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Research Article

From Performative Religiosity to Religious Maturity: A Conceptual Framework and Typology

Gösterişçi Dindarlıktan Dinî Olgunluğa: Kavramsal Çerçeve ve Tipoloji

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Abstract

This article reinterprets the Qur'anic concept of shirk (associating partners with God) through the lenses of psychology and sociology of religion. While the traditional meaning of mushrik denotes one who believes in multiple deities, the study employs the term analytically to describe a religious identity that fails to fully internalize the principle of tawḥīd. The main axis of the analysis is the typological distinction between performative, externally oriented religiosity and the religiosity of the mature believer, a framework developed in Çinici's (2019) thesis. These two types reflect the contrast between extrinsic religiosity, shaped by social validation, and intrinsic religiosity, grounded in spiritual internalization. The article first defines shirk from theological and psychosocial perspectives and then outlines the key features of each believer type. Their implications at the personal and collective levels are explored under the subtopics of symbolism and anthropomorphism, with supporting examples drawn from contemporary literature in the psychology and sociology of religion. The study situates shirk not only in its Qur'anic context but also within contemporary theoretical paradigms of religious maturity, extrinsic-intrinsic faith orientation, and symbolic representation. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes that the distinction between performative religiosity and religious maturity is essential for understanding both individual spiritual fulfillment and broader social cohesion.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Religious Typology, Intrinsic Religiosity, Anthropomorphism, Symbolic Cognition.

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Özet

Bu makale, Kur'an'daki şirk (Allah'a ortak koşma) kavramını din psikolojisi ve din sosyolojisi merceğiyle yeniden yorumlamaktadır. Müşrikin geleneksel anlamı birden çok tanrıya inanan kişiyi ifade ederken, çalışmada bu kavram, tevhit ilkesini tam olarak içselleştirememiş bir dinî kimliği tanımlamak için analitik düzeyde kullanılmaktadır. Analizin ana ekseni, gösterişe dayalı dışsal dindarlık ile olgun dindarlık arasındaki tipolojik ayrımı oluşturmaktadır; bu çerçeve, Çinici'nin (2019) tezinde geliştirilmiştir. Bu iki tip, toplumsal onayla şekillenen dışsal dindarlık ile manevi içselleştirmeye dayanan içsel dindarlık arasındaki karşıtlığı yansıtmaktadır. Makale, şirki önce teolojik ve psikososyal açılardan tanımlamakta, ardından her bir dindar tipinin temel özelliklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu tiplerin bireysel ve toplumsal düzeydeki yansımaları, sembolizm ve antropomorfizm alt başlıkları altında, din psikolojisi ve din sosyolojisindeki güncel literatürden destekleyici örneklerle incelenmektedir. Çalışma, şirk olgusunu yalnızca Kur'an'daki bağlamıyla değil, aynı zamanda dinî olgunluk, dışsal-içsel inanç yönelimi ve sembolik temsil gibi çağdaş kuramsal paradigmalar içinde de konumlandırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, makalede gösterişçi dindarlık ile dinî olgunluk arasındaki ayrımın hem bireysel manevi tatmini hem de daha geniş toplumsal uyumu anlamak açısından temel önem taşıdığı vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Dinî Tipoloji, İçsel Dindarlık, Antropomorfizm, Sembolik Biliş.

Introduction

In the Qur'an, shirk is defined as associating partners with God. It is explicitly condemned as the gravest of all sins: "Indeed, God does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills" (Qur'an 4:48). Classical Islamic exegesis distinguishes between major shirk (al-shirk al-akbar) and the more subtle minor shirk (al-shirk al-asghar). For example, engaging in religious rituals for the sake of social recognition rather than divine approval is classified as hidden shirk (al-shirk al-khafī) and is closely tied to riyāʾ—the act of showing off one's religiosity to impress others (Çinici, 2019). In this article, this riyāʾ-driven, externally oriented mode of religiosity is referred to as *performative religiosity*.

