

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO ERICH FROMM

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1.6. ACORDING TO ERICH FROMM

*“... the essential characteristic of this kind of religious life is that people surrender to a power outside themselves which is invisible, unseeable, and inaudible. The great virtue of this kind of religion is obedience and the chief sin is disobedience. In contrast to God's description of himself as all-powerful and all-knowing, man is powerless and meaningless. It is when and only when he is fully devoted to God that man gains power. Devotion to a powerful authority is one of the solutions that saves man from loneliness, limitation and abandonment...”*¹ Fromm makes this definition for authoritarian religions. He divides the characteristics of religion into humanitarian and authoritarian phenomena. Fromm thinks like Durkheim about believing in God; he states that the important thing in religion is not to believe in God or not to believe in God, but the distinction between a humane way of life and an authoritarian and idol-worshipping life. He states that when religion cooperates with the power in society, it moves away from its humanistic essence. Fromm states that humanistic religions are concerned with man and his powers as follows: “Man must first of all develop his intellect in order to understand himself and his relations with other human beings, to grasp his place in the universe. And man has to recognize reality, to realize the limits of his possibilities and power. He must develop his powers of love, his self-respect, and the experience of being in communion with all living beings. This kind of religious life gives man the intuition that he is one with the universe. A person who builds his relationship with the world on thought and love feels at one with the whole universe. In a humanistic religion, human endeavor is focused on learning to use one's powers. Virtue is not in obedience but in self-realization. Belief is the confidence that comes from believing in something and is the result of personal experimentation in cooperation with thought and feeling. It is not an outright acceptance of a certain behavior because of its author. Instead of guilt and suffering in authoritarian religions, the dominant emotion here is joy.”² What Fromm says about faith is important. He emphasizes that belief emerges as a result of reason and personal experience and points out that behavioral patterns should be accepted in this way, that is, anything that religion commands should not be accepted without questioning its causality, without knowing it. Otherwise, just saying that religion commands this and therefore I accept it as such would be to accept and practice it without knowing. And in such a situation, it is not possible to talk about thought and emotion. Fromm says that any system of thought and action that is shared by the individuals of society and that gives those individuals a certain direction and a certain purpose of attachment can be called a religion. According to him, it does not matter whether such a system is godly or godless.³ He says that there is no culture that has not had the phenomenon of religion and that there will not be any in the future. Therefore, gods and non-gods, even contemporary secular systems, are seen as religions according to this definition.⁴ In this regard, L. Nortbourne argues against defining belief systems that are not centered on

¹ Erich Fromm, a.g.e., s.55.

² Erich Fromm, a.g.e., s.57.

³ Karacoşkun, a.g.m., s.25.

⁴ İsmail Çalışkan, a.g.e., s.36.

and originated from God as religions, saying that some human systems can replace religion, but defining them as religions would not be correct because it would cause confusion. According to him, the word religion is primarily used for something that is not a construct of the human mind, but rather something that originates from God.⁵ However, we have already pointed out that this is not the case with the views of Fromm and Durkheim, and we will elaborate below that the Qur'an also recognizes such human systems as religions.

⁵ Lord Northbourne, *Modern Dünyada Din*, İstanbul 1995, s.11.