

Expressions of Political Quietism in Islamic History

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Babaji was known for his piety and scholarship, and his followers included men and women of every faith—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and untouchables. Although on the face of it Babaji had nothing to do with politics, it was an open secret that no political movement in the Punjab could begin or end without his clearance. To the government machinery, he was an unsolved puzzle. There was always a smile on his face, which could be interpreted in a thousand ways.

Saadat Hasan Manto, “The Price of Freedom,” in *Mottled Dawn*

Introduction

Political quietism is one expression of political theology in Islamic history. Political theology is a discourse capturing the nexus of how the elements of God, humans, and the world intersect in an ever-changing relationship of political community and religious order.¹ It articulates the relationship between “power [or authority, *Herrschaft*] and salvation [*Heil*].”² Modern students of Islam have drawn on European, Christian categories of “quietism,” a tradition in Christian political theology, to explain certain religiopolitical phenomena in Islam. “Quietism” originally referred to a devotional movement in Catholicism led by the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos.³ In other modern European and Christian contexts, political quietism generally refers to styles of thought that combine pietism with conservative politics. For example, Johann Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752), a Lutheran reformist invested in biblical piety, tended to a “pessimistic outlook and political quietism.”⁴ The authoritative *Encyclopedia of Religion*

differentiates between quietism and the generic use of the word *quietistic*, “which implies withdrawal or passivity with regard to politics or ethics.”⁵

Strands of political quietism in Islam have been expressed along a spectrum of Muslim political theologies stretching from the early formation of the faith to the modern period. In early Islamic history, tensions between the motivations of piety and the politics of responsibility laid the groundwork for myriad expressions of quietism that continue, in different iterations, in the modern period. Historically, an important element in strands of mainstream Sunnī and Shī‘ī theology involves the notion of obedience to those in power. Many theologians have refrained from making political judgments on errant or unjust rulers, usually in the interest of personal and communal preservation and stability. Modern scholars of Islam, when referencing these events, have used the label “political quietism.” These Muslim expressions of quietism resemble similar expressions in Christian history. In the Bible, in Romans (13:1-2), St. Paul commands Christians to obey those in authority and warns that whoever rebels against them is rebelling against God. In Christendom and Europe, this was used by rulers to legitimate the divine right of kings.⁶ Similarly, the Qur’ān enjoins Muslims to obey God, the Prophet, and those in authority (4:59). In Muslim history, this verse formed the basis for obedience (*tā‘a*) to political leaders. Very early, the public manifestation of the authority of an Islamic ruler meant that he or his representative exercised the office of leading the public liturgy and prayers, regardless of how unfit he was for such a role.⁷ A practice of toleration for such leaders was captured in the aphorism that one may “perform the *ṣalāt* behind a pious man or a malefactor.”⁸

In this chapter, we take a genealogical approach to the interpretation of Muslim expressions of political obligation based on the commitment to *dīn*, a set of salvation practices inspired by faith. Such an approach precludes neat divisions of history into binaries of “quietist” versus “activist” tendencies or tying origins to subsequent developments. Historians must uncover a tangled history of how Muslims have interpreted political obligations, power, and knowledge, and how these mutated over time. Grasping the motives, contexts, and environments in which Muslim expressions of quietism occurred is more important than trying to find a neat and coherent meaning of quietism that remained consistent and transcendent. Political quietism means very different things in different contexts and eras. The details surrounding political quietism evolved in tandem with the transformation of Muslim politics and political institutions over time. This historical study is divided into three broadly defined periods, each with a set of crucial factors that determine different outcomes of political expressions. These periods are the early caliphate, the era of empire, and the modern era.⁹

Political contestation, expressed as quietist or activist, is a major element in Muslim political theology. For our purpose, the central question in early Muslim political theology was this: Is the commandment to adhere to a political-moral obligation to command what is right and forbid what is wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*) an absolute and unfettered command, or can it be subject to the dictates of human reason, political expediency, and strategy? The most extreme answer came from the Khawārij in the first/seventh century. The Khawārij believed this political-moral obligation was an absolute command that Muslims must adhere to, even if it meant using violence to overthrow a ruler deemed unjust. From their political theology, a spectrum of different iterations of “quietism” emerged under a variety of names and orientations.

Quietist political theology in Islam should not be understood as apolitical or a way to avoid political debates. One form of political quietism (*taqiyya*) was a term used by Muslims in distinctive ways throughout history as a pragmatic or strategic mode of political contestation and self-preservation. Contrary to the literal meaning of the nomenclature “political quietism,” another form of political activism was exercised; this form depended on context. Hence, for some early Muslims the idea of quietism more closely approximated the prevention of strife or the pursuit of social and political stability (*ittiqā' al-fitna*). However, this did not presuppose that these Muslims were apolitical. Even self-described “quietists” in the modern era, such as certain Shī'ī clerics or Salafīs, use the idea of quietism, or nonengagement, as a form of political protest or political preservation. And both protest and strategies of preservation are expressions of power. Power influences relations between people, and it can determine the conduct of others. As Michel Foucault reminds us: “There is no power without potential refusal or revolt.”¹⁰ If politics is the expression of power, then quietism is a form of power demonstrated by refusal, restraint, or the absence of overt political action in the service of an inarticulate motive.

The early caliphate

The historian Marshall Hodgson (d. 1968) made a valuable observation when he explained that the early Muslim community understood political responsibilities “as an essential consequence of their faith.”¹¹ Hodgson illustrated that the idea of “political responsibility” was an intrinsic aspect of the sociopolitical milieu of early Arabia, where Islam began. The egalitarian ethos of Arabia gave this political responsibility a “strikingly egalitarian” hue, among a people who

“disliked structures of authority.”¹² For Hodgson, political responsibility was imprinted into the fabric of Islam. This politics of responsibility or founding political theology was tested as Islam reached into domains outside Arabia and meshed with neighboring Byzantine and Persian political traditions. In these encounters, new political vocabularies mingled with inherited norms of political responsibility, based on the Arabian experience of Islam. These confrontations peaked in the early years of the Umayyad caliphate. As Hodgson astutely observed, “It was almost a corollary of the political responsibility called for by Islam that the tradition of faith proved to be developed most actively in an atmosphere of political opposition to the ruling forms.”¹³

