

POLITICAL THOUGHT IN SUNNITE THEOLOGY

-An Analysis on Wucûb al-İmâmah-

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SÜNNÎ TEOLOJİDE SİYASET DÜŞÜNCESİ

-İmametın Vücûbu Üzerine Bir Tahlil-

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı Sünnî gelenekte baskın olan siyaset anlayışının temellerini ve yapısını çözümlemektir. Sünnî kelamcılarının imâmetin gerekliliği (vucûb el-imâme) başlığı altında iktidarın gerekliliğine dair ileri sürdükleri görüşler; Sünnî ekolün siyasete, yöneticiye, yönetici-halk ilişkisine bakışını önemli ölçüde yansıtır. İslam öncesi Arap siyasal kültürünün de Sünnî siyaset anlayışının oluşumunda etkisi olmuştur. Hz. Peygamberin deneyiminin imâmet-risâlet ilişkisi bağlamında nasıl okunacağı ve Şii teologlara karşı sergilenen tutumun da burada rolü olmuştur. Sonuçta Sünnî paradigma; siyaset, varlık, bilgi kavramları üzerine oturur ve bunlar arasında sıkı bir bağ kurar. Çalışmada Sünnî siyasal perspektifin yanında, bu perspektifle uyum içinde yapılanan nass, bilgi ve ahlâk anlayışları arasındaki ilişki ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kavramlar: Ehl-i Sünnet, Kelam ilmi, imamet, hilafet, imâmetin gerekliliği (vucûb el-imâme).

I shall discuss in this article the nature of Sunnite political thought, its characteristics and problematics. For this reason, we shall deal with the opinions of Sunnite theologians (Mutakallimun) on imamate/caliphate. The way they understand the necessity of imamate or political power also laid the groundwork for other views on imamate. Of course, theologians' political views are not independent of their epistemological and onthological views. Hence, we shall refer, in case of need, to the epistemological and onthological background in which the perception of politics was meaningful and grounded. Views of Islamic schools took shape and systematized during the theological struggle. Therefore, in order to clarify the Sunnite political understanding, we shall, when needed, also touched upon the views of other theological schools.

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In the traditional Sunnite theological literature, the issue of ruler's necessity for people mentioned under the heading of wujûb al-imâma. In order to put forward the way the theologians perceived the matter of politics, one must examine the term of wucûb (necessity), one of the key terms. The question as to how the necessity of imâmate or political power can be known or by which knowledge it can be known leads us to the term of wucûb. Answering this question is the first step in putting the political understanding of theologians. The key point in the phrase of wujûb al-imâma is the word wujûb/necessity. When referring to the matter of knowledge, the theologians use the word wâjib in a special meaning. The secret question regarding the matter has been established as in what cases the knowledge is necessary/wucûb. Many discussions were made over the question whether to know existence of God and finiteness of universe are obligatory by reasoning (istidlâl) or hearing a religious witness (nass).¹ The main aim of theologians was to put the knowledge which make man responsible and obliged to the religion. In Islamic tradition of thought the words of wâjib and wucûb have been used in two meanings. The former was logical necessity, the latter was necessary act to be performed in religious and moral respect.² The latter was the technical meaning given by jurists.³

It is noteworthy that the terms of rational/logical necessity and religious/moral one come together in wâjib as a common ground. When the man attained the knowledge of something through reasoning, does it turn into a religious/moral responsibility? The fact that whether the religious judgements, first of all the existence of God and the unity of God, can be known by reason are of the problems the theologians discussed. The theologians discussed the existence of God under the term of Wâjib al-Wujûd (necessary being).⁴ The problem is concerned with the identification of intellect's function and its field against the main texts (nass) of religion and thus

¹ Al-Baghdâdî, Abu Mansûr Abd al-Qadir b. Tâhir (d.. 429), *Usûl al-Dîn*, Bairut 1990, p. 256; al-Ijî, *al-Mawâqif fî Ilm al-Kalâm*, Cairo, p. 88; al-Bayâdî, Kamâl al-Din Ahmad b. Hasan (1098/1687), *Isbâra al-Marâm 'an Ibârât al-Imâm*, p. 84.

² Fadla Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism the Ethics of Abdal-Jabbar*, Oxford 1971, p. 115.

