Reconstruction of Religious Thought and its Impact on the Shiite Political Discourse in Contemporary Iran (with Special focus on the Thoughts of the Late Ayatullah Mutahhari)

Jalal Dorakhshah∗

Abstract

The reconstruction of religious thought is considered one of the essential components of the politico-religious discourse in contemporary Iran towards the revival of religious thought and making religion more efficient. This reconstruction has involved such goals as universality of religious thought towards playing a superior socio-political role, adapting it to the temporal requirements and benefitting from religious potentials towards resisting against domestic despotism and foreign domination. The historical background of this process and understanding its Islamist discourse involve the hard task of identification and evaluation in a world in which we not only witness the opposition of religious and antireligious thought, but we see that the religious thought itself has undergone extensive developments and interpretations. The wide range of this reconstruction among the Shiite scholars of Iran is a turning point in intellectual and practical developments in the history of contemporary Iran. Explaining this issue and its impact on the Shiite political discourse in contemporary Iran, this article seeks to elaborate on religious reconstruction from the perspective of Ayatuulah Murtaza Mutahhari.

Keywords

∗ Associate Professor, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Political Science, ISU

J.dorakhshah@yahoo.com

Introduction

The renaissance of Islamic thought as one of the fundamental components of the politico- religious discourse in contemporary Iran is a sophisticated phenomenon that consists of spiritual, political, social and economic dimensions. Thus, analysis of the attempts at revival of religious thought and understanding the Islamist discourse that conveys a response to the modern challenges in Iran involves a difficult process of identification and evaluation. Attempts that the west imposed on Christianity in relation to its isolation and alienation successfully forestalled the isolation of Islam in its own environment.

By reconstruction of religious thought is meant all attempts that have been undertaken to make religion more efficient and more inclined to revival of religious thought and those having left a profound impact on the intellectual structure of the contemporary Shiite clergymen. This reconstruction involves objectives such as generalizing religious teachings towards playing a superior political and social role; adapting them with the demands of time, and using religion towards struggling against domestic absolutism and foreign domination. Thus, one observes that propounding it again especially after the 1940's is interpreted as a merely defensive phenomenon defending the essence of religion by means of rediscovery and redefinition of its inherent concepts, ultimately reaching an aggressive position.

The process of reconstruction of religious thought combined with reformism among the Shiite thinkers has clearly been less pervasive than among thinkers of the Sunni school of thought in the world of Islam. However, at the same time, it must be said that in the rest of the Islamic communities, these ideas have not achieved the Shiite dynamism which largely pertains to the nature of the Shiite school of thought itself. In addition, the ideas of religious reconstruction in other

Islamic communities in most cases, due to their bond with *Salafi* doctrines, have taken on a reactionary quality. In contrast, among Shiite societies, alongside reconstruction of religious thought and combating the enemies of Islam and atheism, the attempts of Shiite reformers have been directed at removing deviations that have manifested in the form of superstition and sticking to the surface of religion.

1. Historical Approach

From the historical perspective, the period after the Second World War in Iran was the start of a complete transformation in religious perception and also in the make-up of religious thought of Shiite scholars. This is because under the new circumstances after the fall of Reza Shah, on the one hand, the leftists movements based on Marxism came to be considered as the most significant intellectual current whose main foundations were opposition to religion and religious thought. On the other hand, combating religion in the form of eliminating traditional components of religion by such intellectuals as Ahmad Kasravi became prevalent. These challenges and confrontations brought in its wake certain reactions in the religious strata of society. In terms of quality and quantity, the aforesaid transformation or development had a rising trend until the victory of the Islamic Revolution, having a serious impact on the contemporary political thought of the Shiite school. Although in general, the flow of thought of jurisprudential Islam in fact presented a traditional perspective, it provided the required preliminaries for new thinking within itself, hence emergence of a new spectrum of thinkers. Presenting their points of view and especially expressing religion in common language of the day based on spatio-temporal requirements, these thinkers brought about a major upheaval in the traditional-religious beliefs. This movement -beyond being social based on the

analysis that Dr. Enayat has given concerning its social causes and motivations -(Enayat, 1986, p.78), was also amazingly political.

One can consider the major spokesmen of this development in that period to be groups and individuals such as Fadaiyan-e Islam, Ayatullah Kashani, Ayatullah Burujerdi, Dr. Seyyid Muhammad Beheshti and others. Aiming at bringing religion into operation in society, most of them made serious efforts to enable religious thought to play a superior socio-political role. Although the curve of thought of these spokesmen shows noticeable variations, their efforts among the Shiite community of Iran were directed mainly at important objectives such as giving religion the role of raising an active movement based on religion, combating atheism, giving a new interpretation of traditional Shiite beliefs, seeking freedom, and combating foreign colonialists. Thus Shiite reformism has obvious differences with that of the Sunni school of thought. The major part of these differences – according to the interpretation of Ayatullah Mutahhari -goes back to the Shiite culture possessing a vital, dynamic and versatile content that is nourished by the procedures of Imam Ali (AS) and his thoughts. This is a culture that incorporates in its history the movement of 'Ashura', the Sahifa Sajjadiya supplications (Psalms of the 4th Imam) as well as a two-hundred and fifty year period of the infallible Imams as role models. No other culture has such inspiring and motivating elements (Mutahhari, 1982, p.147).

Thus, it is better to use the terms 'awakening' and 'religious reconstruction' instead of the commonly used phrase 'religious reformism' and refer to those intellectual efforts that have aimed at redefining religion, generalizing religious teachings, encouraging new thinking, and defending religion in the face of intellectual invasions of the Pahlavi era.

