

Salman Rushdie: Heretic or Rebel?

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Abstract: As Salman Rushdie was accused of heresy, this paper weighs the pros and cons of previous heresy cases in Islamic history to demonstrate that very often religious dissent was confounded with political dissent and even treason. Any form of dissent was considered “unorthodox” and therefore “heretical” and punishable by death. The distinction between “the heretic” and “the rebel,” both of which were used interchangeably, was often dimmed on purpose.

Key-words: Salman Rushdie, heresy, blasphemy, Islamic history

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If blasphemy is not the most common of techniques in western fiction it is because so few writers take religion seriously enough to feel it worth attacking.¹

Heresy in Christianity

Heresy in the Christian world is defined as “a doctrinal view or belief at variance with the recognized tenets of ... [the] church,” or “any course of conduct or instruction tending to produce dissension and schism in the church.”² In his pamphlet titled *Blasphemy – a Plea for Religious Equality* (1922), Chapman Cohen makes a clear distinction between “heresy” and “blasphemy”:

The heretic is one who is a threat to the welfare of the tribe or nation, and, in the interests of the whole group, he must be suppressed ... The blasphemy laws are aimed at opinion and opinion alone. It is to the spirit of persecution they owe their existence; it is the spirit of intolerance and persecution they always serve.³

Historically, blasphemy, as seen in the West, grew out of the law of heresy, the purpose of which was to protect the Church from all forms of dissidence. Christ expected unbelievers to be burnt in hell (Matthew 7:19, 13:30; John 15:6).⁴ Zealous Paul was seen as one of the early promoters of persecution of all those who threaten to defile divine truth. He called those Christians who opposed him “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” And as “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,” they may be “his servants [in] disguise” (2 Corinthians, 13-15). Christ’s and Paul’s words, together, come to mean justifying persecution of dissidents or heretics.

Though the persecution of Christian dissidents and unbelievers started in the early middle ages,⁵ it became organized when the Inquisition was set up in 1232. Taking the form of a travelling ecclesiastical tribunal, the Inquisition visited towns, encouraged denunciations, often anonymous, and assumed guilt even on suspicion. More than 90,000 trials were held between 1481 and 1499 and 49,000 between 1560 and 1700.

Those who rebelled against the Inquisition, as one of the most tyrannical institutions, and worked for its dissolution, produced new laws or new engines of repression in the form of laws of blasphemy. It is often really misleading to argue that the Protestants, or the Reformation, brought about religious freedom. Martin Luther (1483-1546), founding-father of Protestantism,⁶ combated the authority of the Pope, as Joachim Kahl put it, only to make room for “an authority which was even higher than that of the pope – the word of God.”⁷ To Martin Luther, Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam were blasphemies.⁸ Sin was blasphemy, political opinion was blasphemy, and missing Church was blasphemy.⁹ In fact, blasphemy was “part of the Protestant currency.”¹⁰ In Geneva, Calvin had his opponent Servetus (who had himself ordered the killing of a blasphemer) arrested, tried for heresy and blasphemy, and sentenced to death. His last words, as his lower half was being burnt, “O Jesus, Son of the

Eternal God, have pity on me,” were even used as proof of his guilt as he did not refer to the “Eternal Son of God.”¹¹ One hundred and sixty people (including women and children) were executed in sixty years in Geneva for transgressing against Calvin’s spiritual rule.¹²

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century disrespectful references to God or the Church, in England and American colonies, were considered blasphemous. In 1656, for example, James Nayler claimed equality with God and was tortured, confined in prison, and set to hard labour. In 1729, Cambridge academic Thomas Woolston was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison (until 1733) for arguing in a series of pamphlets that the miracles of the New Testament were rather allegorical.¹³ Blasphemy as legacy of the Inquisition remained as such throughout most of Europe. More than that, it has always been implicit that blasphemy against God was treason against the secular state. This was Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale’s view in 1676, that a threat to the Church meant a threat to the State.¹⁴ And it is only those who adhere to the “authority of God,” which is Luther’s view, can enjoy the “freedom of expression” guaranteed by the First Amendment of the American Constitution.

From heresy to blasphemy to obscenity to scurrilous language. Whenever one falls into disuse, a new term is invented as an engine of repression. There had always been fear of what was called the “floodgates of impiety” or dissidence. Most Christians believe they had passed through a conscience-centred revolution and benefited from the rigid spiritual rule of the Middle Ages. They have developed Puritan notions of how to follow not Christ of the Scriptures, but Christ within. If they enjoy freedom of expression, that is because they have learnt the sense of responsibility and restraint. It is the sanctity of this “Christ within,” defenders of the abolition of the laws of blasphemy argue, that protects them from transgressing against the Church and its paraphernalia. Blasphemy laws must therefore fall into disuse. But “Christ within” does not protect other religions from libelous language or attitudes which verge on blasphemy. This last point represents the main argument of those who plead for religious equality, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

Heresy in Islam:

In Islam, a heretic (Arabic “zendiq”)¹⁵ is anyone who:

- casts doubts on religion or parts of it;
- sins or makes one’s sins public;
- follows the miscreants in what they believe in;
- adheres to the “Moatazila” (believes the Quran is *created*) and “Moattila” (rejects Quran and Sunna/teachings of Prophet Muhammad) sects;
- believes in *Thunaya*/Dualism; in incarnation (*hulul*); as the Druze do;¹⁶ in reincarnation (*tanasukh*);
- does not believe in God and Afterlife (the “Daharya” creed); and in Resurrection and Hell;
- deifies humans and humanizes God;
- claims being a prophet or messenger or Mahdi
- pretends to be a believer in Islam, while in reality he is not (hypocrite); which is the most known definition.¹⁷

There is no reference to “heresy” or “zendaqa” in the Quran. But Prophet Muhammad is quoted to have said that “there will be misrepresentation [*masakh*] and defamation [*qadhaf*] in the Muslim community; and that is in the *Zendaqia* and *Qadarya* sects.”¹⁸ In Islamic tradition, a heretic is often killed and burnt.

