

The Features of Qom Seminary's Confrontation with Political Affair

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Research Article



Abstract

The political behavior of Qom seminary during the political era has gained features that organize the actions and reactions of seminaries in the political sphere. The inductive investigation and analysis of the positions and actions in various levels of seminary center during the last century in domestic arena suggests that some features have dominated the political behavior of clergies. These features are as follows: the principle of enforcing the Islamic laws and preventing the anti-religious thoughts and symbols, concern about preserving the independence of the country and non-dominance of foreigners over Muslims' affairs, nationalism, the clergies' political endogeneity, idealistic pragmatism, political rationality, priority of theory over practice, obligation-centrism and avoiding politicalism and politicization, people-centrism and belief in people, avoiding radicalism, preserving independence of the seminary,

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pluralism and respecting others' views. This article, while presenting arguments and documents related to each item, leads the readers to the framework model of how clerics confront the political affair wherein most of the political behaviors of the seminaries are formed.

Keywords

seminary, clerics, political behavior, Qom.

Introduction

The most important feature of Qom school compared to the Najaf school can be found in its political-social approach. This feature is intensified by the evolutions related to Islamic revolution and, then, designing the framework of Islamic government fit for Islamic Republic. If we accept that the institutional aspect of Qom seminary is related to the recent century and the presence of Ayatollah Sheikh Abdul-Karim Ha'eri in Qom, some kind of framework and lining for clerics' political behavior was formed along with Qom seminary's confrontation with political affair. This framework specifies the limits of 'valid' and 'invalid' behaviors, spreads some actions, and prevents some others. Thus, political behavior on the part of clerics cannot be attributed to seminary. What are those features? How do they give a framework and order to the plurality governing the political thought and practice of the clerics? The present article is seeking to investigate the political behavior of clerics during the last century to achieve a compilation of their behavioral borderlines.

The theoretical framework and concepts

Despite the fact that seminary center seems to lack the structure and controlling order from the outside view, a little contemplation on its processes and functions reveals the written and unwritten laws and frameworks that seminary elements in various levels regard themselves committed to observe. These frameworks in the classic affairs of seminary – including observing moral principles, teacher-pupil relationship, lifestyle and the like – have been respected. This is what is known as seminary student's life. The experience of Qom seminary in the recent century in reestablishment and finding the structure of seminary on the one hand, and its confrontation with political affair on the other hand, has formed some features in that sphere. Just as remaining in seminary schools necessitates observing the states of

seminary students in various dimensions, the clerics' political activism is also dependent on observing frameworks that organize, in an unwritten and unsaid form, the political activism of clerics. Qom seminary does not like any confrontation with political affair; it repeats some behaviors and repulses some others. We cannot precisely say from where this acceptance and rejection originate. The 'seminary institution' consists of the institution of religious jurisdiction, the managerial structure of seminary, seminary institutions, the intellectual-cultural trends active in seminary, educational centers, educators and scholars, seminary organizations and the body of students. All of them form the seminary, but none of them alone – or along with others – is seminary. The institution of seminary has its authority beyond these components. This institutional aspect has influenced the clerics' political action with some expansions and contractions since the establishment of the seminary center.

The following features that is the product of induction and analysis of various experiences of the clerics' confrontation with political affair in domestic affairs during the past centuries, seminary traditions, students' life and moral-religious requirements for entering the political affair adjust the clerics' political behavior like an unwritten law in various levels, and distinguishes their confrontation with political affair from that of other classes in the society. By knowing these features, one can even predict the political behaviors of seminary in facing with various issues. Of course, this prediction is to the extent that they will not certainly do some actions and reactions, and that definitely, they will take positions in some issues. What are these frameworks and how do they form the clerics' action? Before answering this question, it is necessary to note some points:

First, by 'Qom seminary', we mean the contemporary era of this educational-cultural institution in the past century. Although the background of Qom seminary returns to the time of the Infallible

Imam, it was reestablished, after some vicissitudes, by Ayatollah Sheikh Abdul-Karim Ha'eri. The most important feature of that era was reinforcing the institutional aspect of seminary and implementing some sort of structural system and order. Extension of this discussion to other seminary centers requires serious reflections.

The second point returns to the extension of these features to all seminary trends with various intellectual attitudes. Although there may be various readings of those features due to the variety in attitudes, all agree that these features must be observed.

The third point returns to the rigid enforcement of those features in seminary. This enforcement is in line with seminary requirements and in the form of subcutaneous (discourse) power in seminary. There is no organizational structure and institution for hardware implementation of those features. Observing the following frameworks is done through repulsion and rejection or acceptance.

Besides, it is necessary to pay attention to the important point that the following features refer to politicization in the domestic arena. If we divide politics into domestic and foreign/ international spheres, the clerics have entered both spheres as demanded by issues and subjects. The present study is merely focused on domestic politicization and challenges. Investigating the behavioral framework of Qom seminary in the sphere of international politics requires an independent study.

The last line of discussions is related to discovery of the following features through the dominant aspect of seminary. In the broad clerical institution, there are some elements that act in opposition to the current aspect. Naturally, they cannot be regarded as representatives of seminary, and their behavior cannot be regarded as the model for seminary. The following features have been extracted from the analysis of political behaviors of most seminary members during the last century through an inductive method and finding the common

points. Accordingly, the most important features of their political behavior are as follows:

1. The principle of implementing Islamic laws and preventing anti-religious thoughts and symbols. This axis is apparently evident, because it is one of the essential duties of seminary. That Qom seminary has been concerned about entrance of various *isms* and threat for religious thought from the very onset, and that many scientific efforts and emigrations were formed in facing with that issue is no extraordinary fact. What is important from the viewpoint of this article is the effective role of that variable in defining how the seminary confronted the political affair. In all eras, the position of government in facing with non-Islamic thoughts, publications and books and the religious or non-religious movements of the government were important for seminary, and the clerics' confrontation with political affair was adjusted accordingly.