From the historical aspect, the literature of contemporary Shiite revival and reformism in Iran goes back to Seyyid Jamal al-Din

Asadabadi one of whose foundations of reformism was defending religion and bringing it to operation once again. An instance of his efforts in this area can be found in his important work entitled "Arguments against Materialism." His efforts in this field were mainly directed at proposing the discourse of returning to religion, and providing responses to the challenge of ever-growing western discourse among Muslims. During the Constitutional era of Iran, the most important work in politico-religious literature dealing with the essence and principles of the constitutionalism was the book "Tanbih al-Ummah wa Tanzih al-Milla" written by Mirza Naini. Prominent scholars such as Muhammad Kazim Khurasani and Mulla Abdullah Mazandarani defended his point of view (Naini, 1956).

Naini's book, as a link in the chain of Shiite political thought, presented ideological and positive reasons which were quite significant in support of the constitutionalism. The attempts of revivalism during the reign of Reza Shah were left fruitless because of the government intense confrontation against religion and the pressures exerted by the dictatorial system. Instead, the idea of historical nationalism with strong anti-religious leanings was supported and encouraged by the regime. Nevertheless, the establishment of Qum Theological School is considered as one of the most important events of the history of contemporary religious and political thought that had a serious and lasting impact on the organization and authority of the clergy as well as on recreation of religious thought in subsequent periods.

The collapse of the first Pahlavi regime and the occupation of Iran seriously declined the power of the central government in controlling the opposition forces for a decade and created better conditions for expression of religious thoughts. On the whole, from the historical perspective, religious reconstruction developed and spread from the period after the Second World War until the victory of the Islamic

Revolution and thereafter. "A category of the Shiite scholars attempted to prove that Shiism is a system from the political point of view." (Enayat, 1986, p.50).

A major part of the religious literature of this period especially what was written in the 1950's and1960's had a totally new or at least distinct expression or literary style comparing to that of the past, comprising the political and economic issues, relations between religion and knowledge, the revival of philosophical and intellectual life and finally, introducing Islam in a new way that was favorable to a wide range of the youth educated in the irreligious atmosphere of that period. This resulted in the presentation of religion as a visible part in the social life of people. To a large extent, these efforts were coupled with political activities and culminated in an increase in the level of awareness of a considerable section of people revealing their faithfulness to the Shiite school of thought and ultimately, resulting in the birth of politico-Islamic groups in Iran after the Second World War for the first time.

One of the most political of these organizations was the Fadaiyan-e Islam organization that both because of its method of armed struggle and from the intellectual aspect made an astonishing impact on religious struggles in Iran. In spite of this, there were serious differences of opinion between this organization and the prominent Shiite scholars of Iran. The foremost objective of the Fadaiyan-e Islam for engaging in struggle was to give a response to creating pseudo-cults, to propagation campaigns of the anti-religious ideas of that period (Khosroshahi, 1996, p.35), and subsequently to a large extent, to create motivation in that spectrum of the clergy whose heads -in the opinion of the Fadaiyan-fell short of their duties in struggling against the regime.

The renewed presentation of religion in society by the Fadaiyan-e Islam is considered to be a turning point in the trend of inclination

towards religion and revival of religion, especially because the Fadaiyan-e Islam had begun their activities in a situation in which Islam as a political ideology in Iran had been driven to the margins of the national politics and intellectual ideas. This fact undoubtedly was due to the influence of non-religious ideas including liberal and leftist ones that had come into being as a result of the international situation and the Second World War.

Recognizing the existing challenges facing religion and religious beliefs in the modern history of Iran, the Fadaiyan stressed that Islam was a complete system of living and must prove its pragmatism under the new circumstances. Thus they are considered among the foremost political-religious groups whose aim was to establish an Islamic government and which were actively involved in reaching that objective (Khosroshahi, 1996, pp.280-282).

The efforts of Imam Khumeini in the 1940's are also of high significance. The most important intellectual stance adopted by the clergy against the expansion of anti-religious thoughts in this period was Imam Khumeini's book entitled "Kashf al-Asrar". He wrote this book in response to a small Persian pamphlet that Ali Akbar Hakamizadeh, a friend and protégé of Ahmad Kasravi, had published as an attachment to Kasravi's 'Parcham' magazine under the heading "Mysteries of a Thousand Year". In this pamphlet, Hakamizadeh devoted 38 pages to criticism of the Shiite School and raised thirteen questions.

The main attempts of Imam Khumeini in this book were to defend the essence and entirety of religious teachings within the framework of responses to the spurious arguments raised in the book "Mysteries of a Thousand Years". Viewing the conditions in Iran to be the product of separation and deviation from religion and religious beliefs, Imam starts to criticize and respond to the author's questions in six sections including monotheism, Imamate, role of the scholars,

government, law and Hadith. Although the period in question has been- according to some people- a period of silence of the Imam, his work is a totally political one and is considered as an introduction to subsequent developments. The Imam's general approach towards defense of religion in this book was the reconstruction and reshaping of religious thought in the society of Iran.

In this manner, the Imam's book "Kashf al-Asrar" holds a unique position in the contemporary religious literature of Iran involving discussions on government and law according to religious teachings (Imam Khumeini, n.d., pp.221 and 228). He states that religion is compatible with modern ways of living and the dictates of religion are the same dictates of the intellect (Imam Khumeini, n.d., p.235), concerning desirable administration, state and life (Imam Khumeini, n.d., p.236). In this book, he believes that the reason for backwardness of Iran lies in the separation and remoteness from religion emphasizing that if the laws of Islam are practiced in our homeland, there would be a time when it is the forerunner in global civilization (Imam Khumeini, n.d., p.238). Undoubtedly, analysis of the impact of Imam in redefining the role of religion in society is itself a topic that needs to be discussed separately.

