Book Review : An Introduction to Shia Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiism, by Moojan Momen

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Al-Islam.org

Al-Tawhid General (Al Tawhid)

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Publisher(s):

Al-Tawhid Islamic Journal [2]

A review of Montgomery Watt's book 'Islam and Christianity today', in which the author who has studied Islam for over fourty years, asks searching questions both about Islam and his own faith in Christianity.

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Book Review: An Introduction to Shia Islam, The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism

Introduction

The book is an attempt to present a general outline of the doctrines, practices and history of the Imami Shias, or, according to the title, of `Shia Islam'. The author recurringly uses the terms `Shia Islam' and `Sunni Islam', while admitting that the Shi'ah and Sunnis “are much closer to each other than many Christian sects are”.

Then why, one wonders, we do not find Western writers talk so frequently about, say, `Catholic Christianity' and `Protestant Christianity'. The answer is that putting into circulation such terms as `Shia Islam' and `Sunni Islam' serves divisive goals and Western political interests; it is natural that in the West, where strategic priority and academic curiosity are so closely interlinked, scholars should rally to provide intellectual ammunition to safeguard the security of imperialist interests.

The book itself is intended to fill a vacuum and to attend to a field hitherto ignored by orientalist due to the formerly low strategic significance of the subject. The paucity of works by Western scholars on Shia subjects is usually attributed to neglect or their past tendency to underestimate their importance. But,

possibly, it is the revolutionary potential of those teachings which has forced Western scholars to suppress their dissemination through apparent neglect. Now the main problem before the Orientals is to satisfy the curiosity of the Western audience without becoming propagandists of Shiaism.

His solution lies in partial coverage. That is, through suppressing the most positive aspects of its teachings and providing only skeletal details devoid of soul and spirit. This kind of suppressive treatment has been dealt out in the present book to the Shia and Islamic doctrine and ideal of justice, for justice, in its most comprehensive sense, along with Tawhid, is central to the teachings of the Quran, the mission of the Prophet (S), the function of the Imams, and the ideals of the Shia creed.[1]

The author's ambitious introduction to Shiaism begins with “An Outline of the Life of Muhammad (S) and the Early History of Islam”. The chapters which follow are:

1. Life of Prophet (S).
2. The Question of the Succession to Muhammad (S).
3. The Lives of the Imams and Early Divisions among the Shias.
4. Early History of Shia Islam, A.D. 632–1000.
5. Shia Islam in the Medieval Period, A.D. 1000–1500.
6. Shia Islam in Modern Times, A.D. 1500–1900.
7. The Imamate.
8. The Twelfth Imam (ajtf), His Occultation and Return.
9. Doctrines, Ritual Practices and Social Transactions.
10. Shia Jurisprudence and the Religious Hierarchy.
11. Sufism, Irfan and Hikma.
12. Schools within Twelver Shiaism.
13. The Popular Religion.
14. Contemporary Shiaism.

At the end of the book, in the appendices, follow a useful chronology of political and religious events in Shia history, a list of Shia dynasties, short biographies of prominent Shia `Ulama', notes to the chapters, which mention the author's sources, and then a select bibliography.

Prophet’s Life

The chapter on the Prophet's life, despite its brevity, is not free of speculative hypotheses and legends stated as facts. For instance, the author, states that among the [pre–Islamic] Arab tribes there were certain places that were regarded as shrines and each had a sanctuary around it and that one shrine was the Kaaba in Mecca (p. 2).

This statement, lacking historical evidence, can mislead the reader about the central importance of the Ka'bah–a shrine built by Abraham and Ismail, the ancestors of the Arabs–in the Arabia of pre–Islamic

times. He cites the legend of the first revelation to the Prophet (S) on Mount Hira according to which “he fled in terror at the first revelation” and had to be comforted and reassured by his wife Khadijah (sa). The Shi'ah do not subscribe to this tale, it is not mentioned in their books, and–beside being uncharacteristic of the Prophet (S) is made further doubtful by the fact that exegetes of the Quran from the earliest times have disagreed regarding the first passage or surah to be revealed to the Prophet (*S*). 2

In this chapter, the author mentions the tenets of the Prophet's faith and the obligatory `ritual' duties prescribed by it. But in view of the fact that the Prophet (S) one of the greatest moral teachers of humanity–also established a state, legislated laws, organized an army, and fought his enemies, the reader should be told at least something about the characteristics of his rule and the purpose of his wars.

However, the Western writers in their biographical works on the Prophet (S) seldom mention the fact that the main characteristics of the Prophet's state were uncompromising commitment to justice, the supreme rule of law and the equality of all citizens before law and the rejection of any privileges based on race, color, or origin.

Justice is so important in Islam that it may not be denied even to enemies

***Allah has promised to those who believe and do good deeds* (*that*) *they shall have forgiveness and a mighty reward.* (*5:9*)**

In fact the basic aim of God's sending of His prophets to humanity is held to be that men should uphold justice.

***Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity; and We have made the iron, wherein is great violence and advantages to men, and that Allah may know who helps Him and His messengers in the secret; surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.* (*57:25*)**

Fairness and justice is considered by the Quran to be a part of piety. Another important teaching of the Quran, which needs special mention by anyone attempting to introduce Shiaism, is its emphasis on knowledge, reason, and reflection.

To acquire knowledge is considered a duty in Islam and men of knowledge are considered to be the truly God–fearing and pious by the Quran (35:28). The Quran points out again and again that only those who are in possession of sound reason (*ulu al–'albab*) understand the inward and outward `signs' of God. In this relation, it refers to the “men possessed of knowledge and upholding justice” **(أُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ)** whom it regards, together with the angels, as witnesses to His Unity:

﴿شَهِدَ اللَّـهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴾١٨

God bears witness–and the angels and men possessed of knowledge and upholding justice–that there is no god but He, the All–mighty, the All–wise. (***3:18***)

If one were asked to put the essence of Shi'ism in a phrase, one may say that it is "emphasis on knowledge and justice". Almost everything else that is characteristic of Shi'ism is either directly related to this emphasis or derived from it. The phrase **وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ** is important to the Shi'ah, because it represents the Prophet (S) and the Imams (as) as embodiments of knowledge and justice. A book that does not mention this basic fact neither understand Shiaism nor Shia history.

Even the doctrine of the Imamate may be said to be a 'corollary of the principle of basic importance of knowledge and justice. Justice, as defined by Imam 'Ali (as) in the *Nahj al–balaghah,* is putting everything in its right place. Justice, in this sense, is action, and the most proper way of acting at that. *Din,* or Divine Law, since it relates to the right way of living, is included injustice. Since one cannot act rightly without knowing what is the right thing to do in every case, justice is based on knowledge.

The existence of an Imam is essential because he is, by virtue of his knowledge and his capacity to uphold comprehensive justice (termed as *`ismah,* infallibility), the criterion of knowledge and justice and so the Proof (*hujjah*) of God for mankind. Without his existence God's grace to mankind would be incomplete.

We do not, of course, mean to assert that the Shi'ah in particular or Muslims in general have always and everywhere been committed to the ideals of knowledge and justice, but it appears that it is impossible to understand either the rapid expansion of Islam, or the phenomenal rise of a bunch of backward tribes from the depths of anonymity to the leadership of human civilization, or the early history of Islam, or the early history of the Shi'ah, Shiite doctrines, Shia attitudes, or even such contemporary events as the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

And many such things, without taking note of the fact that Islam has emphasized justice and knowledge more than any other religious or secular teaching before or after it. To keep Western readers in the dark on this issue and to abstain from giving Islam or Shi'ism undesirable publicity may suit Western interests, but it does not contribute to understanding, and, ironically, may lead scholarship to deceive itself, entangling it in the net of its own making.

Succession to the Prophet

Chapter 2, regarding the question of succession to the Prophet (S), is informative. Here are mentioned ten episodes from the Prophet's life, reported both by Sunni and Shia sources, indicating, expressly for the Shi'ah, that the Prophet (S) had designated 'Ali (as) as his successor. This is followed by ten ahadith of the Prophet (S), accepted as authentic both by Sunnis and Shias, which are considered by the Shi'ah to confirm 'Ali's position as the Prophet's successor.

These are followed by five ahadith of the Prophet (S), reported both by Sunni and Shia sources, that indicate the preeminent station of ‘Ali (as), Fatimah (sa), Al-Hasan (as) and Al-Husayn (as) in Islam. Apart from these, the author cites three traditions reported by Shias about ‘Ali (as). Thereafter he refers to Shia interpretations of two Quranic verses (13:7, 5:5), which both the Sunni and Shi’ite exegetes agree as referring to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (as). This is followed by a brief description of the events of the Saqifah and ‘Ali's (as) attitude during the reigns of the three caliphs who assumed political leadership after the Prophet's demise.