As the Muslim polity grew and percolated with norms and customs from foreign lands, Muslims imagined new vocabularies for expressing their faith and acted upon their perceived political obligations. These expressions of faith and political responsibility triggered intense political-theological debates, resulting in the schism of the Muslim community into sects. Debates between these sects revolved around political responsibility and at their core was the Qur’ānic mandate to command what is right and forbid what is wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*), also known as *ḥisba*.¹⁴

Historian Michael Cook tells us that early Muslims interpreted this Qur’ānic injunction to mean that “executive power of the law of God is vested in each and every Muslim.”¹⁵ “Under this conception,” he adds, “the individual believer as such has not only the right, but also the duty, to issue orders pursuant to God’s law, and to do what he can to see that they are obeyed.”¹⁶ Cook also points out that this moral and political obligation defied social hierarchy, and even laymen remained the equal of political superiors in terms of fulfilling God’s order to command the right and forbid the wrong. But, in the early centuries, the egalitarian, socially homogenous tradition that the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula brought to their faith was gradually challenged as the caliphate, now located in newly conquered territories in Syria and Iraq, took on hues of absolutism. The transformation of the caliphate into something resembling a royal court was new political territory for Muslims, and the litmus test of their faith was how they imagined their political responsibilities in this changing milieu. Threads of political activism or quietism must be understood in the multiple ways in which Muslims disputed commanding the right and forbidding the wrong.

The first civil war (36–41/656–61) fragmented any sense of community and raised questions about political legitimacy and religious duties for Muslims. Opposing the political theologies of the proto-Shī‘a and the Khawārij were the Murji‘a, who proposed that the community should withhold passing a

verdict on the moral status of political leaders. In making this argument, they drew upon the Qur'ānic use of the expression *irjā'* in *Sūrat al-Tawba*; this term meant postponing or deferring judgment. This verse encourages believers to defer the judgment of others to God, for only God can judge whether someone shall be punished or forgiven (Q 9:106).¹⁷ This position, “itself the mark of a political attitude,” to borrow the phrase of Montgomery Watt, had consequential outcomes for Muslim politics.¹⁸

The Murji'a argued that the best way to fulfill the duty of *ḥisba* was to defer judgment to God. Indeed, as with other sects, the early Murji'a considered this duty to be “an ideal of higher priority over any other interest.”¹⁹ Political and moral accountability was an especially critical topic for Muslims living in Kufa, the fulcrum of Murji'i thought. One especially important Kufan figure was Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767); many claim that he espoused a form of political theology of postponement (*irjā'*) in a text attributed to him, *al-Fiqh al-akbar* [The major discernment].²⁰

This text falls squarely within the realm of Hodgson's binary of faith and political responsibility. His answer to the defining question of his time—what Muslims should do about a ruler who is deemed unjust—was a clear exposition on the legitimacy of political protest and activism. Abū Ḥanīfa began by objecting to the basis of Khārijī political theology: “We do not consider anyone to be an infidel on account of sin; nor do we deny his faith.”²¹ Abū Ḥanīfa also defied the position of the proto-Shī'a: “We disavow none of the Companions of the Apostle of Allah; nor do we adhere to any of them exclusively.”²² Both these political positions are within the realm of moral and political accountability. “We enjoin what is just,” declared Abū Ḥanīfa, “and prohibit what is evil.”²³

For Abū Ḥanīfa, maintaining the unity of the Muslim community was paramount. As Watt puts it: “The earliest Murji'ites were essentially men who wanted to preserve the unity of the Islamic community.” The Murji'is attempted to preserve unity with minimal expressions of political responsibility, without appearing to endorse tyranny or abet anarchy. So, we also see Abū Ḥanīfa wrestling with the idea of how to practice *ḥisba*. If *ḥisba* is moral responsibility and political accountability, and as Hodgson reminds us, faith requires political responsibility, the question for Abū Ḥanīfa was this: Should one practice moral accountability to such an extent that it destabilizes and jeopardizes the Muslim polity? In answering this question, Abū Ḥanīfa developed the idea that a Muslim who failed to be politically accountable and morally responsible could be deemed a sinner, but remain a believer. “We do not proclaim any Muslim an unbeliever on the account of any sin, however great,” he announced. “Nor does he forfeit the

name of belief; we continue to call him a believer in essence. It is possible to be a sinful believer without being an unbeliever.”²⁴

The category of a sinful believer allowed the Murji’ā to develop a political position in opposition to the hardline Shi‘a and Khawārij. This position was not necessarily one of neutrality. In the early period, expressions of “quietism” did not mean the removal of oneself from political questions. Rather, quietism was expressed politically in unconventional ways or as politics of another kind. Perhaps someone like Abū Ḥanīfa was caught between his obligation to be loyal to the caliph, and his obligation to provide sage political counsel, and quell or mediate in rebellions. Those we would label today as political quietists are persons who were entangled in multiple agendas. Another example of this is Aḥmad b. Hanbal, the eponym of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* and an important voice in early debates over political power and authority. Some modern scholars claim that political quietism is central to Ḥanbalī political doctrine.²⁵ As the Saudi scholar Saud al-Sarhan noted, political expressions that have subsequently been labeled “quietist”—especially by those Muslims who later became part of the Ḥanābila—were generally rooted in the idea of conforming to the Muslim community (*luzūm jamā‘at al-muslimīn*). Commenting on the first civil war, Ibn Ḥanbal averred that preserving community was a “mercy” while division was a “torment,” drawing on a teaching of the Prophet Muḥammad.²⁶

One of the questions Ibn Ḥanbal debated was *tafḍīl*, or preference among the first four caliphs. Debates over this issue took the form of superlatives, and Muslims argued about who among the first four caliphs “was the best.” There is some disagreement over precisely what Ibn Ḥanbal’s position was on this issue,²⁷ but the fact that he was engaged in such a debate demonstrates the complexity of the Ḥanbalī expression of quietism.²⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal might, in theory, have advocated obedience to the ruler, but we also know from history that he and his students and followers were, nonetheless, actively engaged in political protest and the debates of their time.

