Political Conception of Islamic Education:
Revisiting al-Afghani's Ideas on Education

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Article Info	ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Sufis, jurists, philosophers, and theologians, are known as different schools of Islamic thought, each of which has its own approach to Islamic education. However, from the 19th century onwards, another powerful approach emerged: political Islam, which also had a different conception of Islamic education. The present study tries to explain how the political conception of Islamic education was formulated in this approach. To achieve this goal, al-Afghani's ideas have been examined. Al-Afghani was one of the first Islamic theologians who formulated modern political Islam and called for accepting modern values because of their consonance with Islamic values. This article, interprets Al-Afghānī's political theology as an emancipatory proclamation that aimed at the liberation of Muslims. His emancipatory attitude concentrated on the cultural reform; and the education of the nation was the core of this cultural reform. He believed that a general education system must be established that all people enjoy from childhood; and the core of the curriculum of this education should be based on political education with the theme of the greatness of the nation.

Introduction

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, Muslims became aware of the authoritarianism and inefficacy of their rulers as well as the technical-political power of Western nations. It was widespread among young intellectual Muslims that this power of western nations had rooted in their commitment to democracy. In Iran, for example, the intellectuals thought of themselves as slaves of an arbitrary and capricious lord. It was commonly accepted that the destitution, despair, ineptitude, ignorance, and weakness of the most people in those days Iran was the result of this despotism. Although that general conclusion seems controversial, at least this is what the intellectuals in Iran believed in.[1] First-hand reports of those days in Iran, show that this discourse was prevalent among intellectuals.[2] Among them, and more than others, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī, known as al-Afghānī (1217-1275 Hijri /1838/1839-1897), preached this discourse. He declared that:

> No one will make any progress under the dictatorship… in the era of tyranny nothing will end well … every effort, whether educational or commercial, will be trampled underfoot of the tyrant.... A country without law has nothing (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/ 25).

This is due to the fact that

> The authoritarianism firstly weakens morality [of the tyrant] and then corrupts it ... tyranny disrupts the mind and deprives it, so that it can't distinguish between good and evil (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/ 24).

Therefore, he concluded that the two problems, authoritarianism and the inefficacy of economic-political system, are interconnected. In the last chapter of his History of Iran, he wrote that the king of Iran, Naser al-Din Shah (1831-1896), because of his acquaintance with European nations, Knows that there must be law in the country, there must be a parliament in the country. He knows that [press and] pens must be free; he knows that the government must establish schools as well as the national offices. He knows that the progress, civilization, and wealth depend on science. He knows all of these, but … he does not want anyone to tell these things to the people.... He does not want anyone to mention the name of the law. He takes new industrial inventions as much as he needs; he only wants to that extent. He does not want the nation to wake up anymore (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/ 100).

In such a context al-Afghānī started a movement known today as Islamic Modernism. As a prominent theologian, he tried to awaken Muslims and lead them to modernize their political and educational institutions based on a new reading of Islam which meets the needs of the time (Keddie, 1972: 392; Black, 2011: 293-4; Leaman, 2015: 11; Voll, 2004: 733; Groff, 2007: 10-11). At his time, conservative Muslim scholars ('ulama) and Monarchists severely attacked al-Afghānī; and even now, his ideas on Islamic modernism is rejected by fundamentalists / Islamists and by seculars who reprobate religion. However, by

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[1]. Iranian intellectuals thought that the Ottoman Empire did much better than the Iranian government. The pan-Islamic group, organized by al-Afghani, was a sign of this belief. See. Kia, Pan Islamism.

[2]. Ringer in her book, Education in Qajar Iran, especially chapters 1- 2, and 7 discussed this sense of decline in 'Travel Literatures' in those days. Also, for more about this period, see. Keddie, Iran Qajar, especially chapters 3 and 4.

new exegesis of Islamic sacred texts he aimed to make modern values acceptable to Muslims. He believed that it is possible to have a truly Islamic life while we enjoy modern institutions. In fact, for Islamic reformists such as al-Afghānī and his disciples, modernizing institutions and accepting the values of modernism does not mean breaking with tradition; rather, it is an expression of Islamic tradition's ongoing vitality (Haj, 2009, ch. 1; van der Sluis, ?: 393).

