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What is materialism? Is man materialistic by nature? Materialism in history, in Islam, and in Christianity.

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The Causes Responsible for Materialist tendencies in the West Part 1 of 4

Translated from the Persian by Mujahid Husayn
Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari

What appears here is a translation of *'Ilal e gerayesh beh maddigari*, 8th edition (Qum: Intesharat e Sadra, 1375 H. Sh.) There is a long introduction, dated rajab 1, 1398 H by the author written for the 8th edition of the book titled *'Materialism in Iran'*, this will appear at the end of the serial.

Materialism

The topic of the present study are the causes that lie behind materialist tendencies. Before we proceed with the discussion it is necessary that we first define the word 'materialism,' as a term current in common usage, and specify its exact meaning for the purpose of the present discussion.

The word 'materialism' has various usages and all of them are not relevant to our study while studying the cause for materialist inclinations. For example, at times 'materialism' is used to refer to the school of thought which asserts the principality of matter in the sense that matter is something fundamental (asil) and real in the realm of existence and not something imaginary and mental, an appearance and a product of the mind.

In this sense it is opposed to 'idealism' which negates the real existence of matter and considers it a mental construct. In this sense of materialism, we would have to categorize all theists, both Muslims as well as non-Muslims, as 'materialists,' because all of them consider matter-as a reality existing in space and time and subject to change, transformation, and evolution, and which is also perceivable and tangible-as an objective reality existing externally and independently of the mind and having its own properties.

Being a 'materialist' in this sense does not contradict with the concept of God or monotheism. Rather, the material world and nature as a product of creation constitute the best means for knowing God. The workings of Divine will and wisdom are discovered in the transformations which take place in matter, and the Holy Qur'an, too, refers to material phenomena as the 'signs' of God.

Sometimes this word is used to imply the negation of supra-material being, as an exclusivist school of thought which considers existence and the realm of being as confined to matter, confining being to the realm of the changeable and limiting it to space and time. It negates the existence of all that does not fall within the framework of change and transformation and is not perceivable by the sense organs.

Our present discussion centers around the causes for inclining towards this exclusivist school of thought, and the reasons why a group of people became protagonists of this exclusivist and negative theory, negating God and imagining anything outside the ambit of the material world as non-existent.

Is Man by Nature a Theist or a Materialist?

This manner of posing the issue, i.e. with the question 'What are the causes for inclining

towards materialism?,' suggests that we claim that man by nature would not incline towards materialism, and that materialism is an unnatural tendency opposed to human nature (fitrah). And since it goes against the rule, it is necessary to seek its cause and to investigate the reasons which have led to the violation of the rule.

To put it more simply, it implies that faith in God is equivalent to the state of health, and the materialist tendency is equivalent to disease. One never asks about the reasons of health, because it is in accordance with the general course of nature. But if we come across a person or a group which is sick, we ask as to why they are sick. What is the cause of their illness?

This viewpoint of ours is completely opposed to the view usually expressed in books on history of religion. The writers of these books generally tend to pursue the question, 'Why did man develop the religious tendency?'

In our opinion, the religious tendency does not need to be questioned, because it is natural; rather, the question that needs to be examined is why do human beings develop tendencies towards irreligion?

Presently we do not intend to pursue the argument whether being religious is something natural and the lack of religion unnatural, or if the converse is true, because we see no need for doing so from the point of view of the main topic of our discussion.

However, it is worth noting that we do not mean that, as the monotheistic tendency is natural and innate (fitrah), no questions arise when the issue is dealt with at the intellectual and philosophical level. This is certainly not meant. This matter is just like every other issue that naturally- and despite affirmation by natural instinct-gives rise to questions, objections and doubts in the mind of a beginner when posed at the rational level, and satisfying answers to them are also available at that level.

Therefore, we neither intend to disregard the doubts and ambiguities which do in fact arise for individuals, nor do we consider them consequences of an evil disposition or ill-naturedness. Not at all. The emergence of doubts and ambiguities in this context, when someone seeks to solve all the problems related to this issue, is something natural and usual, and it is these doubts that impel human beings towards further quest.

