Chapter 3: Al-Ijmā' or Scholarly Consensus: An Accepted Method for Controlling Heresy?

Orientalists who follow the Christianizing interpretation of Islāmic thought have attempted to present the doctrine of *ijmā'* as an accepted means of controlling "heresy" in Islām.[1] According to Gibb, the doctrine of *ijmā'* can be viewed from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy and can be likened to the case of the council.

Despite their external differences, a certain analogy can be made between the concept of "consensus" of the Christian Church and the Islāmic concept of *ijmā'*. In some cases the results of both procedures were quite similar. For example, it was only after *ijmā'* was acknowledged as a source of law and doctrine that a definitive proof of "heresy" became possible. Any attempt to interpret Scripture in a way that negated the validity of a given and accepted solution was by consensus, a *bid'ah*, an act of "innovation" and "heresy" (Gibb 90).

Gibb's main thesis is that the concept of "council" in Islām forms part of a secular organism that mends Islāmic doctrine. It does so in light of a sovereign authority, thus fulfilling the work of purging and purifying matters of faith that can be assimilated into the work of ecclesiastic canonists. He understands the concept of "council" as a juristic entity, like a council of bishops. In order to protect the theological doctrine of the "Church," the Islāmic Caliphate relied upon the doctrine of *ijmā'* as the basis for the orthodox refutation of "heretical" Shī'ite ideas.

When Gibb speaks of *ijmā'* in terms of councils or ecclesiastic consensus, the distinguished Orientalist maintains himself firmly within a Christianizing interpretation of Islām. The word "council" is derived from the Latin *concilium* which comes from *cum*, "with," and *calare*, "to call" and "to proclaim," hence the sense of convocation and assembly. The word "council" is a Latin term which defines, much like the Greek root of Church [lit. *ekklesia*, from *ek* and *kalo*] a flock or congregation of faithful Christians under the guidance and direction of their pastors.

It applies to a group of individuals with the same character in a double sense: active like convocation of

bishops, and passive like a congregation of the same in an organization, a society or a collegial body. Viewing the doctrine of *ijmā'* through the Christian concept of council presupposes the existence of an orthodox "Church" in Islām which, like the Christian Church, can be recognized and differentiated from other "sects" or "heresies," and as a juridical, hierarchical, sovereign, visible, empirical, and easily perceived institution for all to see.

Gibb's ecclesiastic conception of Islāmic consensus is misguided and even false. It fails to appreciate that in Islām both elements are identical: the doctrine of *ijmā'* as a source of law and canon of the Scriptures, on the one hand, and Islāmic orthodoxy, both internal and external, on the other. Both of them co–exist and coincide in the application of the *sharī'ah* and the *sunnah* of the Prophet as sovereign expressions of the Qur'ān in both Sunnā and Shā'ite Islām.2

Let us now turn from a general critique to some more specific observations. It must be noted that Gibb's Christianizing conception traces back to the 1950s, a period when the type of distinction we are discussing was not viewed with the same importance as it is currently. Hence, the absence of a broader and more elaborate perspective is fully justified. Many of the problems we are discussing here, such as the question of "sects," had barely even been posed.

What we would have liked to observe, among the Orientalists who followed the same Christianizing line as Gibb, is a degree of academic, analytical and philosophical evolution. Above all, we would have liked them, starting with Gibb, the Orientalist from Oxford, to come to a better understanding of the questions raised by the study of Shā'ite Islām.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Besides a handful of honorable exceptions, the majority of research published in the West during the last decade of the fifties and even well beyond consists of nothing more than worthless compilations whose theoretical weakness is in sad contrast to the solid scientific work done by Orientalists in the past.3

These solid scholars include Reynold A. Nicholson, Louis Massignon, Jacques Berque, Miguel Asín Palacios and, why not, even Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb. Despite their incomprehension of the Islāmic spirit, they practiced and professed a science which was more consistent with their intellectual qualifications.

