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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSITY  
OF RELIGIONS AND DENOMINATIONS:  
TEACHING RELIGIONS IN GENERAL  
AND CHRISTIANITY IN PARTICULAR

**SUMMARY:** The University of Religions and Denominations (URD), established in 2008, is the most prominent university in Iran in teaching religions, especially Christianity and host about 8000 students from more than 30 countries. URD, with 12 faculties and 350 full-time and part-time faculty members and more than 2,000 visiting professors, provides BA and MA distance learning, full-time MA, and PhD courses. Its library with 105,000 titles of books on Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and primitive religions is one of the richest in the region. 10 journals and 350 books are among the publications of the University. The first section of this paper is about teaching religions and denominations in general at URD while the second section dealt with teaching Christianity in particular. The latter introduces MA and PhD courses, some titles of MA and PhD theses, journal and published books on Christianity and the international activities of the University. During the article and at the end of it, according to the presented data, several analyses of the activities of this university are presented and suggestions are also made.

### *Introduction*

The Centre for the Study of Religions and Denominations was established in Qom, Iran in 1994 by a number of graduates of the Seminary of Qom to study and research on the Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Judaism), Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, those of Far East and Ancient Iran) and Islamic denominations (theological denominations, mysticism and Sufism) and to learn English, Sanskrit and Hebrew. This centre was upgraded to a higher education institute in 2004 and the first students were admitted in 2005. With the approval of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, this institute was upgraded to a university in 2008 and since then is known as the University of Religions and Denominations (URD)<sup>1</sup>.

This university, which is the first specialized university of religions and denominations in Iran, has introduced its mission as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/88>

Knowledge of religions and denominations and interaction and dialogue with their followers based on commonalities, in the direction of human solidarity, strengthening peace, reducing human suffering, spreading spirituality and morality and the wise introduction of Islam based on the teachings of the Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and training experts in these fields<sup>2</sup>.

URD is the largest non-profit university in Iran in terms of the number of students, and foreign students of 30 nationalities study at this university. Students and researchers of URD study in the fields related to Shi'i history, theology and sects, Islamic schools of theology and jurisprudence, Islamic philosophy and mysticism, history and theology of great religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism and comparative study of religions, and studies of gender and women in religions. Teaching all these fields has caused URD to have a unique position among the universities in the country, the region and the world. A study conducted by Iran's Ministry of Science in 2012-2013 on disciplines related to religions and denominations shows that although some disciplines taught at URD are also taught at nineteen other universities in the country, no university offers all of these disciplines together. Comparing the educational status of these fields in URD with the same or similar fields in important universities of the country, region (such as Turkey and Lebanon) and the world (such as Germany and England) shows that the quantitative and qualitative development of this university in educational and research fields is considerable.

#### *Vision document of 1410/2031*

In the Vision Document of 1410/2031, it is predicted that this university will become the most prominent university in Iran, one of the top five universities in the region and one of the well-known universities in the world. This great development in terms of:

1. being a reference in developing and deepening the studies of religions and denominations,
2. training religious thinkers and social reformers,
3. playing role in scholarly societies and inter-religious and inter-sects dialogues in Iran and the world,
4. participation in understanding and addressing religious challenges, and
5. scholarly explanation of Islam, based on the teachings of the Noble Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (as), can be achieved through:
  1. holding various courses,
  2. conducting basic, developmental and applied research, and
  3. educational, research, and cultural cooperation with other national and international scientific and religious centres<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/90>

<sup>3</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/10132>

### E-Learning

The e-learning (distance learning) centre of URD started from 2012 taking benefit from professors and trainers familiar with e-learning techniques, with the official permission of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The centre is trying to expand the teaching of the University's courses in distance learning method, which will play a great role in the educational and research development of the knowledge of religions and denominations.

After giving an overview of the University, I will first explain about Urd's activities in teaching religions and denominations in general, and in the second section, I will explain about teaching Christianity in particular at this University<sup>4</sup>.

### SECTION A: TEACHING RELIGIONS AND DENOMINATIONS IN GENERAL AT URD

#### *Faculties*<sup>5</sup>

URD has 12 faculties:

1. Šī'ī Studies 2. Religions 3. Islamic Denominations 4. Philosophy 5. Mysticism 6. Women and Family 7. Language and Culture of Nations 8. Media and Communication 9. Law 10. Studies of Islamic Nations 11. Religion and Art 12. Qur'ān Studies.

#### *BA Distance Learning Courses*

1. Šī'ī Studies 2. Islamic Jurisprudence and Law.

#### *Full-Time MA Courses*

There are 24 full-time MA courses at URD:

1. Abrahamic Religions 2. Non-Abrahamic Religions 3. Study of Religions 4. Theological Denominations in Islam 5. Jurisprudential Denominations in Islam 6. Contemporary Jurisprudence and Islamic Public Law 7. Contemporary Jurisprudence and Islamic Penal Law 8. Šī'ī Theology 9. History of the Šī'a 10. Šī'ī Denominations 11. Qur'ān Studies 12. History of Islam 13. Philosophy of Religion 14. Islamic Philosophy and Theology 15. Philosophy of Ethics 16. Applied Ethics 17. Sufism and Islamic Mysticism 18. Religions and Mysticism 19. Women's Rights in Islam 20. Woman and Family 21. Media Management 22. Public Law 23. Arabic Literature 24. Philosophy of Islamic Art.

#### *MA Distance Learning Courses*

1. Theological Denominations in Islam 2. Jurisprudential Denominations in Islam 3. Šī'ī Theology 4. History of the Šī'a 5. Šī'ī Denominations 6. Islamic Philosophy

<sup>4</sup> <http://el.urd.ac.ir/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://urd.ac.ir/fa#>

and Theology 7. Sufism and Islamic Mysticism 8. Women's Rights in Islam 9. Woman and Family 10. Philosophy of Islamic Art.

### *PhD Courses*

There are currently 18 PhD courses at the University:

1. Christian Theology 2. The Qur'ān and the Bible 3. Religions of Iran 4. Religion Studies 5. Theological Denominations in Islam 6. Jurisprudential Denominations in Islam 7. Wahhabism 8. Unity Among Islamic Denominations 9. Šī'ī Studies 10. Twelver Šī'ī History 11. Šī'ī Denominations 12. Islamic Philosophy and Theology 13. Sufism and Islamic Mysticism 14. Islamic Mysticism and the Teachings of Imam Khomeini 15. Women's Rights in Islam 16. Theoretical Studies of Gender 17. Comparative Studies of Women in Religions 18. The Philosophy of Religious Arts.

