

Principles of Reform in Society

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Every reconstruction-oriented movement in the world of Islam naturally comes into clash with many of the old habits and social customs prevailing in society, which with the passage of time acquire a certain amount of religious sanctity. The situation has so developed that apparently it is impossible that any large section of people would ever give up their old habits. A movement which wants to reconstruct society is faced with prejudice and severe opposition. All activities aimed at revolutionizing society are resented by the masses, who in their fight against the new values and conceptions use the weapon of religion.

In these circumstances, a reconstruction movement has two alternatives: either in order to eliminate this blind prejudice it should ignore the question of faith in religion which is the traditional basis of conservative thinking and clinging to old customs and usages; or it should try to separate religion from customs, and inform the people of the true nature of religion and its role in life.

The first alternative instead of solving the problem will make it more complicated. Sooner or later the reconstruction movement has to appear in its true colours. Then it will become clear that it has an open hostility with 'religion' and wants to take its place. This situation will not only strike a blow to our evaluation of religion and threaten constructive activity, but it will also estrange the conservative majority of the people from the movement who will believe such a reconstruction movement to be anti-religious.

The second alternative is also not practical in the case of those reconstruction movements which have a non-religious basis and are related to a non-Islamic ideology. A movement based on a non-Islamic ideology can neither interpret Islam correctly, nor can it persuade people to accept its interpretation. At the most it can only make a nominal claim that it is in a position to expound Islam, its conceptions and teachings.

Contrary to these two alternatives, if a reconstruction movement is based on Islam, has a firm connection with Islam's true sources and enjoys the support of an Islamic government which exhorts people to do what is right and restrains them from doing what is evil, it can attract the majority of the conservatives and the conventionalists to its program. By virtue of its deep knowledge of Islam, it can interpret and separate itself from common customs and usages introduced by external social factors.

As an Islamic government shows a positive interest in the legal sources of Islam recognized by

the masses, and because it implements the acknowledged injunctions of Islam such as; the prohibition of liquor, the enforcement of zakat (charity tax) etc., it can convince the majority of the conservatives of the correctness of its interpretation of Islam. It can sift religion from all customs and habits responsible for backwardness and can turn the negative and harmful forces into positive and profitable ones.

For example, in dealing with backward perspectives on the Muslim woman and her position in society, instead of directing our struggle to the abolition of the Hijab system and defending the western view concerning the relations between man and woman, which naturally antagonizes the majority of Muslims, we should seek the support of religion and apprise the Muslims of their un-Islamic habits and social usages responsible for the backwardness subjected upon women.

That is the way through which we can rectify wrong impressions about the moral and religious values which within a milieu of habits causing backwardness have taken a negative and devastating colour, and instead show that Islamic values are in actual fact positive and constructive.

For example, take the case of the quality of patience. According to Islam it is an outstanding moral value. But as a result of the habits causing backwardness in the Muslim world, it has also taken a negative and devastating colour. Things have taken such a turn that now patience has come to mean accepting humiliation, enduring hardships with indifference and taking no interest in the big problems facing the people.

The Muslims are no longer able to bring such an extensive change in their life that may alter their conception of patience and convince them that it really means bearing the difficulties which one may have to face in the course of making struggle against tyranny and oppression, and sacrificing small interests for the sake of bigger objectives.

“Do you think that you will enter Paradise while Allah has not tested you and has not determined those who fight for the cause of Allah and those who bear the hardships steadfastly?”

“...Those who did not show weakness and were patient. Surely Allah likes the patient.”

No social school other than Islam can restore the conception of patience to its true level and can lay the foundation of a patient nation in the right Islamic sense of the term.

**Selected excerpt from "Introduction to Islamic Political System" authored by Ayatollah
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