Years of political contestation following the civil war led the Umayyad caliphs, based in Damascus, to demand unconditional obedience. This was referred to as “Syrian obedience,” or *tā‘a shāmiyya*. The mufti of Damascus, Sulaymān b. Mūsā (d. 119/737), for example, argued that the perfect Muslim was one who combined Hijāzī knowledge, Iraqi behavior, and Shāmī obedience.²⁹ Expressions of the political, however, must be understood in both a top-down fashion and a bottom-up fashion. As al-Sarhan cogently describes, despite the caliph’s insistence on total obedience, many Muslims in this time did not accept it. Opponents insisted that obedience to the rulers should be conditional, based

on their performance of “good” (*maʿrūf*), not their immersion in sin.³⁰ Thus, the issue of quietism, or obedience to the rulers, was dependent on how Muslims interpreted the political obligations of their faith. The development of certain traditions from this time suggests that many Muslims placed obligations to their faith before obligations of quietism to the ruler.³¹

This dichotomy between obedience to the ruler and political obligations of the faith is evident in Ibn Ḥanbal’s complex positions. In his writings, we see expressions of political quietism or activism that seem to depend on varying contexts. While Ibn Ḥanbal and his contemporaries might have argued that obedience to the ruler was, in fact, necessary, they also argued that Islam demanded that Muslims place obedience to God and His laws above all other forms of obedience. Although modern scholars such as Cook and Crone depict the traditionalist Ibn Ḥanbal as a political quietist, al-Sarhan demurs, reminding us, “Other traditionalists were not against commanding and forbidding the rulers against certain actions ...”³² Quietism for Ibn Ḥanbal and his followers was an expression of political protest that understood the limits of activism. Given the expanding power of the caliphal state, expressions of quietism were also demonstrative of many Muslims’ pragmatic acceptance of their inability to influence the caliph or other rulers.³³

For the early Muslim community, questions of religious allegiance were entwined with duties that stemmed from political commitments. The Shīʿa sect emerged from this milieu and can be interpreted as an early iteration of political quietism in Islam. Early Shīʿī writers such as Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735) and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) explicitly rejected the idea of using armed rebellion to achieve their community’s particular political-theological goals and urged their followers to “differentiate” their religious identity from the early state. The early Shīʿī community represents perhaps a two-pronged version of political quietism. Intellectual leaders such as Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq urged his followers not to engage in rebellion against the broader, Sunnī polity in which they were a minority. But, as Said Arjomand points out, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq also “developed the notion of authority stemming from the divine guidance of mankind into a principle of absolute and infallible authority.”³⁴ Thus, the early development of “the fundamentally quietistic feature” of the Shīʿa sect can be interpreted as strategic dissimulation before the more powerful Sunnī majority.³⁵

A quintessential statement describing the early Shīʿī concept of dissimulation and quietism (*taqiyya*) comes from Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1032). Urging his community to reject armed rebellion and affirming the lawfulness of *taqiyya*, al-Mufid argued that the Shīʿa community must bide their time and wait for the

reappearance of the “hidden imam,” or Mahdī. “Far from holding it a religious duty to rise in armed revolt against their enemies,” al-Mufid wrote, the Mahdī’s ancestors “disapproved of any incitement to such action, and ... the religion by which they approach God consisted of dissimulation [*taqiyya*], restraining the hand and guarding the tongue, carrying out the prescribed worship, and serving God exclusively by good works.”³⁶

The era of empire

It has become something of a cliché in modern scholarship on Islam that, by the medieval period, Muslim politics was characterized by absolutism and thus required a political theology of quietism. Bernard Lewis articulated this standard line of thinking: “Except for the early caliphate, when the anarchic individualism of tribal Arabia was still effective, the political history of Islam is one of almost unrelieved autocracy.” He continues, “For the last thousand years ... the political thinking of Islam has been dominated by such maxims as ‘tyranny is better than anarchy’ and ‘whose power is established, obedience to him is incumbent.’” Lewis then cites a passage from the Syrian jurist Ibn Jamā‘a (d. 733/1333), who wrote about “forced homage,” to a system of politics in which “it was of no consequence” whether the ruler was “illiterate, unjust or vicious, that he be even a slave or a woman.” Further, Ibn Jamā‘a argued, “Whoever has effective power has the right to obedience ... for a government, even the worst one, is better than anarchy, and of two evils one should choose the lesser.”³⁷

History certainly vindicates the claim that the absolutism of the medieval caliphs existed alongside the political quietism of the populace. Maxims like “tyranny is better than anarchy” nourished political theologies that contended with rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances, from the beginning of the crusades in 488/1095 to the Mongol invasions, which climaxed with the sack of Baghdad in 656/1258 that incapacitated the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. The political strife of the first centuries of Islam led the political theorist Hamid Enayat to conclude that, by the medieval period, Muslims had reached “a point at which the supreme value in politics appeared to be not justice but security.” Muslim political thinking, in his view, did not revolve so much around the demands of justice from rulers as it required “the ability to rule and maintain ‘law and order.’”³⁸

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) was a classic exponent of a political theology that valorized security. In the wake of Mongol destruction, Ibn Taymiyya argued that the worst political situation for Muslims would be not having a ruler at all—this

was a fate worse than an unjust ruler. “Sixty years with an unjust ruler,” he said, repeating a well-known maxim, “is better than one night without a ruler.”³⁹ Yet Ibn Taymiyya’s political postures are ambiguous. He advocated quietism when it was strategic to do so, and at other times he advocated activism, even going so far as to specify that it was a religious duty for Muslims to overthrow an unjust ruler.⁴⁰ As Yahya Michot notes, Ibn Taymiyya’s “outspoken personality” and “noncompliance” landed him in prison six times between 706/1306 and 729/1328. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya argued that the notion of absolute obedience imposed by Mongol rulers was “of a pre-Islamic, ignorant (*jāhili*) nature.”⁴¹

By the medieval period, the Muslim polity fell in line with a top-down, political theology of empire characteristic of most human societies at the time; it favored the sovereignty of the caliphs or emperors and the subservience and obedience of their subjects. It is not surprising that major intellectuals such as Ibn Jamā’a characterized the caliph as “the shadow of God on earth.”⁴² Although rule became absolute and the Muslim community grew into an empire that saw quietism as a feature of the virtuous subject, it was in this period that a thriving genre of scholarship known as *naṣiḥa*, or advice, literature emerged. The goal of these works was to “preserve principles of communal consensus and election when it came to political authority.”⁴³ The proliferation of these works can be interpreted as a pragmatic, or quietist, form of activism. Works such as *Siyāsat nāma* by Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), *Naṣiḥat al-mulūk* by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and *al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya* by Ibn Taymiyya tacitly accepted the divinely sanctioned absolutism of the caliph but also exemplified a spirit of political activism.

