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Religion and Politics in Islam

Introduction

For Muslims, one of the most important reasons for the differences in governmental and political views is the idea that politics and managing the human affairs of the world are inseparable from the text of religion, and that religion deals only with the affairs of the people's spiritual and afterlife, and the government as a customary thing and this world is left to the people themselves? In fact, this question or concern is a historical matter, and not only among the followers of religions and laws, which has been more or less discussed with all those who have come to the point of view.

For example, Fadhil Meqddad as a religious scholar states that "religion and government are companions and concomitant that one will not be worthless without another"¹.

Many Islamic scholars believe in the existence of a strong and deep relationship between religion and politics. These theorists and scholars provide various rational and transactional arguments to prove their views. Of course, in the Islamic world, especially in contemporary times, a group of scholars and theorists argues that religion and politics are two separate categories. The group believes that in the field of politics and religion, politics has a world view and terrestrial prestige and religion is divine, and these two are far from each other.

Therefore, in this paper, we try to see the views of the supporters and opponents of the relationship between religion and politics in the Muslim world, based on their reasons, which are examined. In addition, the remoteness or proximity of each of them according to the basis of religion is considered. In order to investigate this, in a descriptive method sometimes necessary with analysis, we at first refer to conceptual definitions of religion and politics, and then to the views and reasons of some of the advocates of the relationship between religion and politics; in the next section, we will look at some of the opponents of the relationship between religion and politics in Islam and their reasons, and, finally, we communicate our findings.

Definitions of Religion and Politics

Scholars have examined religion from various dimensions of epistemology, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, law, sociology, history of religion... etc. Religion is a universal knowledge and evolutionary movement that has four

¹F.M. Najjar, *The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt*, "Arab Studies Quarterly" 1996, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 1-21.

dimensions: reforming thought and beliefs, developing the principles of human ethics, good relations between community members and eliminating any undue discrimination².

Regarding politics, there are various statements and definitions. Politics and its definition, is, like religion, an extremely widespread and challenging topic.

Politics is the management of human life in both individual and social conditions in order to achieve the highest moral and spiritual goals³.

The Proponents' Perspective on the Religion and Politics Relationship

General Discussion

Although the advocates of the relationship between religion and politics do not pursue the same strategy, they all accept the main principle of this association⁴. In fact, they believe that, regardless of conceptual ideas, the two categories focus on the three main teachings of Islam; Ideology, Sharia and Moral. Therefore, there is no doubt that the relationship between religion and politics in Islam is an inseparable and logical one⁵. Moreover, the supporters of this relationship justify their reasons based on The Book (Holy Quran), Sunnah and wisdom. They believe there is no action found in which its results would affect only the worldly life or hereafter. On the other hand, it is clear that the behaviors, habits and culture of the people are directly influenced by the type and objectives of the government⁶. Indeed, the influence of the government on people's culture is much more profound than the role of the family. The Holy Quran also speaks for the misguided: "Our Lord, indeed we obeyed our masters and our dignitaries, and they led us astray from the right path" (33:67). Hence, the religion could never be negligent about the worldly life of the people, especially the government; because the felicity and pleasure of the hereafter greatly depends on these matters⁷.

The justification for this rational relation stems from a number of factors: first, that the arenas of politics and religion share many similarities which help them to accomplish important goals in the social life. Second, both from the theoretical point and from the practical dimensions, politics and religion will inevitably be drawn to each other's territory. And the third point is that in a religious society, everything including politics would be based on religion; however, this correlation is completely natural and a type of obligation. In order to separate religion from politics, religion must be taken away from the people⁸.

² A. Abd Al-Raziq, *Al-Islam wa 'usul al-hukm*, Beirut 1966, p. 15.

³ F.M. Najjar, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–21.

⁴ R. Robertson, *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*, Oxford 1947, p. 47.

⁵ Al-Qutb Muhammad Tabliyya, *Nizam al-idara fi al-islam*, Cairo 1985, p. 23.

⁶ H. Shukrallah, *Political Crisis/Conflict in Post-1967 Egypt*, [in:] *Egypt under Mubarak*, eds C. Tripp, R. Owen, London–New York 1989, p. 12.

⁷ J. Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford 1964, p. 5.

⁸ A.H. Zanjani, *Religion and Politics Ratio*, "Philosophy Magazine" [Tehran] 1996, p. 10.

The Relationship between Religion and Politics from the Quran's Perspective

As we know, one of the characteristics of the Holy Quran which is accepted by all is its comprehensiveness. So many different topics have been discussed in the Quran which indicates the depth and magnitude of its education and knowledge. One of the topics which has been given great consideration is politics; such as the necessity of forming a government, international relations, the council, political system, various political concepts, etc. From the Holy Quran's point of view, politics and government are essential parts of human life for a number of reasons:

1. As we read in the story of Bani Israel who were defeated due to internal chaos and lack of strong sovereignty, having a powerful and influential government is essential in order to stop the rebels.
2. The defeat of Jalut against Bani Israel was the result of a qualified and eligible leadership.
3. The scheme of Jihad in the orderly framework of political, social and economic organization; Jihad and defense are imperative for the government and community's policy to survive.
4. There are many verses in The Holy Quran related to the goals of a competent and righteous government such as 12:21&56, 18:84, 24:55, 38:26 and 4:58.
5. The Holy Quran criticizes and rejects non-divine and dictatorship governments.
6. The Holy Quran has also spoken of the prophets who not only held the position of prophethood but officially took the affairs of society affair in their hands.
7. This Holy Book informs us about God's order to Prophet David regarding the right way to rule the people. He says: "O David, indeed we have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow [your own] desires, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allah. Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account". In fact, this verse represents a close connection between the status of prophecy and the status of political rule.
8. The Quran's statements about the relationship between different societies indicate that religion and government (politics) are interconnected and relevant; for instance, some verses have been interpreted as saying that if the Islamic society and Islamic state conclude and sign an international treaty with a foreign (non-Islamic) government, they must adhere to this agreement and not commit a breach of the contract. (Of course, until they have not violated their covenant.)