A comparison of the courses (both MA's and PhD's) with the faculties shows that the Faculty of Religions with 8 courses and the Faculty of Šī'ī Studies with 5 courses are at the top, and the faculties of Islamic Denominations, Mysticism, Women and Family and law with 4 courses are in the next rank. The faculties of Language and Culture of Nations, Media and Communication, and Qur'ān Studies have only one course, while it seems that a course that has a direct connection with the Faculty of Studies of Islamic Nations has not yet been designed.

The MA and PhD courses at this university make up a wide range of titles, and this kind of diversity is a positive point in itself, and there may not be many universities in the world that teach all of these titles simultaneously. However, it seems that some of the faculties and courses that have been gradually added to the university curriculum do not fit well with the name of this university. For example, when you hear the name of the University of Religions and Denominations, you may not expect to be told that there is a faculty called Women and Family or a course titled Media Management. With the expansionist approach that the university has taken with regard to defining new disciplines, minor amendments to the name of the university may be suggested.

Another point to consider about some of the courses is that some of the titles are exactly the same in the MA and PhD courses, such as Theological Denominations in Islam, Jurisprudential Denominations in Islam, Women's Rights in Islam, and Islamic Philosophy and Theology. While logically the title of the PhD course should be more detailed and specialized than that of the MA one, it is not clear what new approach a student who graduates with an MA degree in e.g. Women's Rights in Islam will pursue in the same field in PhD level.

It is necessary to mention that all courses that are held for Iranian students are in Persian (with the exception of the new field of Šī'ī studies in English). However, both at the MA and PhD levels, units are available to familiarize students with specialized texts in the English language. In addition, URD offers English language courses for those interested.

On the other hand, the resources that are suggested for each field usually consist of three categories: books that have been written in Persian, books that have been translated from different languages into Persian, and English sources. Therefore,

students are expected to refer to English sources as well. For example, in the PhD course on Christian Theology, works from all three categories are introduced:

- Books written in Persian, such as *An Introduction to the Bible*, *A Comparative Study of the Qur'an and the Bible*, *An Introduction to the Abrahamic Religions*, and *Human Nature in Islam and Christianity*.

- Books translated into Persian, such as *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* by Alister McGrath, *Catholicism* by George Brantl, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* by George Christopher Stead, and *La philosophie au moyen-âge* by Étienne Henri Gilson.

- English books such as *The Orthodox Church* by John Meyendorff, *The Spirit of Catholicism* by Karl Adam, *Christendom: The Christian Churches, Their Doctrines, Constitutional Forms and Ways of Worship* by Einar Molland, and *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* by Heiko Augustinus Oberman.

#### *Faculty Members*

There are currently 350 full-time and part-time faculty members and more than 2,000 visiting professors teaching in URD.

#### *Number of Students*

Currently, more than 8,000 students are studying at this university, of which about 30% are Iranians and the rest are from other countries.

#### *Iranians*

The number of Iranian students in BA distance learning courses, full-time MA courses, MA distance learning courses, and PhD courses is 374, 702, 480 and 892 respectively.

#### *Non-Iranian Students*

URD has the highest statistics in registering non-Iranian students amongst Iran's universities. This University takes students in two ways:

1. Education and research oriented, in which presence of the student is necessary.
2. Research oriented, in which presence of the student is not necessary and application is possible by presenting the student's proposal, under the supervision of consultant and supervisor teachers.

The number of non-Iranian students in URD is 5739, of which 5612 are studying in full-time MA courses and the rest are studying in PhD courses<sup>6</sup>.

#### *Alumni*

About 2,600 students have graduated from URD so far, with 2553 being Iranian and the rest non-Iranian. The number of graduates in BA distance learning courses, full-time MA courses, MA distance learning courses, and PhD courses is about 85, 1250, 915 and 350 respectively.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://el.urd.ac.ir/>

### *Memoranda of Understanding*

Since URD encompasses a wide range of religions and denominations and various fields of study, and also due to its international outlook and interest in interfaith dialogue, numerous memoranda of understanding have been concluded between the University and Iranian and international institutions, universities, and organizations, among which mention can be made of Algerian University, Islamic Human Rights Commission of Iran, Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, Indonesia Islamic and Middle East Studies Program, International Islamic University of Malaysia, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Paderborn University, University of Potsdam, Shahid Motahari University, University of Lorestan, University of Esfahan, Pakistan School of Islam and Modern Sciences, Goethe University, Cairo University, Ryukoku University, International Institute for Islamic Studies, Pakistan Institute of Information Technology, Islamic School of Art, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, University of Islamic Civilization, University of Kufa, Mashhad Ferdowsi University, Zaytuna University of Tunisia, The Smolny Institute of Russian Academy, Pontifical Lateran University (Vatican City), Hartford Seminary (USA), Paris Institute of Humanities Methodology, St. Joseph University of Lebanon, German Islamic Academy, Turkish Institute of Qur'ān and Ahl al-Bayt, University of Zimbabwe, University of San Marino, University of Graz (Austria), Kawthar Cultural Centre of Istanbul, Imam Sadiq University of Baghdad, University of Francisco Vitoria (Spain), Haji Baktash University (Turkey), University of Turin (Italy), University of Tehran, and Islamic Institute of Salam (Colombia)<sup>7</sup>.

The multiplicity of the MOUs and the diversity of universities in terms of scientific approach, shows that URD, considering having 12 faculties with different topics related to religions, Islamic denominations, philosophy and mysticism, women, media, law, art, language and culture, has tried to cooperate scientifically with the world's leading universities in the relevant fields. The exchange of professors and students is the most important clause of such MOUs, which seems to still have a lot of space that has been neglected. When a prominent Muslim professor from URD teaches Islam at a Christian university, and vice versa, students will certainly have a more accurate understanding of the teachings of other religions. The same is true of the short-term attendance of students at other universities.

### *Publications*

#### A. Journals

In this university, 7 journals in Persian about Islamic theological schools, Islamic jurisprudential schools, Šī'ī studies, religions, women and family and three journals in English entitled *Religious Inquiries*, *Study of Interreligious Relations*, and *Islamic studies* are published.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/337/>

## B. Books

At the university, two independent centres publish books on religions and denominations and other fields taught at URD and have published more than 350 books so far. The first centre is the Publishing House of the University of Religions and Denominations, which focuses on the publication of books written or translated by researchers and faculty members of URD, and has published about 190 books so far. The second centre, Adyan Publication, focuses on publishing books written or translated by researchers outside URD and has published about 160 books so far<sup>8</sup>.

