

Chapter 2: Two Hypotheses on Imamate

Caliphate, from the view point of Sunnit scholars, is a social position for which only talents for specific purposes are reckoned as significant and urgent.

On the other hand, Imamate, from a Shia perspective, is a divine position which is occupied by God's appointment and is equal to the position of the Prophet in many respects.

Concerning the issue of Imamate, there are two views among scholars: one is specific to the Sunnite scholars and the other is held by the Shiite scholars:

1. The Sunnite point of view

Sunnite scholars hold that Imamate is a widespread sponsorship of Muslim religious and mundane affairs. An Imam or a caliph, in their view, is an individual who held this position after the Prophet's death and who would solve any problem Muslims might encounter.

They define Imamate in the following manner: 1

“الإمامة رئاسة عامة في أمور الدين و الدنّيا خلافة عن النبي”

In the Sunnite view, this great religious and social position is a social asset which is bestowed upon a caliph by people for he is elected by the people.

The limits and boundaries of a caliph are clearly specified in the above definition.

a) Sponsorship of religious affairs:

This phrase indicates that people's religious problems are solved by the caliph. For instance, the spread of Islam across the globe through holy wars is among an Imam's tasks.

b) Sponsorship of mundane affairs:

An Imam or a caliph should preserve people's security through armies and should secure the borders.

When we carefully analyze this definition and consider the caliph's tasks, we can conclude that Sunni scholars consider an Imam a usual governor and a social leader who is elected to secure general security and justice, and in this way only the Imam's knowledge and capability are required (neither a comprehensive knowledge of the Islamic commandments, nor a divine immunity against error is necessary).

However, in every society there are cases of corruption; in every corner of society there are wrongdoers who engage in gambling or who drink wine; there are aggressors who steal public wealth or commit sexual crimes.

Therefore, after the Prophet's death there should be a capable man who should stop the wrongdoings through the application of divine punishments. These and many other such tasks weigh over the shoulders of the Imam who resumes the Prophet's tasks when the latter passes away.

In addition, there are other affairs related to the expansion of Islam across the globe which are issues related to people's religion. For instance, one of the missions of an Imam is to secure Islamic borders and to spread monotheism across the globe through holy wars with an army equipped with powerful weapons.

You might ask who is responsible for people's religious questions. They would answer: the Prophet's close friends, who have learned such issues from the Prophet, are responsible for such affairs.

If the Imam's task was only to settle such mundane affairs, he would not need any moral virtues except for social capabilities, let alone widespread knowledge or immunity against sins.

Unfortunately, from a Sunnite perspective the Imam's spiritual position has so drastically degenerated that an individual such as Baghiani is allowed to speak of a caliph as the Prophet's successor, an individual who can engage in sins and still remain the leader of an Ummah. He writes: [2](#)

”لايخلع الإمام بفسقه و ظلمه بغصب الأموال و تناول النفوس المحترمة و تضييع الحقوق و تعطيل الحدود“

An Imam is never removed from his position because of involvement in the disobedience of God, or for confiscation of people's possessions, or for killing people or for disruption of people's rights. Rather, it is the people's job to make his wrongdoings right or even to lead him towards the right direction!

We will not even wonder when we see a scholar such as Mohaqiq Taftazani judge the caliph of the Prophet in the following manner:

It is never required for Imams to be immune against sins or to be the best of the Muslims. The Imam's disobedience and his lack of Islamic knowledge would never end in his resignation³.

The reasons for such judgments concerning the caliph of Islam lie in the assumption that an Imam should be elected as a usual governor. His only requirement is the ability to manage people's affairs and to suppress the aggressors.

His moral corruption or his involvement in sins are not considered relevant to his job.

2. The Shiite point of view

The Shiite scholars rely on another view. This view states: Imamate is a kind of divine jurisprudential guardianship or *walayah* which is bestowed upon the Imam by God. In other words: Imamate, like prophethood, is assigned to an individual by God.

Based on this assumption, Imamate is a continuation of Prophethood with the difference that the Prophet is the founder of shariah (i.e. the divine Islamic law) and the Imam is the describer of divine Islamic law. The Imam follows the path of the Prophet in all affairs except for the issue of revelation. All the requirements of a prophet (such as knowledge of, Islamic principles and practical laws, Islamic commandments, immunity against sins) are shared by an Imam.

The holders of this view state: If it is true that the Prophet brought an extensive and complex divine system for people and imparted to people all the Islamic knowledge, there should be a capable individual after the Prophet who can analyze all those principles. Such a task could not be carried out except through thorough knowledge.

It is also a fact that while the Prophet lived all the Islamic commandments were revealed to him by God but due to specific conditions a series of problems had to be addressed by the Imam who had to enjoy divine revelation. The Shiite believe that an Imam should be aware of and informed on the affairs of Islamic jurisprudence.⁴

But why should an Imam be innocent and infallible? Sunnites recognize an Imam as the teacher and instructor of the Ummah, however, education should be practical and should be carried out by the instructor. If the instructor himself were to break laws, how could he influence others to the right path? This view holds: since the Ummah could never recognize a sponsor so innocent and well informed, an Imam should be appointed by God.

Now we should find out which one of the two views is correct and well founded and is in harmony with the verses of the Holy Quran and with the Prophet's authentic narrations.

¹ . Sharhe Tajrid, Alaeddin Qoshji, p 72. In addition to this definition, there are other definitions which we will not get into.

² . Al-Tamhid, p 186.

³ . Sharh-e-Maqasid, vol. 2, P. 271.

⁴ . Due to the fact that the Shiite scholars, unlike the Sunnites, recognize the position of Imamate as a divine position, they define Imamate in the following manner:

الإمامة رئاسة عامة إلهية في أمور الدين والدنيا خلافة عن النبي

Imamate is a divine general sponsorship which deals with people's mundane and religious affairs, as a substitute for the prophet.

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