

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS
IN THE HISTORY OF
POLITICAL THOUGHT

Translated and edited by
Hassan Ansari and Nebil Husayn

CALIPHATE AND IMAMATE

An Anthology of Medieval Muslim
Texts on Political Theology

Caliphate and Imamate

One of the most enduring sources of conflict among Muslims is the question of power and authority after the Prophet Muḥammad. This anthology of classical Arabic texts, presented in a new English translation, offers a comprehensive overview of the early history of the caliphate and medieval Muslim scholarly discussions on the subject. Composed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, these texts succinctly present competing views on the prerequisites of legitimate leadership and authority in the Islamic tradition. This volume offers an engaging introduction to the diverse writings of influential scholars representing six classical Islamic schools of theology: Sunnism, Zaydism, Twelver Shīʿism, Muʿtazilism, Ibāḍism, and Ismāʿīlism.

Hassan Ansari is a visiting professor at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton). He is the author of several books, including *L'imamat et l'occultation selon l'Imamisme. Étude bibliographique et histoire des textes* (2017) and *Al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā's Oeuvre and Thought in Context: An Archaeological Inquiry into Texts and Their Transmission* (2022), co-authored with Sabine Schmidtke.

Nebil Husayn is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. His research broadly considers the development of Islamic theology, historiography, and debates on the caliphate. He is the author of *Opposing the Imām: The Legacy of the Nawāṣib in Islamic Literature* (2021).

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

General editor

QUENTIN SKINNER
Queen Mary University of London

Editorial board

MICHAEL COOK
Princeton University

HANNAH DAWSON
King's College London

ADOM GETACHEW
University of Chicago

EMMA HUNTER
University of Edinburgh

GABRIEL PAQUETTE
University of Oregon

ANDREW SARTORI
New York University

HILDE DE WEERDT
Leiden University

Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought is firmly established as the major student series of texts in political theory. It aims to make available all the most important texts in the history of political thought, from ancient Greece to the twentieth century, from throughout the world and from every political tradition. All the familiar classic texts are included, but the series seeks at the same time to enlarge the conventional canon through a global scope and by incorporating an extensive range of less well-known works, many of them never before available in a modern English edition, and to present the history of political thought in a comparative, international context. Where possible, the texts are published in complete and unabridged form, and translations are specially commissioned for the series. However, where appropriate, especially for non-Western texts, abridged or tightly focused and thematic collections are offered instead. Each volume contains a critical introduction together with chronologies, biographical sketches, a guide to further reading, and any necessary glossaries and textual apparatus. Overall, the series aims to provide the reader with an outline of the entire evolution of international political thought.

For a list of titles published in the series, please see end of book

Caliphate and Imamate

An Anthology of Medieval Muslim Texts on Political Theology

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

HASSAN ANSARI

Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey

NEBIL HUSAYN

University of Miami, Florida



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a
department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316510339

DOI: 10.1017/9781108225267

© Hassan Ansari and Nebil Husayn 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Ansari, Hassan, author. | Husayn, Nebil, author.

TITLE: Caliphate and imamate : an anthology of medieval Muslim texts on
political theology / translated and edited by Hassan Ansari, Nebil Husayn.

DESCRIPTION: 1. | New York : Cambridge University Press, 2023. | Series:
Cambridge texts in the history of political thought | Includes
bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023027278 (print) | LCCN 2023027279 (ebook) | ISBN
9781316510339 (hardback) | ISBN 9781316649732 (paperback) | ISBN
9781108225267 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Caliphate – History. | Imamate – History. | Islam and state.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BP166.9 .A475 2023 (print) | LCC BP166.9 (ebook) |
DDC 297.6/1–dc23/eng/20230705

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023027278>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023027279>

ISBN 978-1-316-51033-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-64973-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy
of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vi
<i>Note on the Translation</i>	viii
<i>Introduction</i>	x
<i>Glossary of Key Terms</i>	lxiii
SELECTED THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS	i
1 <i>A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī</i> by Ibn Fūrak	3
2 <i>The Succor of Nations amidst the Confusion of Darkness</i> by al-Juwaynī	19
3 <i>The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate</i> by Abū Ṭalīb al-Hārūnī	42
4 <i>The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering</i> by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī	67
5 <i>The Book of Excellence on the Fundamental Principles of</i> <i>Religion</i> by Ibn al-Malāḥimī	107
6 <i>The Concise Book of Doctrines</i> by 'Abd al-Kāfī al-Warjalānī	140
7 <i>The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points</i> by al-Dā'ī Ibn al-Walīd	148
<i>Bibliography</i>	157
<i>Index</i>	161

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Michael Cook, whose support for this project ensured its completion. We must also thank Elizabeth Friend-Smith, Commissioning Editor for Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, who exercised extraordinary patience with the multiple cycles of revision that this work required.

We are indebted to the faculty and administration at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, who generously provided financial and logistical support for the writing and completion of this book and another forthcoming article entitled “A Developing Doctrine: The Imamate in Twelver Shi’ism.” Angelos Chaniotis, Uta Nitschke-Joseph, Sabine Schmidtke, and Marian Zelazny all worked to ensure that we could collaborate on this project during the summer semesters of 2017 and 2018. Funding for collaboration and travel was further made possible by a 2018–2019 University of Miami Fellowship in the Arts and Humanities.

Michael Cook and Hanna Siurua kindly read draft chapters of the entirety of this work, and their comments and criticisms were deeply appreciated. The research assistance of Abdulrahman Bendamnan was essential in preparing the bibliography and glossary. We thank Pierke Bosschieter for the index.

Hassan Ansari would like to thank Amin Ehteshami and Devin Stewart for their detailed feedback on the entire manuscript. Ansari would like also to thank Tahera Qutbuddin for her comments on Chapter 7. Their comments have improved the final result; they are not responsible for any shortcomings that may remain. Ansari would also like to thank the faculty and staff at the Institute for Advanced Study, where he carried out the research for the present study.

Acknowledgments

Nebil Husayn would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) Department at Harvard University, who welcomed him as a visiting assistant professor during the spring semesters of 2018 and 2019. He also could not have pursued publication of this work without the generosity and good will of his colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, who provided him with numerous opportunities to research, travel, and publish.

Note on the Translation

The translation of the medieval theological works included in this volume, which were composed in classical Arabic, posed several challenges. The complexity of both the prose and the content frequently led us to choose a clearer and more idiomatic English translation over a more direct but awkward alternative. We have offered annotations and paraphrased sentences where an author's argument would otherwise be comprehensible only to an expert of medieval Islamic thought. Our intention was to make these classical texts accessible to non-specialists of Islamic studies. For citations of the Quran, we used *The Qur'an: A New Translation* by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem.

Frequently, authors and copyists followed the names of venerated personalities with added invocations. It was also convention to praise God whenever He was mentioned. The following invocations do not appear in the English translation on account of space and stylistic considerations:

- after the mention of God: “Glorified is He” (*subhānahu*), “Exalted is He” (*ta‘ālā*), “Mighty and Majestic is He” (*‘azza wa jalla*)
- after a prophet or an imam: “peace be upon him” (*‘alayhi al-salām*)
- after a Companion of the Prophet Muḥammad: “may God be pleased with him” (*raḍī Allāh ‘anhu*)
- after a deceased scholar: “may God have mercy upon him” (*raḥimahu Allāh*)

The authors refer to God by various names – standard epithets – recognized in the Islamic tradition as divine attributes. When references to God's names are not directly relevant to an author's argument, we simply refer to the divine as God, Lord, or the Almighty. The Prophet

Muḥammad similarly possesses numerous honorific titles. He is most commonly referred to as “the Prophet” (*al-nabī*) and “God’s Messenger” (*rasūl Allāh*). We have opted simply to refer to him as “the Prophet” even when the text occasionally uses another title.

We have chosen simply to add an “-s” to theological schools with irregular plural forms in the Arabic (Sunnīs, Shīʿīs, Muʿtazilīs, Khārijīs for *ahl al-sunna*, *shīʿa*, *muʿtazila*, *khamārij*). We have also avoided use of the suffix “-ite” inconsistently applied for some schools in English works (Shīʿī, Khārijī, Muʿtazilī for Shīʿite, Khārijite, Muʿtazilite).

Transliteration is based on the guidelines of the third edition of Brill’s *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with the exception of Arabic terms and place names that commonly appear in English print (Quran, hadith, Medina, etc.), in which diacritics are omitted. Dates appear in the Islamic *hijrī* calendar (AH), followed by the Common Era date (CE).

Introduction

The foremost source of division in the Islamic community is the
imamate.

al-Shahrastānī¹

Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) was a theologian and heresiographer whose work on the history and doctrines of religions is still widely consulted as a reference in the Muslim world. Of the many theological disputes he catalogued among the major schools of Islam, al-Shahrastānī considered the subject of religio-political authority, otherwise known as the imamate (*imāma*) or the caliphate (*khilāfa*), the most enduring point of divergence.

When the Prophet Muḥammad died in 11/632, his disciples, referred to in Muslim literature as “Companions” (*ṣaḥāba*), did not immediately agree on the appropriate person to succeed him in authority. According to historical reports about the period, the Companions considered Muḥammad to have been God’s final prophet, so they rejected the possibility of another being sent to succeed him. Thus, when pseudo-prophets appeared in a few remote regions of the Arabian Peninsula after Muḥammad’s death, the Companions dismissed them as false claimants to prophetic authority. Instead, they assumed that one of Muḥammad’s Companions would serve as the Muslim community’s new leader and as the emir (ruler) of the polity that had emerged in Medina and had expanded to encompass most of Arabia. But despite the shared assumption

¹ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, tr. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 19 (with a slight modification to the translation).

that Muḥammad's successor would be someone close to him, members of the community disagreed on the best candidate.

Within days of the Prophet's death, the residents of Medina had fragmented into three political blocs. One party represented members of the Arab tribes of Medina, collectively known as the Anṣār (lit. Helpers, Allies). Another supported the ascendancy of the Muhājirūn, emigrants from Mecca who were also members of the tribe of Quraysh. The last group was aligned with Muḥammad's clan, the Hashimids (*banū Hāshim*).

In the wake of the Prophet's death, leading representatives of the Anṣār and the Muhājirūn met at a portico (*saqifa*) to discuss the issue of succession. It is unclear what exactly the Medinese desired from this meeting. Before the Prophet had arrived in Medina, the heads of the local tribes had governed the affairs of their own city. The Anṣār may have intended to appoint an emir to manage the city once again. They may have assumed that the Muhājirūn would return to Mecca. Would Muḥammad's successor be a religious authority or a political leader who managed the territories that Muḥammad had acquired as a conqueror of the Arabian Peninsula? The Anṣār may have considered both of these positions to be independent of their need for a local emir in Medina. The Anṣār wanted one of their chiefs, Sa'd b. 'Ubāda (d. 13 or 14/634–636), or another respected Medinese nobleman to govern their affairs, whereas the Muhājirūn held that the community needed a single sovereign to lead all Muslims. In their view, the Anṣār could not select their own emir and leave the Meccans to select another for Mecca. According to the Muhājirūn, the Prophet's successor had to be a Qurashī (i.e., a member of the tribe of Quraysh). According to Sunnī historiography, the most senior among the Muhājirūn was Muḥammad's father-in-law, Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–634), who was revered as one of the earliest converts in the community. The Anṣār capitulated once they realized that their own candidates could not win against the Muhājirūn's claims to seniority and precedence. Abū Bakr left the meeting as the community's next leader. Wilferd Madelung provides a detailed chronicle of the political conflicts that subsequently ensued between the Companions.²

The third bloc, consisting of the Hashimids and their devotees, lacked a representative to advocate its views at the crucial meeting under the portico. The meeting had been precipitous and had occurred as

² See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Muḥammad's close kin were preparing his body for its final rites and keeping to their homes in mourning. According to Shī'ī historiography, the Prophet's close family members were the most obvious candidates to succeed him as authorities in the community. Again, it is unclear what type of authority was envisaged. Although the Hashimids were also members of the tribe of Quraysh, they came to possess greater social capital in Muslim society because of their close kinship with the Prophet. The Prophet and, later, Muslim jurists recognized certain legal privileges and dispensations that were unique to the Hashimids on account of their noble status.³ The Hashimids and a few other Companions reportedly held that the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, was the most fit to succeed Muḥammad. After the accession of Abū Bakr, members of this bloc reportedly withheld their oaths of fealty to him for close to six months. Some Sunnī scholars, desiring to diminish the gravity of the conflict, have argued that 'Alī and his partisans were dissatisfied only with their exclusion from the accession process. In agreement with Sunnī orthodoxy, they maintain that 'Alī did not consider himself a superior candidate to Abū Bakr. By contrast, Shī'īs cite many reports according to which 'Alī protested the appointment of Abū Bakr and argued that authority over the community was rightfully his.

Abū Bakr appointed another prominent Muhājir and father-in-law of Muḥammad, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644), to succeed him as caliph (*khalīfa*). After 'Umar, a son-in-law of Muḥammad named 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (r. 23–35/644–656) became the community's third caliph. When 'Uthmān was assassinated, 'Alī (r. 35–40/656–661) finally became caliph under circumstances that alienated him from a few prominent Muhājirūn. 'Alī had been part of the electoral council (*shūrā*) that had previously appointed 'Uthmān. At this council, 'Alī had reportedly come close to becoming caliph, so when opposition to 'Uthmān intensified before the latter's death, both 'Uthmān and the protestors requested 'Alī's intervention to resolve the impasse between them. Those who were not members of the tribe of Quraysh, like the Medinese Anṣār and those who had converted after the Prophet's death, also came to trust 'Alī as someone who was sympathetic to their grievances. Madelung describes him as representing the interests of Hashimids and the Anṣār when he

³ Nebil Husayn, "Aḥkām Concerning the *Ahl al-Bayt*," *Islamic Law and Society* 27 (2020), 145–184.

became caliph, in contrast to his predecessors, who had favored members of the tribe of Quraysh.

It should be noted that most of the relatives of the three previous caliphs fought 'Alī in bloody civil wars or refrained from lending him their support in these conflicts. His policies as caliph alienated some of his own soldiers, who eventually revolted against him and condemned him as a misguided imam. 'Alī's years as caliph were plagued with battles against rebels. Military conflict had required him to build an Iraqi coalition of soldiers of varying tribal identities and political sympathies. One faction included pious Quran reciters from Kufa who earned a reputation for being radical in matters of religion and inflexible in their outlook on the world. This group initially supported 'Alī at the Battle of the Camel, but parted ways with him sometime after he agreed to arbitration (*taḥkīm*) to conclude the Battle of Ṣiffīn. They fought him in the Battle of Nahrawān, and a survivor of this battle, Ibn Muljam, eventually assassinated 'Alī.

When 'Alī was killed, most of his partisans offered fealty to his adult sons. His eldest, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (d. 50/670), briefly ruled as caliph before surrendering to a formidable adversary who had also waged war against his father and emerged as the most militarily powerful claimant to political authority in the community. This new ruler, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), was the chief of a clan, the Umayyads, that had historically feuded with the Hashimids for primacy in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic period. According to authors sympathetic to the Hashimid cause, this ancient tribal feud continued into the Islamic era. Over the course of many years, multiple sons, kinsmen, and partisans of 'Alī revolted against the Umayyads but were systematically killed in the process. In these narratives, the Hashimids consistently display piety and virtue, whereas the Umayyads are depicted as power-hungry and sinful villains.⁴

Mu'āwiya is credited with transforming the early caliphate into a monarchy that relied on dynastic succession. The Umayyads ruled the Muslim empire for more than eighty years, successfully suppressing rebellions led by marginalized members of the community. Eventually, soldiers from Khorasan sympathetic to the Hashimids led a revolution that

⁴ See Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Maqrīzī's "Book of Contention and Strife Concerning the Relations between the Banū Umayya and the Banū Hāshim,"* tr. C. E. Bosworth (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1981).

toppled the Umayyads in 749–750 and placed a branch of the Hashimid clan, the Abbasids (*banū al-Abbās*), in power.⁵ The power of the Abbasid caliphs waxed and waned over the next five centuries. Some managed the affairs of state as authoritarian monarchs, whereas others served only as figureheads, subservient to the warlords and military commanders who had dislodged the previous caliph. Throughout the middle and late Abbasid periods, regional dynasties such as the Buyids and Seljuks played increasingly prominent roles in running the affairs of the state. The Abbasid empire finally collapsed with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 656/1258.

If one may speak of formative, classical, and later periods of Islamic thought, the “classical” period spans roughly from the middle of the third/ninth to the seventh/thirteenth century, with the “formative” period preceding and “later” Islamic thought succeeding it. The fall of the Abbasid empire thus coincides with the beginning of the later period of Islamic thought. This period is characterized by a scholarly motivation to preserve, elucidate, and debate the scholarly texts and opinions of the formative and classical periods. In the preceding centuries, Muslims had engaged in a complex process of identifying and negotiating the boundaries of orthodoxy, but by the later period, clear theological and legal schools had come into existence. These schools possessed well-known institutions of learning where primary texts were taught and subjected to glosses and commentaries that also became part of school curricula. Although one cannot always draw a direct correlation between early political blocs and schools that emerged later, the central role that theories of religio-political authority played in the process of differentiation should not be underestimated. For this reason, we shall discuss briefly some of the political blocs that existed in the formative period before identifying the theological schools of the classical period.⁶ With the exception of two Sunni schools (the Ḥanbalī and the Māturīdī) whose views on the imamate resembled those of other Sunni schools,

⁵ On early Abbasid political history, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1981).

⁶ For overviews of early Muslim political thought, see Gerhard Bowering (ed.), *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Gerhard Bowering, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). Also see Josef van Ess’ informative article “Political Ideas in Early Islamic Religious Thought,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2001), 151–164.

each classical theological school is represented in this collection of treatises on the imamate.⁷

The Formative Period (40–240/661–854)

Historical events that occurred during the lifetime of the Prophet and under the rule of the first four caliphs played a significant role in subsequent disputes on the imamate. The political blocs that were active in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries appealed to the alleged words and actions of the Prophet, the early caliphs, and their contemporaries to legitimize their own identities and doctrines. There was a tendency for each faction to lionize certain historical figures and to portray others negatively. Medieval Muslim historians and modern academics have grappled with partisan literature in various ways when discussing the genesis of the various political blocs or examining the accuracy of certain historical claims. This introduction will forgo the attempt to delve into details regarding the origins and development of the political blocs. For the benefit of the reader, we provide only a brief description of these blocs as they appear to have existed near the end of the formative period.

The ‘Uthmānīs

The ‘Uthmānīs endorsed the succession of the first three caliphs in Islamic history – Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān – but were hostile to ‘Alī and did not consider him to have been a legitimate caliph. The ‘Uthmānīs were considered the party (*shī‘a*) of ‘Uthmān in contrast to the party of ‘Alī. Zealous ‘Uthmānīs cursed ‘Alī as an enemy responsible for the deaths of ‘Uthmān and those who died fighting him in the Battle of the Camel and at Šiffīn. ‘Uthmānī sentiment appears to have been widespread in Basra, the Levant, and Egypt, in particular among the early partisans of hadith (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) from these regions.

⁷ The *ahl al-ḥadīth*/Hanbalī, Māturīdī, and Ash‘arī schools all fall under the umbrella of Sunnism. Although we have selected two Ash‘arīs to represent Sunnism, the representatives of these other schools would likely agree with most of the views expressed by their co-religionists on the subject of the imamate. Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’ (d. 458/1066) best represents the views of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and the Hanbalī tradition, but in his discussion of the imamate he closely follows al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), a Shāfi‘ī. A careful study of the imamate in Sunnī thought would be necessary to detect subtle differences and major shifts that may have occurred over time. For the most comprehensive study to date, see Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

By contrast, many transmitters of prophetic traditions from Kufa were considered pro-ʿAlid and close to Shīʿism in their reverence for ʿAlī. By the end of the formative period, however, ʿUthmānī transmitters of prophetic traditions took a more conciliatory approach to ʿAlī. While they did not condemn him outright, they denied that the Prophet’s teachings (his *sunna* preserved in hadith) endorsed ʿAlī’s caliphate. However, influential scholars such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) held that such evidence existed in favor of ʿAlī.

ʿUthmānī scholars of hadith interpreted reports about ʿAlī’s virtues to diminish their significance or rejected their authenticity altogether. Although ʿAlī’s character was rehabilitated so that he was no longer seen as culpable in the assassination of ʿUthmān, his close companions were still portrayed as misguided individuals who sought civil unrest. Whereas pro-ʿAlids argued that ʿAlī had been compelled to wage war against rebel Muslims during his caliphate – either because the rebels had posed an armed threat, necessitating self-defense on ʿAlī’s part, or because he had been commanded to do so by the Quran or the Prophet – ʿUthmānī hadith transmitters considered the wars that ʿAlī had waged as caliph undesirable and unnecessary. In later centuries, when Sunnis such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) engaged in anti-Shīʿī polemics, they objected to pro-ʿAlid justifications of ʿAlī’s conduct.

Umayyads

The partisans of the Umayyads resembled the ʿUthmānīs in many ways. They revered the first three caliphs, considered ʿUthmān innocent of any wrongdoing in the events that led to his assassination, and blamed ʿAlī for the civil war that ensued after ʿUthmān’s death. The Umayyads publicly cursed ʿAlī as an enemy of God and rejected his claim to the caliphate. This bloc differed from the ʿUthmānīs in recognizing the Umayyad caliphs as the rightful rulers and imams of the community. Some early scholars of hadith in the Levant were proponents of the Umayyads. However, others were pro-ʿAlid or ʿUthmānī. The latter either actively opposed the Umayyads as tyrants or maintained a policy of quietism and mere toleration.

Hashimids

The earliest Muslims used the term *shīʿa* to refer to the partisans of certain caliphs, but it is the term’s use to identify partisans of ʿAlī (*shīʿat ʿAlī*)

in particular that has endured. Partisans of the Hashimids revered the Prophet's kin as members of a noble clan with privileges and rights that distinguished them from others. By the middle of the second/eighth century, Hashimid partisans could be divided into two major genealogically defined branches: those supporting the claims of the Abbasids, descendants of al-ʿAbbās (d. 32/653), the Prophet's uncle, and those backing ʿAlī and his progeny, the ʿAlids. The members of these groups believed that their respective figureheads had inherited the imamate from the Prophet through kinship ties or that the imamate was restricted to the figurehead's family.

As centuries passed, pro-Hashimid and in particular pro-ʿAlid sentiment became a trans-sectarian phenomenon, prevalent in both Sunnism and Shīʿism. It was most prominent in Kufa, the capital city of ʿAlī's caliphate. If pro-ʿAlid sentiment is conceptualized on a spectrum, its mildest form was found among Muslims who believed that ʿAlī had rightfully waged war on rebels as caliph and rebellion against him had been an error. Most Sunnī scholars (who were not pro-ʿAlid) described those Companions who rebelled against ʿAlī as legitimately acting in accordance with their independent opinions (*ijtihād*).⁸ By contrast, pro-ʿAlids characterized ʿAlī's rivals at the Battle of Ṣiffīn, for example, as sinful and misguided.⁹ They considered the ʿUthmānīs and the Umayyads to be their antagonists. Many pro-ʿAlids expressed their devotion to ʿAlī by circulating reports about his merits. Thus, Kufan partisans of hadith earned a reputation of being pro-ʿAlid. Kufans also repeatedly supported ʿAlids and Shīʿīs who led political movements and insurrections. The most zealous pro-ʿAlids (apart from Shīʿīs) held ʿAlī to be the most virtuous Muslim after the Prophet, a doctrine known as *tafḍīl ʿAlī*. This was a Shīʿī doctrine that some Muʿtazilis and other non-Shīʿīs occasionally supported. Here, pro-ʿAlid sentiment and Shīʿism must be distinguished from one another. Shīʿīs, in the formative period at the very least, made a claim that (non-Shīʿī) pro-ʿAlids did not: that ʿAlī was not only superior (*aḥḍal*) to his peers, but also had been most fit (*aṣḥaḥ*) for the caliphate. By contrast, pro-ʿAlid Sunnis and Muʿtazilis all accepted the succession of

⁸ In this context, independent reasoning refers to the Companions' efforts to reach a decision to the best of their abilities and in light of the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet.

⁹ For a study of Shīʿī interpretations of this battle, see Etan Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few: Studies in Shīʿī Thought and History*, ed. Amin Ehteshami (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 85–109.

the first three caliphs as lawful and held them to be the best candidates for the position when they were appointed. Depending on their sensibilities, pro-ʿAlids may have condemned ʿUthmān’s conduct in his final years or refrained from conclusively judging whether or not he was wrongfully killed. However, by the classical period, a rapprochement between all proto-Sunnīs culminated in ʿUthmān’s rehabilitation as a wrongfully murdered, pious caliph in Sunnism.

Some early Shīʿis were described as *rāfiḍa*, proponents of *rafḍ* – the rejection of all non-ʿAlid authorities. The Rāfiḍa, active in Kufa, considered all of ʿAlī’s predecessors to have been illegitimate usurpers of religio-political authority. This negative assessment of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and other Companions who joined them in making claims to legal, religious, or political authority after the Prophet became a distinguishing characteristic of most Shīʿis in the classical period.

Khārijīs

The Khārijīs (Ar. *khamārij*, “seceders”) diverged sharply from pro-ʿAlids in their assessment of ʿAlī’s character and legacy as caliph. The Battle of Ṣiffīn between the armies of ʿAlī and Muʿāwīya ended with no clear victory for either side. Instead, the two commanders agreed to halt hostilities and pursue arbitration. The arbitrators were to consider the question of whether ʿUthmān had been lawfully killed and who was best fit to judge and potentially punish his murderers.

Sometime after the Battle of Ṣiffīn, however, thousands of ʿAlī’s soldiers withdrew from his army and camped near a region known as Nukhayla and Nahrawān, in Iraq. This faction became known as the Muḥakkimīs (*muḥakkima*), those who believed that arbitration (*taḥkīm*) in matters already adjudicated by God in the Quran was unlawful. They claimed that ʿAlī had violated this commandment by engaging in such arbitration with Muʿāwīya.

The Muḥakkimīs asked ʿAlī first to repent of his decision to accept arbitration and then to resume war with Muʿāwīya. When the two arbitrators failed to reach a conclusion that both parties could accept, ʿAlī agreed to launch another campaign against Muʿāwīya. However, the Muḥakkimīs argued that they would only rejoin ʿAlī’s army if he admitted to committing unbelief, which he refused.

After a few months, ʿAlī fought the Muḥakkimīs at the Battle of Nahrawān, which ended in his favor. In the decades that followed, those who were sympathetic to the Muḥakkimīs became known as Khārijīs

in reference to the troops who had famously seceded from 'Alī's army. The Khārījīs mounted several insurrections against the Umayyads and the Abbasids. They gained a reputation for holding radically puritanical views on piety and sin. They held that a Muslim who committed a major sin was guilty of unbelief and needed to renew his or her faith. Muslims who refused to acknowledge their misdeeds were considered unbelievers. Radical Khārījī factions such as the Azāriqa became infamous for killing anyone (including women and children) who did not belong to the group in the course of their insurrections. It appears that by the end of the formative period, almost every Khārījī school mentioned in heresiographical works had disappeared. A notable exception is the Ibādī community, which claimed the early Muḥakkimīs as their predecessors but condemned members of other Khārījī schools as extremists.

The Khārījīs and later the Ibādīs considered Abū Bakr and 'Umar ideal caliphs and imams. Although they acknowledged that 'Uthmān and 'Alī had acceded to the caliphate legitimately, they argued that both had died as unbelievers because of their conduct. Since the Khārījīs and Ibādīs did not consider membership of the tribe of Quraysh a prerequisite for imams, they selected pious individuals of diverse tribal and ethnic backgrounds to serve as imams over the centuries. It should be noted that the Khārījīs differed from other groups by further theorizing that the faithful could function without a single caliph governing over their affairs. Rather, the faithful could appoint a person from among themselves to take on certain responsibilities when necessary, but otherwise the community could govern its own affairs without a leader.

Early Mu'tazilīs, Murji'īs, ahl al-ḥadīth, and the Companions

The members of the various blocs outlined above can be distinguished from one another on the basis of their views on legitimate religio-political authority. By the second/eighth century, one can also identify Muslims who tried to transcend these polarized identities. These groups include the Mu'tazilīs, Murji'īs, and partisans of hadith (*ahl al-ḥadīth*). Ultimately, debates turned to the subject of the righteousness of the Companions.

The Mu'tazilīs were one of the earliest factions to engage in dialectical theology (*'ilm al-kalām*). Mu'tazilīs could be pro-'Alid, 'Uthmānī, or nonaligned, depending on their school and region.¹⁰ Pro-'Alids

¹⁰ For an overview of Sunnī and Mu'tazilī views on the Prophet's Companions, see Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 7–50.

considered 'Alī's opponents sinful, but held a nuanced position on their status. Since Mu'āwiya and his allies were unrepentant in their opposition to 'Alī, they were considered grave sinners (*fāsiqūn*, sing. *fāsiq*). By contrast, 'Ā'isha and other Companions who fought against 'Alī at the Battle of the Camel reportedly regretted their actions. Their repentance safeguarded their status as believers. Nonaligned Mu'tazilis refrained from identifying which Companions were responsible for the civil strife that occurred between them. Ambiguities prohibited these Mu'tazilis from identifying which party was responsible. The Mu'tazilis also endorsed the existence of a middle position (*al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*) between the unbeliever (*kāfir*) and the believer (*mu'min*). Such a person was a grave sinner who claimed to believe in the religious doctrines of monotheism, prophethood, and so on. It seems that Mu'tazilis of all political leanings accepted that some Companions could, in fact, be grave sinners whom God would punish.

Heresiographers referred to a group of theologians as the Murji'is or "those who deferred" judgment on the Companions' moral status. The Murji'is argued that a person's deeds, which include one's political career, did not determine membership to the Muslim community. One should not condemn a tyrant or an insurrectionist as an unbeliever; they were all equally Muslims on account of their declaration of faith in God and the Prophet. Some of the arguments of the Murji'is influenced later Sunnī views of the Companions, although Sunnīs generally came to assert a more forceful position, namely, that all of the Companions should be considered pious without exception.

The partisans of hadith (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) were a prominent faction that developed a culture of refraining from judging between Companions in their political conflicts out of respect for their status as people who had met the Prophet. For example, some members of this group held that any Muslim who had met the Prophet was to be considered a righteous person, a doctrine known as *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba* ("the uprightness of the Companions"). Narratives in which the Companions engaged in sinful behavior were to be rejected as slanderous or interpreted charitably to safeguard the Companions' reputation. In general, scholars of hadith would evaluate the expertise, trustworthiness, and piety of hadith transmitters to determine the reliability of their narrations, but they declared any Companion who transmitted hadith from the Prophet a reliable authority. Jurists representative of this tendency accepted the legal opinions of all Companions, even if these figures opposed one another politically.

For these jurists, the legal opinions of the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha and of 'Alī were both important precedents. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and other influential scholars of hadith in Sunnism represent this view.¹¹

Thus, one can identify three opinions among Muslims who wished to avoid partisanship between the Companions. On the one hand, nonaligned Mu'tazilīs were certain that some Companions would be punished in the hereafter for their misdeeds, but refrained from identifying them. On the other hand, Sunnī partisans of hadith eventually came to consider the integrity and righteousness of all Companions to be a matter of orthodoxy. This latter opinion developed from an earlier Murji'ī tendency to withhold judgment regarding the salvation of those Companions who had been entangled in the early civil strife that had plagued the community. They considered certain verses of the Quran (e.g., Q. 9:100) and hadith reports about the merits of the Companions to be clear proofs that the Companions as a group had received promises of salvation from God and the Prophet. Although the Murji'īs took it as axiomatic that all Companions had once been pious, they were unsure whether one could trust claims about their misconduct after the Prophet's death. Thus, they chose to refrain from judging the authenticity of such claims and to leave the final judgment to God, reasoning that the reports could be false, or that even if they were true, God might still absolve straying Companions of their sins on account of their subsequent repentance for any misdeeds and their past years of service to the Prophet.

The Classical Schools (240–656/854–1258)

Sunnism

In the formative period, the majority of Muslims who accepted the authority of all Companions and caliphs did not need to use any particular nomenclature to characterize their beliefs. Sunnīs asserted that they represented the views of this majority (*al-sawād al-a'zam*). Murji'īs and 'Uthmānīs were influential in these circles, but the contributions of pro-Umayyads and pro-'Alids were not ignored. Nonetheless, anyone who did not accept the authority of the Companions and caliphs would be suspected of heresy by scholars aligned with the majority. The three most important groups regarded as heretics were the Shī'īs, Khārījīs, and

¹¹ For the differences between Sunnī and Shī'ī views regarding the authority of the Companions, see Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 133–149.

dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*, sing. *mutakallim*) who rejected the authority of influential partisans of hadith. Beyond these three groups, Muslims largely fell under the umbrella of Sunnism.

By the beginning of the third/ninth century, influential scholars of law and hadith such as al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal had started to advocate epistemologies that emphasized the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad over the views and practices of jurists and caliphs who had succeeded him. This was a shift away from the practice of previous generations of Muslims, which had recognized many figures after the Prophet as independent authorities in religious matters.¹² Arguably, this prioritization of the practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet over the practice of other potential authorities was a watershed moment in the development of Sunnism. It represented the triumph of hadith scholarship over the rationalist claim that the intellect (*‘aql*) sufficed as a tool to discover the truths of religion and law. In ethical, legal, and doctrinal debates, hadith scholars treated transmitted information from the Prophet as the paramount source of knowledge; meanwhile, “heretical” theologians were portrayed as skeptically denying the authenticity of such reports. This epistemic divide is exemplified by the inquisition led by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–833), who favored Mu‘tazilī and Jāhmī methods of disputation and rational speculation.¹³ His inquisition targeted hadith scholars and others who represented the majority of Muslims (whom one might call “proto-Sunnīs”).

Opposing al-Ma’mūn were hadith scholars who considered theologians misguided in their speculation on matters pertaining to God or issues already discussed by the Prophet. Hadith scholars, following Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, designated a righteous adherent of hadith as a person of the “prophetic practice” (*sunna*), distinct from hadith skeptics who engaged in speculation on religious matters. However, the Ḥanbalī or partisans of hadith (*ahl al-hadith*) faction represented only one dimension of Sunnism. Sunnism encompassed those like al-Shāfi‘ī, who were not Mu‘tazilī, Shī‘ī, or Khārijī and also trusted hadith as the most authoritative source of prophetic teachings and practice.

Since Ḥanafīs, Shāfi‘īs, and Ḥanbalīs viewed one another as rivals, a rapprochement between them under the banner of Sunnism required

¹² See Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

¹³ On the Jāhmīs, see *EF*, s.v. “Djahmiyya” (W. Montgomery Watt).

many centuries. Early Ḥanbalīs criticized Ḥanafīs for relying on rational speculation in matters of law and theology. It should be noted that some hadith scholars condemned Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and other Kufan jurists who supported the use of one's own personal opinion (*ra'y*) in resolving legal questions. Abū Ḥanīfa and his followers, like many other groups, flourished in the Iraqi city of Kufa. Even though Abū Ḥanīfa was not a Shī'ī, representatives of the majority, like him, were pro-ʿAlid to some extent. ʿUthmānīs and hadith scholars may have viewed Abū Ḥanīfa with contempt for his decisions to accept ʿAlī as a legitimate caliph and to utilize analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and personal opinion in judgments instead of deferring to the opinions of Companions or hadith reports. Abū Ḥanīfa also refused to accept the legitimacy of the Umayyads. He reportedly showed support for the insurrection of Zayd b. ʿAlī, the eponym of the Zaydī school, when it began. When Ḥanafī jurists were employed by the Abbasid state, their opponents among the partisans of hadith condemned them as Murji'īs and rejecters of prophetic traditions.

Although the partisans of hadith criticized Ḥanafīs as proponents of personal opinion (*aṣḥāb al-ra'y*), one faction eventually accepted the limited use of analogical reasoning. Al-Shāfi'ī is a quintessential representative of this trend. He opposed the use of one's personal opinion in providing judgments. However, he propounded the theory of jurisprudence in his *Epistle (Risāla)* that became foundational for jurists committed to prioritizing the *sunna* of the Prophet.¹⁴ Al-Shāfi'ī's framework accepted analogical reasoning but still emphasized the *sunna*. Ḥanafī jurists and the partisans of hadith who followed al-Shāfi'ī appear to be the earliest members of the emerging sect known as Sunnism (*ahl al-sunna*).

The Ḥanafī theologian Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and the Shāfi'ī theologian Abū ʿI-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–936) both claimed to represent the *ahl al-sunna* independently of one another.¹⁵ In the fourth/tenth century members of one faction did not recognize the claims of the other. The Seljuks, for example, were Ḥanafīs. When Toghrih Beg (r. 447–455/1055–1063) employed a zealous Ḥanafī as a vizier, the latter persecuted the Shāfi'īs of Khorasan. This vizier was

¹⁴ For an English translation of the *Risāla*, see Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, tr. Joseph E. Lowry (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ On al-Ash'arī, see Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ash'arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990); on al-Māturīdī, see Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) = *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, tr. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

succeeded by the famous Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), who attempted to reconcile the two schools. The Seljuks supported the vizier's move to build the famous network of schools known as the Nizāmiyya, which employed Shāfi'ī teachers who accepted Ḥanafīs as Sunnis.¹⁶ Despite this development, the two factions still violently opposed one another in subsequent centuries.¹⁷ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal represented those partisans of hadith who opposed al-Shāfi'ī's theorizing and considered the transmission and citation of prophetic traditions sufficient as legal evidence. This faction strongly rejected the use of analogical reasoning and was the last to engage in a rapprochement with other Sunnis.

Although Sunnism developed to encompass many different legal and theological schools, all of these schools are unanimous in rejecting the doctrines of Shī'īs, Khārijīs, and other non-Sunnīs on the subject of the imamate. The members of each Sunni school hold that after the Prophet, religio-political authority was dispersed to the community in the form of the early Companions and the first four caliphs. For this reason, Sunnism can be fairly represented by a member of any of these schools, with only slight differences in the rigidity of their claims. To reflect these differences, we have selected two authors to represent Sunnism.

Many early partisans of hadith strictly adhered to precedence and tradition in their conception of the imamate. These scholars sought to reconstruct the views of the early Companions and to derive rules based on their conduct. They considered the first four caliphs to have been ideal rulers, and they expected all subsequent leaders to emulate their example. Nonetheless, when illegitimate rulers came to power, many partisans of hadith considered rebellion unlawful. They reasoned that civil unrest caused more harm to the public good than tyranny.¹⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, for example, did not support rebellion against al-Ma'mūn despite the latter's heretical beliefs. He held that Muslims were obliged to respect the temporal authority of heretical caliphs while disagreeing with their religious views.

As the rule of warlords became normative in the Abbasid state, Sunnīs began to consider the caliphate in more pragmatic terms. The rise of the

¹⁶ For more on the Nizāmiyya, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Wilferd Madelung, "The Spread of Māturidism and the Turks," in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), II. 109–168.

¹⁸ On the topic of rebellion, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Buyids and Seljuks encouraged scholars to tolerate warlords as the community's de facto rulers. Although they came to power through conquest or coup, the famous Shāfi'ī political theorist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) considered warlords to represent a type of delegated vizierate (*mizārat al-taḥwīḍ*). A warlord derived his legitimacy from a legitimate caliph who publicly acknowledged his authority and appointed him to administer the affairs of the empire on his behalf. Since the Buyids and Seljuks who ruled Baghdad nominally paid allegiance to the Abbasids, al-Māwardī reasoned that it was their right to be obeyed.

Other scholars were willing to speculate on matters of authority in a way that provided more latitude to legitimate such rulers. For them, a ruler did not need to resemble the first four caliphs or pledge allegiance to a symbolic Abbasid caliph to be legitimate. 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), whose work is included in this volume, argued that anyone with the requisite skills to administer the affairs of the community could potentially rule. So long as rulers secured the community from existential threats, permitted Muslims to fulfill their religious obligations, and consulted scholars of religion on religious matters, they were legitimate. Al-Juwaynī held that warlords were not only the community's de facto rulers, but also its rulers de jure. In later centuries, the term “sultan” (*ṣulṭān*) was more commonly used to describe such rulers, rather than imam, caliph, or “king” (*malik*).

On the question of the imamate, despite their many differences, Sunnīs collectively agreed on a few core doctrines. First, an imam is not appointed to the position by means of a designation (*naṣṣ*) from God. God does not select imams that the community is obliged to follow one after another. Second, the historical development of the early caliphate was legitimate, and the first four caliphs had all been righteous rulers.¹⁹ Third, the necessity of the office cannot be deduced from rational proofs. Rather, a designated body within the community elects caliphs to facilitate the application of the revealed law (*sharī'a/shar'*). Since the Prophet commanded the community to uphold the revealed law, the community needs

¹⁹ As noted above, 'Uthmānīs did not accept 'Alī as a legitimate caliph. His subsequent inclusion was due to pro-'Alids and hadith scholars such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who sought to rehabilitate his image. The doctrine that there were four rightly guided caliphs (*tarbi'*) rather than three was thus an innovation of the early third/ninth century. See *EP*, s.v. “Ima'ma” (W. Madelung) and “'Uthmāniyya” (Patricia Crone). For a more recent study, see Nebil Husayn, “The Rehabilitation of 'Alī in Sunnī *Ḥadīth* and Historiography,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29.4 (2019), 565–583.

an imam to facilitate certain aspects of the law, such as the redistribution of wealth and the punishment of criminals. For this reason, Sunnis considered debates about the imamate to fall under the sphere of law rather than theology. Lastly, Sunnis held that the necessity of the office of the imamate can be established by deferring to hadiths and historical reports about the conduct of the Companions.

In rejecting the Shī'ī belief in God's exclusive role in appointing imams as He does in the case of prophets, Sunnis relied on the concepts of consultation (*shūrā*) and election (*ikhtiyār*), the legitimacy of elites using their own discretion to appoint imams. Although some modern Islamists such as Rached Ghannouchi have sought to describe the doctrine of *shūrā* as democratic, Sunni jurists neither envisioned nor desired that the majority of Muslims participate in this electoral process.²⁰ The electorate was restricted to *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-'aql* ("those who bind and loosen"), elite members of the community charged with selecting the next leader. Upon the death of a caliph, the community expected members of this group to meet and to decide on the next appointee. After reaching a conclusion, this group would offer the individual a contract (*'aql*) to serve as the community's new ruler under the condition that he abide by the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet. If the selected person agreed, this contractual agreement would serve as the foundation for subsequent pledges of allegiance (*bay'a*) that the rest of the community offered in confirmation.

The requisites for becoming a member of the electorate resembled the qualities required of a caliph. The electorate was understood to consist of the most powerful, respected, and intelligent men in the community. Historically, the selection of early caliphs was restricted to a few members of the Muhājirūn and Anṣār invited to participate in the process of consultation, and who were, furthermore, present in Medina upon the caliph's death. Their decision was understood to represent the selection of the entire community; key groups were historically excluded from the electoral process, however. Muslim tribes residing all over the Arabian Peninsula, non-Arab clients, and residents of conquered Sassanid and Roman territories were not consulted regarding the appointments of the early caliphs.

²⁰ See Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also see Rached Ghannouchi, *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, tr. David L. Johnston (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2022).

Muʿtazilism

The hadith scholars who first characterized themselves as adherents of the *sunna* would have excluded the early Muʿtazilis from this designation. The early Muʿtazilis were prime examples of theologians who rejected the authority of hadith. In the classical period, Muʿtazilism developed into a number of schools that collectively favored rational speculation in matters of religion and law. In the third/ninth century, two major branches, the Basran and the Baghdadi, existed among the Muʿtazilis. The two schools differed primarily on matters of metaphysics and ontology. By the fifth/eleventh century, the Baghdadi school seems to have disappeared, and most Muʿtazilis were followers of the Bahshamī school, a tradition that emerged among the Basran Muʿtazilis.²¹ The most influential scholar among the Bahshamīs was al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025).²² Theologians of various schools, including Zaydis and Twelver Shīʿīs, studied with al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and a prominent pupil of his, Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044). The latter also developed his own school of thought independent of his predecessors. By the sixth/twelfth century, Muʿtazilis were either Bahshamīs or followers of the school of Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī.

Although Muʿtazilis were dialectical theologians, they did not consider the imamate to be a theological question. Like other Sunnīs, they regarded the imamate to be a legal office related to the application of Islamic laws. Scriptural texts (*samʿ*) and certain collective responsibilities required the existence of a ruler. Muʿtazilis nonetheless debated the objectives and requisites of the imamate using arguments from reason (*ʿaql*) as well. In this respect, one can observe a clear difference between the ways in which Sunnīs and Muʿtazilis debated the imamate with Twelver Shīʿīs. Sunnīs almost exclusively discussed historical questions about the first four caliphs, while Muʿtazilis carefully considered the Shīʿī Imāmī theory of the imamate as a type of divine assistance (*lutf*). This theory maintained that God would never leave humans without a designated prophet or imam to serve their needs. A partial rapprochement with Sunnism in the classical period led some Muʿtazilis to identify as Ḥanafīs and a few as Shāfiʿīs in matters of law. As in Sunnism, among the Muʿtazilis

²¹ For the Bahshamīs, see Sabine Schmidtke, “The Muʿtazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 159–180.

²² For al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, see *EB*, s.v. “ʿAbd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī” (Margaretha T. Heemskerck).

the pro-ʿAlid, Murjiʿī, and ʿUthmānī tendencies eventually merged into the mainstream position, which affirmed the legitimacy of the first four caliphs. The Muʿtazilīs agreed with Sunnism in rejecting the Shīʿī doctrine that God appointed imams by means of a designation (*naṣṣ*). Muʿtazilīs further devoted significant effort to responding to Shīʿism in their works on the imamate.

Although Muʿtazilīs generally did not identify as Imāmī or Zaydī, their views on the nature of God and theology caused them to diverge from the Sunnī majority. For example, many influential Muʿtazilīs held that ʿAlī had been the most meritorious person after the Prophet. As late as the seventh/thirteenth century, some pro-ʿAlid Muʿtazilīs remained committed to this doctrine. Many also displayed pro-ʿAlid revolutionary tendencies and anti-Umayyad sentiments. Muʿtazilī scholars of the classical period enjoyed close relations with Zaydīs, who studied and adhered to their doctrines in matters of theology. Likewise, prominent Twelver Shīʿī theologians of the fourth/tenth century incorporated Muʿtazilī assumptions and doctrines into their writings. By the time of their disappearance in the seventh/thirteenth century, the Muʿtazilīs had influenced the development of both Sunnī and Shīʿī legal theory and theology.

Twelver Shīʿism

Adherents of the Twelver branch of Shīʿism believed that the imamate would exist perpetually, without any breaks, until the end of time. These Shīʿīs were also known as Imāmīs, because they held that God selected imams from the Prophet’s household (*ahl al-bayt*) and progeny to serve as His representatives and proofs.²³ Each imam or “proof of God” (*ḥujjat Allāh*) was the highest authority of his era.²⁴ All Muslims were expected to defer to his understanding and application of Islamic law. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) are key figures in the development and articulation of the Twelver Shīʿī doctrine of the imamate.²⁵

²³ On the notion of the *ahl al-bayt*, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Ahl-e bayt” (I. K. A. Howard). Although Ismāʿīlīs shared these assumptions about the Prophet’s household and were also Imāmī, theologians usually had Twelvers in mind when addressing Imāmīs.

²⁴ On the Shīʿī concept of the imam as divine proof, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *La preuve de Dieu. La mystique shīʿite à travers l’œuvre de Kulaynī* (Paris: Cerf, 2018).

²⁵ For an essential study of al-Mufīd, see Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of Al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1978); Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufīd* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2012); Paul Sander, *Zwischen Charisma und Ratio: Entwicklungen in der frühen Imāmītischen Theologie* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1994).

In their expositions of the imamate, al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī provide three key arguments. First, the imamate is an absolute necessity. Imams always assist individuals in fulfilling their moral obligations (*taklīf*) irrespective of the historical circumstances. According to Muʿtazilīs and Imāmīs, whether or not a society possessed prophets or scripture, humans were still *mukallaḥūn* (sing. *mukallaḥ*), or individuals under moral obligations. Second, they held that the intellect (*ʿaql*) was capable of knowing right from wrong independently of scriptural texts (*ṣamʿ*). Nonetheless, according to al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, humans needed imams to assist them in the fulfillment of their moral obligations. Furthermore, such imams must be infallible (*maʿṣūm*) to fulfill their function properly and guide their communities effectively. One cannot expect imams who are liable to err and sin to represent the will of God or to serve as guides to others when they are also in need of guidance. Third, the two scholars expound on the necessity of a divine designation. They hold that one can become an imam only by means of a designation (*naṣṣ*) from God, the Prophet Muḥammad, or another infallible authority, such as a previous imam. Humans cannot be expected to detect infallibility (*iṣma*) in others or feasibly to identify God’s representatives without such designations. In the sections that follow, we consider the doctrine of divine designation in greater detail and elucidate the key arguments of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī concerning the necessity of the imamate.

The Imam as Divine Assistance (*lutf*)

Theologians generally considered anything that aided human beings in the fulfillment of their duties to God to be an example of divine assistance (*lutf*). Following the Muʿtazilīs, Twelver Shīʿīs held that God was too sublime ever to withhold divine assistance. Divine assistance served people by inspiring them to increase their obedience to God and to reduce their proclivity for sinful behavior. Divine assistance, nonetheless, could not be coercive. God’s aid should be of a type that still allowed individuals to choose between obedience and disobedience. Were God to send an angel to punish people every time they committed a sin, for example, obedience would essentially be coerced. Thus, such an alternative would violate the aim of providing people with free will and not qualify as divine assistance even if “obedience” were potentially served by it.

Al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī justified the necessity of imams by arguing that they represented a type of divine assistance. Al-Murtaḍā tied the existence of imams to the existence of any moral obligations. All classical

schools of theology agreed that prophets, as agents of revelation, were charged with teaching humanity those obligations that were particular to the revealed law (*takālif sharʿiyya*). For example, ascertaining the proper method of fasting and worshipping God required revelation and instruction from a prophet. In the absence of revelation, Muʿtazilīs held that humans were only responsible for fulfilling moral obligations that were rationally apparent (*takālif ʿaqliyya*). These duties included the careful examination (*naẓar*) of matters pertaining to the existence of God and the avoidance of repugnant behavior. So long as humans possessed their intellects and the means to do so, they were always obligated to fulfill such duties. Al-Murtaḍā set out to prove that imams represented a necessary form of divine assistance in the fulfillment of rationally apparent duties. He aimed to do this while maintaining the Muʿtazilī doctrine that careful examination sufficed in the discovery and fulfillment of such duties. For this reason, al-Murtaḍā avoided proposing that imams were essential to such examinations or provided people with instruction in fulfilling rationally apparent duties. Instead, al-Murtaḍā focused on the role that imams played as the leaders of their societies.

When imams served as sovereigns, they represented a necessary form of divine assistance by drawing individuals closer to obedience (*aqrah ilā ʾl-ḥāʾa*) to God. The judicial power that they wielded discouraged individuals from engaging in sinful behavior and injustice. The absence of such sovereigns, by contrast, would lead to widespread oppression and chaos. Under such dire circumstances, most people would be forced to focus only on their survival. They would be hindered from either considering or fulfilling their moral obligations. Since imams help ensure peace and stability in their societies, people have more time and opportunities to consider their moral obligations. Furthermore, since God knows that humans will flourish and live more piously with such imams, God should theoretically provide them. This argument relies on the principle of the optimum (*aṣṣaḥ*), which assumes that God does not fail to provide what constitutes the optimum or all that is essential for the benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) and flourishing of humanity.²⁶

Baghdadi Muʿtazilīs argued that God necessarily provided humans with the optimum for their flourishing in this world (*dunyā*) and the

²⁶ The principle of the optimum (*aṣṣaḥ*) in Muʿtazilī (and al-Murtaḍā's) thought should not be confused with the legal mechanism of a similar name that Sunnī jurists employed to derive legal opinions that served the public interest (*maṣlaḥa*).

hereafter (*ākhirā*). The Basran school held that God provided humans only with what served their best interests in the hereafter. In line with his Basran proclivities, al-Murtaḍā held that the imam successfully safeguarded the otherworldly interests of a community in serving as a sovereign. He considered this argument about the necessity of imams for the flourishing of society to be a purely rational one since it functioned independently of any scriptural considerations. For al-Murtaḍā, imams represented a form of divine assistance that drew individuals closer to the obedience of God in all contexts.

Designation (*naṣṣ*), Election (*ikhtiyār*), and Independent Reasoning (*ijtihād*)

Al-Murtaḍā argues that belief in the existence of *naṣṣ* was an ancient concept among Shīʿīs. His comment may seem anachronistic, but he refers to a conception of *naṣṣ* that precedes its technical usage among jurists.²⁷ Jurists of the late second/eighth century appropriated the term *naṣṣ* as a technical term that referred to prescriptions from God or the Prophet that were unambiguous. By contrast, it seems that Muslims of earlier generations held that a *naṣṣ* simply referred to the existence of any statement from God or the Prophet on a subject. In the absence of any religious prescription, humans may choose a course of action based on individual preferences and interests. The belief of early Shīʿīs was that the Prophet discussed the imamate, just as he spoke about prayer and other legal commandments and prohibitions. Thus, in the case of ʿAlī, they argued that there were statements designating him as the Prophet’s successor. Since ʿAlī had been divinely designated (*manṣūṣ*) as an imam, succession to the Prophet was not subject to election.

Sunnī jurists of the classical period envisioned the imamate as a legal concept. Since jurists now incorporated the office into an Islamic legal framework, they theorized whether the imamate followed divine designation (*naṣṣ*) or required independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). *Ijtiḥād* referred to a jurist’s reliance on independent reasoning to interpret the Quran and hadith in order to derive a legal opinion. In this framework, Sunnīs opined that the selection of caliphs entailed a type of legal reasoning.

²⁷ For a different approach to this subject, see Rodrigo Adem, “Classical *Naṣṣ* Doctrines in Imāmī Shīʿism: On the Usage of an Expository Term,” *Shīʿi Studies Review* 1–2 (2017), 42–71.

Thus, the term *naṣṣ* was deployed in one of three ways: it referred to a person's belief in designation, an unambiguous prescription, or the existence of any type of statement about a subject. When understood as a directive from God or the Prophet, the absence of a *naṣṣ* implied the right to choose (*ikhtiyār*). The earliest Muslims who debated the legitimacy of the crucial meeting under the portico, when a small number of Companions selected Abū Bakr to lead the community, did not necessarily frame the caliphate as a legal question involving independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). The question was whether people had a choice in the matter. Those who upheld the legitimacy of the portico meeting affirmed this right to choose imams. Al-Murtaḍā's point is that the earliest Shī'īs had rejected the legitimacy of election in matters of the imamate and believed it was subject to divine designation (*naṣṣ*).

Sometime in the second/eighth century, *naṣṣ* came to have a second meaning, namely, a prescription that was unambiguous in contradistinction to statements that were multivalent and subject to interpretation (*ta'wīl*). In the latter case, a scholar could appeal to the *prima facie* meaning (*ẓāhir*) of a text, but usually acknowledged or attempted to discredit other possible interpretations. Twelver Shī'īs are commonly understood as employing the term *naṣṣ* to mean a text that was unambiguous. Al-Murtaḍā, however, acknowledged that some of the Prophet's statements about 'Alī's succession may have been subtle (*naṣṣ khafī*) and multivalent. This implied that these statements required some interpretation, in contrast to an unambiguous statement (*naṣṣ jalī*) that did not. Furthermore, Zaydis have generally considered statements about 'Alī's imamate to be of the type that required a person to correctly interpret and understand them. All of this suggests that the key question for early Muslims was whether succession to the Prophet was subject to divine designation (*naṣṣ*) or election (*ikhtiyār*), not whether the Prophet's statements on the matter were multivalent. Most Shī'īs held that the imamate was subject to divine designation, while most Sunnīs held that believers should appoint imams. Those who believed in 'Alī's designation simply held that there was a statement from the Prophet to this effect. Later use of the term *naṣṣ* need not serve as a determinant in dating the earliest emergence of the concept or terminus a quo.

By the classical period, jurists understood *naṣṣ* as an unambiguous statement that precluded recourse to independent reasoning on a legal matter. Al-Māwardī, for example, held that the meeting under the portico constituted a type of independent reasoning regarding who should

succeed the Prophet.²⁸ When classical Sunnī jurists argued that early Companions engaged in independent reasoning in appointing caliphs, they projected their own conceptions of *naṣṣ* and *ijtihād* onto these early historical episodes.

Twelver Shīʿīs maintained that the Prophet was obliged to appoint an imam after him so that God could continue to hold humans accountable for the performance of their duties. Such accountability would be unfair in the absence of an infallible authority to guide them and serve as God's proof (*ḥujja*). The Muʿtazilis understood this doctrine as an argument from reason. Thus, Muʿtazilis engaged in debates with Twelvers on the imamate in theoretical terms. They considered the merits and demerits of claims about the necessity of a living proof (*ḥujja*) after the Prophet and the nature of moral obligations. The starting theoretical assumptions for Muʿtazilis and Shīʿīs about God, the place of reason, and moral obligations were mostly shared. The key question was whether evidence existed, as Shīʿīs claimed, that imams were essential to the continued imposition of moral obligations. Muʿtazilis reasoned that the evidence was not conclusive or that the possibility was unlikely. They nevertheless conceded that the Shīʿī theory of the imamate was compelling if one accepted the authenticity of reports about the Prophet's designation of ʿAlī.

Muʿtazilī and Shīʿī discourses on the imamate were lost on the partisans of hadith and later Sunnī polemicists who ignored such literature. For Sunnīs, hadith was central to discussions of the imamate. They responded to Shīʿīs overwhelmingly by citing hadiths that supported Sunnī doctrines regarding the early caliphs and the Companions, and by challenging the veracity of pro-ʿAlid hadiths and historiography.

The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam

The disappearance of the twelfth imam in 262/876 triggered a major debate on how this event was to be understood.²⁹ Twelvers maintained that the imam's disappearance had an eschatological significance. They regarded the twelfth imam, al-Mahdī, as a messianic figure in occultation who would return at the end of time to fill the world with justice. Imāmī doctrines about law, theology, and the occultation of the twelfth imam

²⁸ Hanna Mikhail, *Politics and Revelation: Māwardī and After* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

²⁹ For a study of the early Shīʿī views regarding the imam's occultation, see Hassan Ansari, *L'imamat et l'occultation selon l'Imamisme. Étude bibliographique et histoire des textes* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

coalesced to form a distinct Twelver Shī'ī school in the classical period. The Twelvers, unlike the Zaydīs, did not maintain a revolutionary political agenda. They did not seek to topple regimes or to install their imam in place of the ruler. As centuries passed, the occultation of the 'Alid imam enabled Twelver jurists and hadith scholars to gain greater prominence and authority.

Zaydī Shī'ism

Zaydism was based in Kufa, a key center in the development of law and theology in the formative period.³⁰ Some decades after the murder of al-Ḥusayn in 61/680, Zaydīs considered Zayd b. 'Alī (d. 122/740) as their imam. He was an 'Alid who revolted against the Umayyads, and all later imams were expected to follow his example to establish their legitimacy. Early Zaydīs of the second/eighth century were divided in their views of the first three caliphs. Batrī Zaydīs recognized their accession as legitimate and did not appeal to doctrines of divine designation (*naṣṣ*) in identifying 'Alī as superior to his predecessors in merit. By contrast, Jārūdī Zaydīs held that the relevant texts required interpretation but nonetheless confirmed that 'Alī was the Prophet's designee (*manṣūṣ*) and that the other caliphs were illegitimate.

For Zaydīs, Ḥasanids, and Ḥusaynids, or members of the Prophet's progeny through his daughter Fāṭima, possessed the requisite nobility to lead the community as imams. They held the opinions of Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid jurists in high esteem. If the Prophet's progeny collectively agreed on a legal practice or doctrine, it was deemed correct in the sight of God. If a member of this group inaugurated a mission (*da'wa*) by calling on Muslims to support him in a movement to establish justice and topple a tyrannical ruler, this person became an imam by virtue of this call.

Despite their reverence for the 'Alids, the Zaydīs did not exclude the authority of non-'Alids. Companions, jurists, and later Zaydī scholars who were not 'Alids were also considered capable scholars and authorities.³¹ Over the centuries, Zaydīs adopted Mu'tazilī doctrines and theology, and eventually the imamate was the only matter that distinguished them from the Mu'tazilīs. The Zaydīs also differed from other Shī'īs in

³⁰ On Zaydī Shī'ism, see *EP*, s.v. "Zaydiyya" (W. Madelung).

³¹ For Zaydī views on the Prophet's Companions, see Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 150–159.

that they did not believe in a continuous line of imams, in the imams' infallibility, or in the necessity of a designation from God. Although they agreed with other Shi'is on the merits of 'Alī and the Prophet's household, the Zaydis dedicated many works to refuting Twelver and Ismā'īlī doctrines.

Ismā'īlī Shi'ism

Like the Twelvers, the Ismā'īlīs were Imāmīs.³² They believed in a continuous line of imams that began with the Prophet's grandson al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and extended through al-Ḥusayn's progeny. But whereas the Twelvers traced the line of descent through Ja'far al-Šādiq's son Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799), the Ismā'īlīs considered al-Šādiq's firstborn son, Ismā'il (d. ca. 138/755), the rightful imam after his father.