In this connection, the role of Ayatullah Kashani towards propounding religion in the sphere of political and social affairs in this period is also noteworthy. Without doubt, his efforts in the 1940's had a great impact on bringing out the religious forces onto the scene as well as in involving the Shiite clergy in politics.[1]

Kashani was among the protégés of Mulla Muhammad Kazim Khurasani and a defender of the constitutional movement (Davani, n.d., pp.241-247). He attempted to remain faithful to the principles of constitutional movement. For this reason, like other clergymen of this category, he believed that in their modern history, the Shiites are faced with new demands of the new era and before all else, religion must

overcome the existing passivity that has prevailed the minds of the people. Following his aspirations, he also later participated actively in the movement for nationalization of the oil industry of Iran. In cooperation with the nationalist forces, he strengthened them and was himself among the founders of the National Movement (Davani, n.d., p.237). His efforts to motivate the religious scholars towards supporting the nationalization of oil industry must be considered crucial because it was these efforts that caused scholars like Khansari, Sheikh Bahauddin Mahallati, Shahrudi and Seyyid Mahmud Ruhani to issue their decrees '*Fatwas*' in favor of the nationalization of the oil industry.

This cooperation with the nationalist forces was the second experience of its kind between the clergy and the nationalists in the modern history of Iran and before the Islamic Revolution. Without doubt, because of its results, this cooperation had a profound effect in an evident form on increasing distrust between the combatant Shiite clergy and the nationalist forces. It also had a strong impact on taking new strategies for their struggle.

Although his efforts to propound religion in the sphere of politics and society, were not totally successful, they left a wonderful impact on religious makeup of the society in Iran. His statements regarding the political and social role of religion were considered a new perspective after a period of anti-religious campaign in society. In reply to a journalist who had asked him whether his activities were focused more on religious affairs or political ones, he said: "There is no monasticism in our religion. Involvement in political affairs i.e. attending to social tasks of Muslim brothers is among the obligations of the religious leaders in Islam." (Group of supporters of the Islamic Movement of Iran, n.d., p.106).

In any case, Kashani must be reckoned as one of the struggling and pragmatist religious authorities, not a religious authority who is a

thinker in the sphere of political thought. His attempts at reconstruction of religion and religious renewal as well as motivation of the clergy to involve in political affairs had a wonderful impact.

However, the most important and most distinguished religious leader of this period who was positioned as the universal religious authority of Shiites was Ayatullah Burujerdi. The crisis that engulfed the Shiite theological schools during the reign of Reza Shah made the reconstruction of these schools totally justifiable after the 1940's. This role must be sought especially in Ayatullah Burujerdi's staying in Qum at the invitation of the scholars of this city (Davani, n.d., p.337), as the most important religious center in Iran, and the part he played in strengthening this seminary. Although Ayatullah Burujerdi did not lead a political life and preferred to be apolitical during his lifetime (Davani, 1992, pp.441-442), his presence at Qum Theological School caused this seminary to become the most powerful and most important religious center of Shiites especially in Iran after the 1940's. The reason for this impact was mainly for his supreme religious authority.

However, despite Ayatullah Burujerdi's aversion to politics, that could be logically justified due to the desperate experience of the constitutional movement, the demanding circumstances of the rule of Reza Khan, and the intense pressure brought to bear on the Shiite clergymen, his role in the historical perpetuation of Shiite thought in various aspects was extremely important and fundamental.

In any case, renewed concentration of Shiite religious authority on a single persona in this period due to the scholarly and jurisprudential authority of Ayatullah Burujerdi, created the possibility for the religious forces to reconstruct the theological schools and consequently, bring about cohesion and unity to the Shiite clergy. This cohesion and solidarity undoubtedly prepared the grounds for recruiting the religious forces and making them equipped with necessary things. In addition, with the presence of Ayatullah Burujerdi

in Qum, the Shiite religious authority was transferred from Najaf to Iran. As a result, the intellectual impact of the Najaf theological school on the developments in contemporary Iran-that of course was far from the political and social realities of Iran- was reduced to a large extent. Thus the possibility was created for the Shiite clergy in Iran to unite and direct religious forces based on the realities and actual circumstances of society in Iran, and with a proper understanding of the situation. This fact played a decisive role especially in the political performance of the religious forces, and expansion and generalization of religious thought within the social structure of Iran after the reign of Reza Shah, a role that revealed itself in the subsequent decades.

Beyond this, the establishment of the universal Shiite religious authority in Qum provided the necessary background for the qualitative and quantitative development of the Qum Theological School. Ayatullah Burujerdi made extensive efforts towards preservation and also propagation of religious education after a period of stagnation, while at the same time, his tenure as the supreme religious authority was accompanied with the flourishing of Shiite jurisprudence. He even introduced a new methodological school in jurisprudence (Mutahhari, 1989a, pp.196-204; and Davani, 1992, pp.152 and 156). In addition, by regulating the financial affairs of the Qum Theological School, he successfully faced the earlier challenges and in this manner, his actions enabled Qum not only to be transformed into a bastion of Islamic education, but to be gradually transformed into a center of political struggle and challenge the irreligious leanings of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Among the significant impacts of the presence of Shiite religious authority in Qum was the expansion of communication of the Qum theological School and its clergy with other centers and regions of the country, an initiative that was handled by his representatives. This

network paved the way for mobilization of religious forces and their close relations within themselves. The dispatch of missionaries to cities and villages culminated in the expansion of religious education and also penetration of religion in the core of the society. This expansion and development, did not play any direct political role during the tenure of Ayatullah Burujerdi. However, without hesitation, this was considered as the underlying structure of religious power that made its impact felt two decades later. In other words, during the term of the religious authority of Ayatullah Burujerdi, the Qum Theological School established the basis of a religious movement and political current by laying the foundations of an intellectual structure and reform as well as organizing the clergy. This was because of recognition of the fact that before every movement, such a basis must be created and that it was essential for every movement -beyond having such a basis-to fulfill the conditions for its survival too, a circumstance which during his time was considered to be seriously doubtful. Thus, one notes that the results of his efforts was the educating and training of hundreds of clerical students as well as tens of qualified religious scholars who could successfully organize and lead the subsequent intellectual and political movement.

