# The Most Learned of the Shi'a

## The Institution of the *Marja' Taqlid*

Edited by

Linda S. Walbridge

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LINDA S. WALBRIDGE

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2001

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Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Bombay Buenos Aires Calcutta
Cape Town Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul
Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi Paris São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan



Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The most learned of the Shi'a : the institution of the Marja' taqlid /
edited by Linda S. Walbridge.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-19-513799-X
1. Marja'. 2. Taqlid. 3. Authority—Religious aspects—Islam.
4. Shi'ah—Doctrines. I. Title
BP195.M7 W35 2000
297.6'1—dc21 00-027868

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

I dedicate this book to
John and Nathaniel
*with love*

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# Acknowledgments

This book has been, relatively speaking, a pleasure to work on because of the fine people involved in the project. Each of the authors has shown admirable forbearance in the face of delays, alternating with demands for immediate action. Most important, though, I am very proud to be associated with the contributors as each has produced an excellent piece of scholarship. It was the work and commitment of some of these authors that inspired the project in the first place.

The publication of this book has a slightly odd history. I was in Pakistan by the time I had all the papers for the volume in hand. I approached Oxford University Press in Karachi to see if they were interested in publishing the volume. Tayaba Habib promptly informed me that they were. However, due to the political climate in the country at the time, the publisher thought it best not to go forward with the project. However, Ms. Habib did not let the matter drop there. She approached Cynthia Read at Oxford New York, who graciously recommended the book for publication. I am grateful to both of these individuals for their interest in and concern for this project.

I would like to express my gratitude to the editorial staff at Oxford, who have given such painstaking attention to this volume. Also, I thank Cambridge University Press for permitting me to include a section of Edward G. Browne's wonderful book, *A Literary History of Persia*, volume 4, in this collection.

I thank my parents, Thomas and Patricia Strickland, and my parents-in-law, John and Mary Lou Walbridge, for their support and for their patience and understanding throughout this project and all my other work. Jane and Laith Kubba also deserve special thanks for their hospitality and for their intelligent observations regarding some of the topics covered in this book. David and Teresa Langness also provided hospitality and a quiet workplace for me during my research, for which I thank them. I would also like to acknowledge the love and support that I receive from my sons, John and Nathaniel. Without them there is no inspiration. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Most of all, I thank my husband, John Walbridge. Listing all that he did in helping to bring this book to light seems to belittle his efforts. I wish to thank him especially for his careful reading of the manuscript at a time when there were so many other demands for his attention.

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# The Most Learned of the Shi'a

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# *Introduction*

## Shi'ism and Authority

*Linda S. Walbridge*

The problem of who should succeed the Prophet has plagued the Islamic community since the time of his death. Should politics be the overriding consideration in determining leadership, or should it be heredity? Should a leader be proclaimed on the basis of group consensus, or should there be formal elections? Who is qualified to judge whether or not one can lead? Is it the community, in general, or a select group with certain qualifications? What are the major attributes a leader should have? Should charisma override learning, or is it the other way around? What role should a leader take in society at large? Should the leader be at the forefront of societal and political issues, or should he limit his activities to the spiritual domain?

The Shi'a settled some of these problems by determining that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali was his rightful successor and that his descendants through the Prophet's daughter Fatima were eligible to lead the community. Those Shi'a who are known as Twelver or Ithna Ashari Shi'a recognize 'Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and nine succeeding descendants through the line of Husayn as being the leaders, or Imams, of the faithful.

Mention of two of these Imams is critical for any discussion of Shi'ite leadership. The Imam most important for shaping the future of religious leadership and law in Shi'ism was the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, who died in the year 765 (148 of the Islamic calendar). His writings would become the basis of what would be known in the eighteenth century as the Ja'fari school of law. The twelfth of these Imams is shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he has gone into occultation and will reappear at the end of time when all peoples of the earth are judged. With his disappearance ended the succession of Imams. According to Cole and Keddie (1986), the Abbasid rulers favored the belief in the occultation of the twelfth Imam, a doctrine that meant the Imams were no longer contenders for temporal power. After the end of the imamate, the religious scholars of Shi'ism argued like others Muslims about the relative weight to assign to the traditions and jurisprudential reasoning. Not until the seventeenth century, with the Safavids' rise to power in Iran and the establishment of a Shi'i state, did the Shi'i ulama became economically powerful and influential enough to claim a more prominent and independent role for themselves. In this milieu a group of ulama emerged

who saw themselves as representing the Imams and argued for the primacy of rationalist jurisprudence in determining Shi'i law. They came to be known as the Usulis. Launching a successful challenge against their more literalist rivals, the Akhbaris, they have come to dominate Shi'i religious law and education.

By the eighteenth century there had emerged a religious elite known as *mujtahids*, who could practice *ijtihad*—that is, make religious decisions based on rational deduction from the traditional sources of law. Those without specialized religious knowledge were expected to submit (inf. *taqlid*; part. *muqallid*) to the judgment of a *mujtahid* in disputed religious issues. Eventually a hierarchy of *mujtahids* including the *Marja'iyat al-taqlid al-tamm* (complete authority of one *mujtahid* over the entire community) became recognized. Superiority in learning is generally held to be the primary prerequisite for the selection of a *marja'*, though no clear-cut set of criteria governs the choice. Ultimately, the followers (those who are *muqallid* to the *marja'*) decide which *marja'* to follow.

Ideally, one *mujtahid* is so renowned and revered for his knowledge and piety that he is recognized as the object of emulation for all Shi'a in matters of religious law. It is recognized that there might be more than one *marja'*. Such a notion does not imply a schism within the religion. There may also be more than one *marja'*—maybe several—but one will be *al-marja' al-a'zam*—the highest *marja'* in the world. Ideally, a person may elect to follow a particular *marja'*—and not necessarily the *marja' al-a'zam*—without fear of rebuke or condemnation from anyone else. The influence of the *marja'* is increased by the believers' payment of an important religious tax—the *sahm al-Imam* "the Imam's share"—to the *marja'* to whom he is *muqallid*. Such is the theory and to some extent the practice. To many Shi'a the opinions of the *marja'* are the "final word" on an issue. The *marja'*, therefore, has the potential to wield great influence and a strong *marja'* can be a powerful unifying force.

Whether *ijtihad* and *taqlid* were accepted simultaneously is unclear. According to Said Arjomand, most early religious scholars rejected *taqlid*, "emulation of a *marja'*," though the roots of this concept are obviously deep in Shi'i history. Arjomand reports that Ibn Mutahhar al-Hilli, the 'Allama (d. 1250 C.E.) "justifies taqlid on account of its practical necessity, as the laity do not have the necessary time to devote to acquiring the expert knowledge necessary or determining the ethically and ritually correct behavior in conjunction with new occurrences, and to attempt to do so would prevent them from earning their livelihood."[1] His thinking was influenced by al-Murtada, who lived three centuries earlier. Moussavi finds evidence that Tabataba'i Yazdi (d. 1919) was the first grand ayatollah to clearly state the legal necessity of following the opinion of a *mujtahid*, basing his opinions on ideas set forth by Shaykh Murtada Ansari (d. 1864).[2]

As for the evolution of the *marja'iya* itself , Moussavi claims that it "appeared as an institution rather than a personal office of the chief *mujtahid*'s network" under Shaykh Muhammad Hasan Najafi during the early nineteenth century.[3] Moussavi argues that the *marja'iya* was established on the basis of practical concerns rather than juridical analysis. In the mid-nineteenth century, the ulama faced the challenges of anticlerical Akhbaris, Shaykhis, and Babis. The need for an orchestrated response strengthened the position of the ulama, which led to the Usuli ascendance over the Akhbari school and to more consensus among the Usuli ulama. Other scholars, such as Abbas Amanat, Juan Cole, and Hamid Dabashi,[4] see the *marja'iya* as having emerged in the eighteenth century as the answer to the need to integrate Shi'ite clerics and establish lines of authority.

The *marjaʿ* is supposed to combine the qualities of learning and reason with those of extreme piety and devotion and a just character. As the representative of the "general deputyship" of the Imam, the *marjaʿ*, as source of emulation, enjoys the dual role of chief legal expert and spiritual model for all Shiʿa. A very high level of knowledge of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* (Islamic law and the principles of its deduction, respectively) reflected in his teaching and his writings are what generally qualify a person to be considered a candidate for this position. Authorship of a legal manual (*risala*) is said to indicate a person's willingness to take on the mantle of the position.

Yet, not until after Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Tabataba'i Yazdi, the author of *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa*, died in 1918, did it become customary for all *maraji'* to write such treatises, which are a summation of the *marjaʿ*'s opinions. However, there is no investiture into office. An *ʿalim* is a *marjaʿ* by virtue of (a) being acknowledged by at least some of his colleagues and (b) being the recipient of the *sahm al-Imam* religious tax.

The claim is frequently made that the Shiʿi world recognizes a sole *marjaʿ*. Moojan Momen, for example, identifies Ayatollah Burujirdi as the sole *marjaʿ* between 1946 and 1962.[5] In fact, Arab Shiʿa were not likely to follow Burujirdi, but rather followed Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. While scholars writing from an Iranian perspective say that Hakim was the *marjaʿ* whom most people turned to after the death of Burujirdi, Arab informants state that Hakim became the sole *marjaʿ* in the 1940s (during the lifetime of Burujirdi) after the death of Abu l-Hasan Isfahani, who resided in Najaf.

At times it is widely acknowledged that several *mujtahids* are qualified to be called *maraji'*, as was the case in Iran after the death of Burujirdi. And predictably, there is competition among the *mujtahids* for supreme leadership. This competition is not played out in an open political debate among the *maraji'* themselves, since the Shiʿa find this highly distasteful. Rather, their followers and representatives act to influence public opinion. After a *marjaʿ* dies, the believers, according to the Usuli school, are supposed to turn to another *marjaʿ*. The system of competition among the ulama, therefore, is perpetuated.

Certainly it was Ayatollah Khomeini who made *marjaʿ al-taqlid* almost a household term. While he fit the mold of the *marjaʿ* in many respects, he was not the most learned of the *mujtahids* of his time and would not have gained such recognition even in the Shiʿi world had it not been for his stance against the shah and his leadership in the revolution. His political activism against what was viewed as a tyrannical regime was hardly unusual among Shiʿi ulama. However, his success in overthrowing the shah and his advocacy of united political and religious leadership in the institution of the *wilayat al-faqih* (governance by the jurisprudent) singled him out and led to his recognition as both the temporal and spiritual head of Iran and as *marjaʿ al-taqlid al-aʿzam*, eliminating in this process other *mujtahids* whose scholarly scholarly achievement under more stable conditions would have outshone his. Yet even at the height of Khomeini's prestige, most Shiʿa followed Grand Ayatollah Abu'l Qasim Khu'i in Iraq.

Iraq has had its own political activists in this century. Some of its most outstanding *mujtahids*, including Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, who would later become the grand *marjaʿ* in Najaf, had participated in the 1920 revolt against the British. Later, in the 1950s, "young apprentice-ʿulama in Najaf had come to realise that short of a renewal, their position might be irreversibly jeopardised."[6] With the 1958 revolution, the ulama found themselves in a situation even more difficult than what they had experienced

under the British, especially with the land reform that threatened their economic support. That year Hakim authorized the formation of Jama'at al-'Ulama', modeled after the Egyptian Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers), whose goal was to strengthen the links between the clerical and nonclerical elements of Shi'i society in order to combat the overwhelming forces of the new regime.[7]

After the death of Ayatollah Hakim, Ayatollah Khu'i rose to the position of grand *Marja'* in Najaf, which made him Khomeini's chief competitor as leader of the Shi'i world. Khu'i was renown for his quietism, having never advocated the intertwining of religion and temporal politics, a position that strained relations between himself and social/political activists, most of whom were of a younger generation.[8]

The leader of these activists, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, pressed for the Islamization of society and for reforms within both the *hawza* and Shi'i society.[9] Sadr's influence was limited by his premature death and also by his deference to his teacher, Ayatollah Khu'i. As long as Khu'i was alive, al-Sadr could not openly put himself forward as a *marja'*. Al-Sadr's defiance of the Iraqi regime and Saddam Hussein's fear of an Islamic revolution led to al-Sadr's execution. It was only after al-Sadr's death that he became well known among Western scholars and non-Iraqi Shi'a, and to Sunni activists. Despite their efforts—and their untold suffering and bloodshed—the Iraqi Shi'a have never accomplished a successful revolution and, hence, never captured the world's imagination as the Iranians have.

Some ulama informants have stated that in the past the *marja'iya* was an extraordinarily important institution and that the vast majority of Shi'a were strongly attached to the person of the *marja'*, continually seeking his opinion. One shaykh referred to the Tobacco rebellion in Iran in 1891 as an example of the power of the *marja'*. He related the story that Nasir al-Din Shah's wife told the shah that she and those around her would avoid the use of tobacco because the *marja'* had declared its use religiously forbidden. The point of the story was that the shah's wife listened to the *marja'* rather than her own husband, the king. Another shaykh told the story of the escape of a son of Ayatollah Hakim from Iraq: that a woman saw the illustrious *marja'*'s son and upon hearing of his situation, she had vowed to maintain her fast until she was assured of his safety. This same shaykh spoke of the people's awe in the presence of a *marja'* and their sense of entering into a holy presence.

While such feelings of devotion and acts of obedience could no doubt be found, there were limits to how widespread these sentiments could have been. Before sophisticated technology allowed for easy communication, a single *marja'* could not exert a great deal of influence on the entire Shi'i community. In fact, parts of the Shi'i world were not even aware of the institution until recently and do not have such intimate contact with *mujtahids*. For example, in the early 1960s Shi'i Lebanese immigrants to the United States, though led by a shaykh trained in Najaf, procured their seed money for a mosque in Detroit from Nasser in Egypt, not from the coffers of the *marja'*. The Lebanese, even as late as the 1980s, were often unfamiliar with the term *marja'* though this ignorance was more common among people from the Bekaa than from Jabal Amil. Even some clerics will concede that the *marja'iya* has become a far more important institution over the past several years.[10]

During the 1950s through the 1970s, the Shah of Iran and the Iraqi regime enticed their youth to choose the benefits of secular society over those of a seminary education.

In Iraq, at least, communist manifestos seemed more compelling than the religious rulings of elderly *mujtahids*. The increasing prosperity of Iran, along with a pervasive ambivalence about religion and clerics among various segments of Iranian society, also marginalized the *mujtahids*.

The 1979 Iranian revolution and events that led up to it revitalized the institution, as did the writings of Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq. Religious leaders were offering attractive alternatives to secular or even atheistic ideologies and, for the first time in decades, Shi'ites, particularly young ones, were seeking answers to social dilemmas through religious teachings, which enhanced the prestige of the learned.

Middle Eastern oil money also strengthened the institution. This sudden upsurge in wealth enormously increased the base for paying the *sahm al-Imam*, which could, in turn, be used to increase the prestige of the institution. However, the present political turmoil in Iran and Iraq seems to have the greatest impact on the institution.

Of paramount concern among activist Shi'ites in Iran and Iraq was the question of who was to be given the reins of leadership, not just in religious matters, but at the head of the government. Should the faithful follow a Shi'i jurist in temporal/political matters as well as in spiritual matters? In his book *The Just Ruler*, A. A. Sachedina argues that the comprehensive authority of the most learned jurist was a well-developed concept in Shi'ism by the end of the ninth century; i.e., at the end of the period of the Imams.[11] He states that the Imams appointed close associates (specifically transmitters of *hadith*) as their personal representatives and gave them tremdendous power to administer the Shi'i community. In a 1991 review of Sachedina's book, Hossein Modaressi strongly refutes those arguments, stating that there are well-documented and explicitly stated views that no one can serve as an Imam, except for the Imams themselves.[12] The issue of the jurist's right to act in the place of an Imam is of critical importance today since it is basic to the justification of the Islamic state in Iran. And, if the notion of the guardianship of the jurist, that is, the *wilayat al-faqih*, is legitimate, is the person in that role the same as the *marja' taqlid*? As Iran has discovered, this theoretical issue presents problems when put into practice, as will be discussed in one of the chapters.

This volume explores the factors that gave rise to the the institution of the *marja'iya*—or challenged it—and influenced the institution's power during its uneven history. The articles reveal how social, political, and economic factors interweave with theological debates, leading sometimes to a powerful centralized clerical order and at other other times to one weakened by factionalism, economic constraints, and governmental intereference.

Before summarizing the articles, I should clarify that this volume does not claim to be a thorough review of the *marja'iya*, its history, its ideologues, or anything else. Readers will notice that some major figures and events are never even referred to. For example, the Constitutional Revolution and its major players, such as Ayatollahs Khorasani and Mazandrani, are not discussed because this topic has been written about fairly extensively elsewhere. By contrast, there are two articles about Baqir al-Sadr (chapters 7 and 8) and one on Sayyid Fadlallah of Lebanon (chapter 12). There is also an article about Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (chapter 5), the founder of the Shaykhi school. None of these personalities would be considered the core players in the institution of the *marja'iya*. Yet, they all have had—and, I would argue, continue to have—an influence on the development of Shi'ite leadership. In many respects, this is a collection of articles

about Shi'i leadership on the edges. It should be noted that even Khomeini, the most famous jurist both inside and outside the Shi'i world, was not mainstream in many of his important opinions. Ayatollah Khu'i, on the other hand, is referred to almost in passing, yet far more Shi'a were *muqallid* to him in his lifetime than were to Khomeini. Khu'i was very much within the conventional mode of a *marja'*, and hence his views are not of central concern to this volume, though they are certainly of importance and value on a larger scale.

Shahzad Bashir's article (chapter 2) exemplifies our approach in this volume. While the *mujtahids* represent the Twelfth Imam during his period of occultation, the idea that the Imam actually has returned and is living among the people as the Mahdi has never been well received among the high-ranking jurists. The author has given us accounts of two fifteenth-century religious leaders who, in announcing themselves as the Mahdi, found themselves at odds with normative Twelver Shi'ite thought and, consequently, with traditional jurists. These two men, Muhammad b. Falah Musha'sha' and Muhammad Nurbakhsh, though relying on Shi'ite doctrine and its model of messianism, were strongly influenced by Sufism, in which they found the theoretical bases for their claims to religious leadership. In their claims to religious authority, both men found themselves at odds with the state, though only in the case of Musha'sha' was there any overt attempt to gain political power. The accounts of the lives of Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh clarify the potential challenge to the role of the *mujtahids* as preservers of the tradition by men who claim direct access to divine power, and also account for the perennial tensions between the two paradigms of leadership so strongly expressed in Shi'ism: the messianic/heroic figure vs. the legalistic/ritualistic caretaker, a theme also relevant to the history of nineteenth-century Shi'ism.

Andrew Newman's article (chapter 3 of this volume) brings the reader directly into the debates of seventeenth-century Safavid Iran as the state, in an effort to establish its own power, promoted the expanded authority of the clergy. The theological issue is the legality of the Friday prayer service during the occulation of the Twelfth Imam. As Newman explains, the state desired that this service, with its customary reference to the ruler, take place so as to give him religious legitimacy in the eyes of the people. As economic crises faced the regime, the issue gained urgency. Threatened with popular discontent and political upheaval, the state increasingly needed clerical support. Likewise, the idea of the *faqih* as surrogate for the Imam and supporter of a government that was considered to be corrupt was increasingly challenged. Discontent led to a revival of Sufism and to antagonistic competition between the ulama and the Sufis. The Friday prayer service and its implications also triggered disputes between Akhbari and Usuli clergy. Newman shows how this conflict during the Safavid period led to further debates over clerical rule and the rise of the *marja'iya*.

With the collapse of the Safavid state in 1722, the religious classes found themselves free of governmental control but also in dire need of financial support. In the 1790s the Qajars came to power in Iran, and they, like the Safavids before them, desired religious legitimacy, which they obtained through their support of Usuli leaders. Under the Qajars, the ulama gained power, autonomy, and, in many cases, great wealth. Willem Floor's study (chapter 4 of this volume) portrays the growth of the religious classes during the early Qajar period, their activities, and the manner in which they funded themselves and their projects. Governmental contributions, gifts from believers, endowed proper-

ties, and even bribery and the acceptance of fees to legalize prostitution were only some of the ways that the elite members of this establishment enriched themselves. Controlling education and resisting any educational or legal reforms, the Usuli ulama were able to spread their influence and their views. Highly conservative regarding any sort of social change, they, like so many other members of religious establishments, sought to alleviate the suffering of their people without upsetting their own social status.

The Usuli ulama were not without competitors. Aside from the Akhbari school and Sufism, the Shaykhi school emerged as the ideas articulated by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i gained prominence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Juan Cole (chapter 5) examines the ideas of Shaykh Ahmad on the issue of religious authority and shows the rich variety of influences that shaped his thinking. Shaykh Ahmad was a defender of the rationalism of the Usulis, yet the ideas of the philosopher Suhravardi are reflected in his belief that the jurist receives illumination (*ishraq*) from the Hidden Imam. In exploring these ideas, Cole states that Shaykh Ahmad's ideas resemble those of clerics who turned to the Ni'matu'llahi Sufi order in the nineteenth century, though Shaykh Ahmad himself scorned Sufism and vehemently opposed blind obedience of a Sufi pir. To be a religious leader, according to Shaykh Ahmad, one must have great knowledge of jurisprudence (i.e., be trained in the Usuli school) but, in addition, he must have mystical insight. In other words, authority is "visionary yet rational, esoteric yet in acord with the literal text of scripture, and ethical in such a way as to put contemorary state practices inevitably under judgment." (Cole, this volume). Ultimately, the Usulis won out over the Shaykhis, but the way had been paved for the Babi religion that followed, which was to have far-reaching impact on Iranian society, not the least of which we credit to the remarkable Tahireh, a very early champion of the new faith. Indeed, her story is perhaps more remembered by history than that of the founder of the movement, the Bab himself. Todd Lawson's work (chapter 6 of this volume) provides some background for the extraordinary degree to which her religious authority was accepted by her followers and by the Babis in general. Lawson emphasizes the role of Fatima al-Zahra, of whom Tahireh was considered, if not a reincarnation, then certainly a "re-enactment." He focuses on the Bab's discussion of Fatima in an unpublished Qur'an commentary written before the founding of the Babi movement. Here it becomes clear that Fatima was a symbol and embodiment of the highest possible spiritual rank connected with cosmogony, gnosis, divine love and mercy, knowledge, heroism, and *walaya*. With the appearance of the highly gifted Tahireh in the midst of the eschatalogical drama that was the Babi movement, the reality of Fatima was made present and Tahireh's own authority was thereby retified.

Part II of this volume examines the ideas of contemporary Shi'i reformers. Responding to modern ideologies and to current political and social realities, these men sought to both rejuvenate and reshape religious authority to meet the challenges of modern society. There are two articles on Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the brilliant Najafi scholar whose life was brutally cut short by the Iraqi regime in 1980. Baqir al-Sadr, recognized by both his peers and his elders as likely to rise to the position of a grand *marja' taqlid*, was also a political activist, one of the founders of the Da'wa movement. His quest for reform was therefore comprehensive and, as the authors show, well deserving of serious study.

The first study (chapter 7), by John Walbridge, focuses not on Baqir al-Sadr as scholar of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, but on Baqir al-Sadr the philosopher. Walbridge mentions that

Khomeini was also a philosopher, yet Khomeini's influence in this domain has not been felt; rather, his legalistic and political ideas have survived him. The philosophical ideas of Baqir al-Sadr, on the other hand, have spread beyond the Shi'ism into Sunni communities throughout the world. Baqir al-Sadr engaged Western philosophical ideas, not to discredit them but to challenge them when he sees fit and to incorporate them into his own system when appropriate. Baqir al-Sadr's goals are ultimately religious. He wished to show that religious knowledge was not the antithesis of scientific knowledge, but that the two are actually in the same category, thereby addressing issues of paramount concern to Muslim intellectuals.

Talib Aziz (chapter 8) looks at the political/religious legacy of Baqir al-Sadr based on a careful study of his writings and on interviews with his colleagues and close associates. Baqir al-Sadr wanted religious scholarly ideas to be accessible to educated Muslims. Consequently, attempting to abandon the obtuse writing style characteristic of the *hawzas*, he wrote in a straighforward language. But his contribution was as much substance as form. Aziz explains, for example, that al-Sadr proposed a new taxonomy of the legal system that had implications for the structure of society, including the marital relationship. One of Baqir al-Sadr's main focuses was on the institution of the *marja'iya* itself, citing as one of its primary shortcomings the absence of an organizational structure.

Other contemporary writers join al-Sadr in criticizing this problem, including Morteza Motahari. Morteza Motahari, assassinated in May 1979, was one of the most important ideologues of the Islamic revolution. A vociferous writer, he ardently attacked Iranian secular intellectuals and the materialism he felt he was corrupting Iranian society. While Khomeini lived in exile, Motahari acted as his representative in Iran while maintaining his own independent status as a revolutionary. In his treatise included in this volume (chapter 10), translated by Farhad Arshad with an introduction by Hamid Dabashi, Motahari clearly places the blame for the *marja'iya*'s lack of leadership and influence in society, not on the clerics themselves, but on various facets of its organization. Of particular concern to Motahari is the manner in which the ulama are funded. While expressing approval that the *mujtahids* are not financially supported by the government, which frees them from state control, he bemoans the fact that the ulama are forced to cater to public opinion in order to collect the khums. As a result, the productivity of the ulama is hampered by the "intellectual limitations of the populace."

Ayatollah Khomeini's objective was to eliminate any restrictions to the ulama's power, so that their authority would be equal to that of the Prophet and the Hidden Imam. In chapter 11 of this volume, Hamid Mavani examines the proofs that Khomeini advanced to substantiate his claims of the infallibility and total authority of the religious jurist. Other leading jurists, such as the late Ayatollah Abu'l Qasim Khu'i, did not share Khomeini's views on this subject. As Mavani explains, these jurists counter that Khomeini has based his arguments on traditions with weak chains of transmission and that he differs markedly from his predecessors in interpreting these traditions.

While some of Khomeini's ideas have been branded as unorthodox by more traditional *mujtahids*, those of Muhammad Fadlallah of Lebanon have engendered even more controversy. Talib Aziz (chapter 12) portrays Fadlallah as an enigmatic intellectual who aspires for the leadership of the Shi'i community. A supporter of the *wilayat al-faqih*, he does not approve of the leader of the Shi'i community being the head of a state. Rather,

he sees the person in this role as resembling the pope—that is, an international leader not tied to one nation. His unconventional ideas about the role of women in society and about the abolition of practices that divide Shi'a and Sunni and believer and nonbeliever have won him both ardent admirers and enemies.

Baqir al-Sadr's sister, with the backing of both her brother and Ayatollah Khu'i, led the movement to educate and uplift Iraqi Shi'i women. Joyce Wiley's article (chapter 9) on Bint al-Huda, the sister of Baqir al-Sadr, gives us a glimpse of the private world of the ulama. Educated at home by her brother, Bint al-Huda devoted her life to the education and uplifting of her Shi'i sisters, relying on Qur'anic support for ideas of gender equality. She explored ways to reach her audience that her male colleagues would probably not have even considered. To illustrate her vision of the ideal Islamic life, she wrote novels that deplored both subservience to men and Western values. Though Ayatollah Khu'i ruled that women could not be *mujtahids*, he still funded her religious school for girls in Najaf, suggesting that she was able to work effectively with the ulama—even the most conservative among them. However, she was far less successful in her dealings with the Ba'thist government. On April 8, 1980, Saddam Hussein's government executed both Bint al-Huda and her illustrious brother.

Part III looks at the social and political conditions of modern Shi'i communities, but from very different perspectives. Devin Stewart (chapter 13) discusses the historical rivalry between Najaf and Qom and Khomeini's role in accentuating this rivalry. Khomeini, after being exiled to Iraq, had hoped to achieve the status of *marja' taqlid* in Najaf after the death of Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. However, he lost out to the quiescent Khu'i and, thereafter, reviled Najaf for its obscurantism and lack of involvement in political issues. Even before the revolution he was praising Qom for producing scholars who were willing to endure imprisonment and torture rather than acquiesce to the shah's tyranny. As Stewart notes, the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran and subsequent turmoil in Iraq have bolstered Qom's claims to being the foremost center of learning in the Shi'i world.

It should be cause for sober reflection that study of the written historical record and anthropological fieldwork should produce such drastically different impressions of the situation. While Qom has many more students than Najaf today, it is not so clear that it is truly recognized as the center of Shi'ism throughout the world. In my article (chapter 14), I argue that the politicization of religious leadership in Iran has alienated Shi'a both within and outside Iran and that, at present, the *marja' taqlid* with the greatest number of *muqallids* is Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani, who resides in Najaf. Seen as Ayatollah Khu'i's successor, Sistani has risen to prominence as a *mujtahid* who is both apolitical and outside of the control of the Iranian government.

In the final article (chapter 15), Yousif al-Khu'i portrays the little known Shi'a community of Medina, the descendants of the earliest Muslim community. Suffering from discrimination in education, employment, and the freedom to practice their rituals and ceremonies, this community of Shi'a have sustained their beliefs, quietly coming together for prayer and praise of God, the prophet, and the Imams. Helping to sustain this shared identity is their commitment to following the *marja' taqlid*. A picture of 'Ali Sistani of Najaf graces their *husayniyas*.

I have chosen to begin the volume with a portrait of the life of an *alim*, extracted from E. G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia*. It is a rare, first-person account of ulama

life that has not drastically changed over the past 600 years. This passage shows the intellectual rewards of the madrasa education, the mixture of the scholarly and the ambitious, and the hardships of a student's life.

*Notes*

1. Arjomand, *Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, p. 140.
2. Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*, p. 39.
3. Moussavi, "Institutionalization of the Marja'i Taqlid," p. 279.
4. See, among others, Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 33–69; Cole, "Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Ulama," pp. 33–46; and Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*.
5. Momen, Moojan, in *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*.
6. Mallat, *Renewal of Islamic Law*, p. 36. Mallat provides a valuable description of the workings of the Shi'i colleges.
7. Wiley, *Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 34.
8. In spite of Khu'i's noninvolvement in politics and his advanced age, Saddam Hussein placed him under house arrest. Family and close followers of Khu'i state that the ayatollah, though elderly, was not ill prior to his sudden demise, and this kindled suspicion that the Iraqi government had a hand in his death.
9. Aziz, "Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shi'i Political Activism," pp. 207–22. See also Mallat's analysis of Baqir al-Sadr's contributions in *Renewal of Islamic Law*.
10. See Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam*.
11. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*.
12. Modaressi, "Just Ruler or Guadian Jurist."

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# Part I

## TRADITION

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# 1

## *The Life of an ʿAlim*

### Sayyid Niʿmatu'llah al-Jaza'iri

The great orientalist E. G. Browne wrote that "no class in Persia is so aloof and inaccessible to foreigners and non-Muslims as that of the mullas." He refers to their lives as "peculiar, exclusive, and generally narrow." Yet such people were in great demand when the Safavids conquered Iran and wished to impose Shiʿism on their subjects and, indeed, continue to exert a great deal of influence on the lives of the Shiʿa worldwide. In the seventeenth century, Shah Ismaʿil imported Arab mullas from Bahrain and Jabal Amil in Lebanon as teachers to inculcate the doctrines of Shiʿism among the population. Browne wrote that "some of them came to Persia totally ignorant of the Persian language, like Sayyid Niʿmatu'llah al-Jaza'iri who, on reaching Shiraz with his brother had to obtain from a Persian acquaintance the sentence . . . 'We want the Mansuriyya College,' and even then each learned only half of this simple phrase and spoke alternatively."

The following biographical narrative of Niʿmatu'llah, taken from *Qisasu'l-Ulama*, was translated by Browne in his *Literary History of the Persians* and is reprinted here with slight modification of translation by permission of Cambridge University Press. As Browne himself wrote, this is an "unusually vivid picture of the privations and hardships experienced by a poor student of Divinity." Browne compares the life portrayed here with that of the medieval European student: a life of arduous work, extreme physical hardship, isolation from family, and submersion in "formalism and fanaticism." Relief would come only to the few who had attracted the notice of a great divine.

■ ■ ■

He [Niʿmatu'llah) was born in 1050/1640-1 and wrote this narrative when he was thirty-nine years of age, "in which brief life," he adds, "what afflictions have befallen me!" These afflictions began when he was only five years old, when, while he was at play with his little companions, his father appeared, saying, "Come with me, my little son, that we may go to the schoolmaster, so that thou mayst learn to read and write, in order that thou mayst attain to a high degree." In spite of tears, protests, and appeals to his mother he had to go to school, where, in order the sooner to escape and return to his games, he applied himself diligently to his lessons, so that by the time he was aged

five years and a half he had finished the *Qur'an*, besides learning many poems. This, however, brought him no relief and no return to his childish games, for he was now committed to the care of a blind grammarian to study the Arabic paradigms and the grammar of Zanjani. For this blind teacher he had to act as guide, while his next preceptor compelled him to cut and carry fodder for his beasts and mulberry-leaves for his silk-worms. He then sought another teacher with whom to study the *Kafiya* of Ibnu'l-Hajib, and found an imposing personage dressed in white with an enormous turban "like a small cupola," who, however, was unable to answer his questions. "If you don't know enough grammar to answer these questions, why do you wear this great load on your head?" enquired the boy; whereupon the audience laughed, and the teacher rose up ashamed and departed. "This led me to exert myself to master the paradigms of grammar," says the writer; "but I now ask pardon of God for my question to that believing man, while thanking Him that this incident happened before I had attained maturity and become fully responsible for my actions."

After pursuing his studies with various other masters, he obtained his father's permission to follow his elder brother to Huwayza. The journey thither by boat through narrow channels amongst the weeds, tormented by mosquitoes "as large as wasps" and with only the milk of buffaloes to assuage his hunger, gave him his first taste of the discomforts of travel to a poor student. In return for instruction in Jami's and Jarbardi's commentaries and the *Shafiya*, his teacher exacted from him "much service," making him and his fellow-students collect stones for a house which he wished to build, and bring fish and other victuals for him from the neighbouring town. He would not allow them to copy his lecture-notes, but they used to purloin them when opportunity arose and transcribe them. "Such was his way with us," says the writer, "yet withal we were well satisfied to serve him, so that we might derive benefit from his holy breaths."

He attended the college daily till noon for instruction and discussion, and on returning to his lodging was so hungry that, in default of any better food, he used to collect the melon-skins cast aside on the ground, wipe off the dust, and eat what fragments of edible matter remained. One day he came upon his companion similarly employed. Each had tried to conceal from the other the shifts to which he was reduced for food, but now they joined forces and collected and washed their melon-skins in company. Being unable to afford lamps or candles, they learned by heart the texts they were studying, such as the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik and the *Kafiya*, on moonlight nights, and on the dark nights repeated them by heart so as not to forget them. To avoid the distraction of conversation, one student would on these occasions often bow his head on his knees and cover his eyes, feigning headache.

After a brief visit to his home, he determined to go to Shiraz, and set out by boat for Basra by the Shattu'l-'Arab. He was so afraid of being stopped and brought back by his father that, during the earlier part of the voyage, he stripped off his clothes and waded behind the boat, holding on to the rudder, until he had gone so far that recognition was no longer probable, when he re-entered the boat. Farther on he saw a number of people on the bank, and one of his fellow-passengers called out to them to enquire whether they were Sunnis or Shi'a. On learning that they were Sunnis, he began to abuse them and invoke curses on the first three Caliphis, to which they replied with volleys of stones.

The writer remained only a short while at Basra, then governed by Husayn Pasha, for his father followed him thither to bring him home, but he escaped privily with his brother, and, as already narrated, made his way to Shiraz and established himself in the Mansuriyya College, being then only eleven years of age. He found one of the tutors lecturing on the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik, who, on the conclusion of the lecture, questioned him as to his aims and adventures, and finally, seizing him by the ear and giving it a sharp twist, said, "O my son, do not make thyself an Arab Shaykh or seek for supremacy, and do not waste thy time! Do not thus, that so perchance thou mayst become a scholar."

In this college also the life was hard and the daily allowance of food inadequate, and the writer's brother wished to return home, but he himself determined to remain, copying books for a pittance, and working almost all night through the hot weather in a room with closed doors while his fellow-students slept on the roof. Often he had neither oil for his lamp nor bread to eat, but must work by moonlight, faint with hunger, while in the winter mornings his fingers often bled with the cold as he wrote his notes. Thus passed two or three years more, and, though his eyesight was permanently affected by the strain to which it was subjected, he began to write books himself, a commentary on the *Kafiya*, and another, entitled *Miftahu 'l-Labib*, on the *Tahdhib* of Shaykh Baha'u'd Din Muḥammad. He now began to extend the range of his studies beyond Arabic grammar, and to frequent the lectures of more eminent teachers from Baghdad, al-Ahsa and Bahrayn, amongst them Shaykh Jaʿfar al-Bahrani. One day he did not attend this Shaykh's lecture because of the news which had reached him of the death of certain relatives. When he reappeared on the following day the Shaykh was very angry and refused to give him any further instruction, saying, "May God curse my father and mother if I teach you any more! Why were you not here yesterday?" And, when the writer explained the cause of his absence, he said, "You should have attended the lecture, and indulged in your mourning afterwords" and only when the student had sworn never to play the truant again whatever might happen was he allowed after an interal to resume his attendance. Finally he so far won the approval of this somewhat exacting teacher that the latter offered him his daughter in marriage; an honour from which he excused himself by saying, "If God will, after I have finished my studies and become a Doctor (ʿalim) I will marry." Soon afterwards the teacher obtained an appointment in India, at Haydarabad in the Deccan.

Sayyid Niʿmatu'llah remained in Shiraz for nine years, and for the most part in such poverty that often he swallowed nothing all day except water. The earlier part of the night he would often spend with a friend who lived some way outside the town so as to profit by his lamp for study, and thence he would grope his way through the dark and deserted bazaars, soothing the fierce dogs which guarded their masters' shops, to the distant mosque where he lectured before dawn. At his parents' wish he returned home for a while and took to himself a wife, but being reproached by a learned man whom he visited with abandoning his studies while still ill-grounded in the Science of Traditions, he left his parents and his wife (he had only been married for three weeks) and returned to the Mansuriyya College at Shiraz. Soon afterwards, however, it was destroyed by a fire, in which one student and a large part of the library perished; and about the same time he received tidings of his father's death. These two misfortunes, combined with other circumstances, led him to leave Shiraz and go to Isfahan.

During his early days at Isfahan he still suffered from the same poverty with which he had been only too familiar in the past, often eating salted meat to increase his thirst, so that the abundance of water he was thereby impelled to drink might destroy his appetite for solid food. The change in his fortune took place when he made the acquaintance and attracted the notice of that great but fanatical divine Mulla Muhammad Baqir-i-Majlisi, perhaps the most notable and powerful doctor of the Shi'a who ever lived. He was admitted to the house of this famous man and lived with him for four years studying theology, and especially the Traditions. Yet in this case familiarity did not breed contempt, for, as the author mentions in his *Anwaru'n-Nu'maniyya*, though specially favoured by this formidable "Prince of the Church," he often,when summoned to his library to converse with him, or to help in the compilation of the *Biharu'l-Anwar*, would stand trembling outside the door for some moments ere he could summon up courage to enter. Thanks to this powerful patronage, however, he was appointed lecturer (*mudarris*) in a college recently founded by a certain Mirza Taqi near the Bath of Shaykh-i-Baha'i in Isfahan, which post he held for eight years, when the increasing weakness of his eyes and the inability of the oculists of Isfahan to afford him any relief determined him to set out again on his travels. He visited Samarra, Kazimayn, and other holy places in Iraq, whence he returned by way of Shushtar to Isfahan. In 1079/1668-9 his brother died, and ten years later, when he penned this autobiography, he still keenly felt this loss. After visiting Mashhad he returned to Huwayza, where he was living a somewhat solitary and disillusioned life at the time of writing (1089/1678-9). Of his further adventures I have found no record, but his death did not take place until 1130/1718, only four years before the disaster which put an end to the Safawi Dynasty.

*Note*

This is excerpted, with permission from the publisher, from Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia in Four Volumes*, vol. 4 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1924), pp. 361-67. Browne's notes have not been included, nor are the diacritical marks that Browne used.

# 2

# *The Imam's Return*

## Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism

SHAHZAD BASHIR

The following statement by Muhammad Nurbakhsh (d. 1464), a claimant to the title of Mahdi, reflects the tension between two paradigms of leadership found in the history of Shi'ism.

> Mujtahids are leaders of people concerned only with the exterior (*ahl-i zahir*). They are the people of doubt (*zann-o-goman*), and it is well-known that the mujtahid commits faults and leads (astray). The people who seek true meanings (*ahl-i ma'na*) have always been led by great prophets and perfected saints (*awliya'*) who are masters of unveiling (*kashf*) and seeing (*'iyan*). They see and know the truth (*haqiqat*) of things. The Sultan of Saints, 'Ali . . . has said: "I came to know and worship Him after seeing Him; I would not worship a lord I had not seen." This comes from one who guides to the knowledge and truth of certainty, and not something put forth by a mujtahid full of doubt.[1]

Although a majority of Shi'i intellectual activity in the period of occultation (*ghayba*) has been carried out by scholars primarily categorized as *mujtahids*, the historical record also points to individuals who considered themselves divinely inspired beyond the capacity of ordinary persons, and at the same level as the Shi'i Imams. One such category comprised those who claimed to be the Mahdi, a designation reserved exclusively for the Twelfth Imam in normative Twelver Shi'ism. Being a Mahdi in a Shi'i context necessarily requires going beyond traditional belief since the claimant has to argue against the very basis of the idea of twelve uniquely guided Imams who, according to the religion's orthodoxy, have already existed in history. Conversely, however, it is crucial for a Mahdi to access the charisma inscribed in traditions regarding the Twelfth Imam in order to acquire spiritual and political power through the claim. This tension, endemic to the situation of a Mahdi rising from a Twelver milieu, marks the claimant as one who is the gravest transgressor against accepted dogma while simultaneously being an embodiment of Shi'ism's greatest hope. It is understandable, then, that a self-proclaimed Mahdi such as Muhammad Nurbakhsh considered jurists, the guardians of traditional religion, to be his foes, as reflected in the preceding quote.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate the mechanics of the messianic claim as a paradigm of leadership in medieval Shi'ism by reviewing the history and thought of two fifteenth-century Mahdis. The careers of Muhammad b. Falah Musha'sha' (d. 1462)

and Muhammad Nurbakhsh belong to the history of western and central Asia (present-day Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan), and their thought fits into a general pattern of heterodox religious activity characteristic of the period.[2] The intellectual outlook espoused by their followers reflects the religious history of the times, and the manner in which they articulated their claims vis-à-vis normative Shi'ism exemplifies how the dormant messianism that forms the very basis of Twelver Shi'ism can be actualized under favorable historical conditions. In what follows, I first appraise the two Mahdis individually in their specific contexts, followed by comparative comments and general conclusions.

## Muhammad b. Falah Musha'sha'

The first case of messianic Shi'ism to be considered here originated in the influential Twelver learning centers of southern Iraq. The career of Muhammad b. Falah (d. 1462) contains attempts at both religious innovation and militant activism, motivated by his desire to be accepted as the Mahdi.[3] The religious persuasion of his following was "normalized" soon after his death, though his descendants continued to rule over the area subjugated through his military adventurism for a number of generations. His considerable success in gathering followers in southern Iraq and Khuzistan during the fifteenth century suggests the heightened receptivity of such a message among the people of these areas.

Sayyid Muhammad b. Falah b. Hibat Allah Musha'sha'[4] was born in Wasit some time in the beginning of the ninth Islamic century (fifteenth century CE). His father traced his genealogy to the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim, a mark of considerable honor among the population of the region.[5] After a normal education during childhood, Musha'sha' left home, at the age of 17, to go to Hilla to study with Ahmad b. Fahd al-Hilli (d. 1437–38), the most prominent Twelver scholar of the day.[6] He excelled in the acquisition of all requisite branches of Shi'i learning in the following years, and it is illustrative of the relationship between him and Hilli that the latter married his mother after his father's death and gave one of his own daughters in marriage to him. Along with juristic and theological training, Musha'sha' became proficient in Sufi techniques during this period and is said to have observed a yearlong meditative seclusion (*i'tikaf*) in a mosque in Kufa.

Musha'sha''s initial interest in Sufism was probably due to the influence of his teacher. Renowned primarily for his traditional learning, Ibn Fahd al-Hilli indulged also in Sufism and even the occult sciences (*'ulum ghariba*). The latter interest is connected with a story that relates the purported cause of the souring of his relationship with his promising pupil. Hilli is said to have written a book on the occult sciences which, however, he wished to destroy as he approached his death at an advanced age. He gave this book to a maidservant with instructions to throw it into the Euphrates River, but she was apprehended on her way by Musha'sha', who confiscated the book. When informed of this development, Hilli sent someone to ask Musha'sha' about the book. He denied knowledge of the matter, saying that the teacher had become senile due to illness. Following this, Musha'sha' left Hilla for Khuzistan where he gathered a militant following using tricks learned from the book.[7]

Although mythical in its details, this story is a chronologically conflated version of actual events leading to Musha'sha"s disassociation from Hilli. According to historical information, Musha'sha' publicly declared himself to be the Mahdi in 840/1436–37 and sought ratification of the claim from Hilli. When denied support and charged with "confusion" (*takhlit*), Musha'sha' moved back to Wasit from Hilla and persisted with proclamations such as, "I will conquer the world as I am the Mahdi, and I will distribute cities and villages among my friends and followers."[8] Hilli issued a *fatwa* for his death when he heard such claims and even implored the governor of Wasit to carry out the sentence. The ruler arrested Musha'sha', but he was able to extricate himself from the situation by pleading that he was a Sunni Sufi being victimized by Hilli due to the latter's Shi'i bigotry.

Following his release from captivity in Wasit, Musha'sha' headed toward an area in southern Iraq populated by the Arab tribe of al-Ma'adi. Some clans of this tribe accepted his claim, forming his first significant success, and soon after this event, various other tribes had resided in the Euphrates delta also converted to his cause. As a mark of his special status, he is said to have performed miracles (*khawariq*) at this time to attract followers. He eventually moved to a village named Shawqa in the region of Jasan, but the ruler of the area did not take kindly to the invasion and chased him and his following out of the village sometime in the beginning of 844 AH (1440).[9]

Musha'sha"s group then traveled through the territories of the various tribes whose members had accepted his claim and finally settled in a place called Dub somewhere between the Tigris River and Huwayza. The community now prepared itself for military action under the direction of Musha'sha"s son Mawla 'Ali. On Friday, the seventh of Ramadan, 844 (January 30, 1441), they attacked a village near Huwayza, causing tremendous damage and bloodshed. The raiding party retreated, however, when a larger force appeared on the scene to aid the local inhabitants. Back at its central encampment, the force became restless and impoverished after some time, which resulted in raids on areas near Wasit. One of the successful raids, carried out on the 13th of Shawwal of the same year, constituted Musha'sha"s first direct encounter with the Timurids, the paramount military overlords in the region at the time.[10] Musha'sha"s forces pillaged the property of some nomadic tribes in the area after this altercation and had numerous other confrontations with local rulers in Wasit and Huwayza over the next year. The activity finally provoked Amir Aspand (d. 1445, sometimes called Isfahan or Asban),[11] the Qaraqoyunlu governor of Baghdad, who arrived in Huwayza with a large force. Musha'sha' and his following abandoned the city, and after taking refuge in a nearby village, placated Aspand through gifts and promises of tribute. Aspand agreed to forgiveness, but Musha'sha"s force reentered Huwayza as soon as Aspand had left the city, wreaking havoc on a part of Aspand's retinue that had not yet departed. Musha'sha"s forces were greatly strengthened during this period by the addition of Arab tribesmen from the area who joined him on account of his resistance to Qaraqoyunlu dominance. It seems that a considerable part of support for Musha'sha"s activism was derived from exploiting the anti-Turkoman and anti-Timurid sentiment in the region's Arab tribal population.[12]

Musha'sha"s followers persisted with their military adventurism under the leadership of his son Mawla 'Ali in subsequent years. They gained control of Basra and pillaged a caravan of pilgrims to Mecca in Dhu l-Qa'da 857 (November 1453), followed

by the sacking and looting of ʿAli's tomb in Najaf.[13] The sources tell of raids a few years later, first on the road between Iraq and Khurasan, and later on Baghdad, between the period May through December of 1461.[14] Mawla ʿAli finally met his death at the hands of the Qaraqoyunlu during a siege of the city of Bihbahan, and his head was brought to Baghdad on 16 Jumada II, 861 (May 10, 1457).[15]

Mawla ʿAli's death marks the end of hostile military action by Mushaʿshaʿ's followers, and the Mahdi himself died on 7 Shaʿban 866 (7 May 1462).[16] Political power in the domains controlled by Mushaʿshaʿ was then passed on to his younger son Mawla Muhsin (d. 1499–1500 or 1508–9), who expanded the area under his control to include much of southern Iraq, Khuzistan, and even areas near Baghdad. The religious impetus behind the movement had, however, become moderated by this point, and Mawla Muhsin and his later descendants, who had to contend with the growing power of the Safavids, acted largely as local overlords of the region. Although paying tribute to the Safavid, Afghan, Qajar, and Ottoman dynasties at various times, Mushaʿshaʿ's descendants continued to be influential in the region until the twentieth century.[17]

Although historical sources preserve some information regarding the beliefs held and promulgated by Mushaʿshaʿ, the principal source for understanding his doctrine is his own Arabic work *Kalam al-Mahdi*.[18] This work, a compilation of the author's statements and correspondence spanning the whole period of his activity, was collected eleven years before Mushaʿshaʿ's death (855/1451).[19] The preserved material reflects, therefore, the first fifteen-year period (1436–51) of Mushaʿshaʿ's activity.

In political terms, the most noticeable aspect of Mushaʿshaʿ's movement is his followers' military success and its associated misbehavior. A letter written by Mushaʿshaʿ preserved in the *Kalam al-Mahdi* suggests that the atrocities committed by forces acting under Mushaʿshaʿ's name were initiated against his wishes by his son Mawla ʿAli. In his reply to a scholar from Baghdad, Mushaʿshaʿ laments his inability to control the actions and beliefs of his son and his followers who were tyrannizing southern Iraq. He tells of his own attempts at warning the ruler of Hilla about impending raids on caravans of pilgrims who were departing from the city and also disassociates himself completely from the sacking of Najaf. When asked why he had not forbidden his son from such acts, he replies that he had been powerless in the matter and had himself been living under a threat of death during the period. He also refers to extreme religious views held by Mawla ʿAli and his companions, registering his despondence over their exaggeration (*ghuluw*) of his own status and that of Mawla ʿAli.[20] Mushaʿshaʿ himself was not categorically averse to military campaigning, as he refers positively to the ventures of Muhammad (the prophet) and the wars of apostasy (*ridda*) fought under Abu Bakr.[21] However, the kind of unbridled destruction carried out by Mawla ʿAli may not have been done with his sanction.

Along with his political activity, Mushaʿshaʿ's religious claims also contributed to the animosity aimed against him by the area's religious establishment. As hinted in his adoption of the title Mushaʿshaʿ, it is clear that he considered himself to be the trustee of a special mission. His understanding of this designation combined his earlier Twelver affiliation with concepts traceable to Shiʿi *ghulat* trends belonging to the first three Islamic centuries. The theological system observable in his work *Kalam al-Mahdi* begins with special positions assigned to prophets and Twelver Shiʿi Imams.[22] He states that all the prophets are still alive since death for them is to be understood only metaphori-

cally. A typical Shi'i bias comes to the fore in the statement that Muhammad and some of the other prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an because they belong to the exoteric world (*zahir*), whereas 'Ali and the other Imams are not named explicitly because reaching them requires exercising greater jihad (*jihad akbar*) on the part of Muslims.

Musha'sha"s elucidation of the Imams' status rests upon a distinction between essence (*dhat*) of an entity and its terrestrial form, referred to as the veil (*hijab*).[23] The essence or the reality (*haqiqa*) of an entity is not transferable, but it is possible for the entity to appear in the receptacle of a veil. It is in this sense that Gabriel appeared to the prophets in the form of a person; what was seen by the human eye was not Gabriel himself but his veil. Similarly, when Moses saw the burning bush, it was not that the bush had become God but that God had used the bush as a veil. Bodies of the Imams are also veils for God's essence, though the distinction is strict enough that high praise is allowable only for the essence of God and not for its veils. However, when the Qur'an speaks of God's face (*wajh Allah*), what is meant is his veils, constituted by the physical forms of the Imams.[24] This doctrine is paired in Musha'sha"s thought with belief in a theory of metempsychosis (*tanasukh*) according to which souls of the "saints" (*awliya'*) enjoy comforts in the presence of God after death, while the souls of the damned are first sent back to earth in other bodies as punishment and, from there, they are transferred to an abyss filled with demons (*shayatin*).

In defining his own position in religious history, Musha'sha' begins with the Twelver belief that the Twelfth Imam is hidden (*mastur*). However, Musha'sha' contends that he himself has been sent to the earth as the exoteric aspect or veil of the Twelfth Imam.[25] He has been made to appear so that the pure can attach themselves to him to reach salvation, while those who deserve death may reach their appropriate end. He also calls himself the deputy (*na'ib*) of the Mahdi, saying that if the Mahdi himself actually appeared everyone would be overpowered by his personality and become righteous, leaving no way to distinguish between the true and the false.[26] This doctrine nullifies, in effect, the possibility of the Twelfth Imam's actual return from occultation, vesting Musha'sha' with all the rights and privileges due to the Mahdi. Musha'sha"s appearance as the veil of the Twelfth Imam coincides also with the time for exacting revenge for the treatment of the Imams, and he is to lead the charge against the detractors in this matter.[27]

Along with the militant struggle to be waged in the name of the Imams, Musha'sha"s mission also called for a zealous application of the rules of the *shari'a*. Perhaps as a residue of his early training in normative Shi'i circles, he calls himself the jurist of the people of the house (*faqih ahl al-bayt*) and claims that the observance of his interpretation of the law is supremely incumbent upon all.[28] Far from any sense of the abrogation of outward law, Musha'sha' tells of numerous harsh punishments he had meted out to those under his control who had failed to strictly observe the rules of purity regarding food and drink. As a part of this program, he also held the Friday prayers[29] and expelled Jews from the areas under his administration.[30] His legal viewpoint is characteristically Twelver since, when accused of having forty women in his harem, he states that there is no restriction on the number of women with whom a man can have a temporary marriage contract (*mut'a*), or the number he can possess as slaves.[31]

In summary, Muhammad b. Falah's thought contains a radically activist message which, however, tries to stay nominally within the basic strictures of Twelver Shi'i dogma.

He maintains belief in the occultation of the Twelfth Imam but uses the theory of the Imam's veil to suggest imminent implementation of the messianic hope underlying the belief. He thus appropriates all the functions and privileges invested in the Twelfth Imam as Mahdi, while warding off criticism that he is not the Mahdi himself returned after the occultation. His thought contains a number of radical departures from normative Islamic thought, including postulation of eternal life for prophets and Imams, and the belief that a soul deserving punishment is sent back to another body after departing from one that is dead. These ideas were partly derived from beliefs held by *ghulat* elements from early Islamic history whose birthplace was exactly the region (southern Iraq, particularly Kufa and Basra) where Musha'sha' himself was most successful. It is noteworthy that he achieved his considerable military success in tribal milieux of southern Iraq and Khuzistan, where such beliefs were perhaps more easily acceptable than in more cosmopolitan areas of the Islamic world. Historical evidence also shows that his coupling of a radical religious message with the local people's disaffection toward their Turko-Mongol rulers made his cause more attractive to the Arab tribal population of the region. Musha'sha''s success in launching a long-lasting dynasty resulted, thus, from both his political astuteness and content of his religious message, which resonated with the feelings of the population to whom he preached.

## Muhammad Nurbakhsh

Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abdallah (d. 1464)[32] the second Mahdi to be considered here, was born in Quhistan, Khurasan, in 795/1392.[33] His father, originally from the Twelver Shi'i region of al-Ahsa' in Bahrain, had traveled to Mashad to visit the grave of Imam Musa al-Rida and had settled in Quhistan after the pilgrimage.[34] Nurbakhsh received his early education in Quhistan and then traveled to Herat to seek further knowledge as a teenager. Here a follower of the Kubrawiya Sufi order invited him to become a disciple of Khwaja Ishaq Khuttalani, the foremost Kubrawi master of the time.[35] He accepted this invitation and moved to the region of Khuttalan (in present day Tajikistan) to become a part of Khuttalani's circle. He seems to have excelled at his studies, becoming a leading disciple of Khuttalani, who gave him the title Nurbakhsh (giver of light) based upon a dream.[36] A few years later, in 1423, he proclaimed himself the Mahdi amid a complicated political situation. The claim was perceived as an insurrection by the Timurid governor of the area, who arrested both Nurbakhsh and Khuttalani and sent them toward Herat to Mirza Shahrukh, the Timurid ruler of the day. Khuttalani was executed shortly after the incident, while Nurbakhsh himself was imprisoned for six months.[37]

Nurbakhsh was released after being taken to the city of Bihbahan near Shiraz, from where he took a tour of Shi'i religious sites in Iraq. He eventually arrived in the region occupied by Lur and Kurd tribes (southwestern Persia), where he was able to gain a considerable following. His success in this region provoked Shahrukh's wrath once again, and he was recaptured by Timurid forces. After being taken to Herat in captivity, he was ordered to renounce his claim in the main mosque during a Friday prayer some time in 840/1436.[38] He was freed for a short period after this disavowal and then recaptured in Azarbayjan. Although directed to proceed to Anatolia, he was able to ad-

vance toward Shirwan after his third imprisonment. He later settled in Gilan for approximately ten years (1437–47), where he again achieved success in converting people to his cause. It is during this period that Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Yahya Lahiji (d. 1515), later to be recognized as his most talented disciple, recalls meeting the master for the first time.[39] Shahrukh's death in 850/1447 ended Nurbakhsh's persecution by ruling authorities, and he spent the last nineteen years of his life peacefully instructing students in the village of Suliqan near Rayy. Most of his extant works were composed during the tranquility of this period. Nurbakhsh died in Suliqan in 1464, while his movement lived on through the work of his descendants and his disciples.[40]

The Nurbakhshiya gained considerable influence in Kashmir around fifty years after Nurbakhsh's death through the efforts of an Iranian propagandist named Shams al-Din ʿIraqi, though the community was suppressed when the Mughals expanded into the area in the late sixteenth century. From Kashmir the movement spread also to Baltistan or Little Tibet (in present-day Pakistan), where the Nurbakhshi community continues to preserve its distinct sectarian identity.[41] Nurbakhsh's grave is a pilgrimage site for the Nurbakhshis of Baltistan who paid for the construction of a mausoleum over it in the 1990s.[42]

Of Nurbakhsh's numerous extant works, the *Treatise on Guidance* (*Risalat al-huda*), written in Arabic, is particularly significant for the question of leadership, with its comprehensive argument for the authenticity of his claim of being the Mahdi. He attempts to prove that the time for the appearance of the Mahdi has come and provides evidence for his own identity as the awaited figure.

Nurbakhsh's foremost predilection in *Risalat al-huda* is to rely on the Qur'an and hadith (including hadith *qudsi*), rather than on later works of Islamic religious literature. After these classical sources, the greatest number of references that invoke individuals from the past are to Sufis from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The majority of these are past masters of the Kubrawiya order, Nurbakhsh's personal affiliation.[43] The only extra-Kubrawi shaykh mentioned is Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240), and references to religious personalities are supplemented by predictions made by philosophers and men of science (*hukamaʾ*) concerning the time of the appearance of the Mahdi.[44] Nurbakhsh's choice of sources is noteworthy, bypassing the whole Twelver tradition (sayings of the last eleven Imams, on theology and jurisprudence) aside from hadith reports of a strongly Shiʿi bent. By concentrating on Muhammad and ʿAli, Nurbakhsh's defense of his Mahdism espouses the prophetic charisma used by Shiʿism to bolster its claims as the ideological system representative of the prophet's family. However, the postprophetic and postimamate intellectual orientation used by Nurbakhsh is Sufism rather than any strain of mature Shiʿi thought.

To set the stage for the appearance of the Mahdi, Nurbakhsh uses commonly accepted hadith reports to describe the social conditions that are required before the figure's purported arrival. He also attributes verses to ʿAli, who advises his progeny that the Mahdi would rise after the reign of tyrannical rulers.[45] He adduces the exact month and year (Ramadan 826/1423) of the appearance of the Mahdi from the numerological values of a verse by Saʿd ʿal-Din Humawahyi, which correspond to the date of his own proclamation to the title in Khuttalan. He correlates his own horoscope with astrological predictions made by Ptolemy, which show that the physical world is also "expecting" the Mahdi.[46] The positions of celestial bodies to be present at the time of the appear-

ance of the figure are thus shown to be as unique as the person whose arrival they portend.

In establishing the Mahdi's lineage, Nurbakhsh repeats hadith reports that declare him to be a descendent of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. Similarly, other predictions are related from Ibn ʿAbbas and Ibn al-ʿArabi to show that his father would be an Arab and his mother a Turk or a Persian. With regard to the Mahdi's spiritual genealogy, foretold by the Kubrawi master ʿAla al-Dawla Simnani, he would occupy the place of the fifth pole (*qutb*) after Simnani in the line of Kubrawi affiliation (*silsila*). In addition to lineage, Nurbakhsh describes the physical appearance of the Mahdi based on common prophetic traditions and suggests that he would be between the ages of 30 and 40 at the time of proclamation. Finally, a dream experienced by one of Nurbakhsh's followers reveals the date of the Mahdi's birth—Friday, 27 Muharram 795 (December 13, 1392)—which, predictably, is the date of Nurbakhsh's birth.[47] In Nurbakhsh's eyes, traditions as well as contemporary observations provide concrete descriptions of the genealogy and physical appearance of the Mahdi, and his sustained contention is that all of these characteristics are true for his own person.

A majority of the evidence offered by Nurbakhsh in support of his claim consists of experiences and recollections of a personal nature. These are either received as information from others, or derived from his own inner experiences. For the former, Nurbakhsh invokes the memory of his father who, although he died when Nurbakhsh was only 7, is said to have been aware of the exalted status to be occupied by his son in adulthood.[48] From the side of his spiritual ancestry, Nurbakhsh states that his master, Ishaq Khuttalani, had accepted him as the Mahdi and had instructed his followers to do the same.[49] His other citations from the experiences of his contemporaries include dreams in which Nurbakhsh is designated as the Mahdi by Muhammad; he is protected by the angel Gabriel, drawing the parallel with angelic protection for the prophet; and ʿAli attests to his status as the prime religious guide of the age.[50]

Nurbakhsh's personal experiences cited in *Risalat al-huda* also consist largely of dreams with appearances by past authorities such as Muhammad or ʿAli, who console him regarding the misfortunes that result from his claim and predict a triumphant future. His own view of the future is distributed in the categories of an actual future, which includes specific events he expects to happen, and an expectation of the bliss that will accompany the Mahdi's rule. This period of tranquility and prosperity, which will consist of eight solar years, will end soon after the Mahdi's death, followed by the final destruction of the world and the subsequent resurrection (*qiyama*).[51]

The most noteworthy interpretive concept invoked by Nurbakhsh in a linking himself with prominent religious personalities of the past is that of *buruz* (or *barazat*), according to which souls of the dead can reappear in the physical world and can enter into living human beings. Nurbakhsh distinguishes the concept from metempsychosis (*tanasukh*), which he says occurs when a soul departs one body and instantaneously enters an embryo ready for a soul (meaning when the embryo is in the fourth month after conception). In contrast, *buruz* (projection) occurs when a perfected soul pours into a mature human being, just as epiphanies (*tajalliyat*) pour into him, so that he becomes its locus of manifestation or visible appearance (*mazhar*). As the Mahdi, Nurbakhsh sees himself as a receptacle for the *buruz* of the Muhammadan Reality (*haqiqa muhammadiya*), whose first appearance in the world was in the form

of the Seal of Prophethood (*khatam al-nubuwa*), and whose second and last appearance is to be in the person of the Seal of Sainthood (*khatam al-walaya*).[52] Nurbakhsh's Sufi persuasion is thus made to fit perfectly into the Shi'i-inspired doctrine of the Mahdi.

Nurbakhsh also uses the concept of *buruz* to connect to other religious personalities, such as Jesus, the Twelfth Imam, and 'Ali Hamadani, his spiritual ancestor in the Kubrawiya.[53] The case of the Twelfth Imam is of particular interest since here Nurbakhsh contends that Twelver Shi'is have been misled for centuries in their belief that there could only be twelve Imams. This limitation was a myth promulgated by the Abbasids, who were afraid of Alid ascendancy and had manufactured the story to deprive them of capable leaders. According to Nurbakhsh, the Twelfth Imam died after a normal human life-span and his soul can reappear in the physical world only through projection into a perfected living individual such as Nurbakhsh himself.

Through the concept of *buruz*, Nurbakhsh sees himself not merely as an heir to the knowledge of the prophets, the Imams, and great sufis, but as an actual visible representation (*mazhar*) of the original individuals themselves. He accepts the idea that the souls of certain perfect human beings are able to reappear in the world after their deaths. The process is distinct from metempsychosis as it is not true universally for all humans. Moreover, in Nurbakhsh's understanding, several souls can pour into a single living receptacle, thereby relaying their cumulative authority to that person.

The composite picture of the Mahdi that emerges from Nurbakhsh's work includes segments, first, chosen from various fields, and then modified due to the exigencies of his situation. Nurbakhsh's strategic borrowing from various strands of thought to construct his idea of the Mahdi links his own sense of mission with the historical circumstances in which he lived. His natal affiliation with Twelver Shi'ism, whose fundamental ethos is based upon the expectation of a messianic figure, provided him with the first level of awareness of the issue. However, mainstream Twelver thought inherently resists individuals' claims to being the Mahdi. In the period of occultation (*ghayba*), interests of the guardians of Twelver Shi'ism, the jurists, are centered on the physical absence of the Imam rather than his presence in the flesh.

Nurbakhsh appropriated Sufi concepts in rationalizing his claim because he was trained as a Sufi from an early age, and Sufism was the most vibrant and pervasive intellectual orientation present in the geographical area of his activity (Transoxiana, Luristan, Kurdistan, Shirwan, Gilan, Rayy). Nurbakhsh's social environment thus had a formative role in the construction of his claim to being the Mahdi. A crucial aspect of his appreciation of this situation was his view that the era in which he lived had a special quality. In a letter to the Timurid ruler 'Ala' al-Dawla (d. 1460), he indicated:

> Every knowledgeable person (*'arif*) to whom hidden treasures have been revealed knows that these treasures are the realities of profession of divine oneness (*haqa'iq-i tawhid*). These have been hidden in all previous epochs, but in the present age, the age of manifestation of realities, they are becoming clear paths for people to follow.[54]

Nurbakhsh's explication of the Mahdi's function points quite clearly to the belief that he himself, as the Mahdi, was the agent of this final complete unveiling of Realities. The spiritual aspect of the advent of the Mahdi is given primacy in such a formulation, and although Nurbakhsh expected temporal rule to be realized for him as had been

promised for the Mahdi, his greater concern throughout his discourse is with knowledge and spiritual persuasion, rather than with any form of militant struggle.

The advent of the Mahdi is seen as the inauguration of a new spiritual dispensation in Nurbakhsh's thought, where it is possible to achieve clearer spiritual insight by following the directions of the new leader. His writings contain a pervasive concern with transcending sectarian differences such as between Sunnism and Shi'ism, and between various groups such as the jurists, the philosophers, and the mystics. His discussions of popular topics such as Muhammad's ascension (*mi'raj*) try to prove that the differences of opinion among various Islamic persuasions are due to narrowness of perspective and not fundamental opposition.[55] It is possible, for example, to regard Muhammad's ascension (*mi'raj*) to have been both physical (as the jurists and theologians insist) and metaphorical (as suggested by the philosophers and the Sufis). It is an essential aspect of Nurbakhsh's mission as the Mahdi to lead people away from academic quibbling, and toward a unity among all Muslims in emulation of the times of the prophet.

## Conclusion

A comparison between Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh illustrates features characteristic of Shi'i messianism as a religious phenomenon. On a practical level, both Mahdis confronted established political authorities. In Musha'sha''s case, this was part of a deliberate attempt to gain political power, whereas Nurbakhsh suffered imprisonments due to the political potential of his claim. The contact illustrates the necessarily political nature of messianic claims in the Islamic context, a feature that distinguishes this type of religious leadership from other paradigms.

On the doctrinal level, both Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh moved away from belief in occultation in its usual form in order to successfully portray themselves as equals to the earlier Imams. Musha'sha''s idea of the veil (*hijab*) and Nurbakhsh's explication of projection (*buruz*) made it possible for the Mahdis to access privileges reserved for the Twelfth Imam. Both concepts fall beyond mainstream Islamic thought by allowing for the appearance of a soul departed from the material world into another body. Such ideas, strongly reminiscent of extremist Shi'i (*ghulat*) tendencies, made it possible for the Twelfth Imam to "return" among his followers albeit in a different body. In making such concepts the centerpoints of their discourses, both Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh bypassed normative Twelver discourse, finding their justifications most often in the earliest Islamic sources (Qur'an and hadith), in heterodox ideas, or in radicalized versions of Islamic mystical doctrines. In fact, a grounding in Sufi thought and practice was the most fundamental commonality between Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh. This predilection is understandable since Sufism was clearly the dominant mode of Islamic spirituality in western and central Asia during the period of their activity. The significance of Sufism for a proper understanding of the two Mahdis underscores the importance of seeing Shi'i history as a part of the general intellectual atmosphere of a given period and area.

The Mahdis' attitudes toward jurisprudence (*fiqh*) best illustrate their position with respect to traditional Shi'i leadership of the period. Musha'sha' tells us in his works of his fastidiousness in applying rules of the *shari'a* in the area under his control. Signifi-

cantly enough, however, he considered his personal juristic rulings incumbent upon all, and his attitude did not reflect the orderly practice of jurisprudence as a science by legal scholars. In contrast, Nurbakhsh largely discounted sole obedience to *shari'a* as the religious ideal, placing far greater importance on the sufi path (*tariqa*) and the acquisition of the knowledge of esoteric realities (*haqiqa*).[56] Nurbakhsh thought himself to be the mystical guide par excellence whose presence in the world heralded the age of the unveiling of all mystical secrets. In both cases, the science of jurisprudence and its practice by jurists were supplanted by the personal authority of the Mahdi. This conclusion followed only if one took for granted, as both Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh insisted, that the Imam as Mahdi was now physically present amidst his Shi'a.

*Notes*

1. Muhammad Nurbakhsh, "Risala-yi mi'rajiya," in Ja'far Sadaqiyanlu, ed., *Tahqiq dar ahval va asar-i Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh Uvaysi Quhistani* (Tehran, 1972), p. 121.

2. For general secondary overviews of such religious activity during this period, see Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 493–500; B. S. Amoretti, "Religion under the Timurids and the Safavids," in P. Jackson, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 6, pp. 610–23; Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids: Shi'ism, Sufism and the Gulat* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972), pp. 1–6, 83–85; and Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 66–84.

3. Although external historical sources clearly state that Musha'sha' had proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi, his own writings, in the discussion that follows, suggest the claim to have been more nuanced.

4. Musha'sha' adopted this title for himself during the earliest years of his activity. It derives from the Arabic verb *sha'sha'a* which means "dispersion," as in the case of light emitted from a luminous object, or a liquid, such as wine, becoming diluted in water. No direct explanation for the application of the name to Muhammad is available, though based upon clues in his *Kalam al-Mahdi*, it seems that either the name reflected some remarkable spiritual experiences he had, or it denoted his reputation for being able to induce extraordinary states of trance among his disciples. Taken together, the two possibilities for the origin of the term refer to, first, his understanding of his own person as the recipient of special designation by God, and later, the gaining of outward confirmation of this status through a reputation for the ability to induce unnatural states in others.

5. Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-i pansad sala-yi Khuzistan* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Bungah-i Matbu'ati-yi Gutinbarg, 1951sh), pp. 8–9; 'Abbas al-'Azzawi, *Tarikh al-'Iraq bayn ihtilalayn* (Baghdad: Matba'at Baghdad, 1935–39), vol. 3, pp. 108–9.

6. For Hilli see Mustafa Kamil al-Shaybi, *al-Sila bayn al-tasawwuf wa-l-tashayyu'*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 257–69, and 'Azzawi, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, pp. 104–5. Shaybi provides numerous examples from Hilli's works to illustrate his inclination toward Sufism.

7. 'Azzawi, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, p. 110; Nurullah Shushtari, *Majalis al-mu'minin*, ed. Hajj Sayyid Ahmad (Tehran, 1375), vol. 2, p. 395.

8. 'Azzawi, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, p. 110.

9. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 112.

10. Details of Musha'sha''s military encounters with the Timurids are related in 'Abd Allah b. Fath Allah al-Baghdadi "al-Ghiyath" (d. after 891/1486), *al-Tarikh al-Ghiyathi: al-Fasl al-khamis min sanat* 656–891 (1258–1486), ed. Tariq Nafi' al-Hamdani (Baghdad: Matba'at As'ad, 1975), pp. 273–76.

11. F. Sumer, "Kara-Koyunlu," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 587.
12. ʿAzzawi, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, pp. 113–16.
13. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 142–45.
14. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 147.
15. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 149–51.
16. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 160.
17. For dynastic history of the Mushaʿshaʿ see P. Luft, "Mushaʿshaʿ," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 7, pp. 672–75; Werner Caskel, "Ein Mahdi des 15, Jahrhunderts: Saijid Muhammad ibn Falah und seine Nachkommen," *Islamica* 4 (1929–31), pp. 48–93; and Jasim Hasan Shubbar, *Tarikh al-ʿ* al-Adab, 1965).
18. Mushaʿshaʿ, *Kalam al-Mahdi*, fol. 9a.
19. p. 63.
20. Ibid., fols 75b–76a 5: Kasravi, *Tarikh*, 32–35. Shushtari states that Mawla ʿAli had justified his attack on Najaf by claiming that the soul of ʿAli had entered his body so that ʿAli was now again among the living, and there was no need to safeguard his grave. Later, he may have claimed to be a representation of divinity as well (*Majalis*, vol. 2, pp. 399–400).
21. Mushaʿshaʿ, *Kalam al-Mahdi*, fol. 62a–b.
22. Ibid. fols. 4a–7b, 18b–19a.
23. Ibid., fols. 19a–32b. The idea of terrestrial bodies being receptacles for metaphysical entities, most usually known under the term *hulul*, dates back to the formative period of Shiʿi thought. The Twelver Shiʿi heresiographer Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qummi (d. 299 or 301/912–14) relates from an earlier authority that the *ghulat* believed that the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-quds*) resides in a receptacle that is its veil (Hasan b. Musa an-Nawbakhti and Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qummi [combined edition], *Kitab firaq al-shiʿa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Mun'im [Cairo, Dar al-Rashad, 1992], p. 62). The concept of God's veil figures also in two early *ghulat* cosmogonic schemes preserved in the anonymous *Umm al-kitab* (V. Ivanow, "Ummil-kitab," ī *Der Islam* 23 [1936], p. 93) and *Kitab al-haft wa-l-azilla* attributed to al-Mufaddal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfi (Aref Tamer and Ign.-A Khalife, eds.; [Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1970], pp. 34–37). The latter work is written in the form of a dialogue between Mufaddal and the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, though its author was probably a Kufan named Muhammad b. Sinan (d. 220/835) (cf. Heinz Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis: Die Extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* [Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1982], p. 34).
24. Qummi's list contains an early sect named Bashiriya (after Muhammad b. Bashir), which believed that Muhammad was divine, and that his progeny were his veils (*hujub*), as it is impossible for the divine to beget in a literal sense (Nawbakhti and Qummi, *Kitab firaq al-shiʿa*, p. 60).
25. Mushaʿshaʿ, *Kalam al-Mahdi*, fols. 227a–229a.
26. Ibid., fols. 43b–44a.
27. Ibid., fols. 216a–222b.
28. Ibid., fol. 72a.
29. This marks a significant gesture in Twelver Shiʿi terms as traditional thought forbade holding congregational prayer while the Imam was in occultation. The most significant controversy regarding the matter arose later in Shiʿi history during the Safavid period (cf. Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, p. 134).
30. Mushaʿshaʿ, *Kalam al-Mahdi*, fols. 59a–60b, 282b–287a.
31. Ibid., fol. 95a.
32. For a detailed assessment of Muhammad Nurbakhsh, see my "Between Mysticism and Messianism: The Life and Thought of Muhammad Nurbakhsh," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997. For a summary of information regarding Nurbakhsh, see Hamid Algar "Nurbakhshiyya," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 8, pp. 134–36.

33. Muhammad Nurbakhsh, *Risalat al-huda*, Ms. Esad Efendi 3702 (Suleymaniye Library, Istanbul), fol. 88a. My dissertation contains an edition of this work based upon two manuscripts from the Suleymaniye library, Istanbul.

34. Shushtari, *Majalis*, vol. 1, p. 113.

35. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 143.

36. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 144. An alternative version for the bestowal of the title is given by Hafiz Husayn Ibn al-Karbalai, *Rawdat al-jinan wa-jannat al-janan*, ed. Ja'far Sultan al-Qurra'i (Tehran, 1970), vol. 2, p. 249.

37. The details of this incident are discussed in Devin DeWeese, "Eclipse of the Kubraviyah in Central Asia," *Iranian Studies* 21/1-2 (1988), pp. 59-83.

38. Shushtari, *Majalis*, vol. 2, p. 145; 'Abd al-Wasi' Nizami Bakharzi, *Maqamat-i Jami*, ed. Najib Ma'l-i Herawi (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 1992), p. 192.

39. Lahiji refers to this encounter in his work *Asrar al-shuhud*, ed. 'Ali Al-i Dawud (Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi Mutal'at va Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, 1989), pp. 85-87.

40. Shushtari, *Majalis*, vol. 2, p. 147.

41. For the Indian history of the Nurbakhshiyya, see Mohibbul Hasan, "al-Iraqi, Shams al-Din," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Suppl. 423.

42. Ghulam Hasan Suhrawardi Nurbakhshi, Tarikh-i Baltistan (Mirpur, Azad Kashmir: Virinag Publishers, 1992), p. 180.

43. These are Sa'd' al-Din Hamuwayi (d. 1252-53); Najm' al-Din Daya Razi (d. 1256); 'Ala' al-Dawla Simnani (d. 1336); Mahmud Mazdaqani (d. 1364-65); and 'Ali Hamadani (d. 1385) (Nurbakhsh, *Risalat al-huda*, fols. 87a-88b.

44. He refers, in this context, to Ptolemy, Jamasp, and the Muslim polyhistor Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274) in his capacity as a philosopher (Nurbakhsh, *Risalat al-huda*, fol. 87b).

45. Nurbakhsh, *Risalat al-huda*, fol. 87a.

46. Ibid., fol. 90a.

47. Ibid., fol. 88a.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., fol. 88a-b.

50. Ibid., fol. 89a-b.

51. His basic formulation regarding the resurrection is to perceive of it as a multifaceted phenomenon, so that one has to talk of various kinds of resurrections. A succinct version of this theory is presented in *al-Risala al-i'tiqadiya*, the work comprising his creedal statement (Marijan Molé, "Professions de foi de deux Kubrawis: Ali-i Hamadani et Muhammad Nurbaksh," *Bulletin d'etudes orientales* 17 [1961-62], pp. 196-201).

52. Nurbaksh, *Risalat al-huda*, fol. 87a.

53. Ibid., fols. 88b, 107b.

54. Muhammad Nurbakhsh, "Maktub beh 'Ala' al-Dawla," in Sadaqiyanlu, ed., *Tahqiq dar ahval va asar-i Sayyid Muhammad Nurbaksh*, p. 81.

55. Nurbakhsh, "Risala-yi mi'rajiya," in Sadaqiyanlu, ed., *Tahqiq dar ahval va asar*, p. 116. This perspective is reiterated in numerous other discussions in Nurbakhsh's works.

56. Muhammad Nurbakhsh, "Dar javab-i maktub-i fuqaha'," in Sadaqiyanlu, ed., *Tahqiq dar ahval va asar*, pp. 101-2.

# 3

# *Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance*

## Friday Prayer as Politics in the Safavid Period

ANDREW J. NEWMAN

A confluence of interests has been identified between the Safavid state (1501–1722) and those Twelver clerics who supported the expansion of clerical authority over both theological and jurisprudential interpretation and the practical affairs of the community. Expansion of clerical authority over both doctrine and practice was based on the principle of the *niyaba* (deputyship), i.e., that the *faqih* (jurisprudent) is the *na'ib* (deputy) of the Imam during the latter's occultation. The state's support for these clerics so enhanced their position as the Imam's deputies as to lay the juridical and institutional bases for the later emergence of the position of *marja' taqlid*. It should not be presumed, however, that this confluence, the articulation of a vision of an expanded clerical authority, and efforts at its implementation went unchallenged.

The legitimacy of the Friday prayer service during the Imam's absence was a particular touchstone in the debates over clerical authority and the clergy's association with the state. Broadly speaking, there were three possible positions on the issue. Those classifying the prayer as *wujub takhyiri* argued that the presence of the Imam or his deputy, by this time a reference to the *faqih*, was required to lead the prayer. The *takhyiri* position thus represented an effort to assert an authority for the *faqih* independent of the contemporary political institution. Those arguing the prayer was *'adam wujub* (not obligatory) or *haram* (forbidden) maintained the prayer was, respectively, either not obligatory or actually forbidden in the occultation, as the Imams had not given specific permission for its performance in their absence. Proponents of the third position, that Friday prayer was *wujub 'ayni* (an individual obligation), were less concerned with the presence or absence of any deputy than that a practice carried out during the Imams' presence be continued in their absence in accord with the directive of the established political institution; in Safavid Iran the centre–the court or Shaykh al-Islam of the capital–appointed local prayer leaders.[1]

This study tests the validity of this understanding of Friday prayer. The first part analyzes the careers and writings on this question of several well known clerics of the early Safavid period. Then special attention is devoted to the appointment by Shah 'Abbas II (reg. 1642–1666) of Muhsin Fayd al-Kashani (d. 1680), a proponent of the prayer as *wujub 'ayni*, as prayer leader in the capital of Isfahan. He exemplifies the

confluence of state and clerical interests—in which the state's effort to propound its own agenda was predicated on an expanded authority for the clergy during the occultation—and the opposition it engendered. Based on these case studies, the arguments over the legitimacy of the prayer would seem enunciated as much within, if not directly informed by, a broader socioeconomic and/or political framework in that they were the product of jurisprudential disagreement. At the same time there seem to have been few practical differences between proponents of the *takhyiri* and *ʿayni* positions on the question of *niyaba*—in both cases the *faqih* as *naʾib* was to lead the prayer, and both groups envisioned an expanded role for the *faqih* in other areas of the community's life. Finally, despite the preference of the state and its allies among the Twelver clergy for the prayer's performance—the former not the least in that the inclusion of the present ruler's name in the *khutba* stressed the religious realm's acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the political—it also seems clear that Friday prayer was not continuously performed over the two centuries of the Safavid period.

## The Politicization of Friday Prayer in the Early Safavid Period

Throughout the Safavid period, extrajurisprudential realities informed clerics' discussions of the legitimacy of the Friday prayer service during the occultation. This pattern was well established within decades after the establishment of Twelver Shiʿism in Iran.

ʿAli al-Karaki (d. 1534) was the first major Safavid-period cleric to author a Friday prayer essay. The manner of al-Karaki's identification with the state lent legitimacy to the distinctive nature of the shahs' own association with the faith, prompted the criticism of a number of other clerics, and determined the peculiar nature of his response to that criticism.[2] In 1510, less than a decade after Shah Ismaʿil (reg. 1499–1524) had proclaimed the faith's establishment in Tabriz in 1501, al-Karaki composed an essay in defense of his acceptance of *al-kharaj* revenues from the shah by arguing that the *faqih* who possessed *shara'it al-ijtihad* was permitted to interact with, and receive compensation from, the political authority, based on the principle of *niyaba ʿamma* (general deputyship) of the *faqih* in relation to the absent Imam—*al-naʾib al-khass* (the special deputy), by now understood as referring to one of the Imam's four *sufara*, the last of whom had died in 941. Elsewhere al-Karaki ruled that as such the *faqih* could undertake *al-qada'* (judicial authority) and implement *al-hudud* (legal punishments). This specification of the *faqih* as such a general deputy was attacked by—among others—Ibrahim al-Qatifi (d. after 1539), who also condemned both al-Karaki's receipt of *al-kharaj* revenues and his efforts to expand the *faqih*'s authority over both *al-zakat* and *al-khums*.