In the Sunnī and Shī‘ī traditions, these works were known as “mirrors for princes.” Many of them were written by theologians contracted by political leaders to work for the state, positions that many Shī‘ī scholars accepted only begrudgingly, fearing that involvement with politics would distract them from their scholarly, theological pursuits. For example, when Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) was invited by Shah ‘Abbās II (d. 1078/1667) of the Ṣafavid Empire, he wrote, “I wavered between accepting that command and rejecting it because of the afflictions it entailed through the sons of this world and their affairs.” Kāshānī then added that he only accepted the court position “because of the possibility of propagating the religion.”⁴⁴ Although many of these tracts emphasized the duty of Muslims to remain obedient to their rulers, many of them can also be interpreted as pragmatic, subtle expressions of political activism calling for equitable, sound governance. As Said Arjomand notes, the *Qavā‘id al-salāṭīn*, written in 1081/1670 by an ‘ālim who was a descendant of

Shaykh ‘Alī l-Karakī (d. 940/1534), “mentions twelve principles of rulership, illustrating each with edifying stories of the exemplary behavior of past kings ... First and foremost among these principles is justice (‘*adālat*).”⁴⁵

In the Sunnī tradition, one of the most famous works from this genre is the *Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-dīniyya* [The ordinances of government and religious positions] by the jurist and political theorist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058). In the introduction to his work, he makes clear that his audience is “those in authority.” And although he acknowledges that he owes obedience to them, he writes to ensure that the ruler “honours the dictates of justice ... and aspires to equity in establishing his claims and in the fulfilment of others’ claims.”⁴⁶ Al-Māwardī’s first chapter describes the imamate in terms of a contract (‘*aqd*) between the community of Muslims and the ruler. To link expressions of quietism with political activism, al-Māwardī draws on a verse from the sixth-century pre-Islamic poet al-Afwah al-Awdī. “There is no benefit to a leaderless people when disorder reigns, and they will never have a leader if the ignorant amongst them leads.”⁴⁷ The first half confirms what modern scholars have labeled quietism, while the second half endorses what many Muslims view as a duty to counsel the ruler to secure just and equitable rule, according to the teachings of the *sharī‘a*.

For Shī‘a Muslims, expressions of political quietism were rooted in a historical experience different from that of their Sunnī counterparts. As a minority group, Shī‘ī history is largely characterized by persecution, especially in territories ruled by Sunnī majorities. Shī‘ī expressions of political activism fell on a spectrum but generally reflected a strong Mu‘tazilī influence. This is particularly evident in the Zaydī emphasis on principles of divine justice and commanding the right and forbidding the wrong. The Zaydī applied their duty to command right and forbid wrong to notions of political authority and legitimacy, and they developed an activist political theology that “justified (and even necessitated) the overthrow of an unjust ruler via armed insurrection.”⁴⁸ As Racha el Omari and Najam Haider write, “Rhetoric highlighting free will, the desire to establish justice, and the duty to enjoin good/forbid wrong became staples of the oaths of allegiance administered by most Zaydī *imams*.”⁴⁹ On the other side of the Shī‘ī spectrum of political expression were the Imāmī or Twelver Shī‘a. Prominent intellectuals associated with this sect were al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1032) and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044). Unlike their Zaydī counterparts, the Twelvers advocated what is described, today, as political quietism. They argued that Muslims should have as little to do with politics as possible until the return of the imam.⁵⁰

As previously stated, the concept of *taqiyya* (strategic dissimulation in pursuit of self-preservation) is an important element in Shī'ī expressions of political quietism.⁵¹ Throughout their history, in times of oppression, not only in the formative years, the Shī'ā drew upon this concept to dissimulate their convictions on political questions. Dissimulation of the faith, or what contemporary scholars might call quietism, is a theme throughout the Shī'ī political-theological canon and is included in the foundational works of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). The traditionist (Akhbārī) Shī'īs embraced this concept as early as the third/ninth century and “could live with patrimonial monarchy and even its leadership in religious matters.”⁵² The other school of Shī'īs, the principled discursive school (Uṣūlīs), could not reconcile with that position.

Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) formed yet another expression of the Muslim understanding of political obligations of the faith. The Chishtiyya can be interpreted as adhering closely to ideas of quietism.⁵³ The order spread throughout the Indian subcontinent under the spiritual guidance of Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 725/1325). The Chishtiyya “scrupulously avoid” identification with those who held political office and, by principle, refuse to involve themselves in government service.⁵⁴ Despite their initial unwillingness to engage in politics, the Chishtiyya understood “social service’ as the supreme object of all their spiritual exercises.”⁵⁵ Although the Chishtiyya attempted to avoid any involvement with the rulers of the Delhi sultanate, they became entwined with state politics as early as Sultan Muḥammad b. Tughluq’s reign in India (724–52/1324–51). The arrival of young Chishtī saints in provincial towns under the reign of Tughluq coincided with the rise of provincial kingdoms throughout India, in which young saints were actively involved.⁵⁶ Despite the urging of Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn and other Chishtī elders to refrain from political involvement, “traditions of the saints of the first cycle were consequently discarded,” Nizami writes, “and the comfortable theory was expounded that mystics should consort with kings and high officers in order to influence them for the good.”⁵⁷

The case of the Chishtiyya illustrates that life cannot be neatly divided between the social and the political, in which quietist notions of faith or spirituality are kept separate from worldly notions of politics. Chishtī elders sought to create a social system in which individuals could pursue moral purity and oneness with God. But social values such as these have important implications for the politics of the state in which they exist. We can understand politics to be subsumed under the realm of worldly “facts,” as opposed to “values” or matters of faith. But as social theorist Philip Gorski notes, “The fact/value divide is leaky. Values have a way of seeping into facts; and facts have a way of seeping into values.”⁵⁸ The

Chishtiyya trajectory resembles some of the quietist stance of some Sufis, but over time their political and social roles varied enormously.⁵⁹

The modern era

By 1800, the balance of global power had drifted from Muslim empires and dynasties to emerging European powers. The turnover of Muslim dynasties and the emergence of massive reform programs aimed at Westernization reflected a new world in which European power was hegemonic. As historian Immanuel Wallerstein states, the Europeans “were able to establish the rules of the game in the interstate system, to dominate the world economy (in production, commerce, and finance), to get their way politically ... and to formulate the cultural language with which one discussed the world.”⁶⁰ Some Muslims argued that European hegemony was, as with everything on Earth, the will of God, and Muslims should therefore quietly accept their lot. For example, the Muslim poet Mirza Ghalib (d. 1869) argued that the 1857 Indian Muslim rebellion against the British was wrong because revolt brought nothing but disaster.⁶¹ “When the Lord confers sovereignty he confers dignity also and the talent for victory,” reasoned Ghalib in support of the new political status quo, adding, “It is fitting for the people of the world to obey those whom the Lord has blessed with good fortune and, in obeying them, they should consider it obedience to the Lord himself.”⁶²

