

## Acknowledgments and Observations

The present book is the first English edition of an article which was published in an academic journal in 1994 under the name “El Islām Šī‘ita: ¿ortodoxia o heterodoxia?” [Shī‘ite Islām: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy?]. The article was well-received in academic circles and was soon widely circulated on various Islāmīc sites on the Internet thanks to a digital edition published by the *Biblioteca Islāmīca Ahlul Bayt* in Sevilla, Spain.

Thereafter, in the year 2000, the article was published in three parts in *Az-Zaqalain*, a Spanish language academic journal published in Qum, Iran. In response to the interest received by the article, Dr. John A. Morrow decided to translate it, edit it, and turn it into a book. As often occurs in such cases, the challenge of turning an article into a book relates to its amplification. Dr. Morrow resolved this problem by including an exhaustive amount of notes and bibliographical information from Arabic and Persian sources which, due to their quantity and quality, should be seen as a notable contribution to the original work of the author.

For all intents and purposes, this book constitutes a slightly modified version of that article originally published in *Epimelia: Revista de Estudios Sobre La Tradición*. The journal in question is the official academic organ of the Center for Research into the Philosophy and History of Religion (CIFHIRE) [*Centro de Investigaciones en Filosofía e Historia de Las Religiones*] at the Department of Philosophy of the School of Graduate Studies at John F. Kennedy Argentine University.

The book, in its present form, contains nothing new with the exception of the valuable critical and biographical notes, the translator’s preface, and the detailed index, provided by Dr. Morrow. It also contains a prologue by the author and an appendix in which we further expound upon our criticism of Orientalism, from the point of view of the philosophy of the history of religion, to the broader field of social studies. Besides these addendums, we have not modified the original text in any substantial fashion for obvious reasons.

For starters, it would be impossible to alter the sentences without changing their original intent. Furthermore, any such changes might arouse suspicion, leading some readers to believe that they were done for Editorial reasons. And finally, one of the main reasons for not making any changes, save those

slight details brought to our attention by those who reviewed the original Spanish version or its English translation, is that the work was written with great haste in the space of two months.

It was produced with the specific purpose of responding to endless allegations of Orientalists who, unsatisfied with characterizing Shī'ism as a fundamentalist form of Islām, stubbornly insisted on labeling it as a heterodox sect. By doing so, these scholars were merely echoing old Orientalist prejudices and supporting Muslim reformists. This reformist sector was quickly embraced by Western Orientalists as proponents of “moderate” Islām” while the traditional sector was labeled as representatives of “extremist Islām,” dangerous “fundamentalists” who make militant and violent interpretations of faith based on the Qur'ān.

The purpose of the original study, which has now been converted into a book, was to address this conceptual error which is incessantly repeated, *ad nauseam*, in academic circles and which passes from textbook to textbook. However, when the time came to review the book for publication, we felt much less optimistic with regards to our goal of conveying to Western readers that Shī'ite Islām is not an extreme, heterodox, fundamentalist or fanatical sect.

Evidently, we never pretended to provide a definitive “solution” to such a complex problem. Any such effort would require broader and more detailed studies. We acknowledge that many of the issues related to the topic remained outside the scope of our study. Although we are most conscious of the gaps in our study, we would never even dream of trying to fill them in the space of this exposition. Such exclusion is the understandable result of the need to assume a determined perspective, forcing us to be selective in our choice of the material covered.

In order to avoid confusing or misleading our readers, we must point out that we never proposed to write an introduction to Shī'ite Islām. This book does not study certain aspects which are crucial in the understanding of the political and metaphysical thought of Twelver Shī'ism. It may touch upon them, it may gloss over them, but is certainly does not study them in depth. Although we have drawn from primary sources in Arabic and Persian, presenting various legal and theological views with respect to issues like consensus [*ijmā'*], as well as traditional exegesis, both ancient and contemporary, it was not the objective of this book to expound exhaustively upon the views of every school of thought.

Our immediate and most pressing goal was to demonstrate that Shī'ite Islām is a genuine, legal and spiritual expression of traditional Islām, both in orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In the same way that Sunnī Islām is based in doctrine and practice on the basic principles of the Qur'ān and prophetic tradition, so is Shī'ite Islām, which, in its traditional form, has the added advantage of having been preserved and reaffirmed by a continuous and direct line of successors, the Holy Imāms, the natural heirs of the *wilāyah*, the Cycle of Prophecy.

The goal of this book, then, is to demonstrate that, far from being a heretical schismatic sect or fundamentalist form of Islām, as one hears over and over again, and which is more or less groundless,

Shī'ism is the living expression of original Muhammadan Islām, perfectly preserved by his successors, the Holy Imāms from the Prophetic Household [*Ahlul Bayt*].

