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**Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī and Safavid Shi'ism:  
Akhbarism and Anti-Sunni Polemic during the reigns of Shāh 'Abbās the  
Great and Shāh Ṣafī**

Robert Gleave (University of Exeter)

**Abstract**

The rise of the Akhbārī school in the Safavid period has been portrayed as a challenge to both the clerical power of the *'ulamā'* and sometimes even as in opposition to the Safavid state. As a counter example to these characterisations of Akhbarism, one might consider the example Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1070/1659), known as "The First Majlisī", and father of the famous Safavid scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī ("The Second Majlisī", d.1110/1699 or 1111/1700). He had close relations with the Safavid court, dedicating a work to Shah Abbas II, and generally accepting royal patronage when it was offered. His system of legal interpretation and the analysis of hadith in particular, is thoroughly Akhbārī. In this article I analyse Taqī al-Majlisī's ideas as found in the introductory sections to his *Lawāmi'-i Ṣāhibqirānī*, a Persian language commentary on an early collection of Twelver Shī'ī reports from the Imams. As an appendix I translate one section which demonstrates not only his thoroughly Akhbārī methodology, but also his originality with the Akhbārī school. He should, I argue, be particularly remembered for promoting the authority of the *'ulamā'* from an Akhbārī perspective.

**Introduction**

The Akhbārīs (Arabic: Akhbāriyya/Akhbariyyūn; Persian: Akhbariyān) were a group of Shī'ī religious scholars who held that the reports of the Imams were the sole source of religious (particularly legal) knowledge. All other sources of religious knowledge were if not invalid, then subservient to the Imams' reports (*akhbār*). They rose to prominence among the *'ulamā'* of Safavid Iran (normally dated 1501-1722), and continued to be influential well into the nineteenth century and the Qajar period. The sudden appearance of Akhbarism has been subject to a number of interpretations in the secondary literature, and elsewhere I have surveyed the theories, and offered my own interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Here is not the place to rehearse the arguments and counter-arguments around the history and nature of Akhbarism. Suffice it to say, there has not yet emerged a settled position on why Akhbarism appeared (or for some, reappeared) when and where it did, why it gained popularity (perhaps even dominance) in Safavid Iran, and why it had all but disappeared in Iran by the end of the Qajar period. In this

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<sup>1</sup> See the sources cited and analysed in Gleave 2007: 1-31. To these can now be added Newman 2008: 206ff and Abisaab 2015.

article, I aim to illustrate the key elements of the Akhbārī conception of valid religious knowledge by reference to the multi-volume Persian language commentary on a collection of the Imams' reports by the Safavid scholar Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1070/1659). The collection is the famous *Man lā Yaḥdaruhu al-Faqīh* ("He who is not in the presence of a Jurist") by Ibn Babawayh (d.381/991), and Taqī al-Majlisī's commentary is titled *Lawāmi'-i Šāhibqirānī* (also known by the Arabic title *al-Lawāmi' al-Qudsiyya*).<sup>2</sup> The commentary runs to 8 volumes in its printed edition, and throughout the work, Taqī al-Majlisī takes passages and reports found in the original work, and subjects them to detailed analysis, including addressing questions of meaning and authenticity. The primary focus in this article is the twelve introductory remarks ("useful comments" – *fawā'id*) which preface the work and are found in the edition's first volume. In these *fawā'id*, Taqī al-Majlisī outlines his approach to knowledge and the scholar's dependence on the sayings of the Imams (*akhbār*) for deriving this knowledge. Many of the ideas expressed in these *fawā'id* are clearly influenced by standard Akhbārī views, particularly those found in the supposed founding tract of Akhbārism *al-Fawā'id al-Madaniyya* by Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d.1033 or 1036/1623-4 or 1626).<sup>3</sup> In an appendix to this article, I include a translation of the tenth "useful comment": "on the censure of juristic reasoning and baseless opinions" (*dar madhammat-i ijtiḥād wa-ārā'-i bāṭilah*),<sup>4</sup> in which Taqī al-Majlisī takes up the well-known Akhbārī polemic against individual juristic reasoning (*ijtiḥād*), a concept which acted as the basis for the authority of the Akhbārī's opponents, the *mujtahids*.

At least some of Muḥammad Taqī b. Maqṣūd 'Alī al-Majlisī's ancestors came from Jabal 'Āmil in Lebanon, probably coming to Iran in the early Safavid period.<sup>5</sup> The number of 'Āmilī scholars who came to Iran, and the nature of the migration, if it can be called such has been discussed and disputed in the secondary literature.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, Taqī al-Majlisī grandfather, Kamāl al-Dīn Darwīsh (date n.k.) is recorded with the *nisba* al-'Āmilī, coming to Iran after having studied in Jabal 'Āmil with the important late classical Shī'ī jurist Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (known as the "second Martyr - al-Shahīd al-Thānī – martyred in 965/1558). Kamāl al-Dīn Darwīsh was based in Natanz, and it may have been here that Taqī al-Majlisī was born (in 1003/1594-95) and received his initial education. Details on his early life are scarce, but if, as is recorded, he studied with the renowned Safavid scholar 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī (or Shushtarī, d. 1021/1612), it must have been in that scholar's last years. Al-Tustarī is known to have taught hadith and favoured their use in legal derivation. Elsewhere I have labelled him a

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<sup>2</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH.

<sup>3</sup> Astarābādī 1424AH.

<sup>4</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 87-99.

<sup>5</sup> Sources for Taqī al-Majlisī's life used in the following brief summary include: 'Āmilī 1965: 2, 252; Baḥrānī 1406AH: 57-58; Jurfadaqānī 1364Sh: 144-145; Khwānsārī 1991: 2, 114-19; Mudarris 1967-70: 5, 198-201; Qummī 1327: 439-46; Tunukābunī 1992: 230-45, 250-51. Useful encyclopaedia entries include: Hairī 2012; Brunner 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Newman 1993; Abisaab 1994.