Accordingly we consider such doubts which result in further search for truth as sacred, because they constitute a prelude to the acquisition of certitude, faith, and conviction. Doubt is bad where it becomes an obsession and completely absorbs one's attention, as with some people whom we find enjoying the fact that they are able to have doubt concerning certain issues and who consider doubt and uncertainty to be the zenith of their intellectual achievement.

Such a state is very dangerous, contrary to the former state which is a prelude to perfection. Therefore, we have said repeatedly that doubt is a good and necessary passage, but an evil station and destination.

Our present discussion concerns the individuals or groups who have made doubt their abode and final destination. In our opinion, materialism, although it introduces itself as a dogmatic school of thought, is in fact one of the sceptic schools. The Qur'an also takes this view of the materialists, and according to it they are, at best, beset with a number of doubts and conjectures, but in practice they flaunt them as knowledge and conviction.[1](#)

The Historical Background

This mode of thinking is not new or modern. It should not be imagined that this mode of thought is a consequence of modern scientific and industrial developments and has emerged for the first time during the last one or two centuries, like many other scientific theories which did not exist earlier and were later discovered by man. No, the materialist thinking among human beings is not a phenomenon of the last few centuries, but is one of the ancient modes of thought. We read in the history of philosophy that many ancient Greek philosophers who preceded Socrates and his philosophical movement, were materialists and denied the supra-material.

Among the Arabs of the Jahillyyah contemporaneous to the Prophet's ministry there was a group with a similar belief, and the Qur'an, while confronting them, quotes and criticizes their statements:

“They say, 'There is nothing but our present life; we die, and we live, and nothing but time destroys us.’” (45:24).

This statement, which the Qur'an ascribes to a group of people, involves both the negation of God as well as the Hereafter.

Materialism in Islamic History

The word 'dahr' means time. Due to this verse and the term dahr occurring in it, those who negated the existence of God were called 'dahriyyah' during the Islamic period. We encounter such people in Islamic history who were dhari and materialists (maddi), especially during the reign of the Abbassids, when various cultural and philosophical trends entered the Islamic world.

Due to the freedom of thought which prevailed during that period with respect to scientific, philosophical and religious ideas (of course, to the extent that it did not contradict the policies of the Abbassids), some individuals were formally known as materialists and atheists.

These individuals debated with Muslims, with the adherents of other religions, and with believers in the existence of God, and presented their arguments and raised objections concerning the arguments of the monotheists. Thus they did enter into dialogue and freely expressed their beliefs, and we find their accounts recorded in Islamic works.

During the lifetime of Imam Sadiq, may Peace be upon him, there were certain individuals who used to gather inside the Prophet's Mosque and express such views. The book al-Tawhid al-Mufaddal is a product one of such episodes.

A companion of Imam Sadiq ('a) named al-Mufaddal ibn 'Umar narrates: “Once I was in the Prophet's Mosque. After prayer I became engrossed in thought about the Prophet (S) and his greatness. Just then 'Abd al-Karim ibn Abi al 'Awja', who was an atheist (zindiq), came and sat down at some distance. Later another person holding similar views pined him, and both of them started uttering blasphemies.

They denied the existence of God and referred to the Prophet (S) simply as a great thinker and a genius and not as a Divine emissary and apostle who received revelations from an Unseen source. They said that he was a genius who presented his ideas as revelation in

order to influence the people; otherwise there was no God, nor any revelation or resurrection.”

Mufaddal, who was greatly disturbed on hearing their talk, abused them. Then he went to Imam Sadiq, may Peace be upon him, and narrated the incident. The Imam comforted him and told him that he would furnish him with arguments with which he could confront them and refute their views. Thereafter Imam Sadiq ('a) instructed Mufaddal in the course of a few long sessions and Mufaddal wrote down the Imam's teachings. This was how the book al-Tawhid al-Mufaddal came to be compiled.

Materialism in the Modern Age

As we know, during the 18th and 19th centuries materialism took the form of a school of thought which it did not have earlier. That which is ascribed to some schools of ancient Greece does not have a proper basis. Usually the writers of history of philosophy do not know philosophy, and when they come across certain statements of some philosophers concerning the pre-eternity of matter or some other opinions of the kind, they imagine that this amounts to the negation of God and the supra-natural.

