The Role of Social and Cultural Environment in the Determination of Faith in Islamic Theology

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1. *Īmān* (Faith)

In Arabic the term *īmān* is derived from the root "a-m-n", it is in the "if'al" form and means, "to give confidence to others", "to be ensured", "to confirm and to accept". Verb form "āmana" means "removal of fear and replacing it with confidence[1].

In Islamic terminology the definition of *īmān* given in Gabriel hadith in which six principles of *īmān* is mentioned similarly the term *āmentu*, which forms knowledge of catechism, is symbolized to mean *īmān*. This is why definitions of *īmān* given in many books do not state what *īmān* is, instead tell about what to believe in[2].

Generally speaking, the definition of *īmān* is given as follows: "*īmān* is to confirm (approve)", "*īmān* is confirmation in heart", "*īmān* is the contrivance of the heart", "*īmān* is to confirm by heart and to confess by speech", "*īmān* is contrivance in heart and is confession through speech", "*īmān* is confirmation of heart, confession through speech, and performed by deeds", "*īmān* is speech and deeds"[3]. According to Paul **Tillich**, *īmān* is a total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern[4]. Briefly Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned.

According to the father of all modern Protestant Theology, **Schleiermacher**, *īmān* is the feeling of unconditional dependence. Of course, feeling so defined does not mean in religion what it means in popular psychology. It is not vague and changing, but has a definite content[5].

Because scholars of Kalām (Islamic theologians) recognize intelligence (reason) as a basic they discussed about a person's *īmān* who has a *taqlidī* (imitated, following the authority, imitation in legal matters) *īmān* as a result of observation (*nazar*) and proof (*istidlāl*/reason). Even so, the opinion of rejecting *taqlidī īmān* has become so extreme that common people who have no knowledge about logic and dialect are considered as non-believers, so this opinion has been symbolized with the concept *kufr al-āmmeh*. Scholars of **Mu'tazilite** sect claimed that a person having *taqlidī īmān* is a *fāsiq* (sinful) or a non-believer. The **Ash'arites**, among **Ahl al-Sunnah** (main stream orthodoxy) consider *taqlidī īmān* as something null and for this reason have been a doctrine which had been criticised[6]. According to their criticism, this person is not a Pagan and non-believer, but cannot be called a mu'min (true believer) absolutely.

Besides this, **Māturidī**, stated that the path leading to *Īmān* is proof (*istidlal*)[7] and that knowledge is a means leading to confirmation. He puts knowledge (*'ilm*) at the basic of *īmān* and states that a person having *taqlidī īmān* (imitated faith) cannot be excusable. But representatives following **Māturidī** in the later centuries have accepted that *taqlidī īmān* is acceptable[8].

The basic feature of *īmān* is described as believing in *ghayb* (unseen). Thus when the qualities of believers (mu'mins) are being stated in the Qur'an it has been emphasized that they have faith (*īmān*) in *ghayb*; "Who believe in (that) the unseen" (Q. 2:3). This acknowledgement influenced the famous Christian theologian St. Thomas (1224-1274). According to his opinion: "knowledge is related to objective-seen being, whereas, *īmān* is related to the unseen. This is why *īmān* cannot be mentioned where knowledge exists[9]. That's why it has been accepted that there is certainty within *īmān*. As a matter of fact, it has been stated in the Qur'an: "Only those are Believers who have believed in God and His Apostle, and have never since doubted" (Q. 49:15).

Generally *īmān* means a human attribution (homo credo faith). Because suggestion as regards *īmān* are suggestions which no man can refuse or ignore[10], besides being a human attribution, *īmān* is connected with man's soul. Thus, the Christian theologians described the word as mental acceptance, confidence of heart and submission of the will power[11] therefore, this is an explanation which shows that it is a concept to surround a person completely.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) who describes *īmān* as the most exalted interest of mankind, he also accepts that it is a centered act. According to his opinion: "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned". According to him, *īmān* is in the center of the person's private life, and it surrounds all aspects of life[12]. According to him, faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. *Īmān* at the center unites all emotional, mental, spiritual, physical and even conscious and unconscious aspects of personal life. Just like how mankind is made up of the unity of these elements without separation and they form mankind's aspects, which cannot be separated, similarly *īmān*, which penetrates mankind's soul, has connections with and makes influence ever these elements[13]. Therefore, *īmān* can neither be created as a product of the mind, nor can it be considered as the effort of the will nor can it be regarded as the results of emotional acts. *Īmān* is an unknown phenomenon, which includes all of these elements[14].

