

ISLAM AND BELIEF SYSTEMS: AN EXPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

Despite numerous studies on belief systems, there are scarce sources that combine the distinct belief systems around the world. Human beings consist of myriad races, cultures, and lifestyles so it is necessary to know the beliefs that people hold on to for mutual understanding which eventually may lead to tolerance. Tolerance is one of the core concepts in Islam as humans are social beings who rely on each other to live in this world harmoniously. Thus, it is essential to have knowledge of other people's beliefs to convey the beautiful messages of Islam. Since Malaysia is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, there is a need to be acquainted with its many belief systems to have better understanding and mutual respect amongst its people. Besides that, by having a greater understanding of other belief systems, it will be beneficial in the course of da'wah since Islam is a universal religion i.e. religion for all. The method used to expand the understanding of belief systems is a library-based method. This article aims at explaining the types and characteristics of belief systems viz. theism and atheism. For theism, the focus is on monotheism and polytheism. As for atheism, it will focus on two examples namely materialism and humanism. From the Islamic point of view, human will always differ in every aspect of their belief and this should be respected. However, Muslims believe Islam is the only true religion and by respecting other religions, it does not entail accepting other belief systems to be the truth.

Key words: belief systems, theism, atheism, Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Belief is defined as a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing. It can also be understood as something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion: something believed (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Equally, it is a cognitive content (Hashi, 2016) or a mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2020). Hence, as a noun, a belief system is an organised set of cognitive acceptance and conviction in what is right and wrong and what is true and false (Advanced English Dictionary, 2020).

Belief systems are formed by a set of ideas and concepts that help a person to form a perspective on reality and through which life is interpreted and understood. Each person has his own beliefs and convictions that help him have a sense of reality. A belief system often functions as a mechanism for understanding life and making sense of life. Some belief systems are founded on religious grounds, while others are formed on reason and philosophy. Others are established on trust in scientific conclusions. Generally, beliefs are classified into theistic and atheistic. Theistic belief systems or theism consist of those systems that believe in the existence of god or gods or deities, while atheistic belief systems or atheism reflects the philosophies and schools of thought that are marked by disbelief in god.

Hence, belief is the crucial aspect of human as God has instilled this natural tendency long before human is created. The natural tendency is to serve and worship God and this is called fitrah, the pattern according to which God has created all things. It is God's manner of creating, *sunnat Allāh*, and everything fits each into its pattern created for it and sets in its proper place. It is the Law of God (Al-Attas, 2014). Even though some belief systems deny the existence of God, they are always in need of God and this is evidential when they experience tribulation and hardship in their lives.

TYPES OF BELIEF SYSTEM

Fundamentally, the belief system is divided into two major categories - theism and atheism.

1. Theism

The term 'theism' originates from the Greek term *theos* [θεός] which means 'god'. It can be generally defined as a belief in God or gods or deities (Harris, 2018). The meaning of theism is generally understood as a belief in the existence of a God or gods. In its specific meaning, it is a belief in the existence of God viewed as the creative source of humanity and the world who transcends yet is immanent in the world (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In other words, it is a belief that there is God who is the creator of the universe, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent and loving. He is also a personal god and interacts with the universe through human's religious experience and prayerful activities (Smart & Haldane, 2003). Thus, the essence of theism is a belief in the existence of God, the source and sustainer of the universe, including humanity. God is characterised by eternity. He is not temporal; He transcends time and space yet He is immanent and the sustainer of the universe. He is reachable through prayers and worship (Hashi, 2016).

There are certain basic teachings of theism as practised commonly in various faiths around the world, namely:

1. Firm belief in the existence of god as its ultimate principle.
2. God is not part of the universe. Instead, He is transcendental; He exists beyond time and space, but in the meantime, He sustains and nourishes the universe. Thus, He is related to the universe.
3. Most theists accept the need for, and the authority of, a divine revelation that describes the character of God. They also believe in Divine revelation as a guide to life and its function as the foundation of moral values (Hashi, 2016).

