

Mehdi Bazargan

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The 20th century of Iran is the century of revolution, turmoil and reform movements. This century begins with the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), followed by the Pahlavis' - both father and son - ascendancy to power from 1925 to 1979, the occupation of the country by the Allied forces in the 1940's, the resurgence of a religious movement that was both nationalistic and reformist from the 1940's, the movement for the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry and the establishment of a democratic government under the leadership of Muhammad Musaddiq (1882-1967) in the 1950's, and finally the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The robust movement for the establishment of the rule of law and democratic government that began at the beginning of the 20th century ended with a grass-roots revolution that brought to the forefront the battle for restructuring politics, society and Iran's political culture.

The religious movement that blended nationalism and reform in politics, society and religion from the 1940's was a crucial force in the process of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and is currently a compelling movement in the post-revolutionary politics of Iran. It has been considered a potent alternative to the ideology of theocratic rule and the clerical political establishment. The proponents of this movement, called religious-nationalism (Melli-Mazhabi), in the political scene of Iran today participated actively in the politics of opposition to the authoritarianism of the Shah and continued to oppose the establishment of theocratic rule after the Iranian revolution.

Mehdi Bazargan (1907-1995) is considered the most influential founding father of religious-nationalism in Iran. His reformist views in the domain of religion placed him in an inimitable position among the reformers in the world of Islam, as his ideas and ideals are distinctly clear-cut and unambiguous compared to other reformers in the Muslim world, especially in the arenas of individual rights, limited government, the rule of law and democratic governance. In this context, he is also considered one of the most influential founders of Islamic liberalism in both Iran and the Muslim world.

Besides his credentials in Islamic reform, Bazargan possesses a very unique place among other reformers in the contemporary Islamic world as he was both a statesman and a professional engineer. As a university professor in the area of thermodynamics, he was very successful in his field as an innovator, manager, and teacher. He accepted prominent political roles in government and remained committed to his political ideals of Islamic liberalism, including freedom and human rights. These ideals kept him in opposition to authoritarianism and theocracy almost all of his life.

Bazargan was born into a merchant family from Tabriz. His father, Abbasquli Bazargan, was a religiously devoted and intellectually endowed merchant who was famous for his piety and stand against the authoritarian rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941). He later became a resolute and committed supporter of the national movement of Iran under Muhammad

Musaddiq (1882-1967). Musaddiq's movement (1950-1953) for the oil nationalization of Iran in 1951 attracted both secular nationalists and Islamists who valued and honored the country's total independence from outside influence and the norms of democratic government.

Mehdi Bazargan completed his elementary education at *Soltani* Elementary School and continued his middle and high school at *Dar al-Mo'allemin* (central) High School, a newly established modern high school in Iran. As one of the highest ranking students in his class, he was dispatched with a full scholarship to France in 1927 by the Iranian government to continue his education at *Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures*. Bazargan completed his Ph.D in thermodynamics in 1934 and returned back to Iran. He then completed his compulsory military service and was employed at the engineering college of the University of Tehran as an assistant professor in mechanical engineering. He later became the dean of the college of engineering for two consecutive terms and was appointed by Mohammad Musaddiq as the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company in 1951 when the Iranian oil industry was nationalized. After the coup against Musaddiq in 1953, Bazargan returned back to the university for teaching. Recognizing the merits of his management skills and success in the operation of the Iranian oil industry with Iranian engineers and without the aid of the foreign companies during 1951-1953, the new government (1941-1979) under the Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980), appointed Bazargan as the director of the water authority in Tehran. During this time, Bazargan succeeded in constructing the network of water distribution through underground pipelines for the city of Tehran. After his monumental success at the National Iranian Oil Company, this was another highly remarkable professional achievement for Bazargan as an engineer and university professor.

The Shah's government organized the first election of the Iranian parliament, or *Majlis*, after the coup of 1953. As the election was illegally carried out with no room for the participation of opposition groups, Bazargan, along with a few others, signed a letter voicing his opposition to the election process. He was then discharged from his position in the Water Authority of Tehran and could no longer serve in the government until after the Iranian revolution, when he became Prime Minister of the provisional government of post-revolutionary Iran. He was also dismissed from his teaching position at the University of Tehran when he protested, along with another ten professors, the decision of the *Majlis* to give up the independent management of the nation's oil industry to a consortium of oil companies lead by the Americans and the British. After he was discharged from his government and university positions, Bazargan established a few successful private engineering firms in Iran while concurrently continuing his political activities.