“proto-Akhbarī”<sup>7</sup> – and Taqī al-Majlisī’s Akhbarī tendencies may date from this early tutelage. Give the timings, it seems likely that Taqī al-Majlisī studied with al-Tustarī, and later (or concurrently) with al-Shaykh al-Bahā’ī (Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī, d. 1032/1623). He continued, it seems, teaching in Isfahan during the later years of the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I after al-Shaykh al-Bahā’ī death. Taqī al-Majlisī himself recounts that he travelled to Najaf in the winter of 1628-29 (i.e. 5 years after al-Shaykh al-Bahā’ī’s death) as he there had a dream in which Imam ‘Alī ordered him to return to Isfahan to guide the people. They would need this guidance as Shah ‘Abbās was to die that year, and there would be chaos (*fitnah*) before Shāh Ṣafī assumed the throne. This dream, when communicated to Shah Ṣafī led to a close relationship between the two.<sup>8</sup> In Isfahan, during the reign of Shah Ṣafī and into the reign of Shah Abbas II, Taqī al-Majlisī was the prayer leader in the Friday Prayer Mosque in Isfahan, a position which would have enabled his son to become a confidant of the Shah in later years. He died in 1070/1659-60, in his late sixties, and was buried in the Friday Prayer Mosque in a mausoleum, where subsequent members of his family were also buried.<sup>9</sup>

Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī is often referred to as “Majlisī the First” (Majlisī-yi Awwal; al-Majlisī al-Awwal) in the Shī’ī tradition. The “Second Majlisī” (Majlisī-yi duwum; al-Majlisī al-Thānī) is his more famous son, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1110/1699 or 1111/1700), whose deep involvement in the Safavid state has been the subject of much study to date.<sup>10</sup> The Second Majlisī is regularly critiqued for his close relationship with the Safavid Shah ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-1666), for his rejection (or, for some, persecution) of Sufism, and for popularising an uncritical, sectarian (“exoteric”) version of the Shī’ī faith. This is contrasted with Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī’s alleged affiliation with Sufi teachings and organisations.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent Shī’ī traditions, both Sufi and anti-Sufi, have attempted to claim him as their own; his own son, Muḥammad Bāqir felt the need to refute the allegations that his father was linked to Sufism saying, “If you think that my father was a Sufi, he only appeared as one of them in order to turn them away from their false beliefs”.<sup>12</sup> This does appear a rather forced apologetic response, and the historical likelihood is that *taṣawwuf* or similar disciplines were amongst Taqī al-Majlisī varied intellectual interests. He is described as extremely pious and observant, uninterested in acquiring wealth. His intellectual expertise included the usual religious disciplines (Quranic commentary, hadith transmission, jurisprudence),

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<sup>7</sup> Gleave 2007: 165.

<sup>8</sup> The dream is recounted in the editors introduction to Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: bā’.

<sup>9</sup> Chardin gives a description of the tomb and notes that his asceticism led to his veneration by the people. Chardin, 1735: 7, 159.

<sup>10</sup> Arjomand 1984; Turner 2000; Newman 2008; 217-241.

<sup>11</sup> The fullest account of Taqī al-Majlisī’s career and relationships with the state in English is Babayan 2002: 257-67. Babayan does not, however, mention Taqī al-Majlisī’s Akhbarism; she does, however, provide a evocative account of court politics of in which Taqī al-Majlisī played a role.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Baḥrānī 1406AH: 59, though he is unsure of the source citing two possible works by Baqīr al-Majlisī.

but also ethics and some natural sciences (an interest which may have come from his time as a pupil of al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī).

Taqī al-Majlisī's Akhbārī leanings, though, naturally led to a focus on the collections of reports of the Imams. His two extended commentaries (one in Persian, the other in Arabic) on Ibn Bābawayh's *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh* (referred to scholars simply as *al-Faqīh*) remain his most cited and influential works. In *al-Faqīh*, Ibn Bābawayh collected reports from the Imams on legal matters, ordered them according to the chapter headings of a work of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).<sup>13</sup> When Ibn Bābawayh finds no reports which announce a legal rule, he inserts his personal legal exposition. These interjections are rarely presented as personal opinion, though. Rather they are presented as the religious law of the Shī'a, and almost always stated rather than argued for. The result is what might be termed a hybrid work, somewhere between a collection of hadith and a *fiqh* composition. The law is presented through the reports of the Imams, and supplemented by the bald statement of legal rules. The respect amongst the Shī'ī jurists afforded to *al-Faqīh* is evidenced in its being, in time, considered one of the "Four Books" (*al-kutub al-arba'a*) from which Shī'ī legal doctrine is presented as derived. Taqī al-Majlisī, then, took *al-Faqīh* as his base text for two commentaries, one in Arabic (*Rawḍat al-Muttaqīn*),<sup>14</sup> and the other in Persian (*Lawāmi'i Šāhibqirānī*). These two multi-volume works reflect Taqī al-Majlisī's life-long scholarly focus on the understanding of the *akhbār* of the Imams. The Arabic *Rawḍa* is reported to have been completed in 1046AH, and was viewed with such respect, that Shah 'Abbās II asked him to compose another in Persian. The *Lawāmi'*, with its royal title ("The Illuminations of the Lord of the Auspicious Conjunctions") was a response to this request, and covers only the first half of *al-Faqīh*.<sup>15</sup>

Taqī al-Majlisī's concentration on the *akhbār* of the Imams has led most commentators to consider him an Akhbārī, or at least influenced by Akhbārī ideas.<sup>16</sup> To my knowledge, Taqī al-Majlisī never explicitly describes himself as an "Akhbārī", though as will become clear, hallmark Akhbārī doctrines are found throughout the text. In any case (and as I have argued elsewhere), Akhbarism as a "school" with which a scholar might explicitly identify post-dates Taqī al-Majlisī.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, there is much evidence (not least of all in the following analysis) that Taqī al-Majlisī's approach to the religious sciences had much in common with that promoted by the so-called founder of Akhbarism, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī. The evidence for this assertion lies first in Taqī al-Majlisī's occasional explicit references to Astarābādī and his ideas; and second in his (usually un-credited) adoption of Astarābādī's critique of the *mujtahids* and their reliance on personal opinion.

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<sup>13</sup> Gleave 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1393AH.

<sup>15</sup> Ṭihirānī 1936-1975: 18, 369-370.

<sup>16</sup> Apart from my own assessment, see Newman 1992 and Brunner 2002 along with most of the Shī'ī biographical dictionaries cited above.

<sup>17</sup> Gleave 2007: 173.