Notwithstanding, there are two major categories of theistic belief system, i.e., monotheism and polytheism. These two categories have their own subcategories, which will be discussed in the next section.

a. Monotheism

Monotheism is simply defined as the belief in one god. The word monotheism is a relatively modern one coined in the mid-17th century CE by the British philosopher Henry More (1614-1687 CE). It comes from the Greek words *monos* (single) and *theos* (god). In the Western tradition, this 'belief in one god' specifically refers to the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Denova, 2019) which some scholars term as Abrahamic traditions as these religions were rooted from Prophet Ibrahim or Abraham. Apart from the three Abrahamic traditions, there are other religions that adhered to this system such as Sikhism. These religions are all monotheistic in belief, but there are different understandings and interpretations of its belief.

In addition, this belief can be categorised into different forms, viz. absolute monotheism, qualified monotheism and shared divinity. Absolute monotheism is the belief in one God who is also the creator-God, and this God is supreme with no association with His divinity at all. Qualified monotheism also believes in one god and this god can appear or take expressions in other forms. Then, there is the belief in one god, but this god shares his divinity or bestows equal divinity to other gods. Another form of monotheism is pantheism in which it promotes a belief in one creator-God who resides in his creations (Kamaruzaman, 2009).

i. Judaism

The Jewish confession of faith and prayer that is recited daily at the morning and evening services and expresses the Jewish people's ardent faith in and love of God is depicted in the very opening line of the *Shema* as follows – "Hear O Israel! The Lord, our God, the Lord is One". This creed undoubtedly shows that their almighty God, i.e. *YHWH*, pronounced as *Yahweh*, is only one and without Him there is none. He is the sole creator of each and everything. He is the creator alone and except Him, all are His creatures who are bound to worship Him by obeying His revealed commandments. Out of the Ten Commandments of Judaism, the first Four Commandments are exclusively related to the unity of God. In the First Commandment, God himself has clearly given His own identity that He is the only Lord who freed Israel from the persecution of Egyptian rulers and has also made explicit about the concept of His unity, that there are no other gods and goddesses before Him. Thus, any sort of idol worship is totally prohibited (Sayem, n.d.).

Furthermore, Jewish Monotheism is often associated with the concept of Chosen Community and the Lord *YHWH* who gives the land of others to His selected community (Hashi, 2016). Jews regarded their ethnic identity and political identity as permanent values. Their scripture is only theirs, written in their language by their ancestors for their benefits alone. God is in favour of one man, one family or one party and the favour of God towards them is irrational and groundless. They are chosen by God without any reason. Thus, they are superior to the rest of humanity, and the Hebrew is better than the non-Hebrew simply because he is Hebrew and the other is not (Al-Faruqi, 1999). Besides, the Jews believe that God had a son named *Uzayr* as stated in Quran (9:30);

The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah"; and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah." That is their statement from their mouths.

Hence, Jewish Monotheism can be classified into shared divinity since their religion is community-centric in which their God is not for everybody. Only they are able and should be allowed to reach out to God, seek help, guidance and recompense from God. No one, and no particular group therefore, should have monopoly over God, as no one, and no particular group can claim special attention, affection or treatment from or by God except them (Kamaruzaman, 2009). Plus, they equate the attribute of man to God which is the attribute of having a child.

ii. Christianity

The concept of monotheism is expressed through two major sects which are Unitarian and Trinitarian, or Trinity conceptions.

- a. **Unitarian** is related to the belief of the Father as the only God and Jesus was a messenger of God. This belief was initiated by Arius (256-336) and his followers were known as Arianism. He was the Christian presbyter for Alexandrian Church. This sect still exists though by different names such as Mormon, Unitarianism, Socinianism, Monarchianism, Sabellianism, and other names. Based on historical analysis, there are approximately 23 to 25 sects or churches that rejected the concept of Trinity (Md. Rasip, 2020). Even though the Unitarians believe in Jesus as the messenger, it is not the same as Muslims' belief. The former regards Jesus to be higher in rank than other human beings though lower than God, The Father. Therefore, he shares some God's divinity, the Father, in so far as his status is higher than all humans (Ahmad & Khambali, 2009).