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[1] Ibn Manzūr, 1980 Lisan a'l-'Arab, "amn" art., Beirut.
[2] Smith, W. Cantwell, 1981 Religion and Reason Method and Theory in the Study and Interpretation of Religion On Understanding Islam, 141, Netherlands; Smith, 1979 "Faith as Tasdiq" Islamic Philosophical Theology, 99, ed. Parviz Morewedge, USA.
[3] Ash'ari, 1952 al-Luma', ed. Richard J. McCarty, 75, Beirut; Māturidī, 1970 Kitāb al-Tavhid, ed. Fath Allah Hulaif, 380, Beirut.
[4] Tillich, Paul, 1965 Dynamics of Faith, 4, New York.
[5] Tillich, ibid., 38.
[6] Izutsu, Toshihiko, 1984 Islam Dusuncesinde Īmān Kavrami, Tr. S. Ayaz, 148-149, Istanbul.
[7] Mātūridī, ibid., 287.
[8] Nasafi, 1993 *Tabsirat al-adilla*, I, 25, ed. Claude Salamé, Dımeşk; Ghazali, 1357 *Ihya' 'ulum al-Din*, I, 162, Cairo.
[9] Swinburne, Richard, 1983 *Faith and Reason*, 106, New York.
[10] James, William, 1979 *The Will to Believe*, 14, New York; Maurer, Armand, 1987 *St. Thomas Aquinas, Faith, Reason and Theology*, Int. XVIII, Manitoba.
[11] Meagher, P.K., "faith", *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* V, 798.
[12] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith,* 4.
[13] Tillich, ibid., 106.
[14] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, III, 133, USA.

2. External Knowledge

Religion as a subject of belief has developed with humanity and has become an establishment, which exists with the existence of mankind. No community has existed living in total atheism in any era. Social factors are important in establishing faith, which forms the main essence of religion.

Traditions and customs are initiative in terms of these factors. Qur'an talks about the men who are against the faith; *they didn't hear of this from their ancestors*, "The chiefs of the Unbelievers among his people said: "He is no more than a man like yourselves: his wish is to assert his superiority over you: if God had wished (to send messengers), He could have sent down angels; never did we hear such a thing (as he says), among our ancestors of old." (Q. 23:24); *they shall follow the ways of their ancestors*, "When it is said to them: "Follow what God hath revealed:" They say: "Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers." What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance? (Q. 2:170); or *enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following*, "When it is said to them: "Come to what God hath revealed; come to the Apostle": They say: "Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following." what! Even though their fathers were void of knowledge and guidance?" (Q. 5:104) as revealed in Qur'an these were their excuses that explain the social effects they experience.

The communication systems are one of the effective exterior elements, which influence formation of faith. Some researchers say that these systems are the most effective to "influence to convince and to motivate people", others claim that these systems are limited[15]. According to the first opinion "likings and choices, beliefs and convictions of masses, interest and concerns, thoughts of people are under the control of communication systems[16]. This results in a considerable influence in the formation of people's faith. As a result of different a research it has been seen that, media besides motivating people towards certain ideas helps strengthening existing ideas of people[17].

Besides customs, traditions, and media there are other factors like school, family and close friends in terms of motivation which effects formation of faith. In fact, the prophetic hadith expressed the influence of family as follows: "Every new born baby borns within a natural creation. Father and mother of the baby makes him Jewish, Christian of fireworshipper. If the mother-father is a Moslem, then the child is a Moslem"[18]. **Ghazālī** (d. 505/1111), in connection with this hadith, writes that whichever faith is suggested to children from youth this the faith that will determine their future life[19].

