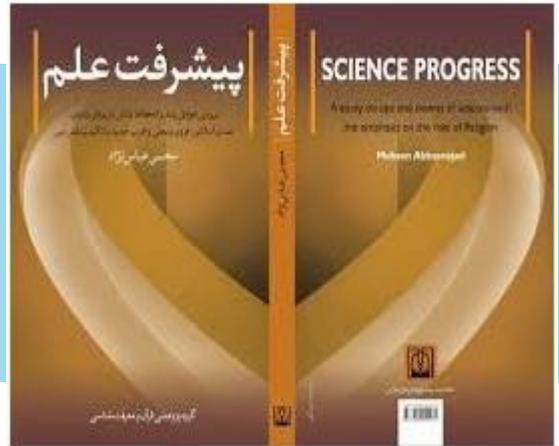


# Science Progress

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# Mohsen Abbasnejad



## Mohsen Abbasnejad

### 1972-Mashhad

Mohsen Abbasnejad was took his BS in Mechanical Engineering but continued his studies in Philosophy. Having studied Islamic Jurisprudence and Usool in seminary under the great contemporary jurist and philosophy under a distinguished philosopher of the eastern world, he passed the highest levels of the seminary with flying colors.

Having authored number of works in such field as philosophy, philosophy of science and Hadith, and Jurisprudence, Abbasnejad is now serving on Quran and epistemology, and the director of the Quranic Research Foundation.

In addition to penning a six-volume collection on the basics of inter-relating science and the religion, some of his other books are as follow:

- Principles and basics of the Quran and Modern Science,*
- Imam Ali (A.S.) Managerial Approach,*
- Imam Ali (A.S.) Personal Lifestyle,*
- Basic Rights within religious Approach,*
- Some Elaborations on the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (3 Vols.)*

# About the Book:

This book starts with a discussion over the main human expectation from the development of knowledge which is: ***Increasing one's knowledge regarding the universe and the human being – Individual well-being with the advancing technology-Providing the required grounds for social peace and stability.***

The most significant periods in the history of science are then singled out, the scientific records of which would separately be examined through the critical analysis of the reasons behind its progression and/or decline. Ancient Greece is the first significant period in the history of science. Scientific communications, manifestations of democracy, high social status of scientists, the establishment of the academic institution, and relative well-being are considered as the most important reasons of the progress of science in the Greece. According to the records, the role of disbelief in divine religions in Greek knowledge would then be carefully investigated.

Another chapter of the book is devoted to studying the Islamic civilization. Honoring Wisdom in the religious teaching, problem raising, opposing superstitions, offering scientific and civilization-building teaching, religious requirement, vast communications and... are regarded as the main reasons for the development of knowledge in this period. The role of religion in the development of knowledge in the Islamic civilization and the reasons behind in decline, especially the influence of the ruling establishment and the rise of anti-reasoning currents are some other issues studied here. Medieval age is another historical period whose records in science and the factors involved in

the downturn of knowledge in the west, the role of religion and Christian teachings are critically investigated. The modern west is also studied based on historical documents, elaborating on the key factors contributed to the fast scientific development of the modern age. Among the factors for the prosperity of the knowledge in this arena including: Christian teaching, the weakening of the Church, efficient academic system, economic growth, familiarity with Islamic legacy, and.....

However, the author examines the dominant role of religious aversion on the destructive aspects of the western technology and its social crises, and the effect of the separation of knowledge from religious beliefs on the knowledge-increasing potential of the modern sciences.

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# Expert of the Book:

## **Christian Teachings**

In the discussion of the factors leading to the degeneration of science in the Middle Ages, we mentioned that some of the pervert teachings in Christianity paved the way to ignore natural sciences. But over time, with the economic and political developments that took place in Europe, the role of these teachings in the West declined. As an example, with the economic growth and the religious reform movement in Europe, monastic teachings in Christianity were moderated. Also, the phasing out of church authority and the growth of democracy in the West, as well as the developments that led to the growth of rationalism, the anti-rational Christian teachings lost their luster and the anti-intellectual trend became marginal.

By diminishing the role of these teachings, Christianity revealed its constructive role in scientific development. Some of these doctrines directly led to scientific development and some indirectly contributed to improvement of other factors. Now, we describe some of the constructive aspects of Christian doctrines.

## **The Social Teachings of Christianity**

As we said, the most important role of Christianity and church organization in medieval times was to restore stability and maintain social solidarity. At a time when social decline caused by the collapse of the Roman Empire and the Barbarian invasions had engulfed the Europe and immense political and economic weakness threatened the social foundations, Christianity stood up alone against deviations and supported civility and constructive social relations.