³ Wâjib (necessary) has been defined in Usûl al-Fiqh as something that was ordered by lawgiver to be absolutely performed. A proof showing that the the order was absolute is found. See Abdulvahhab Hallâf, *Ilm Usûl al-Fiqh*, tr. Hüseyin Atay, Ankara 1985, pp. 293-298.

⁴ Al-Taftazânî, Abu al-Wafâ, *Sharh al-Aqâid*, tr. Süleyman Uludağ, İstanbul 1991, pp. 141-156.

has a close connection with the possibility of man's gaining the knowledge of good and bad only by using the mental powers.⁵

It is known that the Mutazilite theologians who considered the founders of Islamic theology enlarged the scope of reason. In respect of al-Mutazila who regarded the reason as an authority as well as religious text (nass), knowledge gained by reason through its own faculties should be also considered necessary. It is also possible, according to Mutazila, to see man responsible for his knowing God and choosing good or bad despite the absence of a religious order or knowledge.⁶ In the basis of Mutazilite approach lies quite a wide sense of confidence that the reason will finally confirm the truth of religious knowledge.

The way the theologians discussed the matter and the meaning they gave to wājib brought the authority of nass to the fore. The Sunnite theologians put a religious emphasis on the term of wujûb to restrict the authority of reason in comparison with nass. In al-Shahrestânî's opinion, we gain our knowledge through reason. But the authority which finally entails them is the revelation (wahy/sam').⁷ In other words, a religious judgement must be made about knowledge, so that it has an aspect of religious necessity. Although the Sunnite theologians accepted the role of reason within a certain scope, they acted prudently when determining its place concerning religious responsibility. To obtain knowledge is a success of a mental activity depending on reasoning and experience. As for knowledge's having a necessary aspect and thus giving person a responsibility is a somewhat more different matter. It has been accepted that knowledge of a certain wājib in religious sense cannot be reached through reason and that the authority notifying of the necessity of anything is the religion.⁸ Al-Shahrestânî formulated the Sunnite view concerning knowledge-necessity relation more evidently: "The distinction

⁵ Eric Lee Ormsby, *İslam Düşüncesinde 'Ulâhî Adalet' Sorunu (Teodise)*, tr.. Metin Özdemir, Ankara 2001, pp. 28-35. The problem which has been also discussed by the theologians of the day, has been dealt with focusing on the establishment of religious realities, first of all God, through reason. Two concepts have been put forward. The concept of Natural Theology has been used to refer to the theological studies without depending any information of revelation. Contrary to this, to depend up in revelation when making theology is the revealed theology. See. Kenny, Anthony, *What Is Faith? Essays In The Philosophy of Religion*, Newyork 1992, pp. 63, 64.

⁶ Qâdî Abd al-Jabbâr, *al-Mughnî*, XII, p. 55.

⁷ Al-Shahrestânî, Abu al-Fath Muhammad b. Abd al-Karîm, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Beirut 1990, I, p. 88.

⁸ Al-Gazzâlî, Abu Hâmid Muhammad b. Muhammad (505/1111), *al-Iqtisâd fî al-'Ilqâd*, Beirut 1998, pp. 103-104; al-Juwainî, Abu al-Maâlî Abd al-Malik b. Abd Allah b. Yusuf (419-478), *al-Shâmil*, p. 115; al-Juwainî, *İrshâd*, Beirut 1985, p. 29.

between knowledge and its necessity as follows; all knowledge is reached by way of reason, but what entails it is sam‘.”⁹ The above approach formulated by al-Shahrestânî, became a general view adopted by the Sunnite theologians. Al-Ghazzâlî and al-Juwainî, two well-known figures of Asharite theology, confirming each other, said that the necessary (wâjib) can not be reached through reason. The reason has no authority and capacity to necessitate. Necessity is possible only through a religious order.¹⁰

Discussions of theologians on the necessity of imamate also show how they approach to the issue of political authority. Because regardless of what the conclusions of these discussions were,¹¹ the political power has been always sustained, independently of discussions, its existence as a de facto reality. If that is the case, the matter should be nothing but seeking a theoretical basis for an already existing structure. Discussions have an aspect relevant to the legality of political power. Those who held the possibility of imamate in terms of religion and or that it was necessary from a rational viewpoint were weakening the ties of political power with its religious origin. In that case, the political power would feel obliged to find, like every political power, another ground for legitimacy.