Lives of the Imams

Chapter 3 gives brief sketches of the lives of the Twelve Imams (as) and a description of real and imaginary Shia sects based mainly on the works of heresiographers.

Western Critical Scholarship of Shia History

Chapter 4 gives the picture presented by Western `critical scholarship' of early Shia history based on three or four incompetent articles by Watt, Hodgson and Kholberg. 3

But before we examine this picture, which is speculative and naive rather than critical or scholarly, we consider it essential to refer to an important point. In order to understand early Shia history, it is necessary to recognize the full implications of the suppression of the Shi'ah on the one hand and adoption of *taqiyyah* by them on another.

To take up the issue of the suppression of the Shi'ah by state authorities, it began immediately after the death of the Prophet (S), if not before it (the Episode of Pen and Paper [reported by Al-Bukhari and others], which took place in the last days of the Prophet's life, is considered by the Shi'ah to be the beginning of this suppression; the Prophet (S) was not only stopped from writing what he wished to write, a strict prohibition on narrating his words was clamped soon after his death).

The Prophet's leadership in his lifetime was comprehensive; it included spiritual, legal, and political authority, for he was the spiritual guide, lawgiver and ruler of the community, in addition to his function of prophecy. The Shia doctrine of Imamate is nothing but the belief in the continuity of this leadership after the Prophet (S).

Shiaism during the Prophet's time and after him was merely the belief that this authority was invested in ``Ali's person. Had the Companions unanimously accepted ‘Ali's preeminence, the group called Shi'ah would not have assumed a separate existence. ‘Ali (as), however, was denied political leadership, and his preeminence was ignored, if not questioned (for there is much evidence that his legal authority, or at least the authority of his legal judgements, was revered even by the caliphs who assumed power before him).

It is not correct to say that the number of those who subscribed to ‘Ali’s claim of right comprehensive leadership was limited to a group of four: Miqdad, Salman, Abu Dharr and Ammar. In fact the four were the most daring and steadfast of a significant number of Companions who stood by ‘Ali's side after the Prophet (S). 4

The thirty-five years of ‘Ali's retirement from active public life saw the dwindling of this number due to deaths of many of the Prophet's generation and absence of any chances of publicity for ``Ali's claims.

It was only after he assumed caliphate, in the aftermath of `Uthman's assassination, that ‘Ali (as) (and after him Al-Hasan (as), for a short time) got an opportunity to give publicity to the claims of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) to comprehensive leadership. 5

The efforts of some Muslim historians to cast doubts on the authenticity of the *Nahj al-balaghah* are nothing but the continuation of the efforts to suppress those claims.

Perhaps it was the memory of those claims and their renewed public assertion, more than ``Ali's just policies, which induced the revolts against his rule. It was again the persisting threat posed by such claims that moved Mu'awiyah to purge its supporters (for instance, Hurr ibn `Adi and his companions) mercilessly and to launch a suppressive propaganda campaign against ‘Ali (as) and the claims of the Ahl al-Bayt, by employing fabricators of false ahadith aimed to obscure past historical realities.

The doctrine of *Ijma* was developed as a substitute for the *Ismah* of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), and the consensus of the community was made a convenient means for bypassing *nass* and legitimizing the authority of the rulers. An aura of holiness was created retrospectively around the figures of the Companions, and an alternate channel of religious authority was created to counteract the claims of the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

Any criticism of the characters or acts of the Companions except ‘Ali (as) and his supporters was discouraged, as if the *munafiqun* mentioned recurringly by the Quran never existed. Although ‘Ali (as) was rehabilitated later, his claim to religio-political authority continued to be suppressed throughout the Umayyad period, and perhaps more vigorously during the Abbasid rule.

The Abbasids, seeing the difficulties inherent in recognizing ‘Ali's claims, changed the basis of their own claim to the caliphate by tracing it through Al-Abbas instead of through Abu Hashim, Muhammad ibn Al-Hanafiyyah, Al-Husayn (as), Al-Hasan (as) and ‘Ali (as), as they had done earlier.

The distortive propaganda begun by Mu'awiyah-which initially took the form of fabrication of hadith-and sustained by the Umayyads and the `Abbasids, gradually penetrated into all the different branches of Islamic sciences as they developed tafsir, kalam, and history. Although many of such fabrications were discovered and discarded by conscientious Muslim scholars, it was not possible to discover and avoid all of them.

One of the legends, fabricated apparently as late as the late second century is that of `Abd Allah ibn Saba', called Ibn al–Sawda' or ibn al 'Amat al–Sawda' (son of black slave woman), and his imaginary sect of the Saba'iyyah, which was invented, among a plenteous number of them, by Sayf ibn `Umar al–Tamimi (d. 170/786).

Allamah Murtada Askari has traced the story of `Abd Allah ibn Saba' in Sunni works to four sources: al–Tabari (d. 310/922), Ibn `Asakir (d. 571/1175), Ibn Abi Bakr (d. 741/1340) and al–Dhahabi (d. 747/1346), all of whom took it from one single source: Sayf ibn `Umar and his two works, *al–Futuh al – kabir wa al–riddah* and *al–Jamal wa masir 'A'ishah wa ``Ali* . 6

Sayf is accused of being a liar and a *zindiq* by many scholars of *rijal,* such as: Yahya ibn Mu'in (d. 233/847), Abu Dawud (d. 275/888), al–Nasa'i (d. 303/915), Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327/938), Ibn al–Sukn (353/964), Ibn Habban (d. 354/965), al–Daraqutni (d. 385/995), al–Hakim (d. 405/1014), al–Firuzabadi (d. 817/1414), Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1448), al–Suyuti (d. 911/1505), and Safi al–Din (d. 923/1517).7

`Abd Allah Ibn Saba', a Jew converted to Islam during `Uthman's reign, is said to have been a devoted follower of ``Ali. Travelling from place to place he is said to have agitated the people against `Uthman. Said to be the founder of the sect of the Saba'iyyah and originator of *ghuluww*, he is considered by `Allamah `Askari to be purely a creation of Sayf, who also created many imaginary heroes, places, towns, and even Companions of the Prophet (S).

It was from Sayf that al–Tabari and his contemporary heresiographers–such as Sa'd ibn `Abd Allah ibn Abi Khalaf al–'Ash'afi al–Qummi (d. 301/913) in his *al–Maqalat wa al–firaq,* al–Hasan ibn Musa al–Nawbakhti (d. 310/922) in his *Firaq al–Shi'ah,* and ``Ali ibn Ismail al'Ash'ari (d. 324/935) in his *Maqalat al–'Islamiyyin*–have taken the details about Ibn Saba'. `Allamah `Askari traces the mention of `Abd Allah ibn Saba' in Shi'i works to al–Kashshi's *Rijal.*

Al–Kashshi in this work relates five traditions–all from Muhammad ibn Qulwayh, who narrates from Sa'd ibn `Abd Allah al–'Ash'ari al–Qummi–mentioning `Abd Allah ibn Saba' to the effect that he believed in the divinity of ``Ali (as) and considered himself to be his prophet. According to two of these traditions, 'Ali (as) asked him to disavow that belief, and, on his refusal, burnt him alive (however, according to what Sa'd ibn `Abd Allah writes in his book, 'Ali exiled Ibn Saba' to Mada'in, where he remained until ``Ali's martyrdom; thereafter he is said to have stated that ``Ali (as) had not died at all and that he would return again).

Al–Kashshi, after the five traditions relating to Ibn Saba', remarks that he is alleged by the Sunnis to be the first to have publicly spoken about ``Ali's Imamate and the first to have denounced ``Ali's enemies.' 8

Allamah `Askari remarks that not only the burning alive of heretics is against the commands of Islam–both according to the Shi'ah and Sunni legal schools–such an episode has not been mentioned at all by any of the famous historians such as Ibn al–Khayyat (d. 240/854), al–Ya'qubi (d. 284/897), al–Tabari, al–Mas'udi, Ibn al–'Athir, ibn Kathir, or Ibn Khaldun.

The kind of role ascribed to `Abd Allah ibn Saba' in the events preceding `Uthman's assassination or during ``Ali's rule has not been mentioned by the early historians such as ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844), al-Baladhuri (d. 279/892), or al Ya'qubi. Only al-Baladhuri once mentions his name in his *Ansab al-'ashraf* (Beirut, 1364; vol. 2, p. 383) while relating an incident of ``Ali's reign, and says: "Hujr ibn `Adi al-Kindi, `Amr ibn al-Hamiq alKhuza`i, Hibah ibn Juwayn al-Bajli al-`Arani, and `Abd Allah ibn Wahb al-Hamdani-who is ibn Saba'-came to him [``Ali] and asked him about Abu Bakr and `Umar ...."

Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) in his *al 'Imamah wa al-siyasah* (vol.1, p.142) and al-Thaqafi (d. 284/897) in his *al-Gharat* (vol. 1, p. 302) mention the incident. Ibn Qutaybah identifies him as Abd Allah ibn Wahb al-Rasibi and al-Thaqafi mentions his name as Abd Allah ibn Saba. Sa'd ibn Abd Allah al-'Ash'ari, in his *al-Maqalat wa al firaq,* mentions the name of Abd Allah ibn Saba, the imaginary founder of the Saba'iyyah, as Abd Allah ibn Wahb al Rasibi. Ibn Makulah (d. 475/ 1082) in his *al-'Ikmal* and al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1347) in his *al-Mushtabah,* explaining the word Saba'iyyah, mention Abd Allah ibn Wahb al-Saba'i, the leader of the Khawarij. Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1448) in his *Tansir al-mutanabbih* describes the Saba'iyyah as a group of the Khawarij led by Abd Allah ibn Wahb al-Saba'I, Al Maqrizi (d. 848/1444) in his *al-Khitat* gives the name of the legendary Abd Allah ibn Saba' as Abd Allah ibn Wahb ibn Saba', known as Ibn al-Sawda' al-Saba'i. 9

Allamah `Askari points out that none of the scholars who have narrated the legend of `Abd Allah ibn Saba' give any details of his descent (*nasab*)-something extraordinary in the case of an Arab who is supposed to have played an important role in his days. Arab historians never fail to mention the names of the ancestors, the tribe and the clan of prominent Arabs of the early Muslim era.

But in the case of `Abd Allah ibn Saba', supposedly a Yemeni Arab from San`a; we are told neither the name of his grandfather, his ancestors nor the tribe nor clan to which he belonged. `Allamah `Askari believes that Ibn Saba' and the Saba'iyyah (in the sense of the first *ghali* sect) were a creation of Sayf ibn `Umar, whom he shows to be the author of many similar creations.

Apparently, the name of Abd Allah ibn Wahb ibn Rasib ibn Malik ibn Midan ibn Malik ibn Nasr al-'Azd ibn Ghawth ibn Nubatah ibn Malik ibn Zayd ibn Kahlan ibn Saba', a Rasibi, Azdi and Sabai, the leader of the Khawarij, who was killed, with all except a few of his followers, fighting ``Ali's army at the Battle of Nahrawan, was picked up by the maker of the legend to designate an imaginary character who for the first time publicly proclaimed the doctrine of ``Ali's Imamate.

He comes out of nowhere to lead an agitation against Uthman, triggers the Battle of al-Jamal, proclaims the Imamate of 'Ali (as) or his divinity is burnt alive by 'Ali (as), or is banished by him and outlives him to declare his divinity and his return, and having satisfied the purpose of the storyteller he and his gang disappear again into nowhere only to reappear again in the works of insatiable heresiographers on the lookout for all kinds of novel and curious heresies.

According to the findings of Allamah Askari, the term Sabaiyyah was originally used as a general term

for southern Arabian tribes of the Qahtan, who came from Yemen. Later, since most of the supporters of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) were of Yemeni origin (such as Amman ibn Yasir, Malik al-'Ashtar, Kumayl ibn Ziyad, Hujr ibn Adi, Ad'i ibn Hatim, Qays ibn Sa'd ibn Ubadah, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit, Sahl ibn Hunayf, Uthman ibn Hunayf, Amr ibn Hamiq, Sulayman ibn Surad, Abd Allah Badil, who were well-known companions of ‘Ali (as).

The term came to denote those who supported the claims of the house of ‘Ali (as). Thus Ziyad ibn Abih, while drawing up charges against Hujr and his companions, refers to them derogatorily as Saba'iyyah. With this change in meaning, the term was also applied to Mukhtar and his supporters, who came to power through the support of Yemeni tribes. After the fall of the Banu Umayyah, the term Saba'iyyah is mentioned in a speech by Abu Al-Abbas Al-Saffah, the first Abbasid caliph, who used it to refer to the Shi'ah, who questioned the claims of the house of Al Abbas to the caliphate.

However, neither Ziyad nor Al-Saffah attributed any heretical beliefs to the Saba'iyyah, something which at least Ziyad would not have failed to mention among the charges he drew up against Hujr and his companions had they held the kind of heretical beliefs ascribed to *ghulat.* A new meaning was given to the term by Sayf ibn Umar, around the middle of the second Islamic century, who used it for an early heretical sect imagined to be founded by the fictitious Abd Allah ibn Saba.

The aim of Sayf's legend was to distort the history of the Shi'ah and undermine Shiaism by ascribing its origin to the despicable Ibn Saba, A Yemeni Jew, the son of a black slave woman. As we shall presently see, some orientalists have come up with a new version of early Shia history. Their motives also may not be much different from those of Sayf ibn Umar. While Sayf aimed to distort history by putting fictions into circulation in the name of history, orientalism floats conjectures in the name of critical scholarship.

The other side of this matter is the issue of *taqiyyah*, which has not been fully understood by Western scholars of Shiaism. The doctrine of the Imamate represented a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the rulers who, according to the doctrine, had usurped the rights of the living Imam as the rightful successor to the Prophet's comprehensive authority. To proclaim this doctrine publicly was equal to inviting persecution of the Shias and endangering the life of the living Imam.

Taqiyyah, in the sense of abstaining from giving open publicity to the doctrine of Imamate in its *complete* form, was practised even by the first three Imams, ‘Ali (as), Al-Hasan (as) and Al-Husayn (as), all three of whom publicly advanced their claim in the form of a principle of the preeminence of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) with the phrase “Ahl al-Bayt” left deliberately vague, at least in their public statements.

This deliberate vagueness afforded, on the one hand, the later Imams to conceal their identity from the general public and the tyrannical rulers , on the other hand it gave the opportunity to a group to continue their activism under the leadership of `dummy' Imams, such as Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, Abu Hashim, Zayd ibn ‘Ali, Yahya ibn Zayd and others. It is certain that none of the later Imams, from ‘Ali ibn Al-Husayn (as) onwards, wanted their claims to religio-political leadership to be publicly known on

account of the danger of persecution.

Not only the Imams (as) endeavored to conceal their identity and that of their successors, they also abstained from proclaiming the doctrine of Imamate publicly, for public knowledge of that doctrine, based on the idea of the continuity of Imamate through *nass* (designation), would have led the rulers to pinpoint the real Imam. Thus it may be said that all the Imams lived in a state of relative occultation, which was necessary due to the political circumstances of the Muslim world. Let us take note of the following ahadith from *al-Kafi* of al-Kulayni and *al-Mahasin* of al-Barqi:

ابْنُ أَبي عُمَيْر، عَنْ هِشامِ بْنِ سالِم، عَنْ أبي عُمَرَ ألأعْجَمِيّ قالَ: قالَ لي أَبُو عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع): يا أبا عُمَرَ إنَّ تِسْعَةَ أعْشارِ الدّينِ في التَّقِيَّةِ وَ لا دينَ لِمَنْ لا تَقِيةَ لَهُ و التَّقِيةُ في كُلِ شَيءٍ إلّا فِي النَّبِيذِ وَ اَلْمَسْحِ عَلَى الْخُفَّيْنِ.

Al Imam Al-Sadiq (as) said: "O Abu Umar, nine-tenths of *Din* lie in *taqiyyah,* and one who does not practise *taqiyyah* has no *din. Taqiyyah* should be practised in all matters, except for drinking of *nabidh* and performing *mash* (ritual wiping of the feet) with the shoes on. [10]

مُحَمَدْ بْنُ يَحْيى: عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عيسى، عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ مَحْبُوب، عَنْ هِشامِ بْنِ سالِم عَنْ أَبي عَمْرو الْكِنانِيّ قالَ: قالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع): يا أبا عَمْرٍ أَرأَيْتُكَ لَوْ حَدَّثْتُكَ بِحَديثٍ أَو أَفْتَيْتُكَ بِفُتْياً ثُمَّ جِئتَني بَعْدَ ذلِكَ فَسَأَلْتَني عَنْهُ فَأَخْبَرْتُكَ بِخِلافِ ما كُنْتُ أَخْبَرْتُكَ، أَوْ أَفتَيْتُكَ بِخِلافِ ذلِكَ بِإيِهِما كُنْتَ تَأخُذْ؟ قُلْتُ: بِأحْدَثِهِما وَ أَدَعُ الآخَرَ، فَقال: قَدْ أَصَبْتَ يا أَبا عَمْرو

Al-Imam Al-Sadiq (as) said: "O Abu Amr, tell me, if you hear me narrate a hadith or give a fatwa (publicly), and then you come to me after that and ask me about the same thing (in private) and I say something contrary to what I had said earlier, which one of my statements will you adopt?" Abu Amr said, "I will take the later one and drop the former." Al-Imam al-Sadiq (as) replied: "You are right." 11

عَنْ حَمَادِ بْنِ واقِدٍ اللَّحام قالَ: اسْتَقْبَلْتُ أبا عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) في طَرِيقٍ فَأعرَضْتُ عَنْهُ بِوَجْهي وَ مَضَيْتُ، فَدَخَلْتُ عَلَيْهِ بَعْدَ ذلِكَ، فَقُلْتُ: جُعِلْتُ فِداكَ إنّي لَأَلْقَاكَ فأَصْرِفُ وَجْهي كَراهَةَ أَنْ أَشُقَّ عَلَيْكَ، فَقَالَ لي: رَحِمَكَ اللهُ وَ لَكِنْ رَجُلاً لَقِيَّني أَمْسِ في مَوْضِعِ كَذا و كَذا فَقال: عَلَيْكَ السَّلامُ يا أَبا عَبْدِ اللهِ، ما أَحْسَنَ وَ لا أَجْمَلَ.