From a psychosocial standpoint, an individual may identify as a believer yet exhibit behaviors and intentions aligned with shirk-oriented religiosity. This individual can be characterized as a polytheistic believer, or müşrik dindar, who outwardly practices the faith but inwardly remains driven by egoistic or social motives. In contrast, the mature believer (olgun dindar) transcends such motivations, embodying a theocentric worldview and integrating faith into a coherent moral lifestyle grounded in transcendental values (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Conceptually, shirk extends beyond explicit idol worship and, within the Qur'anic discourse, also encompasses the misattribution of qualities to God that compromise divine transcendence or justice. Classical Islamic sources caution against representations that reduce the divine to human-like limitations or distort the intended meaning of revelation. In this broader sense, hidden shirk is often associated with riyāʾ, wherein religious acts are oriented toward human recognition rather than divine sincerity. Prophetic traditions warn that such practices may coexist with outward religiosity while undermining inner integrity. Within this psychosocial framework, the polytheistic

believer may sacralize the self or collective identity, implicitly conflating social authority with sacred legitimacy. By contrast, the mature believer seeks to align conduct with the principles of divine unity and transcendence, emphasizing humility and ethical responsibility toward creation.

Hence, mature religiosity can be understood as a spiritual disposition that prioritizes universal ethical principles over worldly inclinations, embodying the Qur'anic imperative to worship God in sincerity and unity.

1. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a conceptual-theoretical approach, systematically reviewing and interpreting primary religious texts and scholarly literature. In accordance with qualitative literature review conventions, key sources from Islamic theology, psychology of religion, and comparative religion were selected and synthesized. The Qur'an and its classical commentaries constitute the primary theological corpus. For example, Qur'anic passages on shirk (e.g., 4:48) were examined to identify defining attributes of idolatry and divine unity. Secondary sources include contemporary works in the psychology and sociology of religion. Major concepts such as Allport's intrinsic vs. extrinsic orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967) and Fowler's stages of faith (Fowler, 1981) provide interpretive lenses. Studies of symbolic cognition and anthropomorphism (e.g., Barrett, 2004) and classic sociological theories (Durkheim, 1915; Geertz, 1973) were also consulted to understand how belief is shaped by cultural meaning. Comparative theological materials (e.g., discussions of the Trinity in Christianity and Jewish monotheism) were reviewed to situate the Islamic typology in broader doctrinal contexts. The analytical framework is a typological construction of religious identity. Inspired by Weber's use of "ideal types," the two categories, polytheistic believer and mature believer, were defined as conceptual poles for analysis. These ideal-types were characterized by features drawn from the literature: in this tradition, intrinsic orientation is treated as a mature form of religious sentiment that functions as a "master motive" in life, whereas extrinsic orientation reflects an immature faith serving self-interests (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967). Guided by this typology, the literature was coded thematically. Primary texts (Qur'anic verses and hadiths) were interpreted hermeneutically to extract implicit indicators of each believer type (e.g., evidence of sincerity or ostentation). Secondary sources were analyzed comparatively: passages in psychology and sociology that describe extrinsic religiosity, symbolic representation, or anthropomorphic imagery were identified and mapped onto the typology. Throughout, an interdisciplinary hermeneutic method was used. In practice, this meant iterative reading and synthesis: theological texts were examined for their conceptual implications (e.g., definitions of shirk in classical tafsirs), while findings from psychology of religion (Barrett, 2004; Pargament, 1997) were interpreted in light of Islamic norms. The resulting interpretation is therefore a literature-based conceptual analysis. In line with best practices for narrative review, the goal was to build a comprehensive theoretical background and to highlight novel insights by integrating multiple fields. By juxtaposing Qur'anic teaching with

modern theory, the study illuminates how each believer type is consistently characterized across sources.

2. Results

2.1. Typology Construction: The Polytheistic Believer and the Mature Believer

In contemporary psychology of religion, the development of religious faith is often analyzed through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation, as introduced by Allport and Ross (1967). Individuals with an extrinsic orientation approach religion as a means to achieve personal goals—such as status, social security, or dominance. By contrast, those with an intrinsic orientation internalize religious teachings as the central motivational framework of their life. Their belief system is not instrumental, but existential; it is not something they use, but something they are.

Within this framework, what is termed the polytheistic believer (müşrik dindar) should not be understood as a distinct belief category defined by the number of deities affirmed, but as a theological expression of extrinsically oriented religiosity. In this sense, shirk is not treated here as a doctrinal position but as a psychosocial orientation in which religious practices are instrumentalized for social recognition, moral positioning, or group affiliation. Acts of worship performed primarily for public visibility rather than internalized conviction correspond to what Islamic theology describes as hidden shirk (al-shirk al-khafī), commonly associated with riyāʾ. Accordingly, externally driven religiosity already encompasses this orientation; the term müşrik dindar is employed analytically to emphasize the implicit sacralization of ego, status, or social identity rather than to denote a separate theological belief system (Allport & Ross, 1967).