Many scholars of Islam acknowledge this "natural creation" concept as "being created with ability to direct towards religion" or "ability to believe" (have faith)[20]. According to some researches, the most influential 3rd, element is close friends after the family and school. According to the inquiries made on 400 students attending different high schools in Ankara, it has been showed that the influence of friends followed family and school in terms of having faith in God or disbelief[21]. This result makes the hadith "The person follows the religion of his close friend. So be careful in selecting your friends"[22] more meaningful.

Ghazālī considered exterior information factor, which influence the formation of faith, and he said: "I saw that always children of Christians were raised up as Christians, children of Jews were raised up as Jewish, children Moslems were raised up as Moslems"[23]. J. J. **Rousseau** (1712-1778) who says that the faith of people are "like geographical books of knowledge"[24] and he states that everybody accepts the religion taught to them, that they are "circumcised, baptized, Jewish, Muhammadan, Christian"[25] according to the country they live in and that "God knows how many Christian Catholics live in Rome, who could have been good Moslems if they were born in Mecca. Similarly, the honourable and good Turkish living in Asia, could have been good Christians if they were living together with us"[26]. In this regard, the research made on students in America Berkeley University, which shows that their religious beliefs are the same with their neighbourhood, is very meaningful[27].

The observations of **Ghazālī** and **Rousseau** are emphasized by the following statements in the Qur'an "And Noah, said: "O my Lord! Leave not of the unbelievers, a single one on earth!, "For, if Thou dost leave (any of) them, they will but mislead Thy devotees, and they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones" (Q. 71:26-27). This Qur'anic verse states that they raise up their children to the direction of their own religious beliefs.

In this point, the society has a considerable effect over changes of religion in other words changes in faith. The need for social support to protect religious beliefs and making influence over individual faith by using social pressure these expressions are because of this pressure of the society. In an investigation made on youngsters converting to different religions in the West, says that 42 % percent of them convert as a result of social pressure[28].

At the same time a person who is opponent of a religious sect does not attend meetings held by members of that sect or does not read articles supporting their doctrine[29]. With the expression of Qur'an "The unbelievers say: "Listen not to this Qur'an, but talk at random in the midst of its (reading), that ye may gain the upper hand!" (Q. 49:26) by talking with these expressions they wanted do prevent it from being read.

According to the news of Qur'an, the non-believers say: "They say: "Our hearts are under veils, (concealed) from that to which thou dost invite us, and in our ears in a deafness, and between us and thee is a screen: so do thou (what thou wilt); for us, we shall do (what we will!)" (Q. 49:5) in these above expressions there is a rebellious psychological nature. Besides trying to understand they do not even want to listen to. Whereas, to understand something, it is necessary to request it. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an emphasizes this matter as follows: "But people have cut off their affair (of unity), between them, into sects: each party rejoices in that which is with itself" (Q. 23:53).

Initially, a person cannot understand every event in his surroundings, he selects only appropriate ones among many objects and then he gets it. The perception of the

[15] Topcuoglu, M. Nur, 1996 *Basinda Reklam ve Tuketim Olgusu*, 16, Ankara.
[16] Topcuoglu, ibid., 219.
[17] Kaya, Mevlut, 1998 *Din Egitiminde Iletisim*, 220, Samsun.
[18] Bukhāri, "Janāiz", 80, 93; *Muslim*, "Qadar", 6.
[19] Ghazali, 1357 *Ihyā' 'ulum al-Din*, I, 162, Cairo; Cf. Brown, William Adams, 1930 *Pathways to Certanity*, 52 London.
[20] Cf. Akcay, Mustafa, 2000 *Cagdas Dunyada Insan ve Dini Sorumlulugu*, 68-72, Istanbul.
[21] Bilgin, B–Selcuk, M, 1991 *Din Ogretimi*, 201, Ankara.
[22] Abū Dāwud, "Adab", 16; Tirmidhi, "Zuhd", 45.
[23] Ghazali 1987 *al-Munqiz min al-Dalāl*, 25-26, Beirut.
[24] Rousseau, J. J., 1956 *Emil,* Tr. H.Ziya Ulken, 260, Istanbul.
[25] Rousseau , ibid., 303.
[26] Rousseau , ibid., 314.
[27] Ronald J.-Janet S. Schwartz, 1983 *Sociology*, 477, Canada.
[28] L.B. Brown–D. J. Pallant, 1973 "Religious Belief and Social Pressure", *Psychology and Religion*, 282, G. Britain.
[29] Krech-Crutchfield, 1980 *Sosyal Psikoloji*, tr. Gungor, Erol, 222, Istanbul.