Hammad ibn Waqid al-Lahham says, "I met Abu Abd Allah (Al-Imam Al-Sadiq(as)) on the road but I turned my face the other way and passed by him. Then I went to see him and said to him, May my life be sacrificed for your sake, I saw you on the way but turned my face the other way in order not to put you into trouble. He said, God bless you. The other day I met someone in such and such a place and he saluted me saying "Peace be upon you, O Abu Abd Allah!" He did not do a good thing."[11]

عَنْ أَبِي حَمْزَةَ عَنْ عَلِيِ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) قالَ: وَدِدْتُ وَاللهِ أَنِّي افْتَدَيْتُ خَصْلَتَيْنِ في الشّيعةِ لَنا بِبَعْضِ لَحْمِ سَاعِدِي: النَّزَقْ وَ قِلَّةَ الْكِتْمَانِ.

'Ali ibn Al-Husayn (as) said, "By God, I would give away a portion of the flesh of my arm to do away with two qualities in our Shi'ah: recklessness and absence of secrecy." 12

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللهِ بْنِ سُلَيْمان، عَنْ أَبُي عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) قالَ: قالَ لي: مَا زَالَ سِرُنَّا مَكْتُوماً حَتّى صَارَ في يَدَيْ وُلْدِ كَيْسانَ فَتَحَدَّثُوا بِهِ في الطَّرِيقِ وَ قُرى السَّوادِ

Al-Imam Al-Sadiq (as) said: "Our secret [i.e. the Imamate] was concealed until it fell into the hands of the sons of Kaysan [perhaps Al-Mukhtar is meant here] who proclaimed it in the streets and over the countryside of the *Sawad".* 13

عَنء مُعَلَّى بْنِ خُنَيْس قالَ: قالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع): يَا مُعَلَّى اَكْتُمْ أَمْرَنا وَ لا تُذِعْهُ، فإِنَّهُ مَنْ كَتَمَ أَمْرَنا ولَـمْ يُذِعْهُ أَعَزَّهُ اللهُ بِهِ في الدُّنيا وَ جَعَلَهُ نُوراً بَيْنَ عَيْنَيْهِ في الآخِرَةِ، يَقُودُهُ إِلَى ألجَنَّةِ، يَا مُعَلَّى مَنْ أَذاعَ أَمْرَنَا وَ لَـمْ يَكْتُمْهُ أَذَلَهُ اللهُ بِهِ في الدُّنيا وَ نَزَعَ النُّورَ مِنْ بَيْنِ عَيْنَيْهِ فِي الآخِرَةِ وَ جَعَلَهُ ظُلْمَةً تَقُودُهُ إِلى النَّارِ، يَا مُعَلَّى إِنَّ التَّقِيَّةَ مِنْ دِيني وَ دين آبائِي وَ لا دِينَ لِمَنْ لاَ تَقِيَّةَ لَهُ، يَا مُعَلَّى إِنَّ اللهَ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُعْبَدَ فِي السِّرِ كَمَا يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُعْبَدَ في العَلانِيّةِ، يَا مُعَلَّى إِنَّ الْمُذِيعَ لِأَمْرِنا كَالْجَاحِدِ لَهُ.

Al-Imam Al-Sadiq (as) said to Walla ibn Khunays, O Walla , keep our affair secret, and do not divulge it publicly, for whoever keeps it secret and does not reveal it, God will exalt him in this world and put light between his eyes in the next, leading him to Paradise. O Walla , whoever divulges our affair publicly, and does not keep it secret, God will disgrace him in this world and will take away light from between his eyes in the next, and will decree for him darkness that will lead him to the Fire.

O Walla, verily *taqiyyah is* of my *Din* and the *Din* of my father, and one who does not keep *taqiyyah* has *no din. O* Mu'alla, God likes to be worshipped in secret as much as He wishes to be worshipped openly. O Walla, the one who reveals our affair (the Imamate) is the one who denies it. 14

These ahadith show the great emphasis laid by the Imams on concealing not only the identity of the Imam but the doctrine of the Imamate itself. It may be noted that the Imams even abstained from expressly mentioning their Imamate, which is referred to in a great number of traditions with deliberately vague words, such as `*our affair*', or `*this matter*', and so on.

The indication of his successor by an Imam was usually conveyed to the confidants in secrecy and then clothed in a language which was intrinsically vague and unexplicit but was clear and explicit to the closest followers who understood the meaning of the particular words and indications.

The Imams (as) took this caution because they knew that their exact words might be narrated by the

confidants to others and might ultimately reach those who did not deserve similar confidence. Thus in the *Usul al-Kafi* we come across ahadith in which, an Imam, after indicating his successor to a confidential Shiai, instructs him to let the matter known only to the trustworthy Shias.[15]

Taqiyyah was so important for the survival of Shiaism until the middle of the 3rd/10th century that the Imams (as) equated the lack of restraint or recklessness on behalf of their followers to an attempt of voluntary murder of their leader:

عَنْ مُحَمَدْ بْنِ سِنَان، عَنْ يُونُسَ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) قالَ: مَنْ أذّاعَ عَلَيْنا شَيْئاً مِنْ أمْرِنا فَهُوَ كَمَنْ قَتَلَنا عَمْداً، وَ لَمْ يَقْتُلْنَا خَطَأً

Al-Imam Al-Sadiq (as) said: "One who divulges anything of our matter (*amrina'*) is like the one who kills us intentionally not unintentionally."[16]

عَنْ ابْنِ سِنانٍ عَنْ إسْحاقَ بْنِ عَمَّار قالَ: تَلاَ أبو عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) هذِهِ الآيةَ ((ذلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّـهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوا وَّكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ((قالَ واللهِ ما ضَرَبُوهُمْ بِأَيْديهِمْ وَ لا قَتَلُوهُمْ بِأسْيافِهِمْ وَ لكِنْ سَمِعُوا أَحَاديثَهُمْ فَأَذاعُوها فَأُخِذُوا عَلَيْها فَقُتِلُوا فَصارَ ذَلِكَ قَتْلاً وَاَعْتِداءً وَ مَعْصِيَةً.

Ishaq ibn Ammar says "Abu Abd Allah recited this verse

That, because they* (*the Jews*) *disbelieved in the signs of God and slew the prophets unrightfully; that, because they disobeyed, and were transgressors (*2:61*),

Then he said `By God, they did not strike them with their hands or swords, but they heard their traditions and divulged them publicly, on account of which they (the prophets) were caught and killed (by tyrannical rulers). Therefore, that (their divulging) was regarded as murder, aggression and sin.[17]

The following tradition, placed by al-Kulayni in the section of *"Kitab al-hujjah"* on the Twelfth Imam, perhaps applied to every Imam during his lifetime:

عَنِ ابْنِ رِئابٍ، عَنْ أَبي عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) قالَ: صَاحِبُ هَذَا الأَمْرِ لا يُسَمِّيهِ بِاسْمِهِ إلّا كافِرٌ.

Abd Allah ibn Ri'ab reports Al-Imam Al-Sadiq (as) to have said: "No one but an apostate would mention the name of the master of this affair [i.e. the Imam]."[18]

Perhaps the practice of referring to the Imams in traditions in early collections only by their *kunyah* (such as Abu Ja`far for Muhammad ibn `'Ali; Abu `Abd Allah, for Ja'far ibn Muhammad; Abu al-Hasan al'Awwal or Abu Ibrahim for Musa al-Kazim, Abu al-Hasan al-Thani for 'Ali al-Rida, Abu Ja'far al-Thani for Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawad, Abu al-Hasan al-Thalith for 'Ali al-Hadi, and Abu Muhammad for al-

Hasan al-`Askari) or of referring to him by such titles as *"al-Alim"* and *"al-`Abd al-Salih"* or without indicating who the speaker is-as in the case of ahadith related to the Twelfth Imam (ajtf) also served the purposes of secrecy.