In contrast, the mature believer (olgun dindar) reflects a typology grounded in universal values. This believer has transcended the literalism of early doctrinal beliefs, integrating their faith with a broader ethical worldview. As Allport notes, such individuals "live their religion"—faith becomes an end in itself rather than a means to another end (Allport, 1950, p. 71). The mature believer experiences happiness not because they appear religious, but because their faith forms the source of existential meaning and moral coherence.

This distinction is not confined to Islam alone. Traces of both types can be observed across religious traditions: mature believers are often those who have cultivated inner discipline, whereas polytheistic believers continue to struggle with ego and social expectations. As such, the proposed typology provides a novel and dynamic framework for understanding the psychology of belief through both internal and sociocultural dimensions (Pargament, 1997).

2.2. Individual Implications of Polytheistic and Mature Belief Types

The polytheistic believer often experiences a form of spiritual dissonance, characterized by a lack of inner fulfillment, heightened anxiety, and an underlying sense of moral duality. In modern societies, individuals who appear “successful” in external, sociocultural terms may nonetheless struggle with an internal void. They may feel emotionally detached or perceive life as meaningless, despite conforming to religious expectations and social norms. Çinici (2019) refers to such

individuals as religiously conflicted believers—those whose professed beliefs do not align with their emotional and existential realities.

Allport's empirical findings support this view: believers who adopt religion for extrinsic purposes such as prestige, safety, or social conformity tend to display higher levels of prejudice and trait anxiety (Allport & Ross, 1967; Baker & Gorsuch, 1982). These individuals rarely question their beliefs in depth, instead relying on superficial religious assurances to ease their inner tension. This avoidance of introspection often exacerbates their emotional disconnection.

Cognitively, polytheistic believers may find it difficult to conceptualize the transcendence of God. They might attribute human-like limitations to the divine—imagining God as angry, vengeful, or partial. This is a clear expression of anthropomorphic cognition, a phenomenon in which the divine is perceived through the lens of human limitations (Barrett, 2004; Heiphetz et al., 2016). Such distorted theological representations intensify inner conflict and hinder spiritual maturity.

In contrast, the mature believer embodies an internalized faith that fosters emotional wholeness and existential meaning. From a psychological standpoint, this condition reflects meaning-making—the process by which faith becomes the central interpretive lens through which life's events are understood (Pargament, 1997). Mature believers meet Allport's criteria for intrinsic religiosity: religion is not just part of their life—it becomes life itself (Allport, 1950).

These individuals resolve the tension between surrendering control to divine authority and asserting personal agency by developing internal coherence. They align themselves with social norms not out of fear or reward, but because their moral compass is grounded in love, justice, and spiritual integrity. Consequently, their psychological health stems not from external validation but from the integration of belief, behavior, and identity. Unlike the polytheistic believer, the mature believer cultivates psychological flexibility, allowing for a spiritually resilient and ethically coherent life.

2.3. Social Implications of Religious Typologies

In the sociology of religion, religion is commonly regarded as a cohesive force that integrates the individual into the collective. Émile Durkheim famously conceptualized religion as the embodiment of collective conscience, where rituals and symbols express and reinforce communal identity. According to Durkheim, the sacred is not merely a supernatural entity—it is the society itself, symbolically projected onto totemic objects (Durkheim, 1915). Through rituals, the divine becomes the visible body of a community's moral unity.

However, in communities dominated by polytheistic believers, religion may no longer serve a unifying function. Instead, it can devolve into a site of conflict, power struggle, or institutional dominance. Religious structures that are meant to facilitate spiritual growth become tools of social control, instrumentalized for personal gain or ideological enforcement. In such contexts, literalist interpretations of faith often foster legalism, intolerance, and a rigidity that clashes with the pluralistic dynamics of modern societies.

By contrast, communities composed of mature believers emphasize the ethical essence of religion—particularly its messages of peace, compassion, and justice. As Bronisław Malinowski argued, religion can strengthen social cohesion and provide emotional and structural support during times of uncertainty (Malinowski, 1982). In mature religious environments, values such as empathy, tolerance, and altruism are prioritized, and communal solidarity is reinforced through acts of sharing and mutual care.

In societies where polytheistic religiosity prevails, hidden shirk (riyāʾ) is often amplified by social dynamics. As Prophet Muhammad warned, performing acts of worship for the gaze of others amounts to a subtle form of idolatry—not because the ritual is insincere, but because it seeks human approval over divine sincerity (Muslim, Kitāb al-Zuhd, no. 2985). In such communities, religiosity becomes a competitive performance, a vehicle for social stratification and symbolic dominance. Conversely, the mature believer operates from moral conscience, not from a desire for external validation.

