

THE POSITION OF “UNITY” BETWEEN THEOCRACY AND THEODEMOCRACY IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF IMAM KHOMEINI

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Abstract. *“Unity” is a main axis of the Islamic Revolution and one of the principal goals of the architect of this revolution – Imam Khomeini. He says: “Muslims in different countries were similar to lone islands”. The Islamic community should be aware of its potentialities and power! That needs transformation in thought, in practice and a new approach from the Iranian nation! The report presents the aim of this nation – to build a modern, united, ethical society and establish a modern Islamic culture. Islam is the basis that all Muslim must use in constructing Islamic solidarity and belief is the soul of culture. The report concludes with Khomeini’s idea about a new social contract which is valid for any human being.*

Keywords: *Imam Khomeini, unity, new model of political reality, ideal society.*

Introduction

In today’s post-modern world people have stopped following the Kant’s slogan Dare to think, and look for two things: safety and the need for individuality as well as understanding the meaning of this of philosophical individuality. To achieve them a man turns to intelligence and logic and these become the criteria for the determination of values and the meaning of life, for the rediscovery of the end and the beginning of the world.

This loss of individuality is the root of all issues in the western world and essential questions asked by the modern world oppose the essential answers given by the ancient world. According to Nietzsche, when God dies in the modern world, man does not achieve superhuman properties but he must choose and assume responsibility for himself. According to Heidegger, we all are

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“actors and censors” of God’s stage. Human “censorship” manifests itself where it meets difficulties, obstacles, crises and problems.

Focusing on the questions concerning the aim of creation, the presence of soul, the feeling of guilt, and absurdity reveals the crisis of individuality associated with the crisis of values. A similar crisis provokes different reactions in western and oriental thought. Search for the meaning of life in a spiritless world by modern man imitates the way of spiritual perfection in the search for the Truth, God, of a mystic. There are three main factors which cause this kind of anxiety which make a man to shift to religion – the fear caused by the impotence before death, the feeling of futility and dissatisfaction with life and uneasiness about the result of his actions.

The oriental concept of Shiite system (*syasat*) differs from the western concept of politics in that it is a mainly administrative affair aimed at the preservation of the current state. The Shiite system of government includes the concept of leadership, and Islamic realities – Umma and Imam, which fit the oriental tradition of the understanding of politics. The emphasis is put on completeness, education, perfection, forming and activity in the community.

The city of Qom, which gave shelter to the seminary where Imam Khomeini finished his education, prayed and criticized the Shah’s government for destroying ethical bases of Iranian society, is in the south of the country. Today it is the theological centre of Shiites who are launching the transformation of thought in Iranian society.

A transformation of thought

The years of living in Qom (1923-1962) are the years of spiritual and intellectual development for Khomeini as a leader and the period of the formation of his views about the future of the country. The ability of the young Khomeini to penetrate deeply not only into the essence of a text but also to grasp its ethical principles is unbelievable and this is clearly seen in the course pursued by him, „Grounds of Ethics“, in 1936, in which he sedulously applies the main ethical categories to interpret many current problems. The lectures are so popular that they not only attract many students to the bosom of religious sciences (against the background of government efforts to limit the influence of the Ulema from extending beyond religious institutions) but they also outline the way to integrate the nation. The lectures in philosophy (under the influence of the famous peripatetician and representative of the so-called “philosophy of illuminated” Sayed Qazwini) and gnosticism (Irfan) (not so popular in education in madrasahs at that time), the translation of the Koran of Mulla Faiz Kashani, the study of the Fusus al Hikam of Ibn Arabi and Tafsir and Safi, are critical for the formation of his political views. Being a student of the Iranian philosopher academic-platonist Mir Damad, his philosophy is called “Hikma al-muta’alija”

(transcendental philosophy) – philosophy, which reveals spiritual truth (Haqiqa) to man via thought and arguments, and represents the world in a universal way. The philosophy of Molla Sadra is influenced by the thought of Shiit Imams. It is a philosophy of the common nature of the material and supermaterial worlds, and of a permanent advance to perfection, according to modern Iranian philosopher Professor Javadi Amali.

The topic of gnosis as knowledge determines the intellectual development of Khomeini and becomes an integral part of his spiritual individuality influencing his political activity over the next years. Those who are masters of the science of embodying thought are the real “revived, illuminated”. During this period his vision of political leadership is formed – it has to be under the control of leading religious scientists since these are the people who can fight against corruption and stagnation in society. This is the reason that Khomeini often quotes Ayah 34:46 of the Holy Book Qu’ran as a spiritual and political message.

