

Secularism Versus Religion in Politics -II

Abul Mansur Ahmad

imal part of the intelligence manifested in nature."

I agree, on the other hand, with the latter view that religion can do most to raise the standards of politics by keeping away from politics and by attending to religious spheres only. But I do not agree with their view that religion will never enter into any other sphere of human life except the religious. I strongly hold that religion can and should raise the moral standard of society by changing individuals. This will automatically raise the standard of politics because any change in the individual citizens will be immediately reflected in the political life of the country.

No quarrel between the two

Religion, therefore, has no quarrel with the scientific advancement, social welfare and material progress of mankind. Go ahead and achieve all kinds of progress says religion, 'but do not drag me in everything'.

This is so because religion can aptly be looked upon as a spiritual tonic — a kind of medicine in relation to human soul. However much one may be convinced of the efficacy of a medicine, one will never voluntarily take it unless he himself feels its necessity. A healthy person will naturally

not feel the necessity of a medicine. Similarly a rich and happy person living in affluence and pleasures of life will not feel the necessity of religion and God. Now he does not need any supernatural protector, but will surely need one if and when his scientific power will fail him. Such moments do come in the life of individuals. Similarly when mankind will make the unpleasant discovery that our wonderful scientific inventions of amenities of life, our ballistic missiles, our atomic weapons and countless defensive and offensive organizations are powerless to bring us peace and happiness and to avert social disasters only then will they see and feel God, and not until then. This is not disparaging God. Indeed, there are Bengali equivalents of God which say: 'God is the saviour of the fallen', 'God belongs to him who has nothing else', 'He is the friend of the friendless' etc. That is the great secret of God and religion. These two valuable things should, like good medicines, be kept reserved for rare use at times of calamities where every other thing fails. If we make it a thing of every day use it loses its efficacy. How apt is the Persian adage which says: 'Kaaba would have lost its holiness if we had a Kaaba in every city'! It is here and in this

sense, that the comparison of religion with opium is precisely right, not in its conventional sense that opium keeps its devotees addicted, but in the sense that by constant everyday use even an effective thing loses its effect on the user. It is our common everyday experience that religion and God mean absolutely nothing to one who constantly swears by them. To bring religion into politics will inevitably have this effect. It will then be an everyday plaything as we find it in the hand of our politicians.

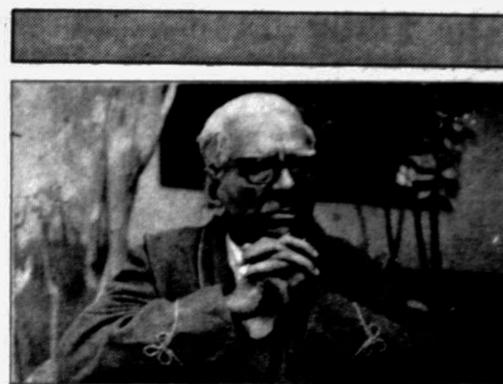
There is another reason for which all sincere lovers of religion must keep their religion uncontaminated by politics. There are more than one country and state inhabited and governed by the people of the same faith. At the time of clashes of their political interests and disputes about their territorial boundaries, the greatest disservice will be done to that religion in particular and humanity in general if either or both parties to the disputes is or are allowed to give their mundane interests a religious covering. This is bound to happen if we bring religion into politics.

From politics' angle

Now from the angle of politics itself. The life of an indi-

vidual as also that of a society, state and nation, has become far more complex than what it was, say, in the nineteenth century. So the reasons for which France, Germany and Italy had to separate the Church from the state do apply today with much greater force. No state can permit a divided loyalty in its citizens.

In the Muslim history, the Khilafat, which was originally designed to be a unified institutional hegemony transcending territorial and national boundaries to be headed by only one Khilafat-ul-Muslimin, had to be divided country-wise into as many Khilafats as there were countries. This division was an unavoidable political necessity to prevent divided loyalty of the citizens. This was the direct effect of religion and politics being mixed up. Had the leaders of the Muslim World of that time been far-sighted enough to keep religion away from politics the institution of Khilafat could have been retained, maintained, organized and developed as a useful well-knit international, moral, cultural, educational and religious body serving humanity in general and the Muslims in particular till today.



