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Our Revolution and the Future of Islam

Civilizations rise and fall. From the dawn of history this has been the fate of Sumerian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Islamic civilizations. At its zenith, Islam acted as the conduit between these ancient civilizations and the modern age. Today, it is Western civilization that reigns supreme, casting its shadow upon all corners of the world.

The Interplay of Civilizations

Unless they are completely unaware of each other's existence, civilizations ordinarily affect and transform one another. For instance, America's indigenous civilization was completely unknown to the outside world until Europeans discovered the continent.

But once the connection was made, the massive tide of explorers and immigrants who conquered and appropriated the new world could not be held back. Using their superior power and resources, the newcomers ruthlessly subjugated and destroyed the continent's old civilization. The wave of European immigrants that took over the Americas eventually succeeded in turning North America into the most powerful center of Western civilization.

Give-and-take among civilizations is the norm of history. Prior to the discovery of the Americas, the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe had been in contact since antiquity, transforming one another in various ways. Fundamentally influenced by Greek civilization, Islam played a central mediating role by introducing Europeans to the achievements of Greek thought and philosophy. Thus 'new' civilizations are never new in the true sense, for they always feed on the work of previous civilizations, appropriating and digesting all that fits their needs, dispensing with all that does not.

The Main Sources of the Emergence of Civilizations

Of the many factors that spur the emergence, rise, and demise of civilizations, two are fundamental: the dynamism of the human mind, and the concomitant surfacing of new needs and necessities in human life.

The human mind is instinctively active, perpetually driven by a burning curiosity that confronts a never-ending chain of new questions to which it must find answers, or it will not rest or be content. But once a discovery is made, the new answers bring to view an untested world replete with new questions, an eternal cyclical process.

At the same time, humans strive to fulfill their material needs, which beckons them to seek greater mastery over the natural world through invention and innovation. The combination of the will to dominate nature and the will to create alters the material and psychological makeup of the human world, and this creates new needs and necessities.

The dynamism of the human constitution and the resulting search for answers to pressing questions or needs spurs a constant transformation of the human historical consciousness. The same two fundamental qualities of humans that underpin the inevitability of change are also the cause of the emergence and decline of civilizations. While other human, social, and natural factors slow down or accelerate the coming, going, and interchange of civilizations, the desire and need for change is the most important in this regard.

Every civilization is based on a specific world-view, which is itself shaped by a people's idiosyncratic historical experience. For as long as the existing worldview successfully addresses the fundamental questions and needs of a community, it remains intact. But when the collective consciousness and soul of a people outgrow the limitations of the existing civilization, the search for new ideas begins in earnest, often taking the form of turning to other civilizations for clues. This is the secret of the emergence, flourishing, and falls of all civilizations.

The Crisis of Civilizations

When it is first born and subsequently at the point of its demise, each civilization places its adherents in a state of crisis. At first, when a new covenant arises in the history of a people and the ground is ripe for the emergence of a new civilization, the social fabric is strained. The new civilization heralds new and often revolutionary customs and mores.

But the previous civilization will not easily relinquish its entrenched and institutionalized dominance. Historically shaped social habits are hard to break. Much of society remains glued to the mental and

emotional predilections of the previous era. The need to throw out the deeply ingrained attachments and replace them with a new worldview induces a painful identity crisis.

At the same time, the new civilization has not been tried out in real life. Its inner contradictions are hidden from view, for it has not passed the litmus test of experience. To endure and lay roots, the new civilization must adapt and fine-tune itself as it encounters the evolving realities of social life. Until this process of adaptation and transformation reaches its fruition, social identity crisis is the norm.

The other instance of crisis, at the point of the demise of a civilization, appears when the dominant worldview cannot satisfy the psychological, material, and social needs of its constituents. People begin to experience a troubling void and sterility. Again, the historically conditioned predilections that are rendered anachronistic will not be easily abandoned. This state of limbo can merely offer the veneer of civilization bereft of substance and soul. An existential void sets in that brings on a full-blown identity crisis.[1]

This discussion is meant to set up the fundamental question, what historical condition does our own society live in and what is going to become of it?