In supporting his argument for a quietist response to British hegemony in India, Ghalib cited a verse from the Persian poet Sa‘dī of Shiraz (d. 691/1292): “The slave must bow his head before the master. The ball has no choice but to follow the swing of the mallet.”⁶³ Sa‘dī’s creative verse is symbolic of another expression of quietism as articulated by Ottoman Tanzimat-era reformers like Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (d. 1873). Rather than rebel against the European powers, Tanzimat-era intellectuals viewed Europe as a sort of ally or guide and studied its history, culture, and political philosophy to glean certain insights into how to improve the Muslim community.⁶⁴ In this context, political quietism meant benefiting from the products of European knowledge, and not resisting it politically, as some more orthodox elements were inclined to do. This expression of political quietism involved acquiescence to European epistemology and its consequences in private and public life, ranging from the family to political economy. Political activism meant resisting European epistemology and knowledge as a matter of principle, and strategically adopting only what was needed, such as technological expertise, but not cultural and political modernity.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī championed this new form of political quietism. Upon his return to Egypt from living in France, he argued, “There is a moral obligation on those who share the same *waṭan* (homeland) to work together to improve it and perfect its organization.”⁶⁵ Yet al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s exhortation for Muslims to “improve” and “perfect” their homelands was limited. It did not mean rebelling against colonialism or protesting rulers; rather, it meant following the rule of law by accepting the new modernizing political order of Muḥammad ‘Alī. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī urged his compatriots not to rebel and argued that citizens should live in a state of freedom, but added, “patriots are not characterized by freedom except when they follow the law of the land and assist in its implementation.”⁶⁶

The political and reformist labor of the revolutionary Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1315/1897) and his disciple Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323/1905) represents another political expression. In his diagnosis of the relative weakness of the global Muslim community (*umma*) on the world stage, al-Afghānī was a realist. But ideologically, he was a revolutionary and stated that Muslims must change their personal relationship with God and Islam before they could improve the political position of their states. This could be interpreted as another modern expression of quietism, namely, one that calls for work on the interior self and the creation of a new pedagogy for the modern Muslim self. In one essay, al-Afghānī sought to explain that turning inward was necessary to correct the “sad situation” of the *umma*. He wrote that Muslims had lost true faith, for when they were “true Muslims,” “the world bears witness to their excellence.” He continued, “As for the present, I will content myself with this holy text: ‘Verily, God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly’ [Q 13:11].”⁶⁷

Granted, al-Afghānī called for political reform in Muslim societies, especially an end to authoritarian rule. In this sense, he was an activist. But his frequent calls for Muslims to quietly turn inward and reevaluate the nature of their faith were an important dimension of Muslim political theology in the late modern era. In many ways, al-Afghānī’s quietist strand of thought was a response to his contemporary, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan of India (d. 1898), whom he accused of calling “openly for the abandonment of all religions.”⁶⁸ In the exchange between al-Afghānī and Khan, the idea of political activism and quietism became much more complex. Al-Afghānī’s version of quietism was not to resist but to remain open to a limited amount of Western knowledge, but he was opposed to the political bondage of colonialism. Khan was quietist in both politics and knowledge and was viewed, by many, as an Anglophile. He was content to let new knowledge of modernity rewrite the narrative of Islam. In the late modern period, activism and quietism were not so much about the nature of politics

but the politics of the body and the body-politic: What kind of knowledge governs the body as well as body-politic of the modern colonial and postcolonial subject? Who acquiesces to the politics and power of Western political and scientific technology and who resists it is difficult to define. It is here that, in the modern era, the category of political quietism and activism became superfluous, because in an age of globalization and fluid boundaries, activism and quietism are one of individual choice. One expression of political quietism called for the acceptance of the new order of knowledge and politics, which is based on the experience of Christian Europe in the form of the nation-state, in the belief that this acceptance would give rise to a new Islamic political theology.⁶⁹ And that new political theology regulating the nation-state required a separation of religion from politics.

The controversial writing of ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1386/1966) is perhaps the most explicit example of the advocacy of Islamic secularism (a new political theology). In *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power*, ‘Abd al-Rāziq argues that neither the Qur’ān nor the sunna provides compelling reasons to view the caliphate as a religious duty. Throughout history, he argued, there was no legitimate consensus (*ijmā‘*) on the obligation to establish a caliphate. The history of the caliphate proved that it was a negative and despotic experience for the Muslim community that led to Islam’s decline on the world stage. ‘Abd al-Rāziq never overtly drew on the concept of *irjā‘* or the Murji’a; nonetheless, his concern was to preserve the solidarity of the Muslim community as a religious, not a political, community.

“The control that the Prophet exercised over the believers was strictly an extension of his Prophetic function,” ‘Abd al-Rāziq declared. “It had none of the characteristics of temporal power. In all certainty, it was not a government; it was not a state; nor a political movement; neither was it the sovereignty of kings and princes.”⁷⁰ We can interpret his line of analysis here as a quietist move to accept the emerging status quo. But unlike earlier forms of quietism, when favoring the status quo was necessary for self-preservation in an asymmetrical power relationship with a potentate, here quietism meant benefiting from the new political and epistemological European order. ‘Abd al-Rāziq attempted to remove the dualism of secular politics versus religion. For most of ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s critics, this epistemological move in the direction of quietism, which involved reinterpreting the political history of Islam to legitimate a separation of religion and politics, was a betrayal of Islam itself. Muḥammad Sayyid Kilānī, documenting the trial of ‘Abd al-Rāziq, described his “evil views” (*al-ārā’ al-khabītha*) as insulting and a reproach (*ta’īn*) of the Prophet and the Companions.⁷¹ ‘Abd

al-Rāziq was charged with portraying Islam “exclusively as a spiritual norm” (*sharī‘a rūḥiyya mahḍa*). His critics argued that his new order of politics was reassuring to Christian missionaries, who congratulated him on his writings, and confirmed that politically, he did not oppose European colonialism nor did he support a political struggle (*jihād*) in support of independence and freedom.⁷²