Given the fact that the paradigm during the formative period of Sunnite theory of imamate was religiosity, it will easily seen that a legitimacy for political power sought outside of the religious ground was impossible. On the other hand, the Sunnite view which established the imamate, even if through indirect way, on the religious basis not only provided a strong legitimacy of origin for political power, but also presented it an unequalled power and superiority in the real politics. Because the imamate was regarded as an indispensable power to protect religion and execute rules. In this respect, that the religious validity of view considering imamate religiously permissible came in the first place among the matters discussed by theologians seems reasonable.

Theological and heresiographical works refer to a certain group holding the religious permissibility of imamate. The Sunnite works speaks of the fact that Muslims held the necessity of imamate but the Najadât, a Harijite group, opposed this view. The Najadite view of imamate briefly as follows: In fact people do not need an imam, since they know God's book. Therefore it is

⁹ Al-Shahrestânî, *al-Milal*, I, p. 88.

¹⁰ al-Ghazzâlî, *al-Iqtisâd*, p. 103; al-Juwainî, *Irshâd*, p. 25.

¹¹ Abd al-Jabbâr, Ahmad b. Khalil b. Abdullah el-Hemedânî, *Şarh al-Uşûl'l-Khamsah*, thk. ve tkd. Abd al-Kerim Usman, Cairo 1988, s. 759-766.

enough to advice. If needed, they choose one among themselves as imam. But they are not obliged to do so. It is enough for them, without lawfully necessitating imamate, to remind themselves about truth and justice. Every man is godfearing and faithful. If that is the case, why should one of them be chosen as imam and exalted though they are equal to each other? Nature of man, religions and the Shariahs do not need the existence of imam. How does the life of Bedouins go on in order without a ruler?!¹² Al-Najadât's view that regarded imamate as permissible differs from the general view that regarded the ruler as necessary either in rational or religious standpoint in several aspects. First, in their opinion, the imamate is not a acquired institution which must absolutely exist. As has been supposed, nor reason, neither religion necessitate its existence, and aslo never need it.¹³ And also it is wrong to argue that the aims of religion will unavoidable come true through imamate, since main target of religion and reason is to establish justice. Human beings have a power to do this. It is clear that as long as they do this, they wil not need an imam. Al-Najadât do not make an obligatory connection between values and imamate as a socio-political institution. Even they treat the approach that regard the imamate as an important means to realize the aims of religion with caution. Their main reservation is the states of discord and trouble. In such cases they gave people permission to choose an imam among themselves on the assumption that the wickedness could be removed only in this manner. According to al-Najadât the imamate is permissible when the justice and security could be established only by way of imam.¹⁴

It is evident that the view of the necessity of imamate put forward by al-Najadât did not overlap with socio-political facts. It is known that justice and security in a society could not be achieved within a spontaneous and haphazard manner. The concepts of justice and security are not the moral values having merely a religious and inner meaning. They are protected through practical relations and measures which are/must be concretely represented in the society at social and political level. For this reason, it is not a realist approach to imagine the concepts of justice, peace and order having been isolated from the

¹² Al-Ash'arî, *Maqalât al-Islâmiyyîn*, ed. Muhammad Muhyiddin Abdulhamid, Beirut 1990, I, pp. 189-190; al-Shahrestânî, *ob. cit.*, II, p. 37; al-Ijî, Abd al-Rahman b. Ahmad, *al-Mawâqif fî Ilm al-Kalâm*, Beirut, pp. 396-398.

¹³ On the Kharijite views and considerations about the necessity of imamate see Abdurrâzîk Ahmad Sanhûrî, *Fiqh al-Khilâfa wa Tatanwuruhâ*, translated into Arabic by. Nâdiya Abdurrâziq Sanhûrî, al-Hay'a al-Misriyya, 1989, pp. 93-101.

¹⁴ Al-Râzî, Fakhr al-Din Abu Abdallah Muhammd b. Omar b. Husain (606/1209), *al-Arbâ'in fî Usûl al-Dîn*, Beirut 1982, p. 256.

institution of political power, the most concrete and powerful institute of society. It can be thought that when emphasizing the intermediary role of imamate, the theologians tried to response to the above utopian view separating the social institutions from values. When arguing that aims of religion could be achieved only by way imamate/headship of state,¹⁵ they realized that there was a practical/pragmatic relation between values and institutions.