### *Library*

The specialized library of URD is a considerable collection of sources and references for the study of religions and denominations in several languages. This library has 105,000 titles of books on of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and primitive religions, etc., as well as encyclopaedias on Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. This library, which is unique in the region, tries to satisfy the clients by providing free access to the library resources through the open shelf system, public acceptance of researchers without any restrictions and with facilities such as mechanized system, Xerox, Internet, etc. There are currently 66,000 volumes of Persian and Arabic books, 17,000 volumes of books in English and other Latin languages, 7,000 volumes of Persian journals, 46 titles of English journals, 160,000 titles of Persian articles, and other scientific sources such as dissertations in the library. The library of URD regularly participates in domestic and foreign book fairs to enrich its resources<sup>9</sup>.

## SECTION 2: TEACHING CHRISTIANITY IN PARTICULAR AT URD<sup>10</sup>

The Faculty of Religions is one of the oldest and most prominent faculties in URD. The Faculty consists of three departments: Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Christianity), non-Abrahamic religions (Eastern religions) and religion studies.

### *MA Course on Christianity*

The title of the course is “Abrahamic Religions” dealing with Judaism and Christianity. This course includes 12 compensatory units, 20 main units, 12 optional units, and 4 dissertation units. Main courses include history of Judaism, history of Christianity, Jewish sacred texts, Christian sacred texts, Jewish law, Christian theology to the Middle Ages, Jewish theology and philosophy, Medieval Christian theology and the Reformation, comparative theology, and modern Christian theology. Optional units include English language, Hebrew language, Latin language, Greek language, modern

<sup>8</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/110>

<sup>9</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/106>

<sup>10</sup> See <https://for.urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/9>

Judaism, Jewish mysticism, Christian mysticism, Jewish ethics, and Christian ethics. Compensatory units include branches and methods of religious studies, background and methodology of studying religions in Islamic culture, an introduction to primitive, Eastern and Iranian religions, teachings of the Qur'ān, and history of the Western philosophy.

#### *PhD Courses on Christianity*

As mentioned before, 2 PhD courses are directly related to Christianity: Christian Theology and the Qur'ān and the Bible.

#### *Christian Theology*

This course consists of 26 compensatory units, 18 main units and 18 dissertation units. Compensatory units deal with the origins of Christianity (ancient Judaism, ancient Greece and Rome, and the characters of Jesus), the history of Jewish theology until the beginning of Christianity, the history of Christianity to the Middle Ages, the history of Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present, the evolution of the Bible, comparisons between the Qur'ān and the Bible in terms of structure and content, history of theological debates between Muslims and Christians, the relationship between Christian theology and Islamic theology, and the relationship between Christian theology and Jewish theology. Main units include the origin of theories of biblical inspiration and authority, methodology of biblical interpretation, Christian theology (from the beginning to the end of the Middle Ages, evolution, the most important topics, the most important theologians), Christian Catholic theology (from the Middle Ages to the present, the most important topics, the most important theologians), Protestant theology (evolution and characteristics of the current situation), Orthodox theology (evolution, characteristics and current situation), Christian theological schools in modern times<sup>11</sup>.

#### *The Qur'ān and the Bible*

This course consists of 14 compensatory units, 18 main units and 18 dissertation units. Compensatory units deal with Jewish history and theology, Christian history and theology, Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Islamic history and teachings, Islamic Scriptures, and methodology of comparative studies of religions. Main units include authenticity and interpretation of Jewish Scriptures, authenticity and interpretation of Christian Scriptures, authenticity and interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, comparative study of the Qur'ān and the Bible: theological teachings, comparative study of the Qur'ān and the Bible: legislative doctrines, comparative study of the Qur'ān and the Bible: moral and mystical doctrines.

The students may also be interested in participating in the following classes: the language of the Christian Scriptures (Greek), the language of the Jewish Scriptures

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<sup>11</sup> <https://for.urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/36>



(Hebrew), the archaeology and mythology of the Abrahamic Scriptures, the language of the Christian scriptures (Latin), the methodology of interpretation and hermeneutics of the sacred texts of the Abrahamic Religions, the sacred texts of the Abrahamic Religions and new issues, the language of the Qur'an<sup>12</sup>.

*Some Titles of MA Theses*

Here I refer to the titles of some of the MA theses defended at URD that deal directly with Christianity, all of which are written in Persian language:

An analysis of the theological foundations of the Return of Christ in the Catholic interpretation of the Bible;

- The concept of love in Christianity with emphasis on the New Testament and the interpretation of the Church Fathers;

- Ethics from the Quakers' point of view;

- The concept of the Scripture in the Quran and its comparison with the Jewish and Christian traditions;

- An analysis and critique of Augustine's view of the Original Sin;

- A Semantic study of the "Word" in the Quran and the Bible;

- Salvation and waiting from the perspective of Jehovah's Witnesses and its comparison with Catholic Christianity;

- History and beliefs of the Russian Orthodox Church;

- Gender in Catholicism and Shi'ism: a systematic approach;

- Comparison of death and its role in preventing sins in Islam and Christianity based on the Quran and the Bible;

- A study of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in the Quran and the Gospels;

- An analysis and critique of Rudolf Karl Bultmann's demythologization;

- The character of Jesus from the perspective of Neo-Orthodox theology and historical theology with emphasis on the views of Wolfhart Pannenberg;

- The concept and place of tradition in Shi'ism and Catholicism;

- A study of new versions (by Paul Tillich and Richard Swinburne) of the Christian argument to prove the existence of God through miracles;

- Free will from the perspective of Augustine and Ghazālī;

- Belief in Christ in the New Jewish Movements from the eighteenth century to the present age;

- The position and function of the angels in Christianity;

- The process of formalizing the books of the New Testament;

- Stages of self-purification in Orthodox Christianity and Shi'i Islam with emphasis on the views of John Climacus and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī;

- The confrontation of contemporary Christianity with the phenomenon of modern atheism;

<sup>12</sup> <https://for.urd.ac.ir/fa/conts/>

- The influence of Catholic theology on ecclesiastical architecture in the Gothic period with emphasis on the Chartres Cathedral;
- Comparison of the functions of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ from the Christian point of view and the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn from the Shi'i point of view;
- Comparison of the concept and place of purgatory in Islam and Christianity;
- History, teachings and rites of the Maronite Church;
- Human dignity in Islam and Christianity;
- Ethics of war in the Abrahamic religions;
- The nature of marriage in Christianity and Islam;
- The psychological impact of Martin Luther's character and its impact on reformist conceptions of Christianity;
- The theory of the historical Jesus in modern Christian theology;
- Pentecostal Movement in West Africa; history, theology and beliefs;
- Jesus from the perspective of the Bible; saviour or mediator?
- Theological and cultural contexts of Iranian Shiites' interaction with Russian Orthodoxy<sup>13</sup>.