Al-Karaki's position on Friday prayer as *takhyiri*, i.e., requiring the presence of the Imam or his deputy to lead the prayer, derived from the principles established in his essay on *al-kharaj*. In a brief discussion of Friday prayer in a general prayer essay composed in 1511—the year after the *kharaj* essay—al-Karaki stated that during the occultation the prayer's performance required *naʾib al-ghayba* (the deputy of the occultation). As used in his *kharaj* essay, this formulation referred to he "who possesses *al-shara'it*." Several years later, in 1515, al-Karaki authored an essay specifically addressing the legitimacy of Friday prayer during the occultation, in which he wrote that "the prayer is not legitimate during the occultation except with the presence of *al-faqih al-jamiʿ li'l-*

*shara'it* (the *faqih* possessing the qualifications) and his being the prayer leader." Al-Karaki detailed and refuted opposing viewpoints on the question, but his careful avoidance of the term *al-na'ib al-ʿamm*—arguing instead the *faqih* was not appointed specifically (*mansub bi-khusus*) but generally (*ʿala wajh kull*)—suggests that his reference to the principle of *al-niyaba al-ʿamma* in his earlier *kharaj* defense had been so controversial as to preclude its subsequent extension to the question of the leadership of Friday prayer during the occultation.

In his longer *Jamiʿ al-Maqasid*, written more than a decade later, al-Karaki, although clear as to the prerogatives of the *faqih* in relation to such areas of community life as *al-qada* and *al-hudud*, was still reluctant to refer to "the general deputyship" in relation to Friday prayer as well as *al-jihad*, *al-zakat*, and *al-khums*. Instead al-Karaki applied the terms used in his earlier essay.

The reaction to al-Karaki's association with the court and his effort to promulgate the principle of general deputyship continued to be considerable. Al-Qatifi, whose *kharaj* essay had already denied the legal bases of al-Karaki's court service and thereby the legitimacy that service lent the court's association with the faith, further questioned these, however implicitly, in later criticisms of al-Karaki's prayer formulations. The political institution was delighted with al-Karaki's record of service: in 1532 a *firman* was issued declaring al-Karaki deputy of the Imam (*na'ib al-Imam*) and granting him authority over all religious affairs—including selection of prayer leaders—as well as rewarding him financially. Within the larger community, however, opposition to al-Karaki and his legacy remained so substantial that sometime after his death in 1534 Friday prayer services were discontinued. The *kharaj* debate also continued to excite controversy well after his death.[3]

Shaykh Zayn al-Din al-ʿAmili, al-Shahid al-Thani (the second martyr, killed by the Ottomans in 1557) was perhaps the first to advocate the *ʿayni* position in this period. In his essay on the prayer, completed in 1554, the Shaykh specifically criticized al-Karaki's stipulation of the presence of the Imam or his deputy as necessary for the prayer's performance. In other areas of community practice, the Shaykh was not at all reluctant to argue for an expanded role for the *faqih*. Indeed, using al-Karaki's formulation of the *faqih* as *al-na'ib al-ʿamm*, the Shaykh granted the *faqih* key roles in managing *al-khums* and *al-zakat*.

Nevertheless, the underlying political agenda of the Shaykh's adoption of the *ʿayni* position seems clear. He remained based in Ottoman territory throughout his career, thereby rejecting the Safavid identification with the faith as explicitly as he did a number of al-Karaki's doctrinal pronouncements. As part of a broader effort to ensure the Twelver community based in Ottoman territory did not appear threatening, a position on Friday prayer that, at least in theory, left to the Sunni Ottoman authorities the decision about the very public expression of community solidarity such a position represented thereby minimized a very visible assertion of independent Twelver clerical authority, and only complemented Shaykh Zayn al-Din's rejection of the Safavids.[4]

Shaykh Zayn al-Din's student and colleague Shaykh Husayn b. ʿAbd al-Samad (d. 1576), having avoided Safavid territory during his teacher's lifetime, came to Iran at his teacher's death. Appointed Shaykh al-Islam of the capital of Qazvin, Shaykh Husayn was charged with restoring the practice of Friday prayer in Safavid territory. In his 1563 essay *al-ʿIqd al-Husayni*, he followed his teacher in advocating the *ʿayni* position and criticizing al-Karaki's *takhyiri* position.

This ruling also seems to have been informed, if only in part, by extrajuridical realities. Shaykh Husayn appears to have composed the essay shortly after being dismissed as the capital's Shaykh al-Islam, ca. 1563. The authority Shaykh Husayn permitted the shah over the prayer by adopting the *ʿayni* position only emphasized Husayn's acceptance of the special relationship with the faith claimed by the Safavids and, thereby, Safavid authority over the community and its daily practices—claims he and Shaykh Zayn al-Din had rejected earlier by their refusal to emigrate to Safavid territory during the latter's lifetime—as well as, more immediately, acknowledgment of Tahmasp's power to take away and grant positions. Indeed Husayn separately expressed his obeisance to the shah and requested an appointment. Penance done, Husayn was later appointed to positions in Tus/Mashhad and then Herat.

Shaykh Husayn lost his post to Sayyid Husayn al-Karaki (d. 1592–93), grandson of ʿAli al-Karaki, whose position on Friday prayer also merits consideration. Several years before, in 1559, Sayyid Husayn had composed a Friday prayer essay that defended al-Karaki's position against that of Shaykh Husayn's teacher Zayn al-Din. Sayyid Husayn's defense of al-Karaki, a scholar of proven loyalty and service both to the court and Tahmasp personally, against a cleric opposed to the Safavids' pretensions and ʿAli al-Karaki's recognition of these only recalled the association of Shaykh Husayn with the rejection of al-Karaki. As such Sayyid Husayn's attack facilitated the dismissal of Zayn al-Din's student. Subsequently Sayyid Husayn's career took such a turn for the better that he participated in the ritual washing of Tahmasp's body at his death in 1576.[5]

The extrajuridical dimensions of debates over Friday prayer featured among the next generation of clerics as well. Shaykh Husayn's own son Baha' al-Din Muhammad, known as Shaykh Baha'i (d. 1620–21), was a close associate of the court during the reign of ʿAbbas I (1588–1629). Condemnation of his alleged Sufi connections, Akhbari-style attacks on his support for *ijtihad* and the expansion of clerical authority, and criticisms of his court connections forced Baha'i to resign his position as Shaykh al-Islam in the capital Isfahan for foreign travel.

In 1616 Baha'i was back in Isfahan composing his *Jamʿ-i ʿAbbasi*. In this work he upheld clerical authority over *al-zakat* and *al-khums* during the occultation, thus continuing the legacy of both al-Karaki and Shaykh Zayn al-Din. However, Baha'i's lengthy discussions of these two issues in *Jamʿ-i ʿAbbasi* contrasted markedly with his brief discussion of Friday prayer: Baha'i only cursorily noted the disagreement within the community on the issue and made clear his own preference for *takhyiri*.

Advocacy of the *ʿayni* position might have cemented Baha'i's links to, and dependence on the court, but his situation in the capital remained sufficiently precarious as to prevent him from resuming any official, formal court association. However, given that the vigorous challenge to the prayer in the previous century had eventually occasioned its abandonment, Baha'i's advocacy of the *takhyiri* position was, in effect, a return to the principle of *al-niyaba al-ʿamma* established by al-Karaki, which permitted Baha'i to advocate an expanded role for the clergy while maintaining a formal distance between himself and the court. Needing no more controversy himself Baha'i was careful not to refer to any other of al-Karaki's propositions which had generated controversy. He also did not point out that his own stance contradicted that of his father and the latter's teacher Shaykh Zayn al-Din.[6]

Thus, throughout the first century following the establishment of faith in Iran by the Safavids, nonjurisprudential considerations clearly formed a background for the arguments over Friday prayer. The cleric's role in legitimizing the agenda of the political institution itself was clearly an issue, whichever of three positions was being advocated, and such was the popular opposition to the confluence of clerical and state interests exemplified by the prayer's performance that for at least a time during this period the prayer service was suspended. At the same time, it is clear that the *takhyiri* position espoused by the Karakis and Shaykh Baha'i did not postulate a role for the *faqih* sufficiently independent to affront the state and preclude close relations between the court and the *fuqaha*. Finally, the *'ayni* position advocated by Shaykh Zayn al-Din and his student Shaykh Husayn did not preclude acceptance of *al-niyaba* on other issues. The support for either of these two positions by these clerics was informed by their acceptance of the broader agenda of the—Sunni or Shi'i—political institution and an expanded notion of clerical authority over the interpretation of doctrine and practice during the occultation. Advocates of the *'ayni* position did not suggest that someone other than the *faqih* was to conduct the prayer but rather argued that the *faqih*'s presence in his capacity as deputy to the Imam was not required for the prayer to be undertaken.

## The Changing Nature of the Safavid Social Formation

Even before his appointment by 'Abbas II, Muhsin Fayd al-Kashani's early career was such that he was certainly aware, directly and indirectly, of the earlier debates on Friday prayer, clerical authority, and the association between the court and the clergy. In his youth Fayd studied *hadith* in Shiraz with Baha'i's student Sayyid Majid al-Bahrani (d. 1619).[7] Fayd then studied with Baha'i himself in Isfahan, likely during the last several years before the Baha'i's death.[8] Fayd then studied with Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, Mulla Sadra, (d. 1640) in Qum for some eight years, married Sadra's daughter, accompanied his teacher to Shiraz, and remained there two years. Sadra had studied with Baha'i and Mir Damad—as much as Baha'i a clerical associate of the court during the reign of 'Abbas I—and was himself no stranger to controversy. Like Baha'i and Mir Damad, Sadra studied the esoteric religious sciences, *'irfan*, and rationalist philosophy. The intensity of attacks on Sadra's alleged connections with the "popular" forms of Sufi inquiry forced him, like Baha'i, to leave Isfahan.[9]

If the available juridical parameters on the legality of Friday prayer in the later seventeenth century were the same as those in the sixteenth, external influences on the debate changed with developments in the broader Safavid social formation. The broader sociopolitical dynamic at the heart of 'Abbas I's reign was already evolving by the end of his reign. At his death in 1629, the dominance of an alliance of *oymaq*, *haram*, and clerical elements—a grouping Babayan has named the Shaykhavand cabal—initially continued into the reign of 'Abbas's grandson and successor Safi (d. 1642), 18 years old at his accession.[10] The 1632 Mab'as massacre—killing, blinding, or dismissing from their posts all members of this grouping—marked the ascension of an alliance of *ghulam* and Tajik bureaucratic elements, which Babayan has called the Rustam Beg cabal. The clerics who were allied with the previous dynamic suffered accordingly.[11]

These political intrigues occurred against the backdrop of, and were hastened by, developments whose genesis lay in earlier decades but whose impact intensified as the century passed. The newly introduced *ghulam* corps's intrusion at the level of the political elite against the influence of *oymaq* elements, the ongoing decline in revenue produced by the conversion of state (*mamalik*) land into crown (*khassa*) land, and the continued outflow of specie that exacerbated the realm's dependence on external, mainly Ottoman, sources of specie all produced military weakness, territorial loss, and further declines in revenue.[12]

The predominance of the Rustam Beg ensured the smooth accession of Safi's son as 'Abbas II—then aged 10—in May 1642. In 1644 a new configuration combining elements of the Shaykhavand and certain *oymaq*s ascended to power. Saru Taqi was assasinated in 1645 and, although Mirza Habiballah remained *sadr*, Sultan al-Ulama was returned as grand vizier.

The center now undertook to control the growing outflow of specie, a problem accelerated by the widening presence of foreign traders in this period, and the activity of the local Jewish, Armenian, and Banyan (Indians based in Iran) merchants. The latter in particular bore the brunt of the government's restrictions and its frustration—if not also "popular" anger—at being unable to control the outflow. A month after his appointment in 1645, Sultan al-Ulama instituted an intensive campaign against these minority local merchants. Accentuating the crisis was an actual increase in the center's need for revenue under 'Abbas II.

The exceedingly harsh winter of 1653–54 was marked by severe inflation and famine. At Sultan al-'Ulema"s death in January of 1654, Muhammad Beg—a *ghulam*—became vizier. Although his crisis measures met with some success, the land conversion process reached its height, aggravating the revenue situation. In 1657 the Dutch East India Company exported record amounts of specie, severe local restrictions closed some money-changers, and Muhammad Beg initiated a campaign against Jews and Armenians.[13]

In the century's middle decades, tribal discontent with the growing dichotomy between Safavid religious, especially Sufi-style, rhetoric—coupled with the downgrading of the tribe's status within the polity—and the anger of both tribal and urban elements with the worsening economic hardships manifested themselves within traditional motifs. Widespread tribal discontent was clear from the degree of tribal support for the 1631 messianic Darvish Rida rebellion, soon after Safi's accession and following rumblings in 1630 of the appearance of the Rustam Beg cabal. The uprising, echoing the messianism of Shah Isma'il himself, shook the central government. Although the *ghulam* forces broke the rebellion, mounting its leader's head on a pike in Isfahan a similar revolt occurred eight years later; its leader proclaimed he was the same Darvish Rida who had never died.

Disquiet among urban merchant and artisanal and craft elements during this time also increasingly occasioned concern at the center. 'Abbas I, fearing the political nature of some of Isfahan's coffeehouses—patronized by artists, poets, musicians, storytellers, and Sufis—had sent clerics to monitor their activities and preach sermons or lead prayers. The growing polemic against "popular" Sufism and messianism attests to their rising popularity over the period; the appearance between 1626 and 1629 of the first of the essays directed against the veneration of Abu Muslim (d. 754), the Iranian 'Alid agent of the Abbasid movement in Khurasan, points to the rise of such a millenarian move-

ment in Isfahan.[14] These attacks also singled out the alleged association between such "popular" movements and clerics affiliated with the court during ʿAbbas I's reign. Thus Mir Lawhi, a student of Baha'i and Mir Damad, attacked what he said was the public support given the messianic aspects of the Abu Muslim tradition by Muhammad Taqi al-Majlisi (d. 1659), also a student of Shaykh Baha'i and Mir Damad. Mir Lawhi was then himself attacked by defenders of al-Majlisi and, presumably also, devotees of Abu Muslim. The Mabʿas massacre in 1632, which marked the end of court support for the clerical associates of ʿAbbas I's court/clergy alliance, only encouraged the anti-Sufi forces in their attacks: in the two decades beginning in 1633–34, some twenty essays were written to attack the popularity of Abu Muslim and Sufi practices generally, and to defend Mir Lawhi.[15] The mid-century campaign of Sultan al-Ulama against minority merchants also cracked down on wine taverns and certain forms of coffeehouse entertainment and points to these as focal points of these polemics in the urban centers.[16]

The mounting anti-Abu Muslim and anti-Sufi campaign, including the targeting of al-Majlisi, checked Safi's own early efforts to establish a connection with the rationalist, *ʿirfani*-oriented clerics associated with those clerics who had served ʿAbbas I. These efforts had included an invitation to Fayd to come to the capital. Fayd declined, perhaps wisely given the prevailing atmosphere.[17]

During ʿAbbas II's reign, the court, free of the influence of the Rustam Beg cabal but still beset by and struggling to contain both the communal clashes and the broader socioeconomic crises that was exacerbating them, gradually adopted a more balanced approach to the middle-ranking clerics' struggle against rising Sufi millenarianism. On the one hand, ʿAli Kamra'i, the critic of Safi's contact with Sadra and proponent of clerical political rule, was named Isfahan's Shaykh al-Islam in Sultan al-Ulama's first cabinet in 1645. On the other hand, at the death of the *sadr* Mirza Habiballah in 1653, Mirza Muhammad Mahdi, a son-in-law of Sultan al-Ulama known for his interest in Sufi-style inquiry, was named *sadr*. Also, following Sultan al-Ulama's death in 1654, the shah himself, now in his twenties, espoused a more public interest in Sufism.[18]

## Fayd's Appointment as Prayer Leader

The burgeoning economic and social crises and the state's generally ineffectual responses explain the persecution of Iran's minorities. The appointment of Kamra'i on one hand and, on the other, both the royal patronage granted certain prominent Sufi shaykhs and the court's open interest in Sufi-style inquiry testify to a balanced effort by the center to associate with—and thereby influence, if not actually control—the religious antagonisms and movements that were exacerbated by these underlying crises and just as threatening to the health of the polity. The *firman* issued in Rabi al-Awwal in 1654 asking Fayd to come to Isfahan to lead the Friday prayer services and the request made in the same year to al-Majlisi to prepare a Persian translation of *Man La Yahdaruhu al-Faqih*, the *hadith* compilation of the Buwayhid-period Twelver scholar Ibn Babawayh (d. 991–92), were also representative of court efforts to manage the religious dimension of these crises.[19]

The loyalty of both Fayd and al-Majlisi to the political institution and, therefore, their suitability for such a project were already well established. Although both are generally adjudged Akhbaris,[20] in fact both are more usefully understood as being of the

category of *mujtahid/muhaddith* in that each supported the allocation of important community practices to the *faqih* during the occultation. In works completed in 1632 and 1636 Fayd, for example, involved the *faqih* in the administration of *al-zakat*, and upheld the *faqih*'s involvement in the administration of *al-khums* "by right of *al-niyaba*." Too, as had most earlier clerics supporting the expansion of clerical authority over doctrinal interpretation and community practice during the occultation, both also permitted interaction with the established political institution. Fayd, for example, expanded on rulings offered by al-ʿAllama al-Hilli (d. 1325) and ʿAli al-Karaki on accepting remuneration from the political establishment.[21]

The support of Fayd and al-Majlisi for the *ʿayni* position on Friday prayer—proof again that holding this position did not preclude support for *al-niyaba* in other areas—was also well-established.[22] Certainly aware both of the fate suffered by his teachers Baha'i and Sadra for their interests in Sufi-style inquiry and of the particular controversy surrounding the efforts of both ʿAli al-Karaki and Baha'i to extend *al-niyaba* to include the prayer, from early on Fayd had cast his lot with the absolute requirement for the prayer—therefore and thereby dismissing the whole matter of *al-niyaba* in relation to the prayer—and thus firmly with the established political institution. Fayd's support for the *ʿayni* position dated at least from his 1619 *Muʿtasim al-Shiʿa*, likely composed in part during his stay in Isfahan and study with Baha'i. Fayd reiterated his commitment to this position in his 1632–33 work *Mafatih al-Shara'iʿ*, probably written in Sadra's company, as the power of the Rustam Beg was becoming manifest.[23] Handing the matter to the political realm, given the very public, intensely political aspect of this community practice in a period of growing crisis, represented a declaration of loyalty to that establishment, and this was only further strengthened by mention of the shah's name in the *khutba*. Such repeated pledges of loyalty only eased Fayd's later decline of Safi's invitation to come to court when the potential for mishap, based on Sultan al-Ulama's fate after Mabʿas and the attacks on his associate al-Majlisi, was great.

In 1645, several years after ʿAbbas II's accession, perhaps appreciating that the ascension of a new ruler mandated a restatement of his acknowledgement of the political authority, Fayd composed *Abwab al-Jinan*, an essay entirely devoted to the prayer.[24] The recitation of the shah's name in the *khutba* only further underscored his loyalty. Fayd composed the essay in Persian, suggesting that among the mass of Persian-speaking population the matter was perhaps yet controversial.

In 1647 Fayd further developed his position in an Arabic-language essay on the prayer entitled *al-Shihab al-Thaqib*, criticizing *ashab al-raʾy wa'l-ijtihad* (the proponents of opinion and independent reasoning) for their insistence on *wujub al-sultan al-ʿadil aw man nasabuhu* (the presence of the Just Imam or his appointee) and, indeed, the presence of *al-faqih* in his capacity as *naʾib al-Imam* as well as the concepts of *al-idhn al-ʿamm* (the general permission) and *al-idhn al-khass* (the special permission). He detailed the lack of evidence in the Qur'an, the *akhbar* of the Imams, and *al-ijmaʿ* for such principles as related to the performance of the prayer during the occultation, and cited evidence that the prayer was to be performed whatever the circumstances.[25] There was no suggestion, however, that any individual other than the *faqih* was to lead the prayer once the political establishment had sanctioned its performance.

If the fealty of both Fayd and al-Majlisi to the political institution was thus clear, so was the connection of each with those religious elements with whom the court was most

concerned.[26] Fayd, who had studied with Baha'i and Sadra, was clearly interested in *'irfan*. Like Sadra also, however, Fayd was on the "right" side of the interest in this form of inquiry, having already condemned certain "popular" "Sufi" practices and behavior as excessive. In his 1650–51 essay *al-Kalimat al-Tarifa*, for example, Fayd had denounced Sufi excesses as well as the ideas and practices of many other groups in a diatribe which, however embellished, denoted the variety of polemics and practices on offer in the chaos of this period.[27] 'Abbas II clearly hoped that as such Fayd would exert a moderating, if not controlling, influence over Isfahan's various vociferous groups, as 'Abbas I had hoped when he sent clerics to the coffeehouses to preach sermons and lead prayers.

Fayd himself confirmed that this was the nature of the role intended for him.[28] In *Sharh-e Sadr*, he wrote that he had been called to "propagate the Friday and group prayers, spread the religious sciences and teach the *shari'a*."[29] He described the process in greater detail in *al-I'tidhar*. Prior to the invitation, he had been studying, writing, and leading the Friday prayer with a small number who also adhered to the *'ayni* position. He led the prayer reluctantly, however, since there was "no one else that I might follow." Coupled with Fayd's certain inclusion of the shah's name in the prayer service, his position on the matter became sufficiently well known that the shah sent for him to come to the capital "that we might benefit from your knowledge and welcome your arrival and promote the Friday and group prayers by your presence." After much discussion with his companions and seeing an opportunity for propagating the faith, Fayd accepted.

Once in place, however, Fayd quickly became aware of great divisions within the community. The shah, "tireless" in his efforts "to propagate the faith and glorify the practices of God" among the people, ordered Fayd to undertake the prayer "in their mosque; he would have no one else in my place." Then, wrote Fayd, the shah waited for the divisions and disputes to settle down, such that "the practices of the faith and the performance of the Friday and group prayers" might be promoted, and "that hearts be tamed by pious deeds and spurred on to invoke God and what God had prohibited of [what was] disagreeable and abominable."

"But," Fayd added, "the people (*al-qawm*) split into groups and made common cause in factions . . . this added to their disagreement and aggravated the roots of the tree of their conflict." In his letter to the shah, Fayd lamented that the divisions and disagreements within the community were such that the Friday prayer, whose goal was bringing people together, was now "the cause of separation and divisions such that all agree to disagree."[30]

In *Sharh-e Sadr* Fayd depicts this opposition as having sprung from three circles. The first, "roguish" people, were ignorant of the "disciplines of the faith" (*'ulum-e shar'iya*), doubting and perplexed about the conditions (*shara'it*) of the Friday and group prayers. They simply withdrew from the prayer. In *al-I'tidhar* he described them as in emulation (*taqlid*) of their fathers, enamored of "the vanities of this world," and followers (*muqallidun*) of teachings of a group that possessed no "discernment."

The second group were those who claimed *ijtihad* and consorted much with the *'awamm* (common people). In *al-I'tidhar* he added that this group left the city with the "rag-tag riff-raff" to perform the prayer in villages, thus sowing further discord among the faithful.

Third, according to *Sharh-e Sadr*, were those who labeled the Friday and group prayers for the *ʿawamm* as "dishonour, shameful, hateful (*makruh*) and forbidden (*haram*)." In the later work, he declared simply that this group forbad the prayer, though they knew the *hadith* in which the Prophet had ordered the burning of the houses of a group refusing to attend the prayer service.[31]

In *al-Iʿtidhar* Fayd described a fourth group that ignored injunctions to command the good and forswear the evil, let alone to perform the Friday and group prayers, "as if it were not counted a sin against them if they isolate themselves, or that there would be no objection if they were silent."[32]

Fayd's letter contained a less schematic portrayal of the same divisions. He noted simply that one group was confused about the permissibility of the prayer, another did the prayer separately, praying less than a *farsakh* away—a stance he called unreasonable and illegal—and another met to pray some distance away. The force of the disagreement scattered the rest of the people from "the spiritual harmony of the rows in the mosque."[33]

The severity of the opposition took a great personal toll on both the shah and Fayd himself. In *Sharh-e Sadr* Fayd reported that these divisions caused the shah to lose his resolve (*ʿazm*) both to propagate the faith and "to put a stop to what had been forbidden and prohibited." In *al-Iʿtidhar* Fayd wrote that the situation caused the shah to lose his resolve to undertake "the propagation of the Friday and group prayers and opening up the gates of well-being." Thereafter the shah himself attended the Friday prayers "only rarely, and gave himself up to pleasure." The shah challenged Fayd himself on the whole affair, and Fayd declared: "I was unable to answer. How is it possible to excuse such disputation and such strife and disagreement?" Fayd was especially irritated with the behavior of those who, like him, "hold with the necessity of performing the Friday and group prayers and who count them as a religious duty." The rankling and slander and casting of aspersions was, he added, visible among both the elite (*al-khawass*) and the masses (*al-ʿawamm*).

This description of the shah's withdrawal corresponds with other accounts of the ruler's behavior in the middle years of his reign. ʿAbbas II is reported to have stayed in the haram or on hunting parties, taking little interest in the wider affairs of the state. The grand vizier Muhammad Beg did continue his efforts to deal with the economy: 1657 saw his own campaign against Iranian Jews, and the export ban on gold was well enforced between 1658 and 1661. Nevertheless the hemorrhaging of great sums of specie continued, only accentuating the social dislocation.[34]

Fayd's own personal turmoil is apparent in his *Sharh-e Sadr*, and especially in *al-Iʿtidhar*, which he had written in a reply to a cleric seeking the same position. Fayd said he himself had only undertaken the post because it had been entrusted to him by royal command. Given the opposition he encountered, Fayd despaired that his repeated requests to be excused from the post had been denied. In a tone reflecting his discouragement and frustration, he declared he now believed it was permissable to abandon the prayer in the event that performing it encouraged corruption, resistance, division, rebellion, contrariness and mutual hatred. "In such instances the Imams also abandoned it," he added. Fayd then lamented more openly his own personal situation, and that the hypocrisy and discord within the community had afflicted and isolated him.

The anomaly of his public situation also grated on Fayd. In his letter to the shah, he noted that his material condition and rank now resembled that of "khans and amirs,"

and engendered a worldliness that was itself causing "disunion of the senses and doubt and confusion." Though not wrong, he felt it was problematic for him to ascend the minbar, "the place of prophets and legatees" to "exhort the people to forsake the world and take a place on the seat of judgement and *fatwa*." He closed the letter with a request to be released from his charge.

In his *l-l'tidhar*, composed in 1666 in the month ʿAbbas died but prior to the shah's death, Fayd referred to his having left his post.[35] Although the exact date of his departure is not clear, he is known to have been leading the prayer in Isfahan in 1661–62 and 1665, although the shah visited him in Kashan in 1662–63. He may therefore have only just resigned his post when he composed *al-l'tidhar* in 1666. [36] Thus it would seem that in the early-to-mid 1660s the prayer was again discontinued in the city at least, although it may have been performed—absent the court-appointed prayer leader—in nearby villages.

In none of his accounts of the opposition to Friday prayer did Fayd note any connection between his opponents on Friday prayer and the propagators of the widespread contemporary anti-Sufi polemic, which certainly continued apace over this period. Muhammad Tahir Qummi (d. 1687), for example—his preference for the *ʿayni* position, and thus his fealty to the shah, already clear and his hostility to Sufism and al-Majlisi in particular already well known—penned at least one more assault in the latter years of ʿAbbas II's reign. On the defensive himself now against implicit allegations of his interest in Sufism, in his 1660–61 *Muhakama* Fayd stepped up his own critique of Sufi excesses and certain classes of clerics. In his *al-Insaf*, finished in 1672, Fayd continued his anti-Sufi polemic and admitted he himself had perhaps shown too much interest in *tasawwuf* in his younger days. The polemic's continuation, the attention given the darvish cults in such histories as *Qisas al-Khaqani*, and the comments of Chardin over this period—some of which have been cited—are obvious evidence that the millenarian/Sufi movement retained its vitality well past the death of ʿAbbas II, in conjunction with the worsening socio-economic crises.[37]

Fayd's lack of reference to the anti-Sufi polemic in his discussions of the Friday prayer polemic suggests that each was a distinct controversy. The reason may have been that each had distinct social basis in Safavid society.[38] Fayd's inability even to establish Friday prayer on a uniform basis throughout the city meant that both he and, through him, the court itself were denied the *minbar* from which to challenge and attempt to mollify the widespread conflict that the Sufi polemic reflected. Given the faith that the court had placed in the appointment of Fayd—and the commissions given al-Majlisi and Qazvini—to resolve these socioreligious tensions, it is no wonder that both the shah and Fayd were so discouraged at the reception Fayd received when he attempted to establish the prayer in the capital city.

By contrast Fayd's own accounts suggest there was something of an Akhbari/Usuli dimension to the opposition he faced over Friday prayer. His reference to his first group of opponents as *muqallidun*, ignorant of the "disciplines of the faith," and perplexed about—i.e., rejecting—the *shara'it*, suggests a distinct Akhbari element to the antiprayer polemic. The *shara'it* referred to the qualifications and personal attributes that were required of the Imam's deputy, whose presence such Usulis as ʿAli al-Karaki and Shaykh Baha'i required for the prayer to be performed during the occultation. Among these qualifications and personal attributes were status as a freeman, maturity and, perhaps

more importantly, knowledge of the various rationalist religious disciplines and use of these to practice individual interpretation (*ijtihad*). The "radical" Akhbari—including perhaps al-Qatifi, for example—rejected both *al-niyaba* and, especially, any recourse to nontextual, and especially rationalist, aspects to the law, relying solely on the Twelver-accepted revelation in matters of doctrine and practice; some excluded any reference to the Qur'an at all.

Use of such terms as *makruh* and *haram*—employed by clerics to classify the degree of objection to an action—by the third group suggest the group's adherence to aspects of the Usuli polemic, with its references to such legal categories. "Moderate" Akhbaris (i.e., the *mujtahid-muhaddith*), including Khalil Qazvini, accepted just such aspects of Usulism and might have maintained that position, as long as they were careful, as was Qazvini, not to otherwise offend the established political institution. Indeed, the shah's commission to Qazvini suggests an effort to reach out to the advocates of the *tahrim* position.

The "claim" to *ijtihad* and the "popular" connections of members of the second group also imply Usuli leanings, but by "popular," less well-educated clerics adjudged unworthy of the claim. Perhaps this was Samahiji's "radical" Usuli, known for using such platforms to propagate their own political agenda, which often included calls for direct rule by the clergy.[39]

The broader political implications of the disagreements between and within the Akhbari and Usuli schools have been rehearsed elsewhere. Each of Fayd's groups, from within its own perspective, saw something to reject in Fayd's attempt to undertake the prayer, in the alliance between the state and certain elements of the Twelver *mujtahid-muhaddith* establishment which Fayd's appointment represented, and in the agenda of the state which underlay that appointment. If Samahiji's 1712–13 essay on the differences between and within the Akhbari and Usuli "schools" offered a somewhat idealized picture of what the dispute eventually became, Fayd's portrait of the objections of his various opponents may suggest the nature of these disputes during their earlier, formative stages.[40]

## Conclusion

The location of the debate over the legality of Friday prayer outside a purely jurisprudential framework is evident from early in the first Safavid century. Disagreement over *al-niyaba al-ʿamma* generally was as much a factor as the specific rejection of the clergy/state alliance's support for extending that *niyaba* to include Friday prayer, and thus to lend legitimacy to the Safavid identification with the faith. Disapproval of the latter effort was so widespread that after al-Karaki's death the prayer lapsed. Even after its reinstitution later in the century, events in the nonjuridical realm continued to influence the debate. Early in the next century, Baha'i's personal position within the clergy/state coalition permitted only limited attempts to reestablish the prayer's legitimacy.

Although by this point the state's identification with the faith was better established, the specific nature of the Safavid political formation was influenced by developments in both the larger tribal dynamic and the underlying socioeconomic formation, itself also subject to influences located outside the Safavid polity. The nature of the interaction

between state and clergy and the opposition to the association of these two realms in turn was informed by developments at such broader levels.

In the specific context of the continuing controversy over the prayer, the support of Fayd and others in this century for the *ʿayni* position completely avoided the question of *al-niyaba*, let alone its extension to include the prayer. By the mid seventeenth century, however, the underlying infrastructural bases for the faith's establishment in Safavid society, and such key cities as Isfahan in particular, for example, were the more firm for a century of patronage and support. Thus, when the opposition to Fayd's alliance with the court in favor of the prayer weakened the resolve of both the shah and Fayd and dashed hopes for quelling the communal fracas in Isfahan, the evidence is not clear that the prayer itself lapsed for very long, let alone throughout the realm. Certainly there was now no shortage of personnel in Isfahan alone to replace Fayd, including such proponents of the *ʿayni* tendency as Muhammad Baqir al-Sabzawari (d. 1679)[41] and Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1699),[42] son of Muhammad Taqi.

The very few practical implications of the juridical disagreements between the *ʿayni* and *takhyiri* positions is also suggested. Neither stance implicitly or explicitly challenged the clergy's *niyaba* over matters of doctrine and practice during the occultation or the clerics' association with the Safavid court, which endorsed the state's manner of association with the faith. Nor was there any suggestion that anyone but the *faqih* was to undertake the prayer, as long as prior approval of the political realm had been obtained.

In the relationship between state and the clergy throughout the Safavid period, the state was generally the senior partner. That alliance suffered occasional setbacks. It is clear, however, that the juridical and institutional bases for an increasingly independent, Iran-based religious institution were also firmly established in this period. Despite later changes in the composition of Iran's political elites, these bases and that institution would only continue to evolve.

*Notes*

Thanks to Drs. H. Modarressi and K. Babayan for their assistance with points in this paper, as cited in the notes below. Errors are mine alone. For an introduction to this confluence, see our "Safavids–Religion, Philosophy and Science," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. 8, pp. 777–87. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the "Second International Round Table on Safavid Persia, Cambridge, 1993.

1. R. Jaʿfariyan, "A Discussion of the Safavid-Period Friday Prayer Essays," in *Religion and Politics in the Safavid Period* (in Persian) (Qum, 1991/1370), pp. 126–27, 134–35. This and Jaʿfariyan's other essays in this book are must-reads for students of the period. Jaʿfariyan suggests that in practice the shah appointed a *faqih* who was *jamiʿ al-shara'it* (possessing the qualifications [for exercising *ijtihad*]) and that such a *faqih*, knowing that he is so designated on behalf of the infallible Imams, would not consider the shah's ruling and the appointment necessary. On the other hand, inclusion of the ruling shah's name in the prayer's *khutba* suggests the religious realm's declaration of fealty to the political. On these terms, see our "The Nature of the Akhbari/Usuli Dispute in Late-Safawid Iran," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55/i (1992), pp. 22–51; 55/ii (1992), pp. 250–61. Jaʿfariyan's additional assertion that most advocates of the *wujub ʿayni* were Akhbaris does not seem born out by the evidence presented below.

2. For background see our "The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safawid Iran: Arab Shi'ite Opposition to 'Ali al-Karaki and Safawid Shi'ism," *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993), pp. 66-112.

3. On Friday prayer, see al-Karaki, "al-Risala al-Ja'fariyya fi'l-Salat," in Sayyid Muhammad al-Hassun, ed., *Rasa'il al-Muhaqqiq al-Karaki*, 1 (Qum: Mar'ashi Library, 1409), p. 129; and his later "Risala fi Salat al-Jum'a," in ibid., vol. 1, pp. 145-58 and especially 158-59, 161, 163, 142-45. On al-Karaki's *kharaj* essay, the underlying issues, and the continued controversy over *al-kharaj* after his death, see our "The Myth," pp. 66-112, esp. 85, 108n.90, and "The Nature of the Akhbari/Usuli Dispute," 55/ii (1992), p. 258. On al-Karaki's other positions, see N. Calder, "Zakat in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46/iii (1981), pp. 479-80, and his excellent "The Structure of Authority in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1980, pp. 157-65. Al-Karaki's position on the prayer also figured in his feud with his former student the co-sadr Ni'matallah al-Hilli, a student of al-Qatifi. The exact positions of both his opponents on the prayer are unclear. See "The Myth," esp. 96-100, 88-89.

4. On al-Shahid, see Ja'fariyan, "Discussion," pp. 124-28; Calder, "Zakat," pp. 478-79; Calder, "Khums in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55/i (1982), p. 44. See also Zayn al-Din al-'Amili, *al-Rawda al-Bahiya* (Najaf, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 662-66 and cf. Calder, "The Structure," p. 165. See also Newman, "The Myth," pp. 91-94, 105-8. Ja'fariyan (124) notes al-Shahid as a exception to his suggestion that proponents of the *'ayni* position were mainly Akhbaris. On the issue that the Ottomans did the prayer, see our "The Myth," p. 79, citing Adel Allouche, and also Ja'fariyan, p. 134.

5. For other titles of Shaykh Husayn's essay, see Agha Buzurg Muhammad al-Tehrani, *al-Dhari'a ila Tasanif al-Shi'a* (Tehran and Najaf, 1353-98) 1934-78, vol. 15, pp. 288-89. On the dating of the essay, see D. Stewart's careful reading of other parts of the text and his citations from other contemporary sources, in his "The Shaykh al-Islams of the Safavid Capital Qazvin," esp. pp. 4f., 23-30, forthcoming in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. On the dates for Shaykh Husayn's arrival in Safavid territory, see ibid., p. 4f., and our "Towards a Reconsideration of the 'Isfahan School of Philosophy': Shaykh Baha'i and the Role of the Safawid Ulama" *Studia Iranica* 15/2 (1986), p. 170n17. On Sayyid Husayn, see our "The Myth," p. 109n.94, and Stewart, pp. 23-30, and esp. 30, citing contemporary sources. On Shaykh Hosayn's charge to restore Friday prayer, see our "Towards," p. 170n.17, and also Stewart, pp. 8, 14, 29.

6. Baha'i himself completed only the first books of the text. See our "Towards," pp. 190-96. For another instance of Baha'i's repudiation of his father, see ibid., pp. 183-85. Baha'i's contemporary Mir Damad (d. 1631)—was a close associate of Baha'i, a relative of 'Ali al-Karaki, student of Baha'i's father, close to the court over his career but not as controversial as his colleague.—He openly advocated the *takhyiri* position and explicitly cited his ancestor's principle of *al-niyaba al-'amma*. See ibid., p. 196n92; our "The Nature of the Akhbari/Usuli Dispute," ii, pp. 258-59; and our "Damad, Mir-e," *Encyclopedia Iranica* VI/vi, pp. 623-66.

7. Sayyid Majid performed the prayer, but the details of his stance on its legality are unclear. Yusuf al-Bahrani, *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn* (Beirut, 1406/1986), pp. 135-38. See also al-Tehrani, ibid., *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 1, p. 228; Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Khatunabadi, *Waqa'i' al-Sinin* (Tehran, 1352), p. 503; 'Ali b. Hasan al-Bahrani, *Anwar al-Badrayn* (Najaf, 1377), pp. 85-90.

8. The relationship with Baha'i is not uniformly accepted. See W. C. Chittick, "Muhsin-i Fayd-i Kashani," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, series 2, vol. 7, p. 475; Yusuf al-Bahrani, *Lu'lu'at*, 131; Muhammad b Sulayman Tanukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulama'* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 328; Muhammad Ali Mudarris, *Rayhanat al-Adab* (Tehran, 1328-33), vol. 4, p. 371. It is confirmed, however, in Fayd's autobiographical *Sharh-e Sadr*, in R. Ja'fariyan, ed., *Da Resale-ye li'l-Hakim . . . Muhammad Muhsin . . . al-Fayd al-Kashani* (Isfahan, 1371), esp. pp. 59-60. Possible study with Mir Damad

is not confirmed in all sources or Fayd's *Sharh* (58–61). See Chittick, Tanukabuni, Yussuf al-Bahrani, and Mudarris, ibid., p. 370.

9. See K. Babayan's excellent "The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1993), pp. 138n.336, 69; Chittick, "Two Seventeenth-Century Persian Tracts on Kingship and Rulers," in S. A. Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 267n.2. See also M. T. Danesh Pazhouh's introduction to Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, *Kasr al-asnam* (Tehran, 1340/1962), p. 2f.; D. MacEoin, "Mulla Sadra," *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2nd ed., 7:547–48; al-Kashani, *Sharh-e Sadr*, pp. 60–66.

10. Thus Mir Damad presided over Safi's coronation, called out the new shah's name at the Friday prayer service, wrote an essay to the new ruler, and died accompanying him to the Iraqi shrine cities. 'Abbas I's grand vizier Sayyid Husayn b. Muhammad, Sultan al-Ulama (d. 1654)—a cleric, member of the Tajik notable class, the son of a *sadr*, and married to a daughter of the shah—continued in his post. See the references cited in our *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article; Muhammad Ma'sum Isfahani's contemporary court chronicle *Khulasat al-Siyar* (Tehran, 1368), pp. 82, 96; Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 104, 122, 135–36.

11. After the massacre Sultan al-Ulama was dismissed from his post and put under house arrest. His four sons were blinded, as were those of the *sadr*, another of 'Abbas I's sons-in-law. The new grand vizier was Saru Taqi (d. 1645), a Tajik turned eunuch and opponent of the Qizilbash. Where 'Abbas's last cabinet had included two prominent clerics, both royal sons-in-law, in the new cabinet there was but one, the *sadr* Mirza Habiballah al-Karaki (d. 1653), a descendant of 'Ali al-Karaki and son of Sayyid Husayn. Mirza Habiballah's family's service and loyalty to the court, and earlier shahs personally, counted for more than his lackluster scholarship. See Babayan, "jThe Waning," pp. 104, 122, 135–36.

W. Floor's recent critique of aspects of Babayan's analysis, in his 'The Rise and Fall of Mirza Taqi, the Eunuch Grand Vizier (1043–55/1633–45), Makhdum al-Omara va Khadem al-Foqara," *Studia Iranica* 36/2 (1997), pp. 237–66, appears to query the validity of Babayan's use of the term *cabal* to describe the Shaykhavand and Rustam Beg groupings in explaining the events of 1632 and 1644—rather than to challenge the fact of these events and thereby undermine efforts to associate them with developments in the religious sphere. Clearly, however, further research into the usefulness of such analysis would be helpful. See further also our "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran," forthcoming in *Iran* (1999).

12. The Ottomans took Baghdad and Hamadan in 1630, shortly after the new shah's accession, and Baghdad in 1638. Qandahar defected to the Moghuls in 1638. The Uzbegs launched the largest number of attacks against Safavid territory in the century. The revenue produced from Safi's acceleration of the land conversion disappeared into the private coffers of the new palace elite. R. Matthee dates the origin of the military weakness of Shah Sulayman's reign (1666–94) to that of Safi and notes that this weakness reflected severe financial constraints and a decline in tribal strength as the linchpin of the Safavid state. See his excellent "Politics and Trade in Late Safavid Iran" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 101–4, 112–18.

13. The need for revenue stemmed from, for example, a tax amnesty announced at the shah's accession, extravagant banquets organized for various foreign visitors, lavish spending on palaces and serais, and an expensive campaign to retake Qandahar. Matthee has suggested the local merchant elements, as minorities, as "conspicuous participants" in the country's economic life, lacked the "political protection" to stave off government and, perhaps more importantly, popular ire. Muhammad Beg's move against the minority merchants was as much an effort to extract bribes as, again, to shift popular attention to minorities seen as better off in the midst of wider crises. See Matthee, "The Career of Muhammad Beg, Grand Vizier of Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642–1666), *Iranian Studies* 24 (1991), pp. 1–4, 20, 23–28.

14. Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 140, 424n.584.

15. In addition to both Baha'i and Mir Damad, al-Majlis had also studied with ʿAbdallah al-Shushtari (d. 1612), for whom ʿAbbas had built a school in the bazaar and who, perhaps therefore understandably, had adopted the ʿayni position on Friday prayer. Babayan's coverage of the anti-Abu Muslim polemic is the best to date. See Babayan, "The Waning," p. 140, and Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash to Imamite Shiʿism," *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994), pp. i–iv, 135–61.

16. Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 103–4, 148f.; Matthee, "Coffee in Safavid Iran: Commerce and Consumption" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27 (1994), esp. pp. 26–30; ʿAli Al-e Dawud, "Coffeehouse," *Encyclopaedica Iranica* vol. VI/i, pp. 1–4.

17. Safi's continuing association with Mir Damad has been mentioned. Sometime before 1634–35 the shah requested that Mulla Sadra translate portions of al-Ghazali's *Ihya* into Persian. The shah also approached Mir Abu'l-Qasim Findiriski, a close associate of Baha'i, Mir Damad, and ʿAbbas I, well-known for his interest in Indian faiths and for his lower-class Sufi connections. Before his accession al-Majlisi had approached Safi with details of a dream in Najaf of the death of ʿAbbas I and Safi's accession. See Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 279–80. On Safi and Fayd, see Fayid, *Sharh-e Sadr*, pp. 63–64. Cf. Chittick (*Kashani*, vol. 7, p. 476) on the date of this approach. The request made to Sadra was criticized by the Shirazi *qadi* ʿAli Naqi Kamra'i (d. 1650), who also criticized Safi for depriving the *fuqaha* of political power; there is no record of Sadra having done such a work. On Kamra'i's later career, see the discussion further on in this study.

18. On the shah's open association with prominent figures in the "popular" Sufi revival, see Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 85–86, 141.

19. The text of this *firman* was published in I. Afshar ed., *Ta'rikh-e Kashan*, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 2536/1978), pp. 500–502, reprinted in Jaʿfariyan, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 449–50. The offer is also noted in the court chronicles. See Mirza Mohammad Tahir Vahid Qazvini, *ʿAbbasname*, ed. Dehqan (Arak, 1329 S/1950), p. 185; Vali Quli Shamlu, *Qisas al-Khaqani*, ed. S Hasan Sadat Nasiri (Tehran: Vizarat-i Farhang va Irshad-i Islami, 1992), vol. 2, p. 39. Khalil Qazvini (d. 1678–79)—usually classified as an Akhbari—was also asked to write for the court at this time, though he opposed performance of the Friday prayer, which suggests that he was attempting to reach out to this faction in the city and that clerics supporting the *tahrim* position did not necessarily oppose all association with and service to the state. Qazvini's opposition to Sufism was, like that of Fayd, perhaps also a factor in this request. See the above sources and Jaʿfariyan, *Din va*, pp. 127–28, 156–57, 172, 231–32; al-Tehrani, *al-Dhariʿa*, 15: 71–72; "The Nature," ii, pp. 251n.4, 260.

20. See, for example, M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 118; S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 146; E. Kohlberg, "Akhbariya," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I (1985), pp. 716–18. See also our "The Nature," ii, pp. 251n.4, 260. Of the primary-source works on Fayd in particular, see Y. al-Bahrani, *Luʾluʾat*, 121; Tanukabuni, 323, both composed well after the Safavid period.

21. Al-Majlisi, in his Arabic-language commentary on *al-Faqih*—dedicated to ʿAbbas II and completed by 1653, the year before he was called to court—allocated to the *faqih* the implementation of *al-hudud* and *al-qada'* and a role in the administration of *al-zakat*, and permitted receipt of funds from the political establishment. Many of these analyses employed distinctly Usuli principles of jurisprudence. See his *Rawdat al-Muttaqin* (Qum, 1393–99/1973–79), vol. 10, pp. 213–14; vol. 3, pp. 6–9; vol. 6, pp. 6–14, 21, 25–43, 63–65; 485–89, esp. 489. For Fayd's rulings see his *Mafatih al-Shara'iʿ* (Beirut, 1388/1969), vol. 1, pp. 209–10, 229; Fayd, *al-Mahajja al-Bayda'* (Tehran, 1339–42), vol. 2, pp. 77, 100–101; vol. 3, pp. 248–49. On the *mujtahid/muhaddith*, see our "The Nature," ii, pp. 260 and n.31.

22. On al-Majlisi, see Jaʿfariyan, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 161–62, and Fayd's references to al-Majlisi's stance in his own 1656 essay *al-Shihab al-Thaqib* (Beirut, 1980), p. 55, in the discus-

sion that follows. Al-Majlisi was appointed a Friday prayer leader in Isfahan under ʿAbbas II. Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 280–81; al-Tehrani, *al-Dhariʿa*, vol. 15, p. 68.

23. Thanks to Dr. H. Modarressi for confirming that Fayd's reference in *Mafatih al-Shara'iʿ* (vol. 1, pp. 21–23) to an earlier discussion of the point was a reference to his *Muʿtasim al-Shiʿa*.

24. Al-Tehrani, *al-Dhariʿa*, vol. 1, p. 77.

25. Fayd al-Kashani, *al-Shihab al-Thaqib*, esp. pp. 8–10, and passim. His reliance on such *akhbar* compilations of *al-Kafi* of al-Kulayni (d. 941) and *Man La Yahdaruhu al-Faqih* of Ibn Babawayh and his criticism of such *ahl al-ijtihad* as Shaykh Tusi (d. 1067) and ʿAli al-Karaki and their role in the articulation of *niyaba* throughout this essay is striking. Reliance on the *akhbar* no doubt contributed to Fayd's later being labeled an Akhbari. As striking, however, are his repeated references to Shaykh Zayn al-Din, al-Shahid al-Thani—no Akhbari he, as acknowledged by Jaʿfariyan ("A Discussion of the Safavid-Period Friday Prayer Essays," p. 124)—and the extent to which the Shaykh's criticisms of *al-niyaba* were strictly limited to the argument over the necessity of the presence of the Imam or his deputy for the performance of Friday prayer. On balance, however, Fayd's argument represented little fundamental challenge to the authority of the clergy over doctrine and practice during the occultation. For a citation from Shaykh Zayn al-Din's essay on the prayer, see Fayd, *al-Shihab*, p. 80f. See also al-Tehrani, *al-Dhariʿa*, vol. 14, p. 252. Thanks to Dr. R. Matthee for facilitating access to this essay of Fayd. Several years after his arrival in the capital, in 1657, Fayd completed his massive *akhbar* collection, *al-Wafi*, in which he further documented his argument on Friday prayer during the occultation. See *Kitab al-Wafi*, vol. 2, *ad Abwab Fadl al-Salat* (Qum: Marʿashi Library, 1404), p. 168f.

26. If Mir Lawhi's account of al-Majlisi's beliefs is problematic, Chardin used the terms *saint* and *prophet* to describe the nature of the veneration exhibited by visitors to al-Majlisi's tomb in Isfahan, which suggested his popularity in his lifetime. Al-Majlisi may also have flirted with singing, a Sufi-style practice condemned by such clerics as the *sadr* Mirza Habiballah Karaki. The divinatory aspects of his dream about the shah implied adoption of some aspects of the role of *pir* and darvish. See Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 272, 283. Certainly al-Majlisi dabbled in *ʿirfan* sufficiently for him, as his teacher Baha'i, to merit condemnation. On the controversial nature of singing, see our "Clerical Perceptions of Sufi Practices in Late 17th-Century Persia," in D. Morgan and L. Lewisohn, eds., *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. III: *Late Classical Persianate Sufism: the Safavid and Mughal Period (1501–1750)* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 135–69.

27. On the extent of Fayd's Sufi proclivities, see Jaʿfariyan, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 271–95. Jaʿfariyan summarizes Fayd's Arabic-language *al-Kalimat* in his *Din va*, pp. 357–65.

28. There are three sources for Fayd's efforts to moderate the prayer in Isfahan and the opposition he encountered. The first is the second section of his Persian-language autobiography *Sharh-e Sadr*, composed in 1654–55, soon after his arrival to undertake the prayer. The second source is a letter Fayd wrote the shah a year after the appointment in which Fayd detailed the opposition he was facing and requested that the commission be revoked. Finally, in 1666, the year ʿAbbas II died, Fayd wrote his Arabic-language *al-Iʿtidhar*, replying to a scholar's request for help in securing an appointment as Friday prayer leader or another post in Mashhad. Chittick, "Kashani" (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 7:476) dates the last to 1657, but the essay's date is on the last page of the essay in Jaʿfariyan, *Da Resale-ye . . .*, 291. Fayd's letter is found in I. Afshar ed., *Ta'rikh-e Kashan*, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 2536), pp. 502–4, and Jaʿfariyan, *ibid.*, pp. 450–52. Thanks to Dr. H. Modarressi for noting that Fayd's letter was not a reply to the *firman*, as suggested by the editor on p. 502. Cf. Jaʿfariyan, 450; Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 142–43. On the date for *Sharh*, see al-Tehrani, *al-Dhariʿa*, vol. 13, p. 363; Y al-Bahrani, pp. 130–31.

29. *Sharh-e Sadr*, p. 63.

30. *Al-Iʿtidhar*, in Jaʿfariyan, ed., *Da Resale-ye . . .*, p. 280f. See also the discussion of the essay by Jaʿfariyan, in his *Din va*, p. 139f. On the letter see also Afshar, ed., *Ta'rikh-e*, pp. 502–

3. In his letter to the shah, Fayd also referred to his earlier involvement with the prayer service in Kashan, noting that people properly understood and followed its purposes and that the local ulama had agreed on the prayer's permissibility. Fayd's admiration for the shah is also evident in his 1655 Persian-language "A'ine-yi Shahi," a work in the 'Mirror for Princes" genre, discussed by Chittick in his "Two Seventeenth-Century Persian Tracts," pp. 269–84, which Chittick dated to 1650. On the date, see al-Tehrani, *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 1, p. 53.

31. *Al-I'tidhar*, p. 284. Thanks to Dr. H. Modarressi for explicating the reference to this text.

32. On the groups' views, see *Sharh-e Sadr*, pp. 68–70; *al-I'tidhar*, pp. 282–84.

33. Afshar, ed., *Ta'arikh-e*, pp. 503–4.

34. *Sharh*, p. 70; *al-I'tidhar*, p. 285; Matthee, "The Career of Muhammad Beg," pp. 33 (citing Dutch reports), 26.

35. For the above citations, see *Sharh*, p. 70; *al-I'tidhar*, pp. 286, 289. References to the shah in the latter do not describe him as dead. On the letter see Afshar, ed., *Ta'rikh-e*, p. 503.

36. On the Friday prayer dates, see Babayan, "The Waning," p. 142n.345, citing *'Abbasname*, p. 306. See also ibid., p. 325. In Shamlu, *Qisas al-Khaqani* (vol. 2, p. 39) Fayd is described as leading the prayer in the capital. Although the chronicle was begun in 1662–63, the second section of this chronicle, in which this reference is found, was completed in 1665, despite the date of 1674–75 that occurs in the text. It seems unlikely that Fayd resigned prior to 1665, to allow him to have been in Kashan in 1662–63, only to return to Isfahan to lead the prayer in 1665. Perhaps the Kashan visit was undertaken specifically on account of the shah's visit to the city. In *al-I'tidhar* (p. 288), however, he notes the continuing dependency of his material condition on some relationship with the court. Thanks to Dr. K. Babayan for reiterating the need for care with the chronicles' Turkish dating, in the text of *Qisas al-Khaqani* in particular.

37. In his *Muhakama*, Fayd described these clerics—as he would in his later *Sharh-e Sadr*—as *ahl-e dhahir* whose presence at the court of Safi was one reason he said he had declined the latter's invitation (*Sharh*, pp. 63–64), and who were overzealous in their condemnation of truly ascetic individuals. On these essays of Fayd, see Ja'fariyan, *Da Resale-ye*, pp. 292–95.

In 1664–65 Qummi—who had tried to curry favor with Safi—completed his *Tuhfat al-Akhyar*, in which, among other things, he attacked al-Majlisi, also a proponent of the prayer as *'ayni*, who had died nearly ten years before, and described "the youth" as especially prone to Sufi influence. Qummi also attacked Khalil Qazvini for his stance against the performance of the prayer. Qummi later dedicated various essays to Shah Sulayman (reg. 1666–1694), demonstrating his loyalty to the throne even as his attacks contributed to the social and religious turmoil of the period. See Qazvani, *'Abbasname*, p. 185; al-Tehrani, *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 15, pp. 72–73, 71; Ja'fariyan, *Da Resale-ye*, pp. 156–57, 127–28. On the strength of darvish cults in this later period, see Babayan, "The Waning," p. 253f. For details on Qummi's earlier involvement in the anti-Sufi polemic, see our forthcoming essay in *Iran*.

38. Cf. Babayan, "The Warning," p. 143.

39. On these groups see our "The Nature of the Akhbari/Usuli Dispute."

40. See ibid., ii, especially p. 256f.

41. Al-Sabzawari's loyalty to the political establishment was as firm as that of his associate Fayd. He dedicated essays to 'Abbas II, was appointed to teach in the capital, and favored the *'ayni* position on Friday prayer and *al-niyaba* generally. He served as leader of the Friday prayer and Shaykh al-Islam in this period, had studied with Baha'i, and was as cautious about Sufi "excesses" as Fayd. He also played a key role in Shah Sulayman's enthronement. See al-Tehrani, *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 15, p. 452; vol. 11, p. 289: Khatunabadi *Waqa'i'*, pp. 501–3, 529f; Ja'fariyan, *Din va*, pp. 112–13, 125, 126n.3, 157, 433. For a discussion of al-Sabzawari's work in the "Mirror for Princes" genre, see ibid., p. 202f.; N. Calder, "Legitimacy and Accommodation in Safavid

Iran: The Juristic Theory of Muhammad Baqir al-Sabzavari," *Iran* 25 (1987), pp. 91–105. Cf. Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 85, 88, 251—where she suggests his own "Sufi" inclinations. See also our "Clerical Perceptions of Sufi Practices in Late 17th Century Persia."

42. Al-Majlisi's support for Safavid legitimacy and his court connections—he was appointed Shaykh al-Islam by Sulayman in 1689—are as well-known as his anti-Sufi polemics, including a disavowal of his father's interests in *'irfan*. See Babayan, "The Waning," pp. 39, 70, 72, 182, 187, 190, 287–91, 298, 300–302; Khatunabadi, *Waqa'ic*, 550; Ja'fariyan, *Din va*, 96–101, 221, 227 (where he is called an Akhbari), 248, 251, 251–67, 412–4; al-Tehrani, *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 15, pp. 66, 79.

# 4

# *The Economic Role of the Ulama in Qajar Persia*

WILLEM FLOOR

The focus of this article is the role of the religious class, in particular of its leading proponents, the ulama, in the economy of nineteenth-century Persia. We begin by describing the context in which the religious class functioned as well as the estimated size of this class. In the first section, those groups that made up the religious class are identified and discussed. In the second section, the alleged financial independence of the religious class and, in the third section, their main sources of income are reviewed. In the last section, the economic role of the religious class is assessed and some conclusions are drawn.

To understand the role, economic or otherwise, of the religious class in Qajar Persia, it is necessary to understand the nature of the society they were a part of. Although their role as preservers and guardians of religious values gave them a clear, though narrowly defined role, the manner in which they carried it out was to a great extent determined by the society in which they figured so prominently. Since they lived in a society of believers, most of them, by the very nature of their function, were respected by the populace. As private individuals rather than members of an official priestly hierarchy (though Shi'ite hierocratic organization came close to that) they used that respect to advance their own private interests as well as their religious cause.

The scope of their activities was further determined by the fact that Qajar Persia was a pre-industrial state that was divided along regional, ethnic, and linguistic lines. Such societies are dominated by a small power elite who supply most of the political, administrative, military, and religious leaders. The role of the religious professionals was not only to promote Shi'a Islam, but also to provide legitimacy to the political system. Because of the legitimization of power through religion, the latter's values and norms, including economic ones, reflected those of the body politic. Moreover, religion provided most of the formal legal structure. It also meant that the religious leaders influenced the limits of the state's power through their broad legal, social, and educational functions. Therefore, any opposition to the existing political order was opposition to the religious order. The conflicts between the political and religious elite were never about the need to fundamentally change the political or economic basis of the existing system or how it should be managed, but always about who should manage it!

Although Qajar Persia in the formal sense was a centrally governed state, in actual practice local elite families and governors administered the outlying regions as they saw

fit. As long as they paid taxes and kept law and order, the center (shah) did not interfere. So-called antigovernment activities by ulama, therefore, were but jockeying for a larger share of the political and economic pie. This also meant that most ulama, as the most learned of the religious class were known and about whom the data are more abundant than on other members of the religious class, played a local or regional role, and only very few played a national role or were known nationally. Further, local differences between leading ulama were very important, and these personal and/or doctrinal differences were often couched in political and social slogans to rouse their adherents. Factionalism, financial needs, and the pursuit of private gain determined the role of the religious class in the economy.

Though the religious professionals sought income and wealth, they did not need those resources to propagate obedience to God and the Shi'a faith, for every Shi'a Moslem in Qajar Persia practiced this belief on a daily basis. Therefore, funds were needed mainly to (a) sustain that achievement, both spiritually (with education) and materially (by means of religious ritual and buildings) and especially (b) to increase the percentage of Shi'ite believers in a particular point of view held by a religious leader, one that did not even need to be doctrinal. For example, when somebody died without heirs his, or her, property had to be disposed of in accordance with the verdict of a religious judge. Such a case, in Qazvin in the 1890s, led to a battle between the partisans of the two leading religious professionals there: Aqa Sayyid Jamal and Aqa Sayyid Ibrahim Tunkabuni. Aqa Sayyid Jamal won the battle because he had more troops.[1] Thus, leading religious leaders literally fought rival colleagues for control in their towns. The ulama on opposite sides of the Tobacco Régie issue even went so far as to call one another "infidel."[2] To sustain this factionalism required financing. Thus, the medium acquired as much importance as the religious message, if not more. In modern marketing jargon this is called "market share" or "brand-name recognition," and that is what many leading ulama fought and paid for.

Qajar Persia was also a subsistence economy, which meant that it was a poor country. Changes in the weather that adversely affected the harvest, and sickness that diminished the human and/or animal population, had a devastating impact on the quality of life and disposable income, which were generally minimal for the majority of the population. Such adversities made these largely illiterate people credulous in the extreme as well as hopeful for improvement of their lives. They suffered from arbitrary rule, tyranny, and wickedness at the hands of most of their self-appointed superiors, secular or otherwise. In fact, the poor populace wanted to be saved and looked to the religious professionals for the road toward salvation, for which they were willing to pay. The fact that most people (more than 90 percent) could not read, write, or calculate occasioned respect for those who had mastered those skills, in particular those who could read the Qur'an, of course. Those who belonged to the class of the literati often had achieved this in the pursuit of religious studies.

## The Size of the Religious Class

The religious class consisted mainly of those who made their living by providing religious guidance and practicing various kinds of ritual; if they were independently wealthy, they engaged in religious affairs as part of a family tradition and usually held important

local religious positions. It would be wrong, of course, to assume that all these religious professionals were driven only by financial gain and not by religious conviction. These two considerations did and do not exclude one another, and, after all, religious professionals and their families also have to live.

Typically, the class of religious professionals represented about one to 3 percent of the population in large towns toward the end of the nineteenth century, though in some cases the number was higher. For example, in 1301/1880, the religious class in Tehran[3] represented 3% of the total population (i.e., households); its composition is shown in Table 4.1.

However, in cities whose business was religion, such as centers of pilgrimage like Mashhad, the religious class and their dependents may have represented as much as 25 to 30 percent of the city's population.[4] A census taken by the ward chiefs (*kadkhoda*) of Qazvin in 1298–89/1880–82 at the instruction of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–96) showed that the religious class was the second largest group (9% of households) after that of the general population of workers (83%). They were followed by the group of notables and administrators (4%) and merchants (3%).[5] However, Greenfield reports that Qazvin province (city plus 700 villages) around 1900 boasted only sixty high-ranking religious professionals.[6] It may be that Greenfield did not count sayyids, who could constitute a significant percentage of the population in certain areas.[7] One could argue that the size of the religious class would be reduced if one considered that it consisted only of religious scholars, or ulama, about whom also more is known. However, I prefer to take the broader view and consider all those for whom religion was their major source of income. This, of course, comprises a much larger, more diverse, and more representative group.

The available data for smaller towns show that the number of religious professionals, aside the from sayyids, was very low and usually less than 1 percent. In each of the towns[8] of Bam, Sirjan, Shahr-i Babak, and Rafsanjan in Kerman province, for example, the main religious professionals numbered three, in addition to some lower ranking mullas. More data are reported by the Russian traveler Shopen in 1852: that in Urdubad, a small town with about 3,500 inhabitants, the high-ranking ulama represented 1 percent, the mullas 2 percent, and sayyids 31 percent of the population. In Erivan, a town of 11,500 inhabitants, there was a mulla for every 100 Moslems. There were 50 mulla and 39 sayyid families, which represented less than 1 percent of the population.[9]

Table 4.1. Number of Religious Professionals in Tehran in 1301/1880

| Class | No. | Class | No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| ʿalim | 108 | pishnamaz | 103 |
| mudarris | 18 | talabah | 210 |
| vaʾiz | 90 | rawzeh khvan | 391 |
| maddah | 107 | nawhah khvan | 85 |
| qabr kun | 25 | talqin khvan | 16 |
| qari | 92 | murdah shuy mard | 8 |
| murdeh shuy zan | 6 | mutavalli + khadamah | 180 |

There were very few ulama in the rural areas. However, in Akda, a village of 1,200 inhabitants, the British frontier commission received a visit from the 5 principal men of the place—4 of whom were sayyids, out of 100 in the village.[10] Some villages consisted almost entirely of sayyids, but these were exception to the rule that the number of religious professionals who lived in villages were few.[11] In the tribal areas very few religious professionals were found. Tribal chiefs might have a mulla in their entourage, "who acted as secretary and chaplain."[12]

## Who Were These Religious Professionals?

The upper echelon, or leaders of the religious professionals, were the *mujtahids*, the *shaykh al-islams*, the *buyuk-akhunds*, the *imam-jum'as*, the *mutavalli-bashis*, the *qadis*, the *mulla-bashis*, and the *mudarrises* (chief professors). Thus, with the exception of the *mujtahids*, these were all holders of important positions that were bestowed by the state. Except for the last two, most of the other well-paid functions were usually hereditary. All these functions were highly respected by the community of believers.[13]

"The priesthood of Persia are almost all Syuds," Malcolm reports.[14] Polak goes even farther, stating that you can only become a *mujtahid*, *shaykh al-islam*, or *imam-jum'a* if you are a sayyid.[15] Indeed it would seem that sayyids dominated those functions throughout the nineteenth century in Qajar Persia as they did the ranks of the ulama (35%) in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala.[16] Their number was probably higher among the ulama in Persia itself, because the religious community in the shrine cities constituted a more open system. The *sadat-e 'ali*, or first-rank sayyids, occupied the leading religious functions, in particular those granted by the state and the well-paid functions in the shrines. The lower-class sayyids had to fend for themselves in the market, as we will see.

Each city had a number of clans who for generations had monopolized the local religious functions, the appointment to which was controlled by the government.[17] These clans not only supplied religious functionaries but also exercised political, social, and economic influence that the governor, and even the shah, had to consider. Similar secular clans, dominating the local administrative and economic functions, existed at the same time. Members of these clans intermarried and jockeyed for more power and influence to advance their clan's position.[18]

Nevertheless, the ulama were a much more open group than any other social class. Also, they were more inclined to reward piety and scholarly excellence than family ties. Litvak has shown that non-clerical origins dominated among ulama who immigrated to the shrine cities, as opposed to those born there. On the other hand, many who held "hereditary" religious functions often did not study in the Iraqi shrine cities, but in Persia itself, thus maintaining a more closed system.[19]

After the *mujtahids* and the holders of important religious functions, who, as we have seen, were often sayyids hailing from the professional and hereditary religious clans, there were the middle and lower echelons. These were the preachers, or *akhunds*, and mullas, who taught and preached, and for the most part enjoyed a good reputation. This middle group consisted of less educated religious professionals who served the first group as aides, aspiring to attain the rank of their masters. Further, this group

included teachers at the intermediary level of the local *madrasa*s, clerks at the religious courts, and the various middle-class religious of the small towns.[20]

In smaller towns the number of middle-echelon religious professionals was limited, but like their high-level professional model in the city, they had under them a number of mullas, who were in charge of religious rites, circumcision, marriage, and burial. The *akhund*s supervised them and undertook these same functions for the notables who paid them annual stipends in return.[21] The mullas "conduct the services in the mosques, teach and recite the Koran, preach, visit the sick and write letters, and in the villages their fees are paid in kind."[22]

The working-class religious professionals included the rural mullas, the managers of small shrines, mosques, and *madrasa*s (seminaries), and further, low-level teachers at the *madrasa*s and the Qur'anic schools (*maktab*), the pulpit preachers and reciters of panegyrics, seminarians (*tullab*), and the lower-class sayyids. All these were financially and otherwise dependent on their masters. They served as their eyes and ears as well as conduits for propaganda to the public at large, and even as shock troops to fight competing religious professionals. For the important ulama kept a large retinue to serve them in all their endeavors, both religious and otherwise.[23] In villages they had seldom more than an inferior mulla, who sometimes doubled as the local government administrator.[24]

## Why the Label "Mulla" Does Not Always Stick

Not every mulla or sayyid was engaged in the pursuit of religious affairs as a profession, however. Sayyids, whose siblings exercised important functions in the religious establishment and who were members of important professional religious families, were engaged in trade and other economic pursuits, while literate members of the artisan class were often referred to as "mulla" because of their religious or literary education.[25]

However, all who went to the *madrasa* did not necessarily want to become a religious professional. According to Sir John Malcolm, "there are a number of persons in Persia who pursue their studies till they are entitled to the name of Moollah, and to all the honours of a Persian college, without classing themselves with the priesthood."[26] Consequently, many of the students showed a less than religious attitude and behavior in life. In the 1870s, half of the students in Isfahan were considered to be without religion by the leading religious leader of that city.[27] According to Malcolm, this was due to "the facility with which a Persian can obtain a certain degree of education at the colleges in the principal cities, and that indulgence to which the usages of these seminaries invite, produces a swarm of students, who pass their useless lives in indolence and poverty."[28] In fact, in the rural, and especially the tribal areas, "mulla" meant only a man who could write and read the Qur'an.[29]

## The Descendants of the Prophets or Sayyids

The sayyids, as part of the religious class, constituted a separate category. They are a hereditary class of nobility. There are several kinds of sayyids. The most important ones are descended from Fatima, the prophet's daughter, and her husband ʿAli ibi Abu Talib,

the prophet's cousin. They had two sons, Hasan and Husayn, and consequently there are Hasani and Husayni sayyids. The Razavis, or descendants of Imam Reza, enjoyed special privileges in Mashhad, where the Imam Reza is buried, and "comparatively few of them apparently work for their living."[30] Descendants of 'Ali through his offspring from other women are called 'Alavi sayyids. Although it all started with a woman, Fatima, sayyids who were descended from a male sayyid were known as *sharif* and ranked higher than those who were descended from a sayyida mother only. Because of their descent, sayyids enjoyed general respect and immunity from normal state regulations. Therefore, a chief sayyid was responsible for the behavior of the sayyids, for only a sayyid could judge another sayyid. In the past such a chief sayyid was called *naqib al-ashraf* or *naqib al-mamalek*, but in Qajar times this official was generally referred to as *ra'is-e sadat*. The *naqib* was the overseer of all dervish groups.[31]

As among the rest of society, among sayyids also there were prominent families, such as the Tabataba'is, whose credentials were well-known and acknowledged. However, it was also a well-known fact that many sayyids had no claim to such distinction. These fake sayyids took advantage of the reverence and the pecuniary benefits paid to sayyids by presenting themselves as a legitimate sayyid in communities that did not know them. It was sufficient to put on a green belt or turban, for even to question the validity of the claim to sayyidship was considered to be blasphemy. Whereas the Tabataba'is have a recognized family tree, these self-made sayyids had such family trees fabricated in the Shi'ite shrine cities in Iraq, in particular from Samarra, and were therefore referred to as Samarra sayyids.[32] In fact, according to Dieulafoy, only four families in Persia were recognized as having a legitimate—though even there on disputable grounds—claim of descent from 'Ali.[33] This was also reflected in the large number of *imamzadah*s, or tombs of alleged descendants of the Shi'ite Imams. The chief professor of the *madrasa* at Qazvin told the Dieulofoys, for example, that he was quite aware that in Persia alone there were more than 20 *imamzadah*s claiming to house the ashes of the same sayyid, in addition to those in the country where the sayyid had or even had not lived at all. However, the point was, according to this *'alim*, one did not really need the ashes of the *imamzadah* to dedicate a tomb in his honor and pray to him.[34]

As a consequence, the number of sayyids was large. "Persia swarms with Saiyids, a lazy, worthless set of men as a rule, who do not work and expect to be fed by others, and the Turkoman Khojah is the same," according to Yate.[35] Other contemporary European observers concurred with Yate's opinion. According to Polak, the sayyids as a group represented as many as 2 percent of the entire population.[36] Another nineteenth-century source estimates their number even higher, that is, at 20 percent of the urban population, which cannot be right, but indicates that the impression existed that sayyids were omnipresent, a hard-to-avoid urban phenomenon.[37] In rural areas sayyids sometimes dominated a village's population, as, for example, in the Khabujan area in Khorasan.[38]

## The Financial Dependence of the Ulama

During the interregnum, between 1722 and 1797, a separation of political and religious hierocratic domination had occurred, due to the breakdown of the Safavid state in 1722, and thus of state control over the religious class through the Safavid's central-

ized hierocratic system under the *sadr*. The *mujtahids* therefore overthrew the *sadrs* "without possessing their revenues."[39] Thus, "freedom from the state" for the religious class came at a price. For endowments and stipends, which formed the backbone of their revenues, were not available to them anymore. Because of this breakdown, the religious professionals had to find ways to survive economically.

The financial ruin of the Shi'ite religious professionals was completed by the 25-year misrule of Afghan Sunnis (1722–30) and the ecumenical Nadir Shah (1732–47). The latter had discontinued most of these stipends and had usurped most of the religious endowments around 1740 and had converted these into crown lands, thus bankrupting the religious class. His successors did not improve the financial situation of the religious establishment. The Zand rulers, for example, only showed some largesse to a few high-ranking ulama.[40] This situation, combined with a major displacement of religious scholars from Persia, led to some measure of financial autonomy of the religious leaders who were in the Iraqi shrine cities. This was possible through the collection of the *khums* and *zakat* (religious taxes) paid by the Shi'ite believers, which now had become the exclusive domain of the *mujtahids* after the abolition of the function of *sadr*. Also, their appropriation of extensive judiciary functions that were independent of state control brought in sorely needed revenues. These sources of income sustained the religious Shi'ite leaders in the Iraqi shrine cities throughout the late 1700s and formed the basis of their financial independence to pursue their religious and scholarly objectives.[41]

With the end to state-controlled religion through the *sadr* and his provincial network of agents, combined with the religious legitimacy of the Safavid sayyid kings as upholders of the Imamate, the Shi'ite religious scholars had been seeking new ways to position themselves in the religious market. During the unsettled times of the second half of the eighteenth century, migrant ulama from Persia had brought Usulism to the Iraqi shrine cities and had developed new structures independent of the state. When the Qajars established their hold over Persia in the 1790s, they needed legitimacy. They obtained it by espousing the cause of Usuli orthodoxy and acquiescing to the termination of formal state control over religion in the persons of the *sadr* and *mulla-bashi*. At the same time, the Usuli leaders of the religious class acquired greater power and autonomy through the active political and financial support from the new Qajar government. In exchange, the Usuli leadership extended their support for the legitimacy of Qajar rule.[42]

It therefore comes as no surprise that the religious professionals during the early Qajar period depended very much on the state, because they relied on royal grants and religious endowments, a custom that, moreover, around 1810, "seems to have become nearly obsolete."[43] Brydges argued that the shah therefore had great power over the religious. Whereas a mullah was held in great esteem in Turkey, "in Persia the person holding the same station, and possessing the same qualities, is laughed at, and is almost a proverbial joke."[44] However, as with modern-day politicians, people may have had little respect for mullas as a class, but they certainly were quite satisfied with their "'own" local mulla.

Very rich *mujtahids* could afford to snub the shah and even refuse his money to help build a mosque. Others, however, gladly accepted the state's bounty, especially those who had been appointed by the shah to remunerative functions. Association with the state was to their best interest.[45]

This begs the question whether the ulama were really that independent from the state, as some scholars have suggested. If they had their own funds, why then did they have to compete with one another for the state's largesse? To answer that question we need a better understanding of the size and nature of the financial resources that the religious class could count on.

## Sources of Income

The sources of income that were necessary for the religious professionals to sustain themselves and their families, and for the leading ulama to maintain and expand market share among the mass of believers, consisted of the following. In the first place, there was personal wealth through inheritance or income from gainful employment or remunerative economic activity in which a religious professional might be engaged. Second, there were pensions, stipends, grants, gifts, and paid administrative offices that the shah bestowed on religious leaders as a form of government employment. Third, there was judicial income—the *khums* and *zakat* taxes—canonical taxes were paid to the religious class. Fourth and last, there were endowments, from which the ulama, either as *mutavalli* (manager) or as *nazir* (trustee), derived an income, while, in addition, these same endowments often had as their main purpose the financing of stipends for students and teachers as well as the maintenance of buildings (school, mosque, shrine, etc.).

### *Personal Wealth*

Contemporary observers have created the impression that the ulama were rich and belonged to the country's economic and power elite. This certainly held true for the leaders of the religious class, who only constituted a small number. However, the majority of the religious class were not rich, and many of them were poor. As Sir John Malcolm wrote, "The lower ranks of priesthood ... are exposed to great temptation; and receive, with their office, but a very limited income. They therefore are often corrupt and bigoted."[46]

Nevertheless, the rich were very wealthy. According to Fraser, "the ecclesiastical body, which includes the expounders of the written law, is very numerous, wealthy, and powerful."[47] Indeed, many contemporary observers believed that the largest fortunes had been derived from religious service. Some *mujtahids* were believed to be as rich as the shah.[48] The concentration of wealth among the religious professionals was, of course, most evident in the large towns. According to Edward Stirling, "The moolahs and priests, which amount here [Mashhad] to about two thousand, are the most wealthy individuals. They enjoy many privileges and perquisites and gifts which are often very rich and high. . . . The Mujtahyd and the Mutawalle [*mutavalli*] are people of large fortune, the former is said to be worth two or three crores of rupees; his son possesses sixty lacs or more."[49]

Among this group the *imam jum'a* of Isfahan, Mir Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Shafti Hujjat al-Islam, stood out. He came from a very poor family. The source of his vast wealth is unknown. His contemporaries believed that through alchemy he could trans-

form paper into money or that he had found an ancient treasure hoard. A more likely source of his start-up capital is less sensational. His piety was rewarded by the khan of his village of Shaft, who gave him money to invest in trade and property. The proceeds he had to divide between charitable purposes and his own expenditures. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was able to earn great wealth from real estate deals and owned four hundred caravansarais and two thousand shops in Isfahan alone, and many villages all over Persia. From his villages in Borujird alone, he had an annual income of 6,000 tomans. Shafti paid 17,000 tomans in taxes on his villages in the Isfahan area. His total wealth was estimated at 200,000 tomans. The mystery of his wealth was part of his success as a religious leader. It is alleged that he was, if not the richest man of his time, certainly the richest religious leader, much richer than the super-rich religious professionals such as Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Qajar or Hajj Mulla ʿAli Kani. Most of the landed property in Isfahan was either his or belonged to the Sadr family, who had been engaged in religious service for several generations.[50] His wealth and greed grew so much that after the death of the powerful governor of Isfahan, Muʿtamad al-Dawlah, the sayyid tried to become the dominant political force in the city. His bands of *lutis* terrorized the population and forced people to sign over property to the sayyid which he turned into a *vaqf* (religious trust) for the people. When Muhammad Shah (r. 1834–48) put an end to the reign of terror in 1842, he at the same time took the misappropriated property back but did not return it to the original owners. Instead, he turned them into *khalisa*, or crown property.[51]

Others, usually landowners and proprietors of lucrative urban property, were less wealthy, but still well-off. However, those specified as well-off were invariably first-echelon members of the religious class such as *imam jumʿas* and *mujtahids*.[52]

Aqa Najafi, another powerful religious leader in Isfahan in the 1880–90s, also started out in life very poor and became very rich. Aqa Najafi, his brothers, and their sons, who were as much as 14,000 tomans in debt and possessed one village after their father's death, owned 5 million tomans twenty-five years later. Aqa Najafi was called *Naʾib-i Imam* by his *tullab*. He also tried to leave his mark on Isfahan through his *lutis*, or thugs. The regular taxes on his property alone amounted to 60,000 tomans, while the irregular ones were still almost 30,000 tomans.[53]

Some *mujtahids*, such as Muhammad Baqir Shafti of Isfahan, the Baraghanis of Qazvin, and Mirza Aqa Javadi of Tabriz, derived their authority and power both from their economic power and from their piety and erudition advantage, the former as much as, if not more than the latter. In fact, Shafti's rise from the status of poor student to that of one of the richest men in Persia in itself was interpreted as a sign of divine grace that one might attain just by associating with him. The wealth of the high-ranking religious professionals gave them enormous latitude in their dealings with both the government and society at large.

Nevertheless, the myth of poverty of the *mujtahids* was part of the image building that took place and that even a *mujtahid* could not avoid.[54] For, according to Malcolm, "their occupation enjoins plainness of dress, and forbids the vanity and display to which other persons in this country are so much attached."[55] However, these religious leaders, who indeed may have had hardly any personal wealth, nevertheless controlled vast financial resources through their custodianship of endowments and monies that were received from believers in the form of *zakat*, *khums*, and gifts. The offspring, or *aqa*

*zadahha*, of these religious leaders did quite well for themselves after the death of their parent.

### *Income from Administrative Functions*

Part of the wealth of the leading ulama was obtained through their religious affiliation and judicial activities, part through secular economic activities such as management of agricultural properties, commercial enterprise, and moneylending. The religious professionals had close contacts with the bazaar community. This was of course logical in view of their role in drawing up contracts, acting as notary public, and the like. Each section of the bazaar, therefore, was under the jurisdiction of a mulla, who oversaw and advised merchants, traders and artisans on all commercial and other transactions. This relationship held in particular for the guilds. According to de Gobineau, "it is clear that these organized cooperations are backed on the one hand by the merchants for whom they work and on the other by the mullahs who, their prestige requiring that they be surrounded by the masses, are glad to take up the interests of apprentices, craftsmen (artisans), and even master craftsmen."[56]

Religious professionals were also directly involved in many business transactions, often as silent partners. In addition, members of important religious clans were heavily engaged in commerce as well as in real estate.[57] It was not exceptional for a *mujtahid* or lower ranking religious professionals to be landlord to artisans or other urban dwellers.[58] Also, as managers of endowments with extensive property in the bazaar or of agricultural lands cultivated with cash crops, the religious professionals came into close contact with the trading and financial community.