## Taqī al-Majlisī's Assessment of Astarābādī

Regarding the first sort of evidence, Taqī al-Majlisī's much cited comment on the founding tract of Akhbārism, Astarābādī's *al-Fawā'id al-Madaniyya*, indicates sympathy for the Akhbārī approach. The passage is taken from one of the "useful comments" prefacing the *Lawāmi'i-ṣ-Ṣāhibqirānī*:

Around 30 years ago, Muḥammad Amīn-i Astarābādī occupied himself with examining and studying the *akhbār* of the sinless Imams. He studying unfounded opinions and comparisons. Having acquired knowledge of the way of the companions of the honourable, sinless Imams, he wrote the *Fawā'id-i madaniyya*, and sent it to this country [viz. Iran]. Most of the people of Najaf and the Holy 'Atabāt approved of his method, and returned to [or "began referring to"] the *akhbār*. The truth is that much of what Mawlānā Muḥammad Amīn said is true. Generally, the way of this Humble [servant, i.e. Taqī al-Majlisī] is a middle way between exaggeration and excess. This is the way I demonstrated, step by step, in *Rawḍat al-Muttaqīn*. God willing, in this commentary I shall also, in general terms, bring it to [the reader's] attention. Its general point is as follows:

If there is a scholar who [1] is fully acquainted with the blessed way of the Imams, studying assiduously their *akhbār* and [2] can combine the [contradictory] reports coming from them, and [3] is just, or rather, he abandons [the desires] of this world (*tārik-i dunyā*), then one can act on the basis of his findings; moreover, it is obligatory for the ordinary believer (*'āmmī*) to act on his findings, and in doing so he is not following his opinion, but rather is acting on the opinion of God, the Prophet and the sinless Imams.<sup>18</sup>

It could be argued that a passage such as this does not add up to a full endorsement of the Akhbārī methodology introduced into Shī'ī thinking by Astarābādī. "Most of what Astarābādī said is true" (*akthar-i ānchah Mawlānā Muḥammad Amīn guftah-ast, ḥaqq-ast*), but for Taqī al-Majlisī he wants a middle way, not tending to extremes. This way, he explains, places the role of the scholar as the conduit of knowledge from the Imams to the ordinary, unlearned believer. Clearly, Astarābādī's message had been interpreted as a rejection of the '*ulamā*'s role in the community; Taqī al-Majlisī appears to accept the general thrust of Astarābādī's argumentation (i.e. that the process of deriving legal norms known as *ijtihād* had gone too far, and had become untethered from the revelatory texts). However, this, for him, does not amount to a rejection of all scholarly authority. The community still needs experts, and these experts are the '*ulamā*'; the '*ulamā*' should, though, pass on knowledge (*'ilm*) rather than opinions (*ārā*'). What is also of interest, given Taqī al-Majlisī's alleged association with Sufism, is that he stipulates that the scholar to be followed is not merely a "just" (*'adl*), but one who is ascetic, and who does not seek the pleasures (and perhaps prestige) of this world (*tārik-i dunyā*). Characterising a scholar as ascetic is, of course, a trope, but it is nonetheless possible Taqī al-

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<sup>18</sup> Taqī Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 47-48.

Majlisī is discrediting scholars who are overly concerned with the cares of this world.

Whether this really constitutes a modification of Astarābādī's message is a separate issue. Akhbarism generally, and this could be said of Astarābādī as much as for subsequent Akhbārīs, did not aim to undermine the authority of the scholarly class *per se*; but rather it was the authority of the those who claimed to be *mujtahid* who were primarily in their sights.<sup>19</sup> What is clear, though, is that Taqī al-Majlisī sees Astarābādī's searing critique of *ijtihād* as potentially undermining of the '*ulamā*'s authority, and hence he embarks on an attempt to re-express the basis of this authority through reference to the *akhbār* themselves. The above passage, where he explicitly references Astarābādī, comes from the sixth "useful comment" (*fā'ida*) of the introduction of the *Lawāmi*, entitled, "Concerning the qualities of the scholars ('*ulamā*') of religion from whom one might acquire knowledge" (*dar awṣāf-i 'ulamā-yi dīnī ast kih az īshān akhdh-i 'ilm tavān namūd*). That *fā'ida* begins with a strident assertion that all knowledge comes from the Imams, and that after the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, the Shī'a follow the recorded *akhbār* of the Imams. They follow the sayings of the Imams instead of following the orders of the rulers of the time (*salāṭīn-i ān waqt*), even if some of those rulers were themselves Shī'i. At the time, the '*ulamā*' also put forward that they were 'those who have authority' (*ulū al-amr*, cf. Q4/al-Nisā'.59). Citing Quranic commentaries (*tafsīr*) from the past, Taqī al-Majlisī illustrates how the Sunni '*ulamā*' and the rulers claim religious authority, when in truth that should be reserved for a sinless individual (namely, the Prophet and the Imams). With these developments and the emergence of the various Sunni schools of law (*madhāhib*), the study and preservation of the *akhbār* was neglected. Even the Shia themselves began to dispute amongst themselves, and individual scholars began to assert their own authority, and gather supporters (*muqallidān*) around them. The emergence of Muhammad Amīn al-Astarābādī halted this trend (it is at this point in the *fā'ida* that the above passage is to be found). Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisī next cites a barrage of citations from the Imams and Quranic commentaries to demonstrate the qualities of a scholar one should follow.<sup>20</sup> They all involve a dedication to the study of the hadith, a piety which protects them from twisting words to suit their own ends, and a rejection of the pursuit of worldly fame and profit from the study of the *akhbār* of the Imams. One story tells of a miscreant scholar came to join the service of Shaykh Ṣafī Ardabīlī. When Shaykh Ṣafī saw his disreputable situation, he cited a report from Imam 'Alī who says "there is a millstone that grounds the heads of the debauched '*ulamā*', the miscreant Qur'an reciters, the oppressive tyrants and the traitorous ministers". The miscreant scholar replies "my head will be given to the share of the miller".<sup>21</sup> The message of all these reports is not to undermine the scholars, but to establish the authority of one type of scholar (pious, other-worldly, and devoted to preserving the message of the Imams as found in the *akhbār*) over another.

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<sup>19</sup> Gleave 2001; 220-222.

<sup>20</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 48-56.

<sup>21</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 55.