Crisis in the West

Indeed, ours is the age of the dominance and entrenchment of Western civilization, a civilization that has lived for more than four centuries and has made great strides in science, politics, and social regulation. But we must accept that the West today faces an acute crisis, a crisis in its thought and all other spheres. Those familiar with the history of Western civilization and its philosophical, scientific, and artistic expressions can more or less see the signs of this crisis. The West was not confronted with a crisis of this magnitude in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century. What does the current crisis signify?

It is possible to assert that Western civilization is worn out and senile. Four centuries is a long time for a civilization-even though it is possible that in the past some civilizations may have lived longer than this. But science, technology, and electronic communication have vastly accelerated the pace of change like never before. The life of Western civilization from the Renaissance to the present cannot be viewed as short, and to treat Western civilization as old would not be an exaggeration.

From Crisis to Demise of the West?

This is not an easy question to take on. Crises are sometimes limited and temporary. This has often occurred in the life of civilizations, which have displayed the ability to confront crises successfully- and

remain intact. For example, in the nineteenth century, the east managed to successfully surmount the crisis that it encountered.

The capitalist order, which represents a key feature of Western civilization, encountered great difficulties in the second half of the nineteenth century and during the two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. But Marxism came to its rescue. The West managed to modify its mental and material structures, coming out of these crises in one piece.

Despite the claims of its protagonists, Marxism was an impractical and unrealistic philosophy. Precisely because of these deficiencies and its lack of adaptability, it did not last. It was kept standing for seventy years only through the use of force and propaganda. Still, although Marx did not offer a solid and comprehensive philosophy, he was a great pathologist of the capitalist order.

What Marxists proposed forced the West to become introspective and to search for ways of adjusting capitalism's methods to the demands of the time, and to modify its social, economic, and political order from within. One key tactic of the West was to replace its old colonialism–which was sowing the seeds of a worldwide explosion–with neocolonialism. This allowed the West to contain and defuse the crisis, postponing its reemergence for a while.

But what about the present crisis? Can the West also pass through this difficult period unscathed? We cannot predict this with certainty, but to the extent that human understanding and research allows, we can collect evidence and observe empirical reality and arrive at a theory on that basis. This is an important task for objective and judicious academic research.

The West's Antidotes for Crisis

The West has adopted a strategy similar to the one it used at the beginning of this century which allowed it to circumvent previous crises: by modifying the ways of old colonialism into a more sophisticated neocolonialism. The so-called 'new world order' is the West's new strategy for handling a crisis that has shaken it at the core.

Presenting itself as the main sponsor and protector of the 'new world order', the United States is focused on adapting neocolonialism[2] to the new age. The logic of this transformation is similar to the shift from old colonialism to neocolonialism. There is other evidence attesting to the decline of the current Western civilization as well. While it is certain that Western civilization is old and worn out, the question of whether it has reached the end of its path needs more thinking and scrutiny. What does the future hold?

Crisis in Our Revolutionary Society

Our society also confronts a crisis today, and although this crisis is to some extent attributable to global conditions, it is different from the West's crisis. Through our revolution we tried to free ourselves from the shackles of the West's domination.

Our revolution made us introspective, we decided to struggle for our independence, to be masters of our own fate. In this regard, we have made great headway in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. But is it possible that we would fall into the West's trap of domination again? This depends on the path we choose in the future and on what the West's own destiny is.

The Islamic revolution was a momentous event in the history of the Iranian nation and the Islamic community, and we can rightly say that because of our revolution we have dispensed with many borrowed and Western values that dominated our thinking. Through realizing our own authentic historical and cultural identity, we have laid a completely new groundwork for regulating our society.

Our revolution proposed the creation of a religiously based system and our society accepted this with enthusiasm and took steps to reach this great goal. The crisis that we experience today can only be remedied if we shed the vestiges of our borrowed identity and don a new garb. Our current crisis is the crisis of birth, which I referred to earlier. Our new civilization is on the verge of emergence.

