

Session 4: Station of Politics in Religion (Part 2)

Separation of religion and politics an extra-religious outlook

In propounding the separation of religion and politics, they say that they have consulted the Qur'an and are examining it through extra-religious lens. Before examining the sources of Islam and considering what the Qur'an says about politics, they pose this question: In essence, what is man's need for religion? In what issues does he need religion to guide him? Regarding this matter, they have considered two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that in everything and in all aspects of life man is in need of religion. Things such as the way of preparing and consuming food, the way of acquiring and building a house, the way of contracting marriage, and forming a society and government are all the same.

They ask: Should religion solve all these problems and man no longer engage in scientific research? Should we have maximum expectation from religion and consult it for all information? Whenever we want to buy clothes, we need to see what Islam says about it. Whenever we want to eat food, we have to check which food Islam suggests. Whenever we want to consult a doctor, we need to know what Islam advises. Also, we have to find out what religion says about forming a government. Their other hypothesis is that religion has limited jurisdiction and we should have minimum expectation from it. Obviously, religion has an opinion in all matters needed by man, but no religion ever claims that it provides for all the needs of man.

After finding out that religion does not teach us the methods of cooking, curing diseases, engineering, and building airplanes and ships, the distinction between the issues dealt by and not dealt by religion must be examined, and in which areas and spheres religion has been involved. They arrive at the conclusion that religion is concerned only with affairs related to the hereafter and has nothing to do with worldly affairs, and that we should have the least expectation from religion. From religion we should only search for the path of eternal salvation and the means and ways that will make us enter paradise and save us from hell. We should learn from religion how to pray, how to fast, how to perform the *Hajj* pilgrimage, and other matters related to the hereafter.

They assume that they have solved the issue concerning the relationship between religion and politics by demarcating them and separating the jurisdiction of religion from that of politics. It has been stated that politics belongs to mundane affairs while religion is only related to the hereafter. Neither should religion interfere in the domain of politics nor should politics interfere in the domain of religion. Only knowledge and human accomplishments should interfere in politics which deals with the jurisdiction of this world and science. Fields such as physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, psychology, and sociology belong to the domain of science. Religion has nothing to do with them. Religion is only involved in matters pertaining to the hereafter.

The origin of this issue can be traced back to many centuries in the West. When there was conflict and dispute between the ecclesiastical authorities and the men of science and politics it led to wars and clashes between them, and finally to an unwritten peace. They agreed amongst themselves that religion should deal solely with otherworldly affairs and the relationship between man and God; the sole jurisdiction of mundane affairs i.e. political, social and academic, should be left to statesmen and scientists.

This happened in the West. Those who are impressed with the West suggest that such a division of labor also be done in our Islamic country. Religion should only be in the hands of religious scholars and interfere in otherworldly affairs only. Religion and the religious scholars should not meddle in worldly affairs. Politics should, therefore, be entrusted to the political scientists and statesmen, and not to the *fuqaha* and *'ulama'*. In this regard, many speeches are being delivered and lots of articles being written. In proving their theory, they leave no stone unturned in inculcating this notion in the minds of our youth, that the religion and politics are apart.

Unfortunately, some of those who are engaged in cultural affairs are unconsciously influenced by this notion and other cultural waves of the West. It is gradually being accepted that religion is the opposite of politics. Religion solves a part of human problems but worldly problems have nothing to do with religion. Erroneous and deviant ideas of our writers, orators and cultural figures pose serious threats to our religious culture.

Close-knit connection between this world and the hereafter

The fact of the matter is that our life is divided into this world and the hereafter. That is, we have a period of life which commences at our birth and ends at our death. Then, the second part of our life begins on entering purgatory [*'alam al-barzakh*] and facing resurrection.¹ This division of life does not necessarily mean that our actions and behavior in this world shall be divided into two and viewed from two perspectives. At any rate, we are in the world of action. Religion is revealed to guide our actions in the world, through a series of commandments and ordinances.

Thus, the religious commandments are not only for after death. It is not correct to say that a portion of our fifty or sixty year-long lives is related to the hereafter while another portion is related to this world.