After the 1953 coup, Bazargan entered into the active politics of opposition to the authoritarian rule of the Shah. He first co-founded the National Resistance Movement, or NRM (*Nehzat-e Muqavamat-e Melli*), in 1953 along with Ayatullah Mahmud Taliqani and Yadullah Sahabi. From 1953 to 1961, leading Islamic intellectuals and liberal minded individuals participated in the activities of NRM. Alongside with the secular nationalists, they also established the short-lived Second National Front which was abandoned in 1960

under enormous pressure from the government. Bazargan had a crucial role in establishing and leading all of these organizations. As NRM and the National Front could not successfully face the challenges of the new political realities in Iranian politics and the demands of the younger generation, Bazargan, Taliqani and Sahabi established a new Islamic political party, the Freedom Movement of Iran, or FMI (*Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran*), in March of 1961. The leadership of the newly established organization was arrested in 1962, tried in a military tribunal and Bazargan was sentenced to 10 years in jail. He was released in 1967 after serving five years of his jail sentence. The new party was shut down by the government in January 1963, and FMI did not have a chance to expand its organization into a nationwide political party. Instead, the party succeeded in bringing Islam to the political scene of the country and opposing the authoritarian rule of the Pahlavi Dynasty. This was a major achievement in a country whose politics was dominated by the government and opposition groups, both who held secular and anti-Islamic political orientations. The Tudeh Party, a satellite of the former Soviet Union, considered Islam the “opium” of the masses and was openly opposing any role for Muslims in opposition politics. From the United States and Europe, the FMI, under the leadership of Ebrahim Yazdi, Mustafa Chamran, Ali Shariati, and Sadiq Qutbzadeh, succeeded in establishing the foundation of a very broad and strong Muslim student opposition movement to the Shah.

Bazargan remained committed to opposing Pahlavi authoritarianism and defending human rights and the rule of law. At the apex of the Shah's oppression in 1977, Bazargan co-founded the Iranian Human Rights Association, or IHRA. Similar to his past efforts to bring together people from different political orientations in opposition to the Shah's rule, he brought together secular nationalists and Islamic liberals under the umbrella of IHRA. He spent years in the Shah's prison, yet remained resolute in his political principles of democratic values in government and society. His reputation as a university professor and highly successful manager did not encourage the regime of the Shah to be less obdurate toward Bazargan. He received harsher punishment each time he was arrested and jailed.

Bazargan also played a crucial role in the process of the Iranian revolution. He went to Paris to meet Ayatullah Khomeini in late 1978 and disagreed with him on the nature and the name of the new republic. Bazargan insisted on the word democratic in the name of the country's post-revolution political system, while Ayatullah Khomeini assured him and the nation that Islam is democratic by nature. He was a crucial leader in holding various forces and groups together in Iran at the time of the revolution. Revolutionaries, and especially Islamic liberals, had a lot of trust and confidence in Bazargan to balance the revolutionary zeal inside the country with his commitment to democratic values and moderation.

He became Prime Minister of the provisional government after the fall of the Shah in February 1979. Bazargan accepted this position because there was no other individual in the rank of the revolutionaries or liberals that could compete with his credentials and the trust that the vast majority of the people and intellectuals bestowed upon him. He formed a cabinet and government that were the true reflection of all involved forces in the Iranian

revolution. He included the Islamic liberals, secular nationalists and progressive clergy in his cabinet and government institutions.

But the politics of post-revolutionary Iran were not in favor of a man who was committed to moderation, reform, the rule of law and democratic values in government. The range of political groups, from the far left to far right and within the Islamist groups and secular forces were contending for political power. Under the leadership of Ayatullah Muhammad Hussein Beheshti, the more political clerics established the Islamic Republican Party (IRP). The party became a major political force around Ayatullah Khomeini and advocated the rule of the clergy, or *Velayat-e Faqih* - the guardianship of the jurist-consult. Although Ayatullah Khomeini was the architect of this theory in Shi'ite Islam, he was not adequately convinced to enact this theory in government after the Iranian revolution. Ayatullah Khomeini ordered the writing of a constitution for the post-revolution republic while he was still in Paris. It was written mostly by Islamic liberals and included no reference to *Valayat-e Faqih* and was approved by Ayatullah Khomeini before he returned to Iran in February 1979. IRP and Ayatullah Beheshti succeed to muster enough forces to impose the rule of the clergy and introduce this theory to the Iranian constitution. Ayatullah Beheshti and his supporters among the clergy filled the first Assembly of Experts for the writing and ratification of the republic's constitution and they overwhelmingly supported and voted for the articles in the constitution that bestowed upon the *Vali-e Faqih* a gargantuan amount of power in the new polity.