It has not been established for us that there existed a materialist school of thought before the modern age. Rather, what did exist earlier in Greece and elsewhere were individual tendencies towards materialism.

However, this is what has led many people to suppose that perhaps there is some direct relation between the emergence of materialism as a school of thought and science and scientific advancements.

Of course, the materialists themselves make a great effort to present the matter as such, and they try to convince others that the cause of the growth and prevalence of materialism during the 18th and 19th centuries was the emergence of scientific theories and that it was the spread of science which resulted in mankind being drawn towards it. This observation resembles a joke more than any noteworthy fact.

The inclination towards materialism in ancient times existed both among the educated as well as the illiterate classes. In the modern age, too, the case is similar. Materialists can be found in all classes, and likewise there are theistic, spiritual and metaphysical inclinations in all classes and sections, especially among the learned.

If what the materialists claim were true, in the same proportion that advances are made in science and great scientists are born in the world, there should be an increase in the inclination towards materialism among the scholarly class, and individuals possessing more scholarship should be greater materialists, while in fact this is not the case.

Today, we see on the one hand some well well-known personalities like Russell, who, to a large extent, present themselves as materialists. He says, “Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms.”² Thus Russell rejects the existence of a conscious and intelligent power ruling the universe, although at other places he avers to be a skeptic and an agnostic.³

On the other hand, we find Einstein, the twentieth century scientific genius, expressing an opinion opposed to that of Russell; he says “You will hardly find one among the profounder

sort of scientific minds without a religious feeling of his own ... His religious feeling takes the form of rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work, in so far as he succeeds in keeping himself from the shackles of selfish desire. It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages." [4](#)

Can it be said that Russell is familiar with the concepts of modern science whereas Einstein is ignorant of them? Or that a certain philosopher of the 18th or 19th century was familiar with the scientific concepts of his age whereas the theist Pasteur was unaware and ignorant of them?!

Or can we say that William James, the monotheist or rather the mystic of his time, Bergson, Alexis Carrell and other such thinkers were ignorant of the scientific ideas of their time and their thinking was in tune with the ideas of a thousand years ago, while a certain Iranian youth who does not possess a tenth of their knowledge and does not believe in God is familiar with the scientific ideas of his age?!

At times one sees two mathematicians, one of whom believes in God and religion while the other is a materialist, or for that matter two physicists, two biologists, or two astronomers, one with a materialist and the other with a theistic bent of mind.

Therefore, it is not that simple to say that the advent of science has made metaphysical issues obsolete. That would be a childish observation.

We need to centre our discussion more on the question as to what were the factors that led to the emergence of materialism as a school of thought in Europe, attracting a large number of followers, even though the 20th century, in contrast to the 18th and 19th centuries, saw a decline in the advance of materialism and in it materialism even met with a kind of defeat?

This large-scale drift has a series of historical and social causes which require to be studied. I have come across some of these causes during the course of my study which I shall mention here. Perhaps those who have done a closer study of social issues, especially in the area of European history, would identify other reasons and factors. Here I only intend to discuss the results of my study.

Inadequacies in the Religious Ideas of the Church

The Church, whether from the viewpoint of the inadequacy of its theological ideas, or its inhuman attitude towards the masses, especially towards the scholars and freethinkers, is one of the main causes for the drifting of the Christian world, and indirectly the non-Christian world, towards materialism.

We will analyze this factor in two sections:

1. Inadequacies in the ideas of the Church relating to God and the metaphysical

2. The violent conduct of the Church

Inadequacies in the ideas of the Church relating to God and the metaphysical

In the Middle Ages when the clerics became the sole arbiters of issues relating to divinities, there emerged amongst them certain childish and inadequate ideas concerning God which were in no way consonant with reality. Naturally, these not only did not satisfy intelligent and enlightened individuals, but created in them an aversion against theism and incited them against theist thought.

Anthropomorphic Conceptions of God

The Church painted a human picture of God and presented Him to the people in an anthropomorphic form. Those who were brought up to conceive God with these human and physical features under the influence of the Church, later, with advances in science, came to find that these ideas were inconsistent with scientific, objective, and sound rational criteria.