Benefitting from the scholarly conditions created by Ayatullah Burujerdi, the Qum Theological School was able to give appropriate responses to the anti-religious ideas. However, it is not our intention to present Ayatullah Burujerdi as a political figure because basically, he would hardly involve himself in political affairs. At the same time, in the course of a decade and a half of his being the supreme religious authority of the twelver branch of The Shiite school, he created a process of revivalism and self-criticism within the religious sphere so that even after his death, it could remain as a motivating factor which in the modern era culminated in a sort of religious and theoretical backlash in Iran. Ayatullah Burujerdi established an important

communication network that spread throughout the country for the purpose of collection of Islamic tax- portion of the Imam – a step that was also taken later on for establishing the leadership of the religious leaders.

The idea of proximity of Islamic schools of thought, dispatching Muslim missionaries and representatives of religion to foreign countries, explaining the relation between religion and science and so forth; and to a certain extent reforming the structure of the theological schools were among the significant initiatives of Ayatullah Burujerdi. All this reveals the fact that in contrast with other religious authorities, in addition to modernist aspects in his points of view, he made serious efforts towards facilitating propagation of religion in society and fostering mutual understanding of the relation of religion and science. He also attempted to find out the contemporary needs of society in the new era.

In the midst of this, there were few thinkers who played a greater role than others in shaping and reviving religious literature and thought. Ayatullah Mutahhari is for sure one of those persons whose pivotal role is emphasized by majority of analysts.

2. Murteza Mutahhari and reconstruction of religious thought in Modern Iran

Murteza Mutahhari is considered one of the most outstanding thinkers among the contemporary Shiite ones. Renewing religious discourse in recent decades, he created an extensive and at the same time varied literature that especially guaranteed the defense of religion against the anti-religious ideas. He began his education in the framework of the traditional system of the theological schools and -as is evident from his writings- remained faithful to the very traditions until the end of his life. Although discussion of religious issues in his written and spoken language revealed a serious innovation within the framework

of the demands and conditions of time, his efforts at redefining religion based on traditional religious teachings and sciences and also his faithfulness to traditions of the Shiite theological schools deserve explanation.

His defense of religion was accompanied with explaining it as an ideology. To this end, the major part of his approach was influenced by philosophical teachings. At the same time, wherever it seemed necessary, he did not ignore the approaches of his own time raising deep considerations. Ayatullah Mutahhari took on Islamic studies at a time when traditional ideas about religion were under a heavy attack due to the widespread rush of new thoughts into Iran and also the weakness of traditional thought in giving a response to the problem of the backwardness of Muslims. He understood quite well that the claim of modern thought was not just opposing religion; but it claimed to be religion's alternative.

Defending religion and its functions logically, Ayatullah Mutahhari in this attempt finds out and pays special attention to the new demands of his society. For this reason, these efforts are in a conspicuous manner coupled with different perceptions of traditional attitudes and in other words, with reconstructed perceptions of the fundamental concepts of religion. Without doubt, his modern interpretation of concepts such as Jihad, justice, promotion of good and prevention of evil, martyrdom, supplication, trust in God, belief in the reappearance of the Messiah Mahdi and so forth, as well as simple presentation of each of them has opened a new chapter in religious knowledge and education. This is because the general religious literature prior to it, was a hard to digest literature in a language other than that of common people i.e. in Arabic. So this problem especially caused inconvenience of the general public and lack of their accessibility to religious knowledge.

This aspect i.e. the simplicity of language and simple style of writing is incomparable even in his philosophical works. So it was a cause of increase in the number of his audiences and pursuant to it, promotion of religious messages in society. In the book "Principles of philosophy and Method of Realism" he writes: "We have tried to write the material in a simple language that is easily understood by the general public and put it at the disposal of the respected readers. Perhaps because of my great concern in this regard, I have sometimes presented a matter with repeated phrases and expressions." (Mutahhari, 1992, p.461).

His efforts at universalizing religious education coupled with the defensive role he played in the face of critics of Islam are quite evident from his writings. His defense of Islam manifested itself in various spheres of politics, economics, religion, philosophy and history. Thus the basis of his motive in defending religion drove him to numerous fields of research and investigation. For this reason, a wide range of topics can be found in his works. So on the one hand, he writes "Story of the Truthful" and on the other hand, the books "Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism" or "Criticism of Marxism".

In this regard Mutahhari himself asserts: "Since around twenty years ago when I have taken up writing books and articles, the only thing that has been my aim in all my writings, is to solve problems and respond to the questions concerning Islamic issues pertaining to our era." (Mutahhari, n.d.-a, p.8). Concerning the spheres of his own studies, he writes: "Some are philosophical, some social, some ethical, some jurisprudential and some others are historical. Although the subjects of these writings are totally different, their objective is one and the same i.e. to acquaint people with the reality of Islam, to analyze Islamic issues, and to resist against deviations in terms of thought and ideology" (Mutahhari, n.d.-a, p.10). Like many other

defenders of religion in the modern era, he tried to present his own prescription for the resolution of the problems of mankind by showing the nature of these problems and proving incompetence of the human intellect in finding solutions to them.

One can find Mutahhari's optimal defense of religious thoughts in his criticism of Marxist and atheistic thoughts that comprised the major part of his intellectual concerns. He observed that materialism in our era and especially in our country had eliminated logic from its arguments having armed itself with the weapon of propaganda (Mutahhari, n.d.-b, p.8). The life span of Mutahhari was the period of the growth of material thoughts in Iran. Therefore, his ideas attracted a wide range of the youth including students and influenced an entire generation in Iran.