As an example, Ayatollah Borujerdi was noticing Baha'is' movement in Iran, and when a few of them were killed in a struggle with people in Abarqu and some were to be executed as their murderers, he commissioned Imam Khomeini to meet with Shah and tell him to free the murderers of Baha'is. Also in 1340s, when communists and the followers of Ahmad Kasravi were trying to change people's beliefs, all those in seminary were making efforts to defend and provide answers, each with his own language. Afterwards, Martyr Motahhari spoke of Allameh Tabataba'i's concerns and his efforts to philosophically confront that wave (Motahhari, 1362 SH, vol. 1, pp. 20-21).

During the recent years, similar concerns have been quoted from Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani. He expressed his concerns about promotion of Wahhabism, Bahatism, and Christianity in Iran, and regarded struggling with them as one of the 'duties of the government': Wahhabism, Bahatism and Christianity are soaring in the country and

we are all silent. The government is seeking its own affairs and no organization sees into the issue of young people who have fallen into the vortex of deviation, perversity and house churches... these affairs are among the duties of the government. It must prevent such propaganda" (Vahid Khorasani, 1393 SH, p. 475).

The abovementioned individuals are from different trends in seminary and belong to various eras. Without trying to fall into the trap of reductionism to judge them as equal entities due to their similar words, connecting these points to one another shows a constant course of scholars' concern about preserving religious thought in facing with atheistic thoughts to make governments accompany them in resolving that concern. In this regard, the religious and non-religious statements of governments are paid attention by Qom seminary.

The late Ayatollah Ha'eri's behavior in dealing with Reza Khan's plan for removing women's veils and the late Ayatollah Borujerdi's action in opposing the plan of 'state and provincial associations' as well as the Qom seminary's opposition to Pahlavi regime during the period between 1340 to 1357 are all analyzable under that concern.¹ The actions and behaviors of revolutionary clerics in those years in the political arena was formed under the influence of that concern. They made a revolution and established a government to implement divine laws. Making a revolution and taking power was not their goal; rather, it was "a means for implementing divine laws and establishing the just Islamic government. Thus, ruling is no more than a means" (Khomeini,

1. As an example, Ayatollah Milani wrote a letter to the Ayatollah Meshkini and Rabbani Shirazi and mentioned four goals for scholars and clerics in their objection to Pahlavi regime. Among them was the following statements: "In this religious country, no law must be enforced in opposition to Islamic law" (Milani, 1427 AH, vol. 2, p. 129). Similarly, Ayatollah Shari'atmadari regarded, in a declaration, 'preserving the sacred laws of Islam' as one of the goals of Islam' (Davani, 1358, vol. 3, p. 297). To see similar statements from Ayatollah Golpayegani and Mar'ashi Najafi, see Davani, 1358, vol. 7, p. 125; and 1358, vol. 8, p. 93.

1381 SH, p. 69). With some differences, especially from the perspective of motivation and ruling system, the behaviors of critical approach and traditional group towards Islamic Republic is performed with the same view. They criticize the Islamic regime for not implementing some of the Islamic laws as such.

Thus, various seminary trends were and are seeking to achieve implementation/ establishment of divine laws through interaction with power/ politics; and this concern does always specify some level of interaction/ using power. One of the main parameters of evaluating the legitimacy of a government for seminary members is the government's commitment to establishing religion and preventing the growth of non-religious symbols and behaviors in the society. This axis is the origin for much political activism during the recent century on the part of various trends in seminary.

2. Concern for preserving the independence of Iran and non-dominance of foreigners over the Muslims' affairs. Qom seminary has always been sensitive to this issue and, on various occasions, has warned people about political, economic and cultural dominance of the foreigners over Iran. From the onset of Islamic revolution, Imam Khomeini used any opportunity to emphasize the necessity of political, cultural and economic independence. In the early days of his movement (Azar 12, 1341 SH/ December 3, 1962), he delivered a lecture in A'zam Mosque in Qom among a large number of scholars and seminary students, and referred to the services made by Mohammad Taqi Shirazi (Mirza Thani) for preserving the independence of Iraq. He added, "all Islamic lands owe to this group. It is they who have preserved the independence of Islamic lands up to now" (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 1, pp. 113-120). On 1343 Azar 7/1994 November 28, the late Ayatollah Mar'ashi delivered a lecture in his class (In Hazrat Ma'souma's shrine in Qom) and referred to the sacrifices made by

clerics for preserving the independence of Iran, and stated some examples as follows:

- The clerics' initiation in confronting the Ottoman Sultan Salim and martyrdom of Allameh Aqa Sayyid Najafi Kamuta in Chaldoran.
- The services made by Sayyid Mohammad Mahdi during the attacks launched by Uzbek Obeydullah Khan and Abdul-Mar' Khan to Khorasan.
- Allameh Majlesi's Iran-centrism to the extent that the author of *Hadā'iq* has stated about him, "When Mowla Majlesi died, Shah Sultan Hossein's affairs got into disorder"; and he was the protector of the country's independence.
- During Afghan's invasion into Iran, this purified shrine was full of blood. When Afghans attacked and killed people, the scholars served as shields for people.
- Services made by the late Mirza 'Ata'ullah Sheikh al-Islam Tabataba'i and Mirza Asadullah Sheikh al-Islam in repulsing the foreigners' attack to Azerbaijan under Zandiya.
- Martyrdom of great grandson of Allameh Mulla Mohammad Saleh Mazandarani during his confrontation with Afghans in 1136 AH.
- Martyrdom of Akhund Mulla Ali Zanjani by Ottomans and Haj Mulla Mohammad Razi Qazvini in confrontation with Afghans.
- Martyrdom of great Allameh Mohammad Saleh Khatun Abadi in confrontation with Ottomans.
- Presence of at least nine scholars in Caucasian war, including Fazel Naraq, the late Sayyid Mojahed, Sheikh Musa Kashef al-Gheta, Sayyid Reza Al Bahr al-Olum Najafi and Sayyid Ibrahim Mar'ashi Najafi.
- Services made by Ayatollah Haj Sayyid Abdul-Hossein Lari in confrontation with British army in Bushehr.

