

# Religious discourse and problematic clarity

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The purpose of the question posed, "How do we understand religious discourse?" is to seek "methodological" clarity and establish knowledge as an endeavor to eliminate the confusion and contradictions of thought in the past and present.

It may be assumed from this question - with its questioning and meaning - the simplicity and naivety of what we have become accustomed to in the imitative and repetitive behavior of scholars regarding their position on religious discourse. Ijtihad has specific sources and origins, and the text shows the criteria for understanding and dealing with it, and there is nothing that needs to be reviewed. Some may add to this, thinking that this work of the behavior of scholars is a Salafi devotional act that is forbidden to be transgressed. Any research in which there is a sign of total renewal is tantamount to a forbidden heresy. This perception stems from the existence of a correct and complete program that meets all requirements, answers various questions, and fulfills all needs.

Undoubtedly, it is wrong to preoccupy ourselves with discussing such an opinion, as it judges itself in the same way as it judges others. The method that led it to a conviction in establishing perspective, constructing understanding, and producing knowledge is sufficient in itself to justify and legitimize such establishment, understanding, and production for the opposing party.

In fact, the reality is that an article like that leads to a circular argument, where the validity of worship is not established unless the process of understanding is proven. Since that argument relies on

understanding religious discourse, any form of understanding cannot contradict worship but can only be contradicted with a similar understanding. The argument of worship is an epistemological issue that depends on understanding the discourse, and the latter in turn relies on the establishment of *priori* consideration as a prerequisite for cognitive possibility. Therefore, logically speaking, going in the opposite direction inevitably leads to a circular argument.

From an epistemic perspective, dealing with religious discourse is not limited to understanding alone. There are two other processes, one of them precedes understanding, and its function is to establish *priori* knowledge, sometimes overlapping with it to the extent of harmony and expressing the understanding itself, as is the case with the textualism method, like that of the traditionalists. The other process, either derived from one of the two processes (*priori* establishment) or both together, generates and produces the detailed structure of thought in all fields of intellect, the universe, metaphysics, and other normative matters, including those based on understanding religious discourse, making it a source of diligence and deduction.

Hence, it was necessary to distinguish between these three levels of knowledge. There is the understanding of the text or discourse, as well as the *priori* establishment of perspective, represented by the basic *priori* that precedes understanding, which constitutes a condition for the possibility of understanding and thinking. Finally, there is the generation and cognitive production resulting from establishment, understanding, or both together.

These levels are interconnected, with some based on others. Understanding is based on *priori* establishment. And cognitive generation and production are based on both of the other levels. However, it should be noted that cognitive generation and production may be based solely on *priori* establishment, or on the common ground between *priori* establishment and understanding. Nevertheless, they can't be solely based on understanding, as the latter is built on the

former by necessity.

After this reference, we return to wondering about the clarity that prevailed in the past centuries. Is there an agreed-upon program that encompasses the levels of priori establishment, understanding, and cognitive production, as we referred to previously? Or are there competing and conflicting programs, with some calling for the denial of others?

In fact, and as it is clear, there are multiple programs, some of which contradict and compete with others. There is a trend that considers religious discourse clear and sufficient in itself, justifying this matter at times by the article “The Statement of Discourse” and that everything is in it, as it considers it expressing a clear and evident truth that does not need interpretation or guidance. And another with the “apparent” article, considering the discourse as apparent with no hidden or concealed meanings. A third approach is discussed in the article “The Spokesperson of the Discourse,” where the Quranic and Prophet’s Sunnah are not considered sources of clarification. Instead, they are regarded as ambiguous and can only be truly understood through the speaker who interprets them, an exclusive role designated for the infallible Imam. He alone can reveal the true essence of what religious discourse entails, being divinely inspired in all its apparent and hidden dimensions.

On the other hand, there is a program that does not often recognize the clarity of religious discourse, but rather attributes the “clarity” to an external foundation associated with a specific type of reason known as “Normative Reasoning”, as a mechanism that establishes consideration and corrects understanding, and then produces knowledge and thought.

There is also a trend that makes the key to clarity based on the “existential philosophical reason” as a source of foundation, understanding, and knowledge production, rather than relying on

religious discourse. Added the existence of another trend that makes the source of clarity based on revelation and heartfelt witnesses that are specific to saints and mystics, as a path that saves from misguidance and opens the path of guidance and clarification to the gnostic.

There is no doubt that the question raised "How do we understand religious discourse?" has no meaning in the era of text or discourse, for everything seems immediately clear, as revealed by the language, the clues of the situation, and the mouthpiece of events...etc. With such indicators and in accordance with the circumstances at that time, the religious discourse becomes clear and covers the needs of the reality in which it was revealed. Until it was known about the Companions that they seldom asked the Prophet about matters of their religion except for rare occasions, but rather they used to do what he did without questioning whether this was a pillar, an obligation, or etiquette. They see him praying, and they pray like him, and the same is the case with ablution, pilgrimage, and other acts of worship and dealings.

Therefore, it is reported that Ibn Abbas said: "I have not seen a people better than the Companions of the Messenger of Allah. They did not ask him about many matters, they only asked him about thirteen questions as they were covered in the Qur'an, including: They ask you about the sacred month...etc. As some of the predecessors said while addressing his contemporaries: "You ask about things we did not ask about, and you argue about things we did not argue about, and you ask about things I do not know what they are." Omar ibn Ishaq also said: "Among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah whom I met, I did not see anyone with an easier demeanor or less strictness than them."

As for after the previous era, the mouthpiece of the question about "understanding" began to appear more and more, as time extended, circumstances became more severe, events multiplied, and life evolved until the day came when this question took another direction that was not mentioned in ancient times. What is the meaning of the

aforementioned question? What is the difference between the perception of what came before the era of “Renaissance awareness” and what follows it?

The problematic of the pre - "renaissance awareness" era was characterized by having a dual nature of reason and religious text, and sometimes a mystical character is added to that.

At one time, the cognitive interaction was taking place within the “reason” circle, another within the “religious text” circle, and a third within their considerations together. There was no reason to ask the aforementioned question due to the considerations of clarity that we referred to. The question from this point of view falls, or is about to fall, in the list of what is called “impensable.”

However, the competition over the true representation of the religious discourse between the epistemological trends was implicitly and not explicitly expressing the content of that question, although this matter was not noticed except by perspectives that fall outside the circle of those competing trends.

Although the supremacy in the conflict between the epistemological trends was the method that mixed the “text and reason” considerations, the events and developments that the Islamic world witnessed nearly two hundred years ago made this problematic insufficient for the foundation, understanding, and knowledge production. There is a “factor” that came out to express itself as a necessary element for entering and interacting within the list of foundation, understanding, and production, which is what is represented in “reality”. This made it necessary to raise the aforementioned question amidst the concepts that have been upended by events and paved the way for a new kind of dealing, not only with religious discourse or Sharia but also with the intellectual channels that dealt with understanding the discourse through the processes of establishing consideration and knowledge production. The concern has

become not in the doctrines that were produced and secreted by those channels, but rather in the methods and mechanisms of foundation, understanding, and production, especially since the conflict and competition between the schools of thought have led to the crystallization and identification of these mechanisms and methods from an epistemological point of view.

This is what allowed us to see behind the sectarian theological conflict, another conflict that mixes with it, appearing at one time and disappearing at another, which is the epistemic methodological conflict arising from the systems of thought and its cognitive mechanisms, which differs from the articulated structures of sectarian conflicts.