Though apostasy (*al-riddah*, desertion of one’s faith) in Islam started shortly after the death of Prophet Muhammad, plunging Caliph Abu Baker’s rule into what was called “*al-riddah* wars,” heresy (*al-zendaqa*, invention of a course of conduct at variance with what was believed) in Islam is known to have developed during the rule of Abbasid caliphs al-Mamun,

al-Moatasem, and al-Wathiq (from 198-231 H/ 813-845 CE) who adhered to the Moatazila belief.¹⁹ The heresy period was characterized by the expansion of lust, whoring, and impudence epitomized in the “infamous” Umayyad caliph Waleed ibn Yazid’s intent, during the first months of his reign (in 125 H/742 CE), to drink wine on top of al-Kaaba during Haj. Had not he been murdered (after 18 months of rule, in a plot involving the majority of Umayyad emirs and army chiefs), he would have carried out his plan. The three Abbasid caliphs mentioned above not only disparaged the Sunni doctrine and adopted the newly-rising Moatazila sect, but also tortured all those who refused to follow them: particularly cadis and Ulamas, famous among them Ahmed ibn Handel, founder of the Hanbali Sunni doctrine now followed in Saudi Arabia and parts of Iraq.

Torture of those who refused to adopt the Moatazila (the secluded) sect weakened the power of the caliphs over their subjects and paved the way for the eruption of dissenting scholastic/religious groups/ associations, the most known of which was the anti-Arab Shaubi (populist) movement which involved all the anti-Sunni sects: the “Batinia,”²⁰ the “Qaramita,”²¹ the “Rafidha,”²² the “Daharya,” the “Thunaya” (Dualist), and the “Jahamya.”²³ The objective of all such groups was apparently to claim equality between non-Arab Muslims of the Islamic caliphate and Arabs, but their claim was tainted with undertones of ridicule of all that was Arab (origin, culture, conduct, etc). So they adopted what the Sunnis considered an intellectual heretic/zendic style and disseminated a wave of atheism that denied religion, mocked it, attacked the moral values, and generated a trend of suspicion in everything that had so far been religiously “forbidden” and published the Magus and heretic works that had hitherto been rejected by the community.²⁴

It was for such reasons that the Islamic caliphate knew what had never seen before of defection from Islam and insult of Prophet Muhammad’s disciples (particularly the first two, Abi Baker and Omar, the shiites refuse to recognize). Beni Buayh (who ruled 110 years), Beni Hamdane, the Fatimids,²⁵ and all those who ruled Egypt, Damascus, Iraq, Iran, Hijaz, and the Maghreb rose against the Sunnis and thousands of people were massacred on both sides. Caliphs, Sunnis or not, failed to bring order as their power grew symbolic in the face of the emerging authority of the Turkish and other non-Arab sultans, army generals, viziers, and dissenting Alaouite (Shiite) or Abbasid (Sunni) high-ranked people.

Among the most known of those accused of heresy in the Islamic world were: Museilama ibn Habib al-Kadhab,²⁶ Lassouad al-Ansi,²⁷ al-Mokhtar ibn Abi Abid al-Thaqafi,²⁸ al-Harith ibn Saad,²⁹ Maabid ibn Abdullah al-Juhani,³⁰ Ammar ibn Yazid,³¹ al-Mughira ibn Said al-Bajli,³² al-Jaad ibn Dirham,³³ Caliph al-Waleed ibn Yazid,³⁴ writer Abdullah ibn Muqaffa’a,³⁵ Al-Muqanna’a Ata al-Khurasani,³⁶ poet Bashshar ibn Burd,³⁷ Perfectus and Joannes,³⁸ Isaac of Cordoba,³⁹ Poet Abu Isa al-Warraaq,⁴⁰ Babek al-Kharami,⁴¹ Ahmed ibn Yahya alias ibn al-Rawandi,⁴² Hussein ibn Mansur alias al-Hallaj,⁴³ Abu Bakr al-Razi,⁴⁴ Abu al-Hussein al-Bureidi,⁴⁵ al-Hakim ibn al-Moez,⁴⁶ writer Abul Ala al-Maari,⁴⁷ Ahmed ibn Khaqan,⁴⁸ Ahmed ibn Abdullah ibn Ata,⁴⁹ philosopher Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Baja,⁵⁰ Sultan Suleiman Shah Mohammad ibn Malikshah,⁵¹ poet Amara al-Yamani,⁵² philosopher Shehab al-Din Suhrawardi,⁵³ Izz al-Dawla Saad bin Mansur ibn Kammuna,⁵⁴ Ahmed al-Russi,⁵⁵ Mohammad ibn al-Hussein,⁵⁶ Nacer ibn al-Sharaf Abi al-Fadhel ibn Ismael ibn al-Heiti,⁵⁷ Othman al-Dakkaki,⁵⁸ Hassen ibn Muhammad al-Sakakini,⁵⁹ Ali ibn Abi al-Fadhel ibn Muhammad ibn Hussein ibn Kathir,⁶⁰ Othman ibn Muhammad alias ibn Dabadib,⁶¹ Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi,⁶² writer Shams Eddine Maki,⁶³ Fadh Allah Astarabadi,⁶⁴ Jerome,⁶⁵ Mirza Ali Muhammad Ridha al-Shirazi,⁶⁶ and Batto Sfez,⁶⁷ Muhammad Riday al-Isfahani,⁶⁸ Kamil Abdel Messiah,⁶⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan,⁷⁰ Sheikh Ali Akbar Quchani,⁷¹ Mirza Yakub al-Muttahidih,⁷² Ahmad Kasrawi,⁷³ Esther John alias Qamar Zia,⁷⁴ Iranian Premier Hassan Ali Mansour,⁷⁵ Mahmud Mohammad Taha,⁷⁶ Sadeq Karim Mal Allah,⁷⁷ Tahir Iqbal,⁷⁸ Mehdi Dibaj.⁷⁹