Aside from clergy who had the tendency to dominate power, multiple centers of authority soon developed, while no one considered himself or herself bound to the rulings and authority of the central government. There was also a developing discord between the government and the Revolutionary Council, which was mostly dominated by the clergy and their supporters.

Multiple sources of power, clerical populism that was prone to be more responsive to popular temper than anything else, human rights violations and executions without trial by courts with no governmental jurisdiction, and the urge for domination of various institutions of power by clergy all conspired to make his government weak. Bazargan supported organization, the rule of law, democratic values and a central government that could protect citizens against the abuse of power. None was possible or available in a political environment that was at best emotional and irrational in its course and discourse. The last blow to the government came when a group of students, with the support of radical clergy, took over the American Embassy in Tehran in November 1979. Bazargan, who had previously attempted to resign several times, resigned after nine months in office. With his resignation, moderation deserted the politics of Iran. He became the only leader in Iranian post-revolutionary politics that was both whole-heartedly dedicated to the rule of law, ethics in politics and democratic values in government, and was ready to openly voice his repugnance for the abuse of power and disregard for citizens' rights.

Despite this, Bazargan is more recognized in Iran and the Muslim world for his contributions in the arena of reform in the reading and understanding of the Islamic faith, rather than his successful professional life, extraordinary management skills, and

statesmanship. Bazargan's views in this domain could be traced back to the history of the development of Islamic liberal thought in the Muslim world, especially in Iran, from the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher, in *Leviathan*, and John Lock, the English philosopher during the Enlightenment, in his *Second Treaties of Government* in the 17th and the 18th centuries, established the foundation of democratic norms in government through delineating the principles of individual rights, limited government and the concept of social contract. From the end of the 19th century, their Muslim counterparts, partially under the influence of Western thoughts of the Enlightenment, began approaching similar issues by constructing their arguments based upon theological and philosophical reasoning. Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (1838-1897) is one of the first pioneers of Islamic liberalism whose attempts were directed at the purification of religion of both superstitions and interpretations which were not based on human reasoning and not adaptive to modern human needs. In the arena of politics, he devoted his attention to authoritarianism and arbitrary rule in Muslim nations. Others who theologially questioned the legitimacy of autocratic rule and defended human rights in governance belonged to the rank of *ulama* and were from seminary schools in Iran and Iraq. The most recognized and well-known document written in defense of the rule of law and constitutionalism that reflected the liberal thoughts in Islam was by Ayatullah Mirza Hussein Na'ini. In his monumental work, *Tanbih al-Ummah va Tanzih al-Millah: ya Hukumat dar Nazar-i Islam (Exhortation of the Faithful and Purification of the Nation; or Islam's Perspective on the Nature of Government)*, Na'ini defended the rule of law, freedom, and the right of political participation, and denounced arbitrary rule and authoritarianism (*Intibdad*). This was a total break with the theology of the majority of *ulama* in both Shi'ite and Sunni Islam who, for the sake of security and relative welfare of the community, preferred collaborating with the courts which were under arbitrary rule. Then, in the 20th century, concepts such as Rights (*Huquq*), Progress (*Taraqqi*), Freedom (*Hurriyat-Azadi*), Prosperity (*Sa'adat*), Equality (*Mosavat*), Dignity (*Sharaf*), Justice (*Idalat*), Authoritarianism (*Istibdad*), Arbitrary Rule (*Hukumat-e Mutlaqeh*), Corruption (*Fisad*), and Reform (*Islah*) entered into the lexicon of political discourse and reform in the nation's institutions of government.