In the modern era, certain Shī‘ī clerics, such as the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ḥusayn Burūjirdī (d. 1961), represent a less explosive form of quietism. Burūjirdī was involved in many charitable works, such as establishing schools, but on pressing political issues, he remained virtually silent throughout his life. Despite his position as a leader of Iran’s Shī‘ī Muslims, Burūjirdī never commented on events such as the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh, the Israel–Palestine conflict, or even British and American interference in Iranian national interests.⁷³ Yet, Burūjirdī was not completely apolitical. Rather, his political positions should perhaps be characterized as silent protest rather than public activism. This protest was framed using religious concepts and symbols. In the 1950s, when the *Fidā’iyyān-i Islām* (“devotees of Islam”) embarked on a series of political assassinations, Burūjirdī denounced their actions as un-Islamic. He was involved in protesting the anti-Baha’i campaigns of another prominent Shī‘ī cleric, Abū l-Qāsim Falsafī, and also protested the Shah’s land reform programs that began in 1951. In fact, according to Nequin Yavari, Burūjirdī’s public denouncement of the Shah’s program was the first instance of open confrontation between the clergy and the Shah’s government.⁷⁴

What we see in Burūjirdī’s thinking is an implicit separation between religious and political spheres of knowledge and engagement with public life. Burūjirdī protested the Shah’s land reform program because he deemed it to be contrary to Islamic law and tradition. Some theorists might consider his protest to be of a more religious than political nature, which would confirm Burūjirdī’s own thinking. The difference between Burūjirdī and ‘Abd al-Rāziq is that the latter might have considered the land reform acts, which were related to property, to be a secular and not a religious issue, and for that reason he might not have protested them. By contrast, Burūjirdī fully believed that *sharī‘a* norms applied to people’s lives and therefore he protested the government’s actions. In fact, after Burūjirdī’s death, more radical and politically active clergymen rose to prominence in Qum. These clergymen frequently criticized Burūjirdī’s quietist, apolitical policies and sought to assert Islamic doctrines as a major factor in shaping politics.

Burūjirdī’s quietist strand of political protest was maintained by Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū‘ī (d. 1413/1992) of Najaf, Iraq. At the time

of his death, al-Khū'ī was the spiritual leader of much of the Shī'ī world. Despite his prominence, most of al-Khū'ī's activism was centered on social welfare and charity. He established the Imam al-Khoei Foundation in London and New York and founded numerous cultural centers in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. Al-Khū'ī represented a strand in Shī'ī thought that disapproved of the involvement of the clergy in politics. He accepted that religion and politics occupied separate spheres of public life and thus he was opposed to Khomeini's doctrine of the governance of the jurist (*wilāyat-i faqīh*). He was even critical of the activism of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, a leading cleric executed by Saddam Hussein in 1401/1980.⁷⁵

Al-Khū'ī's expression of quietism, with some exceptions, amounted to the complete avoidance of the political realm. During the decade-long Iran–Iraq war, al-Khū'ī maintained a strict position of “absolute silence.”⁷⁶ Al-Khū'ī even refused to allow himself to be photographed with Iraqi government officials who visited shrines in Najaf. In 1991, during the post-Gulf war Shī'ī uprising, al-Khū'ī appeared on television to denounce the rebellions among Shī'ī communities throughout Iraq—but only under tremendous pressure from Saddam Hussein. Al-Khū'ī argued that such rebellions were prohibited by Islam and that Muslims should not revolt against their leader.⁷⁷

Ayatollah al-Khū'ī's mode of political quietism has its counterpart in Sunnī Islam, among the Salafis. Various iterations of Salafism have been described as either “purist” or “quietist,” but what underlies this form of contention is political protest.⁷⁸ As one *jihādī* Salafist told Quintan Wiktorowicz: “The split is not in thought; it is in strategy.”⁷⁹ “Purist” or “quietist” Salafis do not generally advocate violence in any form, rather they express themselves politically through *da'wa*, the Islamic concept of community outreach that involves spreading the faith, and education. Quietist Salafis disagree with overt, full-throttle participation in a political system deemed to be inherently Western in nature or un-Islamic. As Wiktorowicz puts it, “They view politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy.”⁸⁰

One of the most prominent Salafī intellectuals who is often labeled a quietist is the Jordanian-Palestinian Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī.⁸¹ Al-Maqdisī represents a distinct mode of political expression. Nearly all of al-Maqdisī's writings are political, but his quietism stems from his views that Muslims should not participate in a system of politics that is not authentically Islamic. Interestingly, he believes that certain traditional Islamic concepts and symbols would become tarnished if used in the contemporary, Western-dominated world of politics. For example, al-Maqdisī admits to supporting various forms of *jihād*

in principle—both offensive and defensive. But in 2004, al-Maqdisī published a book in which he berated many *mujāhidūn* “for their lack of knowledge about Islam and their surroundings, their extreme paranoia or dangerous negligence and their reckless use of violence.”⁸² He followed this work with another tract aimed squarely at critiquing his former student, al-Zarqāwī, in which he urged al-Zarqāwī to refrain from the indiscriminate use of violence and anathematizing (*takfīr*) entire groups of people “because it is wrong to do so and hurts the image of Islam.”⁸³

Quietist Salafism is characterized by a hesitation to participate in strategies or systems deemed un-Islamic and damaging to the image of Islam. The Western-imposed system of nation-states throughout the world, and the strong alliances between many Muslim states and Western powers, has brought about a new phase in expressions of quietism and activism in Muslim politics. At the core of quietists’ political contentions is the question of what Muslims should do about a ruler who is deemed unjust or unworthy of obedience. This contention is rooted in the concept of *kufṛ*, or unbelief. On this issue, the Murji’ā position of quietism, in the sense of deferring conclusions regarding belief and sin to God, has undergone two major changes in modern Islam.

One group of “quietist” Salafīs included Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1420/1999) and the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz (d. 1420/1999). They argued that Muslim rulers who applied “man-made laws” were in a state of “lesser unbelief” (*kufṛ aṣghar*). These Salafīs argue that the application of some “man-made laws” does not necessarily constitute wholesale unbelief, and therefore they do not anathematize (*takfīr*) secular Muslims. Another group of “quietists,” including al-Maqdisī, Muḥammad b. al-‘Uthaymīn (d. 1422/2001), and the former Saudi Grand Mufti Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (d. 1389/1969), sees the systematic application of man-made laws as full-scale unbelief (*kufṛ akbar*).⁸⁴ Here, al-Maqdisī’s position reveals how difficult it is for scholars to apply categories of “quietism” or “activism.” Al-Maqdisī’s defiance of the legitimacy of Muslim rulers is overtly political, but his choice *not* to use the political system itself to protest these rulers is quietist. Rather, al-Maqdisī resorts to private writings and *da’wa* to spread his concerns.