In 1946 under the influence of his teacher of Fiqh, Ayatollah Haeri, Khomeini starts teaching Usul-al Fiqh using rational arguments and relating it to the ethical, gnostic, philosophical and political dimensions. For him, Islam is always beyond geographical dimensions, it is the basis that all Muslims must use in constructing Islamic solidarity, and the role of the philosopher is of extreme importance for any leader. Only the philosopher is able to put in place frameworks for a value system while trying to preserve political and axiological neutrality, following what is situated in his essential nature and successfully combining knowledge and action to achieve a dialogue – intercultural, interreligious, which can lead to consensus and become fundamental to the art of being an authentic man; the dialogue that demonstrates concern for the other, co-existence, co-experience and openness to the problems of the other not only with the intellect but also with the heart. This is the way, in which the doors of friendship and mutual understanding which are the core of any dialogue, are opened. Its main goal is the mutual benefit of achieving peace and consensus. A similar dialogue can be achieved when it is based on cultural religious identity, tolerance, openness and reciprocity and not imposing one’s own models and values. Dialogue is an effective strategy when it is a form of communication and ineffective when it is a form of assimilation, and one who is a master of this art will control the impulses towards religious fanaticism, xenophobia and hate speech. Similarly neutrality warrants a distance that enables seeing and delineating a horizon. The philosopher is able to build critical analytical values in the context of an intellectual culture which provides the meaning of his behavior – to be a mirror of the state of affairs and a leader of humanity.

With his unique way of thinking and being one of the illuminated, following tradition (Sunna), Islamic law (Fiqh) and the concept that belief is the soul of culture, Khomeini uses moral philosophy in conjunction with logic to solve current problems turning himself not only into a messenger of peace but also initiating practical changes in government.

A transformation in practice

The transformation of praxis involves:

- a) new system of government
- b) the role of mediator
- c) the role of prayer

Hence, in Qom a center of people's resistance to American influence in Iran is formed under the guidance of spiritual leaders. The struggle against the violation of civil rights is started after the so-called "White Revolution" (the modernization program of the Shakh in 1963), against the "decadent" extravagance of the life of political elite, against the Shakh referendum for reforms since it opposes the values, Islamic norms and the constitution of the country.

Depending on the degree of religiosity and the psychological state of the believer, the so-called "people of asceticism" who are turned inwardly towards themselves, far from material goods and secular benefits, blessed with mystical love and character, whose aim is to dedicate their lives to prayers, worship and meditation on the Absolute, are present. However, there is also another category of people, the so-called "people of love and activity", who direct their gifts and activities outwardly towards the others. These are charged with the mission of building a new scheme for the world and situating man in a new way within it.

"Velayat-e-Faqih" (government of Islamic scholars) will prove to be a similar conception of Islamic government and provide the corner-stone of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. As an alternative to the ideas of Hobbes, Rousseau and Kant for new public contract, the idea of a new social contract that is valid for any human being is launched. Khomeini becomes the leader who changes the spirit of the age in a practical way. In his theory, which is given substance in the constitution of IRI, Islamic government is performed within the framework of the model of a republic, which is based on law (Fiqh) and Islamic principles as well as democratic principles based on election. Thus, "divine origin and popular legitimacy" are implemented simultaneously, underlining the mandatory condition for any power – to receive the approval of both people and priesthood. This form of popular power is a specific new model of political reality, whose main aim is to harmonize the relationship between religion and secularity, between morality and politics, between spiritual and material values. Islamic government should be achieved by close adherence to Allah's will and His laws. Analyzing the philosophy of political power in Islam Sadeq Amoli Larijani – chairman of the Judiciary – notices that the concept of "government" in Islam is directed towards two vectors – human behavior and the guarantee of safety. The aim of each person as an individual and as a part of whole is to get near to Allah. This is the key role of Islamic government – to encourage people to follow this pathway. This aim should be undertaken collectively. Safety is a necessary

guarantee that this will occur. In the Qu'ran this aim is identified as the greatest happiness for a man, consequently government is obliged to lead society in this direction.

The Shiite concept considers the historical process to be the return of man to Allah. However, Allah's will can be understood only by an educated theologian. Hence, secular government should not only lead society onto the right path but its priority is to maintain it and provide it with all conditions required to achieve this aim. Individual acts of men and government require "divine inspiration" provided by contemporary spiritual leaders – Imams, who are competent in Islam. This is the specific content of the principle of "velayat-e-Faqih", which was transferred from religion to the political stage by the Iranian priesthood announcing the new social-political mechanism, which is confirmed in the Iranian constitution of 1979.¹

"In the establishment of the political structures that are the fundamentals of society, religious interpretation of questions related directly to the government of the country and the activity of governing bodies is used... Law-making is within the framework of the Koran and Sunna. Hence, strong control on behalf of the just, righteous Islamic theologians is required".

