

THE THEOLOGY OF MODERN MAN: SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR'S PERSPECTIVE ON CONTEMPORARY REALITY

EKA PUTRA WIRMAN

Faculty of Ushuluddin, State Institute of Islamic Studies
Imam Bonjol Padang West Sumatera, Indonesia
E-mail : epewe@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research is a study on The Theology of Modern Man: Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective on Contemporary Reality. Science and technology have progressed in 20th century beyond human imagination. One of its greatly-concerned impacts has been men's high dependancy on technology rather than reliance to God. Religion, as widely believed, is currently undergoing marginalization as a by-product of technology answering every human's need. God and religion have been much relegated as irrelevance. Such attitude in modern men has raised a fundamental issue in theology as how to see and respond to the reality. Seyyed Hossein Nasr sees that over-reliance on technology has degraded human values and religion with all its spiritual dimensions has been much replaced by the supremacy of rationalism, empirism, positivism, and pragmatism. Human and divine values have lost their significance to rational measures which dominate and bring about imbalance and self-alienation in modern men. This study proves that despite its phenomenal achievements in science and technology rationalism which negates spiritual aspects in human life will only lead to a lopsided modernity. Man will only grow partially in intellectual capacity and will not reach to his true existential self. He may rise to great material accomplishments but will fail to understand his being and existence. A solution to this reality in Nasr's view is a return to spirituality in which modern man consciously brings his ratio back under the guidance of Divinity. Theologically, this view of Nasr's is not compatible with Mu'tazila's Rationalism theology which goes on the same lane with Western Rationalism that excessively deifies ratio and negates God's active involvement in human life. It is more compatible with the Ahlussunah's theology of Proportionalism which gives right proportion to both ratio and spirituality.

Keywords: *theology, modern man, rationalism, proportionalism, spirituality*

Introduction

In present 20th century, science and technology have progressed spectacularly to an extent that surpasses human imagination. All aspects and segments of life are now highly dependant on the existence and support of technology. One can take for example, the progress in information, communication, and transportation technology. Time and distance are no longer barriers to communicate and move around the world's corners. Everything has become so easily available and ready for grab. The world has become like a small village without borders. One may say, what was previously impossible now has become commonplace, usual, and natural.

Through science and technology, men are able to catch up with and realize their dreams, and therefore, modern men's response toward science and technology is more than their appreciation toward religion¹ (Afif,

2004:xi). God, which is the essential core of religion has also lost His place in modern men's life since they have found a new 'god' to return to. Modern men don't need to ask God now for whatever they need is readily and instantly available. All in calculated, efficient, and professional fashion. Such deification of science and technology has placed man in the position of God. As the creator of science and wondrous technological advances, humans have considered themselves autonomically free from all forces outside themselves. They have become gods for their own destiny who can decide everything without the illusion of any God, heaven, hell, and other theological escathological problems. Modern men tend to set themselves free from any God-related matters (theomorphism) in order to build their own set of rules and orders which make humans as the center (Antropomorphism).

Among the principles that modern men set for their life are materialistic, hedonistic, and totalitarian beliefs

¹ According to Max Weber, Protestant ethics results the rise of capitalism in western, especially in the country where the people is Protestant. Eric Fromm said that western people have two religions now, formal religion and "secret" religion. Their formal religion

could be Christian or catholic. However, in their daily life they are ruled not by both of them, but by one secret religion, according to Fromm, that is capitalism which is the biological children of Rationalism and Empiricism.

in which they only believe in empirical knowledge and positivistic logical concept (Haryati, 2011:308). Logic and empirism become their categorical definition of all and they go above all transcendental guidance or revelations. Theology and human-God relationship are now an irrelevance.

To put aside human relations with nature and God means negating the most fundamental issue in theology. As mentioned in Encyclopedia Americana, theology is "the study or science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and universe". Theology deals with eschatological problems in both profane and transcendental dimensions. The study of God is therefore becomes central and essential. But for modern men God has lost His stage and no longer has a say in deciding human life as they have become capable of setting the rules now. Such attitude has turned human life deprived of meanings and values that keep them balanced and away from committing harms.

Such phenomenon mentioned above has led human civilization to a critical stage especially in matters that concern human principles (Sholihin, 2005:1). Human values which are supreme and noble are marginalized in order to give ways to human ratio to achieve scientific and technological advancements. Religion and all its dimensions is neglected and replaced by the supremacy of rationalism, empirism, positivism, and pragmatism. (Nata, 2003:289-294).

As modern men achieved incredible progress and success in material world, they also lose something of high value in life such as warmth in human relations and spirituality. Amidst all successes and achievements they lose track of finding life meaning and their existence. A situation that leads to self-alienation, chaos, and imbalance.

Being a prominent muslim contemporary thinker and philosopher, it is interesting to see what Seyyed Hossein Nasr has to offer for a solution. In his 'perennial philosophy', Nasr suggests a return to spirituality as a way out from the mire of modernity. In perennial outlook, man is a spiritual being who takes a form of life in profane world. As a spiritual being, man has to move toward the Source of life which is God, not away from it. In doing so, he will not fall into an attitude of making himself a God and will also understand his position in the short-span of worldly life (Aslan, 2004:22).

