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Imam Khomeini (RA):
The Reviver of Pure Islam

There is no devout believer who does not seek greatness, glory and power of his religion and the values he believes in the realm of thought and arena of life and does not devoutly wish the victory of his religion over other religious convictions and systems. Although throughout human history some religions appeared that won public faith and brought about changes and dynamism in the minds and lives of people but there were quite a number of religions that soon declined in strength and popularity. Today there remains no trace of some of these religions.

There have always been passionate religious men who defended survival and truth of their religion and made great efforts for this cause, some of whom have been successful.

The greatest plague that is a threat to a religion capable of survival and sends it off the scene or changes it altogether or hinders its efficiency is oppressing the people to which the Holy Qur’an refers as Bagh’ye, and Bagh’ye is rooted in man’s desires and whims.

Sometimes worldly people that have risen to power see the truth and values of religion a barrier to their selfish interests and oppose religion and bar the spread thereof or pave the way for religious distortion
and misinterpretation to serve best their materialistic covetousness and worldly power. In either case the very essence of religion becomes a forbidden affair and finds its place in the minds and hearts of devout believers.

At other times, religion is weakened from within, i.e. the truth of religion is obscured by thick clouds of habits, customs and subjective approaches of narrow-minded persons. The greatest danger that threatens is to call man's relative and limited impressions of religion as religion itself and ascribe religious holiness to them. Such impressions, however, are apt to be acceptable and effective in certain periods in the history of a nation, but as time goes by the changes in the circumstances and in the mental and materialistic attitudes of society make the impressions fall wide of the mark. Instead of trying to make their insight compatible with the requirements of time, the custodians of religion strive to change the realities in the interest of their impression of the religion. An impossible thing to realize.

The new questions and needs require proper answers. But the limited impressions of, and narrow-minded approach to, religion that are regarded as holy, fail to perceive the requirement of time and the new needs of man, let alone be able to answer to the needs and the new questions.

In other words fossilization is the major inner plague of religion and what accounts for fossilization is improper attachment to mental habits and social customs and attaching a sacred religious dimension to these customs and rites.

The cupidity of worldly people and fossilized beliefs and inertia of reactionary minds mainly account for distortion of religion and its lagging behind time. Hence, religious revival is sought in either case with precedence in history.

Many devout believers have stood firm against the power of oppressors with evil desires and many learned scholars and religious authorities with keen insights have fought against superstitious beliefs and unreasonable mental habits and narrow-mindedness that destroy the dynamism and efficiency of religion. They have cleansed religion
of distortions and manifested the illuminated and animating visage of religion and thus have revived it. Religious revivalism has claimed many lives of great and noble personalities.

Many persons who sought and heralded the truth of religion were killed by tyrants who were inimical towards virtues. Many great minds were excommunicated by ignorant converts or by pseudoscholars who were subordinates of diabolic powers or by fossilized people who have passed themselves off as authorities on religious issues and who have passed their narrow insight off as the very tenets of religion. The blood-stained visage of martyrs on the path of virtue that have illuminated the history of Islam serves as evidence for our claim. Thanks to these movements based on Jihad and Ijtihad whether in the realm of thought or action, the essence of religion has remained intact.

In the present age, there have emerged great reformers and revivalists in Islamic lands among whom Imam Khomeini (RA) was second to none. Our departed Imam was rightly and admittedly the greatest reviver of religion during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam.

Imam Khomeini (RA) made Islam known as the main factor of salvation in our Islamic society and deliverance from the atrocious oppressors. In the century past, the religion had retrogressed owing to deep animosity of imperialists and failure of the correct religious thinking to perceive the realities and know the right way of fighting against enemies of religion.

Religion was retreating and losing trench after trench to the enemies of religion when Imam Khomeini (RA) started his struggle against the autocracy dependent on colonialists from the sacred position of religion. Thanks to the strong resolve of the devout people he was able to defeat the tyrant [ex-Shah].