- b. **Trinitarian** is a belief which elucidates God as one but three in one - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three co-exist and co-eternal. They work in different ways, but they all work together. God the Father is the creator of all things. God the Son is Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of the sin who gives life to all. God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, the one who makes things holy, and is perceived as the active power of God on this earth, carrying out the will of the Father (Keene, 2002). Even though the concept is contradictory to both logic and mathematics and is neither explicitly mentioned in the Bible nor from Jesus, it is still accepted by the Church authority. Some claimed it to be a mysterious concept with no one being able to truly grasp the idea.

Thus, Unitarian and Trinitarian can be classified into shared divinity as Unitarian's concept gives a certain degree of divinity to Jesus. Meanwhile, Trinitarian is a shared divinity due to the separation of powers and authority. The three Gods have different tasks with no one God who has power over everything (Kamaruzaman, 2009).

iii. Islam

According to Hashi (2016), the concept of monotheism is related to the term *Tawhid* or *Tawhidic* Monotheism. The Quranic perspective on monotheism is exclusively uncompromising. God, or Allah, is characterised with absolute singularity; neither could there be a separation in substance nor humanisation in attributes, and worship is due to Him and Him alone. No other gods, lesser or greater, are imaginable besides Him. This type of monotheism requires a belief in one God whose nature is (highly) elevated, so far beyond limited human conception. He is the One and Only God, the Only One to whom worship is due - all other things or beings are His creatures and in no way should be compared or associated with Him. He is Eternal without a beginning or an end. He is Absolute, not limited to time, space or circumstance, and He is the Ultimate Reality. This kind of belief in One God is known as *Tawhidullah* or the Unity of Allah. It is like monotheism but differs in many aspects.

In a general sense, both monotheism and *Tawhid* teach a belief in one personal God who is the Creator and the Ruler of the universe. However, *Tawhid*, goes one step further and teaches not only the unity of the Creatorship (*al-Khaliqiyah*) of God but the unity of His Lordship. It is because firstly, unlike monotheism, *Tawhid* teaches a belief in one personal God, the Creator and the Ruler of the universe, whose character is indivisible and resembles none. Second, in Islamic Monotheism, God's attributes are unique and His actions are comparable to none; He has no equal in rank and absolutely no equal in any manner. Third, *Tawhid* requires acknowledgement and adoration of the One single universal Lord with the belief and assertion of His Oneness in terms of essence, attributes, and actions. Fourth, *Tawhid* is not a theory formed by philosophical debates supported by mystical teachings and justified by clerical declarations. Instead, it is a belief derived from divine revelations. Thus, *Tawhid* and monotheism do not imply the same conception of God. Monotheism then cannot be employed as a synonymous term for *Tawhid*.

To sum up, Islam is classified as absolute monotheism as it promotes a belief in one God who is also the creator-God. This God is supreme with no association with His divinity at all. Besides, this Only God is the God for all creations inhabited in heaven and on the earth.

From the perspective of Islam, Judaism and Christianity are no longer considered as authentic revealed religions since there are a lot of distortions, additions, and removal of facts in their scriptures and teachings. For any Judaism or Christianity records that are in congruence with Islam, Muslims are required to accept them. However, for any records in the Old and New Testaments that are not available in the Quran and *Hadith*, Muslims should neither accept nor reject them because no one knows the Truth except Allah. All in all, Islam is the only authentic revealed religion because Prophet Muhammad has perfected the religion by following the core teaching of all the previous prophets, *Tawhid*. The only difference between Prophet Muhammad's teachings and the previous prophets is in Shariah.

iv. Sikhism

Sikhs believe God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and he is both transcendent and immanent in all his creation. Sikhism affirms transmigration, the continued rebirth after the death of some essential part of living beings. The goal of Sikhism is to achieve union with God (*mukti*) through meditation on the divine name (*nam*), which is the eternal presence of God in creation. If human beings devote themselves to the remembrance of the divine name (*Nam Simran*), they will achieve complete peace in their union with God, thereby stopping the painful cycle of rebirth.