Bazargan was an active observant of this history in which new paradigms in the arenas of politics and religion were flourishing and evolving. After his education was completed, Bazargan returned home from France where the Iranian political elite were pushing for modernization of Iran in the tradition and experience of Western societies. The intellectual elite were mostly secular with a negative slant on religion. The majority in the educated strata of Iranian society had developed a total disconnect with religion, and Marxism was considered by many as a progressive and scientific alternative for the restoration and modernization of society. The clergy were completely divorced from the reality of the socio-political and cultural changes in the Iranian society, and, as a result, had lost their audience in intellectual circles and the articulate sector of the society. For many of the intellectuals, modernization of the country was priority, irrespective of the pervasive authoritarianism in government. The vast majority of intellectuals were not capable of establishing a link between authoritarian rule and lack of progress in developing the nation's economy and society. They looked at the piecemeal

modernization projects that the Pahlavis had pursued, especially those that were relatively successful. Reza Shah established security, modern education and infrastructure in the country. It was an achievement, but was not commensurate to the potential and needs of a resourceful country.

Bazargan, then, faced challenges from three segments of Iranian society: the political elite and the Pahlavis, the secular intellectuals and Marxists, and the clergy and traditional segments of the society. From 1941-1953, alongside with Yadullah Sahabi, Ayatullah Mahmud Taliqani, Muhammad Taqi Shariati (the father of Ali Shariati), he organized and established a number of civic associations with Islamic orientations, including the Islamic Society (*Kanun-e Islami*), the Islamic Engineering Association (*Anjoman-e Islami-e Muhandesin*), and the Muslim Students Association (*Anjoman-e Islami-e Daneshjuyan*). These organizations continued their activities through the unrest during the years of oil nationalization. Two of these organizations, the Islamic Engineering Association and the Muslim Student Association, remain active even today in Iran. The Muslim Student Association expanded in the universities of Iran, published a regular monthly publication (*Gang-e Shaygan*), and organized regular lectures in Tehran. Bazargan had a number of publications in this period, including *Religion in Europe (Mazhab dar Uropa)*, *Purification in Islam (Mutahharat dar Islam)*, *Pragmatism in Islam*, *Work in Islam (Kar dar Islam)*, *the Paved Path (Rah-e Tay Shodeh)*, *the Source of Independence (Sarcheshmeh-e Esteqlal)*, *the Secret behind Un-Development in the Muslim World (Serr-e Aqab Oftadegi-e Melal-e Musalman)*, *Islam or Communism* and *the Youths' Play with Politics (Bazi-e Javanan ba Siasat)*.

In *Religion in Europe*, he tries to convince Iranian intellectuals that Europe respected religion and European progress was not related to rejecting the foundations of faith in society. Contrary to the observations of Sayyid Qutb in *Milestone* and other essays, Bazargan was not at all pessimistic about the West. He tried wholeheartedly to pinpoint positive aspects of Western life. Bazargan argues in this essay that, "Contrary to what some modernists (*Tajadudtalaban*) have propagated in recent years, the twentieth century has not utilized religion as a set of traditional and superstitious rules and regulations in life. In the years that Iran launched its campaign of modernization, these modernists prescribed that faith in God is against progress." (*Religion in Europe*, 15) He is very critical of secular intellectuals who have tried to negate religion and its positive impact on Iranian society. In *Pragmatism in Islam*, he argues, "Qur'an and Islam are completely pragmatic. They expect work and actions that are positive and bring fruitful results for human welfare." (*Pragmatism*, 45) His ideas in this context are not far from the ideas of William James in *Pragmatism*. In *Work in Islam*, he tries to bring the ethics of hard work to society and insists on the notion that only hard work can change society and bring prosperity to the community. In *Islam or Communism*, he tries to rebuff the concepts of a classless society and the notion of equality in a communist society and argues that these societies are based on economic exploitation of the working class and political domination of a special group over the rest of the society. In the *Source of Independence* and the *Secret Behind Un-Development in the Muslim world*, Bazargan directs the attention of his audience to four maladies in the Muslim world: lack of innovation and intellectual independence, obliteration of productive capacity, lack of active participation

in global commerce, and finally lack of the practice of true faith. In the last point, he is not critical of unfaithful seculars, but of their attempts to invalidate faith. He is also critical of the clerical establishment who were not up to the task of purifying the faith from superstitions that prevented its simple and true practice. In line with his argument in *Work in Islam*, he encourages the younger generation in *Youths' Play with Politics* to be pragmatic and educate themselves before participating in the politics of the 1940's and 50's.

