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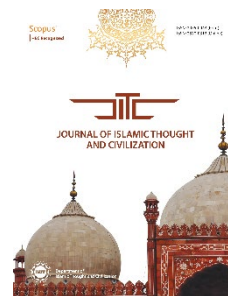|	
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Civilizing Role of the "Religious Idea" in Malek Bennabi's Thought

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Abstract

This study examines the perspective of Malek Bennabi regarding the role of religion (religious idea) in building civilization. Bennabi's writings are analyzed to comprehend his understanding of religion and its multiple dimensions. Specifically, the paper focuses on three dimensions of religion, namely religion as a part of universal laws, as a historical force, and as a governing principle of thought. Bennabi's view about the civilizing function of religion is also highlighted, including its objectives as outlined in the Quran, its historical significance, and its social dimensions. The study concludes that his perception of religion encompasses various dimensions, including existential, metaphysical, teleological, and practical dimensions. Furthermore, religion serves a crucial role as a compound of civilizational values, providing a medium for individual and group formation, organizing human thought towards spiritual goals, embodying the relationship between God and man, and establishing a moral law that gives meaning to human life and actions. Bennabi's work on religion and civilization is of utmost significance in contemporary discussions about the role of religion in the society. Hence, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse by providing an in-depth analysis of his perspective, which emphasizes the positive and constructive impact of religion on human society. By recognizing the civilizational function of religion, Bennabi's work promotes a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of religion in the contemporary society.

Keywords: Bennabi, civilization, dimensions of religion, religion, religious idea, role of religion, society

Introduction

Malek Bennabi (1905-1973) was an Algerian intellectual, a prominent writer, thinker, and potentially the first social scientist and philosopher in the Muslim world since the times of Ibn Khaldun.[1] Although his works were published in both French and Arabic in the late 1950s, it wasn't until the 1980s that his theory and methodology for analyzing the issues facing Muslim civilization gained considerable scholarly attention. Various groups have often misinterpreted and distorted his ideas through ideology-based analyses, leading to misunderstandings about his work.

Muslim intellectuals have now recognized the importance of Bennabi's approach and method to deal with the question of *Nahda* (Renaissance) of the Muslim world. Hence, they acknowledge the merit of translating and disseminating his ideas globally. They view him as a "philosopher-visionary for the entire *Ummah*," whose concern for the decadence of Muslim civilization drove him to analyze the causes of decay and provide solutions.[2]

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[1]Fauzia Bariun, "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 9 (fall 1992): 325-37; Zahra Boussalah, "Malek Bennabi: An Analytical Study of His Theory of Civilization," in *AMSS 34th Annual Conference "Muslims and Islam in the Chaotic Modern World: Relations of Muslims among Themselves and with Others* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2005), 3.

[2]Kokab Arif, "Islam in History (by Malek Bennabi) (book review)," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 10 (2): 251. Retrieved from http://0-

Bennabi's intellectual achievements spanned from the time of the publishing of his first book (published in 1946) until his death in 1973, during which he produced numerous books and articles and delivered hundreds of speeches and lectures on different occasions. His scholarship covers various fields of knowledge, including philosophy of history, sociology, cultural and civilizational issues, and social and historical change. His work continues to engage the thinkers of different cultural traditions and generations across the Muslim world. He titled all 24 of his publications *Mushkilāt al-Hadarah* (Problems of Civilization), with each having its own subtitle.

A key concept and analytical tool employed by Bennabi in his study of Muslim civilization and its historical trajectory is the "religious idea."[3] He utilized this concept to explain the phenomenon of social change and the rise and fall of civilization. Bennabi believed that the "religious idea" serves as a catalyst for interaction between the primary elements of civilization.[4] To evaluate his claim regarding the role of religion in the formation of civilization, this study analyzes his understanding of the relationship between religion and civilization and the role played by the former in building the latter. This would lead us to a clear understanding of the significance of the "religious idea" that Bennabi highlighted as pivotal in establishing civilization.

2. Bennabi's Concept of Civilization

Bennabi recognized the importance of defining civilization in both Islamic and Western contexts and remained mindful of its linguistic and terminological implications. He also acknowledged the intellectual discourse that has influenced the meaning and concept of the term 'civilization'. He employed a multifaceted approach to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of civilization and its nature. This approach involved examining various aspects of civilization, such as its structural constituents and organization, its functional role in the society, and its ultimate objective of social progress throughout history. He offered an analytical definition of civilization that identified its fundamental components, as well as a functional definition that clarified its purpose in historical contexts.