The devotees must love God with intensity. They must seek God not through conventional rituals, offerings, pilgrimages, or following traditional authority but through inward meditation and unselfish devotion. God is sovereign, formless, eternal, and ineffable; he is also immanent in His creation and can be found inside one's own heart through the right techniques and state of mind. These teachings were attributed to Guru Nanak to his group of followers, and this interior, devotional religion continues to be the core of Sikhism. Hence, Sikhism is categorised as pantheism because the divinity of their God is permeated in every creation. God is within his creations and creations are within God or in other words, God is equal to his creations.

In conclusion, the concept of monotheism among religious traditions is similar but with significant differences. For the Jews, they believe in *YHWH* and the laws should always be strictly followed. For Christianity, some sects believe in the unity of God through the Father, but some schools believe in trinity whereby they believe in One God but in three separate entities. For Islam, the Muslims believe in the concept of *Tawhidullah*, i.e., they believe in the uniqueness of Allah hence He cannot be associated with others. On the other hand, in the teaching of Sikhism, God is within his creations. Thus, only Islam is the true and universal religion which confirms that Allah is the God for all humanity and all beings, living and non-living. Besides that, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had maintained a harmonious interpersonal relationship with the non-Muslims in Madinah as they were given equal rights and responsibilities to live in the state

together and to take care of it. He also pardoned the defeated non-Muslims who waged wars against Islam by releasing them from being prisoner. The non-Muslims who chose to live there were given absolute freedom to practice their belief as long as they did not go against or harm Islam in any way. This indicates that Islam has long introduced and implemented tolerance with others.

b. Polytheism

The word polytheism is derived from the Greek word, *polutheon* which means many gods. It denotes a belief in and worship of multiple divinities or gods. The term was first popularised in the writings of 18th century European ethnographers. They sought to identify and label the religious beliefs of primitive people they studied and to contrast them to Judeo-Christian monotheism, or the belief in a solitary divinity. Over time, polytheism has been used to refer to various belief systems in which multiple beings are worshipped. These may include gods, goddesses, semi-divine beings, good or evil spirits, or the spirits of departed ancestors.

There are several significant characteristics typically found in polytheistic traditions. These include:

1. Each divinity or spirit being is typically believed to have a specific function (such as healing protection in travel, etc.), to control a particular realm (material or non-material), or to possess a specific power or range of power. The latter can include forces of nature such as rain, thunder, a celestial body, and the seasons. Besides that, it may involve dominion over characteristics of human personality like love, devotion, compassion, jealousy, revenge, and so forth.
2. Each being is believed to either possess or adopt a specific human, animal form, aspect of nature, or a combination thereof, as his or her primary vehicle for communicating with humans. Thus, a particular animal or natural phenomenon may be viewed as the manifestation of a particular deity or even as an ancestor spirit. An eagle, for instance, may signal the presence of a guardian spirit or an erupting volcano may suggest an angry goddess manifesting herself.
3. Singular devotion to one specific divinity is not necessary. Thus, simultaneous conciliation of several deities is common and accepted. In some cases, it is seen as practical and necessary since different spirits control different realms or powers (Lamb, 2005).

There are various instances of polytheistic religious belief, yet this article focuses on two namely idolatry and animism.

- i. **Idolatry** is the adoration and worship of idols, the act of dedicating oneself to or worshipping earthly and supernatural beings as representations of God. Idolatry is derived from the Greek root *eidolon* or image, figure, and often expressed in combination with the word 'worshipper', i.e., idol worshipper, which means an adorer of images or physical objects as God or as representations of God. There are examples in which idolatry is expressed through excessive reverence or respect for someone, such as a national hero, leader or prophet, or to something, such as an image or statue, as a replacement for God. It is the worship of someone (saints, prophets, heroes) or something (idols, status, images) other than God as though these things are God or deity (Hashi, 2016).

In classical documentation, this belief has been practiced during the pre-Islamic period. Before the prophethood of *Rasulullah* (SAW), the Arabs, including the people of Makkah, worshipped idols. The people of Makkah were from the offspring of Prophet *Ibrahim* and *Ismail* (A.S.). Prophet *Ibrahim* made a supplication to Allah to safeguard his children and himself from worshipping idols. Therefore, for an extended period, the people of his offspring were all sincere believers of Allah. Gradually, with the influence from other Arab tribes, the people of Makkah became idol worshippers. The Arabs worshipped several idols which they carved from various materials. Three of the idols, namely *Lāt*, *Manāt* and *'Uzzā* were the most famous and are mentioned in *Surah al-Najm*; 53: 19-20 (Madani, 2005);

So, have you considered al- Lāt and al-'Uzzā? And Manāt, the third – the other one?