There are traditions according to which the Imams prohibited their companions from narrating their ahadith outside the circle of their confidants (*al-Mahasin, p.* 256) 19

So also most of the time they were prohibited from indulging in polemics and debates with others. The polemics of Hisham ibn al-Hakam (before he was stopped by Musa Al-Kazim (as) during al-Mahdi's reign [158-169/774-785]) revolved mostly about the rational necessity of the existence of a Divinely inspired leader who could settle religious and legal differences.

Hisham was not concerned in his polemics with proving the Imamate of any of his contemporary Imams. 20

Most of those debates of Hisham ibn al-Hakam were with Mu'tazili scholars who, earlier, belonged to the opponents of, Umayyad rule, but seem to have continued into the early Abbasid period. That Hisham was accused by some of his Shia contemporaries of being indiscreet- in his polemics and thus causing the imprisonment of Musa Al-Kazim (as) by Harun al-Rashid shows how dangerous such debates were considered by them (however, as reported by al-Shaykh al-Mufid, in *al-'Irshad,* the Imamate of Musa Al-Kazim (as) was brought to the knowledge of Harun by al-'Imam Musa's nephew ``Ali ibn Isma'il).

Although reports of the claims of Ja`far al-Sadiq (as) to the Imamate may not have fully been confirmed by the ruling authorities during the Umayyad period, the Abbasids, who were themselves a section of the revolutionaries, it appears, had some inkling of the doctrine of Imamate, its principal claimant, and the principle of succession through *nass* and *will* (*wasiyyah*). This is shown among other things by the following tradition in which Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) tactically misled the authorities about the identity of his successor.

Ibn Abi Ayyub al-Nahwi says "Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (the second 'Abbasid caliph) sent for me at midnight on entering, I saw him seated on a chair with a candle in front of him and a letter in his hand. When I greeted him, he threw to me a letter. Weeping as he was, he said to me, this is a letter from Muhammad ibn Sulayman (his governor at al-Mad'inah) informing us of the death of Ja'far Ibn Muhammad. After uttering *inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un* three times, he said (regretfully), `Where can one find anyone like Ja'far.'

Then he said to me, Write down, I wrote the opening of the letter. Then he said, write if he has appointed a single individual as the executor of his will (wasi), take him and behead him. The reply came back that he (Al-Sadiq (as)) had appointed five persons as executors of his will, one of them being Abu Ja'far al-Mansur himself. The others were Muhammad ibn Sulayman, Abd Allah, Musa (the real successor of Ja'far al-Sadiq(as)), and Humaydah (Abd Allah was the elder brother of Imam Musa al-Kazim(as), and Humaydah was Musa's mother). 21

عَنْ أَبي أَيُّوبَ النَّحْوِيَ قال: بَعَثَ إِلَيَّ أَبُو جَعْفَر المَنْصُورُ في جَوْفِ اللَّيل فَأَتَيْتُهُ فَدَخَلْتُ عَلَيْهِ وَ هُوَ جالِسٌ عَلى ... كُرْسِيٍّ وَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ شَمْعَةٌ وَ فِي يَدِهِ كِتابٌ، قالَ: فَلَمَّا سَلَّمْتُ عَلَيْهِ رَمى بِالْكِتابِ إِلَيَّ وَ هُوَ يَبْكِي، فَقَالَ لِي: هَذا كِتابُ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ سُلَيْمانَ يُخْبِرُنَا أَنَّ جَعْفَرَ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ قَدْ مَاتَ، فَإِنّا لِلهِ وَ إِنَا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ- ثَلاثاً- وَ أَيْنَ مِثْلُ جَعْفَرٍ؟ ثُمَّ قالَ لي: أُكْتُبْ قال: فَكَتَبْتُ صَدْرَ الكِتَابِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: اكْتُبْ: إِنْ كانَ أَوْصى إِلى رَجُلٍ واحِدٍ بِعَيْنِهِ فَقَدَّمْهُ وَ اضْرِبْ عُنُقَهُ، قالَ: فَرَجَعَ إِلَيْهِ اَلْجَوابُ أَنَّهُ قَدْ أَوْصى إِلى خَمْسَةٍ واحِدُهُمْ اَبُوْ جَعْفَرٍ اَلْمَنْصُورُ، وَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ سُلَيْمَانَ وَ عَبْدُ اللهِ وَ مُوسى وَ حُمَيْدَةُ.

In another tradition, instead of Muhammad ibn Sulayman and Humaydah two other names are mentioned, but it adds that on receiving his governors reply al-Mansur remarked: “There is no way of killing all these persons. It is possible that the apparent `dispute' over the Imamate of Isma’il (al-Imam Al-Sadiq's eldest son) or that of his son Muhammad, or the `claim' of Abd Allah al-'Aftah (Al-'Imam Al-Sadiq's second son), were merely tactics used to confuse the authorities about the identity of the real Imam.

It is also possible that the *waqifah* or *waqifiyyah* after every Imam-who reportedly denied the death of a particular Imam or stopped at that Imam and refused to recognize any further Imam as the successor of the preceding one were groups of Shias who played such tactics to conceal the identity of the living Imam by appearing to maintain that the Imamate had come to a stop. Such a possibility does not seem remote.

For instance, after the death of Jafar al-Sadiq (as) there were the *Jafariyyah* or *Nawusiyyah* (who reportedly believed that Ja`far did not die), the *Aftahiyyah* (who maintained the Imamate of Abd Allah), the *Shumaytiyyah* (*who* apparently asserted the Imamate of Muhammad, Ja'far al-Sadiq's fourth son), and the *Isma'iliyyah.* Such conflicting claims must indeed have confused the authorities about the identity of the real Imam, Musa ibn Ja'far (as).

Perhaps it was due to this confusion that Al-'Imam Musa (as) could spend the first ten years of his Imamate (148-158/765-774), which overlapped with the last ten years of al-Mansur's caliphate, relatively without harassment. Perhaps the so-called sects of the *Kaysaniyyah, Karibiyyah, Hashimiyyah, Zaydiyyah* (at least initially), *Jafariyyah, Janahiyyah, Aftahiyyah, Shumaytiyyah, Isma'iliyyah* (also at least initially), *Musawiyyah, Bashiriyyah, Ahmadiyyah, Mu'allifah, Muhammadiyyah* or the *Waqifiyyah* at al-'Imam al-Hasan al-`Askari (as) were no more than products of diversionary tactics used by the Imamiyyah Shia is to mislead the authorities about the identity of the true Imam.

Also, the so called sects of *ghulat,* such as the *Bayaniyyah, Mughiriyyah, Mansuriyyah, and* the *Namiriyyah* regardless of whether they were separate sects with any significant number of adherents or not-must have helped the Shias and their Imams in confusing the authorities about the exact nature of the doctrine of Imamate, in addition to concealing the identity of the Imam.

We are not suggesting that there were no *ghulat* or *waqifah in* the history of Shiaism, they were bound to be such groups on the fringes of a religious movement some of whose teachings could not be circulated

publicly and which had to maintain a high degree of secrecy in order to survive and preserve its leaders and followers.

All that we are suggesting is that most of what were referred to by later heresiographers as Shia sects might not have had any external existence, that is, from the fact that such beliefs were circulated in the past by Shia groups, later writers might have concluded that they really existed.

Perhaps only in those cases where those beliefs served to propel activism or seize power did they acquire an independent sectarian existence as in the case of the Zaydiyyah and the Isma'iliyyah, which survive to the present day. History shows that most of the so called `sects' of the activists–ghulat, *waqifah and* the followers of dummy `Imams' from Muhammad Ibn al–Hanafiyyah to Muhammad ibn `'Ali (the son of al–'Imam al–Hadi [as]) died out within some years. They might have been nothing more than apparitions produced by the tactics used by the early Shias practising *taqiyyah.*

In the light of this, the attempt of the Western `critical' scholarship to find *certain* evidence in Sunni histories about the open claims of the Shia Imams to the kind of leadership inherent in the doctrine of Imamate is naive if not ludicrous. In fact, the failure of the Western scholars to find certain proof of the claims of the Imams in contemporary extra Shia sources shows only how successful the practice *of taqiyyah* had been.

Also important in this context is the Shia concept *of bada* which gave the early Shias the opportunity to conceal the identity *of* the successor to an Imam whose identity might have been discovered by the authorities by holding up a dummy successor and claiming that *bada* had taken place. The notion of *bada,* it seems, was greatly useful in affording further flexibility to the Shia tactics of *taqiyyah,* because its basic purpose was to confuse the enemies about the Shia principle of succession by *nass.* The concepts of *ghaybah* and *rajah* also added immensely to the flexibility of such tactics of confusing hostile authorities.