We cannot confront this crisis with trepidation. We must embrace it boldly and intelligently. Only when we have understood the most fundamental historical questions of this epoch can we develop the willingness to solve them.

We wish to base our life on the tenets of Islam; we possess the will to create an Islamic civilization. At a time when Western civilization is going through its last days, or at least experiencing senility, we must ask, did not Islamic civilization already emerge once and end centuries ago? And does not the death of a civilization mean that we can no longer base thought and action on its teachings? Does not this rule apply to our history? Does the coming and passing of Islamic civilization mean that the period of Islam, which provided the basis for Islamic civilization, is over?

If the answer to this question is affirmative, has our revolution been a fruitless effort moving against the traditions of creation and laws that govern the march of civilizations? This is one of the most important and pressing questions that confronts our revolution. If we do not approach it with level-headedness and objectivity, if we cannot find a solid answer to this question, our revolution will inevitably encounter great danger and difficulty.

My answer to the above question is negative. But with this answer I do not want to debunk the rule that I

proposed about civilizations. Generally, I believe that the law holds, but on the basis of my view of religion, I take this case not as a falsifier of the above but as falling outside its purview. For what creates a civilization is the vision and effort of humans, while religion is above and beyond the vision of individuals and societies and thus transcends civilizations.

If the sun has set on Islamic civilization despite its many monumental achievements, a certain view of religion–which was appropriate for that period–has ended, not the age of religion itself.

One of the greatest difficulties that religions have encountered historically has arisen out of confusing the specific religious teachings designed for specific times and places with the idea of religion itself. Naturally, with the obsolescence of age– and place–specific religious thought, some have the impression that the era of religion is over as well. But religion transcends the specific civilizations that it gives rise to. Civilization addresses specific needs and dilemmas of a community in a particular time and place. When conditions and times change, new questions arise that in turn require new answers–and hence a new civilization.

Religion, on the other hand, sheds light on questions of eternity, charting a general and timeless path for humanity, giving direction to life despite its ever–changing circumstances. Religion guides human talents to their plateau, instilling in people a sense of duty in different historical conditions.

Thus if we think of religion *as* being identical to civilization or culture, then the passing of civilization must imply that the era of religion is over as well. But if we believe that religion supersedes and transcends civilization and the specific mores of community, then religion can contain many different interpretations that give rise to various civilizations. The inevitable transformations of human life will do no damage to the eternal life of religion.

In this view, the core of religion possesses such dynamism that in any age it can provide answers to questions and a fulfillment of needs. Thus, while the old Islamic civilization has vanished, religion stands deeply rooted and can generate new civilizations, even though the specific interpretations of religion which have spawned past Islamic civilizations have withered.

With this general picture, I will try to address a number of pressing issues that confront our society today.

Our vision of consolidating a system of religious governance in our future–oriented society *cannot* be materialized in a vacuum. We cannot implement this vision without full contact with the international community. We have come upon this important task at a time when Western civilization dominates the world. Yet simultaneously we must try to free ourselves from the domination of the West. It *is* thus natural that we confront the West, and the upshot of this confrontation will determine our future.

Two Countenances of the West

The West displays two features: one political, the other intellectual. Its political orientation serves as the most outward manifestation or veneer of western civilization. The intellectual foundations of Western civilization illustrate its general world view. We must diligently distinguish between these two aspects. Only then can we find the proper way of confronting the West. This path must be traveled with prudence.

Even though the West has grown old, it maintains tremendous political, economic, military, and technological power, simultaneously wielding a formidable propaganda and communication apparatus to manage the world's perceptions. Equally important, the global economy is controlled and regulated by Western financial institutions.

The West's advanced systems and institutions often legitimize its political power, ensuring its decisive presence in all significant global developments. The military might of Western capitalism is also vast, and even if we concede that official military pacts are not as common as they were, the military and destructive power of the West remains intact.

