

THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF POLITICAL FUNCTION OF RELIGION: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article clarifies some of the political functions of religion that have been used by various institutions, groups and politicians. Religion as one of the social system's structures has some social functions including political one, whether positive or negative. By studying the previous works on religions and the writer's new evidence, here from a political point of view, these eufunctions (positive functions) will be extracted. The writer believes that, unlike the sociologists, political scientists haven't considered the functions of religion in the political arena. So, this article tries to clarify some of these functions to answer the following questions: what are the positive political functions of religion especially in new age? Has religion shifted to new functions? With respect to these questions, from functionalism approach, and after defining religion, the author tries to explain some of these functions such as the effect of integrity and cohesion, Influence in domestic policies and public polices, voting behaviors, nationalism, international relationships and so on.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Political Function of Religion, Political Participation, Mobilization, Ideology, Political Order, Religious Nationalism, Religious Politics

INTRODUCTION

Most of empirical investigations, in recent years, suggest that religious belief and practice are as prevalent as in the past times, if not more. Most of the people in secular countries identify themselves as followers of a religion. In 2001, Gill in an article mentioned that according to some word value survey, three quarters of the respondents in 43 countries continue to profess a belief in some supernatural deity, 63% consider themselves religious, and 70% claim to belong to a religious denomination (gill, 2001). So, religion is still an important factor in politics.

Within the politics, indeed, the effect of religion can be detected in every facet. At the level of the political culture, religious beliefs make a contribution; at the constitutional level, issues of religion and state still remain contentious. For example, in some developing countries religion is the basis of constitution, and in Britain as a developed country the monarch is still technically both the head of state and Supreme Governor of the Established Church of England (Moyser, 1991: 13). And within the arenas of pressure group politics, electoral politics and policy-making, religion takes a substantial part. In U.S.A, Roman Catholic bishops assert their views on nuclear weapons and the rights of the unborn; powerful Jewish groups lobby on behalf of Israel; the effect of born-again evangelicals on politics (Ibid: 23).

Apart from the conducted surveys and investigations, the world's events during last years in some countries like Egypt, Cyprus, and Syria show that religion is and will continue to be a major player in politics. So, religion is a consistent element in human society that can be considered like a part of society as a whole with some functions. And, as the historical investigations show the politics and religion have been in interaction till now. Indeed the most important effect of the social power of religion is that it emerges in the form of its political capabilities (Mofidi, 2005). Despite this, after separation of various disciplines in social sciences, religion and its social functions have already been investigated by some sociologists, especially the functionalists, including some mentions to some political functions as a part of it but not clearly

and under this title while the attempts in political science were insignificant and most of studies have been limited to political religion and fundamentalism. In this regard, and in the continuation of previous writings on religion in politics, this article considers the positive aspects of political functions of religion from the viewpoint of political science¹. For this purpose, first of all, we should define religion and separate its substantive and functional definitions.

Religion: Substantive and Functional Definitions

There are many definitions for religion. All definitions emphasize certain aspects of religion and exclude others. Here, we mention Smith's definition that is supposed to be approximately comprehensive. In his words, 'Religion is a series of spiritual beliefs that unites its believers as a single community'. Thus, religion is one of the structures in the social system. In addition to the moral aspects, it can be discussed as a materialistic existence in religion foundations (like institutional form such as 'church' in Christianity, Mosque in Islam and temple in the Eastern religions), religious groups and religious movements (Hamilton, 2001). Hence, according to Malcolm Hamilton (2001), religion has both substantial and functional descriptions in which here we consider the functional definition. The intent here is to expose religion's function and role in politics.

Structural Functionalism and Religion

Generally, functional approach does not have value-judge and on the contrary, focuses on the objective role of religion. In Merton's view, religion like a part of society can have positive or negative functions and latent or manifest functions. In this text, as it will be explained we regard to eufunction (positive function) in respect to the religion in the politics and political science. But before that, here with regard to what was said above, we review the religion and its function in politics.

