

2. Liberalism

Greetings and blessings of God be upon the cleaned souls of all martyrs in the path of Truth and Justice, Islam and our glorious Islamic Revolution.

I am deeply honored by the great kindness you faithful sisters and brothers have shown, you who are lovers of God and His Path, the Revolution, the Imam of the Ummah and Leader of the Revolution.

In this gathering, which abounds with compassion and enthusiasm, I hope to be able to reciprocate all this warm reception, zeal and sincerity which act as catalysts that augment our commitment and responsibility. Our lives have been spent committed to the cause of God and His people and we hope to be able to spend the rest of it with the same bonds of commitment in many dimensions.

Post-revolution Iran requires vigilance and conviction on our part. It obliges us and the Muslim Ummah to recognize the exigencies of the day and act upon them as dictated by the Islamic faith. We should endeavor to promote the understanding and awareness of our people to a still higher level, making way for the development of a pure Islamic mentality in this society.

Today, I want to take up an issue that has been a popular topic of discussion nowadays. The issue is Liberalism, a subject which is frequently discussed by people holding different ideas and opinions in our society. Liberalism is a school of thought based on the freedom of the individual. In essence this school believes that man as an individual, is a free being who can identify his needs and wants and endeavors to meet them. In other words this school holds that given the absolute freedom and will to act the way he wishes man can improve his personality, culture and behavior, and advance economically and socially.

On this basis, we can then say that Liberalism is then a branch and an offshoot of Rationalism which is founded on the belief that man can absolutely rely upon reason to identify his needs and upon his wisdom as his guide. According to this view man's mental faculty is absolute and sufficient, and that man need not abide by the rules of religion or any other laws except those he discovers and makes through reason.

Rationalism does not believe that Divine revelation can be an independent source of knowledge. It

opines that it is solely man's intellect and wisdom that is capable of understanding life. Hence, man alone can advance, gain knowledge of the world around him and lead a better and prosperous life through reason. Among rationalists, different views exist as to the magnitude of the individual's role in building his life, his self, environment and culture. Some of them hold the idea that man's wisdom is absolute and that it is man's individual identity that determines his personality. This group believes that man can gain knowledge, advance and attain prosperity through forces inherent in every individual that is, as given to him by creation.

This type of thinking is binary: one aspect grants superiority to the individual over the society whereas the other believes that society must dominate. The former caters to the individualistic concept that the individual is free and not subject to fatalism of predestination. It holds that one can move freely in the arena of being in such a way that neither the rule of social determinism nor that of any other antecedents can change man's path or subdue his will. The individual enjoys such great freedom of action that he is able to choose any path he deems right to traverse. In this view social order and environment are by no means barriers to man and the individual because he is not bound by any predetermined course.

In contrast to this there is another type of Liberalism called collective Liberalism which attunes itself with a sort of Socialism and collective rule. Through a gradual process of realization, this school has arrived at the conclusion that man cannot be totally free from the domination of the environment in which he lives. Realizing that social or economic factors restrain the individual and debar him from advancing the way he wishes, Liberalism then has more or less accepted a kind of an independent identity for the collective order (existent in society), thus emerging as another type of Socialism.

In the twentieth century, we now observe how in the seat of Liberalism (the Western communities) socialistic doctrines gradually finding a strong base and are moving along with Liberalism, mutually interacting in a sort of a compromise and coalition. Today, it is plain to see that Liberalism has very well attuned itself with Socialism in those societies.

Liberalism may then be defined as follows:

1. Liberalism is based mainly upon Rationalism. It rejects all kinds of knowledge except that which is acquired through man's own faculty of reason.
2. In today's Western culture and civilization. Liberalism has primarily emerged as a doctrine resting on the concept of Individualism and negated any established order and social determinism.
3. Although Liberalism has evolved as a school rejecting social and other types of determinism, it is gradually tending to appreciate the societal identity to the some extent, and is now emerging as a sort of a "Liberal Socialism" or "Socialistic Liberalism."

In an interview last week, I pointed out that Liberalism almost always goes with a negation of Divine laws and religious edicts. This does not mean, however that Liberalism requires one to refute religion. What it

aims at is for man to employ his own wisdom and scientific knowledge in establishing laws that suit him best. This school believes that in order to make social laws, man need not refer to religious scriptures and revelations sent down to messengers of God.

Liberalism asks man to depend solely on scientific knowledge in the discoveries and establishment of laws and regulations without a holy scripture and prophetic traditions, so says Liberalism, man, gifted with scientific dexterity, can individually or collectively make laws to ensure his prosperity. This doctrine dictates, "any law derived purely as a result of man's own wisdom and reasoning, i.e., free from any external influence, must be obeyed. However, due to the dynamism of man's life, he may not abide by a certain law forever. He can always devise new laws whenever the need arises or circumstances demand."