His most important attempt in criticizing these thoughts was the endeavor he made along with Seyyid Muhammad Husein Tabatabai in writing the book entitled "Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism". Concerning this book he writes: "In this attempt, we have not taken into consideration its philosophical and logical value. Rather, considering that books pertaining to dialectic materialism have been published to excess in our country and have attracted the attention of a relatively large number of the youth, it is possible that some people have come to the conclusion that dialectic materialism is the most supreme philosophical system of the world and is the direct fruit of science and its inseparable feature. They might have thought that the time of divine wisdom is over. Thus it is necessary that the entire philosophical and logical contents of these treatises be analyzed so that their actual value would become known (Mutahhari, 1992, p.51).

Another important attempt of his on this subject is the book "A Criticism of Marxism" that was made separately and in the form of lessons between the years 1976-77 in Qum. On this subject, discussing

the reasons for people's leanings towards materialism, Ayatullah Mutahhari elaborates on the reasons for the birth of Marxism and philosophically criticizes it.

Yet another trend of his intellectual efforts towards safeguarding the framework of religion was criticism and analysis of cultural and political nationalism during his lifetime. Around the time of the constitutional Revolution of Iran, the argument pertaining to nationalism became quite relevant. However, it was directed more towards people's rights and freedom rather than the issue of modern nation-building. So Dr. Enayat writes on this issue as follows: "In writings on this topic that Iranian intellectuals have authored in the nineteenth century, we find rare or indirect references to the sort of issues such as unity or integration of the nation of Iran, the elements constructing its identity, and the contrast between the pre-Islamic culture of Iran and its Islamic culture. Instead, we find in them constant demands for democracy, the system of parliament and rule of law, criticism of the present situation and political current of affairs, and an envious comparison of western new advances in comparison with Iran's backwardness." (Enayat, 1986, p.213).

From the historical aspect, Enayat analyses the reason in this way: From the beginning of the tenth century of *Hijra*, Iran was an independent country and unity and identity of the nation was achieved for all practical purposes (Enayat, 1986, p.212). However, it must be added that without doubt, the spread of Shiite thought in recent centuries in Iran, and the recognition of Shiism as the official and national religious school of Iranians both in theory and practice, have been among the reasons for the reconstruction of Iran's national identity. For this reason, efforts towards historical researches among Iranian thinkers for discovering the ancestral and cultural identity as well as shaping it have not taken place until the recent decades. The achievements of the politico-cultural thoughts of the Shiite school in

Iran's modern history and in events such as the war between Iran and the Ottoman empire, between Iran and Russia; Iran and Britain and even anti-totalitarian movements in the recent century in Iran clearly reveal the successful shaping of Iranian identity so that this identity can be studied totally within the religious context.

However, Iran's cultural and political nationalism was shaped in the form of a measured policy from the time of establishment of the Pahalavi dynasty and the era of Reza Shah. It was a policy coupled with glorification of civilization and culture and the need to regain the grandeur of ancient Persia, or in one word, 'ancient Iranian nationalism' in contrast to degradation of Islamic precepts and religious values. This type of nationalism became one of the intellectual foundations of the Pahlavi regime so that manifestations of this perspective could clearly be seen in the political and cultural performances of Reza Shah's regime.[2]

At the beginning of the reign of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, this policy did not obviously reveal itself because of the unity of the religionists and nationalists. However, subsequently it formed one of the focal points and foundations of his regime. Thus in the cultural sphere, numerous writings dealing with regaining Iranian identity of the pre-Islamic period were published.

Supporters of royalism theory in Iran who seemed to have succeeded in overcoming the people's disturbances and turmoils of the 1950's and early 1960's, gradually started to focus on the culture and civilization of the pre-Islamic period and to make some investigations into the historical background of monarchism providing evidence towards ideological justification of the right to monarchy. It was in such a context that writers of religious subjects, from the middle of the 1960's onward, launched a direct attack in condemnation of the pre-Islamic civilization for the first time in the modern history of Iran.

In this regard, the most significant attempt towards criticism of the idea of nationalist antireligious campaign was made by Mutahhari in a book entitled "Reciprocal Services of Islam and Iran". Although this point of view can be observed in all his writings, in this work he conducted an analysis and criticism of points of view of Iranian nationalist writers and orientalists who had claimed that Islam had arrived in Iran by force of the sword. Thus according to them, the historical and current turbulences of Iran were due to attachment to their early religious tenets and presence of Islam in Iran.

In the foreword of the book "Reciprocal Services of Islam and Iran" mentioning that "we Iranian Muslims have faith in Islam for the reason that it is our school of thought; and we love Iran because it is our motherland" (Mutahhari, 1993, p.13), Mutahhari summarizes his objective in writing this book in three questions as follows: 1. Considering that we have religious and patriotic feelings both, do we have two types of conflicting emotions or there is not such a contrast? 2. What developments has the arrival of Islam into Iran brought about? What has it got from Iran and what has it offered to Iran? Was the arrival of Islam to Iran a catastrophe or success? 3. What has been the share of Iranians in spreading the teachings of the new religion and what have been their motivations in rendering these services?

Stating that those who have written about the common issues of Islam and Iran, either have not had sufficient information or have been motivated by considerations other than academic research (Mutahhari, 1993, p.15), he asserts that the reciprocal services of Islam and Iran have brought honor to both Islam as well as Iran. They have brought honor to Islam since it is a religion because of whose rich contents, has mesmerized an intelligent, civilized and cultured nation; and to Iran as a nation because of whose truth-seeking, unbiased, and culture cherishing spirit, has bowed down before the truth and has made sacrifices in its path more than and before any other nation

(Mutahhari, 1993, p.15). Being of the opinion that researches in this field are full of alterations and that attempts have been made to introduce the relations between Iran and Islam contrary to what they have actually been, Mutahhari tries to give a clear answer to two claims and prove that neither has the arrival of Islam into Iran occurred with the help of the sword, nor has the Shiite school been the outcome of resistance against Islam in Iran.