Political Functions of Religion

Governments, generally, favor those religious complexes which can be "used" for political purposes during history (Holt et al, Op.cit: 206). In relation to the government and politician's use of religion, we can refer to what Bonapart and other politicians in his government did in France. For them, 'the Church is in the state', whereas 'the state is not in church'(Bhargava, Op.cit: 102). It shows the importance of religion for state and indeed shows the truth in the beginning of secularism age. They didn't say church is separate from state because they as politicians wanted to use religion. Until now, this method has been continued So that we partially see the separation of religion from state but not from politics even in secular countries.

The relation between religion and emotion is important in politics. The connection between religion and emotion is a long and intimate one. Religion has always been a source of profound emotional experience(Emmons and Paloutzian, 2003). In politics, this religious emotion and the affect of religion on the emotion is used in various ways such as fundamentals of parties, revolution and creation of new state, voting and elections, segmentation, war, politicization, elections, national issue, charismatic authority... These issues can be divided to negative and positive as Wach (1971) have done like it. He mentions that the influence of religion is twofold: there is a positive or cohesive integrating influence, and there is a negative, destructive, disintegrating influence'(Wach, 1971: 35). So, as already mentioned, in respect to social referent of function, there are two types of functions; eufunction (positive function) or dysfunction (negative function). On the basis of this category, here we relatively regard the positive aspects of political functions of religion.

¹ 'The negative aspects of political functions of religion: an overview' is discussed in the other article of the writer.

Positive Aspects of Political Functions of Religion

There are some categories in relation to positive functions of religion mentioned by other writers. With regard to the functional prerequisites of group life, Johnstone says that religion has five functions: recruitment/ reproduction, socialization, producing satisfactory levels of goods and services, preserving order, maintaining a sense of purpose (Johnstone, 1975: 101-105). And also O'Dea lists six positive functions of religion for the individual and the society: It provides support and consolation, provides emotional security and identity, promotes group goals, criticisms of existing social and form a basis for social protest, provides an individual sense of identity important in the process of maturation and individual crises of life (Hamilton, Op.cit: 138).

In addition to functions mentioned above, and integrating function such as a major social function of religion, there are other functions in which some writers have cited like solidarity and social order, symbolization. Here we throw more light on some of them and also other political functions.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation has various dimensions including informed non- participation to take important responsibility in government. In regard to religion, here we just regard four dimensions of it:

Mass Politicization and Mobilization

According to Smith, under certain circumstances religion has some positive contributions in the process of politicization and promoting mass politicization by providing sacred symbols. Religious identity and conflicts of religious communities are the important factors to political collectivities and politicization, especially in the third world and transitional societies (Karaman, 2004). The fact that various religions continue to attract adherents after several millennia mentions to mobilizing power of them. All old religions have served the political mobilization in recent decades so that religious movements have shown a remarkable ability to mobilize collective action including political protest (gill, Op.cit: 118).

In the various countries, religious functionaries as clerical interest groups (associational groups) have been influential within the political arena in the process of mass politicization. There are, on the other hand, prominent lay politicians who have effectively utilized religious symbols in several religious traditions. Religious communities as non-associational religious interest group come to be politicized especially in conflict situations where the real issues are social, political and economic (Karaman, Op.cit).

Political Parties

As Jean Blondel in his book "Comparative Government" has mentioned structural parties are a kind of parties that religious party is one of them. Religion as the structure of society is a factor for forming the parties. Donald Smith distinguishes three kinds of Third World politico-religious parties. First, *communal parties* such as the Hindu Mahasabha or the Jana Sangh in India which mostly arises in response to the actual or latent conflict in a religiously pluralist society. They act to protect communal interests. The second type of religious political party is the *sect-based party* as the Ummah in the northern Sudan. The third type is the *ideological religious party* which functions in societies in which religious minorities are politically unimportant such as many Latin American parties for Example the Christian democrats in Chile and the Masjumi in Indonesia. These parties are not oriented to conflict with other religious groups, but desire to speak to the ideological assumptions that undergird and shape the society (Johnstone, Op.cit: 203- 204).