In discussions of quietism in Salafī political theology, experts often mention many clerics from Saudi Arabia. In defining their role as guardians of the faith, Saudi clerics draw upon a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet Muḥammad states that the ‘*ulamā*’ are heirs of the prophets.⁸⁵ Members of the ‘*ulamā*’ thus view themselves as protectors of Muslim tradition rooted in the model of the Prophet Muḥammad. They generally do not comment or get involved in the

overtly political matters of the kingdom. But the quietism of the Saudi clerics, as defenders of “tradition,” can be interpreted as expressions of the political, for tradition has the power to conserve as well as conquer.⁸⁶ The Saudi ‘*ulamā*’ might be quietist in the sense that they do not instigate rebellion or political reforms such as democratization, but as upholders of tradition, they are, nonetheless, inherently political and engaged in a project of shaping the future of their society through the narratives of faith.

Conclusion

Muslim expressions of quietist political theologies are tied to the changes in Muslim political institutions, societies, political philosophies, ethics, and doctrines that have unfolded over time. Shifting interpretations of how Muslims could best respond to the moral obligation of *ḥisba* were central to these divisions and internal variations. In the early period, the Muslim polity was relatively small and socially homogenous, and politics was deeply imbued in the Arab tribal ethos of consultation (*shūrā*), consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and the oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*). As Muslim society became more heterogeneous and diverse, the political culture also underwent changes. This political culture required a delicate balance and a continuous reconciliation between the normative imprint of Islam’s original impulse, which remained in tension with new cultures that arose within the emerging and growing Islamic imperium.

Politics was the bedrock of the unfolding of Islam. Political quietism was a product of that milieu and an expression of a political theology. Multiple religious traditions underwent similar challenges as they tried to balance political, pietistic, and ethical impulses within a coherent narrative. Political quietism is a balancing act that tries to retain some of the old theology and accommodate new conditions without creating instability and anarchy. Modernists either weighed in favor of the status quo politics of colonialism and post-colonialism or proposed alternative interpretations of Islam, to make Islam adapt to the status quo. Some call it Islamic reform, while critics would consider it political quietism and acquiescence, since it is not sufficiently revolutionary. While political quietism might not reflect all forms of Islamic reform, it is the impulse that drives nonrevolutionary Islamic reform.

The Italian philologist Giorgio Levi Della Vida (d. 1967) once said, “Islam is so complex that it cannot be made to coincide with anything other than itself.”⁸⁷

Della Vida's attempt to articulate an Islamic exceptionalism ought not be heeded. Indeed, historians of Islam repeatedly untangle the ways in which a multiplicity of ideas from different origins become entwined with the lifeworlds of Muslim societies, cultures, and politics. Quietism is one form of political theology. As with the Indian guru Babaji's smile, these multiple expressions of political quietism can be interpreted in a number of ways.

Notes

- 1 Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 19–21.
- 2 Jan Assman, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (Munich: Hanser, 2000), 24; as quoted in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religion in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 25.
- 3 S.v. "Quietism," in *Britannica Academic*, online: <http://academic.eb.com>; T. K. Connolly, s.v. "Quietism," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale, 2003).
- 4 Werner Raupp, Heiner F. Klemme, and Manfred Kuehn, "Johann Albrecht Bengel," in *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers* (New York: Continuum, 2010), online: www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199797097.001.0001/acref-9780199797097-e-0042.
- 5 Leszek Kolakowski, "Quietism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005).
- 6 "Divine Right of Kings—Oxford Reference," (accessed May 11, 2017), online: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810104754564> (accessed January 4, 2018).
- 7 Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 73.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 All divisions of historical time are, inevitably, somewhat arbitrary. For clarity of narrative, however, we divide these periods as the early caliphate (revelation–750 CE), era of empire (750–1800 CE), and modern (1800–present).
- 10 Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (New York: New Press, 2000), 324.
- 11 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:241.
- 12 Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–6; Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*:

- From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 117; Nicholas P. Roberts, *Political Islam and the Invention of Tradition* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2015), 136.
- 13 Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:241.
 - 14 This order is given throughout the Qur'ān. See 3:104, 110, 114; 9:112; 22:41. As Mohammad Hashim Kamali states, the duty of *ḥisba* is a collective obligation on the community of Muslims, or *wājib/farḍ kifā'ī*. See Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 415.
 - 15 Michael A. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 W. Madelung, "Murjī'a," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:605–607.
 - 18 W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 125.
 - 19 Khalil Athamina, "The Early Murjī'a: Some Notes," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 35, no. 1 (1990), 122. The early biographer and historian Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), in his *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, surveys eighteen prominent Murjī'is, eleven of whom were from Kufa. See Watt, *Formative Period*, 122.
 - 20 The Muslim scholar Mulla 'Alī Qārī assumes this text was that of Abū Ḥanīfa; however, some modern scholars challenge this. Joseph Schacht claims that the opinions in *al-Fiqh al-akbar* are authentic and those of Abū Ḥanīfa, but he doubts that Abū Ḥanīfa composed the text itself. See Abū Ḥanīfa Nu'mān b. Thābit, *Kitāb al-fiqh al-akbar*, ed. Mulla 'Alī Qārī 'Alī b. Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Harawī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabīyya al-Kubrā, 1909); Joseph Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1:123–124.
 - 21 Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, online: <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-6388/page-21> (accessed September 18, 2017).
 - 22 A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 103–104.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Abū Ḥanīfa, "al-Fiqh al-akbar," trans. Hamid Algar, 3, online: <https://archive.org/details/Al-fiqhAl-akbareng.-AbuHanifah.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2018).
 - 25 Michael A. Cook, "Activism and Quietism in Islam," in *Islam and Power*, ed. Alexander S. Cudsi and Ali E. Hillal (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 22; Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 135–139; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics Under the Early 'Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 73; as cited in Saud Saleh al-Sarhan, "Early Muslim Traditionalism: A Critical Study of the Works and Political Theology of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal" (PhD dissertation University of Exeter, 2011), 171.