Research Methodology

This research is a study on the ideas and thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. It uses library research methodology with philosophical approach (Zubair, 1990:63). A research on a figure viewed from its

nature can be categorized as cultural research since the object of study is about ideas, concepts, or the thoughts of a figure (Mudzhar, 1998:12). Data analysis uses descriptive analytical method to describe the analysis and results of study based on comparison of various data sources which talk on the same theme (Winarto, 1978:132).

Research Objective

This research aims to describe the spiritual problems of modern men, the need for theological spirituality for modern men in the perspective of Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Analysis and Findings

The Urgency of Theology in Life (Tauhid-Spirituality)

According to Theism,² God has an important role in the entire universe since the time of its creation up to the time of its destruction or the day after. God in this belief is the Absolute Being who possesses the ultimate power to rule everything and always be among His creatures. God is therefore the Owner, the Determiner, the Judge, the Protector, the Bestower, and the Regulator of the entire universe and everything in it altogether.

Deism, an offshoot of Theism, has another outlook. To its view, God exists and created the whole universe but now is not involved actively in running it. After its creation, He no longer partakes in any affair since He has created self-sustaining system for it to go on its own. Human beings are also given an absolute authority to live and design their life in whatever fashion they like. Thus, praying and asking Him of anything is useless and irrelevant for He is not going to answer. In this context, Deism has much similarity with Atheism which refuses God's involvement in any form, before or after creation; A concept contradictory to religion which believes in the presence of God in all aspects of human life since the onset of creation up to the end of time.

Religions stand on the belief that God does exist in human real life. This belief is then manifested and implemented in forms of rituals, worships, prayers, offerings, chanting of Scriptures, and many others. A religious believer holds that the existence of God who actively cares, sees, and responds to His devotees has brought them peace of mind and happiness. Religion has filled the psychological and spiritual needs of its believers with a Supreme Being who loves and takes care of His creatures. The belief has helped them grow and nurture traits like sincerity, obedience, submission, dedication, loyalty, and devotion. Some of

² In philosophy of religion, response to the existence of God can be divided into two great factions i.e. theism which believes the existence of the God as the creator of the universe and Atheism which refuses the existence of God

these traits will help them avoid the feelings of loss, helplessness, restlessness in life, loss of aspiration, void of loyalty and dedication, and endless thirst for spiritual fulfilment and contentment.

Theoretically and conceptually, a religious person or a believer in God is mentally healthier than a non believer. A person may think of himself as perfect, all-knowing, capable of creating and achieving his dreams, but he will not be able to explain the reason why he lives, his purpose in life, and what happens to him after death. He will not be able to answer such transcendental metaphysical questions and the inability thus affects the health of his psyche.

The core of religion is the existence of God in life and it is such a belief that makes a religious outlook specific. Religion teaches people how to relate to God which in turn creates a communication, a relation, closeness, warmth, hope, loyalty, dedication, sacrifice, and love. Without this relation, God is nothing but an empty name with no reality and effect in human life.

Academically, the study and discourse of God and His relation to human beings is the main and fundamental study in theology.³ The relation between human and God is of paramount importance for human psyche and spirituality. A void in this realm will make him imperfect and imbalanced. As God has created everything in perfect equilibrium, it is imperative for human to seek balance in life by knowing God. In this context, theology finds its urgency for it helps people understand about the existence of God and his relationship with human beings and nature, salvation, eschatology, and other matters on spirituality.

In academic world, theoretically and conceptually, schools of theology can be classified according to their characteristics into the following:

Rationalism Theology

In classical era, the discourse on theology was always dominated by two mainstream schools of Mu'tazilah and Ahlussunnah which is represented by Asy'ariah and Maturidiah. It is almost impossible back then to find theological discourse without reference to these two main schools. Even today, the influence of both is still dominant in the curriculum of many educational institutions in various levels.

It is an undeniable fact that Mu'tazilah was the first school in Islam that talked and took on theology seriously in academic way. Mu'tazilah introduced the validity of ratio to deal with theological matters. Therefore, Mu'tazilah is known as the representation of Rationalism in Islam (*al-'aqliyyūn*).

Harun Nasution, an Indonesian figure in theology, mentioned that the main characteristic of Mu'tazilah's theology is its giving human ratio a big portion of authority to decide on theological matters. In his book '*Abduh Dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah*', referring to Sulayman Dunya's view in his book '*Hasyiah 'Ala Syarh al-Dawwani lil-aqid al-adhudiah*', Harun Nasution mentioned the stance of Mu'tazilah on human ratio as capable of knowing the following matters on aqidah:

- i. Human ratio is able to know the existence of God
- ii. Human ratio is able to know the obligation of gratitude toward God
- iii. Human ratio is able to know and discriminate goodness and evil
- iv. Human ratio is able to know the obligation of doing virtues and avoidance of evil.⁴

In Mu'tazilah's view, even if God didn't send prophets and messengers, human beings still have the obligation on four matters mentioned above. The reason is because human ratio is a blessing from God endowed with capacity to know God itself and to set values and norms necessary in life. This stance has driven Mu'tazilah to impose certain obligations for God to fulfill. Among them are the obligation to keep and maintain human well-being (*ri'ayat mashalih al-ibad*)⁵ and to give reward and punishment according to their deeds.