The Islamic Revolution showed the power of religion in fighting against colonialism and neocolonialism, the bitter enemy of all humanity and the cause of all human catastrophes in recent centuries. The Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeini (RA) gained victory when the inability of “isms” to save deprived nations had become manifest
more than before. Socialism that was once known with much ado as
the unique ideology for salvation of the deprived people, not only
failed to bring about social justice, but also had deprived all its domi-
nated people of all their primary freedoms under the guise of advocat-
ing social justice, their reiterated motto. In the global arena along with
its rival, capitalism, socialism was after strengthening its military and
political might through exploiting nations. We saw how in the end it
was vanquished against reality and fell into oblivion and as Imam
Khomeini (RA) put it, it should be traced only in political history
museums.

Because of historical and social conditions in the West, national-
ism was the cornerstone of the power of new rules and systems based
on capitalism against the absolute global power of the Church. National-
ism became an instrument in the deprived world to effect a historical
division and negate the cultural identity of colonized nations. Eventu-
ally it came to be known that the nationalistic movements in the under-
developed world were either originally designed by colonialists or if
the nationalist leaders themselves had any real goodwill at the outset,
their goodwill was of no use because it was based on no solid founda-
tion in the deprived world. Such nationalistic movements not only
failed to protect national interests, as well as the native culture and
identity, but also collapsed under the slightest attack by colonialists. In
the worst scenario, these nationalistic movements were soon distorted
to serve the aliens.

The Islamic thought with religious objective gained victory at a
time when non-religious and even anti-religious thought dominated
humanity, i.e. centuries after elimination of religion from the scene of
human activity and centuries after man was taught to manage his
affairs based [only] on a reason limited by time and space and divorced
from Revelation. In Iran, Islam initiated its majestic movement to give
man sway over his future and broaden the horizons of progress and
honor for him.

The revolution led by Imam Khomeini (RA) was victorious at a
time our deprived society suffered from the dual distress of atheism or
eclecticism of Westernized intelligentsia and the mental inertia of regressive people.

The former, deprived of deep thinking and mentally incompatible with historical position of society, was alienated from people and therefore could not remedy the deep afflictions of the Islamic society but stood side by side with the antagonists of Islam.

The latter, overwhelmed with their out-of-date subjectivity, instead of trying to know their rival and the problems of the Iranian society, denied and negated all good things. Instead of knowing what the West was and what the needs of the Iranian society were, disapproved of anything they did not like or was not compatible with their subjectivity and labeled it as antireligion. While not keeping abreast of requirements of time, they gradually lost their spiritual and social influence and retreated before the reinforced enemy. The Islamic Revolution was the most important revivalistic movement in our time. It was victorious in overthrowing the arrogant, corrupt autocrat and his regime. Our revolution waged a full-scale campaign against global oppression and oppressors especially America, the main supporter of the dependent and defunct regime.

Imam Khomeini (RA) and his revolution aimed above all at overthrowing a puppet regime that served aliens to the detriment of his nation and its noble culture and then establishing an Islamic system entrusted with inspiring human virtues among people and providing for social justice.

Our Islamic movement believed in people and in their faith and their reawakened will. Imam Khomeini (RA) had no audience but the people in whom he believed. He strove to the best of his ability to free the miraculous might of freedom loving and truth-seeking masses.

The victory of our Islamic revolution not only brought about a change for the better for the Iranian nation but also a sense of pride resulting from such brilliant victory which revived the world of Islam and animated the hopeless and deprived Muslims. Islam moved the people to rise against the tyrannical regimes that usurped the rights of
nations and made the Muslims feel proud of being adherents to Islam.

The amazing efforts made by the Imam and his clash with autocracy and oppression and the spectacular victory of Islamic revolution in political arena should not, however, make us forget the admirable insight and mental and spiritual aspects of the Imam's movement. A revolution of such high caliber is the outcome of thorough insight and thought that was able to know Islam, the time, the needs and issues that face people. Hence, our Islamic revolution has not only been religion-orientated but also the most popular movement.

Now the question is: What was the Islam that the Imam heralded and on which he established our revolution? What was that Islam which can steer the ship of the future of Muslims through the stormy sea of the world today? I believe a proper and well-sized up answer will be necessary for the intelligentsia, especially our centers for religious studies, so that after the departure of Imam Khomeini (RA), this part of his sublime thought should not be forgotten to the detriment of our revolution and Islamic society.