Al-Shahrestânî said “Imamate is not necessary in respect of Shariah. But if the Ummah turn away from it, they deserve to be condemned and punished. It is relevant to interhuman relationships. If the people become just and helping in good and devoutness, if everybody busied himself with his own duty, the imam would not be necessary.”¹⁶ Although al-Shahrestânî, word by word, makes use of the first half of the argument by those holding the permissibility of imamate, he reaches a completely opposite conclusion. The argumentation of those holding the permissibility of imamate was as follows: “People do not need an immam/ruler, as long as they act justly.” The Sunnite view voiced by al-Shahrestânî was established as “if people acted justly, they would not need an imam.” As has been easily seen, the Sunnite argumentation depends on the historical experience. Even though the concept of justice was an innerly felt sensation and aspiration, it needs a political power and organization so that it could be put into action in social life.

Al-Taftazani establishes the necessity of imamate as follows: “ Muslims absolutely need an imam (political leader). Imam carries out such important affairs as fulfilment of religious rules concerning Muslims, execution of punishments, quard of borders of country against enemies, organization of an army consisting of Muslims, collecting taxes, taking the highway robbers and bandits under control and overcoming them, performing Friday and Bairam prayers, finding a solution for the disagreements between people, acceptance of witnessing depending upon law, to marry the youngs who don’t have guradians and dividing booties.”¹⁷ Ibn Khaldûn’s views are set up more systematically. He discusses with those who reject the necessity of imamate and set an argumentation asserting the necessity of imamate. It is of no use to remain distant from administration by saying that designation of imam is not necessary. Because you believe that the religion must be maintained. In that case, a government and authority who will maintain it wil be needed. And the

¹⁵ Al-Gazzâlî, *al-Iqtisad fî al-’îqâd*, p. 176; al-Shahristânî, *Nihaye al-Iqdâm*, p. 482; al-Mâwardî, *Abkâm al-Sultanîyya*, p. 3; Ibn Khaldûn, *al-Muqaddîma*, p. 191.

¹⁶ Al-Shahrestânî, *Nihâyat al-Iqdâm fî ’lmi al-Kalâm*, p. 482.

¹⁷ Al-Taftazânî, Sa’d al-Dîn, *Sharh al-Aqâid*, tr. Süleyman Uludağ, p. 326, 327.

administration will be achieved by way of a ruler. Even though a ruler has not been designated, owing to the fact that a government came into existence, what you wanted to stay away will have happened.¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun was aware of the fact that the nass did not order the imamate clearly. Nevertheless, he saw that the religion spoke to a concrete world in which people lived and the relations of power prevailed. Thus, he underlines that there was not a rough and dogmatic relation between religion, but a practical and pragmatic relation. Religion nor has detracted the act of governing, neither has forbidden to be a ruler.¹⁹ What it is condemned is the enormities stemmed from the act of governing. On the other hand, religion has praised the goodnesses to be fulfilled by political power such as justice, fairness and defence of religion.

Fakr al-Din al-Razi states that the essential duty of imamate was to protect people from damages. Because in case of the existence of a powerful ruler, people will be more careful to abstain from bad doings so that they will not fall into his hands. According to al-Razi who placed “to protect people from damage” in the centre of necessity of imamate, while the reason necessitated imamate for those based upon reason, the nass necessitated imamate for those rely upon nass.²⁰

Ibn Taimiyya discussed the matter of necessity of imamate under the head of “wucûb ittikhâz al-imâra(t)”. Ibn Taimiyya who stated that the walâya which means to undertake the affairs of people and to lead them was one of religious orders (fards) said that the religion could stand up by way of it. Later on, he establishes the necessity of walâya through a non-religious proof. This proof depends upon experience. People come together because of their needs and of interests. And a social life requires the existence of an organizing commanding leader. He supported the rational proof relying upon experience through a hadith stating that if three persons make a trip, one of them must be chosen as a leader.²¹ Commanding the right and forbidding the wrong is one of Qur’anic orders.²² This principle can be carried out only by way of power and political authority (imâmah). Such religious duties as holy war (jihâd), pilgrimage, prayers of Friday and feast day, fulfilment of punishments,

¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad, ed. Ali Abdulvahid Vâfi, *Muqaddima*, Cairo , II, p. 576.

¹⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *ob.cit.*, p. 161.

²⁰ Al-Râzi, Fakhr al-Dîn, *Mubassal*, tr. Hüseyin Atay, p. 271, 272.

