Emergence Of Secular Thought In Europe

The capitalist countries are embarked upon a mission to consistently attack Islam and Muslims and to impose their political and social values over us. The recent trips of American foreign secretary of state James Baker, to the predominantly Muslim inhabited areas of the former Soviet Union, in order to make sure that they do not return to Islam, was also a part of the same mission, which is, to export the secular and capitalist ideas and institutions to the whole world in general, and Muslims in particular. In this article, *Ar-Raya* tries to show the process of development of secular thought in Europe. We hope that the article will help us understand how the secular/capitalist thought is built upon the shallow and reactionary, and not the rational basis of thinking.

During the 18th century, a revolution in thought took place in Europe in all aspects of life. This revolution was the result of a long struggle between the church and the intellectuals in which the Church suffered a defeat and lost all of its ruling power over the people who had become disgusted by its oppressive and manipulative style of Government. The revolution also changed the way people used to interpret the Universe and life. Throughout Europe, people started to abandon ideas and rules about life imposed on them by the Church. Some of the thinkers and philosophers lost so much confidence in the Church and Christianity due to it being used as a tool in the hands of the monarchs to oppress and manipulate people that they decided once and for all to demolish this institution. These thinkers later split mainly into two branches; one stream of thought as mentioned already, advocated the complete abolition of the Church while the other called for a compromise based on the principle of separation of religion and state. The former category of philosophers founded the basis of another ideology or a way of life which was later known as Communism while the latter category put the basis of modern day Capitalism which is the champion of secular democracy. In order to get a clear picture of the whole process, we need to take a brief look at the history of the role of the Church in the medieval European life.

ROLE OFTHE CHURCH:

As the Roman Empire started to decline from the 3rd century AD, the Church started to play a far greater role in the affairs of the sate than ever before. After Constantine, church and state officially allied. This point in history proved to be the start of endless misery and sufferings of the European people at the hands of the coalition between the Church and monarchs. At the same time, the Church and the Roman Empire started to suffer grave divisions. By 476 AD several kingdoms started to emerge in Europe in which the Church continued to play a major role in state affairs.

Christianity lacked a system by which it could run the affairs of the people, so the Roman Church absorbed some of the traditions of the old Roman government in order to fill the gap. The

Church had absolute monopoly over literacy and law because the new kingdoms were engaged in defending themselves from the invasions by outsiders. As a result, Church was the only place the monarchs could turn to when it came to equip themselves with legal systems and the state constitutions.

The Church was Europe's greatest government. Although the papacy directly ruled only the small regions around Rome and from time to time over England, Sicily, or the Jerusalem, it possessed more political power than any other government in Europe. In almost all of the kingdoms, the monarch called, Church's prince, who was chosen by the cardinals (Rome's local clergy). These cardinals in turn were used to be directly appointed by the Pope. The Pope had the ultimate power to install bishops and other clergy or to tax the churches or to give judicial rulings concerning all aspects of life and was believed to be in direct contact with God. The Church used its supremacy over its subjects in such a barbarous and brutal manner the example of which is difficult to be found anywhere in history. Innocent people were exploited in the name of religion and the promises of heaven. A great source of the Church's income was the sale of the keys to heaven to the financially sound Christians. The Church owned much of the useful lands and had accumulated most of the wealth in Europe. A great number of women were tortured and executed after the Church declared them witches. Scientists who dared to disagree with the church and tried to introduced new scientific ideas were executed. People, although living under great misery and

hardships, did not dare speak or act against the will of the Church for the fear of severe persecutions. The list of the atrocities committed by the Church is endless and the details can be found in any history book dealing with what the Europeans call middle ages or the “dark ages.”

The situation continued until the beginning of the 14th century when the first signs of discontent started to show against the Church's rule. Western historians call this period in history the 'late middle ages".

One of the factors for this rebellion against the church was the frustration among European thinkers that resulted due to the continuous humiliation of the crusaders at the hands of the great Muslim state. Also the church had proved to be a total disaster when it came to solving the social problems of the people because of Christianity's lack of a system to govern all aspects of life. These factors and others combined, led to seal the fate of the church and Christianity in Europe.

The Thirty Years War:

During the 16th century, Europe was seething with theological debate and controversy. Each state considering the church as a useful tool to gain control over the other states moved to monopolise the institution of church. The violence broke out in 1618 and soon extended all across the continent. It was much more brutal than any of the previous feudal conflicts. The war went on for thirty years after which much of Germany and rest of Europe lay in ruins, the towns devastated and their industries destroyed. One third of the population had died either in battle or from plague, malnutrition, or similar war-related catastrophes. The war between France and Spain continued even until 1659.

