

Introduction

Americans who know Islam and Muslims are relatively few and those who know the plurality of the Islamic Schools of Thought and that there are among the Muslims Sunnites and Shi'ites are fewer.

However the events of the Iranian Revolution which took place in 1978–79 put the news of the Muslims in general and the Shi'ite Muslims in particular on the front pages of the Western and Eastern press.

This is because the Shi'ite Muslims are the absolute majority among the Muslims in Iran. The American press spoke of the Shi'ites briefly and many times inaccurately. This reconfirmed my conviction for the need of an English book dealing with the Islamic Shi'ite School with some details based on serious research.

Since this is the School of Imam 'Ali, son of Abu Talib, it would be appropriate to study this great Imam and his political–religious history; for this is the only means through which we can understand the foundation of this school.

To satisfy this need I wrote this book and called it *The Brother of the Prophet Muhammad*. This is a title which was given to Imam 'Ali uniquely by the Holy Prophet Muhammad who "brothered" him from among all the Muslims. He never chose for himself any other man as a brother.

The title was the dearest to the heart of the Imam; for when he introduced himself publicly he used to mention his brotherhood to the Prophet after mentioning his servitude to the Almighty. And it was pleasing to the Holy Prophet to call 'Ali "My brother."

The Muslims agree that Imam 'Ali had what no other person from among the Muslims had of distinctions. He is from among them the only person who was raised by the Messenger of God since the days of his childhood. He was brought up by him according to his ethical standards; then he chose him from among all men to be his brother.

The Muslim scholars Sunnites and Shi'ites agree that 'Ali was the most knowledgeable in the Book of God (the Qur'an) and the teachings of His Prophet among all the companions. He was the richest source of wisdom and the most eloquent speaker the greatest defender of the faith the firmest in maintaining

justice and the most selfless endeavorer in the way of God.

These qualities are the Islamic criteria of distinctions for the Holy Qur'an announces that God prefers the endeavors in His way to the inactive; that those who know and those who do not know are not equal and it announces that the noblest among people in the sight of God are their most righteous.

This makes it very clear that the Sunnites and the Shi'ites do not only agree on all Islamic principles stated in the Holy Qur'an or in the authentic hadiths of the Holy Prophet Muhammad but also agree on the religious and the scholarly place of the Imam 'Ali in Islam. Therefore when the Sunnites and Shi'ites differ they do so only politically; for they differ on the political-religious aspects rather than the Imam 'Ali's religious and scholarly place in Islam.

While they agree that 'Ali was a righteous Caliph who came to power through a popular election they disagree on whether he was in addition to this a Caliph by the Prophet's selection. Those who do not believe that the Prophet appointed 'Ali as his successor think that the theory of the Prophet's selection of the Imam 'Ali is a theory of inheritance of rule through blood relationship.

Those who believe that the Prophet selected the Imam as his successor say that the belief in the selection of the Imam 'Ali by the Prophet is the opposite of the belief in the inheritance of rule.

The Muslims also disagree on his political-religious role in the history of Islam as a statesman. While they agree on his adherence to the principle of absolute justice and his firmness in enforcement of the Islamic law in spirit and letter they disagree on the wisdom of such an inflexible attitude.

There is another important matter pertaining to his political-religious place in the Islamic history namely; his role in founding the Islamic State. This aspect was not mentioned clearly nor was it a subject of a serious discussion among the historians and scholars of history.

Since the Muslims agree on the religious-scholarly place of the Imam it would be superfluous to discuss those aspects of the Imam's life.

This book therefore does not review the history of the Imam in details nor does it speak of his knowledge his eloquence or his wisdom. Nor does it discuss his piety and immaterialistic attitude nor does it speak of his unusual performance. Its discussion centers on the political-religious place of the Imam in Islam his spiritual relationship to the Prophet Muhammad and his contribution in establishing the Islamic State and the spread of the Faith of Islam.

It discusses him as a Caliph and as a statesman. It discusses also what was said about his policy and statesmanship and the causes which led to the accumulations of the difficulties which prevented him from reaching a peaceful and more lasting rule during the days of his caliphate.

Finally the book discusses the caliphate as a religious-political system and the kind of caliphate which is consonant with the nature of the Islamic message. Therefore this book contains the following parts:

1. The Imam during the era of the Prophethood.
2. The Imam in the era of the Three Caliphs.
3. The Imam in his own era.
4. The Caliphate in the Islamic Law and the conclusion of the discussion.

I have endeavored to discover the relationship between the historical events which involved the life of the Imam and which took place during the fifty-three years since the commencement of the Prophethood to the end of the righteous Caliphate.

The reader may find that those events were connected with each other through strong ties. Thus they formed a chain of causes and effects the subsequent among them was the outcome of its precedent.

In narrating the events of that period I did not rely on only the sources from the respected books of history but I tried to add to that whenever it was possible what I found in the Authentics and other reliable books of hadith which recorded those events.

This is because many Muslim scholars rely upon hadiths more than they rely upon books of history especially when the hadiths are recorded in the known Authentics and the rest of the reliable books. I did not try to discuss the Imam as a man whose special relationship with his Lord distinguished him and enabled him to perform miracles and bring unusual events. I rather tried to discuss him as a man who is subject to rules of nature time and place who tried his utmost to serve sacred principles and tried to live by those principles and for those principles.

I hope that this book will contribute to better understanding and stronger brotherhood among the Muslims. Certainly the personality of the Imam and his history are inspiring and if the Muslims are ready to receive that inspiration it will lead them to unity.

What would be written of truth about the personality of a man who was chosen by the Prophet to be his brother would certainly be a potential for strengthening the spirit of brotherhood and love among all Muslims.

Mohamad Jawad Chirri

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/brother-prophet-muhammad-imam-ali-shaykh-muhammad-jawad-chirri/introduction#comment-0>