Taqī al-Majlisī's other reference to Astarābādī can be found in the introduction to the *Rawḍat al-Mutaqqīn*, during a discussion of whether all the *akhbār* of the Imams produce knowledge, or just some of them. Taqī al-Majlisī references a debate between two (apparently Akhbārī) positions. On the one hand, there are those who treat the *akhbār* as producing knowledge, irrespective of where they come from; and on the other hand, there are those who reject some *akhbār*, because they only produce opinion (*ẓann*) and not knowledge, and the *akhbār* make it clear we cannot act on the basis of *ẓann*. The reason why both opinions have an Akhbārī appearance is that they both appeal to the notion that knowledge rather than presumption (*ilm* rather than *ẓann*) must be the basis for action. This principle leads one to reject many reports as unfounded, and leads the other to treat all reports as if they are reliable. Taqī al-Majlisī's position is that you need to be discriminating – each report should be classified according to its chain of transmission, but also on the circumstantial evidence (*qarā'in*) that surrounds it. The latter can, on occasions make up for deficiencies in the former. In conclusion he writes:

And so, it is clear that some [or one] of the contemporary scholars is excessive in acquiring knowledge from these reports, to the point where they derive knowledge from any report attributed to the Imam, even if it was transmitted by a Sunni. There is also exaggeration of others when they reject the *akhbār* on the basis that they are isolated transmissions, and only provide us with an opinion, which we are prohibited from following. Both of these positions have departed from the just way. It is clear that one is permitted to act on a sound report, even if there is no circumstantial evidence to support [its reliability], providing it does not conflict with the Qur'an, or the well-attested *Sunna*. Indeed, [it is permitted] to act on the basis of an unsound report which has supporting circumstantial evidence, as I have already made clear in a number of books, and which I will make clear in an expanded book in the future, for this view is similar to [that held] by many of the people today, by reference to the opinion of the honourable Astarābādī. Most of them incline towards his position without looking deeply into his statements which include numerous contradictions.<sup>22</sup>

Now this also does not come across as a ringing endorsement of Astarābādī's opinion either, but it is not a total condemnation either. The opinion of Astarābādī is the view of the majority of (Akhbārī) scholars – reports with an unsound chain of transmission are not completely useless, but can be raised from the status of presumption to that of knowledge by a consideration of the circumstantial evidence. This is also the view that Taqī al-Majlisī wishes to defend. However, Taqī al-Majlisī argues, those who follow Astarābādī have not examined his views carefully enough, because his position does contain “numerous contradictions” - Taqī al-Majlisī does not explain what these might be. Nonetheless the main point is that, as with the passage from the *Lawami'*, there is not here a full-blooded commitment to Astarābādī's critique; instead there is a partial approval, with an attempt to prevent some of his

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<sup>22</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī, 1414AH: 1, 21.

contemporaries from following Astarābādī's opinion indiscriminately. Taqī al-Majlisī is, once again, recommending a judicious attitude towards Astarābādī's Akhbarism rather than a whole-hearted adoption.

### **Taqī al-Majlisī's *Akhbār*-based approach in the *Lawāmi'-i Sāhibqirānī***

Taqī al-Majlisī, in his introductory sections to this Persian commentary, extols the importance of the *akhbār* of the Imams as the sole source of religious knowledge. In these twelve sections, he is not constrained to commenting on the text itself and has created this free space in which he can explore issues of more general and methodological concern. Taqī al-Majlisī uses this introduction to expound on the centrality of the reports from the Prophet and the Imams in the discovery of knowledge, and the weakness of knowledge gained from other sources. The Akhbārī resonance of such an approach is obvious, even though he at no point identifies himself as an Akhbārī.

The titles of the 12 'useful comments' (*fawā'id*) sections cover most of the areas needed to ensure the reader is fully informed about the importance of the hadith commentary he is about to read:

- F1 (*Fā'ida* 1): On the Excellence of Knowledge and the 'ulamā'.
- F2: On the Obligation to Seek Knowledge.
- F3: On those Types of Knowledge Which it is Necessary to Follow.
- F4: On the Knowledge of the Sinless People of the House (the descendents of the Prophet - *ahl al-bayt*).
- F5: In the Obligation to Refer, in all types of Knowledge, to the Sinless Imams.
- F6: On the Qualities of the 'ulamā' of Religion from whom One can take Knowledge.
- F7: On Explaining the Differences between the Reports and how to Combine Them.
- F8: On Getting a Permission to Transmit Hadith.
- F9: On Teaching and Learning and the Etiquette of them both.
- F10: On the Censure of Juristic Reasoning and Baseless Opinions
- F11: On the Technical terminology of the Hadith
- F12: On Knowledge of Ritual Practices, and how, for them, Intention to Perform a Ritual Act is Necessary.

F1-F5<sup>23</sup> all establish the importance of knowledge, its acquisition and how it must have as its source, then sayings of the Prophet and the Imams. F6 deals with the knowledge professionals – the 'ulamā' – in their contemporary setting.<sup>24</sup> F7 through to F12 are extended discussions of what is, and what is not permissible in the transmission and understanding of hadith.<sup>25</sup> In constructing these introductory sections, Taqī al-Majlisī is clearly preparing the reader for the commentary on *al-Faqīh* which is to follow. The primary concerns are how the

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<sup>23</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 12-44.

<sup>24</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 45-57.

<sup>25</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 57-108.



knowledge contained within the *akhbār* can be transmitted to the wider public, and the role and tasks of the ‘*ulamā*’ in that transmission.

Given this *raison d’être*, the style through out is understandably hadith-based. The technique in most of the sections is to have a short discussion of the various potential positions one might take on an issue, and then a strident assertion of one view, followed by carefully selected and ordered hadith reports thereafter. There is rarely the need for a conclusion to the section, since the position has been amply demonstrated by the citation of reports. Reports are translated into Persian with occasional asides and notes of explanation and interpretation.

Taqī al-Majlisī’s general approach to hadith deserves a more extensive examination elsewhere. Here I wish only to focus on the section which develops emblematic, Akhbārī themes, namely F10: On the Censure of Juristic Reasoning and Baseless Opinions (*dar madhammat-i ijtihād wa-ara’-i bāṭila*).<sup>26</sup> The whole section is translated in the appendix below, but Taqī al-Majlisī introduces some unusual points in his argument against *ijtihād*. These can be summarised thus:

1. The Akhbārī polemic is primarily around the use of *ijtihād*, but there is, in fact a whole bundle of practices which Taqī al-Majlisī wishes to condemn including analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and preference (*istihsān*). The condemnation for these can be found not only in the saying of the Imams, but also in the saying of the Prophet, even those transmitted in Sunni books. So, the Taqī al-Majlisī is portraying himself as holding the true opinion not only of the Shī‘a, but wider than this – of all Muslims.
2. These innovations in exegetical practice can be traced to the earliest period following the death of the Prophet, when some companions of the Prophet fabricated a hadith which they would all agree to declare genuine when asked. In this hadith, the Shī‘ī cause was, effectively, condemned from the mouth of the Prophet himself.
3. The declaration of Abū Bakr as caliph following the Prophet’s death was a piece of individual reasoning in direct contradiction to a revelatory text. The text here was the statements of the Prophet in support of ‘Alī including the statements of Ghadīr. Hence by accepting these alternative exegetical practices, one is straying from true Shī‘ī Islam and towards heresy.
4. The invalid juristic practices and the battle for the early caliphate are further linked by the oath of allegiance being the opinion of one person as to who should be caliph. Since this is merely opinion, it cannot overcome the certainty produced by a designation from the Prophet himself.
5. Here are many reports from the Imams and the Prophet, and evidence can also be found in the Qur’an that in a state of uncertainty one should not give express an opinion, but instead suspect judgement. Proclaiming a fatwa is, in truth, an attempt to give the impression of certainty when there is none.