Bennabi presented his definition of civilization as a mathematical formula, which entails analyzing its structure. The equation depicts civilization as a sum of three constructs, namely man, soil, and time. Analyzing civilization in this way, Bennabi argued that it is possible to break down the crisis of human civilization into three primary problems, namely the problem of human beings, soil, and time. Therefore, rather than simply accumulating products, the focus should be on addressing these fundamental problems at their root in order to build a civilization.[5]

Bennabi simplified all of the accomplishments of civilization in terms of the relationship between three essential elements, namely the human element which carries out the endeavor, the element of soil which provides the material resources in various forms, and the element of time which is a necessary condition for any human driven achievement process. Civilization, according to him, is a purposeful achievement that occurs within the course of history.

It undoubtedly results from an idea that motivates human effort over time. Bennabi expanded on the basic components of civilization by incorporating the catalytic role of religion. He identified

search.proquest.com.mylibrary.qu.edu.qa/scholarly-journals/islam-history-malek-bennabi-book-review/docview/1311887004/se-2; Badrane Benlahcene, "Malek Bennabi's Concept and Interdisciplinary Approach to Civilization," *Intentional. Journal of Arab Culture, Management and Sustainable Development*, 2 (1), (2011): 55-71.

[3]Malek Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa [The Conditions of The Renaissance]* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 12-13.

[4]Ibid., 47.

[5]Ibid., 45.

religion as a source of shared ideas that unite societies and give rise to common social values. For him, religion plays a vital role during a civilization's inception, expansion, and evolution. The shared ideas expressed by religion are not abstract concepts but are shaped by collective formulation and common social practices.[6]

According to Bennabi, the relationship between human beings, their environment (soil), and time is interdependent. This relationship was initially inspired by religious beliefs. Afterwards, it was manifested in historical events which required the establishment of a "network of social relations" to achieve unified action throughout the course of history. This network of social relations is another fundamental element that constitutes the true genesis of the society in history as it allows human endeavors to materialize and achieve significant civilizational accomplishments in history.[7]

Bennabi also opined that "civilization must be defined from a functional perspective", which emphasizes the importance of moral and material conditions that allow a society to provide support to its members. From this perspective, civilization "consists of the ethical and material conditions that enable a particular society to provide each of its members, at every stage of their existence from childhood to old age, with the necessary support for that particular stage of their development."[8]

These conditions are essential for individuals to fulfill their role in history and social work is required to provide such guarantees. As a result, a society that can offer ethical and material conditions that enable individuals to perform their natural role in it at a specific historical stage is considered to be in a living state of civilization.[9] From this perspective, Bennabi emphasized the importance of social conditions and the reality of civilization and its impact on the society. He was particularly interested in the sociological perspective of the phenomenon of civilization.

To sum up, in Bennabi's view, civilization comprises both ethical and material conditions that must be balanced to prevent deviation. Social action is crucial in the process of establishing civilization, with the society's centrality and primacy emphasized through the importance of a network of social interactions. Civilization is a collective achievement of the society, achieved to the best of its abilities and will. From a functional perspective, the individual is also essential in the process of civilization, with guarantees provided to enable individuals to perform their various social roles. Furthermore, civilization represents a set of guarantees that the society provides to launch individual and social energies and promote material and spiritual development. Lastly, civilization is a periodic phenomenon that the society goes through, representing a social stage in the ongoing process of human development.

3. Importance of Religion as a "Catalyst of Civilization"

According to Bennabi, the "Catalyst of Civilization" is an element that can effectively blend and synthesize the three structural elements of man, soil, and time into a dynamic interaction, thereby creating civilization. Historical analysis shows that this catalyst is often a religious idea that has been present throughout the building of civilizations. [10] Belief in religion has been a driving force behind the process of building civilizations in human history, as it stimulates and activates the interaction

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[6]Malek Bennabi, *Wijhat al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī* [*The Course of Muslim World*] (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), 32.

[7]Malek Bennabi, *Fikrat al-Ifrīqiyya al-Asyawiyya* [*The Afro-Asiatism*] (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 143.