As holders of large amounts of cash, either as personal property or as managers of religious endowments and gifts, the religious professionals were sought after in an economy where money was scarce. This scarcity was partly due to the hoarding of a large part of their cash revenues by these same religious professionals. According to Stirling, "the system of hoarding is carried to a prodigious extent and not the least among the moolahs. The rate of interest is very high and never less than thirty percent and often as high [as] fifty percent, and money is only granted on deposits to twice or four times the value of the loan, which if not redeemed in a given time, is liable to be sold and disposed of. The Mussalmen are prohibited from lending money on interest and the whole of the transactions are carried on with secrecy."[59] Or, if not involved directly in money lending, religious professionals put their money in the banks on interest-bearing accounts. This even happened with money from the Imam Reza shrine.[60]

A particularly immoral activity, in addition to moneylending, was the organization of prostitution, in which especially the lower-class mullas and seminarians (*tullab*) were engaged.[61] In fact, these lower-class religious professionals were heavily involved in providing a legalistic veneer to prostitution—for a fee, of course. The women involved in this trade had a saying, "*halal bikun, hazar bikun*" (make it legal, make a buck), which basically summed up their position.[62] Hajj Sayyah, the nineteenth century reformer, fulminated against the mullas who made their living by exploiting poor women and immoral behavior.[63]

Some merchants became very critical of the involvement of some *mujtahids* in economic life as competitors and controllers. Through direct investment, usurpation as

well as inappropriate use of endowment funds, these religious leaders had accumulated substantial funds that needed an outlet. These funds, they invested in trade among other things, allying themselves with one or more trading partner. Merchants who had no backing from a religious professional were in a very precarious position, for they either paid for protection or they would suffer severely in court cases. The protection awarded by the ulama to bankrupt and dishonest merchants was a constant cause for complaint by European merchants.[64] Such shady practices also upset some Persian merchants, who, for example in Qazvin, protested the biased verdicts by Mulla Muhammad Taqi Baraghani.[65] Amanat strongly suggests that the religious influence in economic life at a time when there was an economic downturn may have contributed to the appeal of Babism among the merchant class and others.[66]

### *Judicial Income*

Another important economic activity and source of income was the judiciary. No dispute could be resolved and no commercial transaction would go ahead without the ulama's seal of approval. In case of litigation, both parties paid and/or bribed the religious judge. Although religious judges were not entitled to fees, they received presents or plain bribes to sway their opinion. In fact, judges and their staff acquired a reputation of venality, which increased toward the end of the nineteenth century.[67] Nevertheless, the state-appointed judges were paid high salaries. The *shaykh al-islam* enjoyed a state salary. Around 1810, the judges of Isfahan and Shiraz had salaries of 2,000 tomans. The *qadi* of Marand received 140 tomans per month in 1860, an amount that had just been reduced by one-fourth.[68] The small clerks in the judiciary earned an irregular pittance, however.[69]

Because many *mujtahids* and other high-ranking ulama often considered the function of judge below their standing and referred many cases to mullas who stood in a client relationship to them, any ignoramus with some meters of black or white textile on his head could become a *qadi* (religious judge), according to Mustawfi.[70] The judiciary, therefore, provided excellent opportunity for clerical patrons to get their clients employment. Some social critics stated that the judicial cases dragged on for too long because of the personal gain that the religious judge derived from this. Often, therefore, both parties agreed to arbitration to avoid the high cost of litigation.[71] I'timad al-Saltana, who had a dispute with Adib al-Mulk, his uncle, about his father's inheritance, referred the case to a leading *'alim* (religious scholar), Aqa Sayyid Salih 'Arab, for whom he had not much respect. However, he knew that the Aqa was against Shaykhis and his uncle was a Shaykhi. As a result, I'timad al-Saltana won his case "as had been my purpose," he dryly remarks.[72] The ulama also were engaged as notaries public for legal and personal documents, but their willingness to falsify documents did much to invalidate this system.[73] In view of the lucrative opportunities offered by the judiciary, the ulama opposed modernization and increased transparency of the judicial system.[74]

### *State Endowments: Stipends, Pensions, and Functions*

Important ulama and sayyids received stipends and pensions as well as money and other presents during festivals.[75] These government contributions to the important ulama were

insignificant when compared to the flow of funds controlled by the ulama themselves.[76] According to Sheil, the estimated total revenue in 1850 was 3,177,000 tomans. Of this some 800,000 tomans was for salaries, of which only 4,110 tomans was spent on ulama, sayyids, etc., a quarter of what was spent by the shah on poets and physicians, or on the administrative class.[77] An estimate made in 1868, by the British consul Thomson, indicates that the total state expenditures were 8.5 crores of tomans or 1.7 million pounds. Of this amount 0.5 crore of tomans or 100,000 pounds was spent on pensions for "the priesthood and syeds," or less than 4 percent of total state expenditures,[78] while Andreas estimated it at 6.7 percent in the early 1880s.[79]

In addition to endowments the state controlled the appointment of many religious functions (*shaykh al-islam, mulla-bashi, imam-jum'a*). It also granted stipends and pensions, or bestowed gifts on "deserving" religious professionals. The high-ranking ulama purposefully moved to get hold of those public functions (education, judiciary) that gave them control over society as well as access to funds. Both these functions and funds they used to further their cause. It enabled them to control the *vox populi* through the education system and the mosques, while through the courts as judges, and through actively participating in trade and real estate deals and moneylending, they had considerable influence with merchants and landlords as agents, partners, competitors, and financiers. With all this power, they could hold out against government demands, strengthen their bargaining position, and gain more from the government than did most others.

### *Religious Alms and Gifts*

The leading ulama received large amounts of tithes, alms, and gifts from the believers. The amount of these payments was substantial. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Shafti received tithes and alms as the Imam's share from India, the Caucasus, and Turkestan, part of which he gave to the poor, while the rest he kept for himself.[80] The tithes from the believers also reached Shaykh Muhammad Hasan Isfahani, who for years was recognized as the leader (*marja' taqlid*), and he used these funds to enable students to study and for the propagation of knowledge in general. He also spent 80,000 tomans on a water supply canal from the Tigris. One of his students was Shaykh Murtaza Ansari, who became his successor and to whom the community gave each year about 200,000 tomans in the 1870s.[81] Ansari's successor, Muhammad Hasan Shirazi, received the same amount in alms and voluntary contributions.[82]

Many of the religious professionals, particularly sayyids, begged or, rather, demanded alms, on the ground of their holy character.[83] The demanding behavior, termed *mulla-bazi*, was not limited to the lower levels of the religious class [84] In Isfahan the ulama demanded, and obtained by force if need be, one-third of the property if somebody died. The ulama did this in their own quarter, and the *imam-jum'a* all over town (asking *yak-hasht*, or one-eighth). The *imam-jum'a* would send an agent who would seal all rooms in a house, even going so far as delaying the burial preparations. The justification for this behavior was that they claimed that the deceased during his life had not paid the *khums* and *zakat* tax and/or the *sahm i Imam* (the Imam's share).[85] There were also religious scholars, such as Muhammad Madi Naraqi, who criticized the hereditary sayyid class for their assumption that piety is an innate quality obtained through lineage.[86]

Such behavior was not lost on the public, either, which in various theatrical, literary, and other art forms criticized this mercenary attitude by ridiculing it. Members of the religious class sometimes fell foul of officials who knew if a person had no protection. Instead of paying in this instance, they made him pay—a role reversal that was almost theatrical, and certainly ironic.[87]

The sayyids drew so much attention to themselves because they were a kind of religious hereditary nobility, and entitled to part of the *khums* tax under Shi'i law. Consequently, "it is an act of greater *savab* (act of merit) to give to a drunken seyid than to the most deserving beggar."[88] Dieulofoy reported that by 1880 this custom had largely fallen into disuse, though in the large towns, such as Isfahan, where sayyids were numerous they continued to exert much influence and impose themselves in particular on small shopkeepers who did not have the clout to oppose them.[89] Sayyids therefore enjoyed prestige and this led to a proliferation of sayyids (fabricated or not) because of the material reward this position offered. Many true believers cheated the Imam out of his share by conniving with his descendants, who, for a fair remuneration, would hand out a signed statement that the religious obligatory payment had been truly effected.[90] To increase their fair share, many people also would dress up their children and/or relatives as beggars and would grant these fake poor their share of the bounty for the poor. If they were religious professionals they could keep the rest for themselves.[91] Sometimes rich persons, including religious professionals, did not pay their full contribution either.[92]

Sayyids also demanded that the notables pay for their upkeep. There was not a notable who had not a sayyid or two on his payroll. After the harvest the lower ranking sayyids would go into the villages of the jurisdiction where they lived. "They go to the village chief who considers their visit a great honor. He sends criers into the village to announce the that the sayyids have arrived and that they submit themselves to their charity. They will not forget them when they meet Muhammad. The peasants hasten to bring presents to the village chief's house where everything is gathered. These presents normally consist of wheat, barley, straw, cheese, mostala, cream, fowls, cotton etc., and also some silver coins. The sayyids then have dinner with the chief and grey-beards and the chief humbly asks them to accept their gifts, which they gravely do. The next day they leave and go to the next village. These illustrious beggars thus are assured of a comfortable living for only showing up once a year. This takes them two months per year, during which they collect produce to the value of 700 to 800 tomans. Entering gatherings of the great, they did not hesitate to ask for a contribution and nobody refuses; they even accepted my money though I was an infidel."[93] The dervishes behaved in a similar manner and paid their dervish chief.[94]

At the *sartip*'s house, "I found several Syuds with him, who were doing their best to talk him out of some money, and, unless one has witnessed the fact, it is impossible to conceive the impudence of these descendants of the Prophet; they are the veriest bloodsuckers of the people, who are obliged to keep them at their own expense. Nothing can equal their ignorance, but, generally speaking, they are afraid to refuse their demands, intolerable as they may be."[95,96]

Among the Yamut Turkomans, sayyids enjoyed an extraordinary position. When Yamut raiders had taken sheep they believed belonged to the Goklan tribe, they soon found out this was not the case. The sheep belonged to a khojah or sayyid, who came to the chief's tent the next day and demanded restitution of his sheep. The chief, Murad

Khan, "at once gave back his share of the sheep, with many cries of 'Taubah, Taubah' (repentance, or remorse). The dread that the Turkoman have for the Khojahs is a curious one. It is dread pure and simple that makes them restore property stolen from Saiyids in the way they do, sooner than incur the wrath or the curse of the owner."[97]

A sayyid also might organize a pilgrimage. According to Ferrier, "For two months previously to his intended departure [the sayyid] scours the towns and villages, inviting the faithful to join his green standard, and undertake a pilgrimage to the holy places. A sufficient number being collected, he passes them in review, and, raising the wind from each to the extent of 4 or 5 sahebkrans a head, promises to conduct them in safety" to the shrines. "He promises also to halt at the best and the cheapest stations, to preserve them from the effects of the evil eye, the temptations of the devil, the machinations of the bad genii, to consult the stars, to leave on propitious days—in a word, he promises to make this pilgrimage the happiest and most acceptable to God that was ever made."[98]

Sayyids were also hired hands for those who wanted to create a riot or a nuisance.[99] For example, creditors would use sayyids as servers of bills or collecting agents, because they would not be beaten by the debtor's servants due to the inviolability of their person. Their behavior was often so obnoxious that Mozaffar al-Din Mirza, as governor of Tabriz, forbade sayyids "to frequent bazaars and thoroughfares in large bands. Merchants in whose employ they are must not depute them to settle pecuniary claims."[100]

There were, of course, also sayyids who worked for a living as farmers, artisans, merchants, government officials, soldiers, *charvadars*, and as religious professionals. In government service, either as military or civil servant, they were, however, not allowed to wear the sayyid turban, only a green belt.[101] There were also sayyids who were not xenophobic and fanatic, but in fact were quite humanistic in their outlook on life and behavior. Such was the case with Sayyid Muhammad Husayn of Isfahan, who saved Eugene Boré as he was about to be set upon, if not worse, by irate Armenians because he wanted to convert them to Roman Catholicism, and spirited the misguided Frenchman away from Jolfa, hid him in his house in Isfahan and then took him in person to Kashan, so that he could escape via Enzeli.[102]

### *Endowments*

Endowments were a very important source of income for ulama either as *mutavallis* (managers) or as *nazirs* (trustees), and, in addition, they often had as their main purpose the financing of stipends for students and teachers as well as the maintenance of buildings (school, mosque, shrine, etc.). Around 1900 Majd al-Islam estimated that one-third of all cultivated land in Persia comprised religiously endowed lands or *awqaf*, and he was certain that the figure was at least 15 percent.[103] Grollman estimated the income from endowments in the 1860s at 2 million tomans.[104] Around the 1890s, the income reportedly was 4 million tomans, of which the state only directly controlled 12 percent or 0.5 million tomans.[105]

In some areas, endowments were large, such as in the Sabzavar area, where over 10 percent of the villages were endowments.[106] In the cities many of the bazaar shops, houses, baths, and caravansarais were also endowments. The Sipahsalar Mosque in Tehran, for example, which included a *madrasa*, a *maktab*, a hospital, a bathhouse, and hospitium for the students, was endowed by Mirza Husayn Khan with the revenues of

9 villages, two baths, and 53 shops in the Tehran bazaar.[107] Endowments were not only villages and/or shops but often included, among other things, water shares, a share in a garden, a share in a water mill, and a share in a bathhouse. The uses of the endowments were various, including expenditures for the upkeep of pilgrims going to the Iraqi shrine cities and Mashhad; for *rawza khvani* on the tenth of Muharram and/or on Friday nights; for the repair and illumination of a shrine or Husayniya on specific days; for tea and sugar for the audience of *ta'ziya* performances; for the construction of a bathhouse or its repair; for an ice house for the shrine's hospitium; or for the repair of a tomb.[108] Sometimes endowments benefited an entire group, such as one clan of Isfahani sayyids, who had an income of 3,000 tomans per year from property in the Jarquya district.[109]

Of course, endowments dominated those areas where important shrines were located, such as Mashhad. Here, as in other centers of pilgrimage, the religious professionals managed the main economic activity of those towns, which was religion. In Mashhad, for example, in 1860 some 50,000 pilgrims visited the city, which was more than the entire city's population. This number of pilgrims, which had been consistent each year, was reduced by half in 1873 due to famine. However, by 1890 it is reported that the number of annual pilgrims had reached the 100,000 mark.[110] Other cities were not affected in the same way, but many less important centers of pilgrimage were also dominated by the economics of religion. This held true for Qom and to a lesser extent for smaller shrines such as in Shiraz (Shah-i Chiragh), Turbat-i Haydari, and Qazvin.[111] But wherever an important or less important *imamzada* was buried, that site also had its share of visitors. Because the number of shrines in many parts of Persia is impressive, and the guardians of these shrines received gifts from the many local visitors, the total amount of money channeled to the religious class this way was significant. The situation in Baluchistan, where the people "are extremely superstitious, and resort largely to *ziyarats* or shrines, and the custodians of such places derive no small profit from their visitors"[112] was typical for the rest of Qajar Persia.

These visitors gained spiritual satisfaction and in return left something tangible. Many brought votive offerings, which, if donated by the rich, could be very precious indeed.[113] Although many pilgrims ate at the shrine's public kitchen, most could afford to eat in town where they also sought lodging. The financial infusion was considerable, and much found its way directly to the shrine. Another source of large income came from deceased believers who wanted to be in good company at the time of resurrection and paid heavily for the privilege of being buried within the shrine's area. The price per grave varied from 20 to 200 or more tomans, "which is one of the perquisites of the motavalli."[114]

Not only dead religious leaders attracted visitors; the living ones also received throngs of visitors who either wanted to bask in their glory or wanted something more tangible. "The offerings in return for the oracular responses given by the Imam to the anxious enquiries of numerous pilgrims, form no small part of the perquisites of the attendant *mujtahids* and mullas."[115]

## What the Money Was Spent On

Though it is difficult to estimate the total financial power of the ulama, it has been estimated that around 1860 they disposed of 2 million tomans per year when the state

budget was estimated at some 4 million tomans. Most of these funds (75%) were revenues from their own landed properties. When we add to this the transfer payments by the government and the mass of believers in the form of tithes, alms, and gifts, the total financial flow controlled by the ulama could be as high as 2.4 million tomans per year.[116]

It is impossible to estimate how much was spent on the personal establishments of the religious professionals and how much on religious activities *strictu sensu*. We lack a breakdown of such expenditures that would allow us to analyze the available data, and the flows to private households of ulama may also have been spent partly on religious activities rather than purely on everyday concerns. We therefore focus on the budget of the Imam Reza shrine at Mashhad to illustrate how the religious class distributed its revenues (Table 4.2).

According to the manager of the Imam Reza shrine, the revenues and expenditures in 1306/1885 were, respectively, 59,260 and 52,140 tomans. His nonaggregated, nonaudited budget is conservative, because it does not show income, for example, from rice, vegetable oil, nuts, beans, and so on.[117] The expenditure pattern shows that salaries constituted the highest expense category (46%), followed by the costs of lighting, the kitchen, and the library (34%).

As to expenditures on personnel, the shrine of Imam Reza employed as many as 2,000 persons in 1889,[118] of which there were "some 20 *mujtahids* or chief priests, and the same number of superior Shrine officials."[119] The largest share of the revenue went to these 40 people, for most of the rank-and-file servants either received no pay, or received very little money, or only grain for their support.[120]

Table 4.2. Income and Expenditures of the Imam Reza Shrine (in *riyals*)

| Barley (*kharvar*) | Wheat (*kharvar*) | Cash (*riyal*) | Income or Expenditure |
|---|---|---|---|
| INCOME | | | |
| 2,726 | 5,452 | 131,970 | Agricultural property (23.7%) |
| 7 | 15 | 102,144 | Real estate (19.1%) |
| 272 | 944 | 74,416 | Khorasan *vaqfs* (14.0%) |
| 2 | 2 | 30,063 | 'Iraq, Fars, Dar al-Marz *vaqfs* (5.5%) |
| | | 49,890 | Burial fees, gifts (9.3%) |
| 706 | 1,492 | 76,887 | Special *vaqfs* (14.2%) |
| 392 | 975 | 76,235 | Last year's saldo (14.2%) |
| 4,105 | 8,880 | 541,605 | Total Income (100%) |
| EXPENDITURES | | | |
| | | 45,395 | Cash purchases (8.8%) |
| | | 420 | Cleaning |
| 53 | 418 | 43,995 | Gifts to ulama, pilgrims, poor (8.5%) |
| | 387 | 177,931 | Lighting, kitchen, hospital, library (34.2%) |
| 816 | 1,710 | 95,652 | Salaries for *mutavallis*, *nazir*, taxes, cost of transportation grain (18.4%) |
| | | 12,964 | Robes of honor for shah, crown prince, and others (2.4%) |
| 606 | 3,513 | 127,656 | Wages for staff (24.4%) |
| 52 | 330 | 17,393 | Pensions and stipends (3.3%) |
| 1,527 | 6,358 | 521,406 | Total Expenditures (100%) |

A large part of the salaries to staff, including the leading ulama, was represented by those hired to officiate over religious ceremonies and to teach at the shrine and its affiliated *madrasas*. In Mashhad, in the 1820s, there were 14 *madrasas*, each with its sources of funding, supporting between 15 to 90 mullas each,[121] for education was a major sector of economic activity that the religious professionals claimed as their own, a major source of income for them. Higher education was funded mainly through legacies in which the donators had stipulated that a share of the endowment had to be used for stipends for students and professors or the upkeep of educational buildings. Primary education was usually financed through contributions from the parents and guardians of the children.

Controlling access to and the substance of education was a prime target of the religious establishment. The Usuli group of ulama had been able to gain control over "state religion" in Qajar Persia by exercising control over the teaching circles through the maintenance of a kind of oligopoly to influence the thinking of students as well as steer the *ijaza* or authority to exercise *ijtihad* on those who thought the same way. Also, instructing their students to spread out over Persia and attain positions for themselves to advance the cause of *usuli* orthodoxy further strengthened their religious and economic position. For these students, turned teachers, would locally dominate the school curriculum and religious life and thus attract more funding that enabled them to better their position and that of orthodoxy.[122] This was one of the reasons why many conservative religious professionals opposed educational and judicial reforms: it affected them economically.[123]

Because the religious class depended on voluntary contributions, most of which went to leading ulama, the rank-and-file mullas had to seek a patron who would be willing to give them support, business, and gainful employment. This implied, given scarce resources, that teaching and other jobs were not well paid. However, they hoped to supply better compensation in the future. "The elder moollahs receive no fixed pay from the medressas to which they are attached, and many receive nothing at all. Those who can afford it maintain themselves, and do the duty of giving instruction for the sake of the faith they profess, or rather gaining a name, [and ] disciples and followers, and the consequent respect and riches to which they all aspire. The poorer moollahs, who cannot support themselves, have sometimes a small allowance from the extra revenues of the medressa, when the moolwullee, or director, can prevail upon himself to part with so much for the purpose. Pecuniary remuneration for tuition is seldom expected or received; but when a moollah has educated the children of a rich or a noble family, a provision of some description is generally made for him."[124]

The function of head professor or *mudarris* of the most important *madrasas*, on the contrary, was very well endowed and bestowed upon important ulama.[125] Wealth, therefore, was the lifeblood of success for a teacher, for he then could attract a large number of students whom he provided with stipends. Also, given the competitive nature of religion, it provided him with a large following and allowed him to hire thugs or *lutis*, to protect his neighborhood and ward off strong-arm dissent. Both groups were used to send the *'alim*'s message to those who unwilling to hear it.[126]

Therefore, in all major, and even in many smaller towns, there were seminaries (*madrasa*), which in many cases were well endowed with legacies and had established, remunerated teaching positions.[127] Because "a teacher is paid as much as a waiter,"[128]

in some cases the wives of the mullas also earned money by teaching female members of households.[129] Typically, these teaching positions were also endowed with funds to provide for the upkeep of students.[130]

Apart from teaching, expenditures were also incurred for other spiritual activities such as various kinds of panegyrics (*rawza khvani*, *nawhah khvani*, *talqin khvani*, and *maddahi*). This held for the big and small shrines as well as for the more commonplace religious locations. It was not exceptional to see "the experienced moollahs who are employed as stage managers hurrying through the town on their mules, going from one takeah to another to give the benefit of their experience."[131] The shrine of Turbat, for example, just like the larger Mashhad one, was richly endowed for the maintenance of the mullahs, who day and night performed religious services beside the shrine. Kakh, near Turbat, had a shrine to the brother of Imam Reza, and a number of mullahs were employed to read the Qur'an near it.[132]

In addition to these spiritual activities, much of the expenditure was aimed at maintaining the physical aspects of religion. Fraser, in the 1820s, observed that one of the expenses was lights, which in the case of the Imam Reza shrine were paid from the revenues of a caravansarai.[133] The believers also needed physical sustenance, for many of them were poor and when on pilgrimage literally spent their life savings. To assist the poor, donators had granted endowments that had been set aside specifically for that purpose, in the form of public kitchens, and these probably existed in all centers of pilgrimage, both small and large, minor and major.[134]

The numbers of people fed in important religious centers such as the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad varied between 300 to 800 persons per day.[135] In 1860, Eastwick records the following description: "The public kitchen, supported by the revenues of the Imam's shrine, is in the avenue of Bala Khiyaban. Eight hundred persons are fed at this kitchen daily. I saw the dinner served up—there was a goodly mess for every two persons, that is, four breads, four chops, and a platter of rice. Any stranger may dine for twenty days."[136]

The ulama also fed the poor during periods of scarcity such as famine. Eastwick says that Hajji Mulla Rafi' distributed 2 tomans "to each individual of several thousand people in 1861 during the famine. He did not, however, tell me that this was money collected at his instance from the rich, and that he himself only gave his influence."[137] During the famine of 1873, some 500 persons were fed daily, which represents 1 percent of the population of Mashhad and was far below the percentage represented by the poor in that town.[138] Hajji Muhammad Baqir during the 1840s reportedly distributed about 240,000 tomans, but this was during a period when he tried to have political control over Isfahan.[139]

Religious festivals were another occasion to feed the poor, especially during the month of Muharram. Public representations of the *ta'ziya* were staged, at which, according to Wills, "the crowd are often regaled with sherbets by the personage at whose cost the tazzia is given, also pipes, and even coffee; and the amount expended in pipes, coffee, tea, etc. to the numerous guests is very considerable indeed."[140]

Some shrines also maintained hospitals for the poor. Eastwick visited "the new hospital, built by the Mashir [the Mashhad shrine's manager] for eighty sick persons. It is in a fine large garden, and the Mashir told me he intended to endow it with funds."[141] A hospital also existed at the shrine at Qom. "A small annual allowance was formerly

made from the revenues of the country for the maintenance of this establishment," Eastwick continues, "but at present, beyond the accommodation afforded by the bare apartments, there is no provision for distress and sickness."[142]

## In Pursuit of Economic Gain

The religious class controlled significant financial resources that represented about 40 percent of the state's annual budget. This amount was high enough to enable the ulama to make a difference in the economy. In the following section we explore whether this occurred.

Given that the ulama had both political and economic influence, did they use it to improve the lot of their adherents, or did they behave as the secular elite did? One could argue that their role as champions of the poor had already distinguished them from the rest of society. However, first, the ulama were never a monolithic bloc that acted as a united group working for a common social cause. Second, many ulama defended the government's position. Third, many ulama used the respect and influence accorded to them to further benefit their own personal financial interests.[143] This was facilitated by their access to the highest levels of government, which enabled them to protect their own and their relatives' property. For example, during the border delineation of Seistan, "the Saiads and the priestly families had not only been able to hold on to their property but even enlarge it. The superstitious fears of the rival Baluch claimants for supremacy enriched both of these classes."[144]

It is for these reasons that Hajj Sayyah, a late-nineteenth-century reformer, accused the ulama of stealing from the poor to get rich themselves.[145] Also, the author of *Ibrahim Beg* accused them of cheating the people, just as the governors did, and claimed that they respected wealth more than piety and true learning, for they were only engaged in casuistry.[146] Greenfield also notes that wealthy religious professionals usurped the rights of the co-proprietors of villages and neighboring lands along with other abuse of authority, for personal gain.[147]

The growing burden on the population was *inter alia* due to the growth of the number of high-ranking ulama. For this meant an intensified competition for the same amount of money that did not necessarily grow. Whereas in the first decade of the nineteenth century Malcolm knew of only five *mujtahids*, there were hundreds by the end of the century.[148] This fierce competition for scarce funds, which had grown over time, was reinforced by high inflation after 1880 and the depreciation of the Persian currency and consequently the erosion of everybody's purchasing power, including that of the religious class. After 1871 the gold-silver ratio changed dramatically and dropped 30 percent between 1871 and 1889, and a further 50 percent by 1898, when it stabilized. As a result Persia's trade, population, and currency suffered.[149]

That the ulama were not reluctant at all to associate themselves with the court also evidenced their need for money. They gladly accepted high sounding titles, participated in New Year and other official ceremonies, and high ranking ulama paid their respect to the shah when visiting Tehran.[150] In general, the ulama flocked to receive high-ranking government officials—this is clear, for example, in Nizam Mafi's memoirs. In fact, Mafi mentions very few who refused to associate at all with them, such as Mulla Qurban

'Ali *mujtahid* in Kashkan. The usual phrase he uses is "all the ulama" or "groups of ulama," the mullas and others, who came to welcome him.[151] Also, in other ways, the religious professionals tried to improve their financial position. They were willing, for a price, to support government policy or to be silent when others criticized the government. A number of ulama in 1321/1903 each received 250 to 500 tomans to remain quiet.[152] There were also religious professionals who were accused of having accepted money from the British to advance their cause in Persia.[153] The ulama, to make money, at times would declare an important government official an infidel, and then, for a big payoff, would repeal their judgment and even visit his home.[154]

The religious class controlled vast landed properties. However, the peasants on these lands were not better treated than on land owned by secular landlords. According to Forbes, "this village is now the property of the Hazrat Imam [the shrine of the Imam Riza in Mashhad], but the rapacity of the priesthood is more ruinous than the violence of their temporal proprietors."[155] Despite the fact that the ulama pretended to be independent of the government, when they needed the state to protect their own landed interests they exerted their influence to do so.[156] The same held for the usurpation of property by religious professionals, often in league with government officials.[157]

Rich religious professionals were also in league with other wealthy landowners, especially government officials and merchants, who like them had invested heavily in land, to speculate with the price of bread or meat in the cities.[158] A particularly well known case was the bread ring organized by one of the leading religious professionals in Tabriz, the well-known and very wealthy *mujtahid* Nizam al-'Ulama'. The governor who could not break this bread ring, because of the influence of the ulama involved, organized a bread riot that resulted in an attack on the Nizam al-'Ulama's house on August 24, 1898. The mob plundered his house and that of five sayyids, who had killed a few people defending the Nizam al-'Ulama's house. The *mujtahid* had to flee the city, which despite all this still had to wait some time before the price of bread dropped.[159] According to the British Consultate in Isphahan the mullas' role in bread rings was facilitated when locusts arrived and the Persian peasant, "led by his Moollahs, who are chiefly the great holders of the stores of grain in the place, and do not regard this advent of the locust as an unmixed evil, says it is the Divine will, and that Providence will provide the remedy."[160]

Mirza Javad Aqa, the *mujtahid* of Tabriz, who was not only rich, but also greedy,[161] persisted in pursuing his private interests. When the Russian road from Rasht to Tehran was planned, he publicly agitated against it in 1895. According to Gordon, "He saw that the new road was likely to draw away some of the Tabriz traffic, he set himself the task of stirring up the Moullas of Resht to resent, on religious grounds, the extended intrusion of Europeans into their town. The pretence of zeal in the cause was poor, because the Resht Moullas are themselves interested in local prosperity, and the agitation failed."[162]

Malversation was another way through which members of the religious class enriched themselves. Some observers argue that the endowment revenues were rarely used for their dedicated purpose, which is borne out by the many instances of abuse of endowment funds. The perpetrators all went scot-free because of their social position. As a result shrines and mosques were not repaired and *tullab* did not get their stipends.[163] Another contemporary observer writes about property of an owner who died without

heirs that such property "according to law goes to the poor, but unfortunately it has to be done through a medium, and that medium is the mullah. He promptly pockets the property and gives it *supposed* value (valued, mark you, by himself) to the poor. We can imagine what a large percentage the poor receive of that property."[164] Finally, when they could, the important ulama, among whom was Aqa Najafi, one of the richest men in Persia, paid either no taxes or hardly any at all.[165]

## Discussion

Should we conclude from this that all ulama were mercenary and only bent on personal gain? Majd al-Islam, who is critical of many leading ulama, points out that there were many sincere and pious religious leaders.[166] I agree, but have to conclude that the pious ulama were not active in trying to improve the lot of the population. In general, the economic behavior of the ulama did not differ significantly from that of the secular elite. Religious professionals were not the only ones who usurped landed property, exploited the poor, and misused or usurped other people's property. If anything, the religious class was representative of the society in which it lived. However, what I also emphasize is that the ulama had no special economic agenda. They, as a class, were not interested in changing the inequity that existed in Persia, because they were neither revolutionaries nor social reformers. They saw their economic role as limited to the prevention of some forms of oppression—either high taxation or unjust official behavior. They never questioned their own role and behavior as landlords, *mutavallis*, real estate owners, taxpayers, or moneylenders as symptoms of the existing inequities.

This ignorance of the link between the level of taxation and their own demand for money proceeded from their strong belief that whatever the ulama did was good, because it was guided by religion or motivated by religious purposes. This ironic dilemma is nicely captured by an event in 1884 when taxes were raised and the Minister of Finance inquired what the "people" [= ulama] thought about this. One of the replies from the tax official in Semnan was: "Still some banal and insipid ulama, seeking the support of the feebleminded multitude, consider tax collection haram [unlawful], although it is only thanks to the shah's charity, may we be sacrificed to him, that their lives, properties and honors are safe and secure. The taxes collected are spent on their own allowances, pensions, and comfort, and yet they consider the Shah an oppressing tyrant and the property and honor of great men of the state as common property. They never paid the original taxes without much complaining save now that the taxes are increased."[167]

For similar reasons the religious professionals had neither a positive nor a consistent economic policy message. The cultivation of tobacco is a case in point. Whatever the ulama's reason for opposing the Tobacco Régie, it was not necessarily in the economic interest of the tobacco-cultivating peasant. Their opposition, which was by no means universal,[168] was for many ulama more a knee-jerk xenophobic reaction than a rational economic one, though some believed it would hurt their own economic interests. Once the Tobacco Régie had been repealed in 1891 and the country had become indebted to foreigners (the exact opposite of what the ulama had wanted), the right to export tobacco was sold to a Turkish company. And when this company reduced its

annual payment to the shah in 1894, the latter immediately placed a tax of 4 qrans per bag on the cultivator, to make up for his loss. The peasants, stating that it would not pay them to sow tobacco, appealed to the ulama, but they were not interested to interfere.[169] The reason was the personal interest of some of the ulama. Gordon explains that the Société de Tombac had "bought the monopoly of tobacco export had trouble with a Persian combination, who want to buy from cultivators and sell to the foreign agents. A prominent molla was involved in this business, which was at variance with the principles on which the ulama had declared the original concession to be unlawful."[170] In 1895 and 1896, the ulama interfered when purchasers of the Société did not want to buy old tobacco that was unfit for export. They, without inquiry, ordered that all tobacco had to be bought and ordered all the workshops and storehouses closed. The agent of the Turkish company was beaten up. As a result, the Société agreed to buy more of the unfit tobacco but ended up being forced to buy it all. The government then stepped in and caused the ulama to rescind their orders.[171] This interference by the ulama, in Isfahan in particular, continued, though it was contrary to what they had claimed to stand for. However, it served their short-term financial interests. Forcing the Société to buy their inferior tobacco, however, would only hurt the long-term market prospects of the Persian commodity in the world market.

Thus, the interventions of the ulama, which were motivated partly out of concern for the Persian peasant, artisan, and merchant, did not help them and actually often hurt them. The ulama may have been superior religious scholars, but they had neither a comparative advantage in the field of trade nor a long-term economic program. They behaved in the same way in pursuit of their own commercial and/or financial interests focused on short-term gain; moral conviction may have been enough justification for them. The leading ulama who interfered in the market were not personally affected by the results of their behavior. Not only did they and their dependents have sufficient wealth to weather negative reactions by the international market, but they also could recoup themselves, just like the secular elite, through political means to make up for economic loss. What they did not want, nor could realize, was that their flock, whom they wanted to protect, had to foot the bill of their costly, ill-advised, and irrelevant economic interventions. Also, interference was intermittent and incidental, reactive rather than proactive, because the religious professionals, as a group, had neither a policy nor a strategy to deal with economic problems. Beyond that, as a group, the religious professionals shared little beyond religion, and even in that area there was sometimes fierce local infighting. The ulama were too insular and ignorant of the modern and fast-changing world to be effective and helpful agents of economic change. They were convinced, incorrectly, that by identifying the problem and giving their verdict, the problem would be solved.

*Notes*

1. J. Greenfield, *Die Verfassung des persischen Staates* (Berlin: F. Vahlen, 1904), p. 133. On the factional, mostly nonreligious but political, strife between the leading religious professionals and their use of *lutis* and other criminal elements, see Willem Floor, "The Political Role of the *Lutis* in Iran," in *Modern Iran*, The Dialectics of Continuity and Change, ed. M. E. Bonine and N. R. Keddie (Albany: SUNY, 1981), pp. 83–95; Floor, "The Political Role of the *Lutis* in Qajar

Iran," in *Interdisziplinäre Iran-Forschung, Beiträge aus Kulturgeographie, Ethnologie, Soziologie und neuerer Geschichte*, ed. G. Schweizer, Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas, Reihe B, no. 40 (Tübingen, 1979), pp. 179–88.

2. Ahmad Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh-i Inhilal-i Majlis*, ed. Mahmud Khalilpur (Isfahan, Danishgah 1351/1972) (henceforth cited as *Inhilal*), p. 144.

3. Ja'far Shahri, *Tarikh-i Ijtima'i-yi Tihran dar Qarn-i Sizdahum* (Tehran, Intisharat Tslailiyan 1367/1988), vol. 1, p. 86.

4. George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), vol. 1, p. 163; I'timad al-Saltana, Muhammad Hasan Khan, Matla' al-Shams (Tehran, [s.n.] 1301–3/1884–86), vol. 2, p. 31.

5. Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Gulriz, *Minudar ya Bab al-Janna Qazvin* (Tehran, Intisharat-i Tah, 1337/1958), pp. 402–3.

6. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 127.

7. According to Polak, the sayyids as a group represented as much as 2 percent of the entire population (Polak, *Persien, das Land und seine Bewohner* [Leipzig, Olms 1865], vol. 1, p. 38). Another nineteenth-century source estimates their number even higher, viz., at 20 percent of the urban population, which cannot be right but indicates that the impression existed that sayyids were omnipresent and were a hard-to-avoid urban phenomenon (Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121).

8. Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri, *Jughrafiya-yi Kerman*, ed. Bastani Parizi (Tehran, Intisharat-i Ibn Sina 1346/1967), pp. 97, 158, 167, 172–73.

9. N. A. Kuznetsova, *Awza'-yi Siyasi va Iqtisadi–Ijtima'i-yi Iran*, tr. from the Russian Sirus Izadi (Tehran, 1358/1979), p. 84.

10. Sir Frederic J. Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia, An Account of the Journeys of the Persian Boundary Commission 1870–71–72* (London, Macmillan and Co. 1876), vol. 2, p. 170.

11. I'timad al-Saltana, *Matla'*, vol. 1, p. 159; Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 38; Afzal al-Mulk Kermani, *Tarikh va Jughrafiya-yi Qom*. ed. Husayn Mudarrisi Tabataba'i (Qom, 1396/1976), pp. 242, 244.

12. Sir Henry Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia* (London, J. Murray 1894), p. 152.

13. Sir John Malcolm, *The History of Persia from the Early Period to the Present Time* (London, J. Murray 1815 [1976]), vol. 2, pp. 443, 444–45, 574; M. L. Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London, J. Murray 1856), p. 170; H. Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* (New York, 1840), vol. 2, p. 23; Gaspard Drouville, *Voyage en Perse pendant les années 1812 et 1813* (Paris, Imperial Organization for Social Science, 1819), vol. 1, pp. 117–18; Ernst Hoeltzer, *Persien vor 113 Jahren*, ed. Mohammad Assemi (Tehran, 1975), p. 19; Fraydun Adamiyat, *Andishah-yi Taraqqi va Hukumat-i Qanun-i 'Asr-i Sipahsalar* (Tehran, 131/1972), pp. 60–61; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 325; Afzal al-Mulk Kermani, *Tarikh*, pp. 65–67.

14. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 573.

15. Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 325.

16. Meir Litvak, "Continuity and Change in the Ulama Population of Najaf and Karbala, 1791–1904: A Socio-Demographic Study," *Iranian Studies* 23 (1990), pp. 45–46.

17. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 130.

18. Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* (Ithac, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 38–39 with references for various towns.

19. Litvak, "Continuity," pp. 43, 58.

20. J. B. Fraser, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia* (New York: Harper, 1842), p. 256; Hoeltzer, *Persien vor 113 Jahren*, p. 19.

21. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. 1, p. 118.

22. Ella Sykes, *Persia and Its People* (London, Methuen 1910), pp. 135-36; J. Adams, *Persia as Seen by a Persian* (London, 1906), p. 386; Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 445; Ramazan ʿAli Shakiri, *Jughrafiya-yi Tarikhi-yi Quchan* (Mashhad, Shakiri 1346/1967), p. 133.

23. H. Brugsch, *Reise der kgl. preussische Gesandschaft nach Persien 1860–61* (Berlin, 1862–63), vol. 2, p. 95; J. Ussher, *A Journey from London to Persepolis* (London, Hurst and Blackett 1865), p. 591.

24. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 445. Sir Harford Brydges-Jones, *An Account of the Transactions of HM Mission to the Court of Persia in the years 1807–11* (London, Bohn 1834), p. 305; Frederick Forbes, "Route from Turbat Haideri, in Khorasan, to the River Heri Rud, on the Borders of Sistan," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 14 (1844), p. 152.

25. For a few examples see Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 356; J. B. Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces and the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea* (London, Longman 1826), p. 119; J. P. Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan etc.* (London, 1857), p. 121n. See also Willem Floor, "The Bankers (*sarraf*) in Qajar Iran," *Zeitschrift der Dereutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 129 (1979), p. 268.

26. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 575. Many merchants, e.g., had studied at the religious seminaries. Vaziri, *Jughrafiya-yi Kerman*, p. 67; ʿAbdallah Mustawfi, *Sharh-i Zindigani-yi Man* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 238, which was in line with the religiosity of that group. See Willem Floor, "The Merchants (*tujjar*) in Qajar Iran," *Zeitschrift der Dereutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 126 (1976), pp. 101–35.

27. Hoeltzer, *Persien vor 113 Jahren*, p. 19.

28. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 580.

29. Isabelle Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (London, J. Murray 1891), vol. 1, p. 345; vol. 2, p. 7; C. G. Feilberg, *Les Papis* (Copenhagen 1952), p. 146; Layard, *Early Adventures*, pp. 165, 167n.3.

30. Yate, C. E. Khurasan and Sistan (London, 1900) pp. 333–34.

31. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121

32. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 38.

33. Jane Dieulafoy, *La Perse, la Chaldée et la Susiane* (Paris, Hachette 1887), p. 77.

34. Ibid., p. 116.

35. Yate, p. 267.

36. Polak, vol. 1, p. 38.

37. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121.

38. I'timad al-Saltana, *Matlaʿ*, vol. 1, p. 159; Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 38; Afzal al-Mulk Kermani, *Tarikh*, pp. 242, 244.

39. Fraser, *Historical Account*, p. 255.

40. Juan Cole, "Shiʿi Clerics in Iran and Iraq, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985), p. 22.

41. Cole, "Shiʿi Clerics," pp. 3–34; Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley, UCLA Press 1969).

42. Ibid. Usulis considered the collectivity of the *mujtahids* as sources of emulation for Shiʿite laymen.

43. Brydges, Jones, *Transactions*, p. 406.

44. Ibid., p. 407; Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 573; Sir Thomas E. Gordon, *Persia Revisited (1895)* (London, E. Arnold 1896), p. 28; Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys*, p. 30; S. G. W. Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians* (London, J. Murray 1887), p. 343; Mirza Husayn Khan Tahvildar, *Jughrafiya-yi Isfahan*, ed. Manuchihr Situda (Tehran, 1342/1963), p. 86.

45. Algar, *Religion and Society*, p. 49; Iraj Afshar Sistani, *Negahi beh Bushihr* (Tehran, 1369/1990), vol. 2, p. 558; I'timad al-Saltana, *Sadr al-Tavarikh*, ed. M. Mushiri (Tehran, 1970), p. 109.

46. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, 446. "The greater number, however, are poor, and

disappointed with the world and their callings." J. Bassett, *Persia, the Land of the Imams, a Narrative of Travel and Residence 1871–75* (London, 1887), p. 308; "There are in every city, . . . a crowd of mullahs, who live by their wits . . . and contrive by these means to prolong a miserable existence" (Fraser, *Historical Descriptive Account*, p. 256).

47. Fraser, *Historical Descriptive Account*, p. 255.

48. Kuznetsova, *Avza'yi Siyasi*, p. 76.

49. *The Journals of Edward Stirling in Persia and Afghanistan 1828–1829*, ed. Jonathan L. Lee (Naples 1991), pp. 169–71; E. B. Eastwick, *Journal of a Diplomate's Three Years Residence in Persia* (London, 1864), vol. 2, pp. 197, 207; Adams, *Persia as Seen by a Persian*, p. 386; Bassett, *Persia*, p. 308; E. Stack, *Six Months in Persia* (London: Low, Marston, et al. 1886), vol. 2, p. 272.

50. 'Abbas Iqbal, "Hujjat al-Islam Hajj Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Shafti," *Yadgar* 5 (10), pp. 27–35; Mirza Muhammad ibn Sulayman Tunkabuni. *Qisas al-'Ulama*, 2nd ed. (Tehran 1304/1886), pp. 104–5, 135; Algar, *Religion and Society*, pp. 60–1; Ussher, *Journey*, p. 590f.; A. Vambery, *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien* (Pesht, G. Haskonast 1867), p. 176; Brugsch, *Reise*, vol. 2, pp. 95, 233; A. Sepsis, "Perse. Quelques mots sur l'état religieux actuel de la Perse," *Revue de l'Orient* 3 (1844), p. 100.

51. Fashahi, Muhammad Riza, *Vaspini-i Junbish-i quran-i rusta'i dar Quran-i fi'udal* (Tehren, 2536/1977), p. 38; see also Jabiri Ansari, *Tarikh-i Ray va Isfahan* (Isfahan, 1321/1943), p. 47.

52. Sani' al-Dawlah, *Muhi Hasan Khan Kitab al-Ma'athir ua'l-Athar* (Tehran 1307/1889), p. 137; Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, pp. 170–71; Stack, *Six Months*, vol. 2, pp. 262, 272f.; Mas'ud Gulzari, ed., *Safarnama-yi Astarabad va Mazandaran va Gilan va* (Tehran, Bunyad-Farh'ang-i Iran 2535/1976), pp. 110–11; Afzal al-Mulk Kermani, *Tarikh*, pp. 190, 196, 199, 200; Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, vol. 2, p. 189; Vaziri, *Jughrafiya-yi*, pp. 47–50; I'timad al-Saltanah, *Matla'*, vol. 3, pp. 188, 340; A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1953), p. 268; A. Houtum-Schindler, *Eastern Persian Irak* (London, 1896), p. 78; Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 156. The wealth of the leading religious professionals, like that of secular members of the power elite, increased after the 1873 famine (Lambton, p. 261; M. Pavlovich, "La situation agraire en Perse à la vieille de la révolution," *Revue du Monde Musulman* 10 (1910), p. 618.

53. Isma'il Hunar Yaghma'i, *Jandaq va Qumis dar Avakhir-i Dawrah-yi Qajar*, ed. 'Abdul-Karim Hikmat Yaghma'i (Tehran, Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran 1363/1984), p. 53; Ahmad Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (Isfahan, 1350/1971), vol. 2, p. 335 (henceforth cited as *Tarikh*); idem, *Inhilal*, pp. 170–71.

54. Brugsch, *Reise*, vol. 2, p. 100; C. Frank, "Über den schiitischen Mudschtahid," *Islamica* 2 (1926), pp. 186, 192.

55. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 573.

56. A. de Gobineau, *Trois Ans en Asie* (Paris, E. Leroux 1923) vol. 2, p. 133.

57. Sepsis, "Perse," p. 101; Iqbal, "Hujjat," p. 34. For a discussion of a religious family who boasted of familial relations with Shafti and made their money in trade and real estate, members of which continued in these activities, see Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 34–43.

58. For example, the mujtahid of Kerman rented a caravansarai to the Hindus in Kerman for 120 tomans/year (Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, vol. 2, p. 189). In Tehran some mullas rented out many shops (Sirus Sa'dvandiyan and Mansura Ittihadiya [Nizam-Mafi], *Amar-i Dar al-Khilafah-yi Tihran* [Tehran, 1368/1989], *passim*).

59. *Journals of Stirling*, p. 169. For similar remarks, in particular on money lending by religious professionals see Sepsis, "Perse," p. 101; Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys*, p. 127; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, pp. 325, 336, 345.

60. Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, p. 67.

61. Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 2, pp. 164–65; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 208.

62. Shahri, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, pp. 259–61.

63. Hajj Sayyah, *Khatirat-i Hajj Sayyah*, ed. Hamid Sayyah (Tehran, Amir Kabir 1346/1967), pp. 164–65.

64. Willem Floor, "Bankruptcy in Qajar Iran," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 127 (1977); Floor, "Hotz versus Muhammad Shafi': A Case Study in Commercial Litigation in Qajar Iran," *IJMES* 15 (1983).

65. Tunkabuni, *Quisas*, pp. 24, 32–33.

66. Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 348–9, 352–55.

67. Sir Percy M. Sykes, *The History of Persia*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1915), vol. 2, p. 385; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, pp. 325–26

68. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 472; Fraser, *Historical and Descriptive Account*, p. 256; Eastwick, *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 175.

69. Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 1, p. 164; Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 445.

70. Mustawfi, *Sharh-i*, vol. 2, p. 375; see also Ahmad Kasravi, *Zindigani-yi Man* (Tehran, 1323/1944), pp. 145, 148, Shams al-Din Rushdiyah, *Savane-i 'umr* (Tehran 1362/1983), p. 15. In general, see Willem Floor, "Change and Development in the Judicial System of Qajar Iran (1800–1925)," in *Qajar Persia*, ed. Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press, 1983), pp. 113–47.

71. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 261; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 326. Willem Floor, "Hotz Versus Muhammad Shafi," pp. 185–209; Floor, "The Judicial System"; Floor, "The Merchants."

72. I'timad al-Saltana, *Sadr*, p. 279; see also Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, pp. 382–89, 422.

73. J. de Rochechouart, *Souvenir d'un voyage en Perse* (Paris 1867), p. 63; Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 260; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, 325–26.

74. Floor, "The Judicial System."

75. X. de Hell Hommaire, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse* (Paris: P. Bertrand, 1856), vol. 2, p. 74; I'timad al-Saltana, *Mir'at al-Buldan* (Tehran: Donishgah-i Tirhan, 1294–96/1877–79), vol. 1, p. 570; idem, *Muntazam-i Nasiri* (Tehran, 1300/1883), vol. 1, p. 25; R. B. M Binning, *A Journal of Two Years Travel in Persia* (London: W. H. Allen, 1857), vol. 1, p. 397.

76. de Rochechouart, *Souvenir*, p. 114.

77. Sheil, *Glimpses*, pp. 388–89.

78. "Report on Persia by Mr. Thomson," cited in Ch. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 32.

79. H. G. Migeod, *Die persische Gesellschaft unter Nasiru'd Din Shah (1848–1896)* (Berlin, 1990) p. 153; H. *Brugsch, Im Lande der Sonne* (Berlin, Allgemeiner Verein 1886), p. 182 gives a higher figure of 8 percent for the mid 1880s.

80. Iqbal, "Hujjat," p. 34.

81. I'timad al-Saltana, *al-Ma'athir*, pp. 136–37.

82. A. Houtum-Schindler, "The late Shi'a Pontiff," in *Imperial Asiatic Quarterly Review* 10 (1895), p. 197.

83. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 573; Drouville, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. 1, pp. 119, 121; Adams, *Persia as Seen*, pp. 387–88; Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys*, pp. 41, 56; Sykes, *Persia and Its People*, p. 134.

84. Litvak, "Continuity and Change," p. 44n.40; M. E. Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia* (London, Seeley 1909), p. 114; Polak, *Persien*, vol.1, p. 327.

85. Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, p. 101–5; al-Islam, *Inhilal*, p. 165. Elsewhere, this one-third was demanded by the state (Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, p. 101).

86. Juan Cole, "Ideology, Ethics, and Philosophical Discourse in Eighteenth Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* 22 (1989), p. 26.

87. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 573; Tahvildar, *Jughrafiya-yi*, p. 86; Brydges, Jones, *Transactions*, p. 407; Ferrier, *Caravan Journey*, p. 30, 35; Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil*, p. 115;

88. Sykes, *Persia and Its People*, p. 134.

89. Dieulofoy, *La Perse*, pp. 310–11.

90. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 136; Polak *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 336.

91. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 137.

92. Sirjani, *Vaqayi'-yi ittifaqiya* (Tehran, 1361/1982), p. 642.

93. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. 1, p. 119, 121; see also Adams, *Persia as Seen*, pp. 387–88.

94. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. 1, pp. 122–24.

95. Ferrier, *Caravan Journey*, p. 41, also for further impolite behavior.

96. Juan Cole, "Ideology, Ethics," p. 26.

97. C. E.Yate, *Khurasan and Sistan* (London, 1900), pp. 246–47.

98. Ferrier, *Caravan Journey*, p. 56; Adams, *Persia as Seen*, p. 388; see also Dieulafoy, *La Perse*, p. 67.

99. Dieulofoy, *La Perse*, pp. 239, 314

100. Willem Floor, "Bankruptcy in Qajar Iran," *Zeitschrift der Dereutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 127 (1977), p. 68, see also 73.

101. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 121; Gasteiger Chan, 19; Jane Dieulafoy, *A Suse, journal des fouilles 1884–1886* (Paris, Hachette 1888), p. 333. Sayyid also were governors. Layard, *Early Adventures*, pp. 201, 205, Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 38; Dieulafoy, *A Suse*, p. 63.

102. Dieulofoy, *La Perse*, pp. 309–10.

103. Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, p. 169.

104. W. von Grollman, "Militärische Aufzeichnungen während eines Aufenthaltes im Kaukasus und in Persien," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 5/6 (1893), p. 213.

105. Public Record Office (United Kingdom), FO 60/581, Memorandum Sir Mortimer Durand (December 1895, Confi 6704), pp. 26–27; A. Sheikholeslami, *The Central Structure of Authority in Iran, 1871–1896*. Unpubl. Dissertation UCLA 1975, p. 282; H.-G. Migeod, *Die persische Gesellschaft unter Nasiru'd-Din Shah (1848–1896)*, (Berlin, 1990), pp. 152–53.

106. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 137.

107. I'timad al-Saltana, *al-Ma'athir*, p. 83.

108. Abu'l-Qasim Rafi'i Mihrabadi, *Tarikh-i Ardistan* (Tehran, 1367/1988), vol. 3, pp. 645–6, 649, 651–52, 654.

109. I'timad al-Saltana, *Sadr*, p. 91.

110. Curzon, *Persia*, vol.1, pp.162–63; I'timad al-Saltanah, *Matla'*, vol. 2, p. 31. For the situation in the 1960s, see Maria Paola Pagnini Alberti, *Strutture Commerciale di una Citta di Pelligrinaggio: Mashhad* (Udine, Del Bianco 1971).

111. Fraser, J. B. *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 & 1822* (London, 1825), p. 141. For example, the shrine at the village of Mashhad (Qom), the resting place of the *imamzada* 'Ali bin Baqir, had only 150 families. Nevertheless, the shrine had a *khadim bashi* and the *panj kashik* just like the shrine of Fatima in Qom itself, who were remunerated out of endowments attached to the small shrine (Afzal al-Mulk Kermani, *Tarikh*, p. 242).

112. G. P. Tate, *Seistan, A Memoir on the History . . . and the People of the Country* (Calcutta, Superintendent Gov. Printing 1910), p. 228.

113. See, for example in the case of Mashhad, 'Ali Mu'taman, *Rahnama-yi Tarikh va Tawsif-i Darbar-i Vilayatmadar-i Razavi* (Tehran, Chapkhanah-i Bonk Milli 1348/1969), pp. 341–57.

114. Fraser, *Narrative*, pp. 455–56. The cost of a grave ranged from 1000 tomans in the *haram* proper to 2 tomans at the gate of the new courtyard, in addition to administrative fees (J. D. Gurney, "A Qajar Household and Its Estates," *Iranian Studies* 16 [1983], p. 140).

115. L. Adamec, ed. *Gazetteer of Persia* (Graz, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 475–76; see for similar remarks Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, vol. 2, p. 364.

116. Migeod, p. 153n.9.

117. Mu'taman, *Rahnama-yi*, p. 364; the tax of 1,000 tomans levied on the endowments of the Mashhad shrine probably is the same as the expenditure for the robes of honor that were sent to court. Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 2, p. 489.

118. Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 1, p. 163; for the staffing at the Qom shrine see Fraser, *Narrative*, p. 456; for Mashhad-i Qali near Qom, see Houtum-Schindler, *Eastern Irak*, p. 88n.

119. Adamec, *Gazetteer*, vol. 2, p. 476.

120. Fraser, *Narrative*, p. 141.

121. Fraser, *Narrative*, pp. 456–59.

122. Cole, "Shi'i Clerics"; Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 39.

123. Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, pp. 166–67; in general, see Rushdiya, *Savaneh-i*.

124. Fraser, *Narrative*, pp. 464–65.

125. See, e.g., Tahvildar, *Jughrafiya-yi*, pp. 66–67.

126. Willem Floor, 'The Political Role."

127. Fraser, *Travels and Adventures*, p. 85; Bassett, *Persia*, p. 310; de Rochechouart, *Souvenir*, p. 107; J. C. Haentzsche, "Spezialstatistik von Persien," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde* (Berlin 1869), p. 440; Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, pp. 169–70; Binning, *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 283; I'timad al-Saltana, *Mir'at*, vol. 1, p. 345; Adams, *Persia as Seen*, p. 143; Brugsch, *Reise*, vol. 1, p. 217.

128. Sir Percy M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles* (London, 1902), p. 205.

129. Brugsch, *Reise*, vol. 1, p. 270.

130. In Tehran, half of the 80 students of *Madrasa-yi Marvi* received stipends to the annual amount of 464 tomans (De Rochechouart, *Souvenir*, p. 111; see also Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 1, p. 493; I'timad al-Saltana, *Matla'*, vol. 2, p. 31, vol. 3, p. 268; Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, p. 289; Binning, *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 282; Frank, "Über den shiitischen Mudschtahid," pp. 182, 189; Fasa'i, Hajj Mirza Hasan Husayni. *Tarikh-i Farsnama-yi Nasiri* [Tehran, 1314 /1892] [litho]), vol. 2, p. 162; Hoeltzer, *Persien vor 113 Jahren*, p. 19; Bassett, *Persia*, p. 310.

131. R. G. Watson, *A History of Persia* (London, Smith, Elder 1866 [1976]), p. 21.

132. Forbes, "Route from Turbat Haideri," p. 150n; 153.

133. Fraser, *Narrative*, p. 141.

134. Brugsch, *Reise*, vol. 1, p. 376 (*imamzadah* in Hamadan).

135. N. V. Chanykov, *Mémoire sur la partie méridionale de l'Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1862), p. 99; Bassett, *Persia*, p. 226; Vambery, *Wanderungen*, p. 323; Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, vol. 2, p. 364.

136. Eastwick, *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 213.

137. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 333.

138. Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, vol. 1, p. 364.

139. A. Denis, "Question de Perse. Affaire du Kerbela," *Revue de l'Orient* 1 (1840), p. 140; Tunkabuni, *Quisas*, p. 109.

140. C. J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun* (London, Ward, Lock 1882), p. 283. At *ta'ziyahs* "food is provided for the crowd by the patron of the Takeeah. The provision consists of large quantities of boiled rice" (Bassett, *Persia*, p. 306).

141. Eastwick, *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 213; it still exists today (Adamec, *Persia*, vol. 2, p. 486; *Gazetteer*, Mu'taman, *Rahnamu-yi*, pp. 401–14).

142. K. E. Abbott, "Geographical Notes Taken during a Journey in Persia in 1849 and 1850," *Journal Royal Geographical Society* (London, 1855), p. 9.

143. This influence could even take very banal forms like claiming exclusive rights on fish (Ferrier, *Caravan Journey*, pp. 111–12).

144. G. P. Tate, *The Frontiers of Baluchistan* (London, 1909), p. 22.

145. Sayyah, *Khatirut-i*, pp. 21–22.

146. Ibrahim Beg, *Zustände im heutigen Persien, wie sich das Reisebuch Ibrahim Begs enthüllt*, tr. W. Schulz (Leipzig 1903), pp. 182–84, 230, 237; see also Adamiyat, *Andishah*, p. 39; Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, pp. 169–70.

147. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 130.

148. Said Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 246; Tahvildar, *Jughrafiya-yi*, p. 66; Yahya Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahya* (Tehran, 1336/1957), vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

149. E. Lorini, *La Persia e la sua questione monetaria* (Rome, 1900).

150. Sheikholeslami, *The Central Structure*, p. 123.

151. *Khatirat va Asnad-i Husayn Quli Khan Nizam al-Mulk Nizam al-Saltana Mafi* (Tehran, 1361/1982), ed. Mansura Nizam-Mafi and Sirus Saʿdvandiyan, vol. 1, pp. 16, 23-24, 71-72, 82, 87, 112, 144, 153, 155, 233, 245, 275-76, 284; vol. 2, p. 402; see also Sirjani, *Vaqayiʿ-yi ittifaqiyah* index p. 787; *Khatirat va Asnad-i Muhammad ʿAli Ghaffari*, ed. Mansura Ittihadiya (Nizam Mafi) and Sirus Saʿdvandiyan (Tehran, 1361/1982), p. 25, also pp. 27, 37, 43. Many accepted titles and gifts from the shah. Ghulam Husayn Afzal al-Mulk, *Afzal al-Tavarikh*, ed. Mansura Ittihadiya and Sirus Saʿdvandiyan (Tehran, 1361/1982), p. 433. Sirjani, pp. 39, 42, 49, 159, 269, 270, 285, 425, 521.

152. *Namahha-ye Yusif Mughith al-Saltana*, ed. Mansura Nizam-Mafi (Tehran, 1362/1983), p. 83; Iʿtimad al-Saltana, *Ruznama-yi Khatirat*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1345/1976), p. 1002.

153. Ismaʿil Raʾin, *Huquqbigiran*, pp. 100, 103, 180, 96 [re Oudh], 48-49; Fraydun Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran* (Tehran, intisharat-i khvarazemi 1334/1955), pp. 421-22.

154. Iʿtimad al-Saltana, *Sadr*, p. 280; *Khatirat-i Nizam al-Saltana Mafi*, vol. 1, p. 204.

155. Forbes, "Route from Turbat Haideri," pp. 149-50.

156. Brydges-Jones, *Transactions*, p. 304.

157. Sirjani, *Vaqayiʿ-yi ittifaqiya*, pp. 548, 577; Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, vol. 1, p. 55; Tunkabuni, *Quisas*, p. 20; Nadir Mirza, *Tarikh va Jughrafiya-yi Dar al-Saltanah* (Tehran, 1323/1905), p. 118; sometimes the state opposed these activities for local political reasons (Iʿtimad al-Saltana, *Ruznama*, pp. 1001-2).

158. Polak, *Persien*, vol. 1, pp. 325-6; Greenfield, *Verfassung*, pp. 130-31; Floor, "The Merchants." On the formation of these bread and meat rings see idem, "The Creation of the Food Administration in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 16 (1983), pp. 199-227.

159. Greenfield, *Verfassung*, p. 131; Gordon, *Persia Revisited*, p. 24; Floor, "The Creation." In 1905 there was a grain ring once again in Tabriz, the leaders of which were the *Imam-jumʿa* and Saʿd al-Mulk, the mayor, while it was believed that the crown prince was their sleeping partner (A. C. Bratislaw, "Turbulent Tabriz," *Blackwood's Magazine* [1923], p. 53).

160. *Diplomatic and Consular Reports* (henceforth cited as *DCR*) 1662 (Isfahan) 1895-96, p. 6.

161. Iʿtimad al-Saltana, *Ruznama*, p. 1001.

162. Gordon, *Persia Revisited*, p. 24.

163. Sirjani, p. 705; Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, p. 169-70; Curzon, *Persia*, vol. 2, p. 163; Forbes, "Route from Turbat Haideri," p. 153; Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil*, p. 114; Mihrabadi, *Tarikh-i Ardistayn*, vol. 3, pp. 643-4, 646.

164. Hume-Griffith,*Behind the Veil*, p. 114; see also Polak, *Persien*, vol.1, pp. 325-26.

165. Sirjani, *Vaqayiʿ-yi ittifaqiya*, pp. 527-28, 531-32; Majd al-Islam, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, p. 335.

166. Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, p. 171.

167. Sheikholeslami, *The Central Structure of Authority*, p. 119.

168. See, e.g., Majd al-Islam, *Inhilal*, pp. 143-4 (Isfahan); L.V. Stroeva, "Borba iranskogo naroda protiv angliskoi tabachnoi monopolii v Irane v 1891-92 gg.," in *Problemy istorii natsional'no osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniya v stranakh Azii.* (Leningrad, 1963), pp. 171-74 (Tabriz, Mashhad).

169. *DCR* 1662 (Isfahan) 1894-95, p. 9.

170. Gordon, *Persia Revisited*, pp. 29-30.

171. *DCR* 2260 (Isfahan) 1897-99, p. 9; also DCR 1953 (Isfahan) 1895-96, p. 5.

# 5

# *Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i on the Sources of Religious Authority*

JUAN R. I. COLE

When Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i wrote, there was no Shaykhi school, which did not crystallize until after his death. He saw himself as a mainstream Shi'ite, not as a sectarian leader. Yet he clearly innovated in Shi'ite thought, in ways that, toward the end of his life, sparked great controversy. Among the contentious arenas he entered was that of the nature of religious authority. He lived at a time when his branch of Islam was deeply divided on the role of the Muslim learned man. Was he an exemplar to be emulated by the laity without fail, or merely the first among equals, bound by a literal interpretation of the sacred text just as was everyone else? Or was he, as the Sufis maintained, a pole channeling the grace of God to those less enlightened than himself? How may we situate Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i with regard to these contending visions of Shi'ite Islam? What, in short, did he understand to be the structure of authority in Shi'ism?

As these questions demonstrate, Shaykh Ahmad, a native of Eastern Arabia, educated in Iraq, who came to Iran in 1806, remains a figure of paradox and enigma. His place in Iranian history and in Shi'ite thought has by no means been determined.[1] He was given patronage by members of the Qajar ruling house but refused the shah's invitation to reside at court in Tehran on the grounds that he would sooner or later come into conflict with his sovereign over issues of justice. He was widely acclaimed by his contemporaries among the Shi'ite scholastics, but at the very end of his life he suffered an embarrassing excommunication at the hands of a lesser clergyman. He often employed concepts drawn from Sufis such as Muhyi'l-Din Ibn 'Arabi but excoriated the latter as a "murderer of the Faith." He helped revive, and commented on, key philosophical works of the Safavid-era School of Isfahan, by figures such as Mulla Sadra Shirazi, Mir Damad, and Mulla Muhsin Fayz Kashani. Yet he sharply criticized Mulla Sadra and Mulla Muhsin Fayz for what he saw as pantheistic tendencies. Still, he was capable of preferring philosophical definitions and doctrines to those of the Shi'ite jurists. My question here is how to understand these apparent contradictions in the career of one of modern Iran's most important religious and mystical thinkers.

Fath 'Ali Shah's reign, beginning in 1798, saw a wholesale restoration of the Shi'ite clergy to positions of influence, after their eclipse and displacement after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722. This monarch was famed for highly valuing the seminary-trained

clergy, for showering them with grants and perquisites, and giving them authority.[2] The clergy played a role in authorizing the disastrous Russo-Iranian war of 1810–13, as a holy war against infidels, and in forcefully agitating for the even more calamitous Russo-Iranian war of 1826–28, in both of which Iran lost substantial territory and suffered other humiliations.

The rise to prominence of Shaykh Ahmad and his esoteric ideas took place against this backdrop of domestic political centralization and imperial encroachment, as well as of two major religious struggles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The first of these, the battle between the previously influential Akhbaris and their Usuli opponents, concerned the shape of clerical religious culture and the relationship of the clergy with the laity. The second, the rancorous contest between the formally trained clergy on the one hand, and Sufi pirs, or leaders of the Ni'matu'llahi and other mystical orders, exemplifies the conflict between traditional and rational bases of religious authority versus more charismatic styles of leadership. From the 1760s, the Usuli school began to win out in the strategic Shi'ite shrine centers of Iraq, Najaf, and Karbala, led by Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani. He and his disciples trained a new generation of Shi'ite clerics, many of whom went on to gain influence or office in the new Qajar state that began to congeal around 1794. The Akhbaris, dominant in Karbala and some other intellectual centers, believed that only the Imams were worthy of being emulated or blindly followed. They allowed the laity to employ a literalist understanding of the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams as a guide to proper religious conduct, and they saw these sayings, along with the Qur'an, as the only valid sources of Islamic law. Their eighteenth-century paragon, Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani, disapproved of theology and philosophy, and on the whole the movement had a literalist, antirationalist bent and a somewhat egalitarian ethos. The Usulis, on the other hand, allowed trained clerics to use rational tools to derive the law from scriptural texts, as well as appealing to the consensus of such jurisprudents. They insisted that the laity emulate or follow without question the rulings of a trained cleric. Their approach was thus characterized by scholasticism and a clericalist elitism.

Even as the Usulis were decisively winning out over their Akhbari rivals in shrine cities such as Karbala, a popular religious movement arose that challenged the monopoly over religious authority claimed by the *mujtahids* or Usuli jurisprudents. The Ni'matu'llahi Sufi order, which had originated in Iran and then been established also in South India in the sixteenth century and had survived there during the anti-Sufi persecutions of Shah 'Abbas and his successors, now decided to proselytize in the order's homeland. Shah Tahir and Mast 'Ali Shah were sent to Iran by the then leader of the order in the Nizamate of Hyderabad, Riza 'Ali Shah Dakkani, in the 1770s. These emissaries met both popular success and official persecution. Karim Khan Zand (r. 1763–1779) ostracized Ma'sum 'Ali Shah from the then capital, Shiraz, and in 1797 he was executed in Kermanshah at the order of the Usuli jurisprudent Muhammad 'Ali Bihbahani. The new leader of the Ni'matu'llahis, Nur 'Ali Shah, nevertheless managed to attract thousands of followers in Kerman, and the order attained successes in Shiraz, Isfahan, Hamadan, and Tehran into the early nineteenth century, as well. The Ni'matu'llahi Sufis argued that the legalist clerics lacked a "divine faculty" that would enable them truly to become "heirs of the prophets," and that only Sufi clerics could aspire to such a station.[3]

The competing poles of authority in Twelver Shi'ism in this period therefore lie at the extremes of scripturalist literalism versus rationalism, elitism versus egalitarianism,

and spirituality versus legalism. By spirituality here, I mean a self-conscious insistence that religion involves a rich emotional life of the spirit, that it prepares the way for the attainment of alternative states of consciousness and progress toward moral perfection—in other words, that it contains an element of mysticism. As a cultural motif, spirituality or mysticism in this sense may be usefully contrasted to legalism, the conviction that religious duties are fulfilled by exact attention to the carrying out of detailed legal prescriptions. These two poles are not, of course, entirely in opposition, insofar as there could exist an observant mystic. But there could also be an observant believer, fixated upon legalistic minutiae, who saw mysticism as pernicious.

It has been suggested by some that Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i had Akhbari, or literalist, leanings. Despite his conservatism on some issues, there are many reasons for thinking of him rather as a cautious and mystical Usuli. It is true that many important Shi'ite clerics in Bahrain, including Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani, adopted the conservative Akhbari school in the eighteenth century, though their forebears during the Safavid period were largely Usulis. Yet even in Bahrain, the old capital of Bilad al-Qadim (Manama) remained an Usuli outpost till the late eighteenth century.[4] We know virtually nothing of the eighteenth-century religious culture of Eastern Arabian cities such as Hufuf and al-Mubarraz, where Shaykh Ahmad resided much of his first forty years. He dwelt briefly in the shrine cities of Iraq in 1772–73, but had to leave without finishing his seminary studies because of the outbreak of plague. When he succeeded in finally pursuing higher studies in Iraq early in the 1790s, he brought along with him a commentary he had written on a work by the pioneering medieval Usuli thinker, al-'Allamah al-Hilli. He subsequently studied with great Usuli figures such as Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulum Tabataba'i (d. 1797), from whom he received diplomas qualifying him to interpret Islamic texts and law. When he returned to Bahrain, 1795–98, he interacted with a range of scholars, including the Akhbari Shaykh Husayn Al-'Asfur. In a revealing incident, Al-'Asfur teased Shaykh Ahmad by sending over to him some questions posed by his father (Al-'Asfur, Senior) that were critical of Usulism, and suggesting he try to defend the latter school. Although Husayn Al-'Asfur was a diehard Akhbari, he was apparently pleased to teach the sayings of the Imams to Shaykh Ahmad, an Usuli, and was humane enough about the differences between them to treat them playfully.

The queries from Al-'Asfur raised questions about the procedure, enjoined by Usulism, wherein a trained jurisprudent derives a legal ruling on the basis of rational argumentation, coming to a considered opinion (*zann*) about the best judgment. The questioner attempts to paint considered opinion as a sort of whimsy (another possible meaning of *zann*), and to suggest that Usulis actually formed some considered opinions on the basis of others, thus creating an infinite regress, a tissue of unsubstantiated guesses masquerading as Islamic jurisprudence. Can one considered opinion, he wants to know, negate another? The Akhbari interrogator, of course, believed that only a literalist appeal to Qur'an verses and sayings of the Imams could properly form the basis for a legal ruling.

Shaykh Ahmad vigorously defends the validity of a jurist using reason to arrive at a considered opinion.[5] He demolishes the idea that every issue can be confidently settled with reference to a literalist interpretation of a saying from one of the Imams, since these texts are themselves, he says, often ambiguous (*mutashabih*). He also denies that according to the Usuli position the real, correct judgment can change over time. The real judgment is that of God, and it is unvarying. What changes is only its form in this

world. It shifts because of the different manner in which the illumination (*ishraq*) from the heart of the Imam is refracted in the hearts of diverse jurisprudents of greatly varying character. He also establishes that considered opinion can be located along a spectrum, from a conjecture (*rujhan*) to a very strongly grounded conclusion. He avers that a firmly based considered opinion can outweigh a conjecture, so that the Usuli system does not dissolve into a welter of competing guesses but retains some epistemological rigor. He points out that reason cannot be used to establish an Islamic legal ruling all by itself, but the jurist may employ reason in conjunction with the Qur'an, the oral reports about sayings and doings of the Prophet and the Imams, and past consensus, to arrive at a considered opinion.

Shaykh Ahmad presents a syllogism proving the validity of considered opinion, arguing that if the jurisprudent tests his views by considering these conjectural pieces of evidence and reaches a considered opinion, and if he is among those whose considered opinion is recognized as valid (by consensus), then his considered opinion is valid. Perhaps to fend off charges of tautology, Shaykh Ahmad insists that both premises can be proved in their own right. He avers that the minor premise (that a jurisprudent may in fact come to a considered opinion after reviewing the facts and the law) is intuitional (*wujdani*), whereas the major premise (that some jurisprudents have the sort of training and authority that renders their considered opinion a valid ruling) is based on consensus. The conclusion reached in this syllogism, he says, is surely true and not a matter of considered opinion, since the Qur'an promises believers they will not be burdened beyond what they can bear. The jurisprudent who strives for a certainly valid judgment but achieves only a considered opinion will not be punished by God, since he has done all he could. Here he refers to the similar conclusion reached by the Safavid-era Usuli thinker Baha' al-Din 'Amili.[6] He concludes by saying that considered opinion remains considered opinion as long as its basis in the Qur'an and other sources is valid, and it cannot be reduced to mere doubt unless something is found to be wrong with its foundations.

Although Shaykh Ahmad defends scholastic rationalism against Akhbari literalism, and employs a Greek syllogism to do so, it is revealing of the tenor of his thought that he also appeals heavily to intuition as an underpinning of the jurisprudent's authority. He not only has the tools of his seminary training at his disposal but receives illumination (*ishraq*) in his heart from the Hidden Imam. This overt appeal to the language of Suhravardi in the midst of a technical treatise on the principles of jurisprudence is not something I have encountered elsewhere in Usuli writings, and it marks Shaykh Ahmad's jurisprudential theories as being unusually mystical.[7] Indeed, his position on the need for both ratiocination and illumination in a Shi'ite scholar sounds remarkably similar to that of the clerics who deserted unadorned legalistic Usulism for the Ni'matu'llahi Sufi order in the nineteenth century.

Shaykh Ahmad's rationalism went far beyond the limited syllogisms and dialectical theology practiced by the Usulis, to an embrace of important elements of demonstrative logic and Greco-Islamic philosophy. Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani, the Akhbari leader of eighteenth-century Karbala, it should be remembered, forbade the study of dialectical theology and of philosophy.[8] Let us consider just one example of Shaykh Ahmad's complex attitude to the philosophers. In his essay on the sinlessness (*'ismah*) of the Imams, he begins by considering three definitions of sinlessness, which derive from the predestinationist Sunni Ash'arite school, fom a classical Shi'ite text, and from unnamed

"philosophers." After considering the merits of each in turn, he accepts the definition put forward by the philosophers, qualifying it slightly, and sees it as conforming with (but presumably more rigorous than) the Shi'ite definition.[9] I would argue that this willingness to employ philosophical definitions even in so important an area of Shi'ite theology as the sinlessness of the Imams indicates a thoroughgoing rationalism in Shaykh Ahmad's work. At one point, in a discussion of metaphysics, Shaykh Ahmad indicates that the illuminationist (*ishraqi*) position is closest to that of the Imams (*ahl al-'ismah*). Elsewhere, he quotes the illuminationist philosopher Mir Damad (d. 1631) as an authority on issues such as whether the Deity can have a change of mind (*bada'*).[10]

Of course, even though he is in positive dialogue with philosophers such as Avicenna, Qutbb' al-Din Shirazi, Mulla Sadra, and Mir Damad, and even though he often adopts their positions on important issues, Shaykh Ahmad demonstrates not the least hesitancy in harshly criticizing some philosophical positions, for instance the pantheism he felt was implied by Mulla Sadra's idea of "the simplicity of reality" (*basit al-haqiqah*). But note that Mulla Sadra had in this stance departed from that of Suhravardi and Mir Damad, so that Shaykh Ahmad's attack on it is simply an insistence on the original, ontologically pluralist, position of illuminationist philosophy. His jealous independence and his willingness to lambast philosophers such as Mulla Sadra on some issues has helped mask his debt to both the peripatetic and illuminationist schools. Sometimes he rejects philosophical doctrines on rational grounds, but he is also capable of appealing against them to the sayings of the Imams. The point here is that he accepts both Usuli scholasticism and philosophy (the latter often depending on demonstrative logic), as means of deriving religious juridical and theological positions, and therefore as sources of authority. He does not, however, subordinate everything else to demonstrative logic, as did, say, Averroes, and so he remains a philosophical theologian rather than becoming a philosopher, though he is perhaps best classed as a theosophist. His methods are in any case far removed from the scriptural literalism of his Akhbari contemporaries in the Gulf.

As I hinted above, rationalism is only one element in Shaykh Ahmad's approach to religious authority. It coexists with the authority of Shi'ite scriptural texts on the one hand, and with mystical illumination on the other. His emphasis on visions, on the impact of the divine light on the heart of the believer, on the attainment of spiritual perfections, and on the authority of the more gnostic texts in the Imami scriptural corpus lent Shaykh Ahmad's thought its distinctiveness. Let us consider, then, the mystical or spiritual dimension in Shaykh Ahmad's experience and thought. When Shaykh Ahmad was a young man, he frequently dreamed dreams and saw visions of the holy figures of Shi'ism. As his disciple Sayyid Kazim Rashti tells the story:

> He saw our Lord Hasan in a dream, and the Imam put his tongue in his mouth and shared with him his saliva, which was sweeter than honey and more fragrant than musk, but burning hot. . . . His longing grew so extravagant, his love so overwhelming, that he forgot to eat or drink, imbibing just enough to stay alive. He left off mixing with the people, and his heart continually oriented itself toward God. . . . Then he had a true vision of the Messenger of God, who gave him to drink of his saliva, which tasted and smelled like that of the Imam, but was icy cold. When he regained consciousness, the flames within him had subsided, and loving-kindness descended upon him. He learned from them knowledge and enigmas, and dawning rays of light shone over the horizon of

> his heart. The new knowledge did not derive solely from his visions, but rather when he awoke he began finding evidence for it in the Qur'an, and in the sayings and deeds related of the Prophet and of the Imams.[11]

Sayyid Kazim is careful to insist that the Shaykh's visions were congruent with the holy Law and scripture, yet it is inescapably the case that a good deal of his charismatic authority derived from these visions rather than simply from his mastery of the textual sources of Shi'ism. These and other visions reported of the Shaykh are powerful in their symbology.[12] The lesser figure, the Imam Hasan, inspires through his burning saliva a spiritual restlessness and asceticism, whereas the higher figure, the Prophet Himself, bestows by means of his icy cold saliva a radiant acquiescence and mystical gnosis. The effect of the imagery in these visions, of bodily intimacy with the fluids of exalted and holy personages, is to highlight Shaykh Ahmad's special link with the next world in an audacious and concrete manner.

The Shaykh, like the Ni'matu'llahi Sufi leaders referred to above, insisted on the spiritual experiences of the heart as a legitimation of religious authority, rather than accepting the mere mastery of legal details as in mainstream Usulism. Can he, then, be seen as a Sufi pir of sorts? I believe this question is more complex than it might appear on the surface. Let us begin by examining the Shaykh's attitude to the great Sufi thinker Ibn 'Arabi, of thirteenth-century Andalusia. It is clear that Shaykh Ahmad accepted in its broad outline much of the metaphysical scaffolding erected by Ibn 'Arabi. He at one point quotes a commentary on the latter's *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikam*) about the imaginal world and other metaphysical realms and suggests only minor corrections to the view presented.[13] The one point at which he grows vituperative is when, in the *Meccan Revelations*, Ibn 'Arabi discusses the authority of the Sufi leaders as spiritual poles (*aqtab*, sing. *qutb*) channeling the grace of God into the world. For Shaykh Ahmad, this is damnable blasphemy, since only the Shi'ite Imams can play such a role.

Yet, what Shaykh Ahmad ultimately appears to propose is that while the divine grace is funneled into this plane via the Imams, they have their contact points in the person of mystics like Shaykh Ahmad himself. Shaykh Ahmad's conception of moral perfection and the overflowing of grace in those who attain it are homologous with Sufi thought but differ in their strong grounding in esoteric Shi'ite symbols and texts. If the Ni'matu'llahis, with their pirs and their rootedness in the Persian mystical tradition, constituted the bestowal of a Shi'ite veneer on Sufism, Shaykhism might rather be seen as the embellishment of occult Shi'ism with selected Sufi motifs.

For Shaykh Ahmad, then, the Shi'ite learned man is not simply a mundane thinker dependent on nothing more than the divine text and his intellectual tools for its interpretation. The learned must have a spiritual pole (*qutb*), a source of grace (*ghawth*), who will serve as the locus of God's own gaze in this world. Both *qutb* and *ghawth* are frequently used Sufi terms for great masters who can by their graces help their followers pursue the spiritual path. For Shaykh Ahmad, the pole is the Twelfth Imam himself, the light of whose being is in the heart of the Learned. The oral reports, he notes, say that believers benefit from the Imam in his occultation just as the earth benefits from the sun even when it goes behind a cloud. Were the light of the Imam, as guardian (*mustahfiz*), to be altogether extinguished, then the learned would not be able to see in the darkness.[14]

This use of terminology such as pole and *ghawth* implies no accommodation on his part to mainstream Sufism, which he excoriates. When a Shi'ite Sufi questioned Shaykh Ahmad about the benefits of following a Sufi master, or *pir*, Shaykh Ahmad replies by questioning the very premise that Sufi *pirs* possess any valuable or true knowledge about God. He heaps scorn on those who claim the ability to write voluminous volumes filled with divine secrets but say that they forbear to do so because the people could not accept the truth. He insists that since the seeker knows that the *pir* is not divinely protected (*ma'sum*) from sin, the seeker should accept from him only what does not contravene the revealed Law. In each instance, the seeker should find out from the *pir* his reasoning in any judgment and should examine the reasoning closely to see if it accords with Islam. All this focuses on the great, central principles (*usul*) of religion, upon which there is general agreement. On the level of subsidiary (*furu'*) or secondary law, which addresses disputed matters through the principles of jurisprudence, it is necessary for the pir to be a qualified jurisprudent in order to rule authoritatively on any matter, and he may not depart from the consensus of the Shi'ites without strong evidence. Should he not possess this jurisprudential expertise, Shaykh Ahmad implies, his legal advice would be worthless, and he explicitly says that it is not permissible for the seeker to obey his *pir* simply because he is attached to him. While it is allowed unquestioningly to obey someone like an Imam, who is divinely protected, it is not allowed to give such unthinking obedience to a mere mortal. Thus, the *pir* in making any pronouncement must offer his seeker evidence that the seeker finds well-grounded and convincing.[15]

Shaykh Ahmad relies in this essay on the doctrines of Usuli Shi'ism, that formal jurisprudential training is necessary before one can issue authoritative legal judgments, which the laity must obey. Usulis held, however, that in matters of the principles of religion and doctrine, everyone must come to the correct conclusions through his or her own reasoning and effort. Blind emulation of others in the sphere of belief is not allowed. From this point of view, Sufism looked entirely wrongheaded. Here we have *pirs*, who often lack formal jurisprudential training, issuing opinions on matters pertaining to Islamic law and practice. We have seekers pledged to obey their *pirs* unquestioningly, even in matters that should be an individual responsibility, such as faith, practice, and doctrine. Shaykh Ahmad thus rejects the authority structures of even Shi'ite Sufism, in favor of a threefold combination of scholastic (Usuli) jurisprudence, esoteric illuminationism, and philosophical rationalism.