Their work is less suspicious of compromise with ideological controversy which reduces religious polemics, in all of its shades, into terms of extreme triviality and doubtful scientific integrity. It is the ancient affliction that appears to worsen in the West, especially in recent times, in which a host of "opinion–makers," turned into "specialists" of Islām, have come forth like black heralds repeatedly croaking the same mistakes *ad nauseam*.4

Without doubt, the knowledge and analogical application of these theological principles must have seemed very convenient to Gibb in his work of comparing the Islāmic concept of *ijmā'* as a consensus of scholars with that of the Christian council as a consensus of ecclesiastics. This is even more evident

when Gibb alludes to the role of analogy in his comparison and confesses that such a comparison is possible despite the external differences of the Christian councils.

This is absolutely false. Regardless of such esoteric formulaic divergences, there is no Church in Islām. Furthermore, there is no organized clergy in Islām in the ecclesiastic sense of the priesthood because Islām does not accept the mediation between God and man.

In Islām, there does not exist a religious establishment lead by a Pope with a hierarchy of bishops, cardinals and priests, all ranked according to their level of merit and the closeness to the central power of the Church. We must not forget that any attempt to look for examples of consensus in Islām comparable to the Christian councils of Nicea, Lyon, Letran, Trent, and the Vatican, would be useless.5

In the entire history of Islām, there has never been a case in which qualified scholars and jurists gathered in diverse synods to examine a doctrine that they considered erroneous and who then related their conclusions in letters to a prelate in which they asked for this error to be condemned as a heresy by the entire Islāmic community.

There were many times, however, when Caliphs or *mujtahidūn* reacted on the basis of arbitrary and erroneous decisions of incompetent authorities, ignorant of the very basis of the discussed doctrine. We are not claiming that "heretical" doctrines or misunderstood minorities have never been challenged, refuted, condemned and persecuted in Islām because the facts speak for themselves.6

We have the examples of martyrs for whoever would categorically deny any affirmation to the contrary. These include al–Hallāj, Suhrawardī, Uways al–Qarnī, Qanbar, Maytham al–Tammār and, among the followers of ʿAlī, the very Imāms, of which the most tragic case was that of al–Husayn, *sayyid al–shuhadā'* [the Lord of Martyrs].7[138]

Is it not clear that all of these deaths were the consequence of emphatic and arbitrary decisions? In any event, we have made no attempts to deny or to justify the persecution of those who were accused or suspected of heresy as this goes beyond the scope of this study.8

On the contrary, our goal here has been to demonstrate that the concept of consensus as a type of council is an erroneous misrepresentation of the function of *ijmā'* in Islām. In the Muslim tradition, the concept of consensus does not express an accepted mode of controlling heresy or the unanimous authority of all the scholars of the Islāmic community.9

We understand perfectly well that Gibb's goal is to present the concept of *ijmā'* in socio–religious terms that are more readily understandable in the West, by linking it to the Christian concept of *consensus*. In our opinion, however, such simplifications do nothing other than complicate any attempt to penetrate Islāmic thought, particularly when it is done by examples that are as divergent as they are foreign to the Islāmic faith. When we say that concepts such as "councils" are foreign we do not mean to imply that Islām is somehow backwards or less up to date as religious institutions in the West, particularly it terms

of its formal religious expressions.

According to the generally accepted etymology given by Arabic linguists, the technical term *ijmā'* comes from the Arabic root *jama'a*. It has several definitions, each of which relates to the concept of agreement, the first of which is "consensus." Hence, there can be no doubt as to the concept the word expresses. Both the Arabic word *ijmā'* and the Latin word *consensus* convey the idea of being free from coercion, being able to distance oneself from anything oppressive which limits freedom of choice.

The *mujtahidūn* [lit: "those who make an effort" in the personal interpretation of the law] define *ijmā'* as a "point of view" and, in such a sense, it is closer to the Vedic concept of *darsana* than to the Christian concept of *council*. In effect, *ijmā'* as a source of law and doctrine, does not present contradictory concepts, but rather different points of view and differing aspects of the same many sided concept.10

The doctrine of *ijmā'* is obviously found in both the Sunnī and Shī'ite traditions. However, both of these orthodox tendencies interpret and apply it differently. It is universally agreed that what has more weight in Islāmic law is the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the companions of the Prophet, those who lived alongside him, were chosen by him, and who heard his sayings directly.