It is important to note that the above was the title of some of the authored dissertations. In addition, the subjects of many dissertations have been the translation of important Christian texts from English to Persian.

#### *Some Titles of PhD Dissertations*

Here I refer to the titles of some of the PhD dissertations defended at URD that deal directly with Christianity, all of which are written in Persian language:

- The possibility of using Jürgen Multman's Theology of Hope in Shi'i theology;
- Feminist interpretive approaches to the Bible with an emphasis on the subject of creation;
- An analysis of the theoretical foundations of the Catholic Church towards new spirituality;
- A study and comparison of the views of Carl Barth and Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī on the knowledge of God;
- Semantics and typology of the personification of God in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic Religions;
- Analytical-critical study of the attitude of Christian scholars to the Quran in the late Middle Ages, with emphasis on Riccoldo da Monte Croce;
- A critical study of Monasticism in Eastern Christianity by the end of the fourth century;
- Analytical-critical study of the views of Christian theologians about the Quran in the eighth and ninth centuries AD;
- The feasibility of epistemological comparing of types of quasi-sensory experiences in the Quran and the Bible;

<sup>13</sup> <https://for.urd.ac.ir/fa/conts/3>

- Eschatological ethics; comparing the ethics related to the hereafter in Shi'ism and Catholicism;
- An analysis of the criteria for the development of doctrines and dogmas in the Catholic Church, with emphasis on Henry Newman's theory;
- Theology enters cinema; a study of the experience of Christian theology;
- The theological foundations of social justice from the point of view of the Catholic Church;
- The study of the foundations of the legitimacy of mourning in Christian and Islamic theology;
- The Relationship between Divine law and human law in the perspective of Thomas Aquinas and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī<sup>14</sup>.

Examining the titles of MA theses and PhD dissertations shows the special interest of students in comparative studies between Islam and Christianity on the one hand and between Šī'ī and Christian sects on the other. Certainly, such comparative studies contribute to the mutual understanding of the followers of these two religions.

Other titles show well that the authors are well acquainted with the various Christian denominations and their prominent figures. However, the question arises as to whether the chosen figures are necessarily the most prominent in their denomination or field of study. In other words, are some figures who stand out from the authors' point of view, scientific references in the Christian world itself? This point well explains the fact that URD, in its scientific cooperation with other universities, should also prioritize assistance in writing theses and dissertations. When a work is written with the guidance or advice of an internationally renowned Christian professor, better topics will be selected and the results will be much more accurate.

### *Christianity-Related Journals*

#### A. In Persian

Out of 7 journals of URD in Persian language, the subject of two journals is about religions including Christianity:

#### *Pazhūhish-hāyi Adyānī (Studies on Religions)*

The first issue of this journal was published in 2012. *Pazhūhish-hāyi Adyānī* is a quarterly journal on the study of religions and covers the following areas:

- History of religions in terms of nature, emergence, growth and development, evolution and decline;
- Historical geography of religions and a research view of the geographical scope of religions throughout history and their expansion in different parts of the world;
- Sources of authority in religions and analytical study and critique of sacred texts of religions and their teachings, customs, ethics and rituals;

<sup>14</sup> <https://for.urd.ac.ir/fa/conts/3>

- Beliefs; study, analysis and critique of the doctrinal teachings of religions on theology, teleology, cosmology, anthropology, epistemology, etc.

- Rituals, rules and ethics and analytical study and theorizing at the root of religious rites, explaining the criteria of practical rules and also explaining the moral system;

- Comparative studies in the above areas.

Among the most recent articles related to Christianity in this journal are the following:

- A comparative study of examples of “benevolence” in the Quran and the Bible;

- Evaluation of evil in two fields of Orthodox theology and the *Karamazov Brothers* by Fyodor Dostoevsky;

- Comparing the image of Eve in the Bible and the Quran and an analysis of the consequences of this image in literature and art;

- The moral barrier to living according to Paul: living according to the flesh and the wonder that comes with it;

- The concept of “suffering” in Zoroastrianism and Christianity: a comparative approach based on Pahlavi texts and the New Testament;

- The mystical concept of “godliness” and the possibility of human godliness in Christianity;

- Study and analysis of the intra-religious factors of secularization in the Catholicism;

- A study of the social contexts of the Book of Revelation;

- An exploration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Pentecost;

- A study of the Pope’s infallibility doctrine in the Catholic Church;

- The most important themes of Shi’i and Christian prayers;

- Gender and religion; an analysis of the position of women in the Abrahamic Religions<sup>15</sup>.

#### *Haft Āsmān (Seven Heavens)*

This journal is one of the first publications of the University and is 23 years old. Among the most recent articles related to Christianity in this journal are the following:

- The place and geography of “pilgrimage” in Christianity;

- Types of saints in the Russian Orthodox Church;

- Christianity in the eyes of religious existentialism, with emphasis on Kierkegaard;

- Hell in the Bible and Christian theology;

- Tradition in the Ancient Church;

- World Christian Councils and the breaking of Churches;

- Repentance in the written tradition of the Orthodox Church; means or purpose?

- Arab Christianity;

<sup>15</sup> <https://adyan.urd.ac.ir/>

- Comparative angelology: a study of the perspectives of Thomas Aquinas and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī;
- Review and critique of the position of the monastery in Christian monasticism;
- Cross-based theodicy<sup>16</sup>.

#### B. In English

There are two journals in which papers on Christianity are published; *Religious Inquiries* and *Study of Interreligious Relations*.

##### *Religious Inquiries*

*Religious Inquiries* publishes scholarly research on religion, inter-religious relations, philosophy of religion, history of world religions, science and religion, theology, mysticism and religious experience, religious ethics, and more. This journal provides a forum for dialogue between Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Muslim, and other religious traditions on a wide variety of religious issues. The first volume was published in 2012. Among the most recent articles related to Christianity in this journal are the following:

- Distinction between existence and essence in Avicenna's ontology and its influence on Christian philosophical theology, with a focus on Aquinas' views;
- Polkinghorne on metaphysics of Divine Action: presuppositions and implications;
- The story of Mary as a feminine counterpart of the story of Joseph: a narratological study;
- You say *Periklute*, I say *Paraclete*: towards a reconciliation between the Bible and the Quran;
- Refutations of "Heterodoxy": Zoroastrians, New Christians, and Muslims against Manichaeans;
- Truth in the context of Christian Faith and its relation to other religions;
- Mary in early Christianity and Islam;
- Clement of Alexandria and his doctrine of scripture;
- Contemporary shifts in the Christian doctrine of Hell in Anglo-American philosophical theology<sup>17</sup>.