That Shaykh Ahmad, like the strict Usulis, makes a strong divide between the learned and the laity and puts religious authority entirely in the hands of the ulama is clear from his answer to a question raised by Mulla Muhammad Tahir in 1821. The mulla inquired about the meaning of the saying attributed to the Imams, "the learned (*al-'ulama'*) are heirs of the prophets," and of a similar saying of Muhammad's, "the learned of my community are like the prophets of the children of Israel, and even better than they (*wa khayru minhum*)."[16] Shaykh Ahmad replies that the meaning of the first saying is obvious. It refers to those who are learned in the texts and disciplines of revelation, who are manifestly the heirs of the prophets. For the prophets delivered the messages with which they were entrusted to their people. The religiously learned collect them, practice them, and preserve them for the communities founded by the prophets. This knowledge is the only bequest the prophets made, and so those learned in it are their heirs. By the ulama here is meant first of all the Imams,

he says, but by extension it covers all the learned who meet the conditions specified. The second saying refers primarily to the Imams, he explains, who are like the prophets insofar as they must be obeyed by the laity. But it is permissible for the "learned" who are like the prophets of the children of Israel to include the Shi'ite ulama, since their knowledge derives from the Qur'an and the Sunnah (doings and sayings of the Prophet and the Imams), even if it is derived in subsidiary ways from the basic principles contained in the Book and the Sunnah. The duty of the common people (*'awamm*) to obey the ulama with regard to judgments about what is permitted and what is forbidden (*ahkam al-halal wa'l-haram*) is like the duty of obeying the prophets of the children of Israel for their communities.

As for the last phrase of the Prophet's saying, which asserts that the learned are actually better than the Hebrew prophets, Shaykh Ahmad finds no difficulty in understanding this proposition if it concerns the Imams, for he maintains that they are obviously better than the prophets in innumerable ways. If the referent of the saying is the Shi'ite clergy, he allows, then the meaning of the word Arabic word *khayr* here would not be "better" in the sense of "superior to" but would simply indicate that among the ulama there is much good insofar as they preserve the religion of the prophets. In this answer, Shaykh Ahmad establishes the duty of the common people to obey the Shi'ite clergy with regard to issues of right and wrong, and, in the passages discussed here, he locates the basic claim to authority of these ulama in their seminary training and jurisprudential knowledge. Within the corps of Shi'ite learned men, precedence appears to be established in his eyes not only by greater knowledge of jurisprudence, as among the strict Usulis, but also on the basis of the learned man's mystical insight (*kashf*), on the degree to which he has cast off the veils of the mundane world that interfere with perceiving the divine within each person.

Although I have here been primarily interested in the structures of religious authority in the thought of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, one cannot leave aside his relationship to secular authority, which is complex. On the one hand, both in Yazd (1806–1814) and in Kermanshah (1815–24), he received the patronage of Qajar princes and nobles. On the other hand, he showed a marked preference for these provincial towns over the capital, and a disinclination to become a truly national clerical authority by becoming attached to Fath 'Ali Shah's court. This story is told both in Shaykhi sources and in court chronicles.

Sayyid Kazim Rashti explains that the devotion and respect Shaykh Ahmad had earned in Yazd between 1806 and 1808, when he sojourned there, came to the ears of Fath 'Ali Shah. The monarch appears to have been interested, like many ambitious rulers, in building up a coterie of court intellectuals and clerics so as to add to the splendor of his capital. He wrote to the governor in Yazd and instructed him to send Shaykh Ahmad to Tehran with all honor. When the governor gave these instructions to Shaykh Ahmad, he declined. The shah, on hearing of the theosophist's reluctance, renewed his pressure on the Yazd governorship to have him sent. Local officials, alarmed, went to al-Ahsa'i and said they feared the monarch would have them punished if they failed to carry out his command, and they pleaded with the Shaykh to acquiesce. (Among the threats was that the shah himself would come to Yazd, with a large contingent of troops, which would be billeted on the local population). Shaykh Ahmad at length acquiesced, and, according to Sayyid Kazim:

> He then set out on the journey, and they sent to accompany him Mirza ʿAli Riza, who continually served him on the way to the capital, Tehran. He met face to face with the shah, who greeted him with great honor and respect, acknowledging his high station, and gave him a chamber in the palace. All the accomplished clergy and seminary students in Tehran at that time sought interviews with him, showing him perfect reverence, and no two of them differed regarding him; not a single one spoke evil of him nor did anyone seek in any way to injure him.[17]

The warm welcome Shaykh Ahmad received in the capital is stressed so firmly here precisely because many (though not all) in the clerical establishment later turned against him. At this time, however, he was recognized by most clerics as one of their own and was acclaimed by the Tehran high society.

Sayyid Kazim says that the shah next proposed that Shaykh Ahmad relocate permanently in the capital, bringing his family from Basra to Iran. Shaykh Ahmad agreed to settle in Iran but declined to reside in Tehran. He is reported to have told the shah:

> As for dwelling in the same city with you, no. . . . For the shah is the center of the affairs of his subjects and the pivot of sovereignty. He cannot exist without confiscating and bestowing, cutting off limbs, taking and giving. When the people see your acceptance of me and the dignity you bestow on me they will seek me out for their needs and purposes. If I deny them, they will hate and detest me. If I give them what they want and lay before you their requests, you will have only two choices. Either you will accept my intercession and give them all that which they ask, or not. As for the first possibility, I think it unlikely, for you will say that it will destroy your sovereignty and disrupt the order prevailing in the kingdom. If you thus refuse, however, I shall be abased. It is therefore better for me and for you that I live in a distant city, and all these cities after all belong to you, and wherever I am I shall be with you.[18]

The oppositions here are between honor and abasement, authority and power. Shaykh Ahmad, as long as he lived in Eastern Arabia and Iraq, had resided under the Sunni Ottoman government, which entirely lacked religious legitimacy for committed Shiʿites such as himself. The only valid religious authority for Shiʿites there was that of the Sayyids and clerics, so that naked power (the Mamluk government and its troops) contrasted with moral suasion (the sermons of the Imami clergy).

In coming to Iran, he left behind this condition of extreme alienation, wherein the practice of pious dissimulation was constantly enjoined upon him. He entered a Realm of the Shiʿa, where the monarch supported the faith of the Imams. Yet here the relationship between power and authority was much more complex. The shah, as a secular ruler reigning in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, was still prone to act in a manner that Shiʿite scriptural norms would judge unjust. Yet because of his faith, he was willing to honor and promote Twelver clergymen. In so doing he threatened to embroil them in governmental affairs or make them accomplices to the tyranny of the tribal feudalism practiced by the Qajars. In matters that touched upon ethics, Shaykh Ahmad considered his authority as a prominent Shiʿite jurisprudent and illumined thinker paramount and his duty to represent the oppressed clear, and yet this realm overlapped with government spheres wherein the shah had competing authority or at least power. His solution was self-exile to the provinces, where he would be unlikely to come directly into conflict with the monarch, and where no one would expect him to be able to influence royal policies.

## Conclusion

The sort of authority propounded by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i is therefore visionary yet rational, esoteric yet in accord with the literal text of scripture, and ethical in such a way as to put contemporary state practices inevitably under judgment. Among the reasons for the undoubted and widespread popularity of Shaykhi ideas is their appeal to a sort of Shi'ite nativism and to a rich emotional life of the spirit. Akhbarism had the advantage of being firmly based on a literal interpretation of the Imam's own words, but the disadvantage of an intellectual inflexibility. Usulism overcame the rigidity of literalism but at the price of dependence on a dry legalistic scholasticism. Both lacked the "warm heart" that mystics and many among the popular classes sought. Ni'matu'llahi Sufis provided this affective dimension but only at the expense of offering the Sufi poles as sources of charisma beside the Imams.

Shaykhism, by appealing to the esoteric (*batini*) heritage, offered the "warm heart" of Sufism while reaffirming a Shi'ite nativism, exalting the Imams in an almost exaggerated manner. Shaykh Ahmad recognized the claims of the ulama to mandatory obedience by the laity, just as did the Usulis. But he saw the Shi'ite learned man as ideally a mystic and not just a jurisprudent. The Sufi ideal of the Perfect Person was transformed into the Shaykhi ideal of the Perfect Shi'ite.[19] Shaykh Ahmad's acceptance of the authority of the trained jurisprudent implies, as well, an acceptance of the Usuli ideal that all should emulate the single most learned and upright mujtahid, an ideal that underpinned the rise of the *marja' al-taqlid* or overall Exemplar for emulation in the nineteenth century (though no one has ever actually attained the unanimous acclaim of the entire Shi'ite community as the single Marja'). In short, the Perfect Shi'ite, as the notion developed in later Shaykhism, is a more mystically grounded version of the Usuli jurisprudential position that there could, ideally, exist a supreme source for emulation. In addition, the Perfect Shi'ite takes the place of the Sufi leader (*sajjada-nishin*). Shaykhism came into being and functioned as a homologue of the Shi'ite Sufi orders, like the Ni'matu'llahis, but without the liability of putative Sunni influence. It may be that this Shi'ite nativism gained popularity in part precisely because Shi'ism and Iran were under severe attack in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An extreme exaltation of the Imams and an insistence on their having a visible representative in the form of the Perfect Shi'ite helped restore moorings that had been shaken by czars, foreign kings, and the house of Sa'ud.

Shaykh Ahmad lived at a time when the Usuli notion of a single scholar holding the preponderance of authority (*riyasa*) within Shi'ism (especially with regard to the disposal of monies and religious taxes) had not yet been established, and when the idea of a single *marja' al-taqlid*, or source for emulation, was only a theoretical possibility. He probably was among six or seven major sources for emulation in Iran and Iraq during his heyday in Yazd and Kermanshah, and his special claims to esoteric knowledge appear to have created an unusual loyalty in his followers, such that after his death many of them joined his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, in forming a new sect of Shi'ism distinct from the Akhbaris, the Usulis, or the Ni'matu'llahis. Yet in the end it was the more rational Usuli doctrine, with its commitment to a professionalized clergy, that won out. In history, the claims of the exoteric Exemplars (Marja's) for emulation have proved stronger than those of the esoteric Shaykhi leaders who upheld the ideal of the Perfect

Shi'ite. Shaykh Ahmad's religious authority rested on scripture, particularly the less-accepted esoteric sayings of the Imams, on scholastic reason, on Illuminationist unveiling, and on powerful visions of the Imams. This authority, profoundly ethical, inevitably put Shaykhism at odds with the Qajar state, which routinely carried out illegal expropriations and levied illicit taxes—a contradiction that Shaykh Ahmad dealt with, not by rebellion, but by voluntary withdrawal from the political center. His spiritual project could be carried out with less interference, and fewer secular complications, in the provinces, far from the seat of power. It may be that this very unwillingness to accommodate himself to the power realities of the capital, this devotion to principle, put Shaykh Ahmad at a crucial disadvantage in competing with the more worldly Usulis, who became the shah's favorites. If by disentangling himself from the court Shaykh Ahmad lost a great deal of worldly power, this move detracted nothing from, and indeed may have enhanced, his spiritual authority.

*Notes*

1. For scholarship on this figure, see Juan R. I. Cole, "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i," *Studia Islamica* 80 (1994), pp. 1–23; Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972–73), vol. 4; Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, tr. Nancy Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Denis MacEoin, "Ahsa'i, Shaikh Ahmad b. Zayn al-Din," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1979), ch. 2; Vahid Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1979).

2. Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), ch. 3.

3. Hamid Algar, "Religious Forces in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Iran," Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 721–23. Cf. William Royce, "Mir Ma'sum 'Ali Shah and the Ni'mat Allahi Revival, 1776–77 to 1796–97" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979).

4. Juan R. I. Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300–1800," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987), pp. 177–204, esp. 196.

5. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Shaykh Husayn Al-'Asfur, n.d. [1797?], in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, *Jawami' al-Kalim* (Tabriz: Muhammad Taqi Nakhjavani, 1273–76), vol. 2, pp. 42–46.

6. For Shaykh Baha'i as an Usuli mujtahid, see Andrew Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration of the Isfahan School of Philosophy: Shaykh Baha'i and the Role of the Safavid 'Ulama," *Studia Iranica* 15/2 (1986), pp. 165–99.

7. On Suhravardi and Illuminationism, see Hossein Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardi's "Hikmat al-Ishraq,"* Brown University Judaic Studies Series 97 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); and John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Qutb al-Din Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992).

8. Yusuf al-Bahrani, *al-Kashkul* (Karbala: Mu'assasat al-A'lami li'l-Matbu'at al-Hadithah, 1961), vol. 3, pp. 50–55, 148–50; see also Juan R. I. Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 17 (Winter 1985), pp. 3–34.

9. al-Ahsa'i, *Jawami' al-Kalim* I, i, 2:14–15.

10. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, *Jawami' al-Kalim* I, ii, 21:242; al-Ahsa'i, *al-Kashkul*, MSS alif-9 and alif-10, Kerman Shaykhi Library, microfilm, University of Michigan Hatcher Research Library, vol. 1, pp. 79–80.

11. Sayyid Kazim Rashti, "Dalil al-Mutahayyirin," Kerman Shaykhi Library, Microfilm MS, Reel 5, Book 25, University of Michigan Hatcher Research Library, pp. 13-14

12. For a consideration of Shaykh Ahmad's use of mythical symbols, see Cole, "The World as Text."

13. Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, *al-Kashkul*, vol. 1, p. 94.

14. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Sayyid Sharif b. S. Jabir, n.d., *Jawami' al-Kalim* I, ii, 25:266.

15. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Mulla 'Ali Rashti, 1266/1811, *Jawami' al-Kalim* I, ii, 2: 73-74.

16. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Mulla Muhammad Tahir, 18 Rajab 1236/22 April 1821, Jawami' al-Kalim I, ii, 15:219-20.

17. Rashti, "Dalil al-Mutahayyirin," 21-22; Sultan Ahmad Mirza Azud' al-Dawlih, *Tarikh-i Azudi*, ed. 'Abdu'l-Husayn Nava'i (Tehran: Intisharat-i Babak, 1977), p. 128.

18. Ibid.

19. Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp. 49-52.

# 6

# *The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima's Place in an Early Work by the Bab*

TODD LAWSON

In remembrance of Elizabeth Martin

The power and authority of the millennial or apocalyptic imagination is fully evident in the success of the Babi movement of nineteenth-century Iran. Among the most striking and memorable features of Babism is surely the prominence, prestige, and religious authority acquired by the woman disciple of the Bab known as Tahireh. The famous Babi cleric, poet, martyr, and symbol of Iran's encounter with both its own history and the version of modernity proffered by the West is possibly more noted by posterity than the founder of the Babi movement himself because she represents both an apparent anomaly and a heroic symbol of modern female liberation. Tahireh after all left an unhappy marriage and her children to follow her revolutionary vision for a more just society. She was accomplished in a virtually completely male dominated milieu, the clerical. She traveled widely throughout Iran preaching to audiences of men and women the dawn of a new day, and most dramatically, she threw off her veil in public in direct defiance of social and religious norms. She was also a martyr. After the attempt on the life of the shah in 1851, Tahireh was strangled by her own silk scarf and buried in a well in the courtyard of a religious official in Tehran.

However much the story of Tahireh is appreciated by modern and contemporary feminists and suffragists, it is important to recognize that while her heroism may have inspired many in far-flung salons of Europe and eventually America, she is very much a daughter of her own culture, history, mythology, and religion. This assertion will perhaps be received with cynicism, for how could such a paternalistic and male-dominated religion and culture as Iranian Islam of the first half of the nineteenth century produce such a woman celebrity and champion of women's rights? Indeed, it has never been established that Tahireh was a champion of women's rights.[1] What we know is that she was a deeply religious mystic who felt a new day arising in the world. She was a messianic player. But it was not accidental that she was a woman, and it is not without consequence for the history of the Babi movement, which though it passed from the stage of history more or less a failure, it nonetheless gave rise to several other trends and movements in Iran whose influence may still be felt. Tahireh the Babi walked, it seems,

right out of the poems, songs, and higher forms of religiocultural literature as the return of Fatima. It was a sacred performance.

Tahireh, whose full name was Fatima Zarrin Taj Baraghani, Qurrat al-ʿAyn, was seen by a large number of her fellow Babis as the "return," or reincarnation, of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad and wife of the first Imam, ʿAli. Whether this exemplifies reincarnation or transmigration remains to be addressed. It is indisputable, however, that Baraghani was seen by the Babis (and perhaps herself) as the personification of those virtues and attributes that Fatima had come to symbolize for the Iranian Shiʿi community. At the most superficial level, her name was Fatima and her cognomen Tahireh was first applied to her holy ancestor, as was the other name by which she is so widely known, Qurratuʾl-ʿAyn, "Solace of the eyes." As an antitype of the Fatima known and venerated by nineteenth-century Iranian Muslims, she may be expected to be rather distinctive. The Fatima of the Bab's Qurʾan commentary is particularly useful as a function of many different factors: she is a bearer of religious authority (*walaya*: see the discussion that follows for a further elaboration of the meaning of this term); she is a focus of religious devotion and meditation, an icon, as it were, without which the spiritual and religious life may be considered incomplete; she is seen as the embodiment of the spiritual reality of the earth itself, a cosmogonic principle, and at the same time a recurrent actor in a historical drama that will lead ultimately to the long-awaited Day of Resurrection. An examination of the Fatima in this commentary, written before the actual formation or founding of the Babi movement, will help us to understand how many of the Bab's contemporaries saw Tahireh (i.e., the nineteenth-century religious scholar and poet) and, perhaps most important, how Tahireh saw herself. On this latter question, Abbas Amanat has offered the following interesting suggestion:

> Frustrations in her family life and persecutions in her Babi career both served as impetuses for inspirations that she transposed into a religious paradigm; what she terms "the state of primal truth." By assuming the symbolic role of Fatima, she envisaged a feminine model—a "primal truth," as she called it—that substantially differed from the role assigned to Fatima in the Islamic, more particularly Shiʿite, tradition as the daughter of the Prophet, the wife of ʿAli, and the mother of Hasan and Husayn; the role that guaranteed her sanctitude (*sic*) by lineage, marriage, and motherly love. Qurrat al-ʿAyn's Fatima was one of independent will and action. The leadership she assumed in the ʿAtabat and later at Badasht was the realization of this paradigm. . . . The only solution she saw, for women and men alike, was a break with the past, and as the first step, a deliberate infringement of religious norms. To find her in the forefront of Babi radicalism and an advocate of progressive revelation is only logical. Her initiation in the Letters of the Living, on the other hand, was an acknowledgment of her equal place with men in the first unit of the ideal Babi order of All-Beings.[2]

This study suggests that it was not so much a break with the past—that is, the past as "primal truth"—as the revivifying of it that is really at work in the rise of the Babi movement and perhaps its most famous proponent, the woman Tahireh. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of ʿAli was, according to tradition, something of an activist, such as it could be expressed within the confines of seventh-century Arabia. But it seems clear that tradition honors Fatima for her heroism, a brief outline of which is offered below. In the introduction to his *Persian Bayan*, written

after 1848, the Bab specifies that his first followers, the eighteen Letters of the Living, are the return of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, the Family of God plus the historical four emissaries of the disappeared twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-ʿAskari (disappeared in 873–74) who successively represented the highest authority in the Shiʿi world from that time until 949–50.[3] Thus Tahireh not only "assumed the role" of Fatima. She was Fatima.

In the course of this article I also demonstrate that the Bab did not invent such doctrines out of whole cloth, but rather his ideas are, in the main, consonant with the general position of Fatima in Shiʿi religiosity, piety, and mysticism. Most important is Fatima's recognized status as an equal bearer of religious authority (*walaya*) along with the Imams and Muhammad the prophet.[4] In order to demonstrate more fully how someone like Tahireh could acquire the prestige and power she undoubtedly had within her milieu, I delineate the main features of the doctrine of *walaya* as it had developed within Ithna ʿAshari Shiʿism by the first half of the nineteenth century.

## Walaya

In the course of this examination of the religious authority of Fatima, I clarify that however much the eventual course of the Babi movement was at odds with the religious status quo of mid-nineteenth-century Iran, at its core was a cluster of beliefs shared in common with orthodox Shiʿi Islam. The heart of all Shiʿism centers on the strong veneration of the first Imam, ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) (and his wife and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima) as the guardian, protector, and true friend of those who have acknowledged his station as the immediate successor of the Prophet Muhammad. For this reason he is known as *wali*, and the quality of his authority is called *walaya*, frequently (and inadequately) rendered "sainthood."[5] There is in Shiʿism no notion more fundamental than this. It will be seen, perhaps not surprisingly, that the idea was just as central to the Bab's thought, as it is to Shiʿism in general. Also, it will be seen that belief or faith (*iman*) is conditioned by the degree to which one accepts and testifies to the *walaya* of the so-called Family of God (*al Allah*).[6] This family consists of the Prophet Muhammad, ʿAli, and Fatima, and the eleven other Imams. No deed, no matter how meritorious, is acceptable unless it has been performed by one who has fully confessed the truth of this *walaya* as borne by the Family of God. Moreover, such *walaya* has existed from eternity, much like the so-called "Muhammadan light" and numbers among those who have recognized it as the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As an eternal principle, it remains an imperative for all would-be believers at all times: through acceptance or rejection of this spiritual authority, one determines the fate of one's soul.

Walaya is implicated in the fourth of five pillars of belief of traditional Ithna ʿAshari Shiʿism, which are (1) Divine Unity (*tawhid*), (2) Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), (3) the Resurrection/Return (*maʿad*), (4) the Imamate (*imama*), and (5) Divine Justice (*ʿadl*). In Shiʿism prophetic authority ended with the death of Muhammad (632), but the Prophet is understood as having two types of mutually complementing authority: the one, connected with the office of prophethood (*nubuwwa*); the other, in some ways a more general, yet at the same time purer (and therefore higher) type of authority connected with

the office of guardianship (*walaya*). This teaching is based on the Qur'an, where the noun *wali* occurs in several important contexts. Most important for this discussion are all those Qur'anic verses that describe God as the *wali* of the believers[7] or the single verse that says that *walaya* belongs to God alone (18:44). The general meaning of *wali* in these instances is "protector," "friend," and "guardian." By extension, and in the context of the most urgent doctrinal need of the Shi'i community, namely to explain the system of distinctive leadership which it developed, *walaya* came to mean "religious authority": believers are bound to obey what God, their best friend and guardian, ordains. The "Family of God," to use the Bab's distinctive terminology, are the only conduits of this divine protective friendship, particularly in the context of the earliest struggles for leadership within the Islamic community where one could make the error of choosing the wrong "protecting friend" as a leader. Shi'ism says that this is precisely what happened to those Muslims who chose 'Abu Bakr and the other two early caliphs as leaders.[8] While prophethood is in some sense superior to guardianship because only a prophet receives revelation through direct inspiration (*wahy*) and the task of a prophet is to establish a code of law (*shari'a*), *walaya* is essential because only through this office or institution can true religious authority be continued beyond the death of the prophet. Furthermore, it is thought to be superior to *nubuwwa* because unlike that institution, it is related directly to God. God is frequently called a *wali* in the Qur'an, but never a *nabi*. In this way *walaya* is seen to be a divine attribute certainly shared by all prophets, with *nubuwwa* representing in some ways a subfunction of *walaya*. Postprophetic guardians (*awliya'*) do not have *nubuwwa*; it is only by virtue of their *walaya* that they have authority in the community to interpret (never reveal) scripture. But their interpretation has the authority of revelation.

Another complementary meaning of the term *walaya* is kinship, closeness, allegiance and, in some ways, intimacy. A bearer of *walaya* is thus seen to enjoy an especially close relationship to, in this case, God. This feature of the word has lent it so well to all those contexts in the Islamic tradition which have to do with sanctity and saintship.[9] To take a recent example, it was on the basis of these factors that Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) formulated the influential and politically astute doctrine known as "The Guardianship of the Jurist" (*Vilayat-i faqih*), through which he demonstrated to the satisfaction of his numerous followers that the decisions and opinions of the godly jurist are guided by the unerring (*ma'sum*) hand of the Hidden Imam and would therefore be identical with His teaching. Furthermore, these rulings and opinions would somehow represent the very presence of God and the Hidden Imam, a figure with almost ineffable sacral and charismatic authority and power. Earlier examples of the usage have been recently singled out as possibly the most important factor at play in the spiritual authority of the Sufi shaykh or *pir* from very earliest times in Islam.[10] It is something of a truism that the Shi'i Imam is the analogue of the Sufi shaykh (or vice versa). One reason is that the basic understanding and function of the term *walaya* seems to be fairly constant across the borders that otherwise separate the two. The point is that concern with *walaya* means concern with power and authority. In the early work by the Bab, there is a great deal of concern with *walaya*. In this study we are interested mainly in the *walaya* and spiritual authority of Fatima. It is with an enhanced appreciation of this topic that the remarkable life of Tahireh, and the religious leadership of women, can be better understood within the context of nineteenth-century Iran.

## Usuli/Akhbari Debate

Before we turn directly to the writings of the Bab on this topic, it is important to summarize, in very general terms, some of the pertinent historical developments in Shi'i legal theory that serve as immediate background to his career. By the time the Bab was writing, which was very close to the time of the fulfillment of the Shi'i eschaton, a thousand years having elapsed since the disappearance of the Twelfth/Hidden Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-'Askari, a long-standing dispute among religious scholars had been settled for a number of decades. This dispute had to do precisely with the way religious authority (*walaya*) would be expressed and recognized among the believers and is known as the Akhbari/Usuli debate. Although the Usuli position eventually won the day, it is important to know what was at stake. In one sense, this dispute can be characterized as "reason vs. revelation." The Akhbari position was against the institutionalization of "independent jurisprudence" (*ijtihad*), and the Usuli position upheld it. At stake, then, was not only a more or less abstract legal theory, but also the potentially powerful office of mujtahid, independent legal scholar, whose findings in all aspects of religion would be binding upon the believers. These findings were derived through resort to so-called sources (*usul*: roots) by the legal thinker or jurisprudent (*faqih*): (1) Qur'an, (2) Sunna, or (3) Qiyas/Analogy. The process whereby these elements were employed to derive a solution for a legal problem is called *ijtihad*—"independent intellectual exertion." The Akhbaris asserted that there was only one legal authority, namely, the Hidden Imam, the bearer of *walaya* for this time, and that in such a circumstance there was in effect only one *mujtahid* whom the faithful were required to emulate and follow namely, the Hidden Imam. Thus the Akhbari position threatened the social standing of an elite group of highly qualified legal experts by asserting that each believer was to work out their own "salvation" through contemplation of the sources of religion: 1) the Qur'an and 2) the Sunna. The name Akhbari comes from the word used to refer to the thousands of traditions—*akhbar*, sing. *khabar*, sometimes called *hadith*—that preserve the Sunna of not only the Prophet, but the other thirteen immaculate ones, the twelve Imams and Fatima. The Akhbaris taught that each believer had direct access to the truth through reading the Qur'an and this supplementary material. The Usuli position was eventually to lead to the establishment of the important institution known as *marja' taqlid*, "one who is to be [blindly] imitated in matters of religion."[11]

In the process of winning the battle, Usulis argued heavily against the kind of mystical or intuitive communion with the Hidden Imam that made the Akhbari position feasible. In so doing, they argued very persuasively for the superiority of the rational faculty and the use of reason. One response to this argument would come in the form of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843), who throughout their works cautioned against the elimination of the mystical or intuitional aspects of religion and argued, in compelling language, for an epistemology composed of equal parts of reason and "revelation." The Shaykhi position won many supporters precisely because it rescued, in a reasonable manner, the mystical noetic so dear to the Persian soul.[12] The Bab's writings, especially the ones examined in this article, are perhaps an equally strenuously (if differently) argued mysticism. As we will see, the Bab's source of authority is the Qur'an and the Family of God and no one or nothing else.[13]

## The Bab's Writings

There has been a tendency to regard the *Tafsir Surat Yusuf* as the first work of any significance written by the Bab, but this is wrong.[14] The *Tafsir Surat al-Bbaqara*—a work that has been habitually ignored by persons writing on the Babi religion—is really the Bab's first major religious work. It first became known in the West through E. G. Browne, who discussed it and the circumstances under which he received a copy, in an article written in 1892.[15] (It had been sent to him by Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal, who had received it from a scribe in Tehran.) By virtue of the number of existing manuscripts of this work that he enumerated, Denis MacEoin rekindled interest in it as a valuable source for the history and doctrines of the Babi movement.[16] Through further research it has become clear that the Bab's *Tafsir surat al-baqara* enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the growth and development of the Babi religion. MacEoin may have been correct when he suggested that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Baha'i/Azali dispute because of its status as a preproclamation work.[17] On the other hand, such corruption may be a red herring, since a study of a number of manuscripts of the later and much more famous and pivotal *Tafsir Surat Yusuf* reveals very little willful tampering with the text.[18] But MacEoin is certainly correct in his assertion that "since this *tafsir* is the only extended work of the Bab's written before May1844 [when he made his momentous claims public] and till extant, it is indisputably of unique importance as a source of concrete evidence for the development of his thought in the six months or so that led up to the initial announcement of his prophetic claim."[19] Insofar as this first major work was also a *tafsir*, its interest goes beyond the confines of a study of a specific heresy to engage with the greater Islamic tradition itself on the common ground of the Qur'an.

Indeed, it is of some significance that this first major work by the Bab is a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*, or Sura of the Cow (in actual fact, it is a commentary on both the *Surat al-Fatiha*, the first sura and the *Surat al-Baqara*, the second sura), a sura sometimes regarded by exegetes as "the Qur'an in miniature" because in it are found many of the same concerns, ordinances, conceits, and images found throughout the book. A commentary on this sura by any given author would therefore tend to reveal the way he would approach the entire Qur'an. It may be, in fact, that the Bab had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qur'an at this time. He is said to have later produced no less than nine complete commentaries on the Qur'an during his incarceration in Azerbaijan.[20] Why he would have suspended such a project at this earlier date is open to speculation. We do know, however, that it was shortly after the completion of the commentary on the first part[21] of the Qur'an that Mulla Husayn Bushru'i made his visit to Shiraz, during which time the Babi movement may be said to have been born. Such a dramatic occurrence might possibly have had the effect of deflecting the Bab's attention from such a "merely literary" project to concentrate on newer and more important developments. One of these developments was the composition of another tafsir (the *Qayyum al-asma* or *Tafsir Surat Yusuf*) of such a startlingly different nature from this earlier work that the two might be thought to have been written by two different authors, though in reality this is probably not the case.[22]

The radical interpretation of several passages in the *Surat al-Baqara* as speaking directly to the subject of *walaya* is not an innovation of the Bab's but has character-

ized a strong tendency in Shi'i exegesis from the earliest times.[23] This is clarified in notes in the following text that direct the reader to similar interpretations in classical literature. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the ulama class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a perceived need to reassert, revalorize, or perhaps take possession of this cardinal Shi'i doctrine. Why such a need was felt at this particular time and within the Iranian merchant class, has been discussed at length by scholars concerned with the social history of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Iran. The following discussion attests to the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture. Here we begin to understand why the *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* provides invaluable information about the development of the Bab's religious ideas.

## *Walaya* in the Bab's Earliest Work

The subject of *walaya* is introduced very early in the *tafsir* where reference is made to the *Absolute Walaya* (*walayatuhu al-mutlaqa*) of 'Ali. (In the following pages, Qur'an citations are presented in small capital letters in order to make as clear as possible the connection between the words of the commentator and the sacred text.) In the course of the Bab's commentary on the second verse of the Fatiha, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds," the verse is said to be the book (*kitab*) of 'Ali, in which God has placed all the principles (*ahkam*) of Absolute Walaya pertaining to it. It is designated here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (*jannat al-wahidiya*), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm 'Ali's *walaya*.[24]

In this very brief statement, certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the tafsir. Apart from the word *walaya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wahidiya* occurs over and over again throughout the work. It is descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity which constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (*ahadiya*). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called *wahdat al-wujud* school associated with Ibn 'Arabi. Suffice it here to say that the *Absolute Walaya* represents a theoretical position, at least one remove from the Ultimate. A third ontic level, "existence as an expression of divine mercy," is associated with Fatima (see discussion that follows).[25]

The choice of the word *principles* (*ahkam*) has several connotations. In this short introductory sentence to the *tafsir* on the Fatiha, the Bab characterizes this opening chapter of the Qur'an as containing seven clear verses (*ayat muhkamat*). The hermeneutic polarities of *mutashabihat/muhkamat* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsir* in general and have occasioned much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The primary idea is that the Qur'an contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level, these are thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the book. The terminology here is taken from Qur'an 3:7:

> He it is who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [*muhkamat*]. They are the foundation of the Book [*umm al-kitab*]. Others are allegorical [*mutashabihat*]. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*]. But no one knows its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*] except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." And none will grasp the message except those who have understanding.

With this verse comes one of the more fundamental differences between the Sunni and Shi'i exegetes who disagree about the sentence structure of this verse. The above translation represents the "Sunni" reading. A Shi'i reading would be: "And none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rasikhun fi'l-'ilm*). These *rasikhun* are of course the Imams, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Usulis, the *mujtahids*. So understood, the designation of the verses of the Fatiha as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bab read them as having a positive and binding relationship with a true understanding of the Book. Seen in this light, his statement that verse 2 of the Fatiha ordains belief in the Absolute *Walaya* of 'Ali must be taken as divine law, binding upon the believer in the same way as legal prescriptions for the terms of inheritance, or even prayer and fasting, are obligatory.

In this same commentary on the seven verses of the Fatiha, we first encounter Fatima. In line with his method and the structure of this section, the Bab designates the third verse, "the merciful the compassionate" (*ar-rahman ar-rahim*), as "the book of Fatima" (*kitab Fatima salat allah 'alayha*).[26] That Fatima is associated with *rahma*, "mercy," is in line with the general idea of existence as mercy and the role of the feminine articulated in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi.[27] It should also be noted that *rahma* is a feminine noun constructed on the root *rhm*, which is also the basis for the word *rahim*, "uterus, womb." Fatima is associated with this verse because it is gender-specific so that grammar reflects reality—a basic axiom of the worldview we are investigating. That it is also the third verse of the sura means that the order: Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima (*ahadiya, wahidiya, rahmaniya*) is corroborated both through the gender reference and chronological order of birth.[28] The remainder of the commentary runs:

> And God has put in [this verse] all that is hers and all that pertains to her. [This verse] is the Garden of Divine Grace (*jannat al-na'im*). God has ordained its shade for the one who believes in her and loves her after he has recognized her as she deserves (*ba'da ma 'arafaha bima hiya ahluha*), as she appeared to the gnostic through his own self (*kama tajallat li'l'arif lahu bihi*). Then this garden will open to him.[29]

While there is no explicit mention of *walaya* here, it is nonetheless assumed throughout the tafsir that Fatima is, as a member of the Family of God, one of the fourteen bearers of *walaya*. The Bab, it seems, wishes to highlight various nuances of this religious authority according to the particular bearer/*wali* he is discussing. In the case of Fatima, this religious authority is clearly associated with love (*mahabba*) and knowledge/gnosis (*'irfan*), and as we already saw, mercy. For example, in his commentary on 2:25, the Bab states that Paradise or "the Garden" is indeed the love of the form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*). Before we look further at this material, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary of the general place of Fatima in Islam and Shi'ism.

## Fatima of History

Fatima (11/633), the daughter of Muhammad and wife of the first Imam ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (40/661) enjoys an exalted position in Shiʿi piety and is thought by some to function for the Shiʿa much the same way that Mary functions in the Catholic tradition.[30] She is depicted in the histories as the long-suffering darling of her father, to whom she was born through Muhammad's first wife, the incomparable Khadija. She was married to ʿAli, which sources say was a difficult marriage.[31] But while she lived, she was his only wife. She is venerated as the mother of the second and third Ithna ʿAshari Imams, Hasan and Husayn (and by extension all of the Imams). She is held up to the believers by the sources as a model of suffering, patience, generosity, wisdom, and valiant heroism ending in martyrdom. During the Prophet's Meccan and early Medinan period, when the Banu Hashim imposed a ban upon dealings with Muhammad, Fatima is singled out as having endured the privations with great diginity and patience.[32] Of all the Prophet's children, Fatima lived the longest (although she died only a few months after the Prophet's death) and gave Muhammad, who would have otherwise been bereft of male progeny, many descendants. Indeed, one of the many calumnies directed at Muhammad was that he was without male progeny. Such a man was known derisively in this milieu as "cut off" (*al-abtar*).[33] Muhammad was cruelly taunted with this epithet by his fellow Meccans because of the death of his and Khadija's two infant sons, Qasim and Abdallah. Fatima is seen by the tradition as being the one responsible for giving the lie to this cruel insult by providing the Prophet his two grandsons, Hasan, Husayn, and their sisters Zainab and Umm Kulthum.[34] Shiʿi religious literature delights in demonstrating how this epithet, recorded in the sura *The Abundance* (Qur'an 108, as it happens, the shortest sura in the book), was turned against Muhammad's enemies because through Fatima Muhammad's lineage not only continued but multiplied greatly in the Imamate that is the institutional sanctuary of *walaya* in Shiʿism.[35] Ironically, it was Muhammad's enemies who were "cut off" (*al-abtar*) by the will of God.

Fatima is greatly venerated by all Muslims who, when speaking of her, typically add the honorific *al-Zahra'* (the shining one, the luminous, the gloriously radiant). Among the Shiʿa this veneration reaches its greatest intensity. Two Western scholars, Henri Lammens and Louis Massignon, studied the historical basis for this reverence and reached diametrically opposite opinions: Lammens argued that the historical Fatima was "a woman devoid of attraction, of mediocre intelligence, completely insignificant, little esteemed by her father, ill-treated by her husband, . . . anaemic, often ill, prone to tears, who died perhaps of consumption."[36] Massignon has made Fatima "sublime, elevating her to a position often reminiscent of that which the Virgin Mary holds among Christians. For Massignon, she represents the beginnings of Universal Islam" because of her care for the non-Arab converts.[37] Massignon's study improves upon Lammens by offering a "psychologico-religious explanation for the origin and development of the legend of the daughter of the Prophet and bridges the gap between legend and reality as Lammen's book fails to do. However, "[Massignon's work] cannot escape the objection of the historian, who will consider that the author subordinates the facts to beliefs about Fatima which appeared only later."[38] This statement obviously represents a certain historiographical approach. Beliefs, it is clear, have frequently been as crucial to history as facts. Indeed, in this article beliefs are of primary interest; whether or not they represent, in

the case of Fatima, "true historical reality" is immaterial. This is so precisely because we can see how much such belief actually influenced the unfolding of radical religious activity in nineteenth-century Iran. But it is also true—and this is a historiographical element of consequence—that Fatima's life was so obscure that Ibn Hisham and the historians had little occasion to concern themselves with her.

Fatima died in the eleventh year of the *hijra*, six months after the death of the Prophet. Today (because her grave is unknown), Shi'is visit three places in Medina in order to pay homage to her: her house, the Baqi' cemetery, and the space in the Great Mosque between the *rawda* and the tomb of the Prophet.[39] Her nickname, "Mother of her father" (*Umm Abiha*) has several explanations: she learned through a revelation that the name of her very last descendant would be Muhammad, perhaps as a logical inference from the story of her heavenly, luminous origin and birth. Her name Creator (*Fatir*), which is one of the names listed in an eleventh-century source, represents a glorification of Fatima that seems to be characteristic of the extreme Isma'ilis and of "aberrant" sects such as the Nusayris rather than of the Imamis. Have we here a borrowing of the latter from the former? Veccia Vaglieria asks.[40] The belief that Fatima is Fatir, Creator, would also help explain her *kunya Umm Abiha*. Another explanation for the name is that it became Fatima's as a result of her providing comfort to Muhammad during the darkest times.[41] It has been suggested that because of the connections between the cult of Mary among Christians and that of Fatima among Muslims, it is possible that the title arose as a counterpart to that of "Mother of God," especially since the name seems to be found only in later (that is, twelfth-century) sources.[42]

Islam has honored 'Asiyah bint Muzahim, (Pharoah's wife), Maryam bint 'Imran (Mary, mother of Jesus), Khadija, and Fatima as the four perfect women of the world, the best women of Paradise.[43] By the twelfth century, Shi'i scholars had compiled a list of nearly a hundred names and attributes by which Fatima should be honored.[44] This veneration may be best seen in three of the titles by which she is most frequently designated: al-Zahra', "the luminous"; *Fatir*, "Creator"; and Umm Abiha, "Mother of her Father." Others include the masculine form *Fatim*, *al-Tahira*, *al-Zakiya*, *al-Muhaddatha*, *al-Siddiqa*, *al-Batul*, and *Maryam al-Kubra*, and especially significant in connection with Tahireh, *Qurrat al-'Ayn*—one of the most common names by which Tahireh the Babi was known. Official occasions for honoring her are her birth (20 Ramadan), marriage to 'Ali, the public feast of Mubahala (21, 24, 25 Dhu'l-Hijja). This deserves a special word because it is in connection with the Mubahala that Fatima becomes known as one of the *Ahl al-Kisa'*, "People of the cloak." These are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, a group that represents an "elite within an elite" in Shi'ism.[45] The anniversary of her death (3 Jumada II and 2 Ramadan) is also befittingly observed. These are all public holy days in Iran and observed around the world. Other holy days, such as the Day of al-Ghadir (18th of Dhu' l-Hijja) and the Muharram observances—tradition has Fatima making a post mortem appearance at Karbala (which the Bab mentions in his *tafsir*) to lament the cruel fate of her son and his family and companions[46]—are public and private occasions for honoring her memory.

Other events in her life have particular interest here: she is depicted as threatening to remove her head covering twice: on one occasion to protest the treatment of 'Ali after the death of the Prophet,[47] and another time as threatening to remove her head covering in order to stop Abu Bakr and 'Umar from forcibly entering her house after the so-

called election of the first caliph.[48] This will bring to mind Tahireh's removal of the veil that so scandalized even the Babis themselves.[49] In another tradition, she is presented as defiantly turning her back to the intruders to express her repugnance;[50] she is also seen traveling on horseback with ʿAli to ask for the support of the Ansar (who, unfortunately had already committed themselves to Abu Bakr);[51] she is quoted as having challenged ʿUmar himself: "You have left the body of the Apostle of God with us and you have decided among yourselves with consulting us, without respecting our rights."[52]

Thus we clearly see the figure of politically active woman, one who could easily inspire others to similar action. It is curious, in light of this that one of the prevailing images associated with Fatima is that of a sickly and timid victim. Another element in Fatima's political biography is the troublesome Fadak affair. Abu Bakr, according to Shiʿi sources, deprived Fatima of inheriting this productive oasis that the Prophet had promised her. This deprivation caused great hardship for her and her family and also deprived the cause of ʿAli essential material support. In addition, there is the legend of the *mushaf* of Fatima, the book that Gabriel brought her for consolation after the death of her father.[53] As Veccia Vaglieri points out, the material on Fatima remains to be systematical studied. Once it is, however, it will be most interesting to notice whether or not these conflicting images are the result of confessional influences. In the meantime, the question posed by Veccia Vaglieri, did Imami Shiʿism borrow from Isma'ili Shiʿism in the veneration of Fatima? is quite pertinent to the study of the literature of the Shaykhi school in general. As I demonstrate, it is also pertinent in the study of the writings of the Bab, who, as far as we know, was an Imami Shiʿi, born in Shiraz on 20 October 1819 (1 Muharram 1235).

## The Bab's Fatima

Many of the events or topics recounted above are touched upon and elaborated in the Bab's *tafsir*. It is crucial, however, first to establish some idea of what is to be expected. To do this, I rely upon the studies of Henry Corbin, who is the one Western scholar to have penetrated many of the mysteries that this kind of literature holds. In this case, we are particularly fortunate that Corbin devoted an entire book to the study of the spiritual feminine in Iranian religion. In Corbin's distinctive approach, Mazdean religious ideas are connected with Islamic Shiʿite gnosis, first in the work of Suhrawardi and finally, and more resoundingly, in the corpus of the Shaykhis, a corpus that remains lamentably understudied, though progress has been achieved since Corbin's time.[54] In any case, Corbin saw the founder of the Shaykhi school, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, as revivers of "primitive Shiʿite gnosis."[55] It is even more fortunate that part of this book is a study of Fatima in the writings of Hajj Karim Khan Kirmani (1870), the Shaykhi leader who was, in some respects, the Bab's (1850) most bitter opponent. Both had been avid students of the teachings of Ahsa'i and Rashti (as had Tahireh herself). Corbin's reading of Kirmani's works will be shown to resonate with the image of Fatima in this early commentary by the Bab. It is still too soon to determine on what doctrinal grounds they might have differed with regard to Fatima, or indeed, if they differed at all. The main area of disagreement between the two was not a matter for scholasticism.

In this school of thought the Family of God, the Fourteen Very-Pure, function, according to Corbin, in a way "analagous to the *Aeons* of the pleroma in Valentinian gnosis." One of the distinctions between the Suhrawardian and Shaykhi cosmologies is discerned in the shift from a threefold to a fourfold cosmology. For Suhrawardi these were 1) the earthly, human world, "the object of sensory perception"; 2) the world of Soul or Malakut, "the world of imaginative perception" and 3) the cherubinic or angelic world of Jabarut, "the object of intelligible knowledge."[56] Consonant with the motif of quaternity by which much of their thought is distinguished, Shaykhism added a fourth realm (as did Ibn ʿArabi), namely the sphere of deity, the world of *lahut*. For the Shaykhis, however, this realm was "occupied" only by the Family of God–not, as it were, God Himself. Fatima is located first and foremost in this supracelestial realm. As Corbin says, using one of his favorite metaphors:

> One might say that [Shaykhi thought] allows us to hear the theme of the celestial Earth . . . in a still higher octave. Each octave is a new world, a new beginning, where everything is rediscovered, but at a different height, that is, in a higher mode of being. This succession of octaves is what allows the *ta'wil*, or spiritual hermeneutics, to be practiced authentically. Moreover, in the transcendent Person of Fatima as a member of the supreme Pleroma, we shall be hearing something like the motif of the *supracelestial Earth* . . .[57]

The four universes or realms "symbolize with" each other so that the "historic dimension" is a means of discovering the sacred relationship between and among these worlds.

> This will be essentially the esoteric hermeneutic, the *ta'wil*; it will be a discovery of the true and hidden meaning, the spiritual history that becomes visible through the recital of external events. It will mean to "see things in Hurqalya."[58]

In this quaternary world the relationship between male and female is accorded the highest possible value. Hurqalya is, of course, the abode of the Hidden Imam who is alive there and "in hiding" since his disappearance in 260/874. There is ample evidence throughout the works of the Bab, and particularly in the one under study here, that he himself shared a similar, if not identical, approach to history and scripture (although he does not use the word *Hurqalya* here). But we will see more of this later in this essay.[59]

There is no need to dwell further here on Corbin's harmonic rendition of the history of Iranian mythology and religious symbolism[60] whereby he can see the ancient Spendarmat in the Fatima of the Shiʿa, except to say that the *apokatastasis*, the "restoration of all things to their primordial splendor and wholeness, to the state in which they were before the invasion of the Ahrimanian Counterpowers" that he perceives in Shaykhism,[61] is very much a feature of the élan of Babism. As we have already indicated, the authority and power of Tahireh (and the other Babis) is a result of three simultaneous events: a fulfillment of the past, a reenactment of the past, and a break with the past.

## Day of the Covenant

One of the more important controlling myths in Islam, whether Sunni or Shiʿi, is the drama of God's establishing a covenant (*ʿahd, mithaq*) between Himself and humanity through the prophet Adam. The Qur'an tells the story in a characteristically terse pasage

at Qur'an 7:172. At a time before the creation of the world, God summoned Adam to His presence whereupon he caused the "seeds" (*al-dharr*) of all future generations to come forth from Adam's loins. God confronted Adam, thus arrayed before Him, and this vast company with the question "Am I not your Lord?" (*a-lastu bi-rabbikum?* The immediate response was "Yea, verily!" (*bala*). The Qur'an explains that this was done so that no human would be able to say on the Day of Resurrection, when all would be given their just deserts, that they should be excused for their sins because they were not aware of their obligation to God. The "Yea verily!" constitutes humanity's primordial assent to the divine covenant.[62] Within this covenant myth dwells the the explanatory theory of all Islamicate religious authority. It has been particularly instrumental in justifying the mediation and negotiation of charismatic power and authority in a Sufi milieu, but no less in the Shi'i milieu.[63]

In Shi'i communities throughout the world, the eighteenth day of Dhu' l-Hijja, the pilgrimage month, is commemorated as the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mithaq*) and anniversary of the public appointment by the Prophet Muhammad of 'Ali as his successor at a small oasis known as Ghadir Khumm, "the pool of Ghadir." (In Iran, a Shi'i state, this date is an official public holiday.) This oasis was a way station between Mecca and Medina and it was here, during a rest on the way back from his last pilgrimage, that the Prophet made his famous speech, the words of which are preserved in both Sunni and Shi'i books of Tradition:

> We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took 'Ali by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yea verily!' [*bala*] And he took 'Ali's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord [*Mawla*], then 'Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports 'Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And 'Umar [the future second caliph] met him ['Ali] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.[64]

This passage (along with its several variants) is important for two main reasons: 1) the establishment of the continuance of religious authority by the Prophet—"the covenant"; 2) the use of the exquisitely polyvocal term *mawla*, which is a derivative of the root *wly*, upon which the word *walaya* is built. *Mawla* is a particularly interesting Arabic word in that it can mean either "master" or "client"—diametrically opposite denotations, according to usage. As such, it represents admirably the mutuality and reciprocal nature of *walaya*. But it also gives rise to alternate interpretations of this sermon, as the entire history of Islam will attest. It is as the de facto and de jure establishment of the sacred covenant that this sermon occupies us for the moment. This covenant functions as the raison d'être of Shi'ism. Those who recognize, subscribe to, uphold, and defend the appointment of 'Ali as Muhammad's rightful successor and leader—both spiritual and temporal—of the community of Muslims, is faithful to the covenant and may be considered a believing Muslim (*muslim mu'min*). Those who acknowledge anyone else as the successor of Muhammad and leader of the community is accounted a breaker (*naqid*) of this covenant and an infidel (*kafir*).

A natural starting place, then, for a detailed examination of the person/figure/symbol of Fatima in the Bab's Qur'an commentary is the Covenant. The Bab draws a comparison or homologue between the Qur'anic primordial *yawm al-mithaq*, the events of which are narrated in Qur'an 7:172, and the Day of al-Ghadir. The first Qur'anic cue for this comparison is in verse 2:8: "Of the people there are some who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they do not really believe." The people specified here, according to the Bab, are those whom God will cause to forget faith in ʿAli's *walaya* on the Last Day. They are not believers because their faith is flawed, even though they may consider themselves true believers in ʿAli's spiritual authority:

> Whoever knows that ʿAli is the sign of God in the station of the Exclusive Divine Unity . . . is one of the believers "in God and the Last Day," which is really the First Day, and it is the beginning of the mention of the created thing in the world of contingency, and it is the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of ʿAli. Such a one is one of the believers. And whoever abandons this station enters into the category: "and he is not an exalted believer." May God protect us through Muhammad and his family from entering into this error![65]

It will become clear below that "the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of ʿAli" is an indirect reference to Fatima, who is the source of all light. The Bab strengthens the connection or homology between the Last Day mentioned here and the Day of the Covenant and the Day of al-Ghadir Khumm by quoting a long hadith from the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-ʿAskari's *tafsir*, in which the occasion of revelation (known in some circles as *sabab al-nuzul*) for this verse is established as the *Day of al-Ghadir*. In this verse, the Imam says God was warning Muhammad about those who feigned allegiance to ʿAli following the sermon, quoted above. The Bab says:

> That place of testimony is the same as the "dimension" (*dharr*) of the primordial covenant, when the covenant of lordship was taken: whoever was recognized [then] was recognized [for all time]. Indeed, "those possessed of minds" know what happened there by what happened here (Ghadir Khumm), the realm of this world (or "religion" *tashriʿ*) is in accord with the realm of that world (or "divine creation" *takwin*). But this place of testimony (viz. the Day of al-Ghadir) is greater than the first place of testimony, the dimension of the affirmation of Divine Unity, while the second place of testimony is the dimension of the affirmation of Prophethood—nay, rather it is the essence of the Divine Cause. This place of testimony of the Day of al-Ghadir is the third place of testimony and the greatest dimension. The remaining place of testimony is the last: it is the dimension of the Fourth Support, the rising of the Qa'im, may God hasten his glad advent. This occasion of testimony will occur in the beginning of his appearance (*zuhur*) and it is the dimension of the affirmation by their Shiʿa that the Family of God are the WORD of magnification in the midmost sanctity of praise.[66]

Thus the fourfold structure of the Bab's approach. The Bab says that the *shahada*, the true testimony to the truth of this, is none other than the Imams and Fatima.[67] The Bab demonstrates how Fatima is implicated in this covenant in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83. Here he says that the esoteric meaning of the word *kindred* is a clear designation of Fatima, just as the word *orphans* is a reference to al-Hasan and al-Husayn. "God has spoken here about the taking of the *covenant* with all created things in the eight Paradises, in affirmation of the *walaya* of ʿAli"[68] The Qur'anic verse is:

> And remember We took a Covenant from the Children of Israel: Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, And orphans and those in need; Speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity. Then did ye turn your back, except a few among you, and ye backslide even now. [Qur'an 2:83]

In another quaternary interpretation, the phrase: "those who broke the covenant" [Qur'an 2:27] refers to *the covenant* (*'ahd*) of Muhammad vis-à-vis the signs (*ayat*) of 'Ali. This covenant was instituted in the world of the *Unseen* (*al-ghayb*), the spiritual realm. Although the term *lahut* is not used, nor the word *hurqalya*, it is clear that the realm of *al-ghayb* is a spiritual "space" with its own "time."

> These signs were placed within (*fi*) the dimension (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqam*) of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), and [in] the dimension of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and [in] the atoms of souls [which represents] the abode of the Imamate (*imama*), and [in] the dimension of the bodies [which represents] the place (*mahall*) of the love of the Shi'a after God imposed this solemn binding upon all created things [which is] faith (*iman*) in Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn, Ja'far, Musa, and Fatima.[69]

The first who "broke the covenant" was Abu Bakr.

> He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends (*awliya*) in the unseen worlds and he violated the *walaya* of 'Ali in its [future] apppearances in the visible Imams . . . and he [broke the covenant] by taking the land of al-Fadak away from Fatima after he knew very well that the Apostle of God had specified it for her during his life and forbidden its produce to go to anyone else.[70]

In Kirmani's treatment of the Qur'anic Day of the Covenant when God demanded from the seed of Adam absolute obedience, this drama was originally played out in the realm of *lahut*, "long before" it achieved its first earthly iteration at the time of Adam. Its second, and most important iteration occurred at the pool called Ghadir Khumm when Muhammad appointed 'Ali his successor and took a pact with all of the Muslims to this effect.[71] Fatima's response in this divine setting is precisely the "theurgic accomplishment" of becoming the Earth for the production of the cosmos. None can have access or perception of this realm, it is too rarified, powerful in its beauty and luminous beyond mortal ability to perceive. "The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms [*ashbah*], which are the receptacles of their theophanies."[72] According to Kirmani, Fatima *is* the Earth of the sacred *lahuti* universe,[73] which is related to the mysterious earth of Hurqalya.

The Bab describes Fatima as the "Universal earth," "heaven" and "the Sabbath." This same idea may be evident in a particularly vivid passage of the Bab's *tafsir*. At verse 60 of *Surat al-Baqara*, for example, the water that gushed forth from the rock at twelve different places after Moses struck it with his staff, is said to represent the *walaya* of all the Imams. The Bab says that although the water issued from these various places, it was in fact the same water. The station of Fatima is further defined here as that without which *walaya* could not have appeared in the world:

> And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; We said: "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenace provided by God, and do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth. [Qur'an 2:60]

The Bab says, the striker here is Muhammad, the staff is ʿAli, and the stone [from which the water came forth] is Fatima. And the springs are the twelve Imams. ʿAli, by virtue of *walaya*, is counted among them and by virtue of the rank of staff is also distinguished from them. The point of this Qur'anic passage is that it corroborates the history of Islam. Or, more important, the Bab, through this interpretation, demonstrates that in the eternal word of God, the story of Muhammad and his family had been established or "prophesied." History, according to this approach (as Corbin observed), is best seen as a subject for *ta'wil*: it is symbolic (as distinct from allegorical). God commanded Muhammad to give his daughter Fatima in marriage to ʿAli so that all people "at all times" might be able to recognize their Imam, to "eat and drink of the splendours of the knowledge dispensed by your Imam through the grace (*fadl*) of Muhammad."[74] Some sources even suggest that at this marriage (which occurred "first" in the spiritual realm) God himself was *wali* for Fatima.[75] Such a myth nicely supplies a narrative explanation for those verses in the Qur'an, mentioned above, which say that God is a *wali* or protector of the believers.

In the Bab's commentary at 2:29, we encounter another instance of the historical event used as a subject of *ta'wil*. And here we also encounter Fatima as the spiritual reality of a heavenly earth. The Qur'anic verse is: "It is He who hath created for you all things that are on earth; then He turned Himself to heaven, and he gave order and perfection to the seven heavens; and of all things he hath perfect knowledge" [Qur'an 2:29].

Fatima here is described as being this "universal earth" out of which the Imams will appear.

> God made the real meaning of this "comprehensive earth" to be Fatima, upon her be God's blessing and peace. And [He made] what was in her to be the Imams, upon them be God's blessing and peace. He is the One who created, through the angels, all that is in the Earth of the Divine Exclusive Unity, which is Fatima, for Muhammad, upon him be God's blessing and peace.
>
> "Then He lifted Himself to heaven," that is, He married her [Fatima] to ʿAli and thus she is equated with heaven as far as honor (*sharfa*) is concerned. Thus God made her . . . "one of the mighty portents, a warning to mankind. to any of you that chooses to press forward or to follow behind" [Qur'an 74:36–37].[76]

In Corbin's summary of Kirmani, we discern the logic of the Bab's hermeneutic: Since all earthly events are reflections of a pre-eternal order, the earthly marriage of ʿAli and Fatima also had its purest and holiest occurrence in the supracelestial realm. The earthly marriage in Medina thus symbolized the original union that was itself "the manifestation of an eternal syzygy originating in the eternity of the pleroma of the *lahut*. The First Imam and Fatima are related to each other in the same reciprocal way as the first two hypostases [of neoplatonism], *ʿAql* and *Nafs*, Intelligence and Soul, or in terms more familiar to us (because they go back to Philo): *Logos* and *Sophia*."[77] It is also of some interest to note that Kirmani "finds" Fatima in the Qur'anic verse quoted here by the Bab (74:36–37).[78] An examination of more traditional commentaries discloses that this exegesis is quite old indeed. Thus the interpretations of both the Bab and Kirmani represent in this instance a revivification of ancient religious ideas.[79] Whether the following striking development also has its roots in the early history of Shiʿi Qur'an interpretation remains to be established. The Bab continues his commentary on Qur'an 2:29:

> So, in reality it was she who turned to the heaven and fashioned them seven heavens that is, the seven proofs who are equal to 'Ali, upon him be God's blessing and peace, with regard to their Origination. The seven, when they go through the processes of Origination and Invention become fourteen manifestations of Origination. And they are seven heavens.[80]

The words *fashioned* and *equal* do not convey the exegetical device of paranomasia with which the Bab conveys this interpretation. The Qur'anic *sawwahunna* ("he gave order and perfection") is formed from the same root as the Qur'anic *istawa* ("then He turned Himself"). This root, *sawiya*, can be variously translated as "leveling," "making smooth," "making equal," "ordering." That the world is orderly—cosmos rather than chaos—is a classic Qur'anic argument for the existence and function of God as orderer and sustainer. How this ordering and creation is to be explained is of course controversial. The Bab holds to a distinctive cosmogony entailing twin creative processes;[81] through these the seven heavens are rendered fourteen—the number of the Family of God. This is a perfect example of the otherworldly potency of Fatima's creative status: she is not only the "Mother of her Father" (*umm abiha*) but the creatrice of her own self and the twelve Imams as well. Kirmani, as recounted by Corbin, seems acutely apt in this instance:

> Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic initiation. For the pleroma of these entities of light is the very *place* of the divine mystery. Their light is the divine light itself; their transparency allows it to shine through, retaining none of their own ipseity [viz "ego"] . . . they are the very substance of pre-eternal Love; they are the identity of love, lover, and beloved, that identity which all Sufis have aspired to live. . . .[82]

As Corbin summarizes: Fatima is the Soul of creation, the Soul of each creature, "the constitutive part of the human being." Fatima is "the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth; she is both paradise and initiation into it, for it is she who manifests the divine names and attributes revealed in the theophanic persons of the Imams."[83]

> The ontological rank of the Soul and the reality of the Soul are the rank of Fatima. The Imams are masculine as agents of cosmogony, since relation is their soul; as authors of spiritual creation they are feminine, since they are the Soul and since the Soul is Fatima, . . . the theophanic and initiatic function of the holy Imams is precisely their "Fatimic" degree of being (their *fatimiya*, which we faithfully translate as "Sophianity"), and this is how Fatima comes to be called Fatima Fatir, Fatima Creator.[84]

"Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic intitiation."[85] Corbin points out that it is in the light of such theories the Isma'ili epithet Fatima Fatir (Fatima the Creator) begins to be heard and understood, but this time in a new "key." Fatima, the "queen of women"—a frequent honorific—should really be understood as the "sovereign of feminine humanity" where "feminine" equals "meaning,"[86] or "the totality of the beings of the Possible [*al-imkan*]! All creatures have been created out of the Soul itself, out of the Anima of the holy Imams."[87] The Bab will echo this second idea below in his commentary on Qur'an 2:35. Whether the Bab reognized anything like a Jungian "feminine dimension of humanity" is difficult to say with any certainty at this time.[88]

Kirmani says the Imams are the brides of the prophet inasmuch as they have been created from the soul or are the soul of the Prophet. As the Qur'an [16:74 and 30:20] says, "He has made wives for you out of your own souls." The real "mother of the believers" is the initiatic function of the Imams. But this "motherhood" ultimately has its source in Fatima. Spiritual birth happens through the "Fatimic" agency of the Imams. The Prophet has said, "I and ʿAli are the father and the mother of this community." The Bab quotes this tradition in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83.[89]

At Qur'an 2:65-66 Fatima as the creative element par excellence appears as both the true meaning of "the Sabbath" and the primary principle of creation or "primal command." It is reasonable to ask if Tahireh the Babi was referring to this when she spoke "the primal truth" mentioned by Amanat. There, she is presented as seeing Fatima as a role model.[90] It is possible that she was referring to Fatima as the cosmogonic principle we are discussing. This is not to say that Tahireh the Babi did not see in Fatima (the mother of the Imams) a role model. But in line with the metaphysical mood of the time and place which our texts reflect, it is probable that she was interested in Fatima's ontological value before her sociological value. We also see in this commentary a reappearance of the idea introduced at verse 3 of the Fatiha above: a soul perceives according to its capacity, through itself. It sees what it is.

The comprehensive or universal dimension of the Fatimid reality is brought out again in the Bab's commentary on 2:37: "Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and turned towards him; truly he turns, and is All-compassionate" [Qur'án 2:37].

The Bab introduces his discussion by pointing out that words are "single letters that have been combined." The Family of God represent several stations with regard to these letters: Muhammad is the point, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn are each different kinds of *alif* (viz., *layniya*, *mutaharraka*, *ghayr maʿtuf*), the letters that do not change form in the Arabic script (*dal* etc.) represent the remainder of the Imams. Finally, the status of *word* is reserved for Fatima alone, the point being that "meaning" itself is implicated and articulated through the Fatimid reality. The belief in the Divine unity taught by the other prophets is in fact created by God himself from this word. In actual fact, the Bab says, "Adam received certain words" of acknowledgment of the *walaya* of the Tree of the Divine Exclusive Unity that God had forbidden "all other than itself from approaching." But when the visible form of Fatima was manifest to him, by means of his own self, God cast into his soul (his *huwiya*) the likeness of repentance and "He turned to him."

Typically, the Bab here cites, in rapid and skillful succession, a Tradition and another Qur'anic verse supporting his *tafsir*: "The Imam, upon whom be peace, said: 'We are the words of God.'" "God (al-Haqq)," says the Bab, "confirms this statement in His mighty Book with the following words."[91]

> Say: 'If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it." [Qur'an 18:109]
>
> And the "replenishment" (*madad*) is origination (*ibdaʿ*) and invention (*ikhtiraʿ*) which God placed under the grade of their lordship. And this origination is spent before the light of Fatima is spent. "And [this light] is inexhaustible" [*wa ma lahu min nifad* = Qur'an 38:54].

Fatima is also "the Sabbath":

> And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be you apes, miserably slinking!" (2:65)
>
> In the presence of the Lord, the meaning (*al-murad*) of Sabbath is Fatima the Resplendent (*al-Fatima al-Zahra*), because she is the Day of the Book. Verily, God has caused all created things to appear through her; this is clear. And verily God knows that the people of the contingent world are not the Family of Muhammad, because their realities are the shadows of her body, according to the degree to which she appeared to them through their own souls (*la-hum bi-him*). But they transgressed what God had taught them concerning true doctrine (*i'tiqad*) [namely, they thought] "our [human] realities are in the station of unity and gnosis (*maqam al-wahda wa'l-ma'rifa*), and thus more exalted than her body." God said to them: "The wage of their [meager] knowledge concerning the gnosis of Fatima is 'Be you apes, miserably slinking.'
>
> He who claims that the prophets have become unified in the region of their own hearts as the body of Fatima was unified, his Creator has made him, at the very moment of this arrogant claim, an ape. The wage of sin is justice from God, for what they claimed.[92]

Kirmani has elaborated on the epithet *al-Zahra* in a discussion of the Logos/Intellect. Corbin summarizes: The Intellect is the suprasensory calling for visible Form, while the station of Fatima corresponds exactly to this visible Form: "[The logos] is like the archetypal body, the inner astral mass of the sun, invisible to human perception, in relation to the visible Form, which is its *aura*, brilliance and splendor. . . . this is why Fatima has been called by a solar name: *Fatima al-Zahra* . . . the totality of the universe consists of this light of Fatima. . . ."[93] Fatima is furthermore the soul (*nafs*, "Anima") of the Imams, "she is the Threshold or Gate (*bab*) through which the Imams effuse the gift of their light" she is "all thinkable reality." "Her eternal Person, which is the secret of the world of the Soul, is also its manifestation (*bayan*), without which the creative Principle of the world would remain unknown and unknowable, forever hidden."[94]

The Bab's commentary on 2:66 is similar:

> And We made it a punishment exemplary for all the former times and for the latter, and an admoniton to such as are godfearing. [Qur'an 2:66]
>
> God tells about the evildoers who are opposed [to the true *walaya*] namely, that they allude to God by means of a triple allusion (*isharat al-tathlith*).[95] God says that they are apes referring to those who turn to the sign of their own *tawhid* with worldly eyes (*bi'l-nazar al-imkani*). . . . Those who "fear" what God commanded vis à vis drawing near to [Fatima] by attaining the depth of the Fatimid Exclusive Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiyat al-fatimiya*) without modality or allusion (*bila kayf aw ishara*),[96] and fear what God commanded, namely that none would draw near to her/it (*lujja* is feminine) except by clinging to knowledge of Fatima (*bi'l-i'tiqad fi ma'rifat Fatima*). This itself is impossible in the contingent world, except to the degree that she appears to whatever is other than her by means of whatever is other than it. And she is the Primal Command (*al-amr al-awwal*), and nothing else. Therefore God made His admonition compelling for the godfearing."[97]

In his discussion of of the various levels of the "return" to God (*thumma ilayhi turja'una*, Qur'an 2:28), the Bab says that God created Fatima from the light of His essence (*nur dhatihi*) and that all the prophets have their beginning, and therefore their return in the Depth of the Exclusive Unity which Depth was "invented" (*ikhtira'*) from the light of the body of Fatima. "And as for the generality of believers, God originated them from

the shadows of the realities of the prophets (*zill haqa'iq al-anbiya*). So their return is to these."[98]

> The beginning of the Act (*al-fi'l*) is the Depth of the Exclusive unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) and its return is to it. And the beginning of passivity (that which is receptive of act: *infi'al*) is the sea of the inclusive unity (*tamtam al-wahidiya*), and its return is to it. And for each grade there is a station in [the cosmic process of] Origin and the Return.[99]

Another interesting appearance of Fatima in this commentary is her identification with the Tree that Adam and Eve were commanded to avoid at Qur'an 2:35. Here the Bab says that the Tree is "absolute contigency–because all of the manifestations (*tajalliyat*) are enfolded in it. "Tree," *shajara*, it will be noted, is feminine, so that the Arabic reads "enfolded in her." This is perfectly analogous to the Imams being enfolded within Fatima as discussed earlier in this study. Continuing, the Bab says, "As for Adam, God created the beginning of his existence from the superabundance of the luminous rays of the body of Fatima."

> And a thing may not draw nigh to [anything] beyond its origin. So when Adam drew nigh to the Tree of Reality shining forth from Fatima by means of the drawing nigh of existence, he disobeyed his Lord, because God commanded him to not to approach it, except through ecstasy (*al-wijdan*). Because at the time of ecstasy the "thing drawn nigh unto" *is* the Tree, itself nothing other than it.[100]

Adam's disobedience is also related to Fatima in the commentary on verse 6: "Verily as for those who disbelieve, it is all the same to them whether ye warn them or ye warn them not, they will not have faith" [Qur'an 2:6]. Adam's repentance after his expulsion from the Garden is the result of his having been made aware of the generosity of Fatima. Adam had shown covetousness, one of the three sources of *kufr* according to Ja'far al-Sadiq, when he wanted to eat from the Tree.

> The first disobedience of Adam was his desire for the Tree of the Divine Inclusive Unity. Indeed, his desire was the very creation of this Tree! Otherwise, he would have remained a dweller in the Divine Exclusive Unity, not desiring anything else. He would not have abandoned the Garden of Muhammad and his Family. At the time of this desire came *shirk*. And when this desire came about he abandoned the Garden and the Divine Will became attached to the Divine Purpose, and this is Eve and Adam. God created her from the Divine Will for the comfort of Adam. When he disobeyed, he left the Garden of the Divine Ipseity (*huwiya*) and he entered the black sea of this world below–a veritable fire of duality–where even the qualities of submissiveness and humility fight with one another. He perceived the generosity (*jud*) of Fatima. Then he lamented and he affirmed to God his belief in *al-bada'* [viz., the distinctively Shi'i belief that God can change His mind, or "start anew"] and attested to the prohibition of wine and he wept thirty days, then he repented towards God by clinging to the love of the recognition of the Family of God. God accepted his repentance, and thus did Adam become one "of those who do good."[101]

## Love and Authority

We close this survey of Fatima in the Bab's *tafsir* with the subject that opened the study, namely *walaya*, "spiritual authority," and its dimension of love (*mahabba*). At verse 3 of

*Surat al-Baqara*, the subject of Absolute Walaya is encountered. Here the Qur'anic statement "those who perform the prayer" is said by the Bab to imply general obedience to Muhammad and his Trustees (*awsiya*) and his Progeny (*nabt*) through the *Most Great Absolute Walaya* (*al-walaya al-mutlaqa al-kubra*). While in other statements *Absolute Walaya* was linked to ʿAli alone,[102] here it includes all of the Imams. In the same section *walaya* is identified with *tawhid*, the affirmation of the divine unity. The Bab says that the act of prayer (*salat*) "from beginning to end" is the "form for affirming divine uniqueness" (*surat al-tafrid*), the "temple (*haykal*) for affirming the divine unity (*tawhid*)," and the "visible form (*shabah*) of *walaya*." This being the case, only the actual bearers of *walaya* are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost station of distinction between Beloved (*mahbub*, i.e., God) and the lover. The Family of God (*al Allah* = Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous *hadith qudsi*: "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created mankind in order to be known." This love (*mahabba*) was manifested (*tajalla*) by God to them by means of their own selves (*la-hum bi-him*), to such a degree of exclusivity that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.

The Bab continues to say that the Family of God are the places (*mahall*) where servitude and all lordship (*ʿubudiyat* and *rububiyat*) distinguish themselves, implying that it is through their act of servitude that they have been invested with the rank of lordship in relation to others. "Whoever, then, confesses the truth of their *walaya* in the "region of servitude" has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One.[103] And he who performs the prayer and "pierces the 'veils of glory' and enters the house of glory (*bayt al-jalal*), such a one will dwell under the protection(*zill*: shade) of their *walaya*."

At verse 62, the term *Absolute Walaya* is associated again with the entire Family of God, because they are sanctified servants who do nothing of their own wills, but rather the will of God: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their reward awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

The "works of righteousness" mentioned in this verse therefore are described as being represented, par excellence, by the act of recognizing the *Absolute Walaya* of the Family of God; and "their reward awaits them with ʿAli." In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing the authority of ʿAli and the Family of God. This may offer an indication of the way in which "absolute" (*mutlaq*) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Qur'an 10:62 , where it is specifically "the friends of God" (*awliya' allah*) who will neither grieve nor sorrow. Such cross references and correspondences are most certainly not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates this interpretation by virtue of its vocabulary (*awliya'* plural of *wali*).[104]

Love as a synonym for *walaya* is of course not new with the Bab, but it is important that this aspect of *walaya* be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power," in perspective. This equivalence led Corbin to state that Shi'ism is pre-eminently a religion of spiritual love[105]—a very large assertion that must be considered in the somewhat rarified context of Corbin's preoccupations. However, insofar as devotion to the *walaya* of the Imam represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion seems to stand.

In the commentary on Qur'an 2:23, "love" is again associated with *walaya*. The Bab says:

> None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) except by means of his ('Ali's) *walaya*. It is the goal (*maqsud*) of your existence (*wujudi-kum*), because God has made you for the sake of this love (*mahabba*). And He has put His life (*hayat*) and His might ('izz) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world–if only you understood .

Love is related to the idea of knowledge/*ma'rifa* (gnosis), by virtue of the "theosophical" axiom: the more one knows the more one loves, and the more one loves the more one knows. This axiom is represented in the Islamic instance by the *Tradition of the Hidden Treasure*, quoted above: God's love or desire to be known set the terms of spiritual development for "all time." True knowledge is attained through love and devotion, and if this devotion be tested through hardship, the love, and therefore the attendant knowledge (or vice versa) is the purer. All of the Family of God suffered, but perhaps none more than Fatima, who as the mother of all suffers doubly. In his commentary on Qur'an 2:25, the Bab states that "the Garden," that is, Paradise, is indeed the love of the visible form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*).

> But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before." For they are given things in similitude (*mutashabihan*); and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein forever. [2:25]
>
> For the people of inner knowledge "God gave glad tidings to those who believe" in Muhammad and do righteous deeds with regard to his Trusteeship by means of allegiance to 'Ali. For them await gardens, and these [gardens] are the love (*hubb*) of Fatima underneath which are rivers, meaning the two Hasans [ i.e., al-Hasan and al-Husayn]. . . . the fourth [river] is of red wine, flowing for the fragmentation (*kasr*) of all things and their refashioning (*sawgh*) according to the divine signs and tokens. And by it the love bodies (*al-ajsad al-mahabba*) of the Shi'a of the Pure Family of God are reddened. And God fashioned in this river the forms of the believers. And God wrote at its head; "Love of the Shi'a of Ali is My fortress (*hisni*). Therefore, he who enters My fortress is secure from My chastisement." Every one who drinks from a river: they say, "This is that" in which God has put in all the lights of the four signs [i.e., *tawhid*, *nubuwwa*, *imama*, *shi'a*]. . . . And there for them shall be spouses purified and virtuous . . . And they shall dwell forever in the love of Fatima.[106]

Given the dramatic role played by Tahireh–as the reappearance of Fatima–in the formation and development of the Babi religion, such words as these of the Bab's give us an enhanced understanding of the sources of her authority and influence and raise the question, Must a challenge to the status quo entail a break with the past?

*Notes*

1. Susan S. Maneck, "Women in the Baha'i Faith," *Religion and Women*, edited by Arvind Sharma Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 211-27.

2. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 331.

3. *The Persian Bayan of Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab, 1.2*, tr. Dr. Denis MacEoin, The Second Chapter of the First Unity: [*H-Bahai*] *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts* (July, 1997-), available on the worldwide web at http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai/trans/bayan/bayan.htm

4. Such a status is reflected in the words of Ali Shariati: "She herself is an Imam. . . ." (ʿAli Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*, trans. L. Bakhtiu [Tehran: The Shariah Foundation, (1980)], p. 225.

5. This word is sometimes voweled as *wilaya* and frequently nice distinctions are made between the two spellings in which *walaya* refers to spiritual authority and *wilaya* refers to political authority. Linguistically and etymologically there is no basis for this distinction. One important Shiʿi lexicon states that the voweling is optional and the word connotes both political/temporal and spiritual power (A. Isfahani, *Tafsir Mir'at al-Anwar wa Mishkat al-Asrar* [Tehran: Chapkhaneh A/-tab, 1874/1954], pp. 337-38).

6. I prefer "Family of God" as a translation for this term to "clan of God" found throughout Amanat, because of the obvious differences in connotation and denotation it carries: nearness, intimacy, and familiarity. These persons are seen as the Holy Family in Shiʿism, not the Holy Clan.

7. E.g., Qur'an 2:107; 2:160; 2:257; 3:68; 6:51; 6:70; 9:112; 13:37; 18:26; 29:22; 32:4; 42:8; 42:9; 42:28; 42:31.

8. The most recent scholarly treatment of the key events and personalities in the drama that unfolded after the death of the Prophet is Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor, U.M. Dissertation Service, 1986).

9. Hermann Landolt, "Walayah," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, and now the appropriate passages in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), index s.v. *walaya, wali, awliya'*.

10. Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (London: Curzon Press, 1996).

11. On this topic see the works of Kohlberg and Newman listed in the bibliography of this chapter.

12. On the Shaykhi teachings see Corbin, Rafati, and Cole in the bibliography of this chapter.

13. On the subtle, amphibolous, and powerful relationship between Imam and Text, see Todd Lawson, "Reading Reading Itself," *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 1/5 (November, 1997).

14. Even as recently as 1989, we find the following statement on the date of the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*: As far as can be verified, up to this time [when he produced the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*] the Bab had not produced any work of significance, and it was only during his encounters with his early believers that he became fully aware of his talent for producing Qur'anic commentaries." (Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 172-73).

15. Browne, "A Catalogue and Description of 27 Babi Manuscripts," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24 [1892] pp. 493-99.

Azal, like his half-brother Baha'u'llah, had been a follower of the Bab from the early days. As a result of disagreements between himself and Baha'u'llah, he became the leader of the Azali faction of the Babis. Browne received a great number of Babi manuscripts from him.

In this article Browne quotes a passage from the *Tarikh-i jadid* which recounts the conversion of the young Shaykhi Mulla Husayn Bushru'i to the cause of the Bab in May 1844. While Mulla Husayn was visiting the Bab in the latter's home, he discovered a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*. Reading some of it, he was impressed by the merits of the work and asked his host who its author was. The Bab said that he in fact had written the work. This story relates that Mulla Husayn was puzzled by one of the passages in the work: "the explanation of the inmost of the inmost" (*tafsir-i batin-i batin*). Mulla Husayn is reported to have said:

> This appeared to me to be an error, and I remarked, "Here it should be 'the inmost,' and they have written 'the inmost of the inmost.'" "What can I say?" [the Bab] answered, "the author of the Commentary lays claim to even more than this of greatness, glory, and knowledge. Consider the passage attentively." I did so, and said, "It is quite correct. But I am wearied. Do you read and I will listen." He read for a time, and then, as men are wont, I said, "It is enough. Do not trouble yourself further." (Browne, "Catalogue," 496–97)

While this account is important for the history of the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*, it raises the question of why Mulla Husayn should have been stopped by such an expression. The *tafsir* does in fact employ it, although Browne was unable to locate it in his manuscript. It also seems logical to assume that Mulla Husayn would have been quite conversant with such language. The writings of both Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim contain many allusions not only to the *batin al-batin*, but also to the *batin batin al-batin, zahir al-batin*, and so forth. The young Mulla may have wanted to say that this particular passage deals only with the *batin* and should not therefore have been referred to as an explanation of the "inmost of the inmost." It may be that the passage was left out of Browne's manuscript because it was thought to damage the credibility of the Bab. Or it could be an apocryphal tale designed to present the Bab as more learned than Mulla Husayn.

16. MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 46–47.

17. Ibid., p. 41.

18. Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation . . . ," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. A. L. Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 223–53.

19. MacEoin, "Sources," p. 47. Extant works that were probably written by the Bab before the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara* include the short Arabic *Risalat fi al-Suluk* (on which see MacEoin, "Sources," pp. 44–45). For a translation and description of this short epistle, see Lawson, "Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance . . . ," in *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert . . .* , ed. C. Bürgel and I. Schayani (Hildesheim: Olms, 1998), pp. 145–58.

20. Zarandi, *The Dawn Breakers*, trans. and ed. S. Effendi (Willmette: Baha'i Trust, 1974), p. 31.

21. Literally *juz'*. The Qur'an is divided in thirty more or less equal parts (*ajza'*) for liturgical purposes, enabling the believer to read equal parts of the text on successive days of the sacred month of Ramadan, for example. The first part includes the first sura, al-Fatiha, the Opening, consisting of seven verses and the first 141 verses of the *Surat al-Baqara*. The *Surat al-Baqara* comprises roughly two and one-half parts. It is the longest sura of the Qur'an.

22. This much more famous second work, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, appears to be the first work written after the commentary on *al-Baqara*. By its special structure it actually may be considered a commentary on the entire Qur'an. Thus, if it had been the Bab's desire to produce a complete tafsir at this early stage, he may be seen as having accomplished this task though in a radically and unpredictably untraditional form. For a fuller description of this second commentary, see Lawson "Interpretation as Revelation."

23. If the basic conclusion of this paper is correct, namely that the Babi movement represents an efflorescence of themes, motifs, and religiosity associated with the earliest extremist Shi'is, then Halm's statement, referring to the Ahl-i Haqq and the Nusayris, needs to be reassessed: "Descendants of the Kufan *ghulat* have survived to the present time in two mountainous areas of retreat, far from the centres of political power and from Sunni as well as Shiite orthodoxy. . . . The Nusayris are the only Islamic sect to preserve the unbroken tradition of the Kufan *guluw*." Halm, *Shiism*, trans. J. Watson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 158–59.

24. Baq., pp. 8 and I, p. 156: *qad ja'alaha Allahu zillaha li-man aqarra bi-walayatihi*; C, f.2b: *qad ja'ala Allahu. . . .* Repeated reference throughout this commentary to *ahadiya, wahidiya,*

*rahmaniya*, and so on constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn ʿArabi (638/1240) and its use here by the Bab offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history's greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shiʿi spiritual discourse (*ʿirfan*) by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn ʿArabi's student Qunawi and others, see Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," *Muslim World* 72 (1982), pp. 107–28. (See also the critique of this article by Landolt in *Studia Iranica*, Suppl. 8 [1985], #488, p. 126.) Briefly, the term *ahadiya* represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which we can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb) but does not, of course, define the Absolute that must always be beyond whatever occurs about It in our minds. The term *wahidiya* refers to the second highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect that involves the "appearance" of the divine names and attributes. See also ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, *Istilahat al-Sufiya*, pp. 25 and 47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries.

25. Etymologically feminine, *rahmaniya*, from the Arabic word for "womb," is the abstract noun *mercifulness*. Ibn Arabi seems to be the one responsible for characterizing the existentiation of creation as an act of mercy, an expression of *rahmaniya*.

26. In the commentary on the rest of the Fatiha, each verse of which is designated as "the book" or writing of one of the fourteen Pure Ones, that is the twelve imáms, Fatima, and Muhammad. For specifics on the heptadic structure that reflects the realities of Family of God, see Lawson (1986).

27. See also Lutfy, "The Mystical Dimensions of Literature," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Politics* 5 (Spring, 1985), pp. 7–19.

28. It should be noted that we find no mention of Fatima at the corresponding place in the eleventh-century classical work by the otherwise influential Shiʿi theologian al-Tusi, *al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qurʾan* (Najaf 1957–63), vol. 1, pp. 28–30.

29. Baq. p. 8, ll.4–8.The phrase "Garden of Grace" (*jannat al-naʿim*) is determined by Qurʾanic usage (see, e.g., 26:85). "Gnostic" translates *ʿarif*. There are other choices: "recognizer," "knower," "seeker."

