

Interpretative innovations of Iran's martyred Leader

In elucidation of social capacities of Islam



The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei takes note after reading the Holy Qur'an.
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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The book "An Outline of Islamic Thought in the Qur'an" must be considered among the most significant intellectual works of the martyred Leader. The importance of this work does not reside solely in its encompassing a collection of Qur'anic and exegetical discussions; rather, its significance derives from the fact that, within it, Islam is presented as a comprehensive school, a coherent intellectual system, and a social and civilizational order.

This book is the product of 28 sessions of lectures delivered by the martyred Leader during the blessed month of Ramadan in the Persian calendar year 1353 (1974) in the holy city of Mashhad. At that same time, a summary of these discussions was published; however, the complete text of the lectures was transcribed and published after the triumph of Iran's Islamic Revolution, upon the discovery of the audio tapes of the sessions by the Sahba team. Hence, the book that is presently in our possession is, in actuality, the edited text of those very lecture sessions.

To comprehend the importance of this work, one must refer to the introduction that the martyred Leader himself wrote for it. His primary concern in this introduction is the presentation of Islam as a "social and comprehensive school;" a school that possesses coherent and harmonious principles and that is observant of the collective life of human beings.

Islam transcending merely individualistic system

The entirety of the martyred Leader's endeavor in this work is directed toward filling a historical hole in Islamic studies. This hole consists of the absence of a comprehensive presentation of Islam in its capacity as a social and civilizational system. In the martyred Leader's expression, a substantial portion of existing Islamic research has been devoid of this characteristic. For this reason, those who compare Islam with modern schools of thought, at times, entertain the notion that modern schools possess more lucid responses to social and political questions. But, in fact, Islam enjoys an immense capacity in this sphere, too,

yet this capacity has been insufficiently elucidated. He considers his objective to be the presentation of the blueprint of an integrated and cohesive school; a scheme that situates the various components of Islamic thought in relation to one another and that clarifies their relationship vis-à-vis other schools.

Critique of abstract approaches to religion

One of the significant critiques advanced in this work is the critique of abstract approaches to religion. Numerous Islamic works treat religious questions at the level of mental and abstract concepts; whereas religion ought to possess a social and political extension and ought to be capable of generating obligation, commitment, and a practical program for the individual and for society. In this conception, Islam is not merely a collection of theoretical propositions; rather, it is a school that must provide solutions and orientations for the administration of the individual and social life of humanity.

On the other hand, the martyred Leader emphasizes the scholarly authority of the Holy Qur'an. In his view, the understanding of Islamic principles must be grounded upon the primary texts of the religion and, above all, upon the Holy Qur'an. Accordingly, he deems three characteristics to be essential for Islamic intellectual studies: the exit from abstraction and sheer subjectivity, a systemic perspective toward Islamic knowledge, and reliance upon authentic religious sources, especially the Holy Qur'an.

Faith; commencing point of Islam's intellectual system

One of the most significant modalities for reading this work is the faith-centered and wilayat-centered reading. The book commences with the discussion of faith and subsequently proceeds to tawhid, nubuwwah, and wilayat. This sequence is entirely meaningful; for, in this perspective, the human being is a dynamic entity, and every movement requires a propelling force. The driving engine of the Muslim individual is faith; faith in God, the prophets, the Qur'an, and the Day of Resurrection.

The martyred Leader speaks of "conscious faith". If the human being has attained faith in God, he must perceive the world through a tawhidic lens; and, if his worldview becomes tawhidic, his lifestyle, too, must become

tawhidic. Hence, faith leads to commitment; commitment before God and adherence to the execution of His command. However, this commitment is not the end of the trajectory. Conscious and committed faith is generative of action, and its fruit is "righteous deed". In this conception, righteous deed is the natural product of faith. Faith without action has not reached its ultimate aim and destination.

the wilayat of the comprehensive-jurisprudent faqih. Here, a longitudinal wilayat is constituted among God, the Prophet, the Imam, and the Umma; and, alongside it, a latitudinal wilayat emerges among the believers themselves. The third pillar of this system is the cognizance of the enemy and disavowal of the enemy.