Al-Afghānī believed what is required for this purpose is a rational interpretation of religion that is consistent with human knowledge and plants the buds of hope and glory in the hearts of people and invites them to a wise and moral life. Therefore, al-Afghānī focused generally on awakening Muslims and enlightening them by Islam and its moral codes. In fact, he was a teacher; and he tried to teach his companions to be diligent in guiding and enlightening others –the way Muḥammad[3] 'Abduh (1849-1905), Rashid Rida (1865-1935), and others chose and followed. To use modern terminology, his political-Islamic thought has emancipatory and indigenous orientations. While his disciples and some scholars (e.g. Fakhry 2004: 345-346) considered al-Afghānī an advocate of liberalism, some others, perhaps based on his emancipatory orientation and some evidence of his life (See. Makhzoumi, 2002: 163), argued that his political theology belongs to Islamo-leftism (Hanna, 1967: 24 – 32; ʿImāra, 1988: 195-222). Whatever the story is, the fact is that his thought was mainly focused on the political awareness via education of the masses (Makhzoumi, 2002: 120). More than anything else, he was an original thinker and a professional teacher (Black, 2011: 293). Al-Afghānī spent his entire life on teaching Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims and informing them of the past and present conditions; he taught many students through his writings and speeches. He saw the East afflicted with the maladies of disintegration and thoughtlessness, and concluded that the only cure for that was the enlightening of the Easterners (Makhzoumi, 2002: 77; Keddie, 1972: 397; Black, 2011: 294). Al-Afghānī called himself the Muslim Luther (Black, 2011: 294; Keddie, 1972: 95) and considered his duty, as a religious scholar, not the pursuit of ambition and the seeking of high positions, but the guiding, enlightening, and training of people (Makhzoumi, 2002: 64). In fact, al-Afghānī tied his hope for political reform to cultural reform:

> I believe that the establishment of a regular government and the enactment of law and
> the promotion of science among the people and the establishment of schools will cure
> these diseases (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/101).

However, when one look at his works closely, it can be argued that his political actions play a secondary role in his arguments. As explained, he considered the tyranny of the rulers to be the main reason for the Easterners' entrapment in superstition and ignorance.

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[3]. A number of researchers regard the centrality of Islamic solidarity in al-Afghānī's thought as a strategy to resist colonialism and imperialism and a strive to fight back their mercenaries (see, Amin (1966), ʿImāra (1988), Keddie (1972), Leaman (2015), Kurzman (2004a), Newby (2004), Stockdale (2004), Morewedge (2004)). Even in the first translation of al-Afghānī's select writings, Keddie identifies him as a person who was trying to cry out Islam's response to imperialism (1983). Although this interpretation of al-Afghānī seems to make sense, it misses some important points in his overall approach; which is mentioned in the text, above. In fact,

> The tyrant always prefers the subjects to remain in the darkness of ignorance ... He is always afraid of those sciences [law and political science and Sociology] and does not want the people to learn them (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/23).

This ignorance, in turn, fuels tyranny. Where ignorance spreads, so al-Afghānī argued, autocrats arise and remain. And education is the key to eliminating the darkness of ignorance. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the tyranny, al-Afghānī said, is itself the offspring of the "improper education" of the autocratic person (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 55).

Although he frequently interwoven his political ideals with his/her educational Ideas, less attention has been paid to the connection between his political Islamic assumptions and his Islamic educational Ideas. Therefore, this article tries to show how al-Afghānī, as a prominent Islamic ideologue conceptualizes Islamic education for his political Ideals. To explain his Ideas on education,[4] Firstly, it is necessary to see (1) which political assumptions has he accepted, and (2) how has he linked these assumptions to education, and finally (3) how has he used this concept of education to formulate an Islamic conception of education based on his political interests and goals?