- Ayatollah Aqa Haj Mirza Mohammad Arbab’s confrontation with Russian forces in Qom.
- The late Ayatollah Mirza Ali Akbar Ardabili’s wearing shroud in confrontation with the foreigner troops in Ardabil.

In that lecture, the late Ayatollah Mar’ashi Najafi repeatedly requested writers to write those items and emphasized that “here, there is nothing opposed to the independence and territorial integrity.” He also dealt with measures taken by Imam Khomeini and said:

“Was their goal not protecting the independence of the country? Did they say, ‘do not do anything to belittle us and give the country to the foreigners?’ I swear God that anyone who took his pen or said something had this goal in mind. All scholars share this goal: protecting the country and preserving its independence as well as preserving the religious laws and divine decrees... do you not want to protect the country? I swear God that the clerics do this. It is they who call out that ‘loving one’s homeland is from faith’”
(Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 5, pp. 65-71).

The above items have been proposed in various wordings in all eras of Qom seminary by all intellectual trends.¹ Tobacco sanction by Mirza Shirazi,, shouting objections to capitulation by Imam Khomeini, and strong presence of clerics in defending land borders during the imposed war are other examples of that concern. The clerics had and still have special sensitivity to this issue and whenever they felt a risk, they would resist against foreigners whether by issuing jihad decree or by taking practical measures.

3. Nationalism. In regard with the previous paragraph, it is noteworthy to consider the Shiite clerics’ national bias towards Iran. Although Islam has global messages and the clerics do not limit their

1. To see examples of statements by Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri, Imam Khomeini and Shari’atmadari, see Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 1, pp. 142, 154-155; 164-166; vol. 3, p. 277, vol. 4, p. 297.

area of propagation to national borders, the political experience of Qom seminary in the recent century supports the actions and reactions in line with national slogans and institutions. The Shiite clerics in Iran have tendency towards nationalism and appreciate much their Iranian nationality and protecting Iran. In *Nationalism in Iran*, Richard Cottam refers to the fact that although nationalist values are non-religious values, the cleric leaders have accepted, during this century, both liberalist and national values (Cottam, 1978, p. 231). Although this atmosphere was reinforced by Islamic Republic throughout the war period, those clerics who had contacts with political affairs would also consider that variable in previous times as well. In a letter to 'Eyn al-Dowla, Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Tabataba'i wrote:

“Iran is my homeland. My credits are in this country. I serve Islam in this land. My dignity, my title, all depend on this state. I see that this land falls into the hands of strangers, and all my credits and states go away. Thus, I attempt to protect it as long as I am alive. And even, I'll give my life for it when it is necessary” (Nazem al-Islam Kermani, 1389 SH, vol. 1, p. 418).

In one of his lectures in the fourth National Assembly, the late Ayatollah Modarres repeated his well-known saying as follows: “Our religion is the same as our politics, and our politics is the same as our religion... we are friends to the whole world. As long as they have not transgressed us, we will not transgress them. I said the same thing in negotiation with the Ottoman martyred prime minister. I told him, ‘if someone enters the borders of Iran and we have the power to shoot him, we will do that; whether he is an official, or a clergyman...’” (Makki, 1374 SH, vol. 22, p. 294).

By establishing Qom seminary, the tradition of emigration of scholars and seminary students to Najaf lost its popularity to a large extent. A review of the documents in 1350s shows that in the zenith of Reza Khan's anti-religious policies and his pressure on seminary, the

late Ayatollah Ha'eri advised seminary students to remain in Iran. Frequently, he told them that Reza Khan will go away and you will remain. After the incident of invasion to Fayziya school in Qom and Ayatollah Hakim's invitation of Qom authoritative jurists to emigrate to Najaf, the scholars' answer was resistance in Qom and protecting the seminary center. Similarly, when Ba'th regime in Iraq attempted to make use of Imam Khomeini's opposition to Pahlavi regime for its anti-Iranian purposes, Imam Khomeini evaded answering. He was not willing to have his opposition to Pahlavi regime be a resort for strangers. According to one quotation, someone who had introduced himself as an Egyptian diplomat with a mission in Lebanon went to meet Imam Khomeini through a mediation of a clergyman. He says, "I have the mission to inform you of the Egypt's readiness for helping you by fulfilling any of your needs, including money, arms, etc... Ayatollah replied, 'our struggles are related to our domestic affairs, and in continuing them, we need no assistance or interference from others'" (Behbudi, 1397 SH, pp. 291-292).

This strategy went on in next years, in a way that the no opposition or measure taken against the national interests and benefits were found from the clergy's institution. In a notable analysis in this regard, the author of *Nabard Qudrat dar Iran* ("Power Struggle in Iran") writes,

"In understanding and analyzing the clergy's position in the contemporary history, it is important to comprehend the political fact that the Shiite clergies had and have no place and no shelter except in Iran, and they must consider its interests and, as Tabataba'i says, they must sacrifice even their lives for it. When we turn the pages of the contemporary history, we see that many of the political actors from other forces did not show so much sense of sacrifice for Iran and bias towards their homeland. Some westerner intellectuals, as soon as they face a difficulty, will leave Iran and emigrate to Europe. The marketers showed, by doing a sit-

down strike in British embassy during Constitutionalism or sometimes by taking citizenship of the foreign states, that they are not so rigid in that regard. The leftists also had made Soviet Union their ideal place. The Shiite clergies, however, were politically, socially and culturally dependent on Iran and had no way except giving importance to this land... they would even ignore sometimes the expediencies of others to observe the expediencies of Iran" (Sami'i, 1397 SH, pp. 123-124).