Mu'tazilah school is a stout believer in the ability of ratio that it makes reason as the parameter of truth. Human ratio has made man independent from direct influence of God and able to set the rules for his life in general. The existence of God's prophets and revelations serves only to confirm the truth that has been achieved by human ratio. With such perfect ratio, Mu'tazilah argues that God's intervention in human daily life is insignificant and irrelevant. If God were to involve Himself actively in human real life accepting

³ Ensiklopedi Britannica stated that "the themes of theology are God, man, the world, salvation, and eschatology". Lih. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 28, USA. 2010. page. 616. Encyclopedia Americana also stated that theology is "the study or science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and universe". Theology is also the science of the divine or discourse about God. Lih. The Wordworth Dictionary of Beliefs & Religions, Ed. Rosemary Goring (London: Wordworth Reference, 1995). page. 276.

⁴ More complete about the power of ratio by Mut'azilah can be seen in the scheme arranged by Harun Nasution in *Abduh dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah*, page. 54-56. Also see Sulayman Dunya, *al-Syaikh Muhammad Abduh bain al-Falasifah wa al-Kalamiyyin*, page. 200

⁵ Mu'tazilah Baghdad said that Allah has the duty to protect the benefit for in term of world and religion, while Mu'tazilah Bashrah said that Allah has the duty to protect the benefit for human only in religion aspect. According to Baghdad faction, The benefit is about wisdom and regulation (*al-hikmah wa al-tadbir*) while Bashrah faction said it is about advantages (*al-naf'u*)

some prayers and refusing others, it would mean He had destroyed the natural system and logical truth He

had created Himself. And it is impossible for God to do so for it will make Him inconsistent toward His own system.

Looking at this principle of Mu'tazilah on the role of ratio in theology, one may call it as the school of Rationalism in Islamic theology. Islamic Rationalism is a school of theology which places ratio above all to set rules and parameters on theological and religious matters. And there's a common ideological trait between Islamic Rationalism and Western Rationalism. It lies in the fact that both believe in ratio as the searching tool and the defining factor for knowledge and the truth. The truth is decided through logical thinking and reasoning. Ratio becomes the regulator of human affairs and the source of truth (Ahmad, 2010:30).

Rationalism is a school in philosophy which says reason as the most important tool to acquire knowledge and verify its validity (Ahmad, 1990:127). Rationalism was initiated by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), a French philosopher, mathematician, physician, and writer. He was entitled the Father of Modern Philosophy for his ideas and thoughts. In his book Discourse on Methods, Descartes asserts that everything is prone to doubt except ratio and what comes from it (Juhaya, 2003:94).

Along with empirism and positivism ,rationalism has given birth to modernism in Western countries which is marked by their scientific and technological advancements. Due to those progress, human life has become easy. Communication and transportation technology has turned the world like a small village accessible from every point and corner. Medical world is no exception. Various sophisticated tools and means have been invented and are able to diagnose and cure diseases previously unknown and incurable. Modernism has brought comfort and facility in human life.

Modernism is an outcome of ratio optimization in human life. Ratio is indeed necessary and beneficial to understand nature and create means for the benefits of mankind. Modern science and technology are living proofs of ratio contribution to human life. The world may never see what it has enjoyed today in facility if it were not for the optimization of ratio. Although with different object, it is at this point where Western rationalism and Islamic rationalism meet.

Proportionalism Theology

The second mainstream in theology is the school of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (commonly called Ahlussunnah) which is represented by the schools of Asy'ariah and Maturidiah. As commonly happened in

a fiqh school of thought, different branches and outlooks are also found in Ahlussunnah. Those

differences are like different ideas and opinions between Assyafiiyah of Imam Syafii with al Malikiyah of Imam Malik which needn't be confronted with each other to make a new school of thought.

Ahlussunnah is a moderate kind of theology in Islam. Its theological system was founded on the understanding and tradition of early generation of Islam (*al salaf al salih*). It nurtures a system that combines both ratio and revelation proportionally. Ratio is one fundamental instrument to define the system of this school, but it is not the goal nor the deciding factor. To this school, ratio is like a flashlight in a dark night which is necessary to see the road and give direction. But just having lighted clear road is not enough for the road has turns, junctions, and crosses. In this situation, a man still needs a map that can connect and take him to his destination. In theological discourse, that map is called revelation or holy book.