On the other hand, the vast majority of people naturally do not possess such power of critical analysis as to reflect over the possibility that metaphysical ideas might have a rational basis and that the Church was wrongly presenting them.

Thus when they saw that the views of the Church did not conform to the criteria of science they rejected the issue outright.

There is a book titled *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, consisting of forty articles by forty scientists belonging to various fields of specialization, wherein each scholar has presented arguments proving the existence of God in accordance with his own specialized area of study. This book has been translated into Persian.

Among these scholars is Walter Oscar Lundberg, who presents a scientific argument for the existence of God. In the course of his study he examines why some people, including scholars, have developed a materialist tendency.

He mentions two causes of which one has been already mentioned by us, inadequate ideas taught on this subject to the people in the church or at home.

Our singling out the churches in this regard does not mean to imply that those who give instruction on religious issues from our pulpits (manabir) and mosques have always been informed and competent individuals who know what is to be taught and possess an in-depth knowledge of Islam.

One reason why we mention only the church is that our discussion is about the causes behind materialist inclinations and these tendencies existed in the Christian world and not in the Islamic environments. Whatever materialism is found in Islamic societies has been, and is, the result of copying and imitating the West. Secondly, there existed in the Islamic milieu a school of thought at the level of philosophers and metaphysicians, which satisfied the intellectual needs of the researchers and saved the scholars from the fate of their counterpart in Europe, while there existed no such school within the Church.

In any case this is what Walter Oscar Lundberg says

There are various reasons for the attention of some scholars not being drawn towards

comprehending the existence of God while undertaking scientific studies; we will mention just two of them here. The first (reason) is the general presence of oppressive political and social conditions or governmental structures which necessitate the negation of the existence of God.

The second (reason) is that human thinking is always under the impact of some vague ideas and although the person himself may not undergo any mental and physical agony, even then his thinking is not totally free in choosing the right path.

In Christian families the children in their early years generally believe in an anthropomorphic God, as if man has been created in the image of God. These persons, on entering a scientific environment and acquiring the knowledge of scientific issues, find that this weak and anthropomorphic view of God does not accord with scientific concepts.

Consequently, after a period of time when the hope of any compromise is dashed, the concept of God is also totally discarded and vanishes from the mind. The major cause of doing so is that logical proofs and scientific definitions do not alter the past sentiments and beliefs of these persons, and it does not occur to them that a mistake had taken place in the earlier belief about God. Along with this, other psychic factors cause the person to become weary of the insufficiency of this concept and turn away from theology.⁵

Summarily, that which is observable in certain religious teachings-and regrettably is also found amongst ourselves, to a more or less extent-is that a characteristic concept is projected in the minds of children under the name and label of 'God.' When the child grows up and becomes a scholar, he finds that this concept is not rational and such a being cannot exist, whether it be God or something else.

The child on growing up, without reflecting or critically concluding that perhaps there might exist a valid conception, rejects the idea of divinity altogether. He imagines that the concept of God he is rejecting is the same as the one accepted by theists, and since he does not accept this creature of his own mind, which is the product of popular superstition, he does not believe in God. He does not notice that the concept of God which he is rejecting is also rejected by the theists, and that his rejection is not the rejection of God but is the rejection of something that ought to be rejected.

Flammarion in the book *God and Nature* observes: "The Church presented God in this manner: 'The distance between his right and left eye is 12000 leagues.' " It is obvious that persons with even a meagre knowledge of science cannot believe in such a being.

Auguste Comte's Conception of God

Flammarion quotes a statement of Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism and what is known as scientism, which offers a good view of the way God was pictured by such scholars as Auguste Comte living in the Christian environment of that time. Flammarion says: Auguste Comte has said: "Science has dismissed the Father of nature and the universe from his post, consigning him to oblivion, and while thanking him for his temporary services, it has escorted him back to the frontiers of his greatness."

What he means is that earlier every event that took place in the world was explained by relating it to God as its cause. For example, if someone got a fever, the question why the fever had come about and from where it came had the answer that God had sent the fever. That which was commonly understood by this statement was not that it is God who governs

the universe and that to say that He had caused the fever implied that He was the real and ultimate mover of the world.