[8]Malek Bennabi, *Āfāq Jazāʾirīyah* [*Algerian Horizons]* (Cairo: Maktabat ʿAmmar, 1971), 38.

[9]Malek Bennabi, *Mushkilat al-Afkār fī al-ʿālam al-Islāmī [The Problem of Ideas in the Muslim World]* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 42.

[10]Ibid., 45-46.

between the structural elements. This claim is backed by evidence from the fields of history and archaeology. [11]

Bennabi maintained that history is the laboratory where the experiment of synthesizing man, soil, and time to create civilization is confirmed, with religious ideas playing a crucial role. By studying the history of civilizations, it becomes apparent that religious sentiments have been the foundation of all civilizations. In this regard, Buddhism has been the driving force behind the Buddhist civilization, Islam has been the basis for the Muslim civilization, and Christianity has played a fundamental role in the Western civilization, as revealed by history. [12]

Religion is a pivotal coefficient in the equation of civilization, without which the three values (or elements namely man, soil and time) cannot be organized and directed towards their civilizing process. These three elements do not work in separation or isolation but within a harmonious synthesis through which the civilized society exercises its will and power. Subsequently, the problem of this harmonious synthesis becomes crucial. [13]

Bennabi's emphasis on religion extends beyond its essence and divine source, to its critical social role as a catalyst of human energies and capacities. As a social thinker, Bennabi sought to identify the necessary conditions for bringing about a renaissance of civilization in the Muslim world. He aimed to reactivate the primary elements of civilization and integrate them effectively. Religion creates a spiritual (or a vertical) relationship network that connects an individual soul with faith in God, while also bringing together a society's members through horizontal networks of relationships. [14]

Accordingly, Bennabi believed that religion serves as a catalyst for transforming values from a natural to a psycho-temporal state that corresponds to a particular stage of civilization. [15] Therefore, all civilizations throughout history have thrived under the influence of religious ideas. He argued that the significance of religion in the civilizing process can be demonstrated through historical and archaeological evidence. He also maintained that religious thought can be traced back to the earliest periods of human civilization, from its most primitive stages to its most advanced. [16]

Bennabi argued that every civilization has its roots in a religious impulse that drives society toward the civilizing process. This religious impulse is inherent in all human transformations [17] and contemporary civilizations, such as Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim civilizations were formulated in the cradle of a religious idea. [18] Thus, the emergence of a religious idea, in its broadest sense, is a prerequisite for the beginning of civilization. In any civilization, the religious foundations that facilitated its rise must be sought. Buddhism, for instance, planted the seeds of the Buddhist civilization, while Brahma laid the foundation for the Brahman civilization. However, the religious idea can only play a significant social role in the formation and development of social reality if it adheres to its metaphysical value, reflecting the views beyond earthly matters. It is through this

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[11]Ibid., 45-46.

[12]Malek Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt [Contemplations]* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 198.

[13]Malek Bennabi, *Qaḍāyā Kubrā [Grand Matters]* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1991), 58.

[14]Ammar Talbi, "The Implication of Malek Bennabi's View on Contemporary Muslim Society," *The International Seminar on Malek Bennabi* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya, September 1991), 13.

[15]Ibid., 11.

[16]Malek Bennabi, *The Qur'ānic Phenomenon,* Trans. Mohamed Tahir Mesawi (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001), 69.

[17]Bennabi, *Wijhat al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī,* 89.

[18]Bennabi, *Qaḍāyā Kubrā*, 60.

adherence that it can reveal legislation and a method for people, leading to the formation of civilization. [19]

4. Bennabi's Concept of Religion

While examining Bennabi's notion of religion, it becomes apparent that he employs a comprehensive interpretation of the term. Rather than specifically referring to Islam, Bennabi encompasses all religions, quasi-religions, and ideologies under the umbrella of religion. He views religion as any form of relationship between an individual and a divine or social power, or an idea or ideology that creates a sense of commitment and connection among the members of the society, guiding their actions. Essentially, Bennabi regards any long-term social project aimed at building a society, where the initial generation lays the groundwork and subsequent generations carry on the mission, as encompassed within the broad definition of religion.[20] Nevertheless, Bennabi distinguishes between religions based on their originality and approach.