Abu Hasan al Asy'ari and Abu Mansur al Maturidi are two figures that deserve the credit of creating the system of theology in Ahlussunnah. Both figures have made a system of aqidah which is similar in tradition but different in place of origin. The followers of both schools later on attributed their names as the names of the traditions Ahlussunnah and Maturidiah respectively.

Wordworth dictionary writes that:

"The real founder of Muslim kalam was al Ashari (873-939). His school and that of al Maturidi (d.944) became the standard school of muslim theology." (Goring, 1995:277)

And the factor that give birth to Islamic theology was as described in the following:

"However, as the Muslim empire expanded and met with Greek and other systems of thought it became necessary to mount a rational defence of the Islamic intellectual position, to answer the doubts and questions increasingly being raised by Muslims, and to bolster their beliefs in a more systematic way". (Goring, 1995:276)

The thinkers in Ahlussunnah created the system of thought as a rational defence against ancient Greek tradition, culture, and thoughts resulted from the process of knowledge transfer which go against Islamic belief. In this case, what created was a system, not a belief. The belief is already there since the time of the Holy Prophet and virtuous companions.

The concept above goes in accord with theological definition of Ibnu Khaldun (806H/1406 CE) as a science containing reasons to defend faiths and beliefs by means of ratio, and also to study about God,

attributes that can be attributed to Him, attributes which must be exempted from Him; about prophets and what must and mustn't be attributed to them, and

about rejection of heresy and those who go against the tradition of salaf and Ahlussunnah (Khalidun, without year:325). In this relation, Muhammad Abduh also posited similar theological definition as a science that studies about the essence of God, purifying Him from unworthy attributes, and believing in His messengers as exemplified by the pious early generation (*salaf salih*) using ratio with all its limitations (Abduh, 1986:32).

Ahlussunnah faced three forces of opposition against their system of theology namely Mu'tazilah, the philosophers, and muslim textualists.⁶ As a means of defense and argumentation they used ratio and logic. In so doing one can say that Ahlussunnah's theologians made use of logic to defend their faith and beliefs. But for them ratio is only a means that serves a purpose suitable to its scope and capacity. Ratio cannot solve and rationalize all problems since it is not meant to know the essence and substance of the universe. It can only perceive the existence and concepts on accident (*'aradh*) from various elements that exist in universe (Abduh, 1986:50).

Muhammad Abduh gave a few examples and illustrations to clarify on this matter. For example, science and ratio may be able to know the characteristics of light, but it cannot come to know its true substance and its very essence. And so is the case with spirit (*al-nafs*), many questions are beyond logical capacity to answer such as what is spirit? Is it accident (*'aradh*) or material (*jauhar*)? Does it exist before the body, or after? Is it outside or inside the body? Such questions, according to Abduh, are not within the capacity of ratio to answer. If ratio is so limited to understand certain phenomena, it is certainly incapable of knowing God who is far more beyond. Ratio and logic are finite, and it is not within the capacity of finite to understand and know about the infinite like God (Abduh, 1986:50).

The school of Ahlussunnah put ratio and revelation proportionally in their own domain and doesn't contradict each other nor negates one for the other. Ahlussunnah also sets a harmonious synergy between God's absolute authority and human boundary. They encourage men to see and understand proportionally the harmony between God who protects and listens and humans who have to work for their own benefits. God in Ahlussunnah's view is indeed a supreme being, but it doesn't mean He may not answer the prayer of

⁶ "they worked out the orthodox Islamic theological position in opposition to the Mutazilites, the Hellenistic philosopher, and the literalist interpreters of the Quran" (The Wordworth Dictionary, Page. 277)

His creatures in material world. God is not how Deism or Qadariah school depict Him, very much passive after the creation of the universe, nor the way Mu'tazilah describes it, afraid of being branded unjust

for granting some prayers and denying some others. But He is a God who makes Himself present in the life of every creature, who connects to whoever is searching for Him without despair, and who helps His faithful devotees to have a life they can enjoy with love and great pleasure. A life wherein God is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. (*radhiyallahu 'anhum wa radhu 'anhu*)

The Reality of Modern Man and Modernism

Encyclopedically, the word modern means the latest, recent, or most up-to-date. Modern society is a group of people living together in a place with certain set of norms and rules which are up-to-date (Poerwadarminta, 1991:636 kbbi on-line 2016). Modern society undergoes transformation of knowledge and technology along with the progress of an era or lives in up-to-date constellation of it (visiuniversal.blogspot.co.id 2015).

The way of thinking and responding that resulted from modern living has given birth to modern school of philosophy called Modernism. This school was born through the ideas of a French philosopher, Rene Descartes about the dominant role of ratio in human life. Descartes ideas then became a turning point for the progress of European civilization especially after a dynamic dialectic with empirism. Descartes' ideas were followed and continued by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), De Spinoza (1632-1677), Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1775), Christian Wolff (1679-1754), and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). As an antithesis to Rationalism, another school was born and called empirism. Empirism put more stressing on experience and sensical perception as its verifying means for truth. Among its prominent figures are Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and David Hume (1711-1776).