Rather, this statement meant that God, like a mysterious being, or a magician engaged in sorcery, had all of a sudden decided to cause fever without any preparatory cause, and so the fever came about. Later science discovered its cause and it was observed that fever was not brought about by God, but by a certain bacteria.

Here God retreated one step. Henceforth the theist was forced to say that we will shift our argument to the bacteria: Who created the bacteria? Science also discovered the cause of bacteria by identifying the conditions in which they come to exist.

Again God had to retreat one step, and the argument proceeded by asking the cause of that cause. God's retreat continued, and, at last, with the spread and expansion of science the causes of a large number of phenomena were discovered. Even those phenomena whose causes were not yet discovered were known for certain to possess causes belonging to the category of causes already known. Thereat man had to dismiss God for good with an apology, because there no longer remained any place and post for Him.

The state of God at this stage was that of an employee in an office in which he was initially given an important post, but with the recruitment of more competent individuals his responsibilities were gradually taken away, and eventually, when he was divested of all his earlier responsibilities, there remained no post and place left for him. At this time the manager of the office approaches him, thanks him for his past services, and with an excuse hands him the dismissal orders and bids him farewell once and for all.

Auguste Comte uses the term 'Father of nature' for God. His use of this term for God shows the influence of the Church in his thought. Although he was against the teachings of the Church, his own concept of God was derived from the Church's ideas, from which he was not able to free himself.

Taken together, the observations of Auguste Comte suggest that in his opinion God is something similar to a part and factor of this world, albeit mysterious and unknown, by the side of other factors. Moreover, there are two types of phenomena in the world, the known and the unknown. Every unknown phenomenon should be linked to that mysterious and unknown factor.

Naturally, with the discovery of every phenomenon and its becoming known as a consequence of science, the domain of influence of the unknown factor is diminished. This mode of thinking was not characteristic of him, but it was the thinking that prevailed in his environment and era.

The Station of Divinity

Hence the main thing is that we ascertain the station of Divinity and comprehend the place, position and 'post' of God. Is the position of God and the Divine in the realm of being such that we may consider Him to be one of the beings in the world and a part of it? May we allot Him a certain function among the various functions that exist in the world, thereby affecting a division of labour, and then, for determining God's special function, examine the various effects whose causes are unknown to us, so that whenever we come across an unknown cause we have to attribute it to God?

The consequence of such a mode of thinking is to search for God among things unknown to us. Naturally, with an increase in our knowledge, the area of our ignorance will continually diminish and the domain of our theism, too, will diminish to the point where if some day, supposedly, all the unknown things become known to mankind, there would remain no place for God or any theism.

In accordance with this line of reasoning, only some of the existing realities are signs of God and manifest and mirror His existence, and they are those whose causes are unknown. As to those things whose causes have been identified, they lie outside the realm of signs and indications of the Divine Being.

Hallowed be God! How wrong and misleading this kind of thinking is, and how ignorant it is of the station of the Divine! Here we should cite the words of the Qur'an, which observes in this regard:

“They measured not God with His true measure.” (6:91)

The ABC of theism is that He is the God of the entire universe and is equally related to all things. All things, without any exception, are manifestations of His Power, Knowledge, Wisdom, Will, and Design, and are the signs and marks of His Perfection, Beauty and Glory. There is no difference between phenomena whose causes are known and those whose causes are unknown in this regard. The universe, with all its systems and causes, is *in toto* sustained by His Being.

He transcends both time and space. Time and time-bound entities, and similarly space and spatial objects, irrespective of their being finite or infinite—that is, whether they are temporally limited or extend from pre-eternity to eternity, and regardless of whether the universe is limited in its spatial dimensions or infinite, and, ultimately, whether the entire expanse of existents is finite or infinite in time and space—all these are posterior to His Being and Existence and are Considered among His emanations (fayd.)

Hence it is extreme ignorance to think in a Church like manner and to imagine, like Auguste Comte, that while looking for the cause of a certain phenomenon in some corner of the universe we would suddenly discover the existence of God, and then celebrate and rejoice that we have found God at a certain place. And if we do not succeed and are unable to so find Him, we should become pessimistic and deny God's existence altogether.