The government itself as the supreme power should obtain Shariat legitimacy by lawyer-theologians. This, besides the republican forms of power, Islamic forms of power also function in parallel, which are undertaken by representatives of clergy, with the capacity to veto any law, which is not in accordance with Islamic norms. Iranians elect a president and parliament freely but the Supervisory Council selects candidates. An elected president can conduct foreign policy but only a rahbar (a leader elected by the clergy who has greater competencies than the president) can veto any presidential initiative.²

The president embodies republican power, and the rahbar embodies theocratic power. Religious leaders have a leading role in certain aspects of the politics pursued by IRI and form an absolute majority in all Iranian authorities. This fact allows many western researchers to describe IRI as an authoritarian theocratic state, which is incorrect from the perspective of political science. Moreover, today we often see western countries with developed democracies diverging from democratic principles. Also the fact that Iran is a country with a relatively young democracy, about a quarter of a century old, while the democracies in western countries have been formed over centuries, should not be ignored.

Undoubtedly, IRI possesses all the required attributes of a democratic country – the election of law-making authorities, the division of powers, and the equality of citizens before the supremacy of law. The difference between the Islamic "people power" and the western type of democracy is that the former is based on

¹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Preamble, 2010, ALHODA, Tehran, I.R. of IRAN.

² Today, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini Islamic lawyer-theologian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the spiritual leader of IRI.

Islamic canons, which are the fundamentals of Iranian society in general, its unifying element, rather than on liberal values such as individualism and secularism.

In 1988 Ayatollah Khomeini establishes the Council on Advisability as an essential mediator arbitrating debates between the parliament and the Council of Guardians to form a common statement consolidating the unity of nation.³ The Fatwas issued by him in 1987, in which an explanation of possible priorities of governmental interests over religious norms (under specific circumstances and in a specific moment in the development of the country) is given, serve as a basis. According to the Shiites acknowledging the principle of *ijtihad*, this Council on Advisability becomes a specific arbiter, which determines the important questions for the country and the determination of the interests of the country from the Islamic perspective. While according to the initial version of the Iranian constitution the rahbar “defines the general policy of IRI”, according to the new constitution, he acts after consultations with the Council on Advisability, in which lawyers discuss controversial questions not only with representatives of the legislative power but also with the higher representatives of executive power.

Common Friday prayers revived after the Iranian revolution are an important element in the political life in the country. The heart of every believer is a temple, in which complex biochemistry takes place and only the deeply hidden love unlocks the way of belief. With his heart man shows his closeness to God. Kindness, love and patience are both human and God’s principles. God’s will reveals itself to those who are close to Him, not only in written texts but also in the depths of spiritual life. Prayer is the co-experience of Speech in its glory. The Imams talk to people on Friday not only about religious questions but they discuss the foreign and domestic political life of the country, thus consolidating the community of believers – Umma of Allah.

With the practical changes completed in the political life of the country Iran can be an example to other countries and can assist the establishment of theodemocratic regimes in them as an effective functioning alternative to the western liberal model of democracy. The ideological influence of Iran can be globally significant, especially given its current position in the geopolitical realignment of the world and the suggestion of Ali Akbar Velayati to pursue a strategy of “Look to the East”!

A new approach of the Iranian nation

The geographical position of Iran as a transit country between the Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus, and the aim of Iranian government to reopen its economy, gives me a chance to speak about the Islamic Republic of Iran as a new geo-strategic factor with a significant influence on the future of the Islamic world and the international world system.

³ The Council functions as an advisory body to the Supreme leader revealing the pattern of democratic institutions in Iran, where political dialogue is reality.