Hence, in one hand, religion has a role to form the political parties and religion acts as the ideological source of these parties. There are some religious parties in western countries that they have effect on political life in these countries like Christian democratic party and Roman Catholic Party in France and... (see; Bhargava, Op.cit: 119). On the other hand, religion and religious people influence in parties or politicians use religion for reinforcing their parties. Johnstone in explain of the effect of religion on political party affiliation, as it was mentioned, says: 'the popularly held view that members of different religious groups tend to prefer one or the major political party' (Johnstone, Op.cit: 76).

Pressure Groups

Pressure groups have been a rich part of the story of religion in politics. Religious groups can be institutional pressure groups promoting their particular views of issues on the current public agenda and policies. Politicians use these groups to implement their programs or against their oppositions. They may appear in the form of lobbying the legislature making contacts with the executive administration or even going to court. It may also entail building and using links with political parties and forming alliances with other like-minded pressure groups. Their actions may extend to the mobilization of religious adherents, the formation of religiously inspired political movements, and the attempt to sensitize public opinion through the mass media. Even, in the modern world, religious leaders may actively seek office themselves. Although most of religious groups don't seek to entry in the political realm, and see it as an arena of corrupt and corrupting (Moyser, op.cit, p:7).

Elections and Voting Behavior

Religion is one factor that can potentially influence voting patterns and the choices made on Election Day. Both religious affiliation and indices of religiosity have repeatedly shown fairly strong correlations with certain voting patterns (Johnstone, Op.cit: 195). In traditional society and among peasants, religion has a major effect whenever their religious figure recommends voting, most of them participate and vote to that candidate who they want. Religion also has this influence in most of modern society for instance within the American electorate. Political speeches to religious congregations have become as important and strategic as other traditional venues. Many political candidates, too, nowadays realize that communicating religion to the masses can aid to success and culling support at polls (Martin, 2010). Indeed, the important part of power emanates from the mass populace that religion has influence among them. A classic study of western party systems revealed that religion retained a remarkable saliency in fixing voting alignments. To put it another way, religious groups may form political communities, shaping and mobilizing their members' electoral activities as they react to the candidates, parties and issues within the campaign (moyser, Op.cit: 7)

Use of differences among religion and attracting the various groups by political parties for voting and using of their vote is very common in many countries such as U.S. (see: Eversole, 2010 & Martin, Op.cit). Traditionally, in this country the tendency is for American Catholics to vote Democratic Party and for Protestants to be more likely to favor the Republican Party. Some of the national surveys conducted in various periods show this tendency (for some examples see: Johnstone, Op.cit: 197).

Eversole mentions that the rise of the religious right since the 1980s has created a sense that religious affiliation has become a significant force in politics as ethnic, gender, and racial preferences. So that regular church attendance can indicate a tendency to vote Republican as opposed to Democrat, although much depends on the issues at a given time and election (Eversole, Op.cit). In most presidential elections of U.S., various religious groups support one of parties and its candidate. For example Conservative evangelicals played an important role in the presidential election of Ronald Reagan (Gill, Op.cit). In 2000, fundamentalist and most of the other religious groups support W. Bush (Eversole, Op.cit). Hence, as

Martin has mentioned the American politicians have recognized the necessity of pious faith in winning high political office (Martin, Op.cit).

SYMBOLIZATION AND IDEOLOGY

The inter-related aspects of religion, ideology, and symbolism, have a function in politics. Some definitions of religion mention to symbolic connotation like Geertz and Mardin's definitions (see: Karaman, Op.cit). In this regard, and with respect to communalization of politics, we see the mobilization on the basis of religious symbols (Bhargava, Op.cit: 23). Since the essence of religious emotion is viewed as inexpressible, all attempts to express it are symbolic. Throughout history symbols have been and still remain among the most powerful stimulants of human sentiment. Sharing of common symbols is a particularly effective way of cementing the unity of a group of worshippers. Thus, another functional significance of religion is symbolism. It helps to create systems of social values that are integrated and coherent by symbolization (Nottingham, Op.cit: 18-19).