The martyred Leader grounds wilayat upon three pillars: "love," "assistance,"

Strategic and future-oriented approach

One of the important readings of this book is the "strategic reading". In this perspective, the "strategic human being" is one who contemplates the future and who is concerned with the repulsion of future threats; threats that pertain both to the worldly life of human beings and to their otherworldly existence. In Qur'anic thought, the human being is

tion. Concepts such as faith, security, piety, expenditure, and hypocrisy are reinterpreted in this work with a strategic perspective. For example, the martyred Leader, concerning the concept of expenditure, states that the mere bestowal of wealth and money is not the criterion; rather, true expenditure is that which is directed toward addressing needs and resolving the priority problems of society. A significant innovation is also discernible in the martyred Leader's thought concerning the concept of taqwa (piety). Taqwa does not merely signify abstention and withdrawal; rather, it signifies responsible presence in the arena and conscious movement along the path of dangers and difficulties. In his view, piety signifies the taking of a shield along the path of performing one's duty, not the abandonment of the arena.

Systemic understanding of religion

Among the most important innovations of the martyred Leader in this work is the presentation of a systemic understanding of the verses and traditions. To elucidate this matter, he cites a tradition from Imam Baqir (PBUH), according to which the destiny of the human being is linked to the social and political orientation of the society in which he lives. Employing the analogy of a train, he explains that if the human being is placed upon a trajectory whose destination is erroneous, mere individual actions cannot convey him to the desired destination. The purport of this tradition is not the precedence of society over the individual; rather, it is the calling of attention to the reality that the human being cannot consider himself separate from the social and historical destiny of his society.

Cultivation of the active believer

The entirety of the martyred Leader's endeavor in this work is the cultivation of the "active believer". The believer, in his intellectual system, is not an isolated and passive human being; rather, he is a human being who is defined in connection with religion, the leadership, and other believers; and the leadership constitutes the point of connection among the individual believers.

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The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (c) meets with prominent clerics in Tehran, Iran.
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Faith and the establishment of religion

From the martyred Leader's perspective, the objective is not merely the explanation or propagation of religion; rather, it is the call to the "establishment of religion". Faith and righteous deed, in another expression, constitute the very establishment of religion. For this reason, the reader of his book arrives at the conclusion that he must render his faith more conscious and more committed and must consider himself responsible before God, the Prophet, and the divine authorities. One who proclaims "I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of God" has, in actuality, committed himself to obey the Prophet; and one who bears witness to the wilayat of Imam Ali (PBUH) must consider himself obligated to follow that wilayat.

A novel interpretation of wilayat

One of the interpretative innovations of the martyred Leader in this work is the nexus between faith, tawhid, and nubuwwah with the concept of wilayat. In this conception, the believing individual does not permit any distance to interpose itself between him and divine wilayat; whether this wilayat be the wilayat of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), the wilayat of the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them), or

and "guardianship"; in the sense that the relationship of the believer with God and the divine authorities is a relationship predicated upon reciprocal love; a love that culminates in assistance and the acceptance of guardianship. This same logic obtains among the believers themselves.

Governance as wilayat

Another innovation of this work is the possibility of its reading from the perspective of governance. Under the auspices of the noble verse: "Verily, Allah commands you to deliver trusts to their owners," wilayat is referenced as a divine trust. In this conception, every individual must occupy his proper station and must fulfill his responsibility correctly.

Governance acquires meaning when the complex and multi-faceted problems of society are resolved through the cooperation of the people, the rulers, and the official institutions, and when the Umma and the leadership collaborate under divine wilayat for the resolution of problems. In his view, faith likewise plays a fundamental role here. The more profound the faith of society, the greater will be the accompaniment of the people with the leadership in resolving complex problems; and the outcome of this accompaniment is righteous deed on a social scale.

not a self-regulating entity independent of guidance. God is the Protector of humanity, and His legislative protection is realized through religion. If the human being obeys God, he will also enjoy divine protection; and this obedience, in the final analysis, culminates in the establishment of religion.

Problem-oriented approach

One of the most crucial teachings of this book is attention to strategic and priority problems. The martyred Leader, in this work, explicitly states that many statements are correct; however, one must discern, among correct matters, which is necessary; among necessary matters, which is more necessary; and, among more necessary matters, which is an urgent and vital problem.

This work presents a novel methodology in the study of religion. In this methodology, the understanding of religion commences with faith and subsequently proceeds to tawhid, nubuwwah, and wilayat. This sequence is divergent from the conventional structure of theological books. Faith, in this perspective, is not merely a credal proposition; rather, it is the origin of a lifestyle and a mode of existence.

Novel conceptualization

This work also contains numerous innovations in the domain of conceptualiza-



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