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<sup>26</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī 1414AH: 1, 87-98.

## Conclusions

The Akhbārīs, in their rejection of *ijtihād* and associated juristic hermeneutical techniques, wished to demonstrate not merely that these were methodologically unsound, based as they were on uncertain evidence and individual juristic reasoning. More forcefully, Akhbārīs wished to show how the adoption of *ijtihād* endangered the every nature of the Shī'ī religion. It contravened the direct stipulation of the Imams; and it undermined the work of the early Shī'ī scholars who had laboured hard to collect and authenticate the *akhbār* of the Imams.

In the argument of Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī presented here, we have a novel take on the rejection of *ijtihād*. The rejection of the designation of Imam 'Alī, and the Imamate of the subject Imams, is portrayed as the result of the *ijtihād* of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and the other anti-Shī'ī companions of the Prophet. *Ijtihād* then, strikes at the heart of Shī'ī belief and identity, and supporting is an instance of disobedience of the orders of the Prophet and the Imams. Carrying out *ijtihād* is, for all purposes, an act of heresy. Taqī al-Majlisī does not explicitly call his Uṣūlī opponents heretics, but the implication of betrayal of Shī'ī values is ever present in his highly critical attack on his Shī'ī opponents.

Taqī al-Majlisī's polemic against the Shī'ī *mujtahids* merges with a polemic against the core doctrines of Sunnism, as he saw them – the *khilāfa*, the *bay'ah* and the promotion of personal opinion over authoritative dicta. This fits in well with the more general Akhbārī theme that these innovations were incorporated into Shī'ī thought from Sunni sources. This, of course, reflects the distinct Safavid-Shī'ī identity, and the way in which the 'ulamā' wished to portray themselves as the protectors of Shi'ism. That for Taqī al-Majlisī this was linked with a mystical piety and an asceticism also reflects the way in which certain portions of the Shī'ī 'ulamā' were drawn to a meld of religious expressions by which the religiosity of the Safavid state might be preserved.

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## APPENDIX

F10: On the Censure of Juristic Reasoning and Baseless Opinions (*dar madhammat-i ijtihād va-arā'-i bāṭila*)

There is no doubt that the honourable Lord of Prophets and Messengers [Muḥammad] was knowledgeable about everything, and that the True One, may He be glorified and exalted, revealed to him the truths of the physical and angelic realms (*mulk wa malakūt*). If they asked anything of that Honourable Man concerning the principles of religion, or the details thereof, he would wait for divine revelation - so much so that when the Jews and Christians asked [Muḥammad], the Leader of the Prophets, about God's omnipotence, which is one of the fundamental principles of religion, he did not reply for 3 days until Gabriel brought the Sūra [Q112/al-Ikhlāṣ.1] "Say: He is God, one". It is clear to all rational people that extremely learned people may be incompetent at organising their homes, and they make many mistakes every day – so how can these weak rational faculties know the divine intention? They seek it by using these rational

facilities, and using juristic reasoning, analogical reasoning and the expression of preference (*ijtihād wa qiyās wa istihsān*). Furthermore, even the Sunnis, in their books of sound [*ḥadīth*] record reports which condemn analogical reasoning. The Shī'a can relate every one of those well-attested reports from the Prophet and the Imams in which there is a condemnation [of analogical reasoning]. Moreover, many Qur'anic verses and reports indicate that anything which does not bring within it knowledge (*ilm*), cannot be the basis for giving a fatwa:

*God, may he be exalted, said: (Q7/al-A'rāf.27): "Do you speak of God concerning that which you do not know?"*

Meaning [Persian translation]: *Āyā mī-gu'id bar ḥaqq subḥānahu wa-ta'ālā ānchah-rā bi-īn 'ālim nīstand*

*(Q39/al-Zumar.60): "Those who have lied about God will have blackened faces on the day of resurrection."*

Meaning [Persian translation]: *īn jamā'atī kih durūgh bar ḥaqq subḥānahu wa-ta'āla mī-bandand rūyihā-yi īshān siyāh khwāhad būd rūz-i qiyāmat*

And it is, in the same vein, said:

*(Q18/al-Kahf.15): "Who is more of a tyrant than the one who tells lies about God?"*

Meaning [Persian translation]: *kīst zālīmtar az ān-kasī kih durūgh bar ḥaqq subḥānahu wa-ta'āla mī-bandad.*

The condemnation of lies can be found expressed in many verses.

In the sound report from His Holiness Imam Ja'far-i Ṣādiq... it is reported that he declared:

*"What is permitted to Muḥammad is permitted until the day of resurrection; and what is forbidden for Muḥammad is forbidden until the day of resurrection."*

This cannot be contradicted, and there will be no other law.

Then His Holiness [Imam 'Alī] said:

*"Every innovation which you do is a deviation from my Sunna."<sup>27</sup>*

These were the innovations which those who opposed the religion His Holiness had put in place. Because of this, at the first occasion, they withdrew support from His Holiness, the Prince of Believers [Imam 'Alī], who was the Vicegerent of the Lord of the Worlds (*khalifa-yi Rabb al-'Alimīn*). Hence, most of them tell of when the Lord of the Messengers had passed away, and, on account of this, the People of the [Prophet's] House were overcome with grief, some of the Hypocrites (*munāfiqān*) made an oath in the Ka'ba to invent a *ḥadīth*, saying

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<sup>27</sup> Kulaynī \*\*\*\*: 1, 58 (report no. 1).

“When one of us transmits this report, give testimony regarding him, [saying] that he speaks the truth - we also heard it from the Messenger of God.” This [report] was that His Holiness, the Messenger said:

“We are the people of the House; God, may he be glorified and exalted, has chosen us for the Hereafter, not for this world. Prophethood and the Imamate should not be brought together one House.”