The theory that the religious Shi'ah was the product of a fusion between the *ghulat* and the political Shias, although imaginative, is not based on facts. First of all, there are no traces of the concepts of *tanasukh* and *hulul* among the Arab Muslims of the Hijaz or Iraq until the beginning of the second century. The Shia population of Kufa was predominantly derived from immigrants from the Hijaz and Yemen, who, by the time of the martyrdom of Al–Husayn (as), had spent two generations under the pervasive influence of Islam.

There is no evidence that any of the ancient religious systems–such as Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism, Manichaeism, Judaism and various forms of Christianity had any influence in Kufa or Basra, the main Muslim cities of Iraq. Even if their ideas had been known to the Kufans, it is fantasy to propose that such acquaintance would lead to such a rapid crystallization of those ideas into firm beliefs by the time of Mukhtar and fill his followers with religious enthusiasm and make them subscribe so easily to the beliefs in Mahdi (ajtf), the Imamate, *ghaybah* and *rajah.*

The only sane explanation is that such ideas were drawn from the genuine teachings of Islam and misapplied at different historical situations to various figures in order to propel activism. In the light of this, it is wrong to ascribe the beliefs in the Mahdi (ajtf), the Imamate, *rajah,* and *ghaybah* to the *ghulat* or to trace their origin to them. The only ideas we may ascribe to them are of *tanasukh, hulul* and *tashbih,* which were a remnant of the pre-Islamic religious culture of Iraq and found in the population outside Kufa and Basra.

The author himself remarks "That the *ghulat* were only loosely attached to the family *of* 'Ali(as) is proved by the ease with which such figures as Abu Mansur and Abu Al-Khattab felt they could transfer the Imamate from the family of 'Ali onto themselves and their descendants." If we accept that the main characteristic of even the political Shias was their enthusiastic support of 'Ali (as) and the Prophet's Family-to whom the *ghula't* were only loosely attached it is not very consistent to speculate that *ghuluww* views enjoyed `widespread acceptability' among the Muslims of the second century.

To blindly accept the `Abbasid-Mu'tazili defamation of such eminent Shia figures as Hisham ibn al-Hakam and Mu'min al-Taq (the first credited with believing that God has a finite three-dimensional body, and the latter accused of anthropomorphism with relation to God-accusations which probably served the purpose of suppressing their rational arguments in favour of the Imamate by discrediting their authors) and then to adopt it as an "indication of the widespread acceptability of *ghuluww* views" during the second century, may partly suit the purposes of speculative theorists but has little to contribute to a critical understanding of history.

The main defect of the Western scholars is that they are not well acquainted with the bulk of source material available, both Shia and Sunni besides their partial and perfunctory knowledge of the sources, they show a strong tendency-exacerbated by their `critical' presumptions-to develop fanciful theories and then attempt to fit a mass of facts and legends into those theories. The result is that those theories fail to explain all the available facts; as a result an attempt has to be made to underrate the significance of those facts or to completely ignore them.

In the case of Shia history, it is alleged that the Shi'ah started as a purely political movement showing some religious overtones for the first time during the movement of the *Tawwabun.* Towards the middle of the second century this political movement became attached to *ghuluww* speculation, which formed a religious wing to the movement.

The doctrines held by the Shi'ah up to the beginning of the third century were almost diametrically opposed to the final doctrinal position of Twelver Shiaism. This drastic doctrinal change came suddenly indeed almost within a lifetime. It occurred under the influence of Mu'tazili thought, and Mu'tazili kalam became the basis of Shia theology, mainly through the efforts of a Mu'tazili-based Shia group centered on the Nawbakhti family.

The first stage in the change in doctrine seems to have begun in Qum in the last half of the 3rd/9th

century under the leadership of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn `Isa al-'Ash'ari, between the years 260/873 and 360/970. The second change, adoption of Mu'tazili kalam, took place in Baghdad under the influence of al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436/1044) and Shaykh al-Ta'ifah al Tusi (d. 460/1067).

This change involved an almost complete *volte-face* on most issues. From believing in anthropomorphism with respect to God, the Imamiyyah came to accept Mu'tazili *tawhid.* From believing in *bada,* they came to re-interpret it so as to render it identical to *naskh.* From believing that God creates and determines all men's actions, even sins and acts of disobedience, they came to accept that men determine and are responsible for their actions.

From believing that the Quran has been altered, they came to accept that the present version of the Quran is complete and unaltered. From believing that God has delegated certain of his functions such as creation to intermediaries such as the Imams, they came to believe that only God performs these functions.

The author, after presenting this picture of early Shia history, based mainly on surmise and conjecture, adds insult to injury by making yet another preposterous conjecture, he says Indeed, it may be surmised from the paucity of Shia books of any description surviving from before about 330/941 that the large number of books that are known (from bibliographical works such as Shaykhu't Ta'ifa's *Fihrist*) to have been written by Shias all revealed such glaring differences in matters of doctrine (matters such as the *ghuluww* beliefs discussed above and the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam) from later Shia orthodoxy that they were considered unsuitable for onward transmission and thus became lost, whereas numerous Sunni works exist from the mid-2nd century/8th century onwards. (p. 74)

It is obvious that a full criticism of this picture is not possible here. All that is needed to make a brief misstatement is a good deal of ignorance or malice or audacity or all three. But to refute it conclusively on the basis of facts is not so simple a matter. Shi'i scholars had often to write books running over thousands of pages (such as the *`Abaqat al-'anwar* or *al-Ghadir*) to refute misstatements that could be put in one sentence. Unfortunately, even they are of no utility when it comes to silencing the ignorant, who would have nothing to do with books, especially when they run into tens of volumes.

The fact that the political views of the Shi'ah were derived from their religious viewpoint and not *vice versa is* indicated by the historic refusal of ‘Ali (as) at the time of the *Shura* formed at the time of `Umar's death, to follow the precedents established by the first two caliphs. As S.H.M. Ja'fari points out, “This intransigent declaration of ‘Ali(as) forms the most important and earliest theoretical point which ultimately gave rise to the later development of two different schools of law under the titles of Shia and Sunni. ” 22

‘Ali (as), who had claimed the caliphate all along, turned down the offer to accept it by refusing to yield on a legal point. The abdication of Al-Hasan (as) from the caliphate, perhaps a singular event of its kind in the world history, shows that for him political leadership and power did not possess the highest

priority. The speeches, sayings and letters of Al-Husayn (as) also bear testimony to his predominantly religious and moral motives.

The act of Al-Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi and that of the dozens of Kufans who joined Al-Husayn (as) after fleeing from Kufa and chose certain death alongside him, also show that purely political motives were not involved. The author asserts that in the case of Hujr ibn Adi al-Kindi and his thirteen companions it is difficult to see in the charges drawn up against them any firm indication that they were partisans of 'Ali (as) in any but a political sense. (p. 63).

Such a difficulty may not be the result of blindness, because the charges drawn against a dissident by a suppressive regime do not always reflect his motives or those of the authorities. But why should a group of eminent men lay down their lives for the sake of the political partisanship of a family whose leader, al-Hasan (as), had, after assuming the caliphate and with an army under his command, handed over power to his rival and retired from public life?

And why should a pragmatic politician like Mu'awiyah persecute an eminent Companion of the Prophet (S) and a man known for his piety and straightforward nature for his refusal to disavow a rival dead for fifteen years? Why should he kill a man for the political support of a family which had voluntarily dissociated itself from the political leadership and had retired from public affairs?

Basically, political motives are short lived and cannot continue for generations unless they are nourished and kept alive by spiritual and religious motives. and if, supposedly, Shiaism was a political movement supporting the political claims of 'Ali (as), Al-Hasan (as), and Al-Husayn (as), why should it have continued to identify itself with a number of apparently politically quiescent figures from 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (as) to Al-Hasan Al-Askari (as)?

The theory of drastic doctrinal revision is unacceptable for many reasons.

Firstly, there is no centralized religious authority in Islam, like the Roman Catholic Church, so as to decide or to bring about any changes of doctrine without causing convulsive controversies. Even in the case of the Church, doctrinal differences were not solved by the authority of the Pope but through ecumenical councils.

In the Shia tradition, in which there were hundreds of eminent scholars alive at any period (as shown by the books on *rijal* and bibliographical works), any such attempt by a small group (such as the Nawbakhti family) would have been immediately frustrated due to the violent controversies which would have broken out.

Secondly, it is easy to bestow divinity, or its qualities, upon men, but difficult to withdraw it. This is shown by the history of Christianity in which the divinity of Jesus gradually became so firmly entrenched in the Christian doctrine that the cult of Jesus became its predominant characteristic. Had such ideas of the *ghulat* as *hulul* and incarnation, or belief in the ability of the Imams to create, been widely accepted

among the Shias of the second century (for which there is no evidence except for some remarks of the opponents about certain eminent Wills, inspired by Mu'tazili–`Abbasid propaganda) such a trend would not have died out so easily and so completely so soon.

