

Chapter 1: Towards a Definition of Heterodoxy in Islam

The word “sect” comes from the Latin *sequi* or *sequor* and means “to follow.” According to this definition, the term excludes the idea of schism or doctrinal rupture. In Christian usage, the term “sect” is not free from pejorative connotations although it is much better than the label “heretic.” Nowadays, in Christian terminology, the word “sect” refers mostly to a body of people sharing religious opinions who have broken away from a larger body. “Sect” in the sense of “cult” refers to a group of people who follow the “revelations” made by its founder. Such sects, like the Mormons for example, differ from the Church, in the non-theological sense of the term, in that they recognize another new revelation. The sect insists on the need to understand the neo-testamentary text which is different in essence from the sacred scriptures.¹ Besides that distinction, and as can be observed within the Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, the cult believes in collective, not individual salvation, which is exclusively limited to its members.²

It must be understood, however, that the sects which the Church opposes in the name of orthodoxy are merely other religions with their own rites and dogmas which are only heretical with respect to official orthodoxy. If we attempt to remove the slippery polish from the word “sect,” turning it into a simple technical term devoid of subjectivity, we will see that “the meaning of sect is closer to the Spanish word *séquito* [group of followers, adherents and devotees] than to what is commonly understood by *secta* [sect] and its derivative *sectario* [sectarian] which curiously and arbitrarily are applied to it” (García Bazán 114–18).³

As has been regularly documented, a persistent residue has adhered to the word “sect” as a result of use and abuse. In its common meaning, it applies to exclusivist religious minorities which are opposed to a commonly accepted Church tenet. Sects are born through dissent and view themselves as a small flock of chosen ones. This is how quantitative differences come about between Church and sect. For the Western religious historian, what defines a sect is its character as a separate group, much more than its minority status, which can eventually reach the size of a Church. This is where we see the motives

which drive Western religious historians like Gibb to come up with unilateral interpretations of complex concepts and doctrines. They explain and analyze them in terms that prevent the possibility of truly understanding what a sect or religion, such as Islam, really represents.⁴

It can never be sufficiently stressed that the general application of Western terms like “orthodoxy,” “heterodoxy,” “church” and “sect” to Islam is grossly misapplied, especially as Islam does not have a Church to define orthodoxy or the powers to excommunicate.⁵ The use of such terms ends up simplifying complex issues, associating them with Western religious phenomena which do not have equivalents in the language of Islam. There is no place for such terms as “orthodoxy,” “heterodoxy,” “church,” “sect,” and “heresy” in an Islamic tradition rooted in the concept of divine unity.⁶

While there is diversity within Islam, there is not, simply by a slight difference in approach, a contradiction of its central doctrine of divine unity nor the gregarious separation in its fundamentals of faith or its community [*ummah*]. Rather, they are diverse tendencies that make up Islam and so long as they do not stray from the fundamentals of faith, they can all claim with some justification to represent its most authentic expression.⁷ With this understanding, one can appreciate that in Islam there does not exist a clear line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. As a result, the various Islamic currents are neither radically misguided groups which have broken from official orthodoxy nor are they separated from one another, as are the Christian sects of today.

Unlike the Western world, the Islamic world defines orthodoxy by means of the profession of faith or *shahadah*: *Lā ilāhā illā Allāh / Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh* [There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah]. The *shahadah* is the most universal proclamation of divine unity and is not a strictly defined theological formula. There exists, of course, an orthodoxy in Islam, without which no doctrine or tradition is possible. However, contrary to Gibb’s affirmation, Islamic orthodoxy has not been defined by *ijmā’* [scholarly consensus] in any restricted or limited sense. What is more, in Islam there has never existed a religious institution capable of deciding who is orthodox and who is not.⁸

Infatuated with every Western prejudice, Gibb seems to have translated the old axiom of *divide et impera* [divide and conquer] into the more modern: classify and discard! But to understand the history of Islam, however, requires more than merely counting or organizing dates. The eye of the scholar must be capable of discerning the profound print of his subject, its depth, its substance and its essence. He must belong to a tradition and provide us with comprehensive and broad formulas called critical approaches and methodologies. Gibb easily forgets that in Islam, **so long as a practice or a belief does not contravene the *shar‘ah* [Islamic law] and can be traced back to the Qur’an and the *sunnah* it is clearly orthodox and cannot be deemed heretical.** This principle also applies to the genuine spiritual paths of Islamic mysticism [*ta‘awwuf*] in the Sunnī world whose devotional practices and metaphysical doctrines cannot be judged on the criteria of “orthodoxy” that govern the exoteric forms of the religion. This is particularly so since the esoteric can never face the exoteric on the same plane. Both operate on different but not divergent orders of the same reality.⁹ In other words, they constitute the “core” [*al-lubb*]

and the “skin” [*al-qishrah*] of the religion.

In *Nahj al-balaghah* [*The Path of Eloquence*]—a collection of sermons, epistles, and aphorisms of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb compiled by Sharaf al-Raẓī (406/1015)—the First Imām most brilliantly and masterfully settles the question of the diversity of schools and currents in Islamic thought. He describes them as parts of the spiritual freedom given by God which are in accord with His Oneness: [10](#)

Praise be to Allāh who established Islām and made it easy for those who approach it and gave strength to its columns against any one who tries to overpower it ... It is the most bright of all paths, the clearest of all passages. It has dignified minarets, bright highways, burning lamps, prestigious fields of activity, and high objective. (Sermon 105: 249)

This Islām is the religion which Allāh has chosen for Himself ... He made Islām such that its constituent parts cannot break, its links cannot separate, its construction cannot fall, its columns cannot decay ... It consists of columns whose bases Allāh has fixed in truthfulness, and whose foundation He has strengthened, and of sources whose streams are ever full of water and of lamps, whose flames are full of light, and of beacons with whose help travelers get guidance. (Sermon 197: 408)

As one can gather from these words, **the Islamic tradition has, in a general sense, provided a broad umbrella which embraces a multiplicity of points of view** as distinct as the doctrinal masters of thought who formulated them. The only tension between them—when there was any at all—has normally been between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the tradition. This tension has always alternated harmoniously within the same dynamic rhythm. The temporal predominance of one over the other in the successive manifestations of the same living organism is comparable to the diastole and the systole of the heartbeat. Without alternation, these two essential movements continue in harmony, like the exoteric and the esoteric. Like any other tradition, Islām would cease to beat without them and would turn into a rigid form without a pulse. [11](#) In other words, the orthodoxy of the distinct schools of thought in Islām does not manifest itself solely through the preservation of its outer forms. It is expressed equally by its natural development and, especially, by its capacity to absorb any spiritual expression which is not essentially alien to the doctrine of divine unity. [12](#)

It is true that in Islām there is what in the language of the West is defined as “sect.” The word “sect” in Arabic is *firqah* which comes from the Arabic *farrāqa* which means “to separate” and “to divide.” **Let us not make the mistake, however, of considering Sunnī and Shī‘ite Islām as the two main sects of Islām. Let us not differentiate between them by applying normative and schematic judgments to decide, unilaterally, in accord with the mental and moral modes of historically European-based societies, which one of them is “orthodox” and which one is “heterodox.”** If we have acknowledged that there is diversity in Islām, we need to recognize that there is also a means to understand its unity. The unity of Islām rests on one sole factor: the uninterrupted event of the Qur’ānic revelation. In synthesis, the oneness of God and Islām is manifested in every aspect of its doctrinal reach in the affirmation of divine unity [*tawḥīd*], the proclamation that the beginning of existence is one as ratified by

the apothegm *al-tawḥīdu waḥīdun*: “the doctrine of oneness is one.” **For Islām, divine unity constitutes the only *raison d’être* [reason for being] and the essential criteria upon which all “orthodoxy” is based, regardless of its contingent modes of expression.** We can go further and affirm that, as far as Islamic thought is concerned, the doctrine of “divine unity” is the common denominator shared by all traditional monotheistic faiths without exception, so long as they adhered to pure and original monotheism. [13](#) We can expand upon this more and proclaim that the universal and the continuous in all things operate through this Unique Principle which invariably is everywhere and always identical to Itself.

The great metaphysical currents from East and West unanimously agree that the ultimate reality of all things, the essential state of all creatures, their beginning and their return, is divine unity. [14](#) In this sense, this Islamic concept runs parallel to those of Xenophanes, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. [15](#) It runs parallel with those of Judaism, Taoism and Buddhism as well as those of the Advaita Vedanta, formulated by Master Sankara as a recapitulation of the Veda which, according to Muslim Gnostics, is the revelation God made to Adam. [16](#) This also applies to Alexandrine hermeticism—to the extent that it is a continuation of the tradition of Hermes or Idrīs, as he is known in the Islamic world—which is also embraced and integrated into Islām. [17](#)

The truth of the One Absolute, the identification of all things with a Sole Beginning, was revealed by the Qur’ān for Islām in the form of the *shahādah*. [18](#) The divine profession of faith stresses that “He is Allḥ, the One and Only” (112:1), “there is no god but Allḥ” (47: 19) and that “He has no partners” [*waḍahu lā sharḳa lahu*] or, as the chapter “Divine Unity” [*Sūrat al-tawḥīd*] or “Purity of Faith” [*Sūrat al-ikhḥāṣ*] declares, “there is none like unto Him” [*wa lam yakun lahu kufu’an aḍad*] (112:-4). **To be considered as orthodox, Islām requires a true and sincere belief in monotheism.** [19](#) The contrary of *tawḥīd* is *shirk*: the attribution of partners or associates to God, idolatry and polytheistic paganism. *Shirk* is a mortal sin without possibility of pardon. [20](#) It is heresy incarnate which is why the Qur’ān warns: “Allḥ forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allḥ is to devise a sin Most heinous indeed” (4:48). [21](#)

For Islām, the essential element which guarantees true orthodoxy is the belief in “monotheism.” This applies not only to its own schools of thought or spiritual paths, but also to any traditional religion prior to Islām. [22](#) The term “monotheism,” however, is inadequate when it comes to translating the sense of *al-tawḥīd*. The word “monotheism” can only be used to accommodate the lack of a better term in English and other Western languages, without giving it an exclusively religious connotation. The doctrine of “divine unity” is essentially metaphysical in the true and original sense of the term. But in Islām, as in other traditions, it also implies—in its direct application to diverse contingent domains—a whole network of complicated and interlacing parts. These parts, within Islām, are not necessarily incompatible, despite their respective characters, as they are in the West since in Islām there is no division between the functions of “religion” and “state.”

Islam is a complete civilization and a complex culture in which all activities and spheres of daily life, individual, societal and governmental must reflect divine unity.²³ Islam is not merely a “religion” if by religion one exclusively means an ecclesiastic system of belief and practice. More than that, Islam is a way of life with a faith or, if one wants, a traditional way of life [*dīn*] which, through the Qur’ān, the *sunnah* and the *shar‘ah*, proclaims a faith and establishes rituals. It also prescribes an established social order on the basis of the “fundamentals of faith” or the “pillars of Islam” [*arkān al-islām*] for individuals and society in all areas that determine the condition and the *raison d’être* [reason for being] of the orthodox Muslim. An orthodox Muslim, as we have seen, is anyone who is sincere in his faith. A 20th century Gnostic, al-Shaykh al-‘Alawī from Mostagan, a *qutb* or spiritual pole of Sunni Islam of the Shadhilī school,²⁴ said that to be an orthodox Muslim it is sufficient to observe five things: to believe in God and recognize Muhammad as his final prophet, perform the five daily prayers, give the prescribed alms to the poor, fast, and make the pilgrimage to Makkah (Lings 23).²⁵ The *arkān al-islām* or pillars of Islam, as a whole, are the formal expression of Islam and encompass everything which Western language designates as strictly religious.²⁶ The pillars of Islam also include all of the social and legislative realms which in the Islamic world integrate into the religion. Hence, the Western concept of separation between “religion” and “state” is something foreign to orthodox Islamic thought.

Besides these five fundamentals of faith there are five other pillars of religion [*uḥūd al-dīn*] according to Shī‘ite Islam which are in conformity with the *sunnah* of the Prophet.²⁷ They include *tawhīd*, the belief in divine unity; *nubuwwah*, the belief in the prophecy; *ma‘ād*,²⁸ the belief in resurrection and the hereafter; *imāmah*, the Imāmate, the belief in the twelve Imāms as successors of the Prophet and depositories of his *wilāyah* [guardianship], the spiritual and temporal power of Islam and; ‘*adl* or divine justice. Sunnis and Shī‘ites agree upon the three basic pillars, namely, *tawhīd*, *nubuwwah*, and *ma‘ād*. They only differ on the other two. **In terms of the Imāmate, what distinguishes the Shī‘ite perspective from the Sunni one is the insistence on the esoteric function and spiritual supremacy of the Imām.** In Sunni Islam, this difference is formerly overcome through gnosis [*ma‘rifah* or ‘*irfān*] of *ta‘awwuf* in which the *qutb* or spiritual pole of the age represents the esoteric and initiatory role that the Imām plays in Shī‘ism.²⁹ In terms of ‘*adl* or divine justice what distinguishes Shī‘ism is the stress given to this attribute as an essential quality of the divine reality. In its concept of divine justice, Shī‘ism considers this aspect as co-substantial with divinity.³⁰ God cannot act unjustly because it is impossible for the Just to be unjust. There can be no division or contradiction in the One.

Finally, despite their external differences, Sunnis, Shī‘ites and *ṭālibīs* share a stress on practice and conduct as opposed to doctrine. The faithful observance of the fundamentals of faith is what lies at the center of their thought and differences. It is only on the esoteric plane that every religious perspective can be placed so long as it does not contradict the transcendental unity which goes beyond any such limitations. It is this unity which is found in the external expressions of each religion or theological school. **The transcendental unity of all religions is not broken in any way by the transcendence of Islam.**³¹ Such unity is not a material extension and gradual development but rather the fundamental identity of the one within the multiple.³² Even if it varies to infinity, it responds in different ways to the

needs of different human cultures and races.³³ For this reason, the establishment of “orthodoxy” in Islām, based on uniformity instead of unity, as it exists with other religious forms, especially in the West, could never depend on the *ijmā‘* or the consensus of scholars. Gibb’s reductionist doctrine wishes to liken Islamic *ijmā‘* to the “councils of the Christian Church” (90). It is only the metaphysical doctrine of unity which can reconcile all types of differences while maintaining the unity of the Islamic tradition, both exoteric and esoteric, over and above any tension or conflict of a political or religious order.