Based on this premise, he strongly criticizes the reactionary nationalists of Iran and states: "Racism the pioneers of which are the Europeans, has created a big problem for the world at large" (Mutahhari, 1993, p.52). He asserts that "Since we are followers of a school of thought, and an ideology by the name of Islam in which the element of racism does not exist, we cannot remain indifferent to the political currents that are standing against this ideology under the name of loyalty to the race and nationality. We all know that in these recent years, numerous individuals have launched an all-out struggle against Islam in the name of defending the Iranian race and nationality. They have insulted Islamic sanctities under the guise of fighting Arabs and Arabism, … This is a calculated plan and there is an evil purpose involved … (and) it is a calculated political move." (Mutahhari, 1993, pp.52-53).

Mutahhari finds it extremely difficult to accept the claim that Iranians embraced Islam under duress and believes that it is not possible that a nation would accept an ideology under duress and yet would make every effort to spread it. Moreover, sometimes it is claimed that since the ideas of Islam have been formed outside the frontiers of Iran, then they shall be regarded as an alien phenomenon. In that case, Christianity for the Europeans, Buddhism for the Chinese, and Communism for the Russians must be considered as foreign elements whereas such an alienation is basically unjustifiable (Mutahhari, 1993, p.72).

Strongly criticizing those who in the name of supporters of Iranian nationality claim that Iranians converted to their new faith and ideology out of fear, or that they accepted Shiite school of thought in order to preserve their ancient religion, Ayatullah Mutahhari considers such a judgment to be the biggest insult to the people of Iran (Mutahhari, 1993, pp.140-142).

In any case, what matters us here is the viewpoint of Mutahhari in relation to the entire phenomenon of cultural nationalism in Iran of this period that has been raised with the aim of creating a new cultural basis for the social structure of Iran and making this state far from its cultural-religious bedrock. He wants to show that return to the religion of ancient Iran is an imaginary thing without any proper basis, and that efforts made in this regard are devoid of any scientific or analytical point.

Another aspect of enunciation of religion from the point of view of Mutahhari that was coupled with modernism and criticism of the traditional thoughts of Muslims is the issue of religion and the demands of time. He was fully aware that without taking into consideration the demands and conditions of time, the reconstruction of religion and generalization of religious teachings in society would be meaningless. In fact, he considered the demands of time as a social issue to be necessary for propagation of religion and held that "the most important social component of Islam is the demands of time." (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.11). He had found out that the major question concerning religion in the new era is "whether a human being can continue to be a Muslim and at the same time adapt himself with the demands of time?" (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.27).

Mutahhari propounds religion as an ideology and believes that one of the functions of ideology is presentation of a theory and a coordinated, cohesive and comprehensive plan the main objective of which is perfection of human being and public welfare. In such a plan,

the outlines, methods, do's and don'ts, good and evil, aims and means, needs, ailments and cures, responsibilities and obligations all are specified and it is a source of inspiration of responsibilities and obligations for all people (Mutahhari, 1990, pp.54-55). However, the ideology propounded by him is an Islamic ideology that primarily addresses the deprived and oppressed.

From his point of view, since Islam is a religion and because it is the last of the divine universal religions, it was instituted in order to uphold social justice more than any other heavenly objective. Its aim is to save the deprived and the downtrodden and to fight against oppressors. However, the addressees of Islam are not just the deprived and the downtrodden (Mutahhari, 1990, p.60). Based on this very attitude towards religion, he does not consider it simply an exercise of reciting prayers and fasting. He says: "Perhaps one may claim that the question of religion is distinct from all other questions. However, if this hypothesis holds true in case of Christianity, it would not hold true in case of Islam." (Mutahhari, 1989a, p.16).

For this reason, he does not consider Islam and the demands of time to be two incompatible phenomena. Thus he rejects the opinion that "either one must submit to Islam and Islamic teachings and leave any kind of modernization and modernism and bring time to a standstill; or he must submit to the variable demands of time and consign Islam as a phenomenon belonging to the past." (Mutahhari, 1989a, p.12). Basically, he gives answers to these attitudes or perceptions in the book "Islam and Demands of Time" and attempts to show the compatibility between stability and eternity of the laws of Islam, and the phenomenon of time which has a changeable nature (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.13), reckoning it as a necessity of eternality of religion. Thus he considers lack of agreement of these two – that has been claimed by some – to be a kind of fallacy (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.24).

Admitting and believing in the existence of fixed principles in Islam, Mutahhari investigates the conditions and demands of time within the framework of independent authority of jurisprudents on religious questions (*Ijtihad*) and in his own expression, "the lofty objective of giving answers of Islamic jurisprudence to new issues relevant to each period" (Mutahhari, 1989c. p.14). He considers this capability a point "which has confounded the inhabitants of the earth" (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.14). Explaining the point that this temporal development is not peculiar to our era, and it has been of consideration in Islam from the earlier days, he emphasizes that "Islamic jurisprudence has fulfilled its duty without seeking assistance from any other source " (Mutahhari, 1989c. p.14). He considers the fundamental task and special function of jurisprudential deduction (*Ijtihad*) to be referring the new and fresh problems cropping up to their relevant Islamic principles (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.232).