In addition, idol worship can be perceived in Hinduism. 'Idol worship' or 'image worship' is one of the central aspects of Hindu practice. It is one of the prominent valid means that a Hindu can adopt to travel the path that leads to *Moksha* (reunion with the ultimate soul - *Brahman*). The rationality of the worship of idols is its ability to help a devotee connects with his object of devotion, i.e. *Brahman*. In Hindu's belief, the worship of idol is not about worshipping stone or wood. Instead, it is about worshipping *Brahman*/God who has manifested in the form of a devata (deity) in that idol (Sridhar, n.d.).

The major manifestation of *Brahman* is *Trimurti*. *Trimurti* consists of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva*. *Brahma*, the Creator god, is believed to have had four heads. Each of *Brahma's* heads represents the four *Vedas* - *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*; the four epochs of time – past, present, future and *Moksha*; and the four *Varnas* or classes - *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Shudra*. *Vishnu*, the Preserver god, is the one who supports and sustains the Universe and is a force of preservation. He is described as being blue-coloured, four-armed, holding a *Padma* (lotus), *Gada* (mace), *Shankha* (conch) and *Chakra* (wheel). *Shiva*, the destroyer god, is depicted as a handsome and strong man, deeply immersed in meditation or dancing. *Shiva* is portrayed as a powerful and rugged youth with matted hair and ash smeared all over his body. He wears a crescent moon on his head which shows the control he wields over his own mind exhibited through the waxing and waning phases of the moon (Viswanathan, n.d.).

- ii. The second example of polytheism is **animism**. The word animism is derived from Latin '*anima*', which means life or soul in the mid 19th century (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020). According to Park (2020), animism is defined as a belief in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests. Animistic beliefs were first coined by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his work *Primitive Culture* in the year of 1871 (Park, 2020). Animists believe that the physical objects of the whole material world in the universe possess souls and spiritual power (Hashi, 2016). Additionally, they believe that nature has humanlike thoughts and actions. This applies to plants and animals, inanimate objects, geographical parts such as hills, deserts, forest, caves, ocean, and natural phenomena such as rain and lightning - all of these things have a spirit (or soul) or spiritual elements (Jelani & Muhammad, 2018). Hence, the animists worship these souls or animate beings or inanimate beings to survive in this world.

In the Malaysian context, this animistic belief can be observed in the community of *Iban*. *Iban* people believe in the existence of life after death. When people die, their soul is referred to as spirit or (*semengat*) that can rise again. The spirits of the dead can be resurrected and live amongst them and be alive again. They also believe in elements of nature like animals, animal sounds, and rivers which could bring good or bad omens to them (Jelani & Muhammad, 2018). Likewise, the *Kadazandusun* have held their beliefs in good and evil spirits for ages. In general, there are some spirit categories in the belief system of the *Kadazandusun*. The spirits are classified as *rogon* (malevolent spirits that harm people), *divato* (helping spirits), *tombiruvo* (souls of the dead), and *Bambarayon* (rice spirits). They also believe that all surrounding objects, plants, and even household equipment possess spirits (Low Kok On, 2012).

In conclusion, idol worshippers associate god with specific someone or something, while animists believe in every animate or inanimate being possessing souls and spiritual power. Both belief systems believe in the existence of gods and this deviates from Islam. Even in logical inferences, it is impossible for human to worship many gods simultaneously. If that is the case, then it begs the question of which god are they worshipping at one particular time? . Even if they can worship different gods in different days, it will still be hard and confusing. And if there are many gods, then the gods will be fighting with each other as each god wants to be worshipped. This in turn will make the world to be in chaos. This is evidential as stated by Allah in *Surah al-Anbiya*': 21:22;

Had there been within them [i.e., the heavens and earth] gods besides Allah, they both would have been ruined. So exalted is Allah, Lord of the Throne, above what they describe.