On the contrary, it is precisely in this sense that we must reject the existence of God, that is, a God who is like any other part of the world and is discoverable like any other phenomenon in the course of inquiry into the world's phenomena is certainly not God, and any belief in such a God is aptly rejected.

In more simple terms, we should say that this kind of quest for God in the universe is like the conduct of someone who when shown a clock and told that it has a maker wants to find its maker within the wheels and parts of the clock. He searches for a while and on finding nothing except its different parts, says: 'I did not find the maker of the clock and this proves that he does not exist.' Or it is like one who on being shown a beautifully stitched dress and told that this dress was stitched by a tailor, says, 'If I find the tailor in the pockets of this dress I will accept his existence, otherwise I won't.'

This kind of thinking is totally wrong from the Islamic point of view. From the viewpoint of Islamic teachings, God is not on a par with the natural causes so that the question should

arise whether a certain external entity has been created by God or by a certain natural cause.

This kind of dichotomy is both wrong and meaningless, because there cannot be a dichotomy or an intervening 'or' between God and natural causes for such a question to be posed. This form of thinking is anti-theist. Theism means that the whole of nature in its entirety is a unit of work and an act of God in its totality. Hence it is not correct to ask concerning a part of it whether it is a work of God or nature, and then to consider it to be a work of God on failing to identify its cause, and as related to nature and with no connection with God when its natural cause is known.

Auguste Comte's Three Stages of Human History

Auguste Comte suggests a classification of the stages of the historical development of the human mind, which, most regrettably, has more or less been accepted, though from the point of view of those acquainted with Islamic philosophy it is mere childish talk. He says that mankind has passed through three stages:

1. The Theological Stage

In this stage man explained phenomena by resorting to supernatural forces and considered God or gods to be the cause of every phenomenon. In this stage man discovered the principle of causality, but was not able to identify the causes of things in a detailed manner. Since he had grasped the principle of causality, he considered the cause of every event to lie within Nature. In this stage he postulated the existence of forces in Nature with the judgement that certain forces exist in Nature which are ultimately responsible for the occurrence of phenomena.

2. The Metaphysical Stage

In this stage, in view of the fact that man thought in metaphysical and philosophical terms, he could not go beyond the assertion that a certain event had a cause without having any answer to the question about the nature and character of the cause itself.

3. The Positive Stage

In this stage man identified in detail the causes of things in Nature. During this stage, man turned away from thinking in general philosophical terms and adopted the experimental approach to the study of phenomena, discovering the causal links between them. It became completely evident to him that the phenomena are related to one another in a chain. Today science considers this approach to be correct, and, therefore, we call this stage 'the scientific stage.'

These three stages suggested by Auguste Comte could be possibly correct when viewed from the angle of the common people and the masses, in the sense that at one time the common people considered the cause of an event, such as a disease, to be some invisible being such as a demon or a jinn, and there are such persons and groups even today among educated Europeans.

At a later stage they were able to recognize the order present in Nature and henceforth they attributed the cause of illness to the causes surrounding the sick person, believing that natural factors were responsible for it. Also, all those who have not studied medicine and have no medical knowledge but believe in the general order of nature have a similar

kind of understanding.

During another stage the relationships between the various phenomena was discovered by the means of scientific experiments. This was not a new thing in itself and existed in the ancient period as well, although the eagerness to study natural phenomena and their causal relations is greater in the modern era.

However, this manner of classification of human thought is incorrect, because if we were to divide human thought into stages, our criterion should be the ideas of thinkers and not the thinking of the masses and common people. In other words, we should take into consideration the world view of outstanding individuals. Here it is that we find the classification of August Comte to be wrong through and through. Human thought, whose real representatives are the thinkers of every age, has certainly not passed

One of the eras or stages of thought is the stage of Islamic thought. From the standpoint of the Islamic method, all these ways of thinking can possibly be present simultaneously in a certain form of thought. That is, in the form of thought which we call 'Islamic,' all these three kinds of thought are capable of coexisting. In other words, a single person can at the same time have a mode of thought which is theological, philosophical, and scientific.

From the point of view of a thinker cognizant with Islamic thought, the question does not arise as to whether the cause of an event is that which science tells us, or that which philosophy explains in the form of a force, or that which is named God. Hence, those like Auguste Comte need to be reminded that there exists a fourth mode of thought in the world of which they are unaware.