Ismā'īlīs discussed the imamate in at least three ways that distinguished them from other Muslims. First, in their salvation history they upheld a cyclical view of time. They believed in seven cycles in which key figures had publicly represented God as His Speaking Agent (*nāṭiq*) to humanity. That person was followed by a legatee (*waṣī*) who expounded on his views. Muḥammad was believed to be the sixth Speaking Agent in this cosmology and 'Alī was his legatee. In expounding the teachings of Muḥammad, Ismā'īlīs also referred to 'Alī as the foundation (*asās*) of religion. After 'Alī, the progeny of Muḥammad served as imams for the rest of the cycle until the appearance of the seventh Speaking Agent. The seventh Speaking Agent is revered as having a messianic quality. He is termed the One Who Will Rise Up (*al-Qā'im*) and considered to be the last of the Speaking Agents.

Second, they considered esoteric readings of the Quran, which they termed *ta'wīl*, to be essential to understanding religion. In a few notable cases, verses referring to God, previous prophets, and legal commands and prohibitions were interpreted as references to imams, their partisans, and their antagonists. Many Ismā'īlī scholars also incorporated Neoplatonic cosmologies about God in their theological discourses. For example, God's Speaking Agent was understood to be the Universal Intellect and the first emanation from God. Thus, Ismā'īlī discussions of the imamate drew both on their esoteric readings of the Quran and on Neoplatonic philosophy.

³² On Ismā'īlī Shi'ism, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Third, Ismāʿīlīs distinguished themselves from Twelvers by arguing that imams were necessary not only for understanding Islamic law but also for knowing God. In their view, the imam had to guide humanity in matters of religion because without divine guidance, the human intellect was incapable of deciphering religious truths or truly knowing God.

The Ismāʿīlīs can be divided into two major communities, the Nizārīs and the Mustaʿlīs. For the Nizārīs, who flourished in Iran in the postclassical period, the rightful successor of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanʿir (r. 427–487/1036–1094) was his son Nizār (d. 488/1095), whereas for the Mustaʿlīs it was another son, the Fatimid caliph al-Mustaʿlī bi-ʾllāh (r. 487–495/1094–1101). Later, the Mustaʿlīs of Yemen came to be known as Ṭayyibīs when they argued that the son of the tenth Fatimid caliph, a child named al-Ṭayyib, had not died but rather gone into physical concealment (*saṭr*).

The Mustaʿlī Ṭayyibīs thrived in both Yemen and India. They have preserved a great deal of philosophical literature. In the absence of the imam, the Mustaʿlī Ṭayyibī community recognized a leading community member, or “director of the mission” (*al-dāʿī al-muṭlaq*), as the imam’s sole representative in each generation. Members of the community believed that a director of the mission ultimately derived his legitimacy from the concealed imam, who supported his authority. Succession to this office was occasionally contested, which led to further splits in the community.³³ By contrast, the Nizārīs are uniquely positioned as the only Shīʿī community in the contemporary period to have its imam present before the public. The imam, known as the Āghā Khān, currently resides in Europe.³⁴

Ibādīsm

The Ibādīs emerged out of the Khārījī factions of the formative period that championed the views of the Muḥakkimīs.³⁵ They are named after ʿAbdallāh b. Ibād (d. ca. 70/689), a figure active in the second/eighth century; however, biographical details about this person are speculative. The Ibādīs considered other Khārījīs excessive and extreme in their views,

³³ On the history of the Mustaʿlī Ṭayyibīs, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “The Daʿūdī Bohra Ṭayyibīs: Ideology, Literature, Learning, and Social Practice,” in *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 331–354; see also *EP*, s.v. “Bohras” (Tahera Qutbuddin).

³⁴ On the history of the Nizārīs, see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 301–504.

³⁵ On Ibādī Islam, see *EP*, s.v. “al-Ibādīyya” (Tadeusz Lewicki).

but they shared certain key Khārījī assumptions and values. For example, the Ibāḍīs disassociated themselves from ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, who, they believed, had gone astray. Whereas other Khārījīs rejected the faith of other Muslims, the Ibāḍīs were willing to accept non-Ibāḍīs as Muslims. Khārījī groups argued about the legitimacy of sharing allegiance (*malā’*) with Muslims of other schools, with many arguing that disassociation from other Muslims was in fact a religious obligation. The Ibāḍīs were more compromising. They considered it lawful to coexist peacefully with other Muslims and to live under tyrannical rulers. This compromising stance allowed the Ibāḍīs to flourish, while other Khārījī factions were driven to extinction by their aggressive and intolerant stance even toward other Khārījīs. In doctrinal matters, Ibāḍīs appear to have been partially influenced by the Mu‘tazilīs.³⁶

What Makes a Caliph?

Muslim discourses on the imamate centered on one of two approaches. The first was historical. Scholars debated several key issues including the righteousness of leading Companions, the legitimacy of the early caliphs, and the significance of early civil wars. This approach mostly examined historical questions about the first four caliphs. The second method was to consider the imamate as a theoretical question. Such discussions moved away from the idealism associated with the first approach. Scholars debated the legitimacy of tyrants and warlords who seized power. They sought to identify the minimum requirements for a legitimate caliph. Each theological school produced doctrinal positions on the history of the first four caliphs. Likewise, scholars developed another set of practical political theories that acknowledged changing historical circumstances and demands on the Muslim empire.

The question of legitimate religio-political authority that preoccupied the early community immediately after the Prophet’s death can be considered one of its earliest flashpoints of conflict and sources of fragmentation. The ramifications, legality, and legitimacy of the meeting that took place under the portico (*saqifa*) were subject to vigorous sectarian debate. By the classical period, the vast majority of Muslims were Sunnīs who

³⁶ For studies on Ibāḍī theology, see Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Essentials of Ibāḍī Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012); Ersilia Francesca (ed.), *Ibadi Theology: Rereading Sources and Scholarly Works* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015).

considered the portico meeting legitimate; meanwhile, Shī'is regarded the meeting as the moment when the caliphate was usurped from 'Alī. However, beyond the question of which Companion was the best candidate to succeed the Prophet as caliph, the second, perhaps more pivotal, question concerned the significance and meaning of a caliph.

After the accession of Abū Bakr, it was apparent that his partisans considered him the leader of the entire Muslim community. He was its political ruler, but there was also a religious duty to recognize his authority and send him one's alms (*zakāt*). It was a disagreement about the religious dimension of the office that may have led certain members of the community to revolt during his reign. Although many of those who rebelled had publicly renounced the religion of Muḥammad, some were Muslims who contested the scope of the caliph's powers. The primary point of contention was whether their shared faith obliged all Muslims to send their alms to the caliph and to demonstrate their fealty to him. Although the rebel Muslims had dutifully sent their alms to the Prophet, they argued that after the Prophet's death they were free to ignore the caliph and to conduct their lives independently of him. The dispute thus concerned the boundaries of politics and religion: did ignoring the authority of the caliph make the rebels apostates, enemies of the state, or both? Sunnīs and Shī'is disagreed on the identity of the Prophet's legitimate successor and on theories regarding the meaning of the office. Scholars developed very different expectations of caliphs and imams and their relationship to religion and empire.³⁷

It should be noted that neither Sunnīs nor Shī'is viewed the Prophet as someone who had left a kingdom as inheritance (*irṭh*). While Abū Bakr succeeded the Prophet as the community's leader, he was not considered the Prophet's legal heir. It is with the rise of the Abbasids that some partisans of this dynasty attempted to characterize the office in this way. Sunnīs rather considered Abū Bakr the most meritorious candidate to lead the community after the Prophet because of his faith and piety, while Shī'is believed that the Prophet designated 'Alī as his rightful successor before his death. Shī'is (and later Sunnī pro-'Alids) identified 'Alī as the Prophet's legatee (*waṣī*). Although the term suggests that 'Alī served as the executor of the Prophet's estate, Shī'is understood the term as having a much greater significance. As the Prophet's legatee, 'Alī was responsible for attending to the needs of the Prophet's community and leading

³⁷ For a seminal study on the development of theories of the imamate, see Crone, *God's Rule*.

it in his absence. The cessation of prophethood required ʿAlī to assume authority that was both religious and political. Shīʿīs did not portray the Prophet's only surviving daughter, Fāṭima, and her descendants as heirs to a monarchy which began with Muḥammad.³⁸

Muslims conceived of caliphs and imams in different ways. These leaders either served as God's deputy on earth, the Prophet's successor, or a sovereign who managed the affairs of his community that concerned the public interest. Umayyads, Abbasids, and their respective partisans believed that caliphs possessed a divine right to rule. The caliph was idealized as God's deputy (*khalīfat Allāh*) on earth. As religious scholars and caliphs made competing claims to authority, Sunnī scholars envisioned sovereigns as only succeeding the Prophet in his political authority while religious authority was delegated to scholars. With the rise of warlords and sultans who eclipsed the Abbasid caliphs in power, sovereigns were understood to be individuals who simply safeguarded matters of public interest and ensured that the community could discharge its obligations such as almsgiving, pilgrimage, and congregational worship without impediment. Sunnīs eventually recognized the first four "Rightly Guided Caliphs" as special leaders who combined religious and political authority in a way that those who succeeded them did not. For Imāmīs, the imam was a living proof (*ḥujja*), the final authority, in all religious matters.

Rather than focusing on the often contentious debates between Sunnīs and Shīʿīs concerning the best Companion to succeed the Prophet, this book focuses on the issue of the theoretical functions and requisites of a legitimate caliph. In the chapters that follow, we have sought to translate texts that discuss a school's doctrines concerning the office without delving into contested historiography or polemics about specific personalities.

Early Sunnīs typically used the term "caliphate" in discussions of religio-political authority, whereas Shīʿīs, Muʿtazilīs, and Ibāḍīs referred to the office as the "imamate" (*imāma*). In the classical and postclassical periods, Sunnīs increasingly adopted the term "imamate" in the context of theoretical and juridical debates over the position, reserving "caliphate"

³⁸ For a revisionist reading of history, where Fāṭima is described as the community's rightful queen, see Wilferd Madelung, "Ansari, Hassan: *L'imamat et l'occultation selon l'Imamisme*," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 114.4–5 (2019), 377–379; Wilferd Madelung, "The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Naṣ al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭalibīs and Early ʿAbbāsīs in Conflict," by Amikam Elad, *Ilahiyat Studies* 8.1 (2017), 137–139. For a response, see Hassan Ansari, "Wa-lam yakun bi-dhāka: A Response to Wilferd Madelung's Review of *L'imamat et l'occultation selon l'Imamisme*," *Shii Studies Review* 4 (2019), 1–7.

for its practical and historical manifestations. Thus, in the texts that follow, the leader of the Muslim community is frequently described as the “imam” rather than caliph.

The Authors

The following sections introduce the authors of the texts included in this anthology. The authors and their texts appear in chronological order. The one exception is al-Juwaynī’s text, which follows Ibn Fūrak’s in the interest of thematic coherence.

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (d. 406/1015)

Although Sunnism featured several theological schools in the classical period, the Ash‘arī school was one of the most prominent. Leading scholars of Sunnism in the classical and postclassical periods identified as Ash‘arīs and participated in the transmission of influential Ash‘arī theological texts and their commentaries. To represent this school, we have selected two of its leading scholars, Ibn Fūrak and al-Juwaynī.

Little is known about the early life of Ibn Fūrak.³⁹ He adhered to the Shāfi‘ī school in jurisprudence and began his studies in Isfahan and Iraq. He studied theology with two prominent disciples of al-Ash‘arī, Ibn Mujāhid al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 370/981) and Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī (active late fourth/tenth century). Ibn Fūrak became one of the three most influential thinkers – with his contemporaries al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013) and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) – in the Ash‘arī school after the death of its eponymous founder. Ibn Fūrak was active in the city of Nishapur in Iran as a teacher of theology, law, and hadith. His contemporaries revered him as a leading authority in these fields, and a school was built for him in the city to facilitate his instruction of students. His students include the leading Shāfi‘ī jurist and hadith scholar al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) as well as al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), who studied Sufism and other sciences with him.

Ibn Fūrak was the author of several books, including *A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (Mujarrad maqālāt Abī ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī)*, in which he discusses al-Ash‘arī’s teachings and quotes the founder’s words directly from writings that are no longer extant. Ibn

³⁹ On Ibn Fūrak, see *EI*, s.v. “Ibn Fūrak” (Martin Nguyen).

Fūrak's *Précis* is a valuable resource for understanding the doctrines of al-Ash'arī in his own words.

The *Précis* provides a brief overview of traditional Sunnī views on the imamate. Ibn Fūrak and al-Ash'arī interpret the history of succession after the Prophet Muḥammad in a way that is charitable to the Companions and downplays the conflicts between them. This approach reflects the Sunnī view of the first four caliphs as individuals who possessed all of the requisite qualities of an ideal ruler. Ibn Fūrak and al-Ash'arī defend the legitimacy of appointing caliphs by means of an electoral process (*ikhtiyār*), against Shī'ī assertions that the designation of imams is the exclusive province of God. The *Précis*' discussion of the imamate is polemical, aimed at refuting arguments made by some (non-Sunnī) theologians over the centuries for the illegitimacy of the early caliphs. On this topic, the work is representative not only of the school of al-Ash'arī but also of early Sunnism in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Ibn Fūrak champions positions that agree with the doctrines of the Māturīdīs and partisans of hadith but contradict the claims of Shī'ī and many Mu'tazilī theologians. Ibn Fūrak's contemporary al-Bāqillānī also composed important writings on the imamate, but we have chosen to use Ibn Fūrak for two reasons. First, studies of al-Bāqillānī's views on the imamate already exist.⁴⁰ And second, as previously mentioned, Ibn Fūrak's text provides readers with access to the words and views of al-Ash'arī and, hence, an articulation of orthodoxy as it was understood several generations before al-Bāqillānī.

Early Sunnī theologians conceived of the imamate in theological terms that strictly adhered to precedence, while later jurists understood the office in pragmatic and legal terms. Ibn Fūrak writes about the imamate in ways representative of early theologians. This anthology includes a second Sunnī, al-Juwaynī, as a representative of the latter approach. Two other famous works also discuss the imamate in juridical terms, both with the title of *The Laws of Governance* (*al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya*). Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), a Shāfi'ī, composed the first, whereas Abū Ya'la Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1065), a Ḥanbalī, composed the second, which is closely paralleled to the first.⁴¹ In legal works, Sunnī jurists usually discussed the imamate in texts on warfare. Since armies required commanders

⁴⁰ For example, see Yusuf Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of al-Baqillani* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1966).

⁴¹ For an English translation of al-Māwardī's book, see 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *The Ordinances of Government*, tr. Wafaa H. Wahba (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2000).

and a designated leader, jurists discussed the qualities, duties, and rights of such a leader. They also considered the qualities of members of the electorate, which constituted an elite subset of the community. The authors of the two *Laws of Governance*, however, comprehensively examine these topics in standalone works.

It should be noted that for Imāmīs, the imamate remained a doctrinal matter. Since reason justified the necessity of infallible imams, they argued, all of the faithful were obliged to recognize this fact. Sunnīs such as al-Ash‘arī considered the discussion of the subject in theological works only to respond to Imāmī (and Khārījī) doctrines about the Companions and early caliphs. Sunnīs, in this way, also established creeds about the succession of the first four caliphs that all other Sunnīs were required to uphold. One key doctrine was that the most meritorious Companion was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, and then ‘Alī, in that order. Traditional notions about the excellence of the first four caliphs led theologians like Ibn Fūrak to argue that all subsequent legitimate caliphs should resemble those four. The caliph, for instance, should be the most righteous individual in the community, a member of the tribe of Quraysh, learned, and brave. By contrast, al-Juwaynī discussed the office with some pragmatism and assumed that the most pious and respected members of the community usually did not become its rulers. Unlike his predecessors, al-Juwaynī came to terms with the termination of the ideal early caliphate. Instead, he endeavored to provide a theory of the imamate that met the minimum requirements of Islamic law. We include selections from both of these authors to highlight this subtle shift in Ash‘arī Sunnī discourses on the subject.

‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)

Khorasan became an important region in Islamic history after the Khorasani army that toppled the Umayyads seized control of the caliphate in 132/750. Under the Abbasids, the leading bureaucrats and scholars came from Khorasan, and the caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–833) first established his seat of power there before settling in Iraq. The Samanids and the Seljuks both financed the establishment of schools in the region. After the fourth/tenth century, Khorasan became a leading center for Mu‘tazilī and Shī‘ī scholarship and learning. Ash‘arīs, who generally identified as Shāfi‘īs in jurisprudence, were quite active in Khorasan and, in particular, in the city of Nishapur, which became the center of Ash‘arism. Nishapur was also an important locus of Sufism, which developed in a mainly Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī context.

Al-Juwaynī was one of the most prominent Ash‘arī theologians to emerge from fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur. He was a student of Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Isfarāyīnī al-Iskāf (d. 452/1060), who had studied with Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027), one of the three most influential theologians in the history of Ash‘arism after Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī. Al-Juwaynī wrote on jurisprudence, positive law, and theology. He became one of the foremost jurists of the Shāfi‘ī school. As a theologian, he was influenced by the ideas of al-Bāqillānī. Al-Juwaynī, however, developed Ash‘arī thought to have stronger speculative and philosophical leanings.⁴²

Al-Juwaynī’s *The Succor of Nations amidst the Confusion of Darkness* (*Ghiyāth al-umam fī iltiyāth al-zulam*), or simply *The Succor*, is a book that draws on his expertise as a jurist and a theologian. To some extent, *The Succor* falls into the genre of “mirrors for princes,” works dedicated to rulers or leading court officials in which authors discussed the responsibilities, aims, and qualities of the ideal sovereign.⁴³ Such literature usually argued that a ruler could safeguard his rule with wisdom and justice. Authors praised the addressees and affirmed their legitimacy while gently providing them with advice. *The Succor* was dedicated to Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the most important authority in the court of the Seljukid ruler Malik Shāh (d. 485/1092). Nizām al-Mulk was one of the most powerful viziers in Islamic history. The network of schools he established, the Nizāmiyya, became important institutions of higher learning in the Sunnī world. In subsequent centuries, the curricula taught at the Nizāmiyya broadened from the study of religion to encompass secular sciences as well. Al-Juwaynī was appointed as the first professor to teach at the Nizāmiyya in Nishapur. His student Ghazalī (d. 505/1111) followed and surpassed him in fame as an Ash‘arī theologian, a Shāfi‘ī jurist, and a teacher at the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad.

In *The Succor*, al-Juwaynī elucidates the responsibilities of both rulers and scholars in Muslim society. He presents a comprehensive theory of the imamate and a guide to the laws that imams must uphold according to Sunnī Islam. A key thesis of al-Juwaynī is that jurists are essential to the governing process and that without them, a state will fail. It is a political theory that posits the ruler’s consultation of jurists as a key source of his legitimacy. The excerpts we have selected for translation discuss the

⁴² See *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, s.v. “al-Juwaynī” (J. Thiele).

⁴³ For more on this genre, see Louise Marlow, *Counsel for Kings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

objectives of the office and the qualities required of imams. According to the author, a qualified ruler is one who possesses the means (*baṣṭ al-yad, kifāya*) to rule over the empire. Al-Juwaynī is thus quite utilitarian: power makes a ruler legitimate. The ruler must be able to defend his authority against any threat, but he need not possess the knowledge required to apply Islamic law, for he can always consult jurists. Since, for al-Juwaynī, the objective of the office is simply sovereignty over people, the only requirements for a legitimate officeholder are the means to attain power and the ability to run the community's affairs.

In response to claims that a legitimate imam needed to possess other essential qualities, al-Juwaynī argues that these other characteristics serve the same aim: to safeguard the authority of the imam against potential threats. For example, caliphs are expected to have Qurashī ancestry to prevent potential rivals from claiming that their lineage is nobler than the caliph's. The caliph's ancestry thus helps to discourage dissent and to establish his authority. Al-Juwaynī distinguishes between qualities that he considers necessary on the basis of proofs that engender certainty and qualities that lack such a basis and consequently must be deemed conjectural (*ẓannī*) and not essential. A ruler's lack of the latter, he argues, should be ignored. Muslims ought to understand the objectives of the office and to require only those qualities that are necessary for their realization.

Al-Juwaynī argues that a ruler should always abide by the precepts of Islamic law but that it is not necessary for him to be an expert. It suffices for the ruler to recognize the authority of jurists and consult them. This is a departure from al-Māwardī's conception and other predecessors who argued that the caliph should be a legal expert (*mujtahid*) and a religious authority. Although he initially rejects the possibility that multiple imams could legitimately rule at the same time, al-Juwaynī makes an exception when vast distances separate them and they have no news of one another. The imamate was merely the means to implement Islamic law in the community. Military might and the consultation of scholars thus sufficed as requisites of the office.

In contrast to al-Juwaynī's utilitarianism, al-Bāqillānī focuses on defending the theory of the caliphate as an ideal based on the example of the first four caliphs. For al-Bāqillānī, the caliph had to be the most meritorious person in the community. Taking history into account, al-Māwardī lowered expectations in two ways. First, he held that a caliph should be knowledgeable, but acknowledged that others could be superior

to him in merit. Second, he was willing to recognize the legitimacy of warlords such as the Buyids so long as they pledged allegiance to a legitimate caliph. Al-Juwaynī did away with both of these requirements. For al-Juwaynī, the idealized early caliphate had ceased to exist, and there was no need for subsequent rulers to possess the qualities of those revered leaders. Al-Juwaynī also theorized that such rulers had no need of an additional, symbolic figurehead to legitimate their rule. The community needed leaders who could meet its present needs. So long as they governed competently, they were legitimate rulers. Al-Juwaynī then takes a minimalist approach, requiring only those qualities that, he says, are established through consensus and certain proofs (*adilla qaṭʿiyya*). The legitimacy of rulers ultimately rests on the authority of jurists. So long as rulers rely on jurists for the application of Islamic law, they will prosper. Ultimately, al-Juwaynī's opinions represent another key shift toward pragmatism after al-Māwardī.⁴⁴

al-Nāṭiq bi-ʾl-Haqq Abū Ṭālib al-Hārūnī (d. 424/1033)

Abū Ṭālib al-Hārūnī is considered one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Zaydism. He was a theologian and jurist who studied in Baghdad with Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/980), the most prominent representative of the Muʿtazilī Bahshamī theological school at his time. After the death of his brother, al-Muʿayyad bi-ʾllāh al-Hārūnī (d. 411/1020), al-Hārūnī became a Zaydī imam in northern Iran for a short time.⁴⁵

Al-Hārūnī was one of the first Zaydīs to bridge Zaydism and Muʿtazilism. He is best known as the author of several seminal writings on law in the Zaydī Hādawī school, works on jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) according to Muʿtazilī and Zaydī doctrine, and *The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate* (*al-Diʿāma fī tathbūt al-imāma*). He wrote this book in Rayy and dedicated it to the Buyid vizier in Iran and prominent Muʿtazilī Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995). Al-Hārūnī offers a comprehensive theory of the imamate and expends significant effort on refuting the doctrines of his Muʿtazilī and Imāmī counterparts on the topic. Although the Zaydīs agreed with the Muʿtazilīs on many points concerning the imamate, *The*

⁴⁴ For a study of al-Juwaynī's life and thought, see Sohaira Z. M. Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids: An Intellectual Portrait of al-Juwaynī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁴⁵ For more on al-Hārūnī, see Hassan Ansari, "The Shīʿī Reception of Muʿtazilism (I): Zaydis," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 181–195.

Theoretical Underpinning highlights some of the differences between them. Like Twelvers al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, al-Hārūnī draws on key Muʿtazilī concepts and technical terms to propound a comprehensive argument in defense of the Zaydī conception of the imamate.

Against the Twelvers, al-Hārūnī sought to refute three assumptions: the rational necessity of the imamate, the necessity of infallibility, and the necessity of divine designation (*naṣṣ*). He was intimately familiar with Twelver doctrines because his father and larger family identified as Imāmīs. Both he and his brother converted to Zaydism through their contacts with Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās al-Ḥasanī (d. after 353/964). *The Theoretical Underpinning* appears to have been written before al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's (d. 415/1025) exposition on the imamate in his *Summa on Divine Unity and Justice* (*al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*). Although al-Hārūnī discusses the views of early Imāmī theologians such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, he wrote his text before al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā composed his famous work on the imamate, *The Curative Book* (*al-Shāfi*). Al-Hārūnī's *Theoretical Underpinning* was a seminal work that employed Muʿtazilī assumptions about theology and epistemology to defend Zaydī doctrines on the imamate against the objections of Sunnīs, Muʿtazilīs, Imāmīs, and other rivals. Many of the objections that al-Hārūnī raises in *The Theoretical Underpinning* found a response in the work of al-Ṭūsī, the next author featured in this collection.

There are two dimensions to al-Hārūnī's views about the imamate. As with Sunnīs, some of his comments consider the history of the early caliphs, and others focus on the theory of the imamate. Against the Imāmīs, al-Hārūnī believes that imams in general do not require divine designation (*naṣṣ*) for legitimacy. Nonetheless, Zaydīs recognized that a type of divine designation did exist in favor of the first three imams, ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. Regarding historical precedent, al-Hārūnī affirms the existence of a *naṣṣ*, but denies its theoretical necessity. The key requirement to establishing the validity of a person's imamate is evidence that the imam in question summoned the community to a mission seeking justice against tyranny. All imams, of course, were to be noblemen from the descendants of Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter.

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067)

Like the Sunnīs Ibn Fūrak and al-Juwaynī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī studied in Nishapur, located in the northwest of Iran. In 408/1017, he moved to Baghdad, the center of Twelver Shīʿī thought at the time. He studied with the two most prominent representatives of the school

in the early fifth/eleventh century, al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā. It was al-Murtaḍā who introduced him to the Bahshamī strand of Mu‘tazilī theology. Following his teachers, al-Ṭūsī incorporated Mu‘tazilī doctrines into his writings on Imāmī theology, culminating in his major work, *A Prolegomenon to the Foundational Principles of Religion (Tamhīd al-uṣūl)*. He wrote influential works in several fields, including hadith, law, jurisprudence, and exegesis. He compiled two major hadith compendia, both of which are among the four most revered sources of Shī‘ī hadith. As a jurist, he developed a comprehensive theory of Twelver Shī‘ī jurisprudence in *The Provision on Jurisprudence (al-Udda fī uṣūl al-fiqh)* and detailed Twelver positions on positive law in *The Extensive Work on Law (al-Mabsūṭ fī ‘l-fiqh)*.⁴⁶ Al-Ṭūsī is widely acknowledged as one of the most prominent Twelver thinkers in history.

Three Seminal Works on the Imamate

Al-Mufīd, who taught both al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, was respected by disciples and rivals alike. He used his considerable dialectical talents to defend Twelver Shī‘ī doctrines on the imamate in several of his books. However, it is al-Murtaḍā’s *Curative Book on the Imamate (al-Shāfi fī l-imāma)* that can be considered the most comprehensive Twelver Shī‘ī exposition on the imamate from the classical period.⁴⁷ The text was composed as a line-by-line refutation of many sections of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s discussion of the imamate in his magnum opus, *The Summa (al-Mughnī)*. Al-Murtaḍā in fact agreed with ‘Abd al-Jabbār on many doctrinal matters, since they both accepted Bahshamī Mu‘tazilī assumptions about God and ontology. However, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s discussion of the imamate is mainly directed against Twelver Shī‘ī doctrine, which prompted al-Murtaḍā to respond with his own refutation. Al-Murtaḍā’s work grounds the Twelver conception of the imamate in Bahshamī theology and develops arguments about the history of succession, the perpetual need

⁴⁶ On al-Ṭūsī, see Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2017), 311–330.

⁴⁷ For more on al-Murtaḍā’s contributions, see Hussein Abdulsater, *Shī‘ī Doctrine, Mu‘tazilī Theology: Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Imāmī Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 151–210; Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, *Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s Oeuvre and Thought in Context: An Archaeological Inquiry into Texts and Their Transmission* (Córdoba: UCOPress, 2022); Robert Gleave, “Quietism and Political Legitimacy in Imāmī Shī‘ī Jurisprudence: al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s *Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government* Reconsidered,” in *Political Quietism in Islam: Sunni and Shi‘i Practice and Thought*, ed. Saud al-Sarhan (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 99–128.

for imams, and the evidentiary value of certain Quranic verses and hadiths that validate Shī'ī notions about the *ahl al-bayt* (i.e., the Prophet's household and progeny) and the imamate. Al-Murtaḍā also carefully addresses the objections raised by his contemporary theologians, including Khārijīs, Zaydīs, Sunnī partisans of hadith, and Mu'tazilīs.

Influenced by al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī wrote an abridgment of the *al-Shāfī fī 'l-imāma* entitled *The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering* (*Talkhiṣ al-Shāfī fī 'l-imāma*), which reflected his own recension of the text. An important contribution of al-Ṭūsī's work is the complete overhaul of al-Murtaḍā's organization of his arguments. Al-Murtaḍā's discussion follows 'Abd al-Jabbār's closely and sporadically jumps from one subject to another. Al-Ṭūsī, by contrast, addresses each major topic systematically and thematically. He further supplements the work with discussions of the eleven imams who succeeded 'Alī and the occultation of the twelfth.

Al-Ṭūsī begins the book with a discussion of the rational necessity of the imamate and then its necessity according to the Quran and hadith. He draws on al-Murtaḍā's views on the first of these topics, and incorporates the latter's most important contribution. Al-Murtaḍā ties the existence of imams to the existence of moral obligations (*taklīf*) in the sight of God. As long as moral obligations exist, humans need imams. Imams function as a type of divine assistance (*lutf*) when they manage the affairs of their communities and levels of oppression decrease. He effectively justifies the imamate as a necessary office independent of the existence of prophets, hadith, revealed law (*shar'*, *sharī'a*), or the Muslim community itself.

Al-Ṭūsī's second argument for the necessity of the imamate is that the imam not only applies the commandments of revealed law but also ensures its integrity by preserving and transmitting it in its totality. Imams are the principal authorities in matters of religion after prophets; they safeguard the teachings of a prophet and their correct understanding. Unlike other members of the community, the imam's knowledge of religion is always based on certainty. He has no need for the speculative tools other jurists rely upon to derive legal opinions. The imam, furthermore, serves as God's living proof (*hujja*) of the existence of the obligations mandated by the revealed law. He ensures that knowledge of these laws and their correct application are not lost. Imāmīs argued that God would not demand that the faithful carry out any such obligations without a living proof who could clarify to them the nature of such obligations. This view differs from what became the classical Sunnī position, according to which the ruler may facilitate the application of Islamic law without being

an expert in it (a role that was accorded to scholars). For Imāmīs, God's living proof is not only an expert but also an individual uniquely endowed with direct knowledge of the revealed law.

Al-Ṭūsī's exposition of the imamate is significantly shorter than al-Murtaḍā's, but it offers key insights into the logical basis of Twelver doctrines that are not so easily discerned in al-Murtaḍā's original text. Since al-Murtaḍā composed *al-Shāfi* as a refutation, the author occasionally veers from one issue to another in ways that would not suit this anthology (or the general reader). The organization of al-Ṭūsī's work provides readers with a treatise that lucidly responds to Mu'tazilī and Zaydī objections.

Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141)

Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḥimī was a leading Mu'tazilī scholar of Khwārazm, active in the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth century. He was a contemporary of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), acting as the latter's teacher in theology and as his student in exegesis of the Quran. Ibn al-Malāḥimī was a representative of the school of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, a student of the famous Mu'tazilī scholar al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, with whom he differed on a number of theological matters.⁴⁸

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's writings on jurisprudence and theology became influential among the Zaydīs of Yemen, although in law he was a Ḥanafī. Little information is available about his life. He is the author of a comprehensive theological summa, *The Reliable Book on the Fundamental Principles of Religion (al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn)*, which reflects the Mu'tazilī doctrines of the school of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn. He also wrote a refutation of Muslim philosophers in *A Gift for Theologians on the Refutation of Philosophers (Tuhfat al-mutakallimīn fī 'l-radd 'alā 'l-falāsifa)*.

For this anthology, we have selected a portion of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's discussion of the imamate in his *Book of Excellence on the Fundamental Principles of Religion (Kitāb al-Fā'iḳ fī uṣūl al-dīn)*. *The Book of Excellence*, which is extant in its entirety, is a summary of his larger work, *The Reliable Book*, of which only parts survive. *The Book of Excellence* is an important source for modern researchers since it is one of the last available texts from the Sunnī Mu'tazilī tradition, which disappeared by

⁴⁸ On Ibn al-Malāḥimī, see "Introduction," in Ibn al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott (London: Al-Hoda, 1991), iii–xvi; Wilferd Madelung, "Ibn al-Malāḥimī," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2011), III.440–443.

the end of the classical period in the seventh/thirteenth century. Ibn al-Malāḥimī's text on the imamate, in particular, provides an excellent picture of the development of this tradition's views up to the sixth/twelfth century. It justifies the Muslim community's right to select its own imams and affirms the legitimacy of the first four caliphs. Ibn al-Malāḥimī also defends 'Alī's character against Khārījī defamation, while refuting Imāmī doctrines about his designation (*naṣṣ*) and infallibility.

It appears that Ibn al-Malāḥimī was aware of al-Murtaḍā's *Curative Book on the Imamate*. When Ibn al-Malāḥimī composed his *Excellence*, he aimed to address some of the assumptions and claims of *The Curative Book*. For example, Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues that imams ensure the application of Islamic law. Imams need not be infallible to fulfill this duty, which can be accomplished by means of careful examination (*naẓar*) and inference (*istidlāl*). According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī and other Mu'tazilīs, imams do not qualify as examples of divine assistance. Divine assistance should always be available to the faithful. Imams, however, sometimes do not exist. Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues that in such cases other individuals may fulfill the duties of the imam and the community can carry on without one. Mu'tazilīs acknowledged that prophets helped the faithful in fulfilling rationally apparent duties by means of revelation, so they qualified as divine assistance. By contrast, imams do not assist the faithful in such a capacity. They only assist the faithful in the implementation of the commandments of revealed law.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's response to Imāmīs differed substantially from non-Mu'tazilī Sunnī and Ibāḍī responses to Shī'ism. For Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Twelver Shī'ism represented Shī'ī Mu'tazilism. Twelvers shared many assumptions about God, reason, and the existence of moral obligations in the absence of revelation. They used vocabulary and concepts familiar to Mu'tazilī theologians to frame their doctrines. This allowed Ibn al-Malāḥimī to understand the implications and significance of many of their claims in ways that non-Mu'tazilīs did not.

Abū 'Ammār 'Abd al-Kāfī b. Yūsuf al-Tanāwatī al-Warjalānī
(d. ca. 570/1174)

Ibāḍism flourished in two places: Oman and parts of North Africa. Save for a few scholars who traveled to visit their distant counterparts, the two Ibāḍī communities largely developed independently of one another. In theology and law, the scholars of the two regions agreed on some matters

but differed on many others. Warjalān (Ouargla), located in southern Algeria, was an important city of Ibāḍī learning. It produced scholars who composed many influential, still extant books. Al-Warjalānī, a leading Ibāḍī theologian and jurist of the sixth/twelfth century, was one of these scholars.⁴⁹

Al-Warjalānī traveled to several cities in North Africa to study with leading Ibāḍī scholars. He eventually returned to Warjalān, where he settled and presumably wrote many of his works. The available biographical information on al-Warjalānī is sparse. Historians note that he traveled to the Arabian Peninsula, where he likely performed the pilgrimage and studied with local scholars. His sojourns outside Warjalān probably provided him with opportunities to discuss theology and law with non-Ibāḍī scholars.

The Concise Book of Doctrines (al-Mūjaz) is a comprehensive theological work in which al-Warjalānī seeks to lay out correct doctrine and to refute the views of rival religious traditions both Muslim and non-Muslim. In 1978, ‘Ammār al-Ṭalībī edited the work in two volumes under the title *The Theological Doctrines of the Khārijīs (Ārā’ al-khawārij al-kalāmiyya)*. The present anthology contains a portion of al-Warjalānī’s text on the imamate that provides a broad overview of Khārijī and Ibāḍī views on the qualities of a legitimate imam. Khārijīs of the formative period and Ibāḍīs of the classical period agreed with Sunnis on the legitimacy of the first four caliphs’ accession to the office. However, the Ibāḍīs held that Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were legitimate caliphs throughout their reigns, whereas ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī disqualified themselves through misdeeds during their tenures. In an untranslated section of his book, al-Warjalānī devotes several pages to justifying the authority of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar against the views of Shī‘īs.⁵⁰ Theologians frequently debated the legitimacy of historical caliphs, but we have mostly excluded these excursions.

For Ibāḍīs, total obedience is due to God alone. Since God has revealed all of His commandments in scripture, devotion to the Quran is paramount. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar adhered to the Quran, whereas ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī violated its commandments. The function of the imam is to aid the community in commanding right, forbidding wrong, establishing justice, and administering *ḥudūd* (fixed, nondiscretionary penalties for

⁴⁹ On al-Warjalānī, see *EB*, s.v. “Abū ‘Ammār ‘Abd al-Kāfī b. Abī Ya’qūb” (Valerie J. Hoffman).

⁵⁰ Abū ‘Ammār ‘Abd al-Kāfī al-Warjalānī, *al-Mūjaz: Ārā’ al-Khawārij al-kalāmiyya*, ed. ‘Ammār al-Ṭalībī (Algiers: al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya, 1978), II.227–233.

certain offenses specified in the Quran). However, not all Khārijīs saw the imam as essential. Some early Khārijīs, such as the Najadāt, argued that an imam is not necessary if the community is able to fulfill the above duties without one. The community is free to elect an imam or to dispense with the office. One's loyalty should be to God, not to any imam. These Khārijīs believed that the community is collectively responsible for the duties that Sunnīs and Shī'īs typically associate with imams, such as the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties. Following these early Khārijīs, some later Ibāḍīs argued for the dispensability of caliphs even when the faithful have the means to appoint them. A few Mu'tazilīs of the formative period had made the same argument, though the doctrine was not adopted by any Mu'tazilī school in the classical period.⁵¹ Al-Warjalānī, however, does not follow this line of thinking.

The Khārijī-Ibāḍī tradition is unique in outlining a procedure for the removal of an imam. If an imam violates a divine commandment, he should be compelled to repent. Repeat offenses or a refusal to repent are grounds for disqualification and removal from office. If an imam refuses to give up his authority, he is to be fought until he is dislodged from power or killed. For the Ibāḍīs, canceling the authority of an imam to restart the selection process and appoint another is considered a legitimate procedure.

Although many scholars considered the Umayyads to have been tyrants, and many hadith scholars considered al-Ma'mūn a heretic, they could still be tolerated as caliphs in Sunnism because their leadership did not impede the implementation of Islamic law. As long as scholars were permitted to lead congregational worship and judges could give rulings in accordance with revealed law, such caliphs could be tolerated. For the Ibāḍīs, by contrast, the imam is obligated to join the community in implementing and safeguarding God's law. The violation of God's law by the imam or his community is not tolerated. He serves as a member of the community and as a facilitator of the establishment of justice, the distribution of wealth, and the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties.

In the absence of the appropriate numbers, strength, wealth, knowledge, and so on, there is no obligation to appoint an imam. In periods in which there is no imam to lead the Ibāḍī community, their doctrine permits them either to have recourse to dissimulation (*kitmān*) and to live peacefully among non-Ibāḍī Muslims, or to seek martyrdom through

⁵¹ For early Khārijī and Mu'tazilī views on the imamate, see Crone, *God's Rule*, 54–69.

self-sacrifice (*shirāʿ*) in a rebellion against the state.⁵² Thus, Ibāḍī doctrine provides at least three options for its adherents: they can seek the appointment of an imam, live in dissimulation, or seek martyrdom independently. Al-Warjalānī argues that all three of these options are acceptable and legitimate. The Ibāḍī community loses legitimacy only when its imam or members no longer abide by God's law or when it is able to appoint an imam but does not do so.

The Ibāḍīs were the most egalitarian school in their theory of the imamate. The imam did not have to be the most knowledgeable person in the community; he did not have to be a Qurashī or even an Arab. Some Ibāḍīs argued that if the community could collectively govern its affairs without an imam, the office was altogether dispensable. Further, imams were not above the law. They were to be held accountable for their actions. If the community found the elected imam to be irreligious or unsuited to the office, it could exercise the right to remove him. By contrast, Sunnīs developed a political theory that advocated obedience to rulers, whether righteous or not, while Shīʿīs refused to treat the figure of the imam as a mere political ruler. For them, the imam, who is divinely designated and stands as God's living proof on earth, must be the most knowledgeable and virtuous Muslim of his time; no one else has the religious legitimacy to be ruler of the Muslim community.

al-Dāʿī ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd (d. 612/1215)

Ibn al-Walīd led the Mustaʿlī Ṭayyibī branch of the Ismāʿīlī community for several years as its most senior member, the director of the mission (*al-dāʿī al-muṭlaq*). The Mustaʿlī Ṭayyibīs believed that the twenty-first imam, al-Ṭayyib (b. 524/1130), entered physical concealment soon after his birth; his father, the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh (r. 495–524/1101–1130), designated him as his successor, writing to announce this to his trusted representative in Yemen, the Ṣulayḥid queen al-Ḥurra al-Malika. Āmir also instructed her to appoint the *dāʿī* who would guide the faithful during the period of the imam's concealment. The faithful believed that the director of the mission led the community with the support (*taʿyīd*) of the ʿAlid imams who continued to live and

⁵² Ibāḍīs were called *shurāt*, meaning those who engage in militant activism (*shirāʿ*) to overthrow the oppressive ruling establishment. On the concept of *shirāʿ*, see Adam R. Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibāḍī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

die in concealment (*satr*). Until the reappearance of the imams, the faithful had a duty to pledge allegiance to the director (*dā'ī*) and to adhere to his authority. Musta'ī Tāyibīs believed the imam of each era to be a descendant of al-Ṭāyib. In addition, this imam “could be reached only through his representative, the *dā'ī muṭlaq*.”⁵³ Each director was believed to be appointed to the position by means of designation (*naṣṣ*). Ibn al-Walīd was from a well-known family whose members dominated this leadership position in Yemen for many centuries.

Ibn al-Walīd was a prolific writer who produced several works on philosophy, theology, poetry, and esoteric interpretations (*ta'wīl*) of the Quran.⁵⁴ He is well known for his response to al-Ghazālī's *Infamies of the Esotericists* (*Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya*), a refutation of Ismā'īlī views on the imamate. For this anthology, we selected his elucidation of theology in his book *The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points* (*Tāj al-'aḳā'id wa-ma'dīn al-fawā'id*). Wladimir Ivanow published a brief summary of *The Crown* in 1936.⁵⁵ Therein, Ibn al-Walīd briefly explains central theological tenets (monotheism, prophethood, the hereafter, etc.) according to the Musta'ī Tāyibī tradition. The doctrines he supports in his text on the imamate largely correspond with those that appear in Twelver Shī'ī literature. He argues against the right of members of the community to choose their imams and endorses the need for their appointment by means of divine designation. He believes in the perpetual necessity of the office and asserts that the nonexistence of a divinely designated imam is impossible; the imam is God's living proof (*ḥujja*). Whereas Imāmīs such as al-Ṭūsī argued that God's proof was key to the appropriate preservation and application of Islamic law, the Ismā'īlīs maintained that God's proof played an essential role in humans' acquisition of any knowledge relating to God or matters pertaining to religion that God desired humanity to know. Although this Ismā'īlī view appears to correspond to the import of some Twelver hadiths, according to Twelver theologians like al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, the human intellect (*'aql*) suffices for the acquisition of knowledge regarding doctrinal matters; the imam is necessary, however, for the understanding and implementation of the revealed law.

⁵³ See *EB*, s.v. “Ibn al-Walīd, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī” (Daniel De Smet).

⁵⁴ On Ibn al-Walīd, see *EB*, s.v. “'Alī b. al-Walīd” (Ismail K. Poonawala).

⁵⁵ Wladimir Ivanow, *A Creed of the Fatimids* (Bombay: Qayyimah Press, 1936).

Ibn al-Walīd unequivocally denies the possibility that God's living proof could disappear into occultation to the point that no one could contact him. It appears that he wished to distinguish the Musta'li Tayyibī belief in the imam's concealment from Twelver beliefs about the occultation. Al-Ṭūsī maintains that the imam's enemies can coerce his occultation, whereas Ibn al-Walīd rejects such a possibility. Twelvers rely on the concept of divine assistance (*lutf*) to maintain that the imposition of moral obligations (*taklīf*) on humans continues in such cases, since the imam can still intervene in human affairs when required. By contrast, Ibn al-Walīd states that if God's proof became completely inaccessible, there would be no way for humanity to learn the truths that God's proof possesses. If necessity forces the proof to conceal himself from his enemies, he must remain accessible to the faithful or at least to the elite among them. Otherwise, there would be no point in claiming that his existence or his guidance was necessary.

Debating the Need for Divine Guidance

Zaydī, Twelver, and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs disagreed with one another about the extent to which humans needed divine intervention to draw them closer to God. We consider each position in accordance with their increasingly maximalist expectations.

The Zaydī author in this anthology, al-Nāṭiq bi-'l-Ḥaqq al-Hārūnī, argues that God does not need to equip humans with anything beyond their intellects for them to fulfill their moral obligations. Even in the absence of prophets or revelation there are rationally apparent moral obligations (*al-takālīf al-'aqliyya*) that humans should be able to deduce when they investigate these matters. God may provide someone with some stimulus (*khāṭir*) that prompts him or her to contemplate the possible existence of a creator and one's potential duties to such a creator. Prompting from God would not necessarily entail any instruction; it might appeal to pathos by leading people to fear the hereafter or the possibility of a future punishment. Al-Hārūnī argues that anything can serve as a prompt, and such prompts suffice as guidance. God would not need to send an imam for this purpose. The Zaydīs agreed with the Mu'tazilīs on this point.

The Mu'tazilīs theorized that humans have always had the ability to discover rationally apparent duties and metaphysical truths, such as God's existence, through careful examination. Zaydī and Twelver Shī'īs agreed that the intellect and careful examination sufficed for knowledge

(*ma'rifā*) of what was essential for salvation. Since God endowed humans with intellects, careful use of this intellect can lead one to knowledge of God's existence and ethical norms such as the repugnance of lying, theft, and murder. However, humans may be neglectful of their duties to God or too inattentive to engage in careful examination. Their families and daily lives divert their attention away from religion and the contemplation of ethical truths. The direct reminders and sermons of a preacher (*dā'ī*), for example, might lead listeners to consider such matters more carefully. According to Mu'tazilis and Zaydis, for the inattentive, some prompting to engage in careful examination was a sufficient means of guidance from God.

Twelver Shī'is argued that any type of prompt could be a sufficient means of guidance for some people and not others. Some individuals who engaged in moral and metaphysical inquiries needed assistance in correctly framing the evidence (*tartīb al-adilla*) before them. Although prompts, direct reminders, and the framing of evidence were secondary to careful investigation, al-Mufīd acknowledged that they were necessary for some individuals. The framing of evidence required an alerting agent (*munabbih*), a prophet or an imam, to carry out this task. This agent would teach people to understand evidence and to reason better. With such aid, one might continue to engage in careful investigation and to reach the correct conclusions.

For al-Murtaḍā, God provided humanity with imams because they carried out a social function that constituted a type of divine assistance (*lutf*). The imam aided society, one way or another, by drawing people closer to obedience to God. The imam also played a key role in the application and preservation of revealed law and scripture. Twelver Shī'is like al-Murtaḍā came to agree with the Mu'tazilis that humans were capable of deducing their rationally apparent moral obligations by means of careful examination alone. For al-Murtaḍā, imams assisted their societies by using their authority to restrain the proliferation of oppression, which gave people a greater ability to consider rationally apparent duties and opportunities for careful examination. By contrast, al-Mufīd recognized that an agent may sometimes be necessary to help with the process of examination. In such cases, individuals would still be tasked with deducing the existence of God, and the agent is not understood as providing them with unique or compelling proofs.

The Nizāri Ismā'īlis considered rational examination, prompts, direct reminders, and assistance in the framing of evidence all to be insufficient

forms of guidance. Instead, they upheld *ta'lim*, a concept in which God's agents provided the faithful with direct instruction. Such instruction was the only guarantee of knowing the truth and discovering sound proofs regarding God. The doctrine of direct instruction (*ta'lim*) distinguished the Nizāris of the classical period from the Twelvers and all other Muslims. Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), the founder of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī mission and state in Iran, is credited with expounding the doctrine, which emphasized the epistemic necessity of imams for the acquisition of any certain knowledge of God and His attributes. Humans must seek out the imam of their time to receive instruction on these topics. In this view, the careful examination of fundamental religious questions (*ma'ārif 'aqliyya*) with one's intellect was insufficient. The intellect's ability to know God and correctly understand God's attributes by means of inference (*istidlāl*) from rational proofs was imperfect. Without guidance from imams, people would be forced to rely on such imperfect reasoning, which would ultimately lead them astray.

Ibn al-Walīd refers to the imam as the *mu'allim*, the one who provides direct instruction. The imam is the source of knowledge for matters pertaining to God, religion, and the revealed law. According to Imāmīs, the imam's perfect knowledge of the revealed law makes him a representative and living proof (*hujja*) of God. This view of the imam as a living proof was reformulated and expanded in the Nizārī theory of direct instruction (*ta'lim*). For the Musta'li Tayyibī community, even during periods of concealment, the imams still provide direct instruction to the director of the mission (*al-dā'i al-muṭlaq*) by means of spiritual support and subtle inspiration (*ta'yīd*). Ibn al-Walīd's framing of the necessity of imams due to their role as instructors thus draws on a key Imāmī-Ismā'īlī doctrine.

The role of prophets and imams in knowing rationally apparent moral obligations (*takālif 'aqliyya*) was clearly contested among theologians. By contrast, all classical schools of theology agreed that prophets, as agents of revelation, were charged with teaching humanity those obligations that were particular to the revealed law (*takālif shar'iyya*). For example, the proper method of worshipping God was subject to revelation and instruction from a prophet; one could not ascertain the correct way to perform such rituals through reason alone. According to Sunnīs, after God revealed His law to the Prophet Muḥammad, there was no need for further direct instruction from another prophet. The revealed law authorizes experts to rely on conjectural evidence (*adilla ḡanniyya*) to come up with possible answers whenever ambiguities arise. By contrast,

Twelvers and Ismāʿīlīs considered such evidence invalid. Muslims were authorized to rely only on proofs that engendered certainty (*adilla qatʿiyya*) and were infallible; otherwise, the revealed law would be subject to human error. Ibn al-Walīd and other Ismāʿīlīs opposed the idea that humans possess the authority to use conjecture in matters falling under the purview of the revealed law or theology. They considered the human intellect incapable of reaching any truths pertaining to religion without guidance from a prophet or imam.

The Significance of the Caliphate

The last rulers to style themselves as caliphs were the Ottomans. In 1922, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) moved to separate the Ottoman sultanate from the caliphate and dissolved the former. In 1924, he abolished the caliphate before any candidate outside of Turkey was able to amass enough political support to lay claim to the office. Some leading scholars called for the reestablishment of the caliphate, while the Egyptian jurist and author ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq (d. 1966) infamously argued against the necessity of the office altogether.⁵⁶ In the decades that followed, the notion of the caliphate remained attractive to many Islamists and other Muslims. In 2014, the terrorist group in Iraq that refers to itself as the Islamic State laid claim to the caliphate. In an era in which radical militias have gained increased visibility and used religious identities as a pretext to engage in insurgent violence, we hope that this work sheds light on core differences between Sunnis and Shīʿīs on the subject of religio-political authority.

In recent years, the Internet has facilitated the mass proliferation of extremist content that identifies and exaggerates the significance of historic fault lines between Sunnis and Shīʿīs. Extremists promoting sectarianism between Muslims have begun to influence politics in the Middle East. In many Muslim-majority countries, state officials, preachers, and militia-men drum up opposition to “the other” by citing sectarian arguments that appear in extremist literature. Understanding the basis of the caliphate in classical Islamic thought may clarify the claims upon which such arguments are built.

⁵⁶ See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 52–68.

This anthology presents in English translation a range of competing views on political authority put forward by Muslim theologians. By including texts composed by some of the most authoritative thinkers from each of Islam's major theological schools, we aim to provide readers with a comprehensive guide to discussions pertaining to the imamate during the classical period. All of the writers discuss the necessity of political authority, its objectives, and the qualities of a legitimate ruler. In addition to presenting their own sect's doctrines on these issues, the authors were also well informed regarding the views of their counterparts.

Classical theologians from at least six major schools – (Ash'arī) Sunnīs, Mu'tazilīs, Ibādīs, as well as Twelver, Zaydī, and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs – wrote on the imamate. All but one of these schools still have adherents today. The one exception, Mu'tazilism, was one of the earliest theological schools in the Islamic tradition. It had a wide influence on later Islamic theology, a fact that becomes obvious in this comparative work. Later schools frequently reproduced or attempted to refute Mu'tazilī arguments. The school's inclusion here despite its extinction thus greatly enriches our survey of classical Islamic political thought.

Each author in this anthology provides a brief but comprehensive, cogent, and well-organized explanation of his school's doctrines. Texts 1 and 2 are dedicated to Sunnism, by far the largest branch of the Muslim community in terms of adherents. These texts feature two prominent Ash'arī thinkers of Nishapur, Ibn Fūrak and al-Juwaynī. Ibn Fūrak represents the traditional idealism of the formative period, whereas al-Juwaynī is a realist in his expectations of a ruler.

The Zaydī and Imāmī texts, texts 3 and 4, respectively, were both written during the reign of the Buyids in cosmopolitan cities where the authors encountered the views of their counterparts directly. These two Shī'ī texts represent a historical moment when Shī'ī writers could discuss their ideas openly and enjoyed state patronage.

The author of Text 3, al-Nāṭiq bi-'l-Ḥaqq al-Hārūnī, was an influential Zaydī who studied with the leading Mu'tazilī of his day. His text, *The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate*, used a dialectical Mu'tazilī framework that greatly influenced subsequent Zaydī thought. Before that work, Zaydīs, like Imāmīs, had relied predominantly on hadith as the basis of their expositions on the imamate.

Al-Ṭūsī, the author of Text 4, and his teachers al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā reflect a turning point in Imāmī intellectual history. His dialectical Mu'tazilī approach was influential among subsequent Twelver

scholars. His conceptualization of the Shī'ī imamate responded directly and meticulously to the theories of Mu'tazilīs, Zaydīs, and early Ash'arīs. For Twelver Shī'īs of the classical period, the imamate had effectively ceased to embody a theory about political power and instead encapsulated a theory about the nature of religion and God's perpetual guidance. With the occultation of the twelfth imam, the imamate became an ideal that existed separately from the community's present ruler. As Shī'ī empires emerged over the centuries, Twelver Shī'īs developed various theories that considered the ways in which the faithful should obey rulers. Jurists pragmatically argued such positions while maintaining belief in the eventual messianic return of the imam, who was the real head of the community.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī, the Mu'tazilī author of Text 5, offers a heresiographical summary of competing conceptions of the imamate. His narrative includes the doctrines of early Muslim groups that subsequently became extinct. He discusses not only the views of his earliest predecessors but also the opinions of later Mu'tazilīs. As a representative of the school of Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī in Kh'arazm, he can also be described as a Sunnī in his endorsement of the legitimacy of the first four caliphs.

Text 6 is a representative of the literary heritage of North Africa and one of the schools least discussed in academia, the Ibāḍīs. Early Ibāḍī texts that have been published thus far seem to contain a number of errors and omissions. Al-Warjalānī's *Concise Book of Doctrines* is distinguished by its availability in an unabridged, annotated, and critical edition. Al-Warjalānī provides clear evidence that Ibāḍī theologians were well aware of competing theories of the imamate in the sixth/twelfth century: he notes the views of other schools, such as the Zaydīs and the Mu'tazilīs, in his work. The text is significant also because it indicates that Ibāḍī doctrines had already stabilized by the time of its composition, rather than in later centuries.

Text 7 provides an Ismā'īlī theory of the imamate. In *The Crown*, Ibn al-Walīd exercised his authority as the director of the mission (*al-dā'ir al-muṭlaq*) to present the Ismā'īlī view of the imamate with clarity and detail.

The most important conclusion suggested by the material we present is that the imamate as conceived of by both the Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs was central to their conceptions of God and the universe. The wisdom of God and the nature of humans necessitated the existence of an

imamate in perpetuity. It was not the political office of the same name theorized by Sunnis.

In this volume, we include contributions of non-Sunnīs side by side with those of the Sunnī majority. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, academics relied heavily on the Sunnī intellectual tradition to understand Islamic history and thought. Earlier studies typically did not use the literature of a minority school's own adherents to explain its beliefs. Reliance on Sunnī heresiographical texts to describe the positions of other schools on the imamate has led to the publication of inaccurate information about these groups. In such sources, the Zaydīs and the Ibādīs were portrayed in ways that do not consider the schools' evolution over the centuries. There are still few academic experts on these schools, either in the Western world or elsewhere. In addition to the Ash'arī, Twelver, and Ismā'īlī sources, this volume attempts to meet the need for direct access in English to Mu'tazilī, Ibādī, and Zaydī views on legitimate leadership in the Muslim community.

The availability of published editions does not generally pose a problem in the case of Sunnī and Twelver Shī'ī texts, but many of the works produced by members of other schools from the second/eighth to the seventh/thirteenth century are not readily available. Many remain unpublished and scattered across the world in private libraries and national archives. For this publication, we selected those texts that, in our view, best represented the political theories associated with the various schools. Although the texts chosen have already been published, most have not seen critical editions and have received little scholarly attention. The Zaydīs still exist in Yemen, but few studies have attempted to explain their views and history. The Ibādīs of North Africa and Oman have suffered the same fate. Through the efforts of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, many works on the imamate from the early Fatimid period have now been edited and translated in critical editions.⁵⁷ We selected a work from the Musta'li Ṭayyibī branch of Ismā'īlism as a supplement to those earlier works.

We relied on the best available editions of the texts that appear in each chapter. The Arabic edition of al-Juwaynī's *Succor of Nations* features

⁵⁷ See, for example, Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī [attr.], *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West*, ed. and tr. Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021); Imām al-Manṣūr [attr.], *The Shi'ī Imamate: A Fatimid Interpretation*, ed. and tr. Sami Makarem (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

numbered paragraphs, which our translation has preserved.⁵⁸ In cases of doubts about the accuracy of the transmitted text, we consulted manuscript copies. In several cases, we corrected errors found in the published edition of the *Kitāb al-Di'āma* (published as *Kitāb al-Zaydiyya* and misattributed to al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād) by consulting the manuscript that was used by the editor, Nāḥi Ḥasan.⁵⁹ We have added headings to the texts to reflect key transitions in the authors' arguments.

⁵⁸ In order of appearance: Ibn al-Malāhimī, *Kitāb al-Fā'iqa fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy and Institute of Islamic Studies/ Free University of Berlin, 2007); Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987); Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Ghiyāth al-umam fī iltiyāth al-ẓulam*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīm Maḥmūd al-Dīb (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011); Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Shāfi*, ed. Ḥusayn Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1965); Abū Ṭālib Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn al-Hārūnī, *Kitāb al-Di'āma* [incorrectly published as al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād, *Kitāb al-Zaydiyya*], ed. Nāḥi Ḥasan (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyya, 1986); 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd, *Tāj al-'aqa'id wa-ma'dīn al-fawā'id*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmir (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Izz al-Dīn, 1982); al-Warjalānī, *al-Mūjaz*.

⁵⁹ MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1567, *'ilm al-kalām*.

Glossary of Key Terms

- ‘adālat al-ṣaḥāba*: the uprightness of the Companions
adilla qaṭ‘iyya (sing. *al-dalīl al-qaṭ‘ī*): conclusive proofs that engender certainty
adilla ḥaṣṣiyya (sing. *al-dalīl al-ḥaṣṣī*): conjectural proofs
aḥḍal: superior
āḥād: isolated reports
ahl al-bayt: members of the Prophet’s household and his progeny through his daughter Fāṭima and his son-in-law the first imam, ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib
ahl al-ḥadīth: partisans of hadith
ahl al-ḥall wa-’l-‘aql: elite members of the community charged with selecting the next leader
ahl al-sunna: adherents to the prophetic tradition and communal consensus (i.e., Sunnism)
ākhira: hereafter
Anṣār: “Helpers,” converts to Islam from the city of Medina
‘aql: contract, accession; the act or process by which someone rises to a position of honor or power
‘aql: intelligence, reason
aqrab ilā ’l-ṭā‘a: closer to obedience
asās: the foundation
aṣḥāb al-ra’y: proponents of personal opinion
aṣḥaḥ: most qualified, the optimum

bāṭin: the esoteric, inner dimension of things
bay‘a: pledge of allegiance

caliph (*khalīfā*): the highest political authority, head of the Muslim community

al-dāʿī al-muṭlaq: director of the mission (Ṭayyibī Ismāʿīlism)

al-dalīl al-ẓannī: conjectural proof

ḍarūrī: necessary

daʿwa: a mission; campaign (Zaydism)

dīn: religion

emir (*amīr*): prince, ruler; military commander; person of authority, both civil and military

faḍāʾil (sing. *faḍīla*): merits

fasād: corruption

fāsiq: transgressor; grave sinner; individual ineligible to give testimony in court

fī sabīl Allāh: in the path of God

fiṣq: transgression; grave sin

furūʿ (sing. *farʿ*): subsidiaries; often refers to legal aspects of religious practice

ghayba: refers to the occultation of the twelfth imam, al-Mahdī, who will reappear and establish justice on earth according to Twelver Shīʿis

hadith (*ḥadīth*): extant reports of the Prophet's words and deeds

ḥadīth al-ghadīr: On his return to Medina from his final pilgrimage, the Prophet reportedly stopped at a pool (*ghadīr al-kumm*) and announced that 'Alī was the master of the believers.