Liberalism cannot preserve its doctrine and at the same time accept Divine laws. Revealed (prophetic) laws require unconditional obedience and acceptance regardless of whether one understands their philosophy and reason or not. This is a precise point of difference that should not go unheeded.

Before coming here I saw a newspaper article on my recent interview dealing with Liberalism. I had mentioned (in that interview) that one of the characteristics of Liberalism is urging man to be unrestrained in making use of wisdom when devising laws for social, economic, political and other purposes. This doctrine also argues that no holy scriptures such as the Quran, Bible and Torah can serve man's interests.

The writer of that article asked what the basis of my argument had been. I think the writer did not even bother to consult one of these encyclopedias which include a concise explanation of social schools. I advise the writer to refer to the German Bruskhus encyclopedia and see for himself how it has mentioned "a free attitude towards religious decrees" as one of the characteristics of Liberalism. The recently revised edition of this 20 volume encyclopedia compiled over a decade ago includes the latest information on any subject. I will enumerate the various features of Liberalism as they appeared in the above mentioned encyclopedia and see what conclusion we can derive therefrom:

1. The main foundation of Liberalism is Rationalism that is, only reason can provide man with a reliable source of knowledge. Rationalism in itself is a negation of Divine Revelation as an independent fountain of knowledge.
2. Liberalism is also based on man's individual liberty. That is, man wields absolute autonomy over his affairs and is free from any sort of determinism, social or environmental. In this regard, Liberalism is attuned with Individualism.
3. Since schools (of thought) are subject to change, the Liberalist doctrine too, in spite of its staunch individualistic stance and the fact that the society affects individuals one way or another, undergoes change; thus, emerging as a sort of "Socialistic Liberalism."

There are, however, some positive points for Liberalism which we should not neglect:

1. Opposed to autocratic rule, Liberalism urges masses to confront dictators. Liberalists foster the idea that man should not succumb to totalitarian rule. In this respect this school is commendable.
2. Liberalism also negates collective and class dictatorship as advocated by Marxism. It rejects the dissolution of individual human identity in society as well as the concept that the human being advances in an involuntary mechanical manner. This aspect of Liberalism is quite laudable too.

This negation of class dictatorship and the absolute rule of society covet the individual, and the fact that Liberalism provides man with freedom of action and choice while urging him to advance and develop his world by relying on his own wisdom without surrendering to existing situations, induces the growth of man's hidden talents. These characteristics compel one to praise this doctrine as far as such qualities are concerned.

Another commendable aspect of the Liberalistic doctrine is the liberty it grants man in the realm of economy. With emphasis laid on individual ownership, Liberalism urges man to engage in unrestrained production and sell the fruit of his labor. It further endorses the idea that freedom in production, distribution, supply and demand will contribute to the society's economic growth and prepare the ground for man's increased role in boosting the economy.

Now, let us look into the negative aspects of this doctrine which, like its merits, deserve attention. As I have said, Liberalism believes in man's power of reasoning as the only means to attain knowledge. Revelation, it says, cannot be another source. We as the faithful who believe in Divine Revelation, cannot pay any tribute to this doctrine. We consider it a dangerous school of thought because it deprives man of one of the most exalted fountains of God's grace and bounty, the Divine revelation, and the prophetic traditions and knowledge.

Because of its overemphasis on individual liberty, liberalism has failed to take note of the visible and invisible limitations imposed by atheistic and secular social orders on man which restrain his actions. A liberal economic order urges men to work, produce, consume, engage in trade and live the way he wishes. A liberalist propagates that this will lead to a flourishing economy. Superficially, it is a meritorious concept but it loses its luster once we take a closer look. We call upon all the advocates of a "liberal" economic system to note how the world's capitalistic economy has hindered small groups and individuals from participating in a truly free enterprise due to the un-equal distribution of wealth.

Today's prevailing system aims at nothing but the preservation of the welfare of a handful of rich tycoons who toy with the world's wealth and are inconsiderate of the deprived masses who have no access to such provision. While this affluent minority grows stronger and wealthier day by day, the bulk of the people suffer more and more from destitution and poverty resulting in their estrangement from pleasure and happiness. What opportunity for growth and advancement can an individual born in to such families have? Very little and sometimes none.

In other words, the freedom a liberalist speaks of benefits nobody but himself since common people can have no share in it. The concept of liberty as endorsed by Liberalism is one-dimensional and will only result in the bifurcation of people into two categories: An affluent minority unrestrained in the enjoyment of a pleasure-seeking life and the application of their various self-granted liberties; and a deprived, starving and depressed majority with meagre possibilities to enjoy and enact their so-called "freedom".

