The Presentation Submitted to the Marja'

1. Views & Ideas of Dr. Sachedina.

2. On the Imãmate & Wilãyat of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Tãlib (a.s.).

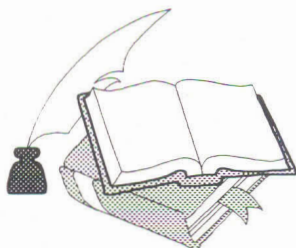3. The Meeting in Najaf with Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni as-Sistani.
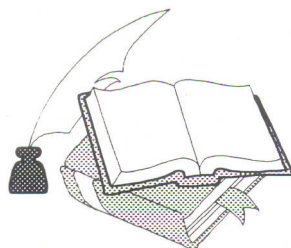
The Presentation Submitted to the Marja‘

1. **Views & Ideas of Dr. Sachedina.**

2. **On the Imãmate & Wilãyat of Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Tãlib (a.s.).**

3. **The Meeting in Najaf with Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid ‘Ali al-Husayni as-Sistani.**

VIEWS & IDEAS OF
DR. ABDULAZIZ A. SACHEDINA

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A. ISLAM
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1. Islam: first a political reality,
then a religious phenomenon

"This is true of all Islamic concepts, since Islam as a religious phenomenon was subsequent to Islam as a political reality." (*Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* [Albany: State University of New York, 1981] p. 4)

2. Religious Pluralism: the idea that there are
more than one right paths & that
Islam does not Supersede other Religions

"The idea that Islam regards itself as the ultimate and perfect religion in the line of the Abrahamic tradition is not difficult from sources other than the Qur'ãn. One might even suggest that the idea of Islam being the only monotheistic tradition that offers an indubitable guarantee of salvation in the hereafter is post-qur'anic... "It is remarkable that the Qur'ãn is absolutely silent on the any notion, however rudimentary, about the abrogation or supersession of the previous Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Judaism" ("Political Implications of the Islamic Notion of 'Supersession' as Reflected in Islamic Jurisprudence," in *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 7 [1996] # 2, p. 159)

Then what is the basis of the Muslims' belief that Islam supersedes other religions? Dr. Sachedina writes:

"Muslim jurists were involved in the routinization of the qur'anic message about 'Islam being the only true religion with God' (Q. 3:19) in the context of the social and political position of the community. The interaction between the idea of Islam being the universal faith for all humankind and the existing predominance of Muslim political power [in the past] created the specific legal language that provided the justification to extend the notion of jihad beyond its strictly defensive meaning in the Qur'ăn to its being an offensive instrument for Muslim creation of a dominant political order." ("Political Implications" p. 159)

"[U]nless Muslim thinkers are willing to recognize the necessity to go beyond the epistemes provided in the classical sources, Islam will continue to remain unresponsive to the emerging pluralism in the global community today." ("Islamic Theology of Christian-Muslim Relations," *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, v. 8 [1997] # 1, p. 33)

Dr. Sachedina also touched on this theme in a lecture entitled 'Social Life in Islam' at Bayview Mosque, Toronto, in May 1990. In it he said:

"If you ask a Christian, he will tell you very frankly that if are not a believer in Christ as Son of God, then you can't be saved. In order to belong to the Jewish community, your mother must be a Jew... And in Islam, masha Allăh, we all believe that we are ahlul janna. Janna has been promised to all of us. And masha Allăh, we the believers in the Imams (a.s.) we are the only ones [to be saved]...
"When Islam becomes part of the society, and if the religion is applied to what I call exclusive claims which all religions do have.

All religions are very particularistic; we do not want to see anybody else having salvation. We also say no other Muslim can ever be saved unless he or she accepts the way we think is the right interpretation of Islam And this creates a problem when Islam becomes then into open, into what I call human relationship in the society How are we going to deal with that situation?

"Here also I use a particular diagram.

"Islam, submission to God, looks at human relationship in the society in a very particular sense. And I want you to understand this very carefully. This is the key to our role in the society in which we are living with religions with other peoples. Let us remember this.
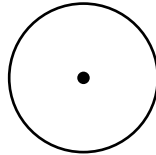
"This center here in this circle is what I call the Divine center; and I explain this to my American students and it makes perfect sense to them...

"We have an important question in our minds when we are dealing with the society. We say truth is only one; truth cannot be two, it cannot be three... The truth has to be only one and universal... a true position necessarily ought to be only one true position. In that case, if I as a Muslim say that I have the truth, I am on the truth, ana 'alal haqq. What does it mean that I possess the truth at the exclusion of the others. This is what I am saying, I am implying very clearly that I am on the truth and nobody else is. Now this creates a problem in the society; and the social role of Islam is not that. The social role of Islam is to create a better human understanding, it is to create a better human relationship. How is it going to help if I were to look at 'I possess the truth?' This is what all the believers believe: Muslims, Christians, Jews and all others: 'We have the truth.' This have is the have of possession. When I possess it, that means you can't have it. If you are not with me as a

Muslim, then you can't have it. So I am excluding you that you are not part of the truth that I possess.

"My whole question is to the Muslims: As Muslims, do we possess truth or are we related to the truth? I am asking a very important question. If we say we possess the truth, that means we have an ownership on the truth. On the contrary, we are related to the truth."