Thirdly, the theory of drastic doctrinal *volte–face* implies that Shia hadith is a mass of forgeries and fabrications. This view reduces one of the richest if not the richest and sublimest collection of religious teachings to a work of forgery produced by hundreds of fabricators who could produce an enormous and a highly consistent mass of literature within a generation and revise the doctrines of a sizeable community spread over a region extending from Khurasan to Egypt and from Syria to Yemen without any serious conflict or controversy.

Moreover, the continuity and consistency between the works of the late or mid 3rd century (such as, *Basa'ir al–darajat* and *al–Mahasin*) and those produced in the early fourth (such as *al–Kafi* of al–Kulayni and the works of al Shaykh al–Saduq and al–Tusi) belies such a suggestion.

Even the great similarity between such works of the Isma`iliyyah as *Da`a'im al–'Islam* of Abu Hanifah al–Nu'man ibn Muhammad al–Maghribi (d. 363/973) and such Imamiyyah works as *al–Kafi* and *Man la yahduruhu al faq'ih* in matters of doctrine and law falsifies such a suggestion, for the Isma`iliyyah branched out from the Imamiyyah after the death of al 'Imam al–Sadiq (as) (148/765).

A similar comparison between the ahadith of the Imamiyyah and those narrated by the Zaydiyyah from Zayd ibn 'Ali from his ancestors (as) from the Prophet (S) can throw further light in this regard.

Fourthly, the sensitivity of the school of Qumm at the time of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isa to ascription of miracles to the Imams, which they called *ghuluww,* was rejected by the later Imamiyyah. Al Shaykh al–Saduq who belonged to the school of Qumm was criticized by al–Shaykh al–Mufid for his defective stand on the infallibility (*ismah*) of the Prophet (S) and the Imams (as) and for admitting the possibility of *sahw,* in regard to them. Many traditions which were acceptable to later Shias might have been regarded as contaminated by *ghuluww* by the Qummis.

Fifthly, Shia kalam and fiqh were derived from and determined by Shia hadith and both evolved out of the ahadith of the Shia Imams. The early Shia mutakallimun and fuqaha, until Al–Saduq and before al Mufid, were more closely bound by hadith than those of the Sunni tradition, in which the development of kalam, fiqh, and usul al–fiqh began much before the Sunni compendia of hadith were produced.

However, it was with the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam (ajtf) that Shia books and Shia scholars emerged out of their former secrecy and it was after this that Sunni scholars began to be acquainted with Shia thought. Perhaps it was the first glimpses of Shia literature emerging from secrecy that al–Khayyat and al–'Ash'ari saw as the formation of what appeared to them a Mu'tazili–based Shia school. The Mu'tazilah themselves were the product of a ferment produced in Iraq by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) whose sermons were rich in theological ideas with their characteristic emphasis on justice and reason.

That the Mu'tazilah stood amongst the ranks of the revolutionary opponents of the Umayyad regime and could cooperate so closely with the Talibi activists and later with the Abbasid shows their early nearness to the Shias. The Mu'tazili emphasis on justice and their conception of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy `an al munkar,* which justified armed revolt against tyrannical rulers, also, reflect their close links with Shia activism.

Moreover, had Mu'tazilism had any deep roots in the Sunni tradition, it would not have been rejected so suddenly as the basis of the state's ideology by Al-Mutawakkil and would not have become altogether extinct with time so soon.

However, with the adoption of Mu'tazilism by Abbasid rulers it came to enjoy freedom of expression almost a hundred years before Shia thought, and when the latter emerged in a period which followed the suppression of the Mu'tazilah it was seer, due to the proximity between the Shia and the Mu'tazilah on some important theological issues, as "Shia-Mu'tazilism".

The Mu'tazilah were speculative theologians who neither produced any distinct hadith literature of their own, nor founded any independent legal schools. Their links with the Sunni tradition were feeble, and when they were severed the Mu'tazilah were lost. Later, after the suppression of the Mu'tazilah, Shia kalam and fiqh, which were firmly grounded in the solid foundations of hadith, continued to flourish while the Sunni tradition having bound itself closely at first with the Umayyad and later with the Abbasid to the rulers had to turn its back on justice and reason by adopting Ash'arism and closing the gate of independent *ijtihad.*

Therefore, it seems, to trace the development of Shia kalam to Mu'tazili theology is like putting the cart before the horse. Western scholars of Shiaism have fallen into this trap because they have naively and uncritically believed much of the Abbasid-Mu'tazili propaganda against Shias at a time when Shias could not openly answer their allegations. Such defamation of the Shias was not confined to the Abbasid period, one comes across many examples of it even today in many periodicals and books sponsored by Arab oil money and Wahhabi aid.

The author's surmise based on the paucity of books surviving from before the fourth century is equally untenable, because most of the early works were still available when Al-Tusi and Al-Najashi compiled their bibliographical works at a time when the supposed doctrinal revolution had already taken place. In respect of doctrine the era of al-Tusi is not different from later eras.

Had the contents of those early books been at great variance from the doctrinal positions of the Shi'ah at the time of Al-Tusi and Al-Najashi, they would not have mentioned those books among the works of the early Shia scholars and, what is much more important, would have abstained from express *tawthiq* (confirmation of the reliability) of their authors. The paucity of early works is not exclusively a problem of the Shi'ah many early works of Sunni scholars have also been lost and the number which remains is insignificant in relation to the number of those that did not survive.

The great advantage enjoyed by Sunni works was that Sunni scholarship enjoyed the recognition of the state authorities during Umayyad, Abbasid and Seljuq periods, under tolerant Shia rule, whether Buwayhid or Isma'ili, it did not face hostile treatment. On the other hand, Shia scholarship had to work under almost three centuries of suppression and *taqiyyah,* and Shia works had often to face destruction at the hands of hostile rulers, conquerors, or crowds.

Before the Seljuq occupation of Baghdad (447/1055) by Toghril, and destruction of a great number of books and burning of Shia libraries, great libraries and huge private collections are known to have existed. Bayt al-Hikmah, a public library founded in 381/991 by Abu Nasr Shahpur ibn Ardshir, the minister of Baha al-Dawlah, the Buwayhid ruler, is said to have been inaugurated with a collection of 10,000 books. Dar Al-Ilm, a library belonging to Al-Sayyid Al-Murtada (d. 436/1044), is said to have contained 80,000 books.

Some private collections at that time are known to have consisted of tens of thousands of books. Many of the early works that survived the catastrophe in Baghdad in the year 447/1055 were later lost. Some works that survived until as late as the time of al-Majlisi (d. 1111/1699) are not available today. Moreover, many works that were written after the third century, or a little before it, have not survived or only parts of them have survived.

Al-Barqi's *al-Mahasin,* which is ranked with the four main Shia collections of hadith, is known to have been a great encyclopedic work with more than 100 parts (*kitab*), of which only 11 parts survive today. *Madi'nat al-`ilm,* said to be the greatest work of Al-Shaykh al-Saduq on hadith, has been lost. Many works on non-legal subjects might have been lost mainly due to the fact that law and jurisprudence acquired centrality in Shia scholarship.

Most of the early four hundred Usul did not survive because of lack of interest in them after the compilation of the major collections of al-Kulayni, al-Saduq and al-Tusi. Nevertheless, about sixteen of these have survived to our day. Besides *al-Mahasin,* two other important collections of ahadith of the middle or late third century that have survived are *Basa'ir al-darajat* of al-Saffar (d. 290/903) and *Qurb al-'Isnad* of Abu al-`Abbas `Abd Allah ibn Ja'far al-Himyari (died in the early decades of the 4th century).

Of the important works of the Imams that have survived are *al-Sahifat al kamilah of* 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (as), *Misbah al-Shari`ah of A*l-Imam Al Sadiq (as), *Fiqh al-Rida* and *Sahifat al-Rida of* 'Ali Al-Rida (as), aside from their other works which survived in extant books of others. The most important Shia work, though compiled at the end *of* the 4th century but whose authentic contents were drawn from earlier works, is the *Nahj al-balaghah of* 'Imam 'Ali (as).

Of the exegeses written before al-Kulayni, four have survived: that *of Furat al-Kufi* (d. during late 3rd or early 4th century), Al-Ayyashi (d. during 3rd century), 'Ali ibn Ibrahim (d. during the first decade of the 4th century), and the tafsir ascribed to Al-Imam al-Hasan Al-Askari (as) (d. 260/873). Yet despite the

unfortunate *loss of* a great number *of* works, what has survived *of* the teachings of the Shia Imams (as) surpasses both in quality and quantity the canonical literature *of* any other religious tradition *of* the world.