30. The bibliography on Fatima remains to be compiled. For this paper I have benefited from Laura Veccia Vaglieri's excellent *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., entry (see my list of sources for the details of this and all other works mentioned in these notes), Corbin, Massignon, Lammens, Ibn Sharh Ashub, Kashani, Lawson, Maneck, Amanat, MacEoin, Frye, Bahrani, Isfahani, Momen, Tusi, and Tabrisi. For example, the very early Shiʿi *Tafsir Furat ibn Ibrahim* mentions Fatima in over twenty places. The commentaries of the two famous classical Shiʿi exegetes, Tusi and Tabrisi, also mention her at various points in their commentaries. The commentaries of Muhsin Fayd Kashani and others also frequently cite *hadith*, or more appropriately *akhbar*, which mention Fatima's name.

31. Ali's nickname Abu Turab is said to have originated because whenever he and Fatima would quarrel, he would lave the house and cover his head with dust, presumably out of the frustration at being married to the Prophet's daughter. Indeed, the Prophet himself bestowed this name upon him (Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima"). For other explanations of the distinctive nickname, see Kohlberg, "From Imamyya to Ithna-ʿAshariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), pp. 521–34; and Lawson, *The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty . . .*, ed. L. Lewisohn (London: University of London, 1992), p. 268. One of the key figures in the drama and legend of Tahireh the Babi is one Shaykh Abu Turab. For the most recent and quite penetrating study of this drama, see Mottahedeh, "Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories, . . ." *Occasional Papers . . .* 2/2 (February, 1998).

32. "She is usually depicted in the Shiʿi sources as a bitter woman who spent her last days mourning the death of her father and refusing any contact with the outside world." Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam . . .* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), p. 40.

33. The lack of descendants is a topos in Muhammad's biography and is reflected in the Qur'an as well. This meant that his progeny was destined to issue only from his daughters, which in his society this meant that he was without descendants.

34. A third son, Muhsin, was stillborn.

35. Later on in his career, the Bab himself would compose a lengthy commentary on this very sura. See Lawson, "Qur'an Commentary."

36. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

37. Massignon, "La notion du voe et la devotion musulmane a Fatima" (Rome: 1956), vol. 2, p. 118f. But see the legend of the heavenly table being removed from the *ahl al-bayt* because they tried to share it with outsiders, Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, pp. 44–45.

38. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

39. Ibid.

40. *Dala'il al-Imama* by Husayn ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab, Najaf, 1949/1369, pp. 1–58. This source is used heavily by Veccia Vaglieri in her excellent *Enclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., article. It is, unfortunately, unavailable to me.

41. Shariʿati, *Fatima Is Fatima*, pp. 160–61.

42. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

43. See McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women," *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981), pp. 19–28; and Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib Al Abi Talib* (Beirut: Dar al-Ida, 1405/1980), cited by Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

44. Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol. 3, pp. 357–58. For the name Qurrat al-ʿAyn, "Solace of the eyes," see also Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandi (d373/983), *Tanbih al-Ghafilin*, 2nd ed. (Taqqadum Press 1324/1906), pp. 7–25.

45. For details on the proper observance of this important day, see Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* (Beirut: Dar al-Ida', 1407/1987), pp. 350–54. See also the related *hadith al-kisa'*, Qummi, pp. 386–89; cf. also Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 14. The following will help set the tone for the Bab's commentary:

The designation *ahl al-kisa'* is traced to an important drama that happened during the so-called year of delegations (631 C.E./9 AH), when various tribal and religious leaders are said to have come to Medina to pledge fealty to the Prophet. On one particular occasion, a delegation from the Christian village of Najran came to determine whether the Prophet's claims were in line with the prophecies of their holy books. One of these prophecies—Adam's vision of a bright light surrounded by four lesser lights said by God to represent five of Adam's descendants—would figure prominently in the Najran Christian's eventual acceptance of Islam. In the initial meeting with the Prophet, the discussions became deadlocked and it was decided to arrange for a special kind of "arbitration" or *mubahala*, a traditional mutual cursing match in which the wrath of God is called down upon the liar. This *mubahala* was set for the next day. In a typical *mubahala* each side would bring to the contest their most accomplished poets and learned men. The Najranis and their religious scholars were thus surprised when Muhammad came to the dual accompanied only by ʿAli, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. This event is said to be the subject of the Qur'anic verse 3:61. One account, preserved by the sect of the Shiʿa known as the Mukhammisa (precisely, devotees of the "five" People of the Cloak), is worth quoting here in Massignon's paraphrase. It was on the red sandhill (*kathib ahmar*) that the apparitional forms (*ashbah*) of the Ahl al-Kisa'i flashed forth like lightning, during the contest. The Shiʿite school of the Mukhammisa was interested in interpreting in all of its symbolism, the mubahala scene. At the cemetery in Medina, at the bottom of the Baqiʿ, on the red dune like the voice of the Adamites, in the *mithaq*—like Moses on Sinai, we see the Five standing under the Mantle, illuminated with thunderbolts and lightning flashes. Before them, together with the other initiated mawali, stands Salman pointing out the Five for the veneration of the amazed Najranian Christians. At the call of the Initiator, they recognize the Five in their glorious transfiguration (*tajalli*).

Their halo of lightning flashes signifies that their authority is a divine "right," inducing them to affirm that their bodies are shadows (*azilla, azlal*) cast by Divine Light, silhouettes (*ashbah*) temporarily outlined in the divine emanation, exempted from the generation and corruption of suffering and death. It is the call (*nida'*) of the Initiator that animates and sets the scene: the instrument of the divine Spirit, which discerns and reveals the divine secret, the seal of the prophetic mission that marks the Five: which raises Salman above the Prophet and the Imams, like Khidr above Moses in Sura 18: above prophesy, there is sanctity [*walaya*], and the initiated companions of Salman have access to it. (Massignon, vol. 1, p. 300; For *kathib al-ahmar* in Shaykhi works, see, e.g., Rashti, *Sharh al-Qasida al-Lamiya* (Tabriz: n.p., 1270/1853), pp. 41, 66, 74.) In Shaykhism, Salman is the Perfect Man (see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., vol. 4, p. 282 and references). The day of the *Mubahala*, mentioned above, figures obliquely in the Bab's commentary on Qur'an 2:124. Here the Bab alludes to this special dignity of "the Cloak" by singling out the five *Ahl al-Kisa'*. The Qur'anic passage in question is: And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands/words which he fulfilled . . ." According to the Bab, the words were this special invocation calling upon the People of the Cloak whose drama, described above (note 45), had already been established and "rehearsed" during the time of the primordial Covenant before creation. Through his primordial submission to God, for example, Abraham automatically numbers himself among the Shi'a of Ali (Baq, p. 229: Jesus is the most noble of the Shi'a of 'Ali).

Mufaddal asked Imam Sadiq about the statement of God: "And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words . . ." "What were these words?" The Imam said, "They are the words which Adam received from his Lord when he turned toward Him." [Slight variation in other mss.] Adam said: "O Lord! I implore Thee by the truth of Muhammad and 'Ali, and Fatima, and al-Hasan, and al-Husayn, please turn to me (i.e., accept my repentance)." And He turned to him "truly He turns and is All-compassionate."

Baq, p. 273. In another context, *ad* Qur'an 2:37, the Bab quotes this tradition:

The Imam has said: "Verily Adam saw written upon the Throne the mighty noble names. And he asked abut them. And it was said to him, 'These are the most glorious names of creation in the estimation of God.' And the names were Muhammad and 'Ali and Fatima and al-Hasan and al-Husayn. And Adam implored the favour of God by means of them to accept his repentance, and to raise his station (*manzala*).

46. Baq, p. 211 in the course of the commentary on Qur'an 2:76; Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."
47. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."
48. Ibid.
49. Mottahedeh, "Ruptured Spaces."
50. Veccia Vagllieri, "Fatima."
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol. 3, p. 359.
54. See now Cole ("Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsai'i," *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykh, Babi and Bahai'i Studies* 1/4 [September, 1997[; "The World as Text," *Studia Islamica* 80 [1994], pp. 1-23), Rafati (*The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam* [Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979]), and parts of Lawson (1987). Until the mid 1970s Corbin's was really the only effort in the West, apart from Nicolas's pioneering work (*Essai sur le Chéikhisme* [Paris: Geunther and Ernest Leroux, 1910-14]), to devote serious attention to this intellectual development of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century in Iran.
55. Corbin, p. 58; "primitive" here is both a formal and a chronological designation. By it such groups as the Nusayris, the early Isma'ilis, and other of the so-called *ghulat* are intended.
56. Corbin, p. 59

57. The passage continues:

"And through this supracelestial Earth, we are led to the idea of a Shi'ite Sophiology, by which we shall perceive afresh something that Mazdean Sophiology already perceived in the Angel of the Earth, but this time at a new and higher level, since the *progressio harmonica* produces the resonance of harmonics which until then had remained silent" Corbin, pp. 59-60).

58. Corbin, p. 60.

59. All of this may be found amplified in greater detail at Corbin, pp. 60-73.

60. Nothing if not baroque, Corbin's interest in the theme of the "celestial earth" (a basic *coincidentia oppositorum*, it should be noted) went far beyond, yet somehow remained centered, in the figure of Fatima. He offered the metaphor of music, specifically the *progressio harmonica* of the pipe organ, to explain what he saw as a beautiful and compelling Iranian enrichment of intellectual history: "Whoever is somewhat familiar with the organ knows what are referred to as "stops." Thanks to these stops, each note can cause several pipes of different lengths to "speak" simultaneously; thus, besides the fundamental note, a number of harmonic overtones can be heard. Among the contrivances that regulate them, the *progressio harmonica* designates a combination of stops which allows more and more overtones to be heard as one ascends towards the upper register, until at a certain pitch the fundamental note also resounds simultaneously" (Corbin, p. 51).

61. Corbin, p. 69.

62. On this see Lawson, "A 'New Testament' for the Safavids," Proceedings of the Safavid Roundtable (Edinburgh, 1998), forthcoming.

63. See, e.g., Böwering, Kazemi-Moussavi, Dabashi, Arjomand, Calder, Stewart.

64. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, tr. Momen, p. 15.

65. Baq, pp. 47-48.

66. Ibid., pp.49-50.

67. Ibid., p.52.

68. Ibid., p.224.

69. Ibid., p.94. *kafirun* instead of the Qur'anic "losers" (*khasirun*, all mss.). These seven names are used as a kind of shorthand to represent the Prophet, Fatima, and the twelve Imams because although they are twelve, they may be known by using only these seven names. That is, each of the names Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan, and Husayn may be applied to more than one Imam while the names Fatima, Ja'far, and Musa can apply to only one person respctively. Earlier in this commentary, the Bab *ad* Qur'an 2:3 (Baq, pp. 22-23), speaks of seven grades of faith (*iman*), taking his cue from *yuminuna*, "those who believe." One grade, the third, is faithfulness (*wafa'*)—a near synonym—associated specifically with Fatima.

70. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

71. For important background to the Shaykhi reading of Qur'an 7:172, see Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'"

72. Corbin, p. 63. A study of Shi'i *akhbari tafsir* on precisely the subject of the Day of the Covenant reveals that the apparitional forms of the "first" participants is more or less a standard topos. See Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'" This, of course, was one of Corbin's main points: the Shaykhis represent a revivification of very ancient modes of religiosity combined with a terminology that had more recently developed through the works of such important Iranian philosophers as Mulla Sadra (d.1640).

73. Formed on the Arabic word *ilah* (god), *lahut* refers to the divine realm. Three other similar words are encountered in such discussions: *jabarut*, *malakut*, *mulk* to refer to three realms that issue in descending order from the *lahut*. All of these worlds symbolize *with* each other. A fifth term, *nasut* (humanity, human dimension), is frequently encountered. It is built on the word *nas* and is the polar opposite of *lahut*. Between *lahut* and *nasut* the whole spectrum of cosmic activity and events occurs.

74. Baq, pp. 192–93. Veccia Vagliera, "Fatima,' noticed this identification of Fatima with the rock "among Isma'ilis and the deviant sects" and says further that she has found no trace of such an idea in the Imami sources. According to Kashani, pp. 136–37 *al-Sufi fi Tafsir Kalam Allah al-Wafi* (Beirut Mu'assasat al-A'lami li-l'Matbi'at, 1979–82), vol. 1, Moses struck the rock invoking the name of Muhammad and his family; therre is no mention of her being the rock in Kashani or Bahrani, two late-seventeenth-century Safavid works. The first is by Muhsin Fayz Kashani (1680) the second by Hashim Bahrani (1695), said to be a teacher of the former. But see Isfahani (*Tafsir Mir'at al-Anwar wa Mishkat al-Asran* [Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1374/1954]), p. 244 where a somewhat rationalistic presentation of this reading is found. Isfahani avoids the extreme personifications and "allegorizing" found in that of the Bab. (n.b the possible connection between *hajar* "rock" and Hagar, the wife of Abraham and mother of the Arabs, as a manifestation of Fatima).

75. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

76. Baq, p. 112.

77. Corbin, p. 64.

78. Corbin, p. 66.

79. Cf. Bahrani, *kitab al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1375/1955), vol. 4, p. 402 and the *hadith* transmitted by al-Qummi via the following *isnad*: al-Husayn b. Muhammad . . . al-Baqir, the fifth Imam who it seems was the first to interpret the verse as such. The immediate translation for this interpretation would seem to be grammatical. "*This is but one of the mighty portents*" translates the Arabic: *innaha l'ihda al-kubra* modifies the previous litany of three portents: "the moon, the night, and the dawn." The Qur'an collapse all three in a not-uncharacteristic rhetorical gesture. The tension between plurality and singularity is represented in the grammatical convention that casts nonhuman plural objects in the feminine. The grammatical feminine is thus the exception rather than the rule. To the Shi'i exegete such an anomolous linguistic event is demystified one of the Family of God, in this case the only female member of that Family, Fatima.

80, Baq, pp. 112–13.

81. *ibda'* and *ikhtira'*. Briefly, the first is the action of God, and the second is the action of the demiurge. For a concise explanation of this terminology as it was used in a much earlier but apparently perfectly cognate context, see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 152–52.

82. Corbin, pp. 63–64. See my translation of the Bab's *Risalat fi'l-Suluk* for an explicit mention of this same idea in the same vocabulary Lawson, "The Bab's Journey towards God': Translation and Text," *H-Bahai Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts* 2/1 (January, 1998).

83. Corbin, p. 66.

84. Ibid., p. 68.

85. Ibid., p. 63.

86. See the cognate idea carried, for example, in the phrase *'ara'is al-bayan* (the brides of meaning), the title of an esoteric *tafsir* by the mystic Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1209). Just as a verse of poetry is called a *bayt* (house, tent), the meaning of the verse is considered the bride waiting within the house or tent.

87. Corbin, p. 67.

88. However 'Abd al-Baha, the Baha'i leader and thinker (and therefore influenced by the Bab's ideas), spoke of the "feminization of humanity" as a precondition for the establishment of universal peace: "The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals,

or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced" (J. E. Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, 5th rev. ed. [Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1987], p. 149). This could be a perfect example of how such an idea as "equality of the sexes," which appears incontestably modern and Western (i.e., foreign to Islam), is in reality a native outgrowth of Islamic culture.

89. Corbin, pp. 67–68. The Bab's commentary, on Qur'an 2:83, is as follows: "And when We took compact the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy; and speak good to men, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms.' then you turned away, all but a few of you, swerving aside."

The Bab says that God is speaking about His "taking compact" with all created things "in the eight paradises," to recognize the *walaya* of ʿAli. The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (*lujjat al-wahda*) and is characterized by the command, "You shall not serve any save God . . . [and this] without reference [to anything else]." In the second paradise the compact was taken by means of recognizing the Universal *Walaya* (*al-walayat al-kulliya*) of the "parents," i.e., Muhammad and ʿAli who are, respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bab says, is in reality the good mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merits. The good that these particular parents deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bab to openly (*bi'l-tasrih*) describe it, the prattling enemies (*mubtilun*) would cavil at it. [Baq, pp. 223–24.]

90. Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 331. No source for this statement is given here.

91. Baq, pp. 159–60. On *shabah*: The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms, which are the receptacles of their theophanies (Corbin, p. 63; cf. Huwayzi, *kitab tafsir nur al-thaqulayn* [Qum: n.p., 1383/1963–1385/1965], vol. 1, pp. 56–57, #142–44). The words are a prayer; the names of the six (above) and an invocation of these names. #149: God created the light of Muhammad before the heavens and the earth and the throne and the *kursi* and the tablet and the pen and paradise and hell. 149, (cont. p. 58) contains reference to ring of Solomon (Bahrani, *Burhan*, vol. 1, p. 86, #2 as Huwayzi #3): Adam was expelled on 1 Dhu al-qaʿda, and on the 8th of Dhu al-Hijja Gabriel sent him to Minna.

92. Baq, pp. 198–99. The last two sentences are perhaps a reference to a specific controversy. Unfortunately, the details of this are unknown to me.

93. Corbin, p. 64.

94. Ibid., p. 65.

95. Baq, p. 200. This is possibly an allusion to the first three Sunni caliphs whom the Shiʿa consider usurpers of ʿAli's position and breakers of the divine covenant.

96. That is through pure contemplation, without images or thoughts contaminated by "the world."

97. Baq, pp. 199–200.

98. Ibid., pp. 109–110.

99. Ibid., pp. 108–9.

100. Ibid., p. 154.

101. Ibid., pp. 45–46 Cf. Tusi, *al-Tibyan*, vol. 1, pp. 59–60: This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl according to al-Rabiʿ b. Anis, and al-Balkhi and al-Maghribi chose this; according to Ibn Abbas, it was sent down about the Jewish leaders around Mecca; some say it was sent down about the Arab idolators. Tabari chose Ibn ʿAbbas: "We say rather that the verse has a general meaning."

102. Baq, p. 195.

103. This is perhaps an example of the antinomian motif so prominent in certain so-called extremist Shiʿi texts and teachings.

104. Baq, pp. 195–96.

105. E.g., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., i, 285–303 and iii, 210.
106. Baq, p. 87: "love of the form of Fatima" becomes (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*).

*Abbreviations*

Baq *Tafsir surat al-baqara* (ms.) by the Bab, Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shirazi, Tehran Bahai Archives.

Corbin Corbin, Henry. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shiʿite Iran*. Translated by Nancy Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

EII Corbin, Henry. *En Islam iranien*. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1971–72.

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*Leiden University Library, Or.4971 (Ar.2414). Item No. 8.* (L)
*Majmuʿah-ye Athar Hadrat-i Aʿla*, pp. 156–410. (I)
"*Risala fi al-Suluk* by The Bab" (1)
*Tehran Bahâ'i Archives, 6006.C:* (S)
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# Part II

## REFORMATION

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# 7

# *Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr*

## The Search for New Foundations

JOHN WALBRIDGE

When Napoleon routed the Egyptian Mamluks at the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798, he began two centuries of Western challenge to Muslim states and cultures. On the military and political side, there were a series of disastrous Muslim defeats: Navarino, the loss of the Balkans, the British occupation of Egypt and India, the French conquest of northwest Africa, the Russian conquest of Central Asia and Transcaucasia, the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of Israel, and on and on. Nonetheless, it was the intellectual challenge to Islam that was more fundamental. Nonbelievers had invaded before—Turks and Mongols, for example—but Muslims were usually their obvious cultural superiors and had always been able to assimilate the invaders. In this new age Lord Curzon, General Bugeaud and their fellows showed little inclination to follow the example of the Mongol Il-Khans in accepting Islam and Islamic culture. The West also possessed clear and increasing advantages in technology and production the Muslims would need equal if they were to hold their own and eventually regain what they had lost. It was thus almost universally agreed that the challenge of the West to Islam was fundamentally cultural, although what exactly the Western advantage consisted of was not so clear.

When the problem of the West entered religious debate, most Muslims considered the central issue to be whether Islamic law should be reaffirmed, rejected, reformed, or marginalized. As evident in some of the other articles in this book, this debate on the future of Islamic law inevitably triggered a debate about the authority of the clerics who interpreted it. A similar debate has taken place in Judaism, another religion in which religious law is central. There was also a pronounced tendency to see the West's challenge as a Christian challenge, as witness the habit of contemporary Islamic groups of referring to Western influence in Islamic countries as "Crusader."

However, it is possible to conceive the challenge of the West more broadly—as a challenge of materialism to religion in general. Perhaps it is the case that by accepting purely material worldviews and ideologies, Westerners lost their moral compass but acquired a demonic power allowing them to impose their values on all rival societies. Only by accepting the materialist premises of the modern West could Islamic societies hope to resist its economic and military challenges, but this abandonment of their spiri-

tual heritage inevitably subjected them to the cultural hegemony of Europe and America. The West has placed the Islamic world in a dilemma from which neither the Muslim traditionalists nor the secularists can escape. But suppose we conceive the problem dialectically. The West has taken a materialist civilization farther than any culture has before, and in doing so it has made the old replies to materialism obsolete. If that is the case, then Islam must answer the Western materialists in their own terms and reconstruct the foundations of religious belief, allowing religion to co-exist with the vigorous products of science and technology. This is not a religious problem; it is a philosophical problem, and it is the philosophical project of the twentieth-century Iraqi philosopher/cleric Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr.

Philosophy has existed as a continuous tradition in the eastern lands of Islam since before the time of Avicenna. For the past four hundred years, this tradition has been carried on mainly by members of the Shi'ite ulama. Though Islamic philosophy continued to produce philosophers of merit, its intellectual universe remained largely confined to the issues defined by the so-called "School of Isfahan" of the seventeenthth century, a refined version of the system first established by Avicenna. On the whole, it has not been these Shi'ite philosophers who have defined the responses of Islam to the challenge of the West. Khomeini and some of his associates were a very conspicuous exception, but even for them their philosophical views and their responses to modernism remained quite distinct. Certainly later Islamic philosophy with its refined speculations about being and its atrophied ethics and politics has had little to say to the crisis of Islam in the modern world, where the great issues have been political, ideological, and economic.[1]

This has now largely changed. Khomeini himself was a philosopher, but his political writings were not really philosophical. Other Shi'ite philosophers, however, attempted to harness Islamic philosophy for ideological ends. The most remarkable of these modern Islamic philosophers was Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr.

The son of a clergyman, he was born on 25 Dhu'l-Qa'da 1353/24 February 1935 in Kazimayn, a Shi'ite shrine town that is a suburb of Baghdad. He came from a prominent Shi'ite clerical family. A cousin was Musa al-Sadr, who was to become the leader of the Shi'ites of Lebanon. Another cousin, Sadiq al-Sadr, was leader of the Shi'ites of Iraq for a time in the 1990s. He came to Najaf at age 12 to study and acquired a reputation for brilliance almost immediately. By his early twenties he was an established instructor, teaching the advanced course in the principles of jurisprudence to students who were for the most part older than he. From the mid-1950s he was a conspicuous part of the Najaf academy. He was a brilliant teacher and orator and soon acquired a reputation as a religious author as well, writing learned treatises, textbooks, popular pamphlets, and articles for journals. He was a key figure in the so-called Islamic movement in Iraq, the movement that in the 1950s began to revive Islam as a serious ideological alternative to Marxism and Western capitalism.[2] He was arrested several times during the 1970s for his opposition to the Ba'thist regime. After the Iranian Revolution, he was arrested and imprisoned. Briefly released after popular demonstrations, he was again arrested in June 1979. In April 1980 he and his sister Bint al-Huda, also an Islamic activist, were executed.[3]

His influence remains considerable. His books are widely read by Muslims, and not just by Shi'ites. They have been translated into a number of languages, notably Persian and English. Almost all are in print, and several have gone through more than a dozen editions each.

Baqir al-Sadr is now best known for his work on Islamic economics. This, however, was only a part of a larger, unfinished project to define an Islamic ideology that would stand against the ideologies of Western capitalism and Marxism. Leaving aside his conventional works on the religious sciences—two books on the principles of jurisprudence, a manual of religious law for ordinary believers, a commentary on another such manual, and other odds and ends, some written simply to establish his credentials as a traditional religious scholar—his reformist works fall into two categories. The first consists of several works of philosophy and political economy containing a detailed critique of Western thought, particularly of Marxism and empiricism. The second are the many pamphlets in which he expounds these ideas and classical Shi'ism for the laity. Originally, he seems to have planned a trilogy—*Our Philosophy*, *Our Economics*, and *Our Society*. The first two of these were actually written and have been very widely read. I have heard rumors that the manuscript of the third, *Our Society*, was seized when al-Sadr was arrested in 1980. This program was interrupted by several other works. First, his growing fame as an articulate spokesman for traditional Shi'ism led to the demand for pamphlets explaining his views in simpler and more concise forms, as well as for commentaries on other issues. Second, establishing himself as a *marja' taqlid*—a grand ayatollah—as well as his duties as a teacher in Najaf, required him to write on conventional religious topics. Finally, his growing knowledge of Western thought led him to come back to the issues dealt with in his earlier works. He dealt with additional philosophical issues in *The Logical Bases of Induction* and with economics in *The Interest-Free Bank*.[4]

This essay focuses on the philosophical aspects of this grand project.

## The Project

Though the following passage indicates the purpose of al-Sadr's overall project, it does give a misleading impression of xenophobia. Though he deplores colonialism as he describes his project, in the course of his argument al-Sadr treats Western thinkers with respect and confidence.

> After the Muslim world fell into the hands of colonialists a stream of Western thought based on these colonialists' cultural principles and notions concerning the universe, life, and society swept through it. This helped colonialism gain continuous ideological expansion in the battle it launched to abolish the existence of the Muslim nation and the secret of its nobility of descent represented in Islam.
>
> . . . It was necessary that Islam make its point on the battleground of this bitter struggle. It was also necessary that its point be strong and profound, evident and clear, complete and comprehensive of the universe, life, the humankind, state, and the system.[5]

Al-Sadr's normal analytical method is to review the various views of influential thinkers, critique them, and then argue for the Islamic alternative.

## Our Philosophy

This work, written in 1959 when al-Sadr was only 24, is a critique of modern Western epistemology and metaphysics, particularly of the views held by the Marxists and the empiricists. *Our Philosophy* is a purely philosophical work, although its purpose is ultimately religious. In this work his philosophical viewpoint is professedly that of the Muslim philosophers, by which he means the school of Mulla Sadra. Thus, it is an informed critique of Western philosophical ideology, purportedly from the viewpoint of classical Islamic philosophy. Nevertheless, the debate is not framed in terms of Islamic vs. non-Islamic ideologies but in terms of contradictory approaches to philosophy: rationalism vs. empiricism, realism vs. idealism, logic vs. dialectic, and theology vs. materialism.[6]

The importance of these debates lies in al-Sadr's view that certain philosophical doctrines are incompatible with religion. Thus, for example, unless it is possible to have objective knowledge of non-sensible things, belief in God makes no sense. Nonetheless, these were philosophical issues, to be debated on rational grounds without appeal to religious authority.

Using the distinction made in Avicenna's logic between conception and assent, he first addresses the question of whether there can be conceptions without an empirical source. Now, clearly most conceptions are empirical. The conception of redness is learned from red things. Conceptions like causality, however, are a more difficult matter. Al-Sadr argues that even if we agree with Hume that the belief in causal relations is merely a mental habit based on the succession of the association of two phenomena, this does not explain where the notion of causality itself comes from. It is certainly not something taken from sensation. He dismisses the opposing Western view—that there are innate ideas—on the grounds that it really is only another way of saying that we do not know where such conceptions come from. Since such ideas are not present in infants, they must be learned in some way. His own view is what he calls the theory of abstraction (*intiza'*), which he attributes to the Muslim philosophers. However, he does not try very hard to argue against the theory of innate ideas, since it would do as well for his purposes. He wishes only to establish that there can be ideas from non-sensible sources.[7]

The most important debate in this book is between idealism (*mithaliya*) and realism (*waqi'iya*). These terms, as he uses them, refer to the question of whether there can be objective knowledge of external realities. The idealist philosophies are those that make such knowledge impossible. Philosophers like Berkeley and Kant specifically reject the possibility of such knowledge, but the same defect infects all empiricist philosophies, for they make any sort of rational proof of the objective impossible. Also among the idealists are all those modern philosophers who condition knowledge on consciousness in some way. This includes the Marxists, for they hold that knowledge is determined by social and especially economic circumstances, as well as such schools as the behaviorists, the Freudians, and even those physicists who draw philosophical conclusions from Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.[8]

The Marxists are discussed at length in *Our Philosophy*, both because of their intellectual influence and surely because of their influence in the Iraq of al-Sadr's time. He saw a great weakness in their use of dialectical logic. He argues that this dialectic is really just a willful misunderstanding of classical logic and metaphysics. He identifies

four distinctive views in the dialectical logic and argues that each is either logically unsound or can be adequately explained by classical logic and metaphysics.[9]

The Marxists had also made metaphysical claims in their "materialistic" philosophy, giving rise to an issue that al-Sadr defines as the question whether the efficient cause of the universe is identical with its material cause. Al-Sadr argues in defense of the traditional doctrine of matter and form, asserting that matter in philosophy is more fundamental than the matter of particle physics. If the fundamental particles that comprise everything else are themselves composed of matter and form, they cannot be the cause of the universe. However, the matter and form of philosophy cannot be the cause, either, since together they are composite and neither can occur separately before the other. Thus there must be some cause of the universe external to matter, which can only be God. Al-Sadr concludes by a restatement of the argument from design based on the elegance of the discoveries of modern science. Nonetheless, the ambiguity of his relationship with modern science is marred by some ill-advised arguments against the theory of evolution by natural selection.[10]

Al-Sadr does not actually discuss at any length the views of Islamic philosophers whose position he purports to be defending. There was both a practical and an intellectual reason for this omission. First, this philosophical tradition was extremely technical, and it was not much taught in Najaf, only in Qom in Iran. As a young man whose education had been mostly in Najaf, al-Sadr simply would not have been qualified to write on this philosophy, particularly for a project that would have required an original reformulation of the traditional systems. Second, he would not have seen it as necessary to his project. *Our Philosophy* had defended the legitimacy of the approach of the traditional philosophers against the attacks of the Western philosophers. Having made its premises once again secure, he had no need to discuss the system in detail; one could go and read Mulla Sadra for oneself.

## The Logical Bases of Induction

Some years later al-Sadr tried again to answer the question of epistemology in a work entitled *The Logical Bases of Induction*, a long and ambitious attempt to construct an epistemology based on induction. There are evidently several reasons why he wished to return to this problem, which he had discussed at length in *Our Philosophy*. One factor, very likely, was intellectual delight in philosophy and logic. His specialty in the religious sciences was *usul al-fiqh*, the principles of jurisprudence, which is to Islamic law what logic is to philosophy and mathematics to science. However, there were intellectual reasons as well. In the intervening years he seems to have reconsidered the challenge posed by empiricism and decided that the realism of *Our Philosophy* was not an adequate response.[11] Finally, he wished to construct a great proof of the existence of God. He had argued in *Our Philosophy* that the argument from design and the metaphysical argument from causality were untouched or even strengthened by modern science. In *Logical Bases* he attempts another sort of proof: a demonstration that the existence of God was known in the same way and on the same epistemological level as modern science. Such a proof would firmly establish religion in the modern intellectual universe.

He found the key to unlock this problem in the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. He called his system "subjectivism," *al-madhhab al-dhātīya*, to contrast it with the realism and idealism that he had discussed in *Our Philosophy*.[12]

In the earlier work he had devoted little attention to induction, dismissing it as reducible to deduction. In *Logical Bases* he reverses himself and argues, correctly, that only in the trivial case where one can examine all the instances of a class can induction be identified with deduction. In most cases, however, induction yields knowledge broader than that contained in its premises. This broader knowledge must be explained objectively and subjectively. The objective analysis of induction is closely linked to the mathematics of probability and is related to deduction. He thus calls it the deductive phases of induction. In principle it is possible to reduce doubt about any given inductive conclusion as much as one wishes. The degree of certainty attained can be calculated by the calculus of probability, but the element of doubt can never be totally eliminated.[13] Psychologically the situation is different. There comes a point at which the mathematical doubt is disregarded and the individual becomes subjectively certain of the truth of his induction.[14]

In this way, a new sort of knowledge is produced from the conviction that some fact is beyond a reasonable doubt. Most human knowledge is of this sort, both the ordinary knowledge of daily life and the more sophisticated knowledge of the scientist. The important fact about this is that it puts scientific knowledge—whose legitimacy and effectiveness is beyond question—in the same category as religious knowledge. Al-Sadr believes that he can show that, in particular, the old argument from design for the existence of God is a matter of induction and can be confirmed in the same way as a scientific theory or a fact of daily life—that is, by continual experience and confirmation. And once this firm foundation is laid, the whole structure of religion can be built upon it.[15]

## The Social and Economic Critique of Capitalism and Marxism

Among Muslims, al-Sadr is best known for his exposition of "Islamic economics," a subject to which he devotes his largest work, *Our Economics*, as well as many short works and pamphlets. It would surely have played a significant role in the lost or unwritten *Our Society*.

Al-Sadr began *Our Philosophy* with a discussion of "the social issue," an overall critique of the ideologies of Western capitalism and of Marxism, the two great rival ideological forms of the modern world. Social systems, he says, are to be judged on whether they are conducive to the happiness of human beings, but there is no agreement as to which system does so best.[16]

The characteristic feature of democratic capitalism is respect for the liberty of the individual in all aspects of life, including the economy. The interests of society are totally identified with the interests of the individual. Though the benefits to the individual are obvious—economic prosperity and freedom from certain sorts of tyranny—democratic capitalism has no moral center. It is prey to an extreme sort of materialism. Moreover, it can be neither theocratic not moral. It is not theocratic because the capitalist system presumes that there is no infallible group to whom the affairs of the community as a whole may be entrusted.[17] Al-Sadr's economic critique of capitalism is actually the Marxist

notion that capitalism inevitably makes beggars of the workers and drives capitalists to become imperialists in order to find new markets for their products. A novelty based on older Islamic law is his stress on the evil effects of usurious loans, for according to most Islamic scholars the giving and taking of interest is prohibited. Al-Sadr later wrote a small book on this theme, *Banking without Interest.*[18]

As for Marxism, al-Sadr makes the familiar distinction between socialism as it exists and communism as it appears in theory but not yet in practice. Marxism, despite its claims to justice, actually makes an error exactly opposite to that of capitalism: it totally subordinates the individual to the needs of society. Al-Sadr rejects the justification that this is the price that must be paid to establish the ideal society. The price is too high since the whole nation must be controlled in every respect to bring about the required change. The individual must sacrifice his freedom completely.

The chief theoretical weakness of Marxism is its failure to take account of human nature as it actually is. Marxism sees private ownership as the source of the ills of society. Al-Sadr counters that the actual cause of the evils of capitalist society is the lack of a moral principle in society. Marxism, moreover, asserts that if the economic system is changed, then human nature can be changed. This is not the case. Self-love, the instinct that Marxism seeks to educate out of the soul of man is the oldest and deepest instinct, and every other instinct derives from it. All Marxism does is deliver the individual from the greed of the capitalists into the hands of Marxist leaders, who will inevitably follow their own personal interests.[19]

The Islamic view of life teaches that the fundamental failure of modern society, capitalism or Marxist, is its materialism. Islam respects the legitimate self-interest of the individual but subordinates it to a moral and spiritual principle. Human beings must understand that their happiness is dependent on the degree to which they satisfy God. The individual in his self-love must understand that his happiness depends on this and that he will be rewarded or punished in the next life. The Islamic state in turn must guarantee the people's devotion to the principle by education and the enforcement of the legitimate claims of society on the individual.[20]

From this it can be understood why al-Sadr is so insistent on demonstrating the truth of religion in a way satisfactory to science. The individuals in society are not motivated solely by an altruistic concern for the well-being of others. They are also motivated by concern for their own well-being, both in the present and the future. If the truth of religion and of the Islamic teaching is a matter of settled scientific fact, then they will act in accordance with morality, religion, and Islam.

It may seem that "Islamic economics" is akin to "Presbyterian auto mechanics." Economics is an objective scientific discipline not tied to any particular religion. Al-Sadr admits this but draws a distinction between a school of economics and the science of economics. The "science" of economics teaches that under certain economic conditions, particular results will occur. A "school" or "doctrine" (*madhhab*) of economics establishes the principles, goals, and moral framework of the economic system of a nation. Thus, while it is true that Islam does not contain a science of economics, it certainly does contain a school of economics, for it has moral teachings that determine the general structure of an Islamic economic system. The relationship between the science and the schools of economics is similar to that between the history and the actual systems of ethics. Just as Islam claims to have a comprehensive legal system for every other aspect

of life, so too does it have an economic teaching sufficient to provide the organizing prinicples of the economy of the Islamic nation. This economic system is to be deduced from the Islamic laws concerning such matters as the responsibilities of the rich to the poor, the prohibition of usury, and the prohibition of allowing land to be underutilized. On the basis of such principles, he hopes to be able to establish the Islamic basis for a workable modern economic system, the project of *Our Economics*.[21]

## Conclusion

Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr is important for several reasons. First, he is a philosopher of note in his own community, influential among both Shi'i and Sunni Muslims. Second, I think that there is material of genuine philosophic interest in his works. He is not, perhaps, the equal of an Avicenna or a Mulla Sadra, but he is certainly a philosopher. He has a political and religious program, but he clearly distinguishes these from his philosophy. Third, his attitude toward Western thought is insightful. He approaches it with confidence and with no trace of either religious bigotry or inferiority. He treats the Western philosophers as formidable thinkers whose ideas must be understood and taken into account, but he writes as the representative of a mature philosophical tradition that has given him the tools to approach Western thinkers. He has, moreover, no hesitation in adopting their ideas when he thinks it necessary.

Unfortunately, we seem to have al-Sadr's system only in an incomplete form. His thought was obviously still developing under the influence of his increasing understanding of Western thought. He had already moved from the rationalism of *Our Philosophy* to the Russellian empiricism of *The Logical Foundations of Induction*. His philosophical sociology is lost to us, unless a manuscript of *Our Society* should happen to be preserved in some office of Saddam's secret police. Still, his influence on the Islamic world is likely to be great and lasting, and his thought, like that of other modern Islamic philosophers, is worthy of our attention.

*Notes*

1. There is no satisfactory history of postclassical Islamic philosophy and no systematic study of twentieth-century Iranian philosophy. Useful introductory works include Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols., Routledge History of World Philosophies 1 (London: Routledge, 1996), esp. chaps. 28–36, and Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1993), esp. pt. 3. On philosophers involved in the Islamic Revolution in Iran, see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), esp. chs. 3, 5, and 8.

2. For an insider's account of the Islamic Movement, see al-Khatib Ibn al-Najaf, *Tarikh al-Haraka al-Islamiya al-Mu'asira fi'l-'Iraq* (Beirut: Dar al-Maqdisi, 1981). Scholarly studies include Joyce N. Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

3. On the life and writings of Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr, see Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf, and the Shi'i International* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Talib Aziz, "The Islamic Political Theory of Muhammad Baqir Sadr of Iraq," Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1991. On the life

and career of his sister Bint al-Huda, see Jaʿfar Husayn Nizar, *ʿAdhraʾ al-ʿAqida waʾl-Mabdaʾ: al-Shahida Bint al-Huda* (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1405/1985).

4. The major works referred to in this paper are *Falsafatuna*, 14th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1406/1986); quotations, except when otherwise indicated, are taken from the translation of it, *Our Philosophy*, trans. Shams C. Inati (London: Muhammadi Trust and KPI, 1987); *Iqtisaduna* [Our economics], 17th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1406/1986); *al-Usus al-Mantiqiya liʾl-Istiqraʾ* [The logical bases of induction] 5th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1406/1986). There is a commentary on this last work: Yahya Muhammad, *al-Usus al-Mantiqiya liʾl-Istiqraʾ: Bahth wa-Taʿliq*, vol. 1 (Beirut: privately published, 1405/1985); *al-Bank al-La-Ribawi fiʾl-Islam* [The interest-free bank in Islam], 6th ed., rev. (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1400/1900).

Al-Sadr's technical works on the Islamic religious sciences include *Durus fi ʿIlm al-Usul* [Studies on the principles of jurisprudence], 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Muntazar, 1405/1985), a manual on legal inference for advanced students; *al-Fatawa al-Wadiha wafqan li-Ahl al-Bayt* [Evident legal judgments in accordance with the Family of the Prophet], 8th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1403/1983), the *risala* for the use of those *muqallid* to him; *Buhuth fi Sharh al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa* [Studies in the interpretation of *The Firm Cord*], al-Majmuʿa al-Kamila 5–8 (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1408/1988), commentary on a standard manual of Shiʿite law; *Taʿliq ʿala Minhaj al-Salihin* [Supercommentary on *The Path of the Righteous* of Muhsin al-Hakim], al-Majmuʿa al-Kamila 14–15 (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf, 1410/1990), notes on a legal manual by a senior marjaʿ.

There are probably dozens of short books and pamphlets on the same range of topics: law, principles of jurisprudence, Shiʿism in general, and Islamic economics. Transcribed lectures, notes, magazine articles, and so on are apparently still being collected and published.

5. *Falsafatuna*, p. 6; trans., p. xvii.

6. Ibid., pp. 6–9, 335–36; trans., pp. xvii, 1–2, 280.

7. Ibid., pp. 52–62; trans., pp. 39–46.

8. Ibid., pp. 104–41; trans., pp. 84–113.

9. Ibid., pp. 179–260; trans., pp. 161–213.

10. Ibid., pp. 285–317; trans., pp. 239–63.

11. *al-Usus*, pp. 7–8.

12. Ibid., p. 123.

13. I was once told of an elderly Shaykh in Damascus who confessed to a student that he found this part of al-Sadr's book to be rather difficult. The calculus of probability was not often taught in the traditional Shiʿite seminaries.

14. *al-Usus*, pp. 333–35.

15. Ibid., p. 469.

16. *Falsafatuna*, p. 11; trans., p. 5.

17. Ibid., pp. 13–20; trans., pp. 6–11. This is almost the only point where al-Sadr's views are distinctively Shiʿite.

18. *Falsafatuna.*, pp. 20–23; trans., pp. 11–14.

19. Ibid., pp. 24–32; trans., pp. 14–21.

20. Ibid., pp. 32–45; trans., pp. 21–32.

21. *Iqtisaduna*, pp. 330–34. A simple explanation of the difference is found in his pamphlet *What Do You Know About Islamic Economics?* trans. Yasin T. Aljibouri (Lanham, Maryland: Imamia Center, 1410/1990), pp. 2ff.

# 8

# *Baqir al-Sadr's Quest for the Marjaʿiya*

TALIB AZIZ

One evening, after participating in an Arab nationalist demonstration in Najaf against the communists during the first few months of the Qasim regime, I came to see al-Sadr at his *sirdah* (a basement where Najafis go to escape the desert heat). I found him indulging as usual in his juristic study. He was studying Akhund's (al-Khurasani's) book of *usul*, *al-Kifaya*. I slapped him on the back and said, for God's sake, get out of this *sirdah* and see what is going on in real life. People are fighting in the streets and you are still reading Kifayah and busying yourself with "Akhund said, and I say . . ."

Interview with Talib al-Rifaʿi,
friend of Baqir al Sadr

With the deaths of Ayatollahs Khu'i and Gulpaygani, there has been intense competition among relatively junior ulama for the position of the *marjaʿ taqlid* in the Shiʿi world. ʿAli Sistani of Iraq, ʿAli Khamene'i of Iran, Muhammad Fadlallah of Lebanon—all of whom are in their fifties and sixties—are just some of the contenders for this illustrious position. It is a phenomenon in Shiʿism that the leading mujtahids in the same age group become *maraji'* when the previous generation of senior *maraji'* have all passed away—at least those who aspire to this position. It is sometimes said that what ultimately distinguishes one of them above all others (making him the grand *marjaʿ*) is not his merits or qualifications but, rather, the death of his peers. For example, it could be argued that Khu'i did not really become the grand *marjaʿ* of the Shiʿa until the death of Khomeini, though Khu'i's *muqallids* always far outnumbered Khomeini's. Gulpaygani only became known as the *marjaʿ al-aʿzam* of the Shiʿi world when all of his peers, including Khomeini and Khu'i, had died. Furthermore, no one could really be a contender for the *marjaʿiya* until Gulpaygani's death, which then opened a window of opportunity for this "younger" generation of senior ulama. Competition tends to be more intense after one *marjaʿ* has dominated the arena for so many years, as did Khu'i. He, along with other senior ulama, produced numerous students, many of whom would be qualified to become *maraji'* and "whose time" could be said to have come.

While the issue of the *marjaʿiya* has gained international attention since the Iranian revolution and particularly since the deaths of Khomeini and Khu'i, the situation we are witnessing is not at all new. The death of the Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim also precipitated profound competition. Though in Najaf Khu'i rapidly became distinguished as the senior *mujtahid*, there were others waiting for their opportunity to lead the community. One such person was Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a student of Khu'i's.

While Baqir al-Sadr aspired to the *marjaʿiya*, laying the ground work for his ascension to this role, he also set his sights on reforming this institution, which he saw as having enormous potential for betting his community. In this essay, I discuss the reforms that Baqir al-Sadr put forward. His execution by the Iraqi government in 1980 cut short his efforts for reform, yet many of his ideas have survived him, his books being read by Shiʿa and Sunni Muslims worldwide, as well as by Western scholars of Islam.

## Background

Born in Kazimayn in northern Baghdad circa 1936 (there is some dispute over the exact date) to a prominent clerical family, Sayyid Baqir al-Sadr lived as most students in the *hawza*s of Najaf: aloof from politics. His friend, Sayyid Talib Rifaʿi, who was a student in the *hawza* with al-Sadr, told me during one of my interviews with him that he encouraged Baqir al-Sadr to participate in political activities and to assist in the formation of the Daʿwa Party. Rifaʿi himself was associated with the Tahrir party, a Sunni-based organization influenced by the Ikhwan and founded by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a jurist of Jerusalem in the 1940s. In the absence of a Shiʿi political organization, it was not uncommon for politically active jurists or Islamists to join Sunni organizations despite the theological differences between the two sects.[1] However, theological differences ultimately drove a wedge between the Sunni and Shiʿi members, with the Shiʿi members seeing a need to build their own organization, especially in the face of the challenge of communism, which grew after the 1958 Iraqi revolution. Thousands of Shiʿa were being influenced by this ideology, and the jurists saw it as a tremendous threat to the survival of religiosity and to the religious establishment. Hence, Daʿwa's main thrust in those days was to counter communist ideas. Al-Sadr played a pivotal role. He was elected to be the *faqih al-hizb* (jurist of the party), the highest religious position in the party's hierarchy. He was also instrumental in writing its main political doctrine and platforms. In the party he was exposed to the political writings of the main leftist and Sunni parties active in Iraq, whose ideas helped shape his own religious and political views.

Al-Sadr's involvement in Daʿwa was highly controversial in Najaf and eventually he, as well as the sons of Muhsin Hakim, were forced to abandon the party. After leaving Daʿwa, al-Sadr focused on preparing himself for the *marjaʿiya*. This was done with the encouragement of his Daʿwa associates, who saw Baqir al-Sadr's rise to the *marjaʿiya* as their best hope for kindling a revolutionary change in religious academic circles.[2] In order to achieve his goals, al-Sadr began teaching graduate courses in the fields of *fiqh* and *usul* (*bahth al-kharij*) and compiling his lectures for publication. Yet he had to be careful not to appear to be competing with his mentor, Khu'i, to whom he continued to defer for the remaining years of his life.

## Baqir al-Sadr's Innovations

Baqir al-Sadr saw the traditional methods of teaching in the *hawza* as archaic and lamented the lack of accountability in the system. In the traditional *hawza* students are free to join the classes of their choice. There are no homework requirements, no exami-

nations to test the students' progress, no limits on the duration of the course. In the *bahth al-kharij* (the most advanced level of study), students may attend classes indefinitely. In the lower levels of *muqaddimat* and *sutuh*, students may change teachers as they please. Therefore, there is no way for the *hawza* to monitor the academic level of students. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that once students are in the *hawza*, they can wear the turban and be considered as part of the ulama class. Furthermore, they can leave the *hawza* without an *ijaza* (certificate) and preach in local communities. In such cases they can function independently, with no accountability to the *marja'iya*. They are also obliged to manipulate because they compete with the various *maraji'*.

Al-Sadr wanted to add the requirement that students pass certain courses at an acceptable level before they are allowed to leave the *hawza*. Moreover, he wanted the *marja'iya* to have full control of all religious centers so that no cleric could head a congregation without an *ijaza* from a *marja'*. This would help ensure that clergy would be competent jurists and religious guides.

One of his first tasks was to introduce ideas taken from modern-style secular universities. He participated in a pilot project to establish the Usul al-Din College in Baghdad in 1964 and to set up its academic curriculum. However, his efforts to implement reforms in the *hawza* itself faced stiff resistance not only from students but from the religious establishment as well. Thus, he had to resort to teaching in the classical style of the *hawza*: commenting and citing arguments and counterarguments of previous jurists on particular legal matters. However, he expressed reservations about doing so because of his distaste for what he considered an archaic style.[3] He completed only the first part of the lessons in *fiqh*, namely, *Tahara* (purity), in a period of four years. These lessons resulted in a four-volume treatise written by his students and edited by him. It was later published as *Buhuth fi Sharh al'Urwa al-Wuthqa*.

The publication of some of his writings, *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy) and *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economics), as well as his work on *fiqh*, drew admiration from educated, reform-minded Shi'a who began to advocate for his *marja'iya*. They wanted al-Sadr to write his own *risala* so that they could refer to his religious opinions. Rather than write a *risala*, he chose to record his opinions as footnotes to Muhsin al-Hakim's *risala*, *Minhaj al-Salihin*. While writing a *risala* as a footnote to a previous one is common practice, in other respects al-Sadr's *risala* is highly atypical.

In order to popularize his *fatwas* among the masses, he wrote his religious opinions in a style that could be easily understood by laypeople, eliminating the jargon of jurisprudence that makes it difficult for them to understand. He wrote his opinions in modern Arabic, addressing himself not principally to other jurists as is usually done, but to Islamic activists, professionals, college students, and other educated people in society whom he was particularly eager to reach. His *al-Fatawa al-Wadiha* is unique in its style among such works and gained popularity among Sunni and Shi'i alike because of its straightforward language and detailed expositions of *fatwas*. Perhaps most important, it concentrated on contemporary problems.

Additionally, al-Sadr presented a new taxonomy for legal codes that was a clear departure from the classical collections of *fatwas*. The legal Shi'i texts always consist of two major categories; *ibadat* (worship) and *mu'amalat* (transactions). Al-Sadr thought that such a bipolar scheme was too broad and awkward since it obliged scholars to ignore some aspects of Islamic law, or to place others in inappropriate legal categories.

He proposed in the introduction of *Fatawa* that the new taxonomy of the Islamic legal system be divided into four main categories:

1. *ʿIbadat*, which includes the individual acts of worship that require *niyah* (intention) on the part of the worshipper
2. *Amwal* (property), which includes all public and private economic transactions
3. *al-ʿalaqat al-khassa* (personal affairs), which includes matters pertaining to family relations
4. *al-ʿalaqat al-ʿamma* (public affairs), which includes social relations and state authority.[4]

This taxonomy has implications for social affairs. For example, traditionally, matrimonial issues are listed under the subheading "financial contracts" which emphasizes the legalistic and structural nature of marriage and male/female relationships. It reflects the conviction that the woman is purely a sexual partner and the man a financial master. In other words, the man gives a dowry to a woman for the sexual services she provides. The relationship could thereby be interpreted as "money for sex." By separating family issues under a different heading, i.e., "personal affairs," al-Sadr set out to interpret the religious legal concepts and to give a new understanding to them.

With the publication of his religious opinions, al-Sadr's relationship with those close to Ayatollah Khu'i began to sour. In order to prove that he was not challenging the authority of his teacher, al-Sadr asked one of his companions to write a letter in the form of a question seeking al-Sadr's opinion about the *marjaʿiya*. Al-Sadr then replied to that letter at the same meeting, directing people to follow the guidance of Ayatollah Khu'i. Al-Sadr asked that his *marjaʿiya* not be publicly promoted; as a result, his *muqallids* generally consisted of those who had already been won over to his approach to Islamic law. His followers were drawn from the intellectual and upper-middle-class groups. They were mostly Iraqis and many were fundamentalist activists and Daʿwa Party members.

## Al-Sadr's Conceptualization of the Marjaʿiya

Of major concern to Baqir al-Sadr was the revamping of the *marjaʿiya* so that it could both fit into the modern world and effectively serve as a guide to human kind in the present and future. He believed that it had enormous potential if certain reforms were put in place. He also saw it as an institution that has changed and evolved over the centuries, so that, therefore, efforts to implement further changes were justified.

In one of his lectures Baqir al-Sadr divided the history of the *marjaʿiya* into four stages.[5] First was the period he referred to as the "Individual *Marjaʿiya*," beginning with the companions of the Imams until the time of al-ʿAllama al-Hilli (d. 1325). During this period, the *marjaʿ* served only as the source of religious laws for the Shiʿi masses. Second was the period of the formal *marjaʿiya* that was established by al-Shahid al-Awwal (d. 1374). This period is marked by the practice of sending representatives of the *marjaʿ* to various areas to preach and to collect religious taxes. The third is the period of the "grand *marjaʿiya*," which was characterized by the consolidation of power within one *marjaʿ*. This period begins with the *marjaʿiya* of Kashif al-Ghita (d. 1813). During this period the grand *marjaʿ* became a dominant authority over the affairs of the Shiʿa all

over the world. The fourth period is what he has labeled the "popular *marja'iya*," which began during the Western colonization of the Muslim world, when the *marja'iya* was directly involved in the political affairs of Muslims to protect religion and to defend the rights of Muslims. In certain cases, the *marja'iya* was responsible for leading struggles against imperialist powers.[6]

Certain things hold constant throughout the periods. For example, the *maraji'* have traditionally conducted their policies and made their decisions on the basis of their own individual styles, depending on an inner circle of close associates and family members who gather information, make political statements, and commonly make important decisions. Thus, there was no fundamental pattern either for the process of making decisions or for the content of those decisions. The resulting inconsistencies have caused, according to al-Sadr, social confusion that has weakened the relationship between the *marja'iya* and the people. Furthermore, there is little or no carryover of trained ulama who could remain "in office" from one *marja'iya* to another. Each *marja'* has his own entourage; i.e., his own hand-picked representatives and advisors, some of whom are close relatives. In other words, each *marja'* starts from "square one" to conduct the course of his business. Therefore, each *marja'* differs from all others in his leadership capacity, crisis-management ability, and experience in political affairs.[7]

In order to enhance the power of the *marja'iya* in society and to heighten its effectiveness, al-Sadr wanted to transform what he called the "individualistic *marja'iya*" into an "institutional *marja'iya*." The *maraji'*, according to Sadr, must preside over a well-defined organized institution. It is only through transformation of the *marja'iya* into a complex institution that it can influence events and guide people effectively.

The role of the *marja'*, in al-Sadr's thesis, "*al-Marja'iya al-Mawdu'iya*," derives from his general view that humankind as God's vicars on earth would always have a constant need for some sort of divine intervention to protect them from corruption and to guide them toward the goals of vicarage. Without this intervention, people can always be influenced by their instincts and passions, which weaken their potential for progress.[8] Accordingly, God established the role of *shahid* (witness), the one who would take the responsibility for conveying divine guidance to humans so as to safeguard the believers from corruption.

According to al-Sadr, the Qur'an designated the Imams, and then the scholars of religious laws, specifically the *maraji'*, to succeed the prophets in the role of *shahid*. Since the Imams and religious jurists understand divine laws and revelations, they will take responsibility for safeguarding the message of God to humans, and take an active role in guiding them in their historical mission under God. "The *shahid*, from an ideological perspective, is the authority on belief and legislation who oversees the social journey and its ideological suitability with the divine message. He is also responsible for intervening when he sees any deviation from the right path."[9] The only difference among the three types of people who take the role of *shahid* is that the prophet is the messenger who receives, delivers, and applies the divine message; the Imam is the divinely chosen guide who interprets the message; and the *marja'* is the one, according to al-Sadr, "who possesses, through his human efforts and long period of hard-work, the comprehension of Islam from its original sources, as well as a deep piety that disciplines him to control himself and his conduct. He must also possess a suitable Islamic consciousness of his environment with all its overwhelming conditions and interactions."[10]

The *marjaʿ* thus becomes the successor of the prophets and Imams for the *umma* as a source of guidance and a center of leadership. The man who possesses the ordained qualifications of knowledge of divine laws, *ʿilm*; and control of one's conduct, *ʿadalah*, shall take the responsibility of *shahid*. However, the *marjaʿiya* is not assigned to any particular person as in the case with the prophets or Imams. It is the qualification for the role that becomes the important criterion to be satisfied by suitable individuals. A wrong interpretation of the role of *shahid* occurs when it is thought to belong to the person of the *marjaʿ* rather than to the role of the *marjaʿiya* itself. The *marjaʿ* is the legitimate successor of the Imams by virtue of his *ʿilm* and *ʿadala*, although there are also certain responsibilities for achieving specific goals connected with the role of *shahid*. The *marjaʿiya* in Shiʿism has entailed the selection of an individual *marjaʿ* but has made the role of *shahid* the consequence of his ability, or the function of the political conditions. However, inconsistencies in the *maraji*ʿs activities, coupled with failure to define goals, have resulted in a weakening of the role of *shahid*. Unless the *marjaʿiya* entails certain well-defined objectives, the *umma* will find it difficult to ascertain its social mission.

Sadr believed that the current system of the *marjaʿiya* has chronic shortcomings, primarily that the *marjaʿ* did not rely on any institutional structure to exercise his authority. Decisions concerning the welfare of the whole community were made largely in consultation with relatives and close associates. In keeping with his views on *shahid* as outlined above, he conceived the idea of *marjaʿiya al maduʿiya* (objective authority) that would replace, in the long run, the existing *marjaʿiya al-dhatiya* (individualistic authority). In other words, al-Sadr believed that the focus would be on the "office" of the *marjaʿiya*, rather than on the *marjaʿ*. The structure put in place, he maintained, would not only prevent the jurist from making arbitrary decisions but would also serve to train new jurists for the responsibilities of *shahid*. The power of the jurists would also be checked by free competition for this position.

Al-Sadr prescribed the establishment of an institution in which the *marjaʿ* himself forms the center, and where its structure, role, and process are thoroughly defined. This would allow for continuity and carryover of ideas and practices from one *marjaʿ* to the next. He wanted an institution in which tasks and activities were specified and there was accountability on the part of each person involved in the *marjaʿiya*. He envisioned two types of organizational arrangements: the "office of the *marjaʿiya*," which would be the central administrative office, and the "representatives," who would act as the sociopolitical branches of the *marjaʿiya*. While in some sense this arrangement already exists, the specific roles that Sadr envisioned define the significant differences between his ideal system and the one that currently exists.

The central administrative office, in al-Sadr's thesis, would initially consist of at least six departments, administered by experts, that perform the planning and executive activities of the *marjaʿiya*.[11] The *marjaʿiya*, later on, could further develop these offices as tasks and responsibilities expand, to include the whole spectrum of affairs of the *umma*. These offices will "replace the court (of the *marjaʿ*) which represents an arbitrary individualistic structure made up of individuals grouped by chance who fulfill some immediate needs but exhibit a superficial mentality without any defined and clear objective."[12]

He wanted the *marjaʿ* to be at the top of a pyramidal structure. The *marjaʿ* traditionally has been represented by ulama in various parts of the world, who serve the reli-

gious needs of Muslims and act as liaison officers for the *marja'*, carrying on such tasks as transmitting his *fatwas* or collecting religious taxes. Al-Sadr does not see this informal relationship between the *marja'* and his parochial representatives as being effective in facilitating a centralized system. And centralization, he argues, becomes indispensable in situations in which the *marja'* seeks to commit himself to achieving political goals or implementing radical change in the society. Al-Sadr's prescription is to make the local representatives more active participants in the process of the *marja'iya*. He proposed that the *marja'* form a council that proposes policies and suggests courses of action for the *marja'*. The council would consist of, in addition to the individuals of the six committees of the central administration, the *marja'*'s representatives and high-ranking ulama. The whole religious establishment in this way becomes a full participant in the decision-making process of the *marja'*, an arrangement that eventually would motivate commitment and ensure dedication to the *marja'iya*. Such a broad consultative process would protect the *marja'iya*, in al-Sadr's view, from adopting policies that might be influenced by personal feelings: "The (institutional) administration would then replace the *hashiya* (the *marja'*'s personal entourage), which is but an arbitrary irrational apparatus composed of individuals gathered by coincidence . . . to meet immediate needs with a fragmented mentality of no clear and specified objectives."[13] Even the titles of the new organizational structures would be modernized. For example, he proposed using titles such as "The Board of Trustees for the Religious Academies," "Propagation Affairs Committee," "The Foreign Affairs Committee," and the "Political Task and Outreach Committee."

While al-Sadr concedes that the individualistic, traditional practices have some positive aspects, such as quick action, higher levels of secrecy, and curbs on the influence of unqualified people, the proposed arrangement, he argues, would have greater and more important results.[14] The formation of the central administration and "council of the *marja'iya*" would ensure the continuity of the role of the *marja'* beyond his lifetime. The structural organization would provide expertise and long-term planning for achieving goals set by the previous *marja'*.

In addition, the institution of the *marja'iya* would serve as a training field and selection agency for the new *marja'*. One of al-Sadr's complaints had been with the traditional manner in which the *marja'* ascends to his rank. There were no specific qualifications for the position except that of *'ilm* and *'adala*. Although these qualifications might be considered necessary for achieving the first goal of *shahid* (i.e., safeguarding the divine message from corruption), qualifications for the second role (i.e., guiding the *umma* in its historical mission) are lacking. Such a political/social role requires skills beyond mere religious knowledge and righteous behavior. It requires an understanding of the social conditions and the way in which these conditions need to be changed to safeguard religion and guide the believers.

Yet al-Sadr did not suggest dispensing with the old system altogether. In fact, in some respects, his prescription is not at all a radical departure from it. Al-Sadr still believed that it was necessary to go through the traditional stages in which a *marja'* builds up his credentials and gains trust and influence within the *hawza* and the *umma*. The *marja'* who wishes to implement reforms must "start forming an institutional structure gradually, such as establishing a limited number of consultative committees

and specialized (offices) to perform some of the tasks of the *marja'iya*. He must not act rashly and quickly in implementing changes so as to avoid resistance and resentment from the traditional sector of the *hawza* and the *umma* who would not be aware of his objectives."[15] Al-Sadr believed that the formation process of the institution should progress gradually; its evolution should take place naturally. The *marja'*, in bringing about changes, should concentrate on educating the *umma* to the point of realizing the goals and benefits of the "objective *marja'iya*." This way the *marja'iya* will develop as a natural part of the culture of the *umma* and reach its maturity. It is only then that the "objective *marja'iya*" will enter its final stage to become the sole *marja'iya* and dominant religious authority that will guide the *umma* toward restoring the leadership role of Islam in society.

## Conclusions

The focus on the Iranian *marja'iya* and the competition that has arisen among the mujtahids since the death of Khomeini have overshadowed the life and contributions of Baqir al-Sadr. Yet I believe that his legacy will continue through the debates taking place in religious, academic, and political arenas.

Baqir al-Sadr was a member of the Shi'i religious establishment and a pioneer of reform. This made him both a focus of love and envy. He was not an outsider like 'Ali Shari'ati of Iran, nor was he a scholar of dubious merit. He was a true product of the *hawza* and also one of its greatest achievements. Yet there is much ambivalence about him. He was an inspiration to the youth and a bonafide martyr on the one hand. But he was also a critic of the establishment and considered detrimental to the traditional way of doing things.

Modernization brought changes to the *hawza* with regard to the sort of students who were enrolling. Prior to mass government-sponsored education in the mid-twentieth century, students had received little formal schooling before entering the *hawza*. During Baqir al-Sadr's time this changed so that students were likely to be graduates of government schools and colleges, something that Baqir al-Sadr felt was essential for the improvement of the *hawza*. To such students the traditional textbooks, such as Ansari's *al-Makasib* on *fiqh* and Kurasani's *al-Kifaya*, seemed arcane. For these students Baqir al-Sadr became the author of choice. On the other hand, al-Sadr's *Durus fi llm al-Usul* was written for university students and continue to be used in the Arabic *hawza* in Qom.

Al-Sadr's intellectual contributions have become the foundation for political Islam in the post-Iranian revolution period. In the wake of the revolution, people wanted less rigorous literature, turning to dogmatic journalistic writings and fire-breathing political speeches. But after the dust settled somewhat, the Islamic intelligentsia and activists were confronted with social and political problems that required complex answers. Today al-Sadr's writings are in demand to much the same extent as those of the Iranian intellectual, Ali Shari'ati. Al-Sadr's ideas and contributions are used as the building blocks for the call for change in the religious establishment. I believe that al-Sadr's call for reforms, religious and political, will come to dominate the debates within the Islamic movements in the decades to come.

*Notes*

1. ʿArif al-Basri, another leading Daʿwa leader in the 1970s, was also known to have been a member of al-Tahrir party. He was executed by the Iraqi regime along with four top Daʿwa leaders in 1974.

2. Talib al-Rifaʿi has told this author that al-Sadr was a dedicated student in *fiqh* and *usul* with no interest at all in politics. In the midst of the communist surge in Iraq, which occurred immediately after the 1958 revolution, Al-Rifaʿi urged al-Sadr to become more concerned about the welfare of the country and to involve himself in political affairs. Al-Rifaʿi went on to invite him to join the Daʿwa party that had been formed by Mahdi al-Hakim, Sahib Dakhil, and al-Rifaʿi.

3. See the introduction to Baqir al-Sadr's *Buhuth fi Sharh al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa* (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿruf li al-Matbuʿat, 1981).

4. Baqir al-Sadr, *al-Fatawa al-Wadiha*, pp. 432–34.

5. Al-Sadr delivered these lectures at the height of the conflict between the *marjaʿiya* and the Iraqi regime. Sadr was concerned about the *marjaʿiya*'s inaction or ineffectiveness in motivating people to achieve its rightful goal.

6. See al-Sadr, "al-Minha," *Sawt al-Wahda* no. 5, 6, 7 (n.d.), p. 56.

7. These points were outlined in M. H. Fadlallah's speech entitled "al-Marjaʿiya wa-al-Tahadhdhub," given at the Fourth Conference of the Muslim Group, in St. Louis, December 1982.

8. Sadr, "Khilafat al-Insan wa shahadat al-Anbiya," in *al-Islam Yaqud al-Hayat*, Iran Ministry of Guidance, n.d., p. 43.

9. Ibid., p. 145.

10. Ibid.

11. Sadr, *al-Marjaʿiya*, pp. 93–94.

12. Ibid., p. 94.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 96.

15. Ibid., p. 105.

# 9

# ʿAlima *Bint al-Huda, Women's Advocate*

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In the late 1950s, Iraqi Shiʿi Muslim clerics launched a movement to renew Islamic law and to fulfill their obligation to build a righteous society. Alarmed by perceived defections from the faith among educated young people, a group of young clerics formulated an ambitious plan for purifying the practice of Islam through mujtahid examination of modern circumstances, using the principles articulated in the Qur'an. Mindful of the Qur'anic verse that says "God changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in themselves" (Sura 13, verse 11),[1] the young ulama resolved upon an educational strategy by which they hoped to effect an ethical transformation first among individual Muslims and then in society. Because transforming society necessitates political activity, one of their goals was political mobilization of the traditionally apolitical Shiʿa, in the defense of Islam. The young clerics obtained the support of the *marjaʿ* (religious authority consulted by other mujtahids) Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim (1889–1970), who believed that Islam was endangered by communism, secularism, and Western values.[2]

The ideologist of the movement, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1933–1980)[3] wrote that the practice of Islam had deviated in the past, making it necessary "to separate religion from the customs and apprise the people of the true nature of religion and its role in life."[4] The participants in the Islamic movement believed that Muslims would rally to defend their faith if the true Islam, stripped of erroneous practices, prevailed. Sayyid al-Sadr wrote that in earlier times it was sufficient for government to consult with notable citizens, but that in modern times it was necessary for Muslim governments to involve "an assembly whose members are the real representatives of the people," that is, an elected parliament.

One of the clerics in the Islamic movement was Sayyid al-Sadr's sister, the *ʿalima* (religious scholar [feminine]) Amina al-Sadr (1937–1980), known as Bint al-Huda, Daughter of the Righteous Path. Bint al-Huda's role in the movement was to educate women about their rights in Islam, including their right to an education and to work outside the home. Educated in Islam and active in society, women could be mobilized to defend Islam and to work for a righteous society. To these ends Bint al-Huda wrote fiction and nonfiction, established and supervised Islamic schools for girls—the first such

schools in Iraq—and conducted study circles in which she taught theology to pious, scholarly laywomen.

In the area of women's rights, the reformers believed error had affected practices in Muslim society, undermining Islam's appeal to modern women. Supporting her work, Bint al-Huda's brother Muhammad Baqir wrote of the need to change the "un-Islamic habits and social usages responsible for the backwardness of [Muslim] women."[5] Sayyid al-Sadr and Bint al-Huda based their belief that error had entered into practice on principles enunciated in the Qur'an and on the example of early Muslim women. The Qur'an contains numerous indications of the spiritual equality of the sexes, for example Sura 9, verse 71, says, "The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another; they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle." Sura 33, verse 35, sets the same requirements for men and women and promises them the same forgiveness and reward. Elsewhere the Qur'an says the rights of wives are equal to the rights of husbands. Early Muslim women, examples being the Prophet's daughter Fatima and his wives, were active in public affairs; but as time passed, the right of believing women to enter public space became restricted. Iraq's twentieth-century clerical reformers sought to make public space again available to believing women. They believed defections from the faith would be reversed and women would become proactive for Islam if Islam's true principles governed women's rights.

That a major renewal of Islamic law was undertaken by Iraqi Shi'i clergy is partly due to their possession of *ijtihad* (authority to make religious judgments and interpretations) and partly to their distance from government power. Government sponsorship was not available to the Iraqi Shi'i clergy, given the Sunni domination of all Iraqi governments in modern times; thus the Iraqi Shi'i clergy were less committed to the political establishment than was the religious establishment in other Middle East countries. Other factors contributing to the initiatives taken by Iraqi Shi'as were the specific leadership in Najaf's seminaries at the time—Sayyid al-Sadr and Bint al-Huda, for example—and the degree of political openness in Iraq in the 1950s and early 1960s.

## Iraqi Women's Position in the 1950s

Iraqi society in the 1950s was patriarchal. The male head of a household was held responsible for its behavior. Young women were controlled by their families, then by their husbands. Women stayed at home except for limited socializing and necessary trips outside the house. In addition to family controls on women, there were legal and religious restrictions. A wife could not travel without her husband's permission. Seeing the outline of a woman's body or even hearing a woman's voice was held to stimulate men to sin;[6] thus women's confinement to the home was justified by religion. Women did not attend communal prayers in the mosques as men did; and in the presence of males other than close relatives, urban girls and women wore the *abaya*, an enveloping black cloak that covered everything but their faces. Peasant women did not ordinarily wear the *abaya*, their farmwork requiring unfettered arms, but they always covered themselves from head to toe.

Islamic injunctions, such as the Qur'an's recognition of a woman's right to contract her own marriage, were selectively applied and frequently breached. The Qur'an prescribes that daughters receive half as much as sons do from their parents' estates, the lesser amount justified by the fact that males are obliged to provide financial support to the family, an obligation daughters do not have. In practice, however, daughters were likely to receive nothing. Women's difficulty in asserting their rights is illustrated in an incident related by Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. After a woman came to him because her brothers would not give her inheritance to her, he called the brothers in and explained to them that Islamic law requires that daughters receive a share of their parents' estate. Their answer to him was, "In our community, women receive nothing."[7]

Unable to work for pay, women were extremely dependent on the good will of their nearest male relatives, whether husbands or brothers or more distant relatives. This meant they dared not assert themselves against their male relatives. A woman who never married was obliged to live in a household headed by a male relative, no matter how unpleasant family relations might be.

Despite all the controls on young women in particular, there were rare occasions when a woman did have an illicit sexual relationship. She could be murdered for it by a male relative—a practice not supported by Islam, but supported culturally, as manifested by minimal punishment for the killer.

Families and society discouraged divorce when a marriage had produced children, but a man *could* divorce his wife without legal grounds, whereas an unhappily married woman could divorce her husband without his consent only in rare cases in which a judge made the decision. The absence of status for a divorced woman in society and child custody laws that gave very young children to the father induced women to stay in unhappy marriages.

The physical isolation resulting from confinement to the home left women poorly informed and poorly connected to the world. Probably for that reason, men tended to dismiss women's opinions.[8] Another reason for the denigration of women's opinion was Shi'i *hadith*. Imam 'Ali, central to Shi'i Islam, was believed to have counseled men not to follow any woman's advice, even the advice of a good woman.[9] Men as well as women were for the most part uneducated and prone to superstition and belief in the evil eye.[10]

Some Shi'i girls were given traditional educations, their families arranging for them to receive training in reading, cooking, and other skills from local women mullas; and a few well-to-do families sent their daughters to a school established by French nuns. By the 1950s there were Iraqi women with college educations, and Iraq had its first woman physician and woman lawyer, and even a woman minister of education. The pioneer women were Sunni, the Shi'i majority being less affluent than the Sunnis and more resistant to outside influences. In Baghdad some women with modern educations had unveiled, reflecting their families' new ideas of acceptable attire. But even educated women found it difficult to exercise the rights Islam gives women. There was no mechanism by which women could act independently of men. Only if a woman could buy the services of a male agent or obtain the backing of the male members of her family could she bring legal action against another person.[11] Yet even these limited changes were unsettling to many people, and the thought of women's emancipation according to Western standards created apprehension and resentment.[12]

## Bint al-Huda's Background

Bint al-Huda was born in the Iraqi city of Kazymiya in 1937. She was a member of the distinguished al-Sadr family, which came to Iraq from Lebanon in the eighteenth century. The first member of the family in Iraq was one Sadr al-Din, the word *sadr* meaning "person holding the highest position in a given area," and the word *din* meaning "religion." The al-Sadr family established and maintained a position of religious influence in Iraq. Sayyid Hassan al-Sadr was the chief religious figure in Kazymiya when the British arrived there in 1917. As Gertrude Bell, British political officer in Baghdad, wrote in 1920, "Chief among the worthies in Kazymiya is the Sadr family, possibly more distinguished for religious learning than any other family in the whole Shi'ah world."[13] Muhammad al-Sadr, a leader of the 1920 revolt against British rule, was the brother of Bint al-Huda's father, Sayyid Haidar al-Sadr, who was a mujtahid and was himself the son of a mujtahid, Isma'il al-Sadr.

Sayyid Haidar al-Sadr died the year his daughter Amina was born, leaving her to be raised by her very religious mother. Bint al-Huda's maternal grandfather was another Iraqi cleric, Shaykh Abd al-Husayn Al Yasin of Kazymiya. The Al Yasins had been clerics in Kazymiya at least since the late 1800s, when Sheikh Muhammad Hassan Al Yasin (d. 1891) was *marja'* for the Kazymiya area. Bint al-Huda had two older brothers, Sayyid Isma'il (1920–1968) and Muhammad Baqir.[14] After Sayyid Haidar's death, the family was essentially without funds and remained in Kazymiya near the Al Yasin family. Bint al-Huda studied Arabic and Farsi at home.

In 1947 her brother Isma'il took a teaching position in Najaf and moved his mother and younger siblings there. In Najaf, Muhammad Baqir studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *usul* (fundamental principles by which mujtahids derive religious laws from the sunna), *hadith*, and other theological subjects in the *hawza* (center of religious education). Bint al-Huda learned the same subjects at home on her own, with help from her brother, Muhammad Baqir.

Her education was highly unusual, but not unprecedented. Over the centuries some clerical families had educated their daughters at home, which resulted in an occasional Shi'i woman gaining recognition as a learned cleric in her own right. Najmabadi cites the example of Nuri Jahan Tehrani in early-nineteenth-century Iran.[15] In Pahlavi Iran, an Isfahani woman cleric, Banu Amin, was certified as a *mujtahida* (authority on Islamic law [feminine]) and circulated her *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis). Most of the ulama, however, claimed she could not be a mujtahid because women were inferior to men.[16] In other parts of the Islamic world, women have been religious leaders, if not clerics. Two of Sayyid Qutb's sisters were very active in the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and spent years in Egyptian prisons for their political opposition to the Egyptian government.

Having diligently used her time for religious studies, Bint al-Huda circulated a religious treatise entitled, "Al-Huda" (The path of righteousness) before she was 20 years old.[17] With the treatise she announced herself as a *mujtahida*. From its title she received her sobriquet, Bint al-Huda, Daughter of the Righteous Path. Like earlier women religionaries, Bint al-Huda remained unmarried, despite offers of marriage from prominent men.[18] Whereas a married woman's husband has rights over her sexuality and "by extension, over her person,"[19] an unmarried Muslim woman has a greater degree of autonomy and is not under direct male authority if she has economic resources. Of

course, time is another reason for a professional woman to remain unmarried, given that marriage and motherhood create many demands.

After the marriages of Ismaʿil and Muhammad Baqir, Bint al-Huda and her mother maintained their own household in Najaf, establishing a precedent that enabled other respectable Iraqi women to live in households without a resident male head. Bint al-Huda made the hajj and published a diary about the experience. Her other travel outside Iraq was to Lebanon, where she had relatives, Imam Musa al-Sadr, leader of the Lebanese Shiʿa, being her first cousin and the brother of the wife of her brother, Muhammad Baqir.

In her career choice and her advocacy of women's rights, Bint al-Huda had the support of her male relatives, in particular that of her brother, Muhammad Baqir. In her personality she was well suited to the mission, being invariably polite and respectful in dealing with people. She carried out her clerical activities in a way that avoided arousing condemnation from religiously conservative members of society and the clerical community.

## Bint al-Huda's Advocacy for Women

Bint al-Huda's part in the Islamic movement required her to develop an Islamist discourse on women's problems and rights and to arm women with knowledge of their rights in Islam and the courage to assert them. The goal was to shape a new women's consciousness in Islam, one in which Muslim women would make the contributions of which they are capable. In part, this women's rights agenda was in response to competing ideologies, particularly the ideology of *al-Rabita*, a leftist organization that prospered during the Qasim era (1958–1963) in Iraq. Calling for civil and political equality for women, *al-Rabita* had 42,000 members by the middle of 1959.[20] The susceptibility of Iraqi women to foreign ideologies was taken by the activist clerics to be proof of a misinterpretation of Islamic principles and flaws in the traditional application of Islamic law.

In June 1960, when she was 22 years old, Bint al-Huda's first published article appeared in the premier edition of the periodical *al-Adwaʾ al-Islamiya* (Islamic lights), a journal sponsored by the steering committee of Jamaʿat al-ʿUlamaʾ, the Society of Religious Scholars. The Jamaʿat had been formed in Najaf in 1958 "to establish bridges between Islam and various segments of the *umma* (community of believers), especially the educated strata and students."[21] Shaykh Murtada Al Yasin, Bint al-Huda's maternal uncle, was the first leader of Jamaʿat al-ʿUlamaʾ. The articles in *al-Adwaʾ al-Islamiya* were commissioned, with the various mujtahids accepting responsibility for writing reinterpretations, or explications, of religious law on given subjects. Bint al-Huda, a regular contributor, was charged with clarifying women's rights.

Her articles in the journal were addressed simply to "Sisters." They are reprinted in a three-volume collection of her works, published in Beirut in the early 1980s.[22] Each article has its own message, but a theme running through them is that Islam does not require the seclusion of women. In the first article Bint al-Huda encouraged Muslim women to open their hearts and minds to Islamic principles and assured them that "Islam is the answer to counteract both the loss of morals resulting from Western ideas

and *the backwardness (tahajjur) of Eastern ideas*" (emphasis added).[23] In the second edition of *al-adwa' al-Islamiya*, she lauded the assertiveness of early Muslim women and reminded her readers that the Prophet's daughter Fatima chose her own husband and later stood up for her rights even though it meant confronting the male power structure. She quoted the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, to the effect that one good woman is better than a thousand bad men. In urging education for women, she reminded her readers that the Prophet Muhammad so valued education that he urged believers to seek knowledge "even in China." She pointed out that mothers are the natural first school for children. She called those who insist women should not be involved in public affairs "extremists" and asked why they imposed restrictions and boundaries not written in the Qur'an.[24] She asserted that the Qur'an gives women equal status with men and said that man is not superior to woman nor is woman superior to man. She acknowledged that women are expected to obey their fathers and husbands in certain matters, but not in matters against their interests. Education is in a woman's interest. Ignorance is not.

In the seventh edition of the journal she wrote that "Muslim women are confused by their erroneous understanding of Islam and their daily exposure to Western ideas. Their choices are: 1) to stay home with no chance of social achievement; or 2) to become Western women, competing with men to acquire rights."[25] Bint al-Huda and the Islamic movement aimed to give Muslim women a third option, namely their rights within Islam.

Enabling women to exercise their rights required that they be educated in religion so they would know their rights. It also required changes in men's understanding of Islam. In an article entitled "al-Mar'a" (Woman), Bint al-Huda argued that the Qur'an does not say women's freedom must be sacrificed to prevent men from sinning. In the areas of attire and behavior, the Qur'an charges both males and females with modesty. Referring to Sura 4, verse 34, which says that men are the protectors and maintainers of women, she advised her readers that men's responsibility for women is a financial one, not a right to dominate. The Sura also says that righteous women are *qanitat* (humble or obedient), which she interpreted to refer to obedience and devotion to God, not automatic obedience to husbands as traditional interpretation has had it.[26]

Another of Bint al-Huda's avenues for women's education was her establishment of religious primary schools for girls, the first such schools in Iraq. They were called the Zahra' schools, Zahra' being a name for the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. Bint al-Huda was principal of the Zahra' schools in Najaf and Kazymiya, which required that she divide her time between the two cities, some 110 miles apart. The religious school for girls in Najaf was funded by the very conservative Ayatollah Khu'i, who was one of the authorities ruling that women could not be mujtahids and who became the *marja'* after the death of Ayatollah al-Hakim. The school operated for about ten years and educated a substantial number of young women. When the government nationalized private schools in 1972, Bint al-Huda resigned from both schools.[27]

While on her weekly visits to Baghdad/Kazymiya (the two cities are divided by the Tigris River), Bint al-Huda conducted "Tuesday Conversations," a theological roundtable with a group of university women. The arrangement was essentially an informal seminary in which she prepared professional laywomen to carry the message of Muslim women's rights and duties to their students and acquaintances. She did likewise in a

room in her brother's house in Najaf. She also conducted sewing and painting classes for adult women and arranged annual exhibitions of their work.

Probably her best-known way of reaching women was her fiction. Fearing that a strictly academic approach would not attract enough readers and constrained by Iraq's authoritarian Ba'thist regimes (1963 and 1968– ), she saw fiction as the way to make her message safe and appealing. To that end she wrote novels, short stories, and poems that were originally published in little paperbacks in Beirut. The stories are interesting and even romantic, but each has at least one moral grounded in scripture; thus the writer is teaching her readers the Qur'an, as well as entertaining them. An underlying message is that the only basis on which God prefers one person over another is piety. Goodness triumphs as Islamic values are put into practice. One of the stories is even entitled "Virtue Triumphs" ("Al-Fadila Tantasar").[28] In it, a young women influenced by the West asks a pious friend, the heroine, what kind of religion it is that makes a woman subservient to men. The heroine replies that she is not ruled by any human and that Islam gives wives many privileges: for example, it does not oblige them to stay home.

Bint al-Huda's works of fiction illustrate her vision of Islamic life. The young professional women in her stories deal successfully with the issues of employment and women's obligations. One of the messages is that a Western education need not preclude men and women from keeping Islamic values. Another message is that it is never too late to repent and abandon Western values. Bint al-Huda did not address the issues of temporary marriage and polygyny, perhaps because they were not often problems for Iraqi women. Polygyny was uncommon in Iraq in the 1960s and temporary marriage was thoroughly eschewed and done secretly when it did occur.[29]

In the matter of *hijab*, Bint al-Huda was pragmatic. She both gave it support and did not give it support. One of her fictional male characters comments that although the Qur'an directs both men and women to cover themselves, the cover should be more enveloping for women because they exert a stronger attraction to the opposite sex.[30] On the other hand, Bint al-Huda advised her followers outside the Middle East, for example, an Iraqi woman physician in London, that they need not wear hijab. It appears that she accepted veiling for strategic reasons but did not believe that it was required by the Qur'an. She maintained that veiling was less important to Muslim women than was achieving economic rights and the right to make life-affecting decisions, a contention still being asserted by Islamist women.