ḥudūd (sing. *ḥadd*): fixed, nondiscretionary penalties for certain offenses; limits set by God

ḥujja: compelling proof

ḥujjat Allāh: proof of God

ijmāʿ: consensus

ijtihād: independent reasoning; often refers to a jurist's legal reasoning or independent judgment

ikhtiyār: choice, selection; the process of selecting the leader of the Muslim community

ʿilla: the cause

‘ilm: knowledge, expertise

‘ilm al-kalām: dialectical theology

al-‘ilm al-yaqīn: certainty

imam (*imām*): leader, guide; in Shī‘ism it is additionally used to refer to those leaders who were divinely designated

imāma: imamate

irth: inheritance

‘isma: infallibility, inerrancy; Shī‘is regard both prophets and divinely designated imams as inerrant

istidlāl: inference

istitār: concealment

kāfir: unbeliever

khafī: subtle and multivalent

khalīfat Allāh: God’s deputy or caliph

khāṭir: stimulus

kitmān: dissimulation

kufr: unbelief

lutf: divine assistance (favor, grace) that facilitates the fulfillment of one’s religious obligations

madhhab: school; sect

ma‘mūn al-bāṭin: pristine inner state and character

manṣūṣ: designee

al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn: middle position between faith and unbelief (in Mu‘tazilism)

ma‘rifa: knowledge of what is essential for salvation

mashhūr: well-known, prevalent

maṣlaḥa: welfare of humans

ma‘ṣūm: infallible, inerrant

mufīṭ: jurisconsult

Muhājirūn: “migrants,” early Meccan converts to Islam who migrated to Medina

mujtahid: legal expert

mukallaf: a Muslim adult of sound mind required to fulfill religious obligations; one subject to the revealed law

muktasab: acquired, i.e., *‘ilm muktasab* is acquired knowledge as opposed to necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*)

mu`min: the person of faith

munabbih: an alerting agent

mursal: an emissary

mutakallimūn (sing. *mutakallim*): dialectical theologians

mutawātir: widely transmitted reports

naṣṣ: divine designation; an explicit text found in the Quran or stated by the Prophet

nāṭiq: speaking agent of God (a central concept in Ismā`īlism)

naẓar: careful examination, rational inquiry

al-qabā`ih (sing. *qabīh*): objectionable deeds

qisās: the law of retribution

qiyās: analogical reasoning

qudra: capability

rafḍ: the rejection of all non-`Alid authorities

rāfiḍa: proponents of *rafḍ*, often used as a derogatory label applied to Shī`is

rasūl: scripture-bearing prophet

ra`y: personal opinion

ri`āsa: leadership

ṣaḥāba: the Prophet's Companions

ṣaḥīḥ: authentic, i.e., a hadith with a reliable chain of transmission

sam`: revelation, revelatory texts (the Quran and hadith)

satr: concealment

shar`: revelation; revealed religion; often referring to the law revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad

sharī`a*: God's revealed law; Islamic law; see also *shar`

shar`iyyāt: religious matters

*shī`a*: (lit.) partisans; refers to the partisans of `Alī and the imams succeeding him

shirā`: self-sacrifice

shūrā: consultation; council

sulṭān: king, sovereign

sunna: prophetic practice

tafḍīl: the ranking of individuals on the basis of merit

taḥkīm: arbitration

takālīf ‘*aqlīyya*: rationally apparent obligations

takālīf shar‘īyya: obligations of revealed law

taklīf: obligations imposed by God; moral/legal obligations; the obligation to fulfill one’s religious duties. An individual with *taklīf* is described as *mukallaf*, i.e., one charged with the fulfillment of legal and moral obligations. A person is regarded as a *mukallaf* if she/he is a Muslim adult of sound mind.

taklīf mā lā yuṭāq: the prescription of duties beyond one’s capacity

tamkīn: full capacity

taqīyya: dissimulation

taqlīd: deference to the authority of another

tartīb al-adilla: the organization and interpretation of evidence

tawātur: widespread dissemination

ta‘wīl: interpretation, often referring to nonliteral interpretations

ta‘yīd: support

ta‘zīr: discretionary penalty

umarā’ (pl.): see emir

uṣūl al-dīn: fundamentals of religion (e.g., God’s Oneness)

uṣūl al-fiqh: jurisprudence

walā’: sharing allegiance

waṣī: legatee

wizārat al-taḥwīḍ: delegated vizierate

yawm al-saqīfa: Day of the Portico, which occurred after the death of the Prophet when a small number of Companions selected Abū Bakr to lead the community

yawm al-shūrā: Day of the Electoral Council, which occurred after the death of ‘Umar. Prior to his death, ‘Umar created a council consisting of six candidates and ordered them to choose someone from among themselves to lead the community. Eventually, ‘Uthmān was appointed as ‘Umar’s successor.

ẓāhir: apparent

zakāt: alms

ẓannī: speculative, conjectural

ẓulm: oppression, injustice

Selected Theological Writings

I A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī

by
Ibn Fūrak

Introduction to the Text

Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015) is widely acknowledged as a pivotal figure in the development of the doctrines of the Sunnī Ash'arī school. Born in Isfahan, he studied with two prominent disciples of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and was active in the city of Nishapur in Iran as a teacher of theology, law, and hadith. The discussion below is a section from one of his few extant works, *A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*. Ibn Fūrak provides a brief overview of traditional Sunnī views on the imamate. Like al-Ash'arī, he interprets the history of succession after the Prophet Muḥammad in a way that is charitable to the Companions and downplays the conflicts among them. Early Sunnī theologians conceived of the imamate in theological terms that strictly adhered to precedence, while later jurists understood the office in pragmatic and legal terms. Ibn Fūrak writes about the imamate in ways representative of early theologians.

Chapter 35: An Elucidation of His Beliefs Regarding the Imamate and Other, Subsidiary Issues

Know that Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī believed that the imamate exists only by virtue of the revealed law.¹ It is only through scriptural texts that we know of its necessity. Al-Ash'arī held the same opinion about prophets and messengers. Prophethood is the foundation of the imamate, yet even the necessity of prophethood, he argued, could not be established by reason. Reason may admit the possibility of prophets and messengers, but it does not establish their logical necessity. The Almighty commands His servants to worship Him in various ways that He sees fit. They are His creation and property and under His power and dominion. It is the right of God to refrain from demanding such worship or to require it through the teachings of a prophet. Prophets exist as a result of divine wisdom, but if God had refrained from ever sending us prophets or legislating worship, this would be neither unwise, unjust, nor unlawful for the Almighty. Al-Ash'arī never claimed to know the reason why God commanded such worship. He did not claim [as the Mu'tazilīs did] that God desired to benefit mankind or to command that which was necessarily in mankind's interests.

It was his belief that the famous axiom “Never did an age pass without a prophet” was only an oral tradition. The axiom was not established through reason. Were God to leave a community without prophets, the actions of its people would not be subject to ethical or legal determinations or classifications. One could not call their deeds morally upright or repugnant, obedient or disobedient, legally compulsory or supererogatory. The rewards and punishments that usually follow such deeds would not apply to these people either. Accountability for actions is fully dependent on a person's hearing or learning about scriptural texts [*al-sam'*].² The moral expectations for and legal responsibilities of an adult in such a community [without a prophet] would parallel the expectations for children in our own community. Thus, since al-Ash'arī believed that the foundation [i.e., prophethood] was dispensable, surely its derivative [the imamate] was as well.

¹ For the Arabic source text, see Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad maqālāt*, 180–190.

² *Al-sam'* refers to revealed knowledge that was transmitted from a representative of God, such as a prophet, rather than reason. The term encompassed both the Quran and prophetic traditions.

In his opinion, consensus establishes the necessity of the imamate. He believed that revelation also supported his opinion regarding the *prima facie* non-liability of humans. Reason could not establish the legal necessity of any action or the liability of any adult who failed to perform it. In this regard, the Almighty says, “We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We sent an apostle [to them]” [Q. 17:15].

According to al-Ash‘arī, the obligation to consider miracles carefully is tied to the necessity of obeying the authority of prophets. The latter entails abiding by their judgments, commands, and prohibitions. It also includes affirming their promises of reward and punishment in the hereafter. If prophets are truthful in what they claim, then it is incumbent on all others to adhere to their teachings and commands. This obligation is not restricted to those who believe in a given prophet; it includes everyone. It is immaterial whether a person knows of this necessity, affirms the authority of a prophet, or considers the prophet’s claims reliable. This is because [divinely imposed] obligations may be fixed even when their intended recipients are unaware of them.

Al-Ash‘arī would argue that imams serve as successors to prophets and stand in their place in the following capacities:

- (1) discharging the duties of the law;
- (2) administering nondiscretionary penalties [*ḥudūd*];³
- (3) levying taxes;
- (4) safeguarding Islam’s centers and territories;⁴
- (5) giving aid to the oppressed;
- (6) preventing oppressors from engaging in unlawful activity.

The imam does all of this without promulgating new laws or altering the revealed law. Rather, he fulfills these responsibilities as the tradition dictates and as an equal member of the community; nothing more. He

³ The term *ḥudūd* (sing. *ḥadd*) refers to fixed, nondiscretionary penalties for specific offenses described in the Quran and hadith such as theft, illicit sexual relations, false accusations of illicit sexual relations, and banditry.

⁴ The author refers to *al-bayḍa* or that which others described as *bayḍat al-islām* (“Islam’s heartlands”). Like *dār al-islām* (“the abode of Islam”), the term referred to those territories under the jurisdiction of the head of the Muslim community who guaranteed the security of inhabitants and their right to practice Islam in accordance with the revealed law. While “the abode” theoretically included borders that periodically shifted as a consequence of war, classical jurists may have reserved *bayḍat al-islām* for Mecca, Medina, and other cities that became major Muslim centers.

protects people's rights according to the dictates of scripture, prophetic practice, the community's consensus, analogical reasoning, and any principles derived from these sources. The imam resembles Mu'ādh [b. Jabal], whom the Prophet sent to Yemen as his emissary:

"How shall you adjudicate?" asked the Prophet.

"By the Book of God," answered Mu'ādh.

"If you are unable to find a precedent?"

"Then by the practice of the Prophet."

"And if you are unable to find a precedent there?"

"Then I will strive to find a solution to the best of my ability."

The Prophet prayed [in approval], "Praise the Lord who made the emissary of His emissary suited for this mission."

According to al-Ash'arī, infallibility is a requisite of prophethood but not of the imamate. Prophets must be infallible because they are obliged to communicate with the unseen world and relay information from it, promulgate revealed law, provide answers that are impossible for others to know, and perform deeds that are impossible for others to carry out in his stead. Imams cannot be described as having these same duties.

Others in the community possess the same information as the imam regarding the laws that he puts into practice. We know this because he relies on the same set of sources as they do in searching for solutions. Thus, it suffices when the imam appears to be a person of just character. Nothing beyond this can be required of him for discharging his duties, as long as he is able to do so appropriately with justice and autonomy. Although one cannot ascertain the inner state of the imam or his secrets, certainty about his public deeds is enough. As long as he governs by the revealed law, observing its duties as prescribed by verses of scripture, well-known authorities in the community, and the tradition in general, his imamate remains legitimate. However, any deviation from this path causes the loss of his legitimacy and the need for a new imam. The community is responsible for assessing the conduct of its imams. The imam can only be held to the same standards as those that exist for other officeholders. His situation mirrors that of the deputies, judges, tax collectors, and other employees who assist him in governing. All of them are equally responsible for observing and enforcing the law.

According to al-Ash'arī, the candidate should be a distinguished scholar and someone noted for his intelligence and discernment. The candidate should also be revered for his religiosity and ranked among the

most pious members of the community. Finally, he should demonstrate political acumen, autonomy, and precision in his decisions and actions. Al-Ash‘arī believed that a candidate’s imamate could receive confirmation only if he was the most learned scholar of his age or considered the foremost in courage, righteousness, and political acumen. The imamate of a candidate of less merit could not be ratified in the presence of such a [superior] person. Al-Ash‘arī differed with several other scholars in our school, who allowed the imamate of individuals of lower caliber to be confirmed in such cases. Al-Ash‘arī argued that each person who governed after the Prophet obtained the imamate only once he had become the most qualified and distinguished member of the community. The imams are to be ranked in merit in the order of their succession.

According to al-Ash‘arī, the prophetic hadiths indicate that the imamate is restricted to a select group of people and a select group of Arabs to the exclusion of others. We are referring to the tribe of Quraysh. This is so because of the statement of the Prophet, “The imams will come from Quraysh,” with some recensions containing the addition “as long as they exist.” Reason does not justify any such tribal restriction. In his *Epistle [Risāla]*,⁵ al-Ash‘arī argues that rational evidence cannot establish the imamate as necessary in one era but not in others, nor can it justify the imamate’s restriction to one house to the exclusion of others. Scholars can reach these conclusions only by adhering to scriptural texts.

According to al-Ash‘arī, a prophet becomes an emissary [*mursal*] of God only when the Lord selects him for this task. One knows his mission to be genuine by the miracles that he performs. One can deduce the truth of those miracles by carefully considering the evidence. As for an imam, his imamate is ratified when those qualified to select such leaders confirm his authority with a contractual agreement. According to al-Ash‘arī, a prophet may confirm the imamate of a person by designating him directly and identifying him by name, lineage, and so on. The Prophet did this in his lifetime with his governors and tax collectors. The Prophet could also confirm someone’s imamate by discussing his qualities in general terms and charging the community with the duty of selecting the right candidate. The members of the community would be obligated to deduce the most appropriate person for the task through a methodical process of reasoning. Only by engaging in such a process can the community

⁵ Ibn Fūrak does not specify which *risāla* he has in mind.

identify the person whom the Prophet desired and described as possessing certain qualities.

The proper method for selecting candidates and investing them with authority can be ascertained in the same way that answers to legal queries are ascertained: by referring to scriptural proof texts and the independent reasoning [*ijtihād*] of expert jurists. In legal cases, one must rely on such reasoning in the absence of any clear precedent or proof text. Independent reasoning involves utilizing a foundational principle of the revealed legal tradition and deriving a ruling appropriate to the circumstances at hand.

According to al-Ash'arī, the duty of appointing an imam necessitates the independent reasoning of experts and resembles the collective obligation to understand Islamic jurisprudence or to bathe, bury, and hold funeral services for the dead. As long as some members of the community fulfill these duties, all others are freed from any further obligation. The responsibility of appointing a new imam upon the death of a previous one, or in other circumstances, falls into the same category. In these cases, a final decision requires experts capable of such reasoning. Al-Ash'arī would argue that such experts are necessary since they, too, are eligible to serve as imams in the candidate's place. When members of the electorate possess these qualities, their decision is lawful and legitimate. As a result, the imamate of their appointee is likewise legitimate.

According to al-Ash'arī, the number of individuals who participate in the electoral process is immaterial. There is neither a quorum nor a limit to the number of participants. When multiple people engage in the electoral process, all participants must possess the necessary qualifications. This is the only requirement. However, al-Ash'arī also believed that one elector could suffice. He appealed to the precedent of Abū Bakr, who appointed 'Umar and subsequently received collective approval for his decision. No one in the community criticized Abū Bakr or objected to his decision to select a successor and to formalize his appointment autonomously [without consulting the electorate].⁶

When someone charged with selecting the next caliph appoints a qualified candidate to the position, the latter's imamate is confirmed, and everyone must yield to his authority and obey his commands. The

⁶ It appears that Abū Bakr discussed his decision with other Companions only after he proclaimed 'Umar his successor. In contradiction to what Ibn Fūrak claims here, there is evidence that Ṭalḥa objected to Abū Bakr's decision. See Madelung, *Succession*, 55. Ibn Fūrak acknowledges elsewhere that there were indeed some initial objections to Abū Bakr's decision.

community must urge anyone who subsequently contests the authority of the new imam to repent. This includes anyone who accuses the new imam of some deficiency that would disqualify him from authority. If a dissenter refuses to repent and to cease his accusations, he should be prohibited and prevented from continuing.

One must consider carefully cases in which two factions confirm the authority of different candidates independently of one another. In such scenarios, the authority of the superior candidate must be universally confirmed. The other candidate would have to be described as less meritorious or deficient in one of the requisites of the imamate. What happens when neither candidate can be described as inferior to the other in merit, rank, or suitability for office? One must ascertain the date on which each candidate obtained his authority. The candidate whose authority was ratified first would then be universally confirmed. If the candidates received their authority simultaneously, or if one cannot determine the earlier date, the constituents must offer a new contract for the position to the candidate who will best serve the community. After this contract is ratified, the members of the community should defend their choice against anyone who contests it. The community should engage the contender in armed conflict until he is killed.

Al-Ash‘arī opined that the procedures outlined above, including the various requisites for a legitimate imam, all come from scriptural texts. Therefore, the imamate of an unqualified candidate cannot be ratified even if some members of the community offer him a contract for the position. Likewise, if an army defeats its opponents and pledges allegiance to someone who does not possess the necessary qualities to be an imam, this person’s imamate cannot be confirmed. A [true] imam cannot obtain authority through coercion or military might. Nonetheless, it is unlawful to rebel against such a tyrant. The faithful should secretly condemn the tyrant in their hearts while manifesting obedience in public. Any other course of action could potentially lead to civil unrest, tremendous turmoil, widespread corruption, and an outbreak of violence. Furthermore, averting tyranny through activism or military action is the responsibility of a righteous imam, who should be ready to lead in this capacity. The faithful should follow this righteous imam’s judgment and any course of action that he commands. According to al-Ash‘arī, the faithful may command what is right and forbid what is wrong only within these bounds.⁷

⁷ For the most comprehensive study on the commandment to pursue all that is right (*ma‘rūf*) and to prohibit all that is wrong (*munkar*), see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

He differed from the Khārijīs and the Muʿtazilīs, who argued that it is obligatory for every person with the capacity to rebel against a tyrant to take up arms and do so.

There can be only one imam [at a time]. Al-Ashʿarī argued that the Prophet's Companions and the consensus of the Muslim community support this principle. Were this not the case and a multiplicity of imams were possible, what would prevent their number from increasing *ad infinitum*? Everyone would desire to manage their own affairs and those of their household. Such an outcome would invalidate the very essence of the imamate. We have relied on scriptural texts to deduce this opinion. One cannot, however, refute the argument that a number of prophets and messengers may appear in the same period. Indeed, we have found examples in history of prophets and messengers appearing together.

According to al-Ashʿarī, the imamate is restricted to candidates from the tribe of Quraysh who possess the necessary qualifications for the office. It makes no difference if he is the closest person to the Prophet or the furthest from him in kinship ties, so long as the candidate is Qurashī. Al-Ashʿarī argued that the office of the imam is not inherited. Only qualified candidates can accede to the office, and it is the community that selects such people when needed. Despite the abovementioned requirement [of lineage], it is wrong to restrict the office further to one particular branch of Quraysh.⁸

According to al-Ashʿarī, it is incumbent on every Muslim to know the identity of the imam of the community. This is so because it is every Muslim's legal duty to obey the imam. Thus, when someone is legitimately invested with the authority of an imam, every legally responsible believer [*mukallaḥ*] must know this person, follow him, and believe in the legitimacy of his imamate.

Al-Ashʿarī believed that an imam has every right to appoint a successor and to invest him with authority by concluding a contract for the position

⁸ Ibn Fūrak may have had the Abbasids in mind when rejecting the claim that the office was inherited. A faction of the Abbasids claimed that the Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās was his closest legal heir and had the best claim to the caliphate. Despite rejecting such claims as erroneous, Sunnīs broadly accepted the Abbasids as legitimate, since they implemented Islamic laws, did not prohibit members of the community from freely practicing their religion, and also happened to possess Qurashī ancestry. Although Zaydis and Twelvers restricted the imamate to ʿAlī and the Prophet's progeny and described the office as a legacy left behind by prophets, they did not argue that it was subject to inheritance. Zaydis argued that ʿAlid imams distinguished themselves by inaugurating a revolutionary mission, while Imāmīs held that God or the Prophet appointed imams to their stations.

with him. When an imam does this, the community is bound by that contract. The constituents must obey the successor selected by the imam, and they have no right to consultation in the selection process. To justify this point, al-Ash‘arī appealed to the succession of ‘Umar and the precedent of Abū Bakr, in particular. He argued that the Companions collectively approved of Abū Bakr’s choice. Although a number of them initially voiced some objections, they, too, eventually endorsed the decision.

According to al-Ash‘arī, dissimulation [*taqiyya*] is lawful for an imam when he does not have the numbers or means to repel his adversaries and they triumph over him. Even in such cases, an imam retains his authority. Dissimulation does not terminate his imamate.

In regard to [debates about] the most virtuous Companion of the Prophet, al-Ash‘arī believed that Abū Bakr possessed the most merit. After the Prophet, no one in the community was superior to Abū Bakr, and he was the rightful imam. As Muḥammad’s direct successor, only Abū Bakr can truly be called “the Successor of the Messenger of God” [*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*]. He is also widely known by his epithet “he who affirms the truth” [*al-Ṣiddīq*]. Al-Ash‘arī appealed to two proofs to confirm the legitimacy of Abū Bakr’s succession. First, he argued that the Prophet signaled his approval of Abū Bakr’s imamate. Second, the individuals who were charged with selecting the next leader ratified his imamate with a contract.

Al-Ash‘arī rejected the claim that the Prophet had officially appointed Abū Bakr as his successor. Had Abū Bakr received such a designation [*naṣṣ*], it would have been unlawful for him to offer the office to anyone else. Yet he [initially] did just that: he asked ‘Umar and Abū ‘Ubayda [al-Jarrāh] to extend their hands, so that he could pledge his allegiance to one of them.

According to al-Ash‘arī, no Companion surpassed Abū Bakr in knowledge, courage, or asceticism. He was the best of them in independently governing the affairs of the community and the most prudent. He was a paragon of justice every day of his life. He was steadfast in his adherence to justice and never deviated from it. One cannot cite a single instance in which he contradicted scripture or the prophetic example. All of his actions represented truth and justice, from the beginning until the very end. This includes his decision to bar Faṭīma [the Prophet’s daughter] from the lands of Fadak,⁹ in particular, and from the inheritance of the Prophet, in general. Indeed, the hadith that Abū Bakr narrated and implemented

⁹ On Fadak, see *EF*, s.v. “Fadak” (L. Veccia Vaglieri).

on the matter is authentic: “All that prophets leave behind belongs to the greater public and is not inherited.” More than ten other Companions backed him in this affair, all of them claiming to have heard the same statement from the Prophet. The same can be said of his other legal rulings and actions as imam. He was absolute and unwavering in his adherence to scripture and the prophetic example until the end of his days.

Al-Ash‘arī believed that the most virtuous Companion of the Prophet after Abū Bakr was ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. In the same way that he venerated Abū Bakr, he praised ‘Umar’s life and conduct and mentioned his merits. ‘Umar’s imamate was confirmed [as legitimate] by Abū Bakr, who designated him as his successor.

Al-Ash‘arī opined that ‘Uthmān was the most virtuous Companion after ‘Umar. The members of the electoral council, who selected him and pledged allegiance to him, ratified his imamate [as legitimate]. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf, in particular, played an important role in this process. The council members agreed to delegate their authority to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and allow him to appoint the next imam. When he appointed ‘Uthmān, all of them endorsed his decision; no one objected.

Al-Ash‘arī believed that ‘Uthmān was steadfast and faultless in serving as a guide and never deviated from this path. He adhered to scripture and considered the Prophet his role model. He followed the example of the Prophet and acted in accordance with the conduct of “the two elders” [*al-shaykhaḥayn*, i.e., Abū Bakr and ‘Umar]. His killing was wrongful; his murderers were grave sinners for killing him and unbelievers if they believed it was legal. In each case in which ‘Uthmān was accused of impropriety, the claims were nothing more than false accusations. His accusers were always mistaken, and he was completely innocent of all charges made against him.

Al-Ash‘arī would argue that ‘Alī neither took part in ‘Uthmān’s murder, nor aided those who did, nor ever considered participating in such a deed.¹⁰ The killers of ‘Uthmān were lowly riffraff. None of the Prophet’s most notable Companions was pleased with what happened. None of them had wavered in obeying ‘Uthmān and complying with his orders. ‘Uthmān offered an independent opinion [*ijtihād*] when he refrained from the use of violence in dealing with his antagonists. In doing this, he made the right decision. For this reason, the Companions followed suit

¹⁰ Here, Ibn Fūrak wants to refute early ‘Uthmānī and Umayyad claims about ‘Alī and his entourage either carrying out the assassination or knowing the identity of the assassins.

and adhered to his opinion. ‘Uthmān’s assassin was never identified. He was killed during a dangerous period of civil strife and rabble-rousing.

Al-Ash‘arī believed that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was the most virtuous Companion after ‘Uthmān. ‘Alī’s imamate can be considered legitimate on the basis of two proofs: first, the covenant he received from the respected members of the community charged with choosing the next leader, and second, the outcome of the aforementioned council that convened after the death of ‘Umar. When the Companions assembled to discuss the matter of succession after ‘Umar’s death, they selected six individuals from among themselves as candidates for the position. Three leaders emerged from among the six, and the community followed in recognizing the preeminence of these three. With the deaths of both ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and ‘Uthmān, only ‘Alī remained of the three. Upon his succession, ‘Alī was the only surviving member of the electoral council to have previously received a nomination. Thus, the decision to appoint ‘Alī as imam was based on what unfolded during the previous council as well as the community’s approval of him after the death of ‘Uthmān.

Al-Ash‘arī opined that none of these four caliphs obtained his authority as a result of consensus or official designation by the Prophet. Each obtained the imamate because those charged with selecting the next leader offered and concluded a contractual agreement for the position with him. Any consensus that emerged thereafter served only to confirm the imam’s appointment. One cannot appeal to consensus to establish a person’s right to the imamate.

According to al-Ash‘arī, a pledge of allegiance to an imam is not defined by the act of formally placing one’s hand in his palm. Rather, someone should approve of the pledge in his heart and deem it appropriate when learning of its occurrence.¹¹ This was certainly the case for the Companions who pledged allegiance to the first three caliphs, but it did not occur in the case of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.¹² Al-Ash‘arī held in high regard ‘Alī’s rulings and conduct as caliph in the [same] way that he revered

¹¹ Ibn Fūrak is arguing that a person pledges allegiance to an imam by genuinely approving of his authority when he hears of his accession. No formal ritual or physical act is required.

¹² Ibn Fūrak is referring to two notable Companions, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, who were among the first to put their hands in ‘Alī’s in a show of allegiance, but famously claimed that they did not actually approve of him. Ibn Fūrak may also be referring to reports about certain Companions who refrained from pledging allegiance to ‘Alī. They promised to pledge allegiance to the caliph once all Muslims accepted him and civil strife had subsided.

‘Alī’s predecessors. ‘Alī was just in his words and his actions throughout his life. Like his predecessors, ‘Alī was steadfast in his commitment to observing the precepts of scripture and prophetic practice. He discharged his duties with justice and equanimity. He never violated any oaths to the Prophet regarding the community’s affairs. Nor did ‘Alī ever fail to abide by any instructions he may have received from the Prophet. He never chose to appease an enemy of God, nor did he fear or pardon such enemies. He was honest and sincere. His inner state never contradicted his conduct in public. Such purity is evident in Muḥammad and in the rightly guided caliphs who succeeded him. ‘Alī refrained from claiming a right to authority during the reigns of his predecessors because he had no right to and he knew this to be true. When authority became his right, he proclaimed his right openly. He struggled and fought to the best of his ability and did not cease to do so until he died on a path that was guided and right.

Al-Ash‘arī opined that all those who rebelled against ‘Alī and rejected his imamate committed an error in doing so. They had no right to spurn his imamate or to revolt against him. According to al-Ash‘arī, ‘Ā’isha wished to mediate between the two factions [that fought each other at the Battle of the Camel] and joined the revolt only to pursue peace and reconciliation. Some had hoped that her mediation would reduce tensions and put an end to the civil unrest. She intended neither war with ‘Alī nor repudiation of his rule. There are no authentic reports of her rejection of his imamate, nor authentic reports from the Prophet about her superiority over ‘Alī. Some fellow Ash‘arīs have argued to the contrary and appealed to evidence that is not compelling – namely, that she dwells in heaven with the Prophet. However, her station in heaven does not establish her superiority over ‘Alī. The fact that she is with the Prophet at his station in heaven is not an indication of any reward she obtained or rank she achieved independently. Rather, she occupies that space because of Muḥammad. One should also not conclude from this evidence that she is superior to her father, even if he occupies a station below hers. The same can be said about Fāṭima. The fact that she dwells in heaven with ‘Alī is not evidence of their equal merit. Likewise, ‘Ā’isha cannot be considered equal to the Prophet in merit just because they share the same station in heaven.

Al-Ash‘arī believed that ‘Alī was correct in agreeing to arbitration and using Abū Mūsā ‘l-Ash‘arī as his agent. ‘Alī adopted this course of action on the basis of independent reasoning and in pursuit of an end to the

strife. Those who disputed with him regarding this decision were mistaken. Arbitration can be viewed as a method of mediation between two factions and as an alternative way of rehabilitating a rebel and preventing him from further rebellion.

As for Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, it is true that they revolted against ‘Alī. They did so on the basis of their independent reasoning [*ijtihād*] and their understanding of religion [*ta‘wīl*]. They believed that what they were doing was right, but this was a mistake on their part. In the end, they regretted their actions and abandoned their cause. Al-Ash‘arī believed that they repented of their deeds and died in a state of repentance. He argued the same in regard to Mu‘āwīya. Mu‘āwīya went to war with ‘Alī on the basis of independent reasoning. On the one hand, what he did was wrong, baseless, immoral, and unjust since it entailed rebellion against a just imam. On the other hand, since Mu‘āwīya’s actions reflected the opinion of someone entitled to carry out independent reasoning in the matter, his conduct did not constitute the commission of a grave sin and unbelief [*al-fisq wa-‘l-kufr*]. Al-Ash‘arī would liken the case of Mu‘āwīya and ‘Alī to that of two judges who reach divergent rulings on a matter through independent reasoning. In this case, one judge may be correct while the other is mistaken.

Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr are forgiven for their error because of a confirmed report from the Prophet in which he announces their place in heaven when giving glad tidings of heaven to ten of his Companions.¹³ The report about this incident includes Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr in the group named. As for the error of someone who did not receive such glad tidings of his entrance to heaven from the Prophet, it is possible that he will be forgiven and absolved of his error.

According to al-Ash‘arī, no consensus of the faithful or designation from God Almighty or the Prophet confirmed the imamate of ‘Alī. Rather, members of the community selected ‘Alī on the basis of independent reasoning. His appointment represented the independent reasoning of only a segment of the community.¹⁴ In such cases, someone

¹³ On this hadith, see *EF*, s.v. “al-‘Ashara al-Mubashshara” (A. J. Wensinck).

¹⁴ Ibn Fūrak is noting that in the absence of a designation or consensus, one needs independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to support the authority of the caliph. All four caliphs had an elite group of men who approved of their caliphate and appointed them, a process known as *ikhtiyār*. In ‘Alī’s case, some leading Companions also withheld their support of his appointment. *Ikhtiyār*, nonetheless, should not be understood as independent reasoning, since the latter commonly entailed the interpretation of scriptural texts. By contrast, *ikhtiyār* referred to the election of leaders. For more on the concepts of designation (*naṣṣ*),

who disputes the judgment is not guilty of corruption or unbelief, as long as he is qualified to exercise independent reasoning.

Al-Ash'arī rejected Imāmī assertions that the Prophet ratified the imamate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib by means of designation. He believed that reports to this effect were uncorroborated and that all attempts to partially confirm them were likewise invalid. These facts are apparent to anyone who examines reports that are generally considered well known [*mashhūr*]. None of them can be described as a designation [*naṣṣ*] in favor of 'Alī's imamate. These reports from the Prophet include statements such as, "You are unto me like Aaron unto Moses" and "Whosoever considers me his master [*mawlā*], 'Alī is his master."¹⁵

election (*ikhtiyār*), independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), and the appointment of imams, see the Introduction above. Sunnīs developed the belief that Muslims utilized independent reasoning in appointing imams as an alternative theory to the Shī'ī position, according to which God designates an imam in each generation. Independent reasoning legitimized and then supplanted *ikhtiyār* as the basis for selecting caliphs in Sunnism. Sunnīs also appealed to independent reasoning to explain the actions of the Companions who revolted against 'Alī. The doctrinal and historical challenge for Sunnism was that 'Alī was regarded as a caliph according to one faction of early Muslims and not so according to others. Some scholars considered those who rebelled against 'Alī to have erred in their judgment, while others believed such rebellions to have been justified. Recognizing these problems, leading Sunnī scholars, including al-Ash'arī and Ibn Fūrak, moved to reconcile these opposing historiographies by describing the political conflicts between Companions as cases in which these early Muslims relied on independent reasoning. Since all Companions were to be revered as expert scholars (*mujtahidūn*), the appointment of 'Alī and his predecessors was now a type of independent reasoning that had been correct. Companions who rejected 'Alī's authority or rebelled against him also exercised independent reasoning, which was valid. In the end, the differences between the Companions became one person's independent reasoning versus the independent reasoning of another.

¹⁵ Scholars referred to the report in which the Prophet compared 'Alī's spiritual station (*manzila*) to that of Aaron as the *ḥadīth al-manzila*. On his return to Medina from his final pilgrimage, the Prophet stopped at a pool (*ghadīr*) and announced that 'Alī was the *mawlā* of the faithful. The term *mawlā* can refer, among others, to a master, the client of a master, a leader, a follower, and an ally. In the context of this ḥadīth, pro-'Alīds and Shī'īs interpreted it as denoting a position of authority that the Prophet bestowed on 'Alī. Scholars referred to this report as the *ḥadīth al-ghadīr*. Ibn Fūrak and leading ḥadīth scholars like Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915) did not deny the transmission or historicity of these two statements. Ibn Fūrak explains that such reports did not, however, constitute an unambiguous designation (*naṣṣ jalī*) of 'Alī as Muḥammad's successor. The Prophet's statements in these cases could be understood differently from what Shī'īs believe to be their manifest meaning. Two leading Twelver scholars considered in this volume, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, acknowledge that the *ḥadīth al-manzila* and *ḥadīth al-ghadīr* were indeed statements open to interpretation. For more on the *ḥadīth al-manzila* and *ḥadīth al-ghadīr*, see *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. "'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib" (Ahmad Pakatchi et al.).

One can derive notions of a designation from such texts only on the basis of independent reasoning and scriptural hermeneutics. Although that interpretation is conceivable, others are equally plausible.¹⁶ This is significant because a designation must be explicit and obvious to the point that no other meaning is possible. If such a designation once existed but was subsequently concealed, as the Imāmīs assert, then nothing precludes the possibility that other parts of the revealed law were likewise suppressed. One would have to be quite brazen and obstinate to maintain such a position. Furthermore, a proponent of this argument would be indistinguishable from a rival who claimed that a designation existed in favor of someone else. Each competing claim, being equally plausible, would invalidate the other. According to al-Ash‘arī, the Bakrīs appealed to various isolated reports to substantiate their belief in a designation [in favor of Abū Bakr]. However, isolated reports do not engender unequivocal facts or certitude. Even if Bakrī reports are evidently more plausible than Imāmī reports about a designation in favor of ‘Alī, one cannot trust such reports.

Al-Ash‘arī used two methods to rank the Companions. First, he appealed to the principle that the imamate of a candidate of lower caliber was unlawful. Since the community confirmed the imammates of Abū Bakr and his successors, it follows that each became the imam only when he was the most virtuous person alive. Second, he discussed their merits and compared them to one another, thus drawing conclusions on the superiority of one person over another. He does this in great detail in his books on the imamate.

Al-Ash‘arī believed that narrations about the Prophet giving glad tidings to ten Companions [regarding their place in heaven] are authentic since such reports are widely circulated and well known in the community. Only those who interpret these reports wrongly dispute their authenticity. It is quite clear that the Prophet offered these glad tidings so that all would be aware of the final destination of these Companions and know that they were neither apostates nor deviants. These tidings mirror other prophecies about the impending punishment of certain unbelievers. In those cases, the Prophet informed the community that certain individuals would die as unbelievers and enter the fires of hell.

Al-Ash‘arī maintained that ‘Ā‘isha was completely innocent of the slanderous charges made against her. Indeed, the Almighty exalted her

¹⁶ Hence, according to Ibn Fūrak, one is not compelled to accept Shī‘ī interpretations of these well-known hadith reports.

above others and honored her by bearing witness to her complete innocence.¹⁷ After absolving her of all the false charges leveled against her, the Almighty promised her heaven. The testimony of God supports those who consider ‘Ā’isha and the Prophet’s other wives to be inhabitants of heaven and people of purity both in public and in private.

Al-Ash‘arī upheld the belief that the caliphate lasted for thirty years after the Prophet. As evidence, he appealed to the hadith reported by Safīna, the Prophet’s freedman.¹⁸ He considered the hadith to be a miracle of the Prophet, since [in it] he foretold the future precisely. The caliphate ended exactly as he said it would. After ‘Alī, sovereignty belonged to monarchs. They would not be described as just imams to whom obedience was compulsory.

Al-Ash‘arī considered the individuals who killed ‘Uthmān, Talḥa, al-Zubayr, and al-Ḥusayn to have been grave sinners. However, he did not declare anyone an unbeliever on the basis of their apparent deeds – a stance that is consistent with his views on the nature of faith and unbelief, as we previously noted in that discussion.¹⁹ According to al-Ash‘arī, one cannot deny the possibility that a person’s inner state – his motives, intent, and so on – contradict his conduct in public. Likewise, it is quite possible that a person’s actions be congruent with his inner state. One simply cannot be sure either way. Al-Ash‘arī agreed with what the majority of jurists have argued regarding the legal duties of a person who prays with an unjust ruler and defers to him, or of a judge who works for such a ruler. He believed that it is lawful to seek the ruler’s arbitration and aid, to follow him in prayer, and to defer to his rulings as long as they are congruent with scripture and prophetic practice. It is also lawful to enter his service as long as one is not compelled to oppress others and is instructed to perform one’s duties with justice. And it is lawful to condemn any acts of oppression that the ruler commits in one’s heart while abstaining from armed revolt against him.

And one prospers only through God.

¹⁷ Ibn Fūrak is referring to Q. 24:11–26.

¹⁸ According to Safīna, the Prophet stated: “Succession to prophethood will be for thirty years, then God will give power or His power to whomever he wills.” See Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, ed. Sa‘īd Muḥammad al-Laḥḥām (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Tibā‘a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1410/1990), no. 4646; Abū ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī, *al-jāmi‘ al-kabīr*, vol. 4, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), no. 2226.

¹⁹ For Ibn Fūrak’s discussion on this issue, see *Mujarrad maqālāt*, 149–157.

2 The Succor of Nations amidst the Confusion of Darkness

by
al-Juwaynī

Introduction to the Text

Al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), a Persian theologian and jurist, was one of the most prominent Ash'arī theologians to emerge from eleventh-century Nishapur. His *Succor of Nations amidst the Confusion of Darkness* is a book that draws on his expertise in both fields. *The Succor* presents a comprehensive theory of the imamate in accordance with Sunnī doctrine. A key thesis of al-Juwaynī is that jurists are essential to the governing process and that without them, a state would fail. It is a political theory that posits the ruler's consultation of jurists as a key source of his legitimacy. For al-Juwaynī, the idealized early caliphate had ceased to exist, and there was no need for subsequent rulers to possess the qualities of those revered leaders. Thus, rulers had no need for an additional, symbolic figurehead to legitimate their rule. The community needed leaders who could meet its present needs. So long as they governed competently, they were the community's legitimate rulers. The legitimacy of rulers ultimately rests on the authority of jurists.

Chapter 3: The Qualities of Those Charged with Selecting Imams and Debates about Quorums

§ 68. This chapter consists of two parts: Part I examines the qualities of those charged with selecting imams. Part II considers debates about any possible quorums that may apply to the selection of imams.¹

§ 69. Before we pursue this endeavor, I would like to draw the reader's attention to a matter that should not be overlooked. When it comes to the imamate, members of the community have engaged in deeply partisan debates marked by an abundance of exaggerated claims. Radicalism exists in each faction, causing people to refuse to consider the subject reasonably and fairly. Thankfully, there are a few exceptions. However, many communities have been destroyed when people follow such a course and turn away from the path of righteousness. The reason these divisions exist can be traced back to the assumptions and expectations of the individuals debating the issue. Many seek to achieve certainty in an area that is subject to speculation. They mix theology with their own predilections and ruin themselves in the process, even exulting in their spiritual illness.

§ 70. This treatise is a small contribution to discussions on the topic of the imamate. I have decided to write it despite the limited value of such an endeavor, the hazards involved, and my awareness that those who usually debate this topic are quite biased, save the very few whom God protects. By the will of God, we will begin by delineating the criteria by which one can distinguish matters of certainty from matters of speculation.

§ 71. Certainty can be derived either from revelation [*sharʿ*] or from rational proofs deduced by the intellect. The intellect, however, does not provide us with any certainty on fundamental or subsidiary aspects of the imamate. If we turn to the revealed legal tradition, three types of proofs can engender certainty: (1) an unambiguous command or verse from the Quran that is not subject to reinterpretation; (2) a report from the Prophet Muḥammad transmitted on such a wide scale in each generation that it is impossible for its transmitters to be mistaken or for the content and origins of the report to be subject to any doubt; (3) any consensus reached by the community.

§ 72. Thus, one must seek to examine matters relating to the imamate by means of such proofs of certainty from the revealed legal tradition

¹ For the Arabic source text, see al-Juwaynī, *Ghiyāth al-umam*, 243–264, 320–325.

rather than proofs furnished by the intellect. However, the Quran does not explicitly discuss the imamate in any of its verses. Likewise, no report from the Prophet transmitted on a wide scale explicitly addresses the subject. Consequently, anyone seeking to ascertain the correct doctrines on this issue must examine what we know by means of consensus. In fact, whenever we argue that a doctrine is based on a consensus of earlier Muslims, this consensus constitutes an indisputable proof and the doctrine is necessarily correct. We consider all the other doctrines that we mention, which are not supported by a consensus, to be innovative rulings within the revealed law. As a result, we are free to apply to them the methods that are associated with innovative cases and that fall under the purview of speculation.

The imamate cannot be considered a foundational theological concept. In its essence, it is simply authority. Most discussions of legitimate governance and the types of authority that exist, both limited and unrestricted, are speculative in nature. These topics are open to debate and reexamination. A reader whom God has prompted to read this work and to use it as a reference when considering perplexing questions will find nothing in it that is unclear or problematic. Rather, the reader will find the correct answers to his questions. This book identifies all that we know regarding the imamate and carefully distinguishes that which is speculative from that which is certain.

Part I: The Qualities of the Electorate

We begin our discussion by delineating the qualities of those charged with selecting leaders for the community.

§ 73. Before discussing what we know by means of independent reasoning and conjecture, we will consider what we know by means of consensus about the qualities of those charged with selecting leaders for the community. We can state with certainty that women play no role in the selection of imams or in the ratification of contracts for such appointments. Men are never required to defer to women. Had the community been obliged to consult women in deliberations about the imamate, Fāṭima would have been the worthiest and most entitled to offer an opinion. After her, the Prophet's wives, the mothers of the faithful, would have participated in such deliberations as well. It is undeniable, however, that throughout history women have never been included in the electoral process. Likewise, those in bondage are excluded from such deliberations, even if they are superior to all others in knowledge. Laypersons cannot be

included, either, since they are not people of scholarship, insight, or prudence. Nor do non-Muslim subjects in the empire participate in the selection of imams. It is clear that members of the abovementioned groups should not be charged with selecting imams for the community. We can say this with certainty.

§ 74. As for that which falls within the realm of conjecture, some respected Sunnī scholars have held that only a legal expert can participate in the selection process. However, al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī and a few others are of the opinion that participants in the selection process need not be legal experts.² It suffices for members of the electorate to be individuals of sound reason and merit, intelligent, and capable of following the right path on important issues. They should understand the types of people who would be best suited to serving as imams and the requisite characteristics of a legitimate imam. We shall first scrutinize these two opinions and deduce from the two what we can know with certainty. Then, God willing, we will mention our view on the subject.

§ 75. Let us consider the first opinion – namely, that those who select imams need not be experts in the law or capable of issuing rulings. First of all, the aim of those who participate in the process is the selection of a leader and an exemplary model for the community. The electorate delegates ultimate authority to this person. Were members of the electorate unaware of the requisite characteristics of a legitimate imam, they would likely appoint an unqualified candidate to the office and consequently harm the entire Muslim community. For this reason, laypersons and the uneducated cannot be included in the electoral process. Women are excluded because they stay in their homes and defer decisions about their affairs to the men in their households, who are responsible for their well-being. One does not rely on women to deal with matters outside of the home, nor do they take the place of men in confronting major threats to the community and resolving its problems. They are poorly equipped to make major decisions. For this reason, most scholars prohibit women from entering into marriages independently of their male guardians. As for slaves, even if they are exceptional in their reasoning, they remain preoccupied with the service of their masters. In most cases, they possess neither the time nor the resources to engage in scholarship and research. Thus, despite their great potential, one cannot consider their opinions.

² Al-Juwaynī refers to the views of al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013) several times in this chapter. Al-Bāqillānī was a towering figure in the Ash'arī school.

§ 76. Some respected members of the community are autonomous in their thinking. They have spent many years engaged in scholarship, refining their views on these matters. These individuals know the requisite characteristics of a leader charged with managing the affairs of a community. Such knowledge suffices for participation in the electoral process. Anything beyond it is unnecessary for the task at hand. We have previously noted that in matters of law, so long as one possesses the requisite knowledge to fulfill a particular duty, this knowledge is sufficient for the task. For example, to be an appraiser one should be able to determine the value of commodities accurately, possess experience in the field, and demonstrate some shrewdness. A person charged with dividing the estate of a deceased person among his or her heirs should be skilled as a surveyor. Such a person should also know how to accurately calculate each person's share of the inheritance according to Islamic law. One can say the same about those responsible for determining the amount of alms that must be paid on certain types of property: knowledge about that subject suffices. Likewise, a marital dispute may escalate to the point of requiring an intervention if a spouse appears unreasonable and intractable. Were one to send two arbiters to resolve the dispute, as stipulated by a clear verse of the Quran,³ the arbiters would not need to be legal experts. It would be enough for them to be knowledgeable about the rights of spouses and about issues pertaining to domestic life, both major and minor. Thus, a respected and intelligent person should participate in the selection of future imams if he understands politics and matters of statehood, knows the characteristics of a good leader, and is capable of identifying candidates qualified for office.

§ 77. As for the claim that the members of the electorate must be expert jurists, the justification for this claim is the belief that imams must be legal experts, a topic we will discuss further below, God willing, in the section on the requisite characteristics of an imam.⁴ Scholars of this opinion hold that only legal experts can evaluate other legal experts. Were the electorate to consist of non-jurists, its members would not have the means to determine the competence or capabilities of an appointee to the imamate.

³ Al-Juwaynī is referring to Q. 4:35, “If you [believers] fear that a couple may break up, appoint one arbiter from his family and one from hers. Then, if the couple want to put things right, God will bring about a reconciliation between them: He is all knowing, all aware.”

⁴ See below, §§ 113–116.

§ 78. Scholars of the first opinion could object that such a requirement for members of the electorate is unnecessary, since people can determine whether or not a person is a legal expert by other means. Members of the community will inform one another and collectively agree that a particular person has become an expert in the law. Public knowledge about a person is thus sufficient. Furthermore, when seeking a legal ruling, laypersons know they must turn only to legal experts. One cannot simply ask any person considered “knowledgeable” to resolve one’s questions. If laypersons are capable of distinguishing qualified jurists from those who are not qualified in such matters, shouldn’t the most eminent members of the community be able to do the same?

§ 79. Upon careful examination, it is obvious that the most sensible opinion is the one held by al-Qāḍī [al-Bāqillānī] and his disciples.⁵

§ 80. As for our own opinion, we will mention it below in the section on quorums since the two issues are tied to one another.

§ 81. We did not omit piety as a requisite characteristic of a member of the electorate due to negligence. Rather, we considered piety too obvious and essential a requirement to require any evidence. Someone who cannot be trusted with even a bushel of onions obviously should not be charged with selecting imams. Why would the entire community, from its inhabitants in the East to those far in the West, adhere to the electoral decisions of such a person? No one can truly be safe from the evil of someone who does not fear God. Furthermore, the merits of a man mean nothing if he cannot keep himself pure.

Part I is now complete. In it, we considered only what we knew with certainty to be true and avoided matters of independent reasoning and speculation.

Part II: Debates about Quorums

§ 82. In this section, we will continue to use the same method to consider the topic at hand. We begin with what is certain to be true. There is a consensus in the Muslim community that no consensus is needed to ratify an imam’s appointment to the office. This is obvious from the fact that Abū Bakr did not postpone his accession or the start of his activities as a ruler. He did not wait for news of his accession to spread to all corners of the community or for those who did not reside in Medina to

⁵ For al-Bāqillānī’s opinion, see § 74.

pledge allegiance to him and confirm his authority. The pledges he had already received sufficed to legitimate his authority, so he immediately began to govern the community's affairs. He issued and enforced legal judgments, mustered armies, appointed governors, levied taxes, managed public spending, and waged war against those who refused to send him their alms. One can say the same of all four caliphs [revered in Sunnism]. No one should doubt this.

It is necessarily true that the objective of appointing imams is safeguarding the Muslim community and resolving matters that require an imam's attention. We are certain of this. The most serious matters cannot tolerate any delays. A delayed intervention may have deleterious effects that are irreversible or result in a catastrophic outcome that cannot be undone. It is obvious, then, that consensus cannot be a necessary condition for ratifying the authority of an imam. This is all that we can say with certainty. Let us now turn to what scholars have speculated to be true on the basis of independent reasoning.

§ 83. Some scholars opine that a new imam needs only two members of the electorate to seek his appointment in order to ratify his authority. Others hold the opinion that four members of the electorate are needed, since the revealed law identifies the testimony of four people as the clearest of proofs. Some individuals who speculate on matters of Islamic jurisprudence and whose opinions should be discounted hold that a quorum of forty men is required to appoint an imam. They draw on Imam al-Shāfiʿī's opinion that Friday worship must be attended by forty men to be valid.

§ 84. As they pertain to the imamate, however, these speculative opinions have no basis. Those who hold that more than one person is required to ratify an imam's authority may argue that two individuals will suffice. They may say that a quorum is fulfilled with two individuals because the imamate requires the support of multiple people, and two technically counts as a multiplicity. Those who hold that a quorum of four is required consider the imamate a matter of great importance, and such matters should be based on the clearest of proofs [namely, the corresponding testimony of four witnesses]. Those who opine that the appointment of an imam requires a quorum of forty argue along the lines that I have already described. They claim that if an imam needs forty people to lead Friday worship, an imam would also need forty to lead the community. Such arguments based on analogical reasoning are hardly compelling. Although the revealed law considers analogical reasoning valid, it is the weakest

form of evidence one can cite. Even in cases requiring speculation in which jurists have the license to favor one opinion over another, I refrain from basing a legal opinion on analogical reasoning. Why, then, should I employ it here, in this key matter of the imamate? If one considers the issue of quorums by means of analogical reasoning alone, one can conceive of countless erroneous answers.

§ 85. The soundest opinion is that voiced by al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, which is also the one attributed to our venerable teacher [*shaykh*], Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. Advocates of this opinion maintain that the appointment of an imam is ratified when a single, qualified member of the electorate pledges allegiance to him. The basis of this opinion is the fact that no consensus is required to appoint an imam. Furthermore, no textual evidence points to the need for a particular quorum. In fact, according to the revealed law, it is enough for a single person to write up a contract. If many people join him in its composition, their participation does not increase its validity. On no basis would one favor a particular number of participants over another in this affair. Thus, if no concrete evidence supports the need for a quorum, then one cannot require one. Since we have already established that a consensus is not a necessity, we can assert that "consensus rejects the need for a consensus." It is also true that the absence of evidence in support of a quorum disproves any [claim that there is a] legal duty to establish a quorum. Therefore, a single person suffices for the appointment of an imam. Al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī appears to believe that his opinion is based on unequivocal proof. Although his opinion is the soundest, we cannot say that it is unassailable.

§ 86. In this section I discuss my personal views on the subject as a supplement to the views mentioned above. In my opinion, had community members launched a revolt and fully rejected the caliphate of Abū Bakr when 'Umar pledged allegiance to him, nothing would suggest that an imam's authority can be ratified by a single person. Likewise, if I held that a quorum for an appointment required two individuals or four or so on, but members of the community objected to the appointment and rebelled, nothing would suggest that such quorums were necessary for appointing imams. However, members of the community followed 'Umar in extending their hands to the caliph and pledging allegiance to him. They collectively yielded to his authority and obeyed him.

§ 87. The key to ratifying the authority of a new imam is power. The masses should follow the imam's partisans in pledging allegiance to him so that they collectively constitute a powerful base capable of crushing

any rebellions. Were rebels to begin persecuting those loyal to the imam, this base should possess the means, the strength, and the numbers to defend against such attacks. Thus, when oaths of fealty to the imam are followed by his clear ascendancy and sovereignty in the region, his imamate and authority must be confirmed as legitimate. When 'Umar pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr, no one vehemently opposed his accession or quarreled with him. Community members approved of his appointment, obeying and wholeheartedly supporting him. In the sections that follow I shall provide evidence in support of my contention that power requires the continued support of a base.

§ 88. All scholars are in agreement that when a member of the electorate abjures any claims to the office in support of another candidate qualified to be an imam, the candidate's appointment is not ratified with a simple pledge of allegiance. This is one indication that my contention is correct. We will discuss the matter again at the end of this section, but I will briefly explain here why this opinion is sound. Were a member of the electorate to appoint an imam in this way, his pledge would not have any force. When a pledge lacks a power base, the authority of the imam cannot be confirmed. If we consider these matters carefully, we must agree that pledges function as I have maintained: as a means of confirming power that a candidate already possesses.⁶

§ 89. A man of high standing can pledge allegiance to a candidate, and this single pledge can suffice to ratify the candidate's authority. This happens when the person pledging allegiance also commands great authority among his people and has many partisans and followers; his allegiance provides the power that we described above. By contrast, a group of men [without power] can pledge allegiance to a candidate, but their pledges do not constitute a base with the requisite strength or force to defend his imamate against dissenters. I would thus not consider the imamate of such a person to be confirmed. Therefore, the view I have propounded does not identify consensus or quorums as requisites for the appointment of imams. Nor does it consider the pledge of allegiance of a single member of the electorate sufficient in all circumstances.

§ 90. The diversity of opinions on this subject stems from ambiguities surrounding the pledges Abū Bakr initially received on his accession as

⁶ Al-Juwaynī argues that oaths of fealty do not by themselves suffice to grant a person the office of imam. Rather, a candidate must first have the support of a strong power base. Oaths of fealty serve only to confirm the existence of such support.

caliph. This event does not establish a clear precedent for the necessity of quorums or the insufficiency of a single pledge for ratifying the authority of caliphs. For most people who have scrutinized this issue, the view that is ultimately correct has become obscured. As a result, the community has produced many theories. The theory I have propounded accords with the aims and ultimate purpose of the imamate. It supports the aim of the institution to secure the obedience and loyalty of individuals and accounts for the ambiguous conditions that legitimated the accession of Abū Bakr. May God bless the one who takes the time to read this work, comes to agree with its contents, and prays for us in appreciation.

§ 91. In Part I [§73–79], we mentioned scholarly debates about the qualities of members of the electorate and the views of al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī in particular. I cannot agree with him in requiring members of the electorate to be experts in the law. There is no clear justification for such a requirement. However, I do believe that those who initially pledge allegiance to a candidate should be men of power and high standing. This is my view on the matter.

§ 92. Related to the subject of quorums is the question of whether witnesses should be present in the selection of imams. Just as scholars have differed on the necessity of quorums, they have differed on this matter. Some, such as al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī, consider witnesses necessary for ratifying the authority of imams, whereas others do not.

§ 93. Those who joined al-Bāqillānī in advocating the first view argued that one could not offer or conclude a contractual agreement for the imamate in secret. Were it possible for them to do so, members of the electorate in early Islamic history would have appointed and ratified the authority of imams without witnesses. Al-Bāqillānī dismissed this latter view as completely impossible. He devoted himself to discrediting it with what he deemed proofs that engendered certitude. He argued that the imamate of Abū Bakr would not have been endorsed as legitimate had ‘Umar pledged allegiance to him in secret. If a person’s imamate could be established and legitimized in this way, why did Abū Bakr and ‘Umar bother attending the meeting under the portico [*al-saqifa*]? ‘Umar could have simply pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr before they attended the meeting, in the absence of any witnesses.

§ 94. Those who maintain that witnesses are required to inaugurate a person’s imamate disagree on how many are necessary. Some consider two individuals sufficient to witness the ratification of a new contract for the position, but al-Bāqillānī rejected this view. He held that the number

of witnesses present must be large enough to constitute a crowd capable of disseminating news of the event widely.

§ 95. In my opinion, one cannot claim to have certitude that those who allow the inauguration of an imamate in the absence of witnesses are wrong. Al-Bāqillānī should not be so certain that 'Umar refrained from ratifying a contract with Abū Bakr in private. In fact, one could argue that the revealed law commands that private contractual agreements precede public ones. Perhaps public investitures serve only to confirm secret ones whenever circumstances dictate their necessity. Perhaps witnesses are needed only to prevent quarrels and challenges to the imam's authority. The revealed law advises the community to call on witnesses in commercial transactions. It is in accordance with this tradition that the inauguration of an imam should take place in public.

§ 96. Nevertheless, were a man of high standing and great power to pledge allegiance to a qualified candidate in the absence of witnesses, and were his pledge to arouse the support of a large and powerful base, I would consider the contract for this imamate ratified. There would be no evidence that engenders certainty nor other grounds to invalidate this person's imamate. In any case, a variety of opinions exist on this issue because they are all speculative. In fact, nearly everything related to the imamate is subject to speculation. On most issues, no hard evidence or certainty exists.

We thus conclude our chapter on the necessary qualities of members of the electorate and on debates about quorums.

Chapter 4: The Qualities of an Imam with Authority over the Muslim Community

§ 97. The qualities of an imam that must be considered in his selection can be divided into the following categories: those pertaining to the physical senses, those pertaining to limbs, essential characteristics, and acquired merits.

§ 98. In terms of qualities pertaining to the physical senses, it is clear that scholars agree on some questions but not on others. Once we elaborate our views, no ambiguity should remain on any aspect of this subject. No one disputes the necessity of sight for the imam. Blindness inhibits one's ability to safeguard the rights of others and to react to difficulties and conflicts. In times of need, blindness further aggravates any problems since the sightless usually cannot meet their needs or responsibilities

independently. How could one expect such an imam to discharge his most important duties when he cannot even identify his audience when he speaks? There is no need to debate this matter further, since a consensus on this issue already exists. I have mentioned it only because this book aims at precision in defining key terms and at clarity on concepts that appear in debates about authority.

§ 99. Among the physical senses, hearing is another ability that is required of imams. The deaf and the hard of hearing are disqualified from this office. Hearing resembles vision with regard to its necessity. Someone may suffer from major or minor hearing loss but still function normally. We are not referring to such cases. Likewise, some imams may be near-sighted or have poorer vision than others, but this does not disqualify them from office. In the case of hearing, what is a problem is when one hears nothing or almost nothing.

§ 100. In accordance with the arguments mentioned above, the capacity for speech is required of imams. The speechless do not qualify for this office.

§ 101. As for taste and smell, it makes no difference whether an imam does or does not possess these senses. This draws our discussion on the senses and their implications for the imamate to a close.

§ 102. We will now consider the significance of limbs and their absence. As long as a person's condition does not affect his mental capacities, his ability to perform the duties of the office, or his appearance to the point of making him repulsive to others, the absence of a limb is tolerable. For this reason, there is no harm in appointing imams who have undergone the amputation of a limb or castration.

§ 103. Most scholars consider a major loss of limbs, such as the loss of both hands and feet, to be catastrophic. Such a loss hinders a candidate's ability to fulfill the aims and needs of the office in the same way that lack of sight, hearing, or speech does. Although this view is widely accepted, it does not reflect any consensus or rest on evidence engendering certainty. The office requires a qualified imam who possesses valor, great acumen, and steadfastness. A physical handicap does not preclude an imam from providing his judgment on cases and implementing justice in the community. If mobility is required of the imam, it can be facilitated by having the imam ride or be carried on various modes of transportation. Thus, one should consider the exclusion of candidates with physical handicaps a matter of speculation.