- 26 Al-Sarhan, “Early Muslim Traditionalism,” 171–172.
- 27 For example, according to Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Ḥanbal once stated that because ‘Alī was “a member of the Prophet’s household,” no one, caliph or otherwise, could compare with him. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *The Life of Ibn Ḥanbal*, trans. Michael Cooperson (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 80.
- 28 Al-Sarhan, “Early Muslim Traditionalism,” 121.
- 29 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ bayān al-‘ilm wa-faḍlih*, ed. Abū l-Ashbāl al-Zuhayrī (Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1994), 2:824–825; as cited in al-Sarhan, “Early Muslim Traditionalism,” 176.
- 30 Al-Sarhan, “Early Muslim Traditionalism,” 177.
- 31 One saying from al-Bukhārī’s collection of traditions states, “[There is] no obedience in disobedience to God; obedience is required only in what is good.” Another similarly states, “A Muslim has to listen to and obey [the orders of his ruler] whether he likes it or not, as long as these orders do not involve one in disobedience [to God]; but if an act of disobedience [to God] is imposed, one should not listen to it or obey it.” Ibid.
- 32 Ibid., 193.
- 33 Ibid., 198–199.
- 34 Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.
- 35 “‘Imam’—the mere word—is an invitation to obedience. More: It is a command to believe,” writes Hamid Dabashi in *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 482.
- 36 Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 61.
- 37 Bernard Lewis, “Communism and Islam,” in *The Middle East in Transition*, ed. Walter Z. Laqueur (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 318–319; Roberts, *Political Islam*, xviii.
- 38 Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 12.
- 39 Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shi‘a wa-l-Qadariyya*, edited by Muḥammad Rashād Sālīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-‘Urūba, 1962), 1:371; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-shar‘iyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Sha‘b, 1971), 185; Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 12.
- 40 For an excellent overview of contested interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya, see Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 41 Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Böwering et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

- 42 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15.
- 43 Paul Heck, “Advice,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Böwering et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- 44 Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 267–268.
- 45 Ibid., 13.
- 46 Al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*, trans. Asadullah Yate (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 1996), 7–8.
- 47 Ibid., 10.
- 48 Racha el Omari, Najam Haider, and Emad El-Din Shahin, “Mu‘tazilah,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For more on this, see Hussein Ali Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine, Mu‘tazili Theology: Al-Sharif al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 This should not be construed, however, as a categorical description of Shi‘ism as a quietist political theology. Many important Shi‘i intellectuals, such as Ali Shari‘ati, argued strongly against the traditional Shi‘i understanding of *taqiyya*. See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 114. Dabashi’s work *Shi‘ism: A Religion of Protest* demonstrates, by its mere title, the complex interplay between expressions of quietism and activism in Shi‘i history. See Hamid Dabashi, *Shi‘ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011).
- 52 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 228. R. Strothmann et al., s.v. “Taqiyya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 10:134–136.
- 53 For this insight, we thank Mohammad Ali, PhD candidate at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, India.
- 54 K. A. Nizami, “Čishtiyya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 2:50–56.
- 55 K. A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (New Delhi: Caxton Press P. Ltd., 1961), 236. Other Sufi orders, such as the Suhrawardiyya, understood that the faith-based obligation of social service required active participation with the state, as Nizami points out (248). Nizami adds, “If a man became ego-centric, limited his sympathies and cut himself off completely from the energizing currents of social life, he failed to fulfill the mystic mission.”
- 56 Jürgen Paul argues that, as with the Chishtiyya, “the Khwājagān’s attitude towards the powers that be was at first quietist and even apolitical and [then] they became more involved with politics ... their attitude towards the way Transoxiana was

- being ruled became more outspoken, when their influence grew,” in Paul L. Heck (ed.), *Sufism and Politics: The Power of Spirituality* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), 141. See also the introduction to K. A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion*, x–xi.
- 57 Nizami, “Āishtiyya.”
- 58 Philip Gorski, “Beyond the Fact/Value Distinction: Ethical Naturalism and the Social Sciences,” *Society* 50, no. 6 (2013): 548, doi: 10.1007/s12115-013-9709-2.
- 59 Black, *History of Islamic Political Thought*, 133.
- 60 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 57–58.
- 61 We wish to again thank Mohammad Ali of Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi for this insight and source.
- 62 Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbūy: A Diary of the Indian Revolt of 1857*, trans. Khwaja Ahmed Faruqi (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1970), 275.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Roberts, *Political Islam*, 37.
- 65 As cited in Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 79.
- 66 Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, “The Extraction of Gold, or an Overview of Paris and the Honest Guide for Girls and Boys,” in *Modernist Islam: A Sourcebook, 1840–1940*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34–35.
- 67 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, “Refutation of the Materialists,” in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn ‘al-Afghānī*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 173.
- 68 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, “The Materialists in India,” in *Islamic Response*, ed. Keddie, 177.
- 69 Ebrahim Moosa, “Political Theology in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring,” in *The African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring*, ed. C. Villa-Vicencio, E. Doxtader, and E. Moosa (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 101–119.
- 70 Ali Abdel Razek, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power*, trans. Maryam Loutfi, ed. Abdou Filali-Ansary (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 95–96.
- 71 Muḥammad Sayyid Kilānī, “Dhayl al-milal wa-l-niḥal,” in *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1402), 74–75.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Roy P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 237–238.
- 74 Neguin Yavari, “Hosayn Borujerdi,” in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004).
- 75 Edmund A. Ghareeb (ed.), “Ayat-Allah al-Khui,” in *Historical Dictionary of Iraq* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004).

- 76 Majid Mohammadi, "Abo al-Qasem Kho'i," *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2016).
- 77 Ghareeb, "Ayat-Allah al-Khui."
- 78 See, for example, Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207–240, doi: 10.1080/10576100500497004. Jacob Olidort argues that "quietist" is an inadequate label for certain Salafis, such as Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) and his followers because they are, in fact, politically active. See "The Politics of 'Quietist' Salafism," Analysis Paper, *Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World* (Washington, DC: Brookings, February 2015).
- 79 Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 208.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 See, for example, Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi*.
- 82 Ibid., 46–47.
- 83 Ibid. As Wagemaker notes, for important analyses of the debate between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawī, see Steven Brooke, "The Preacher and the Jihadi," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 3 (2006), 119; Nibras Kazimi, "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 2 (2005), 109.
- 84 Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi*, 64–66.
- 85 Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 1.
- 86 This insight is derived from Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan (London: Harvill Press, 1964), 267; Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 10.
- 87 As cited in Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 301.

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