²¹ Ibn Taimiyya , *as-Siyâsa(t) al-Shar‘iyya fî Islâh al-Râi‘a al-Raiyya*, ed. Muhammad Hilmi Minyawî, Dâr al-Kitâb al-Arabi, Egypt 1955, p. 161.

²² Loqman 31; A'râf 164; Âl Imran 104, 110; al-Nisâ 114; Tawba 71.

establishment of justice can be carried out only through political authority.²³ Because of the right of political authority to use power and force, the sultan has been perceived as a divine power. Indeed, after stating that imârat was a necessary means for religion, Ibn Taimiyya reminds the hadith pointing out that “the Sultan is the shadow of God in the Earth”.²⁴ While stating that the views of imamate do not belong to the fundamentals of religion, al-Juwainî (d.478) follows the Sunnite tradition, he emphasizes that staying away from the imamate will cause two harms to appear. The former is to go beyond the limits and the latter is to confuse the uncertain matters, i.e. ijtihâd with that of certain ones.²⁵ Al-Juwainî states that the reason why he touched upon the imamate is to distinguish the absolute principles from that of ijtihâdî.²⁶ The mature and systematic form of Sunnite theologians’ views on the necessity of imamate is found in al-Ghazzâlî. Pointing out that necessity of something can be known only by way of religion, al-Gazzâlî says that the advantages of appointing an imam and disadvantages of absence of an imam can be known by reason. While the realization of religious aims depends on the existence of imam, in his absence the religion will suffer damage. It seems that al-Gazzâlî, who made an aim-means relation between religion and imamate, concluded that in terms of religion the imamate was indirectly necessary. In his opinion, both religion and reason requires the necessity of imamate. “Order of religious affairs can be realized only by the order of world, and the order of world can be established through the existence of an imam obeyed to.”²⁷

What has the part maintaining the possibility (jawâz) of imamate intended to say? The traditional Sunnite authors never had an agenda to deal with the matters in detail and get talking them. Their goal was to prove the correctness of their doctrine (mazhab). In this regard, in order that the opposing view on imamate can reach the evidences and the logic lying behind them, the socio-psychological analyses are needed. The groups who rejected the necessity of imamate must have depended on the absence of an evident proof about it. Because, if the imamate was said to be necessary (wâjib), this may have based upon two arguments: The imamate was necessary either as per reason and experience, or as per religion. The meaning of its being necessary on

²³ While establishing why imamate is needed, the Mutazilite theologians also use the same logic. Abd al-Jabbâr, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, p. 750

²⁴ Ibn Taimiyya, *oh.cit*, p. 162.

²⁵ Al-Juwainî says as follows: “*al-qawl fî al-imama(t) al-kalâm fî bâḥḥ al-bâb laisa min uṣūl al-iʿtiqâd.*”, al-Juwainî, *Kitâb al-Îrshâd*, ed. Asad Tamim, Beirut 1985, p. 345.

²⁶ Al-Juwainî, *ibid*, pp. 345-346.

²⁷ Al-Ghazzâlî, *el-Iqtisâd*, p. 176.

account of religion was the existence of an evident nass ordering imamate. But, the nass was not necessitating imamate clearly and referring to it. Therefore, in this sense it was no longer possible to regard the necessity of imamate as the necessity, when abandoned, leading to commit sin.²⁸ The permissibility of imamate means the absence of any religious order stating that God enjoined it. In that case, the people must be free in acting according to their choice, view and experience. After this point, the position of those holding the necessity of imamate and acting in accordance with it, or those holding the opposite view and living as per it was no more a religious responsibility in front of religious text.

The matter of political power which the theologians mentioned as imamate is a factual matter rather than being a theoretical. It is also has a close relations with actual social life as well as value judgements and ideologies. The problem of necessity of government for humanbeing, must be dealt with in a practical and pragmatic level rather than speculative thought. This level is the historical and social experience of man. It is sufficient, since it shows the limits of freedom in Islam, to state that everything was recognized as Islam except for what the Qor'an clearly forbade. This fact which was later codified by the principle "the true characteristic of objects is allowance", does not indicate the measure of verbal conformity but the facility and wideness of "not being clear contradictory to the text." The matter of "not being contradictory" points at a larger area compared to the necessity of "conformity". Politically this means that there was no ready arrangement concerning the government in the religious texts (nass). Indeed there is no obvious religious text forcing Muslims or forbidding them from a certain system of government. This led some persons belonging to the Islamic sects to assert that the caliph, state and head of state were not necessary. The ruler would not be needed, if everyone did his religious duty.²⁹