This is followed by the followers [*tābi'ūn*] of the companions and, finally, the followers of the followers, those who received from their masters what their masters had received from their masters.

With the disappearance of this last generation, for the majority of Islāmic schools of jurisprudence the consensus now rests with the *mujtahidūn*, whose edicts [*fatāwā*] vary in accord with their philosophical postures. If Sunnī Islām declared that the door of *ijtihād* [personal deduction of the law] was closed in the 10th century [we know that some Sunnī 'ulamā' have now reopened the door], Shī'ite Islām, on the other hand, never recognized this closure.11

Shī'ite jurists and theologians, known as *mujtahidūn*, have always defended this right. Although enlightened individuals and scholars can appreciate the inner meanings of the sacred law in all of its dimensions, none can any longer claim perfection and infallibility. Since scholars, regardless of their erudition, are human, their understanding of the law can only be imperfect.12 Hence, they must allow themselves to be guided by the consensus of the *sunnah* of the Prophet and the authorized interpretations of the Holy Imāms.13

In conclusion, it is wise to recall that the fundamentals of faith and principles upon which the Muslim faith is based are irrefragable. Complete faith requires complete acceptance of tenets which are not and cannot be the work of men or the result of human consensus.14 God is the Sole Sovereign and the Final Source of Legitimate Authority.15

The essence of His law is immutable truth. His law is more immutable than the process of human thought for it is eternal and never changes.

1. Author's Note: Concerning ijmā', see G. Hourānī, "The Basis of Authority and consensus in Sunnāte Islām" in Studia Islāmica XXI (1964), 13–60; for ijtihād, see M.I. Jannatī, "The Beginnings of Shāʾite ijtihād" in Tawhīd (1988), VI, I, 45–64; in relation with Islāmic jurisprudence and for a comparisonbetween the differentpoints of view of different schools see, A.R.I. Doi, Sharāʾah: The Islāmic Law (London 1984), 315; S.H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islām (London 1966) IV.

2. Author's Note: It is essential to differentiate between the concept of ijmā' from the Catholic concept of council. Viewing ijmā' as the Islāmic version of the Christian Council is a gross oversimplification. From its very beginning, ijmā' was a fundamentally political concept even when it had legal repercutions. In early Islām, ijmā' was more intuitive than technical. The immediate goal of ijmā' was to address various socio-political questions which had surfaced as a result of the passing of the Prophet Muhammad.

According to the traditional view of Muslim scholars, Islāmic jurisprudence (fiqh) traces back the Companions (sahābah) of the Prophet Muhammad although it was only during the generation of the Followers of the Followers (tābiʿā at-tābiʿān) that the major schools of law (tābiʿā at-tābiʿān) were finally formalized.

According to Sunnā authors, the Companions (sahābah) derived answers to immediate problems from the Qurʾān and the Sunnah. When faced with unexpected issues, the Companions made an(ijtihād) to apply the spirit of the Prophet's teachings new problems. The ijtihād of the sahābah consisted of deriving judgments or legal norms from the teachings of the Prophet.

The sahābah had their own disciples and followers, the tabiʿn, who consisted of Muslims who knew the sahābah and learned from them but never had the opportunity to meet the Prophet. The tabiʿān were thus the second generation of Islām. The tabiʿn, in turn, had their own followers, who consisted of disciples who had never met the sahābah, and they are known as the tābiʿā al-tabiʿān and represent the third generation of Islām.

The second and third centuries of Islām, known as the Century of the Companions, the Companions of the Companions, and the Great Sunnā Imams), were marked by the rapid expansion of Islām. During this time, many non-Arabs became Muslims, integrating into society, and greatly expanding the territory of the Islāmic community. Along with the influx of new Muslims came new questions. The new questions required new solutions and broad generalizations appeared which allowed for universal applications. In short, fiqh moved from a practical realm to a theoretical realm.

Prior to the formation of the major schools of jurisprudence, legal norms had not been organized in an orderly fashion. The early jurists did not engage in theoretical issues, dealing only with practical solutions to practical problems. Since no systematic study of law had been completed during the first and second generations of Islām, it would be inappropriate to refer to early Islāmic law as an actual legal science. Since the science of fiqh developed during the second century of the hijrah, the Companions cannot truly be called fuqahā'. In light of what we have explained, it can be said that Islāmic jurisprudence was born towards the end of the first century of the hijrah, namely, the beginning of the eight century.