At the collective level, polytheistic religiosity tends to reproduce hierarchical and ego-centered social relations. Mature religiosity, by contrast, cultivates a public ethic rooted in collective well-being and mutual respect. Victor Turner's theory of ritual and liminality provides further insight: rituals function as thresholds of transformation, creating moments of unity and shared experience (Turner, 1969). Mature religious communities enhance these liminal spaces by fostering inclusion rather than exclusion.

2.4. The Symbolic Dimension of Religious Expression

Religion, as Clifford Geertz famously argued, functions as a cultural system of symbols that conveys meaning, instills emotional motivation, and presents metaphysical concepts as if they were tangible realities (Geertz, 1973). According to Geertz, religion is "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations... by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality" (Geertz, 1973, p. 90). In this sense, religious symbols do not merely represent doctrine—they construct a world.

From an analytical standpoint, what is traditionally referred to as shirk may be approached as a form of symbolic displacement rather than as a doctrinal judgment. In this reading, when symbolic elements—such as objects, legal structures, or institutional authorities—are treated as ultimate sources of meaning, the symbol ceases to function as a referential marker and instead acquires intrinsic significance. Drawing on Durkheim's theory of religion, such symbols can be understood as collective representations that embody a group's shared moral and social values. In certain religious contexts, these representations may become reified, leading individuals to relate to symbols as if they possessed inherent sacred power. From a psychosocial perspective, this process does not necessarily imply conscious theological intent, but reflects the broader human tendency to

concretize abstract meanings. The analytical concern, therefore, lies not in the symbols themselves, but in the loss of reflexive distance between symbolic representation and transcendent reference.

In contrast, the mature believer recognizes religious symbols as ethical and cosmological reminders, not divine in themselves but reflective of transcendent realities. For example, in Islam, the act of prostration (sujūd) symbolizes submission before divine majesty. For the mature believer, this is not an act of servitude to a material object but a ritual affirmation of God's oneness and greatness.

The sociological relevance of symbolism is thus twofold: first, it binds individual believers to communal narratives, and second, it offers progressive integration of meaning across spiritual development. Rituals like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage become spiritually effective only when integrated into a narrative that connects external acts to internal significance. Otherwise, they risk becoming empty obligations—performed without awareness. As Allport suggested, religion becomes mature only when it operates as a central organizing system of life, not merely a set of behavioral obligations (Allport, 1950).

2.5. Anthropomorphism in Religious Cognition

Anthropomorphism refers to the cognitive tendency to ascribe human attributes—thoughts, emotions, intentions—to nonhuman entities (Epley et al., 2007). Within the psychology of religion, it denotes the projection of human-like mental characteristics onto the Divine. Research has consistently shown that both children and adults tend to conceptualize God as having human-like mental capacities—such as perceiving, thinking, and feeling (Barrett, 2004; Heiphetz et al., 2016).

While adults may explicitly affirm the transcendence and incomparability of God, studies suggest that even mature believers often implicitly anthropomorphize the divine, especially in emotionally intense or ambiguous situations. For instance, in moments of crisis, individuals may imagine God as "angry," "disappointed," or even "proud"—terms deeply rooted in human experience (Boyer, 1994). This phenomenon demonstrates a natural but theologically problematic blending of divine ontology with human psychology.

From the perspective of the psychology of religion, anthropomorphic cognition constitutes a well-documented tendency in human religious thought, rather than a direct or necessary foundation of shirk. Faced with ontological uncertainty, individuals often rely on familiar cognitive schemas, which may lead them to imagine the divine in human-like terms, such as intentionality, emotion, or moral agency. While such representations are cognitively natural and widespread across religious traditions, they may—under certain interpretive frameworks—be viewed as limiting conceptions of divine transcendence. In Islamic theology, concerns arise not from anthropomorphism per se, but from the potential reification of such representations, in which symbolic or metaphorical images are treated as literal realities. In this sense, the risk lies not in anthropomorphic cognition itself, but in the uncritical absolutization of mental representations, which may shift religious focus from the transcendent Absolute to constructed images of the divine.

By contrast, the mature believer affirms the transcendence (tanzīh) of the Divine and actively resists the urge to reduce God to mental projections. While acknowledging that religious language relies on metaphor and symbol (as Geertz noted), the mature believer is cautious not to reify those symbols into ultimate realities. Classical theorists portrayed religious cognition as developing from totemistic imagery toward abstract monotheism (Lee et al., 2018); whatever the merits of such evolutionary schemes, the danger of symbolic regression persists (Geertz, 1973; Malinowski, 1982).