Under the Islamic Republic, by mixing the Islamic culture with some national manners and rites, the Islamic-Iranian lifestyle was formed, whose latter part was always under the objection on the part of a traditional wing of the seminary. However, the dominant aspect of seminary was founded on recognizing the concept of modern state and, accordingly, the national interests and boundaries.

4. Endogeneity of the clerics' politics. Despite the fact that the institutional record of Qom seminary returns to the past century, its ancestor goes back to the first years of occultation period and, according to some accounts, to the time of the Infallible Imam's presence. This invaluable past grants a large amount of texts and lived experiences to the seminary members. Various intellectual trends in seminary make use of this great tradition for designing the roadmap of their politicizing. The references and documents of this plan are founded on authentic jurisprudential, theological and philosophical texts and readings adjusted and compiled in seminary in previous years and are updated as demanded by the new conditions. The clerics' politicizing is adjusted on the basis of such a model. This action is not borrowed from liberal or socialist discourses, is rooted in tradition and has realized the approach of 'rupture in continuity'. In this framework, it is natural that the clerics repulse the imported constitutionalism, western freedom, socialist equality and whatever is opposition to religious tradition. The political Islam and, accordingly,

the political jurisprudence/ *fiqh al-ijtimāʿ* emerged out of a genuine and indigenous discourse that, due to its essential features and method of legal reasoning, can adapt itself to various conditions. Its evolutions are also endogenic and according to the religious framework. During the contemporary era of Iran, few political thoughts are seen in this level of strength and antiquity. Most of the thoughts proposed by the political and social elements and groups are copies of the opinions of liberal and social intellectuals that hardly establish relations with Islamic-Iranian culture, especially considering the fact that they are not easily understandable for ordinary people. However, the clerics speak of the politics supported by intrareligious literature and indigenous history. A clergyman does not commit himself to rebuilding the thoughts presented by John Locke and Carl Marx, and refers people to principles internalized for people for years.

Under this discussion, paying attention to indigenous/ traditional literature of the clerics becomes important in facing with political affair. Although Qom seminary has achieved a relative recognition of the modern concepts and processes in the political arena, it does not feel any need to copy and repeat their literature inconsiderately. On the contrary, by rebuilding the main religious concepts, it speaks with people in a language they are familiar with. The concepts used by clergies for facing with political affair are available, are creditable, are supported by the power behind the discourse, and are simplified. 'Availability' refers to the accessibility of the concepts in the context and situation wherein no other discourse has showed itself as the real hegemonic substitute. The clergies speak, even in the political arena, of terms such as [religious] obligation, Karbala, martyrdom, Waiting and the like, not only as the most accessible and understandable concepts in the Iranian society, but also as the concepts intermingled with Iranian culture, and with which people establish relations readily.

'Credibility' deals with the consistency of the suggested principles

with the society's fundamental principles. The concepts presented by clergies enjoy a high credit in the Iranian society and form a part of Iranian tradition, are self-founded, and their credit needs no argument or confirmation from the upstream authorities. Unlike the imported concepts that must firstly prove their legitimacy and then move towards promotion and internalization, the political concepts presented by clergies during long years in the form of sermons and mourning sessions, house circles and the like are things with which most people are familiar. The clergies just used those concepts in the arena of religious politics. In that atmosphere, historical stories were not recounted just for increasing historical knowledge; rather, they would delineate models for today's practice.

'The power behind discourse' is related to the way the concepts are distributed. From whom and from what positions those concepts are expressed is an important matter. By being in positions like religious authority, imamate of congregational and Friday prayer, pulpit speaker, and the like, the clergies enjoyed the necessary hegemony for instilling their ideas.

The last feature is the 'simplification' and popularism of the clergies in rebuilding and instilling their ideas. They interpret high ideals such as justice, freedom, removing inequality and the like in a way that is understandable for most people. This literature has no color of a certain class, guild, sex, ... and all individual members of the society can find their ideas in it. In this discourse, there is nothing about liberal-democracy or feudalism or bourgeoisie. Rather, there are ideas such as the weak and the arrogant people, Imam Hossein and Yazid, simple and aristocratic life, with which ordinary people readily associate.

The clergies' literature in the political arena has nothing to do with politicians and actors in political parties. Their political literature is influenced by their idea of power and state and easily attracts people

by rebuilding religious concepts in a new style. This framework is in conflict with imported concepts and, instead, deals with making their equivalents in religious concepts.

5. Idealistic pragmatism. Although Qom seminary founded the theoretical and practical foundation for establishing a legitimate government in the Occultation Period, it still considered the essential legitimacy as belonging to the government of the Infallible Imam, and regarded the Islamic states in the Occultation Period at best as the ones preparing the ground for the appearance of the Promised Mahdi. Evolution in the concept of Waiting caused the Shiite strategy to shift from passive waiting to active waiting, and caused the Shiites to do their best in modifying and improving affairs. Establishing a government and making use of power in this line forms a part of the strategy of the active waiting. But all these do not mean giving up the Mahdavi ideal and do not mean a claim for having the genuine and total legitimacy. Imam Mahdi is the true savior of the mankind, and the realization of justice in its true sense will be implemented just by him (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 12, pp. 480-485). This feature is seen in all levels of the clergies' political behavior and action in relation to political affair. The existing governments are compared to the ideal sample, and this prevents the governments from falling into the trap of consenting to the status quo and narcissism.

The experience of Islamic state for the Sunnites was in a way that, in the absence of ideal condition for the caliph, they reached the point of justifying the status quo and, in practice, conformed the ideals to the realities. They theorized the existing states and accepted what was in the caliph as the qualifications of the ruler. As a result, they got accustomed to preserving the status quo and victimized the Islamic ideals for the caliph who lacked, in some cases, the least qualifications for ruling the Muslim society.