The Compromise:

The conflict seemed endless. So, the thinkers finding no other way out, decided to make a compromise. The result of the compromise was the separation of religion from state affairs. The reformers of the church like Martin Luther and John Calvin declared politics as something of an embarrassment; and one of the primary duties of the Christian men was to obey, the constituted authority, no matter how wicked it might be. The great question who should rule, man or God?-was left unanswered and declared irrelevant; A whole new ideology was developed without thinking.

A Retreat to the Greek Philosophy:

The vacuum in the Western thought that seemed inevitable to result in case the church was removed from life, left Europe with no other choice but to retreat to thousands of years back in history-to the Greek philosophy- to find the solutions to their problems (accompanied by their stubborn resistance to accept Islam-the ultimate truth). This issue split the contemporary philosophers mainly into two groups; Those who were for the Greek philosophy, promoted "naturalism" and believed in the human beings natural reason to solve <u>all</u> of their problems, while the other group which was in favour of the church, advocated "realism" and the divinity of human institutions. This struggle resulted in a victory of the secular thought.

This new society whose basis were on the ideas of either the abolition of the religion or the separation of religion from life affairs left the society in obscurity when it came to the meaning and significance of life and the universe. This situation led to a boom in the philosopher population throughout Europe. Everyday philosophers came up with new theories to explain the origin, the meaning, and significance of life. Some of those philosophers like **Rene' Descartes -** a Frenchman- suggested that the *reality* is different for different people, depending upon individual's

consciousness, indirectly leaving the belief in God on the individuals consciousness. Another species of philosophers of which **Immanuel Kant** was a part, claimed that the human mind is responsible for the existence of things as we perceive them.

Initial Signs of Capitalism:

As the reign of the medieval church came close to an end, Europe's secular institutions started to emerge in the form of a new ideological base- the capitalism. Nations started to think of their citizens-,as superior to others by virtue of race and innate genius, began to view themselves as guardians of their nation's freedom. The idea became common that geography , climate, or even heavenly determination selected those frontiers within which men were naturally endowed with a will to be free, to govern themselves, or to dominate others. Each people felt a sense of perfection and superiority to other nations in its character or institutions. Fourteenth century German publicists praised their people's ability to rule others and saw in their elected monarchy a proof of the peculiar freedom of the German spirit. The idea of the natural *franchise* of all things French and of all Frenchman was equally popular across the Rhine river in France. England did not want to be left behind in this race for superiority as John Fortescue- an English thinker claimed English free law and constitution to be superior to any existing law. Most of these ideas were the by-products of Aristotelian thought of particularism.

With the rising tides of capitalism, the church was left with no other choice but to mould itself according to the new laws and institutions of the emerging secular states. The church was not in a position to manipulate the monarchs anymore, but now it was a tool in the hands of the secular governments to manipulate people. An example of this was the declaration by the church that the secular people who lived faithfully and worked honestly were as good before God as the religious people. By the 16th century, a number of reform movements had started inorder to enable the church to coexist in the secular society.

Political Thought of Capitalism:

Macchiavelli, a pagan, from Florence Italy, founded the basis of the modern day western political thought through two of his famous books: **The discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy** and **The Prince.**

According to his political thought, politics is a purely secular affair. It is, quite simply, the combat of men in search of power. Since men are all alike-all brutal, all selfish-politics must follow universal rules which are the same for all men. The successful ruler therefore is the man who has studied his fellow men, both by studying, history and observing his contemporaries, and is willing to exploit their weaknesses.

Later at the end of the 18th century, France experienced a revolution in which the institution of monarchy was abolished and the modem day parliamentary system was adopted. It is known as the French revolution that took place in 1790. Almost all of the western countries including the United States were influenced by this revolution and later, starting with the reign of Napoleon, France, and other western countries embarked upon a policy of colonising other parts of the world in order to export the capitalist ideology and in return, to gain economically. Today, this policy is still prevalent in somewhat modified, but more effective forms.

In today's capitalist society, a politician is exactly according to Machiavelli’s ideal of a politician; an artist performs just for the sake of art, not the people; a writer writes for the sake of freedom of expression, and not for the benefit of the society; their so caged intellectuals or thinkers are experts only at making compromises, instead of giving solutions; their governments serve as a tool in the hands of the corporate businesses and the 0. I% rich of the society who are trying to snatch the remaining world's resources from the possession of the poor peoples around the globe; and each member of their societies lives for the sake of its individuality, not for his or her family or the society.

It is true that the Church no longer controls the Europeans anymore, but today this position has been taken over by the corporations and the banks. Another conflict is about to start. We hope that this time they use their minds instead of compromises. This is what the west or the capitalists are inviting the whole world, including the Muslims, to. We, the Muslims reject this invitation to

Jahiliyah (utter ignorance) comprehensively, because we possess Islam- The system given to mankind by Allah(SWT)- and strive to make Islam dominant so that the whole world is invited towards the light of Al-Haq.

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