1. Political conception of Happiness

Al-Afghānī believed that the human beings naturally aspire to a good life, and this is what inspires them to try harder in this world. Whatever human beings do, sensual or spiritual, "is directed to achieve happiness" (al-Afghani, 2000, 6/ 13). For al-Afghānī, as for other Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi (872-950), Avicenna (980-1037) and Ghazali (1056-1111),[5] this concept is of key significance. However, unlike Sufis and many Muslim philosophers, al-Afghānī seeks happiness within the framework of society and the nation, not inside the individual (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 225). Therefore, for him, the happiness was neither solely this-worldly, nor completely other-worldly. He believed that human happiness inaugurates in this world, but it is not confined to it; it entails the Hereafter. In another words, a considerable part of one's happiness is related to happiness in this world. Living in destitution, slavery, and indignity is certainly not a sign of prosperity or happiness (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 88 and 132; 3/ 84).

By analyzing al-Afghānī's writings, one can argue that, in his view, what was needed for the happiness of the individual/ nation is a righteous political system. Such a system established when a righteous educated ruler governs the state. For al-Afghānī, Rashidun Caliphs are the ideal type of such rulers. Each one of Rashidun Caliphs was an absolute mujtahid in religion who had a complete knowledge of "the Sharia (Islamic law) and natural law" and obeyed God's commands and adhered to them. (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 74 and 96). Finding a ruler like Rashidun Caliphs is difficult; therefore, al-Afghānī preferred the second form which refers to a group of sage people who are called the Council of Resolution in Islam. If there is

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4. The critical edition of his works was published by Sayyid Hadi Khusru-Shahi in Tehran in 2000 (Kolbeye Shorouq Publishing House in collaboration with Islamic Studies Center). In collaboration with Mohammad ʿImāra, he published this collection in Cairo in 2002 as well (Al-Shorouq Publishing). The sequence of the volume numbers of these two publications is not the same. In this paper, the volume numbers are based on the Tehran version, and we have used the Cairo edition only for the "Memoirs of Makhzomi" that is not included in the Tehran version.
5. See. Al-Farabi *Attainment of Happiness* (1995) and *Opinions of the people of Utopia (1995)* Avicenna's *Directives and Remarks (2004) and* Ghazali's *Alchemy of Happiness* (2003)

no council, "then the welfare and misery of the nation will be in the hands of a ruler who is wise, clever, chivalric and just" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 171) –a ruler who is strong and just, but not authoritarian (Makhzoumi, 2002: 99). He told his disciples, "neither the one who is just but impotent, nor the one who is potent but atrocious is worthy of rule" (Makhzoumi, 2002: 331). Al-Afghānī considers the potent, just ruler "as the father of the nation, who not only directs the affairs of the Sharia," but also guides the people (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 216).

However, an amendment must be added to these explanations. Al-Afghānī's governance ideal for modern world is the second type (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 171). In his treatise, On the Dictatorship, he declared that 'the rule of the pious sages' is the only authentic and legislative sovereignty, and the Easterners must proceed in that way (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 64). In his thought, sage rulers are legislators, but they obey the rules themselves –like their subjects; they respect the rights and the comfort of their people and establish meritorious courts of law. They also build relations based on friendship and reconciliation with other countries while at the same time value the grandeur and autonomy of their own country (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 60-62). Such rulers, al-Afghānī maintained, resemble sympathetic, compassionate doctors who see the human afflicted with avarice, lust, and depravity in need of constant nursing (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 63). Al-Afghānī implicitly refers to it as the republic –the rule of law, in which people live equally under a just law which was enacted by the council of the sages. It should be noted that the democracy, in those days, as Hodgson noted, was "identified with the rule of law as against the rule of despots"; and they thought that 'the law' was "most perfectly embodied in the principles of Islam" (Hodgeson, 1974: 3/309). According to al-Afghānī, in such a system, the human being is "authentic" and "concurrently complies with the law" and "reaches real happiness" (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 56). He indicated that the ideal sovereignty is not the absolute rule of a single individual; it is in the form of a 'council' (Shura). The one who imposes her/his will on others is autocratic, and autocracy is one of the main reasons for the backwardness of Muslims (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 100). He explained that one can never be both authoritarian and just; these two cannot coexist. What is needed is a council that draws up a constitution for the country, guides the ruler, and measures her/his actions based on it (Makhzoumi, 2002: 84-83). However, one should notice that the Shura (council) was one of the controversial concepts among Muslim thinkers in those days:

> Modern scholars consider shura to be the basis for the implementation of democracy. Liberal scholars argue that shura declares the sovereignty of people in electing representative leaders to democratic institutions designed to act in the public interest. For conservative thinkers, shura must be based on the principle of the ultimate sovereignty of God and geared toward implementation of traditional Islamic law (Esposito, 2003: 294).

According to al-Afghānī, "no one, although wise and astute and chivalrous, can achieve happiness for him/herself. It is crystal clear that the achievement of happiness and prosperity for the society is much more complicated. And this will only be possible when a council-based government is established" (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 100). God called upon the Prophet to consult with others in his affairs (Qur'an 3: 159) because, al-Afghānī said, human beings, naturally, "have little knowledge of the good […] and bad of things" and

always "need help from others" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 185). This clearly shows that al-Afghānī, like other modern Muslim, saw the 'council' as a way to protect the public interest. As Makhzoumi reported, he said that by the story of Solomon and Queen Saba (Qur'an 27: 30-35), the God taught us the principles of consultative rule and that it should work in the interests of the people (Makhzoumi, 2002: 139). Therefore, he called for parliament and identified it with a Qur'an's injunction (42: 38) about consultation. He thought that the Parliament can pass "appropriate laws" and guarantee "rights, freedom, and equality"; and of course, "it will help the growth of Islam" (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/ 28-29).[6]

2. Politico-moral conception of Education

Al-Afghānī argues that the human infant is completely pure and innocent. However, he does not mean that the soul of a child is adorned with inherent virtues, or that her/his mind is endowed with built-in mental content. He, like Locke and other empiricists, considers the mind of the child to be simple and unadorned – as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) on which the child's family and surrounding people will paint a picture; a picture that will lead him to happiness or misery (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 168 and 121-122). In his opinion:

> Human is human by education, and all of her/his behaviors, traditions, and virtues are acquired. The human closest to nature is one who is farther from civilization and from acquired virtues and customs. If humans abandon the laws of the *Sharia* and the laws of reason, that are very hardly and painstakingly acquired, and surrender themselves to their nature, they will become baser than animals (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 193).

However, we should remember that when al-Afghānī employs the term *education*, he has, for the most part, *moral education* in mind. Education is, in al-Afghānī's view, the institutionalizing virtues within the human soul, and correcting vices and defects (al-Afghani, 2000: 2/ 94 and 5/ 137). Therefore, he believed (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/189-190) that the educational processes either elevate the human nature because it's "the cause of all perfection and goodness," or make her/him worse than s/he was because "the mis-education is the cause of all defects and vices." But, as al-Afghānī assumed, this is not a merely individual event; "the classes of the nation, each in their deserving place, reach a high level of perfection" through a good education and become happy and prosperous, or they become dissolute and wretched through a miseducation. Therefore, what we need is an educational system that, according to al-Afghānī, ought to be general i.e. an inclusive education; both men and women must be educated:

> We will not be free from misery, ignorance, poverty, and weakness unless the women of the community learn their rights and duties (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 102).

And this is possible only through general education. Therefore, although Freedom, justice, law, and parliament, are all vital elements of an ideal political system, what is more important is its educational system. Al-Afghānī argued that the ideal government is the one that constructs "organized schools" and

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6. Keddie (1972: 391) and Hourani (1983: 116) argue that al-Afghānī was not, at least fundamentally, a constitutionalist; he only invited people to follow the instructions of the Quran. But this argument is incompatible with Makhzoumi's reports in *Al-Afghani's Memorabilia*. It also neglects his associations with the constitutionalists. Moreover, it ignores his views about the "council" and his modern interpretations of the story of Queen Sabain Quran and the need for a *parliament*. He believed that what the Iranians need to do is to 'create a strong barrier against dictatorship through constitutionalism' (al-Afghani, 2000: 7/ 27).

employ "trained, caring, and ethical educators" to spread "useful knowledge and skills" among the people (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 61). This proposition has a key role in understanding al- Afghānī's reform policy. A good governance system must make an effort to educate people, "ignite the light of knowledge," and "make people courageous and fearless" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 171).