Between 1953 and 1961, the autocratic rule of the post-coup government dominated Iranian society and gradually stabilized its political grip on power. With oil revenues increasing ten-fold from the beginning of this period, the Shah began to invest in the infrastructure of the country. But this effort brought with it rampant corruption and mismanagement. The Shah was more resolute than ever in modernizing Iran according to Western models, and more palpably neglected the persisting elements of Iranian culture that emphasized a native approach and nationalism. In the *Mission for My Nation* (p.335), Shah later discussed that freedom and political independence is meaningless for a nation that is not economically developed. This was the Shah's justification to the end of his reign in obstructing any path toward political development and participation in the country's politics. During these years, his hold on power gradually suffocated embryonic and weak civil societies and the opposition movements to his rule.

The National Resistance Movement and the Second National Front were shut down under government suppression. Bazargan was arrested in 1955 and 1957, when he spent five and eight months in prison, respectively. In this period and in the political scene of opposition, he was relentless in his advocacy of the rule of law, constitutional government and independence in foreign policy. His emphasis on independence was in response to the Shah's foreign support and suppression of the forces of nationalism in Iran. He wrote a few books during this period, and among them were *Love and Faith: the Thermodynamics of Human Beings* (*Eshq va Parastesh ya Thermodynamism-e Ensan*), *Needs of the Day* (*Ehtiaj-e Rooz*), and *Faith in God and the Contemporary Ideologies* (*Khoda Partasti va Afkar-e Rooz*). Similar to his argument in *Paved Path*, Bazargan attempts to delineate in these books the notion that religions develop as human beings go through an evolutionary process. Human beings, he argues, were worshipping idols in the beginning, and different prophets came to them with new and evolving revelations to usher truth and faith in various communities. The argument leads to the conclusion that faith is an essential component of human life. In *Love and Faith*, he discusses the role of the individual in a society that is run by the rule of law. To convince his audience that societies need laws that bind all its members together irrespective of their positions, he employs the metaphor of a machine that works when all of its components work together in a systemic way. That systemic approach to society was an intentional response by Bazargan to the arbitrary rule of the Shah. He intended to convey that authoritarianism breaks the law and contributes to the malfunction and breakdown of society.

Bazargan and his colleagues established the Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI) in March 1961. During this period, the Kennedy administration had put pressure on the Shah to

open the politics of Iran. Nineteen months later, at the beginning of 1963, he and other leaders of FMI were arrested. Before the arrest, Bazargan published more than twenty books, each ranging from thirty to a few hundred pages. Among these books, one of the most famous theoretical works was *Political Struggle and Religious Struggle (Mobarezat-e Siasi va Mobarezat-e Mazhabi)*. In this book, he defines the boundaries of national and religious identities. He believes that religious identity is a crucial part of national identity. He traces back the history of many conflicts and struggles in the Middle East and Iran and pinpoints the role of religion in each. He specifically ascertains the positive role that Islam and the progressive clergy played in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran in 1905-11.

Another very famous publication of this time was Bazargan's defense in the Shah's court. The 350 page defense document, *Modafe'at dar Dadgah-e Gheir-e Saleh-e Tajdid Nazar-e Nezami*, which was first published outside the country in the 1960's and has been published several times since then, was aimed at articulating two distinct arguments. The first was to defend the legitimacy of his political party, FMI, which took up Islam as the ideology of opposition to despotism. From early on, the Shah was unwavering in dishonoring any opposition social movement to his rule that had religious roots. He called Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters in the 1960's the black bashful (*Erteja-i Siah*), and later he called the Muslims who took arms against his regime in a guerrilla war in the 1970's the Islamic-Marxists. He considered himself the shadow of God (*Zellullah*) on Earth and did not want that legitimacy questioned or that perception taken away in a society wherein religion was a fundamental part of the social composition. The second point was to present an argument in defense of the rule of law and democratic norms in government and in rejection of the existing arbitrary rule (*Istibdad*) and authoritarianism. The latter part of his defense was not allowed by the judge to be read in court. To show that FMI leaders had a fair trial, the court allowed a military lawyer to represent them. However, the travesty of justice was completed when, after they were charged with treason and imprisoned; their lawyer was also arrested and convicted on similar charges.