In accordance with what was said above, therefore, religion is in the realms of ideology and symbolism. Nandy mentions two types of religion; religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology. In his words, Modernization first produces religion-as-ideology and then generates secularism to meet its challenge to the 'ideology of modern statecraft' (Bhargava, Op.cit:22-23). There are also some other definitions of religion in relation to ideology as Fromm and Madan' definitions (see: Karaman, Op.cit & Madan, 2011: 3). So, religion works as an ideology such as in relation to political parties, or by charismatic individuals. Accordingly, religion as ideology, for example, on the cultural level secures the possibilities of conceptual environment for men. Within this context, like ideology, it becomes a system of symbols (Madan, Op.cit: 3). Religion, especially in transitional societies, is the only source of ideological content (Karaman, Op.cit).

In this relation, apart from the important role of religion as ideology to political parties in many countries like Iran and Pakistan that it was already mentioned, we can mention religion as ideology to political opposition. According to Smith (1971), there is "the continuing political potency of religious symbols." And as Tibi (1983) has told, "the mobilizing power of religious symbols serving as ideological formulae for political opposition." Religion can reinforce political opposition by political institutions to assimilate them. It follows that religio-political movement function as a mobilizing force using religion as the mobilizing ideology providing political oppositions with religious symbols and by attributing to its religious aims. Here, the symbolic aspect and integrative function of Islam for political mobilization is significance especially in most of the anti-imperialist movements of the first half of the twentieth century (Karaman, Op.cit). In Maxime Rodinson's view Islam is an ideology which facilitates social and political mobilization by the symbolic aspect and a strong cohesive force for the community of believers especially the symbolic meaning of *Allah*, irrespective of all societal differences among them. So, faith and common religious experiences are important to unite Muslims (Karaman, Op.cit). As in Iran during the revolution in 1979 some ideologists like Shariati and Motahari convert the traditional religion to ideological religion and used shi'ism to mass mobilization. Hence, In short, as Hamilton has mentioned 'religion may lend itself to ideological uses'. And as ideological manipulation it can be utilized for ideological purposes (Hamilton. Op.cit; 95).

INTEGRATION, SOLIDARITY AND POLITICAL ORDER

In respect to the impact on social structure, religion is regarded as an integrative factor especially in Durkheim's view (Johnstone, Op.cit: 142). In traditional religio-political systems, as Smith (1970) pointed out, religion integrates "society by providing it with a common framework of meaning and experience. Through the ordinary processes of socialization, the young acquire a common set of beliefs and values associated with symbols of the sacred" (karaman,

Op.cit). Johnstone considers some of the ways in which religion has been viewed as exerting an integrating influence in societies (Johnstone, Op.cit: 143): *1- Normative reinforcement; 2-Integration into meaningful group relationships; 3- Catalyst for reaffirming societal values; 4- aid in adjusting to personal crises; 5- stimulus to aesthetic expression; 6- Source of social welfare.* In Nottingham's view no society can maintain itself without a minimum of consensus among its members that religion is an important aid in this regard by acting as an agency for value integration and social control (Nottingham, Op.cit: 60). This function makes cohesive harmony for social solidarity.

Common religious experiences and motives of self-protection or of propagation act as a powerful cohesive force, and create feelings of solidarity which unite the members (Wach, Op.cit: 35). In this relation, when there are integrated factors, politicians can use them for political solidarity. Solidarity is the best tool for victory in politics. Those political forces can be wined that have a good political solidarity among their forces. As it was mentioned, religion is one of the factors that the integration of people may be effected through it. So, religion can have the effect on solidarity and political order. For instance, Religion in transitional societies determines the acceptable definitions of power and authority through the mechanism of political legitimization and social integration and providing its membership with a sense of belonging and coherence. Hence, political stability is maintained. In these societies, the functional persistence of religion as both an institution and a belief system helps the religion to act as a buffer. It reconstructs new ties of solidarity and identity through the symbols, artifacts or organizations of traditional solidarities to overcome alienation (karaman, Op.cit).

