

Chapter 14: Governing Is Not Distinct From Spiritual Leadership

There is no doubt whatsoever that while the great prophet of Islam was the governor of people he was, at the same time, the spiritual leader of the people.

According to the Quranic verses, and Islamic texts and history, the Prophet began founding the structure of the Islamic government from the day he started living in Medina and resumed all the obligations of a genuine governor and delegated some of the political, social and economic affairs of the Islamic community to the qualified individuals.

The signs of the Prophet's appointment by God are too many to be dealt with here. However, a few of them will be presented.

1. The Holy Quran considers the Prophet worthier than Muslims:

﴿ النَّبِيُّ أَوْلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ ﴾

“The Prophet has a greater claim on the faithful than they have on themselves”. [1](#)

2. The Holy Quran assigns the Prophet to judge over the divine laws for people,

﴿ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ﴾

“Therefore judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their low desires (to turn away from the truth)”. [2](#)

3. Not only did the Prophet himself govern people and judge over them but he used to appoint a qualified man as the governor, another person as the judge and a third person as the teacher for

religious issues as soon as he conquered a location. On some occasions all three positions would be given to one individual.

While the Prophet lived, Imam Ali (as), Abdullah Ibn Masud, Abu Ibn Kaab and Zayd Ibn Thabit and others used to carry out Judicial affairs³.

When the Prophet conquered Mecca and Yemen he appointed Atab Ibn Asid as the governor of Mecca and Bazan as the governor of Yemen.

Abdul Hayy Ketani, the author of Al-Taratib Al-Edariyyah has collected the names of the Muslim governors who worked as the Prophet's representatives in different fields in the socio-political and economic affairs. The study of this book gives us a glimpse of the Prophet's approach in governing the Islamic territories⁴.

By inviting people to take part in holy wars for the spread of monotheism, by propagating military and defensive instructions among Muslims, and through the Prophet's participation in twenty seven holy wars, and finally. the through appointment of fifty five leaders for the wars in which he did not participate, Islam depicted its true picture of the Islamic government. It proved that unlike Christianity, its invitation did not deal only with spiritual and mental aspects of life; neither was its main objective giving people advice; rather, the Islamic invitation included the foundation of a powerful government which could protect Muslims against foes and its book and religion against tyranny ensuring the realization of the divine rules in the community.

The economic institutes of Islam which deal with governmental revenues (such an Infal or war-booty) and national revenues (such an alms Khums- the statutory 20% Islamic levy on certain qualifying amounts) are a clear sign of the fact that Islam is a comprehensive and complete social system that deals with all aspects of man's social life and does not limit itself to a series of rigid religious ceremonies, which take place only once a week. This statement however, does not imply that the very foundation of true Christianity was like this. Rather it was the fake Christians, such as Caesars and the popes, who gradually transformed Christianity into its present form and deprived this religion of its social aspects despite the fact that most prophets possessed high positions in society. The Holy Quran explicitly talks about Lut and Joseph:

“And as for Lut, we gave him wisdom and knowledge”⁵.

“And when he [Yusuf] had attained his maturity, We Gave him wisdom and knowledge”.

And Yusuf [Joseph] thankfully replies to God:

﴿ رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ ﴾

“My Lord! Thou hast given me of the kingdom and taught me the interpretation of sayings”⁶

The Holy Quran has talked about David's judgment and Solomon's government and Talut and his special privilege for government, and in this way has introduced divine prophets as the very founders of divine government and as the performers of hidden commands⁷.

By studying the issue of enjoining the Good and forbidding the Evil, which is one of the active principles of Islamic government, and through studying the Islamic laws on transactions, boundaries and other jurisprudential chapters, we could understand the very nature of Islamic government which has been laid by the Prophet of Islam. This sort of government is so obvious that we do not have to explain it here.

The position of explaining the Divine commandments and guiding people

Beside his political position, the great prophet of Islam was the describer of the divine commandments and the objectives and contents of Quranic verses.