world occurs beyond the senses of physical body depending on the society. People only listen to and read propagations of their own ideology and doctrines, or obey only leaders of their religious groups, societies. We support our world perspectives and insist that these opinions are correct[30].

Every individual accepts his own cultural and social values accordingly his behaviours as something logical or at least he believers in it[31]. The mind settled within faith is not an objective mind, it is a subjective mind, which protects and supports faith and serves for it. A faith, which looks like something illogical, is logical for the individual who has this faith[32]. This is why Qur'an accuses non-believers of being foolish, this means that they reduce their minds certain fields.

This explanation reminds the claim of **D.Z. Philips**, one of the followers of **Neo-Wittgensteinian**, who thinks that there is a rationality internal to the religion. Although we agree with **Philips** claim of internal rationality in religion, we do not accept their rejection of looking for external evidence for it. We sincerely believe that external evidences can contribute greatly to the formation of faith.[33]. Confirming such opinion is impossible in terms of the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an commands the believer to look at the earth and the heavens after then think wisely in remembrance of God (Q. 77:17-20).

This is why scholars who are members of Māturidī and Mu'tazilite sects oppose the Ash'arites and support the idea that if a person is not one who is addressed by the revelation, his mind is enough to discover God and an individual who has no chance to be illuminated by revelation. According to their opinion intellect is responsible for believing in God[34]. The Qur'an gave the example of prophet Abraham as evidence of discovering God by using the intellect. Again the Qur'an emphasized the importance of using the mind in various verses and it has been said that by using the mind an individual will be delivered from eternal hell fire (Q. 63:10).

Because the matter of faith is a complex form, to support the idea that *īmān* (faith) is only a matter of intelligence and ideas; means to put it in the limitation of narrow blocks. This is why the mental process of faith while being a part of every educated person's religious belief, still it should not be ignored that it is only a simple part[35].

Faith is consisting of strong emotions, but emotions are not the source of faith. With it's content it is subjective, so it is certain in it's focus, and therefore it claims truth, consequently, it demands submission. It has a tendency towards the one and only absolute, therefore it claims truth and commitment, it is directed toward the unconditional, and appears in a concrete reality that demands and justifies such commitment.

3. Conclusion

It is known that the cognitive form of *īmān* (faith) has complex features. In this regard it has a kind of mosaic nature. Ability and earnings made up the mosaic formation. Both categories (ability-earnings) have a special importance in existence and formation of faith[36]. *Īmān* is rejoicing feeling, consists of rational conscious, has a cognitive form of confirmation featured with a total acceptance and submission[37]. According to St. **Thomas**, in classical Roman Catholic theology "will to believe" is not an act which originates in man's striving, but it is given by grace to whose will is moved by God to accept the truth of what the church teaches. This kind of interpretation agrees with the authoritarian attitude of the Roman Church[38].

No command to believe and no will to believe can create *īmān* (faith). In this respect, the arguments of faith cannot form *īmān*[39]. This is explained as; one demands "obedience of faith", the term can mean the element of commitment, which is implied in the state of ultimate concern. Our oscillating will cannot produce the certainty, which belongs to faith.

"Commitment to the traditions of ancestors" emphasized in the Qur'anic verses and hadiths, and "attending groups of the same religion", "influence of family motivating the child's faith", "being careful in selecting friends" such explanations make clear that within the beginning of formation of faith, the exterior factors have initial effects. Deeds and thinking in remembrance of God (tadhakkur) which appears after acquiring faith, presents us the emotion, nature and will factors. The concept of increasing of faith, become conscious in faith and exception in faith according to Islamic theology (Kalām) shows considerable differences. In the Qur'an following verse "O ye who believe! Believe in God and His Apostle, and the Scripture which He hath sent to His Apostle and the Scripture which He sent to those before (him)" (Q. 4:136) addressed to the emotions of believers (mu'mins) through the will dimension.