(Uses example of niyyat for salat: qurbatan ilal Lah. Allāh is the truth; I do not possess Allāh but I am related to Allāh as a creature... He is my Creator, I am the creature.)

"That understanding is very very important because it's going to help me to become a member of the society in which I don't have to fight all the time with the people, I don't have to confront, I don't have to be offensive all the time with the people. What I have to do is: I have to establish my relationship with God and work harder so that I do really become very close to God.

"Now let us look at this diagram.
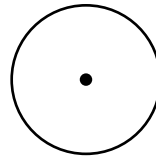
"This **center** is our belief in **God**. And this center is only one. If the centers are multiple, then it is polytheism; then you have many gods claiming your loyalty. On the other hand, this Divine being can be considered very different notion by different people. And there is no harm because I don't have to be the judge. How are others conceiving of this of Divine being? I know that this is Allāh, s.t.; I am related to Him so I am actually moving towards him. As a member of society, I am actually continuously in movement. There is a sort of continuous motion in my goal towards this particular goal which is Allāh, s.t. This **circumference** is the **humanity**. There are human beings. And these are all the paths that human beings have created towards that Divine being. May be this path is going too far; maybe this path is

coming very close but they all are moving towards this universal goal which is the Divinity, the Divine being. That may be a different adjective or even a false conception of this Divine being. Who am I to judge? All are moving towards that.

"What I then need to do is that I must look at the fellow human being as a fellow traveler rather than a competitor, rather than a rival. When I begin to see that person as a fellow traveler, all of a sudden, there is common goal that I see in myself and in the other person. You are already creating a relationship. And this is what I call a human relationship...

"When the goal is the same, how can I be so indifferent; how can I be so righteous, how can I be so self-centered? I am looking at the center and I am moving towards the center. So you can see very clearly that when you understand other religions. I think this is very important...

"Allah ta'ala is saying in the Qur'an so many times; He has reminded us that We have given each one of you communities different laws, different prophets, and you are at variance with each other, and I will make the final judgement on the day of judgement who was right and who was wrong. For the moment, *fastabiqu bil khayrat* — compete with each other in doing good. So compete with each other in doing good is what I call compete with each other in establishing justice. You don't have to condemn each other; you don't have to kill each other; you don't have to hate each other; you don't have to teach your children to hate each other. To hate other religions; by doing so you are blocking, you are blocking an important aspect of the social relationship in which the human dignity must always be respected. Human beings must be respected. And instead of condemning others, you must feel sympathetic to them..."

Question from audience: "If there are many many paths, which is the right path?" Dr. Sachedina answered:

"...I just know one thing that Islam has taught us: *Innad dina 'indal*

lahil islam — the true path is one that submits to Him. I think islam here is not 'I' capital which is a historical Islamic religion starting in seventh century; but I think it is religion of the first human being; dinal fitra, a very natural religion. The path in the eyes of Allāh (s.w.t.) is one that leads to submission of God...

"So we don't have to make a decision today which path is the one that leads to submission of God. We know that we are submitted to God. We don't know that a Hindu who is sitting in front of Krishna whether there is submission to God or to Krishna. We don't read the mind of the Hindu. Therefore I don't think we have to sit in judgement. I don't think we should. This is my personal opinion. I don't hold anybody responsible for this opinion... We don't have to condemn them or oppress them. We should regard them as fellow human beings who are trying to understand the submission to God about which we have the knowledge through our Prophet. Maybe Bhuddism is the same thing. I don't know. So I don't want to sit in the place of God and say 'My dear Hindu, you are the best of my believers.' Or 'O my dear Muslims, jannat is all yours.' I don't want to sit in the place of God. I think one of the tragedies of human history is that we have acted as God. We have even cursed; this man does not believe in this. This man does not believe in that.. Unfortunately, that's none of our business; it's none of our business."

Dr. Sachedina has also mentioned this meaning of 'Islam' in the 2nd speech of Muharram 1419 in Toronto:

"The word '*islam*' does not occur in the Qur'ān more than eight times, and always in the verbal form, never as a noun. Even the famous ayat '*in-nad deena 'indal lahil islam*.' The central word is not islam, it is *deen*... When Allāh (s.w.t.) says 'islam' it means nothing more than submission. '*in-nad deena 'indal lahil islam*' — our usual translation is what? 'Religion in the eyes of God is Islam.' Now I will give you the translation the way the Qur'an says: 'The right way of doing things before God is submitting yourselves.' Islam is not

name of a religion. No, you are mistaken. Islam is a name of an action. Like '*iman*,' '*islam*' (this is known as *babul if 'āl* in Arabic) that means you have firm commitment."

3. Meaning of "al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum"

"'*Al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum* has been interpreted differently than what I understand. 'This day I have perfected your path for you...' You remember the definition that I am using for *deen* is not simply 'religion.' It's a way of conducting your life. It's a way of responding to your life. It's a way of being capable of judging what you are doing. And therefore, '*al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum* — this day I have perfected the path for you...' Does it mean it has been perfected at that particular point? Or is the Muslim community supposed to progressively get into the religion and learn about it, discover it, recover it, so that it can lead itself to its final goal? There's a difference. There's one problem if you believe that the system has been perfected then your eyes are continously in the past. Why do you do that? Because it was perfected at one point in history. My argument is that it was not perfected at that time. Rather the promise was made by Allah (s.w.t.) that this religion will be perfected as human beings begin to discover their own nature and the perfection of their own nature. Because Islam is a religion of nature. It is connected with the human nature." (Speech # 8, Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

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B. THE PROPHET & THE QUR'ÃN

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1. Idealization of the Prophet lead to the belief in him being divinely chosen leader

"The idealization of the Prophet himself gave rise to the notion of his being something more than an ordinary man; he must have been divinely chosen and hence the true leader who could guide his people to salvation." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 3)

2. Should the Muslims change and conform in accordance with the Qur'ãn or is the Qur'ãn to conform to the changing values of the time?