The priests were the most knowledgeable men of their time and during the five centuries of Roman Catholic church dominance, the only teachings that existed in the Western Europe were the result of their great efforts. The Fatwas of the ecclesiastical courts were considered to be the most just judgment in that age. Its Papal Court, though sometimes a bribe-taker and at other times incorruptible, in a sense doubled as a World Court for mediating international disputes and limiting the scope of conflicts. Although that court always had an Italian tone, one must take note that the Italians were the top thinkers and intellectuals of that age, and in addition, in the Latin Christian world, everyone from any strata and nation could have been promoted to the membership of that court<sup>1</sup>.

“To such a world, the church presented moral principles based on powerful supernatural decrees to block asocial motives of unscrupulous individuals. To such a world, it presented the safe haven of monasteries wherein men and women protected the copies of classic books from damage over time. The church ruled such a world with its bishopric courts, educated its people in its schools and universities, and pacified the kings of the Earth to rise up in favor of ethical responsibilities and heavy duties of peacemaking. The church illuminated its children’s lives with poetry and drama and hymns, it was their source of inspiration in the creation of the finest artworks of human history, and since it was unable to create an equality utopia among those who were not equally qualified, focused on charity organizations and to improve the lives of the poor, and to some extent protected the meek against the mighty. Undoubtedly, the church was the greatest factor in the spread of civilization in the Medieval Europe history.”<sup>2</sup>

Since observing moral principles was inconsistent with the people’s inclinations and instincts, it was imperative to trick everyone that those laws came from a

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<sup>1</sup> William James, Durant (2006). *The Story of Civilization, The Age of Faith*; translators: Abutaleb Saremi *et al.*, Tehran, Scientific & Cultural Publ., vol.4, pp.1100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1101.

supernatural source to be respected in the privacy as well, and Christianity presented such a blessing to Europe. The Christian teachings also cut back on rudeness of social punishment and promoted altruism. Moreover, in the absence of the Roman Empire and the myriad of feudal fiefdoms, it fulfilled its role as an international organization for the unification of various nations and ethnic groups.

Maintaining social stability and security in the following years created the necessary platform for the growth of science. On the other hand, its humane teachings inspired human rights and libertarianism ideas of Western philosophers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, the transnational aspect of the church organization created the initial core of international organizations and relationships. This, in turn, created the international communication infrastructure that is an effective factor in scientific growth.

Another service of the church in social stability, was the definition of legitimate roles that enabled the community to enjoy stability and stability, preventing conflicts and disputes. Granting legitimacy to the king, judicial laws, and family life are examples of this.

In general, the teachings of Christianity provided a basis for social morality and preservation of stability and security both in the Middle Ages and in the following years, which paved the way for constructive activities including the scientific activity.

### **Providing Metaphysical Foundations for Knowledge**

Some of the Christian doctrines formed the metaphysical foundations of sciences. Some examples of these doctrines are the theory that man can understand God and the universe or the belief in the order and consistency of nature that enables scientific research.

The foundation of science is based on the affirmation of causal relationships and the existence of order in the nature. In a situation where ancient tribes believed in the existence of an extraordinary system of nature and the management of affairs based on mysterious and magical powers, Christianity, by emphasizing the existence of divine law and order in the nature, provided the essential metaphysical foundation for scientific activities. Saving mankind from believing in management of universe by ancient gods and goddesses and magical beliefs and fighting against superstition and false beliefs, was a prerequisite for establishing a rational system to justify the nature, which was accomplished by Christianity. We have mentioned an example of this role in the church's war on superstition and the witches.

### **Providing a Research Topic**

The Bible put forth teachings for Christianity that required understanding and education, establishment of scientific and research centers, as well as utilization of the intellectual heritage of the ancients. This enabled the monasteries to become a hub of religious education in the dark years of the Middle Ages. Along with these teachings, the teaching and learning tradition was well established and paved the way for the transfer of science and culture during an age of social degeneration.

Right during the early centuries, Christian clerics realized some of the Greek philosophies, especially the Neoplatonism philosophies, can be used to justify Christianity and defend it rationally. Therefore, they turned to the Greek heritage and through a combination of philosophies, provided a mixture of Christianity and Greek sciences. This trend reached its peak during the 12th to 14th centuries by the founding of European universities and schools. In those years, the scholastic philosophy that consolidated Christian doctrines and Greek philosophy was the most important research topic in the European scientific centers.