Frequent was also the execution of a tribe or group the chief of which declared heresy or religious dissent. In 167 H/784 CE, caliph al-Mahdi attended the execution in Baghdad of a number of “heretics” brought to him from various regions of the caliphate. In 192 H/808 CE, Harun al-Rashid ordered the execution of adult Kharamites (or Kharamya)⁸⁰ in Azerbaijan and the sale of their children in Baghdad. In 312 H/324 CE, Nazuk, caliph al-Muqtadir bi Allah’s police chief, killed Haidarah, al-Shaarani, and ibn Mansur, al-Hallaj’s disciples. In 335 H/947 CE, a group of “heretical” kharijites were executed in Tunisia. In 363 H/974 CE, fifteen hundred Qarmate heretics were decapitated in Cairo. In 420 H/1029 CE, Muhammed ibn Sabaktakeen, governor of Iran, killed and crucified a group of Shiite dissenters. Abbas ibn Shohna after him went so far as to build a tower of Shiite heads to humiliate their followers. In 523 H/1129 CE, Bury ibn Taghatkeen, governor of Damascus, killed around 6,000 heretics and crucified their leaders.⁸¹ In 1392, Tamerlane massacred a group of heretics in the Caspian Sea. In 1803, the Wahhabites decapitate, in Mecca, a group of talisman-dealers, players, drug-addicts, prostitutes, and usurers. In 1979 CE, the Islamic Republic of Iran executed around 200 Bahaïs accused of heresy.⁸² In January 1980 CE, Saudi Arabia decapitated 63 rebels surviving the attack of Kaaba in 1979.

There had always been “heretics” or “dissenters” to execute even when no name appears. Executions of what was called anonymous “heretics” abound: in 237 H/851 CE (2 Christians in Cordoba), 238 H/852 CE (4 Christians in Cordoba), 313 H/940 CE (a Jew in Baghdad), 673 H/1275 CE (a notable Christian in Egypt), 720 H/1320 CE (1, in Damascus), 755 H/1354 CE (1, Damascus), 785 H/1383 CE (a Christian, Damascus), 811 H/1409 CE (a Cherif in Cairo), 905 H/1500 CE (1, in Cairo), 1259 H/1843 CE (an Armenian, in Constantinople), 1338 H/1920 CE (a Turk in Smyrna), 1390 H/1971 CE (1, in Qatar), 1410 H/1990 CE (1, in Iran), 1414 H/1993 CE (a woman lapidated in Bangladesh).

Only a few of “heretics” having attended the *cadi* councils or religious debates defected from their “heresy,” were shown around the town bareheaded, and escaped death. The rest persisted in their belief and worried Sunni scholars (who attended their interrogation) even after their execution (as was the case with al-Hallaj particularly). The tribunals, if it is allowed to call them so, were, to some extent, staged according to the ruler’s whims and the sentences were often dictated in advance.

What is worthy of interest also in the stories related to heresy and heretics in Islam is:

- (1) that, apart from exceptions, heresy was limited to scholars, *cadis*, imams, *fakihs* (religious scholars), caliphs, and politicians. To *fakihs*, anything “unorthodox” (*bid’a*) was considered heretical and therefore an uprising against what is received, politically and religiously.
- (2) As heretics were high-ranked people and had followers, it was difficult to disparage their “heresy.” Killing the author of the heresy did not solve the problem. Was the attitude of the Sunni doctrine to “interpretation” (*al-Ta’aweel*),⁸³ “opinion”, “scholastic theology” (*Ilm al-Kalam*),⁸⁴ and “reasoning” (*al-Aql*)⁸⁵ the cause of all this?
- (3) There is a disagreement over which religious group is heretical and which is not. This disagreement sheds doubt on whether or not we can call one heretical. Some Sunni scholars (particularly the Hanbalis) accuse all Shiites of heresy; while others believe that only the “extravagant” (*al-ghalia* or *al-ghalun*) of them are. Some considered the Zeidis (followers of Zeid ibn Ali ibn Zeen al-Abideen ibn Hussein ibn Ali) a heretical movement, much like the Qaramita, the Ismaelites, and the Kharijites⁸⁶ because Zeid was one of the disciples of Wassil ibn Ata (head of the Moatazila); while others (Sunni Ahmed ibn Teymia among them) think that the

Zeidis are closer to the Sunnis than are other dissenters as they recognize Caliphs Abu Baker and Umar and never demonize them as many other Shiite movements do.⁸⁷