"If this revelation was meant to endure as guidance for humanity as long as it remains on this earth, then it must be adaptable to changing conditions of life and the rethinking of many values. Religious fundamentalism in its extreme forms in the contemporary Muslim world, and even Sunni-Shi'i conservatism, are attempts to cling to the safety of the past, which can have only temporary success.

"I dare to suggest that the time has come for Muslims to start over again at the points in normative tradition where a system of practical reasoning… encouraged judgements of right and wrong by the human mind, without having to look to the revelation for validation of every instance of moral-legal decision." ("Islamic Theology," p. 33)

"The Qur'an remains in the hands of humans who have to decide how to make it relevant to their moral-spiritual existence at a given time and place in history." ("Islamic Theology", p 33)

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C. IMAMATE IN GENERAL

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1. Imamate began as a political issue
& later on acquired religious emphasis

"Most of these early discussions on the Imamate took at first sight political form, but eventually the debate encompassed the religious implications of salvation. This is true of all Islamic concepts, since Islam as a religious phenomenon was subsequent to Islam as a political reality." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 4)

"From the early days of the civil war in A.D. 656, some Muslims not only thought about the question of leadership in political terms, but also laid religious emphasis on it." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 5)

Referring to the support of shi'a of Kufa for the claim of leaders for 'Alids, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"This support for the leadership of the 'Alids, at least in the beginning, did not imply any religious underpinning… The claim of leadership of the 'Alids became an exaggerated belief expressed in pious terms of the traditions attributed to the Prophet, and only gradually became part of the cardinal doctrine of the Imamate, the pivot on which the complete Shi'ite creed rotates." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 6)

After explaining the failures and the martyrdom of the religious leaders who rose against the authorities, he writes:

"This marked the beginnings of the development of a religious emphasis in the role of the 'Alid Imams…" (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

2. The Concept of Ahlul Bayt

"The *shi'a* took advantage of the intimate historical relationship of 'Ali with Muhammad and of the old Arab tribal concept of *ahl al-bayt* (people of the household)—the family from whom chiefs were chosen—and zealously supported the candidacy of the 'Alids..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 6)

3. The Shi'a Ideology

"The factor that contributed to the Shi'i disappointment was the absence of a concrete Shi'ite ideology until the times of the great Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), a descendant of 'Ali through his son al-Husayn, at the time of the 'Abbasid victory. Under this Imam the Shi'ite doctrine of Imamate were formulated." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 8)

4. Evolution in the Concept of Imamate

"The doctrine of the Imamate... was the later systematization of what was known to the early adherents of this school as the idea of the messianic savior of the Islamic peoples. The evolution of the doctrine from a simple notion of a leader who would bring Islamic justice to the oppressed, to a highly complex concept of the eschatalogical Hidden Imam, provides an outline of the history of Shi'ism in Islam.

"In the beginning, because of the unbearable political as well as social circumstances, a group of Muslims had come to look forward to a charismatic leader, not unlike the Prophet himself, who would right all wrongs and deliver the community from misery and distress... But very soon such hopes were frustrated by a series of failures and by the martyrdom of the religious leaders who had attempted to redress the grievances of their supporters by rising against the authorities.

"This marked the beginnings of the development of a religious emphasis in the role of 'Alid Imams, who were now held to be in concealment and whose return was confidently expected.

"The belief in the hidden messiahs was a clear shift in the Imam's temporal role as it has been stressed so far." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

"The doctrine of Imamate as maintained by the Imamites clearly shows its development **from** a simple exaggerated belief in the messianic role of the savior Imam **to** a dogma of the religious leadership with all its theological completes." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 23)

"From al-Sadiq's time there was a **definite shift** in the role of the Imam, and a period of reorientation of the belief in the Imamate toward pacific religious leadership seems to have begun at this time. The 'Alid Imamate, more particularly the Husaynid line, **began to be conceived** as a divinely designated authority based on peculiar religious qualifications, not on a political claim." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 24)

This idea about the gradually evolution of belief is reaffirmed by Dr. Sachedina in his The Just Ruler *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) also:*

"In Shi'ite Islam, matters pertaining to the faith evolved gradually... It was the subsequent version of the Imamate that was passed down to the Imams. Although early disciples of the Imams did not conceive the Shi'i Imamate in two spheres, temporal and religious, with the former being postponed for the future, this division gradually became obvious to them during the Imamate of the fifth and sixth Imams, al-Bāqir and al-Sādiq." (*The Just Ruler* [1988] p. 36)

"However, with the reorientation of the Shi'ite toward a more

politically quietistic posture, by postponing the establishment of true Islamic government to the future, the Imamate became more or less a spiritual office, sustaining the Shi'i aspiration for creation of the ideal public order, with the potential of assuming temporal authonty when the time came for it." (*The Just Ruler* p. 36)