Abul Mansur Ahmad (1898-1979)

There is another point, no less strong, which makes the separation of politics and religion irresistible. The complex nature of the life of a modern nation-state is reflected, amongst other things, in its division into religious majority and minority. The basis of modern politics being counting of heads, no religious minority can afford to subject their faith to the majority interference. This was resisted in the nineteenth century in the Muslim World, in the nineteenth century in the Christian World and in the twentieth century in the Buddhist World. Now this separation is an internationally closed question. Pakistan can ill afford to put

the clock back.

Lastly, there are things which are necessary for us and practices which are prevalent amongst us, but they are clearly prohibited and forbidden by our religion. Of these prohibitions some may or may not be reasonable, but some are definitely unreasonable and unnecessary according to our human judgement. The cases of usury and interest, food and drink, music and dance, painting and sculpture, purda and female emancipation, are only a few of the large number of instances in point. Were we to take previous sanction of religion to do these things, which we must do if we mix up religion with politics, we would

never have done them or have done them in flagrant disobedience to the clear order of religion sought and received. That would have been a deliberate insult to religion in addition to disobedience. It would be exactly like a good young son seeking his father's permission to smoke and drink and then starting smoking and drinking when the father refuses such permission. The ideal son would be he who would not seek such permission and the ideal father would be he who will connive at such frailties of his children. Human life is full of such frailties like war and peace, treaties and violations, diplomacy and foreign policy, trade and commerce etc necessitating telling lies and concealing the truth in a conventional sense. It will be sheer insult to religion and to higher values of life if we are to have our such imperfections ratified by our religion. Let man enjoy life to the full to his heart's content judged by his own moral and ethical standard without dragging his religion in it. Let him then, in proper time in a proper mood, come to religion as a blissful retirement from the humdrum of active social life. Let religion succeed where politics fails. Let religion begin where politics ends. The two must not meet. If they do, politics will make religion corrupt and religion will make politics unreal. We can ill-afford either.

Concluded. First published in The Concept, November, 1964.

My World: A Commentary

MY World by Mr S M Ali is an insightful and fascinating reading every week on a variety of subjects.

In one of such pieces (Aug.9) My World had me track down the memory lane back to the early fifties. I was then on the last leg of my university days and was bracing myself for the new career I was about to embark upon. At that moment I received a letter from Mr Ali, already a reputed journalist in the country who was serving in the Dawn, the premier English Daily of the then Pakistan as a senior editorial hand.

His weekly column, 'Sixth Column', if I may recall, was a drawer in those days for many a reader of the Dawn. In his two-page typed letter Mr Ali counselled me on how to improve one's writing ability—a requirement so vitally needed for an aspirant to make a career in journalism, and to read especially The New Statesman and Nation and The Economist, the two highly readable journals published from the UK as regularly as possible. (In those days foreign journals were not so easily available as at present). He also cautioned me not to nurse any illusion about journalism. 'Life in journalism is too hard for most of us. Often it may seem almost unbearable', he wrote. His was indeed a realistic appraisal of the condition prevailing at the time in the field of journalism which obviously, as the circumstances would dictate, did not belong to the faint hearts.

This forewarning was much more relevant in my case for more than one reason. Most of the middle-class families to which I belonged so crucially depended on their wards' earnings to improve their economic standing, and also may be for a sort of face-lift for the families in the community they lived. In spite of such a despairing situation, quite a number of bright youngmen and a few women took heart to take up the challenge of the profession. Many of them I knew had an enviable academic background, and I presume could land without much effort some secure and cushy jobs in other callings of life. To my perception, the moving urge for many, if even remotely felt, to join the profession was its unique role to serve the cause of the society. To-day after a long and arduous journey over the decades journalism has come of age in

this part of the world, as many would agree.

In journalism these days one can hopefully look forward to a decent career, both in terms of money and social respectability which barring a small number of practitioners was almost a dream until some years back. The journalists' record in discharging the varied social responsibilities under the circumstances has also been noteworthy. Thus vastly improved scenario was obviously not an easy street all the way for a Third World country like ours so thickly wired with accumulated problems of ages. In fact, at one point, as one would recall, the Press was muzzled and rendered totally subservient to the dictates of the ruling masters.

In recent times there has been literally a profusion of newspapers not only in Dhaka but in other places as well of the country. It would, however, be a bit naive to expect that all of these newspapers will in the long run be able to survive for

Syed Badrul Haque

very obvious reasons. Nevertheless, an evaluative study of these newspapers if undertaken particularly in reference to quality journalism periodically, say on yearly basis, it will enormously benefit not only the serving journalists but also the burgeoning newspaper industry of our country. This exercise may be continued till such time these newborns reach the take-off stage in terms of social obligation.