##### *Study of Interreligious Relations*

This is a new journal introducing itself as follows:

*Study of Interreligious Relations* is a blind peer-reviewed journal on interdisciplinary research on interreligious dialogue, theology, and other kinds of relations. In a time when the failure of dialogue, ecumenism, and multiculturalism is the word of the day, we seek to suggest alternatives to what has been going on for a few

<sup>16</sup> <https://haftasman.urd.ac.ir/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://ri.urd.ac.ir/>

decades. Given the interdisciplinary interest of the journal, we seek to publish essays from different approaches and methods, from philosophical and theological to historical and social scientific ones. We are especially interested in essays that deal with the challenges, obstacles, and difficulties that need to be overcome. Among the suggested topics, mention could be made of the following:

- Conversion and interreligious relations;
- Environment and interreligious relations;
- Geopolitics of sectarianism;
- Historical investigations of religious conflict and reconciliation;
- Immigration, cultural integration, and interreligious relations;
- Interreligious dialogue and liberalism, secularism, fascism, fundamentalism etc.
- Interreligious relations and genocide;
- Interreligious responses to catastrophes and pandemics;
- Interreligious responses to women's question, minority rights, poverty, war, and terrorism;
- Legal vs. theological obstacles in interreligious relations;
- Peer disagreement, religious diversity, and interreligious relations;
- Power, exclusion, and interreligious relations<sup>18</sup>.

#### *Christianity-Related Books*

As mentioned before, the Publishing House of URD and Adyan Publication have published more than 350 books so far. Some of these books are translations from other languages into Persian and others are authored in Persian. Here is a list of titles of some books related to Christianity.

#### Translations

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by Pope John Paul II;
- *Christian Theology* by Alister Edgar McGrath;
- *The Future of Religions* by Paul Johannes Tillich;
- *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* by Nancey Murphy;
- *Systematic Theology* by Wolfhart Pannenberg;
- *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* by Claudia Setzer;
- *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* by Alister McGrath;
- *Christian Theology: An Introduction* by Alister McGrath;
- *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Classical Texts and Their Interpretation* by Francis Edward Peters;
- *Women in Christianity* by Hans Küng;
- *Protestantism (World Religions Series)* by Stephen Brown;
- *Catholicism & Orthodox Christianity (World Religions Series)* by Stephen Brown;

<sup>18</sup> <https://irr.urd.ac.ir/>

- *Catholicism* by George Brantl;
- *The Myth of God Incarnate* by John Hick;
- *The Catholic Church: A Short History* by Hans Küng;
- *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* by Étienne Henri Gilson;
- *Introduction to Christianity* by Mary Jo Weaver;
- *The Lost Sayings of Jesus: Teachings from Ancient Christian, Jewish, Gnostic, and Islamic Sources Annotated & Explained* by Andrew Phillip Smith;
- *Les manuscrits de la Mer Morte et les origines du Christianisme* by Jean-Guenolé-Marie Daniélou;
- *The City of God* by Saint Augustine;
- *The Way of Perfection* by Teresa of Ávila;
- *The Mystics of the Church* by Evelyn Underhill;
- *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* by Harry Austryn Wolfson;
- *Jesus; Myth Or History?* by Archibald Robertson;
- *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* by George Christopher Stead;
- *Book of Mormon* by Joseph Smith;
- *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity* by Hans Jonas;
- *The Forgotten Books of Eden* by Rutherford H. Platt;
- *Great Christian Thinkers* by Hans Küng;
- *Christianity among the Religions of the World* by Arnold Joseph Toynbee;
- *The Origin of the New Testament* by Adolf von Harnack<sup>19</sup>.

The diversity of topics and authors raises the fundamental question of what criteria are used to select books translated at the University of Religions and Denominations? Of course, there is a committee at this university to review books suggested for translation, but it seems that, as has been said about the selection of theses and dissertation topics, the advice of prominent Christian figures can be of great help to choose the best options for translation. It goes without saying that these scholars know many authors and books for a particular subject and can introduce the best author and book. Also if the purpose of translation is to make the audience acquainted with the author of the book, given the familiarity with all the works of that author, they can suggest their best book.

#### Authored Books

- *Faith and Morality; Comparison of the Theological Approach of Kierkegaard and the Ash'arites*;
- *Moral Virtues in the Quran and the Bible*;
- *Argument of Religious Experience from Richard Granville Swinburne's Point of View*;
- *The Family of the Prophets in the Bible and the Quran*;

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<sup>19</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/BookList/1>

- *Human Nature in Islam and Christianity;*
- *Norms in the Three Scriptures;*
- *The Truth of Muhammad and Jesus Christ;*
- *An Introduction to Protestantism;*
- *Religion and Ethics in the Eyes of Hans Küng;*
- *Philo of Alexandria, Founder of Religious Philosophy;*
- *Teachings of the Catholic Church;*
- *The Infallibility of the Bible from the Christian Point of View;*
- *The Roots of Christian Theology in the Gnostic and Platonic Schools;*
- *Iconography in the Orthodox Church;*
- *Christian Eschatology;*
- *Christianity in Latin America;*
- *The Question of Jesus Christ*<sup>20</sup>.

#### *International Activities*

Expanding international relations, dialogue with the followers of other religions, putting aside ethnic and religious differences between different denominations, and helping to spread peace and coexistence with followers of other religions have been URD's top priorities since its establishment. These activities can be divided into 5 categories: hosting high-ranking political and religious delegations and prominent personalities and groups, holding short-term courses, holding scientific meetings, participating in scientific conferences, and scientific research trips abroad. Here are some examples of these activities related to Christianity<sup>21</sup>.

#### *Hosting High-Ranking Political and Religious Delegations*

In addition to providing study opportunities for 13 faculty members from 11 countries and also providing teaching chairs to 31 non-Iranian professors from different countries at the University, in the last eight years, URD has hosted more than 452 foreign delegations (in groups and individually) from 52 countries. Among such delegations, one may refer to the following:

Professors from the University of Frankfurt, Heads of the Church of the Tatarstan, French Ambassador to Iran, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant leaders of the Republic of Croatia, President of the Pontifical Council for Family Affairs, Senior Orthodox Bishops and professors from the University of Bucharest, President of the Hartford Theological Seminary, Ambassador of the Vatican to Iran, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Armenian Leader of Cyprus, President of the Religious Affairs Agency of Georgia, Delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, President of the National Network of African American Priests, Dean of the American Baptist Church, President of St. John's Cathedral, members of the World Council of Churches, Vice

<sup>20</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/BookList/2>

<sup>21</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>



President of the Christian Democrats in the German Parliament, Board of the Orthodox Church of Romania, Archbishop of Washington Cathedral, President of the American Catholic University, Priests of German Churches in the Middle East, Vatican Interfaith Dialogue Council, Members of the Department of Interfaith Dialogue of the German Evangelical Church, President of the French Catholic University, editors of the German Continental Journal, researchers from St. Thomas University, and a delegation from the Georgian Orthodox Church<sup>22</sup>.