Needless to say that such an answer should be given due consideration of the position and the words of the Imam who was eminent and outstanding figure in Islamic knowledge (be it in mysticism, philosophy and law) and who gave momentum to the greatest revolution in our time, especially in the later years of his prolific life after a quarter of a century of leadership of Islamic movement and a decade of leading a system established based on religion. It is hoped that through the courage, fair judgement and mental endeavor of Islamic scholars especially the young intellectual students of the centers for higher theological studies, etc., we would be able to further familiarize those who love Islam and those who seek to truth with the essential ideas of the late founder of the Islamic Republic.

Imam Khomeini (RA) mastered Islamic knowledge and mysticism and was greatly noted for his piety, perseverance, antityranny attitude, deep insight and resourcefulness to solve problems. Thanks to his leadership in an Islamic system, he topped all religious revivalists in the
present age.

Neither my meager knowledge nor this fleeting opportunity would allow us to do justice to the sublime personality of Imam Khomeini (RA). Suffice it to say that:

The late Imam focused his mind wholeheartedly on Islam and his divine duty.

The late Imam attached great importance to Islamic knowledge and the sublime position of religious centers for theological studies as protector of Islam and also the position and work of religious authorities:

“Religious scholars were educated at these centers and separated their ranks from others and our great Islamic revolution originated therefrom.

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, pp. 91-92

“There is no doubt that the religious centers for theological studies and the committed scholars throughout the history of Islam and Shi‘ism have been the strongholds of Islam against invasion and distorted beliefs. The great scholars have striven to explain the lawful and unlawful issues of religion. Were it not for theologians, no one knew what sort of knowledge might have been given to the masses in the name of the Qur‘anic and Islamic knowledge and the facts dealing with the members of the Household of the Prophet (AS).”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, pp. 88-89

“There is so much to describe the scholarly services of the religious centers for theological studies that it is beyond the scope of our talk on it here. Thanks to God the centers are rich in scholarly sources and methods of debate. To have a full and
all-sided debate about Islamic knowledge, I don’t think any scholarly method excels the method practiced by the Ulama who have preceded us. More than a millennium of research by religious scholars evidence their efforts for fruition of the sacred sapling of Islam.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 89

And in many other instances Imam Khomeini (RA) has expressed his views about the Islamic knowledge and high position of clerics. He has also warned of terrible plots to alienate society from Islamic knowledge that builds human character and to weaken the position of religious scholars and centers for theological studies.

With his deep insight, the late Imam felt the great danger of fossilized and reactionary beliefs threatening Islam and Islamic society from within. His constant and clear-cut warnings especially in the latter part of his life showed his acute sensitivity to this danger. Here the late Imam said:

“There have been quite a number of pseudo-clerics with fossilized beliefs in religious centers who are active against our Islamic revolution and pure Mohammadi Islam. In the guise of piety, they are rooting out religion, the revolution and the Islamic system. It is incumbent upon religious students not to underrate the danger of the backward-minded and the inane who make a show of piety. They are the enemies of Prophet of Islam [SAWA] and are propagating the American [version of] Islam.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 91

“We have to try to remove barriers of ignorance and superstition to reach the limpid fount of pure Mohammadi Islam. Islam is lonely in the world today and to save it from loneliness it would need sacrifices. Please pray to God that I would be one of those who are sacrificed.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 41
The late Imam placed special emphasis on the fact that Islam should tackle the problems that face today’s man. According to the late Imam, the only acceptable Ijtihad is that which is victorious in clashes with intellectual, political and economic ideologies and in fighting against machinations and conspiracies, and this is an Ijtihad which has been much more noble than and quite different from the Ijtihad that we have so far known today.

The late Imam Khomeini (RA) was a theologian of high caliber and had broad support for his views at religious centers for theological studies. The malevolent and those with twisted minds can never accuse him of being Westernized and of “intellectualism” (with its current connotation in Iran) and interpret his lofty opinions in conflict with the truth of religion, Islamic knowledge and the methods of teaching at religious centers. His views have been inspiring for Islamic thinkers and for all believers in Islamic faith.