In this sense, Shī‘ite Islām represents a balancing totality of various points of view. Due to the profoundly esoteric character of its doctrine, it represents a “middle path” between the excessive formal legalism of the jurists and the excessive introversion of the mystics.³⁴ The *ta‘awwuf*, depository of gnosis in the Sunnī world, can be defined spiritually as the Shī‘ism of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Fourth Caliph and First Imām of Islām.³⁵ Both Ṣūfism and Shī‘ism, in accord with the traditions of the Prophet, view ‘Alī as the “gate” of initiation to the esoteric knowledge [*bay‘in*] of Muḥammad who stated quite clearly: “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alī is its gate. Whoever wants to enter this city must first pass through its gate.”³⁶

The symbol of the “gate” [in Arabic *bāb*] alludes to the esoteric function of the First Imām since it is through him that one gains access to initiation [from the Latin *inire* or to “enter”]. Found in many traditions, the “gate” alludes to initiation into the Muḥammadan “mysteries” or “secrets” [*sirr*].³⁷ In its universal sense, the “gate” refers to the spiritual office as the “seal” of the absolute *wilāyah* [guardianship] and the esoteric pole of the prophecy who has opened the Cycle of Initiation [*d‘irat al-wilāyah*] which, at the same time, has been sealed by the Twelfth Imām, al-Mahdī, who closes the Muḥammadan *wilāyah*.

In short, the completion of the doctrinal legacy of Islām explains, as does the absence of any unanimously accepted human authority who has received spiritual and temporal power from the Most High, the rather indefinite character of the notion of orthodoxy outside of what is established by the Qur’ān, the *sunnah* and the *shar‘ah*. In specific, with the exception of the Mahdī, there does not exist in Islām a universally recognized magistrate capable of formulating new laws. The *Ayātullāhs*³⁸ [from the Arabic *‘ayāt*, signs and *Allāh*, God] which in our epoch appear more and more as the jurists [*mujtahidīn*] and the depositories of the *wilāyat al-faqīh*,³⁹ that is, the spiritual and political leadership of Shī‘ite Islām, limit themselves to interpreting the prescriptions and mandates of the Qur’ān. They do so in accord with a tradition passed down from generation to generation by the Twelve Imāms but with nuances and even considerable differences from one *mujtahid* to another.⁴⁰ One thing that must be clarified as well is that when we speak of Shī‘ism we refer to the *ithnā‘asharī* or “Twelver” branch, also known as the Ja‘farī school of jurisprudence.⁴¹ The term Shī‘ism embraces many branches, each with its own interpretation of Qur’ānic doctrine. The term Sunnism embraces various exoteric branches, including the four most famous schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the Shāfi‘ī, the Ḥanafī, the Ḥanbalī and the Mālikī. The term Ṣūfism also embraces various branches. In the esoteric world of *ta‘awwuf* it is possible to distinguish spiritual paths [*quruq*] equal in number to the infinite variety of souls or

beings.⁴² As Ibn Khaldūn explains in his *Muqaddimah* [*Prolegomenon*], the profession of divine unity is the very secret [*sirr*] of these doctrines.⁴³

So far, we have examined the fundamental *ubi consistam* [point of reference] of Islamic thought regarding the concept of “orthodoxy.” Clearly, Shī‘ite Islām must not be removed from this definition.

Excluding Shī‘ite Islām from the realm of Islamic orthodoxy--by omission or by excess--is one of the most common mistakes made by Western scholars who wish to give it a sectarian nature similar to reformist Christian sects. These scholars even go to the extreme of giving Shī‘ism an allegedly “fundamentalist” character which, in the broadest sense, applies exclusively to certain forms of modern American Protestantism.

In present times, the term “fundamentalist” is commonly applied to Shī‘ite Islām and to Islamic groups characterized by a rejection of all manifestation of secularism in the Eastern world.⁴⁴ This is despite the fact that, in every sense, **Shī‘ism represents the living tradition of Islām.**⁴⁵ **Both in politics and religion, Shī‘ite Islām is traditional.**⁴⁶ When faced with outbreaks of innovation [*bid‘ah*] Shī‘ite Muslims, like all orthodox Muslims, react with the same hostility as any who face a subversive movement which seeks to overthrow the established order.⁴⁷ **Due to its imminently esoteric nature and its acceptance of diverse levels of interpretation of the scriptures--each one more profound than the other--Shī‘ism is, in the Islamic world, what least resembles “fundamentalism” if understood in its correct sense of extreme superficial and sterile literalism.**⁴⁸

It may be worthwhile to mention at this point that **“fundamentalism” is a purely Christian term.** It seems to have come into use at the beginning of the twentieth century and describes, first and foremost, certain American Protestant sects, particularly those with a puritanical perspective. The sects in question are noted for interpreting the scriptures to the letter of the law, from a narrow-minded perspective. They reject any profound interpretation of the Bible, prohibiting any hint of hermeneutics. Notably, the term “fundamentalist” is now applied on a daily basis by many Muslims but stripped from the pejorative sectarian sense. Through a strange semantic distortion, they give the term the erroneous meaning and the distorted sense of a “return to the fundamentals” of the Islamic faith. They do so as if at some time in Islamic history, the *arkān al-islām* [pillars of Islām] had somehow ceased to exist, visibly or invisibly, in all spheres of Muslim existence and in all their manifestations in the Islamic world. Even when they are relinquished or temporarily placed on the back burner--as in the atypical case of Turkey--they have always been fully maintained in the spiritual and esoteric order without which any return to original Islām is impossible.⁴⁹ In this sense, **the integral restoration of the true and original sense of the revelation depends on the *ta‘wīz* [spiritual guidance] of the Imāms, the fundamental touchstone of the illuminative awakening of Islamic gnosis.** They are invested with the initiatory function due to their condition as divinely-inspired men and perfect interpreters of His message, well beyond the literary and philosophical paraphrase of rationalist jurists and theological puritans like Ibn Taymiyyah⁵⁰ and those of Abd al-Wahhīb.⁵¹

A return to the fundamentals implies that a distancing or a partial separation [*firqah*] from them has taken place. If returning to the founding principles of the Islamic faith is used in the sense of returning to the straight path, then this may very well require a reencounter with Shī‘ite Islām since its doctrine has always remained firmly grounded in the teachings of the Imāms who are effectively the *arkān* [pillars] *par excellence*.⁵² In the Shī‘ī view, **the Imāms are the fundamental pillars of Islām in the sense that the essence of the revelation was passed on to them by the Prophet, both exoterically and esoterically, through the function of the Imāmate or spiritual inheritance**, that is, the esoteric guidance of the prophetic *bayyin* [secrets]. According to the famous *‘adath al-kisf* [The Tradition of the Cloak], the Prophet called his daughter Fātimah along with ‘Alī, ‘Asan, and ‘Usayn, and covered them completely with his cloak.⁵³ This act symbolized the transmission of the universal *wilayah* of the Prophet, through the epiphany [*ma‘har*] of the partial *wilayah* [*wilayah fā‘imiyah*], to the plethora of the Twelve Imāms, the Prophet’s immaculate progeny [*ma‘ūm*].⁵⁴

Within the bounds of the excessively arid exteriorist “literalism” which defines Protestant fundamentalism, we can only include, in relation to Islām, the exceptional case of Wahhābism.⁵⁵ This obscure puritanical and reformist sect [*firqah*], derived from Sunnī Islām’s strict ‘anbalī school of thought, was founded by **Mu‘ammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who can be called, without exaggeration, the Martin Luther of the Muslim World**.⁵⁶ His doctrine was inspired by the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah, a rationalist rigorist who opposed the ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabī.⁵⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb found his ideological support in the political opportunism of the upstart emir of the Dariya tribe, Mu‘ammad ibn Sa‘ūd, the ancestor and founder of the actual Saudi dynasty which became the secular arm and executor of Wahhābism.⁵⁸

Like Luther with respect to Christianity, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb called for a “return to the fundamentals” of faith. These, however, were reformulated literally and were stripped of the doctrinal complement brought by the teachings of the Imāms and the exegetic and hermeneutical methods instituted by the Prophet as sacred sciences aimed at discerning the inner meanings of the scripture. **A “return to the fundamentals” of Islām, as proposed by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, can only be brought about by the restorative action of the *ta‘ūm* or esoteric guidance of Imām Mahdī, the Hidden and Awaited Imām, and never through human initiative.**⁵⁹ We “return” [*ta’w*] the revealed letter [*tanz*] to the plane where it becomes real. The revelation [*tanz*], according to Shī‘ite Islām, is both exoteric [*‘ahir*] and esoteric [*bayyin*]. The process of understanding consists in starting from the exoteric in order to reach the esoteric. Metaphysical internalization, the cornerstone of Islamic Gnosticism, tends to revive, in the symbolic articulation of the scripture, its profound spiritual sense as revealed by Angel Gabriel to the Prophet according to its original enunciation. Consequently, *ta’w*, [the allegorical interpretation], is the “returning ascent,” the march up country [anabasis] of the *‘ahir* [exoteric] and the *bayyin* [esoteric].⁶⁰ The mission of the Prophet was the founding of the *‘ahir* which implies a descent by the spirit to every formal point of expression of the scripture.⁶¹ **The mission or *ta‘ūm* of the Twelfth Imām al-Mahdī is to lead the *‘ahir* [exoteric] to the *bayyin* [esoteric] in our present cycle. This is why he is called *‘a‘ib al-zamān* [the Lord of the Age].**⁶² In order for there to be a “return to the

fundamentals” of Islām, it is also necessary for there to be a universal restoration of the esoteric sciences in all of their traditions. For that same metaphysical reason, it requires a man who, besides being inspired by God and being a perfect interpreter who masters the exoteric and the esoteric scripture, is a spiritual heir, an inheritor and direct descendant of the Prophet from the line of ʿusayn, the Third Imām.

According to Islamic metaphysics, which stems more or less directly from Shīʿism, the “heterodoxy” of any idea implies, in one way or another, the falsity of its formulations which are in absolute disagreement with the metaphysical and esoteric principles of the tradition. This is precisely what René Guénon⁶³ warns of with respect to the Vedānta.⁶⁴ According to this definition, orthodoxy lies in a constant balance between immutable principles. In the Islamic tradition, these principles are contained in the Qurʾān. **The balance between the letter and spirit of the revealed text constitutes the criteria of Islamic orthodoxy which is founded on faith in the oneness of God.**⁶⁵

The discussion of Islamic sects would be worthwhile if the term was restituted, as García Bazán demands, to the original sense the Romans gave it when they translated the Greek word *hairesis* as “sect” (114). The Greek word which has evolved into “heretic” merely means “selection,” “option,” or philosophical or religious “inclination” (115–17). It does not imply the idea of difference, separation or breaking from a tradition, nor does it possess the pejorative connotation that it has in Western languages. As García Bazán explains, even the middle form of *haireo* and *haireomai*, from which *hairesis* derives, simply means “selection” or “option.”

In terms of Wahhābism, whose influence continues to be observed in Saudi Arabia and much of the Muslim world, “sectarian” deviations are not ritual or doctrinal: they are scriptural.⁶⁶ With regards to the sacred text, **the Wahhābi “heresy” consists in a deformation and literal reinterpretation of the Qurʾānic text and even of innovation in the Islamic canon.**⁶⁷ **They are “heretics” who are formally separated from the Islamic community, not by ritual practice, but by scriptural deviation.**⁶⁸ These rigid rigorist literalists adhere to the external aspect of the written text and reject any extensions or interpretations transmitted through the oral and written tradition. In contrast, Shīʿite religious practice, as strict and legalistic as it may be, which assures a solid orthodoxy and orthopraxy, is accompanied, in the matter of faith, with a profound spirituality of a metaphysical and esoteric character which extends to its interpretation of the Qurʾān, the *sunnah* and the *sharʿah*. It is for these reasons, for its Gnostic character, that the application of the term “fundamentalist” to Shīʿite Islām is totally unjustified. **In every sense, Shīʿite Islām represents Islamic orthodoxy as much as Sunnī Islām.**⁶⁹ Without a doubt, it is the minority status of Shīʿism in the Muslim world, as opposed to ritual, doctrinal or scriptural deviation, that gives Westerners the impression that it is a “sect.”

From ancient times until the present, the notion of “sect” has not been freed from the prejudice that it applies only to small religious groups. As the old Latin proverb goes: *Si duo faciunt idem, non est idem* [If two do the same thing, it is not the same thing]. Obviously, these ideas about sects are applied by

Westerners to whatever phenomenon they can reduce to this label. Evidently, this is done without considering their inner aspects, where major spiritual differences are really hidden. Moreover, we cannot dismiss the ill-concealed aims of certain specialists to place all minority religions into the framework of a single verdict of justification or rejection. They wish to do this by exclusively considering the external manifestations of religion, which constitute the visible skeleton of orthodoxy, when it is essentially a question of interiority.

Finally, if we have spent more time than necessary dealing with term “fundamentalism,” it is because the general use of this term conveys a “sectarian” attitude. Its use is obviously misguided and distorted because it is born out of a fanatic and uncompromising attitude in favor of one party or one idea. **It is always convenient to give a sectarian nature to Shī‘ite Islām by means of the “fundamentalist” label, without understanding that the real reason for its existence is clearly traditional.** The phenomenon we refer to is a common vice. In fact, it is the main reason why the Western mentality is unable to understand the Eastern spirit. Clearly, it is not a question of cultural differences or contradictions in term, but, to paraphrase the words of Suhrawardī,⁷⁰ forms of spiritual participation or perspectives between an Orient of Illumination [*ishraq*] and an Occident of Exile.

There is no point in denying that the most esoteric of these Islamic sciences was related to neo-Pythagoreanism⁷¹ and hermeticism.⁷² It was through them that Islām came into close contact with the Sabians of *ḥarrān*.⁷³ They were responsible for transmitting astronomy, astrology and mathematics from Babylonian sources and later Chaldeans bound with the hermetic–Pythagorean ideas of Alexandria to Islām. All of this is true.⁷⁴

It is also true that medicine and cosmology reached the Muslims by means of the Hindus and the Persians. These sciences were eagerly embraced by Islām since, far from being secular forms of knowledge, they were intrinsically linked to the central doctrine of “divine unity.” On the other hand, some aspects of classical Greek and Hindu culture, like the secular philosophies of the Epicureans,⁷⁵ some of the cynics⁷⁶ and the naturalism of the anatomists, barely aroused the interest of the Muslims. It was impossible for knowledge of this type, based on sensuality and a dualistic relativism, to be integrated into Islamic thought in a cohesive and cogent form since they were outside of the nature of the Gnostic experience. The Mu‘tazilite’s refutation of certain aspects of dualist and Trinitarian theories, however, brought Islām a theological solution in accordance with the concept of divine unity. In their defense of Greco–Alexandrian philosophy, the Mu‘tazilites created favorable conditions for study and scholarship in Shī‘ite intellectual circles. This affinity and sympathy between the Mu‘tazilites and the Shī‘ites must not be confounded in any way as identity.⁷⁷ On fundamental issues, such as the significance and function of the Imām, they differ completely. On that issue, the Mu‘tazilite perspective is much closer to that of the Sunnī. What is clear is that during the entire history of Islām, the pre–Islamic legacy of cosmological sciences and metaphysical doctrines were united, as they were in the Jabirian corpus or in the *Rasā’il* [Epistles] of the *ikhwān al-‘afā’* [The Pure Brethren / The Brotherhood of the Pure]⁷⁸ in a perfect synthesis. Science and scholarship from external sources never ruptured Islām’s

monotheistic mandate.