Together they went to the Saqifa of the Banū Sā‘ada, not including His Holiness [Imam Ali]. They were thinking whom they might make Imam. The Anṣār heard about this, and they also went to Saqifa and said, “If you are to follow the instructions of the Prophet, then ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib should be Caliph - and if not, then one leader should be from us, and the other from you.” They brought Sa‘d b. ‘Ubādah, who was unwell, saying “We pledge allegiance to this one, and you can do the same to whomever you wish.” In the end, one of the Migrants (*muhājiran*) recited this *ḥadīth*, saying that the Prophet declared repeatedly that the Imams should be from the Quraysh. Then Abu Bakr mounted the Pulpit, and said, “Oh Helpers, the vizirate shall be from amongst you.” The Helpers (*anṣār*) threw down a piece of fur. Abū Bakr stretched out his hand towards ‘Umar and said, “I pledge my allegiance to you.” ‘Umar stretched out his hand to the Abū ‘Ubayda [descended from] Jarrāḥ and said, “I pledge my allegiance to you”. Others arrived with a cry, shouting, “What qualifications does Abū Ubayda have?”, and so ‘Umar clutched onto Abū Bakr’s hand and gave his oath of allegiance, and the Hypocritical Migrants on that day all gave their oath of allegiance to him. A group of Helpers began to persuade and threaten, so much so that Abū Sufyān went to the assembled rabble and said, “This Ibn Abī Qaḥāfa [i.e. Abū Bakr] – from where did he gain the credentials to be a leader over us, the Leaders of the Quraysh?” On that same night, they agreed that his son, Mu‘āwiyah, would have leadership over Syria. In the same way, they persuaded one group, and threatened another into making the pledge of allegiance. His Holiness the Prince of Believers [Imam ‘Alī] was occupied, along with the People of the House, with mourning and crying and lamenting, since the Prophet had only died on the Monday; on the Wednesday or the Thursday- there is dispute around which day – they buried him, and they were considering an appropriate marker [for the burial spot]; His Holiness the Prince of Believers was a Helper from amongst the Banu Hāshim – they were few in number and weak, like ‘Abbās and ‘Aqīl. Once they had buried the Prophet, His Holiness the Prince of Believers... came to the mosque, and most of the people were there; he brought out for them all the proofs, including the story of the Day of Ghadīr and the other texts which demonstrate his Imamate.

One of the Helpers stood up and said, “O ‘Alī – if you had come here on the first day, and declared these things, not two people would have opposed you. But most of them made the oath of allegiance to Abū Bakr, and the situation is now unresolvable.” Then his Holiness said, “If we are talking about pledges of allegiance, then three months have not passed since all of you, on the order of the Lord of the Worlds, pledged allegiance to me in the company of the Lord of Messengers.” He went on, “You paid your *salāms* to me at the same time, with the sign of the believers, saying ‘Peace be upon you, O Prince of Believers’. What

has happened to those [promises]? On the day of resurrection, how will you reply to the Lord?”. At that moment, the Hypocrites, on the order of ‘Umar, stood with their swords unsheathed so that if the Banū Hāshim tried to use force, they would all be killed. Much discussion was had amongst them, and these are recorded in the *ḥadīths* and the historical records and the books of the Sunnis.

Since His Holiness had demonstrated to them the divine proofs [of his Imamate], and he knew that there was no point in continuing [to argue], on the order of God and the Prophet, he returned home, and busied himself with collecting the Qur’an. For three days, he did not venture outside. He collected the Qur’an in the manner it had been revealed, and then he brought out the Qur’an and declared, “I make a pact, in the presence of the Lord of the Worlds, by the permission of His Holiness the Lord of the Messengers, that I will not put (nindazam) a cloak on my shoulder, until I have collected the Qur’an just as it was revealed.” In reply, they said, “We don’t need your collection – we have appointed four people from the Helpers to collect the Qur’an.” His Holiness said, “You will not see this Qur’an until the One who will rise up from the Family of Muhammad appears.” And he turned to his prayers.

Those people who remained without giving the pledge [to Abū Bakr] hid in their houses, but they were investigated and sought out. Anyone who did not make the pledge, was beaten and threatened with death until they gave it. After 6 months, according to the traditions in Bukhārī and Muslim, they turned their attention to the Banū Hāshim to get their pledge. They brought together a large crowd, bringing torches and kindling, aiming to burn the home of His Holiness, with all the People of the House inside it. Qunfuz, the freed slave of ‘Umar, was filled with enmity [to ‘Alī] more than anyone else; he was of a more violent temperament, and of more ugly countenance than all those who shared his views. It was he who decided to burn [the house of ‘Alī]. Her Holiness Fatima arrived behind the door, saying, “O son of Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb [i.e. ‘Umar] – are you going to burn my house?” That man then slammed the door against that woman’s stomach, and Qunfuz, forced her back from behind the door with a whip. Abū Bakr who heard about all this, rushed over out of concern and sent out someone to find ‘Umar. Her Holiness Fāṭima then miscarried, losing the one named Muḥsin from her belly. His Holiness the Prophet named him Muḥsin according to the author of the Qamus. Her Holiness Fatima spent two or three days recovering from the miscarriage and the blows, and until she left [this world] to be with the Merciful Lord.

Bukhārī relates in 5 or 6 places in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that when Fāṭima was still alive, the Companions of the Prophet were respectful of the danger to them posed by ‘Alī. Once Fāṭima was gone, he knew that they would gang together to kill him. After 6 months, he gave his pledge to Abū Bakr, even though it is reported that [taking] this 6 months to pledge allegiance was a mistake [on Ali’s part]. However, it is also reported that Her Holiness Fāṭima never talked with Abū Bakr, and was angry with him right up to the day she died. On the night they buried her, God forbid – Abū Bakr said the funeral prayers over her body. This report of Bukhārī is repeated in the Six Books. They also all report from the Lord of the

Messengers [Muḥammad] that he said, “Fāṭima is a part of my body. Whoever harms her, harms me. And whoever harms me, harms God.

