



ABU RAYHAN BIRUNI'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIANITY

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ABSTRACT

As an encyclopedist, Beruni wrote many works. In his writings on the history of religions, he emphasized the contradictions between the emergence of Christianity, councils (cathedrals), prayer ceremonies, holy books, and Christian denominations. He also thinks about St. Paul, who inherited Christian traditions that arose thousands of years ago. The article analyzes the views of Beruni on Christianity.

KEYWORDS: *Al-Biruni, Christianity, Worship, Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Jhon, History of Religions.*

The original name of Abu Rayhan Beruni, who laid the foundation for the study of the history of religions other than Islam in the Muslim world, is Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni al-Khwarazmi. Beruni was born in Kat, the ancient capital of Khorezm, on the 3rd day of Dhul-Hijjah, 362 AH (September 4, 973 AD). He died in Ghazna in December 443/1048.

Beruni worked in various fields of science. For example, astronomy, geography, history, mathematics, geometry. In addition, Biruni was one of the first Muslim scholars to lay the foundation for the study of religions other than Islam.

Although Biruni did not have a separate book on Christianity, he gave enough information about this religion in his works.

For example, in the works "Kitab al-athar al-baqiyah 'an al-qurun al-khaliyah" (The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries) and "Qanuni Mas'udi" (The law of Mas'ud) he devoted separate chapters to Christianity and gave extensive information about it. In the work "At-Tafhim liavaili sinaat at-tanjim" (Understanding Astrology) only Christian rituals are included.

The word Christianity is derived from the Greek word "christos". "Christos" is a synonym of the Hebrew word "meshiah" and refers to the quality of "Messiah" (anointed) as applied to Jesus. Therefore, those who believe in this religion are Christians and the name of the religion is called Christianity.

According to Biruni, before the word Christian, the word "Christian" was used to refer to those who followed Jesus. The word "Nasoro" is a name used to refer to the village of Nasiro (Nazareth) near Jerusalem, the birthplace of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus was called "Nazarene" throughout his life¹.

The word "Christian" is also used in the sense of a Christian or Nazarene. In this respect, a person or a church that follows the path of Jesus is called a Christian. Biruni explains it as follows: "He (Jesus) was born in a village called Nasira near Jerusalem. People always addressed him as Jesus of Nazareth. Because of this ratio, his people are known as Christians"².

In the Holy Quran, the word "nasoro" or "nasroniy" is used to express the word "Christian". "The Jews and Christians each claim that none will enter Paradise except those of their own faith" (2:111); "And from those who say, "We are Christians," We took their covenant, but they neglected a portion of what they had been commanded to uphold" (5:14).

According to Biruni, the word "Christianity" referring to Christians or Christians is a general name applied to all who follow Jesus³. In today's Christian Holy Book, the New Testament (Bible), the Greek word "christianos" (Christian) appears three times. "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts. 11:26); "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts. 26:28); "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter. 4:16). It seems that the term Christianity was not coined at the time of Jesus, but later

¹ Muqaddas Kitob. Muqaddas Kitobni tarjima qilish instituti. 2016. – B. 1577.

² Abu Rayhan Biruni. Kitab al-tafhim li-awa'il sina'at al-tanjim. London. 1998. – P. 179.

³ That source. – P. 179.



by St. Paul. In fact, the name Christian was first given to followers of Jesus by local pagans in Antioch between AD 40-44 and became widely used after the 60s.

So, the Christian term came into mass use by the second half of the 1st century AD. Thus, although the terms “christian” and “nasoro” are fundamentally different, they express different aspects of the same religion. According to Epiphanius, one of the early Christian historians, the Jews later called the community that followed Jesus by the name “Yeshuas” (followers), which means “Christians”⁴.

Biruni was one of the first among Muslim scholars to point out that meetings where high-ranking Christian priests make decisions are called synods (that is, councils or councils). It provides information about the time and place of these cathedrals, which were called to resolve disputes between Christian sects and to determine the number of holy books⁵. “Its (synod) meaning is a gathering of priests, bishops and other dignitaries for important matters related to new events”⁶. It can be said that Biruni’s description above is consistent with the general understanding of Christian cathedrals.

There were eight such councils up to Biruni. “Such meetings were held only at certain times. Elapsed times are recorded. Sometimes these meetings were held in order to glorify Jesus and submit to him”⁷. The councils before the Biruni period are: The First Council of Nicaea (325), The First Council of Constantinople (381), The Council of Ephesus (431), The Council of Chalcedon (451), The Second Council of Constantinople (553), The Third Council of Constantinople (680–681), The Second Council of Nicaea (787), The Fourth Council of Constantinople (Catholic) (869–870)⁸.