§ 104. Jurists have disagreed on the case of a candidate who has lost a single hand or foot. In my opinion, the loss of a limb is a problem when it

causes the complete loss of key senses (such as speech, sight, or hearing), full paralysis, or frailty that prevents a person from riding altogether. Otherwise, the loss of a limb should not be considered a problem when it affects neither the intellect nor the person's ability to produce rulings.

§ 105. We know with certainty that a lazy eye, a mutilated nose, or other off-putting features of appearance cannot disqualify a person from office. Some scrupulous and conservative scholars believe that candidates with such conditions cannot be appointed imams. [They argue that] the imam's appearance could potentially deter people from offering him their loyalty and support. Furthermore, the imam's subjects would be more inclined to criticize and belittle him, which would increase the risk of civil strife and a collapse of authority. These arguments, however, are completely invalid. If a lazy eye or a missing limb were truly a cause for disqualification, then ugliness or a repulsive appearance should also bar a person from office. Scholars would have to require an imam to be handsome and well-proportioned. However, no one claims this.

This is our opinion on the matter of missing limbs.

§ 106. There are other necessary characteristics of an imam, such as noble ancestry. Descent from the tribe of Quraysh is a prerequisite for all imams. No one but Ḍirār b. 'Amr⁷ disputes the importance of Qurashī ancestry as a criterion for the imamate, and he is the type of person whose opinions can always be disregarded. Transmitters of hadith report that the Prophet once said, "The imams will come from Quraysh." Since the community collectively accepts this report as authentic, a number of scholars have ruled it to be certainly trustworthy and true.

§ 107. I cannot support such a claim. One can count the number of transmitters who report this hadith, and their number does not indicate the dissemination of the report on a wide scale. This report neither engenders certitude in our hearts nor strikes us as truly reflecting the words of the Prophet. This is our opinion of all isolated reports [*akhbār al-āḥād*]. Thus, this hadith does not constitute unassailable evidence that Qurashī ancestry is a prerequisite for all imams.

§ 108. Nonetheless, Qurashī ancestry does appear to be a prerequisite for the office of the imam. In our opinion, the fact that Muslims of previous generations restricted the office to members of the tribe of Quraysh

⁷ Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. ca. 200/815) was an independent thinker and prolific writer of the formative period. Non-Mu'tazilī heresiographers characterized him as a Mu'tazilī, but this is not confirmed in Mu'tazilī literature. On Ḍirār, see *EP*², s.v. "Ḍirār b. 'Amr" (J. van Ess).

supports this view. Over the centuries, no one lacking Qurashī ancestry has ever made claims to leadership of the entire community. Were it possible to do so, many men of strength and grit as well as those of high standing and great means would have tried their utmost to become imams. This is obvious from the fact that countless individuals across the Muslim world have vied for power and sovereignty against one another. Feuding between such rivals ultimately resulted in great animosity and violence. In pursuit of their aims, they caused much harm and ruin. The aspirants abandoned their homes, friendships, and a life of ease and took many risks.

Were it possible for non-Qurashīs to become imams, both the eligible and the unsuitable among them would attempt to take office without any regard for ancestry. It would not have been necessary for the heretical Fāṭimids of Fustat, Egypt, falsely to claim descent from the Prophet when they rose to power. It was obvious that they fabricated their claims. With vast amounts of wealth, they bribed dishonest genealogists to link their family tree to the Prophet's. No one would dispute my argument here. As a result [of the office's restriction to Qurashīs], Qurashīs have concerned themselves with the imamate and served as the community's sovereigns even when their knowledge of religion did not surpass that of others. It is true that every critical and meticulous thinker possesses knowledge, but it is also true that even someone with only a little knowledge still has some share of it. Thus, even if knowledge is a prerequisite for the magnificence and power of sovereignty, a little knowledge may suffice. A ruler with some religious knowledge cannot be characterized as lacking knowledge altogether. On the other hand, noble ancestry is an all-or-nothing affair. Someone who lacks it cannot make a claim to the imamate. On this basis, one can consider Qurashī ancestry a prerequisite for the imamate.

§ 109. Nonetheless, we do not believe that ancestry can be considered a prerequisite for the imamate on the basis of rational proofs. Rather, God Almighty has restricted this high office and magnificent station to the house [*ahl al-bayt*] of the Prophet. This is an example of God's favoring some over others, and God does so as He pleases.

§ 110. As for the qualities considered essential to the imamate, candidates should be adult, free males of sound reasoning. There is no need to be long-winded or provide evidence to confirm the necessity of these qualities.

§ 111. Candidates for the imamate must also demonstrate valor and steadfastness in war. There are few men of this caliber. They are the only

ones qualified to serve as heads of state, to command infantrymen, or to lead cavalry in war. The timid and the faint of heart cannot serve in such high positions. It is very unlikely that such courage can be acquired simply through training or strong desire. It is true that people can be hardened by combat and benefit from experiencing multiple battles. Such people will be more familiar with war and better prepared to meet the enemy whenever two armies face one another. Nonetheless, someone whose natural inclination is to panic or to feel uneasy in stress-inducing situations would only be traumatized by prolonged exposure to war. It is also the case that steadfastness in war is effective only with sound judgment, and this makes the reckless ill-suited for any position of authority. Those who wield power are more in need of sound judgment than they are in need of fearlessness.

*When valor emerges from sound judgment, its value increases twofold
For what precedes is the locus of what follows.*

We now conclude our discussion on the essential qualities of imams.

§ 112. Knowledge and piety are two essential characteristics that qualified candidates should possess in order to become imams. We will discuss these two qualities in detail and then mention a third.

§ 113. In terms of knowledge, it is necessary for imams to be legal experts capable of issuing rulings independently. No one objects to this requirement for imams. The fact that most fundamental matters of religion involve imams is an indication of the need for legal expertise on their part. There can be no doubt that the imam is the final authority with regard to political appointments and matters of governance. The imam should also have knowledge of the revealed law in other areas, such as commanding right and forbidding wrong, even if they do not fall directly under his purview. Were the imam not an expert in the law, he would have to defer to the rulings of scholars and depend on them every time he encountered a new case. Such a dependency on others contradicts the imperative to defer to the imam and consider his views.

An interlocutor might reply that imams should be able to seek rulings from a jurisconsult [*mufīḥ*] like anyone else in the community.⁸

⁸ It should be noted that in terms of expertise, a legal expert (*mujtahid*) and a jurisconsult (*mufīḥ*) were generally equivalent. However, a legal expert was always recognized as someone who could derive new legal opinions. A jurisconsult was someone who possessed vast knowledge about the law and whom members of the public consulted for rulings. It was theoretically possible for someone to fulfill such a role without being a legal expert.

However, this is impossible for imams, who must resolve dilemmas with far-reaching consequences daily. The imam is this world's ruler. All eyes are on him to resolve major issues. What would happen if a matter were brought before him and he were unable to consult the foremost scholar in the region or the empire? He would falter and lack the ability to issue a wise judgment. He would be an imam with no real authority or autonomy. In this case, one could not require autonomy or other qualifications of the imam. Rather, unqualified imams should be able to take office and consult a talented team of shrewd and intelligent advisors. However, no one supports such a possibility. The imamate entails leadership in both religious and worldly affairs. The imam should be an autonomous authority on both, since the revealed law also lays down prescriptions for the latter. Thus, one is always obliged to observe the commandments of the revealed law. In all legal matters, the revealed law is the ultimate authority. Furthermore, imams must provide judgments that agree with the revealed law, since anything that contradicts it can never be considered a viable option. Suitability for the office thus requires autonomy. An imam must be capable of independently determining the best answer, according to the revealed law, in the cases that are brought before him.

§ 114. An interlocutor may claim that the Prophet's Companions consulted one another whenever they encountered misfortune or whenever an unforeseen turn of events required action. They were never reluctant to seek the opinion of their peers and to discuss matters with others. [They argue that] one can deduce from these facts that it was a norm to consult others and that complete autonomy is not a requirement for imams. We would respond that the most eminent of all scholars, the limitless sea [of wisdom], and the imam of all others is a person who may consult his peers once in a while when searching for relevant legal precedents or the wisest solutions. How could it be otherwise, when God Almighty instructed His Prophet to seek counsel from his peers? The Quran states, "And seek their counsel in matters" [Q 3:159]. Someone can reach the highest levels of scholarship and still engage in debate or consult others when considering complex issues. Such actions should not impugn a person's scholarship.

§ 115. A fully qualified and autonomous imam who lacks nothing should not deprive himself of the wisdom and guidance of others in matters pertaining to the revealed law or to governance. He who ignores the opinions of others can lead himself astray, whereas he who avails

himself of the wisdom of scholars holds fast to the correct path and merits divine providence.

§ 116. It is essential that the one who serves as an imam hear and evaluate the views of others in forming what is considered the best opinion. The imam should have full autonomy in doing so. The imam is expected to benefit from the wisdom of others and to recognize the usefulness of their analyses. Every intellect possesses value, but accommodating each person's disagreements undermines the ability to accomplish anything. With his deep understanding of matters, the imam should evaluate the views that he solicits. He should consider their strengths and weaknesses and then deduce the best possible answer. He should attract the best minds, benefit from them, and help stave off quarreling and disputes among members of the community. The imam's prudence, analysis of issues, and final judgments should serve to unite the community. The imam leads and never follows. An imam who does not qualify as an expert jurist in God's religion would be obliged to follow other scholars and their students. Such an imam would have to defer to their judgments for or against particular things as well as their commands and their prohibitions. None of this would do for someone occupying the office of the imam and acting in the capacity of a leader. This is our opinion on the importance of knowledge.

§ 117. Piety and righteousness must also be considered essential characteristics of an imam. One cannot trust the grave sinner with even a penny, so delegating the affairs of all Muslims to such a person by appointing him an imam would be preposterous. Despite his possible attachment to or affection for his children, a grave sinner cannot be trusted with the property of his children. Is it conceivable for the community to entrust the highest office of the imamate to a grave sinner who does not fear God? How would such a person be qualified to manage the affairs of the Muslim world when he has not trained his intellect to resist his self-serving impulses or temptations to sin? He is not capable of managing even the affairs of his own inner self.

§ 118. The third quality that imams should possess, after knowledge and piety, is intellectual acuity. Imams should demonstrate acumen in dealing with important matters and discerning the potentially adverse consequences of any actions. This quality of the intellect is acquired, strengthened, and refined through experience.

§ 119. The central aim of the imamate is the unification of diverse peoples and characters with competing interests, loyalties, and motivations

under the leadership of one person. They should be persuaded collectively to follow the imam's opinions and judgments. Frequently, confusion about an issue is the cause of disputes. To safeguard against the escalation of disputes, people should collectively defer to the opinion of the imam. This is how one can have order. Otherwise, the imam's authority over the community will never be consolidated and the religion and the community itself may collapse.

To better understand the key position of imams, one must consider the state of affairs when a powerful imam with a large army and a strong base dies suddenly or is abducted. Such occurrences are so catastrophic that they are remembered as historic disasters by later generations. The Muslim world should never lack a leader capable of resolving disagreements among people, offering rulings to those engaged in major disputes, and serving as an arbiter whose judgment is binding on all parties. This is extremely important in circumstances in which legal wrangling, discord, and divisions have been prolonged. Without a capable imam, such conflicts would erupt into civil strife and potentially ruin the community.

§ 120. When one understands the purpose of the imamate, it becomes obvious that this purpose cannot be fulfilled without an imam who is fully qualified for the position. He should be intelligent, judicious, and capable of responding independently to major crises and leading his community in war. He should not allow the natural human inclination to avoid death to prevent him from ordering executions when required. At the same time, callousness should not deter the imam from acts of mercy and compassion. It should be noted that a candidate's suitability for the office is not determined simply by his capacity to discharge its duties. A person who is barely capable of fulfilling certain duties would be overwhelmed by additional tasks or responsibilities. Such a person would have to rely on others to fulfill them, and this is unacceptable. The imamate requires an incumbent who is capable of fulfilling all of the office's duties with autonomy. This is the real meaning of suitability.

§ 121. In the end, one can describe a qualified candidate for the imamate as a free, pious, fully capable, and independent legal expert who is male and has Qurashī ancestry.

§ 122. All of these qualities can be summarized in terms of two essential categories: qualities pertaining to ancestry and those pertaining to full autonomy. The latter require the imam to be pious, free from bondage, fully suited for the office, in possession of the requisite knowledge, and male. Women have been commanded to remain in private spaces,

but most affairs of the imamate require activity in the public sphere. A woman does not have full autonomy [in such circumstances].⁹

Here we can draw this discussion to a close.

Chapter 7: The Prohibition on Appointing More than One Imam

§ 252. If it is possible to appoint a single imam capable of commanding the respect of the Muslim community and managing its affairs, he should be appointed. Community members in all regions, from the East to the West, should follow his judgments and respect his authority. When such a scenario is possible, all agree that it is unlawful to appoint more than one imam. No one objects to this opinion. When the community ratified the caliphate of Abū Bakr with oaths of fealty, further caliphs succeeded him, one by one, until the age of imams drew to a close. Later Muslims deduced from this history that the office was restricted to only one person at a time. One can also deduce this to have been the view of the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, although they did not explicitly transmit any hadith to this effect. Anyone who disputes this point after learning about the history of these caliphs and those who appointed them truly misunderstands the issue and is seriously deficient in intelligence.

§ 253. No one objects to the view that the objective of the imamate is to unite people with competing opinions and interests under one banner. No intelligent person doubts that factionalism among those who command power, disagreements, and competing self-interests can seriously undermine empires. Good governance requires individuals to respect the authority of an intelligent leader and to abide by his judgments, which are neither arbitrary nor aberrant. Rather, the imam forms his opinions by considering the views of intelligent people, various scholars, and wise elders. By serving as the highest authority in the land, the imam can stave off conflict with his rulings. By hearing the sound reasoning of other intelligent people, he can also ensure that he remains well informed.

§ 254. It is clear from all of this that the imamate can function only with a singular authority at the helm. This point really does not require further elaboration or evidence, since all Muslims agree on it. Situations that require the approval or inclusion of multiple leaders tend to foment

⁹ Al-Juwaynī is referring to legal and cultural norms that limited the presence and duties of women in public affairs.

discord and disputes. Good governance requires emirs in all corners of the empire to respect the authority and judgments of one leader. Without a leader to command their obedience and guide them, these men would attack, fight, and destroy one another in pursuit of even greater power and domains of influence. Without any concern for the harm they inflict on ordinary people, they would fight and attempt to conquer one another. They would cause misfortune, great ruin, and death on a large scale. They would destroy both sultans and their subjects.

§ 255. It is obvious that the appointment of more than one imam would cause great ruin in a society and divert its members from the right path. The obligation to obey the commands of each imam in all corners of the empire would generate conflict. The harmful repercussions of such a system would justify abandoning the imams' authority altogether. One cannot appoint an imam in one region and have another elsewhere when the appointment of a single imam is possible. As we have previously mentioned, this is unlawful whenever the commands of a singular authority can be carried out across the empire. The alternative contradicts the essential purpose of the office, which is the unification of people with competing views and interests under one judicious leader. We have elaborated on this point already, and the truth should be obvious to all.

§ 256. Scholars agree that in some cases it is evident that the leadership of one imam will not suffice because of geography. Some subjects may reside in territories outside of the imam's jurisdiction for several reasons. Sometimes the empire extends across vast swaths of land; people may convert to Islam in regions beyond the imam's realm of authority or at opposite ends of the earth; or great bodies of water may separate people from the imam. It is very possible for some people to have no means of knowing the imam's commands or of benefiting from his leadership in such circumstances. Non-Muslim polities may separate an imam from certain Muslim populations. The imam would be unable to manage the affairs of communities facing such geographic constraints.

§ 257. In the cases listed above, it is lawful for isolated communities to appoint a leader to serve them when they reside in lands beyond the jurisdiction of the imam. Our *shaykh* Abū 'I-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, the great teacher Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī,¹⁰ and other scholars hold that communities may do so since such action safeguards their best interests. These

¹⁰ Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) was a leading representative of the Ash'arī school in Nishapur.

scholars argue that the purpose of the imamate is to protect the welfare of the public, to manage the affairs of state, and to secure the borders against outside threats. As long as it is feasible to appoint a single imam to fulfill these duties, that is by far the best means of governance and leadership. But when it becomes impractical, isolated populations cannot be abandoned. They should still have a leader who unites them under his authority and deters people from evil. Thus, communities should be allowed to appoint an authority who protects the welfare of society. Otherwise, abandoned people will fall into ruin and societies will collapse.

§ 258. Here, with the aid of God, I would like to discuss my own view on the matter. The isolation of a community can occur in one of two ways. First, it may be that the members of a community pledge allegiance to an imam under the impression that he will be able personally to govern their affairs. However, either it becomes apparent that he cannot or conditions change with the result that they now reside in a territory beyond his dominion. Such an isolated community should never be abandoned. Instead, the community's members should be allowed to appoint an emir on whom they can rely for guidance and leadership. By abiding by his authority, they can practice the revealed law established by the Prophet Muḥammad and live by its principles every day. This leader would not be considered an imam. The barriers that isolate a community from the imam may one day disappear. When it is possible for the imam to begin governing their affairs, the emir and the members of his community should accept the imam's authority and carry out his commands. The imam should accept the justification they offer for having independently appointed an authority to govern their affairs. After taking charge of their affairs, the imam should either confirm the authority of this person and keep him in power or replace him with someone else. In either case, the imam's judgment should be respected.

§ 259. In addition to this case, a second possibility may exist. A community may experience isolation before the appointment of any imam and continue in this state for generations. Territories can be so distant and cut off from others that the appointment of one imam to govern all of them and their peoples would be impractical. In each of these lands, people would need to appoint an emir to govern their affairs out of necessity. The presence of an emir in each territory would not pose a problem as long as each community limited the authority of its leader to its own realm. No community should appoint a leader with claims to sovereignty over all territories, since it would be impossible for him to gain access to

all of these territories [in the abovementioned circumstances]. In reality, none of these leaders would qualify as an imam, since the imam is the singular authority whom all Muslims recognize and obey.

I do not deny that necessity may require the appointment of such leaders and adherence to their commands in accordance with the principles of the revealed law. Such an era would be one in which no imam exists. We shall consider periods in which no imams exist comprehensively. This topic was one of the two main reasons I decided to compose this book. If Muslims are eventually able to appoint an imam, the regional leaders should surrender their authority to him. He should then decide on their cases and determine what would best serve their communities.

This is my answer to the central question raised in this chapter.

§ 260. Some pseudo-scholars [who like to speculate on unimportant things] have raised a series of questions [that we will ignore]. Anyone who contemplates them carefully will know their answers. Here we will answer only those questions that help clarify the nature of the office to others who pose similar questions. Let us imagine that there are Muslims living in two different parts of the world and that each community appoints a qualified person to serve as the imam of all Muslims. Both imams receive oaths of fealty from their respective communities, granting them supreme authority over everyone else. Let us imagine that this occurs with neither community having access to news about the other. Each community believes that the person it has selected to receive oaths of fealty and to serve as the imam is the only one eligible for the position. If the office indeed requires that only one person wield its power, neither of these two leaders can really be considered an imam under such circumstances. As we have clarified above, the office requires that imams have complete autonomy and full sovereignty. Allowing two individuals with restricted realms of sovereignty to share the responsibilities of the office does not meet the criteria of a legitimate imamate. Thus, neither of them would be an imam.

§ 261. Jurists have argued over the lawfulness of appointing two judges in one region. They would both have full authority as judge in a single city or territory. The stronger opinion is that one should never do this. Those who allow it speculate that an imam can serve as an adjudicator among judges, governors, and other state officials when conflicts arise. As the highest authority in the community, the imam is expected to deescalate and resolve such disputes when they occasionally occur among Muslims.

§ 262. The imamate is the highest office in the land. Next to the imam, no one can serve as an alternative authority or leader. A state would not function with two individuals serving as co-imams and each independently wielding ultimate authority. Were it to come to pass that two individuals were appointed to the office, as in the abovementioned scenario, Muslims would need to investigate the matter carefully. They would need to establish which of the two appointments occurred first. The community should recognize the imamate of the one who was appointed first and abandon the other. If both appointments occurred simultaneously, neither candidate would be considered a legitimate imam. The electorate would need to choose the better candidate and ratify a new contract with him. If the order of the appointments is unclear or impossible to confirm, the situation is akin to their simultaneous occurrence [and can be resolved in the same way]. One can never dispense with the imamate altogether, since it is one of the essential elements of the Islamic tradition. Even when the community is unable to determine the timeline of two competing appointments, the imamate cannot be shut down or abandoned. If one of the appointees claims that his appointment took place first and demands that his rival swear an oath if he wishes to contest it, his request should be rejected. This matter is far too significant and sublime to rest on a person's willingness or lack thereof to swear an oath in support of his claims. The imam is the head of the entire Muslim community; no one has the authority to demand oaths from him or to command him to relinquish his authority to others. This answer suffices for the purposes of this chapter.

3 The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate

by
Abū Ṭālib al-Hārūnī

Introduction to the Text

Al-Nāṭiq bi-ʿl-Ḥaqq Abū Ṭālib al-Hārūnī (d. 1033) is considered one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Zaydī Shīʿism. A skilled theologian and jurist, he studied under Muʿtazilī scholars in Baghdad. Al-Hārūnī was one of the first Zaydīs to bridge Zaydism and Muʿtazilism. The author of several seminal works on law, jurisprudence, and theology, al-Hārūnī became a Zaydī imam in northern Iran for a short time. Among his writings is *The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate*, which he wrote in Rayy and dedicated to Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād (d. 995), the Buyid vizier in Iran and a prominent literary patron and intellectual. In this work, al-Hārūnī offers a comprehensive theory of the imamate and expends significant effort on refuting the doctrines of his Muʿtazilī and Imāmī counterparts on the topic.

The Foundations of the Imamate According to Zaydīs

Know that the Zaydīs have codified the revealed law [*sharʿ*] to include an imam as an essential feature.¹ It does not function without one. The

¹ For the Arabic source text, see al-Hārūnī, *al-Diʿāma*, 159–173, 181–190, 211–217.

faithful do not need an imam for matters related to those fundamentals of religion that are rationally apparent. Rather, they need him to implement the revealed law and to fulfill its duties. The necessity of the imamate is known through scriptural texts [*sam*'] rather than through reason. This is the position of dialectical theologians of the Zaydī school.² It is also the opinion that we consider correct, despite the existence of a few scholars who have espoused the contrary. The imamate requires the appointment of a candidate to an office unlike any other. The imam should possess qualities that uniquely qualify him for the position, since it is one that obliges all others to obey him. Such qualities manifestly sanction his authority. Infallibility or the guaranteed possession of a pristine inner state like that of the Prophet Muḥammad should not be counted among those qualities. This is the position of most Zaydis and also the one we consider correct. Only a few scholars have disagreed on this issue.

The authority of a new imam must be ratified with a fresh mandate once it becomes apparent that he possesses the requisite qualities. Neither miracles nor an unambiguous designation should be considered prerequisites to the appointment of an imam as the Imāmīs claim. Our Mu'tazilī coreligionists claim that an appointment is ratified by means of an electoral process and a contractual agreement, but this is also false. A preponderance of evidence favors our position. One obtains the imamate neither by right of inheritance nor as a reward for one's deeds. The imamate of a particular person can be confirmed in one of only two ways. The Prophet Muḥammad may endorse someone's authority with a designation that causes anyone who considers it carefully to be certain of its purpose. This was the case for 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn.³ Each possessed a designation from the Prophet. Otherwise, a person's imamate is legitimated by the inauguration of a new mission [*da'wa*] and the active pursuit of its objectives.

It is unlawful for there to be more than one imam at a time. This is the position of most Zaydis, and we consider it to be correct. A minority of scholars hold that in some circumstances more than one imam could exist in a single era. According to Zaydis, if an imam later manifests behavior

² Al-Hārūnī uses the term *muḥaṣṣilūn* to refer to theologians who used dialectics to deduce rational truths. In using this term, he also has Mu'tazilī theologians in mind. He makes this point to differentiate these theologians from those Zaydis who only followed hadith and rejected rational speculation in religion.

³ Al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn were the Prophet's grandsons through his daughter Fāṭima and his cousin and son-in-law, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

or qualities, such as the regular commission of great sins [*fisq*], that would have initially disqualified him from the office, his appointment is revoked. It is also a fundamental doctrine of the Zaydī school to observe any consensus reached by members of the *ahl al-bayt* [i.e., the Prophet's progeny]. It is unlawful to contradict them on any matter on which they are in agreement.

After al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the first person to possess all of the requisite qualities of an imam and to inaugurate a new mission was Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, then his son Yahyā b. Zayd. After these two men, various descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn became imams when they followed the path of Zayd b. 'Alī and Yahyā b. Zayd by:

- (1) inaugurating a new mission;
- (2) actively pursuing its objectives;
- (3) commanding right and forbidding wrong;
- (4) confronting oppressors in the community;
- (5) possessing the requisite qualities for the office of the imamate.

Evidence Regarding the Collective Need for Imams

The conduct of Muḥammad's Companions after his death is an indication of the existence of a collective social need for imams in each era. People need imams who can:

- (1) administer nondiscretionary penalties [*hudūd*];
- (2) secure all borderlands from threats;
- (3) guard Islam's centers and territories;
- (4) distribute the spoils of war;
- (5) prohibit oppression;
- (6) appoint competent governors and judges.

Anyone can see that despite their disagreements over who to appoint to the office, Muḥammad's Companions never disputed the fact that the community needed an imam. For this reason, proponents of the electoral process quickly nominated a candidate and ratified a contract with him upon the Prophet's death. Their actions reveal their conviction that any delays in the process are intolerable. Likewise, those who believed that 'Alī possessed a designation in his favor turned to him immediately after the Prophet's death. When 'Alī elucidated to them the circumstances that prevented him from asserting his authority [as the rightful imam],

they urged him not to delay any longer. We have already discussed the details of these events elsewhere.⁴

When the Anṣār wished to contest the claim of the Muhājirūn to the imamate, they suggested that each faction appoint its own emir. Despite the major differences between them and the emergence of competing claims to authority, no Companion ever asserted that people had no need of an imam. None of them ever rejected the concept of leadership altogether. When Abū Bakr was on his deathbed, he officially appointed 'Umar as his successor. As 'Umar lay dying, he created a council and ordered its members to appoint a successor from among themselves. When 'Uthmān was assassinated, the community hastened to appoint 'Alī as his successor. We are certain that each faction had members who loathed at least one of the abovementioned rulers. Some individuals, such as Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh, disapproved of 'Umar's appointment. Most of the Prophet's Companions were unyielding in voicing their criticisms of and opposition to 'Uthmān.⁵ Nonetheless, no one ever denied the utility or necessity of the office of imamate. This includes those who broke their oaths of fealty to the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. They did so in pursuit of the office for themselves. It was obvious to them that people in every generation need imams to serve them. If all that we have mentioned as evidence is true, then the two following claims must be correct. First, the conduct of Muḥammad's Companions is an indication of their belief that people are in need of imams. Second, in no circumstances is the imamate ever dispensable.

An interlocutor may ask, "Why is their conduct evidence of the necessity of the imamate rather than evidence of its [mere] permissibility?" He should be told in response that to deduce from the Companions' conduct the permissibility rather than the necessity of the imamate would be an error. Muḥammad's Companions endeavored to appoint imams and were unyielding in their efforts to firmly establish the office because they believed that they were obliged to do so. It is obvious from their conduct that they believed one could neither contravene nor disregard the duties

⁴ For al-Hārūnī's discussion of this issue, see *Di'āma*, 59–68.

⁵ Al-Hārūnī is not claiming here that there was widespread opposition to 'Uthmān's appointment, but rather that most Companions did not engage in any attempts to join him or defend his authority in his final days when disgruntled subjects laid siege to his home. Leading Companions such as Abū Dharr, 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and 'Ā'isha are portrayed as individuals who either broke ties with 'Uthmān at the end of his life or had previously expressed dissatisfaction with his policies or the conduct of his governors; see Madelung, *Succession*, 81–113.

associated with the office. Those who are acquainted with the history of the Companions and the imamate will not doubt our assessment of the matter.

An interlocutor may argue that the evidence suggests that the imamate was once a necessity [but is no longer], or that it had been necessary only in those particular cases. Nothing indicates a need for imams in other circumstances or periods. The evidence that we have presented, however, demonstrates the office's perpetual necessity. The conduct of the Companions is an indication that the office is bound to the continuing needs of the faithful, rather than to some historically contingent conditions. As we have already elucidated, imams are responsible for upholding the revealed law, guarding Islam's heartlands, and so on. These duties are perpetual, and thus the office that fulfills them must also be perpetual. On what grounds would the imamate be limited to one period and not another?

Imams Are Only Necessary for Matters of the Revealed Law, Not Rationally Apparent Moral Obligations

Humanity needs imams only for matters of the revealed law [*sharʿiyyāt*]. Rationally apparent moral obligations [*ʿaqliyyāt*] are not the cause [of this need]. God obliges individuals to fulfill rationally apparent duties only when He has bestowed on them the means to do so. This entails providing them with the necessary capacity, tools, evidence, and divine assistance [*alṭāf*, sing. *lutf*] to fulfill such duties or draw people closer to fulfilling them. In this area, we have found the existence or nonexistence of imams to be inconsequential. Therefore, their existence is evidently not essential to fulfilling rationally apparent duties.

An interlocutor may ask, "How is the existence or nonexistence of imams inconsequential in these matters?" We respond that we have found imams inconsequential for the capacity of an individual under moral obligations [*mukallaf*, i.e., an individual subject to the revealed law] to deduce his rationally apparent duties. Imams do not provide the means to obtain any other tools that may assist individuals either. One cannot consider the existence of imams to serve the best interests of an individual under moral obligations, since the existence or nonexistence of anyone – including imams – makes no difference in matters pertaining to reason.

An interlocutor may respond: "Rationally apparent duties can perhaps be understood correctly only by means of an alerting agent [*munabbih*]

whose knowledge is derived from scriptural texts. These agents serve the faithful by drawing their attention to how reason can deduce the existence of such duties. If this is the case, would not the existence of such agents be consequential?" But this argument is flawed. Its consequence is that individuals obtain knowledge of this agent, their collective need of him, and the obligation to obey him only through another agent [who informs them of all this]. These agents are either prophets or imams, but one would only know to follow such an agent by first following another. This entire theory requires an infinite regress of necessary agents for the imposition of moral obligations. It manifestly results in the inability ever to impose moral obligations and their nonexistence.

Our interlocutors might concede that people may first realize their moral obligations and the duty to obey *the first agent*, whether a prophet or an imam, by means of reason [but not later agents].⁶ But is this not also possible in later periods? If one can deduce the existence of this duty without recourse to an agent, the same must be true of other rationally apparent obligations.

An interlocutor may respond: "Individuals need imams who can draw their attention to proofs that require careful examination [*naẓar*] in the appropriate order."⁷ In our opinion, however, any sort of prompt [*khāṭir*] will suffice.⁸ There is no need for imams in particular. This theory also collapses when one considers the present situation, in which there is no imam with an uncanny ability to present proofs [in a way that would convince others of their moral obligations]. Nonetheless, those moral obligations continue to exist, and individuals remain capable of carefully examining the evidence when analyzing any issue. Our replies should put an end to all of this unnecessary talk about the need for imams in these matters.

⁶ Al-Hārūnī incorrectly assumes that Imāmīs believe an alerting agent (*munabbih*) must draw people's attention to the existence of rationally apparent duties before they can fulfill them. From this premise he draws the conclusion that this leads to an infinite regress of necessary agents for the imposition of moral obligations. According to the Imāmīs, however, rationally apparent duties exist independent of any agent.

⁷ The interlocutor is arguing that the sequence is essential to any presentation of proofs and that the imam possesses this requisite knowledge. Theologians assumed that when proofs were appropriately presented to individuals, they would be able correctly to deduce certain truths and the existence of moral obligations.

⁸ In this context, a prompt (*khāṭir*) is anything that draws a person's attention to those matters that necessitate careful examination, like the existence of God and one's duties to God. According to Mu'tazilis, anything could potentially fulfill this function. For example, a miracle, fortuitous event, misfortune, illness, or the death of a family member may lead a person to begin contemplating matters pertaining to God.

An interlocutor may ask, “You say that a prompt will suffice. What prevents imams from fulfilling this function that you attribute to a simple prompt? Such prompting cannot take the place of imams since they are subject to uncertainty and confusion [*iltibās*].” This argument fails when one considers the fact that prompts [from God] are not essential to deducing and knowing those truths that are rationally apparent. The existence or nonexistence of a prompt is inconsequential for one’s ability to scrutinize evidence and reach certitude on matters regarding which the evidence is sound. Prompts only appeal to the pathos of a person and draw one’s attention to those matters that necessitate careful examination. At the very least, a person should consider such questions as a precautionary measure against negative outcomes that may result from ignoring them.⁹ Such prompting from God plays no role in the actual comprehension of matters of reason. According to our interlocutors [Twelver Shī‘īs], imams serve only by prompting people to consider their moral obligations. If such prompting is not essential to knowing rationally apparent truths, then imams cannot be considered essential in these matters either. But our interlocutors mistakenly claim the opposite.

When someone fails to scrutinize these issues, the words of a preacher may suffice as a reminder.¹⁰ In place of God’s sending some other reminder or employing imams [for the purpose], preachers can suffice as a substitute. It may also be the case that rational individuals will consider their moral obligations to God independently of any prompting from God. A rational person may deduce the importance of investigating these matters as a precautionary measure against any negative outcome that may result from ignoring them. An imam would not be of any use to this person.

⁹ Al-Hārūnī believes that certain issues require careful examination. The failure to engage in their scrutiny harms a person’s well-being in the hereafter. One must reflect on these matters, draw the correct conclusions, and fulfill all of one’s duties to God to safeguard one’s salvation. A person could hypothetically live his or her life without ever investigating these important issues. God thus provides prompts so that individuals may consider them. When given the opportunity to consider the question of God’s existence, for example, some individuals may never come to a conclusion, but will nonetheless take precautionary measures, such as refraining from theft, to ensure that they do not incur the wrath of a possible God. In this way, divine prompts assist individuals in considering rationally apparent duties, although al-Hārūnī maintains, nonetheless, that they are not essential to one’s ability to undertake rational inquiry or to deduce the existence of moral obligations.

¹⁰ In this paragraph al-Hārūnī essentially argues that humans will always have moral obligations. If an individual is inattentive to those matters requiring scrutiny, then preachers and other God-fearing individuals will suffice in reminding them to consider such issues.

As for the interlocutor's claim that imams are more suitable than are other types of prompts since the latter are susceptible to uncertainty and confusion: this claim is absurd. Our interlocutor may be assuming that the imam's physical presence plays a role in the process, but it is irrelevant to the desired outcome [of drawing a person's attention to the existence of moral obligations]. Alternatively, he may be under the impression that an imam cannot be prevented from carrying out his duty to remind others, whereas other reminders may potentially be hindered. But this argument is flawed.¹¹ Despite our desire to pursue this argument further, a discussion of it would lie beyond the aim and scope of this book.

An interlocutor may ask, "Why do you deny that the existence of imams serves as a type of divine assistance?" For something to be considered divine assistance, one must know the manner in which it aids individuals. This knowledge may be general or detailed. Were one to accept claims without such knowledge and the evidence supporting it, one could claim anything. For someone's existence to be considered divine assistance, one of two things must be true. This person should, on God's behalf, either provide individuals with something that is considered divine assistance or serve the community's best interests in matters of religion [*din*]. If neither of these conditions applies to a person, his existence is no different from anyone else's. Claiming that such a person's existence represents divine assistance is analogous to claiming the same for other normal people [i.e., it is simply not true]. All of this supports our conclusion that people do not need imams for matters pertaining to reason.

An interlocutor may reply: "Perhaps the existence of imams constitutes divine assistance for another reason. Imams facilitate acts of obedience, since in their presence people hasten to discharge their duties and to comply with what constitutes moral decency. This increased compliance is a result of obeying imams and accepting their authority." We respond that there is no proof of this anywhere in the world. In fact, in many societies the opposite can be observed. The same can be said about the disobedience of humanity to all of the prophets and the imams sent to them. If what the interlocutor asserts is true, then it can only be claimed that some individuals with moral obligations are encouraged to do more in matters pertaining to religion. But this conclusion only supports our

¹¹ The interlocutor may be assuming that the physical presence of the imam ensures that individuals are reminded of their moral obligations. However, al-Hārūnī rejects this argument.

theory that imams serve as divine assistance for those obligations pertaining to the revealed law.

An interlocutor may argue that the existence of imams represents divine assistance for yet another reason. Imams protect communities from suffering hardships and deter individuals from engaging in oppression. It is well known that people are more likely to refrain from such things when someone is there to deter them. We would reply that this is not the case for everyone. In many instances, the counsel of those in authority fails to deter people from such behavior. Some may even increase their oppression in response. If what the interlocutor claims is true for some people, the reason for this outcome can only be their increased adherence to scriptural texts. If the interlocutor means to say that imams encourage others to reassess their behavior, then he is arguing that the imams function as prompts for individuals. But we have already addressed this argument. People do not need imams to be reminded of their duties, since other types of prompts suffice in their place. What the interlocutor claims, in fact, necessitates the presence of a multitude of imams at all times; every region would need one. One would have to conclude that to prevent the proliferation of oppression, multiple authorities would be required to deter rational individuals from wrongdoing. The presence of only one person to fulfill this function in the world would not suffice.

An interlocutor may argue that in the absence of the Prophet Muḥammad, the community needs an imam who can implement and preserve the revealed law in his place. The imam can also prevent discord and resolve disputes in the community. We would reply that the community would need such an individual only if the law's proper implementation and preservation were contingent on this person alone. But this is not the case. After the Prophet Muḥammad, the law remained intact because of its widespread, continuous dissemination [*tawātur*] and the existence of a consensus [*ijmā'*] [on fundamental matters]. There is no need for an imam to do anything in this regard.

The imam is incapable of preventing the emergence of disputes in the community. A dispute can be classified in one of two categories: it pertains either to the fundamental doctrines [*uṣūl*] of religion or to one of its subsidiaries [*furū'*] in the realm of law. The only way to resolve disputes in doctrinal matters is through careful examination of the evidence. People subject to the revealed law are fully capable of undertaking such analysis, and nothing prevents them from doing so. We have already elucidated the reasons for which the existence or nonexistence of imams is

inconsequential to this duty. As for disputes on matters of law, the imam is not charged with resolving them. Rather, the imam is to offer solutions to legal questions to the best of his ability. Our theory explains the status quo in the contemporary period. There is no imam who presently functions as the community's exclusive source of all knowledge and possesses the ability to resolve all of its differences. Nonetheless, moral obligations persist, and observance of the law remains an obligation.

An interlocutor may argue that members of the community, on the whole, possess deficiencies and must, therefore, have recourse to someone free of such deficiencies. According to experts on history, this view is mere pretense and does not reflect reality. They refer to two types of deficiencies, those that prevent people from carrying out their moral obligations as humans and those that do not. In cases of the former type, moral obligations cease to exist. We have already explained in detail why imams are inconsequential to the existence of moral obligations and why people are fully capable of ascertaining their duties without recourse to imams. As for the latter type, if deficiencies do not prevent people's awareness of responsibilities, there is no basis for any need for an imam.

An interlocutor may assert that humans' deficiency is obvious in their tendency to forget or to become negligent of their duties. When they lapse, they need imams to bring the lapse to their attention. But this claim is spurious. Individuals of sound mind cannot endlessly forget or neglect to engage in the scrutiny of evidence and in the other responsibilities they must meet as humans. As for lapses that occur under certain conditions such as sleep, moral obligations cease in those circumstances, and there is no need for an imam.

The Revealed Law, Not Rational Proofs, Corroborates Our Need for Imams

We have already mentioned the relevant proofs indicating that people need imams to fulfill certain duties prescribed by the revealed law. These duties include implementing nondiscretionary penalties, safeguarding Islam's territories, appointing emirs and judges, and so on. Now, if the need for imams is obvious in the duties legislated by revealed law but not in those that are rationally apparent, the likelier explanation for their necessity is scripture and prophetic traditions. We make the same argument in the case of prophets. People need prophets in order to learn from them everything about humanity's best interests in matters of religion.

Humans cannot deduce the knowledge that they bring independently or perceive its necessity rationally. Since the necessity of prophetic precepts cannot be independently deduced by reason, deducing the necessity of prophethood would be harder still.

An interlocutor may ask, “What prevents you from rationally deducing humanity’s need for imams? Is it not the case that we need someone to differentiate food that nourishes us from poison that causes death? Life survives only by these means.” But this argument is flawed on many grounds. Life will continue to exist even in the absence of such knowledge. Is it not the case that many living creatures, animals and humans alike, thrive without any knowledge of these things? Furthermore, what prevents the transmission of such knowledge through norms and customs? Custom suffices in these matters. Even if the interlocutor’s argument were sound, a single prophet or imam would be enough to convey such information. The community would then ensure the widespread transmission of this information. There would be no grounds for maintaining the continued existence of prophets and imams in each generation.

An interlocutor may assert that all rational individuals turn to imams for aid when experiencing crises or oppression, and that this is a rational proof for the necessity of imams.¹² But one would be mistaken in utilizing this example as evidence. Even if rational individuals never failed to seek the aid of imams in such circumstances, their conduct would not constitute unequivocal evidence. Rational people can collectively agree on a decision or a course of action that is unsound as a result of some ambiguity or *taqlīd* [deference to someone else’s authority]. Thus, any appeal to consensus or to the conduct of rational people cannot serve as evidence of the truth. Nonetheless, it is true that under certain circumstances rational people will not collectively agree on something unsound. When one can observe the truth of the matter directly [through sensory perception] or, under certain conditions, rely on the testimony of someone with direct knowledge of the issue, the resulting consensus is admissible.

It appears that the interlocutor can pursue this argument only on the basis of one of three assumptions. He may contend that rational people’s acceptance of the necessity of imams is the result of either immediately evident [*ḍarūri*] or acquired [*mukṭasab*] knowledge. If he claims the former, then all humans should readily share the belief in the necessity of

¹² This is the argument of Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), which Ibn al-Malāḥimī mentions below; see Text 5.

imams as a consequence of such necessary knowledge.¹³ If he claims the latter, he must provide clear evidence. However, if he claims that the conduct of rational people is determined by something other than knowledge, their conduct can no longer be considered authoritative.

If our analysis is correct, one cannot follow the interlocutor in accepting the conduct of rational people as evidence of the necessity of imams. This argument is flawed. One can deduce the necessity of imams from people's recourse to them only if one also contends that people in every region and members of every tribe must always have recourse to one or two chiefs to serve their needs.¹⁴ According to this argument, any other alternative would result in turmoil.

Imagine that a person claimed that the correct position is to believe in the necessity of pledging allegiance in each generation to one leader who must serve the needs of all peoples and tribes despite their differences, their competing claims to authority, and their varied circumstances. Can this claim be made given people's inclination to follow only leaders whom they consider one of their own? People would dismiss this claim as preposterous and its proponents as ignorant. It is obvious from all of this that our interlocutors lack the necessary evidence for their claims. This indicates that the opposite of what they assert is likely to be true.

The Essential and Nonessential Qualities of an Imam

For an individual to rightfully lay claim to the imamate, he must possess certain qualities at the commencement of his mission. The candidate should be:

- (1) an adult male of sound mind;
- (2) Muslim;
- (3) knowledgeable in matters necessary to serve as an imam;
- (4) endowed with moral probity;
- (5) courageous;

¹³ According to theologians, knowledge that is immediately evident (*darūrī*) is undeniable. All humans of sound mind should have access to such knowledge and attest to its truth.

¹⁴ The interlocutor claims that the conduct of rational people indicates the necessity of appointing one leader for all of humanity. Al-Hārūnī responds that evidence which suggests people need leaders to aid them in fulfilling their societal needs undercuts the interlocutor's argument, since such evidence points to the need for multiple leaders instead of one. For reasons outlined in the next paragraph, al-Hārūnī responds that reason would deem belief in one supreme leader impractical.

- (6) judicious;
- (7) neither infirm nor easily distressed;
- (8) generous in offering provisions when necessary;
- (9) the best of humanity or among the best;
- (10) free of afflictions that incapacitate a person and prevent him from fulfilling the duties of the office, such as blindness, a susceptibility to panic attacks, or paralysis.

Our justification for ruling that imams must be adult males of sound mind is the existence of a consensus in support of this view. No one in the Muslim community disputes the fact that children and individuals suffering from a mental illness should not govern the affairs of others. It is more appropriate, in fact, for others to govern their affairs. Likewise, no one disputes that women are ineligible for the imamate; rather, there is debate about whether women can serve in courts as judges. And no one claims that non-Muslims can serve as imams, since the revealed law would never oblige Muslims to obey dutifully someone without faith. There is no difference between a non-Muslim and a Muslim who adheres to a heresy that constitutes unbelief by way of erroneous interpretations [*ta'wīl*]. In both cases, unbelief disqualifies the candidate for this position of authority.

The imam should be learned. Otherwise, he would be incapable of fulfilling the duties that are particular to this office. Such incapacity would obviously defeat the very purpose for which imams are appointed. It is also obvious from the conduct of Muḥammad's Companions that they considered laypersons and common folk ineligible for the imamate. Despite the major differences among the Companions and their competing claims to the imamate, no Companion ever disputed the fact that knowledge and merit are necessary qualities in an imam.

Our justification for asserting that imams must be endowed with moral probity [*'adl*] is the community's consensus that the grave sinner [*fāsiq*] may not issue rulings in legal matters, offer testimony, receive custody of the financial assets of orphans, and so on. There is even greater reason to deem grave sinners ineligible for the imamate. It is the imam who must appoint judges, identify witnesses capable of giving honest testimony, and find trustworthy custodians to manage the community's finances. The conduct of the Companions testifies to the fact that the commission of grave sins [*fisq*] disqualifies a person for the imamate. Accordingly, when they criticized 'Uthmān for his conduct, they urged him to retire.

Imams should be men of courage and generosity. They should also be free of the afflictions that we have mentioned. Candidates lacking

these qualities would inevitably fail to perform the duties of the office adequately; their deficiencies would prevent them from doing so. Such failure would obviously defeat the very purpose for which imams are appointed. We have already elucidated why imams should be the best of human beings or among the best in a previous section.¹⁵

An interlocutor may ask to what extent a candidate's conduct should reflect these qualities. The community should have a way of determining [the degree of the candidate's acceptability], because otherwise it would be an error to consider possession of these qualities essential to the imam-ate. One could reply that the candidate should demonstrate that he possesses the expertise [*'ilm*] and commitment to justice that are required to serve as a judge. Likewise, he should possess the bravery, judiciousness, and magnanimity needed to command the military, if he were ever called to serve in that capacity. This answer is obviously correct, and no one should object to it.

Some qualities are not required of imams. For example, it is not essential for the imam to be the most knowledgeable person in all matters, as the Imāmīs and some Zaydīs assert. Nor should one expect the imam's inner state to be as pristine [*ma'mūn al-bāṭin*] as that of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is obvious that the imam need not be the most knowledgeable person in every discipline. We have already explained that people need imams only to fulfill certain duties prescribed by the revealed law. It is not essential for the person who fulfills these duties to be the most knowledgeable person in all matters. There is evidence that suggests that imams need not possess a pristine inner state. With God's assistance, we will devote a chapter to this subject.

Imams Need Not Resemble the Prophet in Possessing a Pristine Inner State or Infallibility

Although some Zaydīs agree with the Imāmīs in believing that imams should be characterized by a pristine inner state, these Zaydīs have come to this conclusion based on a different set of proofs. We shall provide evidence that manifestly disproves this claim. God willing, we will also discuss why each faction has mistakenly reached this conclusion and clarify why their reasoning is flawed. One proof against their claim is that people need imams to implement laws in ways that are manifest.

¹⁵ For al-Hārūnī's treatment of this topic, see *al-Di'āma*, 101–113.

This function does not require that the inner state of imams be pristine. Likewise, one cannot consider such an inner state a necessary quality of emirs,¹⁶ judges, or witnesses in legal matters. These individuals are capable of fulfilling their duties without the expectation of a pristine inner state. The community is also expected to presume that matters are as they appear and to assess them accordingly. In these affairs, there is no responsibility to ascertain the inner dimension [*bāṭin*] of things.

The Imāmīs have erred in their analysis of this issue. We shall consider the evidence they cite in support of their position and elucidate the reasons for which it is flawed. The Imāmīs argue that imams must be infallible since no higher authority exists to set them aright when they deviate or to stop them from committing oppression. If imams are fallible, there is no guarantee that they will discharge the duties of their office and satisfy the needs of the community.

We reply that an imam who lacks a pristine inner state and a superior authority [to set him aright] will not necessarily be deficient in discharging his duties as an imam. We have already explained that the duties of imams pertain to public affairs that are evaluated on the basis of their apparent merits rather than their inner realities. Were an imam to be deficient in his knowledge of the inner dimension of things, this deficiency would be irrelevant to evaluating his ability to meet the community's needs. He is not accountable for such things.¹⁷ The community is likewise not expected to follow or assess an imam's conduct as it pertains to the inner dimension of things. On the other hand, were an imam to be manifestly deficient [in his public affairs], he should be removed from office. The illegitimacy of his imamate would be apparent.

Our interlocutors claim that if the imam is not guaranteed to have a pristine inner state, one cannot ever be assured that obedience to the imam is appropriate in the sight of God. In other words, we would have no way of perceiving our error in cases in which the imam commands us to [inadvertently] disobey God. Obedience to the imam in such cases would entail disobedience to God. We reply that since the revealed law obliges

¹⁶ The term *umarāʾ* (sing. *amīr*) denotes persons of authority, both civil and military. In some cases, authors clearly employed the term to refer to military commanders, and at other times the governor of a province or city.

¹⁷ For example, the imam would be obliged to punish someone who publicly flouts the prohibition on the consumption of intoxicants. In order to fulfill the objectives of the revealed law properly, however, an imam is not expected to know or punish every instance in which a person privately ignores this prohibition.

us to obey imams in all matters that are public and apparent [*zāhir*], our obedience to them is automatically considered obedience to God – even in instances in which the inner reality of a command contradicts its apparent virtue. This is also true in the case of a judge who issues a verdict that others must obey on the basis of testimony given by witnesses who are considered credible. Such a verdict must be obeyed even when the inner reality of things contradicts the testimony of the witnesses. Likewise, the revealed law obliges the faithful to obey imams despite the possibility that some of their commands may inadvertently entail disobedience to God.

Look at the men whom the Prophet Muḥammad appointed to command armies and military detachments in various wars and raids. There was no guarantee regarding their inner states, but the faithful under their command were nonetheless obliged to obey them. For this reason, [when one of his commanders manifestly disobeyed God,] the Prophet Muḥammad said, “O God! I absolve myself of what Khālīd has done.”¹⁸ If what we say is true, then what [our interlocutors] assert is false, and one is never obliged to follow imams in acts of disobedience.¹⁹ Obedience to imams in these cases entails disobedience to God.

Our interlocutors assert that imams must resemble the Prophet Muḥammad in infallibility for other reasons. For example, imams should succeed the Prophet in bearing responsibility for safeguarding the revealed law and transmitting it to the community. They claim that imams should also teach members of the community and convey to them the essential elements of their faith. We reply that this error stems from a presumption of theirs that is unsubstantiated and false. Our interlocutors believe that people can know the revealed law only through the imam, just as the Prophet Muḥammad was the singular authority on the law in his lifetime. We have already elucidated the reasons for which we dispute this claim in a previous section.²⁰ If our arguments on this matter are sound, [our interlocutors’] assertion that only the imam can fully preserve and teach the revealed law or inform others of their obligation to observe it has no merit. We dispute their claims on this issue as we do on the subject of infallibility.

¹⁸ For this incident regarding the wrongful killing of captives under the orders of Khālīd b. al-Walīd, see Ibn Wādīh al-Ya’qūbī, *The Works of Ibn Wādīh al-Ya’qūbī: An English Translation*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 111.662–663.

¹⁹ Following the Prophet’s conduct, the faithful would be obliged to reject and condemn any commands that manifestly entail disobedience to God.

²⁰ See the section “Imams Are Only Necessary for Matters of the Revealed Law, Not Rationally Apparent Moral Obligations.”

Our interlocutors may claim that imams should be infallible in order to discharge the legal duties particular to the office correctly, guard Islam's centers, secure all borderlands, and so on. However, we have already explained that in discharging their duties, imams are expected only to assess the apparent merits of any case and to act accordingly.²¹ They need not possess a pristine inner state to discharge their duties, just as one does not expect such a state of emirs, judges, or witnesses.

Our interlocutors assert that the community needs imams because people tend to commit serious crimes that carry sentences requiring the imam's intervention. The community expects the imam to ensure that the verdicts in legal cases adhere to the principles of law. The imam should preside over any case in which a guilty verdict entails flogging, the severing of a limb, or the like. Were the imam like anyone else in his capacity to commit such crimes, an even higher authority – another imam – would be needed to set him aright when necessary. Since this is absurd, one must have recourse to an imam who is infallible.

We reply that our interlocutors have misconstrued the divine command [to obey imams] to mean something that it does not. One can easily refute these assertions by illuminating the commandment's actual purpose. When we claim that the community is in need of imams, we mean that God Almighty has obliged the community to obey a person who possesses specific qualities. In turn, God has charged that person with implementing certain laws in his community. God does not command the imam to obey another authority, although he is capable of committing misdeeds just as other members of the community are. God has obliged others to defer to a higher authority because of the benefit in it. The interlocutor claims that when the cause for such a duty applies to the imam as it applies to another person, their duties should be identical.²² But it is incorrect to argue from analogy in matters involving the

²¹ Al-Hārūnī is arguing against Imāmīs who held that imams should possess perfect knowledge of religion and infallibility to keep them from committing errors when presiding as judges. He responds that one should not have such expectations; judges and imams are expected to give judgments based only on the merits of the case before them.

²² The interlocutor is arguing that if both laypersons and imams are capable of committing sins, then the same duty to defer to a higher authority should exist for both laypersons and imams. Al-Hārūnī responds that even if the two resemble one another in their potential capacity to sin, which constitutes the cause (*'illa*) in this case, their duties can still differ from one another. The best interests (*maṣāliḥ*) of individuals may entail a different duty for each party. Al-Hārūnī goes on to argue that one cannot utilize analogical reasoning for matters related to the best interests of humanity. God alone decides these matters and subsequently commands and prohibits humanity accordingly.

best interests [*maṣāliḥ*] of humanity. Rather, one should follow only clear evidence [i.e., scriptural texts] in such matters. All of this suffices to prove our point.

It would not be impossible for there to be a statement from the Prophet in which he carefully instructs the members of his community to adhere to the following advice: “God Almighty has commanded you to appoint one among you to a position of authority and to obey him when he summons you, as long as he possesses the requisite qualities to manage the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties and other responsibilities appropriately. God does not oblige him to obey anyone else, although an imam has the ability to commit misdeeds just as you do.”

If all that we say is true, the necessity of imams is due to their role in these [legal and administrative] matters. It should now be obvious that our acknowledgment of their necessity does not entail that which our interlocutors mistakenly claim. As we have explained, their error stems from their presumption that one can reason out the basis for this commandment of God, but this is utterly false.

An interlocutor may ask, “Would the community still be expected to appoint imams and obey them if none of its members engaged in oppressive activities that require the intervention of imams?” We respond that if the existence of imams serves the best interests of humanity, then their presence would still be considered a necessity in these circumstances. It could also be the case that the best interests of individuals would be collectively served through their continued obedience to imams whenever the potential for oppression exists. Although we admit that the claim of the interlocutor is hypothetically possible, no certain evidence supports it.²³

An interlocutor may respond: “You claim that the best interests of the community entail a duty to obey imams in light of potential circumstances that require them. At the same time, the imam resembles everyone else in the community in his capacity to commit misdeeds. Wouldn’t his own best interests resemble theirs in needing an imam whom he can follow?” [Our reply to this question is that] we believe that the best interests of imams may differ from those of non-imams. It is not essential that each individual benefit directly from matters that serve the best interests of society. Is it

²³ There are two possibilities. Either people need imams because of their potential to commit sins or God has commanded them to follow imams irrespective of such proclivities. Al-Hārūnī is sure of the former, but considers the latter to be a possibility.

not the case that prophets possessed certain rights and responsibilities that the rest of humanity did not? It is in the service of society's best interests that these things came to an end with the cessation of prophethood.

Our interlocutors argue that it is God who selects individuals to serve as imams. The Almighty never selects individuals who fail to embrace monotheism fully, by denying God in some way, endorsing anthropomorphism, and so on. A person suspected of supporting such heresies is likewise unfit to serve as an imam. We concede that God would never name someone who holds these beliefs, even privately, to the imamate. Nothing prevents us from agreeing that a person with such qualities would never have a designation in his favor, either in scripture or in the words of the Prophet.

One must scrutinize further what our interlocutors mean when they say that God selects individuals to serve as imams. If they mean that God has created an office that requires obedience from the rest of the community when a qualified candidate exists and that no one with these [heretical] beliefs could ever occupy this office or deserve obedience, then this is false. Such an assertion contradicts reality, in which the community has faithfully respected the authority of emirs and judges. The community has also abided by legal rulings formed on the basis of the testimony of witnesses. It is quite possible that some of these individuals may have privately held heretical beliefs. Our Zaydī interlocutors have made such assertions on the basis of two arguments.

First, they reason that God entrusts imams with [the role of] presiding over affairs of religion. It would be absurd for God to select someone who is untrustworthy, particularly in such matters. Were God to do this, we are certain that such a person would abuse the trust placed in him and God would then expose him. All of this, however, is highly unlikely. Imams are entrusted with matters that can be scrutinized on the basis of their apparent merits. The duties and expectations of an imam cannot be considered qualitatively different from those of emirs and judges. Just as God Almighty is not obliged to expose the latter's personal beliefs and affairs, God need not do so with imams.

Second, some Zaydīs assert that imams must be infallible since the alternative allows the possibility that individuals who privately deny God or reject faith become imams and then conspire to destroy the Islamic faith. The community would have no means to avert such a threat. But this, like the scenario above, is highly unlikely. Is there any compelling reason for this concern in the case of imams but not regarding military commanders? Why not argue for infallibility as a prerequisite for the

latter as well? We could just as easily argue that a person appointed by the imam to command the armed forces, secure all borderlands, and fight against those who reject the faith must be infallible. Otherwise, the commander could potentially conspire to destroy the Islamic faith. The community would have no means to avert this threat. If, despite this possibility, infallibility is not considered a requisite for military commanders, it cannot be considered one for imams.

Our interlocutors may reply that were a military commander to attempt something like this, the imam is capable of fending off the threat. We reply that it is a distinct possibility that a military commander could go about it without an imam ever discovering his activities or finding an opportunity to stave off the threat. In any case, if our interlocutors believe that it is permissible to defuse the threat by removing the person from power, the same is true in the case of imams. If it were to become apparent that an imam was conspiring against Islam in this way, his imamate would be annulled. The community would remove him from power and appoint someone else in his place. Thus, there is no qualitative difference between an imam and a military commander in such cases.

Establishing the Imamate of a Person in the Absence of a Prophetic Designation

Among the Zaydīs, no one denies the legitimacy of a candidate who inaugurates a new mission and possesses the requisite qualities of an imam. The authority of a person is ratified this way when the Prophet Muḥammad has not designated him as an imam. Some question the legitimacy of an imam who is appointed by a previous imam. Does such a designation suffice to establish his imamate, or must he inaugurate a new mission, too? We should mention our evidence for believing that it is the proclamation of a mission that establishes a person's imamate. It is clear that individuals do not become imams by simply possessing the qualities of an imam. A candidate's imamate is inaugurated and validated by means of a cause. Our Mu'tazilī coreligionists may deem a person's selection the cause, whereas the Imāmīs believe only a designation can serve this purpose. We consider the proclamation of a mission to be sufficient. We have already elucidated why the imamate cannot be acquired by means of inheritance or as a reward for one's good deeds.²⁴ The conduct of the early

²⁴ See al-Hārūnī, *al-Di'āma*, 205–206.

Muslims and ample evidence elsewhere sufficiently discredit the doctrine of designation and the legitimacy of elections, as we have already noted.²⁵ Thus, the only possible means to validate a claim to the imamate is the proclamation of a mission, as we have argued.

An interlocutor may ask, “How can you accept the validity of a mission to legitimate a person’s imamate, but reject delegating the appointment of an imam to the community? In the case of the latter, you claim that ‘there is no evidence of its legitimacy in the revelation.’ It is on the same basis that we reject the legitimacy of missions.” We reply that it is impossible for anyone to claim that the revelation makes no mention of the legality [of missions]. How could this be the case given that everyone agrees that a candidate’s mission, as we have defined it, legitimates his claim to the office? Only the proponents of divine designation contest this point. In our view, a [proper] mission entails that a candidate possessing the requisite qualities inaugurates the mission; pursues the mission actively and does not become inactive; and refuses to make peace with oppressors or accept their offers of amnesty. Under these conditions, a candidate’s claim to the imamate should be considered legitimate. Only Imāmīs would dispute this evidence as irrelevant. All others, including those who believe that the community selects its own imams, should regard [a mission] as sufficient proof of a person’s imamate.

