

Only Qur'anic Morality Can Put Right the Chaos Caused by Postmodernism

H A R U N Y A H Y A

Postmodernism has become one of the most discussed concepts of recent times. Even though thinkers and scholars are not of one mind on the content of this concept, we can look at postmodernism in the light of the generally accepted definition "The stage after modernism, a trend that emerged in reaction to modernism."

The kind of understanding that postmodernism proposes in such fields as art, science and philosophy is the subject of considerable debate. What really needs to be considered, however, is the kind of social structure that the trend foresees. Consideration of the climate of chaos, confusion and uncertainty in present-day societies is sufficient to understand that. Postmodernism is one of the most important trends shaping our world today, and with its values and views is one that constantly drags people towards chaos and difficulties. Even if postmodernism is regarded as a criticism of modern culture, which has left mankind facing a huge impasse, it is actually rising to prominence on the back of the spiritual emptiness and collapse caused by the modern age. Unless that spiritual emptiness is filled, then criticism of the contradictions within the current system is meaningless. We need, therefore, first of all to consider the concept of "modernism" that this system is built on.

Modernism is generally regarded as largely equivalent to the civilisation built by the West and the values of that civilisation. It is a system that was born in Europe, in other words the Western world, comprising those ideologies and movements that emerged with the Enlightenment. The main point that makes this system that developed and strengthened during the 19th century "modern" is that with that system Europe abandoned everything to do with its history and traditions and came under the influence of a new world view. So what kind of world view was that, and what did it change in the Western world? The answers to these questions will help us understand the ideological roots of postmodernism.

The Collapse of Modernism, or Materialism

As we touched on above, the process today known as modernism began with the Enlightenment, which fundamentally altered the way Western societies looked at life. Until that time, religion had been the basic principle of the life of societies. Answers to the questions of what man was, the meaning of life, how man could find the truth, and what was right and wrong were all supplied in the manner taught by God. Religious morality was the fundamental element that ordered the life of society. Yet with the Enlightenment unwelcome changes began to appear. The starting point for that change was the materialist approach. With the spread of philosophies of anti-religious thinkers and the political changes these brought with them, Western societies began to break with religious morality. Materialist and "human-centred" ideologies and movements began to indoctrinate people with the idea that there was nothing beyond the life of this world, that man was responsible to no-one but himself, and even that life and the entire universe were the result of blind chance. Materialist and atheist theoreticians emerged one by one in a wide range of fields, such as science, philosophy, sociology, economics and psychology.

Materialists such as Diderot and Baron d'Holbach, the forerunners who emerged in the 18th century, suggested that the universe was a collection of matter that had existed forever, and that there was no world of existence outside matter. In the 19th century, materialism and atheism spread further. Thinkers such as Feuerbach, Marx, Engels, Nietzsche, Durkheim and Freud applied atheist thought to different spheres of science and philosophy.

The greatest support for materialism came from Charles Darwin, who rejected creation and replaced it with the theory of evolution. Darwinism supplied a so-called scientific answer to the question of how "living things and man had come to be," which atheists had been unable to answer for centuries. He claimed that there was a mechanism in nature that gave life to inanimate matter and subsequently formed billions of different living species from it. A great many people were taken in by this.

At the end of the 19th century, atheists came up with a "world view" that they thought explained everything. They denied that the universe had been created, suggesting instead that it had existed for ever and therefore had no beginning. They proposed that the order and equilibrium in the universe had come about by chance, and that there was no purpose behind the cosmos. They believed that Darwinism had answered the question of how living things and man had come into existence. They thought that history and sociology had been explained by Marx

and Durkheim, and psychology by Freud. Yet all of these views were eventually torn down by scientific, political and social developments in the 20th century. Discoveries and findings in a wide range of different spheres, from astronomy to biology and from psychology to social ethics radically tore down all atheist assumptions.

One of the greatest proofs of the defeats suffered by materialist ideologues was the disaster suffered in the social arena. Those ideologies that developed from materialism, headed by fascism and communism, proved to be destructive forces. The concept of morality underwent total degeneration: Together with the dominance of the materialist worldview, fidelity, loyalty, sacrifice, honour and honesty ceased to be important virtues. The fact that moral values in society were no longer regarded as being of any worth resulted in such virtues being regarded as a kind of "naivety." Selfishness, ruthlessness, injustice and unfairness came to be regarded as the norm. In this social Darwinist climate in which helping others had been replaced by a common desire to earn and consume more, oppressing the weak, ruthlessly exploiting the unfortunate, and excluding the handicapped, the elderly and the needy from society all began to be perceived as quite normal.

One of the major deceptions of the ideologies that emerged together with modernism was the idea that there could be morality without religion, and that people could display proper morality under those conditions. That is a terrible deception. There can be no love, respect or proper morality where there is no religion, no fear of God, and no belief that people will have to account for their deeds in the hereafter. There can be no love of man, friendship or proper morality where there is no religious morality. Where there is no religious morality, there is no fear of God. That, in turn, means that people will aim only to satisfy their own wishes and desires, and that they will recognise no bounds or limits when anything conflicts with their own interests. Such people will only display love of their fellow man, loyalty or sacrifice as long as those are in their own interests. They will love those people who can be of use to them, but will have no hesitation in oppressing or mistreating those they think cannot be of use to them. Their justice will only apply to their own advantage, and there will be no need for them to act fairly towards those who cannot be of benefit to them. They will help their fellow man if they think it will be to their advantage. If not, then the starving, the oppressed and the ruthlessly slaughtered will mean nothing to them. Such things will stir no pangs of conscience in them. That is because people who do not live by the morality of religion act according to their own selfish desires instead of according to their consciences.