9. The Holy Quran talks about the council, one of the most important manifestations and indicators of all the governments and political regimes. Council is one of the oldest methods of directorship in the society. Even the most tyrannized governments have used council in order to force and convince people to accompany and follow them; and on the other hand, reduce the amount of self-oriented and auto-cratic mistakes.

The Oppositions' Perspective on the Religion and Politics Relationship

General Discussion

In general, the advocates of the separation of religion and politics share a number of fundamental ideas. Their first mutual opinion on religion and politics is that the concepts and teachings of religion are related to the hereafter, the fate of man after death; whereas, the realm of political science is related to the human's life in this world. Therefore, the domains of religion and politics are completely separate and distinct⁹.

The second common viewpoint is that religion and all its principles are sacred, persistent, non-objectionable and irreplaceable; while politics is filled with corruption and anti-ethical matters. It is never stable and constantly exposed to criticism and rapid changes in accordance with the society's conditions. As a result, these two domains can never be congregated¹⁰.

Their third mutual axis is that, although part of religious teaching is about solving problems, regulating affairs and expressing the issues of life in this world, its main purpose is incompatible with political goals. The mission of religion is to educate intelligent and scientific people who move in the path of spiritual evolution and ascension from the material issues of life; whereas, the purpose of politics is to manage the material conditions of the people without regard to their spiritual and moral status¹¹.

The fifth, and indeed the most important, argument of the opponents of the relationship between religion and politics which is insisted on the most, is that the Holy Quran which is the first and most reliable source of Islamic laws has not addressed the issue of politics and government. This is when the proponents actually prove this deep and logical relationship with the most solid arguments and reasoning from the Holy Quran.

⁹ D. Eickelman, J. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton 1996, p. 123.

¹⁰ A. Abd Al-Raziq, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹ A. Abd Al-Salam, *Mustalah al-siyasa 'ind al-'arab*, Tunis 1985, p. 9.

The Viewpoint of Sheikh Ali Abd al-Raziq about the Relationship between Religion and Politics

The first Muslim scholar to formally champion secularism was the Egyptian judge, Sheikh Ali Abd al-Raziq, in his seminal work *al-Islam wa' Usul al-Hukm* (Islam and the Principles of Governance), published in 1925. He wrote his book based on this argument and theory that, even though The Holy Quran itself is the first and most reliable source for understanding the nature and laws of Islam, it has not addressed the topics of politics and government¹².

The main point of his book is that Islam did not determine a specific regime nor did it impose on the Muslims a particular system according to the requirements of which they must be governed; rather it has allowed humans absolute freedom to organize the state in accordance with the intellectual, social and economic conditions in which we are found, taking into consideration their social development and the requirements of the time¹³.

In short, Abd al-Raziq concludes that the Quran, Sunnah, Wisdom and Ijma (Agreements of the Muslim Scholars basically on religious issues) do not provide any evidence to confirm that the prophet's mission had any political nature. He argued that Islamic texts were, and should remain, neutral in political debates¹⁴.

Conclusion

According to what has been explained in this article, the relationship between the two basic phenomena of human life, religion and politics in the school of Islam, are presented with various definitions and different interpretations. Despite that, there are two general theories about this correlation; the theory of distinction and the theory of interference.

The advocates of the first theory, who are in the minority, reject any communication and interaction between religion and politics; in addition, they believe their interfering in each other's affairs lead to destruction or weakening and disability of them both. The main theorist of this group in the contemporary era is Ali Abd al-Raziq, who, referring to various citations from the Holy Quran and other narratives, believe that there is no relationship between religion and politics; neither from the institutional dimension nor from its conceptual aspect. Therefore, he accepts the principle of distinction theory, the separation of religion and politics. Other theorists, who also follow this idea, differentiate between the mission and goal of religion from the purpose of politics. They believe each one belongs to a different world with its own special distinctiveness.

¹² F.M. Najjar, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–21.

¹³ A. Abd Al-Raziq, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁴ F. Gazi, *The First Muslim Secularist*, "The Guardian" 2009, p. 1.

On the other side, there are the supporters of the interference theory. By rejecting the belief of the first group, they propose that the opponents of the relationship between religion and politics have not been able to interpret and understand the Quranic verses, narratives and the Sunnah properly; which is why they do not have a correct understanding about this correlation in Islam. Additionally, they have ignored the rational dimension of Islam.

But the followers of the interference theory prove the deep relationship between religion and politics using Quranic verses, narratives and rational arguments. Most importantly, to them, religion and politics share the same mission and goal concerning human beings. Religion is responsible for managing people's lives in the best way possible; moreover, politics also pays attention to the development and nurturing of people in order to achieve the true happiness of the hereafter besides providing for their worldly life. Hence, the separation of these two phenomena makes no sense. Most of the scholars and philosophers of the Islamic world belong to this group such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, Mulla Sadra, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, etc.

Ultimately, the subject and goal of both religion and politics is the human being and human development. Man is a unitary entity with a precise structure; as a result, religion and politics, which have the responsibility for man's guidance, growth and development, have no choice but to be federated in order to fulfill their mission.