As a Muslim social thinker, Bennabi was deeply concerned with the role of religion in resolving the problems of civilization and how it functions in relation to the civilizing process. He recognized that religion plays a crucial role in shaping the values and beliefs of the society and was interested in exploring its various aspects in this context.

4.1. Religion as a Part of the Cosmic Order

Based on the idea that the term religion encompasses all religions, quasi-religions, and ideologies, Bennabi viewed religion as a part of the cosmic order. Hence, it goes beyond being just a mental and spiritual activity of human beings. It is an inherent characteristic of the human species and an integral part of the cosmic order, deeply embedded in the structure of the universe. Therefore, religion cannot be considered merely a moral category acquired by human beings through the course of history and relative to the primitive stages of sociocultural development.[21]

Bennabi drew upon history, archeology, and the Qur'ān to formulate his view that religion is an essential part of the cosmic order. According to him, the Qur'ān views religion as a cosmic phenomenon that governs human thought and civilization. He says, "In the light of the Qur'ān, religion appears as a cosmic phenomenon, regulating man's thought and civilization as gravity regulates matter and conditions its evolution. Religion, in this context, seems to be imprinted in the cosmic system as a special law of thought."[22] He indirectly cites a Qur'ānic verse[23] that affirms religion as an inherent aspect of human nature which is unalterable, emphasizing that it is imprinted in the cosmic system as a distinct law of thought that takes various forms. Therefore, Bennabi asserted that to comprehend the development of civilization, one must begin with an understanding of the religious idea and its role.[24]

This makes religion a necessity for the establishment of civilization, the upright life of humanity, and the effectiveness of human beings in history. Civilization is affected by the extent of the presence of religious ideas in its development and the study of the movement of civilization cannot be

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[19]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa*, 14.

[20]Ibid., 51.

[21] Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi, "Malek Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Contextualizing the Qur'anic Phenomenon," in *"Bennabi's Response to Western Modernity: Context The Qur'ān Modernity and Globalization Studies in Commemoration of Malik Bennabi,* ed., Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (Gombak: IIUM Press, 2014), 15.

[22]Malek Bennabi, al-ẓāhirah al-Qur'ānīyah [the Qur'anic Phenomenon] (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), 300.

[23]Al-Qur'ān: Ar-Rūm 30:30.

[24]Malek Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtamaʻ [Birth of Society]* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 66.

conducted without considering this influence. This viewpoint echoes the ideas of many philosophers, moralists, and theologians who emphasized the significance of religion in human progress and development.[25]

4.2. Religion as a Historical Pattern

In Bennabi's view, religion enjoys a constant presence in human history and remains an essential factor in human achievements. He saw religion as a historical tradition that has been present in every society and culture. He believed that history is a reliable record of human transformations and throughout history, religion has been a fundamental aspect of human personality.

Bennabi disagreed with Toynbee's theory of "challenge and response" as the factor for motivating the civilizational process, since it only explains the rise of certain civilizations.[26] He also disagreed with Marx's materialist school of history which cannot account for the rise of various civilizations, such as Islamic and Western civilizations.[27]

Besides, Bennabi also rejected the assumption of racial superiority which postulates that civilizations rise based on the achievements of certain races. Instead, he proposed religion as a comprehensive explanation for the rise of civilizations and their achievements throughout history.[28]

According to Bennabi, historical examination of past civilizations, whether in their prosperous or primitive phases, reveals traces of their religious beliefs. Moreover, "archaeology has always revealed, among the ruins that have been uncovered, remains of artifacts that ancient humans dedicated to their religious rituals, whatever those rituals may have been."[29] History, on the other hand, teaches us that great civilizations began from the places of worship and from there, these civilizations shone to illuminate the world. Therefore, religion, as a historical and social expression of these repeated experiences over the centuries, is the natural foundation of all major human transformations. Thus, it is not proper to examine human reality only from a material perspective.[30]

4.3. Religion as a Law that Governs Human Thinking

For Bennabi, religion, whether it takes the form of the faith of the prophets or any other forms, encompasses a set of beliefs that introduces an invisible deity and a higher promise. From the monotheistic-prophetic Islam to the most basic forms of paganism,[31] it serves as a law that governs human thought, guides one's vision toward a wider horizon, harnesses human vitality, and directs it toward civilization.[32] This is why Bennabi dedicated chapters in his book *Conditions of the Renaissance*[33] to analyzing two cycles of civilization - Islamic and Western - in order to uncover the presence of religion as the guiding law of human thinking and ambitions. Through his analysis of these two cycles, he affirmed that both civilizations originated "from the religious idea that shapes the individual with its distinctive character and directs them towards noble objectives." [34]

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[25]Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi, *A Muslim Theory of Human Society. An Investigation into the Sociological Thought of Malek Bennabi* (Batu Caves: Thinker's Library Sdn. Bhd, 1998), 14-17.