God himself said:

*(Q33/al-Aḥzab:33.57) Those who affront God and His Messenger, God certainly curses them in this world and the next, and has prepared for them a humiliating punishment*

Meaning in substance (*bi-taḥqīq*) [Persian translation]: *Īn jamā‘atī kih Āzār khudā-rā va rasūl-i ū-rā la‘nat kardah-ast īshān-rā ḥaqq subḥānahu wa-ta‘ālā dar dunyā wa-ākhirat, wa mahiyā sākhtah-ast az jihat-i īshān ‘adhābī khawār kunandah-yi īshān dar jahannum.*

God willing, we will take these reports into account when interpreting the Holy Qur’an, even though they are various versions in such as they usually have. They have abandoned the Book of God and the Ahl al-Bayt, along with the divine legal rulings which the Ahl al-Bayt had. Every day, events occurred, and they clubbed together. They brought their own thoughts into their heads; sometimes they worked on analogical reasoning (*qiyās*); sometimes expressing preference (*istiḥsān*). Because this scurrilous matter goes a long with the seizure of the Caliphate, these useless scholars found ways to support their practices, and one group of them invented this ḥadīth: His Holiness [the Prophet] said, [cited in Arabic] “My community does not come together upon an error.” If by this they mean the whole community, then by their own admission, the Banū Hāshim, Abū Dharr, Salmān, Miqdād and a large group were not included for a period of 6 months – so during these six months, the Imamate of Abū Bakr was invalid. If, however, they mean only some of the community, the oaths of allegiance to the liar Musaylima, Aswad ‘Ansī and Sajjāḥ were also made. By their own admission, they made oaths to the foul Yazid and the unbelieving Walīd. It is clear in all respects that this ḥadīth is not from His Holiness [the Prophet]. Because the most recent scholars of the Ahl-i Sunnat see that consensus has not a basis, they say that the oath of one person is enough, just as Fakhr-i Rāzī, Mawlānā Sa‘d al-Dīn, Amīr Sayyid Sharīf and others have remarked.

This conclusion is even more disgusting that the first – according to this conclusion, they say that when any hypocrite makes an oath with another hypocrite, this means it becomes obligatory to follow him. If every one of the Sinless Ones oppose [this Hypocrite], then they must all be killed. Because the Sunnis argue in this way around consensus, the Shī‘a then argue in response that Consensus is true when the Sinless One is included, and they, opposing the Sunnis, on their own topics record a series of Consensuses, saying “The Sinless One is included in our Consensus”. In reality, it is the opinion of the Sinless One that is a proof, and the agreement of the rest is without merit. There is no dispute amongst the Shī‘a that if all the mujthaidis of the Shi’a agree upon something, their agreement is not a proof, and is the Sinless One is present, then the opinion of His Holiness is the proof. So, Consensus, for the Shī‘a, is without foundation, as are the rest of the rational indicants. Therefore, our source, on which we rely, is the Book of God – may he be praised and exalted – and the

Sunna of their Holinesses, the Lord of the Messengers and the Sinless Imams – May the blessings of God be upon them all together.

In a sound report from His Holiness Imām Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq (May God’s blessing be upon him), it is reported:

Someone once asked him, and His Holiness gave an answer; and then another asked, saying “What is your opinion?”. His Holiness replied, “There is no opinion with us. Everything we say, is the statement of the Prophet of God, God’s blessing be upon him and his family.”

In a sound report from His Holiness it says:

There is no analogical reasoning in the law; have you not seen that a menstruating woman should make up for her fast after she has become pure once more, but she does not need to make up her prayer? Their analogical reasoning would require the opposite, because prayer is more noble than fasting. Every time they perform an act of analogical reasoning, religion implodes.”

In a *ḥasan* report from Abū Baṣīr is it reported:

I requested from His Holiness [Ja‘far-i] Ṣādiq ‘We encounter things which are not in the Book of God or the Sunna. Is it acceptable for us to think about it and answer according to our own reasoning?’ His Holiness said, ‘No – even if your opinion is, in reality, the same as the truth, you will gain no reward for it; and if it contradicts the truth, you have attributed a lie to God, may He be praised and glorified.”

In many *ḥadīths* it is reported that The Honourable Imams – may the blessings of God be upon them – use to condemn Abū Ḥanīfa on account of him acting on the basis of analogical reasoning, and the reports which show that acting on the basis of analogical reasoning is not permitted are transmitted through multiple chains.

In a sound report from His Holiness Imām Muḥammad-i Bāqir – may the blessings of God be upon him – it is reported:

Anyone who gives a fatwa to the people without knowledge and guidance, is cursed by the Angels of Mercy and the Angels of Punishment. On his neck will be the sins of all who act on his fatwa.” It is clear that the meaning of “guidance” here is the reports of the Pure Imams. It is possible that the conjunction here [between knowledge and guidance] is epexegetical, and the two [knowledge and guidance] have a single meaning.

In a sound *ḥadīth* it is reported from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj that:

Imam Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq said to me, “Keep your distance from two characteristics which will each cause you to be doomed, and deserving of divine punishment.” Included in these two was: “Beware! Do not give fatwas on the basis of your own opinion, and do not believe in, or act upon something of which you have no knowledge!”

Also, in a *ḥasan* report it is reported that his Holiness said to Mufaddal b. Yazīd, “I forbid you from two characteristics on account of which most of the people will perish. The first that you believe or act on the basis of something invalid. The second is that you give a fatwa to the people on a subject you do not know.”

In a trusted report, which is treated as if it is sound, it is report from Muḥammad b. Ṭayyār that he presented to His Holiness Imām Ja‘far-e Ṣādiq – God’s blessing be upon him – some of the sermons of his father – until it reached the point where he began to doubt. His Holiness said, “Stop and be silent! You are not permitted to enter into [discussion] for things about which you have no knowledge. Instead you should stay silent, and avoid acting upon them, and tell them to the Imams of Guidance so that they say to you ‘that is the truth.’ In this way God – may he be praised and exalted – says:

[Q16/al-Naḥl.45] “So Ask the People of Remembrance if you do not know.”

Meaning [Persian Translation]: *har chah-rā nadānīd az ahl-i dhikr su‘āl kunīd*. The people of remembrance are the Sinless Imams- may the blessings of God be upon them.

In a *ḥadīth* which is treated as if it is sound, it is reported from His Highness Imām Muḥammad-i Bāqir – may God’s blessings be upon him, “Suspending judgement on uncertain things – that is, things where the ruling or meaning is unclear – is better than rushing into oblivion and giving a reply or giving an answer without knowing about the thing in question. Concerning a report which you cannot remember well, it is better that you do not transmit it.”

In related reports from Imam Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq – may God’s blessings be upon him – it is reported that God – may he be praised and exalted – asks for two things from his servants. The first is that they do not speak on things they do not know. The second is that when they do not know something, and their reason does not come to a conclusion concerning it either, they do not reply, even if it be the truth. Concerning the first, there is the verse:

[Q7/al-A‘rāf.169] “Wasn’t the Covenant of the Book placed upon them so that they would not say anything about God other than the truth?”

Meaning [Persian Translation]: *āyā ‘ahd wa paymān* [For “covenant” (*mīthāq*), Taqī al-Majlisī writes, “the pact and the treaty”] *az īshān nagiriftan dar kitāb-i khūd kih na-gu‘īd bar khudā magar ḥaqq-rā....* [supplementary text] so they know what God has ordered.