Is it not the case among the proponents of election that one cannot pledge allegiance to a candidate who lacks these qualities? No one among them disputes this point. In fact, if the conduct of a candidate to whom one has pledged allegiance subsequently contradicted the abovementioned characteristics, his imamate would not be endorsed as legitimate. On the other hand, whenever the members of the community find a candidate with these qualities, and there is no one else with a stronger claim to the office, they are obliged to pledge allegiance to him and to approve his bid. If this is accepted, we have sufficiently proven our point. The proponents of election must concur with us that one cannot really endorse a claim to the imamate if the candidate has not met the conditions for a valid mission. How can anyone claim that the revealed law makes no mention of this? Our arguments discredit this assertion.

Our interlocutor may claim: “We do not deny that these qualities strengthen a candidate’s claim to the imamate. Nonetheless, a person who is qualified for the imamate does not possess an inherent right to command

²⁵ See al-Hārūnī, *al-Di‘āma*, 191–197, 207–209.

obedience from others. The members of the community are likewise not obliged to recognize his authority until the electoral process is completed and their collective support for him is manifest.” But we have already discredited this argument. In the section above, we clarified that the features of a valid mission can also be seen as necessary conditions for a legitimate claim to the imamate. Candidates lacking these qualities can never be considered legitimate imams, whether or not members of the community pledge allegiance to them. Our interlocutors spuriously assert the necessity of an electoral process and emphasize its precedence over all other considerations. Therefore, we have endeavored to discredit the legitimacy of elections, since revelation makes no mention of it. It is an error to consider it essential.

Elections cannot be considered essential because further evidence contradicts that claim. Leading scholars among the proponents of this doctrine have endorsed the imamate of individuals who took office without any elections. They narrate history in the following way: “There was a time when tyrants held sovereignty over Muslims. One of these unjust imams died, and it so happened that a person qualified to serve as imam succeeded him. When this person became convinced that it was not his right to manage the community’s affairs, he renounced his authority until members of the community elected him to the position, pledged allegiance to him, and publicly expressed their support for him. After this, evil men murdered him and replaced him with someone unqualified for the office. They forced this person to serve as the community’s imam and to discharge the duties of the office. They also coerced the community to accept the authority of this person.” The respected scholar who narrated this tale ended it thus: “And this is the story of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.”²⁶ If his narration is true, we must reject the claim of our interlocutors as false. Our rivals cannot claim that elections are necessary when all of us agree that the imamate of a person can be confirmed without them.

An interlocutor may retort: “Your doctrine essentially endorses the imamate of any qualified person, even when he possesses nothing else. This is evident from the fact that you readily grant a candidate the authority of an imam as soon as you establish that he has the necessary characteristics. For example, you allow the person to proclaim a new mission and to demand obedience from the rest of the community. Yet this right belongs to imams [only].” This assessment [of our position] is incorrect,

²⁶ ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–720) was an Umayyad caliph revered for his piety; see *EP*, s.v. “‘Umar (II) b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz” (P. M. Cobb).

however. Those who consider it sufficient for a candidate simply to have the necessary qualities of an imam do not make it incumbent on the candidate to pursue a mission actively. They do not oblige their imams to confront tyrants, to refuse their offers of amnesty, to command what is right, or to forbid what is wrong.

An interlocutor may ask, “If the proclamation of a mission establishes the imamate of a person, what do you do when multiple candidates among the *ahl al-bayt* [i.e., the Prophet’s progeny] possess the requisite qualities of an imam? What do you do when they are all equal in merit, and each of them inaugurates a mission? Who is most deserving of the imamate?” We hold that the first to inaugurate a mission is the rightful imam. Any subsequent missions are not legitimate. A mission has no legal authority when another mission already exists or when the community recognizes the authority of another [legitimate] imam.

The interlocutor may ask, “What is to be done in the case of multiple candidates who inaugurate their missions simultaneously?” [In such cases,] one would not be able to determine the legality of one mission over another. Each candidate would be compelled to carry on with his mission until the identity of the superior candidate became evident. It will become apparent which candidate is best suited to serve in the position and best represents the qualities of an imam. When this happens, the superior candidate would be obliged to continue with his mission, and the community should collectively recognize his authority.

The interlocutor may further ask, “What if the candidates appear to be equally qualified?” Scholars within our tradition know from the course of history that individuals possess qualities and merits that distinguish them from one another.²⁷ However, it is nonetheless theoretically possible to resolve cases in which members of the community believe the candidates to be identical in their merit and their ability to serve as imams. We would argue that each candidate be obliged to pursue his mission so long as no one else has launched one before him. The community would then be obliged to [determine and] follow the one who began his mission first.

The interlocutor may counter that the outcome of this approach is that no one’s imamate will ever be recognized as valid. Nothing prevents a

²⁷ Al-Hārūnī implies that the interlocutor’s question is unfounded on two grounds. First, there are Zaydis who argue that the merits and capabilities of different candidates for office will never be exactly alike. Second, al-Hārūnī agrees with a second group of Zaydis that, when two candidates are alike, the one who inaugurates a mission first is the legitimate imam.

candidate from inaugurating a mission whenever someone else attempts to do so. Neither mission would precede the other in such cases. People could continue to do this, and the imamate would cease to exist. But our interlocutor would be mistaken. It is certainly possible for two candidates to inaugurate missions simultaneously, as the interlocutor has described. This can occur once or twice, but it would be absurd to assert that no candidate could *ever* precede another. It is implausible that candidates [of equal merit] would always decide to pursue missions at exactly the same time.

Candidates for the imamate resemble two people compelled to tread a narrow path that allows only one person to pass at a time. Whenever one withdraws, the other proceeds, and vice versa. They might repeatedly start and then halt at the same time [so they are never far from each other]. However, it is plain from the course of history that such circumstances are only temporary. The two rivals do not continue in this fashion forever, so that both are impeded from ever reaching the end of the path.²⁸ We offer the same answer to cases in which each candidate independently quits his mission and a new candidate supersedes them both.

The interlocutor may ask, “What happens when each candidate believes the other to be unqualified to lead a mission?” We reply that in such cases both candidates should be considered unqualified for the imamate. When both contest each other’s claims in this way, it becomes evident that they are seeking power. Their aim is not to serve the best interests of the community.

The interlocutor may ask, “What if two claimants to the imamate inaugurate missions independently of one another at opposite ends of the earth? As a result of the great distance between them, their respective missions might never encounter one another. What is the ruling then?” In Zaydī doctrine, it is almost impossible for something like that to occur. For the Zaydīs, only the members of a particular clan [i.e., Ḥasanids and Ḥusaynids] are qualified to become imams. Furthermore, those most qualified to serve as imams are always too small in number for such dilemmas to emerge. In any case, were something like this to occur, each individual would have the right to continue serving his respective community as an imam until news reached him regarding the mission of the other imam. At that point, the second candidate should surrender his

²⁸ Al-Ḥārūnī argues that one of the candidates must ultimately accomplish the aims of his mission first when they share the same objectives. This person would be the rightful imam.

authority to the first to proclaim a mission – as we have already explained. The interlocutor may ask, “Do you consider each of them to have been an imam up until the moment he learned of the existence of the other?” This is exactly what we say, unless it becomes evident afterward that the two were not in fact imams.

An interlocutor may ask, “How can you recognize someone as an imam if it is possible that his imamate may one day be nullified?” One should not consider this possibility a problem. The case of such an imam resembles that of a woman with two male guardians separated by a great distance. If each of them independently seals a marriage on her behalf with a different suitor, both suitors would legally be considered her husbands so long as each knows nothing about the other. It would then be our duty to find out which of the two concluded his contract first, and this person would retain the right to be her husband. If both contracts were sealed at the same time, neither of the two would be considered her husband [and both contracts would be annulled].

When a candidate is officially appointed to the office, the appointment is not enough to legitimize his imamate if he does not inaugurate a new mission. The only exceptions are those individuals whom the Prophet Muḥammad appointed to the position. When the lawgiver [i.e., the Prophet] officially endorses a candidate, this designation suffices to establish the legitimacy of the candidate’s imamate. One does not need evidence of a mission. If the appointment, however, is made by another imam [instead of the Prophet], the new imam must also inaugurate a mission of his own. He is considered the most entitled to lead a mission because of his official appointment by his predecessor. His situation is like that of the legal executor of an estate, whose appointment to the position makes him more entitled than anyone else to manage the property of the deceased. If the legal executor does not carry out his duties, then someone else can intervene. But we have some reservations about this argument [since there may be exceptional cases in which it does not hold].

Lastly, we have already elucidated the reasons why the imamate is restricted to the descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Those who contest this point are mistaken, as we have explained elsewhere.²⁹ Everyone who acknowledges that the imamate is restricted to this group also agrees that being an imam requires a mission. Thus, even in these cases, missions remain essential to confirming anyone’s imamate.

²⁹ See al-Hārūnī, *al-Di‘āma*, 157–158.

4 The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering

by
al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī

Introduction to the Text

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī was born in Tus, located in northwestern Iran. Having first studied in Nishapur, in 1017 he moved to Baghdad, the center of Twelver Shī'ī learning at the time. He studied with the two most prominent representatives of the school in the early eleventh century, al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā. He died in 1067 in Najaf, Iraq. Al-Ṭūsī is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential thinkers in Shī'ī history. *The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering* is al-Ṭūsī's recension of *The Curative*, written by al-Murtaḍā some years earlier. Al-Ṭūsī's exposition on the imamate is significantly shorter than al-Murtaḍā's, but it offers key insights into the logical basis of Twelver doctrines about the imamate that are less easily discerned in al-Murtaḍā's original text. Al-Ṭūsī's chief concerns include elucidating why the imamate is an example of divine assistance as well as the occultation of the twelfth imam. According to Shī'ī doctrine, only the infallible imams are the legitimate leaders of the Muslim community; the office of the imamate is neither subject to election nor to inheritance; rather, the imam is divinely designated and receives his authority from God. In this section, al-Ṭūsī explains the reasons for the imam's occultation and its ramifications for the Muslim community.

On Debates over the Imamate and Its Necessity

There are two opinions regarding the necessity of the imamate.¹ Almost all Muslims consider the office a necessity. Only a handful of people, very few in number, deny this and assert that the imamate is not essential. Those who hold this latter opinion do not represent the views of any known sect in the community. They consist of only a few members of the Ḥashwiyya and of other groups who diverged from the norm.² None of them can be considered renowned.

Those who consider the imamate a necessity also differ among themselves and can be divided into two groups. All Shī'īs and most Mu'tazilis make up the first group. They believe that the necessity of the imamate can be deduced by reason alone. One need not appeal to scriptural texts to prove it. The second group consists of some Mu'tazilis and members of other [theological] schools, who assert that the office is a necessity only because scriptural texts indicate this.

We must first engage with those who dispute the necessity of the office altogether. In deducing its necessity, we will also elucidate the basis of this doctrine. By describing the ways in which the office is essential, our answer will sufficiently refute both those who dispute its necessity and those who deny its rational basis and appeal to scriptural texts alone.

We can establish the rational basis of the imamate through two methodological arguments. The first method consists of two objectives. First, to establish the necessity of the imamate by way of reason and ensuring that the argument is not contingent on scriptural texts. The basis for the imamate should persist in both the presence and the absence of such texts. Second, to establish that the imamate is necessary perpetually or as long as humans possess any rationally apparent moral obligations [*taklīf*] in the sight of God.³ The second method also includes two aims. First, to demonstrate that once divine law is revealed to a community, the community needs an imam to safeguard it and to implement its rulings appropriately. Second, to demonstrate that the need for imams is

¹ For the Arabic source text, see al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Shāfiʿī*, 1.65–112.

² The term *ḥashwiyya* refers to partisans of hadith who opposed dialectical theology (*kalām*). See *EF*, s.v. “Hashwiyya” (Jon Hoover).

³ By “rationally apparent moral obligations,” al-Ṭūsī has in mind the obligations that reason can discover independent of revelation. The discovery of these obligations, however, is preceded by establishing God's existence. As explained in the Introduction, *taklīf* refers to the moral and legal obligations that God has placed on human beings. Any adult of sound mind is required to fulfill his or her obligations by obeying God's commands.

established by means of reason and that our interlocutors are mistaken in disputing with us.

We shall commence with the first set of proofs, as this approach is more appropriate and encompasses all other matters associated with rationally apparent moral obligations. We shall deal comprehensively with the false claims of our interlocutors and consider all potential rebuttals. In this manner, we hope to account sufficiently even for arguments they have failed to mention or discuss in their books.

In this endeavor, I seek God's assistance and grace.

The First Method: The Rational Necessity of the Imamate in the Absence of Scriptural Texts

In the absence of scriptural texts, the imamate remains necessary as an office by virtue of its role in representing divine assistance in matters pertaining to obligations that are rationally apparent.⁴ These obligations cannot be discharged without an imam, and the office must thus be deemed necessary. In matters pertaining to essential knowledge [*ma'ārif*] as well as in other cases, whenever the imposition of moral obligations is contingent on divine assistance, the existence of the imamate is always necessary.⁵

An interlocutor may say, "What is your evidence that the imamate represents divine assistance? Substantiate your claims and present this evidence." We respond that enduring social norms and practices indicate that the office indeed constitutes divine assistance. It is clear that societies flourish whenever individuals possess a great leader [*ra'īs*] who is unhindered in his ability to rule and whom they regard as just, powerful, and capable of confronting adversaries and any military threats to his rule. He should also be someone who exacts justice from oppressors on behalf of the oppressed. In the presence of such a leader, there is greater stability, decreased civil strife, increased agricultural yields, and greater prosperity.

⁴ Mu'tazilīs and Imāmīs believed that God did not withhold anything that functioned as a divine assistance (*lutf*) for humanity. Divine assistance aids individuals in the fulfillment of their moral obligations (*taklif*). For more on this concept, see the Introduction.

⁵ *Ma'ārif* relates to those matters considered essential for all humans to contemplate and know such as monotheism and all other rationally apparent moral obligations (*takālif 'aqliyya*). One such obligation, for example, is the duty to thank one's benefactor (*shukr al-mun'im*). Irrespective of one's religious identity, Mu'tazilī, Zaydī, and Twelver Shī'ī theologians held that any rational person could deduce the virtue of such a duty.

People are deterred from engaging in activities that corrupt their society and incline toward that which serves their collective interests. But when societies are bereft of leaders with these qualities, the strong take advantage of the weak. People are less prosperous, face a string of crises, and turn to sinful behavior. Such a society fails to serve the collective interests of its people and approaches a state of lawlessness. All of this is necessarily true. Anyone with a sound mind can deduce this much. One should not waste any time debating a person who cannot see it.

An interlocutor may argue that a leader benefits and serves the collective interests of a people only in their worldly affairs. God is not obliged to serve people in this capacity. Rather, God provides people with that which serves their needs in matters of religion [and the hereafter]. We would reply that the presence of such leaders indeed serves the collective interests of people in their worldly affairs, as the interlocutor has admitted. We know, however, that it provides people with necessary assistance in matters of religion as well. As we have already mentioned, leaders endeavor to eliminate social ills such as oppression and injustice. Without a doubt, the elimination of these social ills can be considered beneficial in a religious sense.⁶ Such leadership must be considered essential to society on this basis and not on the grounds mentioned above.

An interlocutor may ask, "How can you claim that reason demands the existence of the office of the imamate and that all must necessarily know this, when you have rivals who deny it? Your rivals allow for circumstances in which no such leader exists and argue that people face the same circumstances whether he is present or absent. You must, then, believe one of two things about these rivals: either they are obstinate in their claims, or what they claim to be necessarily true cannot be described as such." We would reply that no reasonable person disputes what we have said concerning enduring social norms and the social implications of having leaders. Leaders prevent the destruction of society. In their absence there is greater turmoil. Our rivals who claim that leadership is nonessential do not dispute this either. They simply argue that such leadership does not always exist and can occasionally come to an end. For our rivals, the future can differ from the present and deviations from enduring social

⁶ Al-Tūsī maintains that by reducing oppression in a society, the imamate functions as divine assistance, since God is providing people with an office that encourages their piety and discourages sinfulness. Thus, the imam ultimately helps humanity to be more pious and this serves their well-being in the hereafter.

norms are possible. However, if we can prove that past social norms are enduring and will continue to exist in the future, this objection collapses.

The interlocutor may then demand that we provide evidence that indicates past social norms will endure in the matters that we have mentioned, as this would serve our aims and strengthen our argument. We would respond that corruption, oppression, civil strife, and turmoil will occur in the absence of leaders since individuals cannot be guaranteed to refrain from activities that lead to such outcomes. This is the case because people are not infallible and are inclined by nature to seek pleasure and to acquire whatever they desire. Humans will continue to follow their base desires and to lack infallibility in the future as they do today. As long as this is the case, the need for leadership will endure.

An interlocutor may argue, "How can you claim that past social norms will endure when we observe variability in the human condition? Even in your claims, you have acknowledged that in the presence of good leadership people are only occasionally inclined to serve the best interests of society and to avoid actions that ruin it. In the absence of such leadership, societies can sometimes flourish in this way as well. Is it not the case that people can continue to act in their collective best interests and to avoid social ills until another leader comes to power? In fact, more conflict, civil strife, and turmoil will ensue with the appointment of a new leader, and this is the opposite of what you claim." We reply that the turmoil that ensues in the presence of a leader is a consequence of people opposing the appointment of a particular person among them. We do not claim that every individual would become righteous in the presence of a leader. Rather, we claim that a society will generally flourish when it possesses leadership. This remains true even in cases in which there is opposition to a leader. Is it not the case that if those same people possessed a leader whom they admired, and this person managed their affairs as they desired, then they would collectively prosper and any turmoil would subside? The source of their problems is what we mentioned above. None of this undermines our belief that people always need leaders.

The turmoil that emerges in the presence of leaders does not compare to the great destruction and oppression that appear in their absence. This point agrees with what we say elsewhere about prophets and messengers of God who bear scripture. Our opponents, in fact, concur with us that the civil strife and turmoil that occur after the inauguration of a new prophetic mission cannot be compared to the counterfactual. Were it not for the prophets, the ensuing civil strife would be far greater. Their missions

function as a type of divine assistance, even when this function is not apparent. This is also our view regarding leadership.

An interlocutor may respond: “What you consider evidence of enduring social norms would require you to believe in the necessity of a multiplicity of leaders, since you would have to believe in the need for a leader in every country and province. Your argument from such evidence collapses as soon as you claim that there should only be one leader, for if you allow the people of a province or a country to live without a leader despite their need of one, you must concede that humans are capable of functioning without leaders despite a need for them.” We reply that the evidence that we mentioned above regarding enduring social norms demonstrates the necessity of leadership, which causes a society to experience prosperity in its presence and decline in its absence. This evidence does not demonstrate the necessity of multiple leaders or dictate their qualities. One would need to appeal to other evidence to discuss these two subjects. Furthermore, one would need to examine what is known [with certitude] and consider the role of humanity’s best interests in adjudicating these matters.⁷ If it is in humanity’s best interest to have one leader, then there can be only one. If it is in society’s interest to have more than one, then there should be more. This is a sufficient rebuttal to our interlocutor’s claim.

Nevertheless, we will entertain their objections and consider the implications of what they believe to be a necessary corollary of our argument — namely, that a leader should exist in every province and country. We accept this objection and add the following: these regional authorities would still need a superior to take them to task when they err. The need for a leader would apply even to these authorities. This fact also discredits the objections of our interlocutor. The existence of infallible leaders in every country and region would not be contrary to reason. It is by way of consensus that we are certain there can be only one imam. For this reason, he must be infallible. However, we do not require rulers and emirs

⁷ Al-Ṭūsī’s use of the term “best interest” (*maṣlaḥa*) should not be confused with a Sunnī legal doctrine that provides a jurist greater freedom to depart from legal precedents to serve the best interests of an individual or society. For Sunnis, such departures are permissible as a result of some necessity (*darūra*); this is a legal interpretive mechanism. For al-Ṭūsī, God determines the needs of a community and consequently provides His assistance on this basis. This is a theological concept related to moral obligations (*taklīf*). Even in cases where humans cannot determine the exact nature of this “best interest,” they must still fulfill their moral obligations. Thus, if al-Ṭūsī describes a certain obligation or ruling as pertaining to the best interests of humanity, by this he implies that it cannot be changed as it serves an enduring need of all humans.

in their administration to be infallible, since they collectively work under the supervision of the imam.

When there is only one imam, people may be separated from him by great distances and live so far away that they hear news about him or his affairs only after long delays. Even these circumstances do not necessarily nullify the existence of moral obligations or divine assistance, since our school [*madhhab*] supports belief in the need for leaders [or individuals with authority] in every country to serve the needs of each person. Additionally, God may safeguard the best interests of individuals far from the imam by means of his deputies and emirs. Such leadership suffices for the auxiliary branches of authority, but not for its foundation.⁸

An interlocutor may ask, “What about people who are so remote that they have no knowledge of any existing imam? Would any of them actually benefit from his emirs or deputies?” We reply that for populations so remote that they face the conditions you describe, God should appoint a leader with the qualities of an imam to serve them. The interlocutor may retort that we must, then, allow for the existence of multiple imams in remote locations at this very moment. We reply that it is impossible that God could have obliged everyone on the face of the earth, both near and far, to follow the law revealed to Muḥammad without such individuals hearing of the Muslim community, the miracles that substantiate the mission of our prophet, and the revealed law he established. Despite major delays, as long as people are capable of receiving news about Muslims and their imams, they have a responsibility to follow the deputies appointed to serve them. Likewise, they are obliged to accept and observe the commandments of the revealed law.

If it is the case that there exist people under moral obligations at the far ends of the earth but who are so remote that they have no knowledge of us [i.e., the community that is led by an imam], then a single imam or multiple imams may exist for such populations. The consensus of the community is that there cannot be more than one lawful imam for those who hear about us [i.e., the Muslim community] and live in locations known

⁸ Al-Tūsī is arguing that delegates of the imam can serve the needs of people when an infallible imam exists as the highest authority. In such circumstances, the imam can still oversee the affairs of his delegates and set them aright when necessary. From this dispensation, however, one should not claim that fallible authorities suffice as imams.

to us. Those who do not live in these locations are like angels and jinns.⁹ Their circumstances require further consideration, since their case can reflect either of the two possibilities mentioned above [i.e., a single imam or multiple imams]. In any case, uncertainty regarding this matter does not nullify the arguments we have made above.

An interlocutor may ask, “Do you claim that such leadership constitutes divine assistance for everyone with a duty to God or only for a portion of such people? If the former, this position implies that leaders themselves should also have leaders – an absurd scenario, as it results in an infinite chain of necessary leaders. On the other hand, if you claim that such leadership is divine assistance for only a portion of those with duties to God, we note that if a portion of the population can live without a leader, all can function without one. If this is true, the argument that leadership constitutes divine assistance collapses.” We would reply that such leadership constitutes divine assistance for any individual who cannot guard himself against error and oppression. An imam helps such a person refrain from reprehensible deeds [*al-qabā’ih*]. In this way, the imam represents divine assistance. By contrast, an infallible person has no need of an imam to assist him or her and prevent him or her from committing errors, oppression, and so on. Imams are not, as our interlocutors argue, individuals of the first category, who need superiors to guide them. This objection is thus invalid.

The interlocutor may respond: “In that case, you must admit that leadership constitutes divine assistance only for those who are fallible, not for those who are infallible. According to your thesis, individuals qualified for the imamate have no need of imams themselves because of their infallibility. If you admit this, then your doctrine is invalidated by a consensus of the community that mandates that people be either imams or followers of imams.”¹⁰ Any claim that contradicts this consensus, such as the one you have mentioned, should be rejected as false.” We reply that this is the response of someone who has not correctly understood what we have said. We explained that leadership is divine assistance for those who are not infallible. It assists by deterring fallible people from committing errors,

⁹ Al-Tūsī is arguing that the affairs of those in remote locations are unknown to the community, so their affairs are concealed like those of jinns and angels.

¹⁰ The interlocutor argues that infallible people have no need for imams since imams help guide fallible people. Infallible people who are not imams would not truly be “followers” of imams either.

oppression, and other reprehensible deeds. There are indeed some individuals who possess the qualities of leadership and refrain from committing errors [by virtue of their infallibility] without the aid of a leader. A leader would then not represent divine assistance for them in this capacity. It would be absurd to claim that something constitutes assistance for an objective that has already been achieved. Divine assistance is always aimed at fulfilling a future objective. Having said all of this, we did not claim that imams seek to assist only those individuals who lack infallibility. The infallible subjects of an imam may have other needs, and nothing prevents an imam from helping them with those matters. The objection of our interlocutor is therefore nullified.

Nothing prevents an imam from constituting divine assistance for subjects who are infallible by fostering such infallibility. When these subjects fear his retribution, the authority that the imam wields deters them from misdeeds. Therefore, infallible subjects also need imams and benefit from their existence. If it is established that everyone who is not an imam is obliged to follow and obey one, we can deduce that these subjects need him as a consequence of his infallibility and his ability to provide them with divine assistance. On this basis alone, imams can be considered a necessity. But perhaps there is a second reason for their existence as well. If this is the case, then both reasons equally provide justification for the necessity of imams.

The interlocutor may demand evidence that subjects who are already infallible are also in need of imams. One should reply that people need imams for a variety of reasons. Some need imams for religious knowledge. The imam may teach them about exceptional cases and obscurities regarding certain rulings in the revealed law. This is our view regarding a person qualified to serve as an imam. Such a candidate should study the revealed law and the various components of religion with the imams who precede him. He should perfect his knowledge of matters that concern the community. In the event of the [current] imam's demise, the candidate should be prepared to succeed him immediately. Such a person is thus in no need of assistance or of the opinions of others, and he obtains a level of perfection. This is clear to anyone who meditates on the issue.

An interlocutor may object, "According to your own testimony, fallible and infallible subjects need imams for different reasons. If all of this is true, what prevents an imam, despite his infallibility, from also needing an imam?" Our reply is that we have already discussed the reasons why infallible subjects would nonetheless need an imam. At no point did we

refer to any unknown proof. Our interlocutor will need to explain the basis on which one imam should need another if he wants to make such an assertion. However much he desires to refute our views and to misconstrue their implications, he has no grounds for this objection.

The reasons for which other subjects need an imam do not apply to the imam himself. Is it not the case that the imam possesses an infallibility that others lack? Unlike other [infallible] subjects, the imam does not need to learn the components of religion from someone else. According to our school, an imam must have complete knowledge of the matters that concern the community. Below we shall prove that no one in the community can be more knowledgeable than he is. No one in the community should be superior to him in merit, either. These qualities exemplify why subjects need an imam. If what we say is true, the interlocutor's argument collapses.

An interlocutor may argue, "The imam would still need someone else. Is it not the case that the imam can be oppressed? He would need another imam to preside over his case and to seek restitution from the oppressor on his behalf. Imāmīs cannot deny this and claim the opposite, namely, that the imam can never be oppressed by others. If you admit the vulnerability of imams, you should also accept that one imam may need another. What prevents you then from admitting this?" Our response is that we never claimed that imams should be considered divine assistance [*lutf*] for oppressed peoples. In fact, oppressors [rather than the oppressed] are the real reason we need imams. The existence of imams in fact helps deter offenders from harming others and committing sins. When such a person refrains from harming others, there are no victims. On this basis, some may figuratively characterize the imam as divine assistance for victims, although he does not in fact aid victims.¹¹ The outcome of this argument is that imams would be unnecessary only if no one were ever capable of oppression. However, the potential for humans to harm others will always remain.

The interlocutor may ask, "Will you deny the need for two imams if it becomes clear that the first imam is less corrupt, more righteous, and more effective as a leader when there is also a second imam? Even if there is no doubt that the imam will discharge his duties, such circumstances

¹¹ According to al-Ṭūsī, the imam should be considered divine assistance (*lutf*) because of his ability to deter and discourage oppressors from potentially harming others. He in fact serves as divine assistance for oppressors, but does so only figuratively for their potential victims.

necessitate divine assistance [i.e., the second imam] to help him excel.” We reply that this theory would be sound only if the person in question was bound to engage in reprehensible behavior or to fail to discharge the duties required of him. In such circumstances, divine assistance would be appropriate. By contrast, if it is clear that he will not fail to fulfill his responsibilities, there is no cause for such assistance. In fact, the existence of another imam for this purpose would be considered a shortcoming.

The interlocutor may ask, “According to your doctrines, does leadership constitute divine assistance for discharging all or some of one’s duties to God? If it aids in all such matters, it should aid the imam, too. Alternatively, if it does not aid in discharging some duties, how can one be sure it helps with anything at all? One could potentially deny its function in providing assistance altogether.” Our reply is the following: We are certain that leadership assists people by influencing their behavior. In particular, such leadership deters individuals from committing those actions that qualify as unjust or entail unfair domination over others; in the presence of leadership the occurrence of such actions will be marginal whereas in its absence these actions will be predominant. The imam might also assist some individuals in their intellectual activities and help them to become aware of their true intentions. Hence, we are certain that leadership cannot constitute divine assistance for the imam himself, since he has no need of an imam. But for others, since we are certain that they need the imam to fulfill the obligations pertaining to their behavior and some also need him to guide their thoughts and intentions, then it can be concluded that the imam’s assistance is needed for the fulfillment of all obligations [including their rationally apparent moral obligations].

Our characterization of leadership as divine assistance in certain matters does not necessarily mean it aids in nothing else. The way in which something aids is contingent on the context, the time, and the person in question. Something can represent assistance in all circumstances in which a duty exists. For example, divine assistance may encourage realization of knowledge [*ma’ārif*] that is considered essential. Sometimes divine assistance may aid humans only under particular conditions. The circumstances of different people desiring to fulfill commandments related to giving alms, fasting, and daily worship will not be identical. Consequently, the type of assistance each person needs will differ. The birth of a child and an increase or decrease in provisions may each serve as divine assistance for one person but not for another, depending on the

circumstances. One should never speculate about matters of divine assistance or compare instances of it to one another.

If all that we say is true, then nothing compels us to believe what our interlocutor has claimed – namely, that a second imam must aid the first or that the latter may not constitute divine assistance for some subjects. We are certain that an imam does not function only to guide us to a second imam who then aids us in the completion of many of our required duties and prevents us from engaging in many forbidden activities. Were the first imam to serve in such a capacity, it would be impossible for individuals to ever fulfill their duty of identifying and following the imam. This duty would be unfair, since it would entail an infinite regress of necessary imams. In other words, if one could know the first imam only by means of a second, the identity of the second imam would be contingent on a third. The imamate of this third person would likewise be contingent on another, and so on. All of this would result in an infinite regress of necessary imams – an obvious absurdity. Therefore, there should be no doubt in the validity of our claims: an imam cannot represent divine assistance by guiding people to a second imam.

The interlocutor may object, “Previously, you argued that the imam may serve in such a capacity by assisting those who are not imams in all of their obligations to God. Now, you claim that the imam cannot aid in the identification of another imam. What has led you to draw a distinction between these duties? What prevents you from recognizing that the imam constitutes divine assistance in all of these matters?” Our reply is that we consider the imam to represent divine assistance for those who are not imams in all of their duties to God because his intervention saves them either from ruin [*fasād*] or from the complete nullification of their moral obligations. If this is the case, then it is correct to believe that God appoints imams to help the community in all of its duties to Him. It is in this way that one’s duties to God remain intact and the imam constitutes divine assistance. If the imam also needed assistance in fulfilling his own obligations, then this would require the existence of a second imam. However, the second imam would have the same needs as the first, and this would result in an infinite regress of imams [in need of aid].

The alternative is to have certitude regarding the existence of an imam who is in no need of another to discharge his duties. We are certain that a second imam cannot constitute divine assistance for any of

the duties of the first imam. The basis of this certainty is the infallibility of the first imam. Otherwise, one must claim that this first imam must still fulfill his duties to God despite his unmet need for a second imam to aid him in this endeavor. This claim would mean that one's duty to obey God persists even when one does not have access to the necessary aid to discharge this duty, but such an argument is untenable. Were one to accept this line of reasoning, it would undermine the basis on which imams exist in the first place. We have argued for the necessity of imams by characterizing them as individuals who represent divine assistance [and God does not fail to provide such assistance when needed]. If it were possible for moral obligations to persist in the absence of necessary aid, there would be no need for imams. Thus, the error in this line of reasoning should be plain.

An interlocutor may object: "You are certain of the imam's function as divine assistance only because of the threat of punishment that his rule poses for anyone who commits misdeeds. In a sense, then, subjects are coerced to fulfill their duties and to refrain from reprehensible acts. Such coercion nullifies moral obligation." We would respond that the threat of reprimand and punishment from the imam or a person's fear of such things does not amount to coercion. We know this from the fact that some subjects will engage in reprehensible acts even in the presence of powerful imams who have established their rule. Furthermore, intelligent people recognize the merit of those who refrain from such conduct. On the other hand, someone who is coerced should not be praised for his conduct.

If we accept the interlocutor's objection that fear of the imam compels subjects to fulfill their duties, then our opponent must also assert that knowledge [*ma'rifā*] of the fact that sinful behavior merits God's punishment similarly compels individuals to avoid such behavior. Our interlocutor may object by arguing that there is no compulsion here. People refrain from immorality because of its reprehensibility and that knowledge of any repercussions is only a secondary motivation. We would then respond with the same answer: people refrain from reprehensible acts in the presence of powerful imams for the very reason that they should refrain from it [i.e., because it is reprehensible]. The presence of an imam is only a secondary motivation. Thus, the argument of our interlocutor collapses.

Our interlocutor may argue as follows: "You [Imāmīs] claim that the imamate is divine assistance since [thanks to it] people are more likely to

engage in acts of obedience and less likely to engage in acts of disobedience. In this way, the imamate resembles knowledge of essential truths [*ma'rifa*] in its effects on people.¹² You also claim that by virtue of his infallibility, an imam has no need of another imam to prevent him from sinning. On the basis of your claims, the imam need not possess knowledge of essential truths. However, if infallibility does not preclude the imam's need for knowledge, what prevents him from also needing another imam to prevent him from sinning? Our previous objections cannot be dismissed: these doctrines entail either an infinite regress of necessary imams or a denial of the necessity of such knowledge for imams. All Muslims would agree that each outcome is untenable." Our reply is that we did not oblige everyone to possess knowledge of essential truths because it functions as divine assistance. In some cases, such knowledge constitutes a necessary type of aid, and in others it is an essential element in one's duty to show gratitude to a benefactor. If an imam were infallible but lacked this knowledge, he would still be obliged to attain it, since it is essential to his duty to show gratitude to a benefactor.

We know it to be necessarily true within the religion of the Prophet Muḥammad that observing the obligatory rituals in the revealed law is incumbent on all those who meet the necessary conditions for performing them. The rituals would be considered invalid if someone attempted to perform them without any knowledge of God, His attributes, or Muḥammad's prophethood. The necessity of knowing these truths should be obvious from this compelling argument; a necessary condition for fulfilling a duty is a duty in itself.¹³ Nonetheless, no one should argue on this basis that the duty to know these truths

¹² According to the Mu'tazilis, every individual has a duty to reflect on the human condition and the source of all existence. They also maintained that deeds are inherently good or evil and the intellect is capable of differentiating between the two. Given these assumptions, they reasoned that in the absence of revelation and prophethood, individuals were still tasked with fulfilling certain duties since these duties were rationally apparent and essentially good. These duties include the necessity of protecting oneself from harm and refraining from causing harm to others. They also include the necessity of showing gratitude to any benefactor, including God, who is the ultimate benefactor in giving life. *Ma'rifa* or knowledge of these truths was considered essential to being a rational person (*ʿāqil*).

¹³ Al-Ṭūsī is referring to the legal status of necessary preliminaries. For example, if obligatory daily prayer is a duty that requires ablution, jurists would reason that the necessary preliminary (i.e., ablution) is also a duty that individuals must fulfill according to the revealed law. See Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence*, tr. Roy Mottahedeh (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 113–116, 163–164.

ceases in cases in which individuals are exempted from performing the obligatory rituals. Other evidence indicates that the duty to know these truths persists in such cases.

In particular, the Muslim community is in agreement that even when an individual is exempted from performing the obligatory rituals, he retains the duty to know God. Some argue that such knowledge is, in fact, necessary.¹⁴ If one were to accept this argument, one would never characterize knowledge of the divine as a duty [since everyone would know it by necessity]. Consequently, one's ability or inability to perform rituals would be of no consequence. An exemption from the duty to perform the obligatory rituals is irrelevant to the duty to know God.

Others have argued that knowledge of divine truths is a type of knowledge that is acquired. Neither doubt nor ambiguity can obscure the obligation to acquire such knowledge. Even if a person is exempted from performing any [other] duty, including performing obligatory rituals, the duty to know God endures. Others, who believe that knowledge of God is natural to humans,¹⁵ would not contest this point either. Any objection to this consensus is bound to fail.¹⁶

Some believe that the duty to know God should be understood only as divine assistance. A proponent of this belief could still consider it entirely separate from the office of the imamate [which also represents divine assistance]. It is impossible for an imam to be infallible without knowing God, since infallibility entails discharging all duties that are required of

¹⁴ Meaning that every individual has necessary knowledge of God and, hence, this knowledge does not have to be acquired through reflection and reasoning; it is rather engendered in the individual by God.

¹⁵ How does knowing God *naturally* differ from knowing God by *necessity*? In contrast to necessary knowledge (which is engendered by God) and acquired knowledge (which is acquired through reasoning), natural knowledge of God is believed to be innate to humanity. This innate knowledge springs forth as a consequence of human nature.

¹⁶ Al-Tūsī argues that there is a type of agreement among theologians that seeking essential knowledge (*ma'rifa*) always remains a duty that humans must fulfill. On the one hand, one group of theologians claims that such knowledge is immediately evident (*darūri*), meaning that all humans necessarily know certain doctrines to be true. For this group, an exemption from certain duties (e.g., performing rituals) plays no role in such knowledge. On the other hand, another group claims that attaining this essential knowledge is a duty that individuals must fulfill. In this case, the knowledge involved is acquired rather than immediately evident. Nonetheless, they are certain that the duty to seek such knowledge persists even when other duties do not. As a result, both groups consider exemptions from other duties to be irrelevant to knowledge of foundational truths like God's existence or Muhammad's prophethood. Al-Tūsī appeals to this implicit consensus (*ijmā' murakkab*) to prove his point.

a person. If knowing God is one of those duties, how can one claim that a person is infallible without it? Leadership does not function this way. In some cases, an individual may choose to fulfill all the obligations required of him even in the absence of an imam. This is a distinct possibility when those obligations are not contingent on the imam's presence or do not require his intervention. Were it possible for the imam to attain infallibility and discharge all his duties without knowing God, such knowledge would not be required of him. However, one knows this to be impossible, given the consensus that exists in the Muslim community that it is necessary for imams to have knowledge of God. Muslims consider imams indistinguishable from other individuals in their need to fulfill this duty. If what we say is true, the interlocutor's objection is discarded.

The interlocutor may ask, "Don't matters relating to divine assistance allow for substitutions? What prevents something else from functioning as divine assistance in the absence of the imamate? Through this alternative, God would still provide the necessary aid for the imposition of moral obligations." We would respond that this argument holds only if an appropriate substitution exists for the imamate. However, the opposite is true. Nothing can take its place in providing divine assistance for the imposition of moral obligations. What they have suggested is untenable.

The interlocutor may respond, "In the case of the imams who function as proofs of God on earth, you allow something other than the imams to constitute divine assistance to keep them from engaging in reprehensible acts. What, then, prevents you from allowing the same thing for others who are neither imams nor proofs? If nothing prevents it, it is possible that God knows that all or most people have access to this type of divine assistance and that they resemble imams in having no real need of imams." We reply, it is possible that God Almighty knows that some individuals will not engage in any reprehensible behavior even though they are not imams. These individuals become infallible as a consequence of something other than the imamate which constitutes divine assistance for them. We acknowledge that they do not need imams to achieve this particular aim. We deny the possibility that unqualified individuals may serve as imams with no change in the outcome. A person who is capable of committing misdeeds and cannot guarantee that he will guard himself against falling into ruin or causing civil unrest cannot take the place of an imam in providing divine assistance. People are more likely to fulfill their obligations and less likely to engage in reprehensible acts in the presence of imams. An unqualified person would not resemble an imam

or be able to achieve the same outcome. We know this fact from human experience. Societies flourish in the presence of imams and experience great turmoil in their absence. Were the contrary possible [as our interlocutor suggests], the evidence in support of our position would not be so conclusive. If the contrary were true, we would rule that individuals were capable of remaining virtuous and prospering in the absence of imams, as they are in their presence. However, we are certain that this position is false. Evidence clearly indicates that nothing can take the place of imams in the affairs we have discussed.

An interlocutor may respond, “Is it not the case that some who consider divine assistance a necessity also allow for moral obligations to persist even in the absence of such aid, when the reward for fulfilling an obligation to God increases manifold? What prevents such obligations from increasing in difficulty [rather than ceasing to exist] in the absence of imams? The rewards for individuals who are pious would increase well beyond the norms that exist when imams are present. Thus, moral obligations may persist even in the absence of imams.” We would respond that if divine assistance exists to help people fulfill an obligation to God, then this obligation cannot exist before such aid is provided.¹⁷ This is true even if the potential reward for fulfilling the obligation in the absence of divine assistance were to increase many times over. If we take this view, the argument of our interlocutor collapses.

Some of our coreligionists say that moral obligations can exist in the absence of divine assistance in such circumstances. However, one who takes this position can argue the following: I allow this possibility only when the absence of such aid does not lead to great ruin. Our interlocutors already know that societies are destroyed in the absence of leaders. Their absence is the reason for such ruin. Thus, those who permit moral obligations to exist in the absence of divine assistance would not hold this position in regard to imams.

An interlocutor may ask, “Can you explain what makes a leader constitute divine assistance? Is his very being a type of assistance? Or is it his conduct, and his commandments and prohibitions? If you claim that his essence [*dhāt*] constitutes divine assistance, then what distinguishes his essence from those of others? If it is his conduct, then how is this claim to be reconciled with his absence from the community for

¹⁷ Since one can only accomplish this duty by means of divine assistance (*lutf*), divine assistance must precede it.

many years? Should not his absence sufficiently indicate that such leadership does not constitute divine assistance?" We would respond that it is the imam's conduct, commands, prohibitions, admonitions, promises, and advice that constitute divine assistance. His presence is a necessity because none of these can occur without him. Thus, the conditions for the imposition of moral obligations cannot be met without an imam.

The interlocutor's claim regarding the cessation of the imam's activities in the community is false. We have argued for the existence of a particular type of leader whose existence constitutes divine assistance. This leader continues to exist even though one dimension of his activities does not – namely, activities pertaining to his role as an infallible imam who governs the affairs of the community. However, we did not appeal to enduring social norms [*ʿāda*] to argue that only the imam's activities as a ruler represent divine assistance. It is true that the imam's activities function in this way because he helps people fulfill their duties to God. As a consequence, the community requires a leader with qualities that distinguish him from other subjects. Proving that leaders require particular qualities [such as infallibility] requires other evidence. Thus far, we have appealed to evidence proving the necessity of leadership. Had we used this evidence to argue that the imam must have certain qualities, the objection of our interlocutors would be warranted. Since we have not done this, their argument is untenable.

An interlocutor may respond: "If you claim that the conduct, commands, and prohibitions of the imam constitute divine assistance and that these activities require a person with distinguishing qualities according to other [unmentioned] proofs, then our objections must be valid. The imam's management of the community's affairs constitutes such aid in its entirety. If this aid ceased, moral obligations would either disappear with it or endure in its absence. If you claim the latter, you should say that moral obligations also endure in the absence of the imam. Otherwise, you would be forced to claim that moral obligations cease in the absence of imams and that individuals should be absolved of any oppression or offense that they commit. However, no one in the community makes this claim." We would reply that when the conduct, commands, and prohibitions of the imam cease, moral obligations do not necessarily disappear. People have brought about the disappearance of these activities of the imam, and they possess the means to restore them. They have terrorized and wronged the imam and usurped his rights. They have a duty

to obey and comply with his commands and to recognize him as their leader. Were they to observe their duties to him, the imam would appear before them to manage their affairs and provide them with his commands and prohibitions. The community would then benefit from the divine assistance that these circumstances entail. Whenever the community is barred from such aid, the fault lies in its members, who put themselves in this predicament but also possess the means to restore such aid. These circumstances differ from the imam's nonexistence. If the person of the imam did not exist, people would be incapable of creating such a person or ever benefiting from his leadership [even if they tried], since it is God Almighty who provides divine assistance. If what we say is true, then there is a significant difference between the apparent absence of the imam and his nonexistence.

The interlocutor may ask, "What exactly prevents the imam from appearing before the community? What is the reason for his occultation?" We would reply that the reason for his occultation must be a perpetual threat to his life, since the imam can endure other types of harm that do not entail loss of life. He would not refrain from appearing before the community if the threat were any other than a threat to his life. In fact, prophets and imams rise in their spiritual stations by enduring other forms of persecution in pursuit of their mission.

An interlocutor may ask, "How can the imam protect himself against assassination?" We Imāmīs say that the Prophet discussed the period of occultation and the ways in which it differs from the conditions that require the public appearance of an imam. The rightful imam of our time has obtained all of this knowledge from his ancestors. For this reason, no ambiguity or doubt should exist about his knowledge regarding these matters. One cannot rule out the possibility that the imam may determine whether he is secure or in danger by means of speculation and reflecting on particular signs. He may believe that his life is at risk and conceal himself. When there are signs that indicate to him that he will find safety in his appearance, he uses his discretion in deciding to appear. No one should object to the imam's right to use his discretion in such matters and to base his decision on certain signs. Some may argue that a person can be fooled by false indicators and mistakenly believe something that contradicts reality. However, it may be the case that God Almighty has commanded the imam to appear only when he strongly believes that he will find safety. Certain signs will indicate to him the necessity [*wujūb*] of his appearance. When he sees these signs, he will

know that his life is no longer at risk. In this way, [his initial] speculation will be transformed into certainty.¹⁸

An interlocutor may ask, “Why can’t God safeguard the imam from his enemies and facilitate his public appearance so he may deal with such people? Is God incapable of protecting him so that no harm comes to him from such people?” We reply that God Almighty is capable of anything. When God refrains from a certain action, the reason is not an incapacity of God; rather, performing that action does not befit Him. God Almighty has protected the imam of our time from enemies by means that do not violate the principle of individual moral responsibility – that is, with His commands, prohibitions, exhortations, and reprimands. By contrast, God forbids Himself from employing means that violate the [fair and just] imposition of moral obligations or entail coercion, since such interventions would jeopardize individual responsibility. Thus, the interlocutor’s argument is untenable.

The interlocutor may ask, “Can you explain the cause for the imam’s concealment? Is every individual under moral obligations at fault for his concealment, or only some such individuals? Claiming that everyone is responsible would clearly contradict reality. We know that at least a portion of the community, the partisans [*shīʿa*] of the imam in particular, are united in their desire to aid the imam and to lay down their lives to keep him safe in the event of his appearance. How could one claim that such individuals have also caused his concealment? Alternatively, if you assert that only other people are responsible for his concealment, then moral obligations should not persist for those who are innocent of any wrongdoing, namely, his partisans. No one claims this, however.” The theologians of our school have answered this question in one of two ways, depending on how they understand the concept of divine assistance and its necessity.

The First Theory Concerning the Cause of the Imam’s Occultation

One group of theologians has argued that all individuals under moral obligations are responsible [for the imam’s continued concealment].

¹⁸ Evidence that engenders certitude, like clear verses of the Quran, may instruct the faithful to rely on speculation (*ẓamm*) or circumstantial evidence. In these cases, speculation may engender certainty that a particular course of action is necessary. For example, in court cases involving fornication or adultery, the testimony of four witnesses, while speculative in nature, engenders certainty for a judge that a nondiscretionary penalty (*ḥadd*) would be appropriate in the event of a conviction, even though he might lack knowledge regarding the veracity of the witnesses’ testimonies.

Both allies and enemies of the imam contribute to the status quo, but they are not identical or equivalent to one another. The manner in which each individual compels the imam to conceal himself differs. There is no need for us to deny the fact that the partisans of the imam are united in their desire to aid him and to lay down their lives to ensure his safety. The imam's enemies are the real cause for his concealment. They have wronged him, resolved to murder him, and carefully follow news of his whereabouts in their quest to destroy him. All of this refutes the assumption that the imam's allies and enemies are equivalent or that moral obligations should cease for his allies.¹⁹

The interlocutor may respond, "According to this theory, why has the imam concealed himself from his allies? Substantiate what you have said with some evidence. Otherwise, you are simply making claims and nothing more." We would reply that nothing compels us to provide further evidence. It suffices us to know that the imam constitutes divine assistance for all individuals under moral obligations, as we have already elucidated above. If divine assistance is necessary for the continued imposition of moral obligations, then such obligations must cease for one party, but endure for others when other parties are the cause of the disappearance of divine assistance.²⁰

As for the previously mentioned case [in which allies and enemies both contribute to the imam's concealment], the imam's allies are viewed as having the capacity to resolve their predicament. We know this to be true even though we do not have detailed knowledge of the circumstances of such individuals. Their case resembles that of someone who fails to meet a necessary condition in the process of careful examination and never obtains knowledge. If we asked such a person, "What happened?" he would answer, "I fulfilled all of the conditions necessary for the task and did everything that could be done, but it was a fruitless endeavor." However, we would reply, "You must have failed somewhere along the way. This is why your attempt [at careful examination] did not engender knowledge. We are sure of this even if we do not have detailed knowledge about your particular case. We are certain that your efforts would have engendered

¹⁹ This line of reasoning maintains that each group can take substantive means to rectify the status quo; thus, both the imam's allies and his enemies would continue to have moral obligations.

²⁰ In this way, the disappearance of the imam from his allies can be explained by the actions of the imam's enemies.

knowledge for you – as they have for many others with obligations to God – had you fulfilled all of the necessary conditions.”

We would address the allies of the imam in the same way. We would argue that, in one way or another, they have caused the imam to conceal himself from them. Although we do not have detailed knowledge about each person, we know that each of them possesses the means to rectify the status quo. We would also argue that one cannot say with certainty that the imam has concealed himself from *all* of his allies. It may be that he makes himself accessible to some of his allies who do not possess the qualities that necessitate his concealment and deter him from [revealing himself to] others. As for those to whom he is inaccessible, the reason for his inaccessibility is a deficiency within them.

An interlocutor may ask us to discuss the possible reasons why the imam might conceal himself from an ally. We would respond that the cause for his concealment may be an unintended consequence of his public appearance. Were he to make himself visible to his allies, all of them would marvel at the experience and tell their trusted friends about it out of joy. Eventually, the news would become public knowledge, and the imam's enemies would come to know of his presence. This would compel the imam to conceal himself from everyone once again. It may also be the case that so long as the imam makes himself accessible only to some of his allies, people will be unable to see and recognize him. Rather, his allies know of his presence only when he reveals his miraculous deeds to them and his superiority to all others becomes evident. One does not know necessarily [*bi-ʾl-ḍarūra*] when something is miraculous; one realizes it only upon careful examination and scrutiny of the evidence. It is quite conceivable that certain ambiguities may engender confusion or doubt in some individuals. When they narrate their experience to others, some may be prompted to begin searching for the imam, compelling him to conceal himself once again. One cannot rule out these possibilities. At the same time, we cannot claim to have detailed knowledge or absolute certainty. The possibility that such circumstances would necessitate the imam's concealment is enough.

Some Shīʿī theologians speculate that there is no benefit in the imam's appearing before some of his allies and not others. The desired benefit of such an imam is his management of the community's affairs, which does not happen unless he is accessible to all people and present to give his command. If this is the case, then the imam's concealment affects everyone [including his allies], since it precludes him from serving the very function for which he constitutes divine assistance and a benefit for everyone.

One could object to this theory as follows: Even when the imam's foes prevent him from serving in this capacity [i.e., governing the community's affairs], such circumstances do not prevent those allies who consider obedience to him an obligation and defer to his judgment on all matters from encountering him. Were there no benefit to encountering him when he is prevented from managing the community's affairs, then this would imply that Imāmī Shī'is gained no substantive benefit from their imams in the period from the death of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib [i.e., the first imam], to the father of *al-qā'im* [i.e., the last imam], al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī [al-'Askarī]. This is a bold statement that no one has dared to make.

Even if we accept the argument [of these Shī'ī theologians] that one can benefit from imams only when they are accessible to the entire community and wield authority over it, this argument collapses when one realizes that it entails the cessation of moral obligations for the imam's followers whenever he is compelled to conceal himself from the community. Their responsibility to fulfill their obligations to God cannot continue if the imam constitutes divine assistance for his followers and they are neither the cause of his concealment nor capable of eliminating the cause to hasten his appearance.

We know this because the alternative would be a situation in which some individuals could prevent others from availing themselves of the divine assistance that exists for fulfilling moral obligations. Such obligations would not cease for those prevented from receiving divine assistance in the above case. The implication here is that people could create impediments or use some similar means to prevent others from ever fulfilling their obligations. Those hampered by such actions would not have the means to remedy their situation. Thus, our interlocutors seek [mistakenly] to distinguish between the loss of divine assistance and a hindrance that prevents individuals from receiving such aid or fulfilling moral obligations. Most Mu'tazilī scholars [*ahl al-'adl*]²¹ consider the absence of divine assistance akin to the loss of the ability and means to fulfill one's moral obligations. Thus, in terms of their duties, the status

²¹ Mu'tazilīs maintained that God never transgresses human conceptions of justice, and referred to themselves as the partisans of justice (*ahl al-'adl*). Many Zaydī and Imāmī theologians also supported this doctrine. The Ash'arī position was that there were no intrinsic goods or evils. Even if it appeared "unjust" to human faculties of reason, God could do anything, including sending Moses to hell and Pharaoh to heaven, and this would still be just if God deemed it to be so.

of individuals who need divine assistance but lack it must resemble the status of those who no longer have the ability or means to fulfill their obligations or encounter obstacles to doing so. A person who lacks necessary aid is like a person who is hindered; neither can fulfill his obligations.

We noted previously the appropriate response to queries about the cause of the imam's concealment from his allies. We said that there is no compelling reason to believe that the imam must conceal himself from *all* of his allies. As mentioned above, it suffices for us to know that the imam must conceal himself from some allies because of certain problems they may pose for him. However, we do not need to have extensive knowledge regarding the [particular] deficiencies of these allies. A general understanding that they represent the cause [of the imam's concealment] is sufficient in this regard.

The imam's concealment does not determine the existence or non-existence of a person's obligations to God. Whether the person from whom the imam conceals himself is an ally or a foe, his responsibility to fulfill his obligations to God does not cease. No blame on God's part can be considered in this circumstance. Both allies and foes should be able to remedy their circumstances so that the imam might appear before them. On this basis, it is reasonable to maintain that when an imam reappears after occultation and community members are unable to identify or recognize him, he is obliged to perform miraculous feats to confirm the veracity of his claim to the imamate. Understanding the miraculous as evidence of a person's imamate is based on a type of reasoning that can be the subject of some ambiguities or confusion. The imam may conceal himself from those who, were they to encounter him and witness his miraculous abilities, would certainly fail to examine the reasons behind such miracles and end up doubting the imam's claims. They would deem him a deceiver and share their experience with others. The imam would then face the same circumstances that led to his concealment.

The interlocutor may ask, "Is the ally of the imam guilty of any deficiency when the imam conceals himself from him on account of his inability to examine the imam's miracles and acknowledge his imamate? Is he able to examine any miracles the imam would manifest in such circumstances? What means does he possess to end the cause of the imam's occultation?" We would respond that the imam's occultation from his allies occurs only when they clearly possess both a well-known deficiency and the means to rectify their condition. For instance, it could be clear that some people will simply never scrutinize or ponder on the miraculous

abilities of an imam if he appears before them. This deficiency stems from these people's inability to distinguish the miraculous from the ordinary. Furthermore, they do not know what qualifies as sound evidence in these matters and what does not. Were they to understand all of these matters correctly, there would be no opportunity for doubts to arise. Such people are obliged to rectify this lacuna in their learning.

No one should claim that this requirement constitutes an obligation that is beyond their capacity or nearly impossible to fulfill since these allies of the imam do not know the precise way in which their analysis of the matter and their reasoning are faulty. [According to this line of argument,] they do not have the means to reconsider their approach to the matter and to resolve their situation, and one would thus be obliging them needlessly to do something that is not a duty. Sometimes moral obligations are obvious, and other times they are ambiguous. Nonetheless, in both cases individuals have the capacity to fulfill their duties.

Allies of the imam must carefully consider their circumstances. They should conclude that none of the false views mentioned above is the reason for the imam's concealment from them. They should then realize that they are themselves the reason for his occultation. If they conclude that the likeliest reason [for the imam's occultation] is what we have mentioned above regarding their understanding of the miraculous and of what constitutes a miracle, then they will have to acknowledge this error. It is thus their responsibility to reconsider their understanding of these matters in order to rid themselves of their shortcomings and any errors in their thinking. If the imam's allies exercise due diligence in analyzing the matter carefully, they should be able to distinguish truth from falsehood successfully. Individuals are best equipped to judge themselves [and to identify their own shortcomings]. One can only command others to exert themselves fully to investigate matters, analyze the facts, and accept the truth once it becomes apparent.

Our opinion of the imam's allies resembles our assessment of those who deny that careful examination always engenders certainty. An interlocutor may claim: "I engaged in careful examination just as you did, but I did not come to any certain conclusions." We would refuse to concur that the interlocutor has satisfied all of the requisites of careful examination. We would say: "Had you properly scrutinized the matter, you would have found certain truths. Since your efforts did not yield these results, we know that you erred somewhere in the process. We are sure of this even if we are unable to pinpoint the place in which the error occurred."

Nothing differentiates our assessment of this person from our view of the allies of an imam in occultation. We would use the same words to describe both cases.

The interlocutor may retort: “What you say cannot be true. If it were, no one would ever be able to discuss miracles or to claim knowledge of them. Such a situation would result in an inability to discuss prophethood and the means to accept the claims of a scripture-bearing prophet. Anyone who makes this argument cannot claim to be a person with real faith or even a Muslim.” We reply that one need not agree with the interlocutor’s assertion. It is quite conceivable that some ambiguity may color certain miraculous events but not others. Ambiguity in some cases does not necessitate its presence in others. A miracle that confirms the prophethood of a person may exist without any ambiguities being associated with it. Consequently, one can have certainty in the occurrence of a miracle and the prophethood of a prophet.

Miracles associated with imams may be of another type. Ambiguities may exist regarding whether an imam’s deeds constitute miracles. As a result, there will be some doubt about whether a person’s imamate has been confirmed [by such deeds], even when there is no doubt about the appearance of a prophet. A similar case is that of a person who acknowledges the prophethood of Moses and the miracles associated with his prophethood. If this person has not had the opportunity to examine carefully the miracles associated with Jesus or with our own prophet, Muḥammad, this does not necessarily mean that he is not fully acquainted with the miracles of Moses. This individual may possess detailed knowledge of the miracles of Moses and understand why these events constitute evidence of his prophethood. The same person, however, may be unacquainted with the miracles of Jesus and Muḥammad or unaware of why certain events constitute evidence of their prophethood.²²

The interlocutor may respond: “In that case, every faithful person who claims to be an ally of the imam should deduce that he is guilty of a misdeed that constitutes unbelief [*kuf̣ṛ*]. In accordance with your statements above, such a person must be deficient in a way that necessitates the imam’s concealment from him. Some benefit must exist in this person’s

²² Al-Tūsī is arguing that a lack of knowledge or the existence of doubt in one case does not necessarily discredit the evidentiary value of miracles altogether. One may correctly understand miracles to serve as evidence of the prophethood of a person in other cases. Thus, one would need to identify and resolve those ambiguities and hindrances that prevent one from accepting the miracles of a particular prophet or imam.

alienation, but in the end, the ally is essentially treated as an enemy.” We would reply that a person’s deficiencies do not necessarily constitute unbelief or a great sin. This person has neither denied the imamate of an imam nor threatened his life. Rather, he may have a deficiency that is known to engender doubts about the imamate. Perhaps he does not presently harbor any doubts, but the deficiency will cause him to experience doubt and confusion at some time in the future. This minor deficiency cannot be compared to the vices [associated with the imam’s enemies]. If a person’s deficiencies do not entail unbelief, rejection of an imam’s authority, or doubt about the veracity of his claims, then they are considered errors and sins that do not disqualify him from receiving blessings in the hereafter or negate his faith. An ally does not become an enemy of the imam by virtue of such a deficiency. An enemy is someone who actively believes something about the imam that constitutes unbelief or a grave sin. An ally cannot be described in this way.

It is also conceivable for a deficiency to be a cause of unbelief in some circumstances but not in others. Take the following example: Let us say that a person believes that individuals are capable of telekinesis, or affecting other bodies without physical contact. This person would be mistaken and hold this belief out of ignorance, but it would not constitute unbelief. Let us say a prophet appeared before this individual and invited him to believe in him. God could cause this prophet to perform miraculous feats beyond the capacity of ordinary humans and confirm his access to miracles. On account of his mistaken beliefs, the above-mentioned person might reject this prophet’s claims to revelation and kill him. Incorrect beliefs regarding human capacity can be a cause for unbelief in one case and for latent error in another. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā has considered this question in his treatise on the imam’s occultation.²³ Our answer here adopts some of the arguments and statements that appear in that treatise.

