

## [PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

[Translator's notes appear in square brackets.]

[Personal information has been **redacted**.]

[The excerpt below is from the section of the article that pertains to the Baha'i Faith]

[Adapted from website:] Radio Farda

[Date:] 10 Mehr 1387 [1 October 2008]

Fazel Meybodi: The Institution of Politics Must Be Separate From the Institution of Religion

Linking day-to-day government decisions with occult sources and their impact on political equations has provoked numerous reactions, especially during the Ninth Government.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of the Republic of Iran, has repeatedly linked the actions of the Ninth Government with “divine management” during his tenure. In a speech in Mashhad on Nowruz 1387 [20 March 2008], he said, “In these two-and-a-half years, of course, throughout the revolution, let me tell you that we see the hand of this divine management every day. God Himself is the witness that we see, and I do not exaggerate, I am not telling you what I have not seen.”

This attitude has been repeatedly criticized by various religious and political figures, in both active Iranian political factions, including the prominent fundamentalist Nateq-Nouri, the well-known fundamentalist cleric who has repeatedly warned of the dangers of superstition.

Although Nateq-Nouri did not mention the president or any other prominent leaders during his speech, he emphasized that, “If all [the country's] affairs are undertaken in the name of the Imam of the Time [the Twelfth Imam], when He would reveal Himself, people will say that he will probably manage the affairs in the same way.”

Radio Farda spoke about this outlook with Mohammad Taghi Fazel Meybodi, a member of the Central Assembly of the Qom Seminary Scholars and Researchers and a professor at the Mofid College in Qom, which ranks him as an ayatollah in terms of seminary rank.

Radio Farda: What effect can the involvement of absentee religious leaders in the daily decisions of the government have on the political behaviour of the rulers and the relationship of the centres of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran—for example, the relationships between the government and the leader, the government and the parliament and the government and the people?

Fazel Meybodi: A government that connects itself to the religious beliefs of the people has an impact on a large part of the religious community and may have a positive impact. But this influence impacts negatively on thinkers, the elites of society, those who have accurate religious information, and the seminary and academic segments.

Some fundamentalist figures believe that the involvement of certain religious groups in political decision-making is not only criticized by the elite, but also does not have a positive effect on ordinary people.

We have always said that the policy of government institutions must be completely separated from the institutions of religious belief. The government must do its job and the religious institutions must do their job. It does not work for the government to interfere in religious institutions in various ways, because any problem that arises in society, such as poverty, addiction, economic disease, political disease and foreign policy failure, will be considered as religious shortcomings.

As a result, the general public may not have a good impression of religion and may think that they raised issues in the name of religion, but they could not solve them, so religion is incapable of solving the problems.

Currently, the concern of many people in the society is to know why everything is connected to the Imam of the Time [the Twelfth Imam].

[Radio Farda:]: Is non-interference of the political institutions in the religious institutions only important when the president and members of the government are not clerics? Or even if the clergy are statesmen, should they refrain from merging the political institutions with the religious institutions?

[Fazel Meybodi:]: It makes no difference; it is a fundamental and a theoretical discussion. The government means politics, and politics is a completely rational, customary and empirical matter.

In my opinion, government's policymaking is not a religious matter and has no religious basis. It is the duty of the government in the religious and Islamic society not to do anything contrary to the text of the Quran and hadith [tradition], but it is wrong for the government to want to pursue its policies with a specific religious interpretation.

[Radio Farda:]: What do you think are the intellectual roots and motivations for engaging in such behaviours?

[Fazel Meybodi:]: The issue of Mahdism in politics is not unique to Iran, but has also existed in Sudan and African countries.

We have always said that government policy must be completely separated from the institutions of religious belief. The government must do its job, and the religious institutions must do their job.

Mohammad Taqi Fazel Meybodi

Many people want to advance their policies, both in the form of Mahdism and the Resurrection, but this policy has failed throughout history.

Belief in the Imam of the Time is a serious issue among Muslims, especially Shiites, but the government's attempt to link its policies to Mahdism in order to fit in with the masses will ultimately lead to failure, and it causes heavy blows to religion.

[Radio Farda:] Some behaviour suggests that to some extent, the debate has gone beyond beliefs. For example, for the apocalypse [return of the Twelfth Imam], they appoint the time and say it is near or it will be until the end of this century. Or the management of occult leaders is seen in some works. What do you think about this issue?

[Fazel Meybodi:] I am not optimistic and believe that these issues are just for making a business.