During most of the first century A.H., Islāmic jurisprudence, in a strict sense, did not possess a legal corpus. The great center of Islāmic jurisprudence during the end of the first century A.H. and part of the second century A.H. was Iraq. Doctrinal influences from one school to another moved almost invariably from Iraq towards Arabia and the doctrinal development of the Medinan school was often surpassed by the school in Kufahh.

By the end of the first century A.H., we find the names of jurists whose existence can be confirmed as historical. These include Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿā in Kufah and Saʿād ibn al-Musayyab and his contemporaries in Madīnah. Not only did these ancient schools share a common doctrinal base, they shared the same legal framework and viewed law as a "living tradition," a concept that dominated the development of Islāmic jurisprudence throughout the second century A.H.. Known as ʿāmal or "living tradition," the aim of Islāmic jurisprudence was to follow the spirit of the Muhammad's teachings. At the same time, this ʿāmal was validated through consensus (ijmā'), which consisted of the common opinion of the learned representatives of each legal school.

Ijmā', as we have explained, was a powerful political tool. It was employed to ensure the election of Abū Bakr as the Caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Later, it would be used to ensure the spread and implementation of the four schools of Islāmic law as sole representatives of orthodoxy. In both cases, ijmā' was employed to marginalize the authority of the Household of the Prophet.

Imām ʿAlī was passed over as Caliph despite being selected as the Prophet's successor and the Jaʿfarī school was cast

aside and considered orthodox despite the fact that is was the most ancient school and formed the basis of the Hanafī and the Malikī schools. Since the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, Muslim jurists had based themselves on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah in order to derive laws. In order to consolidate their political agenda, however, the ruling authorities were required to use ijmā' as a secondary source of legal authority which they did not hesitate to use against the Holy Imāms. In the early days of Islām, ijmā' had not yet been consolidated as a secondary source of Islāmic law. It was only in the third century A.H. that ijmā' became codified as standard procedure.

During the time of the two first khulafā al-rashīdīn, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the analogical method was employed to deduce legal implications and to find solutions to new or unforeseen situations, turning to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. When they found the solution they were looking for, they would apply it, and when they did not find it, they would gather a group of Companions and ask their opinions. Whichever opinion was the most prevalent was the opinion which prevailed. This selective practice represents the origin of "consensus" as a legal practice. In other words, until the time of the khulafā al-rashīdīn, the concept of ijmā' or consensus was an eminently political decision which had the force of law.

The Caliphs in Madīnah, as legal administrators, acted as legislators for the community, and the same example was followed by the 'Ummayad Caliphs and their governors. During the entire first century of Islām, the administrative and legislative activities of the Islāmic government were one and the same. The 'Ummayad governors appointed the first judges who would shape Sunnī law. These judges or legal arbitrators judged new cases on the basis of personal opinion (ray), basing themselves on traditional practices and customs but supposedly considering the the letter and spirit of the Qur'ān. The need to establish an ijmā' al-ummah or community consensus surged from the unwillingness of some tribal chiefs to accept the designation of 'Alī as the Caliph or successor to the Prophet Muhammad. In the early days of Islām, consensus was not so much a legal necessity, as a political requirement.

When differences of opinion affected political matters, particularly relating to the succession of the Prophet, the Shī'ite had no other option but to speak out. As a result of the differences between early Muslims, and the prevalence of partisan politics, the Ummah of Muhammad split into 'Ibadīs, Sunnis, and Shī'īs. The intensity of the political debate accentuated other doctrinal differences leading to the division of the Ummah into three major groups of Muslims, Sunnis, Shī'īs, and 'Ibadīs, each employing their own form of ijmā' as a secondary source of Islāmic jurisprudence.

Although these groups were distinct, they were never separate from the broader Islāmic community. Even though the separation into factions was painful and accompanied with violence and diatribe, the universal spirit of Islām always prevented schism. Each new generation moved from the extreme positions of the generation which preceded it, embracing middle positions, and recognizing the right of each party to its particular position. If one examines the history of Islām, one will find that the first to call for Islāmic unity and the reconciliation of all Muslims were the Imāms Ahlul Bayt.