The issue of *hijab* had become highly politicized decades earlier when Western colonialists, missionaries, and feminists insisted that Muslim women had to unveil in order to modernize. Taking the same position, modernizing Middle Eastern rulers such as Ataturk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran had ordered women to unveil. In Egypt Lord Cromer championed the unveiling of women. Resistance to unveiling came from the ulama and government opponents. As Franz Fanon put it, Algerians affirmed the veil because "*the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria*"[31] (emphasis in original). Thus veiled women became the Islamic marker for communities, just as the veil was the Islamic marker for individual women. Since the veil was the focus of political and cultural contestation between Western and Islamic society, a public position against *hijab* would have discredited a young woman cleric in Iraq.

The clerics in Iraq's Islamic movement left the issue of veiling to an Iranian member of their group, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari (1919–1979), who had studied in Najaf

and who maintained a written correspondence with Bint al-Huda after his return to Iran. Ayatollah Motahhari led the reform movement in Iran from the fall of 1960 to 1963,[32] the period of the renewal movement in Iraq. His book, *Mas'ale-ye Hejab* (The question of the veil), advocated that *hijab* take a more practical form than the traditional Shi'i veil, which occupies one hand in keeping it closed and covers both arms so that neither is free to work. Called a *chador* in Iran and *abaya* in Iraq, this traditional tentlike veil originated with upper-class women and was functional for women who appeared in public only to move from one place to another; but it is not functional for women who are employed outside the home, as modern women often are. Younger Shi'i women now wear a somewhat more practical form of *hijab*, namely a long coatlike garment covering the body, leaving the arms usable and the hands free. The hair is covered with a scarf. How much input Bint Al-Huda had into Ayatollah Motahhari's formulations on veiling is not known, but the more practical form of *hijab* he advocated has been adopted by Shi'i Islamist women.

The political system the reformers aimed for was formulated by Ayatollah al-Sadr, Bint al-Huda's brother. It was to be an Islamic government that included an elected parliament and an elected executive, based on his interpretation of the Qur'an's requirement for *shura* (consultation) by those governing. He believed that in earlier times the requirement for *shura* was met through government consultation with notable citizens, but that in modern times it is necessary for Muslim governments to include "an assembly whose members are the real representatives of the people."[33]

## Government Repression

Within Iraq, Islamic activism became very dangerous under the Ba'thists. Mass deportations of Shi'a and torture of suspected government opponents were the norm in the 1970s. Communists, Kurds, Shi'a, and Islamists were the usual targets, with government attacks focusing first on one group and then another. It was in connection with one of these attacks that Bint al-Huda's one reported incident of premonition occurred. In June 1979, when Iraq's Ba'athist government surreptitiously arrested her brother Muhammad Baqir, their deceased brother Isma'il appeared to Bint al-Huda in a dream, warning her that Muhammad Baqir was in danger. She responded by organizing large street demonstrations in Najaf, Kazymiya, al-Thawra, Nasiriya, and other cities to protest her brother's incarceration. The government responded by arresting many of the demonstrators and a number of ulama, but it did release Ayatollah al-Sadr to house arrest.[34] Bint al-Huda was herself placed under house arrest, where she remained for ten months, her only contact with the world being her companion Umm Furqan.

From his house arrest, Muhammad Baqir sent tape-recorded messages to all Iraqi Muslims, calling on them to move to a revolutionary *da'wa* (defense of Islam), "an uprising to save the *umma* from its present corrupt situation." [35] He stated that "the reformative calls that built religious schools and published books are now peripheral, although they served a good purpose." The government, for its part, pursued a policy of large-scale arrests. In late July, the Islamic Liberation Movement, one of the groups in the Islamic movement, put out a press release saying that the Ba'thists had more than 10,000 Iraqis under detention, 400 of them women.[36] Some of these women had been educated by Bint al-Huda or in her schools, and a number of them were executed.

On April 5, 1980, the government took Ayatollah al-Sadr and Bint al-Huda from their homes in Najaf and transported them to Baghdad. There they were executed without trial on April 8. Given the government's treatment of other prisoners, one has to assume that they were tortured while in custody. Their maternal uncle was then called and ordered to bury their bodies quietly at night, which he did. Their bodies have subsequently disappeared, presumably because the government fears their becoming shrines.

It is hard to fault Bint al-Huda's work or her goals. Her weakness was political naïveté. She did not anticipate the power of interests within Iraq and outside Iraq that militated against any Islam-based political activism. She dealt adeptly with opposition to women's rights within the ulama community, which she knew well, but she could not deal adeptly with the powers in Baghdad, with people unconcerned about what the Qur'an says and uncommitted to the welfare of believers. Political activism was not unreasonable in the Iraq of 1960 when Bint al-Huda and the other Islamic activists began their public efforts, but it became suicidal once the Ba'thists set up their authoritarian state security system and Saddam Hussein took the helm of government.

In her writings Bint al-Huda expressed a willingness to die for her beliefs. One of her poems says, "I swear I will not veer from the path even if my feet are bleeding."[37] People have speculated that she and her brother knowingly chose martyrdom, calculating that it was worth the cost *if* it would lead to the establishment of a just, Islamic society, but the desired outcome has not occurred. Although Bint al-Huda helped believing women, she did not achieve the virtuous society she wanted.

## Conclusions

The rise in the fortunes of the political Left during the regime of Abdul Karim Qasim was perceived by Iraq's clerical community as a serious threat to Islam, leading Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, Iraq's *marja'*, to endorse the ambitious program of activism and renewal that became Iraq's Islamic movement. Through *ijtihad* and political mobilization, the activists aimed to effect a renewed law and a new governmental structure that would meet both popular aspirations for self-government, and the requirements of Islam.

Improving the position of Muslim women was an integral part of the movement. One of the obstacles to an improved position for women was their perception of themselves as naturally inferior to men, a condition Bint al-Huda worked to alleviate by promoting women's education and employment. She made women aware of Qur'anic support for women's rights and cited the need to follow the Qur'an and the good of children as reasons women should be educated. To help women take responsibility for their own spiritual well-being, she worked to educate them in religion through her religious schools and her writings. Her motivation was both religious and practical, to deal with real-life issues of concern to Muslim women—namely their seclusion, their lack of education, their lack of legal rights, and their lack of employment and income. The positions she took form a coherent whole, with the possible exception of her acquiescence to *hijab*.

Why did Bint al-Huda become a leader in asserting women's rights? Part of the answer may be found in her family, which during her whole life was headed by a woman, her

mother, who struggled to raise children in a patriarchal society. Another part of the answer lies in Bint al-Huda's ability to undergo the rigors of a clerical education and the support she received from her family. Then there was her unflagging resolve and willingness to risk life itself for her goals.

The time in which she lived was necessarily a contributing factor. By the time the Qasim government cracked open the door for political activity in Iraq, increased literacy, modern communication and technology, and increased urbanization had enabled the Shi'a, traditionally excluded from government, to make use of the new political opportunities. Muslim women's low status had been made an issue by Westerners, by Muslim reformers such as Qasim Amin in Egypt and the Iraqi poet Jamil S. al-Zahawi (1863–1936), and by leftist political groups. Thus, when the political opportunity came, the issue had been framed, and a young woman cleric stepped into the breach.

Bint al-Huda's support in the Shi'i ulama community was a major achievement. The endorsement of the *marja'*, Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, was necessary to all the girls' schools she established and to her inclusion in *Al-Adwa' Al-Islamiya*. When Ayatollah Khu'i became *marja'*, he supported her schools and thereby women's right to an education. Eventually even Ayatollah Khomeini, who had decried the shah's 1960s election law giving women the vote, allowed women to vote in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In March 1979 he said that "women must have a say in the fundamental destiny of the country," and "Islam made women equal with men."[38] The message he delivered on Bint al-Huda's death was "with utmost grief I have come to know that the martyr Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and his illustrious, noble sister, who held a high station [i.e. rank] among the scholars and possessed a radiant position in the literary field, have attained martyrdom."[39]

Bint al-Huda is highly regarded by Iraqi Islamic groups. The Da'wa Party named its largest operation against Saddam Hussein, its 1982 attack at Dujayl, for her.[40] She is credited with a huge growth in the number of women strongly committed to Islam.[41] Many families name their children for characters in her books—homage that is easy to trace since she used unusual names such as Naqa' (Purity) and Baida' (Desert). Several women's associations in Iran and Lebanon proclaim her. Through her example and her writings, she made women's education, paid employment, and political activism legitimate for pious Shi'i women, and her influence is likely to continue. Given that knowledge and income are sources of power, women's possession of them can be expected to weaken the system of patriarchal gender relations. Women who are knowledgeable about Islam are able to turn the tables on those who use Islam to oppress them.

Religions are constantly being shaped and reshaped to fit changed social conditions and establishment interests, with the specifics affected by the person doing the shaping. In contemporary Shi'ism, one of those persons was Bint al-Huda, a respected woman cleric who made a difference by bringing attention to women's rights in Islam and to issues of major concern to women. In the Muslim world people on all sides of an issue use Islam to support their position. Bint al-Huda was instrumental in moving the clerical establishment and the *maraji'* to support greater rights for women, undercutting those who clung to traditional restrictions on women. Ulama who support greater rights for women continue to work in Qum[42] and elsewhere. Some of them are exiles from Najaf, many of the Iraqi clergy not killed by the government having fled to Qum.

The choice of gender roles to be continued or revived depends on political forces and relevance to modern society, as well as on clerical interpretation. Educated women who work outside the home have become factors in modern society. If Iraq acquires a new political system in which civil society can function, women's organizations and the Shi'i religious establishment are likely to sustain Bint al-Huda's accomplishments in women's rights and may further them. Her legacy is the acceptance by Shi'i clerics and other pious Muslims that Muslim women have rights that have been traditionally denied to them.

*Notes*

I thank the University of South Carolina for the Josephine Abney Research Grant for summer research in women's studies. For assistance in acquiring Bint al-Huda's writings and for arranging interviews, I am grateful to many Iraqis. I also thank those Middle East scholars who read the manuscript and made helpful suggestions.

1. All Qur'anic quotations are from *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, trans. from the Arabic by Abdullah Yousuf Ali, 2 vols. (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-kitab al-Masri, 1938).

2. For an overall account of Iraq's contemporary Islamic movement, see Joyce Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992).

3. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's birthdate is variously given between 1931 and 1935. I am not certain which year is correct but believe that 1933, the year given me by his niece Hanan, is the most likely (December 27, 1993, interview with Hanan al-Sadr, daughter of Isma'il, in her London home; note: The word *sayyid* is an honorific meaning "descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.")

4. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Islamic Political System*, trans. M. A. Ansari (Karachi: Islamic Seminary, 1982), p. 35.

5. Ibid., p. 36.

6. As recently as 1989, Imam Khomeini's daughter tried to deal with the belief that women's voices tempt men. She stated publicly that she believed men could normally hear the voices of women without being tempted to commit sinful acts. See Zahra Kamalkhani, "Women's Everyday Religious Discourse," in *Women in the Middle East*, ed. Haleh Afshar (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 88.

7. Anecdote related to the author by Sayyid Hosein Muhammad Hadi al-Sadr, husband of Hanan al-Sadr, December 21, 1993, in his London office.

8. Sana al-Khayyat, *Honor and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), p. 10.

9. *Nahjul Balagha: Sermons, Letters and Sayings of Hazrat Ali*, 2nd ed., tr. Mohammed Askari Jafery (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1981), Khutba 83, p. 47.

10. Nearly 90 percent of the population in 1950 was illiterate, as noted in Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 110. The illiteracy rate was, of course, much higher for females than for males.

11. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 245.

12. Ja'far Husayn Nazar, *'Adra' 'Aqida Wa Mabda: al-Shahida Bint al-Huda* (Virgin of faith and principle: the martyr Bint al-Huda) (Lebanon: Dar al-Ta'aruf lil Matbu'a, 1985), pp. 13–14.

13. Florence Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, vol. 2. (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), p. 484.

14. During the long period between the birth of Isma'il and the births of the two younger children, Sayyid Haidar and his wife lost eleven children (interview with Hanan al-Sadr).

15. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Veiled Discourse-Unveiled Bodies," *Feminist Studies* 19 (Fall 1993), p. 513n.

16. Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 163.

17. Interview with Hanan al-Sadr.

18. Interview with Husayn al-Sadr.

19. Shahla Haeri, "Obedience Versus Autonomy: Women and Fundamentalism in Iran and Pakistan," in *Fundamentalisms and Society*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 184–85.

20. Marion Farouk-Sluglett, "Liberation or Repression? Pan-Arab Nationalism and the Women's Movement in Iraq," in *Iraq: Power and Society*, ed. Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 64.

21. Al-Khatib Ibn al-Najaf, *Tarikh al-Harakat al-Islamiya al-Mu'asira Fi al-'Iraq* (History of the contemporary Islamic movement in Iraq) (Beirut: Dar al-Maqdasi, 1982), p. 16.

22. Bint al-Huda, *Bint al-Huda al-Majmu'a al-Qasasiya al-Kamila* (The complete collected works of Bint Al-Huda), 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf lil Matbu'a, n.d. [early 1980s]).

23. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 139.

24. Ibid., pp. 154–55.

25. Ibid., p. 169.

26. Ibid., 312.

27. Nazar, *al-Shahida Bint al-Huda*, p. 56.

28. Bint al-Huda, "Al-Fadila Tantasar," *al-Majmu'a al-Qasasiya*, vol. 1, pp. 9–224.

29. I have consulted numerous clerics and prominent citizens of Iraq's shrine cities on the question of temporary marriage. Most of the laity say there was no temporary marriage in Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s. A few sources, however, tell me there were some temporary marriages, usually involving Iranian pilgrims, and that they were contracted in secret because the practice was considered unacceptable in Iraq society.

30. Ibid., p. 48.

31. Cited in Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 164.

32. Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), pp. 118–19.

33. Ibid., p. 82.

34. The only person allowed to visit him was Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, his student and cousin. Sayyid Sadiq was assassinated in Najaf in February 1999, along with his two sons, both of whom were married to daughters of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. See article on Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr by Nabil Yasin in the Arabic language newspaper *Al-Hayat*, March 1, 1999, p. 8.

35. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Min Fikr al-Da'wa al-Islamiya* (Thoughts on the Islamic call), Information Center of the Islamic Da'wa Party, N.p., n.d., p. 37.

36. "Documents File," *Middle East International*, August 3, 1979, p. 14.

37. Bint al-Huda, "I Will Not Veer," *Al-Majmu'a Al-Qasasiya*, vol. 2, p. 378.

38. Ruhullah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (London: KPI, 1985), p. 263.

39. Cited in Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 52.

40. *Al-Jihad* (weekly newspaper of the Islamic Movement of Iraq), June 1, 1987, p. 6.

41. Nazar, *Shahida Bint al-Huda*, 9.

42. Lamis Andoni, "Iran's New Activists Seek Life for Women Beyond the Veil," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 28, 1995, p. 7.

# 10

# *The Fundamental Problem in the Clerical Establishment*

MORTAZA MOTAHHARI

Introduction by
HAMID DABASHI

It is not just because an Islamic Revolution has already occurred in Iran that this extraordinary document that you are about to read has historical significance. Already evident in the text of Mortaza Motahhari's "The Principal Problem in the Clerical Establishment" and the context of its original publication in 1962 is a palpable sense of urgency, the historical awareness of an impending event. Motahhari's essay was originally published late in 1962 along with nine other contributions to a volume that was occasioned by the death of Ayatollah Burujirdi in March 1961. This volume, collectively titled *On Marja'iyat and Ruhaniyat*, brought together some of the leading theorists and ideologues of the beleaguered Shi'i faith. In retrospect, it is rather remarkable to see not only Mortaza Motahhari but also Mehdi Bazargan, Sayyid Muhammad Beheshti, and Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani, four of the most significant figures in the course of the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79, among the contributors to this volume.

The volume in general and Motahhari's essay in particular represent a crucial transition in the modern history of Shi'i political thought. When we consider the range of issues covered by Motahhari and his clerical colleagues on this occasion, we realize the significance of the event. Allama Tabataba'i began this series of essays with a historical and theoretical examination of the two related issues of *ijtihad* and *taqlid*. Mankind, being rational creatures, it was necessary for people to exert their opinion when they could (*ijtihad*) and follow the exemplary conduct of another when they could not (*taqlid*). Mujtahid Zanjani discussed the juridical qualifications of a *mujtahid*. To be a religious authority, and to be able to opine on matters of law and legislation of Muslim affairs (to be a *mujtahid*), a *mujtahid* had to personify the mandates of the Shi'i juridical piety. In his first contribution to this volume, Motahhari also discussed the issue of *ijtihad* and celebrated the Shi'i practice of it as a means of keeping the normative vitality and historical relevance of the faith. In his second contribution to this volume, Allamah Tabataba'i addressed the issue of "leadership" in communities as a way of maintaining the collective good of the faithful at large. Mehdi Bazargan, the future prime minister of the Islamic Republic, contributed an essay to this volume in which he outlined people's expectations of their religious leaders. Here he argued that Shi'i jurisprudence must come to terms with modernity and address issues that were of immediate material and

religious concerns to the believers. Sayyid Muhammad Beheshti, who would later play a pivotal role in the revolution before he and scores of his fellow revolutionaries were assassinated, contributed an essay to this volume in which he examined the social functions of the clerical establishment. It is after Beheshti's piece that Motahhari placed his second contribution to this volume, which is the essay you are about to read. After this essay, Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani, the great revolutionary clergy who became identified not just with the Islamic Republic but also with its two great nemeses, the bourgeois liberal Freedom Front and the revolutionary radical Mujahedin Khalq Organization, wrote an essay in which he argued for the decentralization of religious authority among the Shi'a. Following Taleqani's essay, Morteza Jaza'iri wrote a similar piece in which he too unambiguously argued for his preference for a collective leadership over that of the most learned in the community. In the last essay of this collection, Morteza Motahhari offered his third contribution in which he sympathetically outlined the services of the late Ayatollah Burujirdi, whose recent death had in fact occasioned the publication of this volume.

The death of Ayatollah Burujirdi in early 1961 had brought to an end an illustrious period of leadership in the course of which he had turned Qom into a major center of juridical learning on a par with Najaf. From about 1946 to his death in 1961, Burujirdi had systematically and tirelessly sought to secure religious and political authority for the Shi'i clerical establishment in one of the most crucial periods in modern Iranian history. Qom was given its pre-eminence in Shi'i learning by the late Ayatollah Ha'iri Yazdi, who during the reign of Reza Shah (1926–1941) became the intellectual founder of the seminary in that city. After the death of Ayatollah Ha'iri, two successors, Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani and Ayatollah Hajj Aqa Husayn Qummi, were the highest ranking clerics among the Shi'a until Ayatollah Burujirdi's ascendancy in 1946. The two Grand Ayatollahs Ha'iri and Burujirdi were thus the moral and intellectual pillars turning Qom into "The Vatican" of Shi'ism. That was indeed a remarkable achievement given the fact that it materialized during the reign of two successive autocrats determined to "modernize" Iran on the model of Mustafa Kemal's model in Turkey.

After the death of Ayatollah Burujirdi in 1961, the Shi'i believers were in fact fragmented into different groups who pledged their loyalties to various high-ranking clerics in many regions. In Najaf, first Ayatollah Hakim and then Ayatollah Shahrudi became the prominent figures. It was after the death of the latter that Ayatollah Khu'i became the highest ranking cleric in Najaf. In the meantime in Qom, Ayatollah Gulpaygani equaled in rank and respect with Ayatollah Shari'atmadari in Tabriz and Ayatollah Milani in Mashhad. But as evidenced in the collection of essays in the volume from which Motahhari's piece is here translated, Shi'ism was on the verge of a whole new political experience in which matters of medieval learning were of minimal concern.

Conspicuously absent from this volume was any contribution by Ayatollah Khomeini, who at the time was still in Iran. In the course of the next two years, he would lead his first revolt against the Pahlavi regime, in effect rendering much of the guarded discussions in Motahhari's essay, and a fortiori in the volume from which it is excerpted, academic. Khomeini's June 1963 revolt, however, was not successful. He was arrested,

incarcerated, and eventually exiled first to Turkey and then to Iraq. He remained in exile until his triumphant return to Iran in February 1979. Although he kept a close vigilance on Iran and followed the events of his homeland with relentless attention, Khomeini was largely absent from the national political scene in the two crucial decades of 1960s and 1970s. The significance of Motahhari's essay, and with it that of the volume in its entirety, would have remained totally academic had Khomeini's June 1963 uprising succeeded. That it did not succeed, and that Khomeini was forced into exile in the 1960s and 1970s added relevance and significance to this essay and to the volume in which it appeared.

As it reads now, Motahhari's "The Principal Problem in the Clerical Establishment" is the crucial document of the Shi'i clerical establishment trying to reinvent the medieval institution of religious leadership (*marja'iyat*) in a revolutionary realignment with modernity. Although the Constitutional revolution of 1906–11 had shaken the institution of Shi'i clergy to its foundations, it had not resulted in any major reconsideration of its medieval, feudally based jurisprudence. The clerical advocates of the constitutional revolution had sided with the bourgeois liberalism of the event not ex cathedra, as it were, but by and large from outside their clerical authority. A few clerics, such as 'Imad al-'Ulama' Khalkhali, had indeed tried to provide a Shi'i defense of the constitutional movement. On the other hand, much of the criticism against the constitutional movement, such as that of Shaykh Fadlulah Nuri, was launched principally from a conservative juridical Shi'i stance. Both the minimum success of the Constitutional revolution in dislodging the medieval Qajar absolutist monarchy as well as its colossal failure in achieving a constitutional democracy compatible with the rising Iranian bourgeoisie were, paradoxically, conducive to retrogressing reformist tendencies within Shi'ism back to its medieval jurisprudence. Perfectly compatible with, and in fact a juridical outcome of, medieval feudalism, the Shi'i jurisprudence was in no way ready to deal with colossal changes that were apparent not just in the emerging global capitalism and its extended colonial arm but even more specifically within the Iranian society.

What the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iranian project of modernity—and the rise of secular bourgeois liberalism and revolutionary radicalism—prevented the Shi'i clergy from achieving, what the Constitutional revolution of 1906–11 prevented medieval Shi'ism from reinventing, and ultimately what the scholasticism of Ayatollahs Ha'iri Yazdi and Burujirdi momentarily aborted, Motahhari sought to achieve with the essay that follows. What you are about to read is Motahhari's attempt, along with his fellow activists, to reinvent the institution of *marja'iyat* in a way that would adapt a medieval institution to the ideological needs of a modernity at once informed by the bourgeois liberalism of the clerical constituency and the revolutionary radicalism of its secular rivals. The Iranian bourgeoisie needed an "Islamic ideology," and their intelligentsia were to be "saved" from left and liberal secularism. Motahhari's project in this essay, an index of his larger prolific work and that of a whole community of revolutionary clerical interpreters, is to see to it that that "Islamic Ideology" has an institutional basis in the reinvented Shi'i clergy.

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*In the name of God . . .*

## On Being Concerned and Having Responsibility

Those who wish for the exaltation of the righteous religion of Islam and contemplate the factors that have influenced the advancement and the decline of the Muslims cannot avoid thinking about its leadership apparatus; i.e., the holy clerical establishment.[1] The problems and disorder that beset this institution must cause such people great pain. They can only wish for its advancement and exaltation. It is important in that any reform or modification in the affairs of the Muslims must happen directly through it, because it constitutes the official religious leadership of the Muslims. At the very least, this institution must be involved in pursuing such an objective. If a religious reformist movement is initiated by an individual or a group without the collaboration of the clerical establishment, it cannot be expected to succeed.

One of the characteristics of the sacred religion of Islam is its sense of collective responsibility. Everyone is responsible for protecting, guiding, leading, and assisting others. Therefore, anyone who feels responsible to Islam must ipso facto feel responsible toward its leadership establishment.

Some of our social scientists, lacking interest and faith, may never have thought about the problems facing the clerical establishment and how these problems might be solved. On the other hand, there are people who are faithful and interested but are simple-minded and lack the intellectual capacity to consider these matters. For those who are intelligent and interested and have faith, these issues should be of utmost concern.

I am proud of my membership in the clerical class and am among those who enjoy its benefits. I was born and raised in a family of ulama and, for as long as I can remember, have been in theological seminaries. From the time that I have been able to observe and think about social issues, I have thought about the problem of the clerical establishment.

## On the Principal Problem

One night in Qom about 13 years ago [circa C.E. 1949], I had the good fortune to attend a friendly gathering of the religious authorities and scholars. Our discussion gradually turned toward the issue of the problems and deficiencies of the clerical establishment. We discussed why it was that, in the past, our centers of spiritual and religious learning offered diverse scholarly topics from Qur'anic commentary to historiography, *hadīth*, *fiqh*, *usul*, philosophy, theology, literature, and even medicine and mathematics, whereas now the subject matter has become very limited. In other words, in the past such centers were comprehensive, having the form and function of universities. Today, they have declined into schools of jurisprudence and other fields of study that have lost their importance. And why do countless unworthy and aimless individuals surround the clergy, so that a religious authority must nourish heaps of weeds and thorns in order to reach one single flower? Indeed, I ask you why there is such silence, serenity, and macabre morbidity among us, instead of freedom, mobility, and vitality? And why is it that whoever wants to preserve his position and status is forced to keep silent and be inactive? Why is it that our educational programs are not designed to fit

contemporary needs? Why do we not have enough books, essays, journals, and periodicals? Why are lofty titles, prestigious epithets, gestures, pomposity, and haughtiness so important to us, and, alas, gaining increasing importance by the day? Why is it that as soon as our righteous and enlightened leaders have ascended to positions of authority, they lose their ability to reform, seeming to forget their previous convictions? These are only some of our many problems and deficiencies.

After awhile we decided that each person would express his opinion as to what he thought was the main reason for these problems. Everyone expressed an opinion, and I, too, expressed mine. But one of the colleagues expressed an opinion that I found superior to all others, including my own. I still hold that opinion. He said that the administration of the financial affairs of the clerical establishment, along with the way in which the clergy obtain their daily livelihood, were the fundamental reasons for the defects and problems of the religious establishment. The phrase that he used was this: "The main cause of all our problems is the *sahm-i-imam*. (the "share of the Imam").[2]

Of course, he does not mean to say—nor do I mean to say—that the mere existence of the *sahm-i-imam* in our laws is the cause of the predicament. To the contrary, I believe that the provision in our laws for the *sahm-i-imam*, the purpose of which is the preservation, revival, and exaltation of Islam itself, is one of the wisest instructions that one can imagine. And as we demonstrate in the following discussion, this provision is the best guarantor of the power and independence of the clerical establishment. Nor is it my intention to say that those who are responsible for the management of the *sahm-i-imam* have been remiss in fulfilling their responsibilities. Rather, the point is that, over time, traditions and practices concerning the implementation and uses of the *sahm-i-imam* have become prevalent and have shaped our clerical institution in a particular fashion. The resulting institutional configuration has become the source of many problems and defects.

## On Reforming the Clerical Establishment

At first glance, it appears that both the competence and the corruption of a society, whether that society is large or small, depend exclusively on the level of competence of the individuals, particularly of the leaders, in that society. Many people think in this fashion and express this opinion. For these people, a competent leader is always the solution to social ills. They are, in other words, individualists. But those who have studied the matter in greater depth have reached the conclusion that social institutions, organizations, and order have a far greater impact than do individual leaders. First we must be concerned with competent organizations, and then worry about competent leaders.

Plato created a famous social theory called "Plato's Utopia" [*Republic*]. From among Muslim philosophers, Abu al-Nasr Farabi [d. 950] has written a book in the same vein as Plato's, entitled *The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*). These two philosophers have based their theories on the virtue of individuals. They have paid exclusive attention to what sort of individuals ought to have responsibility for social matters, discussing their necessary moral and intellectual qualifications. But both philosophers have somewhat failed to consider how social institutions should be organized and what type of organizations such ideal individuals should manage.

Critics of these philosophers' theories claim that they have paid no attention to the profound effects of organizations and structures on the thoughts, practices, and spirits of the individuals, including the leaders themselves. They have neglected the fact that, if an organization is virtuously ordered, very few of the corrupted individuals would have the opportunity to go wrong. Conversely, if an organization is not virtuously ordered, even the competent individuals have very little practical opportunity to realize their good and constructive intentions. Most likely they will lose their direction and succumb to the thinking of the unenlightened establishment.

One scholar, in criticizing Plato, has maintained that "Plato, by expressing the problematic issue of 'who should rule the society?' has made a grave mistake and has created an enduring danger in political philosophy. The more logical and innovative question is, how can we structure social organizations so that the bad and corrupted leaders cannot damage and thwart them?"[3] The importance of virtuous leaders is rooted in the way they think about reform, progress, and change in social institutions. Otherwise, the methods of thinking and the opinions of virtuous leaders regarding social institutions and structures are the same as those of unvirtuous leaders. The only difference between the virtuous and unvirtuous leader lies in their personal and moral qualifications. Virtuous leaders, because they work within the same establishment as do those who are not virtuous, cannot greatly influence social change. If we are to justify the opinions of Plato and Farabi, we must say that they have given importance to those virtuous individuals who rule over social organizations rather than being subjected to them.

The relationship between social organizations and institutions and the individual members in the society is analogous to the relationship between the streets, alleys, and houses of a city to its people and their means of transportation in that city. The street design and city planning of each town limit its inhabitants' choices of routes from one point in the city to another; the people are forced to travel within this pattern in order to get to their destinations. Their greatest freedom is in their ability to choose among the available options. They may consider one route to be more convenient, closer, less populated, more sanitary, or more pleasant. If such a city has developed gradually, without any design or city planning and not according to any fundamental principles, the inhabitants have no choice but to adapt their lives to the status quo. As a result, their movement, as well as the management of the city, is very difficult. Within the structural limitations of this town, the individuals cannot do much. All they can accomplish is minor change in the existing streets, alleys, and houses of this town to alleviate their problems. We can compare this situation with that of virtuous leaders presiding over deficient and inadequate organizations. They are as limited in the impact that they can make in society as the person trying to negotiate the best and closest possible path to his destination, making his way through the labyrinth of streets and alleys.

## On the Characteristics of Our Clerical Environment

Our seminaries have characteristics and advantages that are unique and not found in other environments. The collective spirit dominating the seminary is one of purity, sincerity, devotion, and spirituality. Individuals who lack such qualities are exceptions to the norm and are against the spirit of such communities. The esteem with which the

seminarians regard each other is based solely on knowledge and piety. The genuine superiority of a seminarian (*talaba*) over others is based exclusively on his education, sanctity, and piety. Among the seminarians there are the poor and the rich, the peasants and the urbanites, the children of menial laborers and those of wealthy merchants and notables. In the past the ranks of the seminarians included members of aristocracy and royal families. But within the seminary environment all of these things lose their significance. Academic achievement and piety are the only characteristics that distinguish a particular seminarian and attract the respect of others.

The seminary environment is one of asceticism and piety. There is no sign of waste, no revelry or night parties, in which other students typically participate. The very thought of such corruption does not occur to the seminarians. And if one shows the slightest inclination in this direction, his downfall is inevitable. In general, seminarians are content to live on very modest incomes and pose no financial burden on others.

The relationship between teacher and student among the seminarians is extraordinarily intimate and respectful. The students are respectful of their teachers both in their presence and in their absence. They behave toward them with the utmost reverence; and even after their death, seminary students remember their teachers for their benevolence, expressing wishes that blessings be bestowed upon them. This level of respect for the teacher is unique to the students of religion. Belief in the holiness of knowledge and respect for one's teacher are values that the religious authorities have handed down. In other educational environments, as we know, such attitudes are less prevalent.

Seminarians are supposed to think independently about what their teachers have taught them. They study their subjects directly from texts and they debate (*mubahatha*) their studies with each other. In advanced courses they memorize their teachers' lectures and subsequently transcribe them in the evening. But the seminarians' studies are not based on memorization and parrotlike repetition, as is the case in modern education. On the contrary, it is based on deep reflection, thinking, and analysis. Because teaching is not the exclusive right of any one person and because students can choose their own teachers, it is possible for talented students to teach the texts[4] to the lower levels. Therefore, a seminary student may teach while he continues with his studies.

The advantage of the educational method of seminarians over other methods is precisely the fact that the seminarians study carefully and then debate and transcribe what they learn from their teachers, while at the same time teaching other students. The result is mastery of the topics. The objective of the seminarians is not to obtain a certificate. Nor do grades denote the status of the students. The manner in which the student debates, the problems and criticisms he presents in his teacher's class, the way in which he conducts his own classes and sustains the attention of junior seminarians are the best indicators of his achievement and virtue.

The seminarians move gradually through the educational system and the process of becoming a teacher. Teachers are not appointed. The seminarians themselves, by a process of trial and error, select the best teacher. In this respect, there is a kind of freedom and democracy in the seminaries that is absent from other places, a tendency to choose the best teacher among the seminarians. In modern educational institutions, selection of teachers is through appointment by higher ranking authorities. For this reason, it often happens that an appointed teacher is not compatible with his class. He may deserve to teach a course that is either superior or inferior to the one to which he has been assigned.

Thus the students may be dissatisfied and not render their teachers their due respect. Fear of bad grades and failure forces dissatisfied students in the secular system to obey their teachers. Such a situation is nonexistent in our seminarian educational system.

Consequently, individual advancements in the seminaries are based on the natural principle of selecting the best. As ʿAli (may peace be upon him) said in describing the religious authorities: "They are like seeds of different grades that are being sifted, some amongst them are selected and some are discarded, [they are] purified by distinction and refined by scrutiny [*Nahj al-Balagha: Khutba* 205]";[5] This means that they are like the select and refined seeds, and only the best and purest of them may be chosen for planting.

Step by step, the seminarians advance until they have reached the ultimate step, that is, the *marjaʿiyat*.[6] Until this very last stage, only the choice and preference of the seminarians determine the promotion of their teacher. But, as soon as the last stage commences, the issues of religious fees, *sahm-i-imam*, distribution of money, and monthly stipends are raised. It is only at this point that disorder sometimes comes about and that the principle of selecting the best person is deferred. I have cited the advantages of seminary life and education. But certain defects must also be noted.

Because there is no entrance exam for the seminarians, it is possible for an unqualified student to enter this sacred institution. Moreover, because there are no examinations, seminarians are free to advance from lower texts to more advanced texts. It often happens that certain individuals advance to higher levels without having completed the lower levels. As a result, they end up losing interest and dropping out.

The seminarian is not evaluated to determine his specific talents. As a result, one with talent for *fiqh* (jurisprudence), or for *tabligh* (preaching), or for history, or, perhaps, for *tafsir* (Qurʾanic commentary), and so on may pursue a discipline incompatible with his disposition and capabilities.

More recently, the varieties of the religious sciences have been considerably limited, and reduced to *fiqh*. This field itself has continued in the same direction for a hundred years and, thus, has not progressed.[7]

One of the problems of the clerical establishment is the freedom with which people wear the clerical robe. The clerics wear a distinctive kind of clothing, as do military personnel and other groups in society. However, in the case of the clerical establishment, anyone can wear such a uniform without being censured. As a result, certain individuals, lacking both knowledge and faith, opportunistically wear this uniform and become a source of embarrassment.

There are also problems with the way the Arabic language is studied. Arabic literature is taught in the seminaries, but the teaching method is wrong. As a result, the seminarians, after years of studying Arabic literature, learn Arabic grammar, but do not learn the Arabic language itself. They cannot speak Arabic and are unable to use it or write it eloquently. The excessive training in dialectics and the principles of *usul*, while creating a certain authority in and mastery of the material among the seminarians, also manages to distance them intellectually from a realistic understanding of social issues. Moreover, because Aristotelian logic is not sufficiently taught and studied, the seminarians' approach tends toward polemics and disputation. This, by far, contributes most significantly to the seminarians' unrealistic perspective on social issues.

Yet the gravest deficiencies in our clerical organization are the clerical budget, salaries, financial organization, and the means of obtaining a livelihood.

## On the Issue of Finances

There are several ways by which the clerics can earn their livelihood. Some clerics believe that the clerics should not have a special budget; that it is necessary for clerics, like other classes of people, to have a job and a source of income. They should spend a portion of their time earning a living and spend another portion on issues related to spiritual matters; e.g., teaching, issuing *fatwas*, guiding the believers, and propagating the faith. Such people believe that, in Islam, the role of the cleric is not a professional position, and therefore a special budget should not be allocated for them. As far as they are concerned, the person who is able to earn his own livelihood while assuming the responsibilities of the cleric has the right to enter the clerical ranks. If a person desiring to be a cleric can only do so as a financial burden to others, he should not embark upon this path.

These people argue that, in the early Islamic period; i.e., during the time of the Noble Prophet (God's peace and benediction be upon him), and during the time of the Infallible Imams, there were people carrying out similar responsibilities. They were advising people on what was *halal* (permissible) and what was *haram* (prohibited), providing advice and guidance, attending gatherings of religious learning, and educating their own students. At the same time, they had jobs and professions by which they earned their livings. Most of them are known in the books of *hadith*, law and history, according to their professional affiliations. We find among them callings such as fruit seller, druggist, cloth merchant, silk merchant, miller, butter merchant, cobbler, embroidered-fabric seller, and so on. There is not, according to these people, a single instance in which God's Prophet or the infallible Imams have ordered anyone to devote himself exclusively to the work of issuing *fatwas*, teaching, leading the Friday prayer, preaching, and propagating the faith.

In fact, it would be ideal if individuals could support themselves independently, while assuming their duties as clergy. There have been, and continue to be, a small number of individuals who do so. However, this is not to say that everyone should do this. We must consider the expansion of knowledge and the changes that have come about in the lives of people since the beginning of Islam. It has become essential that a group of people devote their entire lives to the education and administration of people's religious affairs. As a result, there is a need for a special budget to be spent wisely toward this purpose.

In the early Islamic period, the need was not as great: there were fewer problems and doubts and, also, fewer enemies of Islam. It is absolutely necessary to have a group of clerics who are devoted to the defense of Islam and who respond to the religious needs of the people. However, certain duties, such as the leading of Friday prayer, do not have to be carried out by clerics. A person with such limited duties—duties that do not require a seminary education—should not use these duties as an excuse to become a lifelong burden to society. In any case, only fanatics think that nothing should exist if it did not exist during the early Islamic period.

Some people also assume that clerics use religious donations and charitable endowments (*awqaf*[8]) for their income. Probably clerical organizations throughout the world depend exclusively on donations and endowments, except for the Shi'a. In most Iranian cities seminaries have been built. Attached to them as endowments is lucrative real estate that yields enormous incomes and profits. In the past these endowments have been a great source of financial help for religious studies at schools in Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz, and other cities. Unfortunately, at present, for reasons that cannot be described, most of these endowments have turned into private property, while others, though remaining as endowments, are under the control of clerical lookalikes: people who are in the service of certain governmental agencies but work against the noble objectives of Islam and Muslims. Still other endowments are in the hands of the Ministry of Endowments and are wasted in a different way. Thus, in only a few instances are endowments spent for their lawful and legitimate purposes.

The endowments (*mawqufat*) that should be controlled by the clerical establishment are not limited to allocations to the schools; there are other and larger assets that should rightfully and legally be allocated to the clerical establishment. Until today, the issue of allocating control of this budget to the clerical establishment has been repeatedly discussed among government officials and upper-level clerics. But for reasons unknown to us, these discussions have not been productive.

If these problems are remedied, and if the endowments are reasonably organized, not only will they provide for the customary budget of the clerics but will greatly improve religion, culture, education, and public morals. However, if the system remains as it is, it will foster corruption and strengthen those who consistently block the way to every kind of reform and who impede the progress of Islamic society.

The alternative to solve these problems is use of the *sahm-i-imam*. I do not know whether or not other religions have designed a system comparable to the *sahm-i-imam* to provide for their religious leaders. But, in Islam, according to the Shi'a, the blessed *aya* of *khums* serves in this way. *Khums* is one-fifth of the individual's income, collectable on booty, mined resources, net annual profits, and certain other things, minus personal expenses. This religious tax should be given to the religious establishment. Half of *khums* is the *sahm-i-imam*, which, according to the opinion of the Shi'a jurisconsults, is to be spent on maintaining and preserving the religion. The other half is to be spent on the needy descendants of the Prophet (*sadat-i faqir*). Presently, the single source for the management of the clerical establishment, and upon which the establishment is based, and from which our establishment has obtained its organizational formation, and which has also heavily influenced all of our religious affairs, is the *sahm-i-imam*.

The ulama and the *fuqaha*, in order to obtain this religious tax, do not mandate or force anyone to pay. Rather, the faithful Muslim, freely and happily, goes to those clerics whom he trusts and in whom he confides to pay his *khums*. The ulama do not have a designated organization for collecting this tax. The people themselves, based on their conscience and faith, and based on their wealth, pay the taxes they owe. The amount may be small or large, from a few thousand to a few hundred thousand tumans.

The spiritual preference for the *sahm-i-imam* over the allocated budget of the Ministry of Endowment reflects the sentiment, humility, and sincerity on the part of those who pay it. A person pays his *khums* to an *'alim* whom he respects and admires. The

payment of the *sahm-i-imam* to a particular *'alim* reflects a believer's recognition and favorable opinion of that *'alim*. The populace determines whether a person should collect his religious tax. Whether or not this *'alim* is truly worthy depends on the populace's judgment, leaving open the question of whether the laity truly judged the *'alim* by the degree of his qualifications or by some other criterion. In any case, the ultimate beneficiary is the institution of the *sahm-i-imam*. Put in place are a series of cause-and-effect relationships. If the people have a favorable opinion of an *'alim*, they will pay their *sahm-i-imam* to him. Should enough of the believers select him as the recipient of their religious tax, he will assume the position of leadership and authority.

Until a hundred years ago, before modernization had come to Iran and when communication between cities was minimal, the people of each city, for the most part, gave their monetary donations to the clerics of their own city. These funds were then spent in their own localities. But, in this past century, due to modernized communication and transportation, it has become customary to pay the *sahm-i-imam* to the *marja' taqlid*.[9] Consequently, the *sahm-i imam* became concentrated, creating a powerful group of elite leaders.

The person who first held this position of centralized leadership and who utilized modern tools of communication to expand his domain of leadership was the great mujtahid Hajj Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi. His leadership and power were first manifested in his famous *fatwa* regarding the renowned tobacco contract.[10] His successors have also behaved in more or less the same way.

The method of collecting the *sahm-i-imam* is described in the preceding discussion. The way in which it is spent depends absolutely on the judgment of the person who has received the fund. Until now, it has not been customary to keep an exact account, including receipts and vouchers, of the expenditures. The use of the funds has depended on the *marja'*s fear of God, his piety, his good judgment, and his ability to avoid mistakes, as well as the opportunities available and his ability to implement projects he deems necessary.

## On the Advantages and the Disadvantages of *Sahm-i-imam*

The *sahm-i-imam*, as it is currently administered, has both advantages and disadvantages. Its advantage is that its sole source of support is the faith and belief of the people. The Shi'a *mujtahids* do not receive any funds from the government and the government officials do not have the authority to appoint or to dismiss them. Because of this, their independence is continually safeguarded from government encroachment. Their power base counterbalances that of the government. Occasionally they have been a great source of annoyance to the government. This independent source of funding and the reliance on the faith of the people are the reasons that, on many occasions, the ulama have opposed the government when it has gone astray. The ulama have proven their ability to prevail over a wayward government.

However, from another perspective, this very strength may also be a weak point among the Shi'a ulama. The Shi'a clerics do not need to abide by the wishes of their governments, but they are forced to act in accordance with the popular style and opinion of the public and maintain the public's good will. Most of the corruption that exists among

the Shi'a ulama is attributable to this. If we compare the clerical establishment of Iran with that of Egypt and the religious leadership of al-Azhar, it becomes clear that each of these two establishments has an advantage over the other from an organizational perspective. In Egypt, principally because the clerical establishment does not have an independent budget, and also because of their view of religious authorities (*ulu al-amr*), the president of al-Azhar is appointed by Egypt's president. Al-Azhar's president in Egypt, from this perspective, is similar to the Attorney General in our government who is appointed by the highest authority in the country, the shah, though there is not a similar system of appointments and dismissals in Iran's clerical system. In fact, if the Iranian government supports an *'alim* and wishes to promote his advancement to leadership, this works against him.

Three years ago [1959], in one of our newspapers, I saw the picture of Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, the Grand Mufti[11] of Egypt, and the president of al-Azhar sitting in his office. Above his head was a picture of Jamal Abd al-Nasir. In Iran it is not possible to find, even in the most paltry room of a seminarian, a picture of any such dignitary. The clerical leader of Egypt will never have enough power to match that of the government, as occurred in the case of the tobacco issue. Why? Because it relies on the government for its financial needs.

But, from a different point of view, the Egyptian cleric, because he does not rely on the populace for his life, livelihood, and position, and because the populace has no control over him, automatically has freedom of thought. He is not forced to hide the truth because of the populace. I do not think that a Shi'a clerical leader is able to—in the current situation, regardless of how openminded, reform-minded, and pious he may be—issue a *fatwa* like the one issued two years ago by Sheikh Shaltut which broke a thousand-year-old spell. Even a less significant decree cannot be issued by a Shi'a clerical leader to issue.

In the early Islamic centuries when Egyptian and Iranian ulama had similar sources for their livelihoods, Iranian clerics were less advanced than their Egyptian counterparts in their intellectual achievement and literary productivity. In fact, according to the testimony of the Egyptians themselves, Iranians were the pioneers in all the Islamic sciences. Today, however, the reverse is true; the Iranian Muslim intellectuals have fallen behind Egyptian philosophers. They wait for the Egyptian scholars to produce and compose something new with regard to Islamic scientific and sociological issues. The Iranian Muslim intellectuals have become disillusioned with their own ulama because, in the present situation, they do not produce anything but manuals of conduct (*risala-yi 'amaliya*) useful only to the general populace. They are not expected to produce anything beyond superficial work directed to the intellectual level of the populace.

## On Power and Freedom

When a cleric relies on the populace, he gains power but loses his freedom. If he relies on the government, he loses power but maintains his freedom. This is true because the majority of people are faithful believers; but they are also ignorant, decadent, and uninformed. As a result, they oppose reforms. In contrast, governments, while usually openminded, are also oppressive and encroaching. The clerical establishment that depends

on the populace is able to fight the oppressions and encroachments of the government, but it is unable to fight the ignorant beliefs and opinions of the people. When it depends on the government, the clerical establishment is powerful when trying to counteract the ignorant customs and thoughts of the public. It is powerless, though, when fighting against the encroachments and oppressions of the government.

In our opinion, the financial dependence of Iran's clerical establishment on the public is not the only factor contributing to its weakness. The disorganized financial situation is another problem. To correct it, the budgetary system should be reorganized so that the ulama are given both power and freedom. We discuss this issue further under the topic of "Proposals for Reform."

## On Populism

In many ways a society is similar to an individual. Both can be afflicted by a disease. Of course, each society is susceptible to particular illnesses and defects, depending on its nature. The defect that has handicapped and crippled our clerical community is populism (*'awamm-zadigi*), which is more severe and detrimental than flooding, earthquakes, or the bite of snakes and the sting of scorpions. Our financial system encourages and perpetrates this infection.

Our clerical establishment, because of the pestilence of populism, cannot be the pioneers and the vanguard in our society; it cannot, in the real sense of the word, be the supreme guide. It is forced to follow rather than lead. It is characteristic of the populace to be loyal to their traditions. They are committed to that to which they are accustomed and do not distinguish right and wrong. The common people label anything that is new as an innovation or a whim; they do not recognize the principle of creativity and the constitutional necessities of nature. They oppose anything new, always in favor of the status quo. In the present day, we see that the common people look at serious issues—such as the just distribution of wealth, social justice, public education, national sovereignty, and other issues irrevocably connected and central to Islam—as if these are childish desires.

Our clerical establishment, infected by populism, is compelled to concern itself with superficial issues and problems and ignore important matters when addressing social issues. Alternatively, they state their opinions on significant matters in a way that unfortunately makes Islam appear backward and obsolete, which gives ammunition to the enemies of Islam. It is regrettable that this great infection has curtailed the abilities of the ulama and has limited Islam's arena of influence. Otherwise, it would have become clear that Islam implies, at any time and in any century, a fresh and applicable concept, with ceaseless marvels and wonders. It would have become clear that even the most sophisticated sociological systems of our century are not able to compete with Islam and all that it encompasses.

The clerical establishment, infected by the plague of populism, has no choice but to prefer silence to logic, immobility to mobility, and negation to proof, because the populace favors those. The ulama's catering to the populace results in hypocrisy, flattery, pretension, concealment of truth, haughtiness of demeanor, pomposity, and the proliferation of prestigious titles and designations to a degree that is unique in the world. It is the catering to the populace that has so disheartened reform-minded clerics.[12]

One day during the early years of the late Ayatollah Burujirdi's leadership (may God raise his station), a hadith from Imam Sadiq was discussed. In this hadith a question is posed to the Imam to which he responds. Someone then says to the Imam that this question had been previously asked of his father, Imam Muhammad Baqir, who had answered it differently. He asked which of these answers was correct. Imam Sadiq said that his father's answer was correct. Then he added: "Indeed the Shi'ites used to refer to my father seeking guidance; and he directed them to truth. But, now, they come to me in a doubtful condition, so I guide them with prudence (*taqiya*[13])." This means that the Shi'is who went to my father were sincere and their intentions were to find out the truth and to put into practice the proper conduct that they were taught. Imam Muhammad Baqir told them the truth. But people who come to ask me questions do so not to be guided and to act righteously but, rather, to hear what I say and then repeat it wherever they go in order to create dissidence and disturbance. Thus, I am forced to respond to them with *taqiya*.

Because this hadith referred to the use of *taqiya* among the Shi'a, and not during an interaction with their opponents, it gave the blessed Ayatollah Burujirdi an opportunity to express his much-suppressed pain. "This is not surprising," he said, "because *taqiya* with an insider is more crucial and important than it is with an apparent opponent. When I first became *marja' taqlid* for the Muslims, I thought my responsibility was to judge what was right and just, and that the people would implement whatever *fatwa* I rendered. However, after issuing some *fatwa*s which were against the popular opinion, I found that this is not how things are." Of course, the kind of dissimulation that is expressed in the hadith, differs from what Ayatullah Burujirdi has noted. There are two kinds of dissimulation. The kind that is noted in the hadith is not unique to our ulama. Rather, it is prevalent throughout the world and there is no way to escape it. The other kind of dissimulation has come about just recently and is unique to our clerical establishment. Ayatollah Burujirdi used this opportunity to vent some of his frustration on this matter.

It occurred to the late blessed Ayatollah Hajj Sheikh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'iri Yazdi (may God raise his station) the founder of the Hawza-i Ilmi-yi Qom (the Seminary of Qom), to train some of the seminarians in foreign languages and in some of the newly introduced sciences, so they could promote Islam in academic environments and perhaps in foreign countries. When news of his idea spread, a group of common people from Tehran's bazaar went to Qom and decisively expressed their opposition to his idea by saying that the money they pay as *sahm-i-imam* is not to train seminarians in the language of the infidels. They added that, if Ayatollah Yazdi persisted in this matter, they would discontinue their payments of the *sahm-i-imam*! That blessed man saw that the continuation of his plan would result in the dissolution of the seminary in Qom and would undermine the foundation of his work. Consequently, he abandoned his commendable plan and intention.

A few years ago, during the leadership of the late Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani (may God raise his station), a considerable number of Najaf's ulama and established scholars, some of whom are currently *maraji' al-taqlid*, met together and agreed to revise the curriculum of the seminarians. The changes would address the present-day needs of the Muslims and would particularly include concepts that are among Muslims' fundamental beliefs. In short, the curriculum would expand the focus of the semi-

nary of Najaf beyond *fiqh* so that dissertations would no longer deal solely with mundane and daily operational topics. This decision was reported to his excellency Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani. The ayatollah, who had learned his lesson from what had happened to Ayatollah Ha'iri, sent a message that, as long as he lived, no one had the right to change the organization of this educational institution. He added that the *sahm-i-imam* that is given to the seminarians is exclusively for their eduction in *fiqh* and *usul'*. It is self-evident that his decision provided an example to those who are the present leaders of the seminary of Najaf.

It is apparent, then, why some of our outstanding personalities, as soon as they come to power, are unable to perform what they had intended to accomplish. Why is it that our seminaries have changed from a religious university to a "college of *fiqh*"? Why is it that our ulama and learned scholars, if they are knowledgeable in fields other than *fiqh* and *usul*, hide and even deny that aspect of their knowledge? Why are there countless numbers of unworthy and aimless individuals in our sacred clerical environment, so many that a religious authority is forced to nourish heaps of weeds and thorns before he can reach a single flower? Why is there such silence, serenity, and macabre morbidity that all supersede logic, mobility, and vitality? Why is it that freedom of opinion and thought is not commonly found among us? Why is the teaching curriculum of the seminaries not designed to be compatible with the contemporary needs of our society? Why is it that our clerics, rather than being the leaders of the social caravan, always follow the caravan from behind? Why? Why? Why?

## Proposals for Reform

Effective reform should not involve doing away with a collective clerical budget so that the ulama become forced to earn their livelihood through hard labor. Effective reform does not entail the dependence of our clerical establishment on the government as is true of the Egyptian ulama. There is only one way to reform: by organizing the existing budgetary system of the ulama. Currently, the *sahm-i-imam* is like a tax assigned by the government assigned to provide for the living expenses of the teachers of the Department of Education, collected by these same teachers. In order to do so, they would have to gain the public's favorable opinion, collecting as much as possible from people, and morally obligated to give any surplus to others. It is obvious what would happen to the educational system under such taxation. Teachers would train their students in order to please their parents, who are typically of the common stock. It is impossible for such an educational system to progress. This method advances demagogues and eliminates reformers and qualified experts in education. It promotes hypocrisy, flattery, dissimulation, and pretension. In short, all the defects that result from, and are related to, pleasing the populace proliferate and become more prevalent. Teachers end up viewing the parents of their students in terms of their capital value. They are obliged to implement and utilize various plans in order to extort more capital from them, much the same way that a factory owner or a businessman would act in order to increase his margin of profit. Finally, elements of corruption inherent in populism, such as hypocrisy, pretension, dissumulation, and poverty, as well as other corruption that results from unjust distribution of wealth, including malice, animosity, grudges, and pessimism would all

also become more common. The budget of our clerical establishment is exactly in this hypothetical situation. To correct these defects and problems, we must create a collective account and keep an exact tally of all transactions in the clerical centers so that no cleric can obtain his livelihood directly from the populace. Everyone would, in proportion to the services he renders, receive his income from this account, which would be controlled by the *maraji'* and the upper-level ulama of the religious seminaries. If this comes about, people would pay their financial dues based on their belief and faith and, as popular control and domination ends, the clerics would be freed from its suffocating claws. All the corruption results from clerics obtaining their livelihood directly from the populace, and they need to ingratiate themselves with lay contributors and to draw attention to themselves in order to meet their financial needs.

Every *marja' l-taqlid* depends on the collection of the *sahm-i-imam* in order to support the seminarians. He must prove himself trustworthy so that he can collect and supervise this budget. Corruption occurs because the clerics of various cities have no choice but to turn their clerical profession into trade and use the mosques as their business offices.

If this situation is corrected, no one will be in direct contact with the populace. The eminent *maraji' taqlid* will be freed and the mosques will serve as business offices and trade centers. No longer will scores of people gather in isolated groups in such great mosques as the Mosque of Guwhar Shad to call for collective prayer. No intelligent person will have grounds for complaint if these changes are implemented. People will no longer be puzzled as to why the collective prayer among the Sunnis signifies greatness, while among the Shi'a it signifies dissension and factionalism!

## On the Means of Livelihood

The means of livelihood cannot be overlooked. It is one of the most fundamental tenets of life and if when it is not in order, every other aspect of life is affected.

Let us consider an honest cleric who, after a few years of education, resides with his family in a city, presiding over one of its mosques. This person, due to his honesty and his commitment to religion, will serve according to his capacity: he will explain religious issues, perform prayers, and teach ethics, Qur'anic commentary and interpretations, and Islamic history. As a human being, he has expenses that are not met by the clerical establishment. He will depend exclusively and directly on the populace for his livelihood. Thus, he is forced to view his devotees in terms of their capital value. Since there may be other clerics in his town in the same situation, it is natural for there to arise among them a kind of competition to please their devotees. This competition in turn causes the cleric to be more cautious so as not to offend any one of his devotees. When this poor person sees that opposition to the populace would ruin him financially, he is inclined to forgo warning the people of their religious duties when this would cause financial ruin to himself. The dependence of this individual on the people influences his thoughts and feelings about his religious duties. It should be noted that the clerics can and should use the legally assigned budget of the *awqaf* (religious endowments) and *sadaqat* (customary contributions).

## On the Impact of Faith and Piety

It is possible for the reader to think that, in what has just been said, we have forgotten the enormous impact of "faith" and "piety" on reforms. What has been said here, so far, is only applicable to the financial organization and does not apply to a clerical establishment composed of pure and pious individuals whose works and affairs are spiritual. It might be claimed that faith and spirituality in the clerical establishment would replace the organizational strategies that strengthen the efficiency of other types of organization. I submit that this is not true. I admit to the power of faith and piety, which resolve many problems and can replace many organizational strategies. If a budget such as the *sahm-i-imam* with its freedom of appropriations and lack of any concrete, accountable system, was under the control of a governmental agency, the result is obvious. Every day we witness the disclosure of multi-million-*tuman* embezzlements in governmental organizations, with their massive systems of bureaucracy, divided responsibilities, rewards and reprimands, courts, and persistent inspections and investigations. Religion and spirituality are the powers that hold our clerical establishment together and prevent its disintegration, despite the absence of extensive organization and accurate accounting.

In the holy community of the clerical establishment, there have been leaders such as the late Hajj Shaykh Murtaza Ansari, who used to say that he saw money as dirty water that remains after clothing is washed. When in desperate need, he used some of it. Among the seminarians there have always been—and continue to be—those individuals who have lived lives of unparalleled piety, contentment, and magnanimity. They have kept their poverty secret, even to their most intimate friends, teachers, and schoolmates. They are living proof of this noble Qur'anic verse: "(Charity is) for those in need, who, in God's cause are restricted (from travel), and cannot move about in the land seeking trade or work: The ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from want. Thou shalt know them by their (unfailing) mark: They beg not importunately from all and sundry. And whatever of good ye give, be assured God knoweth it well" [2:273].[14]

We confess that nothing can replace faith and piety, but it is also not right to replace everything with faith and piety, since there are always effects and impacts. Metaphysics cannot replace physics completely, nor can physics completely supplant the place and importance of metaphysics. In metaphysics one item cannot completely replace any other item. For example, science cannot replace faith, nor can faith replace science. Order and organization are also some of the holy fundamentals of human life. If we observe how spirituality and faith have eliminated some of the corruption that results from disorganization and disorder, we must also pay attention to the way that disorganization and disorder have, to a great degree, shaken the tenets of faith and spirituality and corrupted the environment.

It is extremely sad that people should see the children, descendants, and followers of some of the great *maraji' taqlid*, exploiting this disorder and lack of accountability in the clerical budgetary system to embezzle funds for many years and to spend them wastefully. Have you ever thought about how much these actions have hurt the clerical establishment?!

One serious problem our clerical community faces is the existence of clerical lookalikes who obtain their positions with the help and encouragement of the government. These

people are supported by the government and, in turn, support it. The governments empower such clerics, placing the budget of the *awqaf* and other clerical budgets at their disposal. These clerics, cleverly, capitalizing on greed, recruit other clerics to work with them to the advantage of the government and to the disadvantage of the Muslims.

In this article, I do not want to discuss anything about these people and the corruption that they have produced. Most people already know about this issue to some degree. Here, I ask only whether it is really possible to uproot this corruption without effectively organizing our clerical establishment?

## On Preaching and Propagation

Preaching, propagation, and public lectures comprise some of the principal activities of our clerical establishment. It would take another article to discuss these activities and the services the ulama have rendered, or to discuss the deficiences related to these activities and services.[15] In relation to the preceding discussion, though, I note that preaching and propagation have also been infected and hurt by the populace. These problems are not related to the funds and to the *sahm-i-imam*. Rather, the problem lies in the fact that these responsibilities have become like any other kind of salaried job: a skill for hire. In other words, as noted frequently in the Qur'an, what the prophets refrained from has become prevalent among us. It is obvious that these responsibilities have become part of life's economic relations. They have become subject to the law of supply and demand, with control in the hands of the consumer rather than the producer. If the merchants introduce goods to the market in order to generate interest in what they are producing, it can be assumed that our professional preaching and lecturing, too, are performed to generate interest in Islam and, hence work for the well-being of the Muslims.[16] Therefore, I am not denying that good preachers with good intentions exist. There are those who are righteous and have rendered great services. Nor am I propounding the idea of instantly replacing all features of the current system with a different one. I am, however, defending the idea that the clerical establishment should design competent programs to train certain preachers and propagators who would be solely supported by this establishment. These individuals would not receive any salary for their services from the populace. Our institution of preaching and propagating would have freedom of thought and set examples for others to follow. Our current institution of preaching and propagation, just like other problems in our clerical institution, has power but lacks freedom: preachers might be able to resist governments occasionally, but not the ignorance of the people.

## On the Promising Future

If, God willing, our financial problems are resolved, other defects will also be resolved. If we do not remedy the situation, the world will. But our situation is not hopeless because we have deserving, magnanimous, devoted, and reform-minded people among all classes of our clerics, from the *maraji' taqlid* and other senior teachers to the young seminarians, students, and preachers.

What has been noted in this article is not intended, God forbid, to be understood as if there is a categorical defect unique to the clerics as opposed to other groups in society. In fact, this article in itself is evidence of the writer's expectation that reform and correction can be expected only from this honorable class. The intention of this writer is to convey the point that organizing the clerical establishment correctly will pave the way for our religious leaders to realize their holy objectives.

It is the opinion of the writer that so long as fundamental reform has not been implemented, it is the duty of reform-minded clerics to provide for themselves through jobs that would not be too time-consuming. Earning their own livelihood privately would give them independence and freedom of mind and speech. They could then protect and defend a united and free Islamic fortress and pave the way for fundamental reform. Our great clerics should realize that the perpetuity and maintenance of Islam in this country depends on their control and leadership. They must undertake the task of instituting urgently needed reforms. Today, our great religious leaders are facing a half-awakened nation, but one that is growing more aware every day. The present generation's expectations of clerics and Islam differ from those of previous generations. Though some of this newer generation's expectations are immature and frivolous, most of them have expectations that are legitimate (*mashru'*) and proper. If our clerical establishment does not quickly disengage itself from the populace, if it does not consolidate its strength and take visionary steps, then irreligious reformers will pose a grave danger to it. Today, this nation thirsts for reform in many arenas, and tomorrow it will thirst more. This nation feels itself to be lagging behind other nations and is in a hurry to reach the level of its competitors. On the one hand, there are many advocates of reform, a considerable number of whom are uninterested in religion, who are awaiting the rise of this generation's wave of enthusiasm. If Islam and the clerical establishment do not respond positively to the needs and demands of this nation, and if they do not respond to its excited emotions, then the nation will be distracted to fashionable new ideologies and organizations, a situation that would endanger the existence of Islam and the ulama.

But, if, God willing, we are to improve our clerical establishment, on what bases and foundations should such reforms take place? In order to answer this question, our scholars need to sit together and produce plans to address educational curriculums, methods of administration, and other aspects of reform. I have made certain notes about such reforms that, for the sake of brevity, I do not mention here.

I am aware that some consider these thoughts and wishes to be wasteful and impractical. In their opinion, renovating and rejuvenating the clerical establishment at this time is similar to bringing a dead person back to life or trying to rescue a patient who is destined to die. But I believe the exact opposite. I consider the clerical establishment to be the most vital establishment among all social organizations. However, I believe that this organization needs to be released from the chains that now restrict it. I have reached these conclusions through my study of Islam and the richness of its teachings, based on my knowledge of the meritorious personalities among the religious establishment. As a result, I do not consider the reform of this establishment either impractical or impossible. Rather, I predict that it will be realized in the very near future. While others see reform as difficult to achieve, I see it as forthcoming.

*Notes*

1. This is a translation of Ayatollah Mortaza Motahhari's article in *Bahthi dar Barih-yi Marja'iyat wa Ruhaniyat*, pp. 165–98. Throughout the text, a number of leading Muslim ideologues are brought together to reflect on the nature of supreme authority. Motahhari's article in this regard is indispensable in that he elaborately examines the financial structure of the clerical establishment in Iran and in this process demonstrates the strong connection between the religious and political authority of the Shi'a clerics and their financial infrastructure. He examines the many effects of the financial dependency of the clerical establishment on the populace and calls for significant reform in the organization of this establishment. For a summary account of this text, see Lambton, "A Reconsideration of the Position of the Marja' al-Taqlid," pp. 115–35.

2. The *khums* is a religious tax calculated as one-fifth of a Muslim's annual income less expenses. The *khums* is usually divided into six parts, three of which are known as *sahm-i-imam* [the share of the Imam]; the three other parts are to be collected for the orphans, the poor, etc. During the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the *sahm-i-imam* is given to the Shi'a clerics to spend at their discretion. Ordinarily, this budget is at the disposal of a high-ranking cleric who will supervise its proper distribution to the teachers and students of a seminary. For further detail on *sahm-i-imam*, see al-'Amili, *wasa'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 9, pp. 509–54. For the political implications of the *sahm-i-imam*, see Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims*, pp. 125–28. See also Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, pp. 166–73.

3. Motahhari does not specify who this scholar is.

4. When studying various concepts of philosophy, law, history, and others at the seminaries, such as those in Qum and in Najaf, students refer to their courses of study by referring to the texts they read in order to learn and master certain areas of knowledge. For example, when studying philosophy, the students do not go through a numerically ordered system; instead, a text in philosophy that is considered to be more basic than another is taught first; then other texts that contain more complex ideas and philosophical arguments are taught. Thus, students indicate the complexity of their studies by pointing out the texts they are working on, or those that they have previously studied. For a more detailed account of the seminarian life and educational curriculum, see Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 69–110. See also Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'a Islam*, pp. 200–203.

5. Italics indicate the portions of the text that are in Arabic.

6. The most advanced stage of jurisprudence, after which the student of the religious sciences becomes the source of authority and imitation for Muslims who recognize his status. For a further description and analysis of this concept as well as its political and social evolution and implications in modern Iran, see Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, pp. 178–213.

7. Here Motahhari produces a footnote in which he directs the attention of the reader to his article on "Ijtihad in Islam," on page 61 of the same book *On Marja'iyat and Ruhaniyat*. In this article, Motahhari recommends more professional specialization for the clerical vocation so that instead of trying to master many topics of jurisprudence, seminarians would limit themselves to specific topics; then the public, he argues, instead of following the guidance of one single jurist in multiple topics, would follow a number of jurists who have various related specializations (e.g., commerce, prayers, etc.). As a case in point, he uses the medical profession to show the effectiveness of this type of specialization. He concludes that, as in the case of this profession, the jurists may reduce the range of their concentration and consequently increase their effectiveness and mastery in their fields of specialization.

8. The charitable endowments or *awqaf* [pl. for *waqf* ] are nonperishable property whose benefit and income can be withdrawn and used without consuming the property itself. They are the charitable foundations, the nonprofit organizations and endowments that are donated to the

clerical organizations. The first religious *waqf* was the mosque of Quba' in Medina, which was built on the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad in 622. For further reading see Basar, *Management and Development of Awgaf Properties*; also Zarqa, *Ahkam al-Awgaf*.

9. For a succinct account of the historical background, the theoretical foundations, and the social and political implications of this clerical office, see VI above and Amanat, "In between the Madrasa and the Maarketplace," pp. 98–133.

10. This contract was signed between Nasir al-Din Shah (d. 1896) and a British company; it allocated exclusive rights of selling, importing, exporting, and so on, of tobacco to this company. For further detail, see Kermani, 19–59. See also Avery et al., *The Cambridge History of Islam*, pp. 170–96.

11. The Mufti of Egypt is a Muslim jurist who, upon request, may issue legal decrees (*fatwa*). He holds the highest government-appointed clerical office in the country. For further reading, see Messick, pp. 102–19.

12. Here Motahhari refers in a footnote to Malik al-Shu'ara-yi Bahar (1886–1951), a prominent Iranian poet who had composed panegyrics denouncing the calamities of vulgar populism.

13. This hadith can be found in Shaykh Tusi, *Tahdhib al-Ahlcam*, vol. 2, p. 135. There are a considerable number of hadith about self-protection through *taqiya* which are attributed to Imam Sadiq (d.765). See al-Kashshi, *Rijal*, p. 126, in which Imam Sadiq publicly criticizes Zurara to protect him. In al-'Amili, vol. 1, pp. 107–8, and, vol. 16, pp. 203–54, a large section concentrates on traditions addressing this topic. Further, on the question of *taqiya* and the legitimacy of its manifestation, see Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture*, pp. 267–305. For an interesting textual and sociological examination, as well as an observation of the modern interpretations of this concept, see Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, pp. 175–181.

14. The translation of this Qur'anic verse is taken from A. Yusuf 'Ali 1983: pp. 110–11.

15. Here Motahhari gives a footnote in which he notes that in June 1962 he made two speeches under the title of "Sermon and Pulpit," and that they have been published in a book entitled *'Ashura's Discourse*.

16. Here Motahhari gives a footnote in which he names two sources in support of his claim. The first source is Haji Nuri's *Lu'lu'* and *Marjan* (The pearl and The coral), the second is a short piece [three lines of poetry] by Rumi in which he emphasizes the necessity of the selfless characteristic of the Messengers of God in order for them to be able to meet the demands of their difficult task.

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# 11

# *Analysis of Khomeini's Proofs for* al-Wilaya al-Mutalqa *(Comprehensive Authority) of the Jurist*

HAMID MAVANI

One of the salient features of the Twelver Shi'i creed is the doctrine of the Imamate. This doctrine maintains that there was an explicit designation (*nass*) of 'Ali by Muhammad and that the line of Imams continued in a definite individual from among the descendants of Ali and Fatima, with designation of the next Imam by the preceding one until it reached the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi—a prerogative bestowed by God on a chosen person to act as the protector and expositor of the divine teachings until the end of time. It is incumbent upon God to appoint an Imam because such an appointment is an expression of His Grace (*lutf*)—and a process by which a human being is attracted to obey God and to desist from disobeying Him. Without an Imam, the Shi'is assert, the world could not continue to exist. Thus, the earth can never be void of a proof (*hujja*) of God lest the people have a reason to protest on the day of judgment that they were left without a guide (Imam) and as a result strayed from the divine teachings.[1]

The Imam acquires legitimacy through a process of designation (*nass*) from the preceding Imam and not by public acknowledgment. As long as the Imam was present, the Shi'is were to have recourse to him to resolve their disputes and problems. However, the commencement of the major occultation (*al-ghayba al-kubra*) of the Twelfth Shi'i Imam posed a serious question for the Imamite community: Upon whom should the authority of the Imam devolve after the end of special deputyship (260/874–329/941), which terminated with the death of the fourth agent Abu al-Hasan Muhammad al-Samari in C.E. 941?

The prolonged occultation of the Twelfth Imam forced the jurists to delineate the scope of authority vested in them as indirect deputies of the Imam (*na'ib al-Imam*). The ulama arrogated to themselves certain limited authority of the concealed Imam, pending his return, by virtue of tradition reports that invested them with the role of elucidating the teachings of Islam, resolving disputes, and finding solutions to novel problems confronted by the Shi'i community. This claim to authority is evidenced in their discussions of issues dealing with *qada'*, *hisba*, *jihad*, *khums*, and trusteeship over one who has no trustee (*wali man la wali lah*). Thus, in general, the ulama have subscribed to the concept of *wilayat al-faqih*, however, in its restricted sense (*al-wilaya al-khassa*). What is novel in Mulla Ahmad al-Naraqi's (d. 1245/1830) and Ayatollah Khomeini's (d. 1409/

1989) expositions of this concept is their widening of the scope of authority of the jurists to become identical with that of the Prophet and the infallible Imam during his absence. These opinions deviate from the general view held by the jurists that since they lacked the quality of *'isma* (infallibility), assumption of the total authority of the Imams was not possible: "The ulama indeed lacked the essential qualification on which the comprehensive authority of the Imams rested: their infallibility."[2]

Ayatollah Khomeini's claims for the notion of *al-wilaya al-mutlaqa* primarily rest on tradition reports and the key term *ulu al-amr*, from which he extrapolates arguments and interprets them in favor of the jurist's right to assume the all-comprehensive authority of the Prophet and the Imams. This essay examines the proofs advanced by Khomeini in the light of other Islamic sciences, such as *'ilm al-hadith* and *'ilm al-rijal*, to test their validity, along with competing and counter arguments of others on this issue. In general, the tradition reports put forth by Ayatollah Khomeini suffer from weak chains of transmission (*isnad*), and the meanings he imposes on the text (*matn*) of the hadith are not consistent with the way they were understood by earlier jurists.

## First Proof

The first tradition cited by Ayatollah Khomeini in expounding the concept of *al wilaya al-mutlaqa* is as follows:

> The Prophet said: "O God! Have mercy on those that succeed me (*khulafa'i*). He repeated this twice and was then asked: "O Messenger of God, who are those that succeed you?" He replied: "They are those that come after me, transmit my traditions and practice, and teach them to the people after me."[3]

Shaykh Saduq has narrated the above tradition through five chains of transmission (*isnad*) with variations at the end of the hadith. In one instance, the last part of the tradition, "and teach them to the people after me," is totally omitted, and in another instance it is replaced by "and teach them." Another version states that "they are my friends in paradise."[4] What is crucial to Ayatollah Khomeini is the last part of the hadith, "and teach them to the people after me," since it has implications for the nature and scope of the jurists' authority: to substantiate that their role extends beyond just narrating traditions to guide the masses. As a result, he conjectures that either the copyist inadvertantly dropped the last part of the hadith or it was omitted by Shaykh Saduq or that they were altogether different traditions. However, these assumptions are contrary to the established rules in *'ilm al-hadith* and he acknowledges this (*khilaf al-asl*).[5]

The other deficiency in this tradition is that it is regarded as *mursal*—that is, its authenticity and veracity are not complete because there is a flaw in the chain of transmission. *Mursal*, as defined by the Imamite jurists, is a tradition whose chain of transmission goes only as far back as the "followers" (*tabi'i*) of the Prophet. Thus, there is a break in the chain of transmission with one or more persons (*rajul*) missing. Among the Imamite jurists who unquestioningly accepted *mursal* traditions as authentic are Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Khalid al-Barqi (d. 274/887) and his father. The other Imamite jurists viewed a *mursal* tradition as inadequate proof (*'adam al-hujjiya*) on its own. This group includes al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 676/1277), 'Allama Hilli (d. 726/1325),

Shahid I (d. 786/1384), and Shahid II (d. 966/1558). Shaykh Tusi followed a middle course by validating a *mursal* tradition provided that no contradiction existed between it and an authentic text with a sound chain of transmission.[6] Ayatollah Khomeini dismisses this defect in the chain of transmission by arguing that since it was cited by Shaykh Saduq, a great jurist, he should be accorded the same status as Muhammad b. Abi ʿUmayr, whose *mursal* traditions are accepted because he is from the *ashab al-ijmaʿ* and his integrity is unquestionable (*thiqa*).[7] Again this practice contravenes precedents established by earlier jurists, for although they respect and have a high estimation of Shaykh Saduq, they do not accord any special distinction to the *mursal* traditions he narrates. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini in his own works asserts that every *mujtahid* should scrutinize each tradition by engaging in personal research (*ijtihad*) and not be bound by the conclusions of previous jurists.[8]

In an attempt to substantiate the veracity of this tradition, Ayatollah Khomeini classifies narrations received from Shaykh Saduq into two categories. First are those traditions that he records by appending to them the verb *qala* (he said), as in "Amir al-Mu'minin (upon whom be peace) said so and so."[9] The second form uses the passive form of the verb *rwy* (it was said). Ayatollah Khomeini surmises that the first form is equivalent to an accepted *mursal* tradition because the active form of the verb *qala* indicates that Shaykh Saduq had personal certaintly on the reliability of the hadith. In contrast, when Shaykh Saduq employs the passive form *ruwiya*, the usage suggests that he is hesitant and unsure about validating the tradition as authentic.[10] However, this division of the hadith is more common in the Sunni hadith literature, and the meaning attached to it was probably not the intent of Shaykh Saduq. This is clearly evidenced in the beginning pages of his work *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, where he writes: "I do not intend to present all of what they have narrated; rather I intend to present that which I choose and believe in its authenticity, and believe that it is a proof between me and God."[11]

## *Chain of Transmission* (sanad)

A central argument advanced by Ayatollah Khomeini to reconcile the variation among the four texts of the hadith is that they are reported by narrators who live at a great distance from each other and, thus, could not possibly have been able to conspire in creating similar versions of the tradition.[12] This argument is crucial in explaining why the end of the hadith differs in each case. Furthermore, he argues that since the hadith is reported by several independent chains of transmission, it provides adequate proof that they are authentic despite the fact that three are *mursal*.

This tradition has been reported through eight channels. three of them are *mursal* recorded by Ibn Abi Jumhur al Ahsa'i in *ʿAwali al-La'ali al-ʿAziziya*,[13] Qutb Rawandi[14] and Shaykh Saduq in *Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih*,[15] One is recorded in *Amali* of Shaykh Saduq and another in *Ma'ani al-Akhbar*, both of which are linked to ʿIsa b. ʿAbdullah. There are three traditions recorded in *ʿUyun Akhbar al-Rida*.[16]

The two versions of this tradition narrated through the intermediary ʿIsa b. ʿAbdullah are both deficient. For instance, Muhammad b. ʿAli is a weak narrator.[17] In fact, ʿIsa b. ʿAbdullah is grouped amongst the unreliable transmiters even by Sunni jurists and labeled as a liar.[18] Some of the Shiʿi scholars concur with this assessment; however, others view

him as trustworthy and reliable because his name is mentioned in *Kamil al-Ziyarat*.[19] Another observation worth noting is that Kulayni in his *Al-Kafi* relates several traditions from ʿIsa b. ʿAbdullah but does not record the one under consideration.[20]

One chain of transmission is linked to Ahmad b. ʿAmir b. Sulayman (b. 157/773), who reportedly heard this tradition from Imam ʿAli b. Musa al-Rida (d. 202/817). Several factors cast doubt on the veracity of this transmitter. One is that he is reported to have heard this tradition from Imam Rida in 194 A.H. but it is narrated by his son, ʿAbdullah b. Ahmad, in the year 260 A.H., i.e., 66 years after he first heard the tradition.[21] The natural question is, Why was this tradition transmitted so late? The year 260 A.H. coincides with the beginning of the minor occultation (*al-ghayba al-sughra*) of the Twelfth Shiʿi Imam. Second, although ʿAbdullah b. Ahmad died in the year 324 A.H. and had in his possession a manuscript of traditions,[22] neither Kulayni nor Himyari in *Qurb al-Asnad* record any tradition from him.

The second chain through Dawud b. Sulayman is also suspect for several reasons. For one, he relates this tradition in the year 330/941, which is approximately 130 years after the death of Imam Rida. He is alleged to have recorded this tradition from a manuscript that was composed while Imam Rida was kept in hiding in Qazvin.[23] History cannot attest to an instance when Imam Rida's whereabouts were concealed because of fear. On the contrary, in *ʿUyun Akhbar al-Rida* an incident is recounted in great detail in which Imam Rida is escorted with pomp and fanfare by a government official, Raja' b. Dahhak.[24] In addition, the ʿAbassid caliph, Ma'mun, had on several occasions offered to abdicate the caliphate in favor of Imam Rida.

> I (i.e., Musa b. Salama) was in Khurasan with Muhammad b. Jaʿfar. I heard that the man with two offices (i.e., al-Fad b. Sahl, who was in charge of the military and civil administration) had gone out one day saying: "How fantastic, I have seen a wonder. Ask me what I have seen?" They asked him: "What have you seen, may God set you right?" "I have seen al-Ma'mun, the Commander of the Faithful," he answered, saying to ʿAli b. Musa: 'I will invest you with the affairs of the Muslims. I relieve myself of my responsibility and make it yours.' Then I saw Ali b. Musa saying: 'Commander of the Faithful, I have no ability or power for that.' I have never seen the caliphate more abandoned than that. The Commander of the faithful deprives himself of it and offers it to Ali b. Musa. Then Ali b. Musa rejects it and refuses it.[25]

Thus, two things become apparent from this analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's first proof to establish full-fledged authority for the jurists. One is that the chains of transmission of this tradition are weak and lack historical validity. To compensate for this flaw, Ayatollah Khomeini argues that since it is narrated by several independent chains with minor variations, it can lead one to attest to its authenticity.[26] But even this claim cannot be supported because two chains link with ʿIsa b. ʿAbdullah, one each to Ahmad b. ʿAbdullah, Ahmad b. Amir, and Dawud b. Sulayman, and three are *mursal*. It would also not be far-fetched to conjecture that the latter three obtained this tradition from the same manuscript (*nuskha*) as in *Riyad al-ʿUlama'*, where is a mention of a *nuskha* attributed to Imam Rida dated 194 A.H.[27] Ahmad Najashi also mentions that Ahmad b. Amir had in his possession a reliable manuscript (*nuskha hasana*).[28] Thus, Ayatollah Khomeini's assertion that it is possible to arrive at certainty on the basis that this tradition is reported through several independent chains of transmission is untenable.

## *Text* (matn) *of the Hadith*

Pertaining to the text of the hadith, the key term *khulafa'* has been given three possible interpretations:

1. It refers exclusively to the twelve infallible Imams who have been endowed with comprehensive knowledge and are thus capable to guide humanity.[29]
2. Reference is to all transmitters of traditions irrespective of whether they are expert jurists (*faqih*) competent in Islamic sciences and able to sift through the corpus of hadith literature or not.[30]
3. The term applies only to the expert jurists who can carefully scrutinize the traditions and sift the forged traditions from the authentic ones.[31]

Ayatollah Khomeini rejects the first two intepretations of the word *khulafa'* and adopts the third. He argues that if the term *khulafa'* were delimited to the twelve infallible Imams, then the Prophet would have employed magnificent attributes (*sifat jamila*) to refer to them as "the treasure of His knowledge, exalted be He"[32] instead of as simply transmitters of traditions. Furthermore, if only the Imams were referred to in this tradition, then for the sake of clarity it would be appropriate for the Prophet to state explicitly "'Ali and his infallible progeny"[33] in place of the term *khulafa'*. However, there are several instances in the hadith literature where the infallible Imams have been referred to as *khulafa'* and this usage is not viewed as pejorative or as lowering the noble station enjoyed by them. In *al-Kafi*, several traditions are recorded in praise of the Imams following the consecutive chapter headings:

> Concerning the fact that the Imams are the witnesses (*shuhada'*) of Allah, to Whom belongs Might and Majesty, regarding His creatures.[34]
>
> Concerning the fact that the Imams, peace be upon them, are the guides (*al-huda*).[35]
>
> Concerning the fact that the Imams, peace be upon them, are the custodians of Allah's affairs and the treasurers of His knowledge (*khazanat 'ilmih*).[36]
>
> Concerning the fact that the Imams, peace be upon them, are the vicegerents (*khulafa'*) of Allah, to Whom belong Might and Majesty on His earth and His gates through which He can be reached.[37]

Thus, it is evident that the appelation *khulafa'* is one of the meritorious titles employed to refer to the Imams. The tradition under the last mentioned chapter reads: "I heard Abu al-Hasan al-Rida (peace be upon him) say: 'The Imams are the vicegerents (*khulafa'*) of Allah, to Whom belongs Might and Majesty, on His earth.'"[38] Another tradition in which the sixth Shi'ite Imam, explicating the Qur'anic verse "God has promised unto those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will certainly appoint them successors (*la-yastakhlifanna-hum*) in the earth as He appointed successors those before them,"[39] equates the successors to the Imams.[40] The verb used for *successors* in this verse is derived from the same root *kh-l-f* as the noun *khalifa*.