Deliar Noer (1987), as quoted by Abudin Nata (Nata, 2003:279-280) stated that modern society has the following characteristics:

- i. They are rational, which means they give more ways to reason than emotion. Before starting any work they always consider the benefits and its disadvantages and follow through as they see it profitable and beneficial.
- ii. They think for a much further future, not only on the momentary problem they have at hand, but always looking after its social impact in the long run.
- iii. They appreciate time and always see it as something valuable to make the best of

- iv. They are open-minded, able to take suggestion and criticism and are open to ideas and improvement from wherever source they may come from.
They think objectively, in the sense they see things from the point of view of function and benefits for society.

And according to Soejono Soekanto, the characteristics of modern society are as follow:

- i. They are open to new experience and inventions
- ii. They able to accept change after a good valuation
- iii. They are sensitive toward issues and problems around their environment
- iv. They are present and future oriented
- v. They make plans in their every work and action
- vi. They believe in the benefits of science and technology
- vii. They respect other people's rights and are aware of their own
- viii. They don't give up easily to fate
- ix. They are self-assertive and able to argue for their ideas and principles
- x. They believe that their potentials can be improved and worked upon

Based on the characteristics mentioned above, modern society can be described as rational, visionary, disciplined, open-minded, objective, respectful toward rights, perseverant, and confident of their own potential. But even so, amid all modern progress they still have a number of problems to ponder and reflect upon.

Modern Man's Problem in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective

Along with the progress that modern people have, there are also problems that follow. According to Abuddin Nata, the problems that modern men may have are as the following:

1. Disintegration of Science

Science becomes more and more segmented and specialized that if it goes separately without a line to connect each other and a guidance that includes all, there's every possibility for men to move away further and further from the wisdom of unified world.

2. Split Personality

Modern life which relies so much on the power of science and technology has made modern men devoid of spiritual values and leads them to split personality.

3. Abuse of Technology

Science and technology have been misused to bring destruction on earth. The ability to make sophisticated weapons, for example, has been intended to invade and colonize other countries. Communication technology is misused to degrade human morality and so on so forth in many others.

4. Degradation of Belief and Faith

Modern scientific format especially those which only admit empirical facts (which have no reference in Scriptures) may cause degradation in belief.

5. Materialistic Trend in relationship

In materialistic form of relationship everything is valued through how much material profit one can get from something. And so is the case with human respect. One is only worthy according to his possessions and what can be taken from him materially.

6. Justification of Means to Achieve Ends

As a result of materialistic attitude and degradation of belief mentioned above, modern society may fall easily to an attitude of justifying means to achieve ends.

7. Stress and Frustration

The competitive demands of modern life have turned modern men into material slaves. Consequently, various psychological illnesses like stress and frustration follow them like shadow.

Riki Saputra in his book '*Tuhan Semua Agama*' mentioned some characteristics of modern society. First, they believe in antropomorphism which makes human beings the center and the only ruler in universe. Second, there's a growing belief in society upon relativism as the principles of eternal life diminish and cease to exist. Third, rejection toward anything sacred including the existence of God which in turn leads to refusal of metaphysics (Saputra, 2012:96). Modern men take away the function of God and move it to human being which then make them above all realities. Modern men think that they don't need religion nor God for they are incomprehensible for them while in fact they serve as balancing agent in life (al-Qashshash, 28:77). It is of necessity to make science and religion go harmoniously to help human beings live a better life (Bakhtiar, 2004:231).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr,⁷ a contemporary muslim philosopher made a critical description on current situation of modern men's civilization. In Nasr's view,

⁷ Syed Hossen Nasr was born in 1933 in southern part of Taheran city. His family is from Kashan. His mother is Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri and his father is Vali Nasr. He graduated from MIT department of geology and geophysics in 1956. Graduated his doctoral in Harvard University with dissertation title "*Conceptions of Nature in Islamic Thought*" (Khudori Sholeh, 2003:37)

modern men are currently suffering from a serious crisis of spirituality as a result of separating science from divine values while substantially the essence of knowledge is knowing the sacred itself (Nasr, 1989:1). Houston Smith, an observer on religious studies explained that modern philosophy tried to take away the sacred and the one from the realm of philosophy, science, and art (Aslan, 2004:22)

Modern philosophy has strong roots in the Cartesian theory of doubt upon matters and the supremacy of ratio upon all. Cogito Ergo Sum, by no means, is a statement to substantiate the ideology of Cartesianism that separate humans from nature. For cartesianists, human ratio is a supreme force that can solve all problems in the world.

In modernists' point of view, human is the center of existence. Values and norms, be it in ordinary life or scientific world must refer to human values without any intervention from religion. Modernism has uprooted men from divine lights and made them lose track of life meaning and orientation. Human life has become like a machine without soul, moving mechanically without any reflection for meaning of this life (Saputra, 2012:6).