#### *Holding Short-Term Courses*

URD has offered several short-term courses for both its students and students from 54 countries. Many of these courses have been in collaboration with internationally renowned universities, including 11 short courses on Šī‘ī Islam (in English and Spanish), virtual conference with Yale University, scientific seminar on Christian theology and Western philosophy with German professors, workshop on contemporary developments in Protestant theology with professors from the University of Basel, and Qom-Paderborn-Beirut Academic Theology Course<sup>23</sup>.

#### *Holding Scientific Meetings*

Among Christianity-related meetings one may refer to the following: *Methodology of Studies of Religious Texts in the Catholic Educational System* with the presence of the Head of the French Faculty of Catholic Theology, *Religion and Secularism* and also *The Study of Islamic and Christian Relations* with professors from the University of Basel, *Charismatic Christian Movements as Emerging Religious Movement*, *Angelology in Islam and Christianity*, *Challenges of the Catholic and Protestant Churches on Women*, *The Tradition of the Eastern Churches*, *The Necessity of Dialogue between Islam and Christianity* with the presence of the Jesuit Priest of Egypt, *John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI*, *Continuity and Innovation* with the presence of professors from Vatican University<sup>24</sup>.

#### *Participating in Scientific Conferences*

Professors and students of URD have participated in many scientific conferences, some of which have been directly related to Christianity, such as *Iran-Austria Religious Dialogue*, which has been held for several periods, *The Bilateral Conference on Islamic-Christian Religious Dialogue* with professors from the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy in the University of Ljubljana, *Dialogue between Islam and the Kenyan Protestant Church*, and *Conference on Religion in Contemporary Iran and Germany* at the University of Potsdam<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>

<sup>23</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>

<sup>24</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>

<sup>25</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>

### *Scientific Research Trips Abroad*

In order to talk to the followers of other religions, URD has provided the possibility for professors and students to travel to other countries to talk directly with university professors and visit important places of other religions. In total, URD has organized 37 scientific and cultural trips to 15 countries. This includes Freie Universität Berlin, Community of Sant'Egidio, Moscow University Centres, American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, Goethe University in Frankfurt, Paderborn University, Gregorian Vatican University, National University of Yerevan, Centre for Interfaith Dialogue in Vatican, and Pontifical Council for Interfaith Dialogue. One of the most important of these trips is the visit, in 2016, of the President of URD to Italy to attend the meeting of Sant'Egidio and to meet with Pope Francis. During the meeting, Pope Francis praised the URD's activities in the field of interfaith dialogue and awarded him a commemorative medal for his and the University's works<sup>26</sup>.

### ANALYSIS

After introducing URD from different dimensions, we will now analyse the activities of this university from different perspectives.

#### A. *An Overview of the Scientific, Cultural and Social Effects of URD on the Traditional and Academic Community of Iran*

In 1994, when The Centre for the Study of Religions and Denominations was founded by a group of students from the Seminary of Qom, no one imagined that in early future, this centre would become an influential institution at the national and international levels. Prior to that, there was no specialized education of different religions in the Seminary of Qom, as it was not so common in Iranian universities. It was very meaningful that the students of Seminary became the flag bearers of this valuable action. From 2008 and after the official establishment of the University of Religions and Denominations, the impact of this work at various levels entered a new phase. Currently, URD has a very prominent position in Iran and the region in the field of education, research and publishing, and has played a significant role in raising religious knowledge both in Iran and in some other countries, as researchers in some Islamic denominations consider the library of URD to be one of the best treasures for books related to their sect.

On the other hand, educating about different Islamic sects and different religions in an Islamic country with an overwhelming majority of Muslims and Šī'a is an action that has many positive consequences in culture and society. When the level of people's awareness of the realities of other religions and denominations rises, surely their tolerance for other religions and denominations also increases. According to some researchers, while violence between followers of different sects and religions is high

<sup>26</sup> <https://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/94>

in some countries, the low level of this phenomenon in Iran is due to various factors and the role of URD is undeniable. Decades ago, Iranians may have been surprised to see books on other religions in libraries, bookstores, and book fairs, but the multiple number of books published by URD and other Iranian institutions has led to sections on religions and denominations to be an integral part of all major libraries and bookstores as well as book fairs.

The efforts of the University of Religions and Denominations have even developed the approach of the Seminary of Qom toward this issue, as currently one of the specialized disciplines taught in the Seminary of Qom is related to religions, and in this regard, especially the professors of URD are invited. In addition to forming scientific associations related to religions, the Policy-Making Council for the Religions has also been established in the Seminary of Qom, one of the members of which is the President of URD.

#### B. *Educational Resources and Books*

A review of educational resources related to religions, including Christianity, shows that most of these resources are books that have been translated into Persian from other languages, especially English. Most of these books have been selected from the sources that have been taught in prestigious universities of the world in the last 3-4 decades. For example, in Religion Studies, out of 95 sources, 60% (57 books) have been published in American universities, 33% (31 books) in the universities of England and Wales, and the rest in other countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany and Canada. New York University tops the list with 30 books, followed by Oxford University with 24, Princeton University, University of Philadelphia, and Indiana University with 3 to 4 each<sup>27</sup>.

#### C. *University Research Institute*

Due to the importance of research in URD, it has established a research institute that is managed in the form of three research groups of Šī'ī studies, Islamic denominations and religions. The faculty members of the university carry out their research activities under the supervision of this centre. Due to the lack of valid Persian sources in the field of religions and also the need of researchers for such resources, the goal of the Research Institute in the long run is to write books on religions. Another goal of the Research institute is to educate talented and interested researchers. Also, one of the short-term goals of the Institute is to compile scientific research articles on important religious and theological issues with a new approach addressing issues that have received less attention<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> See Y. Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture on Academic Religion Studies in Iran*, A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Religious Studies, 2018, 135.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 138.

The university has three other centres: the Office for the Approximation of Islamic Denominations, the Office for Religions and Human Rights, and the Office for the Dialogue of Religions.