Politically, the West aims to govern all corners of the world and to dominate the theory and practice of international relations. It possesses the material and symbolic sources of power simultaneously, and it will stop at nothing to achieve its goals and protect its interests. Our struggle with the West is of life and-death importance.

In its political embodiment, the West does not wish us-or any people-to be independent, free, and masters of our own fate. For if one feature of Western imperialism is violating others' territories and exploiting their economies, the concomitant feature is dominating the world of ideas. The West propagates a world view that lures its prey into subjugation.

We confront a determined enemy that brings all of its material, military, and informational resources to convince us to surrender, or risk being destroyed if we resist. The bitter experience of confrontation between domination-seeking powers and the oppressed masses is too evident to be hidden to anyone.

In political confrontations the enemy uses the mask of science and culture to deceive us. But in reality its only wish is to induce a people to surrender to its wishes and serve its interests, and to appropriate all of the victims' resources to serve the imperialist power.

Although the West has no qualms about using the most repressive and violent techniques, even its military and overtly oppressive measures are shrouded in seemingly humanistic and misleading guises that divert public opinion from reality.

When colonial powers violate other peoples, they never concede that their aim is to rob the victims' resources or to subjugate them politically. Instead, by abusing their persuasive powers, they try to disguise their crimes through words and ideas that are acceptable to all of humanity.

From old times, colonial powers have used the excuse of developing and civilizing other peoples to violate them and rape their lands. Today, like before, the political motto of the West remains defending freedom, human rights, and democracy.

At this juncture our struggle against the West is central to our survival. Any form of reconciliation and appeasement, given the penchant of the opponent for deception, will lead to nothing but our debasement and trampling on our pride. We must struggle against this with all our might, and victory is not beyond our reach. We must depend on God and ask for His guidance, relying on our own historical identity which we have regained through our revolution.

With faith in the power of an awakened people and by strengthening the desire for independence and freedom, we must stand firmly opposed to an enemy that lacks humanitarian incentives. This is indeed possible. The awesome resistance of our nation to the conspiracies and crimes of the oppressors can be a lesson for all nations who wish to regain their independence and pride.

Yet, while ignoring the politically treacherous goals and conspiracies of the West can be catastrophic, we cannot see the West merely in political terms or reduce its whole civilization to political issues. This would also lead us to a harmful dead end.

Western-civilization is not limited to its political aspects. Alongside Western politics, there is a system of values and thinking which we must also come to understand and learn to deal with. Here we are confronted with our philosophical and moral opposite, not just with a political rival. To understand the West, the best tool is rationality, not heated, flag-waving emotionalism. Not just here, but nowhere, can force offer an effective response to a way of thinking that we consider flawed. That would be self-defeating and counterproductive.

However, mired as they are in shallowness and hype, it is possible that opportunists will take any thought and culture that their audience dislikes and give it political salience and call it a conspiracy to destroy their political base. This does not come from contemplation but from the need to justify their irrational encounter with opposite views, obviating the need for education and a more powerful logic. This is very common among the overly politicized.

Resorting to force is appropriate in confronting a military invasion, conspiracy, or political sabotage. But the way to oppose thought and culture is not through the use of military, security, and judicial means, for using force only adds fuel to the opposite side's fire. We must confront the thought of the opponent by relying on rationality and enlightenment and through offering more powerful and compelling counter

arguments.

Only comprehensive and attractive thinking can repel this sort of danger. If we do not possess such logic and knowledge, we must endeavor to attain it as our first priority. Islam furnishes us with such a capability. And if some Muslims are devoid of it, the fault lies with them, not with Islam.

If, God forbid, some people want to impose their rigid thinking on Islam and call it God's religion–since they lack the intellectual power to confront the opposite side's thinking on its own terms–they resort to fanaticism. This merely harms Islam, without achieving the aims of those people.

In rejecting the West we wish to free ourselves from its political, mental, cultural, and economic domination, for as Muslims, we differ from them fundamentally in world view and values. Thus, to understand our points of contention and to negate the rival's domination, we have no choice but to :appraise and understand the West precisely and objectively.