- (4) Initially, heresy was political. This means that as long as a dissenter had not threatened the ruler's power (caliph, governor, or emir), the religious authority never took the trouble of accusing him of heresy. As the pen was mightier than the sword, the rate of writers "executed" or "silenced" for "heresy" is noticeable. Some were accused of heresy after their death, and that was when the Caliph wanted to confiscate their properties as Caliph as-Muatasem (Moatazili) did of his former army general al-Afsheen in 226 H/841 CE (unearthed his corpse and burnt it).
- (5) Al-Moatazila movement was considered a heretical movement, as I said earlier. So did Ahmed ibn Hambel (founder of Sunni Hambali doctrine), who suffered their injustices, treat them. But when Abul Hassen al-Ashari (270-325 H/883-937 CE), their leader of 40 years,⁸⁸ left them to join the Sunnis and employ their scholastic argumentation to prove the accuracy of the Sunni doctrine, he was received with great pleasure.
- (6) Heresy in Islam was limited to the individuals or movements that had thrown dissent among Muslims and expressed hatred of Islam. Thus the Sunni movements consider the following non-Sunni movements heretical as they are believed to be influenced by Christians and Jews: al-Qaramita,⁸⁹ al-Yazidya,⁹⁰ al-Ismaelya,⁹¹ al-Nasirya,⁹² the Druze, the Hachachine (or Hashasheen),⁹³ Babism, Baha'ism,⁹⁴ al-Qadianya,⁹⁵ al-Ahbash,⁹⁶ al-Ansar,⁹⁷ and al-Khomeinya.⁹⁸ But these count in millions now. Then it is Khomeini (founder of al-Khomeinya) who issued the death sentence against Rushdie, not the Sunnis. The Khomeinis (or the Jaafari Shiites), and their followers in Lebanon and Iraq, as some in the West pointed out, had always been quicker to defend Islam and its symbols than the Sunnis, hence the meteoric rise of Shiite figures like Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah and the Sunnis' fear of the success of the phenomenon of Shiitification among Sunnis.⁹⁹ Is it wise, then, to claim that Khomeinya is a "heretical" school? or that it is really so and that one should not be tempted by its defence of Islam as "Allah will allow the dissolute to defend Islam," as Prophet Muhammad is quoted to have said, though this *hadith* has never been authenticated in the Sahihs?¹⁰⁰

Having said all this about heresy and heretics in Islam, how can one accuse Rushdie of apostasy and issue a death sentence against him, when he is not a Muslim? Had not he repeatedly claimed that he "does not need God"? Is it not perhaps more important to discuss the reason(s) why many like him have chosen "atheism" as their new "religion"? Is it not more instrumental to think seriously about the reasons behind this growing "doubt in religion" and "atheism" and know if what is now promoted as the petrification of "Islamists' thought" – not Islamic religion – and their refusal of the "Other" and "the different" has a role in the dissemination of this phenomenon?

Notes

[1] Salman Rushdie, "In God We Trust," *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 376-377.

[2] *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Ferguson, 1982), vol. 1. "Etymologically, a *heretic* is one who takes or chooses his own belief, instead of the belief of his church."

[3] Quoted in the International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie's pamphlet *The Crime of Blasphemy - Why It Should be Abolished*, 1989, Article 19, London.

- [4] In speaking of the wheat and the tares which have been sown in one field, Jesus says: “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matthew 7:19, 13:30; John 15:6).
- [5] Famous among those who founded sects the Church considered heretic in the early years of Christianity were: Montanus, founder of Montanism, who claimed in 156 that he received revelations and convinced many of his followers to believe him. Sabellius, founder of Sabellianism in the third century, claimed that Christ and the father were one substance. Arius, founder of Arianism in the fourth century, denied that Christ is one substance with the father. Arianism remained spread until the seventh century. Pelagius, founder of Pelagianism in the fifth century, “denied original sin, confined grace to forgiveness, and affirmed that man’s unaided will is capable of spiritual good.” Donatius, founder of Donatism in the fourth century in Carthage, rejected the state’s interference in Church matters and believed in martyrdom to be granted remission of one’s sins. And in spite of their sufferings (under the Romans, the Vandals, and the Byzantines), Donatism remained popular in North Africa until the Middle Ages. Alexandrian Patriarch Dioscorus, founder of the Monophysite sect in the fifth century. He “affirms that Christ had but one nature, the divine alone or a singly compounded nature, and not two natures so united as to preserve their distinctness.” His excommunication in 451 brought about the split of the Egyptian Coptic Church from Constantinople. Theological disputes and the “excommunication” of the Patriarch of Constantinople led to the split of the Church of Constantinople (from Rome) in 1054. See *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary*, vol. 2.
- [6] Though Martin Luther is considered the father of the Protestant Church, the secession of the Protestant church from the Catholic Church was also the result of the incessant calls for church reform from Czech Jan Hus (1369-1415, accused of heresy and burnt), French John Calvin (1509-1564), and Swiss Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531).
- [7] Joachim Kahl, *The Misery of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 1971), 69.
- [8] In his *Of the Jews and their Lies*, Martin Luther wrote: “The Rabbis, enemies of God and blasphemers against the Messiah and his most holy Mother ... do not understand anything divine. Instead of the flowing water of eternal life, they suck the milk of a sow” Quoted in Isaiah Shachar, *The 'Judensau': A medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (The Warburg Institute: University of London, 1974), 43. Martin Luther wrote also that he “who fights against the Turks [Muslims] ... should consider that he is fighting an enemy of God and a blasphemer of Christ, indeed, the devil himself.” Quoted in E. Grislis, 'Luther and the Turks', *The Muslim World*, vol. LXIV, No.3 (July, 1974), 183. Some of the European thinkers who studied in Andalusia and Constantinople and excelled in Islamic exegesis and Arabic philology were persecuted. Hadrian Reland (1676-1718) suffered to see his book *De Religione Mohammedica Libri Duo* (1717) (“in which he sets out to rectify many popular myths about Islam with quotations from the Quran and other Arab sources”) prohibited by the church; and German Johann Jakob (1716-1774), pioneer in the field of Arabic and Byzantine philology as well as Islamic numismatics, was accused of heresy for defending Islam, lived poorly, and died of tuberculosis.
- [9] Richard Webster, *A Brief History of Blasphemy: Liberalism, Censorship and 'The Satanic Verses'* (Southwold: Orwell Press, 1990).
- [10] Leonard W. Levy, *Treason Against God: A History of the Offense of Blasphemy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 130.
- [11] *Treason Against God*, 135-143.
- [12] R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, (London: Penguin, 1938), 125.
- [13] Nicolas Walter, *Blasphemy Ancient and Modern*, (London: Rationalist Press Association, 1990), 34.
- [14] Richard Webster, *A Brief History of Blasphemy*; and Leonard W. Levy, *Treason Against God*, 313-314.
- [15] In Eastern countries, “zendik” (Persian “zandiq”) is an atheist or heretic; one who practices black magic or worships fire. See “zendik” in *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary. Encyclopedic Edition* (Chicago: Ferguson Publishing, 1982), vol. 2.
- [16] A Shiite group that appeared in Egypt during the rule of caliph al-Hakim bi Amr Allah and deified him. Founded by Hamzah ibn Ali al-Zuzni (375-430 H/985-1039 CE), the sect refuses prophets and messengers and believes that Christ is their herald. The Druze deny Muhammad’s Quran and have a Quran of their own called “al-Munfarid bi Dhatihi.”
- [17] In 1987, Sheikh al-Uthaimin of Saudi Arabia proclaimed in the international assembly of Muslim youth that “our opinion is that anyone joining a religion other than Islam is an infidel who has to repent, if not, he should be killed as any apostate rejecting the Quran.” In Nov. 1989, the Lebanese mufti issued a fatwa stipulating that “if a man or a woman does not repent his/her apostasy, he/she must be killed. Kill anyone who deserts his religion. This is according to [Sahih] al-Bukhari. And an apostate will not be buried in a Muslim cemetery.”
- [18] Mani’a ibn Hammad al-Juhani, *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira* (Riyadh: Dar al-Nadwah al-Alamya li Tiba’a wal Nashir wal Tauzi’a, 1997), vol.2, 1075.
- [19] The Moatazila used reason and logic to understand religion and shari’a. Moatazila thought is known to have five foundations that have to do with the Creator, Man, his works and his freedom. These five foundations are: the creation of Quran, justice (there is no absolute justice unless it provides good and betterment to people), the