To Nasr's view, a civilization built solely on rational principles has thrown human beings from divine source of existence. Modernism has alienated human beings from their true-selves and robbed them of their position as homo religious. Aside from that, modern human intelligence is presently mere intellectuality or worse cunningness without any divine element that enable them to easily acquire the knowledge upon the sacred.

Nasr asserted that Modernism has failed since it didn't see human beings in their true capacity. Now humans have turned into gods who take everything into their hands while they are in fact humans with limitations. The failure in understanding this essential point is the mistake in developing human modern civilization. The world moves in imbalanced state as a result of dominant secular outlook. Human beings then became unwholly creatures because of absolute domination of ratio over other dimensions (Nasr, 1968:86). These unideal men in turn will lose control and exploit nature as they wish and think fit.

Alternative Theology for Modern Man

Nasr said that modern men have suffered from the worst multidimensional crisis in the whole history of mankind. The progress in science and technology that has brought great benefits to human life has also brought with it serious harms and threats. The destruction that happened in modern era do not only happen on physical level but also in mental psychological realm. On one hand, the amazing

progress of modernity has brought comfort and facility, but on the other it is also a disaster that degrade human dignity. Based on this fact, the basic problem of modern men is actually the absence of spirituality to balance the speed of science and technology (Nasr, 1994:20-21).

To name a few examples of the negative impacts are cloning practice to produce human in certain criteria for certain purpose, the production of massive destruction weaponry that keeps the world in endless wars, the depletion of ozone layers resulting from technological waste and its corollary the green-house effects, and one of no less direful, the admission of homosexual marriage in some developed countries and the rampant practice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) that continue to spread all over the world. All those technological advancements have posed a serious threat to the survival of human beings as noble creatures on earth.

In response to this plight of modern men, Nasr proposes spiritual approach as a prerequisite solution. In his view, to separate human beings from spirituality means to negate the existence of human beings itself. An ideal man is one who has all his three aspects body, ratio, and soul function harmoniously. From all the three, modern men have optimized their body and ratio to a great extent, but they ignore to nurture their spirit to balance them all.

Human ratio is able to know the existence of God but it cannot feel the presence of God. Ratio has no capacity to love God. Here is the domain of heart and spirit. The heart that can feel the presence of God prays for His love, mercy, and protection.

God speaks in holy book:

"And recall (o prophet) when your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the sons of Adam, and made them witnesses against their ownelves asking them, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we do testify'. We did so lest you claim on the day of Ressurrection: 'We were unaware of this'. (Qur'an, al A'raf, 172-173).

In religious teachings, the existence of God is primary, essential, and fundamental. The relation between religion and God is like the relation of a king to his kingdom. It is impossible to talk about religion without a God and vice versa to talk about God without religion. In this context, to talk about God is actually to talk about the core spirit of a religion.

Antropologists say that since ancient time up to present era, there has been no society without religion or God. In primitive illiterate societies, religion has become an inseparable part of their daily life. Their

identity is determined and symbolized by the god they worship. A ruling and powerful tribe is marked by the symbol of god they have which also signifies the power of their gods over those of their enemy's. The belief of primitive society in God is usually referred to with several names like animism, dynamism, fetishism, and totemism (Djam'annuri, 2000:6).

The essence of a religion is the feeling of human need, obedience, and total submission to God⁸ (Darraz, 1952:27). The presence of God in human's belief is also an accumulation of experience and human encounter with a reality that overwhelm and control his destiny.(Djam'annuri, 2000:4). Because of human's absolute helplessness, God holds the key position in every religion (Djam'annuri, 2000:17). Every religion was built on the foundation of belief in a sublime power that goes beyond human comprehension. A power that permeates and controls over everything in the universe.

God, in religious perspective, is an Absolute Reality who is free to act His will. He transcends all power and might and is therefore an Absolute Being without bound and limitations. No single religion is able to make rules for God to abide. He is the one who creates, sustains, and decides for His creatures. The limitation ascribed to Him is nothing but human's will and ambition to share His power, which is impossible since He didn't act according to their wish and approval.

In Nasr's view, modern men are now in dire need for the presence of God. A God who listens, cares, and responds to the prayers of their hearts. Modern men who have been thrown away from their spiritual center are not compatible with Deism which belittle the role of God (Harun, 1987:35 and Zakiah, 1996:174). In Deism, the role of God has finished since the creation of the universe with its own self-sustaining system.

According to Deism, God is like a genius clocksmith who leaves his creation to go on its own with the self-sustaining mechanism he has built in. He doesn't need to intervene because now it can run on its own. Deism refuses revelation and the prophets who came with it. Furthermore, a deist doesn't believe in prayers to God for He will never respond them. In Harun Nasution's words (1986), God is like and absentee landlord who never stays or lives permanently in his land.