In sum, anthropomorphism enriches and makes religious discourse more accessible, but it also carries the latent risk of facilitating subtle forms of polytheistic thought. It is therefore the task of mature faith not to reject symbolism, but to refine it—to preserve the evocative power of religious symbols while guarding against their idolatrous distortion.

3. Discussion

The proposed typology of the polytheistic believer versus the mature believer provides a fresh perspective on longstanding themes in theology and religious psychology. It recasts the Qur'anic concept of shirk as a spectrum of religious orientation rather than a binary legal category. Within the Qur'anic discourse, repeated emphasis is placed on sincerity (ikhlāṣ) and inner intention (niyya), as opposed to the mere outward performance of religious acts (e.g., Qur'an 2:264; 39:2–3; 107:4–6). These passages have traditionally been interpreted as critiques of religiosity oriented toward social display or instrumental gain. From a sociopsychological perspective, this orientation corresponds to what Allport later conceptualized as extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967), in which faith serves utilitarian and social ends and may coexist with unresolved ego-centered motivations. By contrast, the Qur'anic ideal of faith, grounded in sincerity, moral consistency, and inner transformation (e.g., Qur'an 13:28; 91:7–10), aligns more closely with intrinsic religiosity, in which belief constitutes a person's core identity rather than a social instrument. This distinction resonates with classic insights in the psychology of religion. William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902), distinguishes between what he describes as "the once-born" and "the twice-born," or, more broadly, between immature and mature forms of religious life. For James, mature religiosity is characterized by inward integration, moral coherence, and existential depth, whereas immature religiosity remains externally driven, fragmented, and dependent on social or emotional compensation. In this sense, what traditional Islamic theology refers to as hidden shirk may be understood—at an analytical level—as overlapping conceptually with externally oriented religiosity, without reducing either framework to the other.

The typology also connects with theories of symbolic cognition. Geertz (1973) described religion as a symbolic system that establishes enduring moods and motivations. Our analysis shows that polytheistic believers tend to reify religious symbols or social hierarchies as ends in themselves, an approach that can generate legalism and division in communities. In contrast, mature believers treat symbols (rituals, doctrines) as signposts to transcendent truths rather than literal absolutes. Psychologically, this involves resisting anthropomorphism: research indicates that humans naturally

impute human-like attributes to God, but mature faith resists such concretization. Polytheistic cognition accepts an image of God with human limits (e.g., imagining divine anger or favoritism), which intensifies inner conflict. Mature cognition, by contrast, emphasizes tawḥīd (unity) and tanzīh (divine transcendence), consistently guarding against idolizing the symbol rather than the reality. In theological terms, the distinction resonates with intra-faith and interfaith discourse. Within Islam, it underscores that shirk is not only a theological lapse but also a psychological one. Broadly, it echoes ideas found in other faiths: for example, Christian doctrine stresses the unity of God even within the Trinity (Nicene Creed: "one God… one Lord Jesus Christ… and in the Holy Spirit"). Judaism proclaims "the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4) to reject idolatries. By framing belief in terms of orientation rather than dogma alone, the typology can facilitate interfaith dialogue. It suggests that what appears as doctrinal disagreement may sometimes reflect differing religious motivations or levels of spiritual development. Recognizing the "polytheistic believer" pattern in any tradition can prompt constructive conversation about the role of ego and community in religion, while the "mature believer" ideal highlights the shared pursuit of internalized meaning and ethical living across faiths. Finally, this framework contributes to the psychology of religious maturity. Mature believers—like Fowler's (1981) later stages of faith—derive deep meaning from their beliefs and show flexibility and empathy. They integrate their worldview with universal values, which support well-being and resilience. By contrast, polytheistic believers often experience dissonance and anxiety, as suggested by empirical studies: extrinsic orientation has been linked to prejudice and trait anxiety (Allport & Ross, 1967; Baker & Gorsuch, 1982). The typology thus aligns personal psychological outcomes with doctrinal concepts. Overall, distinguishing these types sharpens our understanding of religious orientation by linking the cognitive representation of the divine with spiritual maturity. It points to a path by which faith can move from a social badge to a lived, transformative conviction.