The interlocutor may challenge us as follows: “Your answer contradicts the fundamental doctrines [*uṣūl*] of your school. It is a well-documented teaching of your school that a person who knows God by His attributes, recognizes prophethood and the imamate, and becomes a

²³ Al-Ṭūsī is referring to al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Muqni’ fī l-ghayba*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm (Beirut: Mu’assasat Āl al-Bayt, 1419/1998), 70. See also Ansari and Schmidke, *Al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā’s Oeuvre and Thought in Context*.

believer will never entertain unbelief.²⁴ If this is true, how can you argue that the cause of the imam's concealment from an ally is that if the imam reappeared and performed miraculous feats, it would most likely lead the ally to doubt or to fail to recognize him as the awaited imam? According to your own doctrines, doubt in someone's imamate constitutes unbelief."

The claims of the interlocutor are false. Uncertainty about the miraculous deeds of an imam does not invalidate one's general understanding of the concept of the imamate [since in such cases, one can still maintain belief that such an imam exists].²⁵ Such uncertainty only leads to ignorance regarding the identity of a particular imam, but this would not constitute unbelief when one generally accepts the existence of imams. Were the interlocutor's claim true, people would be considered unbelievers on account of their ignorance regarding the identity of the imam. This is not the case. For one to truly commit unbelief, one would have to reject the concept of the imamate altogether, irrespective of anyone laying claim to it or performing miraculous feats. By contrast, the person under discussion [who doubts the miracles of a specific imam] allows for the possibility that the person performing miraculous feats before him is an imam as well as the possibility that someone else may be the imam. Skepticism about miraculous feats is only objectionable when one rejects the concept of the imamate altogether. According to our school, skepticism regarding miracles alone would not constitute unbelief. Such an attitude could potentially result in the rejection of the concept of the imamate at some time in the future, but this potential for future unbelief is not an indication of any unbelief in the present.

In a supplement (*ziyādāt*) to his *Convincing Guide to the Occultation* [*(al-Muqni' fī 'l-ghayba*], al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā offers another answer, which we allude to above,²⁶ that renders it unnecessary to speculate on

²⁴ The interlocutor refers to the *muwāfāt* doctrine of the Imāmis. According to this doctrine, one who truly attains faith is guaranteed paradise forever and thus it is impossible for such a person to entertain unbelief afterward. Imāmis argue that those who appear to have been believers, but die as unbelievers, never possessed faith to begin with. In the sight of God, the status of a person's faith remains constant, even if humans cannot perceive it. For more on this doctrine, see Etan Kohlberg, "Muwāfāt Doctrines in Muslim Theology," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983), 47–66.

²⁵ Al-Ṭūsī is arguing that one is blameworthy only when one can identify the imam as a person and refuses to consider any evidence regarding his imamate or miraculous abilities.

²⁶ Years after completing his *al-Muqni' fī 'l-ghayba*, al-Murtaḍā wrote a supplement (read *ziyādāt* for *ziyārāt*), which is also published; see al-Murtaḍā, *al-Muqni'*, 73–89. We have translated this passage by relying on an identical passage that exists in volume 4 of the

the potential reasons for the imam's concealment from his allies. In brief, he explains how the imam's allies benefit from the divine assistance that he provides whether he is in occultation or publicly present. Those who believe in him and his imamate fear the possibility of his intervention and his ability to punish them at all times. They understand that his occultation does not prevent his intervention in their affairs. If this is true, then there is no need to speculate as to why the imam might conceal himself from allies. His occultation neither entails the cessation of the benefits that the imam provides nor the moral obligations that come with such benefits.²⁷

The Second Theory Concerning the Cause of the Imam's Occultation

A second group of theologians offers a different set of answers. They argue that the imam's enemies, not his allies, are the sole cause for his concealment. The imam's concealment would not entail a cessation of moral obligations for an ally in such circumstances either. According to the proponents of this view, when the absence of divine assistance can be traced back to the actions of individuals under moral obligations, then their responsibility to fulfill their obligations endures. When one lacks the aid required to fulfill such obligations, then such circumstances are always the result of one's own actions. It would be one's own responsibility to rectify the problem. When one sees that others do not have access to divine assistance, there should be no doubt that they have the means to rectify the problem. Moral obligations cease only if the Creator is responsible for withholding assistance for reasons pertaining to divine wisdom – for example, when providing aid would entail oppression,

work being translated here; see al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ*, IV.226. We have reordered the passages due to the disorder of some folios in volume 1, which led the editor of the published edition to provide al-Ṭūsī's arguments out of sequence and with some omissions. One unavoidable consequence of emending this section was the inclusion of al-Ṭūsī's reference in volume 4 to his previous consideration of the topic in volume 1. The earliest known manuscript of volume 1 also includes this note (which duly belongs in volume 4). Al-Murtaḍā's answer is in fact described in the next paragraph, which begins "a second group of theologians" For further details, see Ansari and Schmidtke, *Al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā's Oeuvre and Thought in Context*.

²⁷ The interlocutor argues that there seems to be no difference between the nonexistence of imams and their occultation. Al-Murtaḍā notes that one benefit of the occultation is that faith in an imam who may soon reappear will lead some believers to be more observant in ways that they would not be if such an imam did not exist.

falsehood, or harm to another person.²⁸ God Almighty shuns these things, although He is omnipotent. In such cases, the affected individuals' obligations to God would cease to exist. Thus, those who follow this line of reasoning and answer interlocutors in this way need not claim that the imam's allies are responsible for his concealment from them or identify them as the cause.

Between the above two theories, I have some doubts about the validity of one of them.²⁹ Perhaps I can devote a section to discussing this issue further, God willing.

On the Obligations of the Shī'īs during the Imam's Occultation

There are some Shī'ī scholars who maintain that moral obligations should never cease for Shī'īs, since they always have access to divine assistance through the imam, even when he is in occultation. Is it not the case that when they accept the authority of the concealed imam, they also believe that he can appear at any time? They believe that he will take control of the community's affairs, subject the perpetrators of oppression to disciplinary action, and exact justice on oppressors on behalf of the oppressed. Thus, they fear the imam's intervention. It is the imam who will confront any wrongdoers, end their activities, and then punish them. Even if he is in occultation, he can reappear at any time [and pursue them]. Whether he is managing the community's affairs or in occultation, fear of the imam's intervention and a desire to avoid his punishment is a key motivation for refraining from oppression.

Even when the imam is managing the community's affairs, he may be unaware that certain individuals are engaging in immoral behavior. Their affairs may remain concealed from him, so that they desist from and repent of such activities without his ever learning of them. In any case, the possibility of his intervention [and people's fear of it] exists both in his presence and in his occultation. Thus, people benefit from divine assistance in either case.

²⁸ The imposition of moral obligations would cease if it involved coercion or an act of God that necessitated oppression. In such cases, divine assistance would be deemed repugnant, and God refrains from such acts. For example, a person may be engaging in sinful behavior. God could stop such a person by sending him an angel to prevent him from engaging in such deeds every time he attempts to sin. God could also cause harm to someone else or the individual in question so that he is prevented from committing sins. Although such actions would theoretically constitute divine assistance for that person, they also entail coercion and a type of oppression (*zulm*).

²⁹ Al-Tūsī does not specify which of the two theories he doubts.

No one should object to this by arguing, “How can the imam know the affairs of his partisans and their misdeeds during the period of his concealment? The imam would need to know all of this to ensure his ability to punish them once he reappears.” Nothing prevents the imam from knowing these things while concealed to the same extent that he is able to when present. He learns of these matters in one of three ways: by witnessing their occurrence directly, by hearing a confession, or by discovering clear evidence. These three means are still available to him in his occultation. In fact, the chances of him directly witnessing people’s misdeeds are greater in his occultation. Individuals will make an effort to refrain from openly violating the rights of others once the imam is present and recognizable to all, but during his concealment this is not the case. People cannot identify the imam, so they may engage in misdeeds in his company while they are unaware of his identity. Likewise, it is possible that a group of people may encounter him while he is in occultation and present to him clear evidence of a person’s misdeeds. Were they to swear to the veracity of their testimonies, their collective testimony would suffice. A person’s confession is also valid in both circumstances. For our purposes, we need only establish the possibility of these things and can stop our argument here.

A non-Imāmī may argue that Imāmī doctrine allows for an imam to vanish from society so that no one is able to meet or identify him. When he no longer feels threatened, Imāmīs believe that he will reappear. But an interlocutor may ask how such a belief is any different from God causing the imam to die or to cease to exist. Once the imam is secure from danger, God can cause his [renewed] existence or resurrection. Imāmīs may respond that they would not be able to benefit from the imam if God caused him to die or to cease to exist, but they are able to benefit from him as long as he exists among them. However, [a non-Imāmī] might reply that no one can benefit from the imam while he remains unknown and unidentifiable. Imāmīs may argue that they have the means and the capacity to protect him from danger so that he can reappear and reveal himself to the world. [A non-Imāmī] could argue that this would imply that people have the means to bring the imam into existence – their actions could lead God to create him. But in both cases, the opportunity to benefit from him is not entirely dependent on people. His appearance requires a decision-maker independent of humans. [The non-Imāmī may argue that] according to Imāmīs, the imam disappears until the community can ensure his safety, cease all attempts to harm him, and have faith

in him. Once these conditions prevail, he will decide to appear before the community and identify himself. It will be his decision to do so. But, [the non-Imāmī queries,] how is this any different from the imam's nonexistence and God's subsequent creation of him once the community agrees to have faith in the imam, revere him, and ensure his safety?

[The hypothetical non-Imāmī interlocutor continues:] Bringing the imam into existence or giving him life, if he is dead, requires the intervention of a decision-maker [i.e., God] who is independent of humans. Likewise, a concealed imam's decision to appear and proclaim his imamate publicly is a decision that is made independently of humans. It is evident in both cases that the opportunity to benefit from the imam and to obey his commands is dependent on the decision and actions of God Almighty. Nothing can occur independently of divine action. For if the imam no longer feels threatened and decides to end his occultation, he must openly claim to be the imam, and God must corroborate this claim for him. People will accept the veracity of the imam's claim only when God enables him to perform miraculous deeds to confirm his imamate. It should be evident to all that whether one accepts the imam's possible nonexistence or Imāmī doctrine [about the necessity of his existence], people cannot benefit from the imam unless God ultimately takes action. This divine action entails either creating the imam or granting him the ability to perform miraculous deeds. Is there any substantive difference between the two?

According to Imāmīs, [al-Ṭūsī remarks,] were God to cause the imam's nonexistence, the cause of humanity's inability to benefit from the imam would be God alone. This would not be the case if the imam existed but simply concealed himself. The [non-Imāmī] interlocutor may reply that the actual cause of the imam's nonexistence would be the individuals who threaten his safety and wish to make attempts on his life. Were it not for them, he would be present among us, and we would benefit from him. It is the existence of this threat alone that prevents his reappearance. Until his return, there is no difference between his nonexistence and subsequent creation, on the one hand, and his concealment and subsequent appearance, on the other. In both cases, God cannot be considered the cause of his absence.

Those who have posed a threat to the imam's life are to blame. Sometimes we miss an opportunity to benefit from a thing because we fail to perform a duty, as in the case of someone who fails to reflect carefully on a matter and consequently remains ignorant of a certain truth. At other

times we miss an opportunity even when it requires nothing of us since it is a well-known benefit. Everyone may know the means of obtaining it since it is a part of our daily activities, like eliminating hunger through the consumption of food or ridding oneself of thirst by drinking water. If we are absolutely certain that when we secure the imam from danger, God will cause his creation and appearance, then we must be considered fully capable of bringing about his appearance. In either case, we are at fault when we fail to do this.

[Al-Ṭūsī responds:] Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā includes this [lengthy] objection in his *Provision* [*Dhakhīra*].³⁰ He does not seem to consider the question comprehensively anywhere else in his writings, so I cite his response here, exactly as I have found it. Al-Murtaḍā writes the following: This objection aims to compel us to acknowledge the possible nonexistence of the imam of our age rather than maintain belief in his occultation. However, nothing compels us to change our opinion because we know that all Shī'īs and people who recognize his authority as an imam benefit from him even during his occultation. Reverence for him deters them from reprehensible behavior, so he represents divine assistance for them in his absence, as he does when he is available. God willing, we shall discuss this issue in greater depth elsewhere. The imam also serves his allies in another capacity: He safeguards the integrity of the revealed law. The imam's continued existence ensures that nothing of the revealed law should vanish or be lost, since each generation receives and transmits it. Were the imam to cease to exist, none of these assurances would remain.

This answer already suffices to refute the objection of our interlocutor. Nonetheless, we will indulge him and hypothetically suppose the imam's nonexistence. Our interlocutor may say: "Suppose God allows the nonexistence of the imam [at some time in the distant past or future] after he is prevented from reappearing before the community and managing its affairs. Suppose that no one believes in his imamate or recognizes his authority, and thus no one benefits from him." We would respond that the community might benefit from the imam only under certain conditions. First, there must be divine action; without it nothing can happen. Second, the imam must act. And finally, it is necessary for us to fulfill certain obligations. God requires us to fulfill these obligations, and we have the responsibility to obey.

³⁰ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Dhakhīra fī 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1411/1991), 419–421.

As for divine action, God must create the imam and enable him to perform his duties. God should give him the necessary knowledge and means to fulfill his responsibilities. God should oblige the imam to take charge of the community's affairs and to provide a designation in his favor. It would be the imam's responsibility to accept his obligations and prepare himself for them. Community members would be expected to aid the imam and to ensure that he be allowed to administer their affairs. They should eliminate any impediments or obstacles, obey and follow his commands, and conduct themselves according to his instructions. Divine action is the foundation of everything, so it must precede everything else. After God, the imam must be ready to fulfill his obligations. After God and the imam, the community must fulfill its obligations. If neither God nor the imam moves to act, the community is not obliged to do what we have mentioned. The community's obligations stem from the actions of these two higher authorities. Nonetheless, the community's obligation to aid the imam can still be considered a necessary and foundational obligation [*aṣl*], like the responsibilities of God and the imam. All that we have argued regarding the importance of this obligation, the catastrophic consequences of ignoring it, and the necessity of knowing whether community members are dutiful or disobedient remains true. Thus, it is apparent that the imam must exist at all times. He should be free of any deficiencies in his abilities, knowledge, and other qualities. He should be prepared to run the affairs of the community if he can be protected from all harm and no longer feels threatened. In these matters, the imam's nonexistence cannot be equated with his existence.

Let us suppose that God clarifies to the community that He will create an imam for its members when they eliminate all obstacles to his ascendancy and threats to his safety. In such cases, an imam can be considered present even if one does not actually exist. If the community were entrusted with the revealed law and attempted to breach this trust, God would intervene in some way to deter such action. It would be as if the imam existed because God Almighty, in such circumstances, would discharge the responsibilities of the imam. The existence of a proof [*ḥujja*] is necessary at all times, whether the world continues to function as we know it or we suppose a different reality, as our interlocutors have done.

An interlocutor may object, "Why should the imam remain on earth in occultation and conceal himself so that no one ever knows his location? Why doesn't God raise the imam up to the heavens to safeguard him and

then have him descend at the appropriate time?³¹ Is there any substantive difference between the two?” We would reply that if the imam ascended to the heavens but retained the ability to examine and follow the daily affairs of the community, there would be no difference between his residing in the heavens and his residing on earth. In either case, the imam must have the ability to follow the community’s affairs and to judge whether its members are in a state of obedience or disobedience. The imam’s location is immaterial as long as facts relevant to his decision to continue or to end his occultation are not concealed from him.³²

The interlocutor may respond by querying what would happen if God Almighty judged all of His creation unqualified for the imamate. What if no one possessed the capacity to discharge the duties of the office? Would humans still have moral obligations they must fulfill in such circumstances? We would respond that in such circumstances humanity’s obligation to observe God’s commands would not persist, since that would be objectionable [*qabīḥ*]. Whenever any aspect of these moral obligations becomes objectionable, they become unacceptable as a whole. The interlocutor may ask why it would be considered objectionable. Why not argue that people in such circumstances would resemble individuals who do not require divine assistance in order to fulfill their duties to God? What prevents the imposition of moral obligations [in this situation]? We would reply that this case ostensibly differs from cases in which people need no divine assistance in order to discharge their duties. In this example, people are in need of particular aid that God withholds for reasons related to divine wisdom. Is it not the case that divine assistance is what draws individuals to righteousness, serves their best interests, and deters people from the path to ruin? Sometimes the source of divine assistance is an infallible person, sometimes it is not. In either case, divine assistance removes the impediments that prevent people from fulfilling their duties. Since all fallible individuals also need imams, we consider imams essential for deterring them from transgressions.

In accordance with divine wisdom, God does not deem fallible individuals to be suited to the office of the imamate. When God appoints a person to the position, He must also command the rest of humanity to honor and exalt the imam, to obey his words, and to adhere to his commands and prohibitions. All of this would be objectionable if the imam turned

³¹ An allusion to the case of Jesus’s ascension in the Quran (3:55).

³² Al-Ṭūsī’s quotation from al-Murtaḍā’s *al-Dhakhira* ends here.

out to be fallible. It is unacceptable to oblige people to exalt a person in this way if he is capable of misdeeds. Likewise, one cannot command the community to defer to the authority of a person who is incapable of ensuring that his words and actions will not lead to ruin. It is thus clear that it is God Almighty who forbids fallible individuals from serving as imams. This case [where no one is qualified to serve as an imam] most resembles circumstances in which moral obligations cease because the necessary aid entails some sort of wrongdoing or harm.

People cannot be obliged to commit an evil act to fulfill an obligation to God. Evil acts cannot be equated with righteous acts, even if both types appear to facilitate the discharging of obligations to God. In accordance with divine wisdom, God does not condone evil acts. Moral obligations must cease when any obligations seem to require an evil act. Since God Almighty commands people to refrain from evil, in such cases the command of God is the reason for the cessation of such obligations.

Our answer suffices as a response to these objections. Were one to suppose the nonexistence of an infallible leader, people would be in need of an infallible person to guide them. A community's needs would not be fully met if it possessed a fallible leader. This fallible leader would still need another authority to ensure his continued guidance. If this second authority were likewise fallible, our assessment of him would be the same: he, too, would need another authority to ensure his guidance, and this need would endure in an infinite regress of [deficient] imams. Alternatively, final authority could simply rest in the hands of someone fallible, but divine assistance would be deficient in his case. These two outcomes are both flawed, so the claims of our interlocutor are untenable.

The interlocutor may respond that we have quoted leading Imāmī scholars who argue that humans still have moral obligations when divine assistance requires action from them, but they fail to act and benefit from such aid. Why not argue the same here? Is not infallibility but the choice of an individual to refrain from indecent behavior and to fulfill all of his obligations to God? The choice to follow this course belongs to each individual. By this logic, one must allow the continued imposition of moral obligations even in the absence of infallible imams.

What this interlocutor claims is not necessarily true for those Imāmī scholars who uphold the abovementioned view. God may oblige individuals to perform certain acts in order to benefit from divine assistance and to fulfill their moral obligations. Those who follow the view of these Imāmīs argue that when individuals fail to perform this act, the

imposition of moral obligations remains if it entails nothing objectionable. However, the continued imposition of moral obligations is impossible in those cases in which the intervention of imams serves as divine assistance and no imams exist. Here, moral obligation ceases not for the previously mentioned reason [that discharging a duty would result in some type of evil] but for another reason. Divine wisdom decrees that obligations contingent on the imam cease when no one with the necessary qualities is available to discharge the duties of the office. Unqualified candidates who attempt to fulfill the responsibilities of the imam will always fail. Thus, one must differentiate between these cases.

An interlocutor may object that imams do not change the capabilities, means, or intellectual abilities of a person. They neither provide people with reasoning that is otherwise inaccessible nor enable them to perform their obligations by some other means. People should already possess the requisite means. If this is the case, what prevents them from deducing the existence of moral obligations and fulfilling them in the presence as well as the absence of the imam? Do their abilities change in either situation? When he is present, they must depend on reasoning and careful examination, which would lead to knowledge, and enable them to fulfill their obligations. They have the ability to do the same in his absence, too.

The interlocutor's objection begins with an assumption that we are ready to acknowledge as true but that does not help his argument. The second part of his argument is flawed, and we have a duty to correct this misconception regarding our doctrine on the matter. The view that the imam does not change individuals' capabilities is correct. The imam does not provide them with increased intellectual abilities, special evidence, or the means to discharge their obligations. But then the interlocutor claims that people lack nothing in their ability to fulfill their obligations to God. This cannot be true. We believe that people have the full capacity [*tamkin*] to discharge their obligations only when no impediments prevent them from doing so. This means that they have the capability, the means, and the requisite divine assistance to fulfill their duties. If the imam functions as a type of aid from God with regard to some duties, as we have already mentioned, it is impossible to claim that people are fully capable of discharging these obligations without him.

Suppose his objection were valid; those who categorically deny the necessity of divine assistance could utilize the same argument against him. They would say, "Aren't all impediments eliminated for people when they possess the capacity, the means, and the opportunity to engage in a

careful examination of readily available evidence? Why have you added to this the necessity of divine assistance?" Everything that our interlocutor says in response would be our answer, as well. We say this because so far we have directed all of our arguments at an interlocutor who recognizes the necessity of divine assistance as we do, but denies that the imamate constitutes such aid.³³ As for someone who denies the concept of divine assistance altogether, a debate between us would first entail a review of evidence in favor of the necessity of such aid. Only after proving this would we attempt to elucidate our view that the imamate constitutes divine assistance.

Our Mu'tazilī interlocutors may say: "If what we say is true, then those under moral obligations should be able to deduce anything that they do not know." We respond that we do not disagree with this [or claim that imams are required for what the intellect can deduce]. However, if they want to know the rational basis on which we believe God always provides divine assistance and why the imam constitutes such assistance, we have already done this. The proof is that imams serve people by deterring them from repugnant deeds [*qabā'ih*].³⁴

Alternatively, our interlocutors may claim that one can deduce knowledge pertaining to the revealed law without imams by consulting scriptural texts [i.e., the Quran and hadith]. We shall adopt another set of arguments to prove our doctrine on the imamate in what follows; namely, that without [infallible] imams, there would be no sure means of attaining correct knowledge from transmitted, scriptural texts. Consequently, they would never engender knowledge for us.³⁵ One cannot argue that

³³ Al-Ṭūsī is referring to the Mu'tazilīs, who accepted the necessity of divine assistance (*lutf*), but contested the idea that imams could be identified as a type of divine assistance. Ash'arīs, by contrast, denied the necessity of divine assistance altogether.

³⁴ For Twelvers, imams also constituted divine assistance by ensuring the continued integrity of the revealed laws and their correct application. Although Twelvers employed rational arguments to deduce the necessity of imams after the revelation of scripture, they did not consider such arguments to be purely rational. Such an argument was both rational (*'aqlī*) and dependent on scriptural texts (*ṣam'ī*). The purely rational argument was one that was sound even in the absence of revelation or law (i.e., that imams deterred people from misdeeds).

³⁵ Throughout this exposition, al-Ṭūsī has considered the necessity of imams who can manage the affairs of a society as heads of state and deter people from engaging in oppression and reprehensible behavior (*qabā'ih*). He believes that one can also rationally deduce the necessity of imams from their role in safeguarding revelation, law, and the integrity of religious doctrines. He briefly alludes to this second set of proofs here. For more on this subject, see Hassan Ansari and Nebil Husayn, "A Developing Doctrine: The Imamate in Twelver Shī'ism," *Shii Studies Review* 7 (2023, forthcoming).

it suffices for a person to have access to the revealed law and that such access eliminates all hindrances to fulfilling one's obligations to God. Rather, there must be an imam who safeguards the tradition as it is transmitted to each generation. This person guarantees the integrity of what members of the community are learning and ensures that they have access to everything they need to fulfill their obligations to God. In what follows, God willing, we shall elaborate on this subject further.

Our interlocutors may claim: "God, in His eternal wisdom, may remove all hindrances to fulfilling one's obligations to Him without the imams and use something else in their place. If you consider this a possibility, then your entire argument about the necessity of the imamate collapses. If you deny the possibility of this alternative, then you have characterized imams as having the capacity to do that which God Almighty cannot, and you know the ramifications of such a claim."³⁶

The words of our interlocutor are clearly preposterous. He has unfairly misconstrued our beliefs. He assumes that when one says that only imams can remove hindrances to the imposition of moral obligations and nothing else can serve in their place, one is characterizing the imams as having the ability to do what God Almighty cannot. The concept of divine assistance entails the belief that God can have direct knowledge that something serves the needs of individuals with the duty to obey Him and that nothing else can replace it in this function. Since this is a well-known feature of the concept of divine assistance, how can our interlocutor accuse proponents of this doctrine of believing what was mentioned above? Since our interlocutor considers *ma'rifā* [knowledge of God and other essential truths] to be an example of divine assistance, one could easily adopt the same argument against him. One could argue that according to his doctrine, nothing can take the place of essential knowledge in the particular way it benefits people. Since such knowledge is something that people must attain on their own [through careful examination], has he not also characterized it as benefiting people while denying God the capacity simply to provide such knowledge? How would he respond to this? Our interlocutor would not consider this objection to merit a response. Rather, he would be astounded by the objector's obvious incomprehension of the subject and inform him of the oversight. We praise

³⁶ Ash'arī theologians would describe Imāmīs as essentially believing that the imams can offer something (e.g., a divine assistance) that God cannot. The Imāmīs would consider such a belief (or its characterization as such) to be blasphemous.

God, who revealed the limits of the interlocutor's understanding and allowed him to debase himself with such comments. This response should suffice to dispel the claims of our interlocutor.

An interlocutor may claim, "Were God to create a single person under moral obligations – with no one to interact with – who was capable of committing reprehensible acts, this individual would not be in need of an imam to prevent him from wrongdoing and its like, since there would be no one to be his victim. Is this not the case?" We would respond that the imam represents divine assistance both in situations in which the individual can commit transgressions against others and in situations in which he cannot. When a person's ability to refrain from sinfulness is not guaranteed, even if he is created alone [isolated from all human interaction], he is still capable of lying to himself and of engaging in vain pursuits. An imam thus functions as divine assistance for this person. The purpose of aid in such circumstances is obvious. This aid indicates the imposition of moral obligations and benefits this one person in this particular dimension.

Alternatively, one could also argue that were God to create this person without peers or an imam, nothing would prevent him from planning to commit transgressions as soon as the opportunity arose and God created others. By contrast, the existence of an imam would cause the person to reconsider everything. He would expect such actions to incur a response from the imam, who would find him, try to dissuade him from continuing with his plans, and deter him altogether. Thus, the presence of the imam would dissuade him either from ever making such plans or from pursuing them further. In either case, the need for an imam remains. All of this is quite plausible.

5 The Book of Excellence on the Fundamental Principles of Religion

by
Ibn al-Malāḥimī

Introduction to the Text

Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 1141) was a leading Muʿtazilī scholar of Kh̲wārazm (in today's Uzbekistan), active in the late eleventh and early twelfth century. Little information is available about his life. He is the author of a comprehensive theological summa, *The Reliable Book of Knowledge on the Fundamental Principles of Religion*. For this anthology, we have selected a portion of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's discussion of the imamate in his *Book of Excellence on Fundamental Principles of Religion*. *The Book of Excellence*, which is extant in its entirety, is a summary of *The Reliable Book*, of which only parts survive. In this section on the imamate, Ibn al-Malāḥimī justifies the Muslim community's right to select its own imams and affirms the legitimacy of the first four caliphs succeeding the Prophet. He also defends 'Alī against Khārījī defamation while refuting Imāmī doctrines about his divine designation and infallibility. Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues that, in cases when a qualified imam is unavailable, other individuals may fulfill the duties of the imam, and the community can carry on without one.

Dialectics on the Imamate

It is pertinent here to examine the necessity of the imamate, the means through which one knows it to be necessary, its objectives, the way in

which it is established, its requisites, and that which annuls it.¹ Then we shall consider those prominent personalities who became imams. This leads to debate about their order in terms of merit [*al-taḥḍīl*] and about those who waged war against them. The essence of the imamate is an individual's comprehensive leadership [*ri'āsa*] in both religious and worldly affairs. We have used the term "leadership" since the imam is followed, and he who is followed is a leader. It is "comprehensive" because no one evades his authority, in contrast to the authority of judges or governors, who do not wield any authority over the imam. The imamate is both "religious and worldly" because the imam manages affairs and is obeyed in both domains. The office is delegated to an "individual" because the community [*umma*] may depose that person if he transgresses and grant the imamate to someone else. This definition also effectively differentiates the singular person from the collective community.

The Necessity of the Imamate and Its Justification

Most scholars have argued for the necessity of the imamate. The only exceptions are the reports about al-Aṣamm and those Khārijīs who believed that the imamate was dispensable if people learned to treat one another equitably.² The potential for its necessity to lapse ensues from its *raison d'être* ceasing to exist. However, if we deduce that the underlying reason for the imamate will never cease to exist because of human nature, its necessity is proven.

Scholars have differed regarding the means through which one knows the imamate's necessity. The Imāmīs assert that one knows it through both revelation and reason. Some Imāmīs might argue that only reason provides the means to know it. Both Abū 'Alī and Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā'ī asserted that only revelation provides the means, whereas reason cannot do so.³ Al-Jāhīz and Abū 'I-Qāsim [al-Balkhī] held that both reason

¹ For the Arabic source text, see Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-Fā'iq fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 548–573.

² Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. ca. 200–201/816–817) was a prominent theologian of the formative period associated with the Mu'tazilis of Basra. For more on him, see Patricia Crone, "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists," *Past & Present* 167 (2000), 3–28; Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 450–474.

³ Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933) was the son of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915–916). They are considered the founders of the Bahshamī school of Mu'tazilī theology and two of the most influential Mu'tazilis in history.

and revelation justify the imamate's necessity. Al-Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥusayn [al-Baṣrī], may God have mercy on him, settled on this [final] opinion, since it entails protecting human life from harm, which is itself a necessity.⁴ We have asserted the same, since there will be individuals with power in every era who abuse the weak in order to seize their wealth and womenfolk. This fact is due to humanity's large numbers, their great diversity in ambitions and desires, and the temptations that give rise to hostilities. Most people do not fully consider the outcomes of their harmful actions or pay any attention to pious imams. Thus, only a powerful leader with formidable allies can prevent the powerful from harming others. If there is no such leader, the powerful will hunt the weak, and there will be turmoil. Under such circumstances, people become preoccupied and cease to earn a living through agriculture and business. Corruption then becomes ubiquitous. We observe this state of affairs whenever the sultanate is weakened or the leaders quarrel with one another and are distracted from attending to the needs of the public. What happens, then, when a community is completely deprived of leaders? Thus, it is true that the imamate entails rectifying this world and shielding it from harm. Since shielding oneself from all harm is a necessity, the designation of an imam must likewise be one.

Those who deny that the imamate's necessity can be established through reason contest it through this very proof. Turmoil accompanies the designation of every new leader, since there is always a group of people who disdain his authority over them. So contestation and quarreling ensue. [To this view] we respond that we do not deny that harm may ensue from the imamate, but the misfortune that the imamate averts is far more grievous. In this world, it is quite common to observe some harm resulting from the very means used to avert a greater calamity. Consider how a phlebotomy or the consumption of unpleasant medicine causes pain. Nonetheless, the two procedures remain necessary, since they prevent even greater pain. This is precisely the case with the subject at hand. The opposition contends that turmoil ensues from a single person's

⁴ Ibn al-Malāḥimī cites the views of some of the most prominent Mu'tazilīs in history. Al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868–869) was an early Mu'tazilī theologian from Basra and a famed belletrist associated with the Abbasid state. He discussed the history and concept of the imamate in many of his works. Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) became the head of the Mu'tazilī school of Baghdad. Abū 'l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044) was a student of the renowned Bahshamī scholar al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), but went on to found his own school within the Mu'tazilī tradition.

contesting the ruler's authority and that such turmoil is the product of a desire to jockey for material benefits. But what, then, would happen if there were no more leaders, and if grave sinners no longer feared anything? Someone might counter that our rationale for the imamate's necessity potentially entails the appointment of an unbeliever if the unbeliever were capable of averting worldly harms, but any argument that results in the appointment of unbelievers over Muslims must be false. [We respond that] since it can never be guaranteed that an unbeliever would serve the worldly and otherworldly interests of a believer, such an appointment is prohibited.

Someone who denies the necessity of the imamate might claim that if it were necessary, its necessity would have been established by reason; thus, since reason fails to determine the need for it, it cannot be necessary. In response, we argue that reason does not establish the necessity of a duty when it is directly linked to religion or the material world. In the realm of religion, the imamate appears to be a means of fortification and divine assistance. In the material world, it averts calamities and procures great benefits.

The Imamate Is Not an Example of Divine Assistance [*lutf*]

Some claim that those under moral obligations in the sight of God [*mukallaḥūn*, sing. *mukallaḥ*] are better at observing such obligations and avoiding sin when they know that there is an imam who upholds justice and implements various punitive ordinances [*ḥudūd wa-ta'zīr*].⁵ The Imāmīs, of course, argue along these lines. They conflate the imamate with knowledge of God and with the morally obliged person's knowledge of those things that lead to divine reward and punishment. Indeed, if the imamate could be characterized as divine assistance, it would be for the aforementioned reasons. Fear of the imam spurs people to persist in their obedience and to refrain from repugnant deeds. It stands to reason that the imamate would thus qualify as divine assistance. However, there is no way to be certain of this. In fact, this argument requires a secondary proof [to remain tenable] since it may give rise to an unsound

⁵ The *ḥudūd* refers to fixed, nondiscretionary penalties for specific offenses described in the Quran and hadith. If an offender commits a crime with no fixed punishment, judges may prescribe discretionary penalties, which are known as *ta'zīr*.

alternative. This fact becomes apparent [when one realizes] that the person under moral obligations is immediately rewarded and punished for every deed he commits. Consequently, he is propelled further from disobedience and closer to obedience. The imamate would not represent divine assistance [for such a person] since his obedience and his abstinence from disobedience is almost compelled. For this reason, fear of the imam, as you [Twelver Shī'īs]⁶ have described it, could be considered a form of compulsion and would no longer qualify as divine assistance. Furthermore, people must still fulfill their moral obligations [*taklīf*] in the sight of God, despite the imam's occultation and powerlessness. If the imam functioned as a form of divine assistance, their moral responsibility would be repugnant [and unnecessary] except in his presence and under his authority. In addition, since the imam is also a person under moral obligations, there would need to be another imam [for him to fear and obey], but this would manifestly lead to an infinite regress.

The Imam as a Means of Fortification

It is widely understood that the imam is not endowed with any special instrument, capacity, or sound reasoning independent of the community that would make him a special means of fortification for people. Some claim that he serves as an indicator [of truth] for them in rational and religious discussions. However, this claim is invalid. A sound mind, an ability to examine proofs comprehensively, and the process of scholarly discourse suffice to attain knowledge in rational matters. For knowledge of religious matters [*shar'īyyāt*], it suffices to take recourse to the continuously and widely disseminated transmitted reports [*tawātur*], scripture, prophetic practice, and one's independent reasoning [*ijtihād*].

Regarding Worldly Affairs

Procurement of the benefits of the material world is not a necessity, whereas the role of the imamate in averting misfortune is precisely what indicates its necessity. Some have attempted to refute this point, but we

⁶ Twelver Shī'īs often referred to themselves as Imāmīs as a result of their belief in the necessity of a perpetual imamate. Ibn al-Malāḥimī respectfully refers to Twelvers as Imāmīs elsewhere in his treatise.

have already dealt with their objections above. Some Imāmīs assert that people need an imam to differentiate that which should be consumed from that which is poisonous, to teach them various languages, and to secure other things [in this world]. This explanation is unconvincing. Humans, as a matter of convention, eat and drink only what satiates them. They do not need someone to teach them specifically which items are edible or capable of satiating them. It is for this reason that many generations have passed without anyone observing an imam who seeks to identify these things for people or to transmit knowledge about them from a previous imam. Humans live, eat, and drink without any need for an imam in these affairs. Likewise, they learn languages from their forefathers and from others in their community. This was the case with their ancestors as well; none of them required an imam. Some opine that when reason cannot establish the necessity of a thing, that thing cannot be obligatory. When the means establishing its necessity [by reason] are absent, the possibility of its necessity does not outweigh the possibility of its being nonessential. Moreover, the odds would favor the necessity of something else.

Scriptural Texts [*sam*'] Indicate the Necessity of the Imamate

One can argue [that scriptural texts (*sam*')] prove the necessity of the imamate] by appealing to consensus. Scholars acknowledge that revelation indicates the necessity of the imamate, although they differ regarding the particular evidence that indicates it. They refer to the Most High's command to "Cut off the hands" [Q. 5:38] as universal [since it employs the plural imperative rather than the singular]. The command to sever a thief's hand is applicable either when one is able to carry out the act directly or when one possesses the necessary means to have it carried out. The first meaning is not intended here, since [a large group of] people cannot practically sever one hand together. Thus, it is the second meaning that is intended. In procuring the necessary means to carry out such a punishment, the necessity of appointing someone with the authority to order the severing of a hand becomes apparent. It is a matter of consensus in the Muslim community [*ijmā' al-umma*] that nondiscretionary penalties may be carried out only by an imam or someone appointed by him. Ultimately, then, evidence from revelation indicates the necessity of appointing an imam.

The Objectives and Requisites of the Imamate

The objectives of the imamate include the following:

- (1) the proper management of religious and worldly matters;
- (2) the guidance of those who have been led astray;
- (3) offering rulings on legal questions to those in need of them;
- (4) arbitration between claimants in any dispute;
- (5) commanding right and forbidding wrong;
- (6) safeguarding Islam's centers and territories;
- (7) engaging adversaries in combat;
- (8) preventing oppressors from engaging in unlawful activity;
- (9) administering nondiscretionary penalties;
- (10) the proper collection and distribution of the spoils of war.

The Muslim community is in full agreement that an imam is appointed for these purposes. The Imāmīs add that the imam should convey the Prophet's message to humankind. We shall address this claim later.

The requisites of the imamate fall into two categories. The first category consists of necessary conditions. Without these qualities, the objectives of the office can never be fulfilled. The community also recognizes a second category of requisites based on the transmission of teachings attributed to the Prophet. Let us now discuss attributes belonging to the first category. A candidate must possess the following characteristics:

- (1) He must be a scholar and an expert [*muḥtāhid*] in jurisprudence [*uṣūl*] and substantive law. Such an individual is able to guide those who have been led astray, resolve obscure dilemmas, and offer legal rulings to those in need of them.
- (2) He must be intelligent, so as to know how to negotiate peace and engage in war properly.
- (3) He must be courageous, someone who does not flee from confrontation with an enemy, the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties, or the front lines of war.
- (4) He must be just, or at least appear so in public. An individual who openly transgresses would likely be unjust in his rulings, disregard the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties, and misappropriate public funds for himself and for others not entitled to them.
- (5) The attributes above can only be found in a free adult male of sound mind. Women do not seem to possess the aforementioned requisite

qualities, nor do they inspire great awe and admiration in society, as men do. Society also views slaves with disdain, so they are not generally treated with the reverence and respect required of the office. If society shows respect to a slave, it is usually due to the standing of his master. Children obviously cannot be considered for the office, given that women and slaves are superior to them. Finally, all of these qualities require sound mind as their foundation.

The requirement that the imam belong to the tribe of Quraysh falls into the second category. Both Abū 'Alī and Abū Hāshim [al-Jubbā'ī] considered such lineage a necessary condition, but al-Jāhīz claimed that some early, respected Mu'tazilis did not. The latter opinion became normative among the Khārijīs. Those who consider descent from Quraysh a necessary condition appeal to the statement that Abū Bakr transmitted from the Prophet: "Your rulers will come from Quraysh as long as they obey God." He also said, "Your imams will come from Quraysh."

Those who follow the dissenting opinion [of the Khārijīs and some Mu'tazilis] argue that an imam is desired for all of the objectives mentioned above and that one can deem an imam perfectly suited to achieving these objectives without ever considering his ancestry. Some claim that the imam must be a member of a specific clan of Quraysh. For example, the Imāmīs say that after al-Ḥusayn, the imams must be descendants of him. The Zaydīs opine that the imamate is restricted to the descendants of [the Prophet's daughter] Fāṭima, while the Rāwandīs argue that the office belongs only to the Abbasids. However, these claims are all false. There is no conclusive evidence in support of any of these doctrines.

The Imāmīs argue that the imam must be the most virtuous person of his time and consider that a necessary condition. But neither the Mu'tazilī school of Baghdad nor the Ṣāliḥī Zaydīs consider this characteristic to be a requisite.⁷ Abū 'Alī and Abū Hāshim opined that a person of lower caliber could accede to the imamate only when some complication or predicament hindered the superior candidate from doing so.

Al-Shaykh Abū 'l-Ḥusayn [al-Baṣrī], may God have mercy on him, believed that when the scholarship, political acumen, and religiosity of two candidates are identical, it makes no difference which one is elected. In contrast, if one of them were devout but lacking in political acumen,

⁷ Ṣāliḥī Zaydīs were those who followed al-Ḥasan b. Ṣāliḥ b. Ḥayy (d. 168–169/784–785), a prominent Baṭrī Zaydī theologian and jurist. For more on him, see *EP*, s.v. "al-Ḥasan b. Ṣāliḥ" (Najam I. Haider).

investing him with the imamate would be unlawful. Imagine there were two candidates respected for their scholarship, political acumen, religiosity, and integrity. The only difference between the two was that one was more devout and the other possessed greater political acumen. The latter would be more deserving of the imamate, since the community is in greater need of an imam with political acumen than of one who is more devout. However, this argument is supported by no clear evidence. What is required of us is the fulfillment of the aims of the imamate. Whoever is best able to fulfill those objectives is best suited for the position. If the aims cannot be fulfilled by the election of that person, investing him with the office would not be in the interests of the community and would qualify as capricious and self-serving. Such an investiture would be illegitimate.

The Mu‘tazilī school of Baghdad appealed to the consensus of the Companions in defense of its position. It is narrated that Abū Bakr said from the pulpit, “I stand before you as a ruler although I am not the best among you,” and no one denied the legitimacy of his imamate. Similarly, ‘Umar attempted to pledge allegiance to Abū ‘Ubayda [al-Jarrāh] on the Day of the Portico [*yawm al-saqifa*], saying, “Extend your hand, so I may pledge allegiance to you,” although ‘Umar was superior to him. Later, ‘Umar created a council of six individuals [to select his successor] even though they were not equal in merit.

In response to these Baghdadi Mu‘tazilīs, their opponents have argued that Abū ‘Ubayda defied ‘Umar and replied, “You have never erred as a Muslim except in this case. Can you request this of me while Abū Bakr is among us?” Thus, one cannot accept any claim of consensus. As for the words of Abū Bakr mentioned above, al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] is reported to have commented, “In fact, Abū Bakr knew that he was the best of them, but a believer never elevates himself.” And as for ‘Umar’s creation of a council of six, this was an opinion held by ‘Umar alone. An opinion cannot be considered binding when it is held by just one person.

Infallibility

The Imāmī school considers infallibility a requisite for any imam. No one else considers it a necessary condition. Infallibility entails a type of divine assistance that keeps the imam from committing major sins. The Mu‘tazilīs contest the necessity of infallibility by arguing that imams are desired for the same reasons that society requires governors and judges;

since these last two offices do not require infallibility, why should the imamate? They further appeal to the consensus of the Companions. Abū Bakr is said to have proclaimed from the pulpit: “Revelation would protect God’s Messenger [from sin], but Satan – meaning anger – may sometimes overwhelm me. Assist me when I am steadfast, but set me aright if I stray.” Despite this [acknowledgment of fallibility], none of the pious predecessors denied the legitimacy of Abū Bakr’s imamate.

Imāmīs make their case through several arguments. For example, they argue that if the imam were not infallible, he would be in need of an imam to guide him, just as we [common believers] are in need of him because of our own fallibility. However, the second imam would face the same dilemma as the first, leaving us with an infinite regress of fallible imams [in need of guidance].

The Mu‘tazilis respond that the imam needs divine assistance just as we do. However, for the imam, the community represents divine assistance. Were he to commit a crime that entailed a nondiscretionary penalty [*ḥadd*], the community would appoint someone else as the imam. This imam would then punish the first imam by imposing the proper penalty. Knowledge of this prospect prevents the imam from committing such crimes, just as fear of the imam prevents us from doing so. Therefore, it is clear that a powerful and present imam [capable of sinning] can still serve as a type of divine assistance for the community, whereas an imam in occultation and hiding cannot. In the absence of such a [powerful] imam, it would be reprehensible to annul humanity’s obligations to fulfill the commandments imposed on them by God.

Mu‘tazilis further contend that an infallible army necessarily follows the premise of an infallible imam. Imāmīs could hypothetically respond in the affirmative in one of two ways. First,⁸ a fierce and powerful imam could accomplish the task [of guiding the community] single-handedly. This could happen if God caused him to come to power and he compelled people to obedience by virtue of his own strength. The divine will would be accomplished through such strength. Alternatively, the Imāmīs could claim that the disciples of the imam and the soldiers in his army would be infallible by the grace of God. The infallibility of these disciples and soldiers would be necessary. Otherwise, this first party would require

⁸ The order in which the two alternatives appear is switched in the translation to avoid the author’s decision to begin his first argument, break to discuss an alternative, then return to the first argument.

another powerful imam with disciples and an army to correct them when they commit mistakes. However, this second army would face the same dilemma [of fallibility] as the first, leaving us with an infinite regress of [fallible] armies. Thus, Mu'tazilis conclude that the infallibility of an army is an absurdity that logically follows [the argument for an infallible imam].

Imāmīs argue that if the imam were fallible, nothing would prevent him from convicting someone and wrongfully implementing a nondiscretionary penalty or contravening the revealed law in his judgments. The Mu'tazilis counter that if this premise were true, the infallibility of judges and governors, too, would necessarily follow. In fact, anyone in charge of a matter within the purview of the revealed law, such as a muezzin or a prayer leader, would need to be infallible. What prevents them from performing the ritual call to prayer or leading others in worship in a ritual state of impurity or without ablutions? What prevents a butcher from providing meat to the public that does not meet the requirements of ritual slaughter? If Imāmīs claim that such individuals exercise caution because the imam holds them accountable, one could reply that the Muslim community would similarly hold the [fallible] imam accountable for his wrongdoings. [If he were to stray,] the community would depose him and replace him with someone more suitable. In response, Imāmīs may argue that an [unjust] imam⁹ would prevent the community from doing so by relying on the support of unjust disciples. However, a governor could equally stand against an imam through the help of wicked advisers and aides. Since governors and their supporters may engage in unlawful activity in lands far from the imam, he may never become aware of it. Some of their deeds may entail actions that cannot be redressed, such as instances in which a governor executes an innocent man or a judge sanctions an unlawful union [*al-farj al-ḥarām*].¹⁰ Even if the imam seeks restitution from the governor or annuls the union, he cannot ever undo the injustice that has occurred.

⁹ Here, the term “imam” refers to the head of state or sovereign over the Muslim community. Imāmī conceptions of an infallible imam would not permit him to be unjust or rely on unjust or wicked disciples.

¹⁰ *Al-farj al-ḥarām*, lit. “the vagina that is forbidden.” The term referred to a woman with whom sexual intercourse was forbidden. In androcentric legal discussions, men described a landscape of women who were potentially available for marriage and those who were forbidden due to kinship, marital status, religion, or other restrictions. The writer describes cases in which women are unlawfully wedded to a man as injustices that cannot be undone even when the union is annulled. He may have had the virginity of a woman in mind, viewed as a virtue in antiquity.

The Muslim community has wrangled over various legal matters that the Quran does not directly address. Neither isolated reports [regarding the prophetic tradition] nor juridical analogy constitute sources of true [certain] knowledge of the law.¹¹ The Imāmīs maintain that appeals to consensus or to widely and continuously transmitted reports [*al-akhbār al-mutawātira*] do not engender certitude either if the views of the infallible imam are not included.¹² The Mu‘tazilīs contend that the error of the Imāmīs lies in their misconceived assumptions about the law. Juridical analogy, isolated reports, and consensus are all valid sources of truths related to the revealed law. However, the appropriate place for discussions [of these sources] is the field of jurisprudence. Furthermore, there is no need for an infallible imam to verify information that is available in widely and continuously transmitted reports. It is for this reason that we can attain knowledge that certain countries and kingdoms exist on the basis of reports that ultimately come from non-Muslims. Even if we conceded that these sources were invalid for the revealed law, this would not necessitate the existence of an infallible imam. Our obligation would be to use reason to adjudicate in such matters.

The Imāmīs have alleged that humans are generally deficient in fulfilling their responsibilities and are prone to error, so an infallible imam must exist to compensate for their deficiencies, help them recognize their own errors, and put an end to their heedlessness. The Mu‘tazilīs respond that people who are negligent and unaware of their obligations

¹¹ Scholars of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) referred to isolated reports and juridical analogy as speculative proofs that provided a legal agent with procedures to safeguard himself from liability for any wrongdoing according to the revealed law. These proofs did not engender certitude (*al-ilm al-yaqīn*). The term “isolated report” (*khbar al-wāḥid*) referred to all reports that were not widely and continuously transmitted (*mutawātir*); the latter category is discussed below. Most Sunnī jurists and scholars of hadith considered some types of isolated reports to be too well known (*mashhūr*) or well attested on the authority of reliable transmitters (*ṣaḥīḥ*) to be ignored. Early Mu‘tazilīs, by contrast, earned a reputation for rejecting the reliability of isolated reports.

¹² The terms *al-akhbār al-mutawātira* and *al-tawātūr* refer to widely disseminated and continuously transmitted testimonial reports. Legal theorists and theologians considered well-known facts about the world, like the existence of China, to be established by virtue of conclusive testimonial reports (*tawātūr*). Legal theorists generally considered nearly all extant hadiths about the normative practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muḥammad to be isolated reports (*āḥād*) rather than *mutawātir*. It is true that the Imāmīs contested the authority of consensus when it contradicted or excluded the view of the infallible imam. It does not, however, appear that they ever claimed that the concept of *tawātūr* required infallible imams.

are not held accountable for their actions until God frees their hearts and minds of such negligence. Nothing else can serve as a substitute for this [awareness]. The process of scholarly discourse and our ability to engage in careful examination suffice to safeguard the community from error. Imāmīs may reply that our minds are capable only of imperfect examination; the community thus needs someone with the ability to direct it toward the truth.

In response, the Mu‘tazilīs would ask, “Isn’t the community expected to identify its infallible imam by conducting such inquiries?” If people’s minds are incapable of this, then it is impossible for them ever to learn of such an imam or to uncover truths in general. One could also add that members of the community have always disagreed over the fundamentals of religion and accused one another of error. However, no imam has ever resolved these differences or conclusively identified who is in error. Perhaps the Imāmīs would respond that the truth lies somewhere in what the members of the community have opined on these subjects. Otherwise, if all of their ideas were truly false, God would have sent an imam to remove such falsehood. The Mu‘tazilīs would ask, “Do you know where, precisely, the truth lies on these subjects? Or do you know only that the community as a whole is not in error?” If the Imāmīs answered that they know only that the truth generally exists in the community, it would be evident that members of the community had uncovered these truths in the absence of an infallible imam and relied on their ability to engage in careful examination instead. Or if the Imāmīs claimed to know the truth of these matters precisely, the Mu‘tazilīs would respond, “You have come to this truth through a process of investigation and without an infallible imam at the helm. All those in error can discover the truth by the very same means.”

Grounds for Termination

It must be stated that anything undermining an imam’s ability to discharge the duties of the imamate may serve as grounds for his termination. Examples include a permanent state of insanity or imprisonment with no possibility of release. Some characteristics of an appointee, such as the commission of grave sins, do not completely prevent him from discharging the duties of the office. For example, al-Shāfi‘ī and members of his school consider the imamate of grave sinners to be lawful. By contrast, our fellow [Hanafī] jurists in Iraq assert that an

appointee should be removed from office for the commission of grave sins and that it is unlawful to ratify the imamate of a transgressor. They rule out any possibility of such a person [legitimately] remaining in office as well as the legality of his appointment in the eyes of the Ḥanafī school. [On the other hand,] our [Ḥanafī] brethren in Khorasan and Transoxiana maintain that the grave sinner may both take office and maintain it. I have also heard that the works of Muḥammad [b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī] provide divergent opinions on the subject.¹³ In his *Major Book on International Law* [*Kitāb al-Siyar al-kabīr*] grave sins are a cause for termination, whereas in his *Book of Nondiscretionary Penalties* [*Kitāb al-Hudūd*] it is not.

In his book *On the Legal Verses of the Quran* [*Aḥkām al-Qurʿān*], Abū Bakr al-Rāzī argues that the appointment of grave sinners to the office of the imamate is unlawful.¹⁴ He appeals to the words of God:

When Abraham's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, "I will make you a leader [*imām*] of people." Abraham asked, "And will You make leaders from my descendants too?" God answered, "My covenant does not embrace the evildoers." [Q. 2:124]

The verse is used as a proof text for an important reason. When the verse reveals Abraham's appointment as an imam, it essentially commands people to select him as their leader in religious matters. To be an imam is to be followed. Communities follow prophets. After prophets, communities must follow caliphs, who serve as imams. Governors, judges, and jurists also serve as imams. Let us not forget that someone who leads worship for a congregation is also an imam. Therefore, Abraham responds to this revelation by asking God whether He intends to appoint his offspring as imams as well. Abraham's question may also be understood as a request to make his offspring imams. Either way, God answers, "My covenant does not embrace the evildoers," which can be read as, "My command does not include those who do evil," since God's pledge is His divine command. God proclaims elsewhere, "Children of Adam, did I not command you not to serve Satan ... but

¹³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) was a prominent Ḥanafī jurist whose opinions, with those of Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Yūsuf, form the core of early Ḥanafī legal scholarship. On him, see *EP*, s.v. "al-Shaybānī" (E. Chaumont).

¹⁴ Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 370/981), known as al-Jaṣṣās, was a prominent Ḥanafī jurist based in Baghdad.

to serve Me?” [Q. 36:60–61].¹⁵ Elsewhere He states, “And thus did We command [*wa-‘ahidnā*] Abraham ...” [Q. 2:125].¹⁶

God’s revelation, “My covenant does not embrace the evildoers” [Q. 2:124], may mean only one of two things. Either “the evildoers” are excluded from God’s command to worship and serve Him or they are barred from ever obtaining the right to His authority – meaning that no one should ever follow them in religious matters or in cases in which their opinions would be considered authoritative and people would be obliged to accept them.¹⁷ If the verse does not seem to denote the first interpretation, it must mean the second. Hence, someone who is a grave sinner may never serve as a prophet, a caliph, a governor, a judge, a jurist, or a transmitter of reports about the Prophet, and he may never lead worship. The imamate encompasses all of these different meanings. Since none of them fits better than the other, the term must be interpreted as applicable to each of them. So it is true that one cannot accept the opinion of the grave sinner in religious matters or their sworn testimony. One cannot follow their juridical opinions or implement their legal rulings. And they should not be selected to lead worship. However, if a grave sinner were to lead others in worship, the prayer of the congregation need not be repeated.

One may also substantiate the previous argument by reflecting on the principle that the imamate of any imam is ratified only by a successful election [*al-ikhtiyār*].¹⁸ Those charged with the responsibility of selecting society’s next imam [*ahl al-ḥall wa-‘l-‘aqq*] should consider the best interests of the Muslim community. Their actions should not be self-serving. They should elect a candidate who has the approval of everyone. The candidate whom the council elects to serve Muslims should be a person whom the community desires and accepts as capable of managing

¹⁵ It is customary for authors to cite short passages of the Quran relevant to the point at hand. In full, this passage reads, “Children of Adam, did I not command you not to serve Satan, for he was your sworn enemy, but to serve Me? This is the straight path.”

¹⁶ In Q. 2:125 and Q. 36:60, the verb signifying God’s “command” is derived from the same root as covenant (*‘ahd*).

¹⁷ The author is referring to the imamate as well as cases in which a person may provide a legal opinion or transmit hadith and the community is obliged to accept his statements as true.

¹⁸ Since Mu’tazilis and Sunnis did not advocate for the participation of ordinary laypersons or the entire community, the election (*ikhtiyār*) of leaders should not be equated with modern conceptions of voting and democracy. The electorate was restricted to only a few respected authorities in the community who used their own discretion to appoint leaders. See Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 136–137.

their religious and worldly affairs on their behalf. Obviously, community members would never delegate authority to someone they think is likely to cause great turmoil in their religious and worldly affairs. A leader of this type would misuse and misappropriate public funds and disregard the nondiscretionary penalties [*ḥudūd*] of God. Whenever such individuals are elected to office, their actions are self-serving and do not demonstrate a concern for the public interest. Members of the community would have recourse to no one else to safeguard them from the misdeeds of such leaders.

There is no difference between a candidate who is unacceptable for these reasons before he begins his term and one who becomes corrupt after he takes office. In the latter case, the community would disapprove of his remaining in office or of investing him with authority in their affairs – an eventuality that we have already described. Therefore, the imamate of such a person would be illegitimate.

Those who consider the imamate of the grave sinner to be lawful assert that anyone who obtains the means to govern and demonstrates a capacity to discharge the duties of governance must be allowed to exercise authority. This includes grave sinners who become rulers and their appointees. One obtains the right to such authority through one's selection for the office or the ratification of a contract. This is true for both imams and judges. The suitability of candidates is determined by their capability to fulfill all of the objectives of the position. Since the candidates must also have legal autonomy and demonstrate competency and independence before taking office, their capacity to govern has some corroboration already. The capacity to govern or to exercise authority varies only in circumstances and causes. No one denies a transgressor's ability to govern the affairs of his own life. Such a person [also] exercises authority over others when he gives sworn testimony. Do his words not have an effect on the lives of others? Whenever there is justifiable cause – such as a need for his testimony – is his authority not considered valid? For this reason, Abū Ḥanīfa declares that when a grave sinner bears witness to a marriage, the marriage contract is valid [despite his impiety]. Likewise, if a judge presiding over a case believes the sworn testimony of a grave sinner to have merit and truth, that testimony becomes authoritative and valid.

These arguments deserve a response. Even if the suitability of candidates were determined in the manner described above, why are moral rectitude and uprightness [*ʿadāla*] not among the necessary requisites of suitability? Moral rectitude guarantees that the candidate will act in the

best interests of the Muslim community and protect the religion of God. Just as one's identity as a Muslim is considered a requisite of suitability, so should such rectitude. Even if it does not increase an imam's ability to properly enforce the law, moral rectitude guarantees that he will be just in his efforts.

The fact that a grave sinner properly governs his own affairs cannot be considered proof of his suitability, since he will never cheat himself. But the same assumption cannot be made of his treatment of others, which requires some additional guarantee. Moral rectitude is that guarantee. Abū Ḥanīfa's opinion regarding the transgressor's ability to witness a marriage contract is not evidence that he ever considered such a person suitable for office. Abū Ḥanīfa makes this exception to ensure the legality of a union and to eliminate any possibility of sexual impropriety. Hence, even a malevolent person may bear witness to a marriage. Afterward, a judge may also confirm the validity of the contract at a court hearing.

There are cases in which a judge accepts the sworn testimony of a grave sinner and believes that the latter is speaking the truth. However, this acceptance does not mean that the judge believes that the person is entitled to authority over others. Sworn testimony represents neither a transgressor's authority over others nor the implementation of a legal ruling belonging to him. Such testimony carries very little weight for a judge. It is accepted only in the presence of other compelling evidence. In such cases, the judge only happens to issue a ruling that agrees with the testimony and considers it to be credible. Nonetheless, the judge adjudicates solely on the basis of evidence considered unequivocal in the revealed law. Therefore, it is correct to maintain that moral rectitude is a necessary requisite for authority over others.

If an imam becomes a grave sinner but then repents of his misdeeds, does his repentance necessitate a renewal of his contract? Some contend that the ratification of a new contract is necessary for his newfound authority. Others maintain that he returns to office without a new contractual agreement, since repentance effectively legitimates his appointment in the eyes of Muslims. The ratification of a new contract for his authority would also be a disgrace – a thing that one must always avoid – and would cause great hardship.

A person can be considered a grave sinner because of his erroneous interpretation of religion and his false beliefs. Scholars differ in their judgments regarding the suitability of such a person for the imamate, since his sinfulness is the result of an error in interpreting scripture and prophetic

tradition. Some argue that false beliefs constitute a grave sin in the heart and that this person is no different from someone who is a grave sinner in deed. It is true that a person with false beliefs is plagued with a kind of ignorance, but both types of individuals should be considered grave sinners. Others assert that one must differentiate between the two types. The grave sinner indeed will pursue a particular offense with the knowledge that it is sinful and prohibited. There is no guarantee that such a person will abstain from other unlawful activities. By contrast, a person with unorthodox interpretations of religion maintains his beliefs under the assumption that they reflect proper religion and obedience to God. This person will certainly abstain from anything he knows to be disobedience in the sight of God. For this reason, people with unorthodox beliefs can become imams. Their appointment is lawful even if they are members of unorthodox sects.

As for other physical limitations, such as blindness, deafness, or insanity, if the limitation incapacitates the individual and prevents him from discharging the duties of the imamate, he would be removed from office. Otherwise, he is entitled to remain in office.