[26]Sulaiman Al- Khaṭīb, *Falsafat al-Hadarah 'Inda Malek Bennabi [Malek Bennabi's Philosophy of Civilization]* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 65.

[27]Bennabi, *Qaḍāyā Kubrā*, 63.

[28]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa*, 63.

[29]Bennabi, al-ẓāhirah al-Qur'ānīyah, 69.

[30]Bennabi, *Wijhat al-'Ālam al-Islāmī,* 154.

[31]Bennabi, al-ẓāhirah al-Qur'ānīyah, 300.

[32]Bennabi, *Qaḍāyā Kubrā, 110.*

[33]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa,* 47-72.

[34]Ibid., 50.

This law is not limited only to these two civilizations but extends also to other civilizations in human history. In essence, all civilizations have a religious foundation and cannot emerge "without divine revelation, which becomes a guiding law for people, or at the very least, directs them towards a higher deity."[35]

5. Bennabi's View of the Role of Religion in Making Civilization

Bennabi did not confine his analysis of religion or the "religious idea" to understanding what is religion from different angles. Instead, he delved deeper into comprehending the significance of religion in the process of civilization by considering various interconnected and interdependent perspectives.

In the subsequent sections, this paper examines Bennabi's efforts to define the purpose of religion in the light of the Quran, his analysis of how religion operates historically, and his analysis of the social dimensions of religion in building civilization.

5.1. Purpose of Religion in Light of the Qur'ān

According to Bennabi, in light of the Holy Qur'ān, religion has two purposes. Firstly, connecting the earth to the heavens and secondly, building a network of social relationships. This is because the Qur'ānic verse, "And I did not create the *jinn* and mankind except to worship Me"[36] indicates that the purpose of religion is to connect the earth to the heavens by establishing a spiritual network that connects individuals and the society with Almighty Allah. At the same time, it builds a network of social relationships that enables the society to carry out its earthly mission and fulfill its joint activities, thereby linking the goals of heaven with the necessities of the earth. This law, as indicated by the above verse, does not intend to separate people from earth, rather to open for them a path to greater good so that they can fulfill their earthly work.[37]

From this viewpoint, Bennabi regarded religion as playing the role of connecting human beings with the divine and expanding their horizons by linking them to the dimensions of heaven and lifting their gaze beyond their earthly existence. This understanding emphasizes the importance of balancing spiritual and earthly duties, rather than separating them.[38]

5.2. How has Religion Function Historically?

Bennabi delved into the social role of religion in connection to social transformation and the progression of civilization. He scrutinized this role from two perspectives, namely the influence of the "religious idea" on both individual and collective awareness and its influence on historical development.[39]

Moreover, his scrutiny of the function of religion in the formation of civilization comprised a historical evaluation of how the religious concept has functioned across various epochs. He also took into account the psychological and social mechanisms through which the religious idea molds human character, cultural identity, and social transformation. This methodology allowed him to investigate how the religious idea instills a sense of greater meaning into certain civilizational experiences, such as Islamic and Western civilizations.