Rather, we have nothing in this world which is not related to the hereafter. All our actions in this world automatically assume an otherworldly form. That is, our actions here may be beneficial or harmful for us in the hereafter. Since our actions affect our otherworldly lives, the religious and Islamic view is that life in the hereafter is settled in this very world:

أَلْيَوْمَ عَمَلٌ وَلَا حِسَابَ وَ غَدًا حِسَابٌ وَلَا عَمَلٌ

“Today is the time for action and not for reckoning while tomorrow is the time for reckoning and not for action,”²

And

أَلْدُنْيَا مَزْرَعَةُ الْآخِرَةِ

“This world is the sowing ground for the hereafter.”³

So, we will reap in the hereafter the fruit and product of whatever we sow in this world. It is not correct to say that our worldly life is alien to our otherworldly life; that a part of our actions are related to the life in this world while another part is related to the hereafter; and that we have two distinct spheres of life for this world and the hereafter. Instead, all our actions in this world such as breathing, blinking, walking, sitting, rising, looking, social intercourse, speaking, listening, eating, marital relationship, and government–people relationship can be such that ensure our felicity in the hereafter, or bring harm to us. It is true that the style of cooking and consumption of food are related to this world but the same act of eating can send us to paradise, or throw us into hellfire:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا وَسَيَصْلُونَ سَعِيرًا﴾

“Indeed those who consume the property of orphans wrongfully only ingest fire into their bellies, and soon they will enter the Blaze.”⁴

Anyone who fills his stomach with the property of orphans eats food and enjoys doing so, but the food he eats will become chastisement of the hell for him. Similarly, if a person eats food for the sake of worshipping God, the same act of eating will have a spiritual reward. The same word that a person utters for the sake of pleasing God will be a tree growing in paradise for him. The Holy Prophet (s) said to his companions: “For anyone who recites *tasbehat al-arba’ah*⁵ God gives him a tree that grows in paradise.” Some said: “So, we shall have many trees in paradise because we recite this *dhikr* [remembrance of God] frequently.” He said, “Yes, provided that you do not kindle fire to consume them.”

Thus, once our actions are done for the sake of pleasing God, they will bring about eternal felicity and

rewards, and if they are done against the order of God, they will be the cause of perdition and chastisement in hell. It is not correct to say that our lives have two distinct divisions; one of which is related to the hereafter and is spent in the mosque, church, synagogue, and temple, while another part is related to this world and to ourselves and has nothing to do with the hereafter.

As we have said, this erroneous thinking was prevalent for the past centuries in the West among the followers of certain religions and occupied the minds of many in spite of the fact that neither Islam nor any other revealed religion ever endorsed such a notion. The contention of true religion is that man is created in order to secure his own felicity or perdition, and that his eternal felicity or perdition, as the case may be, lies in his behavior in this world. If his behavior is consistent with the command of God, he will attain eternal bliss, and, if otherwise, he will incur everlasting damnation.

The “minimalist” view on the question of expectation from religion is the result of a fallacy they committed. They imagined that expecting the maximum from religion meant they would have to seek all the information about everything from religion, including the style of cooking food and building a house, which information religion could not provide, so they said that they should not expect the maximum from religion. This is fallacious because the above issue does not have only two options. It has a third option which is the correct one, and that is, we do not expect that religion to say something about everything, including the manner of eating food, wearing clothes and building a house. No one has such a claim. However, since religion has left many issues to the realm of non-religious sciences, the same issues actually belong to the jurisdiction of religion. In this way, they acquire ideological value.

Ideological baptism of actions in this world

Once we consider the life in this world as linked to the life in the hereafter and believe that the totality of man’s actions and behavior plays a role in his perfection or downfall, it will acquire ideological value and we will give religion the right to judge each action. In simpler terms, religion informs us about the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our actions and not the manner of performing them.

Religion says that eating certain foods is unlawful [*haram*] and sinful. For example, eating pork and drinking wine are *haram*, but to say something about the manner of making wine and breeding pig is none of the business of religion. The reason behind religious permissions and prohibitions is their positive or negative effects in the otherworldly life of man, and it states the moral value of every action.

In other words, the path of man toward perfection begins from a point toward infinity. That which is useful for our perfection and provides the ground for the spiritual advancement of man is proportionate to the degree of *wajib*, *mustahabb* [recommended] or at least *mubah* [permissible] acts performed. The performance of *haram* and, to a lower degree, *makruh* [abominable] acts will keep him away from his true perfection and God. So, religion does not say what food to eat or how to cook it and how to build a house.

However, it says that you should not build a house on usurped land or you should not build a house in such a way that it overlooks the house of another and invades his privacy. It also says that you should build your house with *halal* income and not out of money earned through usury [*riba*]. In reality, religion mentions the ideological manner of building a house. It also invites us to consume foods that are effective in our human and spiritual growth and avoid unlawful foods, alcoholic beverages, and narcotic drugs, which are unhealthy for us:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾ *
﴿...إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ﴾

“O you who have faith! Indeed wine, gambling, idols and the divining arrows are abominations of Satan’s doing, so avoid them, so that you may be felicitous. Indeed Satan seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah.”⁶

Hence, the permission and prohibition of religion is meant to expound the ideological value of all actions. To sum up apart from the worldly outcome of actions, religion also speaks about every action’s contribution to the doer’s admission to paradise or entrance to hell.