According to *Tafsir Ma'riful Quran* (Quran.com, 2021), the ayah is about an argument of common nature – an argument on having more than one god. If there were two Gods, each independent and sovereign, then the commands of both would prevail on the earth and in the sky which is not possible because it is implausible that both of them would have common views on all matters. If there are differences of opinion, which is inevitable where power is shared, there could be conflict which would always lead to chaos and confusion. The suggestion that the two Gods could consult each other before passing orders has been adequately discussed and rejected in the books of theology. The thing to note is that if the two Gods had to take decisions jointly, then neither of them would have been sovereign, and a god with divided sovereignty is not God.

2. Atheism

The word atheism can be separated into two parts. The prefix “a-” means without or lacking. The root for the rest of the word, “-theism,” is from the Greek term *theos* which means god. As a noun, atheism is understood as without belief in a god or gods. Atheists are individuals who are without a belief in a god or gods. In other words, atheism is associated with the kind of denial that is the rejection of the existence of God or other deities (Harris, 2018). Among the instances of atheism are Humanism and Materialism.

- i. **Humanism** - It is generally defined as a belief in human effort and skill rather than religion based on divine intervention. It seeks to establish sound ethical and moral principles by relying on human reason, experience, and compassion since there are no supernatural powers or sacred text that can guide them to live their lives. Humanists strive for a tolerant world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences where differences are resolved cooperatively without violence. Everyone has a right to attain happiness and avoid pain, and the best way to achieve this is to help other people do the same¹. Humans are intelligent creatures who can manage their lives and are able to solve every problem without religion whatsoever. Besides, some Humanists bravely assert that humans are the creator of religion and religion is not the creator of humans (Mas'od, 2012).

In Islam, the relationship between man and God (religion) cannot be dichotomised and will never be. This relationship is based on *Tawhid* and has long existed in the world of *ruh*. Due to this fact, humans are powerless even though they are granted by Allah with intellect and freedom of choice. The abilities that humans have will always be limited in nature. They are always in a constant battle within themselves to commit evils. Thus, they are in need of religion to live their lives. Moreover, humanistic approach can lead to the belief of *Murji'ah* in which they believe that *Iman* should always be in the heart without any effects to their life as a whole (Mas'od, 2012).

- ii. **Materialism** is the belief that everything is made of matter and energy with no immaterial entities like souls, spirits, or supernatural gods. In addition, materialists do not believe in 'metaphysical transcendence', or any layer of being

¹ 'What Is Humanism?' (International Humanist & Ethical Union, 2002),
<https://westlondon.humanist.org.uk/Resources/What%20is%20Humanism.pdf>.

beyond the material world (Philosophyterm.com, n.d.) Physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena (Collins English Dictionary, 2014). Hence, every event in the universe happened due to the conditions and activity of matter and thus, denies the existence of God and the immaterial soul (Muttaqin, 2016).

Modern Materialism claims that the universe is the infinite unity of the material. Nature, including all matter and energy (motion or energy), always exists and will always exist, and the universe (world) is a hard reality, it can be touched and can always be known by man. It is further explained that material exists before the soul (mind) - the material world takes precedence while thinking about the world is secondary (Muttaqin, 2016).

One of the famous figures who uphold this belief was Charles Robert Darwin who introduced the evolution theory. This theory states that all organisms, be it existing plants and animals and any that ever existed, develop from a few forms, or even a very simple form, through the process of descent with modification from a common ancestor by natural selection.

The concept of materialism is ultimately contrary to the core teachings of Islam, especially the concept of *Tawhid*. There are six pillars of faith in Islam. These six pillars are metaphysical and undetected by the naked eye. There are two main reasons materialism are unacceptable in Islam. First, materialism revolts against the Creator and decreases the balance of a spiritual relationship between man and his Creator. Second, materialism is contrary to prophethood. Materialism, which does not believe in God, does not believe in anything related to God. Prophethood is related to God. Thus, materialism does not believe in prophethood. In fact, to believe in prophethood is one of the core teachings in Islam and is included in the six pillars of faith (Muttaqin, 2016).