To grasp clearly this valuable point is of paramount importance considering the conditions in which we and the Islamic societies live.

We are faced with the West with its many plans, theories and experiences and the mere claim that Islam is superior to others does not solve any problem. We have to clarify our Islamic position in such a way as to solve the problems with which man is afflicted. Let us not forget that in addition to this claim, today we are in charge of a religious government and that we are in conflict with our rivals and enemies not only in the realm of thought, but also in the field of action. Our enemies are equipped with efficient means to overthrow our system of government or to distort its identity. Besides our people and the Muslims the world over expect our system to tackle their problems and pave the way for their advancement and honor.

What is more, we have to remove the negative perception caused by the so-called religious governments whether in the Islamic East or in the Christian world. Humanity for sure does not have happy memories of many such governments.

Unfortunately one of the reasons for the emergence of secularism in the modern era is the wrong perception that has been imposed on the
people in the name of religion. They have stood in the name of religion against innate desires of man to understand, to know and to live a free life. They have forced on society their old, out-of-date subjectivity and superstitious beliefs. And since the religion at the time could not solve their mental and practical problems, they opposed new ideas (most of which were outside the domain of religious thinking and belonged to the natural and human domains). They exerted pressure on those who had originated such idea and labeled them as apostates and heathens and even burned them at the stakes. But all these could neither bar new developments in the human community, nor prevent the emergence of new ideas, nor could it prolong the rule of the distorted and deviated religion.

Today the rule of theocracy will be successful only when religion is powerful enough to tackle human problems and answer the new emerging questions and at the same time show from logical and practical points of view it is superior to all other religions and ideologies. To know such a religion and its power to cope with the complicated life of today and more complicated life of tomorrow, religious thinkers need new insights and an appropriate Ijtihad which will be compatible with the requirements of time and place.

As Imam Khomeini (RA) has said:

"A very important point to ponder in the world of perplexities of today is the role of time and place in Ijtihad and decision-making. The government decides on the practical philosophy of how to cope with polytheism, disbelief and the problems that face us at home and abroad. But the scholarly debates at the seminaries within the framework of theories not only fails to solve the problems but also leads us to deadlocks which will lead to the apparent violation of the Constitution. While you have to be mindful of not doing anything against religion – May God forbid such a thing - you'll have to do your best lest Islam should come to be known as unable to
manage the world because of entanglement in economic, military, social and political intricacies.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 61

Our clerics should not close their minds to current development of modern times. This is the gateway to success.

Imam Khomeini (RA) has said:

“Unless the clerics take an active part in [solving] the problems, they cannot understand that the Ijihad as has been known would not be sufficient for managing the society. The seminaries and clerics must closely monitor the developments in the society and the public opinion, so they can be prepared to show appropriate reaction.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 100

While emphasizing the need for the transformation in religious perception and while expressing concern about the possibility that religion would be accused of not being able to administer the affairs of the state and of being a stumbling block on the path of progress and advancement, the late Imam was not neglectful of another major change that was a menace to religion. He said religion should not be influenced by misleading thoughts borrowed from outside and gradually lose its purity and noble principles, and the divine religion would become a plaything in the hands of this or that individual. And it is true that whimsical individuals cannot step into the vast and sensitive domain of understanding the divine religion.

The late Imam’s guidance minimized the two dangers. In his teachings, reverence for the Revelation is greatly emphasized in the realm of Islamic thought. This doctrine has been established in religious centers for Islamic knowledge, thanks to more than a millennium of Ijihad.

A thorough knowledge of religious tenets and devotion thereto is necessary but at the same time, one should accept reasonable changes
in Islamic thought. This will save Islam from narrow-minded and regressive insight to preserve the truth of Islam against whimsical approaches of some and the Islamic society against eclecticism that eventually will negate religion.