This policy which can be called *the Education of the nation*, show clearly how education and politics are interconnected and codependent in al-Afghānī's thought. This is an important point that has received little attention. He justifies this connection by focusing on the ethical elements inherent in it. He believed that:

> Everyone's well-being depends on the well-being of all and the happiness and prosperity
> of each individual depends on the happiness and prosperity of all (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/
> 156).

If the interests of the individuals and the collective interests of communities are interdependent, then any precedence of individual interests over the collective ones will eventually lead to the decay of society. In other words, misery has no other reason but selfishness. Al-Afghānī argued that the selfishness will push one towards hostility, hatred, and humiliation of others, and this causes separation and dissension which are the roots of the misery of a nation (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 177 and 5/ 208). Cordiality and sympathy "strengthen the nation and bring about comfort and prosperity in both worlds, whereas hostility and animosity cause loss and misery in both worlds" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 183). Al- Afghānī was convinced that "the virtuous are not hostile to each other" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 122); and this will make the society an integrated and unified whole and, in the long run, brings forth solidarity, cooperation, equality, convergence, and a pure sane life. On the other hand, vices, according to their nature, bring about hostility and distress (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 124-125 and 184; 6/ 166; 5/198). The point is that the organic unity of the nation –i.e. the harmonious co-existence of all individuals and all classes– will make people prosperous (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 157). But selfishness and prioritizing personal interest over national interest is a moral ruin that has profound effects on the man and society (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 145 and 167). A selfish person is the one who lacks any care about others' interests or nation's interest.

It is important to notice that al- Afghānī proposed a political conception of education to remedy this mischief. Based on his writing, we can say that the goal of education is to learn to put the nation's interest above that of one's interest (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 71). The way to conduct this is to cultivate the belief in the greatness of the nation in the hearts of the students. Al-Afghānī argues that this is the function of education. In other words, the political system must promote, through education, the sense of nationalism among the people (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/138-139). Such a sense is "even more stable than religious solidarity" (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/227), and is the cause of nation's prosperity and durability.

However, he tried to explain these issues in an Islamic framework. Therefore, he puts the notion of Jihad at the very core of nationalism. According to him, to become autonomous and independent, Easterners need to develop, more than anything else, Islamic-based patriotic upbringing (see. Keddie, 1972: 399; Black, 2011: 294-295) –to learn from childhood that to die for one's land is brave and glorious, but to live when one's country is dying is a loss and a disgrace (Makhzoumi, 2002: 79). They must believe that the Great is the one who continues to live after the death of her/his body; one who becomes immortal (al-Afghani, 2000:

1/170). Greatness, according to al-Afghānī, is a person's dignity, and dignity is nothing but one's efforts "to exert a positive influence on a nation or on the human race at large" –such as one's efforts "to liberate the nation, eliminate ignorance, help the oppressed, warn and guide the people,[…] or endeavor to unify the nation" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/168-169). Greatness, according to al- Afghānī, needs bravery. He thought that the one who curses the rulers in private but worships them in the public is not worthy of life (Makhzoumi, 2002: 333). Al-Afghānī believed that the one who is timid and does not sacrifice her/his life and property is not worthy of happiness. The sick, licentious, bloodthirsty person does not deserve greatness and prosperity (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 198-199). These propositions show that the will to greatness needs to be fostered by a moral education that encourages students to be courageous.