Rambles aside, though a pertinent question, may I ask the successor-journalists whether they acknowledge the contributions of their pioneering elders at least in terms of gratitude or remembrance. Frankly, I am pained to be in the negative as many others are. To mention, Mr Mahubb Jamal Zahedi, a pioneering distinguished journalist of this soil is hardly mentioned in the profession here. They certainly deserve a little more on that score, I suppose. Beyond this imploring, to stretch the issue a little further, this shift (or should we say we settle into a bland acceptance of it) in our time-honoured value culture, however trivial it might seem to many, is apparent not only in the realm of journalism but in fact in now touches a wide

spectrum of our social fabric.

In many minds there is a question mark about the factors that caused such an erosion in our value-culture. Not a social moraliser myself nor I pretend to be, all that I want is to get a fair understanding of the societal development in a given society like ours. Should our social scientists take up the job to delve into the subject in all its ramifications, they would find it an intellectually stimulating one, and the society would indeed be well-served, the culture-watchers held. Well all these are beside the particular point that I would like to raise in this piece. My apology for the digression which hardly I could help.

Mr Ali in his My World mentions of quite a collection of publications that are signed by eminent personalities of Bangladesh and outside countries to adorn his bookshelf. He now invites his other authors to send him their publications so that some day in future, as he wishes, one of his family members could put them to auction as rare books and make some money. Sounds not an impracticable proposition.

To revert now to Mr Ali's letter I must say that it had been quite a booster to my morale in charting out my future career at a vital crossroad of my life. Over the decades the letter had almost attained the 'antique' status and is preserved with care. I may tell the writer of My World that the letter is not a trade-off and never to go at the call of the hammer, no matter what was the price offered.

Contributor of articles on varied topics, the writer had served as journalist both in the print and broadcasting media and Press Information Department, and also as the Public Relations Officer to the President, People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Emphasis on Being Nice, not Catching Crooks

The most important role of the police is to catch criminals, right? Well maybe. In Britain, a new "Citizen's Charter" is puts more emphasis on the way police treat the victims of crime. As Gemini News Service reports, the police say better relations with the public are essential, but criminologists accuse them of hiding the fact that they are not solving enough crime. by Ken Hyder

THROUGHOUT the world, people expect their police forces to catch criminals, but in Britain both government and police are moving the goalposts.

Police want to be judged on how well they treat victims, rather than how well they catch crooks.

Public confidence in police ability to prevent and solve crime has been declining. People are less willing to cooperate with police investigations and are less willing to approach police for help.

A study by London Metropolitan Police reported, among other problems, that victims of crime were being treated miserably and kept in ignorance and some of them failed to report the crimes committed against them. Police are hoping that their new emphasis on public relations and support for victims will inspire confidence in them and in turn will lead to increased co-operation in the solving of offences.

However, some criminologists believe the new approach deals too much with public perception of the police and not enough on actually clearing up crime.

An example of this is street patrols. In one public survey conducted by police, 42.5 per

cent of respondents said they wanted more visible street patrolling.

But Superintendent Terry Collins, in charge of the improvement project, says increased patrolling has no impact on either the level or the detection of crime. Research indicates that a London bobby on the streets could expect to pass within 100 yards of a burglar at work only once every eight years. And even then he or she might not notice.

Said criminologist Trevor Jones who has studied crime in London, "There's nothing wrong in the police improving their service to victims, and putting more officers on the streets."

But, he said, there is still only one thing that matters: the crime clear-up rate. "If increased public confidence does not lead to improved clear-ups, then all this talk of service is an expensive cosmetic exercise."

Victims' support groups are cautiously happy with the change in attitude of the police and with the government's proclamations in the "Victims' Charter" last year, and this year in John Major's "Citizens' Charter."

Both charters encourage, for example, improving and monitoring response times to

calls for help, informing the victim when the offender is being let out on bail and informing victims of procedures for winning compensation.

The London Metropolitan Police force is now sending out monthly letters to all victims to update them on the progress of their cases. Victim support services are growing in many centres.

The provisions of the charters are not, however, enforceable by law, and have not gone far enough in some areas, says Martin Wright of the National Office for Victim Support. He would still like to see, among other changes, a concrete timetable for implementation of the changes laid out in the Charters and a complaint procedure.

Criminologist Jock Young thinks police are de-emphasising catching criminals because their performance in that area has been falling off.