Modern Muslim scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Allamah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn ‘Abūtabā‘, Aḥmad Aḥmad, and Orientalists like Henry Corbin,⁷⁹ Titus Burckhardt, René Guénon, and Frithjof Schuon,⁸⁰ teach us to view Islam from a perspective which appreciates the diversity within its unity. The harmonious integration of diverse systems of thought within its unitarian perspective makes it all the more appealing particularly since it is the product of the Muḥammadan spirit which is essentially metaphysical and ethical. Thanks to the research of these scholars and the research of those who follow in their footsteps like William C. Chittick, Christian Jambet, and Pierre Lory, to mention only a few, Islam is no longer a mass which crushes us under its enormous religious weight.⁸¹ It is also no longer a primitive pastoral religion of shepherds or an Arab imitation or adaptation of Judaism and Christianity.⁸² On the contrary, Islam is now presented as a type of intelligent filter that magically selects, cleans and purifies, preserving what is of value, while filtering out and rejecting what is harmful and useless, from profane secular knowledge. Like these scholars, we view the transfer or transmission of the pre-Islamic legacy as a natural unveiling of the universal continuity of the same spiritual inheritance.⁸³ Due to its metaphysical nature, its development is indefinite. It manifests itself in given historical moments and takes root in the most fertile field to ensure its spiritual blooming. This is how we see things as opposed to embracing theories of “influx” and “imitation.” Our perspective is not a personal one. It is entirely in accord with the eternal sacred tradition.

But let us be candid. Even if we were to view Islam as the result of some historical “influx” or as a “copy” or a pre-Islamic religious model—rejecting everything that is authentic and unique in its own revelation—we should recognize as well, as does Cruz Hernández, that even under such conditions **no religion has turned out better than Islam.**⁸⁴

It was Cruz Hernández, the distinguished professor from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, who presented a staunch criticism of the methodology employed by Asín Palacios. As Cruz Hernández points out, Palacios’ attitude is not only the product of his social context, and his training as a Catholic priest, it also reflects the state of scientific thought of his time (490). Like Cruz Hernández, our goal is not to cast doubt on the value of Asín Palacios work as a whole by criticizing a widely held prejudice against Islam which was also applied to other religions. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Palacios for his important contributions to the knowledge of Islam during the period of al-Andalus. Although much of his work has merit, it must be stressed, however, that the methodology he employs, which is employed by Gibb as well, is completely wrong. Their approach is erroneous for the simple fact that it is based on a principle which is inherently flawed. The problem with their approach is the belief that for religious studies to be scientific, to come to an understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular, it is necessary to narrow things down to a few facts.⁸⁵ Once non-essential elements have been reduced to minimal terms, to abstract formulas and to skeletal hypotheses, all traditions can be condensed into an imaginary framework of classifications that conveniently explain certain similarities between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions through theories of “assimilation” or “successive reproduction.”⁸⁶

As can be appreciated, we would exhaust ourselves uselessly attempting to criticize such an understanding of religion. The case has been judged and the verdict has been given. As René Guénon has observed in relation to the Vedanta, Eastern and Western concepts of “religion” are profoundly different.⁸⁷ In order to prevent such confusion from extending to Islām, it is important to remember here that tradition, as opposed to religion, is the vital source of all religious forms. A tradition does not have established dogmas or precepts; it has universal meanings which are applied to dogmas and religious precepts. **At the end of this cycle and the beginning of the next cycle, it is exceedingly important not to reject tradition.**⁸⁸ **So long as we believe that the part is present in the whole there will be religion. Revelation, faith, truth, and religion are neither fact nor are they ideas. They are expressions of a sole spiritual beginning.**⁸⁹ In the Western world, however, specialists have a very different conception of religion. Some will argue that if you know one religion then you know them all. Others hold that if you know one religion, you know none of them. And there are still others who hold that a religion outside of your own is incapable of teaching you anything and is not even worthy of consideration.⁹⁰ These are the very same specialists who stubbornly insist on portraying Islām as an Arab invention based on Judeo-Christian traditions or a classic case of “assimilation” or “successive reproduction.”⁹¹ Religious traditions from East and West do indeed share many similarities which are more or less obvious to scholars.⁹² Nowadays, most sincere scholars are willing to drop the term “religion” in favor of the more appropriate term “tradition,” a concept that acknowledges God as the eternal source of all revelation.

^{1.} Editor’s Note: The Mormons are followers of the Church of Latter Day Saints founded by Joseph Smith (1830) in the state of New York. His authority rested on the revelation to him of The Book of Mormon, an alleged pre-Columbian work giving the history of American peoples of Hebrew origin from the Diaspora to 800 A.D. After Smith’s death, Brigham Young became leader and transferred the movement to Salt Lake City, Utah (1847), where a prosperous community was established. When the practice of polygamy was stopped, Utah was incorporated (1896) into the Union as the 45th state. Mormons believe that The Book of Mormon is of equal inspiration with the Bible. The Church of Latter Day Saints is considered by some to be a cult.

^{2.} Editor’s Note: The Seventh Day Adventists are members of an Adventist sect founded in 1844 in the U.S.A. Like the Mormons, they also follow a modern “prophet.” As for the Jehovah’s Witnesses, they are a Christian sect founded in 1872 in Pennsylvania by Charles T. Russell. They accept a literal interpretation of the Bible and stress the imminent coming of a terrestrial, theocratic kingdom, into which only the Witnesses will pass. The Seventh Day Adventists hold that Ellen G. White (1827–1915) was given the gift of prophecy by the Holy Spirit and was the Lord’s messenger, her writings serving as an authoritative source of trust, guidance, instruction and correction. See “Fundamental Beliefs,” Seventh Day Adventist Church: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/> [1] fundamental/index.html. The Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. Website, explains that: Seventh-day Adventists believe that Mrs. White was more than a gifted writer; they believe she was appointed by God as a special messenger to draw the world’s attention to the Holy Scriptures and help prepare people for Christ’s Second Advent. From the time she was 17 years old until she died 70 years later, God gave her approximately 2,000 visions and dreams. The visions varied in length from less than a minute to nearly four hours. The knowledge and counsel received through these revelations she wrote out to be shared with others. Thus her special writings are accepted by Seventh-day Adventists as inspired. (White)

^{3.} Author’s Note: For the development of heterodoxies in Christianity, the following should be considered: A. Orbe, *Parábolas evangélicas en San Ireneo-I-II* (460 and 515 respectively).

^{4.} Editor’s Note: Some Orientalists seek to cause confusion, to put up smoke screens and to undermine Islām at the behest of certain states, for purely political reasons. Historically, some Orientalists served the imperial intentions of colonial

masters. For more on Orientalist efforts to undermine Islam, see Ahmad Ghurīb's *Subverting Islam: The Role of Orientalist Centers*. The book is also available in Spanish translation by Héctor Abad Dharr Manzolillo, under the name *Subvertir el Islam: La función de los centros orientalistas*.

5. Editor's Note: As Nwyia explains,

On sait que les fuqah⁹, qui lisent le Coran en philologues ou en juristes, rejettent la lecture spiritualiste des soufis comme une nouveauté étrangère et infidèle au texte sacré. Or, parce que leur point de vue légaliste s'est imposé dans l'Islam officiel et est devenu pour ainsi dire le point de vue de l'orthodoxie, les soufis ont pris, aux yeux de l'histoire, figure de secte plus au moins hétérodoxe, leur lecture du Coran a été considérée comme une lecture tardive et étrangère à l'Islam primitif. (23)

[It is well-known that the fuqah⁹, who interpret the Qur'⁹ as philologists or jurists, reject the mystical interpretations of the ⁹ as a foreign innovation which is unfaithful to the sacred text. Since their legalistic perspective imposed itself in official Islam it became the orthodox position. In the eyes of history, the ⁹ were relegated to the status of a more or less heterodox sect and their interpretations of the Qur'⁹ viewed as a later development which was alien to primitive Islam.]

As Murata observes,

Though the proponents of al-kalam [scholastic philosophy] have often been looked upon by Western scholars as the representatives of 'orthodox' Islam, this is to impose an inappropriate category upon Islamic civilization, as many other scholars have pointed out. In fact, by and large the criteria for being Muslim have been following the shar'ah and acknowledging the truth of a certain basic creed. Beyond that, a variety of positions concerning the details of the creed was possible, and none could be said to be 'orthodox' to the exclusion of others. (8)

ʿAḥmad Ramaḥmān, grandson of Ḥasan al-Bannā, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, confirms that "[a]ll Muslims--Orthodox, Sunnī, ⁹, or Shā'ah--are part of the same understanding of the shar'ah" (211-212).

6. Editor's Note: Muslims, in general, should oppose the labels imposed on them by outsiders. This applies to the terms "heterodox," "heretical," "sect," "fundamentalist" and "Islamist." The author and the editor, however, must use them in order to disprove them.

7. Editor's Note: In this sense, Sunnism, Shā'ism and ⁹ism can all claim to be authentic expressions of Islam. As Sachiko Murata explains, "When we look at the Islamic intellectual history...we see...that there is no question of a universally recognized 'orthodox' school of thought, but rather a large number of schools that debate among themselves concerning how the basic items of the creed are to be understood" (The Tao of Islam 8).

8. Editor's Note: As Naḥr has put it, "There is no Magisterium in Islam" (The Heart of Islam 85). While Vittor and Naḥr are correct that there is no official institution which speaks for Islam in matters of orthodoxy, for Shā'ites, there is a Magisterium in Islam, the Imāmate, the throne of which is mostly empty, in the absence of the chief magistrate, Imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī.

9. Editor's Note: In simpler and more modern terms, the esoteric and the exoteric are two faces of the same coin. For scholars like Corbin, Shā'ism and ⁹ism were identical in essence and Shā'ism was only the outer form of Islamic mysticism. Evidently, this is not the case as Shā'ism represents a balancing totality between both the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of the dīn [religion].

10. Author's Note: The following quotations are from Nahj al-balāghah / Peak of Eloquence translated by Sayed 'Alī Reḥmān. It contains an interesting preface, a brief biography on the compiler, and abundant notes.

Editor's Note: The work is also available in a Spanish translation titled *La cumbre de la elocuencia*. An abridged Arabic / French edition translated by Samih Atef El-Zein also exists but devoid of most of the sermons dealing with the status of the ahl al-bayt .

11. Editor's Note: Allawī's "Sufyān and Muḥammadī Islam" gives an exposition of two distinct interpretations of the Muslim religion. There cannot, however, be two versions of Islam, a good Islam and a bad Islam. There is only Islam and what is not Islam. As Hector Abad Dharr Manzolillo explains in his article "La filosofía de Abū Sufyān," "Abū Sufyān no veía ni entendía cual era la misión de Muḥammad (tenéis ojos pero no veis, tenéis oídos pero no oís, como decía Jesús). Lo único que veía y entendía era que la religión daba poder mundanal que era lo que él quería" [Abū Sufyān could not understand the mission of Muḥammad. As Jesus, peace be upon him, used to say, "You have eyes but you can't see. You have ears but you can't hear." Likewise, the only thing that Abū Sufyān could understand was that religion leads to worldly

power, which was exactly what he wanted.]

[12.](#) Editor's Note: The [عرب](#) Muslims, for example, embrace music and poetry from other cultures as a means of drawing people into Islam. As Na'iri explains, "Arabism has had the greatest role in the spread of Islam, in addition to its vital function in the preservation and purification of ethical life, the creation of the arts, and the exposition of unitive knowledge [ma'rifah] and metaphysics within Islamic society" (Heart of Islam 63–64). Massignon notes that "In India, Islam was spread not by war but by mysticism and the great orders of mystics" (61). Islam is a great syncretic sponge. Its survivability is the result of its adaptability.

[13.](#) Editor's Note: Strictly speaking, the ahl al-kitāb, the People of the Book, are the Jews and Christians. [أهل الكتاب](#) and [لنكران](#) include Zoroastrians in this definition. Mawlawi Muhammad 'Alī, the Aḥmadiyyah scholar, is the most liberal, claiming that "the Persians, the Buddhists and the Hindus all fall into this category" (614). He even believes that "Persian and Hindu women may be taken in marriage, as also those who follow the religion of Confucius or of Buddha or of Tao" (615). He criticizes the narrow conception of the word ahl al-kitāb adopted by jurists and holds that "there is no reason why the Magians, the Hindus and others who profess a religion and accept a revealed book, should not be treated as such" (615).

[14.](#) Editor's Note: This is an allusion to the Qur'anic verse: "From Allah we come and to Him is our return" (2:156).

[15.](#) Editor's Note: Xenophanes (6th c. B.C.) was a Greek philosopher and poet known for his monotheism. He is not to be confused with Xenophon (c. 430–c. 355)—the Greek general and writer—the disciple of Socrates. Xenophanes, who particularly objected to the anthropomorphism of Homer and Hesiod in their portrayal of the gods, gave the following definition of the Divine: "God is one, greatest among gods and men, in no way like mortals either in body or in mind" (qtd. Netton 1). Parmenides (c. 504–450 B.C.) was a Greek Eleatic philosopher. He regarded movement and change as illusions, and the universe as single, continuous and motionless. Plato (c. 428–c. 348 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher who was a follower of Socrates. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher, pupil of Plato, tutor of Alexander the Great, and founder of the Peripatetic School at Athens (335 B.C.). His philosophy grew away from the idealism of Plato and became increasingly concerned with science and the phenomena of the world. His analyses were original and profound and his methods exercised an enormous influence on all subsequent thought. Plotinus (205–70) was a Roman philosopher of Egyptian birth. After studying in Alexandria, he established his Neo-Platonic School in Rome (244). He used the metaphysical truths of Plato [esp. the dialectic of love] to create a mystic religion of union with the One through contemplation and ecstatic vision. Through Saint Augustine his theory of the human spirit entered into the mainstream of Western philosophy.

[16.](#) Author's Note: For a comparison of the doctrines of Plotinus and Sankara, see García Bazán, in Baine Harris (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought* (181–207); *Neoplatonismo y Vedanta; La doctrina de la materia en Plotino y Sankara* and for a paragon between Plotinus and Islam see Nabi, "Union with God in Plotinus and Bayazid" in Harris (227–232). Most importantly, one should consult the volume prepared by P. Morewedge, *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*.

Editor's Note: Sankara was a commentator on the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita, writing in c. 800 A.D. He was an upholder of traditional monistic Hinduism, which reduces all reality to a single principle or substance.

[17.](#) Editor's Note: Idrīs is the Arabic name for the Hebrew Hanokh and the English Enoch, the Biblical prophet who supposedly lived from 3284 to 3017 B. C. In the Holy Qur'an, Almighty Allah says that: "He was a man of truth and a prophet. We raised him to a lofty station" (19:56–57) and refers to him as a man of "constancy and patience" whom Allah admitted to His Mercy as a righteous one (21: 85–86). More than a man, Idrīs is an archetype, a sublime soul appearing in various cultures as Thoth, Hermes, and Metraton, among others.

[18.](#) Editor's Note: The first sentence of the shahādah is typically translated as "There is no god but Allah" but it can also be translated as "There is no god; only Allah." The attributes of Allah can also be used in the shahādah as in "There is no Reality but the Reality" which leads to the metaphysical notion that nothing exists outside of Allah.