1. Justice, honesty and mercy have been central to the teachings of all prophets, yet no religious ideal has been treated so unjustly as justice itself (honesty being part of justice). Christianity, although it has emphasized the ideals of mercy and charity, has failed to give an equal importance to justice and honesty. However, the significant characteristic of the new 'liberation' theology, which has acquired many adherents in the Christian parts of the Third World, is its emphasis on justice. The same emphasis is also characteristic of the contemporary Islamic movement, an emphasis which draws its inspiration and power from Islam. Yet the Western press in its coverage of this movement seldom refers to this central ideal of the movement, which has been dubbed 'Islamic fundamentalism' in order to mislead Muslims and Non-Muslims about its real goals.
Yet, the new Christian theology, which bases its approach on going back to the historical Christ and rejects classical Christology, although radically fundamentalist 'in its approach, has been blessed with the epithet 'liberation'. This unequal treatment of two different religious movements, inspired by similar goals, by the imperialist press shows that it is Islam not Christianity which is regarded as the really serious threat to the unjust international order whose burden lies on the backs of the poor of the Third World.
2. See Al-Tabarsi, Majma' Al-bayan (Qumm, 1403 H.), vol.5, p. 514, Al-Wahidi, Asbab al-nuzul (Qumm 1362 H. Sh.), pp. 5-8.
The Kitab al- asnam (Tehran 1348 H. Shamsi, ed. by Ahmad Zaki Basha, the Arabic with Persian trans. by Sayyid Muhammad Rida Jalali Na'ini) of Hisham ibn Muhammad Al-Kalbi (d. 204/819) is an important source on pre-Islamic Arab beliefs and practices. Kitab Al- Asnam gives a great many details about the various idols worshipped by the different Arab tribes of the Jahiliyyah. But there is nothing in that work which would suggest the existence of any pagan shrine comparable in importance to the Ka'bah among the pre-Islamic Arabs. In fact it is doubtful if there was any shrine in Arabia of the nature of the Ka'bah. Al-Kalbi does mention two structures called “ka'bah”, one belonging to Banu al-Harith ibn Ka'b, in Najrin, and the other to the tribe of Iyad in Sindad, a village situated in the region between Kufah and Basrah (pp. 44, 45) But he immediately adds that they are said to be only prominent structures without any religious significance. Al-Kalbi mentions also the case of one `Abd al-Dar ibn Hudayb, a man belonging to Juhaynah, who tried to persuade his tribesmen to build a place of worship which would compete with the Ka'bah for the allegiance of the Arabs. His tribesmen rejected the proposal, considering it sacrilegious. This episode also shows the special respect in which the Ka'bah was held. Although the Surat al- Alaq is considered the first surah to have been revealed to the Prophet (S) in the ahadith of the Ahl al-Bayt, there is no mention there of this story, which is rejected emphatically by Shia scholars as a fabrication. Ja'far Murtada al `Amili, a Lebanese scholar, in his book al-Sahih min sirat al-Nabi al- Azam (Qum, 1400 H., v. I, pp. 216-238) has discussed in some detail this spurious story of the first revelation.

Had this story any circulation during the early era of Islam, there would not have existed early divergence about the first surah to be revealed to the Prophet (S). The episode, of course, is a favourite with the Orientalist, who despite their critical leanings, are only too willing to accept as authentic an image of the Prophet (S) distorted by filtration through a tradition formed during the degenerate Umayyad and Abbasid rules. This tradition could not have preserved the true image of the Prophet (S), which would have been radically destabilizing for the rulers.

3. Of these writers, W. M. Watt, who has written more on the Shi'ah, and Shi'ism than the others, seems to be the least competent of them. His works show an amazing ignorance of Shia sources even such important Shia sources as Al-Kafi and an equally intrepid readiness to advance bold conjectures about the origins of Shiaism.
4. Some of the other Companions who are considered to have been Shi’i are: Khuzaymah Dhu al-Shahadatayn, Abu al-Tayhan, Hudhayfah al-Yaman, al-Zubayr, al-Fadl ibn al-'Abbas, 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbas, Hisham ibn 'Utaybah, Abu Ayyub al-'Ansan, Aban ibn Said, Khalid ibn Said, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Anas ibn al-Harth, 'Uthman ibn Hunayf, Sahl ibn Hunayf, Abu Said al Khudri, Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah, Buraydah, al-Bara' ibn Malik, Khubab ibn al-Art, Rifa'ah ibn Malik al Ansari, Abu Tufayl 'Amir ibn Wa'ilah, Hind ibn Abi Halah, Ju'dah ibn Hubayrah al Makhzumi, his mother Umm Hani, and Bilal ibn Rabah. Mullammad al-Husayn Kashif al Ghita', in his Asl al-Shi'ah wa usuliha (Beirut, 1982), p. 24, says that he has found

more than three hundred Shi’is amongst the Companions of the Prophet (S) in al-'Isabah, Usd al-Ghabah and al 'Isti'ab.
5. ‘Ali's correspondence with Mu'awiyah and his public statements in the course of his sermons, as recorded in the Nahj al-balaghah and other sources, are replete with reference to the claim of his own preeminence and that of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (as). Al-Tabarsi, a Shia scholar of the 6th/12th century, in his al-'Ihtijaj (Persian translation by Hasan Mustafawi, vol. 2, p. 188), records an interesting exchange between ‘Ali (as) and Qays ibn al-Ash'ath. In the episode described, ‘Ali (as) is said to have stated in a sermon delivered in the Mosque of Kufa

(ألا فإنّي لأَولى النَّاس بِالنَّاس فَمَا زِلْتُ مَظْلُوماً مُنْذُ قُبِضَ رَسُولُ ٱلله (ص.

Indeed, I am nearer to (or have more authority over) people than they with respect to themselves. Yet I have been treated unjustly since the demise of the Apostle of Allah (S).
At this, Qays is said to have remarked: “O Commander of the Faithful, from the day you have come to Iraq you have not delivered a sermon without adding this sentence at the end.”

6. See 'Allamah Murtada 'Askari, 'Abd Allah ibn Saba' wa digar afsanehaye tarikh (Tehran, 1360 H. Sh.) Persian trans. by Muhammad Sadiq Najmi and Hashim Harisi vol. 1, pp. 46-66; Taha Husayn in al-Fitnat al-kubra, 8th ed., vol. 1, p. 131-7, and' ‘Ali wa banuh, 7th ed., pp. 43, 90,152; and Dr. ‘Ali al-Wardi, in Wuaz al-salatin, Persian trans . (Tehran), p. 112, have rejected the story of Ibn Saba' as a legend and have advanced numerous arguments to support their viewpoint.
7. Ibid. p. 70.
8. Al-Kashshi, Ikhtiyar marifat al-rijal (Mashhad, 1348 H. Sh.) ed. by Hasan Mustafawi, pp.
106-8.
9. 'Allamah `Askari, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 193-199.
10. Usul al-Kafi, [Tehran, `Ilmiyyah Islamiyyah] “bab al-taqiyyah”, vol. 3, p. 307
11. Usul al-Kafi , “bab al-taqiyyah,”, vol. 3, p. 310
12. Usul al-Kafi, “bab al-kitman”, vol. 3, p. 314
13. Usul al-Kafi , vol. 3, p. 316
14. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 317
15. Usul al-Kafi, Kitab al-hujjah, vol.2, p. 83
16. al-Barqi, al-Mahasin, “Bab al-taqiyyah', p. 256
17. al-Barqi, al-Mahasin, Bab al-taqiyyah, p. 256
18. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 126
19. Al-Naj'ashi cites the case of Muhammad ibn Abi 'Umayr (d. 217/832), a companion of a Imam al-Sadiq (as),al-'Imam al-Kazim (as) and al-'Imam al-Rida', who was thrown into prison by Harun and al-Ma'mtin. His books were lost when his sister buried them or concealed them during the period of his imprisonment. Thereafter he narrated the ahadith that he remembered without their isnad (which he did not remember), and his marasil (traditions with break in the beginning of the chains of transmitters) are considered as authentic by Shi’i scholars. Ibn Abi 'Umayr is considered thiqah (reliable) by Sunni scholars of rijal also. His case illustrates how Shi’i books were often lost due to conditions of secrecy. Zurarah, a revered companion of al-'Imam al-Sadiq (as), was publicly disowned and cursed by him for reasons of taqiyyah; see al-Kashshi, op. cit., pp. 149, 158-160.
20. Al-Kashshi, op. cit., pp. 258-263, cites the polemic of Hisham ibn al-Hakam on the Imamate that led Harun to order his arrest.
21. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, pp. 86-87
22. Ja'fari, S. H. M., The Origins and Early Development of Shi’ah Islam, p. 75. Available on line at: http://www.al-islam.org/the-origins-and-early-development-of-shia-islam-... [9]

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