

Khilafat: its two portfolios, spiritual and temporal

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With the political turmoil spreading from one Arab country to the next, during the last few weeks, several fears and demons have been reawakened. Could these changes herald development of a theocracy or establishment of Caliphate in some Muslim country? These speculations have served as a golden opportunity for some fear mongers. For example, Glenn Beck claims that Caliphate will result from the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt. Rush Limbaugh and Donald Rumsfeld have also been tilting at windmills and have joined Glenn's Jihad against presumed Caliphate. We label the commentary of Glenn and like as fear mongering, as there is no political tool available in the Muslim world to reestablish Caliphate.

What is Caliphate? After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad, Caliphate – spiritual, moral and political succession -- was established in 632, akin to the Papacy in Catholic Church. Early on it was a democratic and beneficent institution, but, unfortunately, within a few decades it deteriorated into kingship, largely giving up the spiritual and moral dimension and providing only some political leadership to the Muslims, in some form, over the centuries. The consolation for the believers, as they look back on the history, is that they find the events followed the predictions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, as he had said, "Prophethood shall remain among you as long as God wills. Then khilafat on the pattern of prophethood will commence and remain as long as He wills. A corrupt monarchy shall then follow and it shall remain as long as God wills. There shall then be a tyrannical despotism which shall remain as long as God wills. Then once again khilafat will emerge on the precept of prophethood."¹

Khilafat after prophethood can have two portfolios, mainly spiritual and moral and secondarily temporal. It was a special blessing of Allah for Islam that in the early history of Islam, after the demise of the Holy Prophet, the two portfolios were combined in one person during the tenure of the Rashidun Khulafa, the rightly guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, may Allah be pleased with them all. This helped tremendously in the early consolidation of Islam. This, however, is not the case after every prophet and was indeed not the case after Jesus, may peace be on him. His earlier followers did not enjoy any temporal influence for a long time to come. After the rightly guided Caliphs the title of Caliph was retained by the kings and temporal rulers but they largely lost moral and spiritual legitimacy and influence. This gulf was filled by the Mujaddids and Sufis, over the centuries, in various parts of the Islamic Empire.

After the three decades of the rightly-guided Khulafa, the title of Khalifa or Caliph was borne by the fourteen Umayyad kings of Damascus (661-750) and subsequently by the

thirty-eight Abbasid monarchs of Baghdad (750-1258). After the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, the title was also assumed by the Spanish branch of the family who ruled in Spain at Córdoba (755–1031) and by the Fatimid rulers of Egypt (909–1171). Thus there existed multiple contemporaneous Caliphs from the 7th to 12th centuries. The last Abbasid Caliph of Cairo was captured in 1517 by the Ottoman sultan Selim I. The Ottoman sultans then claimed the title of Khalifa and brandished it for four centuries until it was abolished in 1924 by the Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic.ⁱⁱ

After a snapshot of the Islamic Empire, let us briefly review history of the Christian world. With the weekly news cycle in the national media most of us have lost the historical perspective. Heeding Santayana's warning, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," let us anchor our thoughts in proper historical context. There was no separation of Temple and State in the Roman Empire and everyone was made to worship the State Gods and that led to persecution of the early Christians, who refused to be polytheist. The reign of Diocletian, Roman emperor (284–305 AD), was darkened by the worst persecution of the Christians. The reasons for this persecution are uncertain, but various explanations have been advanced: the possible influence of Galerius, a fanatic follower of the traditional Roman religion; the desire to restore complete unity, without tolerance of a foreign cult that was seen as separatist and of men who were forming a kind of state within the state. There was also the fear of an alienation of rebellious armies from emperor worship. At any rate, some or all of these factors led Diocletian to publish the four edicts of 303–304 CE, the persecutions spread through the empire with an extreme violence. However, contrary to Diocletian hopes, persecution did not succeed in annihilating Christianity but caused the faith of the martyrs to blaze forth instead.

What often escapes notice is that the separation of Church-Mosque and State has fully crystallized, only gradually in human history in the last few centuries. In recent times the Popes have limited themselves to moral and spiritual dimension of the humanity, leaving secular leadership to the elected political leaders, but this was not always the case. Pope Urban II and Pope Innocent III were certainly military leaders in as much as they initiated and stoked the First Crusade. Pope Innocent III (1160 - 1216), was the most significant pope of the Middle Ages, he, reestablished and expanded the pope's authority over the Papal States, worked tirelessly to launch Crusades to recover the Holy Land, combated heresy in Italy and southern France, shaped a powerful and original doctrine of papal power within the church and in secular affairs. Fast forward a few centuries, and the political landscape is unchanged, from the beginning of his papacy to the fall of Napoleon I Bonaparte in 1815, Pope Pius VII was completely involved with France; he and Napoleon were continually in conflict, eventually the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) restored nearly all the Papal States, including Rome to Pius. Eventually, during the 19th-century movement for Italian unification, the existence of the Papal States proved an obstacle to national union, because they divided Italy into two parts. The Papal States were sandwiched between two secular domains; annexation of the Papal States to the new Italian nation, however, was eventually

achieved. The Papal States had finally come to an end. Nevertheless, Pope Pius IX refused to accept the new political situation or to recognize the loss of papal temporal power, and he and his successors remained self-described “prisoners in the Vatican.” The question of the Pope’s relation to the Italian state was unsettled until the Lateran Treaty of 1929 set up the independent ecclesiastical state of Vatican City.ⁱⁱⁱ