[19.](#) Editor's Note: The words "faith" and "belief" cannot convey the sense of the Arabic imān which means "absolute knowledge, belief and conviction."

[20.](#) Editor's Note: As Shaykh [إدريس](#) explains, "There can be no forgiveness for skeptics [ahl al-shakk] and polytheists [ahl al-shirk]; nor for unbelievers [ahl al-kufr] and those who are persistent in their denial [ahl al-juḥūd]. But the sinful among those who believe in the unity of Allah [ahl al-tawḥīd] may be forgiven" (122).

[21.](#) Editor's Note: For the Qur'anic quotes in this translation, we have relied mostly on the English translation of 'Abdullah

Yūsuf ‘Alī. We have also consulted Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall and M.H. Shakir; the French translations of Muḥammad Ḥamḍullāh and Denise Masson, as well as the Spanish translations of Julio Cortés and Juan Vernet. The Yūsuf ‘Alī translation is closer to conveying the style as opposed to the literal sense of the Qur’ān which Pickthall adheres too more closely.

The original Yūsuf ‘Alī commentary was a fine work of scholarship. Over successive editions, however, the text and tafsīr [commentary] have been “purged” of any and all ideas which are not in line with Wahhābī ideology. The value of Shakir’s translation resides primarily in its clear modern English. The Ḥamḍullāh translation, the product of two years of labor, adequately conveys the meaning of the scripture and is accompanied with a basic commentary. The Masson translation, however, the result of three decades of effort, is far superior stylistically. However, the modified Ḥamḍullāh version prepared in Saudi Arabia is the most perfect. While the Vernet translation manifest a pro-Christian bias which often substantially modifies the sense of certain figures of diction and classical Arabic formulas its literary value far exceeds the crude and vulgar translation made by Cortés.

While the Vernet translation is more manicured, both the Vernet and Cortés translations manifest distortions and corruptions of the Qur’ān. Vernet’s introduction and notes are devoted to casting doubt on the authenticity of the text on the basis of sloppy scholarship which is easily dismissed by Ayṭullāh Mūrziḥ Mahdī Pooya Yazdī’s comprehensive criticism of taḥrīf [textual change], “Originality and the Genuineness of the Holy Qur’ān in its Text and Arrangement” which accompanies Aḥmed ‘Alī’s translation of the Qur’ān which itself is very poor and which can only be partially redeemed by its philosophical commentary. See also, Taḥrīf al-Qur’ān: A Study of Misconceptions Regarding Corruption of the Qur’ānic Text” by Muḥammad Bāqir Anṣārī.

[22.](#) Editor’s Note: As Almighty Allāh explains:

Those who believe [in the Qur’ān], and those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Christians and the Sabians, – any who believe in Allāh and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:62, see also 22:17 and 5:69)

This could also be applied to Vedic Hinduism. In the Vedas, we read that God has many names but the wise call Him One. In the 20th century, the Arya Samaj reformist movement was formed within Hinduism. It calls for a rejection of all polytheism and idolatrous worship in favor of the Vedas alone. This acceptance of previous religions applies to pre-Islamic times and to those who, since the advent of Islām, were not reached by its message. According to the Qur’ān and Sunnah, it is incumbent on all believers to accept Muḥammad as the final Messenger of Allāh.

[23.](#) Editor’s Note: Tawḥīd is also the union of the divine order and the worldly order, between religion and state.

[24.](#) Editor’s Note: As Gibb explains: al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) studied in Fez under a disciple of Abū Madyan. Eventually settling in Alexandria, a circle of pupils gathered around him. He had no monastery and no set form of rituals. He discouraged his followers from giving up their trades and professions for the contemplative life. But little more than a generation later, his disciples adopted the normal organization of a Ḥarāqah, which spread over North Africa and into Arabia. The town of Mokha in the Yemen in particular adopted al-Shādhilī as its patron saint and venerates him as the originator of coffee-drinking. The Shādhiliyyah order is in general more extravagant in ritual and more ecstatic than the Qādiriyyah, but is remarkable especially for the large number of sub-orders to which it gave rise, both directly and in conjunction with the Qādiriyyah. Among the best known are the ‘Iṣṣāwiyyah, with its famous sword-lashing ritual, and at the other extreme the orthodox and austere Derqawī of Morocco and Western Algeria (108).

[25.](#) Editor’s Note: When asked what one needed to do to attain Paradise, the Messenger of Allāh stated: “Offer your five obligatory prayers, observe fast during the whole of the month of Ramaḍān, pay the poor due (zakāh) out of your wealth and obey whatever He commands you, then you will enter the Paradise of your Lord” (Aḥmad). The Qur’ān and the Sunnah are explicit in establishing Muḥammad as the final prophet and messenger. Almighty Allāh says that: “Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allāh, and the Seal of the Prophets [khātim al-nabiyyīn]: and Allāh has full knowledge of all things.” (33:40). The Messenger of Allāh said on numerous occasions that “There will be no prophet after me” (Bukhārī, Muslim, Ḥākim, Ḥadīq, Mufīd, Kulaynī, Majlisī).

Consequently, the sects and cults who believe in a prophet after Muḥammad cannot be considered Muslims. These include the Aḥmadiyyah who believe that Mūrziḥ Ghulam Aḥmed was a prophet, the Nation of Islām and its offshoots (the Five Percenters, the Anṣārī, and so forth). The followers of Elijah Muḥammad and Louis Farrakhan are outside of the fold of

Islam for, as the “Muslim Program” explains on their web site and their publications, they “believe that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Christians and the “Mahdī” of the Muslims.”

The NOI believes that Master W. Fard Muhammad was Allah and that Elijah Muhammad was his Final Messenger. This is whom they refer to when they say “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.” The belief in *ʿulū* [incarnation] is the antithesis of *tawḥīd* [oneness of God] and the belief in a prophet after Muhammad is clearly inconsistent with the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

The NOI believes in racial separation and that “intermarriage or race mixing should be prohibited” while Islam has abolished racism (49:13; 4:1; 2:213; 6:98; 7:189; 21:92; 23:52). As the Prophet said in his Farewell Sermon, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white – except by piety and good action” (Muslim, Ahmad, Darimī, Ibn Majah, Abū Dawūd, Ibn Ḥibbān et al.).

The NOI believes “in the resurrection of the dead—not in physical resurrection—but in mental resurrection” while Islam believes in physical resurrection. The NOI believes that black people “are the people of God’s choice” while Islam does not believe in Chosen People. In short, the Nation of Islam has little in common with Islam besides its name.

Claude Andrew Clegg is thus in error when he claims that “in regards to traditional or orthodox Islam, the Nation of Islam was heterodox in many of its views and practices; however, it was arguably a legitimate Muslim sect given its marginal adherence to central tenets of the Islamic faith.” (68). He adds that “overall, the basic outlines of both religious traditions do appear to overlap enough to allow the black organization to reasonably claim membership in the body of Islam, albeit as a heretical limb” (69). The Nation of Islam cannot be heterodox, a legitimate Muslim sect, a member in the body of Islam, and a heretical limb at the same time.

[26.](#) Editor’s Note: The term *arkān al-dīn* is not used by Shāʿah scholars, but there is mention of *daʿīm al-Islām* in Shāʿah tradition with five items with an interesting modification: *ʿalāt*, *ṣawm*, *zakāt*, *ḥajj* and, nota bene, *wilāyah*. For example, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir said, “Islam is based on five [pillars]: on *ʿalāt*, *sawm*, *zakāt*, *ḥajj* and *wilāyah*—and nothing has been promoted more than the promoting of *wilāyah*” (Kulaynī). In another *ḥadīth*, the same Imam has been quoted in the same way with the addition of the following sentence at the end “...but the people took the four and abandoned this one [ie. *wilāyah*].”

[27.](#) Editor’s Note: Shāʿite scholars prefer to list belief, *uḥūl al-dīn* [the pillars or religion] and practice, *furūʿ al-dīn* [the branches of religion], separately.

[28.](#) Editor’s Note: The term *qiyyamah* [Resurrection] is used synonymously to express this pillar.

[29.](#) Editor’s Note: Whereas the Shāʿite might seek the intercession of the Imams, the *ḥafīs* seek the intercession of their *awliyyāʾ* or saints. For more on intercession in Islam, see ‘Abd al-Karīm Bi-Azar Shirāzī’s “Tawassul.” The Salafīs do not believe in *tawassul*.

[30.](#) Editor’s Note: Most Sunnis, however, follow the Ashʿarite school of theology established by Abū al-ʿAsan ‘Alī al-Ashʿarī (c. 874–935), a famous Arab theologian from Iraq. Ashʿarī insists that, since God is All-Powerful, he can do as He pleases, placing a good person in hell and a bad person in Heaven. The Ashʿarites give precedence to God’s All-Powerful attribute as opposed to the integral attribute of justice which is stressed by Shāʿite theologians. They also hold that the Qurʾān is the uncreated word of God, an idea rejected by Shāʿites as only Allah is eternal. For more on the differences in the approach to the concept of divine justice among the theologians and philosophers of Shāʿah Islam, see the introduction to Shahīd Muḥahharī’s *al-ʿadl al-ilāhī* which has recently been published in English as *Divine Justice*.

[31.](#) Author’s Note: For the distinction between “tradition” and “religion,” see Guénon, *Introduction générale à l’étude des doctrines hindoues* (4) and García Bazán, “La tradición y la unidad transcendente de las religiones” in *Atma Jnana* (5–8). See, as well: Schuon, *L’unité transcendente des religions*.

Editor’s Note: Islam recognizes all revealed religions. In the Islamic view, Judaism and Christianity are steps on the spiritual road to salvation: its followers are People of the Book. The religions revealed by God are different crystallizations of the divine message. It should be noted, however, that the author is not advocating religious relativism or pluralism. His thoughts are more in line with the perennial philosophy of René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon which holds that all religions teach the same thing, but in different ways. However, in order to see this universal core, one must turn from the exoteric to the

esoteric aspects of the religions. As regards the divinely sanctioned nature of religions outside of Islam, Muslims scholars are divided. Western-trained Orientalists like Naṣr and Sachedina believe that all Abrahamic religions remain valid, based on the following Qur'ānic verses:

Those who believe [in the Qur'ān], and those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Christians and the Sabians,— any who believe in Allāh and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:62; 5:69)

According to Naṣr “al-islām refers to that universal surrender to the One and that primordial religion contained in the heart of all heavenly inspired religions, not just to Islam in its more particular sense” (The Heart of Islam 17). Ibn al-‘Arabī, the great spiritual master, observes that:

Religion is of two kinds, the religion of God and those whom God has taught His religion and those whom they have taught and, second, the religion of created beings, which God acknowledges. The religion of God is that chosen by Him and set by Him at a level far above the religion of creation. (Bezels 113)

According to the Shaykh al-Akbar, the Qur'ānic verse “The religion with Allāh is Islam” (2:132) means following, obeying, yielding and submitting to God, regardless of one’s religion. In the eyes of Ibn al-‘Arabī, there is truth even in pagan deities since “in every object of worship there is a reflection of the Reality” (Bezels 78). Ayṭullāh al-Uṣmānī Shaykh Yūsuf Saḥrāwī goes even further arguing that:

I am of the opinion that paradise is the result of doing good deeds and avoiding evil deeds according to the best of one’s understanding. Regardless of the religion people practice, and so long as they are convinced without a doubt of the righteousness of their belief, they will get what they deserve. God says, “Good deeds will be rewarded ten times as much as they deserve, and evildoers will be given punishment which fits the evil; You shall not be unfairly treated.” According to Molla-Sadra, paradise inevitably evolves from spiritual development. In some Qur'ānic verses, faith is a vital prerequisite for paradise. According to my interpretation, faith is a sincere belief in the goodness of one’s deeds, not belief in God. Strong belief is associated with the mental serenity, and it contributes to spiritual development. However, someone with a sense of being under compulsion can never be consistent in doing good deeds and improve. Neither identification nor label, be it Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist, is the requirement for paradise, but indeed good deeds are. An agnostic involved in his skepticism cannot believe in God or prophet. Neither do Christians put trust in Prophet Muḥammad. It would be utterly inconceivable if God called for a particular identification on the Doomsday. Would it be unfair? The Qur'ān says reassuringly: “God shall not be unfair to any of his creatures.” Similarly, evil doing mortifies the human soul, which leads to hell. It makes no difference which religion or belief you follow but the deeds you perform. If doubt is cast upon the authenticity of one’s religion, one must seek the truth; otherwise one is guilty of laxity.

<http://www.saanei.org/page.php?pg=showmeeting&id=22&lang=en> [2]

With all due respect, Ayṭullāh Saḥrāwī’s interpretation of the Qur'ānic imān as faith in one’s deeds and not faith in God is clearly untenable as it is duly defined by Almighty Allāh as ḥimāna bi Allāhi wa al-yawmi al-ākhirī wa al-malā’ikati wa al-kitābi wa al-nabīyyina, namely, belief in Allāh, and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers (2:177).

Ayṭullāh Saḥrāwī further holds, “all non-Muslims, including Hindus, fire-worshippers, and cow-worshippers, are pure,” only atheists are unbelievers. He holds that spiritual impurity is the result of ascribing partners to God while one knows that He is One. He claims that “ascribing partners to God through neglect does not make one an unbeliever, merely unenlightened.” However, if Muḥammad had adopted this pluralistic position, the prophetic mission would surely have failed.

According to traditional Muslim scholars and jurists, Islam has fulfilled all previous monotheistic religions, superseded them, abrogated them and replaced them. In their view, Islam has precedence over its predecessors. As Legenhausen explains: Islam not only shatters previous forms in the name of the spirit, however, it also imposes its own form in place of those it has shattered. It is that form, or exterior, which constitutes the gateway to its spirit, or interior, which, by virtue of its content and the position of Islam in the line of succession of revealed religions, is more comprehensive than any other is.

Furthermore, Islam does not violate the truths of the previously revealed religions; rather it confirms them. What Islam shatters is what is false in the other religions because of corruption and deviation or because of the temporal limitations of their validity.