"Among the Shi'i Imams, it was during the Imamate of Ja'far al-Sādiq (d A.D. 765) and his successors that the idea that the 'Alid Imam was the sole legitimate authority—by virtue of his being an infallible leader and authoritative interpreter of Islamic revelation, and therefore qualified to establish the Islamic state— became a distinctive feature of Imami Shi'ism." (*The Just Ruler*, p 89)

5. Wilaya: does it include political leadership or is it confined to religious leadership only?

(a) In the 2nd Speech during Muharram 1419, Dr. Sachedina moves the Prophet, and consequently imamate, away from the political leadership. He says:

"By the way, the Prophet (s.a.w.) was never recognized as the political leader. No, that is not correct at all. He was recognized as Rasul-lah, the envoy of God, the Messenger of Allāh (s.t.). There was no politics, there was no political language attached to it. It isn't that what the moderns are telling us; the way Iran is telling us time and again that the Prophet was a political leader. No. He was recognized fundamentally and essentially as a prophet of God.
"Task of prophethood was to lead the society to perfection. And that perfection could not be done individually — it had to be done as members of the community, the ummah. Ummah means a community under the Prophet as prophet, not a political leader.
"Now we know why '*man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*' meant something very very important. The Prophet (s.a.w.) could have said, '*man kuntu khalifa fa hadha khalifa*.' He

could have said, '*man kuntu hakiman fa hadha hakiman*.' He is not using any of the terminology that we would use in the normal political sense of carrying on the authority of the political leader...

"Look at the word chosen by Allāh (s.t.) for guidance. After all the Prophet is '*ma yantiqu 'anil hawaa in huwa illa wahyun yuhaa*.' He is given instructions. '*Mawla*': what does the word 'mawla' mean? Allāh (s.t.) says in the Qur'ān 'wal kafirun laysa lahum mawla.' The disbeliever has no mawla. They don't have a mawla — they don't have a protector, they don't have a patron, they don't have somebody who cares for them. This is the meaning of mawla...

"The Prophet (s.a.w.) when he introduces Imam 'Ali's authority in the community, what does he say? '*Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*.' What he means is that 'whoever regards me as a perfect example to be followed to the ultimate goal of salvation, 'Ali is the man who should be followed.' The question was of obedience. *Mawla*, one who should be obeyed, one who should not be disregarded. In that sense, Allāh is *Mawla*. Allāh is the *Mawla* of *deen*, that path on which you cannot afford to disobey Allāh (s.w.t.)...

"The Prophet never forced. After he returned to Medina from Ghadir; one night he was home with 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud. He tells 'Abdullah that the messenger has come and wants me to go; that I have received the news of my death. 'Abdullah says, by the way this is after Ghadir, 'Appoint a successor.' Yes, this exactly what he said. 'Why don't you appoint Abu Bakr?' The Prophet shakes his head and says, no. He mentions one after the other. (I don't know about the value of this hadith; Shaykh Mufid mentions it and I am mentioning it on the authority of Shaykh Mufid. I am not here to examine and judge how authentic is the hadith. But I am telling you it reflects the situation in the community. If it is authentic, if reflects the situation in the community...) 'Abdullah's hadith goes; and the Prophet is asking, 'What shall I do?' 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Umar; why don't you appoint 'Uthman?' And

finally, 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Ali?' And the Prophet says, and he is weak by this time, 'O I wish, they would obey. I wish they would obey.'

So apparently, there was a big question of the religious role that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was playing in the community. The community saw itself organized under the leadership of the Prophet (s.a.w.). When he was gone, someone had to replace him in the same position—in the same authority.

"And this is where today we are still searching for the interpretation." (Then Dr. Sachedina talks about the interaction of history and faith and says:)

"The belief system says anybody who had any right to claim obedience after the Prophet Muhammad (saw.) is 'Ali bin Abi Talib That is the meaning of Imamate; it is nothing more than that. You open any book of *kalām*, you will find theologians describing Imam 'Ali has having the right to become *mutā'*, obeyed, one should be obeyed by the people. Why should he be obeyed? Because he is exactly sitting in the place of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)...

"Imam 'Ali was the Imam from the day the Prophet Muhammad closed his eyes. Regardless whether he became a khalifa or not. How can he become an Imam without becoming a khalifa, without sitting on the throne? That was not the requirement. Because the obedience was to the position of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)."

(2nd speech of Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

(b) Then in the 6th speech, Dr. Sachedina, in a way, contradicts his above statement:

"... The fact remains that the Qur'ān conceived the Prophet to be the leader of an *ummah*, an *ummah* that was religious, social and political. In other words, it was civil, moral community that was being guided by a person, who had some kind of comprehensive authority, which was not conceivable at that time even, by the Arab tribes. That was also the difficulty during Ghadir. When Ghadir

happened, one of the challenging dimensions of Ghadir was an introduction of the Qur'anic concept of leadership. *Wilayah* means that kind of leadership, which combines the civil and moral authority in one person. That means there is no separation of power. This is no church and state as such, rather the civil and moral authority combines in the person who holds the office of the wilayah. What was new about it? The new thing about it was this that in the Arab culture, the Arabs were never used to see a young person assuming the leadership. In Arab culture it was impossible for a thirty year old young man to become a leader because the Arabs believed that an older person has to become a leader... "