The Violence of the Church

To this point we have pointed out the role of the Church in the process of inclination towards materialism from the point of view of the inadequacy of its theological concepts. Yet in another way, which was more effective than the inadequacy of its theological ideas, the Church has played an important part in driving people towards adopting an anti-God stance. This was its coercive policy of imposing its peculiar religious and scientific doctrines and views and depriving the people from every kind of freedom of belief in both these areas.

The Church, apart from its peculiar religious beliefs, had incorporated a set of scientific doctrines concerning the universe and man, which had mostly their philosophical roots in Greece and elsewhere and had gradually been adapted by major Christian scholars into its religious dogma. It not only considered any dissent in regard to the 'official sciences' impermissible, but also vehemently persecuted those who disagreed with these dogmas.

Presently, we are not concerned with the issue of freedom of religion and religious belief and that religious beliefs should inevitably be studied freely because otherwise that would go against the very spirit of religion, which is to guide to the truth. Islam supports the thesis that belief in religious doctrines ought to be based on research and not on conformity or compulsion, in contrast to Christianity which has declared religious dogma a prohibited zone for reason.

There were two other aspects in which the Church committed a major mistake. Firstly, it placed certain scientific notions inherited from the earlier philosophers and Christian theologians in the rank of its religious tenets, considering opposition to them to be heresy.

Secondly, it did not stop at exposing the heretics and excommunicating those whose heresy had been proven and confirmed, but instead, like a violent police regime, it investigated the beliefs and convictions of persons by employing various tactics and tried to detect the faintest signs of dissent to religious beliefs in individuals and groups and persecuted them in an indescribably ruthless manner.

As a result, scholars and scientists did not dare entertain any ideas opposed to what the Church considered as science; that is, they were constrained to think in accordance with the Church's thinking.

This intense repression of ideas which was a common thing from the 12th to the 19th century in countries like France, England, Germany, Holland, Portugal, Poland and Spain, naturally resulted in the development of a general extremely negative reaction towards religion. The tribunals held by the Church and known as the Inquisition were initiated with an objective reflected in the very name given them. Will Durant says:

The Inquisition had a special procedure of inquiry and prosecution. Before the inquisition held its tribunal in a city, the summons of faith were communicated from the church pulpits. The people were asked to inform the inquisitors of any heretics or pagans that they knew of. They were encouraged to denounce and accuse their neighbors, friends and relatives. The informers were promised total secrecy. Anyone who knew a heretic and would not denounce him or hid him in his house faced denunciation and excommunication ...

The methods of torture varied from time to time and from one place to another. Sometimes the accused was left to hang with his hands tied behind his back. Or he would be bound in say a way that he could not move, then water was poured into his throat so as to suffocate him. Or his arms and fists were so tightly bound with ropes that they cut into his flesh and reached the bones.⁶

He also said:

The number of victims between the years 1480-1488, that is in eight years, exceeded 8800 burnt on stakes, and 96,494 condemned to severe punishments According to estimates, from the year 1480 to 1808 more than 31,912 were condemned to death by fire and 291,450 were condemned to severe penalties.⁷

George Sarton, the distinguished scholar and famous authority on history of science in his book *Six Wings: Men of Science in the Renaissance*, has a discussion under the caption 'witchcraft,' where he relates the crimes committed by the Church in the name of campaign against witchcraft:

Divines and religious scholars, consciously or otherwise, considered apostasy to be the same as witchcraft. Men quickly conclude that those who disagree with them are bad people. Magicians were men and women who had sold their souls to the Devil. On the assumption that heretics and irreligious persons also communed with the Devil, their persecution and torture were readily permitted and those who were orthodox in their faith could say to themselves: These trouble-making and disruptive people are magicians and they should be dealt with in this way, because they are neither capable of a straight faith nor eligible for pardon.

George Sarton refers to the book *Hammer of the Magicians*, which was written by two

Dominican priests on the instructions of Pope Innocent VIII (r. 1484-1492) and which was, in fact, a practical manual on how to conduct the Inquisition of those accused of heresy and witchcraft. He says:

The book Hammer is a practical handbook for the Inquisitors and in it are found the details of the methods of detection, prosecution and punishment of magicians....

