. Another common denominator between the two scriptures is the emphasis on the role of faith in God in overcoming adversity. According to Qur'an, people rely on God with constant faith. The New Testament also heralds Christ's companionship and help to overcome adversity.

The last similarity of the two books can be seen in reminder that hardships are divine exams for believers. Believers are not afraid to face problems and consider it a exam that they can overcome with their faith.

Naturally, there are slight differences between two books. The first difference is that the Qur'an emphasizes more on role of God in human destiny and gaining peace, and historical events are less considered. On the contrary, the New Testament emphasizes role of original sin, the birth and appearance of Jesus Christ, and his ransom for comfort. The second point is the different interpretations of the two books about original sin and the life of Jesus Christ, which naturally lead to different conclusions about gaining peace.

4. Conclusion

The most important component in theistic religions is that there is a God who has provided a plan for human life so that man can live according to it. Belief in God and religious legitimacy automatically brings peace. This peace prepares the believer to face any bitter and sweet event. Based on religious belief, man in this world is a traveler who must leave it soon. Therefore, he is not

very happy with joys of the world. Also, the loss of worldly interests does not cause him eternal sorrow and unhappiness. Relying on God, the believer has inner and permanent peace.

Understanding the meaning of eternal peace can greatly illuminate analysis of the situation of religious violence in today's world. An analysis of many political events, such as wars, suicide attacks, bombings, and recent assassinations - carried out under the banner of different religions - shows that there are different interpretations of Bible's contents. These different interpretations can turn the concept of peace into a tool to justify violence. The interpretation that in this world man will not have real peace and in either case of victory or defeat against the enemies of religion, he will go to heaven can to some extent justify violence. This shows how extremist groups such as ISIS have used their misinterpretation against followers of other religions.

The last point is that the content of the Qur'an and the New Testament show that both heavenly books seek peace of man in both worlds. A positive view based on avoiding magnifying world issues reduces the conflicts among people. Understanding that all religions have a single view of human beings and do not differentiate between them on the basis of factors such as political boundaries, race, language, economic status and social class helps humanity to achieve peace. Modern man must learn from the Qur'an and the New Testament that there is no worldly benefit that justifies murder, looting and violence. No need for the world reduces national and international conflicts and brings more peace to all.

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