Sachedina was reproached by Ayṭullāh al-Uṣmānī Sistani for his belief that salvation can be obtained through any major

monotheistic religion so long as one submits to God (Sachedina “What Happened”). His position find support in Imām al-Riḍā’s ʿadāth which states that: “Whoever denies the Prophet of Allāh is like one who has denied all the prophets of Allāh.” Sachedina’s belief that all Abrahamic religions are valid and equal in truth was dismissed by Ayatullāh Sistani as “nonsense” (“What Happened”). According to Sachedina, the word islām, as it appears in the Qurʾān, merely means an act of submission and is not the name of a religion (“What Happened”). According to Ayatullāh Sistani this is not the case. Sachedina’s interpretation is based on a failure to understand the basic rules of Arabic grammar regarding definite and indefinite nouns (“What Happened”). The word islām is accompanied by the definite article al- [the] which makes it a proper noun. As such, the Qurʾān is speaking about Islām as a religion and not “submission” as a vague, indefinite, generalized concept. Scholars like Sistani cite the following verses of the Qurʾān to argue that, since the coming of Muḥammad, the Final Messenger, there can be no salvation outside of the religion of Islām:

The Religion before Allāh is Islām. (3:19)

O ye who believe! Fear Allāh as He should be feared, and die not without being Muslims. (3:102)

Those whom Allāh willeth to guide, He openeth their breast to Islām; those whom He willeth to leave straying. (6:125)

This day have those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion: yet fear them not but fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islām as your religion. But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, Allāh is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (5:3)

If anyone desires a religion other than Islām, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost [all spiritual good]. (3: 85)

Those who die rejecting faith, and die rejecting, on them is Allāh’s curse, and the curse of angels, and of all mankind. (2:161)

The followers of past monotheistic religions, prior to the advent of Islām, have nothing to fear:

Those who believe [in the Qurʾān], and those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Christians and the Sabians,– any who believe in Allāh and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:62; 5:69)

According to most traditional scholars of Islām, the Qurʾānic verses which reassure that the People of the Book will have their reward (2:62; 5:69) apply to monotheists of all times who were not reached by the prophetic message but who would have embraced it had they heard about it. From the time of Muḥammad, they argue, there is only one path, one right religion, for as Almighty Allāh says, “But set thou thy face to the right Religion before there come from Allāh the Day which there is no chance of averting” (30:43). And as the Messenger of Allāh warned, “Any Jew or Christian who heard about me and did not believe in me and what was revealed to me in the Holy Qurʾān and my traditions, his ultimate destiny is the [Hell] Fire” (Bukhārī). As for Sachedina, Ayatullāh al-ʿUḍmā Sistani has expressed the following:

I have looked at the presentation of the writings and statements of Dr. ‘Abdul ‘Azīz Sachedina that was sent [to me].

Whereas his views on the issues presented are based on incorrect understandings, and are incompatible with religious and academic standards, and cause confusion in minds of the muʾminīn [believers] all the brothers and sisters in imān [faith] (may Allāh help them in [gaining] His pleasure) are enjoined to refrain from inviting him for lecturing at religious gatherings, and not to approach him for seeking answers to questions pertaining to beliefs. [21 August 1998] (Sistani “Translation of the Letter”)

[32](#). Editor’s Note: The author is alluding to the Prophet’s saying that “The number of paths to God is equal to the number of human souls” (qtd. Chittick, A Shīʿite Anthology). Since Dr. Chittick did not provide the source of this saying, I contacted him for more details. He responded to me that:

When I wrote A Shīʿite Anthology, I was much more inclined to accept the oral reports of my teachers than I am now. Also, the grammar of the passage demands “breaths” rather than “human souls,” given that anfas is the plural of nafas, not nafs. Anyway, in one passage in the Futūḥ (II 317), Ibn al-ʿArabī cites it without ascription, and says, “which means that every breath is a path to God, and that is correct,” and goes on to add some clarification. In another passage (III 411), he ascribes it to ahl Allāh, “the folk of God” (i.e., great ʿāfīs), and says, “Each breath emerges from the heart according to the heart’s belief concerning God” (cf., the gods of belief, Chap. 19, ʿāfī Path of Knowledge). A couple of the Futūḥ commentators cite it with the expression, “It has been said” (qil). So, I would say that opinion 2 is correct.

(Personal email from Dr. William Chittick to the editor, dated Dec. 18, 2007)

In short, the tradition attributed to the Prophet should read: “The number of paths to Allāh is equal to the number of human breaths.” In one passage, Ibn al-‘Arabī attributed the tradition to the Prophet; in another, he presents it as a ṣūfī saying. Although the content of the tradition is correct in the sense that it agrees with the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, it does not have an isnad [chain of narration] and would thus be rejected by ḥadīth scholars.

33. Editor’s Note: The differences in Islamic schools of thought are a mercy upon the Muslims. As the Prophet said, “Difference of opinion among the ummah is a blessing from Allāh” (Bayhaqī, Maqdisī, Daylamī). It is clear from the Holy Qur’ān that Almighty Allāh appreciates differences and diversity:

O mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other [not that ye may despise each other]. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allāh is [he who is] the most righteous of you. And Allāh has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things]. (49: 13)

34. Editor’s Note: The author is alluding to the Qur’ānic teaching concerning the middle path (17:110; 35:32). As Almighty Allāh says in the Holy Qur’ān, “We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you (2:143). As Imām Khumaynī explains, “The faqīh imagines that there is nothing but fiqh; the mystic, that there is nothing but mysticism; the philosopher, that there is nothing but philosophy; and the engineer, that there is nothing but engineering... Knowledge, once seen in this way, becomes the thickest of all veils” (Islam and Revolution 395). To be a complete Muslim requires a balance between the inward and the outward.

35. Editor’s Note: As Naṣr explains, “the Imāms of Shī‘ism are seen in the ṣūfī perspective as the spiritual poles of their age. They appear in the spiritual chain [silsilah] of various ṣūfī orders, even those which have spread almost exclusively among Sunnis” (Ḥabībī A Shī‘ite Anthology 7).

The Shī‘ite origins of ṣūfism are well-documented by Naṣr in his “Shī‘ism and ṣūfism: their Relationship in Essence and in History” found in his ṣūfī Essays. As Naṣr explains, “from the Shī‘ite point of view Shī‘ism is the origin of what later came to be known as ṣūfism” (106). According to Moosa, “since the early period of Islam, the Shī‘ites...were strict zāhid [ascetics], who were the forerunners of later ṣūfīs (xxii). Awani confirms that

There is a close relationship between Shī‘ism and ṣūfism... From an esoteric Shī‘ite point of view, Shī‘ism is the origin of what came to be known as ṣūfism. Shī‘ite Imāms play a very basic and fundamental role in ṣūfism, but not as Shī‘ite Imāms, rather as representatives, par excellence, of Islamic esoterism...almost all ṣūfī orders [salsil] trace their spiritual pedigree to the Holy Prophet through Imām ‘Alī. (172–73)

As he explains, “Both Shī‘ism and ṣūfism can be described as the Islam of Alī ibn Abī Tālib. Both emphasize the principle of wilāyah [friendship of God or proximity to Him] which in both is traced to the Shī‘ite Imāms and Fāṭimah. Both believe that the cycle of sanctity [dī‘irat al-wilāyah] starts immediately after the termination of the cycle of prophecy [dī‘irat al-nubuwwah] (173). As Naṣr explains, the cycle of initiation guarantees the ever-living presence of an esoteric way in Islam (ṣūfī Essays 108).

36. Editor’s Note: This ḥadīth can be found in Ḥakīm, Ibn Kathīr, Ḥabarī, Suyūṭī, Kulaynī and Mufīd. A variant version is also found in Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr and Suyūṭī.

37. Author’s Note: For the symbolism of the “gate” see Guénon, Símbolos fundamentales de la ciencia sagrada, especially chapters 25 and 41.

38. Editor’s Note: The Ayatullāhs, it should be noted, are jurists and not theologians. The titles Mawlānī, Ḥujjat al-Islām and Ayatullāh, among many others, are honorary titles given by the people and have no theological or jurisprudential implications. In the Shī‘ite system of scholarship, the main academic titles are ‘alim or scholar, an individual who has completed approximately 10 years of study in the ḥawzah or Islamic seminary; mujtahid, a Muslim lawyer or attorney, an individual who has reached the level of jurist, after an average of 20 years of study; and Marja‘ al-Taqlīd, popularly known as Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī or Grand Ayatullāh, a title acquired after 30 to 50 years of study by individuals who have devoted their entire lives to the Islamic sciences and who are acknowledged by their peers as the foremost jurists and de facto heads of the ḥawzah.

At present, some of the top Shī‘ite Sources of Emulation in Najaf include: Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī al-Sayyid ‘Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Sīstānī, Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī Bashīr al-Najāfī, Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī Muḥammad Isḥāq al-Fayyīd, and Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī Sayyid Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Ḥabībī al-‘Irāqī, among others.

Some of the top Shī‘ite Sources of Emulation in Qum include: Ayatullāh al-‘Uṣmī al-Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Behjat

Fuman, Aytullh al-Um al-Shaykh Nfir Makarim Shiraz, Aytullh al-Um al-Sayyid Ms Shubayr Zanjan, Aytullh al-Um al-Shaykh Lufullh Sff Gulpaygan, Aytullh al-Um al-Shaykh Nur Hamadan, Aytullh al-Um al-Shaykh usayn Waqid Kurasn, Aytullh al-Um Sayyid Abd al-Kar M saw Ardebil, Aytullh al-Um Sayyid Muhammad usayn Shahroud, and, according to some, Aytullh al-Um al-Shaykh Yusuf San. Aytullh al-Um al-Sayyid Al Khamene has muqallidn [followers] from mostly outside of Iran. Aytullh al-Um al-Sayyid Muhammad usayn Faullh, whose ijthd [authority to interpret Islamic law] is called into question by the Sources of Emulation in Iraq and Iran, is also very popular among young people due to the more pragmatic and lenient nature of his edicts; his greater accessibility to the laity, and his acquaintance with Western culture (Takm). For links to all the leading scholars of Shism, the Marjiyyah al-dniyyah (Religious Authority), see: Aalulbayt Global Information Center: <http://www.al-shia.com/html/eng/p.php?p=Miscellaneo> [3] us&url= Ulama.

39. Author's Note: See Aytullh Al Mishkin, "Wilayat al-Faqh: its meaning and scope" in al-Tawd: A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Thought and Culture (Tehran 1406/1985): III, 1, 29-65.

Editor's Note: The concept of the "Authority of the Jurisconsult" was developed by Im Khumayn who brought Shite political thought in line with the Sunn perspective which views the head of the Islamic state, the Caliph or Im, as political successor of the Prophet. Traditionally, Shite scholars have considered all governments to be illegitimate in the absence of the Twelfth Im.

40. Editor's Note: The differences between Shite jurists are mainly ones of degree, expressing different dimensions of the same issue. For example, one jurist may hold that a certain act is forbidden [ar], another one may consider it a precautionary prohibition [ar im iyyiyy w jib] and yet another may hold that it is merely reprehensible [makr].

41. Editor's Note: The complete name of this branch of Islam, which represents 10 % of Muslims worldwide, which is the majority in Iran and Iraq, and is strongly represented in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan, is shah immiyyah ithn-ashariyyah or Twelve Im Shism. Its school of jurisprudence, the Ja'far madhhab, is named in honor of the sixth Im, Ja'far al-diq who, along with his father, Muhammad al-Bqir, were the founding fathers of fiqh. The Ja'far madhhab is also known as the fifth school of thought in Islam, along with the four Sunn schools. The orthodox nature of the Ja'far school of jurisprudence was admitted by Shaykh Mahmud Shal, the head of al-Azhar University, in his historic ruling of 1959 in which he recognized the ithn 'ashar school as an acceptable school of jurisprudence in Islam which Muslims were free to follow like any other school of jurisprudence among the Sunnis:

Islam does not command any of its followers to follow a particular Islamic madhhab. On the contrary, it establishes for every Muslim the right to follow, at the beginning, any one of the correctly conveyed madhhib, whose verdicts are recorded in their respective books. It is permissible also for any one that follows one of these schools to change to another one--any other school--and he is not sinning by doing that.

The Ja'far school which is known as 'the madhhab of the ithn 'ashar immiyy sh' is a sound madhhab. It is permissible to worship God according to its teaching, like the rest of the Sunn madhhabs.

The Muslims ought to know this and get rid of their undue bigotry for particular madhhib. The religion of Allah and His law do not follow, nor are they bound to, a particular madhhab. All [the founders of these madhhib] are mujtahids [jurists], reward-deserving from Allah, and acceptable to Him. It is permissible to the 'non-mujtahid' to follow them and to accord with their teaching, whether in devotions or transactions. ("Epilogue" Chirr)

Shite minorities are present wherever there are Muslims. For a study on the Shites of the Maghreb, see "Shism in Morocco." The article was published in Jafariya News on July 27th, 2006 and has appeared on many websites.

42. Editor's Note: See note 29 and Ahmad Ahmad, "Irfn and Taawuf (fism)" in al-Tawd (Tehran 1404/1984), I 4: 63-76.

43. Author's Note: See, Ibn Khaldn, Muqaddimah (Cairo 1957) 321; as well as the English version by F. Rosenthal, Ibn Khaldn, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History (New York: 1958): 3 vols.

Editor's Note: Abd al-Ramn Ibn Khaldn (1332-1406) was an Arab historian most famous for his Muqaddimah in which he develops a scientific philosophy of history. While he recognized the Shite influence on fism (Awnn 172-73), he held some distorted views about Shism and rejected the belief in Im Mahd (al-Kff, 2:4, 479, note 2).

44. Editor's Note: Nafr defines "fundamentalism" as a reaction to the onslaught of modernism and secularism (The Heart of Islam 40). It is worth recalling that terrorism is strictly prohibited in Islam and the events of September 11th were

condemned by Muslim scholars, both Sunnī and Shīʿī. Ayatullāh al-Uṣmānī Yūsuf Sanʿī has said,

In [the] Shīʿite religion terror is definitely condemned. Therefore you are not able to find a Shīʿite Muslim in [the] ʿalīb movement. We are Shīʿite Muslims, and my interpretation as well as that of other religious leaders in Islām, is that Islām does not accept terror. Terror in Islām, and especially [in] Shīʿite [Islām], is forbidden. (MacIntyre)

45. In an interview with Christiane Amanpour for the CNN investigative report God’s Warriors, Ayatullāh al-Uṣmānī Yūsuf Sanʿī stated that “Terrorists should go to hell.”

For rulings against terrorism, see Ḥurrīn Yayh’s Islām Condemns Terrorism <http://www.geocities.com/> [4]

Islamicissues/terrorism.html which has been translated into Spanish by Abū Dharr Manzollilo; “Muslims against Terrorism,” Internet: <http://www.islamfortoday.com/> [5] terrorism.htm; “Muslims Condemn Terrorist Attack; <http://www.muhammad.com/> [6] otherscondemn.php, as well as the following links: <http://groups.colgate.edu/> [7] aarislam/response.htm and <http://www.cair-net.org/html> [8] /911statements.html; <http://www.unc.edu> [9] /~ kurzman/terror.htm.

Editor’s Note: Shīʿite scholars are unanimous in their insistence that, in matters of fiqh, one can only commence the taqlīd of a living mujtahid. For Ayatullāh al-Uṣmānī Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḥrullāh, it is a question of precaution (<http://www.baynat.org/www/english/Fatawa/jihad.htm> [10]). For all others, it is an obligation. See A Concise Commandments of Islām by Khumaynī with footnotes from Shariatmadārī, Najafī–Marashī, Gulpaygīnī, Khunsarī, Shirazī, Khuʿī 3; Khumaynī’s The Practical Laws of Islām 18; Khuʿī 18; Gulpaygīnī 22; Lankarīnī <http://www.lankarani.com/English/> [11] onlinepub/tawdhih–al–masael/taqleed.htm; Sistani <http://www.sistani.org/> [12] html/eng/main/index.php?page=3&lang=eng&part=1. This prevents scholarly stagnation and allowing for gradual evolution of interpretation. The Shīʿite sharʿah is not static nor is it stagnant.