In this regard, a person who has a tendency towards religious belief and faith in God having faith (*īmān*) a godsend gift –this will is called natural will- is a result of his surrounding. According to **Teftazānī**, faith is a divine light granted by Allah who "motivates his slave's will". After his stage, emotion and will interferes and directs the structure and dimension of faith. This is why there are conscious (muhaqqiq) religious and faithful people among Moslems, as well as Christians and Jews.

With rejoicing and emotions and perfect will these people within enthusiasm of their faith they form mental and physical state by using them to enrich their cognitive structure of faith. A hadith "The ones who were good in the era of ignorance (Jahiliyyah), are good also in the Islamic era"[40], expresses good quality of the individuals.

[30] Condon, J. C., 1995 *Kelimelerin Buyulu Dunyasi,* Tr. Ciftkaya, M., 34-35, Istanbul.
[31] Selim Aydin, 1994 *Bilgi Caginda İnsan*, 82, Izmir.
[32] Krech-Crutchfield, ibid., 196.
[33] Kellenberger, J., 1985 *The Cognitivity of Religion Three Perspectives*, 54, Hong Kong.
[34] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, 1962, *Mafātih al-'Ghayb,* XIII, 41, Cairo.
[35] Clark, W.Houston, 1961 *The Psychology of Religion*, 219, USA.

[36] Alper, Hulya, 2000 *Bir Kelam Problemi Olarak İmanin Psikolojik Yapisi*, 230, Istanbul.
[37] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 6.
[38] Cf. Maurer, Armand, 1987 *St. Thomas Aquinas, Faith, Reason and Theology*, Int. XVI-XVII Manitoba.
[39] Tillich, ibid., 37.
[40] Bukhāri, "al-Anbiyā"; 8, 14, 19; "al-Manāqib", 25; Muslim, "al-Fadāil", 168.

For example, the attitude, which **Ghazālī** puts forward for this religion of Islam, can be found also in the ones that arise from other religions. This is why whichever position Ghazālī has among Moslems, Thomas has the same position among Christians. The Qur'an makes it clear with the following verse: "But people have cut off their affair (of unity), between them, into sects: each party rejoices in that which is with itself" (XXIII, 53)".

In this respect, when Ghazālī as a Kalām scholar, explains about his life story, he says that he wants to be free from traditional belief (taqlīd) that has been taught to him by his mother-father and teachers, and expresses this as a result of a natural habit, a godsend blessing. Again he emphasises that his striving is not a result of his will. Finally, -with his words- he recedes from "traditional belief" that has been given to him by his mother-father and teacher.

Ghazālī made a research on which of the knowledge he obtained "haqq" (righteous), and which of them was "batil" (perverted). The answer of it is that he obtained faith which he defined as a knowledge does not bring any doubt of a matter, a position of perfect faith[41]. In this context, a lot of the Qur'anic verses, which starts with "most people", ends in a negative way (Q. 2:243; 6:116).

Ash'arī and **Māturidī** representatives of the Ahl al-Sunnah (main stream orthodoxy) sect do not give excuse for those who have *taqlidī īmān* (imitated) because they aim to raise up informed and conscious believers.

In the cognitive structure of disbelief and faith when effects of physical and spiritual elements of moral are considered, universal dimension of faith becomes meaningful[42]. The Qur'an says: "Say: "True guidance is the Guidance of God: (Fear ye) lest a revelation be sent to someone (else)", "Say: "All bounties are in the hand of God: He granteth them to whom He pleaseth: And God careth for all, and He knoweth all things" (Q. 3: 73).

[41] Ghazali, 1987 *al-Munqiz min al-dalāl*, 25-26, Beirut.
[42] Cf. Guler, Ihami, 1988 "Īmān ve Inkarin Ahlaki ve Kognitif Temelleri", *Islāmiyāt* I, 24, Ankara.