Such nationalistic tendencies can be easily developed, so al-Afghānī argues, because the desire for greatness is a core natural tendency in human beings without which there is no motivation for life. He maintained that the truth is that every joy and glory, except for grandeur and greatness, have only instrumental value; they are simply tools to achieve greatness (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 145-147). In al-Afghānī's thought, this natural desire for greatness has its root in another natural inclination, namely, the desire for being praised. Human beings "love to be praised and admired," and, according to al-Afghānī, this is "the most sublime inclination of human beings"; "it is what differentiates them from other living beings" and for which they sacrifice many of their other ambitions and dreams. It is the same desire that guides human beings to perfection and excellence (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 162-163). Therefore, we can conclude that through the proper political conception of education, i.e. the education of the nation, the government must direct this natural inclination toward the happiness of the nation and venerate and glorify those who endeavor for the greatness of their country (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 167).

3. Political conception of Islamic education

For al-Afghānī, *the education of nation* is based on belief in God. Therefore, religious scholars (*'ulama*) have a vital role in this plan. They have to guide people and "reconcile them with true religious beliefs, […] strengthen their spirits by religious beliefs" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/120-121), "help them regain their conscience, […] heal them from desperation"," (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 187), "try to unite the people and to bring them together" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/152). In a word, they should try to emancipate them from the impasse they face. He regarded religious education as "the first education" and considered the role of *'ulama* to be very decisive; for the same reason, he contended that "the *'ulama* ought to make use of their knowledge for self-improvement, first and foremost". Otherwise, they will not be capable of emancipating people. In fact he believed that the "wretchedness of Muslims is due to the wretchedness of their religious scholars" (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/134). The fundamental part of this self-improvement is to keep away from backwardness and to welcome new thoughts. He maintained that the dogmatism of some of the *'ulama* hurts Islam more than any enemy can (Makhzoumi, 2002: 333). He called them *the spirit of the nation* because they are the teachers of the community: "If they have pure elevated thoughts", then the people who follow their way "will tread in the path of happiness, prosperity, and salvation, but if they […] have perverted and degenerate thoughts, or are morally corrupt, they will lead people to damnation and misery" (al-Afghani,

2000: 5/ 122-123). Al-Afghānī stated that the theologians should teach people genuine / true religious beliefs, purge religion of perverted convictions and superstitions that surround it (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/119; Makhzoumi, 2002: 297). Religion brings about prosperity and happiness if it is purged from superstition and interpreted wisely. As Fakhry (2004) states:

> He reduces religion to a rationalist system of beliefs, shorn of any supernatural content.
> Genuine religious beliefs, he argues, must be founded upon sound demonstrations and
> valid proofs, rather than the doubtful fables or opinions of the ancestors (p. 349).

Al-Afghānī had emphasized the need for a critical attitude and the search for truth in religious thought. This is what he calls the *Ijtihad* (Makhzoumi, 2002: 150-151; Hourani, 1983: 127). He warned Muslims that faith and certainty do not mean devoutness to religious authorities (Makhzoumi, 2002: 333; Kurzman, 2004: 468). It is worth noting that this is a common strategy among Muslim reformers. As Haj noted:

> Most reformers invoked the concept of *Ijtihad* to challenge the authority of the religious
> leadership in their respective communities. Going back to the original authoritative
> sources, the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, revivalists claimed to want to free Islam from the
> dead weight of ineffectual and harmful accretions. They considered the conventional
> religious authority, which imbued *taqlid*, as unable either to recognize the serious
> problems raised by current practices or to provide proper guidance to the community
> (Haj, 2009: 9).

They claimed that the *Ijtihad* can lead Muslims out of their miserable situation (Hedin, Janson, and Westerlund, 2004: 172). On the other hand, al-Afghānī was so enthusiastic about the new sciences that he stated that if some Muslim beliefs were incompatible with the new knowledge, it would be necessary to try to reach at a new interpretation of the religious propositions, for the scientific-philosophical truth cannot be incompatible with the holy Quran (See Keddie, 1972: 394; Van der Sluis,?: 394). In fact, in his view, *Ijtihad* is mainly an attempt to reconcile religion with human knowledge. It is only after this that *Ijtihad* succeeds in resolving the challenges of life. But if the door of *Ijtihad* is closed, then a fanaticism will arise. In such a situation, an individual has unexamined beliefs and a fanatical and uncompromising adherence to those beliefs. Religion is misused here and, according to al-Afghānī, this misuse has "brought about chaos, hostility among people, and the present misery of people" (al-Afghani, 2000: 6/ 100). He sees the beginning of this misery and helplessness, in particular, in the blindness and fanaticism that precluded the search for meaning in religion and made Islamic sciences faded and sterile.