The acquisition of the Greek knowledge led to the gradual reinforcement of the role of reason and, through the developments that we will mention later on, provided the

grounds for the growth of other sciences. Thus, as we mentioned in the case of Islam, Christianity provided a consistent platform for scientific activities by throwing many questions to the scholars and creating the necessity for its own rational defense that even during the dark years of the Middle Ages kept the lamp of knowledge burning, to gradually pave the way for the growth of natural sciences as well.

### **The Secondary Roles of Christianity**

Some other Christian doctrines, especially after the religious reform, gradually laid the foundation for economic growth. The church taught people that labor is not shameful. The monks and priests developed many lands through agricultural and industrial development during the Middle Ages and encouraged other people's economic efforts.

The church sanctified the organization of guild workers and organized religious sects for charity work. For example, Protestant priests played an important role in the UK's economic growth. The Protestant priests deemed it a duty to determine or ban the type of behavior, clothing, study, and entertainment of the people. Moreover, they prohibited the tradition of stopping work on holidays which was established according to pagan or Catholic codes, and thus added fifty non-holiday days to the number of days. The Protestants encouraged everyone to observe ethical principles, and induced people to bravery, self-confidence, precaution, economics, and labor.

These ethical principles were favored by the middle class, because it provided diligent laborers and legitimized private ownership and business activities from the religious viewpoint. Thus, poverty rather than wealth was considered a sin, and poverty was seen as the lack of personality and deprivation from God's grace.

Although the Protestants defended wealth, they rejected wasteful luxuries of the aristocracy.”<sup>3</sup>

In this context, some studies emphasize the relationship between the formation of capitalism and the Protestant doctrines. The Catholic Church teachings in the Middle Ages developed lands and the Protestants provided the grounds for the Industrial Revolution in later periods. While the importance of the church’s monastic teachings was diminishing, the constructive role of some other doctrines revealed itself in economic growth, and in turn, economic growth provided a platform for scientific growth.

### **Undermining the Role of Church’s Organization in the West**

In the medieval period, the church was the most powerful religious and political organization in Europe and by relying on its financial resources, extensive bureaucracy and mass influence, played a decisive role in all developments, including the scientific ones. Unfortunately, as we mentioned above, while the church enjoyed all the facilities to play a constructive role, it used its authority to confront new thoughts and scientific progress. Church institutions that had monopolized the education, provided no education other than religious knowledge and the Inquisition Courts also deemed any new thought heresy and vigorously stood against it.

The church authority was an obstacle to the advancement of sciences from two aspects. First, through their monopoly on education, they refused to teach any non-religious knowledge; and second, they ignored new thoughts and scientific advancements, and used their authority to suppress the scientists. Finally, the Europeans came to the conclusion that one should choose between the knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> William James, Durant (2006). *The Story of Civilization, The Beginning of the Age of Wisdom*; translator: Esmail Dolatshahi, Tehran, Scientific & Cultural Publ., vol.7, pp.226.

and the church because the church had no motive for non-religious activities and when it considered an idea contrary to its formal beliefs, it opposed it based on religious mumbo jumbo. Particularly, the increased wealth and power of the church gave way to numerous abuses. The widespread church bureaucracy had trapped it within itself and to stay in power, it could not accept any rival force and pursued its selfish ends with the slogan of protecting the people's faith.

From the 10th century A.D. onwards, some developments took place in Europe that undermined the church's power and its influence and authority declined by the day, and science and knowledge flourished by eliminating obstacles and the existence of other necessary infrastructures. Here are some of the factors that undermined the church's authority:

### **The Moral Degeneration of the Papacy**

One of the Christianity's problems was its massive religious bureaucracy. The Papacy needed a lot of financial resources to manage this complex and these resources were provided in many ways. Some of these resources included the free workforce at the church's disposal, along with the vast lands in the continental Europe entrusted to the church by endowment or tithing, as well as many gifts to the church. In the dire economic conditions of Europe, this huge wealth caused a deviation, since on the one hand, it eventually pushed the Papacy toward luxury and greed, and on the other hand, it increased the efforts of seculars to occupy religious positions.

Many who were not religiously qualified, by using influence or bribing the rulers, secured high positions in the church and filled their own and relatives' pockets with the church's riches. Alongside this abundant wealth which promoted luxury and wastefulness among the church's senior authorities, some of the church's laws also exacerbated the problem. From the church's viewpoint, the priests should be

celibate all their lives, and thus, many of them suffered moral deviations and turned to illegitimate debauchery.

All of these factors undermined the sanctity and spiritual standing of the Papacy in the public opinion and they did not consider the clergy holy. As a result, the church's popularity decreased by the day from the viewpoint of the masses and their standing weakened in contrast to the intellectuals and emperors.