Radiant capability of intellect in discerning value of actions

The ideological value of action from the perspective of permissibility or prohibition is sometimes so clear and unambiguous that the human intellect can discern it well and there is no longer need for religion to state its ruling about it. In fact, the intellect alone can identify the decree of God. As such, concerning “rational independence” [*mustaqillat al-‘aqliyyah*], the *fuqaha* have said that in some cases the intellect can independently give a judgment and know the goodness [*husn*] or badness [*qubh*] of actions. Through the use of the intellect, we discern that the will of God is in the performance or abandonment of an act; we discern that God is pleased or displeased with a certain act.

Our intellect understands that taking out a slice of bread from the mouth of an orphan is an abhorrent act. In this regard, there is no need to state the religious ruling of law, though sometimes, in addition to the discernment of the intellect, the Qur’an and *ahadith* have also mentioned the religious rulings which actually confirm the judgment of the intellect. In most cases, nonetheless, the intellect does not possess the capability to understand that a certain action (depending on its being positive or negative, and how valuable) is obligatory [*wajib*], prohibited [*haram*], recommended [*mustahabb*], abominable [*makruh*], or permissible [*mubah*]. It is at this point that religion has to state the type and degree of impact of a certain act on our ultimate perfection.

Jurisdiction of Religion

Once we observe the commandments of religion, we will realize that the jurisdiction of religion is not restricted to personal matters. It rather deals with social issues such as those related to family, marriage, divorce, and commerce, and states the scope of *halal* and *haram* and their ideological values. By stating the ideological value of those things, religion actually explains their orientation—which form will lead toward God and which will incline toward Satan. This is something which science is incapable of dealing with.

Science mentions the amount and kind of elements needed to form different things and enumerates the physical and chemical properties, but it does not state how to use things in order to secure the real success of man. In this case, religion has to judge. Therefore, just as our personal action affects our felicity or wretchedness, our action in sociopolitical affairs has greater effect.

Meanwhile, in connection with the main axis of our discussion, which is social administration, can it be said that the mode of managing society has no relation with the ultimate success or failure of man and that the people in society are free to choose whatever form and method of administering their society, and religion has nothing to do with it? Who does not know that observance of justice in society gives success to man and that justice has a very strong positive value?

In this context, even if there is no pertinent Qur'anic verse or *hadith*, our intellect will discern that the observance of justice contributes toward the perfection, advancement and exaltation of man. When people do not regard their intellect as sufficient to discern ideological issues in these contexts, they have to resort to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Of course, we believe that the intellect can understand many of the ideological issues in sociopolitical affairs. This does not mean, however, that whatever the intellect understands is outside the realm of religion.

We have mentioned earlier the “discoverer” of the will of God, which expresses the divine will and wisdom and conveys to us what is pleasing to God. It makes no difference how we discover this thing. What matters is that we discovered the divine legislative will.

Sometimes, this discovery is through the agency of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* while, at other times, through the intellect, for these three are the proofs and discoverers of divine decrees and religious laws. As such, the intellect [*ʿaql*] is considered as a source of divine law. The *fuqaha* regard the intellect as among the proofs in proving religious decrees and settling religious issues.

So, there is no demarcation between the intellect and religious law [*sharʿ*]—some matters belong to the intellect while some others belong to religious law. Rather, the intellect is a light which, owing to its luminosity, can also discover the will and pleasure of God, and whatever can be discovered by the intellect in this regard is a religious matter.

Relationship between Religion and Government

In view of the different forms of government existing in the world, especially the so-called Islamic governments formed during the Islamic period, it cannot be said that Islam has neither a positive nor negative view on the forms of government. If we try to compare the corrupt and oppressive government of Mu'awiyah⁷ and Yazid⁸ with the just government of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), can we claim that the religion of Islam treats the two equally and does not make any distinction between the government of 'Ali ('a) and that of Mu'awiyah?!

Can it be said that everybody is free to choose any form and system of government he likes, and religion cannot interfere; that the performance of neither the government of 'Ali ('a) nor that of Mu'awiyah has any effect on the ultimate fate of man because the form of government is related to politics and this world and has nothing to do with religion?! Could any reasonable person accept such a contention? Can it be said that the two types of government are equal in the sight of religion and that religion neither recommends nor discourages any of them?

The fact of the matter is that involvement in sociopolitical affairs is among the most evident areas in which religion must get involved. Religion has to explain the appropriate structure of government. Religion has to explain that the ruler has to think about the deprived and the downtrodden as well as about the consolidation of the pillars of his rule from the very beginning of his assumption of office.