We have to keep in mind that Western civilization rests on the idea of 'liberty' or 'freedom'. These are indeed the most cherished values for humanity in all ages, and to be fair, Western civilization's march from the Middle Ages to modern centuries has broken many superstitions and chains in thought, politics, and society.

The West has indeed freed humans from the shackles of many oppressive traditions. It has successfully cast aside the deification of regressive thinking that had been imposed on the masses in the name of religion. It has also broken down subjugation to autocratic rule. These are all positive steps and adaptive to the traditions of creation. Yet; at the, same time, the view of the West about humans and freedom has been rigid and one dimensional, and this continues to take a heavy toll on humanity.

When confronting the opponent in the name of rejecting the West and defending religion, if we stifle freedom we will have caused a great catastrophe. Neither the traditions of creation allow this nor does Islam desire it. But if rejecting the West means' critiquing its view of freedom, humanity, and the world, then we will have achieved our most fundamental historical mission. Indeed, we take issue with the West on the notion of freedom.

We do not think that the Western definition of freedom is complete. Nor can the Western view of freedom guarantee human happiness. The West is so self–absorbed in its historical setting and thoughts that it cannot see the calamities that its incorrect view of humanity and freedom has caused. If we look at the West from the outside, we can objectively judge this issue. But achieving this important task requires much intellectual rigor and knowledge.

Benefiting from the West's Experience

As Western civilization becomes increasingly worn out and senile, humanity is today searching for a new vision for its future, awaiting a new civilization which is more capable of meeting its material and spiritual needs and wants. Through our Islamic revolution, we have endeavored to create a new system whose values and visions differ markedly from what is prevalent in the Western-dominated world. Can we claim that our Islamic revolution has opened a new chapter in human history?

As noted above, no civilization is independent of the influences of those that have preceded it. The nature of the human mind does not allow it to suddenly and completely dispense with the experiences and knowledge of previous times.

The secret of the evolution of human life on planet earth is that every person and generation starts its movement where others have left off. If all generations started and ended at the same point, human destiny would be no different from that of bees. The difference between humans and other social animals is that humans learn from their past experience, improve upon it, and leave their achievements for the next generation. This process has continued uninterrupted for as long there has been a human race. Thus, there is no limit to' human evolution.

Civilization, which is the fruit of humans' intellectual emotional, and practical endeavors, works the same way. A vibrant, civilization-building thought is a thought that incorporates all the positive aspects of the previous civilizations, digests it, and adds to it.

Now, on the basis of our popular revolution we wish to construct an Islamic system. But we can only think of our revolution as giving rise to a new civilization if we have the ability to absorb the positive aspects of Western civilization and the wisdom to recognize the negative aspects of it and to refrain from absorbing them. This means that if we can break through the dead ends that the West has reached because of its values, and pass through them unscathed, we will succeed in our mission.

If we must adopt the positive features of Western civilization, simultaneously casting aside its deficiencies, we have no choice but to understand the West correctly and comprehensively in the first place. We must judge it fairly and objectively and learn from and use its strengths, staying clear of its defects by relying on our revolution's Islamic values.

It is obvious that this approach is different from a rigidly political appraisal of the West. Those who cannot separate the political West from the nonpolitical West are acting against the interests of the nation and the Islamic revolution, even though they may be doing so inadvertently. Here, introspection, rationality and objectivity will be effective, not harsh words and violence.

The Difficulties of Our Revolution

In all fairness, our Islamic revolution has been the source of great transformations in many corners of the world, and we, as the source of revolution, are naturally the most affected by these transformations. In the wake of our revolution, we have a mission which is as grand and formidable as the challenges we encounter. Passing through this difficult stage requires much wisdom and far-sightedness, as well as patience and perseverance.

Although Islam had existed for centuries in the collective consciousness of believers as a collection of thoughts and values, our revolution propelled it into the contemporary political and social sphere, where it stands steadfast against its opponents. At the same time, this development has brought three novel challenges to the fore: our people's expectations, the opponent's treachery and conspiracy, and discord within our society.

