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Preamble

At the outset, it seems necessary to explain the meaning of the title of this book, i.e. *The General System of the Virtuous Community*. In order to bring to fruition the goals to which we have referred in the first book of this series, we must mention that the Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) took much interest in setting forth a set of practical systems and guidelines, both general and detailed, fixed and dynamic, which were aimed to achieve the following purposes:

(1) Maintain the character, identity, and unity of the virtuous community.

(2) Enable this community to meet its requirements and carry out its duties and responsibilities.

(3) Regulate its various internal and external relations.

(4) Guide this community towards growth and perfection.

(5) Protect it from internal and external dangers, suppression and aggression.

In this respect the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) undertook two steps:

First: They set forth a general conception of the system of the virtuous community, which consists of the following aspects:

(1) The general framework of the system of the virtuous community along with the general responsibilities and duties necessary to meet the needs of the community.

(2) The identity, role and features of the virtuous community.

(3) The nature of relations between the religiously commissioned leader (i.e. Imam) and the individuals of the virtuous community, the nature of internal relations within the community and external relations with other communities.

(4) The groundwork and fixed political and social guidelines that the virtuous community must abide by in

its movement towards perfection.

Second: They presented detailed rules and principles in various fields.

In this section, we will thrash out the first step along with its aforementioned four aspects within seven chapters. The second step will be discussed in future volumes of this series.

From the beginning, the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) understood that this general system must be capable of functioning within an Islamic system of government in the Muslim community in general, adjusting to the common surroundings.

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