(c) Again in the 8th speech, Dr. Sachedina brings the political leadership back into the fold of nubuwwat. He says:

"The whole question is 'Is Islam a political system or it's a religious system?' There are two opinions about it. Many scholars are fighting the battle, including Ayatullah Khui, Ayatullah Mutahhair, Ayatullah Khumayni, in Egypt, al-Ashmaawi, al-Jaabiri in Morocco... For me there is a very important issue involved here. If we say that Islam is not a political system, and Islam is simply a religion that is concerned with moving humanity towards self-perfection and prepare humanity for the hereafter, then we are denying a very major role played by the Prophet in the establishment of the *ummah* itself...

"Nine-tenth of Islam is *mu'amalat*, how you deal with each other, how you conduct your affairs in this world because whatever you do in this world has an implication for the aakhirat. Now in that kind of religion, to say that Islam is simply a religion without any social system is to deny the fact of *wilayah*. By the way, if you remember my lecture on the sixth night because *wilayah* means moral, civil authority that can lead you to your ultimate goal of creation, and 'ultimate goal of creation' is not only knowing what is five times a day prayers, fasting, but knowing how to live as human beings in a

society. Otherwise there would not be civil authority, the Prophet could just be what we call *an-nabi ar-ruhi...*" (Speech # 8 at Toronto, Muharram 1419)

(d) Najaf & Qum are alleged to have different views on "the role of the Imam":

"...**Najaf and Qum** are divided on the whole debate about the Prophet's political role. Najaf as one of the most important centres of Shi'a learning, and Qum, now the most important centre of Shi'a learning **have maintained two different views about the role of the Imam... Najaf has maintained a conservative attitude to the role of the Imam.** They believe that religion has a moral function, an ethical function but not a political one, including Ayatullah Khui, whose opinions are well stated. He does not believe that the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) has any need for manifesting itself politically because the Imam remains the Imam as a spiritual, moral, ethical leader regardless whether people pay allegiance to him or not. That opinion was for the first time **contested by Ayatullah Khumayni** himself." (Speech # 9 at Toronto, Muharram 1419)

6. 'Ilm-e Ghayb of the Imams

After mentioning the evolution of Imamate (quoted earlier in # 4), Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The Imams were now believed to possess divine knowledge which enabled them to predict future events, including the proper time for the messianic Imam to strike. The highly speculative aspects of the doctrine of the Imamate should be attributed to the circusmstances in which the Imams manifested political quietism but did not object to certain extravagant claims made for them by their fanatical associates. These claims included the possession of esoteric knowledge inherited through designation by the Imam.

Later on, the very question of designation became one of the pillars of the Imamite doctrine of the Imamate." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18-19)

7. The Doctrine of Badā'

"The alteration of an earlier prophecy of seventy years, then of one hundred and forty to an indefinite future time implied a change of the earlier divine determination. In Imamite dogmatics this divine alteration is known as *badā.*'

"The doctrine of *badā*' was propounded by the early Shi'ite leaders, who, in order to justify their failure to establish a rule of justice in spite of their self-declared prophecies about their victory in a particular political venture, sought to explain the change in circumstances which caused God to alter His determination in their own interest...

"The failure of various Shi'i revolts was conveniently explained by accepting the *badā*' - the intervention of a new circumstances which had caused God to alter His early determination.

"*Badā*' also explained the delay in the appearance of the rightful successor of the Propeht to deliver the umma, which the prophecies like the one cited above had predicted and which should have taken place at a certain moment." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 153)

8. Badā' & the Imamate of Ismā'il bin Ja'far

"Furthermore, it [ie., *badā*'] served to demonstrate the limitations of the Imam's knowledge, more particularly when the succession to the Imamate was contested by more than one person. This happened in the case of **Isma'il, the son of al-Sadiq, who was previously designated as the Imam by his father** and who predeceased him. The change in the decision about the Imamate of Isma'il, designated by the Imam endowed with infallible knowledge, and which was now vested in al-Sadiq's other son, was explained as *badā.*' It implied

God's change of mind because of a new consideration, caused by the death of Isma'il." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 153)

9. The Concept of "al-Qur'ān an-Nātiq"

"The belief that the Imams were the 'speaking (*al-natiq*) Qur'ān,' who knew the esoteric interpretation of the Book, most probably began during al-Baqir's time." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 15)

10. The Number of the Imams

"The dissension within the Imamiyya concerning the Imamate after al-'Askari seems to have reached such an extent that, even among the prominent theologians of this group, at least in the early days following the year 260/873-874, there was no agreement on the number of the Imams." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 54)

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D. THE IMAMATE OF AL-MAHDI

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1. *The basis of believing in the Messiah*

After saying that although the Qur'an did not envision the appearance of al-Mahdi, Dr. Sachedina gives two reasons as the basis for the belief in the Messiah: (1) exaltation of the Prophet; (2) unbearable political circumstances.