The Charter for the Dialogue of Religions states: "In this plan, dialogue and interfaith relations are a strategy, not a tactic. Interfaith dialogue from this perspective is concerned with the future of religion, the future of man and the future of the earth, and the new dialogue in the coming age should seek to provide answers to new social, cultural, moral and spiritual paradigms"<sup>29</sup>. The Interfaith Dialogue Office of URD, as an Iranian institution, can be a good partner in many projects that are purely related to Iran. Research on the doctrinal foundations of Shiism, Islam, Iran, Iranians, Šīʿī history and seminaries, the Islamic Revolution, the clergy, the religious government can all be topics that the office can participate in<sup>30</sup>.

#### D. *Software System of Religious Studies in URD*

In order to find the software system of religious studies in the Faculty of Religions, examining the general characteristics, curriculum and course titles of PhD courses can provide the initial idea in this direction. If we look at the courses and books and articles suggested as the sources, we come to a regular structure and software system that is in line with the purpose designed for religious studies. In this system of thought, religions study is a scientific process that examines different religions with rational, critical and impartial approach. In compensatory courses, by designing a phenomenological approach to religion, a new look at the structure of experience or consciousness and the systematization of the philosophy of cognition is proposed. The message of this view is that modern study of religions requires modern epistemology. The same attitude is followed in other units such as religious hermeneutics. After passing the compensatory courses, the student gets acquainted with topics of anthropology, psychology and sociology of religion, etc.

#### E. *Methodology in Studies*

A researcher at URD can become acquainted with a descriptive approach to religion by passing the units related to phenomenological approach to religion and religious hermeneutics. In studies with a philosophical-historical approach to religion, the method of analysis is usually used. In URD, for units such as "Christian Theology from Kant" analytical method is used. There are also units such as "the Truth of Religion", "Religion and Rationality", and "Religion and Ethics", which have a critical analytical method<sup>31</sup>.

Anthropology of religion is one of the topics of interest at URD. While getting acquainted with the anthropology of religion, students pay attention to the subject of

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 139.

<sup>30</sup> <http://urd.ac.ir/fa/cont/1003>

<sup>31</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 140-143.

the truth of religion and how anthropologists of religion deal with it. In this sense, the student learns how the anthropology of religion has approached and theorized about the truth of religion. The topics studied in this section are comprehensive definition of religion, difference between religion and philosophy, difference between religion and mysticism, difference between religion and science, difference between religion and art, and difference between religion and magic.

In Iran, the psychology of religion is known by the Persian translations of the books by Wolf and Bernard Spilka. Types of religiosity, religion and mental health are also among the most important issues in the psychology of religion among the courses and units offered in PhD course of religion studies. "Religion and Secularism" is taught as one of the most important issues in the sociology of religion in URD. However, in proportion to the importance of sociology and sociology of religion in religious studies, it seems that more contribution should be considered for this science in the educational structure of the field. Recommended topics for this course are, "The Historical Origins of Secularism", "Arguments for the Separation of Public from Religion", "Arguments Against the Separation of Public from Religion", "Positive and Negative Effects of Secularism on Society", "Positive and Negative Effects of Secularism on Religiosity"<sup>32</sup>.

The philosophy of religion is another important unit in the Faculty of Religions. Among its units, one may refer to Evidentialism, Fideism, Reformed Epistemology, the need of ethics to religion in the definition of moral concepts, realization of examples of moral concepts, identifying instances of moral concepts, and the implementation of moral precepts.

In URD, the subjects of historical study of religions and comparative study of religions have been considered as important in the form of courses on the historical typology of religion and criteria for evaluating different religions. Suggested educational topics in these courses are: monotheism, polytheism, unity of existence; animalism, pre-animalism, anthropomorphism and idolatry; ethnic and world religions, primitive and advanced religions, Biblical religions and national religions, founders of religion, the history of religion, moral fruits of the teachings of religion, and the standards of modernity<sup>33</sup>.

#### F. *Comparison of Religious Studies in URD and Prestigious Universities in the World*

Regarding the educational structure, there are fundamental similarities between this university and other similar cases in the faculties of academic studies of religion, and in some cases, preferences can be considered in this regard. The establishment of an up-to-date university in the global norm with all the necessary structures on the subject of religions and denominations is very significant.

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<sup>32</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 146-152.

<sup>33</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 157-160.

Academic religion education, in accordance with what is offered in other universities of the world, is also done in URD in the following categories.

One. Intra-religious studies and researches, which include academic-promotional or cognitive academic studies. In URD, disciplines such as ŠĪŪ Islam, studies of ŠĪŪ history, ŠĪŪ sects, Islamic denominations, jurisprudential denominations, mysticism and Sufism, religions and mysticism in the field of denominations, and disciplines such as Abrahamic religions, non-Abrahamic religions in the field of religions are examples of this category.

Two. Ultra-religious studies and researches which include academic scientific-research studies. In URD, disciplines such as ŠĪŪ sociology in the field of denominations and disciplines such as sociology of religion, psychology of religion, philosophy of religion, comparative studies of religions, and comparative studies of women in religions in the field of religions are examples of this category.

Three. Professional or specialized ultra-religious studies and research. Titles such as “Women’s Movements”, “Christian Women and Freedoms and Civil Rights”, “Contemporary Islamic Political Movements”, “Islam in Europe”, “Multicultural and Multinational Islam”, “The Role of the Absent Imam”, “Socio-Cultural Environment of Iranians”, “Religion and Society in Qajar Iran”, “Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law”, “Presence of Persians in the Islamic World”, “History of Islamic Societies”, “Islam and the West, Compromise or Clash?”, “Islam and the Threat to the West”, and “pluralist Islam” are included in this category<sup>34</sup>.

#### G. *Modern Study of Religions with a Centralized Structure*

The design and structure of URD indicates some innovations. The formation of an academic complex around the study of religions is an important and innovative issue, and it seems that this academic structure has bright prospects for the future. The PhD course on the study of religions in URD is in accordance with what is seen in different universities around the world and the students are introduced to several categories of studies, including:

One. The cognitive approaches, such as phenomenological approach to religion, religious hermeneutics, and feminist approach to religion.

Two. Theological approaches, such as modern theology.

Third. Religious studies, such as comparative studies, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, anthropology of religion, feminism of religion (feminism-based theology), and philosophy of religion.

Four. Specialized studies such as religion, human rights and universal ethics, and interfaith dialogue.

