

The Essence of Tawhid

The day the Prophet (S) of Islam, charged with the mission of salvation of mankind, announced the principle of لا إله إلا الله (there is no god but Allah), the first to oppose him—at first through derision and verbal attacks and later through the force of arms—were no other than the chiefs and leaders of various tribes. It was under their influence that other people also arose against the Prophet and his spiritual allies, and once again a shameful era in human history was repeated in the thirteen years that elapsed before Hijrah. This historical fact deserves close study for any new attempt to understand Islam in general, and in particular the principle of *Tawhid*, which is central to Islamic teachings.

One of the most unfortunate, or rather the greatest tragedy of our times, is the distortion and misinterpretation of the message brought by all God's prophets, namely, the doctrine of *Tawhid*, which is the most fundamental tenet of religion; because no other concept or doctrine in the history of human ideas has its power and potential for liberation and emancipation of oppressed human beings.

As far as we know, all prophetic missions were aimed at bringing about revolutionary change for the benefit of the human kind. The purpose which all the principal religions of the world aimed at, was to liberate the oppressed and downtrodden masses from the evil clutches of injustice and social discrimination, or, in the words of Erich Fromm, it was realization of the ideals of wisdom, brotherly love, reduction of human misery and stimulation of the sense of independence and responsibility (and of course realization of other sublime ideals—things a materialistic researcher fails to perceive).

All these aspirations and ideals are summarized in the principle of *Tawhid*. In propounding this principle, the prophets not only projected all their aims and purposes, but also paved the way for a struggle that ensued with the annunciation of this principle, moving a step nearer towards realization of the goal. This is the reason why, at a time when a great sense of urgency is attached to secondary ideals, ignorance or distortion of this basic principle, or its projection as a superficial and pedantic idea, is a misfortune not only for those who believe in a *Tawhidi* world outlook, but also those who cherish those secondary ideals.

We said that the polarization of groups during the early Islamic era itself can be indicative of the true importance of *Tawhid*.

In fact the dictum لا إله إلا الله was, in the first place, aimed as a strong blow at those who rose to oppose it: the ruling and dominant class of the society. The acts which reflect hostile reaction against any movement are always eloquent revealers of its social standpoint and the extent of effectiveness and depth of its roots in that society. A face reading of the opponents and the knowledge of their group loyalties is sufficient to reveal its standpoint with respect to various classes and its social approach.

The extent of intensity and earnestness on the part of its opponents can serve as an indicator to measure the extent of its depth and profundity also. The most reliable way to understand various prophetic missions is to scrutinize the ranks of its supporters as well as those of its opponents. If we minutely observe, we shall find that it was ever the dominant class of society which was the first to wage war against all the prophets of God, and was the staunchest of their enemies.

From this we can distinctly perceive that the prophets and their religious movements were, of nature, opposed to the character of this class; they were against its exercise of power and force, its accumulation of wealth and, basically, against the very system of class stratification which gave it predominance over the rest of society.

Before we elucidate the principle of *Tawhid* from this point of view, that is, its rejection of social predominance by a single class, I think it necessary to mention the fact that *Tawhid*, contrary to the popular belief that it is merely an intellectual and philosophical theory, is not only a fundamental outlook regarding man and universe, but a social, economic, and political doctrine as well.

Amongst all religious and non-religious terms and concepts it would be difficult to find any term or concept so loaded with constructive and revolutionary implications, which cover diverse social and historical aspects of human existence. It was no accident that every one of all the Divine movements in history was launched with so much of emphasis on Unity of God, His unshared Divinity and authority over the whole universe.

Some of the various dimensions of the principle of *Tawhid* can be explained as follows.

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