Biruni also describes the ranks of the clergy in Christianity. It also says that their number is nine from the lowest level to the highest level, but the first three levels are in danger of disappearing. “The first of the ranks of the great priests of Christians is Tasulta, the second is Qoruna, the third is Khyuvufdiakta (Hebukdeacon), the fourth is Shammass, the sixth is Qiss, the sixth is Usqf, the seventh is Mitron (Metropolitan), the eighth is Jasliyyq (Catholic) and the ninth is Batruk (Patriarch). I found out that the first three of them are little remembered by their own people”⁹. To this day, the ranks of the clergy differ in each Christian denomination.

On the Bible, Biruni also studied The Canonical Gospels of Christians. In his book “The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries” he expresses his thoughts about the New Testament part of the Holy Book, the Four Canonical Gospels. Biruni says about the four Gospel: “Obviously, the Gospels are a copy of four copies in the eyes of Christians. The first belongs to Matthew, the second to Mark, the third to Luke, and the fourth to John. In fact, these four authors wrote the Gospels at the request of the people of their city. Each of them contains the attributes, callings and prophetic works of Christ”¹⁰. According to Biruni, the Gospels are the texts that contains the messages of Jesus from his birth to his death.

Muslims understand the Gospel in two ways. According to the first, the Injil is a holy book that was revealed in the Quran and brought to Jesus by the angel Gabriel. There are several verses in the Holy Quran about the Gospel. Verse 46 of Surah al-Maida says: “Then in the footsteps of the prophets, We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah revealed before him. And We gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light and confirming what was revealed in the Torah – a guide and a lesson to the God-fearing”. In addition, there are verses about the Gospel in the Surahs of Ali Imran, Al-A’raf, At-Tawbah, Al-Fath and Al-Hadid of the Holy Quran. The second aspect, according to Biruni’s view, is a book composed of four Gospels. These two views can be summarized by saying that the Gospel was originally a holy book revealed to Jesus through Gabriel. But over time this book has undergone major changes. The original has been completely altered or completely lost. After that, today’s canonical Bible writers wrote the Gospels that tell the story of Jesus’ life. As a religious scholar, Biruni emphasizes the second view, namely that the New Testament is essentially a collection of four Gospels. Because at that time there was no real Gospel, and there were almost no believers left.

Biruni states that these four Gospels are collectively called the Gospel, and gives the following information about its formation and the authors of the Gospels: “It (the Gospel) was written by four people with different places of residence and languages: Matthew in hebrew in Palestine, Mark in rum (Latin) in Rum (Anatolia), Luke in greek in Alexandria, and John in greek in Ephesus. Later,

⁴ Şinasi Gündüz, Mahmut Aydın. *Misyonerlik, Hristiyan Misyonerler, Yöntemleri ve Türkiye'ye Yönelik Faaliyetleri*. İstanbul. Kaknüs Yayınları, 2002. – S. 25.

⁵ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *Tanlangan asarlar. I jild. Tarj. A.Rasulov. Toshkent. O'zbekiston fan nashriyoti*, 1968. – B. 348.

⁶ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *Kitab al-athar al-baqiyah 'an al-qurun al-khaliyah*. Leipzig. 1878. – P. 294.

⁷ *That source*. – P. 294.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical_council

⁹ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *The Mas'udi Law*. Cairo. *Waqf of Amir Ghazi*, 1954. – P. 250.

¹⁰ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *Kitab al-athar al-baqiyah 'an al-qurun al-khaliyah*. Leipzig. 1878. – P. 22.



these four Gospels, which differ in terms of words and meanings, were united in two covers, and all of them were called the Gospel under one name¹¹.

Even today, when discussing the Gospel, Biruni's information is accepted. However, it is worth noting that Christians today include 23 other books in the New Testament in addition to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. After this information, based on the sources, we will explore Biruni's views on the authors of the four Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew: The Gospel of Matthew is the first book of the New Testament of the Bible and one of the three synoptic Gospels. It tells how Israel's Messiah, Jesus, comes to his people (the Jews) but is rejected by them and how, after his resurrection, he sends the disciples to the gentiles instead. Biruni said: "The first of the Gospels was written by Matthew and is called the Gospel of Matthew after his name. Matthew wrote this Gospel in Palestine. The Gospel of Matthew was written in hebrew because it is known from where it was written that it was written in hebrew"¹².