46. Editor’s Note: Both the quietist and activist approaches are sanctioned by Shīʿism and find ample justification from the lives of the Prophet and the Imāms. In the early days of Islām, the Most Noble Messenger was obliged to adopt a quietist approach. After the establishment of an Islāmic State, his policy became an activist one. While his Caliphate was usurped, Imām ʿAlī adopted a policy of strategic compromise. When he assumed power, he adopted an activist line. Imām Ḥasan moved from activism to quietism while Imām Ḥusayn took activism to its glorious pinnacle of martyrdom. All of the Imāms after Ḥusayn adhered to the quietist line. Since the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām, Shīʿite scholars have followed the quietist approach, which predominates in the ʿawāḥ in Najaf or the activist approach, which finds its bastion in the seminary in Qum. For more on the quietist and activist approaches, see my “Strategic Compromise in Islām” For more on activist scholars refer to Ten Decades of ʿUlamā’s Struggle by Aqqā Bakhshayeshī.

47. Editor’s Note: The Shīʿite condemnation of bidʿah is as strong as the Sunnī one. The Messenger of Allāh is quoted as saying “When innovation appears among my people [the Muslims], it is the obligation of scholars to declare their knowledge. May Allāh curse the scholars who do not declare [the truth]” (al–Kifī 1:2 141: ʿadāth 160). The Messenger of Allāh is also reported to have said that

For each and every innovation [in Islām] which deceives the very faith, there will be after my death, a sentinel and guide Imām from my progeny, being in charge of the belief to challenge it, to defend it. He will speak under inspiration from Allāh, will declare and enlighten the truth, will negate the wiles of the cunning and will speak on behalf of the meek. (143: ʿadāth 163)

The Messenger of Allāh has also said that “Every innovation [in religion] is misguidance. And every misguidance leads to hell” (146: ʿadāth 166). Imām ʿAlī has said that “No innovation is introduced unless one sunnah is forsaken, keep away from the innovations and stick to the broad road. Surely the old tested ways are the best and the innovated ones are bad” (Nahj al–balāghah 302).

48. Editor’s Note: Shīʿism belongs to a true living hermeneutic tradition. As Imām Khumaynī explains, “The Qurʾān has seven or seventy levels of meaning, and the lowest of those levels is the one where it addresses us” (Islām and Revolution 391). He was referring to the tradition of the Prophet which states that “The Qurʾān has been revealed on seven levels (aḥruf), each having an outer and inner meaning, and ʿAlī ibn Abī ʿalīb has knowledge of both” (430). A similar tradition is related in Sunnī sources on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd (Khaṭīb al–Tabrīzī, Book 3, Chap. 37 No. 605). It is also related that the Prophet said that: “The Qurʾān has a beautiful exterior and a profound interior” (ʿabṭabī, The Outward).

49. Editor’s Note: The author alludes to Muḥafīz Kīmel Atṭūrīk (1881–1938), the Turkish soldier and statesman who was the founder and first President of the Republic of Turkey. He contributed to the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and

abolished the Caliphate in 1924. As a result, Islam ceased to be a political force in the world. He closed theological schools and replaced the *shari'ah* with a law code based on the Swiss legal code, the German penal code and the Italian commerce code. He outlawed traditional Islamic headdress for men and insisted that all Turks wear European style hats. He banned the *hijab* and encouraged women to wear western dress and enter the work force. In 1928, in an effort to distance the people from the Qur'an, the government decreed that the Arabic script was to be replaced by a modified Latin alphabet. All citizens from six to 40 years of age were obliged to attend school to learn the new alphabet. The Turkish language was "purified" by the removal of Arabic and Persian words and replaced by new Turkish ones. Mustafa Kemal opened art schools so that boys and girls could engage in the visual representation of human forms which has been banned during Ottoman times. Atatürk, who was most fond of the national liquor, raki, and consumed vast quantities of it, legalized alcohol which is strictly forbidden in Islam. In 1934, he required all Turks to adopt Western style surnames. Ironically, after waging war against the Turkish culture and religion, he adopted the name Kemal Atatürk meaning "father of the Turks." He died in 1938 of cirrhosis of the liver, the result of years of excessive drinking. He left Turkey with a divided identity, trapped between East and West, Europeanized but not quite European, alienated from the Islamic world but still a Muslim country.

[50.](#) Editor's Note: Ibn Taymiyyah (661– 728) was a scholar of the Hanbali school of thought. He held that Allah's "hand," "foot," "shin" and "face" were literal [*haqiqi*] attributes and that Allah is upon the throne in person. Sunni authorities like Taqī al-Dīn as-Subkī, Ibn Qajar al-Haythamī and al-'Izz ibn Jama'ah passed rulings against following him in matters of 'aqidah [religious beliefs] as his views fell outside of the consensus of Sunni scholars. Ibn Taymiyyah is considered one of the ideological forefathers of Wahhabism and Salafism. For more on his views see Allawī's "Sufyanī or Muhammadī Islam."

[51.](#) Editor's Note: Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–92) founded the puritanical Wahhabi sect of Islam in Nejd c. 1744. The Wahhabis conquered Arabia (1803), were beaten by the Ottoman Turks (1819) and acquired political power under King Ibn Saud (early 20th c.). They destroyed the tombs of the Prophet's Family and Companions in the Cemetery of al-Baqī in Madīnah. They were poised to raze the Prophet's tomb but were forced to retreat due to Egyptian threats of war. Extremist Wahhabis hold that all Muslims, with the exception of themselves, are heretics and infidels whose blood is *halal*. This has resulted in the rape and slaughter of Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi Muslims throughout the Islamic world, most particularly in Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India.

[52.](#) Editor's Note: It is for this reason that Shi'ite Islam is described as Islam-Original and the Imams are viewed as the Pillars of Islam.

[53.](#) Author's Note: The word *kisā'* means "mantle" or "cloak." In Shi'ite Gnosticism, the practice of wearing and passing on the mantle is associated with the passing of the spiritual and temporal authority of the Muhammadan *wilayah*. Among the *awliya* from the Sunni world, the practice of wearing and passing on the mantle is intimately associated with the transmission of the "sanctifying grace" of "blessed influx" [*barakah*] of the *wilayah* [holiness] which, in its origins, is related to Shi'ite esoterics and the Gnostic doctrines of the Imams. This *hadith* appears in different form in Shi'ite sources like *Ghuyat al-marām* (Tehran 1272, 287).

The recognition of the spiritual supremacy of ahl al-bayt (The Prophetic Household), namely, Fātimah, 'Alī, Hasan and Husayn by Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet, who did not include herself among them, appears in many Sunni sources like, *ʿaḥḥadīḥ* Tirmidhī (vol. 5, 31 (H. 3258), 328, (H. 3275); 361, while the recognition of this spiritual supremacy by another wife of the Prophet, 'Īshah, who also excluded herself from the ahl al-bayt, appears in *ʿaḥḥadīḥ* Muslim (Cairo, many different editions), ed. 'Isā al-Halabī, vol. 2, 368, vol 15, 194; as well as *ʿaḥḥadīḥ* Bukhārī (Cairo, 1932) vol I, 39, and Tirmidhī V. 31.

[54.](#) Editor's Note: The author refers to al-Kawthar, [the Fountain], the title bestowed upon the Prophet's daughter, Fātimah al-Zahrā', the wife of 'Alī, the First Imam, and the mother of the eleven Imams that followed. According to some Shi'ite sources, *Sūrat al-Kawthar* was revealed by Almighty Allah regarding the birth of Fātimah al-Zahrā'.

[55.](#) Editor's Note: For an analysis of the genesis of Wahhabism, see *ʿamād* Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. Oneonta (N.Y.): Islamic Publications International, 2002. See also, *Wahhabism* by Ayatullāh Ja'far Subḥānī.

[56.](#) Editor's Note: Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the leader of the Protestant Reformation. By labeling 'Abd al-Wahhāb as the "Luther of the Arab World," the author wishes to stress the similarities between Protestant and Wahhabi reformism.

Luther, like ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib**, was opposed to all metaphysical speculations, that is, to any interpretation which was not strictly literal. Luther, like ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib**, was a rigid and uncompromising moralist and Luther, like ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib** was a simpleton, devoid of intellectual lucidity.

When the author makes an analogy between Luther and ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib**, he does so to stress the dry, literalist and fundamentalist spirit of these Christian and Muslim innovators. While Luther is widely considered a “reformer,” he did not reform Christianity in the least bit. Protestantism remained the same as the Catholic Church from which it separated: Trinitarian, believing in the divinity of Jesus, his incarnation, and his crucifixion. The only change that Luther instituted was a moral reform, a reform in customs, in much the same way as ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib** did.

If the author has compared these two figures it is because they wanted to adjust the sense of the scripture to their own literal interpretation. Furthermore, both figures manifested a narrow-minded, fundamentalist and fanatical spirit. If Netton is justified in saying that “Ibn al-‘Arab**ī** is the Meister Eckhart of the Isl**ā**m**ī**c tradition,” the author is amply authorized to compare ‘Abd al-Wahh**ib** to Luther, particularly considering the audience to which the book is addressed: the Western World. As the Qur**’**ān says, speak to the people in the language of the people (14:14).

In the present-day Sh**ī**‘ite world, reformist figures include the philosopher ‘Abd al-Kar**īm** Soroush, often likened to Martin Luther, and Ay**at**ull**ā**h al-U**ḥ**ay**ā**ḍi Y**ū**suf San**ā**‘**ī** who is at the head of what has been described as a full fledged Isl**ā**m**ī**c Reformation, an event comparable in many ways to the Christian Reformation of the 16th century. San**ā**‘**ī** has passed many modernist reformist rulings. He allows sex change operations under certain circumstances (Fat**w**ā). He has legalized abortion in the first trimester, and not only due to a mother’s health and fetal abnormalities. He believes that “under some conditions—such as parents’ poverty or overpopulation—then abortion is allowed.” The Ay**at**ull**ā**h even writes letters of consent for women to take to their doctors (Wright). He believes in a slack enforcement of **ḥ**ij**ā**b: “There is no need for admonishing against women who leave their hair uncovered if it is considered as inefficient” (Hamshahri Newspaper). His attitude toward nik**ā**h al-mut**’**ah is the most restrictive of all Sh**ī**‘ite scholars. In his view, “temporary marriage basically is not a lawful revelry in Isl**ā**m or something parallel to permanent marriage. So for those whose wives are available and they can provide their sexual needs with her, temporary marriage, even with Muslim women is problematic, in my idea, and even possible to prohibit” (Hamshahri). He has even ruled that: “There is no oppression and denial of rights [in Isl**ā**m] and all human beings are honored. And All**ā**h says, “We have honored the children of Adam.” Thus, there is no racial discrimination in Isl**ā**m**ī**c laws and the black and the white are equal. There is no sexual or national discrimination either.” Several years ago I suggested to Ay**at**ull**ā**h al-U**ḥ**ay**ā**ḍi Lankar**ā**n**ī** that an edict prohibiting racism would be in order. He explained that no edict was required for such a matter as “Isl**ā**m has abolished racism.” Rulings and edicts are only required for new issues and developments. There is no need for a fatw**ā** against racism because Isl**ā**m clearly condemns racial discrimination.

The populist apologetic edicts of San**ā**‘**ī**, who is described as “Khomeini’s feminist protégé,” find ample support among liberals, reformists, feminists and non-Muslims. Nonetheless, San**ā**‘**ī** has made some important rulings regarding women’s rights which are most welcomed, namely: “Blood money for intended-like murder of women and men is equal and this is provable from reasons of blood money” (Hamshahri); and “Studying science and jurisprudence cannot be excluded to men, since all humans are encouraged to study and they can have all decrees of judgement, jurisprudence, authoring, and leadership” (Hamshahri). Women are thus equal before the law and free to assume any role within society.

57. Editor’s Note: Ibn al-‘Arab**ī** (1165–1240) is perhaps the most famous mystic of Isl**ā**m. His chief works, Fu**ṭ**ū**ḥ** al-‘**ī**kā**m** and al-Fu**ṭ**ū**ḥ** al-makkiyyah [The Makkan Openings] form an encyclopedia of **ḥ**ik**ā**m**ī**c doctrines. The attitudes of philosophers towards Ibn al-‘Arab**ī** are divided.

58. Editor’s Note: Saudi petrol dollars, the CIA, and the Israeli secret services, are accused of spreading the Wahh**ib** ideology worldwide. See, Richard Labevière’s Dollars for Terror.

59. Author’s Note: For the eschatological notion of the parusia of the Twelfth Im**ā**m al-Mahd**ī**, the Hidden and Awaited Im**ā**m, see Corbin, “L’Im**ā**m et la rénovation de l’homme dans la théologie sh**ī**‘ite” in Erannos-Jahrbuch (Zurich 1960), XXVIII, 87; Mu**ḥ**ahhar**ī** and B**ā**qir al-**ḥ**adr, L’Im**ā**m Occulto (Roma 1987), translated and edited by Palazzi; ‘All**ā**mah **ḥ**ab**ṭ**ab**ī**‘**ī**, Sh**ī**‘ite Isl**ā**m (Qum 1409/1989), especially chapters VII, 210–214; as well as Shaykh al-Muf**ī**d’s Kit**ā**b al-ir**ṣ**ād: The Book of Guidance (Tehran 1377), with a preface by Na**ḥ**r and translated by Howard, IX, 524–551.

Editor’s Note: Numerous traditions establish Im**ā**m Mahd**ī**’s role as religious reformer. According to the Sixth Im**ā**m,

When the Qa'im, peace be on him, rises, he will summon the people to Islam anew and guide them to a matter which had become lost and from which people had gone astray. He is only called the Mahdi [the one who has been guided] because he guides to a matter from which [men] have deviated. He is only called the Qa'im [the one who rises] because of his rising. (Mufid 551)

60. Editor's Note: Ta'wīl can be translated as spiritual hermeneutics. Literally, it means to go to the origin of a thing. As Na'ūr explains, "It means to penetrate the external aspect of any reality, whether it be sacred scripture or phenomena of nature, to its inner essence, to go from the phenomenon to the noumenon" (Shā'ite Islam 85).

According to Nwyia, Sunnī exegesis is a tafṣīr, an explication of the text at the level of the letter of al-faṣṣā whereas Shā'ite exegesis is more of a ta'wīl, that is, an interpretation at the level of the ma'nā: it seeks, beyond the literal sense, the hidden sense, the secret of which belongs to the ahl al-bayt, the Family of the Prophet (33). The book then becomes an esoteric revelation, a sealed treasure which can only be opened by the Imāms, the retainers of ta'wīl and the guardians of the book (33).

To speak of Sunnī exegesis as literal and Shā'ite exegesis as profound is a groundless generalization since most tafṣīr, of both branches, is simply tafṣīr, commentary. It is only the Gnostics, of both branches, who have interpreted the Qur'ān according to the ta'wīl. Nwyia's comments need to be further qualified as they imply an inaccessibility of the Scripture to all but an exclusive elite of initiates, the Prophet and His Family.