In the following verse, the Holy Quran introduces the Prophet as the introducer of the sacred concepts in the Holy Book:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

“And We have revealed to you the reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them”. ⁸

The word “لِيُبَيِّنَ” so that you may make clear to men indicates that the Prophet's job was not merely the reading of these verses to people but also to explain to people what they meant.

The Prophet, due to orders from the Holy Quran was the divine instructor of the Holy Book and the true teacher of God's wise commands. The Holy Quran says:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ



“He it is Who raised among the illiterates an Apostle from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error”. [9](#)

During his life–time, the Great prophet possessed two positions simultaneously (i.e. being a commander and the divine Guide); naturally, after his demise, the Islamic community needed another dignitary such as the Prophet to carry out these two related positions.

Now, we should find out who could perform these two roles.

It is clear that the announcement of the divine commandments and guiding people in the right way depend on immunity against sins and wrongdoings. This is because such guidance requires absolute chastity and immunity against sins and immense of knowledge. In other words, the leader of the Islamic community should have a command over the principles and practical laws of Islam; or else he would not act as a divine leader among people. In the future we will prove that such a guidance would be impossible without chastity on the part of the leader.

The Holy Quran provides two reasons for the appointment of Talut as the commander:

1. His superiority in knowledge;
2. His physical and bodily strength by which he could work for people under severe conditions (the necessity of this physical condition has been proved by experience in the past and has become a proverb, which says: true wisdom is located inside a healthy body).

Now observe the text of the verse:

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ ﴾

“Surely Allah has chosen him in preference to you and he has increased him abundantly in knowledge and physique”. [10](#)

While Imam Ali (as) was speaking to a group of soldiers and army officers to invite them for Holy wars he used the above verse to prove his merit and worthiness in the management of the affairs of the Islamic community, saying:

O people! Follow and obey the Quran which was revealed to your prophet. By God, we still read in the Holy Quran that after the demise of Moses, a group of Isralites asked their prophet to ask God to send them a governor and commander so that they could participate in Holy wars. Then God appointed Talut as their commander. But that group did not accept him and doubted his capabilities in the management of affairs. Then God revealed to his prophet that Talut was appointed because of his superiority in knowledge and his physical capabilities” [11](#).

To verify the appropriateness of the Infallible for caliphate, Imam Mujtaba (as) too, stressed on their vast knowledge of religious commands and the Ummah's needs, saying:

O people, the leaders should be among the Prophet's Household and nobody else is qualified for such a position. Through His Quran and His prophet, God has approved of such a position for us. This is because knowledge is with us. We are aware of any event that will take place in the world up to the day of resurrection, even of any scratch on anybody's skin"[12](#).

It is not right to separate these two positions

The separation of the governor and the spiritual leader is not the product of the Sunnite ideology: rather, it has a precedent in history.

The Saqifah event came to its end and Abu Bakr came out as the governor. Among the Prophet's followers and friends some became extremely angry over Imam Ali's deprivation of the right of leadership; this is because they still remembered what the Prophet had said concerning Imam Ali at the occasions of their departure from Medina at the war of Tabuk,[13](#) and on the day of Ghadir[14](#) and on his death bed[15](#).

Thus, a group of Muslims became agitated over Abu Bakr's election and, without taking sides, came to the caliph, asking him questions concerning Ali (as). The caliph and his associates had no answer except for the rationalization that these two positions should be separated, saying the positions of commandment and religious leadership could not be gathered in one family.

Buraidah Ibn Khusaib was one of the Prophet's close friends who was absent from Medina when the Prophet passed away. When he entered Medina, he observed the turbulence. Then he established the flag he had in his hands in front of Ali's house and, agitated, he entered the mosque. Addressing the caliph and his associates, he said:

Do you remember the day when the Prophet ordered us all to greet Ali as our head and as the commander of all faithful ones by the expression “السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ”. Now you have forgotten all these recommendations?