Imam Khomeini (RA) has said:

“As far as scholarly research at religious centers for theological studies is concerned, I am entirely with traditional theology and Ijtihad in the Javaheri style [referring to the school of Ijtihad of eminent Shi’a jurisprudent Sheikh Muhammad Hassan an-Najafi, who is simply called Saheb-e Javaher]. The Islamic jurisprudence is dynamic and time and place are the two determining elements in Ijtihad. A [religious] issue that demanded the exercise of a certain divine law in the past may demand another divine law considering the prevailing political, social and economic conditions in a system of government today.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 2 1, p. 98

In this connection the late Imam expresses his views on the desired Ijtihad and competent authorities on religious issues.

According to the late Imam, it is strongly recommended to benefit from human thoughts and experiences. He positively refuses the opinion that:

“New civilization should be annihilated and people should live a nomadic life or settle down in the desert forever.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 2 1, p. 3 4

Elsewhere the late Imam has said:

“The accusation that Islam opposes innovations is absurd like what Mohammad Reza, the deposed [king], used to say that
‘that they [i.e. clerics] wanted to travel on donkeys or on horses in the modern era.’ If manifestations of new civilization are technical, and industrial innovations, neither Islam, nor any other monotheistic religion have ever opposed or will oppose them. Islam and the Holy Qur’an are supporters of science and industry. But if modernism is what professional intellectuals aim at, i.e., permissiveness in sexual matters, prostitution and even homosexuality, all revealed religions and men of understanding oppose it, although the Westernized and Easternized individuals approve of it in blind imitation.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 178

The Islamic law as viewed by the late Imam is pivoted on Islamic rule for whose establishment our great Islamic revolution took place. According to the late Imam, this is what has to materialize:

“The enforcement of law based on the principles of justice and equity; prevention of despotism; spreading individual and social justice, forbidding corruption and all deviant acts; freedom based on reason, justice, independence and self-sufficiency; prevention of colonization, exploitation and servitude; punishment and retribution based on justice in order to prevent corruption in society; and leading the society based on the principles of reason, justice and fairness.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 177

The late Imam said that the Islamic rule pivoted on the expediency of society and sound human reason is charged with recognizing the expediency of society and factors of progress and evolution or of stagnation and decadence.

The late Imam was of the opinion that human reason plays a fundamental role in managing the society and the holy religion never opposes this role. To use thought and resourcefulness in the right way and management of society is in line with Islamic law [because] rea-
son is God’s blessing unto man.

Let us not forget that the relationship between revelation and reason in managing the society and human life has always been the bone of contention in the history of thought and a preoccupation for pious thinkers. Deviation of reasoned thinking has been to the detriment of man.

Those inert in thought propose to put aside thought and reason to settle the dispute between revelation and reason and unbelievers negate revelation and think they can in this way solve the problem, but despite all this, the problem that faces man still exists.

According to the late Imam:

a) Islamic rule is of primal importance.

b) The basis for such rule is the expedience of the system and society and reason determines such expedience.

Besides defining the Islamic rule on page 61, vol. 21 of *Sahife-ye Nour*, the late Imam Khomeini has said elsewhere:

"[Islamic] Government is a branch of the Absolute Guardianship [Wilayat al-Mutlaqa] of God’s Messenger (SAWA) and is among the primary decrees of Islam. It is more important than such secondary decrees as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. The government can stop any affair, religious or non-religious, that may be contrary to the interest of Islam, for as long as it remains so."

What has been said or will be said is due to lack of proper understanding of the divine absolute mandate. It is rumored that share cropping and commodity will be abolished. Supposing this may be true, this is an authority vested in the government."

*Sahife-ye Nour*, vol. 21, pp. 170-71

The late Imam mastered the rational and traditional knowledge, theoretical mysticism, mystic journey to higher moral standards, practical mysticism inspired by teachers doing wonders and gained a thor-
ough life-long practice, experience and selfpurification.