Although the oldest Gospels in existence today are in Greek, some of the Gospels were written in hebrew. Muhammad Abu Zahra in his book "Mukhadarat fi an-Nasraniya" approves Biruni's opinion and says that "the Gospel of Matthew was written in hebrew in Jerusalem"¹³. Also al-Hindi (1306/1889) said in his work "Izharul Haq", "The original copy of Matthew's Gospel was written in hebrew. But it is lost. It is not clear when and by whom the current Greek translation was made"¹⁴. While Biruni says that the land where the Gospel of Matthew was written is Palestine, there are also researchers who say that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greece or Syria¹⁵.

The Gospel of Mark: The Gospel of Mark is the second of the four canonical gospels and one of the three synoptic Gospels. It tells of the ministry of Jesus from his baptism by John the Baptist to his death, the burial of his body, and the discovery of his empty tomb. Biruni states that Mark is the second of the biblical authors. But the Turkish researcher, Dr. Akram Sarikchioglu, says in his book "The History of Religions from the Beginning to the Present" that "the Gospel of Mark was written before the Gospel of Matthew, it is the first Gospel"¹⁶.

Biruni states that the Gospel of Mark was written in rum language (latin)¹⁷. But, Muhammad Abu Zahra said, "Gospel of Mark was written in greek. We have not witnessed conflicting views of Christian scholars on this. Mark wrote the Bible in Greek at the request of Roman believers. However, there are also opinions that it was written in Latin"¹⁸.

Summarizing these two points, the Greek language was divided into two dialects during Biruni's time. The first dialect was Greek, and the second dialect was Rumi (Anatolia).

The Gospel of Luke tells of the origins, birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Biruni states that the third of the New Testament Gospels is the Gospel of Luke¹⁹. The third of today's Canonical Gospels is the Gospel of Luke. Luke wrote his Gospel in Alexandria. Saint Paul called him a healer. Biruni mentions that Luke wrote his Gospel in Greek²⁰. Even today, Christian scholars claim that the Gospel of Luke was originally written in Greek. However, there is no doubt that the Gospel of Luke was written in Latin.

The Gospel of John is the fourth of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament. According to Biruni, John wrote his Gospel in Ephesus²¹. Muhammad Abu Zahra says that the Gospel of John was written in Rum. According to historical sources, when the Romans captured Jerusalem, John left Palestine and went to Ephesus. During this period he wrote his Gospel. It is unanimously accepted that the Gospel of John was written in Greek. Because it is written in the style of Hellenistic philosophy, unlike the previous three Gospels. The controversy over the Gospel of John is not its language, but rather its authorship. This is because there are two Johns in the New Testament. The first John was an apostle. He spoke Hebrew. The second John lived nearly two centuries after the

¹¹ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *The Mas'udi Law*. Cairo. Waqf of Amir Ghazi, 1954. – P. 54.

¹² *That source*. – P. 252.

¹³ Muhammad Abu Zahra. *Mukhadarat fi an-nasraniya*. Riyadh. 1404. – P. 50.

¹⁴ Rahmatullah ibn Khalilurrahman al-Hindiy. *Izharul Haq*. Beirut. Dorul Jayl, 1989. – P. 74.

¹⁵ Şaban Kuzgun. *Dört İncil Farklılıkları ve Çelişkileri*. Ankara. Fazilet Neşriyat, 2008. – S. 178.

¹⁶ Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu. *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi*. İstanbul. Fakülte Kitabevi, 2002. – S. 313.

¹⁷ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *The Mas'udi Law*. Cairo. Waqf of Amir Ghazi, 1954. – P. 252.

¹⁸ Muhammad Abu Zahra. *Mukhadarat fi an-nasraniya*. Riyadh. 1404. – P. 51.

¹⁹ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *Kitab al-athar al-baqiyah an al-qurun al-khaliyah*. Leipzig. 1878. – P. 22.

²⁰ Abu Rayhan Biruni. *The Mas'udi Law*. Cairo. Waqf of Amir Ghazi, 1954. – P. 252.

²¹ *That source*. – P. 264.



apostle John and wrote the Bible in Greek. To this day, many believe that the Gospel of John belongs to the apostle John. This is a misconception.

In conclusion, it can be said that Biruni's works on the origin of Christianity, its traditions, priestly ranks and important councils are important. In Christianity, the work of priests who lead prayers and rituals is important. Biruni gave extensive information about the historical and regional description of the emergence of Christian prayers, the chronology of Christian rituals in the works "The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries", "The Mas'udi Law" and "Understanding Astrology". In addition, the language of the Christian Bible, the written regions, and the manner in which he explained the differences in the Bibles, which he covered in the above three works, are still widely used by the Christian world today.

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