The idealistic pragmatism saved, on the one hand, the Shiite society

from passivity and stagnation in front of the oppressive states and, on the other hand, enlivened the hope for establishing the ideal state in the Last Days (*Ākhar al-Zamān*). The Shiite thoughts compensates, on the one hand, the gap created by the absence of the Infallible Imam through choosing the most knowledgeable, the most pious and the most qualified manager for leadership of the Islamic society and, on the other hand, considers the essential legitimacy as belonging to the government of the Infallible Imam and believes that there is an unfillable gap between the Infallible Imam and non-infallible leaders.

6. Political rationality. The way seminary faces the political affair and the actions and reactions in that arena is based on rationality with its special features. Three major features are seen in that rationality: it is 'religious'; that is, it has accepted the harmony between religion and reason. It is *ijtihādī* (related to legal reasoning); that is, it attempts to refer to the text and offer new readings of it in various arenas. It is policy-centered and establishes relations with managing the society, politics and collective life and is seeking to realize religion in the collective and political life (Mir-Ahmadi, 1379 SH).

The rationality is explainable both in the individual and institutional levels; that is, both the individual scholars and seminary personages assess political affairs, along with religious obligations, through the criterion of reason, and the institutional aspect of seminary relies on the collective reason. This feature, though it may somehow slow down the political actions and reactions, makes it stronger and more certain. Besides, it gives more stability to decisions and positions. Similarly, emotional and reactionary behaviors, which are done with pragmatism without thinking, are reviewed and criticized in the framework of the clergies' political behavior.

7. Priority of theory over practice. In the history of political thought, there are three theories regarding the interaction of theory and practice: priority of theory over practice, priority of practice over

theory, and their interaction. In the first approach, pure reason, mathematics, metaphysical truth, transcendental politics, the world of 'being' and abstract things and immaterial beings are emphasized. This approach to universe and the everlasting truths believes and attempts to move what is in the sensible world on the basis of *a priori* and fixed principles. In the approach of priority of practice over theory, referring to the world of reality and the palpable perceivable daily life is considered. According to this view, the political action – due to its non-predictability and accepting events – does not follow *a priori* and fixed principles; rather, creativity and initiation are considered basic elements. Beyond this approach, we may reach a 'pragmatist turn', a view that considers – through the interaction of theory and practice – the political life as the embodiment of practice and theory mixed together and created by the interaction of human beings.

According to the scholars' metaphysical view of existence and their definition of politics in continuation of their monotheistic view of the universe and Mahdavi utopia, politics must move on the basis of *a priori* and fixed principles. Any political action and theory is assessed according to those *a priori* principles; then, comments come about it. In this paradigm, theory is prior to practice. If in the current literature any action is assessed on the basis of reason and theory and then is practiced, in addition to this parameter, there is a strong framework of jurisprudential and moral principles for clergies based on which the foundations and functions of any political action and statement is evaluated; then, it is judged as permissible or illicit. In this atmosphere, there is no room for feelings, party and faction calculations, and even individual interests.

8. Obligation-centeredness and avoiding politicizing and political game. Seminary considers entering the political affair as the scholars' obligation and duty in the Occultation Period. Thus, it is

focused more on obligation, and getting the result is in the next phase. In this literature, “if we are killed in the path of truth, it is a victory; and if we kill in the path of truth, it is victory again.” (Khomeini, vol. 4, pp. 148-153). This view has an instrumental perception of politics and is present in the power arena for performing obligation. Thus, it brings two behaviors out of the clergies' basket: first, politicization and adding political color to all social, cultural and economic affairs; second, avoiding politics and giving up any political action or statement. In politicization, all individuals want to give comments in all dimensions and levels of politics; and in avoiding politics, individuals refrain from political participation on the pretext that it is a 'right'. Under the discussion on elections, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli deals with this issue and says, “participating in elections is among the most important and critical issues of the society. It is not like watching a match, because taking part in watching a match is a permissible and initial right, with no obligation along with it. Thus, taking part or refraining from taking part in it has no restrictions for individuals. However, taking part in the critical issue of elections – upon which relies the independence of the state, authority of the nation and grandeur of the Islamic society – is both the certain and definite right of the Islamic nation along with an essential obligation, just like participating in culture, politics and health matters whose executive support is a mandatory obligation. That is, such a right must be necessarily observed” (Javadi Amoli, 1385 SH, pp. 277-278).

An obligation view specifies the limits of behaviors in relation to goals and methods for clergies in the political arena. For instance, the goal of political parties and groups is gaining political power and, many times, they get into the vortex of some immoralities in this path. But in the framework of political obligation, individuals seek to get a religious permit for their actions and sayings. The approach of acquiring power may start to ruin its rivals, reveal secrets, ignore

national interests, etc. However, this kind of behavior is rejected in seminary. Even establishing a party is not considered a proper method for clergies' activism in the political arena. Ayatollah Taheri Khorramabadi quotes Imam Khomeini who opposed establishing a party in seminary for the fact that he regarded his work as 'merely religious and jurisprudential': He (i.e. Imam Khomeini) seriously opposed formation of a party and said that our work is merely jurisprudential and religious; and we could further our affairs through jurisprudence and religious laws; and our work has nothing to do with party" (Taheri Khorramabadi, 1384 SH, vol. 2, pp. 204-233).

This dialogue, which happened in the mid-1357 SH, shows Imam Khomeini's obligation-centered view founded on jurisprudence and religion. Thus, Qom seminary did not go to establish a party to design and pursue its goals, and one must not attribute membership of some clergies in parties or naming a party after them to Qom seminary; just as we may not consider the sense of duty in political arena and acting accordingly as the decision of the 'institution'. This is because the [religious] obligation is something individual and contingent upon the individual's qualification, not conformed to group work and expediencies discerned by the group.