status in-between (*al-menzila beina al-menzilatein*, that anyone committing a great sin is neither a believer, nor an unbeliever, but in between, staying in Hell forever), the promise and the menace, and promoting kindness and disavowing abominations.

[20] A Shiite group whose argument is based on verse 13 surat al-Hadid which refers to “visible” (*dhahir*) and “invisible” or “intrinsic” (*batin*). For them, each verse is thus open to interpretation. Muhammad’s revelation is visible; Ali’s personal interpretation is “intrinsic” and more important; which Ali refused and fought against.

[21] Called also the Ismaelites because they relate to Ismael ibn Jaafar al-Sadiq. They are considered heretic believing in the Persian Zarathustra and legitimize what is forbidden in Islam. They are called Qaramita (or Qaramites) because their founder was called Qarmat ibn al-Ash’ath al-Baqqar. This is a Shiite group that ruled parts of Iraq, modern Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Bahrain about a hundred years, killed pilgrims in Mecca, and even took the Kaaba’s Black Stone and kept it with them 22 years. They were exterminated by Egyptian caliph al-Moez li Dean Allah al-Fatimi (Shiite also) in 363 H/974 CE.

[22] Or “the disapprovers.” They refuse to recognize caliphs Abi Baker and Umar ibn Khattab and believe that it was Ali ibn Abi Talib’s right (being Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law) to inherit the rule. Included in al-Rafidha sect are the following groups: “al-Yazidiya” (named after caliph Yazid ibn Muawea, as we will see), “al-Imamya al-Ithna Asharya” (who believe in 12 imams the return of the last of whom they are “waiting” for), “al-Ghalia” (“the Extravagant,” they deify Ali and think that Gabriel mistook Muhammad for Ali because they looked-alike).

[23] A scholastic group related to Jaham ibn Safwan. The group denies God’s names and qualities and consider them metaphors. It believes also that the Quran was created (just like the Moatazila sect does) and refuses to believe in tomb-suffering, divine justice, and the Day of Judgement.

[24] The Shaubi movement published works such as: *Pre-Islamic Prostitutes of Quraish* (by Haitham ibn Adi), *Arab Thieves and Persian Merits* (by Muammar ibn al-Muthanna), and *Persian Advantages Over the Arabs* (by Said ibn Nakhtakan).

[25] Their rule lasted 280 years until it was ended by Salah Eddine al-Ayubi in 564 H/1169 CE.

[26] From Bani Hanifa, Yamama. ‘Al-Kadhab’ means ‘the liar.’ Claimed to be a prophet and produced verses like those of the Quran. He was killed in 11 H/632 CE (that is, a year or so after Prophet Muhammad’s death).

[27] His real name was Ablahah ibn Kaab. Claimed to be a prophet and that he received revelations. He was killed in Yemen in 11 H/632 CE.

[28] Known as the liar. Claimed prophecy and was killed in 67 H/687 CE.

[29] Known as the liar too. Claimed prophecy and made people see “satanic” miracles. Caliph Abdelmalik ibn Marwan’s ulamas failed to convince him that what he was doing was satanic. He was crucified and killed in 79 H/698 CE.

[30] Criticised fate. He was crucified by Caliph Abdelmalik ibn Marwan in a jar in 80 H/699 CE.

[31] He asked people in Iran to adopt the “heretic” Kharami sect and legitimized men sleeping with each other’s wives. Emir of Iraq and Iran (Khaled ibn Abdullah al-Qasri) cut his hands and tongue and had him crucified in 118 H/736 CE.

[32] Known also as the liar. He claimed to be a prophet and disparaged caliphs Abi Baker and Umar. He was killed by Khaled ibn Abdullah al-Qasri in 120 H/738 CE.