First, our people's expectations. Now that a new system based on new ideas has taken over the reins of governance, people expect a great deal from it. This is especially true of those who have sacrificed for the system. Before the Islamic revolution, people did not have many expectations because the enemy, giving us the sense that we were not masters of our own fate, dominated our economy, culture, politics, and educational system. But as an Islamic and independent government has come to power-as all of the state's resources have been placed in Islam's hands-people have the right to expect the fulfillment of their needs and wants.

People wish to know specifically how the new system will regulate their lives and guarantee their rights. They also want to know the system's policy toward science, and technology, as well as social justice and equity.

At this juncture, people will not be satisfied with promises alone; they want real, tangible, and practical results. Our system will be successful only if it can meet these expectations.

Some expectations are undoubtedly unrealistic. No government can work miracles overnight and eradicate all bottlenecks. Nor have all of people's expectations been based on a realistic appraisal of available resources. It is conceivable that unrealistic visions as well as impractical and unattainable ideologies have spurred these exaggerated expectations.

Still, government must have the power to satisfy people's needs and guide them to modify their expectations and views. If it is not possible to meet all expectations-and it is not-at least people have to be convinced that our orientation is generally toward a fulfilling life, focused on meeting their spiritual and material needs.

Our society has to believe that what the revolution was offered and what it expects of people will

simultaneously meet individual and societal needs, utilizing all of society's human resources and achievements. Society must also believe that our system is not burdened with the shortcomings and strains that bedevil our opponents. The natural expectations of people put officials and the elite under great pressure to perform, and the enemy fans the flames of people's expectations in various ways.

Second, the opponent's treachery and conspiracy. Before the victory of our revolution we had many theoretical disagreements with opposing schools of thought. Those confrontations were easy to carry out because there was no real friction. But when ideas are put into practice and taken to the social and political sphere, opponents feel more threatened and thus resort to more violent and comprehensive confrontation.

Conspiracy to overthrow the revolutionary system, spying, economic pressure fomenting pessimism and dejection among our people, attributing all our problems to the system's officials and portraying them as incompetent in meeting people's difficulties, and even resorting to military force to damage the revolution and its popular base, are among actions taken by opponents who see their interests threatened by the new system.

Our great nation in this period has experienced all sorts of enemy conspiracies. Just when the system and its managers need people's calm and optimism more than ever to focus all their thoughts and ingenuity on meeting society's needs, we encounter a heavy storm of enmity and conspiracy that sometimes forces us to focus our scarce resources on counteracting the danger posed by the foreign enemy and its domestic sympathizers.

These are among our greatest difficulties at this juncture, and there is no other way than to confront these realities. In the midst of these pressing difficulties, we must persevere and march on with patience, confidence, and wisdom.

Third, discord within. In the last hundred years our society has experienced two acute woes which have weakened' and undermined its fabric. These woes have become more chronic and troubling at this sensitive juncture in our history. One is secular intellectualism, the other being unenlightened religious dogma.

The Secular Intellectual

Our society has, a religious identity. All throughout Shi'ism's history, the clergy have played a crucial role in awakening people to social, pathologies, inciting them to fight injustice, awakening their religious identity. In our history, Islam has perpetually invited people to unity in religious belief, protecting their individual and social dignity. With their incessant calls to social justice throughout the history of Islam, populist religious leaders have served as society's most astute pathologists and healers.

That is why Muslim societies have never harbored a negative view of religion. This stands in stark contrast to Western societies where unsavory and misguided religious leaders have turned people away from religion.

In the Muslim world, especially in Iran, whenever oppressed people have risen against tyranny, their activism has been channeled through religion. People have always witnessed the fiery and bloodied face of religious revolutionaries who have risen to fight oppression and despotism.

Our social conscience is replete with memories of the clash of true believers with hypocrites who have used religion to justify people's misery. Our part of the world has witnessed the historical antagonism between truth and justice-seeking religion and the oppressive and misguided views of religion that have been the tool of oppressors.