It was for this reason, that we proposed, without any polemical or apologetic intent, to present the Shī'ite point of view, with the highest possible degree of objectivity, without any concession to influence by the prejudiced views of its detractors, be they Muslim or non-Muslim. We have presented Shī'ite Islām from a Shī'ite point of view. We made sure to put aside outside influences received during our academic formation for, as G. Bachelard has pointed out, these can turn into real epistemological obstacles which impede objectivity.

Readers should not be offended if, at given moments, they get the impression that they are reading a panegyric. This impression is to be expected as this work does not contain the redundant repetition of pejorative postulations presented in Orientalist works which claim to present Islām and the Arab world "objectively." Despite the overt contempt its secular ideologists manifest towards Islām, the West remains cynically passive.

This attitude, however, can only be understood within its historical context. The Western animosity towards Islām forms part of a long history of cultural encounters through which the West attempted to impose its hegemony on the East. It should come as no surprise that the unrepressed hatred towards Islām and Arabs forms the very basis of much Western Orientalism.

In many cases, Orientalism has been more or less officially at the service of the intellectual self-satisfaction of secular illustrated despotism and the conservatism of Western imperialist authoritarianism. Be it politically, militarily or intellectually, Western imperialism rarely hides its overwhelming aversion towards those who resist being physically or economically annexed as colonies, and those who refuse to be assimilated culturally, linguistically, mentally and spiritually.

It should be known from the onset that we are not unaware of the various aspects which have fallen outside of the reach of our study. Despite shortcomings related to time and space, we have attempted to develop our arguments in the most satisfactory fashion, using all our abilities to help readers overcome their resistance to the topic, the result of heightened sensitivities caused by events of worldwide repercussions which, directly or indirectly, involve Shī'ite Islām.

Since this book was written so rapidly as a response to current events, it cannot be considered an introduction to Shī'ite Islām. Any such claim would do a grave injustice to Muslim scholars who have devoted their entire lives to the study of one of the many fields which this book has merely surveyed with a bird's eye view. We have merely shown some of the scenery of Shī'ism, not its depth and detail. However, in our own defense, the general overview we have provided may be justified by the fact that it is not the fruit of improvisation.

This book is the result of years of study on the origins of Shī'ite Islām. Even though the book was written during the first semester of the 1994 academic year, it should be mentioned that its final form was

based on various preliminary versions and partial drafts from courses and lectures we delivered in the *Seminarios de historia, pensamiento y cultura del mundo islámico* [Lectures on the History, Thought, and Culture of the Islamic World] between 1991 and 1992.

This series of lectures was organized by the Argentinean Institute for Islamic Culture and the Cultural Bureau of the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires and took place in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires. Any good which comes from this limited contribution to the topic of Shi'ite Islam is due, in great part, to the valuable critical interest displayed by colleagues, friends, and students, whose questions and observations contributed considerably to the preparation of the final version of the book.

The very idea of writing an article on the basis of those classes and lectures owes much to the guidance of Dr. Francisco García Bazán, Dean of the Department of Philosophy, and Director of the Center for Research into the History and Philosophy of Religion at John F. Kennedy Argentine University, as well as the Editor of the journal *Epimeleia*. Dr. García Bazán must be thanked, first and foremost, for encouraging me to write this article.

He deemed the article a necessary contribution to scholarship. He understood, much better than most Orientalists, that Shi'ism, although representing a minority tradition, represents a spiritual current of Gnostic illumination, law and theology, which is entirely Islamic in orthodoxy and orthopraxy, to the same extent as mainstream and majority Sunni Islam. To be sincere, we must recognize that it was our director, Dr. García Bazán, who revived our interest in writing that article which was always in an indefinite state and which we could never come around to completing.

Dr. García Bazán's constant encouragement gave us an almost journalistic rhythm of redaction and, in little time, he granted us the time and the confidence to transform those initial rough drafts into a completed work. We are greatly indebted to the generous spirit of Dr. F. García Bazán, who, besides always knowing how and when to help us, from start to finish, has been of great benefit due to his scholarly knowledge and experience, counseling and guiding us with mastery in many ways. We will always consider it a privilege and an honor to have worked besides this great master of philosophy and comparative religion. We also thank him for permitting us to republish our work.

We are equally grateful to *Hujjat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin* Feisal Morhell of the *World Center of Islamic Sciences* of the *Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah* from Qum in the Islamic Republic of Iran, who also happens to be the Director of Cultural Affairs for the *Fundación Cultural Oriente* and Editor of the Spanish version of the academic journal *Az-Zaqalain*, for his interest in republishing the article which gave origin to this book.