Integrating and solidarity have important role in political order. Political order is the center of politics that government and politicians have to regard. And also, thinking on politics, in one angle, is thinking on order. For this purpose, according to Durkheim, religion provides an image of the governing principle of our collective body. Collective political claims are immanent in the divine, supra-human powers, and the practices that relate to them (Friedland, 2001). So, religion has proved itself as the most effective and potent unifying forces in the life of all types of states. Inasmuch as its social and political order is not an arbitrary one but is based on static religious principles, the state is bound to conform to the requirements of religion (Wach, Op.cit: 289-290). In this regard we should mention the importance of preserving order in religious group. The one of primary tasks that groups must perform is that of preserving order (Johnstone, Op.cit: 105). There are various types of these groups that their order is used in politics. In one hand, with preserving order in each group and the help of their clergies and organization, a larger political order can be created, too. On the other hand, it is, most of time, effective when the majority of people in the population are members of the religious community. And the larger majority is more effective.

Religion, for instance in the modern world, is one of the solidarity element in 'the European integration project'. Historians of Europe have focused on religion as fundamental to European identity so that the EU is mentioned as a 'Christian Club' (Fokas, Op.cit).

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER

The social integrating function of religion can be served by strong and centralized government (Abraham, 2003: 83). Throughout the history of civilization, many conquerors and leaders have attempted to unify a population by declaring one official religion. In this relation, we can mention Islam as a good example. At the beginning, there were no central political and economic institutions in Arabian society but by Islam they were tied together. Through declaring Islam, Arab clans and eventually many different national groups despite the schisms are unified (Richerson & Newson, 2009). Islam has a great unifying force and a strong integrative function. Thanks to this aspect, the community of believers in Islam, the *umma*, is conceptually unified, irrespective of all differences by the common acceptance of a single God (karaman, Op.cit).

Islam as a political religion, likewise, is not just about the relationship of the individual to God, but about a politically organized community of believers, the *umma*, called by their sovereign (Ibid). Under the second caliph, Omar, the movement was consolidated and Islam's characteristic combination of secular and religious authority was assured (Nottingham, Op.cit: 153). This practice has been in place throughout the history of Islamic countries, even, after Caliphate era for example in Iran after the Iranian revolution in 1979 in which the winner side (e.g puritan Shiite) used religion to make a vigorous centralization in this country. Although other nations but Persian have not been satisfied and have been fighting against this centralization and they see this function as abuse of religion by central government.

LEGITIMACY: RELIGION AND CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

If we regard authority as a legitimate power, according to Weber, religion has a role in legitimization of three kinds of authorities. As a part of tradition, a source of religious charisma as a type of charisma, and a source of constitution in some countries, religion plays a role in traditional, charismatic and legal-rational authorities. In this relation, in most of societies religion has an important role. Most states, include secular states, use religion to gain the mass legitimacy. This relationship between religion and state has a long origin. Room Empire used Christianity, and Islamic Caliphate also used Islam. Even, today, many of Islamic countries with secular politicians use Islam to gain legitimacy. In most religious societies in constitution, the official religion is mentioned. And, also, as we cited, in some countries include secular states, religion is one of the sources of constitution as Iraq, Iran, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Apart from the role of religion in traditional and legal legitimacy mentioned above, it has an important role in charismatic authority. According to Weber, the charismatic personality is one of the three "pure" types of authority for religious and other social movements(Holt et al, Op.cit: 118). There are different types of charisma and charismatics, but according to Wach the religious type is fundamental (Wach, Op.cit: 337). This type is related to religious-based authority that describes the great variety of divine gifts (a religious sense) bestowed upon the faithful so that a number of charismatic signs are interpreted as an indication of supernatural favour (Turner, 1996: 146). As one of more charismatic leaders we can mention to Ayatollah Khomeini during revolution of Iran (1979) and after that till his death (1988). His name also was "Roh allah". Most of the religious people regarded him as 'spirit of God' and as super leader of Iran had full power, absolute authority and high influence among lay people.

