

10. What Is The Way Of Change And Evolution In Islamic Society?

Someone may say: It is true that the Islamic way is a way comprising all the essentials of a happy life, and that an Islamic community is so fortunate as to be envied, but as this is a comprehensive system in which there is no freedom of belief, it will make the society stagnant, and hinders all change and evolution, and as it is said, the defect of a perfect society would be to remain stagnant.

For, the course of evolution requires that a series of contrary powers center in one thing and dispute one another, so that as a result of diminution and fracture a new thing is created which would be free from the defects of its creating agents which have disappeared as a result of that dispute.

Therefore if we suppose that Islam removes its defects and contraries and has in particular got rid of opposite beliefs completely, the requisite for such a statement is that the society created by Islam will be hindered from the course of evolution. This is what is claimed by dialectic materialism.

Our answer is: These gentlemen have deviated from the subject in a surprising manner. It must be explained that human beliefs and learning are of two kinds: One kind is subject to change and evolution, and those are industrial and technical sciences which are employed in raising the level of the bases of material life and harnessing nature in the interest of humanity, such as natural and mathematical sciences and so on. These sciences and techniques, as well as others which belong to the same group can change, and the more they change and defects go the way of perfection, the more will social life advance in this respect.

Another kind of learning which is not subject to change, even though in one sense it is subject to perfection, is divine teachings, which even though they may undergo evolution and exaltation, yet they have a decisively permanent and unalterable form with respect to origin, resurrection, happiness and adversity. These teachings affect society only in a general way¹.

So if these views and teachings remain constant, it does not hinder society from its evolutionary course. We observe that we have a number of constant general laws which are no barrier to social progress. For

example, one of the general rules necessary for every human being is to work for the preservation of his life. Another example is that an action must be for a benefit received; and another is that it is necessary for a man to live in society.

Or we may say that universe really exists, and it is not a fancy and imagination; or man has organs, means and powers; or other constant views and learning the constancy and stagnancy of which do not affect the constancy and stagnancy of society. Constant religious teachings are of the same kind. For example we say: The universe has one God; God has sent a divine law for people which comprises all the ways of happiness, and this is established through Prophethood; God will one day gather all creatures to call them to account for their deeds.

This is the only word on which Islam has based its society and has provided a protection for it wholly and in every sense. It is clear that if negation and affirmation appear in this word and if negative and positive views clash resulting in the appearance of a third theory, the consequence will only be the decadence of society².

The conclusion is that human society in its course of progress needs only something, and that is to undergo change and gain perfection every day in its use of natural advantages. This change and evolution is secured through constant scientific investigation and permanent application of practice on science, matters which have never been checked by Islam.

Another point is that the manner of managing society and the methods prevalent in communities are always seen to change. For example despotism changes into democracy and democracy turns into communism.

It must be remembered that these changes become necessary only for this reason that all these systems are defective and none of them is adequate for the social perfection desired by man, and cannot provide that perfection.

The direction of these changes is not that it must go from defect towards perfection. If there is a difference between these systems, it is the difference between right and wrong³, not between perfect and imperfect.

Thus if the social system is established, and people lived under the banner of proper education, learnt beneficial acts, and committed good deeds, and moved on towards happiness in comfort and enjoyment, and climbed the steps of theory and practice towards perfection, and found happiness every day and developed it, what need would there be for changing social traditions and way of life? What would such people want in addition to what they already have?

A clear-sighted person should not affirm that change is necessary in every way for man, even in cases when no change is required.

If a reader says: None of these you mentioned need a change, there are things like belief and general morality which must necessarily change, for all these must undergo a change with changed conditions and different environments. It cannot be denied that modernism has ideas different from those of ancient times. In the same way, his thoughts differ with differences of the regions in which he lives, such as living in the polar or temperate regions. Moreover various living conditions influence his thoughts and views. Someone is a master, another is a servant; one is a tent-dweller, another is a citizen; one is rich, another is poor; one has money, the other has not, all these differences affect a man's thoughts. Therefore, whatever thoughts and views they may be, they change with different actors and periodic changes. There is no doubt about this point.

In answer to the above statement we say that all these matters are based on the relativity of sciences and human views⁴.

The requisite for this theory is that right and wrong, good and bad should be a series or additional relative matters, and not true and realistic ones.

According to this theory general theoretical knowledge which is connected to this origin and resurrection, as well as general practical views such as the view that society is useful for man, or justice is good⁵, or all general precepts which change with changed conditions and times. Generally speaking this theory is not correct with such a degree of generality, as we have discussed it at length elsewhere⁶.

In short, this theory does not comprise general theoretical matters of one type of general views. To show the doubtfulness of the generality of this theory it is sufficient to say that if it possessed generality and was an absolutely permanent general theory, it would mean that we have an absolutely non-relative proposition that is the same theory that is general and constant.

Even if it is not a general proposition, but an incidental one, it would again mean that we should have an absolute proposition, that is, we should state in an absolute way that this theory is not general. In either case the generality of this theory will be null and void. In other words, if this view were true that every view and belief must change one day, this view itself, too, must change. If the above view is changed, it would mean that there is no necessity for every view, and belief to change one day, but only a part of it is unchangeable.

¹. For example, the universe is created for a wise purpose; every action whether good or bad has a reward or punishment; happiness means following the laws of the universe, and adversity is opposition to them, all of which are general laws.

². This was discussed in the previous chapters, especially in chapter 5.

³. For, all the three schools cannot be right.

⁴. This theory says: Man has no real knowledge of anything, but his knowledge is relative and there is nothing that he can claim decisively. No absolute right and wrong, or good and evil exists. To prove the invalidity of this theory needs a more elaborate discussion, and the reader can refer to the vol. I of Al-Mizan, or the Principles of the Philosophy and Method of Realism.

⁵. Vol 1 of Al-Mizan, and Vol. 1 Principles of the Philosophy and Method of Realism.

⁶. Of course this statement is true as a general theory, but not in application to this case.

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