[33] Founder of the Jahamya sect which was named after al-Jaham ibn Safwan. He questioned the verses related to Abraham and Moses in Quran. He was slaughtered just like a sheep by Khaled ibn Abdullah al-Qasri (Emir of Iraq and Iran) on the Eid day in 124 H/741 CE. Al-Jaham ibn Safwan was captured and killed in 132 H/749 CE.

[34] Accused of atheism, heresy, fornication with his stepmothers, and sodomy. His brother Suleiman ibn Yazid said of him, the day he was murdered, “I testify that he drank wine, was debauched, and even wanted to sodomize me, and I’m his brother.” He was assassinated by his Umayyad cousins in 126 H/743 CE. See al-Hafidh ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wal Nihayah*, vol. 9, 8-10.

[35] Author of satirical *Kalilah wa Dimnah* (allegorical stories, criticising politics and politicians). Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur ordered him cut into pieces and thrown into an oven in 145 H/762 CE.

[36] He wore a mask (hence *al-Muqanna’a*) to hide his ugly distorted face. He claimed to be a god. He drank poison when Muslim troops besieged his fortress in 163 H/779 CE.

[37] Born blind. He talked about condoning Satan when he did not submit to Adam and wrote verses to this effect. Caliph al-Mahdi ordered him killed with a group of heretics in 167 H/783 CE.

[38] Decapitated in Cordoba, on 235 H/18 April 1850, for having wanted to show the errors of Islam.

[39] Priest. Decapitated in Cordoba, 237 H/3 June 852, for blasphemy.

[40] Executed for heresy in 248 H/862 CE.

[41] Leader of the Shiite sect that bears his name (*al-Kharamya*). He was killed in 278 H/891 CE.

[42] Son of a Jew who embraced Islam. He wrote a book called *al-Damigh* and another titled *al-Zumuroda* in which he vituperated Islam and called Prophet Muhammad a liar. He was killed in 298 H/910 CE.

- [43] Called al-Hallaj because he showed people what they had in mind. He believed in incarnation (of God in the individual) and union (of Creator and created). He claimed being able to produce verses like those of the Quran. He was killed and burnt in 309 H/921 CE.
- [44] Executed in 313 H/925 CE for his rational criticism of religion.
- [45] Shiite. Killed and burnt in 333 H/944 CE.
- [46] Alaouite (Shiite). Imams of Baghdad treated the Alaouites (or Fatimids) as heretics who insulted the Prophet and claimed deity. Al-Hakim was killed by his own sister in 411H/1095 CE when he accused her of debauchery.
- [47] He confessed being heretic in one of his writings. To avoid being caught, he imposed home-arrest on himself (around 50 years) until his death in 449 H/1057 CE.
- [48] Governor of Samarkand (in present Uzbekistan). He was strangled in 488 H/1095 CE for heresy and replaced by his cousin Messaoud.
- [49] Shiite. Garrisoned himself in a fortress in Isfahan (in present Iran). Muhammad ibn Malikshah besieged his fortress until he caught him and beheaded him in 500 H/1106 CE.
- [50] In 533 H/1139 CE. Considered atheist by his enemies. Poisoned in his cell.
- [51] Mocked religion and drank wine in Ramadan. His kingdom's manager Yezdyar rebelled against him and killed him in 556 H/1161 CE.
- [52] He derided religion and wrote what convinced the Ulemas in Egypt to sentence him to death. He was executed in 569 H/1173 CE for heresy.
- [53] Surnamed "al-maqtul"/the murdered. Decapitated in Aleppo in 586 H/1191 by order of Sultan Salah Eddine al-Ayubi.
- [54] A Jewish physician. Died in Baghdad in 683 H/1284 CE. He wrote *Tenqih al-Abhath fi Akhbar al-Milal al-Thalath*/Emendation of What Came in the Three Faiths and showed irreverence towards the prophecies. He was carried to Hilla in a leather-covered box where he stayed until his death.
- [55] He derided the Quran and Prophet Muhammad. A council of cadis sentenced him to death and was executed in 715 H/1315 CE.
- [56] He claimed to be the awaited-for Mahdi and that Ali ibn Abi Talib was God and convinced many to go out shouting "There's no God but Ali and prayer is to al-Mahdi who lends life and brings death." He was caught and killed in 717 H/1317 CE.
- [57] Decapitated in Damascus in 726 H/1326 CE for his blasphemy and derision of Quranic verses and Muhammad's prophethood.
- [58] Claimed to be God and defamed prophets. He was decapitated in Damascus in 742 H/ 1341 CE.
- [59] In 744 H/1343 CE. Considered the first two caliphs infidels, slandered Ayesha, and claimed that Gibreel mistook Muhammad for Ali. Executed in Damascus.
- [60] Shiite. He insulted caliphs Abi Baker and Umar, accused them of injustice, and repeated that even in the presence of the cadis. He was decapitated and burnt in 755 H/1354 CE.
- [61] He was accused of insulting the Prophet frequently. The cadi gathered evidences then ordered his execution in 761 H/1359 CE.
- [62] He was accused of cursing caliphs Abi Baker and Umar frequently, which he repeated in the presence of the cadis and fakihs. He was executed and burnt in 766 H/1364 CE.
- [63] Decapitated for heresy in 785 H/1383 CE.
- [64] Decapitated for heresy in 796 H/1394 CE in Anatolia.
- [65] Buried alive by Ali Pasha in Algiers in 976 H/1569 CE.
- [66] Born 1819. Founder of the Persian sect "Babism" in 1844. He claimed to be the awaited-for Mahdi and the "Bab" (door) leading to divine truth. Ottoman Caliph ordered his execution in 1850.
- [67] A Jew, executed in Tunis in 1857 for blasphemy and disparagement of Prophet Muhammad.
- [68] Bahai. Executed in 1306 H/1889 CE.
- [69] Syrian. Poisoned for apostasy in Bassorah in 1309 H/1892 CE.
- [70] Accused of heresy and atheism. A series of death fatwas were issued against him. Murdered in 1316 H/1898 CE.
- [71] Bahai. Executed in 1333 H/1915 CE.
- [72] Bahai. Executed in 1339 H/1921 CE.
- [73] Iranian linguist, historian, and reformer. Author of pamphlets involving anti-religious sentiments. Tried and charged of "slander against Islam." Killed in open court by a member of "Fida'yani Islam"/Devotees of Islam in 1365 H/1946 CE.
- [74] Pakistani Christian convert from Islam. Murdered, for apostasy, presumably by one of her brothers in 1379 H/1960 CE in Chichawatni.
- [75] Ayatollah Fadhil Milani issued a death fatwa against him in 1384 H/1965 CE. He was assassinated, the same year, by a student of theology.
- [76] Sudanese theologian and reformer. Sentenced for apostasy in 1968. Hanged publically in 1405 H/1985 CE.