To the north of the Tomb, the capital Tehran, the city raising him to power during the revolution of 1979, is to be seen. This is the year, in which all Iranians united around the idea of a complete cultural rethinking, which can lead to the establishment of the Islamic republic with Khomeini as the leader and the foremost spiritual figure. The Islamic revolution is an important event not only for Iran but also worldwide. It makes the people rethink the current relations between religion and politics, giving notice of the first serious taking up of political power by Islam. For the first time anywhere on the globe, an attempt to establish a country unifying the civil and religious powers took place. A unique political system functioning on two different planes was created: the democratic and theocratic levels. Occurring as a result of the successful Iranian revolution, theodemocratic government is based on both the Islamic and democratic principles and due to the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini it is arguable that a unique new project – the national Iranian project is developed.⁴ The following are the three aims of this project: territorial integrity, national sovereignty and national prosperity, intended to protect Muslims and establish Islamic government based on the Shiit principles.⁵

The government should:

1. Develop the new policy of “an opening of civilizations” in the context of new unions and with the aim of connecting “hinterland” (the Middle East) with “heartland” (Europe).
2. Develop and pursue a new legislative policy that allows for the use of advances in Islamic law to construct European policies given their increasing Muslim population.
3. Offer the application of the Iranian system of social care as a model for addressing the social-economic, political and national-cultural problems, taking into consideration the national patterns of traditional Islam and Islamic values.
4. Promote the Khomeini’s idea “Unity – a great Truth” in constructing the theodemocratic model of a Muslim nation.

Khomeini believes that if the society wants to develop and advance, people should direct their intentions and actions in that direction. Society should stimulate the evolution of some traditions and customs rather than block them. Personal liberty should not endanger the freedom of others and individual liberty should not harm social liberty. A man must humbly serve God’s orders and hence his behavior will acquire God’s image. According to Imam Khomeini, human society as well as the basic relations within it influence the ideas and actions of all its members. This influence is at its most significant level in the formation of a clear conception by the members of society about the ultimate aim of the individual existence. Based on its values a society structures certain ambitions

⁴ Abrahamian Ervand, *Khomeinism. Essays of the Islamic Republic*, I. B. Taurus, 1993, pp. 14-15.

⁵ Seriolghalam Mahmud, *Theoretical Renewal in Iranian Foreign Policy. Discourse*, vol. 3, nr. 3, Tehran, winter 2002, pp. 73-79.

in human souls and directs human actions towards their realization. Religion becomes a central factor in social systems since it aims at comprehensive human happiness. At the same time, it develops individual and social structural elements, assumes responsibility for the satisfaction of all social demands, while material aspirations are limited only to a the sphere of daily life. A system of human relations truly worthy of recommendation will appear as soon as human values become a factor for the valuing of people based on their devoutness and moral purity and society discards nonsense and barrenness. A society that struggles against oppression and tyranny builds its immunity to depravity and deviation from God's essence. In such a society human relations are based on justice. However, relations between individual societies, which should be in accordance with the aims of creation and religious foundations, comprising human wholeness, are also of importance. Human and divine substances aim at service and the obtaining of God's grace. The aspiration to service is a result of human responsibilities and religiosity and grace is rooted in the individual and social stability and independence. Whenever the human freedoms established through religion are under threat, the social and divine responsibilities require a revolt for their restoration.

Conclusion

Iran is a country, in which the religious and democratic governments act simultaneously thanks to the person of Ayatollah Khomeini – the people's leader and leading figure in God's government. This is the man who succeeded in resurrecting the role of religion at a time when both the East and the West believed that its time is over and it is fading.

The bases are constructed and the horizons of a new society based on belief, patience, jihad and hope, are set-up. The following is the most valuable lesson of Imam Khomeini: one should transform one's thought into an action so as not to be a blind imitator.

The Islamic revolution in Iran is a significant event with consequences for the entire world. It requires a rethinking of the relationship between religion and politics and is one of the first major applications in Islam of political power. It was first attempt undertaken in order to create a country that unites the secular with the religious. It created a unique political system that operates from two different political viewpoints: democratic and theodemocratic. The theodemocratic management relies on both Islamic and the democratic principles. Authority should be supported by the people and by the clergy. This rule by the people is a new model for political science. Its purpose is to harmonize the relationship between the religious and secular spheres, morality and politics, spiritual and material values.

The identification of Iran as an authoritarian theocracy is, from my point of view, not correct politically. Iranian democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon,

while the Western democracies have been formed over centuries. The difference between the Iranian people's rule and the western type of democracy is that it is not based on liberal values (individualism and secularism) but on Islamic canons (for Shi'a historical process is the return of man to Allah, at the individual level and at the level of the community as a whole). The future of Iran and the Islamic democracy will depend on whether the Iranian government will deal with internal contradictions and will skillfully strike a balance between religious and democratic principles and structures of power.

The most important aim is to form a united, ethical "ideal society" and establish modern Islamic culture – a culture in which science accompanies morality and politics accompanies justice. Reaching this goal needs time, but it is a duty of the young generation to strive towards this goal.

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