To overcome these problems, therefore, religious scholars must take their duties more seriously. They should undertake to flesh out a new exegesis of sacred texts. But in addition, al-Afghānī suggests three other duties: (1) teaching true beliefs that obstruct superstitions; (2) openness to reasoning, evaluation of beliefs, and condemnation of unchecked biases and blind imitation; and (3) training teachers who familiarize people with the truth and preach virtues (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 58-62). If all these duties are to be gathered under a concept, that concept would be *education* (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 2/ 93-96).

Conclusion

"Islamic revivalism" as Haj (2009: 7) noted, "is neither an innovation nor a novelty, for it is deeply embedded in the Islamic tradition". Ghazali is one of the prominent examples of these revivalists (Ormsby, 2007; Haj, 2009: 8-9; Griffel, 2009; Bolandhematan 2019). However in the 19ᵗʰ century Muslim scholars encountered a new phenomenon called *modernization*. For some, this familiarity was accompanied by fears and prejudices. Nevertheless, there were also groups that were fascinated by the modern world and wanted to copy it. Al-Afghānī, who may be considered as the most influential modernist activist of the nineteenth century among Muslims (Kurzman, 2004: 467), did not approve of any of these two approaches. He believed that it is possible to be modern without necessarily accepting the Western culture (Voll, 2004: 733). In his view, Islam is not really incompatible with the fundamental values of modernity. To the contrary, it embraces them. A clear example of this is the call of Islam for acquiring knowledge, which is itself one of the foundations of modernity. Islam is in no way in conflict with advancement and justice. To the contrary, Islam itself propagates them. He argued that there are two fundamental beliefs that are the foundations of human civilization; beliefs that religion has taught human beings:

1. The human being is the noblest being and the master of the world.
2. Human beings have come to this world to achieve perfection and transcendence (al-Afghani, 2000: 2/150; 5/ 24 and 158).[7]

The first belief saves the human being from her/his animal-like fierceness and brutality, elevates her/him, and paves the way for the blossoming of wisdom. The second belief motivates the human being to enlighten reason with knowledge and nourishes and purifies inner power to adorn it with moderation and merit (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 2/ 150-153; 5/ 24-27; 5/ 185-160). Based on these assumptions, al-Afghānī in his article, *Virtues and Vices and their Effects*, criticized the Muslims who have abandoned religion and argued that it is this abandonment of religion which has brought about their dispersion and distress (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/128).

As the first Muslims who had been enlightened by the teachings of Islam, built a new civilization, he thought, we can create another one. Al-Afghānī under the influence of Francois Guizot (1787-1874) "stressed the importance of religion in stimulating morality and intellectual development, which were according to him the foundations of civilizational progress" (Van der Sluis, ?: 399). For this, according to al-Afghānī, two prerequisites must be met, including (1) the establishment of *the council of sages* as the only authentic and legislative sovereignty in Islam; and (2) the *Education of the nation* as a key policy for building a great nation. He has a political conception of education which was rooted in his conception of Happiness. In his view, the happiness of the individual and society are interdependent. Moreover, this happiness is not only about this world; it is also about the hereafter. Therefore, religion, undoubtedly, has an eminent role in al-Afghānī's educational plan. His central idea is that religion can endow us with happiness and prosperity in both worlds (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/92, 128, and 180; 5/ 100; Makhzoumi, 2002: 326). According to him, religion is not merely a spiritual process; it has also instructions for this-

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7. In fact he mentioned three beliefs; the third one is that: My nation is the best nation. This belief motivates her/him to excellence and rivalry with other nations –each seeking the best– and this facilitates the blooming and flourishing of the life of the human race.

worldly life. "It organizes humans' relations and behaviors and clarifies their rights and duties" (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/71; See also, Makhzoumi, 2002: 324). He believed that the adherence to the sacred religious orders is synonymous with happiness and blessing in this world while defying those orders leads to misery and wretchedness in the same world (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 182; Makhzoumi, 2002: 180).