It will be incomplete to describe the rise of Islam in Arabian peninsula merely as the birth of a new religion. Whatever the opinions about the essence of Islam are, the picture to be seen by a researcher who view the early period of Islam from a factual aspect is clear. Islam which presented itself primarily as a

²⁸ Abd al-Jabbar states that there exists no religious text/*nass*, no matter evident or hidden. In his opinion, the existence of a nass requires to accuse ones of infidelity for their different. The imamate was discussed in the Mutazilite theology within the principle of commanding the right and forbidding the wrong. These two matters were regarded as an inseparable whole supplementing each other. Abd al-Jabbâr, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, pp. 741-749.

²⁹ Muhammad Âbid al-Jabirî, *İslâm Düşüncesinde Yeniden Yapılanma*, tr. Ali İhsan Pala, Mehmet Şirin Çıkar, Kitâbiyât Yay., Ankara 2001, p. 84.

faith accomplished an undeniable socio-political change in Arabian peninsula. The process through which the former tribal arrangements weakened and submitted to a more comprehensive and wider authority also brought about the problem of institutionalization. The old solutions and structures had no answer to the new needs. At this point, the social order is no more sufficient, and does not correspond to the new intellectual and political developments.

The new experience of leadership the Prophet Muhammad actually executed was representing a new model of political power in Arabian Peninsula. The Arabs attached importance to tribe rather than charisma. Whereas the prophethood that through the Prophet Muhammad came to the agenda naturally produced a comprehensive perception of leadership including both physical and spiritual dimensions. But to describe the prophethood as an institution is not true, at least in view of Sunnite theology, since the continuity observed in the institutions is not valid for prophecy.³⁰ In fact, one of the most distinctive successes of the Sunnite Theology is its opposition to the Shiite Theology which by using the institute of prophecy as a theological and historical justification, created a semi-religious and semi-political perception of leadership and after that eternized it, and its proclaiming that the religious function of prophecy came to an end. In according to the Sunnite discourse the caliphs politically succeed the Prophet. Hence, although the office they held was necessary to realize the aims of religion, it had not a sacred character.

The problem arisen after the Prophet was practically the problem of constructing the political power as an institution. It was unthinkable to step back, after the political power was experienced and the advantage gained from it was seen. That the religion did not contain any evident expression on this matter would not have invalidated the need for political power. The problem was practical one to be urgently solved. Indeed, the Sunnite Theologians in general sated that the imamate was not a subject of faith and that to arrive a final decision was not necessary, but those who did not know this matter would be in more danger compared to those who knew it.³¹ In that case, it can be argued that the necessity of imamate for people was not neither a religious one nor a theoretical/rational one, but a social one. The religion, through the principles of faith and thought, radically changed the viewpoints towards the

³⁰ Ali Abdurrâzık says as follows: “*The obedience of Muslims to the Prophet was the obedience of creed and faith, not the obedience of government and sultanate*”. Ali Abdurrâzık, *İslâm'da İktidarın Temelleri*, tr. Ömer Rıza Doğrul, İstanbul 1995, p. 102.

³¹ Al-Shahrestânî, *Nihâya al-Iqdâm*, p. 278; al-Juwainî, *Irshâd*, p. 345; al-Baghdâdî, *Usûl al-Dîn*, p. 271.

existence and social life. In the meanwhile, it is also possible to say that a new consideration forced their possibilities in their views to the institution and concept of power. Religions directly or indirectly caused this effect.

It can be expected that in a society whose system of values changed and began to perceive itself and existence from a different perspective a problem of power, sooner or later, will be experienced, since it is an obvious sociological fact that the institution of political power as well as other institutions will be affected by the deep-rooted change. The socio-political turbulence seen in the rise of each of three great religions proves this. The fact that the problem of political power discussed under the name of imamate in the process of establishment of Islam, both as a system of belief and a way of life, can be regarded as a comprehensible development. But the crucial fact to be considered is that the parts who participated in the discussion of imamate and expressed their opinions tried to dictate their ways of life, or at least a certain lifestyle and political preference presented itself in a Theological language.