Hence, humanism and materialism reject god in totality as they glorify human beings' ability and material beings. Both systems are extreme to its end. Humanism corresponds to human's desire and desire will always be biased according to the subject, whereas materialism upholds the supremacy of matters - that matters do not have any powers to help or inflict harms to human.

In conclusion, theism is a belief in the existence of god or gods or deities. Meanwhile, atheism is a belief in no god or any supernatural powers. The major categories of theism are two, namely monotheism and polytheism. These two can be divided into many subcategories. For monotheism, the subcategories that were discussed are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. Meanwhile, for polytheism, the instances are idolatry and animism. As for atheism, the examples are humanism and materialism.

CONCLUSION: BRIEF ANALYSIS

All the belief systems discussed above show how sophisticated the human minds are to come up or create their belief systems, even if it is against their nature. Humans are always in need of one superpower being, i.e. God, to make sense of the reality of the world even though they reject it. This is because each and every human being has a tendency to rely on or believe in someone/something that can help them, especially when they are in crises. Nevertheless, their belief systems should be acknowledged because Allah himself declared that diversity or plurality will always exist, not only in religions and beliefs but in other instances such as languages, races, skins, and colors. Allah highlights the plural phenomenon in this world as the sign (*al-ayah*) of His supremacy as the Creator of the universe. As stated in *Surah al-Rum* (30:22) and *Surah al-Shura* (42:29);

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge."

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and what He has dispersed throughout them of creatures. And He, for gathering them when He wills, is competent."

The above verses clearly indicate that universal diversity is a part of human reality and destiny. It is among the signs and wonders of Allah. Thus, Allah's supremacy is everywhere in every of His creations (Ibrahim, 2016).

Besides, knowing belief systems other than *Tawhid* will help Muslims to practice the concept of tolerance. Respecting other religions or belief systems may not create any harm as long as it does not interfere with a Muslim's faith and belief. Islam even forbids Muslims to insult other religion as stated in the Quran in the *Surah al-An'am* verse 108:

"And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah out of ignorance. Thus, have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did".

Hence, respecting others is a must, but the degree of respect should not make Muslims to be receptive and apologetic of their own belief system. Muslims should hold on to the principle that Islam is the only true religion and *Tawhid* is the accurate belief system to be followed by human as it is the pattern ingrained in them in the world of spirit. Moreover, knowing and understanding the belief systems of other religions is crucial as it will help Muslims to be vigilant and to always be considerate to others as they do not receive the blessing of worshipping Allah. Being non-Muslims do not make them less human because all humans come from the same source which is Allah. There are several reasons why Allah created diverse religions in this world. In *Surah al-Maidah*; 5:48, Allah says;

Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.

Based on the Tafsir Anwarul Bayan (2005), the above verse is about Allah's test to human. Allah gave us a new religion (*Din*) - the true religion which perfected all the previous religions. With the arrival of this new religion, whether humans want to follow this religion or remain to be a follower of previous religions is the test from Allah. He wanted to see who will adhere to and obey His command. Those who pursue the pleasure of Allah will not find any difficulty in discarding the previous religions and following the teachings of the new Holy Prophet as instructed by Allah. Then it shall be clear who was right and who was not, and retribution will take place accordingly.

According to Osman Bakar (2014), there are three related purposes of this diversity of religions. First, it acts as a test to human. Second, it is to inspire the different communities to strive in all virtues as if in a race. Third, it is to demonstrate to all communities that the goal of our lives is to worship Allah. These purposes are emphasizing the human need for unity in diversity in collective life within the pluralistic community as well as the human challenge to its realization. The Quran also seeks to highlight the main principles of governing interreligious understanding and peace in the global human community.

Since the study only involves several examples of belief systems, it is hoped that it can be a guideline or benchmark for other research. Apart from that, it is suggested for further research to explore other types of belief systems and its effects on tolerance among its adherents. Given that the findings have shown that there is a dearth of research which analyses the expansion of understanding belief systems, it becomes more important to develop the study.

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