As Imām Khumaynī explains, "The Qur'ān is like a banquet from which everyone must partake according to his capacity. It belongs to everyone, not to any particular group; there is a share in it for everyone" (Islam and Revolution 424); "The Qur'ān possesses everything. It is like a vast banquet that God has spread out in front of all humanity and that everyone partakes of according to his appetite" (414). "The highest share," however, "is reserved for the one to whom it was revealed: 'The only person who truly knows the Qur'ān is he who was addressed by it'" (415); "only he who was addressed by it fully understands it" (393-94); "Full benefit can be drawn from the Qur'ān only by the man to whom it was addressed—The Messenger of God" (392). "All others are deprived of such complete benefit," he continues, "unless they attain it by means of instruction from him, as was the case with the awliyā'." (392). We can understand only a given aspect or dimension of the Qur'ān; interpretation of the rest depends upon the ahl al-'ilmah (365-66). This is consistent with the Qur'ānic verse which states that: "We bequeathed the Book on those of Our servants We chose" (35:32).

As Imām Khuṭb explains, "the knowledge of the Qur'ān's reality is exclusively with the Imāms (A) and others do not have a share in it." The Prophet made it clear that personal interpretation of the Qur'ān was forbidden. He stated that: "Whoever interprets the Qur'ān according to his opinion, let him seek his abode in the fire" (Tirmidhi); and "He who makes tafṣīr according to his own opinion has become an unbeliever" (Kashānī and Ibn al-'Arabī qtd in Murata 227). The interpretation of the Qur'ān lies with the Prophet and the Holy Imāms for as Imām al-Ḥadiq has said, "We are the custodians of Allāh's affairs, the treasurers of Allāh's knowledge and the containers of Allāh's revelation" (Kulaynī 2:1 74: ḥadīth 505). By tafṣīr bi al-ra'ī, the Prophet and the Imāms were referring to interpreting the Qur'ān without the necessary skills.

61. Editor's Note: As Imām Khumaynī explains:

The Qur'ān indicates that it descended to the Prophet: 'The Trusted Spirit descended with it to your heart' (26:193). The Qur'ān underwent a descent to the Prophet by means of the Trusted Spirit so that it might be received by him at his station. In the same connection, God says, 'We sent it [the Qur'ān] down on the Night of Power' (97:1); that is, 'We sent it down in its entirety to the Prophet on the Night of Power, in the form of a manifestation.' First, the Qur'ān was in the keeping of the Trusted Spirit, and then it underwent a descent in order to enter the heart of the Prophet.

The Qur'ān descended, then, from level to level, from degree to degree, until finally it assumed a verbal form. The Qur'ān is not verbal in substance; it does not pertain to the audiovisual realm ... When the manifestation of God Almighty emerges from the unseen and descends to the world of nature or bodies, there is a vast distance separating this lowest degree from the infinite realms of the unseen, and beyond them, the first appearance of that manifestation. There is a correspondingly vast distance separating our perception from that of those superior to us, at the pinnacle of whom stand the awliyā' and the prophets of God. (Islamic Revolution 393)

The Qur'ān is a mystery, a mystery within a mystery, a mystery veiled and enveloped in mystery. It was necessary for the Qur'ān to undergo a process of descent in order to arrive at the lowly degree of man. Even its entry into the heart of the Prophet was a descent, and from there it had to descend still further in order to become intelligible to others. (409)

Or, as the Prophet put it, “This Qurʾān is God’s banquet” (Durrīm qtd. in Murata 291).

[62.](#) Editor’s Note: The Mahdī is also known as Imām al-‘Aḥr, the Imām of the Age.

[63.](#) Editor’s Note: René Guénon became a Sūfī Muslim in 1912 under the influence of ‘Abdul-Ḥadī (1869–1917), formerly known as Yvan Aguéli, a Swedish painter who was a convert to Islām. Upon taking his shahādah, Guénon adopted the name ‘Abd al-Wahīd Yaḥyā. Shortly thereafter, he received the barakah, namely, the spiritual initiatory influence of Muslim mysticism from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Alish al-Kabīr, a shaykh of the Shadhilī order.

Guénon left Paris in 1930 and moved to Cairo, where he lived the rest of his life as a Sūfī, married to Fāḥima Ḥanem, the daughter of Shaykh Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, with whom he had four children, two girls and two boys, Aḥmad and ‘Abd al-Wahīd. Since the 1930s, he had been surrounded by numerous European “disciples” who were drawn to Islām and Sūfism, including Frithjof Schuon who visited him in Cairo in 1935, as well as Titus Ibrāhīm Burckhardt, Martin Lings, whose Muslim name is Abū Bakr Sirjī, Michel Muḥāfabī Vālsan, and others.

René Guénon was the restorer or reviver of traditional thought in the West and its most eloquent exponent. Subscribing to the doctrine of perennialism, the Traditionalists believe that all “traditional” religions share the same essence. They believe that salvation can be found by means of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islām. They reject Sikhism, Bahāʾism, and other newer religions, sects, and cults.

The Traditionalist movement divided in 1948–50 after a split between Guénon and the Swiss Sūfī Shaykh Frithjof Schuon (1907–98), founder of the Maryamiyyah ʿarḥāqah. As Mark Sedgwick explains, Traditionalism was developed in different directions by Schuon and by two other followers of Guénon: Baron Julius Evola (1896/8–1974), and the scholar Mircea Eliade (1907–86) who had a far-reaching influence in American academia. Over the second half of the twentieth century, “Schuon’s Sūfī order remained secret, but grew in influence in Europe and America, and in Iran under the leadership of Seyyed Ḥossein Naʿrī (1933–). Although many of Guénon’s followers professed the shahādah, not all Guénonian Traditionalists are Muslims.

Guénon died in 1951, shortly after becoming a naturalized Egyptian. Unlike Henry Corbin, who left no Muslim followers, René Guénon brought hundreds of thousands of people into Islām in France, the United States, Latin America, Spain and Portugal. Like many Sunnī Muslims, Guénon had many misconceptions about Shīʿites. He did acknowledge, however, that all Islāmic spirituality was Shīʿite, in the true sense of the term.

There are those who wish to dismiss Guénon for being a Freemason, however, it should be recalled that he wrote strong articles against modern Masonry and was even a member of the magazine *La France Antimaçonique*. It must be recalled that Masonic Lodges operate independently. There is also a major difference between the Masonry practiced in France and the Masonry practiced in Scotland, for example. Guénon was opposed to the modern, anti-traditional, Speculative Masonry, not the traditional Operative Masonry of the middle Ages which build magnificent cathedrals. The original Freemasons disappeared in the XVII century and were replaced by a speculative Masonry based on Protestant ideas of free thought and progress. Despite being a Mason, Guénon lived and died as a pious Muslim, having brought many Masons into the fold of Islām.

[64.](#) Author’s Note: See R. Guénon, *Introduction général à l’étude des doctrines hindoues*. III 3.

Editor’s Note: The Vedānta is the orthodox Hindu school of philosophy concerned chiefly with the latter part of the Vedas, the four books of the ancient Hindu scripture.

[65.](#) Editor’s Note: The goal of Islāmic hermeneutics is to establish a balance between the letter of the law and its spirit; not focus exclusively the letter of the law as the Wahhābis and Salāfis do; nor focus exclusively on the spirit of the law as some mystics do.

[66.](#) Editor’s Note: While Wahhābism aims to cleanse Islām of what its adherents view as innovations, deviations, heresy and idolatry, most historians (both Arab and non-Arab) hold that Wahhābism is in fact a new form of Islām, containing many changes in both theology and practice. Shaykh Hishām Kabbanī from the Islāmic Supreme Council of America has estimated that 80% of mosques in the United States follow the Wahhābi ideology. He was criticized, however, for failing to substantiate his claim.

[67.](#) Editor’s Note: The Wahhābis accuse ahl al-sunnah and ahl al-bayt of innovations when they themselves are the greatest of innovators.

[68.](#) Editor’s Note: An example of Wahhābī scriptural deviation includes the application to Muslims of Qurʾānic verses that

were specifically revealed regarding polytheists. For a contentious overview of Wahhābī / Salafī / Deobandī beliefs, see Zubair Qamar's "Wahhābism: Understanding the Roots and Role Models of Islāmic Fanaticism and Terror" and Fayad A'ḥmad's "Some Beliefs of the Sipah e Sahaba and Lashkar e Jhangavi."

[69.](#) Editor's Note: As Asaf Fyzee observes, "As for 'orthodoxy,' a minority, however small, may well have retained a very close touch with the original tradition; the majority, however preponderant, may conceivably have lost it in the stress of political conflicts" (3–4).

[70.](#) Editor's Note: Suhrawardī was the founder of the School of Illumination in which the symbolism of light and darkness prevails.

[71.](#) Editor's Note: Neo-Pythagoreanism refers to the doctrines of an Alexandrian school of philosophy (1st c. A.D.) which put a mystical interpretation on many Pythagorean ideas. Pythagoras (c. 580–c. 500 B.C.) was a Greek mathematician and philosopher. He founded the Pythagorean School which believed in metempsychosis, that the soul imprisoned in the body could be purified by study, and following a strict discipline of purity and self-examination.

[72.](#) Editor's Note: Hermeticism pertains to alchemy or magic relating to the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.

[73.](#) Editor's Note: The Sabians were a sect from ʿArrān which followed astrological doctrines. According to some interpretations, they were Manicheists. They are not to be confused with the Sabaeans, the inhabitants of Saba, mentioned in the Qurʿān. These latter developed a flourishing kingdom (c. 930–c. 115 B.C.) in South Arabia. They are mentioned in the Qurʿān but are no longer extant.

Author's Note: Both the origin and meaning of the term Sabian is uncertain, and many etymologies have been suggested to define it. Many linguists lean towards the Arabic verb ʿabba (convert, namely, one who receives the "baptism" instituted by John the Baptist). The term ʿabba is known to Arabic-speaking Muslims and the Sabians are mentioned in the Qurʿān (5:73; 2:59; 22:17) as People of the Book. The title of "Baptists" is based on the regular use of baptism as a religious discipline. It is for this reason that the Christian Patriarchs referred to them by the Greek term emerobaptistai, namely, those who practice baptism on a daily basis. Even the term soubaioi was known among Greek writers. Nevertheless, the most common name used in religious literature is that of Nasoreans, from the Arabic naṣrānī. This extraordinary coincidence is startling since the Nasoreans are not the least bit inclined to Christianity. On the contrary, they look down upon it and detest it. Their doctrines are also far removed from Christian beliefs, with the exception of the belief in a Saviour, and some superficial similarities their ceremonies have with Christian rites.

It has also been argued that the term Sabeian is derived from the Hebrew saba [one who walks]; the Ethiopian Sbh [scattered souls], and even the Syrian sb [to baptize]. Some claim that the term probably derives from the Egyptian root sba which means "star-guide" and "star-god." This is quite possible as the Sabians of ʿArrān were the ancient Chaldeans who professed a doctrine containing neo-Pythagorean and Hermetic elements. As such, they were the last representatives of Alexandrine Hermetic gnosis. They are those with whom the prophet Abraham dealt with since he was born among "star-worshippers."

Muslim researchers have identified the Sabians of ʿArrān as the true Sabians mentioned in the Qurʿān and which are described as "star-worshippers" and "idol-worshippers." Both practices were very common among the Sabians of ʿArrān and Abraham struggled against them. ʿArrān was founded as a city some 4,000 years ago, as a business post for the city of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, located on the commercial route of Mesopotamia. Despite the fact that they worshipped idols and celestial bodies, the Sabians of ʿArrān believed in one God, IL, unique and unknowable, beyond the comprehension of His creatures. They also believed in the need for messengers of God to educate humankind.

The Sabians believed that they had received their religion from Seth, the son of Adam, which is why they are identified with the Gnostic Sethians and with Idris or Enoch who is usually identified with Hermes Trismegisto. The Islāmic tradition recognized Hermes or Enoch as a prophet. The names Hermes, Idris or Enoch all refer to the same Person.

Sabianism flourished from the 9th to the 10th centuries under Islāmic rule. They Sabians produced philosophers, astronomers, medical doctors, and botanists. The most distinguished figure from that renaissance was the great Sabian astronomer Thābit ibn Qurrah, one of the main transmitters of ancient science to Islām, who attempted, unfruitfully to reform his religion and to free it from the superstitions of its priests. In the year 717, the Caliph Umar the Second, founded the first Islāmic university in ʿArrān. To get the university off to a good start, the Caliph invited the last Hermenesian philosophers from Alexandria to move to ʿArrān. In the 9th century A.D., there existed four hermenesian schools in ʿArrān.

[74.](#) Editor's Note: Like Ayatullah Miqbal Yazdi, the author does not deny the existence of foreign elements among Muslim Gnostics or Sufis. Both scholars assert the originality of Islamic Gnosis. This does not, however, mean that they condone whatever has been called gnosis or Sufism in Islam since many of the views and manners of behaviour of the Sufi Orders are disputable. The key to differentiating between a true Muslim mystic and a pseudo-Sufi charlatan is the respect, application and practice of the shari'ah. There can be no esoteric without its exoteric grounding. It was these pseudo-Sufis who were cursed by the Imams, and not the true followers of the spiritual path. For more on the image of the path in Islam, refer to our study on this subject: Morrow, John Andrew "The Image of the Road in Islamic Literature." Proceedings from the Image of the Road Conference. Eds. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan. Pueblo: SSSI, Colorado State U-Pueblo, 2005.

[75.](#) Editor's Note: Epicureans were the followers of Epicurus (341–270 B.C.), an Athenian atomist philosopher. He regarded sense perception as the only basis of knowledge and believed that material objects throw off images which enter our senses. He considered the highest good to be pleasure, but this meant freedom from pain and emotional upheaval, achieved not through sensual indulgence but through the practice of virtue. His teachings formed the basis of the De rerum natura of Lucretius.

[76.](#) Editor's Note: The Cynics were members of a school of Greek philosophy founded by Antisthenes. They taught that virtue is the only good and that it is to be won by self-control and austerity, not by social conventions.

[77.](#) Editor's Note: Bilal Philips is wrong to link Shī'ite and Mu'tazilite philosophy (5).

[78.](#) Author's Note: For the ikhwān al-ṭāfīq, see S.H. Na'ir, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines (London 1978), 1, I to IV, 25–104; Islamic Life and Thought (London 1981), especially chapters 10 and 11.

[79.](#) Editor's Note: Henry Corbin privately professed to be a Shī'ite Muslim mystic. He acknowledged his belief in the secret of Shī'ism, namely, the existence of the Living Imam. 'Allamah Ḥabībullah Ḥasan-zadeh Amoli, Seyyed Ḥusein Tehranī, and Seyyed Ḥossein Na'ir have all attested to Corbin's acceptance of Twelver Shī'ism. It is said that Corbin performed the pilgrimage to Makkah with Na'ir.