In particular, when examining Western civilization, Bennabi focused on Christianity and its substitutes, whether religious or non-religious. In his view, the "Christian idea" played a crucial role

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[35]Ibid., 51.
[36]Az-Zariyaat 51:56.
[37]Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtama'*, 73.
[38]Ibid., 73.
[39]Ibid., 13.

in the genesis of the Western civilization. He contended that Europe's intellectual framework was founded on this idea and the revival of classical Greek philosophy during the Renaissance bolstered it further.[40]

Bennabi emphasized the importance of studying the past to understand the essential components that contribute to a civilization's creation, namely man, earth, and time. While he acknowledged the influence of religion on the formation of civilizations, he chose not to delve into it further, as scholars like Toynbee or Henri Massis have already examined the impact of Christian thought on Western civilization and the role of the teachings of Gautama Buddha as a religion in the composition of Buddhist civilization. Similarly, those who study Islamic civilization can observe the impact of the revelation that started to descend upon the prophet in the cave of *Hira*.[41]

Arnold Toynbee similarly noted Bennabi's observation about Christianity's role in the formation of Western civilization, as well as the role of other religions in the formation of different civilizations. Toynbee recognized Christianity as one of the significant religions linked with historical civilizations, together with Buddhism in China, Hinduism in India, and Islam in Islamic civilization.[42]

Moreover, Bennabi held the belief that the Christian concept played a pivotal role in shaping Europe's identity and outlook that persists to the present day.[43] Similarly, Bernall's book *Science in History* discusses the Protestant Reformation, highlighting its contribution in ending feudalism, ecclesiastical influence, slavery, and outdated systems. Bernall also noted that the scientific field underwent a comparable revolution against tradition, freeing human creativity and intellect from its prior limitations.[44]

Huntington also shares Bennabi's view regarding the crucial role played by the Christian idea in shaping both individual and collective self, making it a primary factor in the formation of European individuality and the Western sense of superiority during the early days of colonial expansion. According to Huntington, Western Christianity, particularly Catholicism and later Protestantism, are the most significant factors that set the Western civilization apart from others. During the first millennium, Westerners were known as Christian Westerners and a shared Christian identity united them, distinguishing them from other cultures such as the Turks and Byzantines.[45]

Christianity was the primary moral and ideological driving force behind Europe's expansionism worldwide, as previously mentioned. Bennabi noted that Christianity deposited a sense of moral expansionism that became the justification for the Crusades and colonial projects, imbued with the appealing virtue of cooperation while ignoring hospitality.[46] Furthermore, as Huntington observed, Westerners justified their global conquests in the name of both God and gold during the sixteenth century.[47]

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[40]Bennabi, *Mushkilat al-Afkār fī al-ʿālam al-Islāmī*, 41-42.

[41] Bennabi, *Taʾammulāt*, 199.

[42]Arnold Toynbee, *Change and Habit* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1992), 161-183.

[43]Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtamaʿ,* 56.

[44]John Desmond Bernal, *al-ʿIlm fī al-tārīkh [Science in History],* Trans. Shukrī Ibrāhīm Saʿd (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1982), 2/136.

[45]Samuel Huntington, "The West Unique Not Universal," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 6 (November/December 1996): 30. Retrieved on April 9, 2023, from https://doi.org/10.2307/20047828

[46]Bennabi, *Wijhat al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī,* 40.

[47]Huntington, "The West Unique Not Universal," 30-31.

Bennabi cited Keyserling's perspective regarding the European Western civilization which regards it as a fusion of Christian spirit and Germanic traditions.[48] He also mentioned that François Guizot, the French historian, shared a similar viewpoint a century before Keyserling.[49]

Bennabi's emphasis on Christianity as the primary driving force of early Western civilization leads us to consider the role of atheism, particularly Marxism, and its connection with religion in contemporary and postmodern Europe. In response to this concern, Bennabi argued that Christianity that influenced the West was the one that emerged in Europe and became ingrained in the Western psyche after centuries of historical development. During this period, it underwent a distinct transformation that incorporated elements of Greek and Jewish philosophy, giving rise to what can be called the "Greco-Judeo-Christian idea." This idea served as the psychological underpinning for the development of Western identity, both at the individual and collective levels.[50]

However, as previously mentioned, since religion is a pattern that is associated with human existence, the religious concept remains influential and "plays its social role so long as it adheres to its metaphysical value... in other words, as long as it reflects our perspective on what lies beyond earthly things."[51] In the absence of this metaphysical value, secular alternatives emerge to take its place,[52] as happened in the West where Christianity lacked a cohesive metaphysical value and remained a framework or foundation that gave rise to Marxism. The general concept of Marxism can be seen as a religion because it offers an interpretation of the cosmic view, makes promises, and motivates its followers. Therefore, when materialism presents itself as a substitute for religion, it essentially becomes a religious concept.[53]