RELIGION AND NATIONALISM; RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND USAGE OF RELIGION IN NATIONALISM

Religion has an important role in nationalism and construction of state. It is a part of communal identity, common culture and historical continuity so, with 'nation' become closely entangled. Religion can be a means through which a nation or group of people expresses its identity and aspirations (Moyser, Op.cit: 4). political and social control through religion is facilitated not only through identification of religious with national aims, but also through identification of head of states with form of deity(Holt et al, Op.cit: 210). On the other hand, in connection with military and political development, a religion or cult may be formed which helps to integrate unified states or empires. For instance Israel, Rome, Mexico, Peru, China, Japan, Egypt, Babylonia, the Hittite empire, and Persia (Wach, Op.cit: 300).

In most ancient Semitic communities men and their gods were regarded as a social, political, and religious unit. Historically, in Assyria, "God", "city" and "nation" all bore the same name. And also during the earliest known stages of Judaism, Yahweh had an exclusive and national character so that no significant messianic note appeared among the Jews until they developed a strong national consciousness. Some of biblical passages suggest that the Messiah was the Lord's anointed primarily for political purposes. Similarly, as Wash has pointed out, "Ideas of nationality and deity are

intertwined in the roman concept of *genius populi romani...*” (Holt et al, Op.cit: 208).

In this relation, there are other contemporary examples. In Japan, Shinto identifies a nation with its deity. Nationalism in Japan has functionally been ‘a state religion with the head of the state serving as the most powerful God’. And the Japanese word for “government” means “affairs of worship”. Indeed, modern Japanese religion and nationalism have been one. And also for Arabs, religious fanaticism is the best guarantee of national feeling and patriotic fervor, and it is the strongest weapon of resistance to foreign aggression that describes one function of the identification of state and religious institutions (Holt et al, Op.cit: 209- 210). About relationship between religion and national identity, the Greek case is also a good example. In this country, the Orthodox Church under the Ottoman millet system attempted to mobilize much of the Greek public on issues relating to Greek national identity (Fokas, Op.cit).

Another point about religion and nationalism is related to religious nationalism. Keddie, in explanation of the two types of what she calls “new religious politics”, wants to distinguish the religious use of government authority from the religious control of territory; In other words “fundamentalism” from “religious nationalism”. In his opinion, ‘Religionationalist movements’ usually do not stress scripture or particular religious practices, while fundamentalists do. So, it simply makes religion the basis for the nation’s collective identity and the source of its ultimate values and purpose. It is only a viable option when the collectivity has a religious basis in common. Thus, religious nationalism was possible in India, Israel, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and the United States, in part because of the existence of a hegemonic religion such as Hinduism, Judaism, Shiite Islam, Sunni Islam, and Protestantism, respectively (Friedland, Op.cit). The territorial practices of religious Zionist Gush Emunim in Israel and the Hindu nationalist BJP and RSS in India are both understood and justified in terms of religious narratives. Both make politicized use of ritual spaces and religious ritual practices as devices for mobilization (Ibid).

Indeed, in one hand, religious nationalists make politics into a religious obligation. They all read religious texts politically. This nationalism offers a particular ontology of power that revealed and affirmed through its politicized practices and the central object of its political concern, practices that locate collective solidarity in religious faith. Religion, hence, partakes of the symbolic order of the nation state and that contemporary nationalisms are suffused with the religious. This kind of nationalism fills existent state forms with new cultural contents and new sources of authority. Sometimes it is a form of politicized religion in which religion is the basis of political judgment and identity (Ibid). On the other hand, religious nationalism extends the institutional logic of religion into the domain of the nation-state, deriving authority from an absolute divine writ, not the subjective aggregations of the demos. It is not alien to the formation of the modern nation-state. Even the formation of many non-Western modern national identities and nationalist movements were suffused with religious narrative and myth, symbolism and ritual such as Iran, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Palestine to take just a few examples. Even militant Islamists who have a universal ideal, almost all seek to create an Islamic order within the existent nation-states (Ibid). In Isreal, they use religion and their divine right as they tell to create this country (Davis, 1994:112). Hence, religious nationalists always center their energies on the nation-states in which they live.

RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN NATIONAL LEVEL (EFFECT ON POLICIES)

As I already referred, Keddie has mentioned two types of religious politics; fundamentalism and religious nationalism, but religious politics isn’t limited to these two types. It can be seen in many fields. The purpose of religious politics, here, is the government and politician’s understanding of the function of religion and its importance to carry out and promote their programs in national level. So, it is different from the religious politics that fundamentalists deal with

them, as it was explained. For instance, many religious politics are seen in U.S.A. In respect to nationalization and use of religion in national politics by politicians this country is a good example. Religion and politics in this country are tied inextricably to one another, a tandem that is manifest in several key ways. From the efforts of religious special interest groups to influence public policy to candidates' goals of appealing to a large portion of the populace, religious faith is both a desired end as well as a tool used by eager politicians.

This country is one of the important secular states but as Brian Jackson (2011) has mentioned religion has been becoming a political weapon in that country. Historically, religion has been noticeably visible in national politics of the U.S. In this relation, Justin D. Martin mentions some cases. President John Adams remarked that "our constitution was made only for religious and moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other." Every American president has openly identified himself as either protestant or Roman Catholic. Jimmy Carter proclaimed himself as evangelical Christian and George W. Bush proclaimed 'Jesus Christ' as a hero in his life. And other politicians vying for high office seemingly took notice of the relationship between faith and victory at the polls(Martin, Op.cit). There are some examples that the candidates in elections of America have these politics to attract the people. It has been seen in their speech for various groups (see some examples in: Jackson, 2011).

In relation with religious politics we also can mention to 'God Strategy' in U.S.A. According to David Domke and Kevin Coe, there are four signals at the heart of this strategy: "[a]cting as political priests, by speaking the language of the faithful"; "fusing God and country, by linking America with divine will"; "offering acts of communion, by embracing iconic religious elements"; and "engaging in morality politics, by trumpeting bellwether issues". In this strategy, it is explained that '*How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America*' and how the Republican Party "used calculated religiosity to transform American politics." This started since Ronald Reagan's time that Jerry Falwell used the evangelicals to help him in elections. When G.W. Bush was elected, the God strategy became a conflation of the will of God and the policy of country. In this relation, politicians use God to advance agendas, to connect with the electorate, and to make some people incredibly uncomfortable (Jackson, Op.cit).

Apart from what was mentioned above, most of the time, politicians and governments regard the social structure for legislation, policy making and implementation of policies. They should consider the religion of the people and their actions in regard to those policies, especially at the local level. For example, in this relation, the fate of the stem-cell bill, in the summer of 2006, demonstrate the important role that religion plays in American politics. Despite having broad support of congress (both houses), the bill never made it past bush's desk due largely to conservative religious groups that were able to assure the president of the bill's reprehensible nature (Martin, Op.cit). So, religion can serve to promote very active rejection of government policies such as the case of the peace movement, or abortion (Moysers, Op.cit:8). Hence, in making and implementation of policies religion is regarded.

REVOLUTIONARY USE

Mass political behavior is not confined to voting. Another particularly significant activity is the protest and even 'political violence'. Religion can be the means of focusing and intensifying alienation from an entire political regime which can lead to political violence, insurgency and revolution (Ibid). In this situation, it justifies the violence although sometimes in the worst mood it leads to humanitarian tragedy and tends to negative aspect such as what happened after Iranian revolution (1979) that most of the officials of previous regime and also oppositions of new regime were executed.

So, religion has an important effect on the revolutions. As Weber mentions 'the concept of a religious revolution was consistent most with inner-worldly ascetic rationalism which oriented to the holy orders of God' commandments

within the world. Within Christianity this was true in Calvinism which made it a religious obligation to defend the faith against tyranny by the use of force...’ (Weber at: <http://www.ne.jp>). But apart from religious revolution which converts to ideology for them, it has effect on other revolutions, too. The economic and political revolutions that ushered in the modern world coincided in their early stages with the religious revolution known as the protestant revolt (Nottingham, Op.cit: 154). ‘The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism’ which is Weber’s work bring out specifically how the Calvinistic variety of Protestantism and emerging capitalism reinforced one another. It shows interrelations between developments in religious thought and concurrent changes in economic and political institutions (Ibid: 157). In regard to political revolutions, we can mention the American Revolution. According to Frieland, this revolution was prepared by a diffuse transformation in Prootestant belief known as “the Great Awakening” that located the basis of religious authority in personal faith, not in ordination, the profession of doctrine, or a church hierarchy (Friedland, Op.cit).