Is it not true that, in the history of Islam, religion has opposed religious and secular tyranny? Have not most martyrs of truth been religious activists? Is it not the case that over the past hundred years, religion has been the greatest champion of the fight against despotic agents of colonialism? Has not the experience of religious struggle, among other revolutionary and nationalist experiences-some of which are worthy of praise been the most successful?

Our society is religious and it is natural that secular intellectuals have never enjoyed a social base or a place *in* our people's hearts.

Unfortunately what has been called intellectualism in our society has been a movement that has been superficial and cut off from the people. Never has the voice of self-appointed intellectuals traveled beyond the cafeterias and coffee houses where they have posed as a political opposition. Even if people have heard their voice, they have found it incomprehensible. Thus, there has never been any mutual understanding.

And if public-minded intellectualism came to the fore and gained respect, it was through people who cast their claims in authentic, traditional, and religious terms. This was the reason for the vast popularity of figures such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad[3] and Ali Shariati.[4] These two were real intellectuals, and our society felt that they were a part of the people and spoke to the people's pains and concerns.

The secular intellectual, knowingly or not, pours water into the enemy's mill, the same enemy who is against our independence, who opposes our people's authentic culture, religion, and freedom. History testifies that this group has on the whole been on the same side as, and has sometimes actively cooperated with, despotic systems propped up by foreigners.

But fortunately, because it lacks deep roots in our culture and people's souls, it has not had much effect.

Today also, I believe secular intellectuals present no real danger, even though they may foment chaos in the minds of the young and other susceptible parts of society, or provide a foothold and opening for the enemy to penetrate society.

Religions Dogma

The other main problem we face is the parochialism and regressive visions of dogmatic believers. Religious dogma is nothing more than ascribing sanctity and eternity to limited and incomplete human interpretations, and giving priority to emotions over rationality and realistic appraisal.

If we ask dogmatic believers–who may see themselves as thinkers and intellectuals–what they expect from the revolution, they claim that they want a return to Islamic civilization. We must alert such people that their wishes are anachronistic. The specific thoughts' that underpinned Islamic civilization ended with the passing of that civilization. If it had maintained its dynamism, relevance and ability to provide answers to people's problems, that civilization would have endured.

Dogma presents the most formidable obstacle to institutionalizing a system that wishes to provide a model for the present and future of human life, a system based on a more powerful logic than competing schools and ideologies.

The effect of dogma on our society, which has a religious identity, is vast. Its negative effect is greater than secularism, especially because dogmatic believers usually project the aura of religious, legitimacy. Their religious' duties compel them to act but they have no connection to authentic Islam, the Islamic revolution, or to the present and the future.

Imam Khomeini[5] especially in the last two years of his life, was deeply concerned with the danger that dogma and backward vision posed to the revolution's path and the progress and welfare of Islamic society. In line with all of Imam Khomeini's warnings, vigilance about this phenomenon is crucial to us and the future of the Islamic revolution.

The Void in Religious Intellectualism

Here I want to touch on one of the most important deficiencies of our society at this sensitive juncture, hoping that it spurs debate among thinkers, irrespective of whether they accept my proposition or reject or modify it.

In my view, the greatest defect we have in the sphere of thought and development is the lack or

weakness of religious intellectualism, even though I see the ground as ripe for its emergence and growth.

An intellectual, in my view, is one who lives in his own time and understands the issues and problems confronting humanity in that period. He keenly pursues such knowledge, and because he understands the problems of the day, he represents the only hope for finding solutions to those problems. For how can we expect someone to solve a problem when he does not know that a problem exists?

Here, moral rectitude will not suffice. Nor will knowledge by itself. A moral person who is a moving encyclopedia but lives outside his time, for whom the most pressing problems are for example the second and third Islamic centuries, cannot solve even the smallest of today's problems, for today's problems do not interest him. In contrast, the main quality of an intellectual is that she lives in her own time, taking on a social responsibility, her mind constantly curious and restive about reality and human destiny. An intellectual is one who respects rationality and thinking and also knows the value of freedom.[6]

Who is a Religious Believer?