Overall, clear-up in England and Wales have fallen from 45 per cent in 1970 to 32 per cent in 1990. In London, only 17 per cent of crimes are likely to be solved and only eight per cent of household burglaries. In some smaller centres, police clear up over half the crimes committed in

their area.

Jones sees a steady move away from clearing up crime: "Already in London, the police attitude is that autocrime is unimportant... The worrying thing is that this attitude is gradually being applied to burglary, a crime which hits people personally, in the home." "The smell of glasnost (openness) is in the air," says an article in the Police Review. The examination of public concerns, police performance and job satisfaction have "got to be good for all of us."

The Victims' and Citizens' Charters are also working to make the courts less of an ordeal for victims of crime. Wright gives the example of defence lawyers saying unpleasant things, often mistruths about the victim in order to shift some of the blame off the accused. Before, the victim could do nothing but listen but the charter now gives the prosecutor the right to interrupt and correct any falsehoods.

Warns Young: "In some ways it's like medicine. People don't want a pleasant, customer-friendly medical service which says at the end of the day: 'We're sorry, we can't cure your illness.'"

— GEMINI NEWS

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

After 15 years of marriage, I and my husband got a divorce. I am trying to adjust to the new situation but it is very hard. There are so many memories and questions. I often ask myself if we had done this or that, then may be the divorce would not have happened. Maybe it's all my fault, I was too independent minded. Do you have any advice for me, so that I can adjust better with my new life?

Anonymous Dhaka

Dear Anonymous,

Women often suffer from guilt after a divorce. It is a traumatic experience and scars remain for a long time. Contrary to what we are told, divorce is not always somebody's fault. All marriages were not meant to work and any one spouse does not have to take the blame. Get rid of the guilt feelings and start thinking positive again. If you are a professional woman pursue your career with more energy and dynamism. Once you have the right attitude you will automatically adjust to the changed situation.

Selina Dhanmandi

Dear Selina,

This is a complex situation and any advice I give in this column will sound too simplistic. Unfaithfulness and infidelity is basically a breach of trust. It takes a lot of time, patience and mutual support to recover from. Only your friend can decide if she wants to forgive and forget. It seems they want to give the marriage another chance. I would advise that they start the process of healing by beginning to communicate in a meaningful way.

Dear Mita,

I have been married for 12 yrs but do not have a baby. My husband wants to adopt one, but I am not too sure. What will

be the attitude of my friends and relatives? Can I tell the baby that we are not the real parents? These questions create doubts in me. Please advise.

Samira Eskaton

Dear Samira,

Your doubts do have some basis but not enough to deprive yourself of the unique pleasure of parenthood. Whatever friends and relatives may say, the decision is yours and your husband's. If you pursue it with confidence society will accept it. As for telling the child, it will come later. Concentrate on making a happy, secure and loving home for her/him first.

Dear Mita,

My sister-in-law gives me lot of problems. Even though I am married and don't live with them anymore. They still talk behind my back. My parents live with my brother and I feel so bad for them. What can I do?

Cindy Dhaka

Dear Cindy,

Problems of this kind are common in our culture. When people from different background live together there is bound to be some problems. It requires a high degree of tolerance, patience and tact. Don't get too upset if they talk behind your back. Ignore it and eventually it will stop. Try to give as much support to your parents because it is difficult for elderly people to adjust to new situations. Try talking to your brother but not in a way that your sister-in-law feels left out. You can also find out what is bothering her, perhaps it is some misunderstanding, and talking might help.

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toybee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.

My Days

From Page 9

All the issues and problems which make up the challenges of a vice Chancellor and his institution are framed by the realities of an economically marginal society at the top of which there is a power-elite which does not regard the university as an organization of central importance. Bangladesh has been ruled without consent for over a decade and this has been a prime source of conflict and corruption in public life with consequences for the University. The twin facts of a

marginal economy and dictatorship ensure that we are deprived and defrauded society with its commanding ideas and metaphors such as 'people', 'democracy', 'development', 'freedom', and 'religion' ignominiously appropriated by the rulers and emptied of their meaning. The University must help restore their content. The culture of a marginal existence and ruthless exploitation such as ours is bound at some point to brutalize social life and render it insensitive to values while the ruling groups pursue the illusion of security

and power. It is important, therefore, for our universities to avoid their own marginalization by refusing to give cause for scepticism as to both their utility and value as a civilizing and sustaining agent.

The challenge of being a Vice Chancellor today is to preserve the University as an intellectual institution, make it work and recover its vision, so it can give society back its basic and over-arching metaphors. This can only be done if we all make the enterprise our own.