The first basis:
"...[I]t was, in all probability, the personal devotion of the faithful to the Prophet that made them await the advent of a divinely guided savior from his family (ahl al-bayt)." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 3)

The second basis:
"In the beginning, because of the unbearable political as well as social circumstances, a group of Muslims had come to look forward to a charismatic leader, not unlike the Prophet himself, who would right all wrongs and deliver the community from misery and distress. The fulfillment of such an expectation was believed to be possible only through a relative of the Prophet, more precisely a descendant of 'Ali and Fatima." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

Both bases:
"The notional exaltation of the Prophet and his rightful successor as a second cause, in addition to the hope of the ill-treated mentioned earlier, gave rise to the very concept of messianic leadership from among the descendants of the Prophet, an Imam who could save the believers." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 5)

2. Sunnis' devotion to Ahlul Bayt & their belief in al-Mahdi is because of Shi'a influence

"The moderate Shi'ites, who were later on to form the bulk of the Shi'ites maintaining the Imamate of the twelve Imams, although insisting on the exalted status of the Imams and allegiance to the twelve successors of the Prophet, maintained relations with the community at large.

"The Imamite accommodation also warranted their continuity and, **indirectly, their pervasive influence in gaining a recognition for the elevated position of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet) in Sunnite circles.** The *walaya* or love and devotion to that family was given an official status in the personal piety of all Muslims, and **the idea of the appearance of the Mahdi** from among the descendants of Fatima through her son al-Husayn **became a widespread Islamic belief**." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 13-14)

"By the early tenth century the Mahdi tradition had gained acceptance even among the Sunnites, especially the idea that the ideal ruler of the Mulims would be among the descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law 'Ali..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 69)

3. Was the Twelfth Imam "the Mahdi"?

"The study of the Imamite sources of this period leads one to assume that, at least at the beginning of the Imamite history, which should be placed at the end of the third/ninth and the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, the twelfth Imam's role was conceived more as al-Qa'im and Sahib al-amr, while no idea about his being al-Mahdi, the eschatological savior of Islam, had yet been accentuated. The title al-Mahdi, with its messianic implications became prominent feature of the Shi'ite creed in the period subsequent to the Short Occultation (A.D. 873-945)." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59)

While talking about the Complete Occultation, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The accentuation on the twelfth Imam's role as the promised Mahdi, the eschatological leader of the Islamic peoples, must be dated from this period when it had become clear to the Imamites that the Qa'im's appearance 'in the near future' was uncertain." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 100)

4. Meaning of "Al-Mahdi": from "ideal leader" to "eschatological sense"

By the time of al-Mufid, the Imamites "recognized the twelfth Imam as the *khatam al-hujaj* and the messianic Imam, the Mahdi, who would appear in the near future." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59)

"The title al-Mahdi, which appeared sometimes along with the title al-Qa'im was, in the beginning, merely a designation for the ideal Islamic ruler. But with the delay in the great social transformation under al-Mahdi's command, the title took on eschatological tones in Imami Shi'ism." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 68)

"It is plausible to maintain that the prolonged occultation of the Imam was one of the factors which contributed toward interiorization of al-Mahdi's function, who became *al-mahdi al-muntazar* (the Awaited) and *mahdi akhir al-zaman* (of the Last Days)..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59-60)

"The eschatological significance of al-Mahdi seems to be a later concept, because even the word *mahdi*, as we have seen above, conveyed a different idea in the beginning, where it was used to show a special mark of the Shi'i Imam who was endowed with a knowledge of secret matters and of the revealed scriptures of God. This meaning should be contrasted with the much later meaning accepted even today by Imamite writers:

'The twelfth Imam is known as the Mahdi because he himself has found the way, and has been entrusted with the task of guiding mankind. Those who will live under his rule will all be Muslims and the followers of the Qur'an by the favor of his guidance.'" (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 65)

5. Ghaybat & its division into Sugra & Kubra

"The two forms of the ghayba are based on traditions, undoubtedly of later origin." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83)

After quoting a hadith from al-Kulayni, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The occultations in this tradition do not state the length of time. This suggests another fact, namely, that until the days of al-Kulayni, who died at the end of the so-called Short Occultation (329/940-41), the two forms of ghayba were not divided into sughra (Lesser) and kubra (Greater), as was the case much later. None of the early sources uses these two terms sughra and kubra for the two occultations. Al-Kulayni in another tradition on this subject uses the terms qasir (short) and tawil (long) for the two occultations...
"The terms *qasir* and *tawil*, as used above do not connote the meaning of *sughra* and *kubra*, which most probably originated in the writings of the Imamites during the Safavid period." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 84)

An-Nawbakhti and al-Kulayni have not mentioned the two types of occulation. (p. 57, 82-84) Al-Nu'mani for the first time spelled out the two forms of ghayba. (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83)

Why were these two forms of ghayba 'fabricated'? Sachedina writes:

"Perhaps it is in the prolongation of the occultation that the reason for the two forms of ghayba for the twelfth Imam must be sought."

