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Phases, Varieties and Structure of the Islamic State

Question No. 7: Imamate and Caliphate

What is the difference between Imamate and caliphate? What is the relationship between them? Are they mutually exclusive?

If we consider the literary meaning of "Imamate" and "caliphate", there is no contradiction between them, and Imam is also called caliph. But if we consider the content of the two trends and the two types of leadership as two doctrines originated in Islamic society, measuring them through the criteria set in religious texts, we will clearly find out that the government approved by religion is the very "Imamate and Wilayat" system. There are plentiful evidences for this, including:

1. The Quranic evidences to the effect that Imamate is a divine covenant, belonging just to those with special qualifications:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

***"And** [**remember**] **when his Lord tried Abraham with** [**His**] **commands, and he fulfilled them; He said: Lo I have appointed thee a leader for mankind.** [**Abraham**] **said: and of my offspring** [**will there be leaders**]**? He said: my covenant includeth not wrong-doers** [**and only those of your scions who are infallible would deserve this position**]**."** (**2:124**)* [1]

2. The traditional evidences to the effect that Imamate and leadership do exclusively belong to Infallible Imams of the Prophet's progeny. These evidences are plentiful and consecutive. Interestingly, most of these texts are also found in Sunni collections of traditions. The following traditions are examples of this kind:

The holy Prophet said: *"this community's affairs will be set in order as long as twelve caliphs, all from Quraish, govern them"*.[2]

In another tradition, it is said: *"this community's affairs will be orderly as long as twelve men govern them"*.[3]

There are many traditions similar to these ones in both Shiite and Sunni collections. Other traditions have also been transmitted interpreting these traditions, such as the one transmitted by Imam Juwaini (Imam al-Haramayn) on the authority of Ibn Abbass from the Prophet:

"I am the leader of the prophets, and Ali bin Abi Talib is the leader of the Awsia (the trustees). Verily my trustees are twelve whose first one is Ali bin Abi Talib, and the last one is Mahdi".[4]

3. The arguments for "The Muslim scholar's Authority" (Wilayat-e Faqih) in the Occultation period, which deserve to be studied independently.

1. The Qur'an, Baqara (2), 124.
2. Muntakhab-e kanz al-ummal, 5, 321; Tarikh-e ibn-e kathir, 6, 249; Suyuti's tarikh al-khulafa,10; kanz al-ummal, 13, 26; al-sava'q al-muhriqa, 28.
3. Nadavi, sharh-e sahih-e Muslim, 12, 202; al-sava'q al-muhriqa, 18; Suyuti's tarikh al-khulafa,10.
4. Fara'd al-samtain, 1164. for furthr information, see: Allama Sayyid Murteza Askari, imaman-e in ummat davazdah (12) nafarand.

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