A believer is one whose vision of being transcends the small cage of the material, and while he sees humans as having come from nature, he does not see them as limited to the natural world. Instead he sees every human as bigger than the whole of nature, because nature is limited while humans are, in a way, limitless and eternal.

Just as the questions and needs of humans know no limits, time and space cannot limit and circumscribe humans in their narrow bounds. For this reason, humans look at the future and at the past, and with the aid of their mental faculties break the bounds of nature to find the gateway to transcend it.

The religious intellectual is one who loves humanity, understands its problems, and feels a responsibility toward its destiny and respects human freedom. She feels that humans have a divine mission and wants freedom for them. Whatever blocks the path to human growth and evolution, she deems as being against freedom.

Our dynamic society at this sensitive juncture badly needs religious intellectuals. If religion and intellectualism are combined, we can hope that our great Islamic revolution will be the harbinger of a new era in human history. But if these two are separated, each will endanger the health of society.

When you mention God to secular intellectuals, they say they prefer to focus on humans. When you mention humans to the dogmatically religious, they say they prefer God. But the religious intellectual seeks 'Godly humans', a creation whose emergence is as pressing a need today as it will always be.

I hope that through our revolution and a well-conceived connection between these two spheres-by connecting religious seminaries and the main centers of thinking in today's world, meaning universities-we will witness the emergence of the religious intellectual. This is a scenario that has neither the deficiencies of secular intellectualism nor those of dogmatic religious belief. Such a movement must shoulder the grand mission of our revolution and solve the crisis that is born out of the birth of a new system, all to benefit humanity, moving us toward a future replete with fulfillment and growth.

1. This argument does not imply that each of the two types of crisis necessarily follows the other. Because of the connection of the 'death crisis' of the first civilization to the 'birth crisis' of the second, they must not be viewed as being identical because:

First, my focus is on the crisis that one civilization creates, one at the peak of civilization and the other at its nadir, not the crisis of the end of one and the birth of the second. Second, even if the crisis of the end of one civilization and the crisis of the birth of another civilization coincide, this does not mean that we should see them as the being one and the same, for these two crises are qualitatively different in nature, similar to the way life and death are different.

Third, it is not as though as soon as a civilization dies there is immediately another one to replace it. Instead, a civilization comes, stays for centuries and then leaves. Different societies provide different breeding grounds for civilizations. To know this for certain requires greater and more careful scrutiny, which this author has not had the chance to undertake. Nonetheless, we should not doubt the qualitative difference between these two kinds of crisis.

2. The very quest for a 'new world order' is an obvious sign that the current order is under serious strain as it fails to meet people's fundamental needs. The evermore frequent and extensive discussion of the new 'order', especially in the West, is itself proof for the existence of a crisis in the West and in the rest of the world.

We cannot overlook the fact that oppressive powers, led by the United States, continue their deceitful attempt to manipulate the current historical moment and world consciousness to assert their destructive domination of the developing world under the guise of the 'new world order'. This is an attempt to subvert and prevent fundamental transformation in the current order that would benefit all of humanity. There is voluminous material on the 'new world order', which I defer to another occasion.

3. Translator's Note: Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969). Seminal and prolific Iranian writer who popularized the effects of the cultural imperialism of the West or 'Westoxication' among his generation.
4. Translator's Note: Ali Shariati (1923-1977). Iranian sociologist and reformer of religious thought who played an important role in bridging the gap between Islamic thought and modern Iranian intellectuals. His numerous books and speeches, widely disseminated before the 1979 revolution, were instrumental in arousing Islamic revolutionary sentiment among Iranians.
5. Translator's Note: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902?-1989). Leader of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
6. My interpretation of the intellectual is based on convention. I use this concept to refer to actual, existing individuals. Others may have interpretations that do not allow a combination of intellectualism and religious belief. But it is unwarranted to confine us to the prejudiced interpretation of a certain social group.

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