*Hujjat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin* Feisal Morhell is a young specialist in traditional Islamic sciences who is not alien to this work since he proof-read our Arabic and Persian translations and, furthermore, provided us access to all of the primary Islamic sources which appeared in the original article. The bibliography for the book, however, has been greatly amplified by Dr. John A. Morrow.

We would also like to thank *Hujjat al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn* Murtadā Beheshtī, General Director of the *Islamic Thought Foundation* of Tehran, and the Editor-in-Chief of the Spanish version of the journal *Az-Zaqalain*; *Hujjat al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn* Sayyid Muhammad Rizvī, the resident *ʿālim* at the Ja'farī Islamic Center in Toronto, Canada, and Dr. Liyakat 'Alī Takīm, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver, whom we thank especially for reviewing the doctrinal, juridical, and historical aspects dealt with in the present book, with truly limitless dedication, patience and generosity.

There is no doubt whatsoever that we would have faced many difficulties during the preparation of this work were it not for the constant advice and observations made by these great scholars and brilliant Muslim. Thanks to their help, however, we have overcome many obstacles and we will be certain to include their contributions in a future edition of the Spanish version of the book.

There are many people in Argentina, the United States, Canada, the U.K., Spain, and Iran, who collaborated with us during the preparing of this study, in its dissemination, and in its first English translation. In this sense, we are particularly grateful to Mrs. Sumeia Younes from the *World Center of Islamic Sciences* of the *Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah* in Qum in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Editorial Secretary for the journal *Az-Zaqalain*, for reading the manuscript of the first Spanish article, as well as the American linguist, Mrs. Barbara Castleton, from Ohio University, who had the kindness of proofreading the English translation and preparing a commendatory preface.

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They are both young research scholars at the Center for Oriental Studies, School of Letters, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, in Santa Fe, Argentina, an institution associated with the Mullā Sadrū Center for Islamic Studies and Research (CEDIMS) [*Centro de Estudios y Documentación Islámicos Mullā Sadrū*] at the Universidad Católica Argentina de La Plata (Sede Bernal). We are particularly grateful to its General Coordinator, Dr. Horacio López Romano, for the generous institutional space he has provided to us, opening us the door to his installations and Dr. Sonia Yebara, Director of the Center for Oriental Studies of the School of Literature of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario for their unselfish institutional support.

Other friends and colleagues read fragments or complete version of my rough drafts, providing an impressive volume of critical observations and facts. It would be impossible to mention them all. Nevertheless, we would like to express our gratitude to the following persons, whose constant kindness and cooperation facilitated our task: Mr. Ángel Almazán de Gracia, the Spanish cultural journalist, writer, and historian, who specializes in Sorian culture and Numantine archeology, for enthusiastically reading

this work and citing it in many of his articles and books, as well as his generous and selfless support.

To Mr. Mikail Álvarez Ruiz, Director of the *Biblioteca Islámica Ahlul Bayt* from Sevilla, Spain, to whom we owe the first digital version of the Spanish original, and which has been well-received and distributed over the Internet. He was the first to conceive of the idea of turning our article into a book and he is also one of the most energetic promoters of our work on the Internet.

It was on the basis of the digital edition that he prepared that Dr. John A. Morrow based his English version. The valuable collaboration of Mr. Héctor H. Manzollillo, one of the most prolific and recognized translators of Islamic texts in Spanish, also stands out. He was kind enough to review the notes to the English translation, making corrections which were greatly appreciated by the translator and Editor.

Finally, we would like to express our endless gratitude to the Editor, Dr. John A. Morrow, Assistant Professor of Modern Languages at Northern State University in the United States, to whom we owe the first English edition of our work, as well as his scrupulous critical annotations.

The exchanges which resulted from his translation have allowed us to know a marvelous human being, wise yet humble, who honors us by his irreplaceable friendship. We would also like to thank our wife, Mónica Delia Pereiras, for supporting patiently and lovingly our domestic “absences” through all the time it took us to write and correct this book.

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Professor Luis Alberto Vittor  
Center for Research into the Philosophy and History of Religion (CIFHIRE)  
Department of Philosophy, School of Graduate Studies  
John F. Kennedy Argentine University

Mullā Sadr Center for Islamic Studies and Research (CEDIMS)  
Department of Social and Political Sciences in Africa and the Middle East  
Catholic University of Argentina de la Plata (Sede Bernal)  
Associated with the Center for Oriental Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Sciences, National University of Rosario

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