Theologically and sociologically, Deism is anti God and religion movement that happened in the history of Western world. It grew and gained dominance especially since aufklarung and renaissance and also industrial revolution in England by mid of 18th century. This idea then gradually came to modern

Islamic world wherein people try to understand God as being limited by His own creatures. They only believe in the existence of God but never admitted Him as the Protector, Keeper, and Sustainer of the universe (*rabb al 'alamin*). This school of thought glorifies the potential power of creatures and puts God to rest along with whatever role He may have after creation. In classical era this school was known as Qadariah Mu'tazilah, and in contemporary time as the theology of Rationalism.

Be it Deism, Qadariah Mu'tazilah or Rationalism, it is actually a kind of revolt against God's domination in human life. These beliefs have put God in a sacred 'palace' far up there in heaven, and the palace 'door' has been closed so life can go 'rationally' without any intervention from the owner of the palace. To them, every intervention made by God in human life is a kind of injustice while it is impossible for Him to be unjust. Those beliefs try to make a concept of 'fair play' between humans where each and everybody is given a full right to do whatever he likes and later on in the life after God must judge it accordingly. This is what Mu'tazilah called as the concept of God's justice, one of their basic tenets (*al ushul al khamsah*) in their belief system. The justice of God will be tarnished if He ever involves Himself in human affairs or grants some of their prayers.

Modernism which has succeeded to make the most out of nature through its science and technology has also thrown God away from human real life. Consequently, as Nasr says, modern men are heading toward destruction and crises of multidimensions. As a solution they cannot but return to spirituality and bring back divine values to their life. And by spirituality he means to bring God alive in every individual's heart which in turn will guide them in every aspect of their life, be it science, technology, politics, society, or culture. It is necessary to do so because one cannot expect for a remedy from the cause the problem. In other words, Rationalism that negates God has been the root cause of modern problems. The plight of modern men started with the disappearance of divine perspective in their lives. Naturally, the most logical and sensible solution is to bring back divine values and spirituality that will guide and give them clear perspective.

The disappearance of God in human life also happened in academic world. Nasr sees that Rationalism and Empirism which gave birth to Modernism after middle age was the main cause as to why the sacred disappeared from religious studies, especially in academic world (Nasr, 1992:88). As a result, it also gave birth to science and technology which don't have spiritual perspective and awareness.

On referring to theoretical concepts of theology discussed earlier, modern men are actually in need of a

⁸ Schleiermacher said that "*L'essence de la religion consiste dans le sentiment de notre dependance absolue*"

theology that proportionally accommodates rationality on the one hand and believe in the presence of God on the other. With a balanced portion between ratio optimization and divine guidance modern men will be able to achieve scientific and technological advancements as well as spiritual fulfillment that bring them joy and peace of mind.

God in proportionalist theology and Ahlussunnah school of thought is a God who guides, sustains, and nurtures human life. He is not the God of the past who deserved praises and glorification for having created the universe with a wonderful autonomous system. But He is a God whose presence is to be felt, His words listened to, and guidance followed. Modern men who have undergone liberalization from all kinds of ties and bonds outside themselves, including God, must put themselves back in their true nature as noble and unique creatures who serve God and His creatures.

Modern men have gone a long way with their theology of liberation or Rationalism and end up in spiritual crisis. Modern men are in need of a transformation from human-centric perspective or rationalism to God-centric perspective or proportionalism. The concept of man as the center taught by rationalists and existentialists should be shifted to God as the central Existence. For Nasr, who is also a propounder of perennial philosophy, the Ultimate Reality doesn't lose its existence in the psychophysical world where human acts and functions. Instead, it surpasses all rules and limitations (Saputra, 2012:105).

Conclusion

Trial and error are common in search for the truth. And so is true with finding the right understanding about relationship between God and His creatures which is a common issue in theology. There were times when religious dogmas were so dominant and binding in describing the relationship which lead to internal revolt. There are also times when people miss the existence of dogmas but in balanced portion with ratio.

In middle age, church domination in Europe was very strong in various aspects of life including scientific world. The church dictated scientific truth and filled it with religious doctrines. Sadly enough, science and knowledge were chained in fallacious meaning that stopped them from growing. Simultaneously, in different world and different region, Islam was on its high enthusiasm for scientific learning and improvements. For certain period of time it kept on producing scientists and academic scholars up until a point in history when Europe rose from its ignorance. The period was marked by the birth of Renaissance era during which European scientists rose to fight the church domination and declared independence from all kinds of dogma that hinder scientific progress and development.

Europe changed, rationalism and empirism were the motors that generated progress and encouraged people toward modern era. Along with the movement, the critical figures among Christian leaders initiated a theology of liberation movement which in turn gave birth to Protestant sect and its leader Martin Luther in 16th century. This idea about liberation theology then crept into Islamic world and there emerged a fusion between the ideas of liberation theology with Islamic rationalism motored by Qadariah Mu'tazilah.