Adhering to the theory of the separation of the two positions, the caliph said: each day God carries out different affairs. He would never put both prophethood (the spiritual leadership) and commandership in one person.

This is taken to mean that the Prophet's Household members should either be the Muslims' leaders and teach shariah or be the political leaders for Muslims; and these two should never come together.

But these two positions had been gathered in the person of the Prophet. Other prophets, too, such as Solomon, had these two positions simultaneously.

Or perhaps the caliph meant that these two positions had to be separated after the Prophet's demise? However, this hypothesis, like the previous one, is baseless.

Thus, while Imam Baqir (as) discusses the theory of the separation of these two positions as held by the coordinators of Saqifah, he quotes the following verse of the Holy Quran to annul the separation view: this verse confirms the view that these two positions were put in Ibrahim's children:

﴿ أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ فَقَدْ آتَيْنَا آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مُلْكًا عَظِيمًا ﴾

“Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Ibrahim's children the Book and the wisdom, and We have Given them a grand kingdom”. [16](#)

After reciting the above verse Imam Baqer (as) asked: why do they confess to the combination of these two positions in Ibrahim's Household but deny it in Muhammad's Household?

Christianity – oriented view

Fundamentally the separation of these two roles is a Christianity-oriented view. This is because it is today's metamorphosed Christianity which declares that it is its job to let a Caesar do a Caesar's job. But Islam is a system of laws which can deal with all sorts of materialistic and spiritual affairs and can provide man with social, moral, political and economic approaches to solve his problems.

Islam whose very foundation is based on social management, could not separate spiritual leadership from political leadership.

In Islam, governing people is not an objective in itself and an Islamic leader accepts such a role only to correct an evil-doer.

Imam Ali (as), referring to those governors who look at the government as an objective in itself, says:

“وإن دنياكم هذه أزهى عندي من عظمة عنز”

“The world of yours is meaner in my view than the water from a goat's nose”. [17](#)

A group of the elite in the past and in the present assume that the only way to unite both Shiites and Sunnites is for them to divide these two roles between then caliphs and the Prophet's Household and let the caliphs rule and govern and the spiritual leadership do the job of the Infallible so that in this way the fourteen century conflicts between these two sects could come to an end and let Muslims be united vis-

à-vis the imperialism of east and west.

However, this view is also wrong because it is squarely based on a sort of Christianity-oriented view or secularism.

How could we, contrary to the Quranic text, separate these two?

There are other ways for the unity of these two sects, and that is the commonalities between them. All follow one book, one prophet and one Qibla (kaaba) and share many principles and practical laws. Disagreements in other aspects should not end in calamities and blood-shed. Having unity and political harmony, each group should be free to defend its ideology and at the same time should not forget their unity against the common foes (colonialism and Zionism).

[1.](#) . Quran 33:6.

[2.](#) . Quran 5:84.

[3.](#) . Al-Taratib Al-Edariyyah, vol 1, p. 285.

[4.](#) . Refer to volume 1, pp. 240-264.

[5.](#) . Quran 22:74, Quran 12:22.

[6.](#) . Quran 12:10.

[7.](#) . Refer to the surahs Quran 38:26 and to 27: 15-18.

[8.](#) . Quran 16:44.

[9.](#) . Quran 62:2.

[10.](#) . Quran 2:247.

[11.](#) . Ehtejaj Tabarsi, vol. 1, p. 353, (in a shortened from).

[12.](#) . Ehtejaj Tabarsi, vol. 2, p. 6.

[13.](#) . While the prophet was on his way to Tabuk, he appointed Ali (as) as his successor, saying: you are to me like Harun was to Musa, except for the fact that there would be no prophet after me. Through thin statement, he gave all his positions, except for his prophethood to Ali.

[14.](#) . We will see the details of Ghadir in chapter 19.

[15.](#) . By this is meant the narration of Thaqalein. See chap 22.

[16.](#) . Quran 4:54.

[17.](#) . Nahj-ul- Balaghah, sermon no. 3.

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