He believes that the relationship between jurisprudential deduction (*Ijtihad*) and the demands of time is important to such an extent that "In my opinion one of the miracles of Islam is the faculty of jurisprudential deduction" (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.241). Explaining the concept of *Ijtihad*, he remarks: "jurisprudential deduction does not mean that a person sits down and speaks at will. In certain respects, Islam… has some features in its structure with the help of which it can move forward without being in any way opposed to the spirit or essence of its teachings. It is not required that we set it into motion. Islam has some fixed and unchangeable tenets, but because it has made the variable tenets dependent on the fixed ones, it never loses its authority." (Mutahhari, pp.224-241).

For this reason, he considers the duty of an intellectual Muslim to have a correct understanding of the true Islam as a social philosophy and the knowledge of the conditions and demands of time. Simultaneously he emphasizes that understanding the conditions and

demands of time, one must throw away certain realities arising from development of science and industry which involve deviations and factors of decadence and collapse. He reckons the two factors of inattention or indifference of those in charge of Islamic affairs in the last two centuries on the one hand, and the terrible shock of facing the development of the west on the other, to be the causes for the fear of lack of compatibility between Islamic tenets and the conditions and demands of time. Concerning the fallacy raised concerning the phenomenon of time, he believes that it is not the nature of time that requires all things – even their truths –be subject to erosion and being outdated. Rather, that which becomes either new or outdated is the matter and material compositions (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.15). Therefore, in his view the changes in time does not cause any change in the substance of legal issues pertaining to the social relations of human beings. To answer his general question, Mutahhari proposes that if we wish to pass a fair judgment on Islam and the demands of time, the only way is to become acquainted with Islamic teachings, comprehend the spirit of the Islamic canons and recognize the unique Islamic system of legislation in order to clarify whether Islam possesses the bearing on a particular century and specific era or from beyond the centuries and eras, it has taken on the responsibility of leadership, guidance and driving mankind towards perfection (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.17).

He enumerates the three political currents of the Kharijites, Asharism and traditionism (*Akhbariyya*) to be opposed to the demands of time in Islamic thought, and believes that all the three were a sort of formalism and verbalism which seriously weakened the trend of Shiite rationalism that would act on the basis of demands of time. He is especially critical of the current that attempted to weaken the Shiite rational thought explaining that: what is regrettable is that in recent centuries, the way of thinking of the Sunni traditionists has infiltrated

into the Shiite ranks so that among Shiites too there is a group which considers any kind of contemplation and meditation about Divine teachings to be heresy and misguidance. However, undoubtedly this is a kind of deviation from the pure way of the pioneers or Imams of this school of thought (Mutahhari, 1992, p.877).

He deems the intellect to be a means of identifying the demands of time as well as updating religion within the framework of the demands and needs of man dwelling on it extensively.

Among other important questions of Mutahhari's consideration was the relationship between science and religion. This fundamental question caused the intellectual thinkers of religion in that period to present a scientific image of religion based on the findings of empirical approach. However, basically, in his works he does not pay much attention to giving scientific explanation of religion. His main hypothesis on this issue is that these two are not in conflict with each other while stressing that they complement and supplement each other (Mutahhari, 1990, p.27).

Bearing in mind that science and faith are aspects that distinguish human beings from the rest of animals, (Mutahhari, 1990, p.20) he analyzes the issue in his writings and believes that "history of Islamic civilization is divided into the era of prosperity or flourishing in which science and faith both developed; and the era of decadence in which science and religion both were corrupted" (Mutahhari, 1990, p.21). In this way, he wants to conclude that science and religion are complementary of one another, and that religious and scientific worldviews are not in conflict.

Thus, in his point of view, the realms of knowledge and religion do not clash with each other, because according to him, "Science imparts to us illumination and ability while faith imparts love, hope and warmth. Science furnishes the means and faith the end. Science increases the speed and faith the direction; science is a matter of

ability and faith is a matter of wishing well. Science shows what is there while faith gives inspiration about what must be there…" (Mutahhari, 1990, pp.23-24). At the same time he accepts that science and faith can help one another in securing a better life for human beings. "Faith must be recognized in the light of science; faith remains free of superstitious beliefs in the light of science. With the removal of science from faith, the latter is transformed into blind and rigid fanaticism that goes round itself in a vicious cycle without getting anywhere;" (Mutahhari, 1990, p.28). "Science without faith is a sword in the hand of an intoxicated individual; it is a midnight light in the hand of a thief that enables him to make a better choice of stolen articles." (Mutahhari, 1990, p.28).

Yet another attempt of Mutahhari at presenting an updated image of religion while preserving its intellectual and historical tenets was that of revival of religious thought coupled with religious reformism. Basically, he rejects the concept of revival of religion and presents it simply as a "revival of religious thought". He reiterates that "it is we who are in need of revival of religious thought; meaning that we are the followers of religion; we possess religious thought although in a half-awake and half-asleep condition and in a half-dead and half-alive condition… and in a very dangerous state." (Mutahhari, 1982a, p.113).

Mutahhari had understood quite well the point that religion was being repelled in society. For this reason, for him the revival of religious thought was a so important duty that he deemed it to be one of the functions of the prophets. At the same time, he also focused on refining religion and considered it essential for making religion efficient within the context of the principle of religious deduction (*Ijtihad*) and towards responding to the needs of the day. In other words, preserving the fixed elements of religion, he tried to refine religion and reach it to a degree of purity because he believed that

"Religion just like any other phenomenon is affected by what comes to it from outside… religion is like water that is clear at the fountainhead; later when it reaches the delta, it becomes polluted and these pollutions must be removed." (Mutahhari, C, p.379).

Based on this premise, concerning the part of the Hadith about the Savior Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his blessed reappearance) that states "the Savior Imam will come with a new religion" he believes: It implies that so many omissions and additions have been made to Islam by then. So when he comes and mentions the truth about the religion of his grandfather, it will seem to people that this religion is something other than that which they followed whereas the true Islam is the very one that His Holiness states.[3] The outcome of this point of view is quite obvious in Mutahhari's conception and interpretation of the rising of Imam Husein (AS). He i.e., Imam Husein, intends to erase the alterations from it and refine the religion while re-acknowledging it.