He pragmatically believed that respecting boundaries and protecting the rights of others is "possible only if one believes in God and the Day of Resurrection." This helps peace and tranquility to spread in the society and brings about the happiness and prosperity of the nation (al-Afghani, 2000: 5/98-99). He particularly highlights three moral virtues that are rooted in religion and are age-old and venerable: modesty, trust, and truthfulness. Modesty, as the foundation of all good, elevates humans, distances them from brutality, and protects moral boundaries. Trust regulates peoples' conducts and organizes the country's apparatuses. Truthfulness helps people to profit and to avoid loss and detriment. It stabilizes the society (al-Afghani, 2000: 2/ 154-159; 5/ 27-31 and 161-164; Morewedge, 2004: 252). Here, likewise, one can recognize al-Afghānī's opinion on the functional role of religion and religious ethics in the policies of nations, their survival, and their greatness and prosperity (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 5/ 13 and 2/ 134). Without a religious moral living, al- Afghānī thought, we will have no prospect of happiness and prosperity. In other words, religious ethics are prerequisites for the flourishing of nations (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/105; Makhzoumi, 2002: 266). This last statement is the foundation of his conception of Islamic education.

Moreover, there is another crucial aspect of the interactions between religion and politico-moral education. For al-Afghānī, preferring the nation's interest (: political education) requires an inclination that can be called *the will to greatness*. Hope is the fundamental condition for aspiring greatness. Hope is what alleviates all the pains and hardships one encounters in the path to reach glory. Hope is not the same as wishful thinking; the one who hopes starts to work and is patient in the face of hardships (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/147-148). Analyzing the writings of al-Afghānī in this regard elucidates two points about hope. The first one is that hope brings about patience and endurance, and these qualities are exactly what the Easterners need the most (Makhzoumi, 2002: 116 and 127). The second one is that hope needs proper education. Otherwise, it will lead to disappointment. Disappointment happens when all one can see is her/his own (limited) power and the difficulties of the way; s/he forgets to rely on God –the One God who holds the keys of heaven and earth (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/150). In His article, *Islamic Solidarity*, al-Afghānī indicated that the early Muslims followed God's commands and achieved greatness and glory because they did not fear death but hoped in God's promises (See, al-Afghani: 2000, 1/132). He thought that faith has its own signs and indications, and God will test those who claim faith to indicate whether they are faithful or not (See, al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 178). In his article, *Cowardice*, al-Afghānī maintained that the faith's most conspicuous sign is courage, for the believer sees life, death, property, and poverty in the hands of God (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/212). In another article, *Fate and Destiny*, he declared that the believer is one who has courage, for s/he believes in predestination (*qadar*); s/he proceeds bravely in life and is patient in the face of the difficulties of the way. Perseverance and altruism are indicators of true believers –just as Muslims were at the beginning of the burgeoning of Islam (al-Afghani, 2000: 1/ 116-119; See also, Makhzoumi, 2002: 295-296).

In sum, al-Afghānī has a functional and pragmatic approach to religion in order to make the Islamic world a powerful, modern, and civilizing world (Keddie, 1*972*: 392 and 398). Hourani interprets this as an innovation, or at least a new emphasis, in al-Afghānī's thought:

> The center of attention is no longer Islam as a religion; it is rather Islam as a civilization. The purpose of man's acts is not the service of God alone; it is the creation of human civilization flourishing in all its parts (Hourani, 1983: 114).

In his view, religion, per se, is both a proper assistant for political awakening and a valuable mediator for moral education in the path to political glory.

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