- [77] Saudi Shiite. Decapitated in Khobr, Saudi Arabia, for apostasy in 1413 H/1992 CE.
- [78] Pakistani. Accused of apostasy, blasphemy, and desecration of Islam. Died in prison in 1413 H/1992 CE in unknown circumstances.
- [79] Iranian. Christian convert from Sunni Islam. Executed for apostasy in 1414 H/1994 CE.
- [80] Whose leader, Babek al-Karami, was executed in 278 H/891 CE, as explained above.
- [81] al-Hafidh ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wal Nihayah*, vol. 12, 24, 178.
- [82] Ever since the execution of the “Bab” in 1850, as seen above, the Bahais have been persecuted and executed: 1867 (3, in Tabriz), 1867 (1, in Teheran), 1867 (1, in Zanjan), 1869 (1), 1877 (1), 1889 (1, in Ishqabad), 1892 (1), 1896 (5, from Turbat Haydari), 1909 (1, in Isphahan), 1915 (1, in Mashhad), 1920 (1, in Sultanabad), 1921 (1, in Kermanshah), 1944 (3, in Shahrud).
- [83] Sunni imams divide “interpretation” into “praised” and “dispraised.” That which is praised is seen as the “source and fate;” like interpreting something (in Quran or Prophet Muhammad’s teachings) by what we have been asked to do; or interpreting prohibition by refusing to do or follow what has been prohibited. “Dispraised” interpretation is “distorting” Quran or saying what has not been said or meant. It is considered the method of the Jewish, Christian, and extravagant Shiites. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol. 2, 1007-1008.
- [84] Scholastic theology (*Ilm al-Kalam*) was known as the religious argumentation the intention of which was to defend religious truth. It was founded during the reign of Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun when scholars started laying down the details of the ideologies and gave rise to disagreements and controversies. Sunnis treated scholars involved in such arguments as “heretics” because they started discussing issues never discussed by Prophet Muhammad’s disciples and followers. *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.2, 1106-1108.
- [85] Moatazila scholars made a distinction between “reasoning” and transmission (*nakl*) of religious rules (*shari’a*). For them, the first is certain, the second is “suspicious.” Sunni scholars believed the contrary: religious rules (revealed to Prophet Muhammad) are more certain than human reasoning. Allah is “infallible,” while “reason” is.
- [86] The first religious movements to appear in Islam. They were called so (the Kharijites) because they refused the “arbitration” in 37 H/657 CE between caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawea ibn abi Sufiane (Umayyad governor of Damascus). The Kharijites (or al-Kawarij) split into the al-Azariqa, al-Thaaliba, al-Ajarida, al-Abadhya, and al-Safarya (the last two ruled parts of the Maghreb for about 200 years). Their belief centered around the following: the right to reject a debauched and despot imam/ruler; treat the “arbitration” people of apostasy (including Ayesha, Prophet Muhammd’s wife). And their source had always been the Quran. Sunni scholars refused to treat them as heretics, but an Islamic movement that had gone astray. Ibadhya followers live now in Oman, Libya, and some parts of the Maghreb.
- [87] The Zeidis live in Yemen particularly. *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 81-83; vol. 2, 1076.
- [88] Founder of al-Ash’arya movement after his withdrawal from al-Moatazila. His movement calls for the adherence to Koran and Prophet Muhammad’s teachings (Sunna). He used reason where reason agrees with the interpretation of the religious text. He tried to use reason to prove the existence of the 7 qualities: life, knowledge, ability, will, hearing, sight, speech. One of the characteristics of al-Ashrari movement was their hesitation and oscillation, their closeness to al-Moatazila, their use of scholastic argumentation, their Sufism, and their considering philosophy part of their doctrine.
- [89] Disappeared, as shown in a previous note. But the Ismaelites share their belief except in matters the Ismaelites refuse to practice not to bring about people’s revolt against them. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 381-385.
- [90] Named after Yazid ibn Muawea during whose rule Kerbala war (40 H/660 CE), in which Hussein ibn Ali was killed, took place. The sect was founded just after the fall of the Umayyads in 132 H/749 CE in the Iraqi Kurdistan, region of Umayyad last caliph Marwan II’s (or Marwan al-Himar’s) mother. They ranked Yazid as God and diverted from Islam. They have two “sacred” books: *al-Jilwa* ((talks about God and his recommendations) and *Mus’haf Rush* (or the Black Book, which talks about the genesis, the angels, the creation of Yazidya, and their doctrine). Followers of this sect live in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Russia and are believed to be around 120,000. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 374-380.
- [91] A Shiite sect named after Ismael ibn Jaafar al-Sadiq. It split into
- al-Ismaeliya Qaramita,
 - al-Ismaeliya Fatimya (in North Africa, Egypt, and Hijaz),
 - al-Ismaelya Nizarya or Hachachine (see note below),
 - al-Ismaelya al-Bahara; or Ismaelya of India, called also “Daudya”, or of Yemen, called “Slimanya.” The Bahara (or merchants) left politics and chose business.