5.3. Psycho-Social Dimensions of Religion in Building Civilization

According to Bennabi, the religious idea should be investigated from multiple perspectives, considering the role it plays as a social factor that influences the course of history by intervening in the formation of human civilization and directing psychological and social values.[54] Hence, the impact of the religious idea should be examined in the cycle of civilization, while relying on psychological and social considerations in addition to historical ones.[55]

The religious element, in general, directly intervenes in the personal elements that form the conscious self in the individual and in the regulation of the vital energy that instincts put at the service of self.[56] Religious concepts have played a pivotal role in the significant changes that occurred throughout the course of history by making important contributions in shaping social phenomena. They possess the power to deeply affect an individual's conscience, permeating their innermost being, and solidifying their significance, ultimately molding them into people with strong principles and messages.[57]

On the other hand, the religious idea conditions human behavior to make it capable of accomplishing a prepared message. However, the role of the religious idea is not limited to this point.

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[48]Mary Anne Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), 14.

[49]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa,* 64-65.

[50]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa, 14.*

[51]Ibid., 14.

[52]Bennabi, *Qaḍāyā Kubrā,* 60-61.

[53]Ibid., 110.

[54]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa, 12.*

[55]Ibid., 13.

[56]Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtamaʿ,* 66.

[57]Bennabi, *Shurūt al-Nahḍa, 22.*

It solves for us another psychosocial problem of fundamental importance related to the continuity of civilization. A society cannot face the challenges of history as a community unless it is fully aware of its purpose. Furthermore, since the religious idea conditions the behavior of the individual, it instills in the heart of the community a specific goal (the concept of the afterlife) which makes life significant and meaningful. When this goal is passed down generation to generation and transferred from one class to another, it enables the survival of the society by establishing and guaranteeing the continuity of civilization.[58]

The religious idea also provides the moral ground or the moral law upon which the society proceeds and establishes its network of social relations which preserves it from disintegration. In addition, any violation of the ethical law in a particular society leads to a breakdown of the network of relationships that enables it to create history. Religion (religious idea) intervenes in the social structure by inculcating in it moral values which remain embodied in its customs, traditions, administrative rules, and legislative principles.[59]

Regarding the spiritual aspect, Bennabi observed the spiritual relationship between God (Allah) and man as the one that gives rise to social relationship which, in turn, connects human beings with each other. Thus, the social and religious relationships should be viewed together from a historical perspective as events and from a cosmic perspective as an expression of a single movement for social development. The social relationship that binds individuals to society is, in fact, a reflection of the spiritual relationship in temporal domain.[60]

Hence, Bennabi asserted that regardless of Islamic or Christian societies or societies that have long since vanished or those who exist today, it can be determined that the idea that sowed its seeds in the field of history is always a religious idea. The growth of humanity is reflected in its religious sentiments recorded in social events that shape human life and existence on Earth. Moreover, religion (religious idea) influences individuals by playing a significant role in shaping their personal aspects and serving as a vital psychological framework. It not only acts as a guiding principle that molds behavior but also provides support and solace during challenging or stressful circumstances.[61]

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Bennabi's perspective about the role of religion or the "religious idea" in the process of civilization reveals its significance as a vital concept and tool for analyzing the formation and development of civilization throughout the course of history. According to Bennabi, religion encompasses all forms of beliefs and ideologies that provide a worldview, moral and spiritual laws, justifications, and also serve as a catalyst for civilizational values. He preferred to use the term "religious idea" instead of "religion" to avoid any misunderstandings.

Additionally, religion plays a crucial function in the building of civilization, as its existence and impact are necessary for the evolution and advancement of the society. It is the driving force that creates civilizational values. Religion serves as a universal and historical reality that governs thinking, as a source of values, and as an impetus for civilization to emerge and flourish in history by providing space for both individuals and societies to thrive.

Religion also offers a means of organizing and directing human thought towards transcendental aspirations that go beyond mundane tasks. These aspirations are manifested in the spiritual connection between humanity and Almighty Allah, expressed through social relationships.

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[58]Ibid., 72-75.
[59]Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtama'*, 60.
[60]Bennabi, *Mīlād Mujtama'*, 49.
[61]Ibid., 52-66.

Lastly, Bennabi's work highlights the civilizational role of religion, promoting a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of religion in the contemporary society.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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