In the argument against authoritarianism, Bazargan raised three lines of reasoning. First, authoritarianism contributes to instability in society and diminution of the growth of a unique national and historical political culture. Second, authoritarianism promotes corruption and lack of faith in one's own God-given potentials. Third, authoritarianism causes social discord, irresponsibility, and lack of progress in developing viable economies and social institutions. Authoritarianism, he argues, "does not have any support within the society, and, as we have observed in the history of our nation, it is exposed to instability and riddance." (*Modafe'at*, 242) He further extends his argument to the incompatibility of faith and authoritarianism. "Religion and authoritarianism cannot coexist. The conflict between the two has existed in the past and it will persist in the future. God does not allow absolute rule and the people's submission to such rule, and absolute rulers are not satisfied with anything short of complete submission of their subjects to their rules." This stand stayed with Bazargan to the end of his life. He was not only against authoritarianism for political reasons, but also for religious convictions. That religious conviction aided Bazargan after the Iranian revolution in opposing authoritarianism under the name of faith and the mantle of religion.

Bazargan was convicted in court and spent five years in jail and exile(? Not true). When he was released in 1967, he began to publish his writings and wrote a number of new books. Between 1967 and 1979, the year of the Iranian revolution, he published fourteen new books. In the book *Mission and Ideology (Be'that va Ideology)*, Bazargan tries to introduce Islam as a dynamic faith that can play the role of a viable ideology for change. In *Is Marxism Scientific? (Elmi Bodan-e Marxism)*, Bazargan argues that Marxism as an ideology is more a utopian ideal rather than a well-grounded scientific approach to politics and society. These were the years that the Marxist elements within the Mujahidin Khalq Organization (the People's Mujahidin Organization) eliminated their Muslim members through bloody confrontations. One of the most famous works of Bazargan, *the Evolution of the Qur'an (Seir-e Tahavvol-e Qur'an)* was completed and published in this period. Resorting to his engineering background and training, Bazargan tries to prove, in this three-volume book, that the Qur'an followed an evolutionary process in the history of its revelation. The book has been recognized as one of the best studies on the Qur'an in the Muslim world. Ali Shariati (1933-1977), the Iranian-Islamic reformer, refers to this book in a later letter to Bazargan as elevating his faith in the scientific methodology of the Qur'an.

With the Iranian revolution in February 1979, Bazargan was destined to play yet another role as statesman in the government of the country. Bazargan was chosen by Ayatullah Khomeini to lead the provisional government of Iran, as no one else was bestowed with the high level of respect and trust of the clergy and the intellectuals. He was also a man with enormous skills in management and integrity in his personal conduct. He was a committed liberal who had fully devoted himself to democratic ideals in government, which were the credentials needed in a revolution that was carried out under the slogan of independence (*Istiqlal*), freedom (*Azadi*), and an Islamic republic (*Jomhour-e Islami*). His appointment satisfied most of the Islamic and secular liberals who devoted time and energy to the revolution. But these characteristics of Bazargan later became a justification for his foes among the puritanical clergy and the proponents of radicalism to criticize his views and policies, to oppose his government, and to ostracize his moderation and gradualism.

After nine months as head of government, he relinquished the position as the revolution took a different course. He was for moderation, but the radicalism of post-revolutionary politics was against any moderate steps in domestic and foreign policies of the country. He was for gradual change in society and economy, while his foes were for abrupt change and radical measures. He (and his foreign minister Dr Ebrahim Yazdi) was for a foreign policy that was non-confrontational, while his foes were for a confrontational and unrepressed foreign policy. He was for the rule of law, while his opponents in the clerical establishment were for the rule of *Velayat-e Faqih* and the absolute power of the clergy. He was for human rights, while his opponents were for the theological interpretation of rights that were limited to the perceptual understanding of those clergy who were approaching these issues in the arena of government for the first time in their lives. Those clergy who were in charge of the judiciary did not have a keen understanding of how judicial reviews and verdicts should be dispensed in a society that carried out a revolution

under the motto of justice and human rights. Finally, he was for democratic rule and formal politics within the framework of a viable constitution that insisted on accountability and responsibility, while his clerical foes neither valued democratic rule nor formal politics with ingrained mechanisms for checks and balances.

