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The Effect of Social, Economic, and Political Factors in Religious Thought

Question:

What effect have social, economic, and political factors had on religious thoughts and creeds and on belief in the appearance of the Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return)?

Answer:

From the viewpoint of the godless worldview, all affairs must be attributed to historical and material causes.

However, from the viewpoint of the religious worldview, the source of that which is genuine and true from among various ideas and creeds is revelation, the call of the prophets, and the inborn comprehension of humanity, which is referred to as the guidance of reason, natural disposition, revelation, and prophecy.

In the eyes of this viewpoint, all of the devious courses and harmful thoughts are the effect of material and historical causes, personal goals, and deficiency of culture of society and its upbringing. Religious creeds taken from revelation and prophecy are all genuine and actual and have a place in humanity's nature.

History, the passage of time, human knowledge, and material causes do not bring them into existence. Rather, the source of conviction about matters such as the principle of the messengership of the prophets and *Imamah* of the Imams (peace be upon them) and all true creeds is reason, human disposition, and revelation from Allah.

On this basis, no social, economical, or political factor has had or has an effect even in the appearance of belief in the appearance of Mahdi the Savior (may Allah hasten his return). The beginning and source of it is the narrations of the prophets, the celestial books, and the guidance, narrations, and words of the

person of the Final Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), Imam Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), and the remaining Imams (peace be upon them).

Though there have been false claims regarding being the Mahdi based on seeking rank and political aims, by analysis and recognition the original source of the appearance of these claims and the appearance of false claimants we reach the reality that an uncontested reality has been involved around which these claims and distortions have come about and been made tools by individuals.

In the same way, regarding belief in Allah, revelation, and prophecy itself we see that some realities exist and there is a ground for its acceptance in people's hearts, and opportunistic individuals, abusing this fact, have throughout history made claims of Godhead or prophecy.

And the issue of the Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return) as well—since it was raised by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) himself and the companions have heard and related it from him—is a reality which has been accepted by all.

For this reason it has been abused and individuals have made it means for differing objectives, most of which have been political.

If the issue of the Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return) did not have reality, individuals would not have resorted to such distortion with regard to it. Thus, these abuses themselves confirm the fact that this issue has been accepted as a reality by all.

It is possible for events to guide humanity to realities, just as Ibrahim (peace be upon him), the great monotheist, taught recognition of Allah to people by use of events.

When night set, that personage saw a star. In the beginning, he said, "This is my Lord." But when the star set he said;

لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ

"I love not those that set." 1

By making use of the incident of the rising and setting of the star, Ibrahim (peace be upon him) taught people that the star cannot be God.

After that, the moon also rises and sets, and from this incident as well he concludes that the moon, too, cannot be God.

Then, the sun rises and sets and, in the same way, he reaches the same conclusion about it.

In this way he seeks aversion to all polytheistic beliefs and guides the people to the Creator of all the world's inhabitants.

Thus, events can lead people to realities, but credal realities cannot be considered the effects of events.

Yes, it can be said that the passage of time caused a strengthening of people's belief in the family of 'Ali (peace be upon him) and deepening of Shi'a thought in their hearts. But if someone says that Shiaism and the occultation of the Imam (peace be upon him) were originated and completed by the passage of time, this is false, since many proofs, which have been pointed out in the previous discussions, belie this view.

No one can say that the traditions of the Imams (peace be upon them), all of which they have related from the tongue of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), are all forged, since all of them, in addition to consecutive narration, have external contexts with themselves. In reality, they are like the news of the martyrdom of 'Ammar, when the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said,

تَقْتُلُكَ الْفِئَةُ الْبَاغِيَةُ.

"The oppressive party will kill you."²

No one said that after 'Ammar was martyred by Mu`awiyah and his army, this tradition was forged, i.e. the tradition is an effect of that event. This is because before this event, the companions would relate this tradition. The issue of the *Imamah* of the Imams (peace be upon them) is the same way, regarding which it has been related from three of them, that is 'Ali and Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) said,

"The number of Imams is twelve, the last of whom shares my name." And it transpired exactly in this way in the external world. In this situation, none can claim that these traditions are spurious and were forged after the occurrence of these events.

1. Surah Ana'm (6), Verse 75

2. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 18, Page 123

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