President Thomas Jefferson’s constant struggle to establish the separation of the Church and State in nascent USA are known to most. Now, fast forward another century and a half, and visit the Muslim world, Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. The Founder of the modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal was given the title of Atatürk (Father of the Turks) in 1934. He pursued a policy of Westernization and secularization, in which Western styles of dress and appellation were made mandatory. The teaching of separation of the Church-Mosque and State that was paramount in the early history of Islam, which was somewhat befogged in Middle Ages, again fiercely pierced Muslim consciousness. The Holy Prophet Muhammad had been a great champion of pluralism, in as much as he created a multi-religious society soon after his migration to Medina. This dimension of his personality can certainly be a light for our global village.

As Muslims who believe in the Messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has a clear vision that religion should not legislate in the domain of man’s relation to God. Islam offers guiding principles in matters of man’s relation to man. These principles can easily be translated into secular laws based on justice, tolerance and love for mankind. We believe that good governance should be beneficent and should ensure universal human rights, protect the rights of the minorities and dispense absolute justice for all people. We believe that after the demise of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the community has continued to have a divinely guided spiritual leadership that we refer to as Khilafat, which by its constant focus on spirituality and morality, aims at elevating the moral fiber of humanity. The Ahmadiyya Khilafat is apolitical; spiritual and religious in nature, in contrast to the Ottoman Caliphate, it symbolizes complete separation of Church-Mosque and State. It is poles apart from the misplaced aspirations of Caliphate of some Muslim groups for political and militaristic dominance over the entire world.

Dr. Andrew Conway Ivy was appointed by the American Medical Association as its representative at the 1946 Nuremberg Medical Trial for Nazi doctors. By 1945 he was probably ‘the most famous doctor in the country.’ He wrote, “Only in a moral world, a world of responsibility, can man be free and live as a human being should. Men are truly equal and free only as creatures of God, because only as the children of God and only in the sight of God and ultimate moral law are men truly equal.” In the Nuremberg trial he struggled with the question that if man-made law is the sole source of basic human rights, why condemn the Nazi assault on Jews, Gypsies, Poles, and political enemies; and having shaken by this perplexing trial he concluded, “If God and the ultimate moral law are denied, there can be no absolute argument against slavery, against ‘might makes right’ and man’s greedy exploitation of man. If human beings have no absolute intrinsic value, no absolute intrinsic freedom of decision, no absolute liberty, no absolute duties, they possess only extrinsic value and may be used as chattels, slaves or serfs

by those who have the intelligence and power.” We all understand that there are absolute moral values that cannot be violated. Every human expresses abhorrence against rape, incest and murder. But, when it comes to politics and especially international politics we feel expediency and compromise should be the primary guiding principle. How could this be? If there are absolute values in personal sphere why not in a broader international arena? If any human life is not sacred then no human life is sacred! Haven’t all religions and all sages over the millennia preached the Golden rule: “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself?” All this underscores that the moral dimension of human affairs cannot be underestimated. Herein, lies the need and scope of Khilafat as Ahmadiyya Muslim Community understands it.

The word Khilafat is a Quranic term signifying stewardship of our abode, the planet earth. Different sects of Islam may have varied understanding and aspirations for Khilafat or Caliphate. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believes that Ahmadiyya Khilafat is only spiritual and moral in dimension and by being constantly focused on our responsibilities to God and fellow humans, by its firm belief in absolute morality even in the international arena, like in personal dimension, its insistence on absolute justice for everyone, will guide humanity towards harmonious living and can play a pivotal role in the world peace, by highlighting the moral and spiritual needs of humanity. The Khilafat proposed by the general Sunni and Shiite Muslim clergy is fraught with un-Islamic proposals while the Ahmadiyya Khilafat fits the needs of today's political and moral scene for interfaith and international harmony.

ⁱ Musnad-Ahmad, Mishkat, Chapter Al-Anzar Wal Tahzir.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.alislam.org/egazette/updates/the-islamic-khilafat-its-rise-fall-and-re-emergence/>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Papal States." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011. Web. 11 May. 2011. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/441848/Papal-States>>.