The opposition of bedouins who internalized the nomadic life, on the basis of their simple, egalitarian and unchanged lifestyle, to the opinion that the imam was necessary for people in view of religion or reason also stemmed from their own experiences. The simplicity of desert life, its serenity and natural stability was making the existence of a power unnecessary. Because the desert life was passing through its own simple but hard rules. Because of the fact that the present and likely problems and their solutions were more or less known, it was not necessary to ruminate and to be careful in taking decisions. The desert life had produced its wisdom. That was why they gave much credence to the common will and charisma of tribe. Maybe it will be necessary to speak, for desert life, of the invisibility form of power. The political power was a common and impersonal power distributed to all individuals of a tribe and represented by each individual in an equal way. Whereas the political, tribal and economic differentiations, mobility seen in population, dynamism in the commercial and cultural life and all problems arisen from them also brought about many problems from the necessity of political power to its establishment.

It is natural to show reaction against the desert life centred understanding of government which presented an out of date solution and lost its social-practical validity. In our opinion, this social development lies behind the adoption of view that considered imamate necessary by Sunnite Theology. This is also a process started by the social and political institutions to constitute their legal ground. This process advanced in Theological discussion within a religious/theological form. Eventually, the necessity of imamate took its place

as a principle in the Sunnite Theology. The Sunnite theologians opened their doors for all kinds of views regarding imamate as necessary. For this reason, all rational and legitimate proofs putting forth the necessity of imamate were accepted.³² This was, according to us, due to the fact Islamic community wished to solved the problem concerning the origin and legality of political power in a way that it would no longer come to the agenda. The view that considered the imamate permissible (jâiz) was standing as a radical problem relating the origin of government. The discussion made under the shadow of practical need for powerful, consolidative and active ruler came to an end with a centralist solution.

Because of the fact that the discussions made about the necessity of imamate in quite a practical ground and resulted in government, the politics has been always perceived as a government centred matter. Muslims always conceived the matter of state/rule in a centralist point.³³ Therefore a thinker who tries to get to know the obstacles in the way of a society centred understanding of politics should go back to the historical and theological origins of matter, since the matter is not just a simple problem of institutionalization and transformation, but a problem of deep rooted mentality and perception.

Within the classic literature of Theology there also exists one another different view that considered imamate was a favour (lutf). Terminologically favour means to get success in an action (al-tawfiq fi'l-fi'l).³⁴ According to Shiite and Mutazilite theologians, to appoint an imam was a favour. The favour to appoint an imam is obligatory for God as has been in all favours.³⁵ Thema of divine favour has an important place in the Shiite and Mutazilte thought. In respect of some Shiite and Mutazilte theologians who regarded the imamate as the continuation of prophecy, just as the prophets have been chosen by God, so the imams have been chosen by God. According to their theory of justice, the earth will not be deprived of divine guidance. After the last prophet Muhammad, the imams undertook the mission of divine guidance. Therefore, the imamate has been seen, particularly in the Shiite theology, solely as the matter of faith.³⁶ In their opinions, the matter in question was a substantial

³² Al-Shahrestânî, *al-Milel wa al-Nihal*, II, p. 96; al-Gazzâlî, *al-Iqtisâd*, p. 197; Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, p. 142; Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasl*, IV, p. 177.

³³ Muhammad Arkoun, *Tarih Felsefe Siyaset Üzerine Konuşmalar*, p. 96.

³⁴ Ibn Manzûr, *Lisân al-'Arab*, Beirut 1990, XI, p. 228.

³⁵ Ahmad Mahmud Subhi, *Nazarîyya al-Îmâma(t)*, Beirut 1991, p. 72.

³⁶ Al-Kulainî, Abu Ja'far, *al-Usûl min al-Kâfî*, Beirut 1401, I, p. 168.

matter of faith related to the divine justice and divine favour.³⁷ Thus this matter could not left to the *ijtihâd* of men. Against of the Shiite view that held the necessity of imamate, the Sunnite theologians opposed this view reminding the different views suggested in Saqifa meeting. Al-Razi said “If the appointment of imam was obligatory for God, he would do it. But he did not.”³⁸

The argument that the imamate is obligatory for God entails a certain approach towards the problem of government. This approach, attaching the problem of government within a dogmatic discourse to the prophethood, tries to ignore its human facets and dimensions. If the problem of government/imamate is a matter belonging to the divine scope which is isolated from its human facets, it goes indispensably beyond the limits of human mind. Idealization of imamate did not accord with the realities. Thus, the Shia strengthened the doctrine of imamate with some additional mythos such as the infallibility of imam and his knowing the invisible world. To hide the real relations of power by idealizing the government, as a matter open to social and human interactions can be possible by constructing a comprehensive and constrained authoritarian doctrine. Yet, the Sunnite approach fits on a more realistic foundation.