During the life of the Prophet, discord and disputes were resolved through revelation. The issue of the succession of the Prophet however, was left unresolved in the hearts of Muslims, and simmered below the surface. Despite the fact that the successor of the Prophet had been established and confirmed by the Qur'ān, Muslims were divided: some felt the successor should be elected by tribal leaders and others accepted that the successor had been chosen by divine decree. Sunnī jurists have justified the use of ijmā' or consensus based on a hadīth from the Prophet Muhammad which states that: "My community will never agree on an error" (Tirmidhī). This hadīth served as the basis for turning ijmā' into a tool for deriving Islāmic laws. This tradition grants apparent infallibility to the consensus of Sunnī jurists, an infallibility no Shī'ite fuqahā' would ever claim for themselves as they rely on the legal and spiritual authority of the Holy Imāms who, as far as Shī'ite Muslims are concerned, are the only individuals worthy of being considered infallible (ma'sūmīn).

As far as Shī'ite Muslims are concerned, the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt were, by divine design, perfect human beings from the moment of their birth. They were purified, and infallible due to the innate perfection they had been granted by divine grace. Although the need to recurr to political consensus might be invoked in the absence of divinely appointed leadership, the fact remains that the Prophet Muhammad appointed 'Alī as his successor in accordance with a divine decree. Despite the fact that no ijmā' was required, it was employed by the opponent of 'Alī in order to destitute him from his legitimate right to the Caliphate.

Had the Prophet Muhammad received a divine order to place the leadership of the Islāmic community into the hands of tribal leaders, he would have said so. We would have ample traditions in which they Prophet states: "When I die, hold

elections and elect a Caliph." The truth of the matter is no such traditions exist. What does exist is a large body of traditions in which the Prophet explicitly appoints Twelve Imāms as his successors, all of whom were individually named, the first of which was 'Alī and the last of which was the Mahdī. Rather than leaving his community in the lurch, the Prophet Muhammad had always emphasized the need for an Imām or divinely-inspired guide to lead the Muslim community.

It is important to remember that the Prophet Muhammad never considered the Islāmic Ummah as being infallible or free of error. When the tribe of Quraysh reached the peak of its aggression towards him, the Prophet prayed: "O Allāh, pardon my people for their ignorance." Had the Islāmic community been capable of governing itself and acting in the best interest of Islām, there would never been a need for Allah to send Spiritual Guides.

The fact that Allāh had opened the wilāyah (Guardianship of the Imāms) upon the closing of the nubuwwah (Prophethood) is sufficient indication that the Islāmic community was in no position to guide itself and that it needed divinely appointed Imāms to guide it on the straight path. In this light, it could even be argued that consensus or ijmā' is an innovation (mustahdath) in Islām. Based on the pre-Islāmic tribal custom of shūrā, ijmā', as an Islāmic institution, was developed after the death of the Prophet in response to the political need to consolidate the power of the emerging Caliphate.

In the Twelver Shī'ite context, the use of ijmā' or consensus came at a much later date and coincides with the Greater Occulation of the Twelfth Imām. As far as Ja'farī jurists were concerned, the use of ijmā' could scarcely be conceived in the presence of Infallible Imāms. It is for this reason that Shī'ite jurists only started to employ ijmā' after the Greater Occultation of the Imām Muhammad al-Mahdī. It should be noted, however, that the concept of ijmā' for Shī'ite jurists differs completely from the concept of ijmā' held by Sunnī jurists. For Shī'ite scholars, ijmā' is used for religious matters and not as part of political ploys.

3. Editor's Note: As we explain in "El idioma árabe en proceso de convertirse en un arma contra el Islām," "No cabe duda alguna que los orientalistas norteamericanos de hoy no son comparables a los orientalistas franceses e ingleses de la época colonial" [There is no doubt that the American Orientalists of today cannot be compared to the French and English Orientalists from colonial times].