Thus, the station of sociopolitical issues in religion, especially in Islam, is clear and eminent. One cannot consider them outside the jurisdiction of religion and believe that they have no effect in the felicity and wretchedness of people. Assuming that the hereafter, the Reckoning, the book of account, reward and punishment really exist, can it be said that the behavior of Mu'awiyah, Yazid and the like has no effect on them?! Of course, even if some of our Sunni brothers have not yet resolved the issue of Mu'awiyah's uprightness, there are many tyrants and oppressors who have blackened the pages of history.

Can it be said that these tyrannical rulers are ideologically on the same footing as the just rulers? Today, are those who are butchering and bombing innocent women and children equal to those who are totally in the service of the deprived and the oppressed, and will live together in paradise? Which religion or nation supports this view? How then can sociopolitical issues be considered as outside the realm of religion? If religion were supposed to give its opinion about reward and punishment, *halal* and *haram*, positive and negative values, then sociopolitical issues are the most important issues about which religion must give its opinion.

Based on what has been stated, the scheme on the basis of which religious issues are separate from that of the world and religious issues are just related to God and the hereafter and are outside the realm of worldly affairs, is totally erroneous and inadmissible, and in no way consistent with Islam. The worldview presented by Islam and the life to which it invites us are repugnant to this way of thinking. This is not to mention the fact that those who are uttering such words essentially believe in neither God nor

the Day of Resurrection. They are doing so with the aim of expelling religion from the scene. But we have nothing to do with their personal conviction.

Our only point is that separating mundane affairs and temporal issues from the jurisdiction of religion will lead to the denial of Islam and has no other outcome. As we have said, every action contributes to our felicity or wretchedness, as the case may be. So, we have to acknowledge that religion can give its opinion on all matters in our lives and state their ideological value. As the Prophet (s) said:

مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ يَقْرِبُكُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَيَبَاعِدُكُمْ عَنِ النَّارِ إِلَّا وَقَدْ أَمَرْتُمْ بِهِ وَمَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ يَقْرِبُكُمْ مِنَ النَّارِ وَيَبَاعِدُكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ إِلَّا وَقَدْ نَهَيْتُمْ عَنْهُ.

“There is nothing that would draw you toward paradise and keep you away from hell except that I commanded you and there is nothing that would draw you toward hell and keep you away from paradise except that I prohibited you.”⁹

In the Islamic perspective, felicity without paradise has no meaning and wretchedness without being thrown into hellfire simply does not exist:

﴿فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ شَقُوا فِي النَّارِ... وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سَعِدُوا فِي الْجَنَّةِ﴾

“As for the wretched, they shall be in the Fire... And as for the happy, they shall be in Paradise.”¹⁰

Universality of Religion

In view of the statement of the Prophet (s), the other assumption is refuted, and to say that it is true that religion can state the value of actions and say what is *halal* and *haram* but it was the Prophet (s) himself who stated the values of some actions while some were delegated to the people, i.e., he stated whatever was related to his own time, delegating the rest to the people to identify what is *halal* and what is *haram* according to the circumstances of their time.

This statement means that the Prophet (s) did not state all that would give us felicity. This is what he said: “There is nothing that will ensure your felicity except that I have stated it.” Of course, this statement does not mean that he has stated all the minute details. He has rather stated the general rulings, so that, in all times after him, those who have authority can deduce from them specific laws; what is *halal* and *haram* according to the evidence, and present them as primary and secondary rulings or government decrees.

Undoubtedly, to identify the specific laws and evidence, which is called religious edict [*fatwa*], is in

accordance with the general principles mentioned in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah (s) and sayings of the infallible Imams (‘a).

1. Of course, another part of life prior to the life in this world can also be considered and that is the life in the womb.
2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 32, p. 354.
3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 225.
4. Surah an-Nisa' 4: 10.
5. Tasbihat al-arba'ah: literally, the four tasbihs; it refers to the recital of "Subhan Allahi wa'l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar" [Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is greater]. [Trans.]
6. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:90-91.
7. Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan was the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty (40 AH/662 CE), which ruled the Muslim world after the martyrdom of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and the five-month rule of the second Imam, Hasan ibn 'Ali (‘a). As the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'awiyah revived hereditary monarchy and aristocracy in sharp contrast and opposition to the rudimentary precepts of Islam. [Trans.]
8. Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah (26-62 AH) succeeded his father to occupy the office of the caliphate in the year 60 AH. He was a young man devoid of knowledge and virtues and was well known for his debauchery and other vices. Yazid ruled for three and a half years. During his first year he killed Imam al-Husayn (‘a) and his votaries at Karbala' and made the latter's surviving kith and kin captives. In his second year as Caliph, he ransacked Medina (the seat of the Prophet's rule and his burial site), and in his third year of rule he invaded Mecca. [Trans.]
9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 70, p. 96.
10. Surah Hud 11:106, 108.

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