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"Rethinking" and "Meaning-Making": An Exploration of the Functions of Religion (A Comparative Reading of Giddens' Theory and the Teachings of Nahj al-Balagha)

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Abstract

Anthony Giddens, a contemporary theorist, has redefined the meaning of religion at the level of society by proposing theories of "rethinking" and "meaning-making" in the context of society and religion. His perspective is somewhat different from that of the extreme materialist movements that emerged from modernity. He considers the origin of religion to be a reaction to meaninglessness and considers "meaning-making" to be the most important characteristic of religion. By examining the achievements of modernity, he argues that religion can be a refuge for the present era, provided that it is reconsidered. Giddens' perspective on religion is similar to Islamic teachings, especially those of Nahj al-Balagha. This issue led the present study to first explain the foundations and concepts of these theories using a descriptive-analytical method and then to identify their shortcomings and differences by analyzing and comparing these concepts with the teachings of Nahj al-Balagha. The result is that Giddens, with a functionalist approach, considers "meaning-making" to be one of the most important functions of religion and regards it as specific to this world. However, from the perspective of Nahj al-Balagha, meaning-making is not limited to this world and also includes the hereafter, while this world is a prelude to the hereafter. Nahj al-Balagha locates the main factor of religiosity within the human being, namely the innate human need for perfection and happiness in this world and the hereafter. However, Giddens has a reductionist and utilitarian view of religion and views religion as a tool for organizing material life.Giddens' "rethinking" means going beyond the main principles and pillars of religion. This concept reduces religion to the level of everyday life and gives it a worldly character. However, reflection in Nahj al-Balagha has a broader horizon than this world and includes the hereafter, considering this world as a field for action and immortality in the hereafter.

Keywords: Anthony Giddens; reflection; meaning-making; Nahj al-Balagha

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