9. People-centeredness and believing in people. The movements by the social reformers throughout history were focused on reforming government to be followed by social reformation, or were oriented towards society to lead to political reformation through social movement. Sayyid Jamaluddin Asadabadi was an example of reformists of the second lot. He dedicated his efforts to change the rulers' views towards the method of ruling and their surrounding world: the approach that Sayyid referred to as follows:

"I regret that I did not get what I wished completely. I wish I had planted all the seeds of my thoughts in the fertile field of the nation's thoughts. It would be nice if I didn't spoil my useful fertile

eggs in the salty soil of Sultanate.” (Mohit Tabataba'i, 1350 SH, p. 281).

Although Qom seminary was attempting, in the first decades of its reestablishment, to reform the government through conversation and, accordingly, reform the society. After 1342 Farvardin and Khordad (1963 April and June), the seminary's orientation shifted towards the society. The Tobacco incident and the accompaniment of various groups of people with Mirza Shirazi's fatwa regarding sanction of tobacco revealed a fact vividly: the key to incite people is in the clergies' hands. This experience was referred to by Imam Khomeini repeatedly and he used it as an argument. He attempted to inform people and make evolution in the society to make alterations in politics. Martyr Motahhari quotes from Imam Khomeini while he was in Paris:

“When I returned from Paris, my comrades asked me, ‘what did you see?’ I answered, ‘I saw four *āmana*’¹: *āmana bi-hadafihī*. He has faith in his goal. If the whole world gather together, they cannot deviate him from his goal. *Āmana bi-sabīlihī*. He has faith in the way he has chosen for himself. It is impossible to dissuade him from this path. This is like the faith the Prophet had in his goal and his way. And *āmana bi-qowliī (bi-qowmihī)*. I saw that, among all my comrades, no one has faith in Iranian people as he has. Some say to him, ‘act somewhat slower! People get tired and discouraged.’ And he replies, ‘people are not as you say. I know them better than you do.’ And above all, *āman bi-rabbihī*. He has faith in his Lord. In a private meeting with him, he told me, ‘This is not we. I feel God's hands working’” (Motahhari, 1387 SH, p. 51).

In 1357 SH (1979), Imam Khomeini described the government he had in mind as ‘relied on people's votes and under public supervision, evaluation and criticism’ (Khomeini, 1362 SH, p. 31). After establishment of

1. *Āmana* means ‘he has faith in’ and refers to Quranic verses wherein this phrase is used.

Islamic Republic, he acknowledged people's role in the spheres of conventional legitimization of the government, specifying the form of government, choosing agents, and the process and method of ruling (Tabataba'i-far, 1400 SH, pp. 484-487).

This confidence received response from people with mutual respect. In his dialogue with the late Ayatollah Hakim, Imam Khomeini answered him who had said, 'If we act severely, people will not follow us', and said, "In Khordad 15th,¹ people showed their honesty and gallantry." The late Ayatollah Hakim continued, "If we rise and there comes some bloodshed or some ballyhoo, people will insult us." And Imam Khomeini replied, "when we rose, we did not receive anything except respect, greeting and hand-kissing." (memories of years in Najaf, 1389 SH, vol. 1, p. 34; *Sayr Mubārizāt Imām Khomeini dar Ā'īnay Asnād bi Riwāyat Sāvāk*, 1386, vol. 9, pp. 278-289). This mutual confidence and respect has been preserved during the past century, affecting the way Qom seminary deals with the political affair. Seminary has always pursued its goals in the political arena by relying on people's support.

10. Avoiding radicalism. Based on the jurisprudential principle of the sanctity of Muslims' blood, properties and prestige, as well as the mutual respect between seminary and society during the last one hundred years, the seminary never felt a need to resort to people's violence and taking arms to further its plans in the political arena. A concern for people's lives and opposition to disorder and anarchy is the dominant discourse in Qom seminary in specifying the strategy for dealing with political affair. In most studies, this concern is attributed to the semi-active groups in Islamic Revolution (including Ayatollah Golpayegani, Shari'atmadari, and Mar'ashi in Qom; Hakim and Khu'i in Najaf; and Khansari in Tehran). The revolutionary group has been explicitly or ironically introduced as hardliners or a group lacking

1. It refers to Iranian people's uprising in 1342 Khordada 15 (1963 June 5th) against Pahlavi regime.

concern for public order. However, it seems that avoiding violence and having concern for people's life must be considered as the general feature in political activism of seminary center. Referring to the previous axis, Imam Khomeini specified society as the orientation of his movement and with his trust in people, he would encourage clergies and preachers to inform the society. He considered the political power of people so strong that he did not consent to give permission for terrorist operation or armed struggle. In the early years of his struggle (1341/ 1963), when Shah insisted to hold a referendum for his White Revolution despite the scholars' disagreement, a group of people requested Imam Khomeini to permit them to set fire on the voting tents on 6th day of Bahman (1963 January 26), he told them not to do so. He argued, "when some tents catch fire, they will say the owners and lords have incited their agents, i.e. clergies. The one who has some right thing to say will not do such things" (Behbudi, 1397 SH, p. 238).

At the last months of year 1341, some Khans of Fars province sent a message to the scholars of Qom, saying if some of their conditions are accepted, they will seize Shiraz in a short while. Imam Khomeini replied, "this is not advisable at all. The uprising of the nomads causes disorder and anarchy and causes them to take my cloak and yours too; Things get mixed up." The interesting point is in the rest of Imam's statements: "I will fix things with these announcements" (Gerami, 1381 SH, p. 231). In 1343, Bahman 1 (1965, January 21), Hassan Ali Mansur was assassinated by Mohammad Bokhara'i (a member of *Fadāiyān Islām* group). Regarding that assassination, it is transmitted that "*Fadāiyān Islām* group accompanied by Mr. Anvari went to meet Imam Khomeini to get permission [for assassinations]. Firstly, Imam refrained to give permission. But then, he forbade them" (Khalkhali, 1379 SH, pp. 163-164). Similarly, Imam Khomeini, in 1351 SH (1972), after seven sessions of negotiations with the representative of People's Combatants (*Mojahedin Khalq* group), Hossein Ahmadi Rowhani, had