Ayatollah Khomeini dismisses the second interpretation as more absurd and far-fetched than the first. He argues that the term *khulafa'* cannot encompass all the transmitters of traditions (*muhaddith*) because the tradition under consideration qualifies the role of the *khulafa'* as one of disseminating the teachings of the Prophet to the people. This task demands certain prerequisites and abilities to be able to discriminate between the

authentic traditions and the unauthentic ones, as many traditions were either forged or related by the Imams under *taqiya* (precautionary dissimulation). Thus, he advocates that the term *khulafa'* be confined to expert jurists who have attained the level of *ijtihad* and adds "it certainly does not apply to those whose task is simply the narration of tradition and who are not competent to express an independent juridical opinion or judgment."[41] The last part of the tradition—"and teach them to the people"—is central to his argument in rejecting the second interpretation of *khulafa'*.

### *Etymology*

In Lane's *Lexicon*, the word *khulafa'* has a general sense of "one who comes later, or follows, or succeeds."[42] Thus, the context of the sentence would indicate the extent of authority that the successor would possess. However, Ayatollah Khomeini construes the word *khulafa'* in this tradition to signify all the authority that was vested in the Prophet and the Imams except that which is explicitly excluded by proof: "[Authority] is possessed by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) unless there is a proof. It appears from the tradition that the ulama should possess that (authority) which is possessed by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) unless there is a proof which indicates its exclusion, then it [the proof] should be followed."[43] Thus, the jurists succeed the Prophet and enjoy all of his functions of prophethood. He denounces those who attempt to reduce the role of the jurists to dissemination of Islamic ordinances: "It is remarkable that nobody has taken the phrase: 'Ali is my successor,' or 'the Imams are my successors,' as referring to the simple task of issuing juridical opinions; instead, they derive the tasks of successorship and government from them, whereas they have hesitated to draw the same conclusion from the word 'my successors' in a tradition under consideration."[44]

According to Sayyid Murtada 'Askari, a contemporary scholar in Iran, equating the term *khilafa'* with governorship is a late development from the constant usage of this term by the believers in the context of government. A more appropriate term to refer to this function of governing would be *ulu al-amr*.[45] He argues that a similar distortion of the original meanings also applies to terms such as *ijtihad*, *qiyas*, and *istihsan*.[46] Thus, he asserts that it is erroneous to render the term *khulafa'* as "successors to the Prophet in all his capacities," because this meaning was applied by jurists and theologians when formulating the Islamic political structure.[47]

Furthermore, the tradition explicitly states in what capacity they are the successors of the prophet—that is, in disseminating Islamic ordinances to the people ("and teach them to the people"). Thus, he finds it untenable to advance a claim for absolute and comprehensive authority for the jurists based upon this tradition. In addition, if this claim were true, then the singular noun for "successor"—*khalifa*—would have been used instead of the plural, *khulafa'*, which suggests that the function of the Prophet which is transferred is one of propagating Islamic knowledge.[48]

Traditions that are attributed to the Prophet in *Kanz al-'Ummal* employ the term *khulafa'* to refer to the ulama in the restricted sense of being expositors and disseminators of Islamic knowledge: "Should I guide you to the *khulafa'* who are related to me, to my compansions and Prophets before me? They are the bearers of the Qur'an and the traditions. . . ."[49] The bearers of knowledge in this world are *khulafa'* of Prophets in the hereafter.[50]

ʿAskari divides the technical terms into two categories, *sharʿi* and *mutasharriʿ*.[51] The distinctive feature of a *sharʿi* term is that it has retained its original (*asli*) meaning that was given either by God or the Prophet, such as *salat* (ritual prayers), *wudu'* (ritual ablution), and *hajj* (pilgrimage). In contrast, the *mutasharriʿ* terms acquire meanings and connotations as a result of constant use by believers and scholars who endow them with a disparity in meanings. For instance, the term *ijtihad* is defined differently by Shiʿi and Sunni jurists; however, gradually, through incessant use of the term, it erroneously came to be considered a *sharʿi* term. Such is the case, he argues, with the meaning of the term *khalifa*, whose original meaning is apparent in works dealing with the Imamate and the guide for the community.[52] However, with the passage of time and repeated usage, the term *khalifat rasul* was equated to the *shariʿ* term *khalifat Allah* and found its way even into the work of the learned scholar Ibn Khaldun, who writes that "*khalifa* in reality is on behalf of the Prophet (*sahib al-sharʿ*) in safeguarding religion and managing the affairs of the world.[53]

In the Qur'an, the term *khalifa* is employed in the sense of being *khalifa* of God (*khalifat Allah*) and not of the Prophet. This is evident when the Qur'an refers to Adam[54] and David[55] as the *khalifa* of God. It would be absurd to regard Adam as *khalifa* of a prophet because there was none before him.[56] Further, to dispel any ambiguity, the term *khalifa* was originally employed in a construct as *Khalifat Rasul Allah* or *Khalifat abih*; however, later the second part of the construct was omitted and the term *khalifa* came to mean a "ruler who succeeds the Prophet."[57] Thus, this later accretion to the meaning of the term *khalifa* should be discarded in the effort to understand the scope and nature of the authority invested in the jurists as successors to the Prophet.

## Second Proof

The second tradition adduced by Ayatollah Khomeini in favor of all-comprehensive juristic authority in the absence of the infallible Imam is the following:

> Whenever a believer dies, the angels weep together with the ground where he engaged in the worship of God and the gates of heaven that he entered by means of his good deeds. A crack will appear in the fortress of Islam that naught can repair, for believers who are *fuqaha'* are the fortresses of Islam, like the encircling walls that protect a city.[58]

### *Chain of Transmission* (sanad)

Ayatollah Khomeini points out a serious flaw in the chain of transmission of this tradition due to ʿAli b. Abi Hamza al-Bata'ini, who is reported to have been condemned and disowned by Imam Rida because of his conversion to the Waqifi sect. He is alleged to have been the first to subscribe to this sect upon the death of Imam Musa al-Kazim.[59] He asserted that the Imam had not died but rather was in a state of temporary absence and would return soon. There are reports that Bata'ini propagated this notion because of material ambition as he possessed a substantial amount of wealth he had collected as an agent (*wakil*) of Imam Kazim.[60] This money would have had to be transferred to Imam Rida if he believed in the continuation of the Imamate. Because of these considerations, Bata'ini is well-known for being classified as a weak

transmitter (*da'if 'ala al-ma'ruf*)[61] and is thus not accepted. Ayatollah Khomeini argues that there is no contradiction between the deficiency in the chain of transmission of this tradition and use of it to substantiate the all-comprehensive authority of the jurists, for three reasons:[62]

1. Shaykh Tusi has mentioned in his book *'Uddat al-Usul* that the Imamite jurists relied upon traditions narrated by Bata'ini.
2. Ibn al-Gada'iri's characterization that Bata'ini's father was more trustworthy than he (*abuh awthaq minh*).
3. The *ashab al-ijma'*, whose tradition reports are accepted unquestioningly by Imamite jurists have narrated traditions from Bata'ini.

These three factors collectively, according to Ayatollah Khomeini, compensate for the weakness in its chain and thus make the tradition acceptable. This is known in the science tradition as *jabir li al-da'f*. However, Ghurayfi, in his *Qawa'id al-Hadith*, argues that Sheikh Tusi amends his opinion of Bata'ini in his later work *Kitab al-Ghayba*, where he says about the deputies of Imam Kazim: "Among the blameworthy ones from the group are Ali b. Abi Hamza al-Bata'ini, and . . . all of them were agents of Abu al-Hasan Musa and they possessed abundant property. When Abu al-Hasan Musa passed away, they embraced the Waqifi sect out of greed for the wealth, and rejected the Imamate of al-Rida and denied him."[63] In addition, Bata'ini is reported to have been cursed by Imam Rida and labeled as a polytheist and desirous of extinguishing the light of Allah, based on the Qur'anic verse:

> They wish to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God will not have it so, for
> He wills to perfect His light, however the unbelievers be averse.[64]

Other evidence put forth by Ghurayfi to discredit Bata'ini as a reliable transmitter is character assessment by other scholars. For instance, 'Allama Hilli writes that Bata'ini was the pillar of the Waqifi sect and extremely unreliable.[65] In addition, Majlisi regards Bata'ini as weak and Mamaqani concurs with this assessment in his *Tanqih al-Maqal*.[66] Al-Kashshi further substantiates the view that Bata'ini was unreliable by recounting an incident that took place in the time of Imam Rida. Bata'ini read a tradition from Imam Rida and omitted a sentence from it, upon which the Imam disowned him and cautioned him to fear God.[67]

It is argued that the credibility of a transmitter is not contingent on his sharing the faith of the Twelver Shi'is or possessing the quality of justice (*'adala*) in its comprehensive sense. What is required is that the transmitter not be a liar. However, collective reports against Bata'ini, such as the curse from the Imam, the warning of punishment in the hereafter, and his disassociation from the Imamites due to greed for the wealth that was entrusted to him as the agent of Imam Kazim, malign his character to the extent that his reports are considered of questionable accuracy.[68]

Despite strong defamatory statements against him, Bata'ini is still considered a reliable transmitter by Ayatollah Khomeini because of Sheikh Tusi's assertion in *'Uddat al-Usul* that the three persons from *ashab al-ijma'*—i.e., Muhammad b. Abi 'Umayr, al-Bazanti, and Safwan b. Yahya, do not relate traditions from any transmitter unless he is reliable. Since they narrate traditions from Bata'ini, he must be a trustworthy transmit-

ter.[69] The fact that these three individuals, along with other members of *ashab al-ijma'* record traditions from Bata'ini, speaks in favor of his credibility.[70]

Other points cited in Bata'ini's favor include a tradition he related, on the authority of the Prophet that the number of Imams after him will be twelve. The first one among them would be 'Ali b. Abi Talib and the last one al-Qa'im. They are his successors, testators, friends, and proofs for his community after his demise. Those who associate with them are believers, and those who reject them are unbelievers.[71] Furthermore, Imam Rida prayed for mercy upon the deceased Bata'ini, suggesting that he had not disowned him. Ghurayfi argues that this act in no way confirms the moral integrity of Bata'ini as it was customary for the Imam to pray for fogiveness for all the Shi'is.[72] Also, the Prophet petitioned God to forgive people, even the hypocrites (*munafiqun*) as the Qur'anic verse testifies: "Whether you plead forgiveness for them or not, God will not forgive them, even though you plead seventy times, for they disbelieved in God and His Apostle; and God does not guide the transgressors."[73] Pertaining to the statement by Ibn al-Gada'iri about Bata'ini that "his father [i.e., Bata'ini] is more trustworthy than he," Ghurayfi argues that it does not establish the reliability of Bata'ini because his son is unanimously viewed by the jurists as being a weak transmitter. Thus, what can be deduced from this statement is that Bata'ini's son was less reliable than his father but it does not vouch for the character of Bata'ini.[74]

## *Text* (matn) *of the Hadith*

The signficance of this tradition has been marginalized by the interpretation that the role of the jurists is to expound the ordinances of Islam and that in so doing they would preserve Islam. Since the tradition does not employ any verb of appointment like *j-'-l*, as in the case of *maqbula* of 'Umar b. Hanzala, Ayatollah Khomeini has been taken to task for extrapolating all-comprehensive juristic authority from this *hadith*. However, he dissents from this restricted interpretation and vociferously objects, "If a *faqih* sits in the corner of his dwelling and does not intervene in any of the affairs of society, neither preserving the laws of Islam and disseminating its ordinances, nor in any way participating in the affairs of the Muslims or having any care for them, can he be called 'the fortress of Islam' or the protector of Islam?"[75] To supplement this tradition, Ayatollah Khomeini narrates another one that is attributed to the Prophet: "The *fuqaha* are the trustees [*umana'*] of the prophets, as long as they do not concern themselves with the illicit desires, pleasures, and wealth of this world. The Prophet was then asked: 'O Messenger of God! How may we know if they do so concern themselves?' He replied: 'By seeing whether they follow the ruling power. If they do that, fear for your religion and shun them.'"[76] There are also other traditions, attributed to the Prophet, where the ulama are referred to as the trustees of God:

> The *'alim* is the trustee of God on earth.[77]
>
> The ulama are the trustees of God over the creatures.[78]
>
> The ulama are the trustees of my community.[79]

He argues that trusteeship is not confined to issuing juridical opinions but rather extends to establishing a just social system based on the Qur'anic prescription. Thus, all tasks that were entrusted to the Prophet would now devolve upon the jurists: "We ver-

ily sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance, that mankind may observe right measure."[80]

Ayatollah Khomeini is criticized for reading too much into this tradition. It is argued that all that this *hadith* attempts to point out is that the *fuqaha'* are custodians of prophets' knowledge. However, to claim by extension that this endows them with exclusive prerogative to govern is not plausible. In addition, the chains of transmission of this tradition are all weak. Another objection leveled against Ayatollah Khomeini's interpetation of this tradition is that the second part of it implies that ruling and government are not the exclusive right of the jurists—"[Evaluate the jurists] by seeing whether they follow the ruling power. If they do that, fear for your religion and shun them." If only jurists were competent to govern, then the admonition to shun jurists who follow the ruling establishment would not be justified. Furthermore, the last part of the tradition, "fear for your religion," also implies that the jurists' trusteeship is over strictly religious matters, and thus people are advised not to disassociate from those enslaved to the governing power because it would adversely affect on religion.

## Third Proof

The third tradition adduced by Ayatollah Khomeini in favor of al-*wilaya al-mutlaqa* is a *tawqi'* (rescript) in which the Imam Mahdi responds to a number of questions posed to him by Ishaq b. Ya'qub during the minor occultation.[81] The text of the questions that was conveyed to the Imam through his second deputy, Muhammad b. 'Uthman al-'Amri, has not survived, but the full text of the Imam's answers on various issues is preserved.[82] To one of the questions of Ishaq b. Ya'qub, in which he presumably asked the Imam with whom to seek recourse in the event of new contingencies in the future, the Imam wrote: "As for the newly occuring events (*al-hawadith al-waqi'a*), return to the transmitters (*ruwat*) of our traditions, for they are my proof (*hujja*) over you as I am God's proof."[83]

### *Chain of Transmission* (sanad)

The chain of transmission of this tradition has been subjected to criticism because Ishaq b. Ya'qub is an unknown (*majhul*) figure in works of *rijal*.[84] However, Ayatollah Khomeini accepts this tradition because he believes that one can test the veracity of a tradition by means of external factors in the event that the moral probity of the narrators of the traditions are unknown or questionable, or even if they are known to be immoral. This view is adopted by the majority of the jurists, including Sheikh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'iri (d. 1355/1937) and Sheikh Ansari. The other view, to which Ayatollah Khu'i subscribes, is that only a sound chain of transmission can produce confidence in its authenticity. What is crucial is to critically examine the individuals on whose authority the tradition is narrated. Other factors like the text of the tradition, historical proofs and the opinions of previous jurists do not justify acceptance of a tradition composed of an unsound chain of transmitters. Thus, Khu'i rejects this *tawqi'* as unreliable because the trustworthiness of Ishaq b. Ya'qub has not been established.[85]

This tradition has been recorded by Shaykh Saduq in *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'ma*, by Shaykh Tusi in *Kitab al-Ghayba* and by Abu Mansur Ahmad al-Tabarsi in *Al-*

*Ihtijaj*. All of them have derived it from a chain that links to Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni, the author of *Al-Kafi*. However, surprisingly, this tradition is not recorded in the hadith collection of the latter, and it is likely that he mentioned it instead in *Rasa'il al-A'imma*, whose subject is the Twelve Imams. This work apparently has been lost. The fact that Kulayni is the common link for this tradition strengthens its authenticity, since he lived during the period of minor occultation, during which the Shi'a were said to be perplexed by the absence of the Imam and the proliferation of factions.[86]

### *Text* (matn) *of the Hadith*

The text of this tradition is more important than the previous two traditions in establishing *wilayat al-faqih*, because the Imam commands his followers to resort to the transmitters of traditions to resolve new issues. These *ruwat* cannot be simply transmitters of traditions, argues Ayatollah Khomeini, because merely narrating the traditions would not encompass novel problems and issues confronting the Muslims. Thus, the *ruwat* are expert jurists who can issue juridical opinions after exercising *ijtihad*.[87]

Ayatollah Khomeini interprets the term *hujjati 'alaykum* (my proof upon you), which refers to the transmitters, as equivalent to bestowing the comprehensive authority of the Prophet and the Imams upon the jurists and as not limited to issuing legal judgments or transmitting traditions, which was the case even during the time of the infallible Imams.[88]

> Today, the *fuqaha'* of Islam are proofs to the people. Just as the Most Noble Messenger (upon whom be peace and blessings) was the proof of God—the conduct of all affairs being entrusted to him so that whoever disobeyed him had a proof advanced against him—so, too, the *fuquha'* are the proof of the Imam (upon whom be peace) to the people. All the affairs of the Muslims have been entrusted to them. God will advance a proof and argument against anyone who disobeys them in anything concerning government, the conduct of Muslim affairs, or the gathering and expenditure of public funds.[89]

A. A. Sachedina observes that the version of the tradition preserved by Majlisi ends with "I am proof over them [the transmitters] (*ana hujja alayhim*)" instead of "I am proof of God (*ana hujjat Allah*)." Importantly, for the authority of the jurists this implies a hierarchy in which the jurists oversee the needs of the people and the Imam caters to the needs of the jurists. Thus, Sachedina conjectures that the tradition was tampered with to give credence to the concept of *taqlid* and to arrogate for the jurists the position of deputyship of the Imam.[90]

Another key term in the tradition is "*al-hawadith al-waqi'a*" (new occurrences), to resolve which, the Imam instructs the Shi'is to seek recourse to the *ruwat*. Ayatollah Khomeini infers that what is meant by newly occurring contingencies includes the sociopolitical affairs of the community and extrapolates further that the *fuqaha'* possess *wilaya* over all affairs.[91] It is also important to note that the pronoun in *fi-ha* refers to the new contingencies, suggesting that the jurists' role encompasses social issues and is not limited to issuing decrees; otherwise, it would have been appropriate to replace the pronoun with *fi-hukm* (in legal judgments). This stand is in contrast to the interpretation of Ayatollah Khu'i, who restricts the scope of authority of the jurists to *hisba* and issuing legal judgments.[92] Nonetheless, even if "new contingencies" is interpreted in its widest sense to refer to all forms of exigency—political, social, and economic—still it does

not follow that only a jurist should head the government. The jurists' counsel in executing affairs of the state could be sought by a nonjurist. However, Ayatollah Khomeini has been insistent in demanding that only a jurist would be eligible to assume leadership because of his characteristic attributes of knowledge, justice, and piety.[93]

## Fourth Proof

The next tradition that is instrumental for Ayatollah Khomeini in establishing *al-wilaya al-mutlaqa* is the *maqbula* of ʿUmar b. Hanzala:

> I asked Imam Sadiq (upon whom be peace) whether it was permissible for two of the Shiʿis who had a disagreement concerning a debt or a legacy to seek the verdict of the ruler or judge. He replied: "Anyone who has recourse to the ruler or judge, whether his case be just or unjust, has in reality had recourse to *taghut* [i.e., the illegitimate ruling power]. Whatever he obtains as a result of their verdict, he will have obtained by forbidden means, even if he has a proven right to it, for he will have obtained it through the verdict and judgment of the *taghut*, that power which God Almighty has commanded him to disbelieve in." ("They wish to seek justice from illegitimate powers, even though they have been commanded to disbelieve therein." [4:60].)

ʿUmar b. Hanzala then asked: "What should two Shiʿis do then, under such circumstances?" Imam Sadiq answered, "They must seek out one of you who narrates our traditions, who is versed in what is permissible and what is forbidden, who is well acquainted with our laws and ordinances, and accept him as judge and arbiter, for I appoint [*jaʿaltu* ] him as judge [*hakim*) over you."[94]

### *Chain of Transmission* (sanad)

The chain of transmission of this tradition is not flawless because the character, integrity and moral probity of ʿUmar b. Hanzala has not been established in the works of *rijal*. Ayatollah Khomeini is aware of this deficiency in the chain; however, evidence that the previous Imamite jurists acted upon it and accorded it the status of *maqbula* (approved) is compelling enough for him to disregard any doubt about the chain.[95] However, some jurists have questioned the reliability of ʿUmar b. Hanzala, and as a consequence Ayatollah Khuʾi rejects this tradition because of a weak link in the chain of transmission.[96] It should be noted that this tradition is also related by Safwan b. Yahya who is from amongst the *ashab al-ijmaʿ* whose traditions are generally authenticated on the basis that they do not relate traditions unless the transmitters are reliable (*la yarwi illa ʿan al-thiqa*).[97]

### *Text* (matn) *of the Hadith*

The operative phrase in the above tradition which invests the jurists with a mandate to resolve disputes on behalf of the Imams is, "I have appointed him a *hakim* over you (*fa inni qad jaʿaltuh ʿalaykum hakim*). This is interpreted by Ayatollah Khomeini to encompass not only adjudicating disputes but also to include the necessary means and resources to enforce the verdict:

> I said earlier that for the adjudication of both civil and penal cases, one must have recourse to judges, as well as to the executive authorities or general governmental authorities. One has recourse to judges in order to establish the truth, reconcile enmities, or determine punishment; and to the executive authorities, in order to obtain compliance with the verdict given by the judge and the enactment of his verdict, whether the case is civil or penal in nature. It is for this reason that in the tradition under discussion the Imam was asked whether we may have recourse to the existing rulers and powers, together with their judicial apparatus.[98]

As further evidence, Ayatollah Khomeini emphasizes that the Imam's admonition not to seek a judgment from a *taghut* (illegitimate ruling power) but instead resort to the narrators of traditions implies that the latter are invested with the judicial and executive authority, not unlike the tyrannical government.[99] In addition, having authority to pronounce a judgment without power to enforce compliance with it would be ludicrous.[100] This all-comprehensive authority, he feels, is also expressed in the following Qur'anic verse:

> God enjoins that you render to the owners what is held in trust with you, and that when you judge among the people do so equitably. Noble are the counsels of God, and God hears and sees everthing.
>
> You who believe, obey God and the Prophet and those in authority among you; and if you are at variance over something, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day. This is good for you and the best of settlements.[101]

## Fifth Proof

Another evidence to support the investiture of the jurists as deputies of the Imam is the *mashhura* of Abu Khadija:

> I was commanded by the Imam [Sadiq] to convey the following message to our friends [i.e., the Shi'a]: "When enmity and dispute arise among you, or you disagree concerning the receipt or payment of a sum of money, be sure not to refer the matter to one of these malefactors for judgment. Designate as judge and arbiter someone among you who is acquainted with our injunctions concerning that which is permitted and prohibited, for I appoint [*ja'altu*] such a man as judge [*qadi*] over you. Let none of you take your complaint against another of you to the tyrannical ruling power."[102]

This tradition, like the *maqbula* of 'Umar b. Hanzala, is categorized as *khabar al-wahid*; i.e., it has been conveyed by just one source.[103] Again, the verb *j-'-l* (to appoint) is of primary significance in this tradition, and Ayatollah Khomeini argues that the investiture is permanent and not temporary: "According to this tradition,then, the *ulama* of Islam have been appointed by the Imam (upon whom be peace) to the positions of ruler and judge, and these positions belong to them in perpetuity. The possibility that the next Imam would have annulled this ruling and dismissed the *fuqaha* from these twin functions is extremely small."[104]

In this tradition, unlike the *maqbula* of 'Umar b. Hanzala, the noun used in the investiture sentence is *qadi* and not *hakim* (*fa inni qad ja'altuh 'alaykum qadi*). The former restricts the authority of the jurists to issuing verdicts on legal issues and is narrower in scope that *hakim*. However, Ayatollah Khomeini dissents from this interpretation and

instead feels it plausible that the scope of authority of a *qadi* be broader than that of a *hakim* based on Qur'an 33:36, where the verb *Q-D-Y* has been used in reference to a decision rendered by God and His mesenger: "And it becometh not a believing man or a believing woman, when God and His messenger have decided [*qada*] an affair (for them), that they should (after that) claim any say in their affair; and whoso is rebellious to God and His messenger, he verily goeth astray in error manifest."[105]

## Other Proofs

The other traditions cited by Ayatollah Khomeini constitute supplementary evidence to establish *al-wilaya al-mutlaqa* and are susceptible to differing interpretations. The Prophet is reported to have said:

> For whoever travels a path in search of knowledge, God opens up a path to paradise, and the angels lower their wings before him as a sign of their being well pleased [or God's being well pleased]. All that is in the heavens and on earth, even the fish in the ocean, seek forgiveness for him. The superiority of the learned man over the mere worshipper is like that of the full moon over the stars. Truly the scholars are the heirs [*waratha*] of the prophets; the prophets bequeathed not a single dinar or dirham; instead they bequeathed knowledge, and whoever acquires it has indeed acquired a generous portion of their legacy.[106]

Another version of the tradition has the following appended at the end:

> Therefore, see from whom you may acquire this knowledge, for among us, the Family of the Prophet, there are in each generation just and honest people who repel those who distort and exaggerate, those who initiate false practices, and those who offer foolish interpretations [that is, they will purify and protect religion from the influence of such biased and ignorant people and others like them].[107]

Both the above traditions appear to establish the excellence of knowledge and the great merit in seeking it. Furthermore, the legacy of the prophets which is inherited by the scholars is specified to consist of knowledge, their sayings and traditions. This would suggest that the role of the scholars is limited to disseminating the teachings of the Prophet and does not necessarily extend to governance. Ayatollah Khomeini rejects this interpretation:

> The meaning of the next expression in the tradition, "The prophets bequeathed not a single dinar or dirham," is not that they bequeathed nothing but learning and traditions. Rather it is an indication that although the prophets exercised authority and ruled over people, they were men of God, not materialistic creatures trying to accumulate worldly wealth. It also implies that the form of government exercised by the prophets was different from monarchies and other current forms of government, which have served as means for the enrichment and gratification of the rulers.[108]

Importantly, the above tradition appears in *Al-Kafi* under the section "Divine Rewards for the Scholars and the Students," which suggests that it was earlier viewed as outlining the merits of acquiring knowledge and making this task commendable and meritorious. In the same section, the following tradition is recorded on the authority of the fourth Shi'i Imam, Zayn al-'Abidin (d.95/713):

> Had the people known the real worth of the acquisition of knowledge, they would have acquired it even if they had to pay for it with a bleeding heart or if they had to dive in the deep seas. Almighty Allah revealed to Daniyal, "Most wretched among My creation is the rustic who makes light of the learned and stops following them. And the most lovable among My creation is the person who guards himself against evil seeking My maximum rewards, attaches himself to the learned, follows the path of the patient and the forbearing, and always accepts the words of the wise.[109]

Another objection leveled against employing this tradition to establish the authority of the jurists is that the word *ʿalim* (scholars) may be ascribed to the infallible Imams and not to the *fuqaha'*. Ayatollah Khomeini finds this interpretation flimsy because the virtues and characteristics of the Imams are far more sublime and exalted than the attributes mentioned in this tradition. In addition, in the second version of the tradition, the warning, "therefore, see from whom you may acquire this knowledge," indicates that the reference cannot be to the infallible Imams because they do not revert to others to acquire knowledge.[110] However, in the section preceding this one titled "Categories of People," the following tradition is recorded in *al-Kafi*, where the word *ʿalim* is used to refer to the Imams: "People are of three types: (i) The learned scholars; (ii) the learners; and (iii) the rubbish. We are the learned scholars [*al-ʿulamā*], our disciples (*Shiʿatuna*] are the learners, and the rest are just rubbish."[111]

Another piece of supplementary evidence advanced by Ayatollah Khomeini in support of *wilayat al-faqih* is a tradition from Imams Ali b. Abi Talib and Husayn b. Ali from *Tuhaf al-ʿUqul*. It castigates scholars for neglecting to address the plight of the oppressed and allowing their rights to be trampled. It calls for those who are knowledgeable concerning God (*al-ʿulamā bi Allah*) to wrest power from the wretched tyrants by engaging in *jihad* and remedy the state of affairs by enjoining good and forbidding evil. "The administration of affairs and the implementation of law ought to be undertaken by those who are knowledgeable concerning God and are trustees of God's ordinances concerning what is permitted and what is forbidden."[112] The chain of transmission of this tradition is weak, and the author of *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* casts doubt on the identity of the author of *Tuhaf al-ʿUqul*.[113] The author is supposedly Hasan b. ʿAli al-Hirrani who was a teacher of Sheikh Mufid and who lived during the fourth century A.H. In addition to the weak link in the *isnad*, it is postulated that the term *al-ʿulamā bi Allah* refers to the infallible Imams who are viewed as the genuine repositories of knowledge. This interpretation is disputed by Ayatollah Khomeini on the basis that the advice in this tradition is not restricted to any particular period; rather, it is for all times, and thus he argues that it is the scholars who have been addressed as *al-ʿulamā bi Allah*.[114]

## Conclusion

Based on the traditions discussed here, Ayatollah Khomeini asserts with certitude that all the power and authority (*al-wilaya al-mutlaqa*) that was vested in the Prophet and the infallible Imams now devolves upon the ulama. He acknowledges that some of the traditions advanced to support his thesis exhibit weak links in the chain of transmission; however, textual and historical proofs compensate for this deficiency. His extrapolation

that the jurist has a prerogative even over the fundamentals of Islam, such as ritual prayers and fasting in order to promote public welfare, is a novel concept that is not found in the works of his predecessors who wrote on *wilayat al-faqih*, people such as Muhammad Husayn Kashif al-Ghita' (d. 1374/1954), Mulla Ahmad Naraqi, and Mirza Muhammad Husayn Na'ini. Attempt has been made to demonstrate the fragility of these claims and the extent to which Ayatollah Khomeini had to stretch some of the tradition reports that he employed in order to sustain his argument. This theme of the all-embracing authority of the jurists is consistently reiterated in the works of Ayatollah Khomeini. The notion of *al-wilaya al-mutlaqa* was stretched to its farthest limit with the proclamation of Ayatollah Khomeini in January 1988, that the Islamic state has priority over secondary injunctions, such as prayers, fasting and *hajj*. Debate on this issue was curtailed by his death in June 1989 and his replacement by a junior cleric who lacks both his charisma and the credentials of a *marja' taqlid*. Thus, the Constitution of Iran was revised in 1989 to divide the two functions: leadership (*rahbar*) of an Islamic state and *marja'iya*.

*Notes*

1. Muhammad b. Ya'qub b. Ishaq al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, trans. Muhammad Rida al-Ja'fari (Tehran: WOFIS, 1978), vol. 1, pt 2, p. 36.
2. Wilferd F. Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shiism in the Absence of the Imam," in *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, ed. George Makdisi and Janine S. Thomine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), p. 167.
3. Khomeini, Rohallah al-Musawi, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981) p. 68; Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, (Najaf: Matba'at al-Adab, 1971), vol. 2, p. 467.
4. Muhammad Husayn al-Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* (Tehran: Al-Maktaba al-Islamiya, 1962), vol. 3, p. 182.
5. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 470.
6. Al-Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Mamaqani, *Miqbas al-Hidaya* (Qum: Mu'assasat al al-Bayt li Ihya al-Turath, 1990), pp. 341-44.
7. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 468.
8. Khomeini, *Al-Rasa'il* (Qum: al-'Ilmiya, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 96-99.
9. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 468.
10. Ibid.
11. Muhammad b. 'Ali Ibn Babuya al-Saduq, *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, ed. Hasan al-Khirsan (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1985), vol. 1, p. 3.
12. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 468; Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 68.
13. Muhammad Mahdi Musawi Khalkhali, *Hakimiya dar Islam* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Afaq, 1982), p. 339.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Abu al-Qasim al-Musawi al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, 3d ed. (Qum: Madinat al-'Ilm, 1983), vol. 16, pp. 298-300.
18. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Sharaf Ashab al-Hadith* (Ankara: Matba'at Jami'at Ankara, 1971), pp. 30-31.
19. Khu'i, *Mu'jam*, vol. 13, p. 198.
20. Ibid., vol. 13, pp. 193-99.
21. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 130.

22. Ibid., p. 131.
23. Radi al-Din Muhammad Qazwini, *Diyafat al-Ikhwan*, ed. Ahmad al-Husayni (Qum: Al-ʿIlmiya, 1976), p. 210.
24. Muhammad b. ʿAli Ibn Babuya al-Saduq, *ʿUyun Akhbar al-Rida* (Qum: Dar al-ʿIlm, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 136-38.
25. Mufidiat, Muhammad b. Nuʿman, *Kitab Al-Irshad*, trans. I. K. A. Howard (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981), p. 470.
26. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 68.
27. Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasaʾil*, vol. 3, p. 334.
28. Khuʾi, *Muʿjam*, vol. 2, p. 131.
29. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 469.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Muhammad b. Yaʿqub b. Ishaq al-Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, with translation and commentary in Persian by Jawad Mustafawi (Tehran: n.p., 1969), vol. 1, p. 270.
35. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 272.
36. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 273.
37. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 275.
38. Ibid.
39. Qurʾan 24:55.
40. Kulayni, *Usul Al-Kafi*, vol. 1, p. 276.
41. Khomeini, Islam and Revolution, p. 69.
42. Edward William Lane, ed., *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 vols.
43. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 469.
44. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 72.
45. Sayyid Murtada ʿAskari, *ʿAwamil-i Tahrif* (Qum: n.p., n.d.), p. 15.
46. Ibid., p. 14.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 15.
49. ʿAlaʾ al-Din ʿAli al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿUmmal*, ed. Bakri Hayyani and Safwat al-Saqa (Halab: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islamiya, 1969-77), vol. 10, p. 151; Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasaʾil*, vol. 3, p. 185.
50. Ibid., vol. 10, p. 170.
51. ʿAskari, *ʿAwamil-i Tahrif*, p. 14.
52. Ibid., pp. 14-15. Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds point out that in tradition reports and poetry, Imam ʿAli was addressed as *khalifat Allah fi ardih/biladih*. See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pess, 1986), p. 17n.57.
53. Ibid., p. 14.
54. Qurʾan 2:30.
55. Qurʾan, 38:26.
56. ʿAskari, *ʿAwamil-i Tahrif*, p. 14.
57. Ibid., p.15; See also Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 4-25.
58. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 73; Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, pp. 470-471.
59. Muhyi al-Din al-Musawi al-Ghurayfi, *Qawaʿid al-Hadith* (Qum: Maktabat al-Mufid, n.d.), pp. 79-80.
60. Ibid., p. 80.
61. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 471.

62. Ibid.
63. Ghurayfi, *Qawaʿid al-Hadith*, p. 79; Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Kitab al-Ghayba*, 2d ed. (Najaf: Maktabat al-Sadiq, 1966), p. 285.
64. Qurʾan 9:32. See also 61:8.
65. Ghurayfi, *Qawaʿid al-Hadith*, p. 84.
66. Ibid., p. 92.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., pp. 85–92.
69. Ibid., p. 93.
70. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 471.
71. Ghurayfi, *Qawaʿid al-Hadith*, p. 94.
72. Ibid., pp. 95–96.
73. Qurʾan, 9:80.
74. Ghurayfi, *Qawaʿid al-Hadith*, p. 100.
75. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 73.
76. Ibid., p. 76; Khomeini, *Kitab al Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 472.
77. Al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿUmmal*, vol. 10, p. 134.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Qurʾan 57:25.
81. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, pp. 473–74.
82. Abu Mansur Ahmad al-Tabarsi, *Al-Ihtijaj* (Najaf: Dar al-Nuʿman, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 281–84.
83. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 283.
84. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, pp. 474, 75.
85. Khuʿi, *Muʿjam*, vol. 3, pp. 75–76.
86. Khalkhali, *Hakimiya dar Islam*, p. 369.
87. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 274.
88. Ibid.
89. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 87.
90. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism* (Albany: SUNY, 1981), p. 101. However, an earlier Shiʿi jurist, Shaykh Saduq (d. 381 A.H.), cites the same version of the tradition that is recorded by Majlisi, thus dismissing the possibility that this hadith was tampered with during the Safavid period.
91. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 475.
92. Abu al-Qasim al-Musawi al-Khuʾi, *al-Raʾy al-Sadid fi al-Ijtihad wa al-Taqlid*, 2d ed. (Qum: al-ʿIlmiya, 1991), pp. 194–95.
93. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 79.
94. Ibid., p. 93; Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiʿite Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 140–41.
95. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bayʿ*, vol. 2, p. 476.
96. Khuʾi, *Muʿjam*, vol. 13, pp. 27–29.
97. Ibid., vol. 13, p. 29.
98. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 93.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid., pp.98–99.
101. Qur'an 4:58–59.
102. Khomeini, Islam and Revolution, p. 96.
103. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, p. 220.
104. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 98.

105. Qur'an 33:36.
106. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 99.
107. Ibid., p. 100.
108. Ibid., p. 106.
109. Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, trans. Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 87–88.
110. Khomeini, *Kitab al Bay'*, vol. 2, pp. 484–85.
111. Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, trans. Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Rizvi, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 84.
112. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 121; Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 486.
113. Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il*, vol. 3, p. 327.
114. Khomeini, *Kitab al-Bay'*, vol. 2, p. 487.

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# Part III

## SURVIVAL OF THE TRADITION

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# 12

# *Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marja'iya*

TALIB AZIZ

## Fadlallah's Background

Seyyid Muhammad Fadlallah was born in Najaf in 1935, the eldest son of a religious family from Lebanon. Unlike the majority of prominent ulama, such as Khu'i, Khomeini, Gulpaygani, Burujirdi, and the al-Sadrs, who trace their lineage through Imam Husayn (via Musa al-Kazim), Fadlallah traces his to Imam Hasan.

Hasan 'Ali Surur, in his 1992 book *Fadlallah wa Tahdi al-Mamnu'*, has given us an account of Fadlallah's early education. He states that Fadlallah's school began in "al-Katatib" seminary classes where he learned the Qur'an and alphabet. Fadlallah's own recollections, according to Surur, are of harsh discipline: principally the beating of the soles of students' feet for mistakes made during lessons. He later enrolled in Muntada al-Nashir, a newly formed Islamic school in Najaf that is similar to government schools in Iraq.

Najaf, though renowned as a Shi'ite religious center, has also produced many poets. Fadlallah gravitated toward this aspect of Najafi intellectual life. He read literary magazines published in Egypt such as *al-Katib* and began writing poetry as a teenager. At the age of 10, he even produced a handwritten newsletter, entitled *al-Adab*, in cooperation with his cousin, Mahdi al-Hakim, the son of the Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. At age 12, he publicly delivered a poem, commemorating the occupation of Palestine in 1947. By then, he had already enrolled in the *hawza* to begin his religious studies.

His love of poetry was not well received in the Najafi *hawza* where the ulama focus exclusively on legal studies. Even *'irfan* (mysticism) and philosophy are not subjects of study at Najaf as they are in Qom. But Fadlallah had no intention of abandoning his love of poetry and sought support from his uncle, Muhammad Said Fadlallah, and from Ayatollah Hadi al-Shirazi of Najaf, the latter a poet himself. His uncle, who apparently was very influential in Fadlallah's life, defended the writing and reading of poetry as a means of perfecting one's Arabic and, hence, of gaining greater understanding of religious sources that are written in Arabic. Fadlallah continued to write poetry, later joining the Muntada al-Nashir guild for poets in Najaf, and regularly recited his literary works at religious occasions and in seminars. A contemporary of Fadlallah, who was

closely associated with him, claims that a well-known Najafi poet used to plagiarize Fadlallah's work.[1]

People I have interviewed who are close to Fadlallah claim that he is a man of sharp contrasts, coresponding to events in his youth that shaped his personality and intellectual life. He pursued the exacting, rigid studies of *fiqh* and *usul* under both Ayatollahs Hakim and Khu'i, while continuing to write and present his poetry. And while he was a product of the seminaries of Najaf, he was also influenced by the secular ideologies that dominated the thinking of Iraqi youth in the middle part of this century.

In the West, Sayyid Fadlallah is far better known for his politics than for his poetry or his knowledge of jurisprudence He was accused of being the spiritual guide to the suicide bombers of the U.S. Marine and French forces in Lebanon, though Fadlallah himself denies any link to terrorist activites, including the issuing of *fatwas* to sanction terrorism, or heading Hizbullah.[2] Despite these denials, the CIA, according to journalist Bob Woodward, planned an operation, financed by the Saudis, to kill Fadlallah in a car bomb in 1985.[3]

We do know that Fadlallah was involved in the political activism of postrevolutionary Iraq with the formation of the Da'wa Party. He was recruited by Baqir al-Sadr to write the editorial page of the journal *Adwa'*, and afterward served as the journal's editor. His early writings could be considered as practical manuals for Islamists, emphasizing the practice of one's sociopolitical religious duties.

But it was Lebanon that gave Fadlallah scope for his ideas and energies. Settling in the eastern Beirut suburb of al-Nab'a where a small Shi'i community lived among Christians, he founded an institution called Usrat al-Ta'akhkhi, which included a women's league and a clinic. He also formed a "mini-*hawza*" for the education of junior ulama in Lebanon and gave regular seminars to high school and college-aged students, while also preaching in his father's and mother's home towns in southern Lebanon. His seminars were published in a series of pamphlets, entitled *Mafahim Islamiyah*,[4] and in his book *al-Haraka al-Islamiyyah, Humum wa Qadiyah* (The Islamic movement, obstacles and issues)[5] where he outlines his views on Islam and sociopolitical issues.

In his writings Fadlallah generally takes two sides on issues. For example, he expresses himself as both an apologist and a critic of the rising Islamic movement of the 1980s during the post-Iranian revolution period. While he appears to be revolutionary and fundamentalist in approach, he interjects views that oppose the predominant Iranian views. He found himself in particular disagreement with the Khomeini regime when he claimed that the Islamic movement is overly concerned with charismatic leaders, so that the messenger overshadows the message. He wanted the Islamic movement to surpass the appeal of the leader-hero and to focus on the message. He went so far as to give examples of cases where this phenomenon had occurred: Nasser of Egypt, Musa al-Sadr of Lebanon, and Khomeini in Iran. The following excerpt from his book, *al-Haraka al-Islamiya*, indicates the reason that he might have run afoul of the Khomeini regime:

> The idea of the "the line of the Imam" or "the line of the leader" may be acceptable if there is a clear sense of what the leader plans and the approach he intends to take to accomplish that plan, presenting a comprehensive methodological idea to the masses. In practice, however, the situation is far from that. We are facing scattered ideas, found in stump speeches or political/social meetings and interviews during special events or acci-

dental circumstances. The ideas presented in these forums result in conflicting interpretations as each group understands the ideas differently.[6]

However, Fadlallah did not gain great attention during the lifetime of Musa al-Sadr, the founder of the Shi'i Council and the Amal movement. Musa al-Sadr, a cousin and brother-in-law of Fadlallah's erudite friend Baqir al-Sadr, was the very sort of charismatic leader whom Fadlallah criticized. Fadlallah, like his martyred colleague Baqir al-Sadr, is far more cerebral in his approach than was Musa al-Sadr. However, he avoided open confrontation with Musa al-Sadr, though he was opposed to the Shi'i council, asserting that it would be a divisive force among the total Muslim (including Sunni) community. On the other hand, he did encourage the formation of Harakat Amal as a means to recruit Shi'i youth away from leftist organizations, in which they served as rank and file, and into a religiously based paramilitary and political organization. Fadlallah's ties to Da'wa probably helped draw its members to Amal, but it should also be noted that many Iranian revolutionary leaders were also involved at the top levels of the movement.

With the onset of the Lebanese civil war, Fadlallah continued to have political influence. He published his famous book, *al-Islam wa Mantiq al-Quwa* (Islam and Logic of Power), in which he urges the use of power, whether it be technological, educational, or spiritual, to achieve one's ideological goals. While he was not the mastermind of the Hizbullah Party (that role fell to Muhtashimi, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus), graduates of his seminary were among those recruited to Hizbullah. Therefore, Fadlallah had indirect influence on the party, although party policies are designed by the Iranian leadership. His influence was felt in other ways as well, since throughout the war he focused his efforts on providing social services to the victims of the civil war. He was able to do this through his representation of the *marja'*—the apolitical Khu'i.

Yet, in spite of his writings and activities, Fadlallah remained obscure. But his patience and industriousness finally paid off. Between 1974 and 1982, it could be said that Fadlallah was a jurist in search of a role. In the years since, however, he has risen to great popularity, at least in certain circles. Rather than build mosques and *husaynniyas* as most clerics in his position would have done, Fadlallah focused on social centers to care for orphans and the needy. He has also established schools, community colleges, hospitals/clinics, and libraries. Probably his most prominent institution is Jam'iyat al-Mubara'at al-Khayriya, which began with a single project funded by Ayatollah Khu'i. These projects have made Fadlallah popular with the Lebanese masses, who see him as a religious leader involved in their lives and hardships.

Still, it is actually very difficult to pinpoint the basis of his fame and/or popularity because Fadlallah means very different things to different people. As mentioned earlier, he is referred to most commonly by Western scholars and the press as the spiritual leader of Hizbullah—an Islamic militant group whose name is equated in the West with fanaticism and terror. He is also known as the jurist with ties to an assortment of political leaders who would seem unlikely friends of a Shi'i cleric: Assad of Syria, Ben-Jadeed of Algeria, and the Saudis. Among some traditional Shi'a he is known as the defender of the traditional *marja'iya*, remaining loyal to Khu'i rather than following Khomeini. Among other traditionalists, he is viewed as a radical whose religious ideas reflect compromise with the West. Though unpopular with many of the ulama in Iran because of

his refusal to give total and blind support to the regime, he was still invited to an official conference in Iran in 1985, where he delivered a speech in the *hawza* in Qom defending Khu'i.

What perhaps is most remarkable, though, is that Fadlallah, whose standing as a *mujtahid* is questioned by those in the clerical establishment of Najaf, is referred to as a contender for the *marja'iya*. Evidence for this is his publication of *al-Masa'il al-Fiqhiya*, which can be construed as type of *risala*, though not a traditional one. In it he has collected the questions from the letters written to him requesting religious advice and has published these questions with his answers. The second recently published volume bears his seal and statement that the *fatwas* are religously binding. He has recently published his *fatwas* in conjunction with the late Baqir al-Sadr's *al-Fatawa al-Wadiha*. In this book, rather than citing his opinion on each item, he simply states in the main body of the text where he differs from Baqir al-Sadr. Thus, he is stating that he is departing from the old style *risalas* of other *maraji'* and following as-Sadr's format and classifications of Islamic laws.

Even before the publication of this book, however, there were among the younger Shi'a residing in the United States a number of university-educated men and women who looked upon Fadlallah as the spokesman for a progressive form of Islam. Some of these were members of the Muslim Group, a group that had split with the Sunni-dominated Muslim Student Association. In the 1980s the Muslim Group wrote to Khomeini, Khu'i, and Fadlallah, asking each to respond to a number of questions generated by the group. The Muslim Group collected the responses to these questions and published them in a volume entitled *Masa'il Fiqhiya*.

In this article, I hope to show how Fadlallah differs from other *fuqaha* and how these differences might precipitate changes in the institution of the *marja'iya*. Through his statements, and comparisons of these with the work of other jurists, I hope to demonstrate how dramatically different Fadlallah's approach to social issues is from mainstream Shi'i thought, as put forward by the grand *marja'*. In reading these rulings, it should also be kept in mind that Fadlallah served as Khu'i's representative for twenty-five years.

## Rulings Relating to Women's Issues

Fadlallah has a great deal to say about the status of women and their rights in society. As the position of women in Islam generates much heated debate both within Muslim communities and from outside, it is not surprising that Muslim associations in the West would consider this topic of primary concern. The Muslim Group asked Khu'i for his view of the candidacy of women to parliament. They wanted to know if it is permissible for a believer to vote for a woman. Further, they asked, whether or not a woman can be a candidate for parliament, is she allowed to vote? In response, Khu'i wrote:

> Like any other laws that violate the canons of Islam that are based on the Koran and the Sunna, it is not permissible for either men or women to become involved in such parliaments. . . . [As for woman] because of her lack of rationality and her deficiency in organization and her inability to get to the level of men, by-and-large Islam does not allow her to be appointed as a judge or to give her the guardianship over her children even in

case of death of the father. So, how can it be possible for her to be allowed to guard the interests of the *umma* and whatever is related to such an overwhelming task?[7]

In contrast, Fadlallah argues for full rights in political participation: the right to vote as well as the right to be nominated for public office. He goes even farther by arguing that women can hold leadership positions in an Islamic state and he challenges the view that women are not capable to lead or that they are rationally deficient in comparison to men.

> We must derive the Islamic views about women from the glorious Qur'an. So, if we would analyze women's roles in the political and social spheres, we encounter the divine saying: "The male believers and female believers are guides to each other, enjoying rights and forbidding evil." If we discern that 'right' encompasses all spheres of human activities that God cherishes, and that 'evil' is all that God dislikes, then we conclude that men and women believers endeavor to be each others' guides, protectors, helpers, lovers, and to be to each other all that *wilaya* is meant to be.
>
> And if we analyze the Qur©anic views about women's mental capacity, do we conclude that it is possible for women's rationality to reach the level of men's? Or is she higher than he is? I have addressed in my studies about women the story of the Queen of Sheeba whom God has presented as a woman better than man. While the men around her behaved emotionally, she was rational. When the men were zealous, she was the planner and thinker. Is this compatible with the notion that women have one-quarter or one-half the brain capacity of men? Is this how the Qur©an is portraying her?[8]

In his book *Ta'ammulat Islamiyya hawla al-Mar'a* (Islamic views about women), Fadlallah writes:

> We recognize that considering a strong believing woman as a model for men and women is a clear indication that the Qur'an acknowledges that women with her abilities can be strong and able to transcend all shortcomings and weaknesses. . . . We can find in our study of history that there were women who have excelled in their societies, proving that women when allowed to live up to their potential, can surpass all elements of weakness and turn them into elements of strength so that they can achieve eminent standards.[9]

Fadlallah also challenges the authenticity of the famous saying of Imam Ali that "women are deficient in faith, in luck, and in rationality," upon which most jurists rely for their views and rulings about women.

Both among traditionalists and modern fundamentalists, women's role is seen as principally that of obedient wife and nurturing mother. Fadlallah, by contrast, sees much greater scope for women. Fadlallah argues against unlimited, unchecked dominance of men over women. A man may exercise control over his wife when he is the sole source of financial support for the family, but his authority should not interfere with her domain in other spheres of life. A woman, he claims, has the obligation to satisfy her husband's sexual needs, but she is free to practice her natural social, political, and economic duties and rights. In sermons Fadlallah has articulated that a woman should be allowed to leave her husband's house to attend religious sermons and educational gatherings. Her husband should not deny her such rights once she has fulfilled her marital duties. In one of his articles, Fadlallah made the startling statement that the traditional Muslim marriage is like a prison for women. Why, he muses, should women marry at all if they are faced with such inhumane treatment?[10]

He emphasizes in his sermons the long-held juristic view that women do not have to breastfeed their children or perform housework and that they can ask for salaries from their husbands for doing such labor. He argues that women should perform such services not out of a sense of coercion but out of love for her family. I was present during a sermon during which Fadlallah was expressing his liberal views on women. Male members of the audience asked him to refrain from stating his positions regarding women because these "would corrupt their wives" and encourage disobedience. Fadlallah only smiled in response. He argues that an uneven relationship between husband and wife contradicts the basic teachings of the Qur'an. He states that women should not be at the mercy of their husbands for their physical survival. Matrimony should stem, he argues, from the Qur'anic teachings of love, mercy, and fairness. Men's relatively higher status rests only on his financial support of his wife during pregnancy and nursing.[11]

On the issue of sexual intercourse, leading jurists, including Ayatollah Khu'i, have ruled that men are required to have one encounter every four months with their wives. Even then he is not required to have sexual intercourse. When a husband leaves his wife or wives for an undetermined period of time, women do not have the right to ask for a divorce, so long as he or his guardian is providing for her. Fadlallah disagrees with such rulings:

> Here we come to the *fatwa*s from other ulama, that a man is not obliged to have sexual intercourse with his wife except once every four months. No matter how long he travels away from her, she has no right to sexual intercourse, even if he is gone fifty years, so long as he provides her with financial means. . . . Let us take these *fatwa*s and compare them with what we have learned from the Holy Qur'an: Is this "kind, mutual companionship?" . . . But how can God order man to have such companionship with his wife, then institute laws that oppress her? Is life-long imprisonment considered mutual companionship? Can the marriage be judged to be a form of "mutual companionship" when a man marries a woman, then permanently denies her sexual fulfillment?[12]

Fadlallah legalized birth control and said that women have the right not to have children even if this runs contrary to her husband's wishes.[13] As for abortion, we see considerable divergence among jurists' viewpoints. Most have ruled that from the moment of conception, abortion is not permissible on any grounds. Khu'i's ruling differs from this majority opinion: if the pregnancy poses a danger before the fetus has acquired a soul (fourth month of pregnancy), then abortion is permitted. However, he says, after the four-month period, abortion is forbidden.

Fadlallah's response is significantly different from all others. He rules that, if a pregnancy at any time threatens the survival of the mother, her life must be saved. He argues that, if someone threatened to kill her, she would be obligated to defend herself even if it meant taking another life. He thereby compares abortion in a life-threatening situation to an act of self-defense. Furthermore, he argues that if a woman has been raped and becomes pregnant, she would face social disgrace, her life might be in danger, which gives her the right to have an abortion. Probably most noteworthy is Fadlallah's statement that "a man has no role in such decisions (relating to abortion), whether he is hurt by them or not, since pregnancy is an issue of concern and danger for the woman and not for the man."[14]

No subject has been quite as controversial as his rulings related to female masturbation, about which Khu'i and all other *fuqaha* strongly disagree. His detractors say that

he condones the practice. Those sympathetic to him say that he does not condone masturbation, but that he challenges the rationale that other jurists have used to approach this and other issues. The general view among the ulama is that women have a semenlike fluid that can be ejaculated during sexual intercourse. Since by religious law it is only permissible to ejaculate during sexual intercourse, masturbation is forbidden for both sexes. Fadlallah consulted several physicians and scientists at the American University of Beirut and concluded that women do not have such a fluid. Since the existence of this fluid was the basis on which masturbation was forbidden, and since this fluid was determined by experts to be nonexistent, Fadlallah argues that there is no basis for the decision that masturbation is forbidden.[15]

Not surprisingly, Fadlallah is very popular with women, whether or not they are educated. They see him as the only advocate of women's rights among the mujtahids and jurists. Unlike other jurists, he has long been a champion for the right of women to hold religious and political positions.

## Fadlallah's Ruling on Other Issues

Aside from his rulings on women, other opinions pronounced by Fadlallah are also controversial. He legalized games involving gambling as long as no money was exchanged. He also says that men are allowed to shave their beards. But his supporters—particularly those residing in the West—consider his most progressive ruling to be *Taharat al-Insan*, the general cleanliness of the human being. The consensus among most jurists has been that only Muslims are *tahir* (ritually pure). It was Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim who broke with this ruling by declaring that the *ahl al Kitab* (people of the Book) are *tahir*. Fadlallah takes this ruling a step farther, stating that man in general is *tahir* regardless of religious affiliation.[16]

In addition, Fadlallah has tackled certain issues and invalidated the authenticity of basic concepts that have been part of Shi'i identity. For example, he has made it admissible to depend on astronomical calculations or to use other modern techniques for the sighting of the moon. At the end of Ramadan in 1999, Fadlallah concluded that the *eid* was a day later than that announced by Iran, as well as many Shi'i (and Sunni) organizations throughout the world. He went along with the Shi'i and Sunni organizations in the West that consulted the observatory centers in the United States and Canada, which determined that the new moon of the month could not be seen in the Middle East on January 17, 1999, although some people did claim to witness the crescent on that night. On the following day, Fadlallah made a public speech questioning the authenticity of such witnesses, stating that other *maraji'* were wrong in their determination.

On a similar line, the Shi'a have historically adopted the norm that the time of sunset prayer starts at the beginning of darkness, not specifically at sunset. Fadlallah has proclaimed that sunset is the time for *maghrib* prayer. Since these ritual practices are subtle yet powerful symbols of the distinctiveness of Shi'ism, his rulings meet with considerable resistance by other ulama.

In 1992 Fadlallah declared in one of his sermons in Damascus that the firmly held Shi'i belief that Abu Bakr and 'Umar violently pushed Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, behind a door, thus causing the death of the fetus she carried, is a myth. The

content of this sermon spread throughout the Shi'i world, giving his foes an opportunity to discredit him publically. Leaflets were distributed by clandestine organizations, namely Hizbullah of Kuwait, saying that Fadlallah is not a Shi'i jurist, because his religious ideas are permeated by Sunni thought. They admonished Shi'a not to pray behind him. I have heard members of Hizbullah and supporters of Fadlallah's archrival, Shams al-Din, portraying him as influenced by Sunnism and linked to Saudi Wahhabis. The criticism has been so sharp that Fadlallah has seen fit to modify his views and to stress purely Shi'i topics such as the status of the Imams, to publicly prove his dedication to Shi'ism. His recent theological opinions have drawn sharp criticism from the religious centers in Najaf and Qum. One of his colleagues in Lebanon, Jafar al-Amili, has published a book in four volumes entitled *Ma'asat al-Zahra* (Torment of az-Zahra), directly criticizing Fadlallah's views. The publication of this book was an unprecedented act by the religious establishment to silence Fadlallah. The author seems to have had the approval of the main *maraji'* in Qom and Najaf, including Ayatollahs Tabrizi, Khorasani, and Sistani, all of whom were students of Khu'i.

## Deriving Islamic Law

Fadlallah insists that his views about the role of women are rooted in his jurisprudence on deriving Islamic law. He maintains that religious principles and juristic views must be cleansed and purified of cultural influence and popular consensus. Throughout history, he argues, Islamic principles have been molded to satisfy cultural practices or to conform to political pressure. Once divine principles and laws are derived, they can be applied to current circumstances. He argues that the jurist's duty now should be to take a second look at precedents set by previous jurists. He maintains that one must understand and respect the juristic views of one's predecessors but not to elevate them to the level of sacred scripture.[17] Jurists in the *hawzas* and Islamic academies must have the freedom to question any aspect of widely held religious views and come up with new understandings of Islamic laws or develop new methodologies in jurisprudence. He even argues that Greek philosophy has warped the interpretation of Islamic laws and limited the scope of understanding of religious principles. Jurists, he maintains, must evaluate the influence of philosophy on jurisprudence and *kalam* (theology).

## Fadlallah and the Marja'iyya

It is my opinion that Fadlallah would like to follow in the footsteps of Baqir al-Sadr in terms of redefining the *marja'iya*. His suggestions for its restructuring are modeled on, yet go beyond, what Baqir al-Sadr had invisioned. An adherent of the theory of *wilayat al faqih*, he believes that the *marja'iya* and the *wilayat al-faqih* should be differentiated.[18] The *wilaya* holds political leadership within the domain of the state. He advocates for the legitimacy of having many *wilaya* within the larger Islamic *umma*. He argues that since Shi'ism gives every mujtahid the authority to be the general deputy of the Imam, then it is permissible to have several *wilaya*.[19]

The *marja'iya*, on the other hand, is the symbolic/religious leadership of the entire Shi'a community. This institution should transcend political boundaries, just as the papacy is not restricted to Rome or Italy. In fact, Fadlallah would like a system that resembles that of the Vatican. Fadlallah's major concern appears to be the degree of active involvement by the *marja'* in modern society. Having witnessed the active role taken by Pope John Paul II in world affairs, Fadlallah believes that the *marja'* should not only have the spiritual and intellectual capacity to fulfill his job, but also the physical endurance. He should not be confined to his quarters in Najaf or Qom but should pay visits to Muslim communities throughout the world and have an influence on political regimes. Furthermore, since the *marja'iya* is a symbolic religious leadership, Fadlallah says that it must be unified, for diversity in the theoretical and religious opinion of one school of thought in one era would be confusing to the believers.

It follows, therefore, that Fadlallah does not believe that the *marja'iya* should be confined to the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[20] If such were the case, the Iranian government would restrict the *marja'* by placing its own concerns above others. Hence, he has not supported the *marja'iya* of 'Ali Khamene'i, the man put forward by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## Conclusions

As mentioned, with the publication of his *al-Masa'il al-Fiqhiya*, Fadlalallah has positioned himself as a contender for the *marja'iyyah*. The death of the most senior ayatollahs in Iraq and Iran has left open the arena for many relatively junior ulama to compete for religious leadership. There are a number of factors mitigating against Fadlallah's ascent to the level of grand *marja'* of the Shi'i world, not the least of these being his highly controversial rulings which generate much antagonism toward him from other ulama.

Yet, because the Shi'i world is undergoing such enormous transitions—the Iranian revolution that left many of its citizens alienated from their religion, the uprising in Iraq, and the civil war in Lebanon that has precipitated the flow of refugees and immigrants to the West, among other things—Fadlallah's views may well move beyond his own core of followers and affect the rulings of other jurists. Since Fadlallah has not limited his role to simply that of an isolated jurist but has been active in philanthropic, political, and educational activities, his opinions have gained prominence. Aside from building strong grass-roots support, he has also been financially independent. As the grand representative of Khu'i in Lebanon, he received *khums* throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Due to his influential role in Lebanon, Ayatollah Khomeini also granted him an *ijaza* to collect *khums* from his followers. The *ijaza* from Khomeini boosted Fadlallah's reputation within the radical Shi'i groups. While Khomeini's actions gave Fadlallah legitimacy among the radicals, he still maintained the allegiance of traditionalists because he had been an eloquent supporter of the much-revered Khu'i.[21]

In addition, Fadlallah has shown that Islamic law can support the idea of women's integration into all spheres of economic and political life. While many people in all strata of society are opposed to changes in women's roles, there are also many forces—including economic needs—that support a broadening view of women's place in society.

His followers tend to be educated and enthusiastic about both their religion and Fadlallah's ideas. They can be expected to support Fadlallah's views, particularly on women's issues. The more popular Fadlallah becomes, the more impact his ideas will have.

Most Muslims in the West feel beleaguered by anti-Islamic sentiment, regardless of their specific sect affiliation. Being a minority in a non-Islamic society necessitates some cooperation among various groups, even if this cooperation extends only to the realm of political /civil rights activities. Thus, many active Shi'a will not want to antagonize their Sunni friends and neighbors and may attempt to build bridges between the sects. Fadlallah, whose views often have a more conciliatory tone toward Sunnis and Non-Muslims than do those of other Shi'i leaders, may very well help the process of reconciliation between the majority Sunni and the Shi'a.

It is unlikely that Fadlallah will ever be recognized as the grand *marja'* of the Shi'i world. However, Fadlallah, as an active, articulate jurist living on the periphery, may have more influence on the Shi'i community than he would have if he followed the traditional path to the *marja'iya*.

*Notes*

1. Personal communication.
2. Interview with Fadlallah in *al-Mustaqbal*, July 9, 1985.
3. Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981–1987* (NewYork: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
4. Dar al-Zahra was Fadlallah's press house, which ran from 1975 to 1980.
5. Fadlallah's *al-Haraka al-Islamiya* (Beirut: Dar al-Malak, 1990).
6. Ibid., p. 361.
7. Abul Qasim Khu'i, quoted in the Moslem Group of U.S. and Canada publication, *Masa'il Fiqhiya*.
8. Fadlallah, "'Anaween fi al-'Amal al-Islami," a lecture to *hawza* students in Beirut, Nov. 26, 1995.
9. Idem, *Ta'ammula Islamiya hawla al-Mar'a*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Malak, 1994), pp. 12–13.
10. Fadlallah, "Al-Minhaj al-Istidlali," in *al-Murshid*, vol. 3 (Damascus: 1995), pp. 244–270.
11. Fadlallah asserts that his views about the role of women and other religious issues stem from his methodology in deriving Islamic law. He argues that Islamic concepts and general articles of belief must derive from the teachings of the Qur'an. The *sunna*, on the other hand, is meant to explain and show the application of those Qur'anic teachings. In other words, he suggests that the Qur'an has precedence over the sunna, a view that is new to juristic studies, which place the Qur'an and the *sunna* on an equal standing as the main sources for deriving Islamic laws and teachings.
12. Fadlallah, "Al-Minhaj," pp. 244–270.
13. From a transcript of a lecture by Fadlallah at the Social Science College of the University of Lebanon, December 12, 1994.
14. Interview with Fadlallah, published in *Al-Murshid*, September 21, 1995, p. 188.
15. M. H. Fadlallah, "Al-Manhaj al-Istidlaly," in *Al-Murshid*, vols. 3–4 (1995), p. 251.
16. Idem, *Al-Masa'il al-Fiqhiya*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Malak, 1995).
17. Al-Bahrani, Ja'far, "Nazrah fi al-Manhaj al-Fiqhi lil Seyyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," *Al-Murshid*, vols. 3–4 (1995), pp. 277–280, and M. H. Fadlallah, *Al-Manhaj*," pp. 246–51.

18. Fadlallah claims that there is no textual evidence for the legitimacy of *wilayat al-faqih*, but supports the general principle for the welfare of the *umma* and for the Islamic state.

19. Lecture to the Muslim Group Conference by M. H. Fadlallah on *wilaya al-faqih*, December 1982.

20. Fadlallah, M. H. "*Al-Marjaʿiya: al-Waqi wa'l al-muqtada*," in Arif al-Hussaini, ed. *Ara' fi al-Marjaʿiya al-Shiʿiya* (Beirut: Dar al-Rawda, 1994), pp. 111–14, 1994.

21. When asked to whom one should be *muqalllid*, Fadlallah always responded that Ayatollah Khu'i was the most knowledgeable jurist of our time. In several instances, in cases with which I am personally familiar, Fadlallah convinced people to shift from Khomeini's *marjaʿiyya* to that of Khu'i.

# 13

# *The Portrayal of an Academic Rivalry*

## Najaf and Qum in the Writings and Speeches of Khomeini, 1964–78

DEVIN J. STEWART

The relational hierarchy of Twelver Shi'ite jurists and the top position of *marja' taqlid* are intimately related to the institution of the *hawza 'ilmiya* (center of Shi'ite Islamic legal study) and the relative prestige and influence of the top legal authorities in the various centers of the Shi'ite world depend heavily on the relative standing of the centers of learning themselves. This century has witnessed the establishment of Qom as a prominent international center of Shi'ite learning and the development of an intense rivalry between the center there and that of Najaf, evident in various ways, such as the international competition to draw Shi'ite students from regions like Lebanon. While the relative standing of Najaf and Qom has been influenced by many political and economic factors, this chapter focuses instead on how ideology has shaped the relationship between the two centers. It examines references to Najaf and Qom in Khomeini's writings and speeches in order to trace the changes in his view of the two centers in the period leading up to the Iranian revolution. This analysis defines Khomeini's Qom policy, a major component of his revolutionary ideology important to the rise of Qom to international prominence before and after the revolution.

Despite the view of most scholars on the modern Shi'ite office of *marja' taqlid*, a relational hierarchy of jurists headed by a recognized top jurist is neither exclusively Shi'ite nor exclusively modern. Though perhaps defined less precisely and less formally than the modern office of *marja' taqlid*, the position of *ra'is al-madhhab* or *shaykh al-madhhab*, the top jurist within one of the legal *madhhabs*, was recognized throughout the medieval period.[1] In fact, it may be argued that this position has been fundamental to the legal *madhhab* as an institution ever since the consolidation of the Sunni legal *madhhabs* in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, when there emerged recognized top jurists, authoritative professors of law who transmitted legal knowledge to a large number of students within an organized framework.[2] In Twelver Shi'ism, a position of top legal authority existed as early as the Buwayhid period, when the Twelver Shi'ite legal *madhhab* was formed under the leadership of al-Shaykh al-Mufid (336–413/948–1022), al-Sharif al-Murtada (355–436/966–1044), and al-Shaykh Abu Ja'far al-Tusi (385–460/995–1067). These jurists served in succession as the leading law professors and legal authorities of the Twelvers, teaching students and producing qualified legal schol-

ars in a regular manner.[3] While Islamic biographical sources tend to stress the influence of teachers rather than institutions, the legal *madhhab* and the centers of study within a particular city or region, whether *madrasas*, *masjid-khan* complexes, or other combinations of educational institutions, gave legal education a more rigid, formal structure than other fields such as philosophy or mathematics. One may not examine Islamic juridical hierarchies, Sunni or Shi'ite, without reference to these institutions of legal education, whether the wide array of *madrasas* in Mamluk Cairo or Ottoman Istanbul, or the personal *madrasas* of the Twelver Shi'ite jurists such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid in Baghdad or al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 726/1325) in Hilla.

In modern Twelver sources, the center of learning has come to be termed *hawza 'ilmiyya*, roughly translatable as "academic center."[4] It is perhaps this institution, more than the office of *ra'is al-madhhab* or *marja' taqlid* itself, which gives structure to the Twelver Shi'ite legal *madhhab* diachronically and which has allowed a remarkable degree of continuity in Shi'ite legal education from the eleventh century until the present. It is also the center of learning which provides for communication between Shi'ite communities across political and geographical boundaries both within the Muslim world and outside it. The modern office of *marja' taqlid* does not and cannot exist outside this institution. A *marja' taqlid* is only recognized as such after rising through the quite complex legal academic hierarchy which the center of learning defines. A jurist cannot rise through these ranks and cannot, traditionally, attain the rank of *marja' taqlid* outside the major centers of learning.

Qom in Iran and Najaf in Iraq are now the two most important centers of Twelver Shi'ite legal study in the world. In the course of this century, there has developed between them an academic rivalry much like those between Cambridge and Oxford, Harvard and Yale. Both towns can point to a long local history of Shi'ism, and both harbor important Shi'ite shrines, popular pilgrimage sites that lend them an aura of sanctity. Like other rival institutions, the educational establishments at Qom and Najaf support dubious claims to antiquity. Qom was an important Shi'ite center in the early Islamic centuries, producing numerous scholars of *hadith* and theology between the eighth and tenth centuries. It lost this status in the eleventh century and was little more than a quiet backwater until the Safavid period, when it experienced a small renaissance as a center of learning. The Faydiya *madrasa* was built and a number of scholars studied and taught there, including the famous seventeenth-century philosopher Mulla Sadra . It was only in 1922, though, that the modern *hawza 'ilmiya* was re-established—as a continuously functioning institution, it can only be said to be about 70 years old, rather than over 1,000.

Similarly, it is claimed that the center of learning at Najaf was founded in 447/1055 when the Seljuks captured Baghdad and al-Shaykh Abu Ja'far al-Tusi fled to Najaf. In the strict sense, this claim cannot be supported either. It is true that Najaf became a major center of Shi'ite legal study when al-Tusi settled there, but this status did not hold continuously from that time until the present. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the center of legal study shifted to Hilla, also in southern Iraq, which produced the major jurists al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 676/1277) and al-'Allama al-Hilli. Najaf lost its former importance but became the main center again in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and the accomplished jurists 'Ali b. Hilal al-Jaza'iri (d. after 909/1504) and 'Ali b. 'Abd al-'Ali al-Karaki (d. 940/1534) spent substantial portions

of their teaching careers there. With the establishment of the Safavid state, Twelver legal study flourished in the empire's capitals, first in Tabriz (1501–55), then more markedly in Qazvin (1555–97), then Isfahan (1597–1722). Isfahan in particular surpassed Najaf in terms of the numbers of qualified jurists produced. Najaf nevertheless continued to function as a center of legal study during this period, and the well-known jurist Ahmad al-Ardabili (d. 993/1585) taught there. The well-known ʿAmili jurists Hasan b. Zayn al-Din al-ʿAmili (d. 1011/1602) and Muhammad b. ʿAli b. al-Husayn b. Abi 'l-Hasan al-Musawi (d. 1009/1600) both studied in Najaf under al-Ardabili in the late sixteenth century.[5] With the fall of the Safavid empire in 1722, Najaf regained prominence as the premier center of Twelver legal studies, and from that time until the twentieth century, its status was never seriously challenged.

The *hawza ʿilmiya* of Qom has grown from its humble beginnings in 1922 to rival and surpass that of Najaf. A group of local Qommi scholars began reconstructing the abandoned *madrasa*s of Qom in 1916.[6] It is ʿAbd al-Karim b. Muhammad Jaʿfar Haʾiri (1859–1937), however, whose arrival at Qom in 1922 marks the founding of the modern *hawza* there.[7] Born in 1859–60 in Mahrajird, a village in Yazd in southern Iran,[8] he first studied in nearby Ardekan, then went to Yazd to study at the Khan *madrasa*. He went to Najaf to study under Mirza Hasan al-Shirazi, then the top jurist of the *hawza*. Haʾiri stayed in Iraq, studying and teaching, until 1913–14, when he formed a circle of students in Arak. He visited Qom for Naw Ruz, March 21, 1922, ostensibly to visit the shrine of Fatima, the daughter of the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim. With some difficulty, the Qommis succeeded in persuading him to stay and establish a center there.[9] Haʾiri directed the *hawza* at Qom from 1922 until his death in February 1937. Under him the Faydiya *madrasa* was restored, a hospital was built, and a new library was established at the Faydiya *madrasa*. He arranged accommodations for large numbers of students and actively recruited students and professors. His influence on subsequent generations of Iranian jurists was enormous; Razi lists ninety of his students, including the four *marjaʿ taqlid*s who gained prominence in Qom after 1962. Haʾiri succeeded in making Qom the unquestioned leader in religious legal studies within Iran, outstripping Mashhad.

After Haʾiri's death in 1937, direction of the *hawza* was taken over by three of his protégés, Ayatollahs Hujjat Kuh-Kamari, al-Sadr, and Khwansari. Ayatollah Hujjat was born in 1892–93 in Kuh-Kamar, a village near Tabriz. He studied in Tabriz as a youth and in 1912 went to Najaf, where he studied for nineteen years. His most important teachers there were al-ʿAllama al-Yazdi, Diyaʾ al-Din al-ʿAraqi, and Mirza Husayn Naʾini. He came to Qom in 1930–31, nine years after Haʾiri's arrival.[10] Ayatollah Khwansari was born in Khwansar in 1887–88. He went to Najaf at the age of 17 in 1904–5 and studied there for eleven years. In 1914–15 he fled to India from the British, who were occupying Iraq at the time, and returned to Iran in 1919. Shortly thereafter, he joined Haʾiri's disciples in Arak and followed Haʾiri to Qom.[11] Ayatollah Sadr al-Din al-Sadr, the father of Musa al-Sadr, was born in 1882 at the Shiʿite shrine of al-Kazimayn in Baghdad. Sadr al-Din studied with his father Ismaʿil al-Sadr in al-Kazimayn, then from 1910 until 1918–19 in Najaf with al-Khurasani and al-ʿAllama al-Yazdi. He then left Najaf and taught in Mashhad for twelve years. In 1930–31, in answer to an invitation by Haʾiri, he came and settled in Qom. These scholars controlled the *hawza* in Qom until 1944, when Ayatollah Burujirdi assumed its leadership.

Burujirdi was born in 1875 in the town of Burujird in central Iran. He studied at the local *madrasa* until 1892–93, then in Isfahan for the next eight years. In 1900–1901, at the age of 26, he traveled to Najaf and completed the *kharij* level under two leading jurists, al-Khurasani and al-ʿAllama al-Yazdi. He returned to his native Burujird in 1910 and set up a *madrasa*. In December 1944, Burujirdi succumbed to the insistence of Qommi scholars and came to Qom to assume leadership of the *hawza* until his death in March, 1961. He did a great deal to attract scholars to Qom and to spread Qom's reputation. He built mosques, *madrasa*s, hospitals, and libraries in Qom and elsewhere, including the Grand Mosque of Qom. He kept up good relations with the shah and received endowments and assistance from the government. His achievements enabled Qom to support a much larger population of students and teachers.[12] Qom became solidly established as the most prominent center of religious studies in Iran and developed an international reputation.

In 1961 three scholars, Shariʿat-madari, Marʿashi-Najafi, and Gulpaygani jointly assumed administrative responsibilities for the *hawza* and were recognized as *marajiʿ taqlid*. Kazim Shariʿat-madari was born in 1904–5 in Tabriz. After studying as a youth in his native town, he traveled to Qom in 1924–25, about three years after Haʾiri's arrival. In 1934 he traveled to Najaf to study for a short period of time. He returned to Tabriz to teach ca. 1935–36, and in 1949–50 was invited to Qom by Burujirdi. He got along with Burujirdi extremely well, and the older jurist did much to further his career. Although the youngest of the successors to Burujirdi, Shariʿat-madari was recognized as the highest in rank.[13] He died in 1986. Muhammad Rida Gulpaygani was born in Gulpaygan in 1899. After studying in his native region, he joined Haʾiri's circle of students in Arak in 1917–18 and completed the *sathi* level of study there the next year. He taught the *sathi* level under Haʾiri for several years, then, in 1922, followed Haʾiri to Qom.[14] He remained in Qom until his death in 1993. Shihab al-Din Marʿashi-Najafi was born in Najaf in 1900. He studied first in Najaf but came to Qum in 1924–25 and completed the *kharij* level of study under Haʾiri.[15] He died in 1990.

Ruhollah Khomeini belonged to the same generation of scholars, but his career had been stymied to a certain extent by his relationship with Burujirdi. Khomeini was born in 1902 in the village of Khomein in southwestern Iran. He at first studied with his older brother in Khomein, then traveled to Arak to study with Haʾiri's circle. He was among the circle of students who came to Qom when Haʾiri first relocated there in 1922. In 1927 he finished the *sathi* level of study, and in 1936 Haʾiri recognized him as a qualified jurist, a *mujtahid*. He remained in Qom, teaching a variety of topics. When Burujirdi became the head of the center at Qom, Khomeini experienced some difficulties because Burujirdi disapproved of his political activism and wanted him to avoid open criticism of the government. In 1949, under pressure from the minister of education, Burujirdi removed Khomeini from his teaching post at the Faydiyya *madrasa*. When Burujirdi died in 1961, Khomeini was not recognized as one of the top legal authorities at the center, but he took the opportunity to resume political activities, staging a number of protests against the shah's policies which resulted in his arrest. Khomeini was generally recognized as a fourth *marjaʿ taqlid* in May 1963, when Shariʿat-madari wrote a letter of protest to the shah in which he referred to Khomeini by the title Ayatollah, and other top scholars followed suit.[16] Khomeini was released from prison but was arrested again in 1964 and exiled to Turkey. The following year, 1965, he was allowed

to go to Najaf in Iraq, where he taught in exile for the next thirteen years, until the outbreak of the Iranian revolution in 1978.

## Rivalry between Najaf and Qom

From the very beginning, the establishment of the *hawza* at Qom implied a certain rivalry with Najaf. The spiritual standing of Qom, and particularly in comparison with Najaf, is supported by popular interpretations of several sacred texts, *hadith* reports attributed to the Imams, extolling the virtues of the city.[17] Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bafqi, a Qommi preacher, supposedly convinced Ha'iri to found the center of learning at Qom:

> Bafqi asked, "Have you seen those *hadith* reports from the Imams which are about the end of time: that Qom will be a center of knowledge and learning and from it, learning will spread to the rest of the lands, and that at that time, like a snake, learning will go down into the ground in Najaf and come up in Qom?"
>
> "Yes," answered Ha'iri.
>
> "Do you accept these *hadith* reports or do you find any fault with them?"
>
> "I accept them," he said.
>
> Bafqi asked, "Do you not want this foundation to be by your hand, so that this coin may be forever struck in your name and be added to the number of virtuous deeds you have done?"
>
> "How so?" he asked.
>
> Bafqi said, "Resolve to stay here, and send a message to Arak telling whoever wants to, to come to Qom."[18]

Even before 1922 there was a common conviction among Qommis that Qom was destined to replace Najaf as the chief *hawza* of the Shi'ite world. Shaykh Bafqi expressed this idea, referring to several hadith reports, when he tried to convince Ha'iri to stay and teach in Qom. One of these hadiths reads as follows:

> It has been related through trusted chains of authority from al-Sadiq, peace be upon him, that he mentioned al-Kufa and said, "Al-Kufa will be emptied of believers, and learning will disappear from it like a snake descending into its burrow. Learning will come forth in a town called Qom, which will become a source of learning and virtue."[19]

The modern interpretation of this hadith equates al-Kufa with the center of legal study in Najaf. This sacred text is cited often as proof of Qom's inevitable prominence as a seat of Shi'ite religious authority.

There were always undercurrents of tension between Arab and Iranian Shi'ite jurists, recalling the Shu'ubiyya of the early Islamic centuries. Arab jurists often accuse Iranians of having limited knowledge of Arabic grammar and poor comprehension of difficult Arabic texts. Iranian jurists often share, to some extent, the common Iranian cultural prejudice against Arabs, whose lack of sophistication is ridiculed in popular Persian epithets such as "lizard-eaters," "camel-milk-drinkers," and so on. Furthermore, since Iran harbored one of the largest Shi'ite populations in the world and was the only officially Shi'ite state, Iranian jurists felt entitled to play a leading role in the international system of Shi'ite Islamic legal education. It seemed preferable that the leading

center of Shi'ite religious studies be subject to the rule of a Shi'ite shah than Sunni regimes or foreign mandates.

A number of factors indicate the enormous relative prestige Najaf enjoyed long after the founding of the *hawza 'ilmiyya* at Qom. From the arrival of Ha'iri in 1922 until 1961, all the top scholars in charge of the *hawza* had completed their studies in Najaf. Ha'iri's tremendous prestige resulted from his studies in Najaf under Mirza Hasan al-Shirazi and subsequent teaching in Najaf. In organizing the center of learning at Qom, he used the Najafi curriculum. The three scholars who controlled the *hawza* after Ha'iri's death had all studied under the leading jurists of Najaf—Ayatollah Hujjat for nineteen years, Khwansari for eleven years, and al-Sadr for nine years. It was typical for ambitious Iranian scholars to travel to Najaf to complete their legal studies, since there was no comparable center of learning in Iran at the time. The invitation of Burujirdi to assume control over the *hawza* in 1944 attests to the continued prestige of a Najaf education.

Under Burujirdi, the center of learning at Qom became far more important than the one at Najaf. Burujirdi was widely recognized as a *marja' taqlid* outside Iran, and many Iranian writers claim he was *marja' taqlid* for the entire Shi'ite world.[20] His death in 1961 was a temporary setback for Qom, but Muhammad Sharif Razi, writing in 1973, states that Shari'at-madari was a *marja' taqlid* for believers not only in Iran, but also in Pakistan, India, Kuwait, the Persian Gulf, and Lebanon.[21] Events since 1978 have ensured Qom's rise to dominance over Najaf. A combination of factors, including the Iranian revolution, the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the support of the Iranian government both before and after the revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Gulf war and its aftermath, have allowed the center at Qom to flourish while the numbers of scholars and students in Najaf have dwindled. Access to Najaf for aspiring students from outlying regions such as Lebanon and India has become increasingly difficult, and it seems unlikely that this trend will be reversed in the near future. Qom has indeed become the most important center of Twelver Shi'ite legal study in the world.

## Najaf and Qom in Khomeini's Writings and Speeches

The generation of scholars who gained control of Qom after the death of Burujirdi, including Shari'at-madari, Gulpaygani, Mar'ashi-Najafi, and Khomeini, were the first not to have had strong ties with Najaf. Though Shari'at-madari and Mar'ashi-Najafi had both studied in Najaf, their training was completed under Ha'iri and they were therefore more Qommis than Najafis. This generation of jurists, who have passed away in the course of the last decade, witnessed the establishment of Qom as the primary world center of Twelver Shi'ite legal education. Khomeini's writings and speeches between the years 1964 and 1978 provide an interesting commentary on the relationship between Najaf and Qom, specifically a major change in attitude toward the two centers. Khomeini's earlier writings grant Najaf decided precedence over Qom. Later he criticizes Najaf's scholars for their inactivity and lack of involvement with the pressing political issues of the day. He repeatedly urges Shi'ite scholars in general, and especially the scholars of Najaf, to adopt political engagement as a moral duty, carrying on the tradition of protest in which many earlier prominent Shi'ite jurists, including many

Najafis, took part. Finally, he entirely forsakes Najaf, convinced that it will lose its prominence as a center of learning and that Qom will replace it as the intellectual and religious capital of the Shi'ite world.