His political views on issues pertaining government policies and individual rights in the post-revolutionary politics of the nation placed him and his party in a precarious position with respect to the ruling clergy. He was elected to the Iranian parliament (*Majlis*) representing Tehran in 1980 with a sizable vote. He used that platform to challenge the government and galvanize support for moderation and rationalization in Iranian politics. He showed more interest in forcefully voicing his opposition to the politics of the ruling clergy in four specific areas: challenging the clergy on their reading and interpretation of faith that had an impact on government, politics and policies; the war with Iraq; human rights; and freedom.

In the books *Rediscovery of Values (Bazyabi-e Arzeshha)*, *Return to the Qur'an (Bazgasht-e be Qur'an)* and *The Misled (Gomrahan)*, Bazargan tries to introduce his audience to the misleading interpretation and the fallacious reading of the faith that the ruling clergy offered in order to justify their control of power and restrictions on freedom and human rights. In *Religion and Liberty (Din va Azadi)*, which is part of the book *Rediscovery of Values*, Bazargan forcefully argues that Islam unequivocally supports human liberties and rights in society and its affairs. In the book *The Misled*, Bazargan takes the example of medieval Europe to prove how wrong the Church was in limiting and dismantling liberties and imposing its unquestionable and absolute power over society. In *Religion and Liberty*, he begins, "Now, the question is whether all God's emissaries, particularly the founders of Islam, approved of the medieval Christian practices. Are religion and freedom essentially mutually exclusive? Were God's prophets instructed to instigate bloody revolutions on Earth, beheading skeptics, destroying anti-revolutionaries, sowing the seeds of hatred and discord, and swaddling or tying down the youths in the school yard of religion? The Qur'an explains the mission of the prophets both directly, through commandment, and indirectly, through the explication of the general divine plan of creation. What we learn from the story of the prophets and our own slogan 'There is no god but God,' is that the mission of the prophets has been to liberate human beings, not to enslave them." (Kurzman 1998, p. 78) In another part of this essay, he extends his argument to the meaning of the word freedom. "Let me reiterate: freedom means freedom to oppose, criticize, and object - even if criticism is untrue and unjust. Where there is freedom there are opponents and currents that disturb routine stability and normalcy. Otherwise, freedom would be meaningless and useless. This notion of freedom is hard for many zealots - if sincere - people to digest, as they consider such freedom unwise and deleterious to the survival of the nascent Islamic Republic (of Iran). They may even consider it a blunder on their part to have allowed this notion of freedom to prevail in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, omniscient, compassionate God has not only sanctioned freedom in many affairs, he has made it very foundation of survival and revival in the world." This theology was powerful and unique in a society in which a class of people, under the mantle of religion and religious authority, attached to their position a sufficient amount of sacredness that put them above

the law and beyond criticism. Clergy were immune to criticism in a culture that trusted them to God and infallible imams, and that was exactly what the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* was poised to institute - the God-given mission of the clergy to establish an "Islamic Government."

In the books *The Iranian Revolution in Two Phases(Directins) (Enqelab-e Iran dar do Harekat)*, *The Problems and Difficulties of the First Year of the Revolution (Moshgelat va Masel-e Avvalin Sal-e Enqela)*, and *The Revolutionary Council and the Provisional Government (Shaowray-e Enqelab va Dowlat-e Movaqqat)* he describes the political problems that the country faced as a result of the ruling clergy's domination of power. In *The Iranian Revolution in Two Phases*, Bazargan sees the roots and ills of politics of Iran in Ayatullah Khomeini's diversion from the pre-revolution slogan of and commitment to unity and equality. He argues that before the revolution, Ayatullah Khomeini insisted on the slogan of *Hameh ba Ham* (all together in unity) while after the revolution, the slogan was changed into *Hameh ba Man* (all with me). This, according to Bazargan, was the root cause of many problems that the nation was facing and the ensuing alienation of a substantial portion of the society from participation in the nation's politics. In 1986, FMI wrote a book (*Bahthi Piramoon-e Velayat-e Mutlaqeh-e Faqih- A Diascussion on the Absolute Authority of Faqih*) questioning the doctrinal legitimacy of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*. Bazargan wrote chapters of this book in which he based his argument mostly on religious documents, prophetic tradition, and previous debates on the issue of faith and governance among the theologians of Shi'ite Islam. The significance of this book was that it was published when the architect of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, Ayatullah Khomeini, was still alive. The well-articulated and convincing discussion of the book, in addition to Bazargan's respect in Iran, discouraged the authorities to take drastic measures against him and his party except in banning the publication of the book. In all of these books, he is forceful and relentless in his criticism of the policies that brought disunity, discord, radicalism, and alienation to the politics of the nation.