explicitly said, "I do not agree with armed struggle." Hossein Ahmadi's perception is that "Ayatollah meant not guerrilla armed struggle, but rejecting armed struggle with Shah's regime in general" (Ja'fariyan, 1381 SH, pp. 717-718). In interviews with Figaro's reporter (1978, October 14) (Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 8, p. 208), Al-Mustaqbal magazine (1978, November 6) (Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 8, p. 225), and The Sunday Telegraph Weekly (Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 8, P. 229), Imam Khomeini repeated his position regarding no use of arms. In a message delivered on 1979 January 9, he referred to the facts that "some individuals have been threatened as being members of SAVAK and Shah's agents", "some houses were burnt on the same pretext and their women and children were persecuted", and "actions were performed against Islam and fairness, without observing Islamic rules", and wanted people to prevent anarchy and chaos (Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 9, pp. 170-171). Even on 1357 Bahman 21 (1979 February 10), in a message to the "Iranian brave nation", he wrote: "as you know, I am resolute to resolve the problems of Iran peacefully, but since the system of oppression saw itself convicted before the law, it committed the crime of attacking the brave people in Gorgan and Gonbad Kavooos and massacred them." The rest of these statements is more important for us, where he says one day before the victory of revolution, "I have not issued the order of jihad yet, and I want to act peacefully based on people's votes; but I cannot tolerate these wild actions. If Shah's Guard does not give up killing people and does not return to its headquarter, I make the last decision" (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 6, pp. 121-122).

The last decision was never made, and the Islamic revolution of Iran became victorious with Imam Khomeini's announcements and clergies' informing people. Imam Khomeini's orientation towards people and recognizing the spirit of the time made the Islamic revolution needless of any violence and anarchy. This feature is in the same line as the clergies' method in Constitutionalist Revolution,

which is observable in confrontation among various seminary trends in dealing with political affair. This was what Kasravi called "oppression-killing resistance" (Kasravi, 1387 SH, p. 635) and it was founded on the Shiite belief in necessity of avoiding violence for seizing power.

11. Preserving the independence of seminary. The important service made by Ayatollah Mo'asses and, after him, Ayatollah Borujerdi to Shiism was establishment of self-founded and autonomous seminary of which no dimension was dependent on the governmental system. Its financial sources were the religious payments and endowments, and even when there came some limitations for endowments, seminary could survive. This feature has been considered as the distinctive point between the Shiite and the Sunnite clerics. Under the events of referendum for the White Revolution, the religious authorities of Qom decided to dispatch Ayatollah Kamalvand to a meeting with Shah. Kamalvand was to ask for Shah's motivation for holding that referendum and the six items. Apparently, Mohammad Reza Shah had said in that meeting: "the Iranian clergies must learn loving Shah from the Sunnite scholars who pray for their Shah after saying their obligatory prayers. But our scholars... what should I say?" In response, the late Kamalvand said, "they are official agents of their state, and their prayers for Shah is for doing their mission... but the Shiite scholars, in their one-thousand-years period, were never and will never be the agents of their states. There must be a distinction between them" (Davani, 1358 SH, vol. 3, pp. 200-201). This independence would place seminary in the position of a civil institution along with the state, would grant it the power to supervise and criticize, and it had the power for public mobilization due to speaking of religious concepts. According to Martyr Motahhari:

"The Shiite clerical institute is essentially an independent institute, is spiritually dependent on God, and is socially dependent on

people; thus, throughout history, it appeared as a rival power before the arrogant powers of the history.” (Motahhari, 1357 SH, p. 59)

In the early days of the victory of Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini replied a question posed by Hamed Elgar about the role of the clergies in the future state as follows: “you asked whether the clergies want to join the state... no, they don’t what. However, they are not out of the state’s scope. They are neither inside the state, nor are they out of it. They are not in the state, because they do not want to sit in the prime minister’s palace and perform his tasks. They are not out of the state’s scope, because if the prime minister is deviated, they prevent him. They can prevent him, thus they have a role; and yet, they have no role” (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 11, pp. 446-448). In an explanation of Imam Khomeini’s views, Martyr Motahhari says, “The clerical institute must remain independent, as it was independent in the past... now that the government becomes Islamic, [Imam Khomeini] believes that the clerical institute must remain independent as always... he opposed the idea of the clergies’ dependence on the state, as the Sunnite scholars are.” In the continuation of his statements, Motahhari considers the clergies’ duty in the Islamic state to be “guiding, supervising and struggling with deviations of the states and governments” (Motahhari, 1382 SH, pp. 25-27).¹

This parameter has always been considered and paid attention to by seminary members. In a reply to the letter from Ayatollah Fazel Lankarani, the head of Jame‘at al-Modarresin (society of educators) in

1. Of course, this idea is altered in practice due to some executive difficulties, and a part of clergies were involved in political executive works in Islamic Republic. Imam Khomeini refers to this fact and says, “in my interviews, whether with those who came from abroad – even in Najaf and Paris – or in my speeches, I have stated that clergies are in a position higher than executive jobs... however, when we came to the scene, we saw if we tell the clergies to go, this country would be fallen into the hands of USA or Soviet Union... [thus], we yielded and accepted our president to be a clergyman” (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 16, pp. 343-357; vol. 18, pp. 241-244).

Qom seminary, Ayatollah Golpayegani emphasized that:

“One of the great honors of the Shiite clerics is the independence of the seminary that is not dependent on anyone or any official except the sacred position of Imam Mahdi. And – thanks to God – these seminaries have preserved their independence in spite of various pressures and plots in difficult situations and severely close and stifling atmosphere created by arrogant tyrannical regimes by tolerating a variety of distresses and troubles, not being influenced by any factor out of the seminary; and so far its management has remained with religious authorities and scholars. This characteristic of seminaries is a custody entrusted to us from previous righteous people, and we must give great importance to this independence... to protect seminary and its spiritual position in the hearts and its infiltration into the Muslims society, I greatly stress on this fact and maintain that the consequences of weakening it are overwhelming and thumping...” (Ostadi, 1375 SH, p. 250).