There are other examples within Christianity world. Christianity and Christian missions have helped to produce in the third world both the revolution against colonialism and a revolutionary urge towards modernization(Nottingham, Op.cit: 191). And, also, we can mention the role of Catholicism in Nacaraguan Sandinista Revolution in 1979, and the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland and the Catholic Church’s role in the eventual fall of communism there (Gill, Op.cit & Fokas, Op.cit).

Among religions, over all, revolution is a specific tradition that is always there in the content of Islam. In the political realm, Islam has had various roles and functions from legitimization and advocates the status quo to the device to announce the protests and make field to revolutions (Mofidi, Op.cit). In this regard, we can mention Islamic countries as Algeria where the reformist movement formed a crucial component of the liberation struggle against the French, and Iran where the ulama actively participated in the Constitutional Revolution. In the 20th century against modernity in Iran the distinctive phenomenon of “revolutionary traditionalism,” that is, “a general movement for the defense of Islam against Western influence,” emerged (Moaddel, 2002). And also, in the Iranian revolution in 1979, Islamic clerics overthrew Iranian regime with widespread popular support.

Hence, although religion can be a tool for maintaining the status quo, it also can act such a catalyst factor to change and one of the leading parts of a revolution. So religion and revolution are strangely and intricately interwoven in the non-western world (Nottingham, Op.cit: 183).

MAINTAINING POWER AND GOVERNMENT

In politics, one of the most important issues for politicians is the maintenance of power. For this purpose they should consider the social factors and whatever is important to mass that religion and religious symbols are included. Religion and religious leaders have influence among masses, for this politicians use religion to maintain government and its power so that they try to satisfy the religious leaders by being close to them.

In this regard, according to Hood in many kinds of authoritarian regimes as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt leaders rely on various interpretations of Islam to maintain power. Most scholars believe that leaders of Islamic countries use Islam as a tool to maintain exclusive political rule. And they point out the contradictions between Islamic religious doctrine and political and practical practice (Hood, 2004: 6-8). In most of these countries, although they often have not exclaimed Islamic government but secular politicians for keeping content of the Islamic parties and groups, society and Islamic movements, and as a result maintaining their power in constitution Islamic legal has been based as we already mentioned. And also, sometimes they accept the religious formal responsibility like Saudi Arabia’s king that has responsibility of ‘Kaeba’.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Religion has an important function to relationship among states and international relations. Religion prepares the common field for better relations among some countries. For instance, relations among Islamic countries and making some international organizations like ‘the Organization of the Islamic Conference’ (OIC). And, as we mentioned earlier, it has effect on integration project in EU. In the vast area, we can imagine some relations between Muslim and Christian and even Jews as the followers of Abraham religions. We can see many of these relations based on religion in various places of the world. So, religion has a linkage function between various nations and states, and acts as a good factor to make common fields for international relations.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned, religion has a substantial and functional description. Religion is a series of beliefs, and one of the social structures in society with many social functions. In this article, we have concentrated on a part of these functions under political functions of religion. Religion, relatively, has dual functions; positive and negative functions in politics (for example it has acted as a factor for both unification and division). And, historically it has fluctuated between these two roles. Although there is no clear boulder between these two, and in different angles, sometimes the positive functions are seen as abuse of religion in politics. Despite this, although from the point of view of secularism and ideal view use of religion and political religion in politics isn’t recommended but the reality of society especially in third world encourages the politicians and governments to regard its functions. And these functions, as we mentioned, are not the same today like past. According to society some changes are seen. There are some new positive functions such as effect on mobilization, voting and public policy, making and implementing policies (although these can be negative also with regard to conditions and policies), religious nationalism, international relations and so on. Hence, in political science the political functions of religion in society should be regarded more than past.

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