We would like to ask the liberals if they truly believe that the masses who are tackling immense difficulties have any "freedom". Does this oppressed majority really enjoy the right to exercise their freedom as the affluent minority does? You (liberals) want freedom, but for only five percent of the people while the rest (95 percent) are deprived of it. If freedom is good, it should be good for everybody and not for a chosen class of society.

By advocating this sort of freedom you only seek to deny the fact that "poverty breeds disbelief". You want to deny the fact that poverty and destitution can push man into doubting God's grace and justice. Do not deprived people ask God why they are engulfed in misery? Is poverty not a fertile ground to grow cynical about God's justice?

Upon hearing a poor man complaining of his inability to stand in worship due to his wretched state, a liberal may sneer and say that he grudged because of his illiteracy and ignorance and that he would not have made such remarks had he been a man of knowledge. It is true that "lack of knowledge" may give rise to such complaints, but the question is would the same man adopt such a lackadaisical attitude in face of imposed poverty if he had attained a higher level of knowledge or would he launch a battle against such express injustice and inequality?

If we discredit Liberalism, we do not intend to strip it bare of its merits. We, too, believe in the expediency and supremacy of human liberty in facilitating the growth of the human being. However, this liberty should not be exclusive to a special group. Everybody, not a certain class, should be given the opportunity to explore his talents and advance. In short, we can endorse freedom as advocated by Liberalism only if it applies to all and does not transgress the limits set by Islamic laws. The reason is because Divine Decrees require absolute obedience, that is not withstanding whether we know their philosophy and reasons or not.

We believe that God's commandments should be obeyed unquestionably and that an Islamic community cannot turn a blind eye to the violation of even the least significant of God's laws.

A point of vital importance should be noted here, namely, Divine Laws are not imposed upon us. From the Islamic point of view, man is free to accept or reject religion and faith. The Holy Quran says:

"There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error..." (2:256)

But accepting Islam also entails absolute subscription to its laws and codes. One cannot say, "I believe in Islam, but what if I do not say the morning prayers or do not fast if Ramadhan falls in summer time. Or

what if I sometimes watch obscene movies, etc." This type of person may further ask "what freedom then does Islam endorse? Why should one not be allowed to watch scabrous shows? One should be permitted to show such films ad-libitum. Likewise, one should also be free to watch them or not."

For these people freedom is having fun in mixed swimming pools. As for the religious, they are free not to go to such places. They say, "Men and women should be free to appear in public or places of work in suggestive and indecent apparel just as a pious woman should be free to dress otherwise. Women must be given the liberty to mix with men in society, with make-up. Men, too, are free not to look at such women." Definitely, we oppose this type of freedom. It is not on the word "freedom" that we differ from liberals. The bone of our contention is something substantial.

What we want to put across is that in the very center of liberalism i.e. Europe, every nook and corner we visited bore marks of such "liberal" practices. So, if we now express our concern about the liberals coming to power in the Islamic Republic, it is because we have seen and still observe the crystallization of liberalistic doctrines in the place which gave birth to it. In those countries, the path leads man toward corruption and not to where he can rectify his talents and enjoy the fruit of maturing humane values. Can man be truly free where he is constantly exposed to the lewdness explicit or implicit of a permissive society?

It is not in the word where our dispute lies. We are not the least concerned whether one calls oneself a liberal or non-liberal as long as one abides by God's commands. Proclaiming our faith in Islamic laws and principles orally or in writing will not suffice. It is one's deeds which count. If the head of an office, for instance, reacts against discrimination, oppression, corruption and enjoins piety, justice, righteousness, decency and adherence to God's words, upon his subordinates, he has truly earned our profound respect irrespective of the political beliefs he holds.

We earnestly believe in the necessity of a number of social limitations and rules in human community. Such laws in our view, should rest on the following:

1. Faith in Divine religion. This is the main factor that affects man's conviction in observing religious decrees and laws.
2. The law and its execution by the government and social institutions. It will be too naive to assume that everybody obeys the law because of his conscience and faith. If people violate the law, they must be stopped by law enforcing authorities.

Islamic doctrines say that law enforcement is the exclusive right of the government. In this regard I would like to speak of a loophole unknowingly created by lovers and advocates of the Revolution through which critics attack our Islamic Revolution accusing it of "suppression of freedom in the country." This is when they (supporters of the Revolution) meddle in the performance of government duties and do things which should be done by government organs. I call upon such people to let the responsible organs perform their job as they should.