(*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83) On the same issue, he also writes: "In all probability, it was the confused situation caused by the 'Abbasid atrocities committed against the descendants of al-Sadiq on one hand, and the confusion over the succession of the Imam Hasan al-'Askari (d. 260/873-74) in Samarra on the other, which became an important factor contributing to the theory of the occult Imamate of the Imami Shi'ism." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 24)

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E. ON *FIQH* & *FUQAHÃ'*

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1. On the two women witnesses being equal to one male witness

Dr. Sachedina describes the event that after the death of Imam Hasan al-ʿAskari (a.s.) some of his companions went to see Hakima (the aunt of the deceased Imam) and asked her: 'Have you seen Sahebul Amr?' After quoting the positive reply from her, Dr. Sachedina says:

"And here I raise a very important point that we in the fiqh we raise: the two women witnesses for one man. **And this is all nonsense. It has no basis on the Qur'ãn.** If it had basis on the Qur'ãn, then the sahaba would have asked Hakima that we need another woman to tell that you are telling us honestly. It is a creation of the fuqaha. [They] had their own problems in understanding the situations. There were not maʿsum."
(Speech on 1 April 1988 / 15 Sha'ban 1408 at Bayview Mosque)

2. On the niyãbat-e ʿãmm (general deputyship) of the mujtahidin

"The important question that must be raised at this point is, where and when does the much later interpretation of the delegation, albeit indirect, of this prerogative of the niyaba to the Imamite jurists (mujtahidun) begin? The only tradition cited by the later Imamite scholars in support of the indirect niyaba of the Imamite jurists during the second occultation is contained in a letter from the twelfth Imam received by a person named Ishaq b. Yaʿqub in reply to his enquiries about some religious questions...The tradition under consideration is as follows:

'As for the events which may occur [in future when you may need guidance in religious matters] refer to the transmitters (ruwat) of our sayings (hadith) who are my hujja to you and I am the Hujja of God to you all.'

"The text of the hadith as cited above seems to have been tampered with during the later period when tremendous importance must have been attached to this tradition. The text preserved by Tusi has the last part of the sentence as follows: '.. and I am the hujja to you all ('alaykum).' On the other hand, Majlisi's text reads: '...and I am the hujja to them (the transmitters) ('alayhim).' By this latter reading only the transmitters would become directly answerable to the Imam and not all the Shi'ites, who would have to follow the rulings of one of these ruwat, in case of difficulty. This would necessarily add to their power in deciding matters pertaining not only to religion but also to social and political problems." (*Islamic Messianism* [1981], p. 100-101)

After saying that the Persian translator of Majlisi's Bihār al-Anwar has interpreted the word 'transmitters' in the meaning of 'mujtahids', Dr. Sachedina comments:

"The absence of such an interpretation in Majlisi's text itself suggests that this interpretation of the ruwat as the mujtahids belongs to the Qajar period of Iranian history when the power of the mujtahids increased tremendously... In all probability, this rise of power of the mujtahids began in the Safavid period when persons like Majlisi rose to eminence." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 101)

Dr. Sachedina reaffirms his opinion about 'intentional tampering' of the above hadith in his The Just Ruler (1988).

"I have discussed this rescript in my *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 100-101, where I have explained the problem, together with the preserved texts and variations in them, reflecting some intentional tampering with the rescript." (*The Just Ruler* [1988] p. 271)

3 A new concept of 'ijtihād' & 'niyābat' of Imam Zamāna (a.s.)

After talking about the principles of intizār and ijtihād as explained by Dr. 'Ali Shari'ati, Dr. Sachedina says:

"Now I will draw a larger conclusion here, a larger conclusion here, that as long as we treat each other with justice, as long as we treat each other with consideration, then we have the access to Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan's will among us. It cannot be otherwise. **That will of Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan is not in Najaf or Qum!** It is right here in this community! ...

"Without *ijtihād*, this community will die of Imam's presence. You cannot live without ijtihad, and my friends, *ijtihād* is not limited to five, six people. As Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq has taught us, as long as we have ethics, we have morals, we have spirituality, we can be sure that the Imam is with us. **Let us stop mystifying the Imam. This is mystification of the Imam.** Had it not been for Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan, this community would not have existed today. But he left with us a very dynamic principle. Think; my friends, *ijtihād*! *Rahmatullahi 'alayh*, Dr. 'Ali Shar'ati, they don't like him; they curse him. Yah, they curse him; they say he was kafir; I don't know, he was this, he was that. He was a Sunni, he was this, that. What a world we are living in my friends. It's not a tolerant world at all.

"You know the problem? We are faced with freedom around us, and we are frightened by it. We say, my God, the best thing is to go into the cocoons, withdraw and not face, like the ostrich. In the desert, it puts its head in the sand says, I will not worry about anything, this is my world. And Imam says no, this is your world. Go out, you are my ambassadors, you are my representatives. There is no Special representation. The specific niyabah of Imam (a.s.) ended with the four wukala. **Today, any Shi'a can represent the will of the Imam.** If you see a man of character; I am telling you, if you see a man of character, if you see a man of honesty, if you see a man of God, by

God it's not very difficult, it's very objective. Those who cheat you, look into their eyes, and see for a moment, and you will discover the lies. You can't hide lies for a long time. . . See into their eyes, and you will discover there are lies. **And there are people, who, without any pretensions, without any kind of hanging robes or turbans on their head, they represent Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan, in truth, in action.** (Speech # 9, Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

4. Tension between 'being part of the modern society' & 'being followers of Ahlul Bayt'

"There is a tension in our being part of the modern society and being the followers of the Ahlul Bayt, there is a tension.. There are severe tensions in our functioning as full members of the society because there is a conflict situation. We find our modern selves are not completely operative in the society the way we think we should be operative. There are certain teachings, there are certain understanding of Islam, the way we have understood it, and the way we have inherited it. And our inheritance sometimes becomes an obstruction to the right type of understanding of our religion...