Likewise, the late Imam had a clear, deep-insight into the affairs of the world, a divine commitment to the future of Muslims and all humans, an unwavering determination to fight against all factors of mental deviation and moral decadence and political disloyalty, a remarkable valor displayed for the cause of God and hundreds of laudable attributes I am unable to enumerate. The late Imam’s personality was so sublime that he could by the grace of Almighty God bear the banner of religious revivalism in our time and lead the most majestic divine-popular revolution, a revolution that gained victory through his wisdom and the help of the masses who saw all their lofty aspirations, faith, and love of virtue and justice shine in his brilliant visage. Our Islamic revolution not only had an influence on the future of the noble people of Iran, but also on the geography of thought and politics of our time.

Although Imam Khomeini (RA) has departed from this life, our ears and our historical conscience are with his fiery words:

“O You Muslims the world over and the underprivileged masses, rise and get united and defend Islam and your future. Let not the might of oppressors fill you with dismay. By the will of Allah, the Creator of the universe, it is time for underprivileged to defeat the oppressors and for truth to overcome falsehood.”

Message to Pilgrims to the
Inviolable House of God
(September 5, 1981)

Fully aware of the devastating plots of colonialists to alienate colonized countries from themselves and making them Westernized and Easternized (Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 21, p. 184), the late Imam made known the secret of success of Muslims and the deprived nations in rising up and changing their future and history for the cause of Truth and Justice:
“If one finds himself and does not allow despair to overcome him and does not expect others to do him a favor, in the long run he will have the power of doing and making the things he likes. You will achieve success just like these human beings ... on condition that you put your trust in God and depend on yourself and not on others, and endure hardships to lead a dignified life and remove the shackles of foreign domination.”

Sahife-ye Nour, vol. 2 1, p. 184
Anmerkungen

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1 Religious revival and religious thought make sense and are possible as long as the religion has proven its staying power and survivability. Naturally what belongs to a certain place and time can survive within that time and in that place and not beyond them irrespective of what we want. Religions are for man and man's life in this world, materially and spiritually, is constantly prone to changes. That is why the man of today is totally different from the man of the past as far as his thought, habits and customs as well as his relation to the world and nature and the way he interferes in the affairs thereof are concerned. This is the very secret of changing cultures, for cultures are the result of the conflict between tendencies, subjective approaches, beliefs and tastes and realities of life that are greatly influenced by time and place and by changing factors.

When realities are transformed, many cultural foundations and manifestations change, too. As time goes by, human insight, needs and the state of living change. In such a case, is an unchangeable religion reasonable and acceptable?

We believe that Islam was the last revealed religion to govern man for all times and all places. Taking the above into consideration the correctness of this claim depends on three conditions:

1. In the nature and existence of man there should be some unchangeable facts in all different manners, times and places.

2. The religion be adaptable to this unchangeable fact.

3. The lasting religion should have such a flexibility that can adapt to the changing aspect of human existence and answer the changeable personality and the changing problems and needs of man in all the periods of history.

2 Of course, it should be borne in mind that it is the first time that the Islamic government [in Iran] is established in the Occultation of Imam
of Age [May Allah Expedite his return]. To have proper strategies, it needs longer time and in \'ore experience. Thanks to our Islamic Revolution and with the assistance of faithful thinkers, men of insight, trustworthy experts aware of the exigencies of the time and also human experiences gained in the direction of affairs, we have to endeavor to remove the faults in our work. Our strategies should aim at observance of the sublime position of Islam and divine revelation and canonical criteria and at the same time should not bar the way to benefit from the best human thoughts and mental and scientific efforts. The rights of people and their active presence in decision-making on our future should be observed in order to ensure existence and prosperity of our country and our people.

Here we have to distinguish between the very essence and principles of Islam and the content of Islamic rule in the manner it is established and like other human affairs has its own faults. The methods and criteria of the establishment of Islamic rule should improve. The expediency of the country and the nation might be replaced with more reasonable and comprehensive methods. This needs to be propounded and discussed more fully so that justice would be done to this issue. Devout scholars in the religious centers for theological studies are expected to express their views on this issue.

3 The distinction should be made between what explains unchangeable religious tenets with the traditions relating to the way of ruling should be made. Although the Islamic law has been supported by Islamic scholars and thinkers, it needs to be studied and revised more thoroughly and carefully in the light of Imam's latest positions and views.