In Khomeini's earlier writings, Najaf is always given precedence over Qom in contexts referring to religious scholars or centers of learning. On October 27, 1964, he delivered a speech in front of his house in Qom criticizing the Iranian government for granting legal immunity to United States citizens living in Iran. This speech, which brought about his arrest and exile, includes the following passages:

> Scholars, students! Centers of religious learning! Najaf, Qom, Mashhad, Tehran, Shiraz! I warn you of danger.[22]

> Leaders of Islam, come to the aid of Islam!
> 'Ulama of Najaf, come to the aid of Islam!
> 'Ulama of Qom, come to the aid of Islam! Islam is destroyed![23]

Whether Shi'ite jurists or the centers of learning as a whole are mentioned, Najaf appears first, before Qom. This order is intentional and implies that Najaf enjoys a higher rank and more influence than Qom. This being the case, the scholars of Najaf have a moral duty to lead the way, setting an example for Shi'ites elsewhere by speaking out on pressing political issues.

Between January 21 and February 8, 1970, Khomeini gave a series of lectures in Najaf which were recorded and published as his major work *Wilayat al-faqih*. He emphasized that Najaf's status as the leading center of learning in the Shi'ite world entails a moral obligation to adopt an active leadership role with regard to social and political problems which face the believers. He stressed the obligation of Najafi jurists to provide guidance for Iranian university students in Iran and in Europe: "The students are looking to Najaf, appealing for help."[24] Here, too, he set Najaf before Qom: "Ideas like these are the result of several centuries of malicious propaganda on the part of the imperialists, penetrating deep into the very heart of Najaf, Qom, Mashhad, and other religious centers."[25] Retaining this order of presentation of the centers, he urged the jurists to forsake a tradition of political quietism which he argued is not authentic to Islam: "In the centers at Najaf, Qom, Mashhad, and elsewhere, there are individuals who have this pseudo-saintly mentality."[26] Najaf appears consistently before Qom: "Present Islam to the people in its true form, so that our youth do not picture the akhunds as sitting in some corner in Najaf or Qum, studying the questions of menstruation and parturition instead of concerning themselves with politics, and draw the conclusion that religion must be separate from politics."[27]

These passages reveal a consistent and rigid ordering of Shi'ite institutions of learning, and, by association, of scholars or students of Shi'ite Islamic law in general. Najaf appears first, followed by Qom, then Mashhad, then other centers such as Tehran and Shiraz—an order that clearly corresponds to Khomeini's view of the relative rank of the *hawzas*. Furthermore, this perceived ranking was unaffected by Khomeini's change of residence. The lectures given during his exile in Najaf in 1970 preserved the order of his speech in Qom in 1964. In keeping with the traditional view, Khomeini portrayed Najaf as the foremost center of Shi'ite learning. Gradually this opinion would change.

Until 1970, Khomeini probably entertained some hope of attaining the position of leading authority in Najaf, now that he could no longer return to Qom. In June of that

year, the *marjaʿ taqlid* Muhsin al-Hakim died. Forty-eight scholars from Qom sent Khomeini a message of condolence, supporting him as the new *marjaʿ taqlid* in Najaf.[28] That such a large contingent of scholars could think this possible indicates that Khomeini was a serious candidate for the post. As it turned out, Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i, a scholar who, though Iranian, had spent his entire career in Najaf, was chosen over Khomeini. This must have been a severe blow for Khomeini. He had struggled to establish a reputation in Najaf and had just delivered his *wilayat al-faqih* lectures earlier that year, perhaps in anticipation of the possibility of becoming the leader of the *hawza*. After al-Khu'i became *marjaʿ taqlid*, Khomeini knew that his future career in Najaf was limited.

Khomeini's failure to convince the leadership of Najaf to espouse the political causes he saw as important, primarily those having to do with the Iranian government and its relations with the West, became another source of his disillusionment with Najaf. He repeatedly urged Najafi scholars to protest against the shah's dictatorial ways and his concessions to foreign powers. Some Iraqi scholars, such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980), agreed with Khomeini and supported him. Khomeini also gathered a considerable following of students. Yet the most senior scholars, including Muhsin al-Hakim and Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i, seemed to ignore him. Their disapproval of the direct involvement of Shi'ite jurists in political affairs limited Khomeini's ability to lead at the *hawza*. At the same time, their attitude went against Khomeini's principles of morality. According to him, politically quietist jurists were hypocrites, for they did not act upon the precepts that they studied. For this reason above all he forsook Najaf.

After 1970, Khomeini increasingly criticized the scholars of Najaf for indifference to political affairs, which was a major factor in his growing disillusionment with Najaf and confidence in Qom as the center of political action and resistance to the shah. He repeatedly urged the scholars of Najaf to take action, assuming scolding, even pleading tones. In a June 1971 speech, he urged resistance to the shah's economic dealings with Israel: "Why is Najaf asleep? Are we not responsible? Are our obligations restricted to mere study? Is it not our duty to oppose the sending of our oil to the nation which is in a state of war with Islam and the Muslims?"[29] On October 31, 1971, in a declaration condemning the Shah's planned celebration of 2,500 years of monarchy in Iran, Khomeini called for action from the scholars of Najaf in a desperate and imploring manner.

He began with a traditional stance—that the jurists have a duty to advise the government, criticizing faulty policies, drawing attention to abuses, and suggesting alternative courses of action. His tone, however, suggests that his attempts to urge his fellow scholars to use these methods have met with little success: "I demand of the learned scholars and authorities of Najaf that they give some advice to the Iranian government—I do not even say they must protest."[30] Khomeini voices his disappointment with the scholars of Najaf quite clearly: "If one hundred telegrams were sent to Iran by the religious scholars and students of Najaf, in a polite form and even using the title "Highness," it would probably have some effect. But unfortunately, such an idea occurs to no one, and I should be grateful that no one complains to me about my criticisms of the Iranian government."[31] He relies here, as in many other passages, on images of sleep and wakefulness to describe the degree of political and moral engagement he saw in his colleagues: "This crime just happened recently, but here in Najaf no one is aware of it! Why is Najaf so sound asleep? Why is it not trying to help the wretched and oppressed people

of Iran?"[32] He urges Najafi scholars to take some action of protest: "Come to your senses, awaken Najaf! Let the voice of the oppressed people of Iran be heard throughout the world. Protest to the government of Iran by letter and by telegraph. It costs nothing to write a letter; for God's sake, write to the Iranian government."[33]

Najaf should play a key role in the political struggle between the oppressed people of Iran and the tyrannical government of the shah. Najaf is responsible for the Iranian populace and expected to take action against the Iranian government on their behalf. Not to do so is an appalling breach of trust. Khomeini was outraged at the Najafi jurists' lack of action and concern and was disappointed at a very personal level at not being able to win over the bulk of Najafi jurists to his cause. His overriding goal and criterion for authority and true piety was political action. Najaf still held, in his opinion, a position of prominence in the international system of Shi'ite Islamic education and represented the highest religious authority in the Shi'ite world, but the scholars of Najaf were not living up to the demands of their privileged position.

On December 1, 1977, in Najaf, Khomeini gave a speech containing a long section on the political activism of past religious scholars.[34] The speech mentions the political struggles of Iraqi scholars, then those of Iranian scholars. It emphasizes that scholars of Najaf in the past stood up to governments and led resistance movements, in obvious contrast to the present situation. Khomeini intimates that the Shi'ite jurists owe much of their prestige and moral standing to their political involvement. He describes the Tobacco Protest of 1891–92 and stresses that its success was achieved through concerted effort in Iran, but only after Mirza Hasan al-Shirazi, then the leading jurist in Najaf, had issued his *fatwa* forbidding tobacco.[35] Concerning the constitutional movement of 1905–6, Khomeini states: "The constitutional movement, directed against dictatorship, began from Noble Najaf through the initiative of the scholars, because of the vitality of their free thought. Then the scholars of Iran revolted against the autocratic rulers, and they kept up their rebellion until they had annihilated the dictatorial rule, in accordance with which the Shah used to kill whomever he pleased and do whatever he pleased."[36] Here too, the jurists of Najaf played an important leadership role, even though they were not directly involved in the conflict in Iran. Khomeini continues by praising the resistance of Iraqi scholars to British occupation: "If it were not for the struggles of the religious scholars and their patriotic stands, we would today be a part of Britain's colonies."[37] After praising the past political achievements of scholars from Najaf, Khomeini criticizes the modern Najafis, who have failed to keep up this tradition of protest: "I censure the religious scholars because they are ignoring many important political matters."[38] This is in sharp contrast to the scholars of Iran, of whom he reports: "Today, the religious scholars are making great sacrifices. Some of them are still in torture-chambers and prison cells, and among them are many great *mujtahids*."[39] The section on Iranian scholars stresses their ongoing, active opposition to the government.

In Khomeini's view, political action, resistance to the shah's policies, and courageous and defiant opposition to oppression came from within Iran. This became the crucial element in Khomeini's characterization of the center of learning at Qom. "Activity" and "vitality" would come from within Iran, and especially from Qom. In October 1971 Khomeini expressed his hopes for active opposition within Iran to the shah's immense celebration of Iran's ancient imperial heritage: "If the ulama of Qom, Mashhad, Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz and the other cities in Iran were to protest collectively today against this

scandalous festival, to condemn these extravagances that are destroying the people and the nations, be assured that results would be forthcoming. There are more than 150,000 students and scholars of the religious sciences in Iran."[40] The great number of religious scholars in Iran suggests not only their potential power against the Iranian government but also the importance of Iran itself as a center of Shi'ite religious and intellectual life in comparison with other regions in the Shi'ite world. The idea that Qom should be the center of resistance to the shah was a major component of Khomeini's revolutionary ideology, which took shape during his years in Najaf.

Khomeini's speech on February 19, 1978, revealed his fully formed ideology with respect to Qom. On January 8, 1978, a group of demonstrators in Qom protested against the government following the publication of defamatory articles about Khomeini in the Iranian press. After forty days, the traditional Muslim period of mourning, Khomeini delivered this speech at the mosque of al-Shaykh al-Ansari in Najaf. It included the following points, the essential components of his Qom ideology: (1) Qom, as the leading center of religious teaching in Iran, was the center of resistance to the shah. (2) Qom was superior to Najaf for one important reason: the religious scholars in Qom were actively involved in political and societal issues, while the scholars of Najaf were inactive obscurantists, ignoring the Islamic duty to enjoin good and forbid evil whenever possible (*al-amr bi 'l-ma'ruf wa 'n-nahy 'an il-munkar*). (3) Qom was the origin of an international movement destined to affect Shi'ite areas outside Iran, including Najaf, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, and the entire Muslim, let alone the Twelver Shi'ite world. (4) Qom would be the seat of supreme Islamic religious authority for centuries to come.

Khomeini censures the scholars of Najaf for their lack of attention to political issues and extols Qommi scholars' active opposition to the government. He emphasizes Qom's central role in the opposition to the Shah: "We are anxious for the major cities in Iran, like Mashhad, . . . Tabriz, . . . and Qom, the center of all our struggles."[41] Qom is the center of resistance. The students there are actively engaged in opposing the Shah, exposing themselves to danger and death for the greater moral, political cause: "The center for religious learning in Qom has proven its vitality; the people of Qom and the respected students of the religious sciences have fought the government and the agents of the Shah with their bare hands, with courage rarely equaled in history, and yielded their martyrs."[42] The vitality of Qom is not limited to the students but includes the leading jurists, who play an active role in criticizing the government: "The great *maraji'* of Islam in Qom have expressed themselves courageously both in their speeches and in their declarations . . . and they have stated who is responsible for the crime—not explicitly, it is true, but by implication, which is more effective."[43] For Khomeini, Qom is the stronghold of resistance to the Iranian government and the center of political activism in Iran.

Political commitment and concerted political activity make Qom superior to Najaf. Khomeini praises the scholars of Qom repeatedly and expresses the wish that scholars of Najaf emulate their Qommi colleagues, contrasting Qom's dynamism to Najaf's lifelessness. In stressing the inevitable superiority of Qom to Najaf, he refers to the hadiths mentioned: "In accordance with the prediction of the Prophet's family that Qom would be a center of learning whence knowledge would be disseminated to all lands, we now see that it is not knowledge alone that is disseminated from Qom, but knowledge and action together."[44] What is added is of course the link he establishes between knowl-

edge and action, a fundamental feature of his moral code and his revolutionary ideology. Qom is portrayed as a focus or spring, from which morally committed political action will spread to other areas: "Qom is the center of Islamic activity; Qom is the center of the Islamic movement. The movement starts out from Qom, from the city itself, from the *tullab*, from the ulama, from the teachers (may God support all of them), from the masses of its people who are the faithful soldiers of Islam, and spreads to all parts of Iran. Let us see whether it spreads to us here in Najaf."[45]

Political activism is not limited to the populace or to students of religious law but is led by the prominent jurists, who guide and become part of the ongoing political struggle of the oppressed masses. Furthermore, this situation is not fleeting or temporary in Khomeini's portrayal. Qom is destined to be an international center, the rallying point of all Islam, the supreme source of authority for centuries to come. He avers, "The religious center in Qom has also established for all eternity how fully alive it is."[46] This last statement seems to refer again to the hadiths predicting the fate of Qom and Najaf at the end of time.

Khomeini's February 1978 speech makes it perfectly clear that while Qom is destined to become a thriving, influential, and prestigious intellectual center for all time, Najaf can only look forward to decay and abandon:

> The religious center in Qom has brought Iran back to life; it has performed a service to Islam that will endure for centuries. This service must not be underestimated; pray for the religious center in Qom and pray that we will come to resemble it. The name of the religious center in Qom will remain inscribed in history for all time. By comparison with Qom, we here in Najaf are dead and buried; it is Qom that has brought Islam back to life. It is the center in Qom and the preaching of its *maraji'* and *ulama* that have awaked the universities, those same places where we religious scholars used to be accused of being the opium of the people and the agents of the British and other imperialists. . . .[47]

The scholars of Qom are alive, but those of Najaf are dead and buried.

Khomeini's speech on April 18, 1978, draws an extremely stark contrast between the lifelessness of Najaf and the vitality of Qom. He laments over the inevitable demise of Najaf:

> The institution of learning of Najaf is in danger and I am worried and distressed over it. The personality and dignity of this institution of learning, which is nearly one thousand years old, are fading away to nothing in front of the Muslims. Take note of all the discussions current in Iran and read all the publications from beginning to end, whether they come from the pious sector, the university-educated sector, or the sector of religious scholars, and do you find the name of Najaf mentioned? Sirs, the center of learning in Najaf is forgotten! Save Najaf![48]

This passage suggests that Najaf is destined for oblivion, despite the final exhortation. It is striking here that Khomeini's chief criterion for the relevance or significance of the center of learning at Najaf is its role in contemporary Iranian politics. The situation in Qom, however, is altogether different:

> The center of learning in Qom is alive. It is giving up its martyrs, and if it is able it will also *kill*. Despite the fact that it now lives in a state of suppression and oppression, it is nevertheless alive and defiant. The students of Qom are defiant. The city of Qom is defiant, despite all the blows it has received. The students of Qom are defiant, despite the martyrs

> which they have surrendered, for they are alive. Qom is eternal in the minds of the people. I am a Qommi, but I am distressed for Najaf. We all love the centers of learning. We love this center of learning, which is nearly one thousand years old. Do not let this center of learning perish, and do not let it be forgotten.[49]

This passage, addressed to the scholars of Najaf, assumes an extremely patronizing tone. While outwardly lamenting for Najaf, Khomeini seems to be blaming those who refused to listen to him earlier or thwarted his goals and aspirations. In no uncertain terms, he tells the Najafi scholars that they are of little consequence and that their center of learning has lost its vitality. Qom has superseded Najaf. Najaf is dying, but Qom has come to life. Despite statements urging the scholars of Najaf to fight against the trend, the overall tone of the speech implies that the fate of Najaf is sealed. In this passage the center of learning at Qom, the city of Qom, the students, and the Iranian people merge into one.

Later events seem to have confirmed this prediction to a large degree. The Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and the aftermath of the Gulf war made it increasingly difficult for scholars to travel to and from Najaf and for the prominent jurists to exert influence internationally. For Qom, in contrast, the establishment of an Islamic government meant an increased access to funds and increased opportunities to attract students from throughout the Shi'ite world. The turning point had been reached, and Qom indeed became the more prominent center, in terms of not only numbers of students and teachers but also international standing.

It is not surprising that Khomeini promoted Qom's importance. He was one of the students who had come to Qom when Ha'iri came to establish the new center, and he belonged to the first generation who completed the traditional legal education entirely at Qom. He naturally saw his career and those of his colleagues as an extension of the work of Ha'iri, the founder of the center. It was also part of a natural progession for Qom, once having surpassed other Iranian centers of learning, to develop a rivalry with Najaf, and this is merely buttressed by the hadiths that predict that learning will burrow into a hole in Najaf and spring forth from Qom at the end of time. The aspects of Khomeini's Qom policy which set it apart from an ordinary academic rivalry are his linking of Qom with the moral obligation of the jurists to engage in political activity in general on the one hand and the particular populist struggle against the oppression of the government in Iran. The history of Shi'ite legal education has witnessed a number of shifts of the major centers of learning, from Baghdad to Najaf in the eleventh century, from Najaf to Hilla in the twelfth century, from Isfahan to Najaf in the eighteenth century, but it is clear that this latest shift of the foremost center of Shi'ite learning concerns not only geography but ideology as well. Khomeini's vision of Qom developed along with the rest of his revolutionary ideology, particularly between the years 1965 and 1970. It became crucial to his revolutionary ideology, intimately related to other issues such as his populism, that is, his commitment to the struggle of the oppressed Iranian masses (*mustad'afan*) against the tyrants (*mustakbiran*).[50] For Khomeini, Qom was the center of politically engaged Shi'ism and would remain so for centuries to come. Implied in this vision is the belief that the leading jurists, those who have proved their moral right to legitimate religious authority through political commitment, were and would remain Qommis rather than Najafis. Qom would be the single most vital focus of Shi'ite religious leadership, and the leading jurists of Qom would therefore be the supreme guides of the Shi'ite believers throughout the world.

*Notes*

1. I discuss this point in greater detail in "Islamic Juridical Hierarchies and the Office of *Marjiʿ al-Taqlid*," a paper delivered at the conference Shiʿi Islam: Faith, Experience and Worldview, Temple University/University of Pennsylvania, September, 1993. See also Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiʿite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), pp. 229–35.

2. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West with Special Reference to Scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 21; Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law Ninth–Tenth Centuries* C.E. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pp. 203–8, 125–29, 147–49.

3. See Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, pp. 128–33. The common view that the Twelver Shiʿite legal school dates to the time of Jaʿfar al-Sadiq is patently anachronistic, particularly if the *madhhab* is taken to represent an institution for the organized transmission of legal knowledge, and the same may be said of statements that trace the Hanafi, Shafiʿi, Maliki, and Hanbali madhhabs back to their eponymous founders.

4. The term *hawza* means literally "property," "possession," "area," or "territory" and conveys a sense of sanctity, particularly connoting the preservation of tradition from outside attack.

5. Muhsin al-Amin, *Aʿyan al-Shiʿah* (Beirut: Dar al-Taʿaruf li'l-Matbuʿat, 1984), vol. 10, p. 7.

6. Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 109, 256.

7. Hossein Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Law: A Bibliographical Study* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), p. 58.

8. Muhammad Sharif Razi, *Ganjina-yi danishmandan* (Tehran, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 281–304.

9. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 286–87.

10. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 305–20.

11. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 321–26.

12. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 346–56.

13. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 12–30.

14. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 31–36.

15. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 37–52.

16. Mir Ali Asghar Montazam, *The Life and Times of Ayatollah Khomeini* (London: Anglo-European Publishing, 1994), p. 306. Khomeini's students had already urged him to write a "practical treatise" (*risala ʿamaliya*), which implies a claim to the status of a *marjiʿ al-taqlid*, following the death of Burujirdi. It was published in Najaf in 1961 (Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* [London: I. B. Tauris, 1993], 10). Shariʿat-madari supposedly first publicly recognized Khomeini as a *marjiʿ al-taqlid* when trying to get him released from prison, where he was held for ten months, between June 1963 and April 1964.

17. See ʿAbbas al-Qummi, *Safinat al-Bihar*, vol. 2, pp. 445–49.

18. Razi, *Ganjina-yi danishmandan*, vol. 1, pp. 286–87.

19. ʿAbbas al-Qummi, *Safinat al-Bihar*, vol. 2, p. 445.

20. Razi, *Ganjina-yi danishmandan*, vol. 1, p. 352.

21. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 14.

22. Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1978), p. 184.

23. Ibid., p. 185.

24. Ibid., p. 129.

25. Ibid., p. 136.

26. Ibid., p. 142.

27. Ibid., p. 38.

28. Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 194.
29. Muhammad Jawad Maghniya, *al-Khumayni wa'l-dawla al-islamiya* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm li'l-malayin, 1979), p. 127.
30. Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 207.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 203.
33. Ibid., p. 206.
34. Ruhollah al-Khumayni, *Durus fi al-jihad wa al-rafd* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 237–43.
35. Ibid., pp. 237–38.
36. Ibid., p. 238.
37. Ibid., p. 240.
38. Ibid., p. 244.
39. Ibid., p. 242.
40. Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 205.
41. Ibid., p. 213.
42. al-Khumayni, *Durus fi al-jihad*, p. 242.
43. Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, pp. 212–13.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 216.
47. Ibid., pp. 218–19.
48. Khomeini, *Durus fi al-jihad*, p. 309.
49. Ibid., pp. 309–10.
50. Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* [London: I. B. Tauris, 1993], pp. 13–38.

# 14

# *The Counterreformation*

## Becoming a *Marjaʿ* in the Modern World

LINDA S. WALBRIDGE

In 1979 the Iranian Revolution put a regime led by clerics into power in Iran. By the year 2000 the clerical establishment in Iran, despite its political success, was in disarray, its prestige plummeting both inside and outside Iran with many of its political leaders unable to win seats in the Majlis. The effective religious leadership of the Shiʿite world was once again in the hands of clerics associated with the Iraqi shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. How the Iranian Shiʿite establishment squandered its prestige in the aftermath of its greatest triumph and how a comparative handful of Iraqi clerics, most of them exiles, managed to regain leadership of the world Shiʿite community, is the story told in this paper.

Khomeini was hardly the only high-ranking cleric who wanted to see reforms in religious leadership. As discussed in other articles in this volume, the *marjaʿiya* has long been the focus of attention among reformers and intellectuals, this interest intensifying in the 1960s. Both Baqir al-Sadr and Motahhari saw the reformation of the Shiʿi communtiy as being in the hands of the *marjaʿiya*. They, like Khomeini, saw a need for an institutional *marjaʿiya*, emphasizing the need for an official office to ensure continuity, regularity of finances, independence from influence of both governments and popular opinion. The issue of what to do with the *marjaʿiya* became increasingly critical as Middle Eastern oil money poured into Najaf and Qom, increasing the risk of corruption in the *marjaʿiya*—or at least the perception of corruption.

Carefully phrased expressions such as those voiced by Motahhari in reference to "His Excellence Ayatollah Haʾiri," for example, or a letter from Baqir al-Sadr stating that Ayatollah Khuʾi was the person to whom people should make *taqlid* cannot disguise their disastisfaction with the *maraji*ʿ and their entourage. While honoring the men who hold the position, they rail against their traditional manner of doing business and advocate reforms that reflect modern bureaucratic systems.

Since the Iranian revolution, reforms have been put into place that have caused the *marjaʿiya* to undergo substantial change, which has been brought about, both intentionally and inadvertently, by the policies of the current Iranian regime. In addition, the Gulf war, intellectual debate among high-ranking clergy, and the emigration of many Shiʿa to the West have also contributed to this change. Ironically, they have resulted in

reduction of prestige of the *marja'iya* in Iran at a time when the institution is gaining in prestige at a world level.

In this chapter I first review the style in which the "traditional" *marja'iya* works: how the *marja'* is chosen and how he asserts his influence. The focus then shifts to the reforms begun by Khomeini and promoted by the Iranian government. I next look at the consequences of these reforms for the Shi'i world.

## Ascending to the Traditional Marja'iya

Central to the issue of the traditional workings of the *marja'iya* is the manner in which a jurist rises to this position. To indicate his interest in this position, he writes a *risala* stating his views on the wide range of religious laws that regulate all aspects of the believer's life. Often, this is done in footnote form to the *risala* of a previous *marja'*. Sometimes a *mujtahid* is encouraged by his colleagues to write a *risala* but he refuses. This is generally a sign that he is not interested in the role. On the other hand, it may also simply indicate that he thinks that it would be premature to acknowledge his interest. Regarding the age factor, although depictions of the Imams 'Ali and Husayn are those of young men—warriors, in fact—the model of the great religious leader that has prevailed is the elderly Middle Eastern patriarch. Young men who put themselves forward have not been acceptable either to other scholars or to the public at large.

The layperson, for his part, is supposed to consult with two people who are *'adil* trustworty) to decide which *marja'* to follow. Or, alternatively, he may consult a *mujtahid* who is *muhtat* (practices precaution); i.e, a high-ranking *mujtahid* who does not claim to be a *marja'*. While many do follow one of these two prescribed paths, others do not. Individuals, unless they are accustomed to close contact with the ulama, do not seek such guidance. They simply "know" whom to follow based on the *mujtahid*'s fame and what others around them are doing. In fact, the Imam of an American mosque stated that it really is a matter of "common sense" whom one should follow. For example, a person who does not know Arabic well would naturally turn to a *marja'* whose *risala* is translated into a language with which he is more familiar.

Aside from paying the *sahm al-imam* to the *marja'*, a person who is *muqallid* to that *marja'* is also supposed to follow his opinions as stated in the *risala*. If the *risala* does not directly answer the issue of concern to a person, then he is free to consult the *marja'* (most often indirectly through a lower-level cleric) for an opinion on that issue.

In practice, an ordinary layperson might never have read a *risala* and might not even know what the *marja'* has to say on a particular matter. Still, depending on his upbringing and where he was raised, he may "follow" a *marja'*, though there is some ambiguity about just what this means. (Alternatively, a person who does not know Arabic and only recites the Quran by rote, might be more familiar with a *risala* written in his native language than with any other religious text.) Yet, in spite of this informality and almost haphazardness in the selection process, a strong sense of importance and sanctity is associated with the *marja'*. Rank-and-file Shi'a speak disparagingly of the institution only if they believe it has been politicized.

We can now turn to just how the traditional *marja'iya* actually works by looking at the institution under Ayatollahs Hakim and Khu'i. These two men, it should be noted,

differed in many respects. During their lifetimes the governments of Iraq and Iran were deeply interested and concerned with the activities within the *hawza* of Najaf but each responded differently to this interference.

In the 1920s a number of *mujtahids* (including Muhsin Hakim) of Iraq were involved in the revolt against the British rule in Iraq. As a consequence, they were expelled to Iran and only permitted to return in 1924 on the condition that they sign an agreement stating that they would not become involved in politics.[1] The *mujtahids* abided by this promise until the rise of Ayatollah Muhsin Hakim to the position of *marja' taqlid*, a process that began with the death of Ayatollah Abu'l Hasan Isfahani in the 1940s. Hakim's opposition to the communist and Ba'thist regimes led to his persecution and, after his death in 1970, the assassinations and/or imprisonments of most of his sons. According to Dr. Muhammad Bahraloom of London, who was closely associated with Ayatollah Muhsin Hakim, Hakim differed from other *maraji'* because he managed to combine religious and social/political leadership.[2] Yet, in spite of Hakim's adversarial role with the Iraqi government and his "political leadership," he and his *marja'iya* can still be viewed as traditional. It is known that he was opposed to the Iraqi government, yet he intervened when the political activities of Da'wa, with Baqir-al Sadr as its spiritual leader, placed the Shi'i community in danger of governmental retaliation. His aim seems to have been to strengthen the Shi'i community and prepare it for a leadership role in the country.

Interviews with Iraqis who were *muqallid* to Hakim, among them people with close personal links to him, consistently refer to the way in which he "reached out" to the Iraqi tribal peoples in particular, and the Arab people in general. One of his goals was to encourage young Arab men to attend the *hawza*. He not only sent his *wakils*, he also sent his sons to represent him. The reputations of his sons spread widely and stories abound of the reverence that people felt towards them.

When Ayatollah Hakim died, his son Yusif had a great deal of popular support to become the next *marja'* in Najaf, but, reportedly, Yusif, who was about 60 years old at the time, said that he was not a *marja'* and deferred to Ayatollah Abul Qasim Khu'i, whose longevity and activity as a teacher caused him to be known as "the Teacher of the Hawza." In fact, by the time of Hakim's death, there were, I am told, more than 100 *talaba* from his family, but none of them competed with Khu'i for leadership.

According to accounts I have been given, the sons of Ayatollah Hakim met with Ayatollah Khu'i after their father's death. Given that Baqir Hakim had been part of the Da'wa movement and was closely associated with Baqir al-Sadr, it might have been expected that he would have backed Sadr's *marja'iya*. Yet, Khu'i's age and reputation precluded Baqir al-Sadr's rise to this position. The Hakims, in fact, became active in building the *marja'iya* of Khu'i, though at least some of them felt strongly that Baqir al-Sadr should begin putting himself forward as Khu'i's successor.

Traditionalists use this and other accounts to counter the argument that the *marja'iya* is based on nepotism and close personal ties, a charge usually made by reformers. They point out that it is very unusual for the son of a *marja'* to become his successor. The case of the successorship of Khu'i is also revealing. After Ayatollah Khu'i's death in 1992, his son, Muhammad Taqi (d. 1994), probably assassinated by Iraqi forces, whose reputation for competence and resourcefulness was widespread, was not put forward as the successor to his father. It should be noted that Khu'i's son-in-law, Mustanbit, was

looked upon favorably by Khu'i as a possible successor, but he was killed in 1985, probably by Mukhabarat (the Iraqi secret police). However, Khu'i's endorsement of a *mujtahid* would not have guaranteed the success of Mustanbit. Too many factors are involved with the rise of the *marja'iya*—factors, argue the traditionalists, that help prevent the corruption of the institution.

Yet no one quarrels that sons and sons-in-law play a major role in the *marja'iya*. They are referred to sometimes as the "eyes and ears" of the *marja'*. Depending on one's perspective, they are portrayed either as the ones who pilfer money from the coffers of the *marja'iya* and who perform *wasta*, mediation, for their close friends and associates, or as saintly figures whose closeness to the *marja'iya* gives them *baraka*, blessing, smooths the workings of the institution, and, in a sense, brings the *marja'* closer to the people.

It seems likely that the close relationship between a father and son could actually work against the son to some degree. Cautious about accusations of misuse of funds and preferential treatment of family, the *marja'* might very well be inclined to take the opposite extreme and deny their children any of the prerogatives one would expect would come with such a position in society.

The *wakils* (representatives) play a variety of roles, some of which are ambiguous and could be viewed suspiciously. If a person needs asssistance, he is supposed to have someone to vouch for him. For example, Khu'i had more than twenty *wakils* in Basra and, if a person from Basra was truly in need of help, then one of the *wakils* was supposed to testify that this person was honorable and truly in need of money for a specific person. Rather than being seen as *wasta*, the person who related this story likened the process to that of obtaining letters of recommendation for a job.

While the *marja'* himself might have been resistent to the use of *wasta*, that it existed in the traditional *marja'iya* seems indisputable. For example, a businessman from a city in southern Iraq, when he needed to petition the government for permission to conduct a transaction, would go to the representative of Ayatollah Khu'i in his town and ask him to intervene on his behalf with the government. Before the crackdown by Saddam's regime on the Shi'a at large, the government was generally responsive to the requests of these representatives, either to give the government religious legitimacy in the eyes of the people or to back one representative or one *marja'* over another. In fact, the government of Iraq made some representatives very influential. In the town of this businessman, for example, both Khu'i and Baqir al-Sadr had representatives, but the government would only deal with Khu'i's. Those close to the *marja'iya* counter such claims of cooperation with the government by saying that the governments of Iran and Iraq were constantly trying to manipulate the *marja'iya* and often pit various ulama against one another. In fact, in the 1991 uprising even Khu'i's representatives were killed.

The picture that emerges is that of a mutual relationship between the institution of the *marja'iya* and the *muqallid*. There is an interdependence between the two. The lay Shi'a need the *marja'*, not only for religious guidance but as a symbol of communal unity. But the *marja'* needs the *muqallid* even more. Recognition of his station—the reverence shown to him, the *khums* paid to him—are his one true means of ascent to the role of supreme *marja'* of all the Shi'a. Or, to quote Sachedina, it is "the right of the Shi'a to determine the jurist's qualification to assume the comprehensive authority of the Imam."[3] The intermediaries (the *wakils* and sons and sons-in-law) between the *marja'*

and the *muqallid* understand the relationship between *marja'* and *muqallid* and they know how to foster it. Even in cases in which the follower never meets or lays eyes on the *marja'*, there is a sense of a personal relationship, maintained by both the intermediaries and by the informality of the institution. We now explore what happens when reforms are instituted.

## The Iranian Attempt to Reform the Institution

When Khomeini guided revolutionary and postrevolutionary Iran, he did so on the basis of religious authority, as the representative of the Imam. He linked the traditional role of the *marja'* to temporal political power through his interpretation of the theory of the *wilayat al-faqih*. Though being recognized as a *marja' taqlid* gave him the legitimacy inherent in this religious institution, his personal charisma and his ability to manipulate religious symbols seem to have been the dominant factor in his success. Certainly, he became a larger-than-life figure. While there were other *maraji'* in Iran during Khomeini's lifetime who had the prestige to challenge Khomeini, they were all removed from the scene in one way or another. Therefore, by the time Khomeini died in 1989, every *marja'* whose charisma might have made him a rival was either dead or no longer a free agent.

In many respects Khomeini's most revolutionary act was the integrating of two roles: the *marja'iya* and the *wilayat al-faqih*, a traditional concept of the jurist's guardianship which he redefined and expanded to include governmental power. Khomeini, while alive, exercised *wilayat al-faqih*, as the recognized embodiment of temporal and spiritual power in Iran. Because he does seem to have realized that successorship would be a problem, as Abrahamian[4] points out, he modified his interpretation of *wilayat al-faqih* shortly before he died. Khomeini divided the clergy into religious specialists and "political" specialists, thereby acknowledging that running a state was not the same as being a religious guide. Yet the head of state was supposed to be a cleric, so that he did not abandon the idea of a clerically run government. He did not divide the role of *marja'* and *wilayat al-faqih*; rather he redefined the type of person who should serve in this dual capacity.

However, his modifications were not enough to rid the Iranian regime of successorship problems, especially when we consider the worldwide Shi'i community. First, the *marja'* would have to reside in Iran. While there is a tendency for Iranians to prefer to emulate a *marja'* in Iran, the new circumstances of the Islamic Republic would make this a necessity. As head of state, the *marja'/wali faqih* could not live in Najaf. Second, the institution of the *marja'iya*, while ever-evolving, had become a strongly entrenched institution that served spiritual and practical needs of many Shi'a, including ulama supported by the *maraji'*. Third, as a powerful personal figure, Khomeini actually weakened the institution. He taught that it was the office that was important, yet his life and the events following his death belied this notion. The institution that he envisioned has proved to be insufficient to wield power. Only if the *marja'* who exercises *wilayat al-faqih* (as defined by Khomeini) has sufficient charisma and prestige can he fill this dual position of religious and temporal leader. However, the great charismatic religious leaders of Iran were not going to fall into line with Khomeini's thinking.

Because there was no suitable and acceptable *marja'* to succeed him, Khomeini appointed a lower ranking *mujtahid,* Hojjat al-Islam 'Ali Khamene'i, a man in his fifties, as "President" of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[5] After Khomeini's death though, he was not referred to as a *marja'*. Thus, the problem remained that there was not a suitable *marja'* whom the government could encourage Iranian Shi'ites to follow. The leaders of the Islamic Republic faced the choice of either appointing a cleric who lacked traditional credentials as a *marja'* or allowing someone outside the government to hold this office. The latter posed a danger because a person recognized as a *marja'* could oppose government policies with relative impunity. The government solved its problem for the next several years by putting forward two very elderly *mujtahids* as the government-endorsed *maraji'*—men who would generate neither controversy nor new ideas. The press has reported that the first of these was Ayatollah Muhammad Reza Gulpaygani, followed by Ayatollah 'Ali Araki. Yet, even this matter is more complex. After Khomeini's death I met young Iranians who claimed to follow Araki because he had the blessing of the Iranian government. However, as long as Gulpaygani lived, a traditional, nonrevolutionary type of *mujtahid* and the last of the great ayatollahs of his generation, no one else could hope to rise to prominence. Gulpaygani had long been a revered figure in the *hawza,* and now it was "his turn" to be the spiritual leader of the Shi'a. Only after his death was the door open to other contenders. If he had spoken out against the regime, it would have had to intervene to ensure that he could not rise to such prominence. Since he did not, they simply bided their time and, when he passed away in December 1993, the government moved swiftly to support "their candidate," Araki, a man of little reputation or prestige. His only claim to fame was his thoroughly unpopular decision to ban satellite television dishes. Promoting Araki was advantageous because he was very old and controllable, offering no challenge to government policies. His *marja'iya* also gave some factions of the government time to build backing for one of their own. Araki died at the age of 106 in Decmeber 1994.

With the demise of both Gulpaygani and Araki, the government, or at least some segments of it, proceeded to put forward Ali Khamene'i as the *marja'*. It is obvious that they saw it as greatly to their benefit to reincorporate the leading religious institution into the government leadership so as to suppress religious opposition. Such opposition is commonplace in Iran—there are more ulama in Iranian prisons today than there were during the reign of the shah. The time for advocating Khamene'i as the *marja'* was at hand. According to a February 7, 1995, *St. Petersburg Times* article about Iran, "applicants for government jobs are asked to state their preferred *marja'e taghlid*—the 'source of emulation' whose interpetations of the Koran they will follow. The correct answer is undoubedly Ayatollah Ali Khamenei."[6]

The response to the government's move to promote Khamene'i was swift. From many quarters, including the U.S. Shi'i community, was heard the complaint that Khamene'i lacked the qualifications. He is generally considered to be a *hojjat al-Islam*—i.e., an aspiring mujtahid—and, consequently, not high ranking enough to be considered a *marja'*.[7] But the people also objected that the government failed to consider a principal ingredient in the institution of the *marja'iya*—that is, the *muqallid.* As mentioned earlier, the people have a model of the great patriarchal *marja'*, which Khamene'i does not fit.

Khamene'i's representative at the Islamic Centre of England in London, Sheikh Mohsen Araki, claims that Khamene'i's *risala* does not differ from the standard one.

Khamene'i's detractors refer to his book as simply question-and-answer and claim that he does not dare write a standard *risala* for fear that his ignorance would become too evident. Khamene'i's style of leadership is also unconventional. He has an office to which laypeople can send their questions and ulama prepare answers. Every week he schedules special hours for exclusive discussion of these religious problems. For traditionalists, this smacks too much of a *marja'iya* by committee and consensus and undermines the importance of the *marja'*s capacity for ijtihad.

Yet the factions of the government supporting him reflect Khomeini's view that, what today's *marj'* needs is knowledge of world affairs above all else—something that Khamene'i, they protested, had in abundance. This did not quell public dissent, so the government instructed the Association of Teachers at the Qom theological seminary to select seven men who were eligible candidates for the role of *marja'*.[8] Included in the list was Khamene'i but conspicuously absent were ayatollahs who have developed reputations within and outside of Iran and are known for opposition to the government.

Ayatollah Azeri Qommi was one of these. Ayatollah Qommi had written his *risala* during the days of the 'shah, before he was arrested and kept under house arrest. While he served in the Majles and in other capacities supported the new government, he broke with it when, according to his son who lives in exile in London, he saw Ahmad Khomeini and Khamene'i take control of the system. Once again, he was placed under house arrest until his death in February 1999. Probably the best known of the ayatollahs out of favor with the Iranian government is Ayatollah Montazeri, once considered Khomeini's heir apparent, who is under house arrest in Iran, even though, as one informant said, 30 to 35 percent of the members of parliament follow him. Ayatollah Ruhani, also now deceased (d. July 1997), had been a prominent student of Ayatollah Khu'i and an obvious contender for the *marja'iya*. His loyalty to Khu'i made him unpopular with the government, though he managed to avoid a crackdown.

In the meantime, the Iranian government changed the law that the *wali faqih* has to be a *marja'*, clearing the way for Khamene'i to hold this position legitimately. After hearing the criticism of his candidacy to the *marja'iya*, Khamene'i himself said that he was not putting himself forward as a *marja'* inside Iran. However, he declared himself the *marja'* for the rest of the Shi'i world, based on his knowledge of the world that other mujtahids lacked. This seems to have been a major diplomatic mistake, because Shi'a outside of Iran asked why Iranians could select their own *marja'* while they were deprived of this right. On the other hand, Khamenei has had some success in winning over followers because he, through the government, is able to provide financial support to projects outside of Iran. This has been the case in Pakistan, for example. There, the Shi'a have turned to Iran for assistance in their struggle against domination by the Sunni majority. Thus, we find madrasas that receive funding from Iran.

Because the Iranian people at large did not fall in line behind Khamene'i, the Iranian government is now saying that it is perfectly all right to have many *maraji'*, that it is a point of pride to have so many high-ranking, knowledgeable ulama. Many of the Iranian people have resorted to following local high-ranking *mujtahids*. People often, though certainly not always, ignore the decisions in Qom. However, the government has ways to punish those who insist on following a *marja'* of whom they disapprove, especially one in open disagreement with the Iranian government, such as Montazeri, who became critical of the government toward the end of Khomeini's life. A person

who is caught following Montazeri is approached by the Iranian tax authorities and faces fines. Another contender for the *marja'iya*, Muhammad Shirazi, has followers who are in prison, one of whom was killed there in February 1996.

As for Khamene'i, certain Iranians, particularly bazaar merchants, find it beneficial to call him their *marja'* and to pay *sahm al-imam* to him. After all, he can provide favors for them through his official offices. But he has not built a broad-based following and it appears unlikely that he will be able to do so. The linking of temporal and spiritual leadership, direct government involvement in the selection process, legal measures taken against those who follow the "wrong" *marja'*, and the use of *sahm al-imam* as a virtual government slush fund all detract from the sacredness of the institution. The *maraji'* have been involved in political matters in the past, as in the Tobacco Rebellion, but generally against the government. Otherwise, they avoided connection with the secular realm. Any *mujtahid* who rises to a high enough position now is suspect because he must be approved by the government in order to be considered a *marja'*. Thus, he can be associated with all the errors and misdeeds of the regime. It is possible but unlikely that a *marja'* in the traditional sense—i.e., a person confined to religious scholarship and piety—could arise as the chief clerical figure. The government has already taken measures to ensure that if the people will not accept the government's candidate, the government will encourage the emergence of numerous *maraji'*, no one of whom can threaten them. The great irony is that, although the regime in Iran is Shi'i and the one in Iraq is anti-Shi'i, it is principally to the centers in Iraq that the Shi'a outside Iran.

## Keeping the Traditional Marja'iya Alive in Iraq

The situation prevailing in Iraq today is quite different from the one in Iran. The Iraqi Shi'i population has been under duress for a good many years, but the events subsequent to the Gulf war have made the present situation deplorable. Attacks by the Iraqi army on the shrine cities decimated them. Imprisonment, torture, and execution of Shi'a are commonplace. The horrendous persecution has led Iraqis to flee to Iran or to the West.

Within a relatively short time after the passing of Ayatollah Khu'i, there was a general consensus in Najaf that Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani, who had been teaching in Najaf since at least the 1950s, would succeed him. He is now viewed by many as "Khu'i's successor." Sistani himself is very much the model of the traditional *marja'*. He is known as a man totally engrossed in his religious studies who has shunned all involvement in either Iranian or Iraqi politics. He has been portrayed as someone who does not even read the newspaper, a type of cleric that Khomeini criticized bitterly during his lifetime. Yet it is also true that little is known of his views of the world. Even people with close links to Najaf claim that they have not ascertained his position on *wilayat al-faqih*, which was the foremost issue of debate among ulama during Khomeini's time and continues to be so even now. Today Sistani is in Najaf with few students. He is virtually a prisoner in the city where devout Shi'a have for centuries come to pay homage to the Imam 'Ali who is buried there, though he does have contact with his followers. In spite of his relative isolation, Sistani is the most widely followed *marja'* in the world.

During the 1997 *hajj*, one pilgrim who follows the rise of the *maraji*ʿ closely was stunned at the number of ayatollahs with offices in Mecca. Having an office in Mecca is a sign that one is putting oneself forth as a *marja*ʿ. It is also an indication that the Iranian government's policy of encouraging a proliferation in the number of *maraji*ʿ (thereby weakening the institution) is working. This same pilgrim reports that the line outside of Sistani's office was by far the longest—a very good indicator of his success.

Of course, Saddam has his hands in the *marjaʿiya* as well, attempting to co-opt it. Blaming the United States for having destroyed the shrines, he has now rebuilt them. He tried appointing a *marja*ʿ of his own—Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, the cousin of Baqir al-Sadr and Musa al-Sadr,[9] both of whom are symbols of struggle against governmental tyranny. At first it seemed as if Sadiq al-Sadr had simply sold out to the government. Certainly there were indications that this was the case. If a Shiʿite wished to study in the shrine cities, he needed permission from Sayyid al-Sadr. If a man wanted a religious exemption from the army, he had to obtain it from this man. Saddam is aware that having the *marja*ʿ residing in Iraq brings prestige to his country. Also, Saddam was eager to use religion as a means of softening the misery of the people so that they would not rebel. Sadiq al-Sadr was supposed to promote a patient, long-suffering Shiʿism. However, as time progressed he became more outspoken. Threatened by the Sadiq al-Sadr's popularity and his increasing independence, Saddam had him killed on February 19, 1999.

All things being equal, a government—whether in Iran or Iraq—would prefer the *marja*ʿ within its own borders to bring prestige and revenue to the country and allow the government to monitor the activities of the *marja*ʿ. The shah, for example, promoted the leadership of Burujirdi. However, if the main contender for the *marjaʿiya* is viewed as seditious and a threat to government stability, then a government may promote a *marja*ʿ outside the country if that individual does not seem interested in encouraging political activism—or at least political activism outside of the country in which he resides. So, for example, the shah supported Hakim after the death of Burujirdi because he was not agitating against the Iranian regime but was opposed to the Iraqi government. The Arabs in particular have been dismayed that the *marjaʿiya* has been so strongly dominated by Iranians in the past century due to the large influx of Shiʿi scholars to the shrine cities, where, particularly in Karbala, they outnumber the Arabs.

Though Sayyid al-Sadr apparently did have the respect of the Shiʿa of Iraq, it has been Sistani whose reputation has grown significantly among the world's Shiʿa. How has he gained so large a following? There are a number of answers. When Khuʾi passed away, there were a number of clerics who were of the same rank as Sistani. Many of the clerics of Najaf, including Sistani, were arrested by the government after the Gulf war. However, informants say that good fortune saved Sistani from the fate of his colleagues. As the story goes, a sympathetic jailer was told that Sistani was "like Khuʾi" (i.e., apolitical) and released Sistani while the others remained in prison, with their fate as yet unknown. An alternative explanation of his release may be that the Iraqi government believed that Sistani, as an Iranian, was not a threat and could counterbalance the rebellious Iraqi Shiʿa.

However, Sistani's release from prison does not explain everything. Part of the answer predates his ascendancy to the *marjaʿiya*. Because the Iranian mujtahids had such a broad base for support, and a good part of that support was the bazari class, they did

not need to actively seek a following outside of Iran. This was not the case for those in Iraq. During the period of Hakim and Khu'i, prosperous Iraqis were rarely among those devoted to traditional Shi'ism. They were not differentiating themselves from other Iraqis. While Baqir al-Sadr may have been able to generate some interest among this set because he addressed contemporary issues in a compelling manner, he could not turn the tide or translate the interest into large payments of *sahm al-imam*. Therefore, the Iraqis turned to the oil-rich countries of the Gulf and to India, Pakistan, and East Africa for support, and during the 1970s this prosperity greatly enhanced the coffers of Khu'i. Even during the Iran/Iraq war, when money could not get to Khu'i's offices and in fact, his offices were temporarily shut down, *sahm al-imam* collected in his name continued to be used to enhance his prestige and following. In 1981 Khu'i issued a *fatwa* saying that the people should not send money to him but should use it directly to benefit the people in their own area. Consequently, the 1980s became a time of institution building in the Shi'i world. Mosques, hospitals, schools, libraries, and the like sprang up in Iran, India, Pakistan, and Lebanon.

It was not until after the war that the Khu'i Foundation in London was founded. The projects it has either completed or begun are impressive. For example, the Khu'i Foundation mosque in Queens is a large structure, housing offices, a mosque, and a school. In northwest London there is a large complex with an attractive mosque, a boys' and a girls' school and an office complex. The foundation has funded the Imam al-Khu'i Charity buildings in Lebanon and distributed food to the needy in that country. A large, beautiful cultural complex has been designed for Bombay, India. No other *marja'* has his name associated with so many building projects. While other *maraji'* have initiated projects in their own names, such as the Mar'ashi library in Iran, these are limited in comparison to the Khu'i projects.

Ayatollah Sistani's reputation as "Khu'i's successor," therefore, has been of enormous benefit. His informal links to the Khu'i Foundation, for example, quickly spread his reputation throughout the Shi'i world. Other clues to Sistani's success can be found by looking at Shi'i groups outside of those in Iraq. For example, Sheikh Fadlallah of Lebanon might have been expected to advocate for Khamene'i after the latter was put forward as a *marja'*, but he did not. Instead, he stood by Sistani.

It is not just Arabs, though, who are eager to follow Sistani and, in the process, ensure that Iran does not get a stranglehold on the institution of the *marja'iya*. For example, one group of Twelver Shi'a, the Khojas (who broke off from Ismaili Khojas in the late nineteenth century) acknowledge Sistani as their *marja'*. Their leader, El Hajj Mullah Asgharali M.M. Jaffar in London, has announced that Sistani is the most knowledgeable religious scholar in the world and that his people should follow him.[10] While Khojas might be a small minority of Shi'a, they are extremely prosperous. They also are active in educating Shi'i youth wherever they reside and can thereby spread their belief in the superiority of Sistani. Being more likely than Arabs to take the role of the *marja'* to heart, their influence is out of proportion to their numbers. The Khojas are widely respected in the Shi'i world and are trusted for their competely apolitical stance even by the governments of Iran and Iraq. For example, they have been able as a group to visit the shrines in Iraq since the Gulf war without triggering the paranoia of Saddam's government. One very knowledgeable informant said that, had the Khojas elected to follow Ayatollah Rohani[11] in Iran (who was a likely candidate for them to follow), the

Iranian government would have had to back down on their suppression of Rohani. The Khojas' relatively unified stance, their prosperity, and their phenomenal organizational abilities have rendered them a powerful force in the Shi'i community, one that even governments cannot ignore.

In addition to all these factors, Sistani's position has also been strengthened by the precedence of the horrendous conditions of the Iraqis over other internal disputes. The great breach between the Iraqi Shi'i opposition groups Hizb al-Da'wa and 'Amal, for example, while not vanishing, has been set aside in the face of a common threat. While disagreements among the more prominent ulama do exist, their primary concerns are to liberate the holy cities from the domination of Saddam Hussein and to free their fellow countrymen from Iraqi prisons. Sistani, recognized as the highest *marja'*, acts as a unifying force, and no one serves this function among Iranians.

## The Role of Charisma

As stated earlier, any *mujtahid* who wishes for recognition as a *marja'* is supposed to produce a particular kind of legal treatise, a *risala*, a concise manual for the use of those *muqallid* to him. This treatise addresses the range of ritual issues and social and economic transactions. The *risalas* of various *mujtahid*s are very similar to one another. The differences are often just in the degree of "goodness" or "badness." Is something simply encouraged, or is it required? On ritual matters, the greatest difference between the teachings of Grand Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khu'i in the eyes of those most familiar with their works regards veiling. Khu'i said that women should cover their faces. However, he also gave the proviso that, if a woman wanted to follow another *marja'* on this issue, she was free to do so. Hence, many women who were *muqallid* to Khu'i followed Khomeini, who said that a woman's face need not be covered. On social and economic issues there tends to be more variation, but not radical differences.

Other ritual issues are, of course, more complicated. For example, Ayatollah Sistani says that when a Shi'ite enters a foreign (non-Muslim) country he is not supposed to steal or cheat or disobey the law of that state, for when one enters a country with a visa, one accepts the rules and regulations of that country. It is not permissible to do anything to break that law. If one enters the country unlawfully, he needs permission from the *marja'* for anything he does that could be considered illegal. This is referred to by at least one of his representatives as an innovation, for according to other *maraji'* the belongings of non-Muslims can be taken from them without violating Islamic law. On the other hand, if a Shi'i asks the *marja'* about specific cases, the *marja'* is likely to say that a person is not allowed to take from non-Muslims. He will say that they make the determination based on current conditions—and particularly the reputation of Islam—rather than according to the laws of Islam.

These points show that, in reality, Shi'a following one *marja'* as opposed to another do not differ greatly in their religious and social behavior. Indeed, it was certainly impossible to determine from appearances or general conduct whether a person was a follower of Ayatollah Khu'i or Khomeini. During an interview with a leader of an Iraqi opposition group, I asked if new issues generated by advances in technology might occasion greater divergence in the rulings issued by the *maraji'*, he emphatically said

that this would be impossible. They all make their decisions on the basis of the same principles and, therefore, there could be no substantial disagreement. The differences that have been noted have been minor.

However, the decision of which *marjaʿ* one follows is considered extremely important by conscientious Shiʿa. One should not just casually select one *marjaʿ* over another but should seek the opinions of learned individuals. Many Shiʿa do not actually go around questioning ulama about whom they should follow, though certainly there are those who do. The vast majority of Shiʿa whom this writer has known have chosen their *marjaʿ* in other ways. One common approach is simply to follow the *marjaʿ* recognized in Najaf or in Qom. For example, one woman, born and raised in Lebanon, but whose grandfather had migrated from Najaf to Jabal Amil, claimed in 1995 to be following Khuʾi. When reminded that Ayatollah Khuʾi had died, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "Whoever is in Najaf now." This is not an uncommon response. Part of this attraction to Najaf has to do with loyalty to former *maraji*ʿ, particularly Hakim and Khuʿi. Furthermore, the horrendous conditions of the Iraqi Shiʿa also seem to accentuate the desire of many Shiʿa to accept the most prominent *marjaʿ* in Najaf. Using tanks and artillery, Saddam Hussein's army attacked the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf where hundreds of men, women, and children had sought shelter. Thousands of people, including a substantial percentage of the ulama in southern Iraq were arrested. Many have never been seen since. Those who have left Iraqi prisons have been freed only so that their tortured bodies can be seen as a warning against rebellion. While Sistani is under extraordinary constraints, his representatives are active throughout the world. They can represent him to the *muqallid* as a person who quietly defies the tyranny of Saddam. By not selling out to the Iraqi regime, he enables Najaf to retain its aura of sanctity, which makes its survival all that much more critical.

That personal charisma plays a large role in the *marjaʿiya* is obvious. It is actually a rather elusive institution, and even to call it an institution is misleading. It is not at all like the papacy. There is no formal election procedure, no ordination, none of the bureaucracy found in the Vatican. The person who is up for consideration as a *marjaʿ* is more like a Catholic saint than a pope. While there is a canonization process to make a person officially a saint, in practice, canonization is not what is really important. Catholics in different parts of the world have their saints and their own criteria for choosing them. It might help if the church sanctions the sainthood of an individual, but it is not an absolute necessity. The *marjaʿ* has a role in the devout Shiʿite's life that is somewhat akin to that of a saint in a Catholic's life (although this analogy does have its limits). According to Arjomand, the charisma associated with the great theologians resulted from either contact with the Hidden Imam (the Shiʿite messiah) or favors he bestowed upon them.[12] The *marjaʿ* is a reminder, a symbol of one's belief. He guides, but he has no authority to dictate. The fact that the follower largely decides whom to follow mitigates against an authoritarian position.

The person accepted as a *marjaʿ* has certain qualities, including a very high level of religious learning and piety. Occasionally he may also be heroic. He certainly cannot be seen as worldly. He must transcend the petty affairs of the world and shun materialism. While it might be difficult for the individual Shiʿite to describe in detail the exact characteristics of a person qualified to be a *marjaʿ*, he is able to recognize a legitimate *marjaʿ* when he encounters one.

Although it is commonly argued that Khomeini broke out of the mold of the traditional *marja'*, he actually remained within acceptable boundaries, unquestionably a religious figure within the Shi'i paradigm. During his tenure as the "leader" of Iran, there was great ambiguity about exactly what his title and role were in the Islamic Republic. He was commonly referred to as the "spiritual leader" or the Imam. Both are vague terms and do not refer to specific offices. Underlying these titles was murmured speculation that he might have been either the return of the Twelfth Imam or a precursor paving the way for the actual return of the Hidden Imam. He was both involved in government and stood apart from and above it. He obviously did not want to be seen as involved in governmental power struggles or in mundane decisions. Khomeini was, in every sense of the word, a personal charismatic figure.

Problems arise when an attempt is made to anchor the *marja'iya*, to concretize it, or, to use the Weberian term, routinize it. This is what elements in the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran attempted to do. They wanted to establish the *marja'iya* as part of the government. The *marja'* would not be above the government, as was the case with Khomeini, but actually involved in its everyday workings. The *marja'*, therefore, would not be a saint but a bureaucrat, subject to the same well-deserved damnation as all other bureaucrats.

It is true that people justified their rejection of Khamene'i on the basis of his low standing as a scholar. However, it could be argued that Khamene'i's standing in the clerical pecking order is a secondary matter. The experts in Qom did declare him eligible to be a *marja'*, yet the Shi'i world did not listen to them either. In fact, because the government was using Khamene'i to change the *marja'iya* from a charismatic to a routinized charismatic institution, the Iranians are left in a very weakened position in the Shi'i world. Of course, many Iranians have refused to recognize "an official *marja'*" and persist in selecting a *marja'* for themselves through more traditional means. Moreover, the government's power to punish someone for following the "wrong" *marja'* is unlikely to strengthen the institution in Iran.

In addition to this, the Iranians have another problem, the growing charisma of another *marja'* outside Iran. As stated earlier, Sistani is the quintessential traditional *marja'*. While not the heroic figure that Khomeini was, he is recognized by his colleagues as the most learned among them and meets all the other necessary qualifications to serve in this role. While he himself is nearly invisible, isolated in Najaf and not prone to publicity in any case, he relies on his family and representatives to spread his influence, which has actually become synonymous with the influence of the institution and the theological center of Najaf. The Iranians dissipate their influence through divisiveness, but Iraq has put forward a traditional model of leadership that has been acceptable throughout the world. Those around Sistani have also maintained the means of spreading this influence through the traditional kinship network and a system of representation.

The Iraqi Shi'i leadership is largely in exile, either in England or the United States. The Iraqi Shi'a (or at least those identified with the *hawzas* of Iraq) have experienced persecution and are in urgent need of world attention and assistance. Paradoxically, these disasters have placed the Iraqi clergy (at least those who have avoided the Iraqi government's imprisonment and execution) in an advantageous position, though this may sound odd, considering the suffering they have endured. The Iraqi ulama and those

affiliated with Iraqi religious leadership, such as the nonclerics at the Khoei Foundation, have found themselves the spokesmen for the Shi'i world. The Iranian government is almost as alienated from the United States and the rest of the Western world as it was in 1979 when it was holding American hostages. The Iraqi Shi'a, while perhaps tainted by religious association with the Iranians, have not opposed the West and have competent, articulate representatives who do not take an anti-Western stance in their dealings with Westerners and with Western governments.

Their more unified stance, along with Sistani's refusal to make political statements, help to ensure that the Iraqi Shi'a in the West are not seen as antagonistic to Western governments. Therefore, Shi'a residing in the West, often as citizens, can feel more comfortable having a religious leader who does not represent anti-Western or anti-American sentiments, as did Khomeini. Any *marja'* approved by the Iranian government would also bear the stigma of Khomeini.

Certainly not all the non-Iranian ulama are teaching that Sistani should be their *marja'*. Even direct representatives of Sistani do not necessarily try to determine the decision of the lay Shi'a. They may state that they are not qualified to tell someone to whom he should be *muqallid*. Instead, they say, they tell them generally about more than one *marji'*. Which ones they deem it appropriate to tell people about is influenced by personal opinion and regional origin, but very likely Sistani would be on the list of possibilities.

Sistani has many representatives in the West. In other words, he has "given" lower-level clerics an *ijaza* (certificate) to act on his behalf. While there is a certain ambiguity about this position (others besides a representative can act on behalf of Sistani, and a person may have *ijazas* from several *maraji'* at once), this person does spread Sistani's influence.

In contrast to the Arabs, Iranians in the United States have not been religious institution builders. The majority of Iranians in the United States are not religious Muslims, if indeed they are Muslims at all. Many of those who fled Iran during the time of the revolution were Jews or Baha'is, and those who were Muslims were often nonobservant and refugees from the theocracy. Except for members of the Mujahidin, immigrant Iranians generally prefer to focus on secular aspects of Iranian culture. While there has been a growing sense of urgency among emigré Iranians to maintain some sense of religion, especially for the sake of the youth, this religiosity has a very anti-ulama tone to it. Sufi elements are pronounced. Pro-Khomeini people in the Los Angeles area are known to keep a low profile so as not to attract attention from monarchists, leftists, and others. Again, this situation strengthens the position of an Arab *marja'*.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the United States and Great Britain are growing strongholds of Shi'ism. Individual Shi'i clerics see the need to bridge the gap between the Shi'a and Western governments, intellectuals, and religious bodies. While the Shi'a are generally not very assimilated or acculturated to Western society, they are becoming less isolated from it. They are beginning to recognize that it is to their advantage to build understanding of Shi'ism in the West.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, and in various articles in this book, the *marja'iya* has been the focus of various attempts to reform society. Baqir al-Sadr complained that the *marja'iya* has proceeded without any plan and called for actions that would "remedy" this situation. The suggestion has been made that there be a committee of *maraji'*

who would act together to decide on a matter. Alternatively, all the decisions of the *maraji'* could be on computer so that a person with a question could receive an answer based on a majority opinion of the *maraji'*.

There are problems with all these options. While they appear to have the advantage of unifying the community, they might so routinize the institution that it would lose its impact. Moreover, although the disagreements of the *maraji'* concern what may seem to be trivial matters of ritual, the divergent views are deeply held. Given the charismatic basis of Shi'ism, there is nothing to prevent a *marja'* from disagreeing with the decisions of the majority and going his own way. Most important, the Shi'a are deeply attached to the traditional image of the saintly and unworldly man of religious learning. He does not have the qualities of a politician, a diplomat, an administrator, or a financial wizard. His qualities are more elusive and, at least at this point in history, therein lies his strength.

## Conclusions

The Iranian attempt to strengthen the *marja'iya* by combining religious with temporal authority has actually weakened the role of the *marja'* in Iran. Khamene'i's attempt to be both political leader and the *marja' taqlid* has not been well received by the majority of Shi'a in the world. The objections to Khamene'i were were based on a variety of issues. First, the *marja'iya* is a grassroots institution in which the *muqallids* play a great role. The government, in proclaiming Khamene'i the grand *marja'* of the Shi'a, usurped their role. The government also ignored the fact that the Shi'a in general are opposed to a politicization of their religious leadership. Furthermore, Khamene'i does not fit the role of the great patriarchal leader as people such as Hakim and Khu'i had. The negative reaction to Khamene'i's aspirations caused the Iranian government to encourage a proliferation of *maraji'* in Iran, thereby weakening any one person's ability to challenge the government. Discussion of, or even attempts at having the work of the *marja'iya* performed in a bureaucratic, committeelike fashion have been unsuccessful. Since the *marja'* is principally a charismatic figure, a symbol of the qualities revered by the Shi'i and a symbol of unity, it is hardly likely that such attempts will ever be accepted by the followers at large.

As a result of Iranian governmental interference, the high Shi'i leadership on a world scale is becoming increasingly "Arabized" as the Arab Shi'a—along with others—galvanize around the figure of one *marja'*, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who resides in Najaf, while the Iranians are divided in their allegiance. A great deal of evidence points to the fact that Sistani, increasingly, is seen as the successor to Ayatollah Khu'i.

The steps taken to establish Shi'i communities in the West—building mosques and establishing centers—have mostly been taken by groups whose members are *muqallid* to Sistani. Because Sistani is seen as having "inherited" his position from the enormously popular Khu'i, he has benefited from Khu'i's network of institutions and representatives, as well as his own. Both his representatives and followers in the West face new problems never experienced for so many Shi'a before. Living in a non-Muslim, secular society poses continual problems for a devout Shi'ite. Those ulama facing the problems of the faithful find themselves in a position to argue for a more flexible approach by the

*marja'* in addressing everyday ritual and religious duties. Certainly a *marja'* outside of the sphere of the Iranian government is in a better position to be flexible. In addition, he does not have to be entangled in U.S./Iranian political affairs, which have remained highly strained since the revolution and show little sign of improving. His responsiveness to the needs of the people increases his appeal and strengthens the position of Najaf as the spiritual center of the Shi'i world.

Of course, the fact that Sistani is isolated and without students should not be overlooked or downplayed. The Arab Shi'a are concerned that young men wishing to pursue religious studies are most likely to study in Qom. Yet as long as the Iranian government interferes with the *marja'iya*, it is, in effect, actually helping to promote a *marja'* outside of the sphere of Iran. Sistani's success could be counterbalanced by the Iranian government's power to purchase influence for the *marja'* of its choice. However, thus far only highly politicized Shi'a have opted to follow Khamene'i and they are still in the minority.

*Notes*

I thank the many people I have interviewed for this article, most of whom have to remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

1. For a discussion of the events of this time period see Yitzhad Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), ch. 3, and Joyce Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992).
2. Dr. Muhammad Bahraloom, interview with author, April 1996.
3. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 236.
4. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (Berkeley, Cal., 1993), pp. 33-38.
5. For an analysis of the evolution of the use of the terms *Hyjjat al-Islam* and *Ayatollah*, see Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, "The Institutionalization of the Marja'i Taqlid in the Nineteenth Century Shi'ite Community," in *Muslim World*, 84/3-4 (July-Oct. 1994) pp. 279-99.
6. From an article written by Neil Brown, "Drumbeat of Religion," *St. Petersburg Times*, February 7, 1995, p. 1A.
7. It should be noted that many Khamene'i supporters do view him as a mujtahid, using the title "Ayatollah."
8. For a discussion of the elections and their implications, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Islamic Movement: The Case for Democratic Inclusion," *Contention* 4/3 (1995), pp. 107-27.
9. The leader of the Lebanese Shi'a until his disappearance in Libya in 1978.
10. Mulla Asgherali died in March, 2000. It is assumed that his successor will also advocate following Ayatollah Sistani.
11. Sayyid Mohammad Hossaini Rohani passed away July 25, 1997.
12. Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning in 1890* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 137-44.

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# 15

# *The* Marjaʿ *and the Survival of a Community*

## The Shiʿa of Medina

YOUSIF AL-KHOEI

Medina is the second holiest city in Islam after Mecca. The Muslim calendar begins with the Hijra, the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to this city. Much of Islam's earliest history, indeed its very foundation, is rooted here. Here the first Islamic state was set up; here the concept of an Islamic *umma* was born and the faith began to spread. It is also the burial place of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny), who is buried in the Haram al-Nabawi, the sacred mosque of the Prophet.

Many of the Prophet's early companions and members of his family, the Ahl al-Bayt, are buried in Medina. These include Fatima (his daughter and the wife of Imam ʿAli) as well as four of the Imams of the Twelver (Jaʿfari) Shiʿa who are buried in al-Baqiʿ cemetery next to the Haram. These Imams are Hasan ibn ʿAli, ʿAli ibn Husayn, Muhammad al-Baqir, and Jaʿfar al-Sadiq. The latter is one of the principal authorities for Shiʿa jurisprudence and a leading scholar of Medina who taught a large number of students, including other renowned scholars of Islam.

The Shiʿa of Medina are heirs to those who witnessed the birth and evolution of the Muslim Umma. The early Shiʿa of Medina were followers and companions of the Holy Imams, many of whom were involved in farming the lands belonging to Imam Hasan, the second Imam. The survival of the Shiʿa of Medina as a distinct community reflects the development of Islamic history in general, and of Shiʿa Islam in particular. Their history attests to important, and sometimes controversial, aspects of this early period of Islam: disagreements over the caliphate, disputes over *fadak* (the land which Shiʿa Muslims believe was inherited by the Prophet's daughter Fatima directly from her father and of which she was dispossessed), and the exodus of Imam Husein, the third Imam, which would eventually lead him and his followers to the tragedy of Karbala, an event central to Shiʿi identity.

However, despite the long history of the Shiʿa in Medina—and their unique position in Saudi Arabia today—they are not well-known even in many parts of the Kingdom, nor have there been any known contemporary studies by social scientists about them, mainly due to the lack of access and proper information.

In 1996, when I was on pilgrimage, I identified two main concentrations of Shiʿa Muslims in and around the city, in addition to some other smaller communities. The main Shiʿa population comprises city dwellers who live in, and own farms around, the Haram. They are called Nakhawila, which is also the name given to the area they in-

habit of approximately 12 square kilometers. ("Nakhawila" is from *nakhl*, lit. palm trees"; but in the vernacular it may be used in a derogatory sense.) The term *Nakhawila* is said to have been first used by the Ottoman rulers of the Hijaz (present-day western Saudi Arabia) to describe and distinguish the Shi'a of Medina. The second concentration is a number of Shi'a tribes who live in Wadi al-Fara', an area some 60 kilometers southwest of Medina. There are, in addition, the Shi'a Sayyids, who are descendents of the Prophet. The majority of the Nakhawila refer to their forefathers as the original Arab tribes from the Khazraj, among them the 'Amr, the Asaybi'i, the Jurfi, the Manshi, the 'Auf, the Far, the 'Irfi, the Da'udi, and the Hajuj. Some Nakhawila are descended from black slaves who date their affection for the Ahl al-Bayt from the days when they were freed from slavery by Imam Hasan and worked on his farms.

There is an obvious social, political and, to a certain extent, economic and geographical marginalization of the Shi'a within Medina. In order to distinguish them further, the word *Nakhawila* is added to their tribal surnames. One taxi driver exclaimed, "Frankly, the Nakhawila exist in one world and we in another." The actual population of the Nakhawila is difficult to estimate. Some have indicated a figure above 100,000, but a religious leader I met offered the more conservative estimate of about 32,000, comprising some 19,000 Nakhawila, 8,000 from the tribes in Wadi al-Fara', and some 5,000 Shi'a Sayyids who live in and around Medina. Others put the figure nearer 40,000. These totals are based on an estimate taken from the Medina school population, which is 15 percent Shi'a.

Discrimination against Medina's Shi'a Muslims invariably extends to education, and it is an unwritten rule that a Shi'a cannot become a teacher of religion, history, or Arabic, or the headmaster of a school. Conflicts in schools do occur because all children are given religious instruction according to the Salafi (Wahhabi) doctrines, which differ from the private instructions Shi'a children receive from parents at home. Indeed, Shi'a texts and prayerbooks are not allowed to be published and may be confiscated if found in anyone's possession . No private schools may be set up by the Shi'a and there is little or no chance of scholarship assistance abroad for their students. The famous Salafi Islamic University in Medina, which has students from all over the world, preaches that the Shi'a are not to be recognized as Muslims.

There is also widespread discrimination in employment. Those who manage to find work in the civil service, the police, and the armed forces cannot achieve senior positions, although on occasion they may reach middle ranks. The Nakhawila are not given duties in sensitive posts such as the judiciary, in the Haram, or at al-Baqi'. However, a good number have benefited from the oil boom and are successful businessmen, shopkeepers, and landlords, who rent to pilgrims houses on their farms in the vicinity of the Haram. (Indeed, the delegations of the various *maraji'* from Najaf and Qum generally have their headquarters in Medina during pilgrimage in such houses.)

Although this community cannot have access to all professions, they are increasingly enjoying other economic benefits from the state. One can detect little or no discrimination in social security payments. In fact, many Shi'a were positive about the interest-free loans that are given by the government, some amounting up to R300,000 (US$80,100) for housing, as well as social security payments for the needy averaging R6,000 (about US$1,650 per annum). In recent years, there has been some intermittent permissiveness to those who wish to travel abroad, notably to visit holy shrines in Iran and Syria, although this seems to depend largely upon the political climate.

The Shiʿa of Medina are isolated from the larger Shiʿa communities in the Eastern Province, in al-Hasa and al-Qateef, but some religious and kinship linkage is maintained. Compared to the Eastern Province, the environment in Medina is even less tolerant of religious and cultural differences: the Nakhawila are neither allowed to proclaim their faith nor to perform their rituals openly; they may not declare their call to prayer and must not wear the traditional Shiʿa turban, though foreign pilgrims are excluded from this prohibition. They also endure the widespread distribution of discriminatory literature that often uses the term *rafidhi* to describe them, a derogatory term meaning "rejectionist." Such literature is disseminated even from the confines of the Haram itself. While prayers over a deceased are traditionally recited in the Haram after the main prayers, the Shiʿa are not included in such remembrances, as is otherwise traditional in the city. Government employees who have to join in congregational prayers cannot display any outward signs of being Shiʿa, such as the *turba* (clay tablet), traditionally used to rest the forehead on during prayers. In addition, they cannot build mosques but instead have to use privately funded, converted halls in large unmarked houses called *majalis husayniyas*. These are used for prayers as well as other religious and social functions where the traditional tribal serving of tea and coffee is an integral part of the gathering. There are about ten *majalis husayniyas* altogether in Medina, including one for women. You must naturally be part of the community to know where such centers exist.

The main commemoration of Ashura, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, takes place in a large *husayniya* situated in a run-down farm away from the city center. Nearby, there is a mosque named after Salman al-Farisi, one of the closest companions of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, in al-Biqa, which had become a central gathering place for Shiʿa faithful from Medina because the palm trees here are believed to have been planted by the Holy Prophet himself. A *fatwa* by the religious authorities has, however, led to the felling of these trees and the place is no longer a focal point of veneration for the Nakhawila.

Celebrating publicly the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad is strictly forbidden since it conflicts with Salafi doctrine, a measure that also affects most of the Sunni population of Medina who, along with the Shiʿa, are forced to celebrate the joyful occasion in private. The Salafi pay little heed to the preservation of historical sites. Many Shiʿa and Sunni Muslims speak with nostalgia of a time before the destruction of this rich heritage of the history of Islam, particularly during the development and expansion of the Haraam.

Salafis also prohibit as *bidʿa* (innovation) such practices as visiting graves and mausoleums. Thus, there have historically been problems with the Shiʿa over visiting the graves of the Ahl al-Bayt at al-Baqiʿ and holding prayers there. Indeed, all domes over the graves were destroyed by Salafi zealots (the Ikhwan) during the 1924–25 assault, and remain reduced to rubble, distinguished only by one unmarked stone on each grave for men and two stones for women. In recent years, however, the Shiʿa have again been allowed to bury their dead at al-Baqiʿ in a special plot close to the graves of the Ahl al-Bayt. They take this opportunity to visit and pray as a group at the graveyard of the Imams in the early morning after a burial has taken place. Shiʿa pilgrims from abroad who die in Medina may also be buried in al-Baqiʿ. There is another large Shiʿa cemetery—one that is relatively little heard of—situated by the Qubba mosque, the first mosque in Islam, on the outskirts of Medina.

## The *Marjaʿ* and Leadership in the Community

The present head of the Shiʿa community in Medina, Shaykh Muhammad ʿAli al-ʿAmri, is an elderly religious and tribal leader who handles the main religious aspects of the community. For a long time he has been the main representative of the leading *marajiʿ*, such as the late Grand Ayatollahs Muhsin al-Hakim and al-Khu'i and, at present, Ayatollah ʿAli Sistani. Shaykh al-ʿAmri leads the congregational prayers twice a day: midday prayers at his *husayniya* in the town and evening prayers at his farm. There are also a handful of Shiʿa religious figures in Medina.

Shiʿa pilgrims from abroad usually have little exposure to the indigenous Nakhawila. When I was asking for directions to the place where Shaykh al-ʿAmri held congregational prayers, I was told that it would not be advisable to go there. When, after some difficulty, I reached the place, I discovered a basement hall full of about 180 worshipers. It was obvious from the atmosphere that strangers were looked on with caution, but I recognized many familiar things: the *turba*, for instance, as well as portraits of my grandfather, the Grand Ayatollah Khu'i, as well as of Ayatollahs Gulpaygani and Sistani. After prayers, many took their turn to meet and consult with Sheikh al-ʿAmri.

The Shiʿa of Medina are not politicized because of their precarious existence as a minority located in one of the Muslim world's holiest places. Most people I met, including religious leaders, were not prepared to discuss the situation. They have carefully distanced themselves from both domestic politics and the political conflicts that began during Hajj in recent times. In previous years, when tensions existed between the Saudi authorities and some Iranian pilgrims, Sheikh al-ʿAmri would leave Medina during Hajj to avoid any conflicts.

Apart from leading the daily prayers, Sheikh al-ʿAmri is also responsible for other important day-to-day religious and social matters. He perfoms marriage ceremonies and leads the prayers for the departed. He is also referred to in matters pertaining to the Shiʿa Awqaf (religious endowments). They are registered separately, allowing the Shiʿa of Medina to establish endowments which are to be set up during their lifetime or after. To a certain extent, this gives this community some recognition, albeit invisible.

In terms of judiciary, unlike in al-Qateef, there are no Jaʿfari courts in Medina. Matters that are purely concerned with Jaʿfari jurisprudence are dealt with by Shaykh al-ʿAmri, who acts as an unofficial arbiter in cases involving domestic or other disputes among this close-knit community. The official courts do not accept the evidence of a Shiʿa Muslim unless the dispute involves only them.

## Summary

The Nakkawila of Medina face discrimination in education, employment, and justice. They cannot openly celebrate their holidays, nor can they perform the rituals that are uniquely Shiʿa. Yet, their sense of identity remains strong. Clinging proudly to their religious beliefs and to the bitter memories of their history, they have learned to survive in a society that denies them recognition. It is the link with the *marjaʿ taqlid* that ties them to Najaf and, hence, to the larger Shiʿa world.

# *Glossary*

*ʿadalah* justice

Akhbaris a school of thought that arose in the seventeenth century which sought to establish Shiʿi jurisprudence on the basis of the Traditions (*akhbar*) rather than on the rationalist principles (*usul*) used in *ijtihad*, as promoted by the Usulis. In the eighteenth century, the Usulis gained prominence over the Akhbaris.

*al-marja ʿal-aʾzam* the *mujtahid* recognized as the leading *marjaʿ* in the world

*ayatollah* a title bestowed on a *mujtahid* who has demonstrated advanced learning; *marjaʿtaqlid* must have risen to the station of an *ayatollah*

Babis followers of Ali Mohammad, a merchant from Shiraz who claimed prophethood. Many of the Shaykhis became his followers, believing that he was the Mahdi, the return of the Twelfth Imam. The Babis were considered heretics by the majority of Twelver Shiʿites and were persecuted for their beliefs.

*batin* a theological term referring to the hidden meaning of a word or phrase

*faqih* an expert in *fiqh*, a term used interchangeably with *mujtahid*

Fatima the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, the wife of ʿAli and the mother of the Imams Hassan and Husayn, a woman highly revered by the Shiʿa

*fatwa* an opinion on a point of law given by a *mujtahid*

*fiqh* religious jurisprudence, elucidation, and application of the *shariʿa*

*ghayba* occultation or concealment; a term associated with the Twelfth Imam, with the understanding that there would be no Imam alter him and that he would appear to establish the rule of justice and equity as the Just Ruler of Islam, the Mahdi

*ghulat* extremists whose doctrines are so heretical that they are outside the pale of Islam

*hadith* the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, an important source for determining Islamic law

*halal* that which is legally permissible

*haram* that which is forbidden or unlawful

*hawza* the collective term for the complex of madrassas and other religious institutions in one of the shrine cities

*hijab* generally refers to the garments that a woman wears to cover her hair and her entire body

*ijaza* certificate permitting a student to transmit his master's teaching or testifying to his ability to serve in a particular religious role

*ijtihad* making religious decisions based on reason

Illuminationists the Islamic philosophical school founded by Suhrawardi (d. 1191 CE)

*ʿilm* religious knowledge

Imam one of the twelve spiritual leaders of the Shiʿa, beginning with the Imam Ali. The remaining eleven Imams (according to Twelver belief) are descendants of Imam ʿAli and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.

imam one who leads prayers; commonly used as a term referring to the leader of a mosque

Imam ʿAli the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the first Imam of the Shiʿah; also the fourth caliph of the Sunnis

Imam Husayn the third Imam and the second son of the Imam ʿAli and the Prophet's daughter Fatima; he was killed on the plains of Karbala and is considered Shiʿism's greatest martyr. His death is commemorated each year during the month of Muharram.

*imam-jumaʿah* Friday prayer leader who is normally a government appointee. He plays a significant political role as well.

*ʿirfan* gnosis, mystic knowledge

*ʿisma* immaculateness or freedom from error, a property of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima, and the twelve Imams

*isnad* chain of transmission guaranteeing the authenticity of *hadith*

*kafir* one who does not believe in the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an; a term used to refer to someone who does not subscribe to beliefs held by the majority of Muslims

Karbala a shrine city in southern Iraq where the Imam Husayn is buried

*khums* a 20 percent tax on the surplus of income over necessary living expenses: half is paid to the *marjaʿtaqlid*, as the representative of the Imam and half to the seyyids

*madrasa* religious college where the Islamic sciences are taught

Mahdi refers to the Twelfth Imam who went into occultation (*ghayba*). The Shiʿa believe that he will appear to lead the world at the time of the Day of Judgment.

*marjaʿtaqlid* a *mujtahid* recognized as the source of emulation for Shiʿa in matters of religious law

*mujtahid* a religious scholar who has achieved the level of competence necessary to practice *ijtihad*

mulla the usual Persian term for one of the ulama

*mutʿa* temporary marriage sanctioned in Shiʿism

Najaf a shrine city in southern Iraq where the Imam ʿAli is buried; a center for religious scholarship for the Shiʿa

*qadi* a religious judge

Qajars Shiʿite dynasty ruling Iran from 1779 to 1925

Qom a city in central Iran where the eighth Imam's sister, Fatima, died. A shrine built to commemorate her draws pilgrims. The city has become Iran's foremost theological center.

*risala* a text written by a *mujtahid* presenting his opinions on points of religious law

Safavids Shiʿite dynasty ruling Iran from 1501 to 1722. The Safavids made Shiʿism the state religion of Iran.

*sahm i-Imam* (Persian), *sahm al-imam* (Arabic) the half of the khums that belongs to the Imam and is paid to the *marjaʿtaqlid*

*salat* obligatory prayer

*sayyid* a descendent of the Prophet through the Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband, the Imam ʿAli

*shahid* martyr

*shariʿa* Islamic law

Shaykhis a Shiʿite school founded in the late eighteenth century by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i; best known for its esoteric philosophical theology

Sufis the usual term for Islamic mystics

*tafsir* commentary or exegesis of whole or part of the Qur'an

*tahir* being in a state of purity

*talaba* a religious student at a madrassa

*taqlid* emulation, imitation or following; denotes the following of the dictates of a *mujtahid*

*tariqa* the Sufi path

*ulama* the religious class. The singular of this word, *alim*, can refer to a person learned in any branch of knowledge, but the plural is restricted to the religiously learned.

*umma* the entire community of Muslims

Usulis a school of thought that arose in the seventeenth century that promoted the enhanced role of the *mujtahid* and the establishment of Shi'i jurisprudence on the basis of *iftihad*

*wakil* an ambassador or an agent

*waaf* (pl. *awqaf*) property dedicated to religious charity; an endowment given in perpetuity and which cannot be sold or transferred

*wilaya* (Arabic), *vilayat* (Persian) a term that can indicate temporal government or power, as well as spiritual guidance and sanctity

*wilayat al-faqih* (Arabic) or *vilayat-i faqih* (Persian) the concept that government belongs by right to those who are learned in jurisprudence

*wudu'* ritual ablutions

*zakat* a religious tax payable by believers on certain categories of property and wealth and intended to assist the poor and needy, travelers and debtors. Both Sunnis and Shi'a pay *zakat*, but the Shi'a usually pay zakat to the *marja'taqlid*

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