"You want to see an example, I will give you an example.. that is in the book of Ayatullah Khui that I translated and Oxford is printing, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'ān*, and Ayatullah Khui, to my bafflement, I was, I was, I didn't like it when I read it. I will be honest with you, Ayatullah Khui was our marja-e taqlid, well and good, but as a scholar, I could not, and when I will tell you, you will say we too don't agree with him. For example, he criticizes one of the Egyptian scholars who says that slavery is irrelevant in the modern times even if the Qur'an says about it. He is talking about *al-Manaar*; Rashid Ridha is being criticized by Ayatullah Khui that Rashid Ridha is under the influence of modernity and he is criticizing the Qur'an. No I don't think; when I read, I checked al-Manaar, by the way, and I read that what he says that, that institution of slavery is not relevant today; it may have been

relevant at one point, it is no more relevant today. Ayatullah Khui is criticizing Rashid Ridha saying that no you can't say that an institution that is described in the Qur'an or is sanctioned by the Qur'an should become irrelevant today. In other words, there should be slavery, You and I will not agree with it even if he's the greatest 'alim of ours. Isn't that true?...And in my opinion, Ayatullah Khui's view point there is not correct. I don't think he is criticizing Rashid Ridha correctly."

(Speech # 10 in Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

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ON THE IMÃMAT OF ‘ALI BIN ABI TÃLIB (A.S.)

In 1995, Dr. Abdul ‘Aziz Sachedina published an article in the Bio-Ethics Encyclopedia (vol. 3, p. 1289) entitled as "Islam" in which he has briefly presented the early history of Islam also. On the issue of succession (khilãfat), Dr. Sachedina writes:

"Muhammad died in 632 C.E., having brought the whole of Arabia under the Medina government. However, he had left no explicit instructions regarding succession to his religious-political authority."

When this article was distributed on the Internet in the Shi‘a community, Dr. Sachedina became even more a controversial figure than before. And when Br. Muhsin Jaffer and Br. Murtaza Lakha sent some questions to him pertaining to the article, Dr. Sachedina insisted on the correctness of his writing and replied:

"On the question whether there were no EXPLICIT instructions regarding succession to the Prophet's 'religious-political authority' let it be clear that the statement while asserting that there was no EXPLICIT (that is, distinctly expressed, clearly stated, not merely implied) instructions in the matter of succession to the 'Prophet's religious-political authority,' it asserts by implication that there was IMPLICIT (that is, necessarily involved though not plainly expressed) direction in the matter.

"This implicit direction of the Prophet was expressed on several occasions in his life-time, including finally at al-Ghadir. It was also because of this absence of explicit statement

on these occasions that Imam 'Ali never used any of these occasions, including al-Ghadir, to put forward his candidacy as the only rightful successor of the Prophet."

After 21st of Ramadhan 1418, Dr. Sachedina issued a statement via the Internet in which he wrote:

"The foundation ot our faith, that is the Shi'a faith, is based on this IMPLICIT sense. Historically (the only position that can be taken in the article here) the source of dissension in the early community was the absence of EXPLICIT directions regarding the succession in community.

"The statement of the wilaya (man kuntu mawa fa hadha 'Aliyyun mawla), which is the main documentation for the Shi'a acclamation in support of the Imamate of Imam 'Ali, is regarded as an implicit rather than explicit statement of the Prophet regarding the 'succession of his comprehensive authority.' The reason is that the word mawla in Arabic is ambiguous as far as the 'succession' itself is concerned."

When the objections of some Shi'a brothers increased, in the last days of Ramadhan 1418, Dr. Sachedina issued a general ciruclar addressed to the Shi'as via the Internet:

"I am taking this opportunity to state in the most ABSOLUTE terms that not only do I believe in the unequivocal authenticity of the event of al-Ghadir which took place on the 18th of Dhul- Hijja, 11 AH/632 CE; I believe that the statement by the Prophet: 'Everyone whose master I am, also has 'Ali as a master,' to be the explicit desgination of the Imam 'Ali to the office of the Leadership of Muslim Community, as upheld in the Twelver Shi'a faith."

* * *

Finally, after the Ashura of 1419, Dr. Sachedina faxed to some Shi'a brothers in Toronto copy of the letter that he had sent to the publishers of the Encyclopedia in which he had asked them to amend the problematic paragraph as follows:

> "Muhammad died in 632 C.E., having brought the whole of Arabia under the Medina government. However, although he had explicitly designated his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, to succeed him, he had left no written guidelines about the political process."

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In the 4th speech of Muharram 1419, Dr. Sachedina talked about this controversy and while criticizing his opponents in Toronto, he said:

> "How can such a thing divide the community when it is such a trivial part, and it is not even part of the faith."

In the same speech, he also said:

> "That historical event, what does it have any connection with our belief system? So if I said in my article that the Prophet (s.a.w.) did not leave any explicit instruction about his successor, am I treading the path which is dangerous to the survival of the religion of the Ahlul Bayt? Or am exercising my right as a researcher to see what the documents say?"

Again, in the same speech, he said:

> "Yes, al-Ghadir is an explicit designation; it does not mean explicit instruction about the political process. No history supports that."

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