If an individual violates Islamic rules, we as Muslims are duty bound to make efforts to prevent him. In doing so, however, we must comply with the conditions as stipulated in our Islamic jurisprudential treatises on applying the principle of *Amr b'il Ma' ruf wa Nahi an Al-Munkar* (efforts to enjoin good and forbid evil). This principle, however, has various stages which include the following:

A. That one should enjoin the Ma'ruf (good and decent) and detest the Munkar (evil and obscene) deep in one's heart (this is in cases when one is unable to do anything against the offender.)

B. One's pleasure and happiness upon encountering the good and displeasure when witnessing a case of evil should be reflected on one's face (e.g. an encouraging smile of approval for good actions and a frown of indignation for wicked deeds.)

C. One should engage in a vocal encouragement of the good. In a similar manner, one must openly criticize and reproach the evil-doers.

D. In this stage one should take action to some extent and directly warn the person committing evil.

E. The fifth stage refers to occasions when force becomes expedient in implementing justice and the good and in preventing tyranny and evil. In this case, Islamic laws should be put into practice by the organs concerned and it is imperative that individuals and groups refrain from embarking on any irrelevant intrusion. If affairs are handled by non-governmental individual and group. The critic (of the revolution) will be emboldened into fabricating and use accusations that the country has been plunged into chaos, anarchy and lack of Islamic order and discipline. In cases like these, such statements will not seem entirely baseless.

Brothers and sisters! Safeguard the laws of Allah with all your might, awareness and vigilance. Let us all consider it our duty to enjoin good, prevent evil, support truth and justice and fight corruption, tyranny and falsehood. In carrying out this duty we must abide by our noble Islamic heritage to divest the opposition of any excuse to propagate against our glorious Islamic Revolution.

Summing up, I would like to touch once more on these major points:

1. Islam considers man's liberty as the most exalted aspect of his being. Man is the glittering diamond of creation because he has been gifted (by God) with freedom and wisdom.

2. Islam, to a great extent, believes that the free and erudite human being is well capable of determining the path that will lead to his growth and development of his talents. Islam urged man to traverse the path to perfection by means of his inner guide i.e. wisdom.

3. Aided by his analytical mind, man discovers another great fountain of knowledge in the Divine revelation, prophet hood, book of God and the traditions of His messengers. Thus, man's knowledge does not exclusively emanate from what he perceives through reason; it also includes knowledge inspired by the Divine Revelation.

4. Once man perceives the Divine Will and Purpose of creation, then he will not depend on his own wisdom alone in making the laws of life. While wisdom plays its role in legislation, it is nevertheless Divine Revelation that serves man as a foundation of all his rational thoughts and pursuits. In an Islamic order, therefore all laws and ordinances stem from the Divine Revelation. The role of human reason as mentioned earlier, will be the interpretation and regulation of the laws.

5. Islam considers man a free being. This is why it urges man not to bow before corruption under any circumstances. Islam deems it incumbent upon man to destroy the nucleus of corruption or die fighting it; or at least immigrate from where corrupt practices are prevalent. This, however, does not mean that Islam is indifferent and insensitive toward the effects a corrupt and oppressive social order may impose on individuals in the society.

6. From the Islamic point of view, man, though conceptualized as free, is subject to certain social limitations. He is free, but within the framework and jurisdiction of Divine Laws.

7. In the Islamic Republic, corrupt, oppressive and aggressive practices will be prevented and duly punished by jurisprudential authorities; their prevention is not confined to mere gestures of piety and conscience.

8. The law and order in the Islamic Republic is primarily founded upon faith and religious and human conscience; and secondarily on a powerful government.

9. A Muslim brought up in an Islamic environment is repulsive toward all tyranny and corruption; he will never be indifferent to such issues. It is a community consisting of faithful and militant men who always react against corruption and this is the kind of society we endeavor to establish.

10. The task of interpreting God's ordinances is a duty laid on the shoulders of a Marja' at-Taqlid (top jurisprudent whose religious decrees are honored and followed by the people) who is brave, just and abreast of current issues. Such a task cannot be handled by an ordinary person who may interpret Islamic laws arbitrarily. While freedom of expression is the right of every individual, the final verdict and criterion are to be decided by a Marja' at-Taqlid who is a savant and authority in Islamic jurisprudence, pious, just, brave and well-informed of current events. In the interpretation of Divine Laws. Our Islamic community follows the views of such a religious leader and not any individual or group. In this way, our community has always a clear-cut policy. Whether one calls it a liberal or non-liberal society, is not a matter of our concern. What counts is the essence, not the name.

Brothers and sisters! We should meet in gatherings like this more often and discuss the essence of Islamic issues on a concrete, clear and decisive basis, lest we should be caught in confusion over trivial issues like names, with the inventors of falsehood. Names are immaterial and undaunted by names, we should pay attention to the essence in order to preserve the totality of the genuine and non-eclectic essence of our Islamic Revolution.

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