As for the second, in this next verse, there is a condemnation of a group who, when they don’t know something, make up a lie about it. It says:

[Q10/Yūnis.39] “Rather they have lied about those things they do not know, and for which no interpretation has yet come.”



Meaning [Persian Translation]: *balkih ān jamā‘at takdhīb nimūdand chīzī-rā kih ‘ilm-i ishān bi-īn nimī-risad wa hanūz bi-īshān na-risīdah ta’wīl-i ān.*

This is a disaster for many of the seekers of the different forms of knowledge – most of them are in one of these two categories, such that they have got used to always giving rulings on the basis of their deficient rationality.

It is reported from Imam Muḥammad-i Bāqir, “God – may he be praised and glorified – has placed upon his servants the duty that anything they know about, they should speak about, and anything they do not know about, they should suspend judgement on.”

In a sound *ḥadīth*, it is reported from his Holiness Imām Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq – may God’s blessings be upon him, “Every time they ask you something you do not know, say you do not know. Don’t say, ‘God knows better’, because from this the questioner will have doubt, and might think that though you know. God knows better.”

In another sound *ḥadīth* His Holiness – may God’s blessings be upon him – it is reported, “If they ask something from a learned person, and he does not know it, say ‘God knows best’. Someone who is not learned will not speak this way. The faithful will then settle on the view that God knows, they say this cautiously.”

In a *ḥadīth* which is treated as if it is sound, from His Holiness Imam Muḥammad Bāqir, it is reported that he said to one of his honourable companions, “Anything you know about, speak about it. Anything you don’t know about, say ‘God knows best’. It is true that often someone interprets a verse without knowing –from his own level, [he] is brought low and falls down as if from the heavens to the earth. Anyone who sets out on this path, will certainly not remain alive.”

In a related *ḥadīth* it is reported, from Ibn Shubruma, who was a Sunni judge who went back and forth in the service of His Holiness [the Imam] , said, “For every situation which occurs to me, I hear a report from Imam Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq – upon him be peace. It is almost as if my heart is torn to shreds.” [The Imam] said, “My father gave me a report from my father, from my grandfather, from the Prophet of God – may God bless him and his family.” Then Ibn Shubruma said, “I vow to God that I do not lie about his father, and neither would his father about his grandfather, and neither would his grandfather about the Prophet of God, when his Holiness the Prophet of God – may God bless him and his family – said:

Anyone who acts on the basis of analogical reasoning is doomed, and has caused the others to be doomed also. Anyone who gives a fatwa, but does not distinguish between the abrogating and the abrogated, or the decisive and the ambiguous, is doomed, and caused the others to be doomed also to hell.

In a *ḥadīth* which is treated as if it is sound, from the Prince of Believers – may God’s blessings be upon him – it is reported that His Holiness whilst giving a sermon, said:

All groups of humanity should know that the origin of internal discord in the religion of Islam is the selfish whims which people have followed. There are numerous rules of the Holy Law which decree that they have innovated in opposition to the Book of God the Most High; one group has followed another without any evidence. If [their opinion] was purely false, then this would not be hidden to anyone with reason; if it was purely true, this would also not be hidden. However, they have mixed the true with the false, and brought about the people's confusion. Satan has become powerful amongst his companions. Only those who stay close to trust in God are saved.

In a sound *ḥadīth* from His Holiness Imām Ja‘far-i Ṣādiq – may God’s blessing be upon him – it is reported that His Holiness the Lord of the Messengers – may God’s blessings be upon him and his family – said:

Every time there is an innovation after me on account of which Islam, faith and religion are harmed, God – may he be praised and exalted – secures one of his guardians from the People of the My House, who is charged with the preservation of religion. He is then to protect religion from this innovation, and speaks with divine inspiration. He openly reveals the Truth, and illuminates it by proofs. Moreover, he refutes the deceivers. He disproves the confusion of the innovators for those who are of weak intellect. Take as your example any of those who have insight; think about who this group might be; remain faithful to God – may he be praised and glorified – until you clearly see the Truth and the People of the Truth.

The apparent meaning is that he means the Sinless Ones here. It is possible that this could be generalised to include the ‘*ulamā*’ of the Shī‘a, because their knowledge is the knowledge of the People of the House – may God bless them.

In sound reports it is reported from the Sinless Ones – may God bless them – an interpretation of this verse which God – may he be praised and exalted – revealed in condemnation of the Christians and the Jews:

*(Q9/al-Tawba.31) “They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides God himself.”*

Meaning [Persian translation]: *īshān ‘ulamā’-i khūd-rā wa zuhhād-ra khudāwyān-i khūd kardand wa ‘ibādat-i khudāwand-i khūd nakardand* ([or *min dūna allāh* - “besides God himself” – Taqī al-Majlisī translates “and they have not worshiped their own Lord”].

His Holiness [Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq] said:

By God? The scholars and pious people who do not do their own worship; and who does not bind them [to himself] in an obvious manner? But if they give a ruling which opposes the rule of God, they will all follow them. If they say the permitted is forbidden, and what is forbidden for them is permitted, then God – may he be praised and exalted – will declare this meanings/idea.

This is unbelief because they prioritise the opinions of the scholars over the opinion of God. His Holiness reminded the Sunnis about this verse, of which they

were, and still are, the target. So, in the verse, and their reports which are well-attested, it is reported that there is a group which when they leave the Holy Mosque, do “the Pilgrimage of Pleasure” (*ḥajj-i tamattu*). Since the *ḥajj-i tamattu* did not exist in the period before Islam, and Umar didn’t wish to oppose the [practices of] the time before Islam, a report appeared in which [the Prophet] opposed [the *ḥajj-i tammattu*] during his Farewell pilgrimage. A large group agreed with ‘Umar; and His Holiness the Lord of the Messengers said, “Gabriel came and brought this verse:

(Q2/al-Baqra.192) “He who does *tamattu* between the ‘*Umara* and the *Hajj*”.

He said that God decreed:

(Q2/al-Baqra.19) “Complete the *Hajj* and the ‘*Umara* for God.”

All the Sunnis follow ‘Umar, in opposition to God and his Prophet. God willing, for every verse which the ‘*ulamā*’ of the Sunnis explicitly oppose [them], the view of God himself will become clear. In any case, the obvious meaning of these reports is the condemnation of the Sunnis, but there is also a warning to the select [Shi’a] from following them in this way. Some of them have done what they have done. God willing, this will also become clear.

Many are our reports from His Holiness the Lord of the Messengers, and the pure Imams – may God’s blessing be upon them – say that every innovation is an error, and every error is the road to Hell. *May we be protected by God from error after having been guided.*

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