4. Editor's Note: Ahmad Ghurāb's Book, Subverting Islām, is a valuable read as it exposes Saudi supported schools and scholars. The leading pseudo-specialists on Islām include the neoconservative Daniel Pipes who is viewed by many as Islāmophobic.

5. Editor's Note: The Council of Nicea was the first ecumenical council convened (325) by Constantine I to condemn Arianism. Lyon was the place of two councils (1245-1274) while Letran was the place of five. The Council of Trent took place in Trent, from 1545 to 1547, in Bologna from 1547 to 1549 and once again in Trent from 1551 to 1552 and 1563 to 1563. It was convoked by Pople Paul III and concluded by Pious IV. It was the keystone of the Counterreformation by which the Roman Church opposed the Protestants, revised their disciplines, and reaffirmed their dogmas. For the Vatican Council, see note 87.

6. Editor's Note: It cannot be denied that there have been cases of persecution in Islām. To cite a single example, Sultān Selīm I, the Cruel, exterminated 40,000 of his Shī'ite subjects for political reasons. As for the main madhāhib in Islām, they were imposed by various authorities on their subjects. For more on the spread of the Sunnī schools, see the chapter "[The] Secret Behind the Spread of [the] Sunnī Schools" in Tījānī's The Shī'ah: The Real Followers of the Sunnah: 82-87.

Although Tījānī conveniently fails to mention it, this applies equally to the Ja'farī school of thought in Persia which was imposed as a state-religion, for political reasons, by the Safavids. Without the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām, Twelver Shī'ites did not have a physical candidate for the leadership of the Muslim Community.

Hence, they posed no immediate threat to the authorities at a time where multiple movements were vying for power and leadership. It is important to note that, although the Sunnī schools of law were imposed by the ruling authorities to ensure uniformity and unity, many of the founders of the Sunnī madhāhib had been persecuted by the powers that be. For more on the suffrage of ahl al-sunnah by the ruling class, see Khaled Abou El Fadl's The Search for Beauty in Islām: A Conference of the Books.

7. Editor's Note: Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj was a theologian, mystic and Muslim martyr whose work marked the beginning of a strong Sūfī current. Accused of claiming divinity for having stated anā al-Haqq (I am the Truth), he was executed by the Abbasids. The rigorist literalists who judged him could not see beyond the surface of his words.

Al-Hallāj was not claiming to be Allāh. He was stating that he had submitted to Allāh and had become at one with Him. As Annemarie Schimmel explains, "in rare moments of ecstasy the uncreated spirit may be united with the created human spirit, and the mystic then becomes the living personal witness of Allāh and may declare anā al-Haqq" (72). The legitimate theological basis for such an understanding is demonstrated in the following hadīth qudsī where the Messenger of Allāh says that Allāh said:

Whosoever shows enmity to someone devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks.

Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful servant: he hates death and I hate hurting him.' (Bukhārī)

Rather than claiming that he was God, al-Hallāj was expressing that he had lost his "I"–his selfhood–and had been submerged in the Beloved. Rūmī believed that the words "I am God" and I am creative truth" meant "I am pure" and "I hold nothing within me except Him" (Arasteh 89). Rūmī contrasted this interpretation with "orthodox" believers who claim, "I am a servant of God," which asserts the dualism of existence (89).

The Messenger of Allāh and the Holy Imāms are also the Supreme Names of Allāh for it has been said by Imām al-Sādiq: "We are the Most Beautiful Names" (Khumaynī Islāmic Revolution 411). The Ahlul Baytare manifestations of Allāh. As such, the divine names are applicable to them, despite the fact that they themselves are not divine. As Khumaynī observes, "The whole world is a name of Allāh, for a name is a sign, and all the creatures that exist in the world are signs of the Sacred Essence of Allāh Almighty" (367); "Everything is a name of Allāh; conversely, the names of Allāh are everything, and they are effaced within His being" (370).

Suhrawardī (c. 1155–Alepo 1191) was a philosopher and mystic. He integrated the Gnostic tradition, hermeticism and neo-Platonism into Islām and exerted a great influence. Uways al-Qarnī was a follower of ʿAlī who died fighting for him. Qanbar was a retainer of ʿAlī. Maytham al-Tammār was a freedman of ʿAlī and a loyal Shīʿite. He was executed by Ibn Ziyyād in Kufah. For a detailed description of the Imāms, consult Mufīd's Kitāb al-irshād.