### **Reformist Movements**

From the 13th century onward, first the Literary Renaissance movement and then the Protestantism and later, the Enlightenment Movement challenged the Catholic Church. During the Renaissance movement, most Roman and Greek literary works were translated and the classic pagan culture attained such a high standing that it seemed the time had been rewound for fifteen centuries. The Renaissance humanists talked about the golden age of Rome and Greece so proudly that they began to ridicule the principles of Christianity based on humbleness, piety and downplaying carnal matters. They thought of the span of ten centuries between themselves and the Roman Empire as a catastrophic mistake.

“Humanists behaved as if Christianity was a myth that fitted the morals and paranoid needs of the masses of people, but free thinkers should not take it seriously. Humanists defended Christianity in their public speeches, clearly demonstrated their commitment to Salvation Christianity, and sought to consolidate the teachings of Christ and the Greek philosophy. But ultimately, that endeavor disgraced them. They tacitly considered the intellect to be a superior reference, and equalized Plato's Dialogs with the New Testament. Like the Greek Sophists before Socrates, they undermined the audience's religious beliefs directly or indirectly, and knowingly or unknowingly. The life of the humanists reflected their true beliefs.

Most of them followed the pagan moral standards in practice, basically from its Dionysian aspect rather than its Stoic aspect, for that matter.”<sup>4</sup>

the Renaissance humanists in Europe were inclined toward interest in life rather than the afterlife-centric views of Christianity.

“The people were happy about the discovery of a polytheistic civilization - in which the citizens did not worry about the Original Sin or the punishment in hell and the natural stimuli were accepted as permissive elements in a vibrant society. Austerity, abstinence, and the sense of guilt lost their power and almost lost their meaning among the Italy’s upper classes. The monasteries were suffering from the lack of applicants, and the monks and priests and the Popes themselves, instead of the Christ’s approval, pursued worldly pleasures. The chains of tradition and obeying religious authorities were broken and the monstrous burden of the church organization had diminished in the people’s thoughts and intentions.”<sup>5</sup>

The religious reformist movement and Protestantism delivered the next blow. Unlike the literary renaissance movement of the 13th to 16th centuries A.D. in Europe, Protestantism movement was a kind of Christian fundamentalism and return to the original Christianity, but since it targeted the authority of the Pope and the church, it undermined the papacy. Luther, from denunciation of Indulgence went further to deny the Pope’s authority, and argued that there was no reason for Germany to pay ransom the Italian church, and meanwhile called the Pope Antichrist. For hundreds of years, and in order to protect the Papal interests, they lured the Christians to consider a distinct personality for the Pope and the priests appointed by him and consider him to be the heir of Jesus Christ, but Luther denied all that.

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<sup>4</sup> William James, Durant (2006). *The Story of Civilization, Renaissance*; translators: Safdar Taghizadeh *et al.*, Tehran, Scientific & Cultural Publ., vol.5, pp.96.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp.598.

Finally, his ideas led to public revolution and practically the Pope's authority left Germany which later extended to some other countries. Luther was a fanatic Christian who believed that the entire Bible was an oracle, but condemned the church and Papal orders and ceremonies they created later on which were not documented in the Bible and were used as a means to fill their pockets and things like Indulgence, Clerical Celibacy, etc.

However, he did not put wisdom above revelation, and in fact his movement was a kind of purging Christianity and a return to primary principles and an insurrection against the structure of church and its content.<sup>6</sup> Protestantism tried to eliminate the mediator between God and Christ and directly introduced the message of Christ to the people. Therefore, it condemned any church authority and challenged the Papacy. The Enlightenment philosophers took the next step to undermine the church's authority. Backed by Voltaire, they challenged the church's beliefs one after the other.

Voltaire, with the slogan "Crush the despicable!", besides the Encyclopedia editors and some other Enlightenment philosophers, wrote thousands of articles and books on Christian beliefs and myths. Many of them challenged church beliefs; not to fight Christianity, but to combat deviations.

"What did Voltaire mean by 'the despicable'? Was he going to eliminate prejudice, superstition, shortsightedness, and religious persecution and harassment, or wanted to crush the Catholic Church or all forms of Christianity or religion in general? We know that he did not rise to destroy religion because even at that time and in the heat of his battle, admitted to his god-worshipping devoutness with phrases taking root in Voltaire's religiousness.

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<sup>6</sup> William James, Durant (2006). *The Story of Civilization, Religious Reform*; translators: Fereidoun Badrei *et al.*, Tehran, Scientific & Cultural Publ., vol.6, pp.407.

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