The Sunnite theologians not only paid attention to the theoretical aspect of imamate, but also to its practical aspect. But it also appears that this Sunnite approach has been forced to an extreme point. This extreme point is to surrender to the reality and to organize the political discourse in accordance with the reality. For instance, it is not much clear where they stand when they asserted that the imamate by force and invasion was also possible. They put forward this assertion in a manner of a jurist, historian or a chronicler rather than a theologian.³⁹ The Sunnite discourse displays a persistent consensus about the impossibility of looking for a better state than *de facto* one, its vanity and dangerousness. It will be more proper to describe the ways of governing observed during the Middle ages not as an established order but as a *de facto*

³⁷ Qadi Abd al-Jabbâr is among those holding that the imamate is a matter relating, in a way, to divine favor. *Sharh al-Usûl al-Khamsa*, p.751.

³⁸ Al-Razi, *al-Arbaʿîn*, p. 428.

³⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya begins his work in which he dealt with issues of authority (*imâra*) and government by dividing the politics into two parts, oppressive and just. It appears that jurists (*fuqahâ*) did not much discuss the necessity of imamate. On the contrary, holding the necessity of imamate, they discussed the more practical matters. For instance, Ibn al-Jawziyya assigns a part of his work to the permissibility of sultanate. Shams al-Din Muhammad b. Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Turuq al-Hukmiyya fi al-Siyâsa al-Sharʿiyya*, Matbaʿa al-Âdâb, Egypt 1317, pp. 12-15.

situation. we come up with a person-centred discourse depending on the personal character of ruler rather than a systematic organization of government which can be described as a political order.

The insistence of Sunnite theologians on the maintainance of status quo is closely connected with another theological discussion lying in the deep. This is the problem of Husn and Kubh in the literature of classical Theology, a matter concerned with the possibility of reaching the knowledge of good and evil without the help of divine knowledge. The Sunnite view argues in general that one cannot reach the knowledge of good and evil without the religious/divine knowledge.⁴⁰ At the root of this approach, one can notice the traces of efforts to eliminate the opposition as well as the doubt against reason. The fact that Husn and Kubh, justice and oppression, good and evil can be also identified by reason itself points out that on the basis of an idea of higher justice and rightness, the legitimacy and acts of the de facto rule can be questioned.

It is reasonable that a theology of stability tending to make the status quo meaningful centralizes the authority of shariah and predecessors (salaf) regarded as the true followers of shariah in order to narrow the domain of reason. Because at the root of exaltation of salafs and sunnah and the narrowing the domain of reason lie the attempt to dry up the theoretical and theological sources with which the opposition fed.⁴¹ It is clear that to pursue the exaggerated idealism and the utopias that will never realize is a tendency in the long term doomed to exclusion, since the political and social balance calls for a security, even if limited and relative, within the social reality. And it opens the ways to the doctrines that appeared to ensure this. At this point we face with another problem, namely over realism.

The common sense having moved away from disappointments caused by idealism and inconclusive theories is obliged to surrender to reality. Surrender of intellectual thought to these instead of going beyond the limits of de facto social structure is often seen in authoritarian social structures which narrow the domain of liberty. For an intellectual the main crisis is not, here, to be deliberately an instrument of the legitimation of rule, but, by establishing a social and historical orthodoxy, to constitute a permanent and consistent form of obedience which will also include the next generations. However, this

⁴⁰ Al-Ijî, *el-Mawâqif*, p. 396.

⁴¹ Ibn Taimiyya, *al-Siyase al-Shariyya*, pp. 10-11; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *l'Îlm al-Munvaqqi'n*, III, pp.3-6; al-Ijî, *ob.cit.*, pp. 396-397.

mechanism is not only the success of ancient thinkers. It is the traditional discourses that eternalize their influence. This includes the traditionalism. The salafi current one of traditionalist models in the Islamic culture ties the past with present by using a religious logic. Determination of present reaching out from the past is due to the authority of tradition. Speaking in the context of historical/religious discourses such as Sunnism and Shiism, it seems that some institutions and concepts of orthodoxy maintain their existence within the social/historical memory through theological language. This has been illustrated by the honorable place of caliphate within the theological memory, although it was abolished and the alternative structures developed instead.