The Means to Secure the Imamate

Scholars agree that one does not become an imam simply by being suited for the position. One must acquire some sort of mandate to become an imam. Scholars differ, however, over the nature of this mandate. The Imāmīs contend that only the Prophet or the reigning imam can provide such a mandate by designating the next imam. They also state that when an imam appears and performs miracles [to prove his claim], we know that he is the [divinely approved and] designated imam.

The Mu‘tazilis, the Zaydī school of al-Ḥasan b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy, the partisans of hadith, and the Khārijīs maintain that the mandate may come from an election or from his designation. A proper election occurs when the scholars and the righteous of the community elect a man who is suitable for the imamate. He should be someone whom they know and have previously vetted. His appointment is legitimate if it takes place at a time when there is neither an imam nor a person already appointed to become the next imam.

[Other] Zaydīs maintain that to become an imam, an individual who possesses all the necessary qualities for leadership must launch a campaign and a mission [*da‘wa*] against oppression. This person must proclaim his intent to take office, to command what is right and to forbid

what is wrong, and to confront all oppressors. He becomes an imam only on this basis.

According to the Mu‘tazilis, the consensus of the Companions demonstrates the legitimacy of using elections to determine the next imam. In every case in which the Companions were obligated to appoint another imam, they relied on an electoral process. In each case, a candidate’s suitability for office determined the outcome. When the Companions considered a particular candidate more suitable than his opponents, he became the next imam.

On the Day of the Portico [*yawm al-saqifa*], the Anṣār gathered to elect someone as the Prophet’s successor from among themselves. When Abū Bakr and ‘Umar joined them, the Anṣār argued, “We have a greater right to this authority. The abode of Islam is our abode. The source of our glory and might is Islam alone.” “You all know,” responded Abū Bakr, “that *we* [the men of Quraysh] are the most honored among the Arabs and considered the noblest in lineage. We are the Prophet’s kin and come from the same tree as he does. Whenever the Quran mentions the community, God addresses us first. Indeed, the Quran is more deserving of emulation than anything else.” He continued, “This authority will triumph only when it is in the hands of Quraysh. The Arabs will submit to no one else.” And ‘Umar argued, “God has commanded us to treat you all with fairness, but He has not commanded you all to care for us. The intelligent among you can discern that this fact assumes that authority will belong to us.” When a member of the Anṣār suggested that they select two chiefs, one for the Anṣār and one for the members of Quraysh, ‘Umar retorted, “Two swords in a single sheath? That will never do.” He then said to Abū Bakr, “You were the Companion of the Prophet at every turn. You were there for the good times and the bad.” He asked the assembly, “Are any of you bold enough to step in front of the person the Prophet put forward to lead the community in worship?” All of this indicates that whenever the Companions were compelled to appoint the next imam, they were concerned only with selecting the most suitable candidate.

On the Day of the Council [*yawm al-shūrā*], ‘Umar created a council consisting of six candidates: ‘Alī, ‘Uthmān, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf. He ordered them to choose someone from among themselves to lead the community. They met and eventually invested ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf with the duty of choosing between ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān addressed ‘Alī first. He said, “I pledge allegiance to you on the basis that you abide by God’s Book,

the practice of His Prophet, and the example of the Two Elders [i.e., Abū Bakr and ‘Umar].” ‘Alī answered, “Pledge allegiance to me rather on the basis that I abide by God’s Book and the practice of His Prophet and use my best judgment.” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān then took the hand of ‘Uthmān and made the same request to him. In contrast to ‘Alī, ‘Uthmān readily accepted [the third condition]. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān made the request three times to each candidate. Each time, ‘Alī refused and ‘Uthmān accepted. Finally, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān pledged allegiance to the latter.

After ‘Uthmān’s assassination, public support for ‘Alī led the community to offer him the pledge of allegiance. ‘Alī initially declined the offer and said, “Leave me and go pin your hopes on someone else. I will not oppose whomever you appoint to power.” The next day, he ascended the pulpit and asked, “My people, did you all consult one another in this affair? This authority belongs to you. No one may acquire it without your consent. I will step aside if you so desire.” “We have remained steadfast in our opinion,” they replied. The community then pledged allegiance to him. Immediately after receiving the pledge of allegiance, ‘Alī wrote the following letter to Mu‘āwiya:

Indeed, the pledge of allegiance that was offered to me in Medina is now incumbent on you although you are in the Levant. This is so because those [respected members of the community] who previously swore allegiance to Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān in Medina have now offered the same oaths of fealty to me. Those who witnessed them do this had no grounds to appoint someone else, and others who were absent must abide by their decision. Indeed, the electoral process is confined to the Muhājirūn and the Prophet’s Anṣār. When they collectively appoint someone as an imam, their consensus indicates divine approval. People who reject their decision by denouncing the new appointee or the electoral process or by proclaiming their own right to rule will be pressured to conform. If they refuse, then the community will wage war against them for following a course in opposition to the faithful.

These examples indicate that whenever the Companions were compelled to appoint the next imam, they resorted to an electoral process. No one among them ever objected to this method. If election were an illegitimate means to attain office, the community would not have collectively failed to condemn the practice. We know that such a mistake did not occur, since an infallible imam existed among them according to Imāmīs. It is

evident that 'Alī never condemned the practice either.¹⁹ Therefore, elections should be considered a legitimate means to securing the imamate.

Imāmīs may argue that 'Alī approved of the electoral process only once he obtained that which he desired, namely, the opportunity to take office. They might assert that the imamate was already 'Alī's right by way of a divine designation,²⁰ but that he refrained from appealing to this designation to stave off factionalism and civil unrest. The Mu'tazilīs could respond with the following: When 'Alī finally took office and most members of the community yielded to his authority, why did he refrain from mentioning the existence of such a designation? Why did he fail to mention it when arguing with Mu'āwiya? Citing such evidence would be much more compelling than an appeal to the electoral process. Why not appeal to both? Even if we accepted [the existence of this designation], it would not have been incumbent on 'Alī to wage war against the community for pledging allegiance to someone else. Rather, he could have gently and amicably appealed to this designation. When Abū Bakr sought fealty from the Anṣār in this way, it did not cause civil unrest. The Anṣār relinquished their claim to the office in his favor. 'Alī could have followed the same course. Only after the failure of appeals to such a designation does one cease to mention it.

Imāmīs may argue that 'Alī had already abandoned hope of appealing to any designation in his favor after witnessing the community deliberately cast such evidence aside. The Mu'tazilīs would respond that 'Alī's conduct contradicts their claim. One can win debates only by appealing to facts and arguments that neither party will deny. If such a designation existed, then 'Alī would certainly have mentioned it.

The Imāmīs contend that 'Alī abandoned hope in appealing to any designation once other individuals had secured the imamate for themselves. One can reply that only one segment of the community [the Muhājirūn] secured rights to the imamate. By contrast, the Anṣār were essentially barred. 'Alī could have approached the Anṣār and said, "Do not disgrace

¹⁹ Imāmīs would dismiss Ibn al-Malāḥimī's assertion that 'Alī never condemned the electoral process, since Shī'ī literature is rife with reports of him and his supporters doing just that. Imāmīs also rejected Sunnī theories about the authority of consensus. They deemed the collective just as capable of committing errors as the individual. For Imāmīs, a consensus was only valid if it appeared to follow the opinion of the infallible imam. It was the infallible imam who truly possessed authority in such cases.

²⁰ Divine designation, according to the Shī'īs, refers to the Prophet's designation of 'Alī as his successor in accordance with revelation.

yourselves twice! Will you defy a designation by the Prophet and then concede the imamate to others as well?”

The Imāmis also argue that ‘Alī lost hope since he knew how much people loved Abū Bakr. One could ask the Imāmis why people loved Abū Bakr so much. He certainly never had to trick them into supporting him or request that they compromise their faith. Did they not love ‘Alī for the same reasons? In fact, they would have had more reason to love ‘Alī had the Prophet designated him as his successor. Their love for the Prophet was much stronger than their love for anyone else. The community was much more receptive to obeying a command from the Prophet than one from Abū Bakr. So how was it that ‘Alī lost hope in them?

The Imāmis respond that the issue was the resentment they felt toward ‘Alī. He had killed many of their relatives [in battles], and ‘Alī lost hope [that they would ever forgive him]. One could respond, however, that he never killed a single relative of the Anṣār. He had no reason to fear any hostility from them. As for the Muhājirūn, they fought and killed their own kinsmen in the course of resisting oppression.²¹ Why would they wish to retaliate against ‘Alī, who fought those individuals for the same reason? [Even if ‘Alī had previously refrained from appealing to his designation for the reasons mentioned above,] why didn’t he appeal to it when confronting Mu‘āwiya and his men? In addition to occupying the seat of power, ‘Alī had no reason to maintain any pretense with Mu‘āwiya and his men.

One proof that the electoral process constitutes a proper means to securing the imamate is the necessity of safeguarding oneself against harm. Since one cannot fully achieve this objective without this office, then the necessity of the latter is also established. The obligation of preventing all harm in a community cannot be contingent on a designation. Rather, strong faith in the suitability of a candidate should suffice to elect him to

²¹ *Fi ṣabīl Allāh*, “in the path of God.” Scripture and prophetic traditions command Muslims to carry out all good deeds (e.g., charity, work) solely for the sake of God rather than for any personal gain. The term also refers to those good deeds that serve the common good. In this case, Ibn al-Malāḥimī refers to wars that occurred in the lifetime of the Prophet after he and his followers were forced to flee Mecca. The tribe of Quraysh subsequently confiscated the wealth and properties of Muslims who left the city. When early Muslims engaged in military conflicts to defend themselves and the Prophet from further persecution, they understood this to be “in the path of God.” Since Q. 22:39–40 specifically sanctions war to resist ongoing persecution and oppression, we have opted to translate this reference to fighting *fi ṣabīl Allāh* as commands to *resist* in order to reflect the context in which this phrase was deployed.

fulfill the obligation of defending the community. Have you not considered the example of people who find themselves surrounded by the enemy and in dire circumstances? If they come to believe that one of them has the potential to save them, are they not obligated to follow that person? The Prophet's Companions certainly did this at the Battle of Mu'ta when they appointed Khālīd [b. al-Walīd] to lead them after the Prophet's three appointees had been killed.²² The Prophet did not censure them at all for this appointment.

The opposing side makes several arguments, one being that the imam must be infallible. Since the community has no means of knowing who is infallible, electing people to the office is not an option. Instead, they argue, an imam must be divinely designated to take office. However, we have already explained that infallibility is not a requisite for the imamate. Even if it were, nothing would have prohibited the Prophet from designating more than one suitable candidate for the imamate. The community would then use its own discretion to choose one of these eligible candidates.

The opposition also argues that the imam must surpass his peers in knowledge, piety, asceticism, and political acumen, but that elections do not guarantee that such a person is appointed. One could reply that a vast knowledge of religion is not a requisite for the office either. Even if we had strong faith in a candidate's superiority, knowledge, and political acumen, we would still need to carry out an electoral process for him to take office. The imam himself must also appoint governors and judges in the hope that their inner states resemble their good conduct in public, even if this is not in fact the case.

Imāmīs contend that someone who is elected cannot appoint the next imam because his office is subject to the outcome of an election. He does not possess the authority to appoint a successor, since this collective right belongs to the community. What right do imams have to invest their powers in someone else if their own authority comes from election? One may reply that [Islamic law confirms that] nothing prevents such investment. Doesn't the case of a woman's guardian exemplify this? The guardian is not entitled to marry the bride himself, yet he officially grants this right to someone else.

²² The Battle of Mu'ta was a skirmish fought near the village of that name, east of the Jordan River, in 8/629 between the forces of Muḥammad and the Byzantine Empire and its Arab Christian vassals.

Imāmīs argue that the electoral process eventually leads to turmoil. Whenever an imam passes away, the subjects residing in a particular region should not be more entitled than others to select the next imam. When two communities simultaneously offer and conclude a contractual agreement for the position with two different leaders, neither one can be considered more legitimate than the other. Civil unrest will certainly befall the nation. Muʿtazilīs respond, “Why not view this case like that of a woman who has two guardians, each of whom has contracted her to marry a suitable groom?” The marriage that is contracted first invalidates the other. If they are contracted simultaneously, both are invalidated, and a new marriage contract must be negotiated. This ruling applies to the imamate, too. Some also recommend drawing lots between the two candidates to resolve the affair. If one of them subsequently protests the outcome of the draw, all [the civil strife] that follows is of his doing. Others believe that the matter is subject to local social norms and practices. For example, future candidates and those charged with selecting the next leader commonly reside near the imam and learn of his death well before others. One should note that the Imāmīs are appealing to a scenario that does not reflect reality. It does not benefit those charged with appointing the next imam to protest the outcome of an electoral process. Were they to follow such a course, all [the civil strife] that follows would be of their doing. Such contestation is antithetical to their duty to seek the community’s best interests.

Imāmīs argue that another feature of the electoral process may generate civil strife: there are many different religious sects and schools of thought. The members of each faction would love to have one of their own become the next imam. Therefore, all of them would support candidates who represent their own school of thought, resulting in civil strife. One may reply that this dilemma also plagues the Imāmīs, who believe imams are divinely designated. Despite their shared belief in the need for a designation, Imāmīs differ among themselves, and each faction hopes that the next imam will be one of their own. This wish leads members of each faction either to reinterpret or to deny the existence of a designation for any imam outside of their faction. They also counter claims made by others by inventing a designation for one of their own imams. Thus, turmoil can ensue from this doctrine, too. In reality, the splintering of the Imāmīs into a number of factions that all uphold the doctrine of designation has not produced major turmoil and chaos in the community. The same can be said of the electoral process. The Muʿtazilīs assert that the

dilemma above presupposes that those charged with selecting the next leader are contemporaneous, differ over creed, and match each other in strength and number. However, there is no evidence that such a set of circumstances has ever existed. Those [Companions] who were involved in disputes immediately after the Prophet's death did not differ with one another over creed. As for the major schisms that took place later, they can all be dated to different periods in history with particular circumstances. In some cases, the imam died, while his partisans represented the most powerful bloc in the community. Since no rival force possessed the means to resist their will, their decision to appoint the next imam independently did not lead to major turmoil in the community. In other cases, those charged with selecting the next leader were unable to carry out their duties for one reason or another. Thus, the objection that the Imāmīs have raised is without merit.

The Imāmīs contend that if election constitutes a lawful means to appoint imams, then one can also elect individuals to become prophets. Furthermore, the community should be able to remove imams from office by means of an electoral process. One could respond that the Imāmīs have unjustifiably conflated the authority of imams with that of prophets; the two are not alike. A prophet implements divine law and serves as its source. For this reason, his authority as a prophet entails that he refrain from manipulating, concealing, or erring in communicating the revelation. Imams, by contrast, are desired for the same reason that society requires governors, judges, and many others: to discharge duties prescribed by religion. All of these individuals are selected in good faith, in the belief that they are people of good character and suited for such responsibilities.

The community cannot elect to remove an imam from office because of a sound legal precedent [preventing such a move], namely, the consensus of the Companions. The Companions collectively forbade the removal of an imam from office after the pledge of allegiance. The community contemplated this question during the rule of 'Uthmān. Some believed that he had committed objectionable deeds that warranted his removal from office. Others argued that he had committed no such deeds and did not deserve to be removed. Arguably, their situation was like that of a guardian, who possesses the right to contract a marriage but not the authority to annul one.

The Imāmīs argue that if the community is given the authority to select its own imam, he will face a conflict of interest. As caliph, he would

be a delegate of the people but charged with prosecuting them at the same time. This is an impossible task.²³ Humankind cannot be in the position of electing the caliphs who will judge them [on God's behalf], just as individuals are not entitled to serve as judge in their own cases. The Mu'tazilīs respond that the electoral process serves as a preliminary to God's appointment of an imam over the people. This case resembles that of a legal expert [*mujtahid*], whose expertise leads him to support a particular legal opinion and to implement it. His application of the ruling is understood to be in accordance with the rule of God, not simply his own judgment.

The Imāmīs ask, since decisions about the imamate have such far-reaching consequences, why would the Prophet fail to appoint someone personally to the office, leaving the task to others? Did he not demand that every legally responsible Muslim prepare a will and bear full responsibility for its completion? [The claim that he approved of] an electoral process seems baseless. The Mu'tazilīs respond that perhaps a concern for the public interest led the Prophet to this decision. Furthermore, the Prophet required only those with debts or young children to prepare a will. The revealed law does not mention the use of testaments on any other occasion. There are some prophetic reports suggesting that public interest was precisely the reason why he refrained from naming a successor. In his book, *On the Battle of the Camel*, Naṣr b. Muzāḥim [d. 212/827] cites a report – with a chain of transmission – in which the Companions of the Prophet approached him and said, “O Messenger of God, name a successor so that he, too, may name a successor. We will then remain steadfast in obeying these two until we meet you in the hereafter.” “I will disclose to you what prevents me from naming a successor,” responded the Prophet. “If I named a successor who rules in accordance with God's revelation, you would be obligated to obey him as you have obeyed me and to recognize his rights and privileges as you have recognized mine. On the other hand, if I appoint someone who does not rule in accordance with God's revelation, you would rightfully hold me responsible and dispute with me in the hereafter.”

²³ This would be akin to a lawyer being charged with both the defense and the prosecution of the same client. It is clear in this sentence that Ibn al-Malāḥimī uses the term “caliph” to refer to someone who was expected to serve as a delegate and representative (*wakil*) of the people. Delegates were expected to advocate for and fulfill the needs of those who hired them. For this reason, Imāmīs envisioned imams as deputies of God selected by God to implement divine law over a community.

The Essentials of a Proper Election

The Mu‘tazilīs have discussed the essentials of a proper election. In cases in which there is neither an imam nor a successor with a ratified contract, five righteous men suitable for the office should meet. They should be respected as scholars in the community. They must be of good character and moral integrity and demonstrate great acumen. If the group is unanimous in its support for a candidate, one of its members can ratify a contract with the selected person on their behalf. So long as no other imam or claimant possesses such a contract, the appointee would thus be the new imam. The participants in the electoral process must be scholars to ensure that they know the requisites of the imamate. This requirement ensures that they select a candidate who possesses all of the necessary qualities. The participants must also be intelligent in order to fulfill this special duty. Only people who demonstrate great acumen and expertise should be decision-makers. To guarantee that they do not bring harm to the community, those who select the next imam must be committed to justice. Finally, the participants should be individuals who are likely to consider the best interests of the Muslim community and to refuse to appoint a person who is a grave sinner or who is unqualified.

The revealed law [*shar‘*] has laid down the requisites of the imamate, and we are obliged to follow the law in all matters that fall under its purview. According to the abovementioned Mu‘tazilīs, the law mandates that the quorum for an election be five individuals. On the Day of the Portico and the Day of the Council, the Companions reached this quorum [before appointing a successor]. On the former occasion, ‘Umar ratified Abū Bakr’s authority with the support of Sālim b. Abī Ḥudhayfa, Abū ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ, Bishr b. Sa‘d, and Usayd b. Ḥudayr.²⁴ In the latter case, ‘Abd al-Rahmān [b. ‘Awf] ratified ‘Uthmān’s contract with the approval of ‘Alī, al-Zubayr, and Sa‘d [b. Abī Waqqās]. When Ṭalḥa appeared, he also approved.²⁵

According to al-Shaykh Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn [al-Baṣrī], a single person alone may suffice for the appointment of the next imam. Someone who demonstrates wisdom, scholarship, and a commitment to justice and benevolence may single-handedly appoint the imam if the candidate possesses all of the necessary characteristics and is a person of great merit.

²⁴ On these Companions and the Day of the Portico, see Madelung, *Succession*, 32–33.

²⁵ For more on the Day of the Council, see Madelung, *Succession*, 70–73.

I agree with this position and noted in [our work] *The Reliable Book* [*al-Mu'tamad*] that such an appointment would be lawful. There, we argued that our fellow Mu'tazilis had cited two historical events in which the Companions settled on [accepting the authority of] five participants, but that no legal precept mandates such a quorum.

As for the Zaydī assertion that one may become an imam by launching a campaign and a mission, this cannot be the case. We, as human beings, neglect to scrutinize ourselves and fail to perceive our own shortcomings. We cherish ourselves too dearly. This danger does not apply when a scholar whose sole concern is the best interests of the Muslim community informs a potential candidate of his suitability and appoints him.

The Prophet Did Not Designate an Imam to Succeed Him

Scholars differ on this subject, but the Mu'tazilis, the Khārijīs, the Murjī'īs, and some partisans of hadith maintain that the Prophet did not designate an imam to succeed him either implicitly or explicitly. Others argue that he designated an imam to succeed him, but they disagree on the identity of the designee. The Bakrīs [i.e., the partisans of Abū Bakr] agree that he designated Abū Bakr but differ on the nature of this designation.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī held that Abū Bakr's designation was implicit.²⁶ It occurred when the Prophet selected him to lead worship during his final illness. By contrast, the partisans of hadith asserted that Abū Bakr's designation was explicit and happened when the Prophet ordered: "Bring me paper and pen so I may write a document for Abū Bakr that will prevent Muslims from ever opposing him after me." He also said: "God and the community of Muslims will accept no one but Abū Bakr." The Imāmīs and the Zaydīs dispute these claims and maintain that the Prophet designated 'Alī, but they differ on the nature of this designation. The Imāmīs state that 'Alī's designation was explicit, whereas the Zaydīs contend that his designation was implicit. According to the latter, one would not see the Prophet's motives unless one deduced them from all of the evidence [in favor of 'Alī].

Fellow Mu'tazilis have denied the existence of any designation for several reasons. Someone who appeals to the existence of a designation

²⁶ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) was a prominent theologian and jurist.

necessarily believes in one of two possibilities. First, one might claim that the first generation of believers was required to know of this designation [and to implement it] but that their successors were not. However, no one claims this, so we are left with the second alternative: the faithful of every generation are obligated to know about the designation until the end of time. For this to be true, it would be incumbent on God, the Wise, to remove all barriers to the designation by divinely inspiring the community with knowledge of it or causing a large number of transmitters to narrate the information [concerning this designation] continuously on a wide scale in each generation [*tamātur*]. Otherwise, God would have obligated something that lies beyond human capacity [and He does not do this]. If the community had disseminated such a designation in widely and continuously transmitted reports, then everyone – including us – would have learned of it. Despite our love for 'Alī and our own pro-'Alid proclivities, when we carefully consider and investigate the issue, these investigations do not engender certainty in us regarding the existence of such a designation for him.

There is another problem. It is untenable to claim that such a designation was obvious and apparent to people in every generation while also contending that members of the community lacked knowledge of it. These claims contradict one another. However, this [juxtaposition of claims] occurs when one asserts that many people apostatized after the Prophet's death and refrained from transmitting [their knowledge of 'Alī's designation]. Others argue that most Muslims [at that time] were hypocrites, so they, too, avoided transmitting this information. Likewise, if an interlocutor claims, "You haven't engaged with the sources that transmit this information for you to be aware of it," or if he claims that, "Previous generations refrained from narrating it to safeguard themselves against harm," this is also a problem. Any one or a combination of these conditions implies that most Muslims of each generation could not have possessed knowledge of such a designation.

There is yet another problem. If the faithful of every generation were obliged to know of this designation, then the Prophet would have disclosed it to numerous people. It would have been incumbent on this first generation, and on every generation that followed, to disseminate the information. Dissemination of the reports concerning the designation would have engendered knowledge of it [in those who did not personally witness the Prophet's designation of his successor]. It would have been impossible to conceal such a designation; knowledge of it would have

been obvious and apparent to Muslims of every generation, as is their knowledge of the fundamentals of the revealed law, such as the obligation to perform the ritual prayers, to fast, and to perform other such required actions.

There is one more problem. The same reasons that compel people to circulate reports about 'Alī's unique merits [*ṣaḍā'ih*] would also compel them to transmit reports about any designation in his favor. Why did one of these sets of reports circulate, but not the other? In fact, there would have been a greater incentive [for 'Alī's supporters] to transmit any reports about his designation. Therefore, we ask, why would our predecessors transmit [reports about] 'Alī's unique merits but conceal those reports concerning his designation? If members of the community had good reason to transmit both, why would they transmit one but not the other, when the motive for circulating both was one and the same? Both are essential to confirming 'Alī's imamate. Why did 'Alī's rivals consider the circulation of reports about his unique merits and his superiority to others inconsequential, when they held that only the most virtuous person in the world could become the imam?²⁷

If we concede that a designation can be concealed, it follows that a ritual – such as an obligatory sixth prayer – or a prerequisite of a fundamental duty of the revealed law may have suffered the same fate. We would then have to concede the possibility that God could have sent a messenger after Muḥammad who abrogated Islamic law but whose mission became concealed. If this reasoning leads one to lose confidence in the laws and traditions of Muḥammad, what about the imamate of his successors?

The Imāmī school maintains that the Prophet designated 'Alī to succeed him as caliph. He also ordered the community formally to accept 'Alī's authority over all believers and made sure that everyone learned of his command. According to the Imāmīs, all of this is true for a number of reasons. For example, they appeal to the fact that the Imāmīs have

²⁷ Ibn al-Malāḥimī is arguing that the same motivations which hypothetically led Muslims to conceal a designation in 'Alī's favor would have led them to conceal reports about his unique merits. Since most theologians held that the imam should be the most distinguished person in the community, it is unlikely that the community would allow the circulation of reports that portray 'Alī as superior to his peers, but conceal reports about the Prophet's designation of him as his successor. Imāmīs would respond that there was a clear incentive for some individuals and factions to conceal an unambiguous designation of 'Alī since it would have discredited all others who desired to succeed the Prophet as caliphs. Reports about 'Alī's other merits were innocuous since they could be interpreted in ways that did not necessitate his succession.

circulated reports about the subject in large numbers and across many regions. Even with only a fraction of the actual transmitters, these reports would be considered widely and continuously transmitted [*mutawātir*]. If one were to count them all, would there be any room for doubt?

The Mu‘tazilis reply that the Imāmīs are abundant in number only in terms of their laypersons [who do not transmit hadith]. Their laypersons are not responsible for circulating these hadiths, and their scholars do not constitute a numerical majority. They point out that although Imāmīs currently make up a large segment of the Muslim community, one cannot claim that this has been the case in each generation. Just as the Imāmīs transmit these reports [about ‘Alī’s designation], they also circulate the belief that they [Imāmīs] have always been abundant in number. However, there is no evidence that Imāmīs have been represented in large numbers in each generation. They are also suspected of forging the reports that they transmit, since people do this to justify their personal [sectarian] sensibilities. Their adversaries among the Bakrīs [i.e., the partisans of Abū Bakr] are similarly capable of making contradictory claims and forging reports for the same reasons. One may also reply [to the Imāmīs] that you assert that Imam ‘Alī refrained from circulating reports about his designation to protect himself [*taqiyya*] [against persecution].²⁸ You also maintain that the entire community, to the exclusion of four or five [partisans of ‘Alī], apostatized after the Prophet’s death. How, then, could reports about ‘Alī’s designation be considered widely transmitted? How can the Imāmīs also claim to have always been numerous?

The Mu‘tazilis also pose the following question: How can the doctrine of ‘Alī’s designation be true when it is narrated that [the Prophet’s uncle] al-‘Abbās came to ‘Alī after the Prophet’s death and said, “Extend your hand so I may pledge allegiance to you and the community can proclaim that the Prophet’s uncle has pledged allegiance to the Prophet’s cousin. With this pledge, no one would dare to oppose you.” If there truly were a designation that was both well known and established, al-‘Abbās would have placed greater trust in it instead of feeling the need to utilize his status as the Prophet’s uncle [to support ‘Alī’s candidacy]. During the Prophet’s final illness, al-‘Abbās is also reported to have said to ‘Alī, “Visit the Prophet while I am sitting with him and let us ask him together about

²⁸ On the doctrine of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) in Shī‘ī theology, see Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few*, 266–299.

this issue [*hādhā 'l-amr*] [of authority].²⁹ If we are to rule, let him clarify it. If he has not yet decided, let him make a final will in our favor.” However, ‘Alī responded, “I fear that he may say that this authority does not belong to us exclusively, and that the community subsequently refuses ever to allow us to take office.” Some sources also preserve an exchange that occurred on ‘Alī’s deathbed. Someone said to ‘Alī, “Appoint a successor.” He replied, “I will leave you as the Prophet left us. If God sees any good in you, He will unite you under the leadership of the best of you just as He united us under the best of us, Abū Bakr.”

It has also been narrated on ‘Alī’s authority that during the Prophet’s final illness, Bilāl would recite the call to prayer, and when the Prophet found the strength to do so, he would lead the community in prayer. When he was too weak, he would say, “Go to Abū Bakr and have him lead the prayer.” ‘Alī added pointedly, “The Prophet was fully aware of my merits as a person [when he chose Abū Bakr].” An interlocutor may claim that the Prophet in fact commanded ‘Alī to lead the community in worship, but that ‘Ā’isha deviated from the Prophet’s instructions when relaying them. We ask, how can this be the case if ‘Alī himself said that the Prophet was “fully aware of my merits as a person” [but chose Abū Bakr instead]? In addition, only a curtain separated the Prophet from the mosque. It seems unlikely that [had his instructions been subverted,] he would have remained unaware of the situation for long. Wouldn’t God have apprised him [of ‘Ā’isha’s actions] and put an end to such a misdeed?

The Imāmīs argue that if the reports about ‘Alī’s designation were false, one would know when they had been fabricated and who was involved. However, the partisans of Abū Bakr could make the same claim about their own reports. This argument also obliges [the Imāmīs] to accept as authentic reports that support predeterminism and anthropomorphism, since one cannot identify the persons involved in their fabrication or the time when it occurred.³⁰ Everyone knows that someone who fabricates reports must also carefully conceal what he has done. Such a person discreetly shares the fabricated report with a few people until it becomes widespread. People successfully disseminate false information in this way.

²⁹ *Hādhā 'l-amr*, lit. “this affair.” The phrase was a euphemism for the caliphate or imamate in classical Islamic literature.

³⁰ Both Mu’tazilis and Imāmīs consider hadiths supporting predeterminism and anthropomorphism to be inauthentic. Since neither group would require detailed knowledge of how such reports were fabricated to reject their authenticity, Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues that it is unreasonable to expect this for reports about ‘Alī’s designation.

The Imāmīs have also argued that the authenticity of the reports about ‘Alī’s designation is corroborated by [Sunnī] hadith specialists such as al-Ṭabarī and others.³¹ These specialists were compelled to narrate the reports because they appeared to be authentic, even though their contents contradicted their personal sensibilities. If these reports were false, only those who agreed with the polemical value of their contents would circulate them. Al-Ṭabarī narrates that the Prophet gathered the descendants of [his grandfather] ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib under a single roof and asked, “Which one of you will serve and assist me as vizier? Who among you will become my brother? After me, who will serve as my successor?” “I will,” answered ‘Alī. The Prophet ratified the agreement with ‘Alī right there.

One may respond that the partisans of hadith traditionally transmitted reports both from those who agreed with them [on doctrinal matters] and from those who did not. They attempted to preserve and transmit everything they heard, whether or not they accepted the contents of the reports. Therefore, the hadiths that they cite cannot be declared authentic on these grounds. Fellow Mu‘tazilis have also countered that al-Ṭabarī’s report does not contain the phrase “serve as my successor *after me*”; rather, the Prophet asks [his family], “Who will serve as my brother, legatee, and successor *among you*?” In another recension, the text reads “serve as a successor in my family.” Abū Ishāq al-Wāqidī also reported this event, known as the *Report on the Event at the House* [*ḥadīth al-dār*], but he did not mention the words [“Which one of you will serve and assist me ...”] that are essential for the Imāmīs.³² There are obvious inconsistencies in the wording of this hadith [that prevent it from constituting compelling evidence].

Imāmīs may appeal to other, [more ambiguous] hadiths that require one to deduce the existence of a possible designation in favor of ‘Alī. God willing, we shall respond to these arguments in due course.

³¹ Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) was a polymath whose extant multivolume works on Islamic history and exegesis are considered authoritative, but who also wrote extensively in other fields such as theology, law, and hadith.

³² Abū Ishāq Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) was a historian from Medina whose reports on early Islamic history are cited extensively.

6 The Concise Book of Doctrines

by
ʿAbd al-Kāfī al-Warjalānī

Introduction to the Text

ʿAbd al-Kāfī al-Warjalānī (d. 1174) was a leading Ibāḍī theologian and jurist from Warjalān, an important city of Ibāḍī learning in southern Algeria. He traveled to several cities in North Africa to study with leading Ibāḍī scholars. He eventually returned to Warjalān, where he settled and reportedly wrote many of his works. *The Concise Book of Doctrines* is al-Warjalānī’s comprehensive theological work. Below is a portion of this text on the imamate that provides a broad overview of Khārījī and Ibāḍī views on the qualities of a legitimate imam. The Ibāḍīs were perhaps the most egalitarian school of thought in their theory of the imamate. According to Ibāḍī doctrine, the imam does not have to be the most knowledgeable person in the community, a Qurashī, or even an Arab. The imam is obligated to join the community in implementing and safeguarding God’s law. He serves as a member of the community and as a facilitator of justice, the distribution of wealth, and the implementation of nondiscretionary penalties. Some Ibāḍīs argued that if the community could collectively govern its affairs without an imam, the office was altogether dispensable.

On the Imamate

*In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.
May God bless our noble leader Muḥammad and his family.
Praise be to God who assists humanity in the realization of all that is true,
the One who beckons to the path of righteousness and guides whosoever
desires guidance.*

As to the topic at hand:

When it comes to the imamate, opinions are plentiful.¹ This issue has produced countless quarrels in the community – so many that an entire volume devoted to the subject would not suffice. Nevertheless, I will attempt to discuss this issue, addressing only those aspects that are essential and humbly acknowledging my own wretchedness. All strength lies in God's grace!

Indeed, the Almighty desires to reward the obedient rightfully with His blessings and to hold the defiant accountable for their sins and transgressions. This desire reflects God's favor to humanity and His judiciousness. So God commands humanity to administer nondiscretionary penalties [*ḥudūd*], to establish justice, and to restrain tyrants. For this reason, He has sent forth prophets, inspiring them with revelation and scripture. In countless verses [of the Quran], the Almighty provides parables, clearly distinguishes the lawful from the unlawful, and identifies the nondiscretionary penalties and the revealed law. He praises efforts to command what is right and to forbid what is wrong. God also denounces those who command what is wrong and forbid what is right. God does all this comprehensively in His Book, which His envoy and prophet, Muḥammad, recited. Thus, the Almighty says:

We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance,
so that people could uphold justice. (57:25)
You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is
against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. (4:135)
[O] Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from
your Lord – if you do not, then you will not have communicated His
message. (5:67)
[Believers,] you are the best community singled out for people: you order
what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. (3:110)

¹ For the Arabic source text, see al-Warjalānī, *al-Mūjaḥḥid*, 11.223–227, 233–239.

Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together: out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil. (9:122)

[O] David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires. (38:26)

We are two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other: judge between us fairly – do not be unjust – and guide us to the right path. (38:22)

When they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our messages, We raised leaders among them, guiding them according to Our command. (32:24)

Why do their rabbis and scholars not forbid them to speak sinfully and to consume what is unlawful? How evil their deeds are! (5:63)

Fair retribution is prescribed for you in cases of murder. (2:178)

Fair retribution saves life for you, [O] people of understanding. (2:179)

If anyone is killed wrongfully, We have given authority to the defender of his rights, but he should not be excessive in taking life, for he is already aided [by God]. (17:33)

Strike the adulteress and the adulterer one hundred times. (24:2)

As for those who accuse chaste women of fornication, and then fail to provide four witnesses, strike them eighty times. (24:4)

As for the thief, male or female, sever their hands. This is in requital for what they have wrought and as a deterrent ordained by God. (5:38)

Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land. (5:33)

You may fight the idolaters at any time. (9:36)²

Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly] believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit. (9:29)

In countless verses of the Quran, the Almighty commands [humanity] to command what is right and to forbid what is wrong. He does so by determining penalties in His Book, which His Prophet then recited. It is only because of God's wisdom and His desire for His servants' success

² Al-Warjalānī does not quote the statement in full, which reads, “though you may fight the idolaters at any time, if they first fight you.”

that He commands them to uphold what is right and to forbid what is wrong. Were God to refrain from providing the servants with His commandments, truth would have no foundation, and Islam would have no structure. Satan and his allies would be victorious over God's servants and the lands He has created. However, by God's grace and mercy, the Almighty has clearly delineated the revealed law, penalties, and the law of just retribution [*qiṣāṣ*]. God legislated a complete religion and sent Muḥammad with a directive to command what is right and to forbid what is wrong, to "show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this" [Q 9:33]. With the authority granted him, God's Messenger undertook this mission: "As one who calls people to God by His leave, as a light-giving lamp" [Q 33:46], restraining the unjust, and preventing the tyrant from corrupting all of God's lands and harming his servants. The Quran states, "God does not like corruption" [Q 2:205]. Elsewhere it states, "They try to spread corruption in the land, but God does not love those who corrupt" [Q 5:64]. So God's Messenger remained steadfast in his mission and acted in accordance with God's religion. He prevented the wicked from destroying God's lands and religion and from harming His servants until he left this world to be with God. He left this world with the satisfaction of God and of the community of the faithful. God forbid that He take His Messenger's soul and the Prophet show negligence toward the affairs of God by leaving humans uncertain about their religion! Nay – it was God who commissioned His Prophet to rise up and teach them the faith that He desired for them. The Prophet did not leave this world before entrusting the care of children to elders, the affairs of the powerless to the powerful, and the well-being of slaves in the community to their owners. Only then did the Almighty cause His Prophet to die and a caliph to succeed him in governing the affairs of the community with justice. The caliph closely followed the Prophet's practice and aspired to his example. He never failed to offer sincere support to the Muslim community and aid to the religion of God.

On the Necessity of the Imamate

Those who follow Najda b. 'Āmir among the Khārijīs hold the opinion that humanity has no need of an imam. Instead, the faithful are obliged to make God's Book their criterion when dealing with one another. Their opinion on this matter is baseless, even if a few Ibādīs concur with them. Their doctrine amounts to forsaking a portion of God's religion, annulling the nondiscretionary penalties of God, and discarding the command

to uphold what is good and to forbid what is wrong when God has made these duties incumbent. God commands humanity to uphold what is right and to forbid what is wrong. God commands humanity to implement the penalties that He has identified and elucidated in the Quran [as explained in the opening section of this treatise]. Although the revealed law specifically obliges the faithful to implement certain penalties, the community has reached a consensus that such penalties can be administered only in the presence of imams and their delegates.

Abolishing the imamate and renouncing its necessity entail the termination of efforts to implement nondiscretionary punishments and rulings of the revealed law. Such a doctrine abolishes not only the legal duty to implement such rulings, but also the laws themselves. When people steal property, engage in unlawful sexual intercourse, and slander others, on what basis can one abandon their penalties after God has commanded their implementation? Once the community collectively agreed on all this, the office of the imamate became incumbent [*farḍ wājib*] and a necessary obligation [*ḥaqq lāzim*]. Likewise, the legal duties that we mentioned are all contingent on the imamate. None may be implemented without the imamate. When a legal duty cannot be fulfilled except under certain conditions, achieving those conditions becomes a legal duty as well. Furthermore, the community can never collectively agree on a matter and then differ on it.³

Moreover, would Muslims have burdened themselves by establishing the imamate after the Prophet's death despite the difficulties of the undertaking, if they did not believe it to be incumbent on them? How could this be the case, given all that we have mentioned regarding the Prophet's words about the caliphate of Abū Bakr?⁴ For this reason, Abū Bakr was named the "successor to God's Messenger" [*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*] and the community ratified his authority. The claim that the imamate is not incumbent on the faithful is completely false. Why did Abū Bakr [deem it necessary to] appoint 'Umar as his successor? Why did 'Umar appoint a council consisting of six candidates shortly before his death? It was 'Umar who commanded the council members to execute anyone who contested the outcome of their deliberations on the imamate and the consensus they

³ Al-Warjalānī appeals to the concept of consensus (*ijmā'*) to argue that it is incorrect to contradict any opinion that represents a consensus among Muslims. Furthermore, he is sure that once the Muslim community reaches consensus on a matter, this consensus can never be superseded by an alternative view.

⁴ Al-Warjalānī refers to a section of his treatise beyond the scope of our study; see al-Warjalānī, *al-Mūjaz*, 11.227–231.

reached. Would ‘Umar have commanded them to shed Muslim blood for the sake of a matter so insignificant that its existence or nonexistence is inconsequential? Abū ‘Ubayda Muslim b. Abī Karīma reportedly gave a group of his peers heading to the Maghreb instructions concerning the imamate with words very similar to ‘Umar’s.⁵ If the conditions allowed them to establish an imamate, they should appoint one of their own to the office. If the chosen person persisted in refusing to comply with their decision, he was to be executed. Members of our school have documented and preserved many anecdotes [from the early community] conveying this lesson. They have transmitted this knowledge from one generation to the next. With it, they have prevailed against those Ibādīs who differed with them, so we praise God abundantly for this blessing.

An interlocutor may ask, “What are the essential conditions that make [the duty to establish] the imamate incumbent? Is there a quorum that community members must meet before it becomes their duty to appoint an imam?” We answer that Muslims should possess the means, the strength, the wealth, and the learning required to represent God’s religion and to implement God’s commands and penalties. Their wealth should be enough to enable them to confront any worldly challenges to their mission. They also need the requisite learning to resolve the ambiguities and obscurities that arise with new religious questions in each generation. The faithful should be mindful of the strength of the enemy that they will encounter. If the believers are able to muster at least half the number of soldiers that the enemy has at its service, then it is incumbent on them to select an imam from the best of their company. The imam should fulfill the following functions:

- (1) Implement the required ordinances of God.
- (2) Govern and rule with justice.
- (3) Ensure the equitable distribution of public resources.
- (4) Remain steadfast in his sincere devotion to God and his support for God’s religion.
- (5) Follow the path of the pious predecessors [*salaf*] and later respected luminaries [*khalaf*].

If an imam with these qualities appears, it is incumbent on all Muslims, both city dwellers and desert nomads, near and far, to recognize his

⁵ Abū ‘Ubayda Muslim b. Abī Karīma (d. ca. 145/762) was an early Ibādī authority based in Basra.

authority and rights over them. These are rights that God has bestowed on imams. They include pledging allegiance to the imam, providing him with aid, and responding to any calls he makes as they pertain to the authority God has granted him.

Anyone who refrains from responding to the imam's requests, refuses to surrender what is lawfully the imam's, or shows carelessness or neglect regarding a command is truly disobedient to God and opposes a divine command. God states, "Obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you" [Q. 4:59]. God equates obedience to imams with obedience to Him and His Messenger. God also states, "And those who go against his order should beware lest a trial afflict them or they receive a painful punishment" [Q. 24:63].

If an interlocutor asks, "What is your opinion of Muslims who possess the numbers and strength that you stipulate along with the other necessary conditions that you lay out but who nonetheless fail to appoint an imam?" We answer that in this case, they are facilitating the death of God's religion and its debasement, even though they are capable of raising it up and strengthening it. They are showing complacency with such a disgrace. However, God will not accept the death of His religion when they possess the ability to revive it. The Almighty states, "Be mindful of God as much as you can" [Q. 64:16]. They have failed to be mindful of [their duties to] God although they possess the ability to do so.

An interlocutor might ask, "What if Muslims have neither the strength nor the requisite numbers but nevertheless set out to appoint an imam and consequently conclude a contractual agreement for the position with someone? Would their deeds be considered obedience to God, or not?" In that case, we would answer that these Muslims would be obeying a duty that they were not obliged to observe. On this topic, the Almighty states, "But if anyone does good of his own accord, it is better for him" [Q. 2:184]. As we stated above, the imamate is incumbent on them only when they possess the necessary numbers, strength, wealth, and learning. The Almighty states, "[O] Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred" [Q. 8:65]. According to scholars, this [promise of God] was particular to the dawn of Islam and the earliest Muslims, who were few in number. When God granted His Messenger victory and made His religion manifest, He relieved them of this responsibility and reduced their obligations. Thus, the Almighty announces, "But God has lightened your burden for now,

knowing that there is weakness in you – a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred” [Q. 8:66].

In some cases, Muslims are unable to gather the requisite numbers, that is, at least half the number of soldiers in the enemy’s forces, or to appoint an imam. [In such circumstances,] scholars prefer that Muslims maintain the status quo and dissemble. This is, in their view, the most appropriate and flexible course of action for the community, unless its members resolve to engage in pious protest. When one does not have the ability to establish a polity, both God and the Muslim community consider pious protest one of the most important responsibilities of the individual. It is the course of action that most resembles the work of establishing a polity. However, our scholars have not deemed pious protest to be incumbent on the faithful as they have deemed the pursuit of a polity to be. Thus, whoever desires to offer his soul to God [by risking his life in such protest] has the right to do so. And whoever opts to dissemble among non-Ibāḍīs may do so. This is the way of real Muslims:⁶ one does not differentiate between the activist and the quietist. The radical Khārijīs are wrong to claim that Muslims may never dissemble in the presence of tyrants, whether or not all of the necessary conditions [for a successful revolution] are present. The Almighty states, “God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear” [Q. 2:286]. Indeed, after he was inspired with revelation, God’s Messenger remained in Mecca for a while without making his mission manifest.⁷ He dissembled.

⁶ Ibāḍīs commonly referred to themselves as “the Muslims.” In this sentence, al-Warjalānī is clearly referring to Ibāḍīs.

⁷ Al-Warjalānī is referring to the first three years of the Prophet Muḥammad’s mission, when most biographers noted that he only preached to friends and family in private.

7 The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points

by
al-Dā‘ī Ibn al-Walīd

Introduction to the Text

Ibn al-Walīd (d. 1215) was born in Yemen and led the Musta‘lī Ṭayyibī branch of the Ismā‘īlī community for several years as its most senior member, the director of the mission (*al-dā‘ī al-muṭlaq*). He was a prolific writer who authored several works on theology, exegesis, philosophy, and poetry. For this anthology, we selected his elucidations on the imamate from his book *The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points*. The doctrines Ibn al-Walīd supports in his text on the imamate largely correspond with those that appear in Twelver Shī‘ī literature. He argues against the legitimacy of the community’s election of its imams and instead holds that imams must be divinely designated. Ibn al-Walīd believes in the perpetual necessity of the office of the imamate and asserts that the nonexistence of a divinely designated imam is impossible. He unequivocally denies the possibility that the imam could ever disappear into occultation and become completely inaccessible.

Article 35: When a Legatee Dies, His Office Ceases to Exist

A scripture-bearing prophet [*rasūl*] will appoint a legatee [*waṣī*] and elucidate for him the essentials of the revealed law and the secrets of his tradition.¹ The prophet also teaches the legatee the essence of guidance and the reality of his words. The legatee also learns to safeguard all arcana.² If the legatee does all this and then passes away, a second legatee cannot succeed him. Since the legatee does not alter or repeal the revealed law during his tenure, there is no need for him to appoint a new legatee. A legatee only safeguards [newly revealed] legislation. He acts in accordance with it and delineates its parameters and dimensions. For these reasons, when a legatee appointed by a prophet dies, his office ceases to exist.

Article 36: The Cessation of Prophethood, the Office of the Legatee, and the Continuity of the Imamate

The imamate never lapses. The imamate exists in every epoch, from the beginning of time to the end. This is so because imams serve as heirs both to prophets, who promulgate the revealed law, and to legatees, who elucidate it. Imams alone inherit the means of guidance from these two figures. Therefore, only the imam is capable of fully preserving such guidance within the community.

Since the commands of a scripture-bearing prophet and his legatee remain binding on all those who live in that epoch, from its start until its end, the office of the imamate must also exist the entire time to safeguard these teachings. No new office is necessary when the revealed law is not supplemented with new legislation. Rather, all guidance [that consecutive imams articulate] is inherited from the start of an epoch. This guidance ultimately comes from the person who initially taught the revealed law and its meaning. Guidance continues in this fashion

¹ For the Arabic source text, see 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Walīd, *Tāj al-'aqqā'id*, 68–71, 76–78. Muslims revere Moses, David, Jesus, Muḥammad, and a few others as scripture-bearing prophets. Muḥammad is frequently described as *rasūl Allāh*, “Messenger of God,” in Muslim literature and various rituals. Depending on the context, we provide either the literal translation or technical meaning of the term *rasūl*.

² According to Ismā'īlī doctrine, religion consisted of teachings that were both manifest (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) in their meaning. The esoteric consisted of arcana (*asrār*) that the imam or his representatives may share with a select group of believers with the capacity to fully comprehend the truth (*ḥaqīqa*) of religion.

until divine wisdom authorizes the promulgation of the revealed law and divine commands once again [in a new cycle]. This occurs when the world is in need of such renewal to safeguard its existence. The revealed law of this [present] epoch – the one belonging to Muḥammad – shall never be annulled. The spirit of the law and its axioms will remain true, never to be lost, until the end of time. For this reason, the imamate remains, guarded and safeguarding, until the end of time. The office will endure until the Day of Judgment unlike prophethood and the office of the legatee.

Article 37: Opposing Any Belief in the Imam's Absence from the Earth

The imam cannot vanish from the community in any way or for any purpose. Were the imam to conceal himself even for a moment, his innermost circle of followers should have access to him. They should know his location and guide others who are sincere in their desires and actions to find him. This inner circle should have access to the place of his abode and the center of his blessed mission. Consequently, they can obtain his guidance directly and in its entirety.

The absence of an imam can occur for only three reasons: God commands it, the imam unilaterally decides to conceal himself, or others coerce him. In the last case, the imam's enemies may endanger his life.

It cannot be the case, however, that God commands the absence of an imam, since this scenario would result in a logical contradiction. The Almighty never imposes a duty that is beyond one's capacity.³ It follows that God would not command obedience to a person and then remove him from our presence. It would be erroneous to attribute the absence of an imam to God. Such a deed does not befit a wise and just Lord.

Can an imam unilaterally decide to retreat from the community? This does not seem to be the case either. The imam is infallible [and it would be an error for him to do this]. The nature and necessity of his authority demands his presence. It also cannot be argued that the imam would conceal himself after a public manifestation [of his power and authority].

³ Mu'tazilī and Shī'ī theologians considered it repugnant to assert that God could impose something beyond a person's capacity and then punish him or her as a result of that incapacity. A jurist may ease legal restrictions or dispense with some obligations if they are identified as cases of *taklīf mā lā yuṭāq* (the prescription of duties beyond one's capacity). Such reasoning is understood to be in accordance with divine wisdom.

A unilateral decision to withdraw from the community into concealment [*istitār*] or occultation [*ghayba*] would bar everyone from his guidance and from the benefits of the unique qualities that make him the imam.

One likewise cannot blame the community for the absence of the imam. An imam who does so would be guilty of distrusting the religion of God.⁴ Is it not God Himself who appoints the imam and charges him with the duty to serve the members of the community as a guide? Is it not God Himself who informs the imam that he will not leave this world until another imam inherits his office and the duty to serve as a guide after him? On what grounds would the imam fear the community enough to withdraw completely from it, when he has no doubt about the authority and mission he has been given? The imams of various epochs have certainly had nothing to do with these repugnant claims.

How does one respond to the argument that an imam may be obliged to flee from danger? Was not Moses compelled to do just that? A verse of the Quran states, “And I fled from you in fear; later my Lord gave me wisdom and made me one of His messengers” [Q. 26:21]. One should consider this a sound argument. When Moses fled, he did not completely vanish from the world. He only concealed himself from the public until God’s command came to him. During this time, he stayed in a well-known location and remained among Israelites, and people still knew of his affairs. Moses fled only when the authorities sought to arrest him, and he had not reached the level of spiritual perfection required of him at the time. Once he had achieved this spiritual state of perfection, God blessed him [with wisdom and appointed him as a messenger], as he explains in the verse above. After God thus favored him, Moses never concealed himself again.

The imam serves as a judge for all of humanity. The Divine Judge who knows all truths endows him with this authority. God gives humankind sovereignty over the rest of His creation, and the imam serves as God’s deputy. The imam inherits the earth and possesses full authority in its governance. In this regard, a verse of the Quran states:

[Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, “I am putting a successor on earth,” they said, “How can You put someone there who will

⁴ Ibn al-Walid argues that the Twelver Shī‘ī view (discussed in the Introduction and Text 4) that the imam enters occultation when he fears persecution of his enemies would imply an insufficient trust in God. However, it should be noted that the Twelver argument can be more accurately understood as one wherein a clear and present danger to the imam’s life prevents his emergence rather than any notion of fear.

cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?” He said, “Indeed, I know what you know not.” [Q 2:30]

Never shall such authority cease to exist or be removed on any grounds.

Article 38: The Earth Shall Never Be Bereft of a Deputy of God

The earth must never be bereft of a deputy who serves as God’s proof [*ḥujja*]. This person may be a prophet, a legate, or an imam, and he is charged with the following:

- (1) Setting aright the affairs of the community.
- (2) Administering nondiscretionary penalties [*ḥudūd*].
- (3) Safeguarding religious rituals and customs [*marāsīm*].
- (4) Preventing the corruption of the revealed law.
- (5) Endorsing deeds [intended to please God] and purifying them [of any evil].
- (6) Providing unequivocal evidence of the truth for those who seek it.
- (7) Resolving dilemmas for students [of religious knowledge] who face them.
- (8) Strengthening and securing the community after its prophet passes away, since it is impossible for the prophet to remain in this world forever.

[The characteristics of an imam are:]

- (1) He must be of noble birth and well-known lineage.
- (2) He should follow the faith of his ancestors, neither contradicting their opinions nor favoring the views of others over them.
- (3) When disputes arise, only he is guaranteed to be correct.
- (4) None should surpass him in merit.
- (5) He never follows others; others follow him. Others search for him, but he is never in search of others.
- (6) Others seek his rulings.
- (7) Others acknowledge the legitimacy of his actions and the truth of his teachings and guidance.

The Prophet made the imam a proof for students of religious knowledge and a means of deliverance for the perplexed. The Quran states, “The disbelievers say, ‘Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his

Lord?’ But you are only there to give warning: [earlier] communities each had their guide” [Q. 13:7]. The imam serves as a witness against [the inequities of] his contemporaries according to the verse, “What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you [Muḥammad] as a witness against these people?” [Q. 4:41]. It is his duty to forbid all types of immorality according to the verse, “Why do their rabbis and scholars not forbid them to speak sinfully and to consume what is unlawful? How evil their deeds are!” [Q. 5:63]. In this case, the “rabbis” [*al-rabbāniyyūn*] are the imams. Through the Messenger, God bestows on the imams that which benefits the community in this world and in the hereafter. They safeguard and preserve the prophetic legacy entrusted to them. This legacy benefits everyone who lives in the epoch of this Messenger. The “scholars” [*aḥbār*] are those in particular who devote themselves to learning from the imams in each generation. An imam constitutes a proof, whether or not he wields authority publicly. The earth is never devoid of an imam. The Prophet described imams in the following way:

In every era, this knowledge will be inherited by a group of individuals who will refute heresies propounded by the ignorant, theologians, and those who provide erroneous interpretations [*ta’wīl*].

He also said:

God has delegated a successor to confront every heresy that appears after I have died, and which threatens to destroy the community’s faith. The successor will defend the faith, will speak with divinely inspired illumination, and will ward off any threat posed by those who conspire against the faith.

Ponder on this, those of you endowed with insight!⁵ Those who seek guidance must abandon all the predilections and prejudices they previously held. Instead, they must search for that which offers salvation. Predilections and prejudices impede the seekers’ ability to discover the truth and the path to God, who is worthy of all worship.

Article 41: The Illegitimacy of Delegating the Appointment of an Imam to the Community

It is unlawful for members of the community to select an imam for themselves. It is the imam’s responsibility to administer penalties as an

⁵ Ibn al-Walid here uses a phrase from the Quran, 59:2.

authority over the community, not the other way round. It is clear that there are some duties of the revealed law [such as determining the imams' succession] that are exclusive to the imam; the community is not involved in such matters. The appointment of an imam impacts the implementation of every aspect of the revealed law. The imam occupies the foremost rank in the community. It would thus be more appropriate for succession to this office to be subject to divine command. Now, if the appointment of imams can take place only by the command of God, [his] appointment by the community is necessarily unlawful. This is the case because anyone who appoints an imam must first himself know everything that imams should know in order to discharge their duties, including knowledge of the revealed law, scripture, and their commandments. Second, the community must be able to ascertain whether the candidate under consideration knows the tradition well enough to fulfill his duties as an imam. If the potential candidate were capable of answering correctly any question posed to him and of resolving any issues as an imam, but [other] members of the community were just as capable, there would be no compelling reason for him to serve as an authority over them. This scenario would eliminate the very reason for the candidate's appointment. If members of the community and the candidate that they had selected were all equally qualified to serve in this position of authority, there would be no need for the appointment of an imam. The selection process is only a corollary of the necessity of appointing as imams individuals with complete knowledge of religion. When one eliminates the cause for such action, there is no need for the corollary.

In reality, our interlocutors rely on the legitimacy of consensus in the appointment of imams. For them, consensus always determines truths and the appropriate outcome. Since the selection process effectively reveals the existence of a consensus about a candidate, it is considered a legitimate method of establishing the right course of action. One can deduce from all of this that the appointment of an imam can never be disputed when it is the result of consensus. In essence, consensus becomes an unequivocal proof. [However, this cannot be true, because] we would then be compelled to accept the consensus of Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians, and Sabaeans that Muḥammad was not a prophet. God forbid we should give credence to their claims that he was a madman or a sorcerer, since they reached a consensus on these claims, too. The consensus of these communities is no reason to discredit the prophethood of Muḥammad. Thus, neither consensus nor election can be considered

authoritative. They are invalid – especially in the event that someone with no right to the imamate is invested with full authority over a community. The Quran forbids a community from appointing imams through election with the following verse: “Your Lord creates what He pleases and chooses those He will – they have no choice – so glory be to God, and may He be exalted above the partners they ascribe to Him!” [Q 28:68].

If the community possessed the right to appoint its own imams, it would also have the right to appoint its own judges, to determine the trustworthiness of court witnesses, to safeguard the assets of orphans, and to marry them off when they are of age. If members of the community are barred from intervening in these subsidiary matters, why would succession [i.e., to the imamate] be delegated to them? If they are excluded from subsidiary issues, then their elections of imams must also be invalid. The decree of the Almighty and His Messenger is that none can assume leadership in place of another. For example, no one may attempt to serve as a legal guardian, deputy, or any other legal representative when this role belongs to someone else. Even if one intends to secure the rights of another or to fulfill certain obligations, it is unlawful and will remain so until the end of time. Indeed, the imam serves God’s servants by protecting, supporting, and guiding them in place of the Prophet. Any attempt to invest people with such authority through an election is unlawful. An imam can fulfill these functions only if he is infallible. Since no one can assess the infallibility of an imam, it is impossible and simply futile for the community to have the authority to choose its own imams; the community has no choice in the matter.

Is it not in the story of Adam that the Almighty exhorts His servants to avoid what they do not know? The Almighty commands this of [His] servants [i.e., angels] who do not commit errors. Are not angels near to the Lord and infallible? They do not disgrace themselves with sin. When the Almighty desired to appoint a caliph on the earth to represent Him, He said:

[Prophet,] when your Lord told the angels, “I am putting a successor on earth,” they said, “How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?” He said, “Indeed, I know what you know not.” [Q 2:30]

When God states, “I am putting a successor on earth,” this means that the choice is His alone. He is clarifying that this caliphate does not belong

to the angels. This is clear from their statement, “How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?” God barred them from any participation in His decision despite the angels’ purity and infallibility. He then censured them with His statement, “Indeed, I know what you know not.”

No doubt the ban on selecting [imams] is even more fitting for a community made up of fallible people. But this community abandoned the very scripture that God has given them and inclined toward tribalism and prejudice. The path of guidance became concealed, and the early community lost the rewards of the hereafter. Generations pass, and sons only emulate their fathers.

Bibliography

Unpublished

al-Hārūnī, Abū Ṭālib Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb al-Di‘āma*, MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1567, *‘ilm al-kalām*.

Published

- Abdulsater, Hussein, *Shi‘i Doctrine, Mu‘tazili Theology: Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Imāmī Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- Abou El Fadl, Khaled, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Shī‘ī [attr.], *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West*, ed. and tr. Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021).
- Abū ‘Ammār ‘Abd al-Kāfī al-Warjalānī, *al-Mūjaz: Ārā’ al-Khawārij al-kalāmiyya*, ed. ‘Ammār al-Ṭalibī, 2 vols. (Algiers: al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya, 1978).
- Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath, *Sunan*, ed. Sa‘īd Muḥammad al-Laḥḥām (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1410/1990).
- Adem, Rodrigo, “Classical *Naṣṣ* Doctrines in Imāmī Shī‘ism: On the Usage of an Expository Term,” *Shii Studies Review* 1.1–2 (2017), 42–71.
- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali, *La preuve de Dieu. La mystique shi‘ite à travers l’œuvre de Kulaynī* (Paris: Cerf, 2018).
- Ansari, Hassan, *L’imamat et l’occultation selon l’Imamisme. Étude bibliographique et histoire des textes* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- Ansari, Hassan, “The Shī‘ī Reception of Mu‘tazilism (I): Zaydīs,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 181–195.
- Ansari, Hassan, “*Wa-lam yakun bi-dhāka*: A Response to Wilferd Madelung’s Review of *L’imamat et l’occultation selon l’Imamisme*,” *Shii Studies Review* 4 (2019), 1–7.
- Ansari, Hassan and Nebil Husayn, “A Developing Doctrine: The Imamate in Twelver Shī‘ism,” *Shii Studies Review* 7 (2023, forthcoming).