History is full of examples that demonstrate how once the proper behaviour that religion instils in the human soul and God's guiding rules cease to apply, then true morality can in no way be established: The way that those who staged the 1789 French Revolution in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity sent tens of thousands of innocent people to the guillotine, for example, or the way that communist regimes that emerged in the name of so-called social justice murdered millions of people.

Postmodernism is an idea that recognises the emptiness of the values, criteria and aims of modernism. Yet although it sets out from that correct starting point, it reaches erroneous conclusions, such as that there are no absolute values, criteria or aims. The greatest error of postmodernism is "relativism," in other words, the mistaken idea that all values and beliefs change from person to person, and they are all relative ideas containing no absolute truth.

Whereas the fact is that there is one very important truth that does state the purpose behind human existence: God created man, and man owes his whole life to God. Modernism either ignored or rejected that truth. Postmodernism, on the other hand, portrays that truth as a "relative idea," which is actually a similar deception.

For that reason, postmodernism offers mankind no solution. It is another error that leads mankind to ideological chaos, in which man has no absolute values or aims. It is essential to grasp the purpose behind human existence in order to free ourselves from both that error, and from the error of modernism, which is still a powerful influence today.

Postmodernism is also Collapsing

All of these experiences over the last two centuries, the moral bankruptcy experienced by most of mankind today and the disasters that led to it, have spelt the end of both modernism and all the atheist movements that emerged after it. Today, modernism and atheism, and thus the ideologies built on them, are undergoing a rapid collapse. Advances in various different spheres, such as cosmology, biology, psychology, medicine and sociology have accelerated the collapse of materialism and atheism. In his book *God: The Evidence, The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World*, the American writer Patrick Glynn makes this comment on this collapse and process of change:

The past two decades of research have overturned nearly all the important assumptions and predictions of an earlier generation of modern secular and atheist thinkers relating to the issue of God. Modern thinkers assumed that science would reveal the universe to be ever more and mechanical; instead it has discovered unexpected new layers of intricate order that bespeak an almost imaginably vast master design. Modern psychologists

predicted that religion would be exposed as a neurosis and outgrown; instead, religious commitment has been shown empirically to be a vital component of basic mental health....

Few people seem to realize this, but by now it should be clear: Over the course of a century in the great debate between science and faith, the tables have completely turned. In the wake of Darwin, atheists and agnostics like Huxley and Russell could point to what appeared to be a solid body of testable theory purportedly showing life to be accidental and the universe radically contingent. Many scientists and intellectuals continue to cleave to this worldview. But they are increasingly pressed to almost absurd lengths to defend it. Today the concrete data point strongly in the direction of the God hypothesis. (p. 19-20, 53)

The defeat the idea of materialism suffered on scientific grounds is an important sign that the post-modern world view fostered by materialism is about to vanish.

Some say that postmodernism identifies and criticises the errors and shortcomings of the present system and therefore works for the good of humanity. It is true that it has such a critical aspect. There is an important truth disregarded by the proponents of this claim, however. The important thing is not to criticise these shortcomings, but to offer a solution to deal with them. Postmodernism is unable to offer any solutions to these problems because it derives its power from the same ideological sources. It should not be forgotten that the points criticised by postmodernism are the result of a modern culture far removed from religious values. And postmodernism is very much part of the problem with the godless culture it endorses.

Today, many countries in the world suffer the consequences of a disregard of the values of religion. A culture of violence prevails in many societies caused by a godless way of life. This culture drives people to chaos, depression, poverty, darkness, war, struggle and exploitation. The system shaped by this culture has now been unmasked with all its contradictions. Scholars and sociologists maintain that only an approach from outside this culture can eradicate the chaos brought about by post-modern culture.

This approach is the values of the true religion God commands in the Qur'an. The values of the Qur'an offer the most perfect and fundamental solutions to various social problems, such as injustice, conflict, inequality, disputes, fighting, unfairness, extravagance, anxiety, bigotry, oppression, and violence in such a way as to make peoples' lives most happy, secure and easy. The Qur'an has also outlined the ideal behaviour and moral code to be displayed in every situation. A society formed by people who live by this superior ethical model will, surely, embody the ideal system longed for years.

Solution: The Values of the Qur'an

Without the guidance of the true religion, people can never find viable and satisfactory solutions to either social or personal problems. The fact that those societies which led a life distant from the values of religion had numberless unsolved problems is evidence of this. As long as man turns his back on the values of religion, he will have to pay the price of this with various quandaries and problems to which neither he nor society as a whole will ever be able to find solutions.

The solution is obvious: To turn to God, the Creator of everything, and to attain true bliss by living by the religion He chose for us. God informed us that the way of salvation in this world is to turn to religion. He gave His sincere servants the good tidings that they will not face fear in this world so long as they observe the values of religion. The salvation of humanity is then to turn to Islam, as our Lord has commanded in the Qur'an:

O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam). Do not follow in the footsteps of Satan. He is an outright enemy to you. (Surat al-Baqara: 208)

We must not forget that this important period in history imposes many important responsibilities on Muslims. Fate works in such a way that humanity is getting rid of the materialist delusion and turning to God and religion. This naturally brings with it the question of "which religion." This situation shows that Muslims have to make a serious effort to present Islam to the entire world and to represent it in the best way possible. It is indeed a very important duty to present Islam, the Religion of Truth, in a correct way, in a period when communication tools such as the Internet, television and the press are spreading so rapidly and the entire world is drawing closer together.