Al-Ismaelya al-Aghakhanya (originally Nizarya; they live in East Africa, India, Pakistan, and Syria. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 386-392.

[92] These are Shiites too. They deify Ali ibn Abi Taleb and so they are also called Alaouite. They live in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Albania, and Iran. They believe that Ali created Mohamed and that Mohamed created Salman al-Farsi. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 393-399.

[93] They are so called for their use of “hashish”/drugs and their becoming professionals of assassination, hence the European reference to them as “assassins. They live in Syria, Iran, and Yemen.

[94] This is a movement founded in the mid-nineteenth-century by Mirza Muhammad Ridha al-Shirazi (1819-1850) after having frequented Kadhim Rishti’s (Imam of “Sheykhia” Shiite sect’s) salon in Baghdad and learnt from him. When he declared that he was the awaited-for Mahdi and the “bab” leading to divine truth (which what the “Sheykhia” believed it would happen after Richti’s death), Richti was the first to believe him. The Babis:

- believe their religion invalidates Mohamed’s Shari’a
- consider al-Bahja in Acca, Palestine, their Kaaba
- claim that the soul of God is in the Bab or Baha
- consider that their holy book *al-Bayan* abrogates the Quran.

Before his execution in 1850, the founder of Babism made his brother Mirza Yahia Ali, known as “Sobh Azal,” his heir. But his brother Mirza Hussein Ali (1817-1892), known as “Baha Allah,” contented Mirza Yahia over the caliphate and strife between their followers rose to an extent that the Ottoman Sultan banished Baha and his followers to Acca and Sobh Azal and his followers to Cyprus where many of them converted to Christianity. Mirza Hussein Ali – head of Baha’ism or the second stage of “Babism” – is considered Allah’s messenger and his divine Spirit on earth. Most of their followers live in Iran, though some also live in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel (where their headquarters are), and the United States (where they are thought to be around 2 million). For more information, see *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 412-418. In 1343 H/1925 CE, the Egyptian Religious Supreme Court declared Bahaism “a dangerous heresy.” For more on the persecutions of the Babis and Baha’is since 1842, see Glenn Cameron and Wendi Momen, *A Basic Baha’i Chronology* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996); and Moojan Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions of the Babis and Baha’is in Iran, 1844-1978,” in *The Baha’i World 1979-1983*, vol. XII, 380-392.

[95] Founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed al-Qadiani (1839-1908) in India in 1900. Al-Qadiani started as an Islamic propagandist (dai’ya); then he claimed that he was the awaited-for Mahdi, that he received divine revelations, and that Prophethood did not end with Muhammad, as is claimed by Sunnis. He invalidated Jihad and called for an allegiance to the English government (which drove many to believe that he was the product of colonialism). His followers live in India, Pakistan, and UK. For more information about them, see *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 419-423.

[96] A sect ascribed to Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi. It appeared during the Lebanese civil war after the arrival of al-Habashi to Lebanon in 1969. Al-Habashi is accused of having disseminated al-Jahamya doctrine which claims:

- postponement (*al-Irja*): that man remains believer even when he does not pray and practice the rest of Islamic rites;
- predestination (*al-Jabr*): that man has no choice in what he is doing and that Allah helps the unbeliever to be so, and that had not there been a divine predestined act or power, the unbeliever would not have been so
- Sufism
- Cursing the Prophet’s disciples
- Issuing fatwas legitimizing selling children and changing the *kiblah* (direction towards which Muslims turn in prayers).

They live in Lebanon, Europe, United States, and Australia. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 430-435.

[97] Or Ansaaru Allah Community. Founded by Nuwaubian leader Isa Abdullah (alias Dwight York) in 1960s in New York. He claimed descent from Sayyid Abdur Rahman al-Mahdi, imam of the Ansaars in Sudan until 1959. He declared that

- white people have no souls
- Jesus Christ was the son of Gibreel/Gabriel
- he found the scripts of Adam, Abraham, and Idriss and translated some of them.

Isa Abdullah, who had around 58 other names, just as his community had dozens of names, issued numerous weird fatwas, was arrested in 2002, charged with over 100 counts of child molestation and harassment, and sentenced, in 2004, to 135 years in prison. See www.wikipedia.org 25 Aug. 2008.

[98] Sunni scholars reproach Khomeini for having invented “the scholar’s rule” (*wilayat al-fakih*), which ranks the *fakih* as the infallible imam in the absence of al-Mahdi. Khomeini claimed that prophets and messengers did

not end the divine mission and that the awaited-for Mahdi is he who will do that (while the Sunnis think that Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet and messenger). Khomeini underrated the canonical Sunni sources and called upon the Shiites to rely on their own references: *Kitab al-Kafi*, *Man la Yahdhuru al-Fakih*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, and *Al-Istibsar*. Sunnis consider his fatwas, collected in his *Tahrir al-Wassila*, “unorthodox” as they are not based on the Sunni doctrine. See *Al-Mausua al-Muyassara fi al-Adyan wal Madhahab wal Ahzab al-Muasira*, vol.1, 440-443.

[99] Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 81, the star preacher on al-Jazeera channel, warned of a Shia attempt to “invade” Sunni societies and provoked a furious response from Shiites. See “Try to Be Nice About Each Other,” *The Economist*, 27 Set. 2008.

[100] *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari*. Both contain the Prophet’s generally-acknowledged *hadiths*/ teachin

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