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Liberalism

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The idea of liberalism comes from the idea of freedom. Liberalism is recognition of civil rights: freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and conscience. However, liberalism cannot be confined to freedom alone. Nor it is about freedom without limits, because liberalism has rule of law. The developed countries that practice liberal democracy guarantee freedom. Every individual has the equal right to express their ideas freely, guaranteed by law.

Neutrality toward religions in the idea of liberalism means that the State provides no special treatment toward particular religions, including the majority's religion. Liberals argue that religion should be treated in a critical way. Liberal spirit leads to a society where everyone feels safe and does not fear expressing their conscience. Freedom is accompanied with respect of the freedom of others.

Liberalism in religion is an outcome of openness and the ability to criticizing one's self, an attitude crucial in a multi-cultural society, without eliminating religious identities. Liberalism places religious plurality in an autonomous space independent of the State's intervention. The State has no authority over individual salvations. Particular value orientations such as religion and ethnicity are under the authority of each of these particular religions and ethnicities. To eradicate religious totalitarianism, the State should act against violence that comes from religious absolutism. Liberalism is a strategy to addressing the problem of religious absolutism or totalitarianism.

In liberalism, religious freedom is an absolute right that has to be protected by law. Freedom is a gift from God and human beings have no right to taking the gift away. God gives human beings freedom in order that when if believe they believe sincerely. In liberalism, men who violate the right of others are punished. The freedom in a liberal society is stabilized by the system of rights. Liberalism is a par-excellence modern ideology whose principles are protecting individual freedom, political freedom in a democratic participation, equality of humankind, and pluralism. Liberalism inspires the people to have a spirit of freedom in thinking of the best solutions to faced problems. Liberalism guarantees democracy, a system that serves as a solution to social problems.

In early Islam, the mission was liberation, that is to liberate society from exploitation, tyranny, and any kind of injustice. The spirit of liberation has to be renewed so that no monopoly of

religious interpretation prevails, so that no *fatwa* (religious edict) of attacking the other as heresy is issued. Liberalism is recognized in the Qur'an, although it is not explicitly mentioned in it. Islam regards freedom of religion as one of the objectives of the Shari'a (Islamic law): namely protection of religion, protection of intellect, protection of family, protection of property, and protection of honor. Regarding protection of religion, Islam gives everyone freedom to believing and observing their own faiths. The Qur'an states "there is no compulsion in religion".

In the history of Islamic thought, freedom is not a foreign concept. In Islamic philosophy, freedom of thought is recognized. Islamic philosophers seek to find alternatives to orthodox understandings. Islamic mystical scholars (Sufi) also recognize the doctrine of freedom in understanding sacred texts. Thus the roots of Islamic liberalism can be traced in philosophy and Sufism. Philosophy gives intellectual and rational underpinnings whereas Sufism spiritual ones.

Islam is freedom. Islam gives space for thinking freely. Monotheism is a liberation from polytheism and nature. This means liberalism is rooted in Islam and has existed since the early time of Islam. Liberalism has become a positive idea. It bridges the past and the present in order to renew interpretations and thus making Islam a living religion. Because we live in a dynamic and changing world and because we want to make our religion ever relevant we need new ways of thinking.

In the broadest sense, to solve the complex human problems which are full of discourses, we need a liberating interpretation, that is an interpretation which serve as a tool of analysis for identifying the problem of humanity, for considering culture, eliminating our dependence upon particular historical reality and making a religious doctrine that can be an ethical source for making change. In facing religious absolutism and authoritarianism, liberalism is an apt strategy. Liberalism protects religious balance, because thinking liberally, rationally, and critically serves to reach progress. Liberalism is a worldview that locates human beings in their right place, with their rights and freedoms in this life. One of the goals of Islam is to provide peace and happiness and these will not happen without ensuring and protecting freedom.

Excepts,

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