Fortunately, the authorities and scientific experts of our society have stood firm against these dealers, and recently very good positions have been taken, particularly by Mr. Nateq-Nouri in his Ramadan speech.

[Radio Farda:] In his speech this year, Mr. Nateq-Nouri said, “Learn the path of the Imams from the clerics.” Is this a sign that the clergy are in danger?

[Fazel Meybodi:] The clergy not only feel threatened but also feel the religious misinterpretation. This means that beliefs that have no religious or scientific basis may be created for people. The issue of the second Jamkaran raised by Mr. Nateq-Nouri is correct, because Jamkaran was not one of the Shiite beliefs. In my opinion, even the first Jamkaran is not among the Shiite beliefs and is only a place of worship.

[Radio Farda:] Mr. Fazel Meybodi! Does this mean that the clergy feel in danger of being eliminated and that apocalyptic currents are bypassing the clergy?

[Fazel Meybodi:] Such a sense of danger does not yet exist, and the clergy will not be removed from the public life with these issues. Some may just want to remove the clergy from the political scene. The Shiite clergy has a strong influence and base among the masses of the people and cannot be eliminated with these things.

These apocalyptic policies are the ones that will soon fail in our country.

[Radio Farda:] The fact is that if all the decisions of the government and ruling power are connected to the “occult source” and approved by “the unseen source” [the Twelfth Imam], the philosophy of Velayat-e-Faqih<sup>1</sup> [Guardianship of the Islamic jurists] is practically eliminated. How do you assess this issue?

Mohammad Taqi Fazel Meybodi: Many people, both in the form of Mahdism and the apocalyptic issue, wanted to advance their policies, but this policy has failed throughout history.

Last year, Mr. Nateq-Nouri raised this issue and felt threatened. This sense of danger also exists in society in the form of promoting superstitions.

These issues are raised and abused by the authorities. It is considered ridiculous and funny amongst all religious leaders, religious thinkers and speakers such as Mr. Nateq-Nouri that someone would go to the United Nations and in every interview say that the hand of the Imam of the Time is behind all these issues.

Unfortunately, the [Islamic Republic of Iran] Broadcasting sometimes adds fuel to these issues. The fact that issues with no strong religious, Sharia and religious support such as these are broadcast on [Islamic Republic of Iran] Broadcasting must be severely criticized. It is only to provoke emotions and promote superstitions.

[Radio Farda:] Mr. Fazel Meybodi! You, who were also involved in political and religious activities before the revolution, remember that the anti-Baha’i Society, or the Hojjatieh Society, was apocalyptic. Before the revolution, it was accused by the revolutionaries of deviating from the path of struggle. In addition to theoretical and practical work, they used to encourage their followers to attack the Baha’is. Recently, during Friday prayers, a petition was prepared for the worshipers to sign and ask the prosecutor general to deal with the Baha’is and to dissolve what had been called the Baha’i institutions. Are not such behaviours of recruiting and mobilizing fans used for inciting them?

[Fazel Meybodi]: The issue of Baha’ism in Iran has been a complex issue both before and after the revolution, and the question has always been what the position of the Baha’is is.

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<sup>1</sup> [Velayat-e-Faqih: The authority of a leading jurist as the leader of society]

Of course, Ayatollah Montazeri recently defended the Baha'i citizenship rights and the idea that every human being should have his/her citizenship rights protected.

Debates about the Baha'is are being revived, and the Hojratieh Society is being strengthened, while Hojratieh's way of thinking is not accepted by many elders; even Ayatollah Khomeini himself did not accept this thinking and tried not to allow this way of thinking to influence the political currents of the country.

The government must conduct politics based on reason, custom and human experience. The thought-provoking fact is that government creates beliefs and incorporates these beliefs into politics.

If you decide to involve your religious beliefs in politics, these beliefs may not be accepted by others, and many clergymen, authorities and academics may not accept it. If our policy is based on science, reason and experience, it would be acceptable to the majority; for example, with regard to elections, the principle is "democracy" and "the free vote of the people". This has been experienced in the world for many years, but if I say that I believe that the regime should be a caliphate organization and not a parliamentary election system, it is very dangerous. We must completely separate the boundaries of a belief system from politics.

The "Special Interview of the Week" will be broadcast every Monday in the Evening Magazine after news at 19:30 on Radio Farda. The first rebroadcast will be on Tuesdays after the 30-minute morning news in the Evening Magazine, and the second broadcast will be after the news at 13:00 in the Noon Magazine programme.