As for the Shīʿite Imāms, the majority opinion, with the notable exception of Shaykh al-Mufīd, is that all of them were martyred through poisoning with the exception of Imām ʿAlī who was killed by the blow of a sword while conducting prayers and Imām Husayn in a heroic battle at Karbala.

8. Editor's Note: The author wishes to make it explicitly clear that he is not justifying or defending the actions of any individuals. Al-Hallāj's words may seem excessive to some, but so was the punishment inflicted upon him by the authorities. When the author describes al-Hallāj as a "martyr" he does so in the sense found in the dictionary: "someone who suffers death rather than renounce his faith // someone who suffers greatly for some cause or principle" and not in the strict Islāmic sense of the word shahīd, which means a Muslim who has died defending his dīn [religion], who struggled in the path of Allāh, and who is assured of immediate and eternal reward in Paradise. In the case of Hallāj, Allāh is the Judge and Allāh is Just.

9. Editor's Note: This is in contrast to Nasr's view that heterodoxy can be judged by the consensus or ijmāʿ of the mainstream community on the basis of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah (Heart of Islām 87).

10. Editor's Note: In Islāmic jurisprudence, one can find a variety of opinions on different issues, each suited to the variety of individuals and levels found in society. While there may be a myriad of multicolored leaves on the tree of Islām, they all contrast and complement one another to create the Muslim mosaic. Truly, there is a great blessing in differences and diversity.

11. Editor's Note: Among the Sunnis, the doors of ijtihād, the independent interpretation and application of Islāmic law to changing times and circumstances, was closed in the 10th century. As a result, many Sunnī Muslims are obliged to follow Islāmic law as understood by medieval scholars which comes into conflict with their ability to manage with modernity. See Morrow, John A. "Like Sheep without a Shepherd: The Lack of Leadership in Sunnī Islām."

The reopening of the doors of ijtihād was done by Muhammad ʿAbduh, leader of the Salafī movement which can be defined as "Wahhābism with ijtihād." Their ijtihād, however, is not the interpretation of the sharīʿah to apply it to modern

times but rather subjecting modernity to misinterpreted medieval mandates.

12. Editor's Note: A fact which must be remembered when following the fatāwā of any scholar. In some cases, what they are presenting are educated points of view which is why they often finish their fatāwā with the words wa Allāhu a'lam or "And Allāh knows best." They are not necessarily absolute facts. On many issues, there is not just one ruling: there are many, each of which is based on a thorough understanding of the Islāmic sciences.

It is a must for Muslims to adopt this tolerant attitude of mutual respect and comprehension. Imām Khumaynī, who was perhaps the greatest Islāmic scholar of the 20th century, firmly adopted this humble attitude. In both his commentary of the Qur'ān, and other contingent domains, he reiterated that "what I have to say is based on possibility, not certainty" (Islām and Revolution 366). And this is precisely what differentiates Muslims from the Ahlul Bayt. While we may have knowledge, the ahl al-'ismah have knowledge of certainty.

13. Editor's Note: As Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir explains:

He who has given verdicts [in matters of religion] on the basis of his own opinion, has actually followed a religion which he himself does not know. And he who accepts his religion in such a matter, has actually contradicted Allāh, since he has declared something lawful and something unlawful without knowing it. (Kulaynī 152: hadīth 175)
And as the Prophet Muhammad has said: "He who interprets the Qur'ān from his own personal opinion will have a seat in hell" (Tirmidhī, Ghazālī).

14. Editor's Note: Shī'ite Islām places a great deal of importance on 'aql or reasoning. While Shī'ite Muslims must follow experts in matters of law, they are prohibited from following anyone in matters of faith without proof and conviction. As Imām Khumaynī explains, "A Muslim must accept the fundamental principles of Islām with reason and faith and must not follow anyone in this respect without proof and conviction" (The Practical Laws of Islām 17).

15. Editor's Note: The author is alluding to the following verse "to Allāh belongs all power" (2:165), among others.

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