A perusal of Corbin's scholarship, however, demonstrates his interest in "spiritual Shī'ism," consisting of the ghulāt and the Ismā'īlīs, as opposed to "official Shī'ism," namely, the mainstream legal tradition of Twelver Shī'ism. Although he greatly admired the Twelve Imams, Corbin held many "heterodox" beliefs. For example, he believed that the occultation of the Mahdī was permanent and that he would only reappear in the hearts of believers.

According to Ismael Velasco, Corbin's work "constitutes a philosophical bridge between the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths and the philosophical and religious matrix within which they were conceived" and may be seen "as a veritable Prolegomenon to the study of Bābī and Bahā'ī scripture." In the words of Velasco, "Corbin followed the thread of Islamic spirituality from the Twelve Imams at its genesis, to the Shaykhī school at its terminus." It is important to mention, however, that although his works represents a conceptual link between Shaykhism, Bābism, and Bahā'ism, Corbin was critical of these last two movements.

For more on the subject, see the following works by Vittor: "La fe bahai y la contra-tradición en el mundo islámico," a paper read on October 23rd, 1997 at the Joseph de Maistre Institute of Traditional Studies in Buenos Aires, and amplification and expansion of an article previously published in Atma-Jñana. Revista Bimestral de Síntesis Espiritual 8 (Buenos Aires 1990): 17–29; "Guénon y la iniciación en el esoterismo islámico" a paper read on August 23rd, 2001, during the Primera Semana Guenoniana de Buenos Aires, celebrated in the Library of Congress, as well as the article "El Concepto del ta'wil desde la perspectiva fenomenológica de H. Corbin" in the cultural suplement Letras e Ideas 18 (Buenos Aires 1991): 3–8.

[80.](#) Editor's Note: Editor's Note: Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) was a German-Swiss scholar. A convert to Islam, his Muslim name was Ḥṣa Na'ir al-Dīn Aḥmad. He was a student of René Guénon, the reviver of the Traditionalist theory, with whom he broke from in 1950. He claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary in the 1960s. According to Schuon, the Virgin Mary gave him the universal message of proclaiming the transcendental unity of religion. As a result of this series of visions, he formed his own Ḥarḥaqah known as the Maryamiyyah.

It should be stressed that the Maryamiyyah, which was named after the Virgin Mary, was an invention of Schuon, who claimed she had invested him from on high. In an interview with the magazine Vers la tradition Khaled Bentounès, the present Shaykh of the Ḥarḥaqah 'Alawiyyah categorically denied any ties between Schuon's group and the mother Ḥarḥaqah from 1954 onwards. As such, there was a clear rupture in the silsilah, the chain of transmission, which is an essential component of the spiritual universe of Islamic initiatory orders. While Shaykh Bentounès does not deny the value of

Schuon's work, he views the Swiss as a scholar and not as a spiritual guide. In his article "René Guénon y la iniciación en el esoterismo islámico" (Buenos Aires 2001), Luis Alberto Vittor makes the following observation:

As is well-known, while Schuon was living in Paris in the early 1930s, he wrote to Guénon, then a resident of Cairo, asking his advice as to which "spiritual guide" he should associate himself with. Before receiving a response from Guénon, Schuon moved from Paris to Marseilles. While at a *zawiyyah* with some Algerian *fuqarā'* from the *Ṣarḥ* 'Alawiyyah, he was persuaded to pay a visit to Shaykh Ahmad Muḥafīz al-'Alawī. In the middle of all this turbulence, he received the response from Guénon advising him to head to Mostagan to contact Shaykh al-'Alawī. This answer finally convinced Schuon, who set off to Mostagan in 1932, to join the *Ṣarḥ* of Shaykh al-'Alawī. It was in Mostagan that Schuon embraced Islam, adopting the Muslim name 'Iṣṣā Nūr al-Dīn. By this time, Guénon had already established ties with Shaykh Salama Raḥī, the founder of the *Ṣarḥ* *Ḥamdiyyah Shadhiliyyah*, whom he met on his way to Mosque of Sayyidīn al-'Usayn where he regularly went to pray.

In order to avoid controversy, and simple "refutations," we will not pass judgement, but merely pose a question. Why did Guénon advise Schuon to go to Mostagan to contact Shaykh al-'Alawī rather than having him contact his own shaykh in Cairo? Perhaps some passages interspersed through his letters may give us a hint.

In a letter dated November 1st, 1927, Guénon made the following comments regarding the opening of a *zawiyyah* of the *Ṣarḥ* 'Alawiyyah in Paris: "It seems that this brotherhood is spreading to great extent. I have also been informed that it has a *zawiyyah* in Paris, on Boulevard Saint-Germain, a few steps from here. Otherwise, it arouses suspicion that it might become too open and can mislead like many others."

In another letter dated December 31st, 1927, he repeats:

I think I already mentioned that the 'Alawis have a center in Paris which is aimed exclusively at Arabs and Kabyles. Although I have been invited to contact them I have not had time to do so, despite the fact that I am close by. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see it, as it might be more interesting than the brotherhood presently in formation and in which Europeans will also be admitted. As I believe I already mentioned, the introduction of Western elements can easily become a cause of misguidance.

Note that both passages correspond to letters written in 1927, three years before Schuon requested Guénon to recommend him a spiritual guide. A detractor of Schuon might easily wonder why Guénon directed him to the *Ṣarḥ* 'Alawiyyah when he apparently disapproved of the openness to Western elements manifested by the Parisian *zawiyyah*. It is not our aim to examine the reasons which led Schuon to deviate from straight path. It suffices to say that it is likely related, consciously or subconsciously, to the influence of anti-traditional forces which made him a mere instrument. One must wonder whether Guénon viewed Schuon as one of those destructive Western influences through which misguidance might enter Islam. Later developments regarding the devious practices and innovations made by Schuon seem to give credence to those who affirm that Guénon had perceived the shadow of his twisted spirituality.

It should be stressed that Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahīd Yaḥyā never had issues with the *Ṣarḥ* 'Alawiyyah itself as its chain of initiation is legitimate and unobjectionable. His only concern was that one of its branches in the West might undermine traditional principles, distorting its teachings, and introducing innovations. As far as the author and Editor of this work are concerned, we have no doubts that these were the concerns of Guénon as we have both observed deviant developments throughout the Western world.

Whether Schuon was a bona fide *Ṣarḥ* Shaykh revolves around the famous *ijāzah* he received from the hands of Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis. Luis Alberto Vittor was fortunate enough to have an Arabic copy of the *ijāzah* before his own eyes, graciously provided to him by ex-members of the *Ṣarḥ*. As he explains in his article:

From the beginning of Schuon's trip to Mostagan and his contact with Shaykh al-'Alawī, a great misunderstanding developed which we now hope to clarify. This misunderstanding--which has nothing to do with the *Ṣarḥ* 'Alawiyyah--revolves around the supposed *ijāzah* [authorization] that Schuon had received as *muqaddam* [delegate] at the hands of Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis, the successor of Shaykh al-'Alawī, allegedly authorizing him to initiate others in the Western world. The dispute between Schuon and Guénon derives precisely from a misinterpretation of the contents of the licence, particularly with regards to the true role Schuon was supposed to play as *muqaddam*.

In the famous document, whose Arabic original we have before our eyes, Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis clearly says, *qad adhintu fī nashr al-da'wah al-islāmiyyah* [I grant him permission to call people to Islam], *talqīn kalīmāt at-tawḥīd: L*

illaha illā Allāh [to preach the profession of faith: There is no god but Allāh], and most importantly, to teach al-wajībāt al-dīniyyah [the religious obligations]. This means that Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis merely gave Schuon a permission [idhn] to do da'wah, namely, to spread the message of Islām in the West, that is, to teach the basic exoteric aspects of the religion. The Shaykh did not, in any means, grant him the authority to act as a spiritual guide or initiator.

On the basis of the evidence, Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis never authorized Schuon to transmit the Ṣarḥ to others. Guénon himself seems to have been confused with respect to the reach and restrictions of the permission [idhn] since in a letter dated July 7th, 1949, he writes: "In any event, Shaykh 'Isa's title of muqaddam, with the power of transmission which it implies, cannot be questioned."

In all fairness, we must admit that the "permission" [idhn] which Schuon received from Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis does not specifically grant the authority to initiate others into Islāmic esoterism. Schuon had claimed to have the ijāzah of Shaykh al-'Alawī, and Guénon, out of good faith, had accepted his word. The ijāzah in question, however, merely mentions that Schuon is designated the muqaddam or representative of the Shaykh with regards to simple daily observances, the basic, elementary teachings used to spread the exoteric or universal pillars of Islām. In other words, the license given by Shaykh Adda Ben Tānis only permits Schuon to fulfil the basic works which every Muslim must accomplish de motu proprio [on his own] and which does not require any special permission. Schuon may have been a great scholar, philosopher, and talented artist; he was not, however, a certified shaykh of the 'Alawīyah Order.

In 1954, Schuon cut his ties with the Ṣarḥ 'Alawīyah, abruptly breaking the chain of initiation in a fashion which, to say the least, is entirely unusual. The break was formalized when Schuon founded his own, entirely autonomous, Ṣarḥ, separate from the mother branch, and which he eventually named the Maryamiyyah. By breaking ties with the Ṣarḥ 'Alawīyah of Mostagan in 1954, Schuon created a Ṣarḥ order which was totally anomalous. Unlike other orders, it was devoid of any silsilah or initiatic chain of transmission. In the Ṣarḥ world, any Ṣarḥ needs to provide a silsilah tracing its spiritual lineage back to the Prophet, thus assuring its authenticity. It is perhaps due to this reason that Guénon described the Maryamiyyah as a "vague 'universalist' order." In a letter from Cairo dated October 9th 1950, Guénon says, ...in Lausanne, the ritual observances have been reduced to a strict minimum. Most of them no longer fast during the month of Ramaḥān. I never thought things could reach such a point. It seems that I was entirely correct when I said that, soon enough, it would no longer be a Ṣarḥ but a vague "universalist" order, more or less like the disciples of Vivékānanda! In yet another of his letters from Cairo dated September 18th 1950, Guénon makes the following observations with regards to Schuon, Burckhardt, and other members of the Ṣarḥ Maryamiyyah:

On the other hand, I received a letter from Burckhardt regarding my responses to M.L. [Martin Lings] saying that "the violence of my letters has deeply troubled him, and that he cannot understand the reasons for such severe remarks." It seems to me that it should not be very difficult to understand! ... It is shocking how far bad faith can go. I, for one, am not the least bit surprised since, from a technical point of view, the ignorance of those people, starting with F.S. [Frithjof Schuon] himself, is truly frightening...

Ex-members of the Maryamiyyah have revealed disturbing information about its founder and the ritual practices of the secretive Ṣarḥ to several Muslim scholars, including a Shaykh from the Jerrahi Order.

Some of the early followers of Schuon included Marco Pallis, Charles Le Gai Eaton, John Levy, and Léo Schaya. The Swiss born Charles Le Gai Eaton (1922-) embraced Islām in 1951 and is presently a consultant to the Islāmic Cultural Center in London. Other Schuonian writers include: Thomas Merton, Huston Smith, Jean Borella, Joseph Epes Brown, Titus Burckhardt, Rama Coomaraswamy, Keith Critchlow, James Cutsinger, Victor Danner, Michael Oren Fitzgerald, Martin Lings, Jean-Louis Michon, Vali Reza Naḥr, Osman Bakar, Roger du Pasquier, Whithall Perry, Philip Sherrard, Huston Smith, and William Stoddardt. Seyyed Ḥossein Naḥr was a member of the Maryamiyya Ṣarḥ, a discipline of Schuon, and is now his most influential student. Dr. Mark Sedgwick's academic website, traditionalism.org, describes Naḥr as "the leading Maryami author" who took over from Schuon.

[81.](#) Editor's Note: As Naḥr notes, "the voices of Louis Massignon, H.A.R. Gibb, and Henry Corbin, followed by a later generation of sympathetic Western scholars like Annemarie Schimmel, remain truly exceptional" (Heart of Islām xii). It would also be worthwhile to add Sachiko Murata to this list.

[82.](#) Editor's Note: As Murad Wilfried Hofmann explains in his review of Muḥammad Musḥaf al-'Azīm's History of the Qur'ānic Text, Christian demagogues like John of Damascus, Peter the Venerable, Raymundus Lull, and Martin Luther,

followed by infamous Jewish, Christian or secularist Orientalists like Julius Wellhausen, Gustav Flügel, Theodor Nöldeke, Ignaz Goldziher, Alphonse Mingana, Snouck Hurgronje or Joseph Schacht, all did their best to prove that Islam was a corrupted Jewish-Christian copy, based on forged aqūdth, without any originality or saving grace.

[83.](#) Editor's Note: As Héctor Abad Dharr Manzollillo explains in his article "Los 'conversos' en países con minorías musulmanas," revealed religions correspond to different steps along the same path to spiritual perfection. Hence, going from Judaism to Christianity and from Christianity to Islam is part of a logical continuation established by God.

[84.](#) Author's Note: See M. Cruz Hernández, "Los estudios Islámólogos en España en los siglos XIX y XX" in A. Heredia Soriano (ed.), *Exilios filosóficos de España* (Salamanca 1990): 490. Editor's Note: The author is playing the devil's advocate with Orientalists. Even if scholars subject Islam to the most rigid and merciless scientific analysis, Islam, even as an allegedly man-made religion, comes out on top.

[85.](#) Editor's Note: As Na'ar notes, "most of these Orientalists studied Islam in the arrogant belief that they possessed a flawless scientific method that applied universally to all religions" (*Heart of Islam* xii).

[86.](#) Editor's Note: The Islamic attitude, however, is not that Muslims copied Christians who copied Jews who copied Egyptians and Babylonians but that the similarities between their legislation can be accounted for the fact that they come from the same eternal source: God.

[87.](#) Editor's Note: The Western concept of religion is narrow. The Eastern concept of religion is much broader and encompasses all aspects of human existence.

[88.](#) Editor's Note: According to Islamic sources, the hundreds of prophecies signaling the End of Days have been fulfilled. Only the final major signs remain: the appearance of the anti-Christ, the return of Imam Mahdī along with Jesus, the Messiah, and the sun rising in the West which, for some, is not meant to be taken literally and refers to the rise of Islam in the Western world. The return of the Twelfth Imam is imminent.

[89.](#) Editor's Note: This is an allusion to the Qur'ānic verse: "To Allāh We belong, and to Him is our return" (2:156) and (49:13). The author is also alluding to the prophetic traditions concerning God creating everything out of his own light.

[90.](#) Editor's Note: We remember vividly how Nigosian, our religious studies professor at the University of Toronto, started his class on world religions: "Religion is the product of the human imagination..." For many such scholars, atheism is the basis for the "scientific" study of religion.

[91.](#) Author's Note: See Henry Daniel-Rops, *La vida cotidiana en Palestina en tiempo de Jesús* (Buenos Aires 1961), III, 1, 382-83; as well as Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *El judeocristianismo: Formación de grupos y luchas intestinas en la cristianidad primitiva* (Valencia 1970: 146-150).

[92.](#) Editor's Note: Similarity between religions does not imply that they borrowed from one another but rather that they have the same spiritual origin: God.

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