The fear of the magician was the real cause for killing them and these killings themselves became the reason for a heightened fear. In that period, a psychic epidemic had developed the like of which has not been seen until the present age of enlightenment. The proceedings of some trials of the Inquisition recorded in precise detail have survived.

The Inquisitors were not bad people. They imagined themselves to be better at least than the ordinary people, because was it not that they were ceaselessly striving to uphold the word of truth and the name of God?!

Nicolarmy, the inquisitor of Lourn was the cause of 900 magicians being burnt to death during a period of fifteen years (1575-1590). He was a conscientious man, and during the last years of his life he had a sense of guilt for having overlooked to kill some children. Has anyone the right to desist from killing the young of a viper? Bishop Tersepeter Binzfold issued verdicts for the death sentence of 6500 people.

He goes on to observe:

When the Inquisitors arrived in a new region, they used to announce that anyone suspecting someone of being a magician should provide information about it. Anyone concealing information was liable to exile and fine.

Providing information in this regard was considered a duty, and the names of those who provided information were not disclosed. The accused-among whom were possibly persons whose enemies had slandered them-were not informed of the crime they were accused of and were kept in the dark concerning the evidence of their culpability.

It was assumed that these people were sinners and criminals, and the burden of proof lay upon them to prove their innocence. The judges adopted all kinds of mental and physical means for exacting a confession of sin and identifying collaborators. For encouraging the accused to confess, they were promised pardon or extenuation.

But the judges imagined that honouring a promise given to magicians and heretics involved no moral obligation and the promise was kept for the short time which the accused took to say what had to be said. Every act falling outside the limits of honourable behaviour was committed against the accused and was justified as it was done for a holy cause.

The more they tormented and tortured the people, the more they thought it necessary. What we have said can be easily confirmed by referring to the Hammer and other books and can also be pictured more vividly by studying the proceedings of the trials, of which there are plenty.⁸

After discussing this issue for three or four pages, George Sarton observes:

Belief in magic was truly a mental illness more dangerous than syphilis, and was the cause of the terrible death of thousands of innocent men and women. Apart from that, an attention to this matter reveals the dark side of the Renaissance, less appealing than other

*things which are usually said about this period, but knowing which is necessary for a correct understanding of the events of this age. Renaissance was the golden age of art and literature, but at the same time it was also a period of religious intolerance and cruelty. The inhuman character of this period is such that, excepting the present age, it has no parallel in history.*⁹

Religion, which should have been a guide and a harbinger of love, acquired this kind of countenance in Europe. The very notion of religion and God came to be associated in everyone's mind with violence, repression, and tyranny.

Obviously, the reaction of the people against such an approach could hardly be anything except the rejection of religion and the negation of that which constitutes its very basis, God. The severest blow is struck on religion and to the advantage of materialism whenever religious leaders, whom the people consider as the real representatives of religion, put on a leopard's skin and wear a tiger's teeth and resort to excommunication and accusations of heresy, especially when private motives take this form.

¹ ... they follow only surmise, merely conjecturing. (6:116)

² Irving William Knobloch, *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, cf. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (Penguin Books 1953), "A Free Mans Worship"

³ See Russell, *Mysticism and Worship*, (Penguin Books 1953), "A Free Mans Worship", pp.50-59

⁴ As the original source of Einsteins statement quoted by the author was not accessible to the translator, a parallel statement of his has been cited here from *Ideas and Opinions* by Albert Einstein (Calcutta: Rup & Co, 1984, first published by Bonanza Books, New York), based on *Mein Weltbild*, edited by Carl Seerling, trans and revised by Sonja Bargmann, pp. 40 (Tr.)

⁵ Irving William Knobloch, op. Cit, the article by Walter Oscar Lundberg

⁶ Will Durrant, *The Story of Civilization*, Persian transl. Tarikhe Tamaddun, v18 p350

⁷ Ibid., p360

⁸ George Sarton, *Six Wings: Men of Science in the Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), Persian transl. Shish Bal, pp296-8

⁹ Ibid, p. 303

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