- Ansari, Hassan and Sabine Schmidtke, *al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā's Oeuvre and Thought in Context: An Archaeological Inquiry into Texts and Their Transmission*, Arabo-Islamica 4 (Córdoba: UCOPress, 2022).
- Ansari, Hassan and Sabine Schmidtke, *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2017).
- Bayhom-Daou, Tamima, *Shaykh Mufid* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2012).
- Bowering, Gerhard (ed.), *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- Bowering, Gerhard, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Cook, Michael, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Crone, Patricia, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- Crone, Patricia, "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists," *Past & Present* 167 (2000), 3–28.
- Daftary, Farhad, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- Enayat, Hamid, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- Francesca, Ersilia (ed.), *Ibadi Theology: Rereading Sources and Scholarly Works* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015).
- Gaiser, Adam R., *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).
- Ghannouchi, Rached, *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State*, tr. David L. Johnston (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2022).
- Gimaret, Daniel, *La doctrine d'al-Ash'arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).
- Gleave, Robert, "Quietism and Political Legitimacy in Imāmī Shī'ī Jurisprudence: Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's *Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government* Reconsidered," in *Political Quietism in Islam: Sunni and Shi'i Practice and Thought*, ed. Saud al-Sarhan (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 99–128.
- al-Hārūnī, Abū Ṭalīb Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb al-Dī'āma* [incorrectly published as al-Šāḥib b. 'Abbād, *Kitāb al-Zaydiyya*], ed. Nāḥi Ḥasan (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabīyya, 1986).
- Hoffman, Valerie J., *The Essentials of Ibādī Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012).
- Husayn, Nebil, "Aḥkām Concerning the Ahl al-Bayt," *Islamic Law and Society* 27.3 (2020), 145–184.
- Husayn, Nebil, "The Rehabilitation of 'Alī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29.4 (2019), 565–583.
- Ibīsh, Yusuf, *The Political Doctrine of al-Baqillani* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1966).
- Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987).
- Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-Fā'iq fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy and Institute of Islamic Studies/ Free University of Berlin, 2007).

- Ibn al-Malāḥimī al-Khuwārazmī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott (London: Al-Hoda, 1991).
- Ibn al-Walīd, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, *Tāj al-'aḳā'id wa-ma'dīn al-fawā'id*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Izz al-Dīn, 1982).
- Ivanow, Wladimir, *A Creed of the Fatimids* (Bombay: Qayyimah Press, 1936).
- al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ḥaramayn, *Ghiyāth al-umam fī iltiyāth al-ḡulam*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīm Maḥmūd al-Dīb (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011).
- Kennedy, Hugh, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1981).
- Kohlberg, Etan, *In Praise of the Few: Studies in Shi'i Thought and History*, ed. Amin Ehteshami (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
- Kohlberg, Etan, "Muwāfāt Doctrines in Muslim Theology," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983), 47–66.
- Madelung, Wilferd, "Ansari, Hassan: *L'imamat et l'occultation selon l'Imamisme*," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 114.4–5 (2019), 377–379.
- Madelung, Wilferd, "Ibn al-Malāḥimī," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2011), III.440–443.
- Madelung, Wilferd, "Introduction," in Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott (London: Al-Hoda, 1991), iii–xvi.
- Madelung, Wilferd, "The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Tālibis and Early 'Abbāsīs in Conflict, by Amikam Elad," *Ilahiyat Studies* 8.1 (2017), 137–139.
- Madelung, Wilferd, "The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks," in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), II.109–168.
- Madelung, Wilferd, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Makdisi, George, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).
- al-Manṣūr, al-Imām [attr.], *The Shi'i Imamate: A Fatimid Interpretation*, ed. and tr. Sami Makarem (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).
- al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī, *al-Maqrīzī's "Book of Contention and Strife Concerning the Relations between the Banū Umayyā and the Banū Ḥāshim"*, tr. C. E. Bosworth (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1981).
- Marlow, Louise, *Counsel for Kings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
- al-Māwardī, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, *The Ordinances of Government*, tr. Wafaa H. Wahba (Reading: Garnet, 2000).
- McDermott, Martin J., *The Theology of Al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1978).
- Mikhail, Hanna, *Politics and Revelation: Māwardī and After* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).
- Motzki, Harald, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

- el-Omari, Racha, "Abu l-Qāsim al-Ka'bi/al-Balkhī's Doctrine of the Imāma," in *A Common Rationality: Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism. Proceedings of the First Conference of the Mu'tazilite Manuscripts Group*, ed. Camilla Adang, David Solar, and Sabine Schmidtke (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 39–57.
- Qutbuddin, Tahera, "The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis: Ideology, Literature, Learning, and Social Practice," in *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 331–354.
- Rudolph, Ulrich, *Al-Māturidī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) = *Al-Māturidī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarkand*, tr. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
- al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Bāqir, *Lessons in Islamic Jurisprudence*, tr. Roy Mottahedeh (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).
- Sander, Paul, *Zwischen Charisma und Ratio: Entwicklungen in der frühen Imāmītischen Theologie* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1994).
- Schacht, Joseph, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).
- Schmidtke, Sabine, "The Mu'tazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 159–180.
- al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, tr. Joseph E. Lowry (New York: New York University Press, 2013).
- Shahrastānī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, tr. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984).
- al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, *al-Dhakhira fi 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1411/1991).
- al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, *al-Muqni' fi 'l-ghayba*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥakīm (Beirut: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt, 1419/1998).
- Siddiqui, Sohaira Z. M., *Law and Politics under the Abbasids: An Intellectual Portrait of al-Juwayni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- Tamimi, Azzam, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- al-Tirmidhī, Abū 'Isā, *al-Jāmi' al-kabīr*, vol. 4, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996).
- al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Talkhīṣ al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. Ḥusayn Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1965).
- van Ess, Josef, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- van Ess, Josef, "Political Ideas in Early Islamic Religious Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2001), 151–164.
- van Ess, Josef, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries Hijra*, vol. 2. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn Wāḍih, *The Works of Ibn Wāḍih al-Ya'qūbī: An English Translation*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon, Chase F. Robinson, Everett K. Rowson, and Michael Fishbein (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Index

- Aaron, prophet, 16
- al-Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 137–138
- Abbasids, xiv, xix, xxxix, xlii, 10 n. 8
- 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qāḍī, xxvii, xlv, xlvii
- 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 139
- 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Awf, 12, 125–126, 133
- 'Abdallāh b. Ibād, xxxvi
- abode of Islam (*dār al-islām*), 5 n. 4
- Abraham, prophet, 120–121
- absence of imams
- Ibn al-Walīd on, 150
 - Musta'li Tayyibīs and, xxxvi
 - al-Tūsī on, 70, 82–85
 - see also* occultations/concealments of imams
- Abū Bakr, caliph
- appointment of successors by, 11, 144
 - Day of the Portico and, 125
 - designation of, 127, 134
 - election of
 - Anṣār and, xi
 - Ibādīs on, xix, li
 - Ibn Fūrak on, 11–12
 - al-Juwaynī on, 24–25, 26–29
 - Khārijīs on, xix
 - Rāfiḍa on, xviii
 - Sunnīs on, xxxviii
 - 'Uthmānīs on, xv
 - al-Warjalānī on, 144
 - fallibility of, 115, 116
 - pledges of allegiance to, 24–25, 26–27, 28–29
 - superior merits of, xi, 11–12
- Abū Ḥanīfa, xxii, 122, 123
- Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī, xl
- Abū Ishāq Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidi, 139
- Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ, 115, 133
- Abū 'Ubayda Muslim b. Abī Karima, 145
- accountability, in absence of guiding authority, xxxiii, 4
- ādālat al-ṣaḥāba* (the uprightness of the Companions), xx
- Āghā Khān, xxxvi
- āḥād* (isolated reports), 17, 31, 118
- ahl al-bayt*, *see* Prophet's household
- ahl al-ḥadīth*, *see* Ḥanbalīs/partisans of hadīth
- Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, xvi, xxi, xxii, xxiv, xxv n. 19
- Ā'isha, xx, xxi, 14, 17–18, 138
- alerting agent (*munabbih*), lvi, 46–47
- Alī b. Abī Tālib, caliph
- in council of six, 125
 - death of, xiii
 - designation of, 127, 136–138
 - election of
 - in general, xii–xiii
 - Abū Ḥanīfa on, xxii
 - Hashimids on, xvi–xviii
 - Ibādīs on, xix, li
 - Ibn Fūrak on, 13–14, 15–17
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 126–128
 - Khārijīs on, xviii–xix
 - Muḥakkimis on, xviii
 - Mu'tazilīs on, xxviii
 - Quran reciters on, xvi, xvii
 - Shī'īs on, xxxviii
 - Umayyads on, xvi

- ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib, caliph (Cont.)
 ʿUthmānīs on, xv–xvi, xxv n. 19
 Zaydī Shīʿīs on, xxxiv
 merits of, 14
 Muʾāwīya and, xviii, xx, 126, 127
 pledges of allegiance to, 126, 137
 rebellion against, xvii, 14–15, 16 n. 14
 allegiance, pledges of, *see* pledges of allegiance
 al-ʿĀmir bi-Ḥkām Allāh, Fāṭimid imam-caliph, liii–liv
 ancestry of imams, *see* Qurashī lineage of imams
 Anṣār, xi, 45, 125, 126, 127–128
 appointment of imams
 civil strife after, 71–72, 130
 consensus and, *see* consensus
 by designation, *see* designation of imams
 by election, *see* election of imams
 by imams themselves, 10–11, 45, 61, 66, 129, 144
 lack of numbers and, 146–147
 arbitration (*taḥkīm*), xviii, 14–15
 al-Aṣamm, Abū Bakr, 108
aṣḥāb al-raʾy (personal opinion), xxiii
 al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Ḥasan
 religious affiliation of, xxiii
 views interpreted by Ibn Fūrak, *see under* Ibn Fūrak
 al-Ashʿarī, Abū Mūsā, 14
 Ashʿarīs, *see* Ibn Fūrak; al-Juwaynī
aṣḥāḥ (optimum), xxx–xxxi
 Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal, lviii
 attributes of imams
 in general
 see merits of imams
 al-Bāqillānī on, xlv–xlv
 Companions on, 54
 courage/bravery, 7, 32–33, 54, 55, 113
 al-Hārūnī on, 53–61
 Ibn Fūrak on, xlii, 5–7
 Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, l, 113
 Ibn al-Walīd on, 152
 infallibility, *see under* infallibility
 intelligence of, 35, 36, 37, 54, 113
 al-Juwaynī on, xlii, xliii, 29–36
 legal expertise, xlv, 33–34, 55
 al-Māwardī on, xlv–xlv
 miraculous abilities of, 7, 88, 90–92, 93–94
 moral probity, 54, 122–123
 physical handicaps and, 29–31
 piety/religiosity of, 6–7, 33, 35, 114–115, 145
 political acumen of, 7, 114–115
 scholarship of, 34–35, 54, 114–115
 al-Warjālānī on, 145
 authority
 imamate as, 21
 of imams/caliphs, 8–9
 of Prophet, xxi–xxii
 of prophets, 5
 religio-political, xxiv–xxv, xxxvii, xxxviii–xxxix
 autonomy of imams, 34, 35, 36–37, 40, 122

 Bahshamī theological school, xxvii, xlvii–xlviii, 108 n. 3
 al-Balkhī, Abū ʿl-Qāsim, 108–109
 al-Bāqillānī, al-Qādī Abū Bakr
 on imams/caliphs
 attributes of, xlv–xlv
 participants in elections of, 22, 24
 quorums in elections of, 26
 witnesses to, 28–29
 mention of, xl, xli
 al-Baṣrī, Abū ʿAbdallāh, xlv
 al-Baṣrī, Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn, xxvii, 109, 114, 133
bayʿa (pledge of allegiance), *see* pledges of allegiance
bayḍat al-islām (Islam’s heartlands), 5 n. 4
 al-Bayhaqī, xl
 best interest (*maṣlaḥa*), xxx, 72
 Bishr b. Saʿd, 133
The Book of Excellence on the Fundamental Principles of Religion (Ibn al-Malāḥimī), xlix–l
Book of Nondiscretionary Penalties (al-Shaybānī), 120
 bravery, *see* courage/bravery of imams
 Buyids, xxv

 caliphate
 reestablishment of, lviii
 use of term, xxxix–xl
 see also imamate/caliphate
 caliphs, *see* imams/caliphs
 Camel, Battle of the, xiii, xv, xx, 14
 careful examination, *see* rational inquiries
 civil strife/turmoil, 71–72, 130
 see also rebellions

- coercion, 79
- communities, isolated, 38–40
- Companions (*ṣaḥāba*)
- on imams/caliphs
 - ‘Alī, 16 n. 14
 - attributes of, 54
 - consensus in election of, 115–116, 125–126
 - election of, x, 13, 125–126
 - need for, 44–46
 - quorum for election, 133–134
 - legal opinions of, xx
 - Prophet and, 15, 17
 - repentance of, xx
 - views on, xx–xxi, xxiv
 - see also under specific Companions*
- concealments, *see* occultations/concealments of imams
- The Concise Book of Doctrines* (al-Warjalānī), li, ix, 140–147
- see also* al-Warjalānī
- consensus (*ijmāʿ*)
- in electoral process
 - of Companions, 115–116, 125–126
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 115–116, 125–126
 - al-Juwaynī on, 24–25
 - legitimacy of, 154
 - of Muḥājirūn and Anṣār, 126
 - of the Prophet’s household, 44
 - al-Warjalānī on, 144
- consultation (*shūrā*), xxvi, 11
- Convincing Guide to the Occultation* (al-Murtaḍā), 94–95
- council of six (of ‘Umar), *see* Day of the Council
- courage/bravery of imams, 7, 32–33, 54, 55, 113
- The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points* (Ibn al-Walīd), liv–lv, ix, 148–156, *see also* Ibn al-Walīd
- The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering* (al-Ṭūsī), xlviii–xlix, 67–106, *see also* al-Ṭūsī
- The Curative Book on the Imamate* (al-Murtaḍā), xlvī, xlvii–xlviii, 1
- dār al-islām* (abode of Islam), 5 n. 4
- daʿwa*, *see* missions of imams
- Day of the Council (*yawm al-shūrā*)
- in general, xxii, 12, 13, 144
 - creation of, 45, 115
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 125–126
 - quorums for elections and, 133
- Day of the Portico (*yawm al-saqifa*)
- in general, xi–xii
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 125
 - legitimacy of, xxxii, xxxvii–xxxviii
 - quorums for elections and, 133
 - mention of, 115
- designation of imams (*naṣṣ*)
- of Abū Bakr, 127, 134
 - of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 127, 136–138
 - different meanings of, xxxii–xxxiii
 - al-Hārūnī on, 43
 - Ibn Fūrak on, 7–9, 16–17
 - Ibn al-Walīd on, liv, 153–156
 - Muʿtazilīs, xxviii, 134–139
 - by Prophet, 66, 127, 134, 136–138
 - Sunnīs on, xxv
 - Twelver Shīʿīs on, xxix, xxxi, 126–128, 130, 136–138
- devoutness, *see* piety/religiosity
- Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, 31
- direct instruction (*taʿlīm*), lviii
- dispensability of imams/imamate, lii, liii, 4, 45, 108, 143–144
- disputes, 36, 40, 50–51
- dissimulation (*kitmān; taqīyya*)
- legality of, lii–liiii, 11
 - al-Warjalānī on, 147
 - see also* occultations/concealments of imams
- divine assistance (*lutf*)
- essential knowledge and, 69, 77, 80
 - God and, xxix, lv–lviii
 - human intellect and, xxxvi, lv–lviii
- imams/caliphs and
- absence of, 82–85
 - al-Hārūnī on, lv, 49–50
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī, 1, 110–111
 - Ibn al-Walīd on, lvii–lviii
 - Ismaʿīlī Shīʿīs on, xxxvi, lvi–lviii
 - Muʿtazilīs on, xxvii, lv–lvi, 89–90, 104
 - al-Ṭūsī on, xxix–xxx, xlviii, lix–lx, 69–70, 74–75, 76–79, 81–84, 103–104, 105
 - Twelver Shīʿīs on, xxix–xxxī, xlviii, lvi, 104 n. 34, 110
 - Zaydī Shīʿīs on, lv
- moral obligations and, 83–84
- occultations of imams and, 87, 89–90, 96

- elections of imams (*ikhtiyār*)
 in general, xxv–xxvi, xli, 8, 13, 116, 121–122
 consensus and, *see* consensus
 equal merits and, 64–65, 114–115
 Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 124–131, 133–134
 independent reasoning and, 15–16
 al-Juwaynī on, 24–29
 Khārījīs on, xviii–xix
 Muʿtazilis on, 124, 132–134
 participants in, *see* electorate
 power base of imams and, 26–27
 vs. proclamation of mission, 61–66
 proper process of, 133–134
 quorums and, 25–26, 133–134
 superior merits and, xi, xlv–xlv, 11–12, 129, 152
 Twelver Shīʿīs on, 130–131, 132
 underpinning by scripture, 9
 witnesses to, 28
see also under specific imams
- electorate
 in general, xxvi
 attributes of
 high standing, 28
 legal expertise of, 22–23
 piety of, 24
 al-Juwaynī on, 21–24
 size of, 8
- emirs, 39–40
Epistle on Legal Theory (al-Shāfiʿī), xxiii
- essential knowledge (*maʿārif*)
 divine assistance and, 69, 77, 80
 Muʿtazilis on, 80 n. 12
 al-Ṭūsī on, 80–81, 105–106
see also knowledge of God
- evil acts, *see* reprehensible acts
- existence/nonexistence of imams
 al-Hārūnī on, 46–47
 Ibn al-Walīd on, liv
 al-Ṭūsī on, 85, 97–101
- fallibility
 of Abū Bakr, 115, 116
 of humans, 74–75, 117
see also infallibility
al-farj al-ḥarām (unlawful union), 117
- Fāṭima
 descendants of, xxix, xxxiv, xlv, 114
- inheritance of Prophet and, 11–12
 as successor of Prophet, xxxviii
- Fāṭimids, 32
fi sabīl allāh (in the path of God), 128 n. 21
 Friday worship, 25–26
- Ghannouchi, Rached, xxvi
ghayba, *see* occultations/concealments of imams
- al-Ghazālī, xliii, liv
A Gift for Theologians on the Refutation of Philosophers (Ibn al-Malāḥimī), xlix
- God
 absence of imams and, 150
 creation/selection of imams by, 60, 99–101
 divine assistance and, xxix, lv–lviii
 knowledge of, *see* knowledge of God
 obedience to, xxix
 occultations of imams and, 97–99
 proof of, *see* God's proof
 God's proof (*hujjat Allāh*)
 Ibn al-Walīd on, liv–lv, lvii, 152
 Muʿtazilis on, xxxiii
 al-Ṭūsī on, xlviii, 101
 Twelver Shīʿīs on, xxxiii, xxxix, xlviii, xlix, liv, lvii
- hadiths
 on age of caliphate, 18
 on designation of ʿAlī, 137, 138–139
ḥadīth al-ghadīr, 16 n. 15
ḥadīth al-manẓila, 16 n. 15
 on inheritance of Prophet, 11–12
 isolated reports of, 17, 31, 118
 on Qurashī lineage, 31, 114
- Ḥanafīs, xxiii, xxiv, xxvii
 Ḥanbalīs/partisans of hadith (*ahl al-ḥadīth*)
 ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and, xv
 on Companions, xx
 hadiths transmitted by, 139
 on Ḥanafīs, xxiii
 on imams/caliphs, 124
 on rebellion, xxiv
- harm
 imams as safeguards against, 76, 109, 128–129
 protecting oneself from, 80 n. 12
 al-Hārūnī, al-Muʿayyad bi-ʿllāh, xlv

- al-Hārūnī, al-Nāṭiq bi-'l-Ḥaqq Abū Ṭalib
in general, lix
biography of, xlv, 42
on imams/caliphs
attributes of, 53–61
designation of, 43
disputes and, 50–51
divine assistance and, lv, 49–50
existence/nonexistence of, 46–47
infallibility and, 43, 55–61
as judges, 58
legitimacy of, xlvī
moral obligations and, 46–49
multiple candidates, 43–44, 64–66
necessity of, 51–53
removal of, 43–44
revealed law and, 42–43, 46, 50, 51, 57
social need for, 44–46
validation of claim of, 61–66
works of, *The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate*, xlv–xlvi, lix, lxii, 42–66
- Ḥasan, Nāji, lxii
al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, caliph, xiii
al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 115, 134
Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāh, lvii
Hashimids
feud with Umayyads, xiii–xiv
major branches of, xvii
status of, xii
on successors of Prophet, xi–xii, xvi–xviii
ḥudūd (penalties), 5, 143
ḥujjat Allāh, see God's proof
humans
deficiencies in, 51
fallibility/infallibility of, 74–75, 82, 117
intellect of, xxxvi, lv–lviii, 20
non-liability of, 5
al-Ḥurra al-Malika, Ṣulayḥid queen, liii
- Ibādīs
dissimulation used by, lii–liii
on God's law, lii–liii
on imams/caliphs
dispensability of, liii
legitimacy of, xix, li
procedure of removal of, lii, liii
Khārijīs and, xxxvi–xxxvii
other Muslims and, xxxvii
on Quran, li
scholarly attention and, lxi
- Ibādism, l–li
Ibn al-Farrā', Abū Ya' 'lā, xli–xlii, xv n. 7
Ibn Fūrak, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan
in general, lix
biography of, xl, 3
on Companions
'Ā'isha, 14, 17–18
ranking of, 17
Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr and Mu'āwiya, 15
on imamate/caliphate, xl–xli, 4–18
on imams/caliphs
Abū Bakr, 11–12
'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib, 13–14, 15–17
appointment of successors by, 10–11
attributes of, xlii, 5–7
election of, 7–9, 15–17
lineage of, xlii, 7, 10
pledges of allegiance to, 13
'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 12
'Uthmān b. Affān, 12–13
on independent reasoning, 8, 14–17
on prophets, 6
on unbelief, 18
works of, *A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'ari*, xl–xli, 3–18
- Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad, xxii
Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Ruḳn al-Dīn
in general, lx
biography of, xlix, 107
on *The Curative Book*, 1
on imamate/caliphate, 107–139
essence of, 108
necessity of, 107–110, 112
objectives of, 113
requisites of, 113–115
on imams/caliphs
attributes of, l, 113
designation of, 134–139
divine assistance and, l, 110–111
election of, 124–131
election of, proper process of, 133–134
equal merit and, 114–115
infallibility of, l, 115–119, 129
lineage of, 114
as means of fortification, 111
occultations of, 111
removal of, 131–132
sinning of, 119–124
superiority over other candidates, 129
worldly affairs and, 111–112

- works of
 in general, xlix
The Book of Excellence on the Fundamental Principles of Religion, xlix–l, 107–139
The Reliable Book of Knowledge on the Fundamental Principles of Religion, 107
The Reliable Book on the Fundamental Principles of Religion, 134
- Ibn Mujāhid al-Baṣrī, xl
- Ibn Mujaḥ, xii
- Ibn Taymiyya, xvi
- Ibn al-Walid, al-Dāʾī ʿAlī b. Muḥammad
 in general, lx
 biography of, liv, 148
 on imamate/caliphate, 148–156
 on imams/caliphs
 appointment by designation of, liv, 153–156
 attributes of, 152
 divine assistance and, lvii–lviii
 existence/nonexistence of, liv
 as God’s proof, liv–lv, lvii, 152
 legal duties of, 151–152
 occultations/concealments of, lv, 150–151
- works of
 in general, liv
The Crown of Doctrines and the Mine of Instructive Points, liv–lv, lx, 148–156
- ijmāʿ*, see consensus
- ijtihād*, see independent reasoning
- ikhtiyār*, see elections of imams
- imamate/caliphate
 in general, lix
 as authority, 21
 dispensability of, lii, liii, 4, 45, 108, 143–144
 essence of, 108
 with multiple imams, see multiple imams
 Muʿtazilīs on, xxvii, xlix–l, 108–109
 objectives of, 35–36, 113
 requisites of, 113–115
 al-Shahrastānī on, x
 with single imam, 37–38, 41
- Sunnīs on
 in general, xxv–xxvi
 Ibn Fūrak on, see under Ibn Fūrak
 al-Juwaynī, see under al-Juwaynī
 legal works on, xli–xlii
- Twelver Shīʿīs on
 in general, xxviii, lx
 al-Murtaḍā, xxviii–xxix, xlvii–xlvi
 al-Tūsī, see under al-Tūsī
 use of terms, xxxix–xl
 Zaydī Shīʿīs on, xxxiv–xxxv, 42–43
 see also imams/caliphs
- Imāmī Shīʿīs, see Twelver Shīʿīs
- imams/caliphs
 absence of, see absence of imams
 appointment of, see appointment of imams
 assessment of conduct of, 6
 attributes of, see attributes of imams
 authority of, 8–9
 autonomy of, see autonomy of imams
 capabilities of individuals and, 103
 characteristics of, see attributes of imams
 coercion and, 79
 concealments of, see occultations/
 concealments of imams
 dispensability of, lii, liii, 4, 45, 108, 143–144
 dissimulation of, see dissimulation
 divine assistance and, see divine assistance
 divine right to rule of, xxxix
 election of, see elections of imams
 existence of, see existence/nonexistence of
 imams
 legitimacy of, see under legitimacy
 lineage of, see Qurashī lineage of imams
 miraculous abilities of, see miraculous
 abilities of imams
 moral obligations and, see under moral
 obligations
 multiple, see multiple imams
 necessity of, see under necessity
 in need of other imams, 76–80, 111
 nonexistence of, see existence/nonexistence
 of imams
 as non-hereditary, 10
 obedience to, 56–57
 occultations of, see occultations/
 concealments of imams
 pledges of allegiance to, see pledges of
 allegiance
 rebellion against, see rebellions
 remote populations and, 38–39, 65, 73–74
 removal of, see removal of imams
 revealed law and, see revealed law
 rights of, 146

- single, 37–38, 41
 sinning by, *see* sins/misdeeds/crimes
see also caliphs; imamate/caliphate
- immoral acts, *see* reprehensible acts
- independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), xxxi–xxxiii,
 8, 14–17, 25
- inerrancy, *see* infallibility
- infallibility ('*iṣma*)
 of humans, 74–75, 82, 117
 of imams/caliphs
 al-Hārūnī on, 43, 55–61
 Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, I, 115–119, 129
 Mu' tazilīs on, 115–119
 al-Ṭūsī on, 72–75
 Twelve Shi'īs on, xxix, xlii, 56, 58 n. 21,
 115–119
 leadership and, 102
 of the military, 60–61, 116–117
 of prophets, 6
- The Infamies of the Esotericists* (al-Ghazālī), liv
- Institute of Ismaili Studies, lxi
- intelligence
 of electorate, 133
 of imams, 35, 36, 37, 54, 113
- al-Isfarāyīnī, Abū Ishāq, xl, xliii
- al-Iskāf, Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Isfarāyīnī, xliii
- Islam
 minority schools in, lxi
 see also under specific schools
 sectarianism in, lviii
 see also Islamic thought; under specific
 branches
- Islamic thought
 in general, xiv–xv
 classical schools of, xxi–xxix
 formative period, xv–xxi
- Islam's heartlands (*bayḍat al-islām*), 5 n. 4
- Isma'īl b. Ja'far, xxxv
- Isma'īlī Shi'is
 cyclical view of time of, xxxv
 esoteric readings of Quran, xxxv
 on imams/caliphs
 divine assistance and, xxxvi, lvi–lvii
 as God's proof, liv–lv
 lineage of, xxxv
 major communities of, xxxvi
see also Ibn al-Walīd; Musta'li Tayyibīs;
 Musta'lis; Nizārīs
- isolated communities, 38–40
- isolated reports (*āḥād*), 17, 31, 118
- istitār*, *see* occultations/concealments
 of imams
- Ivanow, Wladimir, liv
- al-Jāhīz, 108–109, 114
- al-Jaṣṣās, 120
- Jesus, prophet, 92
- al-Jubbā'ī, Abū 'Alī, 108, 114
- al-Jubbā'ī, Abū Hāshim, 108, 114
- judges
 imams/caliphs as, 58, 144, 151–152
 lawfulness of appointing two, 40
- juridical analogy, 118
- jurisconsult (*mufīī*), 33 n. 8
- jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), 118
- al-Juwaynī, 'Abd al-Malik
 in general, lix
 biography of, xlii–xliii, 19
 on imamate/caliphate, 20–41
 in general, xlii
 as authority, 21
 central aim of, 35–36
 examination of, and proof, 20–21
- on imams/caliphs
 attributes of, xlii, xliii, 29–36
 autonomy, 34, 35, 36–37, 40
 courage/bravery of, 32–33
 disputes and, 36, 40
 elections of, 24–29
 knowledge, 33–35
 legitimacy of, xxv, xlv
 lineage of, xlv, 31–32
 participants in elections of, 21–24
 physical handicaps, 29–31
 piety of, 35
 single or multiple, 37–41
 suitability of, 36–37
- on independent reasoning, 25
- on jurists, xliii
- on radicalism, 19
- works of, *The Succor of Nations amidst the*
Confusion of Darkness, xliii, lxi–lxii, 19–41
- al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī, Abū 'l-Qāsim, 108–109
- Khālid b. al-Walīd, 129
- Khārījīs
 on dissimulation, 147
- Ibāḍīs and, xxxvi–xxxvii

- Khārijīs (Cont.)
on imams/caliphs
dispensability of, lii, 143–144
elections of, xviii–xix
lineage of, xix, 114
on obligation to rebel against
tyrannical, 10
procedure of removal of, lii
other Muslims and, xxxvii
rebellions of, xviii
Sunnīs on, xxiv
on unbelief, xviii, xix
khāṭir (stimuli), lv–lvi, 47–49
Khorasan, xlii
kitmān, *see* dissimulation
knowledge, *see* essential knowledge; knowledge
of God
knowledge of God
in general, 81
divine assistance and, xxxvi, lv–lviii, 81–82,
105–106
see also essential knowledge
kufṛ, *see* unbelief
law of just retribution (*qīṣās*), 143
The Laws of Governance (Ibn al-Farrāʾ),
xli–xlii
The Laws of Governance (al-Māwardī),
xli–xlii
laypersons, 21–22, 24, 54, 58 n. 22, 121 n. 18,
137
legal expert (*mujtahid*), 33 n. 8
legal expertise
of electorate, 22–23
of imams/caliphs, xlv, 33–34, 55
legal opinions, xx, xxi
legal works, xli–xlii, xlvii
legitimacy
of consensus, 154
of Day of the Portico, xxxii, xxxvii–xxxviii
of imams/caliphs
al-Hārūnī on, xlv
Ibāḍīs on, xix, li
al-Juwaynī on, xxv, xlv
al-Warjalānī on, li
of warlords, xxv, xlv
lineage of imams, *see* Qurashī lineage
of imams
lutf, *see* divine assistance
maʿārif, *see* essential knowledge
Madelung, Wilfred, xi, xii–xiii
al-Mahdī, twelfth imam, xxxiii–xxxiv
Major Book on International Law (al-
Shaybānī), 120
al-Maʾmūn, Abbasid caliph, xxii, xlii
maṣlaḥa (best interest), xxx, 72
al-Māturidī, Abū Maṣṣūr, xxiii
al-Māwardī, xxv, xxxii–xxxiii, xlv–xlv, xv n. 7
mawla, use of term, 16 n. 15
merits of imams
Abū Bakr's, xxxviii
ʿAlī's, xxxiv, 136, 138
equal, 64–65, 114–115
ranking of, xliii, 7, 17
superior, xi, xlv–xlv, 11–12, 129, 152
miraculous abilities of imams, 7, 88, 90–92,
93–94
mirrors for princes, 19
*see also The Succor of Nations amidst the
Confusion of Darkness*
missions of imams (*daʿwa*)
vs. elections, 61–66
Zaydī Shīʿīs on, 124–125, 134
moral obligations (*takālif* *aqliyya*)
in general, xxx
divine assistance and, 83–84
human deficiencies and, 51
human intellect and, lv
imams/caliphs and
in general, lvii
al-Hārūnī on, 46–49
al-Murtaḍā on, xxix–xxx
Muʿtazilīs on, xxxiii
nonexistence of, and, 101–103
occultations of, and, 86–90, 95–96
al-Tūsī on, xlviii, 78–79, 82, 83–84
Twelver Shīʿīs on, xxxiii, xlviii, 102–103
reprehensible acts and, 102–103
Moses, prophet, 92, 151
Muʾaḍh b. Jabal, 6
Muʾāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, Umayyad caliph
ʿAlī and, xviii, xx, 126, 127
Ibn Fūrak on, 15
rule of, xiii
al-Mufīd, al-Shaykh, xxviii, xlvii, lvi
mufīṭ (jurisconsult), 33 n. 8
Muhājirūn, xi, 45, 126, 127–128
Muḥakkimīs, xviii

- Muḥammad, Prophet
 appointment of imams by, 66, 127, 134,
 136–138
see also designation of imams
 authority of, xxi–xxii
 Companions of, *see* Companions
 miraculous abilities of, 92
 mission of, 143
 Mu'adh b. Jabal and, 6
mujtahid (legal expert), 33 n. 8
 multiple imams
 al-Hārūnī on, 43–44, 64–66
 Ibn Fūrak on, 9, 10
 al-Juwaynī on, 38–40
 al-Ṭūsī on, 72–74
munabbih (alerting agent), lvi, 46–47
 Murjī'īs, xx, xxi, 134
 al-Murtaḍā, al-Sharīf
 on imamate, xxviii–xxix, xlvii–xlvi
 on imams/caliphs
 designation of, xxxi
 divine assistance and, xxix–xxx, lvi
 on existence/nonexistence of imams,
 99–101
 reasons for occultations of, 94–95
 revealed law and, xxx
 social need for, lvi
 al-Ṭūsī as student of, xlvii
 works of
Convincing Guide to the Occultation, 94–95
The Curative Book, xlv, xlvii–xlvi, 67
Provision, 99–101
 Mūsā al-Kāzīm b. Ja'far, xxxv
 al-Musta'li bi-'llāh, Fāṭamid caliph, xxxv
 Musta'li Ṭayyibīs, liii–liv
 Musta'lis, xxxvi
see also Musta'li Ṭayyibīs
 al-Mustanṣir, Fāṭimid caliph, xxxvi
 Mu'ta, Battle of, 129
 Mu'tazilis
 branches of, xxvii
 on Companions, xxi
 on essential knowledge, 80 n. 12
 on imamate/caliphate, xxvii, xlix–l,
 108–109
 on imams/caliphs
 on appointment by designation of, xxviii,
 134–139
 divine assistance and, xxvii, lv–lvi,
 89–90, 104
 election of, 124, 132–134
 election of, 'Alī, xxviii
 election of, first four, xvii, xix–xx
 election of, proper process of, 133–134
 equal merit and, 115
 as God's proof, xxxiii
 infallibility of, 115–119
 lineage of, 114
 on obligation to rebel against tyrannical,
 10
 occultations of, 116
 quorums for elections of, 133
 revealed law and, 118
 on optimum, xxx–xxxii
 Twelver Shī'īs and, xxviii
 Zaydīs Shī'īs and, xxviii, xxxiv
see also Ibn al-Malāḥimī
 Mu'tazilism, lix
muwāfāt doctrine, 93–94
 Nahrawān, Battle of, xiii, xviii
 Najda b. 'Āmir, 143
 Naṣr b. Muzaḥhim, 132
naṣṣ, *see* designation of imams
nāṭiq (Speaking Agent), xxxv
naẓar, *see* careful examination
 necessary preliminaries, 80 n. 13
 necessity
 of imams/imamate
 al-Hārūnī on, 51–53
 Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 107–110, 112
 Ibn al-Walid on, 149–150
 Mu'tazilis on, 108–109
 perpetual, 149–150
 rational proof for, 51–53, 68–86, 109–110
 revelations and, 108–109
 scriptural texts and, 112, 141–142
 Twelver Shī'īs on, 108
 al-Warjālānī on, 143–147
see also social need
 of prophets, 51–52
see also dispensability of imams/imamate
 Neoplatonic philosophy, xxxv
 Nishapur, xl, xlii
 Niẓām al-Mulk, xxiv, xliii, 19
 Nizār b. al-Mustanṣir, xxxvi

- Nizārīs, xxxvi, lvi–lvii
- nonexistence of imams, *see* existence/
nonexistence of imams
- obedience
to God, xxix
to imams/caliphs, 49, 56–57, 58–59, 60
- obligatory rituals, 80–81
- occultations/concealments of imams
God and, 97–99
Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 111
Ibn al-Walīd on, lv, 150–151
al-Murtaḍā on, 94–95
Musta' lī Ṭayyibīs on, lii–liv
Mu' tazilis on, 116
al-Ṭūsī on
in general, lv
detection of immoral behavior and,
96–97
responsibility for, all individuals, 86–95
responsibility for, enemies, 95–96
Shī'īs' obligations during, 96–106
threat to life and, 85–86
Twelver Shī'īs on, xxxiii–xxxiv, 89, 97–98
see also absence of imams; dissimulation
On the Battle of the Camel (Naṣr b. Muḏāḥim),
132
On the Legal Verses of the Quran (al-Rāzī), 120
oppression, 76
optimum (*aṣṣlaḥ*), xxx–xxxii
- partisans of hadith, *see* Ḥanbalīs/partisans
of hadith
- penalties (*ḥudūd*), 5, 143
- personal opinion (*aṣḥāb al-ra'y*), xxiii
- physical handicaps, 29–31
- piety/religiosity
of electorate, 24
of imams/caliphs, 6–7, 33, 35, 114–115, 145
- pious protest, 147
- pledges of allegiance (*bay'a*)
to Abū Bakr, 24–25
to Abū 'Ubayda, 115
to Alī, 126, 137
al-Ash'arī on, 13
lack of qualities and, 62–63
ratification of authority and, xxvi, 26–29
removal of imams after, 131
political acumen of imams, 7, 114–115
- portico meeting, *see* Day of the Portico
A Précis of the Doctrines of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (Ibn Fūrak), xl–xli, 3–18
see also Ibn Fūrak
- prescription of duties beyond one's capacity
(*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*), 91, 150
A Prolegomenon to the Foundational Principles of Religion (al-Ṭūsī), xlvii
- prompting, *see* stimuli
- Prophet's household (*aḥl al-bayt*), xxviii
- Prophet's progeny, xxxiv
- prophets/prophethood
authority of, 5
designation of imams by, 8–9
dispensability of, 4
as foundation of imamate, 4–5
infallibility of, 6
necessity of, 51–52
Provision (al-Murtaḍā), 99–101
pseudo-prophets, x
- qisās* (law of just retribution), 143
- quorums
for Friday worship, 25–26
imams' appointment and, 25–26, 133–134
- Quran
esoteric readings of, xxxv
Ibādīs on, li
penalties in, 143
reciters from Kufa, xiii, xvi, xvii
revealed law in, 141–143
see also Quranic verses
- Quranic verses
2:30, 151–152, 155
2:124, 120, 121
2:125, 121
2:178, 142
2:179, 142
2:184, 146
2:205, 143
2:286, 147
3:110, 141
3:159, 34
4:41, 154
4:59, 146
4:135, 141
5:33, 142
5:38, 112, 142
5:63, 142, 153

- 5:64, 143
 5:67, 141
 8:65, 146
 8:66, 146–147
 9:29, 142
 9:33, 143
 9:36, 142
 9:122, 142
 13:7, 153
 17:15, 5
 17:33, 142
 22:39–40, 128 n. 21
 24:2, 142
 24:4, 142
 24:63, 146
 26:21, 92
 28:68, 155
 32:24, 142
 33:46, 143
 36:60–61, 121
 38:22, 142
 38:26, 142
 57:25, 141
 64:16, 146
- Qurāshī lineage of imams
 in general, xi, xii–xiii, 125
 Dirār b. ‘Amr on, 31
 hadiths on, 31, 114
 Ibādīs on, xix
 Ibn Fūrak on, xlii, 7, 10
 Ibn al-Malāhimī on, 114
 al-Juwaynī on, xlv, 31–32
 Khārījīs on, xix, 114
 Mu‘tazilīs on, 114
 from specific clans, xxxv, 65, 114
 Zaydī Shī‘īs on, 44, 65
- al-Qushayrī, xl
- radicalism, 19
 Rāfiḍa (in Kufa), xviii
rāfiḍa (rejection of all non-‘Alid authorities),
 xviii
- rational inquiries (*naẓar*)
 al-Hārūnī on, 47–49
 Mu‘tazilīs on, xxx, lv
 Twelver Shī‘īs on, lv
 al-Rāzī, Abū Bakr, 120
 al-Rāziq, ‘Alī ‘Abd, lviii
- rebellions
 against ‘Alī, xvii, 14–15, 16 n. 14
 of Khārījīs, xviii
 obligation to, 10
 unlawfulness of, xxiv, 9
see also civil strife/turmoil
- regional leadership, 38–40
*The Reliable Book of Knowledge on the
 Fundamental Principles of Religion* (Ibn
 al-Malāhimī), 107
*The Reliable Book on the Fundamental
 Principles of Religion* (Ibn al-Malāhimī),
 xlix, 134
- religious-political authority, xxiv–xxv, xxxvii,
 xxxviii–xxxix
- religiosity, *see* piety/religiosity
- remote populations, 38–39, 65, 73–74
- removal of imams
 grounds for, 119–124
 al-Hārūnī on, 43–44
 Ibādīs on, lii, liii
 Ibn al-Malāhimī on, 119–124, 131–132
 Khārījīs on, lii
 Zaydīs on, 43–44
- reprehensible acts (*qabā’ih*)
 detection by imam of, 96–97
 imam’s help with refraining from, 74, 79,
 82–83, 102–103, 104 n. 35, 106, 110–111
see also sins/misdeeds/crimes
- repugnant acts, *see* reprehensible acts
- revealed law (*takālif shar‘iyya*)
 imams/caliphs and
 in general, xxv–xxvi, xxx
 al-Hārūnī on, 42–43, 46, 50, 51, 57
 Ibn Fūrak on, 6
 Ibn al-Walīd on, lvii–lviii
 al-Juwaynī on, 34
 al-Murtaḍā on, xxx
 Mu‘tazilīs on, 118
 al-Tusi on, xlviii–xlix
 Zaydīs on, 42–43
 in Quran, 141–143
- revelation (*shar‘*), xxx, l, lvii, 20, 108
- roles of imams
 in general, xxxviii–xxxix
 as arbiter in disputes, 36, 40, 50–51
 as divine assistance, *see* divine assistance
 as God’s proof, *see* God’s proof

- roles of imams (Cont.)
 to help refraining from reprehensible acts,
 74, 79, 82–83, 102–103, 104 n. 35, 106,
 110–111
 as judges, 58, 144, 151–152
 as safeguards against harm, 76, 109,
 128–129
 as safeguards of traditions, 104–105
 as successors to prophets, 5
see also God's proof
- Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, 125, 133
 Sa'd b. 'Ubāda, x
 Safina (Prophet's freedman), 18
 Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād, xlv
 al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād, lxii, 42
 Sālim b. Abi Ḥudhayfa, 133
 scholarship of imams, 33–35, 54, 114–115
 Seljuks, xxiii–xxiv, xxv
 al-Shāfi'ī, xxii, xxiii, 25, 119
 al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm, x
shar' (revelation), xxx, 1, lvii, 20
 al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *see* al-Murtaḍā, al-Sharīf
 al-Shaybānī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, 120
shī'a, use of term, xvi–xvii
 Shī'īs
 on Day of the Portico, xxxviii
 on first four caliphs, xvii–xviii, xxxviii–
 xxxix
 as *rāfiḍa*, xviii
 views on, xxiv
 see also Twelver Shī'īs; Zaydī Shī'īs
 Ṣiffin, Battle of, xiii, xv, xvi, xviii
 sins/misdeeds/crimes
 imams committing, 43–44, 54, 58–59, 116,
 119–124
 witnesses committing, 122, 123
 see also reprehensible acts
 slaves, 21, 22, 114
 social need
 for imams/caliphs
 al-Hārūnī on, 44–46
 al-Murtaḍā on, lvi
 al-Tūsī on, 69–72
 Zaydī Shī'īs on, 42–43
 Speaking Agent (*nātiq*), xxxv
 speculation (*ẓann*)
 on need of occultations, 85–86
 on religious matters, xxii–xxiii
 stimuli (*khāṭir*), lv–lvi, 47–49
*The Succor of Nations amidst the Confusion
 of Darkness* (al-Juwaynī), xliii, lxi–lxii,
 19–41
 see also al-Juwaynī
 sultan (*sulṭān*), use of term, xxv
The Summa on Divine Unity and Justice (Abd
 al-Jabbār), xlvī, xlvii
 Sunnīs
 on authority of Prophet, xxi–xxii
 on Companions, xxi
 on Day of the Portico, xxxvii–xxxviii
 on imamate/caliphate, xxv–xxvi
 on imams/caliphs
 Abū Bakr, xxxviii
 on appointment by designation of, xxv
 elections of, xxxviii
 election of, first four, xvii–xviii, xxxix
 independent reasoning in election of,
 xxxī, 16 n. 14
 on non-Sunnīs, xxiv
 on religio-political authority, xxiv–xxv
 see also Ash'arīs; Mu' tazilīs
 Sunnism (*ahl al-sunna*), xxiii
 superiority of imams, xi, xlv–xlv, 11–12,
 129, 152
- al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr, 139
taḍdīl 'Alī doctrine, xvii
taḥkīm (arbitration), xviii, 14–15
taklīf mā lā yuṭāq (prescription of duties
 beyond one's capacity), 91, 150
 Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh, 8 n. 6, 13 n. 12, 15, 18,
 45, 125–126, 133
 al-Ṭalībī, 'Ammār, li
ta'lim (direct instruction), lvii
taqīyya, *see* dissimulation
 al-Ṭayyib, liii
 Ṭayyibīs, xxxvi
The Theoretical Underpinning of the Imamate
 (al-Hārūnī), xlv–xlvī, lix, lxii, 42–66
 see also al-Hārūnī, al-Nāṭiq bi-'l-Ḥaqq Abū
 Ṭalīb
 Toḡhril Beg, Seljuk sultan, xxiii
 turmoil, *see* civil strife/turmoil
 al-Tūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan
 in general, lix–lx
 biography of, xlvī–xlvii, 67
 on essential knowledge, 80–81, 105–106

- on imamate, xxviii–xxix, xlviii–xlix, 68–86
- on imams/caliphs
- absence of, 70, 82–85
 - civil strife after appointment of, 71–72
 - coercion and, 79
 - divine assistance and, xxix–xxx, xlviii–xlix, lix–lx, 69–70, 74–75, 76–79, 81–84, 103–104, 105
 - existence/nonexistence of, 85, 97–100
 - as God's proof, xlviii, 101
 - to help refraining from reprehensible acts, 74, 79, 82–83, 102–103, 104 n. 35, 106, 110–111
 - infallibility of, 72–75
 - miraculous abilities of, 88, 90–92, 93–94
 - moral obligations and, xlviii, 78–79, 82, 83–84
 - multiple candidates, 72–74
 - in need of other imams, 76–80
 - occultations of, *see under* occultations/concealments of imams
 - as safeguards of traditions, 104–105
 - social need for, 69–72
- on obligatory rituals, 80–81
- works of
- The Curative Book on the Imamate: A Paraphrastic Rendering*, xlviii–xlix, 67–106
 - legal, xlvii
 - A Prolegomenon to the Foundational Principles of Religion*, xlvii
- Twelver Shī'is
- on imamate/caliphate, xxviii, xlii, lx, 108
 - on imams/caliphs
 - designation of, xxix, xxxi, 126–128, 130, 136–138
 - divine assistance and, xxix–xxx, xlviii, lvi, 104 n. 34, 110
 - election of, 130–131, 132
 - as God's proof, xxxiii, xxxix, xlviii, xlix, liv, lvii
 - infallibility of, xxix, xlii, 56, 58, n. 21, 115–119
 - moral obligations and, xxxiii, xlvii, 102–103
 - occultations of, xxxiii–xxxiv, 89, 97–98
 - wordly affairs and, 112 - Mu'tazilis and, xxviii
 - on unbelief, 93–94
 - see also* Imāmi Shī'is; al-Ṭūsī
- ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, caliph
- allegiance to Abū Bakr of, 26–27, 28–29
 - Day of the Council and, 115, 125–126, 144
 - Day of the Portico and, 125
 - election of
 - in general, xii, 45 - Ibādīs on, xix, li
 - Ibn Fūrak on, 12
 - Khārijīs on, xix
 - Rāfiḍa on, xviii
 - Umayyads on, xvi
 - ʿUthmānis on, xv
- umarāʾ* / *amīr*, use of term, 56 n. 16
- Umayyads
- on divine right of caliphs, xxxix
 - feud with Hashimids, xiii
 - Khārijīs' insurrections against, xviii
 - rule of, xiii–xiv, li
 - on successors of Prophet, xvi
- unbelief (*kufī*)
- Ibn Fūrak on, 18
 - independent reasoning and, 15–16
 - Khārijīs on, xviii, xix
 - occultations of imams and, 92–94
 - Twelver Shī'is on, 93–94
- unlawful union (*al-farj al-ḥarām*), 117
- Usayd b. Ḥudayr, 133
- uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence), 118
- ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, caliph
- Day of the Council and, 125
 - election of
 - in general, xii, 45 - Ibādīs on, xix, li
 - Ibn Fūrak on, 12–13
 - Ibn al-Malāḥimī on, 125–126
 - Khārijīs on, xix
 - Rāfiḍa on, xviii
 - Umayyads on, xvi
 - ʿUthmānis on, xv–xvi
 - killings of, xviii, 12–13
 - rehabilitation of, xviii
- ʿUthmānis, xv–xvi, xxv n. 19
- Warjalān (Ouargla), li
- al-Warjalānī, Abū ʿAmmār ʿAbd al-Kāfī b. Yūsuf al-Ṭanāwatī
- in general, lx

Index

- al-Warjalānī (Cont.)
 - biography of, li, 140
 - on consensus, 144
 - on dissimulation, 147
 - on God's law, lii–liii
 - on imams/caliphs
 - attributes of, 145
 - dispensability of, lii, liii
 - legitimacy of, li
 - necessity of, 143–145
 - rights of, 146
 - on pious protest, 147
 - works of, *The Concise Book of Doctrines*, li–liii, lx, 140–147
- warlords, xxv, xlv
- witnesses, 28
- women
 - ineligibility for electorate, 21, 22
 - ineligibility for imamate, 36–37, 54, 113–114
 - unlawful union with, 117
- Yahyā b. Zayd, 44
 - yawm al-saqifa*, see Day of the Portico
 - yawm al-shūrā*, see Day of the Council
- Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, xxiii, xxxiv, 44
- Zaydī Shī'īs
 - on imamate/caliphate, xxxiv–xxxv, 42–43
 - on imams/caliphs
 - divine assistance and, lv
 - election of, 124
 - election of, first four, xxxii, xxxiv
 - lineage of, 44, 65
 - missions of, 124–125, 134
 - removal of, 43–44
 - revealed law and, 42–43
 - Mu' tazilīs and, xxviii, xxxiv
 - on Prophet's progeny, xxxiv
 - scholarly attention and, lxi
 - see also al-Hārūnī, al-Nāṭiq bi-'l-Ḥaqq Abū Ṭālib
- al-Zubayr, 13 n. 12, 15, 18, 125, 133

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Titles published in the series thus far

- Aquinas *Political Writings* (edited and translated by R. W. Dyson)
- Aristotle *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens* (edited and translated by Stephen Everson)
- Arnold *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (edited by Stefan Collini)
- Astell *Political Writings* (edited by Patricia Springborg)
- Augustine *The City of God against the Pagans* (edited and translated by R. W. Dyson)
- Augustine *Political Writings* (edited by E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro)
- Austin *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (edited by Wilfrid E. Rumble)
- Bacon *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (edited by Brian Vickers)
- Bagehot *The English Constitution* (edited by Paul Smith)
- Bakunin *Statism and Anarchy* (edited and translated by Marshall Shatz)
- Baxter *Holy Commonwealth* (edited by William Lamont)
- Bayle *Political Writings* (edited by Sally L. Jenkinson)
- Beccaria *On Crimes and Punishments and Other Writings* (edited by Richard Bellamy; translated by Richard Davies)
- Bentham *A Fragment on Government* (edited by Ross Harrison)
- Bernstein *The Preconditions of Socialism* (edited and translated by Henry Tudor)
- Bodin *On Sovereignty* (edited and translated by Julian H. Franklin)
- Bolingbroke *Political Writings* (edited by David Armitage)
- Bossuet *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* (edited and translated by Patrick Riley)
- Botero *The Reason of State* (edited and translated by Robert Bireley)
- The British Idealists* (edited by David Boucher)
- Burke *Pre-Revolutionary Writings* (edited by Ian Harris)
- Burke *Revolutionary Writings* (edited by Iain Hampsher-Monk)
- Caliphate and Imamate: An Anthology of Medieval Muslim Texts on Political Theology* (edited and translated by Hassan Ansari and Nebil Husayn)
- Cavendish *Political Writings* (edited by Susan James)
- Christine de Pizan *The Book of the Body Politic* (edited by Kate Langdon Forhan)
- Cicero *On Duties* (edited by E. M. Atkins; edited and translated by M. T. Griffin)
- Cicero *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (edited and translated by James E. G. Zetzel)
- Comte *Conciliarism and Papalism* (edited by J. H. Burns and Thomas M. Izbicki)
- Comte *Early Political Writings* (edited and translated by H. S. Jones)
- Condorcet *Political Writings* (edited by Steven Lukes and Nadia Urbinati)
- Constant *Political Writings* (edited and translated by Biancamaria Fontana)
- Dante *Monarchy* (edited and translated by Prue Shaw)
- Albert Venn Dicey *Writings on Democracy and the Referendum* (edited by Gregory Conti)

Diderot *Political Writings* (edited and translated by John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler)

The Dutch Revolt (edited and translated by Martin van Gelderen)

Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists (edited and translated by Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff)

The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics (edited and translated by Frederick C. Beiser)

Emerson *Political Writings* (edited by Kenneth S. Sacks)

The English Levellers (edited by Andrew Sharp)

Erasmus *The Education of a Christian Prince with the Panegyric for Archduke Philip of Austria* (edited and translated by Lisa Jardine; translated by Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath)

Fénelon *Telemachus* (edited and translated by Patrick Riley)

Ferguson *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (edited by Fania Oz-Salzberger)

Fichte *Addresses to the German Nation* (edited by Gregory Moore)

Filmer *Patriarcha and Other Writings* (edited by Johann P. Sommerville)

Fletcher *Political Works* (edited by John Robertson)

Sir John Fortescue *On the Laws and Governance of England* (edited by Shelley Lockwood)

Fourier *The Theory of the Four Movements* (edited by Gareth Stedman Jones; edited and translated by Ian Patterson)

Franklin *The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue* (edited by Alan Houston)

Gramsci *Pre-Prison Writings* (edited by Richard Bellamy; translated by Virginia Cox)

Guicciardini *Dialogue on the Government of Florence* (edited and translated by Alison Brown)

Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (writing as 'Publius') *The Federalist with Letters of 'Brutus'* (edited by Terence Ball)

Harrington *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics* (edited by J. G. A. Pocock)

Hegel *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (edited by Allen W. Wood; translated by H. B. Nisbet)

Hegel *Political Writings* (edited by Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet)

Hess *The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings* (edited and translated by Shlomo Avineri)

Hobbes *Leviathan* (edited by Richard Tuck)

Hobbes *On the Citizen* (edited and translated by Michael Silverthorne and Richard Tuck)

Hobhouse *Liberalism and Other Writings* (edited by James Meadowcroft)

Hooker *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (edited by A. S. McGrade)

Hume *Political Essays* (edited by Knud Haakonssen)

Jefferson *Political Writings* (edited by Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball)

John of Salisbury *Policraticus* (edited by Cary J. Nederman)

Kant *Political Writings* (edited by H. S. Reiss; translated by H. B. Nisbet)
 Ibn Khaldūn *Political Thought* (edited and translated by Gabriel Martinez-Gros)
 King James VI and I *Political Writings* (edited by Johann P. Sommerville)
 Knox *On Rebellion* (edited by Roger A. Mason)
 Kropotkin *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (edited by Marshall Shatz)
 Kumazawa Banzan *Governing the Realm and Bringing Peace to All below Heaven*
 (edited and translated by John A. Tucker)
 Lawson *Politica Sacra et Civilis* (edited by Conal Condren)
 Leibniz *Political Writings* (edited and translated by Patrick Riley)
 Lincoln *Political Writings and Speeches* (edited by Terence Ball)
 Locke *Political Essays* (edited by Mark Goldie)
 Locke *Two Treatises of Government* (edited by Peter Laslett)
 Loyseau *A Treatise of Orders and Plain Dignities* (edited and translated by Howell
 A. Lloyd)
 Luther and Calvin on *Secular Authority* (edited and translated by Harro Höpfl)
 Catharine Macaulay *Political Writings* (edited by Max Skjönsberg)
 Machiavelli *The Prince, Second Edition* (edited by Quentin Skinner and Russell
 Price)
 Joseph de Maistre *Considerations on France* (edited and translated by Richard A.
 Lebrun)
 Maitland *State, Trust and Corporation* (edited by David Runciman and Magnus
 Ryan)
 Malthus *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (edited by Donald Winch)
 Marsiglio of Padua *Defensor minor and De translatione Imperii* (edited by Cary J.
 Nederman)
 Marsilius of Padua *The Defender of the Peace* (edited and translated by Annabel
 Brett)
 Marx *Early Political Writings* (edited and translated by Joseph O'Malley)
*Medieval Muslim Mirrors for Princes: An Anthology of Arabic, Persian and Turkish
 Political Advice* (edited and translated by Louise Marlow)
 James Mill *Political Writings* (edited by Terence Ball)
 J. S. Mill *On Liberty and Other Writings* (edited by Stefan Collini)
 Milton *Political Writings* (edited by Martin Dzelainis; translated by Claire
 Gruzelier)
 Montesquieu *The Spirit of the Laws* (edited and translated by Anne M. Cohler,
 Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone)
 More *Utopia* (edited by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams)
 Morris *News from Nowhere* (edited by Krishan Kumar)
 Nicholas of Cusa *The Catholic Concordance* (edited and translated by Paul E.
 Sigmund)
 Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morality* (edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson; trans-
 lated by Carol Diethe)
 Paine *Political Writings* (edited by Bruce Kuklick)
 William Penn *Political Writings* (edited by Andrew R. Murphy)

Plato *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras* (edited by Malcolm Schofield; translated by Tom Griffith)

Plato *Laws* (edited by Malcolm Schofield; translated by Tom Griffith)

Plato *The Republic* (edited by G. R. F. Ferrari; translated by Tom Griffith)

Plato *Statesman* (edited by Julia Annas; edited and translated by Robin Waterfield)

Political Thought in Portugal and Its Empire, c.1500–1800 (edited by Pedro Cardim and Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro)

The Political Thought of the Irish Revolution (edited by Richard Bourke and Niamh Gallagher)

Price *Political Writings* (edited by D. O. Thomas)

Priestley *Political Writings* (edited by Peter Miller)

Proudhon *What Is Property?* (edited and translated by Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith)

Pufendorf *On the Duty of Man and Citizen according to Natural Law* (edited by James Tully; translated by Michael Silverthorne)

The Radical Reformation (edited and translated by Michael G. Baylor)

Rousseau *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch)

Rousseau *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch)

Seneca *Moral and Political Essays* (edited and translated by John M. Cooper; edited by J. F. Procopé)

Sidney *Court Maxims* (edited by Hans W. Blom, Eco Haitsma Mulier, and Ronald Janse)

Sorel *Reflections on Violence* (edited by Jeremy Jennings)

Spencer *Political Writings* (edited by John Offer)

Stirner *The Ego and Its Own* (edited by David Leopold)

Emperor Taizong and ministers *The Essentials of Governance* (compiled by Wu Jing; edited and translated by Hilde De Weerd, Glen Dudbridge, and Gabe van Beijeren)

Thoreau *Political Writings* (edited by Nancy L. Rosenblum)

Tönnies *Community and Civil Society* (edited and translated by Jose Harris; translated by Margaret Hollis)

Utopias of the British Enlightenment (edited by Gregory Claeys)

Vico *The First New Science* (edited and translated by Leon Pompa)

Vitoria *Political Writings* (edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance)

Voltaire *Political Writings* (edited and translated by David Williams)

Weber *Political Writings* (edited by Peter Lassman; edited and translated by Ronald Speirs)

William of Ockham *A Letter to the Friars Minor and Other Writings* (edited by Arthur Stephen McGrade; edited and translated by John Kilcullen)

William of Ockham *A Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government* (edited by Arthur Stephen McGrade; translated by John Kilcullen)

Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (edited by Sylvana Tomaselli)