At this point, it is important to clarify that the term müşrik dindar is not intended to designate a distinct or empirically grounded psychological type. From a social-scientific perspective, adherence to polytheistic belief systems does not in itself constitute a form of religious maturity, and this conclusion can be drawn independently of any additional typological construction. Accordingly, this study does not treat polytheism as a developmental stage of religiosity, nor does it equate specific belief contents with psychological outcomes. Rather, references to shirk and müşrik are employed in an interpretive and illustrative sense, drawing on Islamic theological discourse to illuminate patterns of externally oriented religiosity already identified in the psychology of religion. The analytical focus of the typology remains firmly grounded in the intrinsic–extrinsic–quest framework articulated by Allport, James, and Batson, with theological concepts serving as contextual parallels rather than classificatory labels. In this way, the study seeks to preserve analytical objectivity while situating its discussion within a culturally meaningful conceptual horizon.

4. Limitations

The findings and conclusions of this study should be considered in light of certain limitations. First, this article presents a conceptual analysis and a theoretical model rather than an empirical investigation. The validity and prevalence of the proposed "polytheistic believer" and "mature believer" typologies need to be tested through future qualitative and quantitative field studies. Second, the study relies heavily on classic theories in the psychology of religion, such as Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity. Despite the foundational importance of these models, more recent theories or critiques have not been included in the discussion, potentially narrowing the analysis's theoretical scope. Finally, the typology was developed primarily within the context of the Qur'an and Islamic theology, and its applicability in other belief systems is hypothetical. This requires caution regarding the model's cross-cultural and inter-religious generalizability.

5. Conclusions

This article has explored the psychosocial foundations of two distinct religious identity types: the polytheistic believer (müşrik dindar) and the mature believer (olgun dindar). Conceptually, the former reflects a faith orientation that instrumentalizes religion for ego-centered or socially driven motives. By contrast, the latter represents a stage of spiritual maturity in which belief is fully internalized and integrated into a comprehensive ethical system. Psychologically, the polytheistic believer is more prone to inner conflict, dissatisfaction, and anxiety, whereas the mature believer attains a sense of spiritual fulfillment and existential coherence.

Sociologically, polytheistic religiosity may contribute to legalistic rigidity, social stratification, and exclusionary dynamics. In contrast, mature religiosity fosters communal solidarity, compassion, and cooperative moral frameworks. Symbolically, the article examines how religious symbols function as tools of spiritual elevation or as potential traps of idolatrous fixation. Likewise, the discussion of anthropomorphism has highlighted how one's cognitive image of God can either enhance or undermine theological integrity.

Ultimately, the typological distinction articulated here holds significant value for both individual well-being and collective moral consciousness. In Muslim societies—and arguably in all religious cultures—achieving genuine spiritual maturity requires not only the internalization of tawḥīd (divine unity), but also the ability to interpret symbolic structures and theological representations with depth, nuance, and humility.

However, it is important to note that Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic orientation model, upon which this typology is based, has been subject to criticism, despite being a foundational framework in its field. In the academic literature, it has been suggested that this sharp dichotomy risks oversimplifying the complex, multi-layered religious motivations of individuals. In reality, the motivations of many believers are neither purely intrinsic nor purely extrinsic; rather, these orientations are better understood as poles along a motivational continuum. This critique was articulated early on by Batson and Ventis (Batson et al., 1993; Batson & Ventis, 1982), who argued

that the intrinsic–extrinsic distinction risks oversimplifying the complexity of religious motivation. To address this limitation, they introduced a third orientation—quest religiosity—which conceptualizes faith as an open-ended, dynamic process characterized by questioning, exploration, and ongoing meaning-making rather than fixed commitment or instrumental use.

From this perspective, religiosity is not a static trait but a developmental and contextual phenomenon. An individual's religious orientation may shift over time or vary across life situations, reflecting movement between instrumental, internalized, and exploratory modes of belief. Interpreted in this light, the "polytheistic believer" and "mature believer" typology proposed in this study should be understood as ideal-typical reference points rather than rigid classifications. Rather than being invalidated by this dynamic view, the typology is conceptually enriched: it allows for transition, struggle, and transformation, acknowledging that religious life may involve periods of externalization, internalization, and reflective searching along a spiritual trajectory.

Future research should empirically validate this framework through qualitative and quantitative studies. Educational and pastoral settings, in particular, could benefit from integrating this typology into curricula and counseling practices. By doing so, religious education may shift from a model of ritual compliance to one of existential integration and ethical clarity—hallmarks of the truly mature believer.

Note

This article is derived from the author's master's thesis completed at Atatürk University, Institute of Social Sciences (Çinici, 2019). Bu çalışma, Murat Çinici'nin Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nde tamamladığı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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