The roadmap of this course begins with cognitive teachings. Students first learn with what cognitive perspective to enter the subject of theology. This means that the subject of epistemology in modern study of religions is the beginning of the way. In

<sup>34</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 175-178.

the second stage, modern theology or the theology after Kant is discussed. The difference between Christian theology before and after Kant is the Kant's epistemological revolution in theology. The third stage is to know the concepts and functions of academic studies of religion in three main areas of comparative study, sociology and psychology of religion and philosophy of religion. The fourth pillar consists of specialized topics such as "Interfaith Dialogue", and "Religion, Human Rights and Global Ethics". Thus, evidently, this course in URD has both epistemological and methodological approaches as well as modern texts for further research<sup>35</sup>.

It seems that the main emphasis in planning modern studies of religion in URD is on PhD course on religious studies, but the same approach is seen, though to some extent, in some fields in the Faculty of Religions as well as in other faculties and departments such as the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Women's Studies. Examples include PhD in Comparative Studies in Christian Theology, PhD in Comparative Studies of Women in Religions, Master in Religious Studies, and Master in Philosophy of Religion<sup>36</sup>.

#### H. *Investigating the Structure of Religious Studies in URD as Influenced by Society*

Structurally, URD is an institution developed from the Seminary of Qom, the main theme of which is the teachings of intra-religious traditions. For this reason, this university is the product of a dialogue between the seminary tradition and the social context with a strong religious infrastructure. Accordingly, on the one hand, this university has paid attention to the knowledge of religions and denominations, and on the other hand, it teaches students ultra-religious, non-biased and modern systems of research of religion, such as comparative, psychological and sociological studies of religion. Another valuable point about the exchange structure of the relationship between URD and the surrounding community is the enthusiastic presence of the students who have chosen this type of study. Studying at URD seems to be a choice for both the students and professors.

Thus, it seems that the direction of academic research and studies of religions in this university should be towards the current social needs and actions as a principle in the educational and research culture of the university. Basically, it seems that any research in the field of religious studies that does not have the characteristics of "link between theory and social function" and the research field of the surrounding society is far from the basics of the study of religions. Thus, it seems that a comprehensive study of religion in a modern and systematic method is a necessity in URD<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 178-182.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 182.

<sup>37</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 200-201.

## SUGGESTIONS

### 1- *Redefining the Field of Religious Studies*

If in modern religious studies, modern Christian theology has reached such purposes and has adapted to new conditions and is even trying to participate in it, in the theory of Iranian religious studies, social religion and the philosophy based on it can have such effects.

The proposed principles of indigenous religious studies in URD are:

- 1- Changing the paradigm from public knowledge to scientific knowledge;
- 2- Changing the approach from logical approach to methodological approach;
- 3- Knowledge based on institutional theology;
- 4- Theology based on expediency and agreement;
- 5- Methodology based on theory and model presentation;
- 6- Production and social reproduction of knowledge;
- 7- Academic system of science production based on research school and scientific community;
- 8- Scientific community with dual approaches of accumulation and reconstruction.

### 2- *Establishment of a Reference Council for Religious Studies in URD*

Since by definition, indigenous religious studies in Iran is a paradigm of scientific knowledge, based on a systematic model of theology of social Islam that is produced and reproduced in religious institutional structures, the Reference Council for Religious Studies as a fundamental pillar of this field of knowledge should be established based on a vision of its structure<sup>38</sup>.

Reference Council for Religious Studies in URD will be a specialized body consisting of three pillars:

The first pillar, as the highest part, is related to religious studies, which consists of religious thinkers, and the task of this pillar is to try to form, organize and restore religious studies as a scientific science.

The second pillar as its middle part is the religious pillar which consists of thinkers in the field of religion and the task of this pillar is to try to form, organize and restore religious knowledge and social theology as a philosophical source and paradigm for religious studies.

The last pillar as its executive and research part is related to humanities such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics, which consists of thinkers in these fields. The task of this pillar is to provide and conduct methodological and scientific research in the field of knowledge related to a kind of production and reproduction of knowledge in such a way that the commitments and systems of religious thought and social theology in different parts of society are reviewed and rewritten<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 267-273.

<sup>39</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 273-274.



### 3- Completing the Chain of Religious Studies

Hermeneutics and phenomenology of religion (with regard to epistemology and philosophy of religion), comparative theology, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion and sociology of religion (with regard to subject) and ontology are among the most important fields in religious studies. It seems that other fields such as cognitive science of religion and economics of religion can be added to this set of sciences.

The economics of religion has also received serious attention in research and educational circles in the last decades of the twentieth century. In these views, religion sometimes directs the behaviour and economic activity of what is called “Religious Economics” and sometimes the thought and function of religion is clarified by economic tools and rules called “Economics of Religion”<sup>40</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

Diverse and multidimensional activities of URD in connection with the introduction of religions and inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue in general and the introduction of Christianity and the dialogue between Islam and Christianity in particular, have provided the rood for students to properly understand religions and denominations and contributed to peaceful coexistence of their followers. However, it seems that in order to achieve its long-term goals, URD should have a more specific look at its international activities. The presence of professors and students from different countries of the world with different beliefs and various approaches can give a more active role to this university in interfaith dialogue. Just as Muslims expect non-Muslims to learn true Islam from Muslim scholars, the followers of other religions and schools, and even atheists and agnostics, rightly expect to present their beliefs to Muslims and to answer possible questions, since certainly knowledge of religion through the language of the person who believes in it and without any mediation will help to better understand religions. If this approach is followed by world-renowned universities and institutes that introduce religions, we will undoubtedly see a reduction in the pain and suffering caused by a misunderstanding of the beliefs of followers of other religions and denominations.

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<sup>40</sup> See Ahmadi, *The Influence of Texture*, 280-282.

## RÉSUMÉ

The University of Religions and Denominations (URD), fondée en 2008, est la plus prestigieuse université d'Iran pour l'enseignement des religions, et tout spécialement du christianisme. Elle accueille environ 8000 étudiants de plus de trente pays. L'URD avec 12 facultés et 350 enseignants à plein temps et à temps partiel, ainsi qu'avec plus de 2000 professeurs invités, dispense BA et MA d'enseignement à distance et cours de MA et de PhD à plein temps. Sa bibliothèque, avec 105.000 ouvrages sur l'islam, le christianisme, le judaïsme, l'hindouisme, le bouddhisme et les religions primitives, est une des plus riches de la région. Ses publications couvrent 10 revues et 250 ouvrages. La première partie de cet article concerne l'enseignement des religions et des confessions en général à l'URD. La deuxième partie se concentre sur l'enseignement du christianisme de façon particulière. La dernière partie présente les cours de MA et de PhD, quelques titres de thèses, la revue et les publications intéressant le christianisme et les activités internationales de l'université. Au cours de l'article et à la fin, sont présentés quelques analyses des activités de cette université et quelques suggestions sont également faites.