In the process of the reformation of religious thought, he takes serious note of reforming the thought of Muslims believing that revival of Islamic thought depends on correcting our way of thinking and judgment about Islam. At the same time he considers this reformation to be necessary for Muslims emphasizing that we must turn our Islamic thought into a living form and change our perception of Islam. This change is necessary because the Islamic faith of Muslims in the contemporary world is an impotent and ineffective one and cannot act as a motivating factor for a religious movement (Mutahhari, 1982b, pp.171-174).

Mentioning the point that our religious thought seems to be half-dead, he believes that "It is necessary that Islam in the new conditions be offered in a refined pure form and be coupled with action. Among the factors of this refinement, he believes, are to revert to the Quran,

to the prophetic narratives or traditions, and to the intellect in order to rediscover religious beliefs." (Mutahhari, 1989c, p.132).

Referring to the decadence of Muslim societies, Mutahhari asserts that the backwardness of the Muslim World is not only in the field of industry and science, but it is also backward in morality and spirituality. He says: "The truth of Islam does not exist in its original form in our brain and soul. Rather, it often exists in our mind in a distorted form." (Mutahhari, 1982a, p.121). Strongly criticizing the existing perceptions and readings concerning The Shiite school, he states: "Even on the issue of general guardianship (*Wilaya*) and Imamate, our way of thinking has taken on a strange and inverted form. Although the leaders (Imams) should be a force of motivation and encouragement for our acts and performances, they have turned into a means of restriction, indolence and our aversion to action." (Mutahhari, A, p.123). He stresses that "Our thinking of religion must be reformed.; our thinking about religion is wrong; I dare say, putting aside four articles concerning branches of religion that concern devotional acts, and a few issues on transactions, we do not have a correct thought about religion. We can find right thoughts concerning Islam neither on the pulpits, nor in the sermons or books, nor in newspapers and articles that we write. Before thinking of converting others to Islam, we must think about ourselves." (Mutahhari, 1982a, p.125).

In an open criticism of existing jurisprudence and jurisprudential regulations as well as the challenges and difficulties that it faces, Mutahhari considers it ineffective and believes: "A jurisprudence has come into being that is incompatible with the rest of the Islamic tenets; without principles and fundamentals, and without social philosophy. If liberty and freedom of thought had remained and overcome of the traditionists over the followers of justice had not occurred, and if the Shiite school had not been afflicted with the blight

of traditionism, we would have had a codified social philosophy on which our jurisprudence could be founded, and we would not have suffered from the present conflicts and deadlocks (Mutahhari, 1982, p.27). For this reason, he reckons the existing religious thought to be half-dead or dead (Mutahhari, 1982a, p.124) and ultimately concludes that at present-more than anything else-we need an Islamic religious resurrection, a revival of religious thought, and an enlightening Islamic movement (Mutahhari, 1982a, p.128).

Conclusion

Recognizing the challenges and obstacles facing religion, the late Ayatullah Mutahhari as one of the renowned thinkers of contemporary Iran concentrated all his efforts on propounding, rediscovering, and reforming religious thought. Being well aware of the diminishing role of religion and gradual fading of spirituality in society, he came to the basic point that one must give answer to the new questions facing religion with a comprehensive perception of religion and a reformist vision of religious thought and idea. Thus you may find the least trace of old questions or old challenges concerning religion in his writings.

In this attempt, he was on the one hand faced with a group of rigid and bigoted believers who insisted on the earlier and traditional frameworks repeating frequently their own ideas and considering any kind of modernity to be heresy. On the other hand, he was faced with individuals who used to relegate religious teachings to the level of human doctrines. In such confusing circumstances, he tried hard to safeguard religious thought and confronted both points of view. He suffered two terrible afflictions, one of which he called 'stubborn conservatism' and the other 'ignorance'. He considered these two to be the most dangerous and threatening problems (Mutahhari, n.d.-c, p.86) and held that the result of the former was stagnation, silence and being left behind from progress and development; while that of the

latter was collapse and deviation. In his view, a stubborn conservative is averse to any thing that is new and gets along well only with the old things, while the ignorant person-misusing the concept of the demands of time - considers every new phenomenon as an instance of modernism (Mutahhari, n.d.-c, p.86).

His writings are an encyclopedia of Islamic issues that reveals his efforts at presenting Islam as a comprehensive ideology. Undoubtedly, this attempt is a response to the challenges that religion and religious thought were faced with everywhere during his time. It is the outcome of his defense of the entirety of religious teachings that intrinsically involves important discussions of the inherently political and social Shiite and Islamic concepts – a fact that has had an astonishing influence on spreading the contemporary Shiite political thought.

Ayatullah Mutahhari got acquainted with the modern studies and investigations in social, human, economic, art, and psychology fields, and came to the conclusion that these investigations offered solutions to the spiritual, social, educational and political problems of mankind. Nevertheless, he found out that these studies had opened a period of serious confrontation against religion and religious thought claiming to have revealed certain secrets in this sphere.

He knew quite well that modern man had become equipped with instruments about which his predecessors had no idea. Thus he tried to get familiar with new research fields. In addition, despite the sharp criticism of his opponents about his presence at universities, the late Mutahhari was able to act as one of the reformers among the clergy of the theological school, and spread religious literature among students and thinkers of society.

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1. For further study of the points of view of Ayatullah Kashani, Cf. Group of Supporters… (n.d.).
2. For more information Cf. Ashena 1997.
3. For further study Cf. Mutahhari, 1981, vol. 1; 1982c; vol. 2; 1986, vol. 3.

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