Bazargan and his party, FMI, stood against the odds and the emotions that the patrons of the continuation of the war with Iraq instigated inside the country. While they were advocates of the defense of the country against the invading forces of Saddam Hussein, they opposed the continuation of the war after 1982, when the Iranian army had successfully expelled the Iraqi invading forces from Iranian soil in Khorramshahr. They argued that aggression should not be a response to the aggression of the invading Iraq. The moral dilemma for FMI was the fighting of two Muslim nations and the killing of thousands in the battlegrounds. The questions of the justice of the war and the justice in the war were both consequential to Bazargan and his party in articulating their opposition to the continuation of the war. However, FMI was not only voicing its opposition to the continuation of the war, but to many policies of governments that restricted freedoms and ignored human rights under the emotional climate that the patrons of war had created. The party and his leadership paid heavy prices for these positions by the government imposing restrictions on their activities, arresting and jailing its members in the leadership, abducting its leaders, and setting on fire the residences of a few among its leadership.

In 1992, three years before his death, Bazargan expressed a new theological argument and reading of the faith that had been at the heart of the debate of Muslim thinkers concerning the ultimate mission of the Islamic faith. In the article, *The Purpose of the Mission of the Prophets (Hadafe Ba'that-e Anbia)*, he concluded that the prophetic mission was only to educate people about God and to inform them about the hereafter. He questioned the legitimacy of arguments that accommodated any role for Islam in establishing governments. Bazargan argued that Islam does not prescribe any specific kind of government or politics. We as Muslims, he contended, should configure what kind of government is upright, worthy, and more prone to serve the interests of the community. In other words, he questioned and disposed of the notion of "Islamic Government." In another small book, *The Kingdom of God (Padeshahi-e Khoda)*, written after the revolution, Bazargan sees the kingdom of people at the heart of the kingdom of God when it comes to government and the affairs of the Muslim community. The reason for this rejection is abundantly clear for Bazargan and the proponents of the liberal Islam. The term "Islamic government" in the current dominant Shi'ite theology of Ayatullah Khomeini means the government by the jurist-consult, *Faqih*, and a hierarchy of power that suspects democratic governance. The problem with Ayatullah Khomeini's theology was that he advocated this theory as an essential and unquestionable component of the faith. In the real world of Shi'ite theology, that was an innovative theory that was based on a specific reading of the tradition (*Sunnah*) and did not have any direct relation to any understood principles in Islam. Ayatullah Khomeini's attempt in this regard was mostly directed at establishing a hierarchy of power around the clergy within the world of Shi'ite Islam that would control and dictate conventions in politics, society, and faith.

Both Bazargan and (Yazdi as the present Secretary General of the) FMI remained, until the present, a viable force in Iranian politics. Bazargan's views and teachings were not appreciated by the nation in the days during which emotions and radicalism remained rampant and dominant in the nation's politics. With the war with Iraq ending in 1988, a new rationale and reality set in the society that brought with it a different and new discourse in national politics. In the 1990's, most of Bazargan's critics became apologetic to him and admired the man for his conviction to democratic norms, commitment to moderation, and especially for his faithfulness to ethics in politics and government. The generation that instigated radicalism, took the American embassy, established the foundation of the information ministry with austere rules to protect the revolution, was in favor of clerical absolutism, and was indifferent to and effortless in upholding democratic norms in politics, divorced itself from its past and advocated reform and democratic government. Khatami, the country's president from 1997 to 2005, came to power as this new force mobilized for reform. Much of the seeds of this reform movement were planted by the legendary reformer, Mehdi Bazargan. His life-long struggle, over a span of half of a century for purification of religion, establishment of democratic rule, respect of human rights, and approbation of ethics in politics, began to show its impact in Iranian politics. In Iran today, even his foes cannot question his integrity, his piety, and devotion to the interests of his nation. His impact on the new discourse and debate over democratic rule is more evident and perceptible than ever. Although radicalism still holds sway in Iranian politics, its time has passed as it failed both in theory and practice to accomplish viable politics and economies.

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