In his will, he repeated his emphasis on preserving the independence of seminaries and told the future generations that they are ‘responsible for this before his majesty Imam Mahdi’. Although some budget has been considered for seminary centers due to bureaucratic spread of management of seminary, it seems that neither participation of some clergies in the executive structure nor appropriation of budget from the state has led to state/ governmental nature of the seminary. Just as at the present time, the universities get all their expenditures from the state, but do not support all measures taken and decisions made by the state. Providing a part of administrative budget of seminary has not led to its definite support of governmental policies and the seminaries still proclaim their opinions in the political arena as they discern, especially considering the fact that this policy is supported by the high levels of government. Ayatollah Khamene’i refers to the independence of seminaries

throughout the history, even under the Shiite governments (Safawids) and believes that “the Shiite clergies... have always been independent, never being placed in the hands of [political] powers. Today, it is still the case, and it must also be the same afterwards.” He describes the relationship between the seminary and Islamic Republic of Iran as follows:

“The relationship of the clergies and seminaries with the Islamic regime is the relationship of support and advice... defense along with modification... the Islamic Republic is the state of religious values... it is the ruling of religion, not a certain guild or a certain group.” (lecture on 2010 October 21)

In adjusting its relations with politics, the seminary always pays attention to preserving its independence. This axis is emphasized by all seminary groups. But some of the traditional groups have used this principle as an excuse for evading politics. Ayatollah Khamene'i, in a part of his abovementioned lecture, deals with this issue and says, “the independence of seminaries must not be considered as meaning that the Islamic regime does not support the seminary or the seminary does not support Islamic regime... some want to cut the link between seminary and Islamic regime on the pretext of independence. This is not right. Dependence is different from support.”

12. Pluralism and respecting various views. In dealing with political affair, the seminary respects plurality of views and positions. Disagreement in jurisprudential/ scientific in seminaries is a common and respected reality, because jurisprudence is founded on scholars' efforts in legal reasoning and their various readings from religious texts. In dealing with the altering affair of politics, these perceptions experience a great variety, but this never turns into rivalry and conflict. Despite plurality inside the seminary, there is a cohesion and consistency in dealing with political affairs. Thus, the position of some clergies in criticizing the Islamic regime and position of others

under the strategy of supporting it have not led to a conflict and struggle in Qom seminary; rather, it has increased the atmosphere of dialogue and theoretical challenges. It is improbable for the Qom seminary to move towards one-sidedness in dealing with political affair; this is probably due to the fact that the seminary's methods and traditions do not allow such measures. In his well-known message called *manshūr barādarī* (brotherhood chart), Imam Khomeini emphasizes that "in the Islamic state, the door to make legal reasoning must be always open, and the nature of [Islamic] revolution and regime necessitates that the juristic-jurisprudential theories in various contexts be presented, even though in opposition to one another. And no one has the ability or the right to prevent it" (Khomeini, 1389 SH, vol. 7, pp. 177-180).

Of course, this plurality gets meaning under the seminary traditions and the features of political behaviors of seminary members. The seminary does not confirm all political behaviors or statements of the authorities, educators and students in seminary centers. Just those political behaviors are confirmed that have some of the aforementioned qualifications. It gives some behaviors an institutional state and prevents some others. On the other hand, it distinguishes the way seminary deals with politics from what other social groups do.

Conclusion and some functions

The abovementioned features influence the political behavior of the seminaries in an institutional way. The political actions of any clergyman in any level cannot be considered the behavior of the 'seminary'. The seminary does not confirm all behaviors as authentic and valid; and many times, it may reject an action. Just as the individual, economic, cultural and other behaviors of a clergyman cannot trespass some frameworks or exit the realm of clerical life, his political behavior also makes sense in the above framework. The

abovementioned features give – simultaneously – limitation and facilities to clergies. The institution of seminary defends the behavior conforming to that framework, and the clergies' action in various levels in political issues is supported by the institution. This acceptance and rejection/ support and repulse is the tool in the hands of the institution for realizing the abovementioned features, in a way that it distinguishes the framework of the clergies' political behavior from other political activists, forms it and organizes it in the form of a hidden structure.

Some of the above features are accepted by the majority of the pious people. The people expect clergies to have behaviors proper for the status of seminary in various spheres, including political sphere. They expect to see clergies in the political arena in the same way as they see them on the pulpit or in the altar. The above features make this possible. They highlight the difference between political action based on religious obligation and the action originating from seeking power and politicization. People expect clergies to accompany them in the struggle of political issues as they were with them in all individual and social problems. Thus, what is mentioned as avoiding/ evading politics is nonsense for most people. The society expects the clergies to deal with politics on the basis of some principles. The problem arises where, for some classes of society, the institutional aspect of seminary is not detached from the clergies' behavior, and most of them consider individual clergymen as representatives of seminary. Thus, non-conformity of a clergy's political behavior with the aforementioned features and with people's expectancies arises some cynicism towards the whole institution.

Not paying necessary and sufficient attention to plurality of views in political arena on the part of some seminary groups is among difficulties for politicization in the contemporary seminary. Regardless of the seminary's atmosphere – which has been a place for

scientific disputes and diversity of opinions since past – politics has a lot of room for much investigation and criticism. Unlike some sciences such as law wherein quite closed statements can be produced in accordance with laws and legal foundations, in political issues the bandwidth is always open for disputes and discussions. Systemic dialogues conformed to the frameworks help – while clarifies the discussion – increase the weight of political knowledge and level of politicization in contemporary Iran.

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