The progress in modern era has turned people into god who measure everything through logic even for values. The multidimensional crisis that followed was inevitable and modern men find themselves alienated from their inner voice which has been so far ignored and almost forgotten. Modern men lose their center and their connection to the Ultimate Reality. Together with it they also lost purpose and orientation in life for almost all their physical needs have been fulfilled easily by the help of science and technology. In such angst and restlessness, a new longing and search come into being for the long lost spirituality. Seyyed Hossein Nasr suggests a return to spirituality where humans discover their true nature as spiritual beings who will not find the highest form of joy and contentment except in living with God's love in harmony. Nasr's ideas then are followed through the implementation of perennial philosophy in understanding the relationship between God and human as well as other fellow religious believers.

Liberation theology or rationalist theology cannot serve as remedy for the plight of modern men because they leave an empty room which supposedly meant for a God who is present, not a God who is absent. Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts for the need of modern men to come back to their true nature as spiritual beings who bow down the ratio under divine guidance. Theologically, this offer by Nasr to return to spirituality is not compatible with Mu'tazilah theology of rationalism which takes the same line with Western rationalism in ratio deification and negation of God's active involvement in human life. Modern men in Nasr's perspective are only compatible with the theology of proportionalism by Ahlussunnah Asy'ariah which appreciates both ratio and spirituality proportionally.

The proportionalist theology brought by Ahlussunnah teaches about God who is present in human life, a God who has commanded people to make the best of this life using the gifts He has bestowed especially ratio, senses, and heart. Proportionalist theology puts all those sets of human faculty in ideal portion and always seeks guidance and mercy from the all-present and all-loving God.

REFERENCES

- Abduh, Muhammad. (1986). *Risalat al-Tauhid*. Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-'Ulum.
- Anwar, Rosihon, (2001). *Ilmu Kalam*, Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 1st Print.
- Aslan, Adnan, (2004). *Menyingkap Kebenaran Pluralisme Agama dalam Filsafat Islam dan Kristen*, Terj. Munir. Bandung: Alfiyah.
- Bakhtiar, Amsal, (2004). *Filsafat Ilmu*, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Daradjat, Zakiah, (1996). *Perbandingan Agama I*, Jakarta: Bumi aksara.
- Daraz, Muhammad Abdullah, (1952) *al-Din*, Kairo: Maktaba al-Alamiah.
- Djam'annuri, (2000). Ed., *Agama Kita; Perspektif Sejarah Agama-agama sebuah Pengantar*, Yogya: Kurnia Kalam Semesta.
- Dunya, Sulaiman, nd. *al-Syaikh Muhammad Abduh bain al-Falasifah wa al-Kalamiyin*, Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-Arabiah, tp.
- Goring, Rosemary, (1995). Ed., *Wordworth Dictionary of Beliefs & Religions*, London: Wordworth Reference.
- Haryati, Tri Astutik, (2011). *Modernitas Dalam Perspektif Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Pekalongan, Jurnal Penelitian, Vol. 8, No. 2.
- Hidayat, Komaruddin. (1998). *Tragedi Raja Midas*, Jakarta: Paramadina.
- Khaldun, Abdurrahman ibn, nd. *Muqaddimah*, Beirut: Daar al-Bayan.
- Mudzhar, Atho, (1998). *Pendekatan Studi Islam dalam Teori dan Praktek*, Yogyakarta, Pustaka Pelajar.
- Muhammad, Afif, (2004). *Dari Teologi ke Ideologi; Telaah Atas Metode dan Pemikiran Teologi Sayyid Quthb*, Bandung : Pena Merah.
- Nasution, Harun. (1996). *Teologi Islam, Aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan*, Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press.
- , (1987). *Falsafah Agama*, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, (1992). *Filsafat Perennial: perspektif Alternatif untuk Studi Agama*, translated by Saiful Muzani in *Ulumul Quran*, vol. III, No. 3.
- , (1989). *Knowledge and The Sacre*, State Univ of New York Press.
- , (1968). *Islam and the Plight of Modern*, Unwin Paperback.
- , (1968). *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.
- , (1994). *Islam Tradisi di Tengah Kancah Dunia Modern* translated by Luqman Hakim, from *Traditional Islam in The Modern World*, Bandung: Pustaka.
- Nata, Abuddin, (2003). *Akhlaq tasawuf*, Jakarta: PT.Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Praja, Juhaya S., (2003). *Aliran-aliran Filsafat & Etika*, Jakarta: Prenada Media.
- Saputra, Riki, MA. (2012). *Tuhan Semua Agama*, Yogya: Penerbit Lima.
- Sholeh, Khudori, (20013). *Pemikiran Islam Kotemporer*, Yogyakarta: Jendela.
- Solihin, M., (2005). *Melacak Pemikiran Tasawuf di Nusantara*, Jakarta: PT.Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Surahmad, Winarto, (1978). *Dasar-dasar Terknik Research Pengantar Metodologi*, Bandung: Tarsito.
- Tafsir, Ahmad Tafsir, (2010). *Filsafat Ilmu*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- , (1990). *Filsafat Umum akal dan hati sejak thales sampai capra*, Bandung: Rosdakarya.
- The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 28, USA. 2010.
- W. J.S.Poerwadarminta, (1991). *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.
- Zubair, Charis, (1990). *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius.