

Government in the Islamic Perspective

Muhammad Husayn Na'ini (Iran, 1860–1936) was an Iranian religious scholar who lived for decades at Shi'i seminary cities in Iraq, which was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1918. When the constitutional movement took power in Iran in 1906, Na'ini was the assistant to one of the leading scholars of Najaf, whom he helped in arranging an influential *fatwa* (religious ruling) issued in support of the constitutionalists. Three years later, Na'ini expanded on this theme in a treatise defending constitutional limits on power in Islamic terms—the introductory section of which is presented in this chapter. This treatise was widely distributed in Iran and provided theological support for the constitutionalists in the face of monarchist and clerical opposition. Na'ini later came to reject political involvement, famously—though possibly apocryphally—urging that all copies of his treatise be thrown into the Tigris River. Na'ini even supported the rise of the Pahlavi dictatorship in the 1920s. Yet his text survived long after its author's disavowal. Its biting criticism of both monarchical and clerical despotism has remained common knowledge among educated Iranians and a thorn in the side of successive dynasties in Iran, as well as the Islamic Republic.¹

Thanks are due to God, Lord of the two worlds, and salutations are due to the noblest of the earliest and the latest and the seal of the prophets, Muhammad and his pure progeny, and damnation is deserved for all of their foes, until the Day of Judgment.

And then, those aware of the history of the world have come to realize that prior to the Crusades, the Christian nations and the Europeans were deprived not only of all the varieties of natural sciences but also of the sciences of civilization, practical reason, and political axioms. This was due either to the lack of such knowledge in their divine parchments or to adulteration of their heavenly books. After that fateful event [the Crusades], those nations attributed their defeat to their lack of access to civilizational sciences and their general ignorance. Thus they considered curing this mother of all ailments as the greatest of their goals and pursued knowledge as a lover who seeks after the beloved. So they appropriated the principles of civilization and politics

implicit in the Islamic holy books and traditions, and in the edicts of 'Ali [son-in-law and fourth successor of the Prophet] and other early leaders of Islam, as they have justly acknowledged in their earlier histories, as they have admitted that learning such principles and sciences conducive to such spectacular advances in such a short period of time would be impossible for unaided human reason. Therefore the progress and perseverance of the West in translation, interpretation, and application of these principles on the one hand, and the concomitant regression of the people of Islam and their subjugation at the hands of unbelievers [the Mongol conquerors] resulted in such a state that Muslims gradually forgot the principles of their own historical origins and even supposed that abject subordination is a necessity of Islamic life. Therefore they thought that the commandments of Islam are contrary to civilization, reason, and justice—the fountainhead of progress—and as such, they equated Islam with slavery and savagery.

Muhammad Husayn Na'ini, *Tanbih al-umma wa tanzih al-milla ya hukumat az nazar-i islam* (*Exhortation of the Faithful and Purification of the Nation, or Government from the Perspective of Islam*), 6th ed. (Tehran, Iran: Shirkat-i Sahami-i Intishar, 1960). First published in 1909. Translation from Persian and introduction by Mahmoud Sadri.

1. Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1977); Baqir Parham, "Nigahi bih nazariyyat-i Na'ini" (A Look at Na'ini's Theories), *Chishm-andaz* (*Perspective*), number 5, 1988, pp. 48–77; Tawfiq Sayf, *Didida al-istibdad* (*Against Dictatorship*) (Beirut, Lebanon: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 1999).

At this juncture in history, with God's benevolent support, the retrogressive trajectory of the Islamic world has been halted and slavery under the imperious passions of dictatorial rulers has been terminated [the reference is to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906, and possibly also to the Ottoman Young Turk Revolution of 1908]. The Muslim community has, thanks to the superb guidance and reasoning of its clerical leaders, become aware of the true requirements of its religion and its God-given freedoms. Thus they have endeavored to free themselves from the pharaohs of the time, and to restore their legitimate national rights of partnership and equality in all affairs. In their struggle to break the chains of slavery and in claiming their legitimate rights, Muslims have hazarded oceans of fire, from which they have emerged as a phoenix. They have faced martyrdom and spilled their pure blood in order to achieve the great privilege of national salvation and prosperity, and in this holy project they have followed the utterance of the prince of the oppressed, Husayn [grandson of the Prophet and third *Imam* of Shi'i Islam], who extolled "those who prefer noble death to the abject life of servitude."

The momentous edicts of the leaders of the Ja'fari religion [Shi'i Islam] in the city of Najaf,² and the subsequent edicts of the elders of Istanbul [Sunni Islam] who unanimously declared the struggle for these holy and legitimate goals [of constitutionalism] as a necessity of religion, exonerated Islam from acquiescing to such tyrannical and irrational rules. These were clear historical documents concerning the position of the Islamic leadership on the issue, thus silencing critical tongues. But the man-eating pack of wolves in Iran attempted to sustain the polluted tree of injustice, tyranny, and the plunder of the lives and property of the Muslims. Finding no better pretext for this than religion, they turned to the pharaonic declaration: "I fear for you, for they may change your religion." [Qur'an, Sura 40, Verse 26]

Thus they allied themselves with the pharaoh of Iran and revived the atrocities of Zahhak [a mythical Iranian tyrant] and Genghis [Khan, Mongol ruler, 1206–1227], and called it religion. Absolute power

belongs only to God, yet they declared it un-Islamic to struggle against the absolute power of earthly tyrants. They dared to contaminate this sublime religion with such an insult; they dared to commit this grave affront to the prophet of Islam, even in God's sovereign domain. This is the extent of their injustice, that they at once affronted the Creator and His creation. Verily God spoke the truth in the holy Qur'an: "Therefore evil was the end of those who did evil, for they denied the signs of God and made fun of them." [Sura 30, Verse 10]

An authentic *hadith* [tradition of the Prophet] states: "When apostasy prevails on earth it is incumbent upon the knowledgeable to reveal their knowledge, and if they fail in doing so God's damnation will be upon them." Accordingly, silence in the face of such an outrage and derision of religion, and failure to support the holy religion in repelling such a mischief and injustice, is contrary to the duty, and even abets the injustice. So this lowliest of servants of the illustrious religion has taken it upon himself to discharge his responsibility, to render this service, and to reveal the incongruity of this apostasy with the essential necessities of Islam. It is my hope that with God's blessed succor this offering will achieve divine approbation, thus making it unnecessary for others to undertake such a task. "And I have no success except in God. I have put all my confidence in Him, I repent and take refuge in him. And he is the ultimate guide toward righteousness."³

Since the aim of this essay is to admonish the faithful concerning the necessities of the religion and to cleanse the nation of the apostasy [of tyranny], I have given it the title of "Exhortation of the Faithful and Purification of the Nation." I will organize it in an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion.

Introduction: An Analysis of the Nature of Tyranny, Conditionality⁴ of the Government, Achieving a Constitution and a Consultative Assembly of the People, and an Explanation of the Meaning of Liberty and Equality

2. [The author is referring to the joint edicts of three grand *ayatullahs* in Najaf, in today's Iraq, declaring the Iranian constitutional revolution to be in accordance with the spirit of Islam.—Trans.]

3. [This phrase is in Arabic but is not quoted from the Qur'an. Using such phrases in Persian texts is the equivalent of using Latin phrases in English texts.—Trans.]

4. [The term "conditionality" (*mashrutiyat*) also was used to mean "constitutionalism."—Trans.]

Be aware of the notion that all sages of Islam and of the nations of the world agree that some form of polity and government is necessary for the constitution of the society and the life of humankind, whether it be personal or group rule, legitimate or illegitimate government, freely elected, hereditary, or dictatorially imposed. Also, it is necessarily true that the maintenance of the honor, independence, and nationality of every nation, be it in religious or national affairs, is contingent upon their own endeavors. Otherwise, their privileges, the honor of their religion, the integrity of their country, and the independence of their nation will be utterly destroyed, regardless of how wealthy, progressive, and civilized they may be. That is why the pure *shari'a* [religious law] of Islam has designated the protection of the "essential constitution" of Islam as the highest of duties, specifying Islamic government as a holy duty invested in the institution of the imamate [Shi'i religious leadership]. (A detailed explication of this issue is outside of the scope of this essay.) It is evident that all worldly affairs are contingent upon government, and that the protection of every nation's honor and nationality is contingent upon self-rule, based upon two basic principles:

1. Protection of domestic order, education of the citizenry, ensuring that rights are allotted to the rightful, and deterring people from invading others' rights—these are among the internal duties of government.
2. Protection of the nation from foreign invasion, neutralizing the typical maneuvers in such cases, providing for a defensive force, and so on—these are what the experts in terminology call the "protection of the essential constitution" of Islam.

The *shari'a* canons concerning the upholding of these two holy duties are known as political and civilizational laws and are considered as the second subdivision of "practical reason."⁵ This is why the greatest kings and emperors of Persia and Rome were adamant in choosing competent sages in theoretical and practical disciplines for the management of societal affairs. These sages realized the necessity and legitimacy of discharging such duties, and this real-

ization persuaded them to accept such responsibilities, despite their abhorrence of tyrannical rule. One can even surmise that the reason for any government, any system of taxation, any organization of forces in society, whether initiated by divine prophets or by sages, was to uphold these principles and discharge such duties. The pure *shari'a* too has endeavored to remedy the shortcomings [of government] and to stipulate its conditions and limitations.

The nature of the ruler's domination, in terms of the extent of the exclusiveness of its rule, can only be conceived of as one of two kinds: It is either "possessive" or "preservative."

The possessive form of government is the case in which a prince considers the nation his personal property to dispose of as his whims and desires dictate. He treats the nation like a stable full of animals meant to satisfy his passions and wishes. He rewards or punishes people insofar as they aid or impede him in realizing his ends. He does not hesitate to imprison, banish, torture, or execute his opponents, tear them to pieces, and feed them to his hounds. Or to encourage his pack of wolves to spill their blood and plunder their property. He can separate any proprietor from his property, and give it to his entourage. He upholds or tramples people's rights as he sees fit. He considers himself the sole possessor of the right to expropriate any holdings, to sell, rent, or give away any part of the nation or its rights, or to exact any taxes for his personal private use. His attempt to maintain order and to defend the nation is like that of a farmer toward his farm. If he wishes, he keeps it. If not, he gives it away to the obsequious bunch around him. On the slightest suggestion, he sells and mortgages national rights to finance his silly and hedonistic trips abroad.⁶ He doesn't even hesitate to give himself leave for open sexual debauchery at the expense of his subjects, and still, he adorns himself with divine titles worthy of God. His courtiers help him identify his powers of tyranny, domination, passion, and anger with those of the nation. They help him to arrogate to himself God's attribute: "He cannot be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned." [Qur'an, Sura 21, Verse 23]

5. [As distinct from "theoretical reason," in Islamic philosophy. The field of practical reason consists of three subdivisions: purification of the soul, management of society or politics, and home economics.—Trans.]

6. [This jab is meant particularly for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century shahs who sold exorbitant concessions to foreign corporations in order to finance lavish personal trips to Europe.—Trans.]

This form of government, because it is autocratic and arbitrary, is known as possessive, tyrannical, enslaving, imperious, and dictatorial. It is clear why each of these titles would be appropriate for such a form of government. The head of such a form of government is known as an absolute ruler, “owner of the yokes,” dictator, and so on. The nation that is subject to such rule should be called servile, down-trodden, and oppressed. And insofar as they are alienated from their own resources and wealth, like little orphans, they may be called “children” as well. And insofar as their use for their rulers is like the use of crops for the farmer, they may be called “vegetative”! The degrees of dictatorship exerted by this form of government varies according to the personal attributes and rational faculties of the princes and their courtiers, as well as the degree of the awareness of nations of their rights and the rights of their rulers, and the degree of their devotion to monotheistic or polytheistic religions. (For this affects the leave they give to their rulers to lord over them as the sole arbiter and proprietor of their rights.) The most extreme form of tyranny is where the ruler declares himself God. Its power will be limited to the extent to which those subject to such a rule resist it. The rule is absolute if the citizens acquiesce to it, as happened under the rule of the pharaohs. And according to the old adage: “People follow the religion of their princes.” They in turn treat their subordinates as petty tyrants. The root of this sprawling, degenerate tree is none but the nation’s ignorance of its own rights and the rights of its rulers, and a general lack of responsibility, accountability, watchful deliberation, and checks and balances.

The second form of government is that in which rule does not belong to an absolute arbiter. Government is based on discharging the aforementioned legitimate responsibilities. It is a limited form of government, and the ruler’s authority is rule-bound and conditional to the same extent.

These two forms of government are distinct both in their true nature and in their effects. Because the former is, in all its manifestations, based on domination and possession, the nation is hostage to the whims of the leaders. National resources are at the mercy of the ruling group. They are not responsible to anyone for what they do, so whatever they refrain from doing deserves profuse thanks. If they killed someone but didn’t mutilate him and feed him to their hounds, they should be thanked. If they expropriated

property but didn’t rape the women, they should be thanked. Everyone’s relationship with the ruler is that of a slave to his master—even lower than that! It is the relationship of the farm animal to the farmer. It is even lower than that: it is the relation of the crop to the crop owner. Their only value is to sate the needs of their owner. They have no independent right to their own life and existence. In short, this relationship is like the relationship of creation to the Creator. On the other hand, the nature and essence of the latter form of government are stewardship, service, upholding domestic order, and protecting the nation. This form of government is committed to using the nation’s resources to meet the nation’s needs, not to satiate the passions of the rulers. Therefore, the authority of the government is limited to the above-mentioned matters, and its interference in its citizen’s affairs is conditional upon the necessity of reaching those [national] goals. The citizens are partners with government in the ownership of the nation’s powers and resources. Everyone has equal rights, and the administrators are all stewards, not owners. They are responsible to the nation, and the slightest infraction is punishable by law. And all citizens share the national right to question the authorities safely, and are safe in doing so. Nor does anyone protesting the government bear the yoke of servitude of the sovereign prince or his courtiers. This kind of government is called limited, just, conditional, responsible, and delegated. And it is evident why each of these designations would be appropriate for such a form of government. Those in charge of such a government are called protectors, guardians, just arbiters, and responsible and just rulers. The nation that is blessed by such a government is called pious, emancipated, gallant, and alive. (And again, it is evident why each of these designations apply to such a nation.) The nature of this government is analogous to loaning and delegating, and it can survive only in the absence of usurpation and violations of trust. That which protects this form of government and prevents it from degenerating into an absolute and arbitrary rule is none other than the principle of accountability, vigilance, and responsibility.

The most exalted means of ensuring that a government will not betray the trust of the nation in any way, is, of course, having infallible rulers. This is the same principle that we Shi’is consider as a principle of our religion. It is necessarily evident that anyone who partakes of the exalted status of an infallible

leader will be innocent of base passions, blessed with wisdom, and endowed with many moral attributes (whose explanation falls beyond the scope of this essay). Due to divine protection, such a leader is immune even to the slightest oversight and neglect. In short, this is a status "whose true nature is incomprehensible for ordinary human beings."

However, given a lack of access to such divine leaders,⁷ seldom does it happen that the king is just and virtuous and happens to choose a perfectly wise and chaste supervisor of the affairs of the state, as happened in the case of Nushirvan [Khosrow, king of Iran, reigned 531–579] and [his vizier] Buzarjumihr a long time ago. The level of vigilance, accountability, and responsibility and the partnership, equality, and honesty of the people and the government achieved under Nushirvan's rule was an exception, not a rule, in history. It is indeed rarer than the rarest of jewels. It is impossible to expect it to happen with frequency in history. Thus in the absence of divine leadership and the exceedingly rare incidents of just kingship, nations may attempt a pale likeness of such a rule only under two conditions:

First, by imposing the aforementioned limits so that the government will strictly refrain from interfering in affairs in which it has no right to interfere. Under these conditions, governmental powers are stipulated in degree and kind, and the freedoms and rights of all classes of the people are formally guaranteed, in accordance to the requirements of religion. Violating the trust of the nation on either side and in any form, whether by excess or penury, is punishable by permanent termination of the service and other penal measures applicable to betrayal of trust. Since the written document concerning political and civil affairs of the nation is analogous to "practical treatises" [compendia of ritual duties issued by a religious scholar], in that it sets limits and the penalty for exceeding them, such a document is called the constitutional law or the constitution. There should be no doubt about its universal application, with no conditions, except in areas of conflict with religious laws. Other considerations concerning this issue, and the points that must be observed in order to maintain the integrity of the constitution will be mentioned later, God willing.

7. [The last of the infallible Imams, according to Shi'i theology, went into occultation in 874.—Trans.]

Second, strengthening the principle of vigilance, accountability, and complete responsibility by appointing a supervisory assembly of the wise, the well-wishers of the nation, and the experts in internal and external affairs, so they can discharge their duties in preventing violation and wrongdoing. The people's representatives are comprised of such individuals and their formal seat is called "the Assembly of National Consultation." True accountability and responsibility will preserve the limits on power and prevent the return of possessive government only if the executive branch is under the supervision of the legislative branch, and the legislative branch is responsible to every individual in the nation. Slackening either of these two responsibilities will lead to the deterioration of the limits on power and reversion of constitutional government to absolutism in the first case, and to oligarchic autocracy of the legislature in the second. The legitimacy of the supervision of the elected legislative assembly rests conclusively on the will of the nation's selection, according to the principles of Sunni Islam, which relies on the contractual powers of the *umma* [the Muslim community]. But according to Shi'i Islam, this legitimacy rests in the principle of the supervision of the "the public representatives" of the Hidden Imam during his occultation.⁸ Thus the legislature should either include some of the experts in religious law or be comprised of people who are given leave by such personages to adjudicate on their behalf. The correction and confirmation of the representative assembly's decisions by the grand experts in religious law will suffice, as we shall, God willing, explain later.

From what we have explained so far it is clear that the foundation of the first form of government [tyranny] is absolute power, possession of the nation, inequality of the citizens with the government, and irresponsibility of the leaders. And all of these stem from a disregard of the above two principles. All of the devastation and atrocities in Iran; all that has ruined religion, government, and the nation in that land, knowing no limits, is of this sort. "There is no need for explanation after exhibition!"

The foundation of the second [constitutional] form of government, as you have learned, is limited

8. [In Shi'i Islam, the Hidden Imam had "specific representatives" for the first seventy years of his occultation. Since that time, those knowledgeable in religion serve as his "public representatives."—Trans.]

to delegation in affairs beneficial to the nation. Contrary to the first form, this government is based on partnership, liberty, and rights, including the right to financial accountability and supervision of administrators. All these, as well, are the results of the application of the above two principles.⁹ These two principles and their corollaries were constituted by the founder of the religion. So long as they were protected, and Islamic government did not degenerate from the second to the first form, the pace of the expansion of Islam was mind-boggling. After Mu'awiyya [reigned 661–680] and the children of al-'As came to power, and all the principles and corollaries of Islamic government were transformed into their diametrical opposites, the situation changed. Still, so long as other nations too were enslaved in tyrannies of their own, nothing much changed, and Islam continued to enjoy a measure of stability despite its tyrannical leaders. However, as soon as the other nations realized the natural foundations of progressive government, it was inevitable that they would prosper and that the Islamic nation would become their inferiors and, worse, be returned to the pre-Islamic savagery and ignorance, like animals, even plants, in the degree of their servitude. "Verily, God does not change the state of a people til they change themselves." [Qur'an, Sura 13, Verse 11]

At any rate, since the basis of the former is thralldom and of the latter liberty, the text of the holy Qur'an and traditions of the holy infallible ones have on several occasions likened the servitude of the tyrants to idolatry, the opposite of liberty. They have guided Muslims to free their necks from the yoke of wretchedness.

For example, the Qur'an tells that the Pharaoh ruled over the children of Israel, although they did not worship him as the Egyptians did, and were tormented and imprisoned in Egypt and prevented from leaving for the holy land. In one verse [Sura 26, Verse 22] Moses, may peace be upon him, tells the

Pharaoh, "You consider me indebted to your hospitality even though you have enslaved the Israelites?" In another blessed verse [Sura 23, Verse 47] the Pharaoh says, "whose people are our slaves." In still another verse [Sura 7, Verse 127] he says, "and we shall subjugate them." It is evident that the slavery of the Israelites is an expression of this subjugation. The noblest of all, the Prophet of Islam, greetings be to him and his pure progeny, has stated in the authentic and frequently quoted tradition: "When the children of al-'As reach 30 in number, they shall turn the religion of God upside down and take the servants of God as their own servants." [Hadith scholar Fakhr al-Din Turayhi, circa 1571–1674,] the author of *Majma' al-Bahrain [The Bahrain Collection]*, interpreted the word "servant" as "slave." Similarly, [Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Firuzabadi, circa 1329–1414,] the author of *Qamus [The Concordance]*, generalized the meaning of the word "servant" in this context to "serfs" and "subordinates." This generalization is further confirmed in the blessed verse [Sura 6, Verse 94]: "you have left behind your servants [upon death]." The prescient *hadith* of the Prophet of Islam concludes that once the number of the fruits of the evil tree of tyranny reach 30, they will alter God's religion and take people as slaves. The Prophet designated this number of wrongdoers as a critical threshold at which they would begin to transform the form of Islamic government from stewardship to tyrannical possession. 'Ali, the commander of the faithful, to whom is due the highest of prayers and salutations, elaborated on the sufferings of the children of Israel at the hands of the Pharaoh and his people in a sermon: "the pharaohs took them as slaves." He then expounded on the meaning of slavery: "then they subjected them to the worst tortures and made them drink the poisonous cup drop by drop. They continued to languish in this state of abject ruin and defeated subjugation. They couldn't find any way to refuse or defend themselves." In the same sermon 'Ali explained the reign of the leaders of Iran and Rome over the children of Israel and Isma'il [the Arabs]. Although in these cases the domination was not connected to deification of the kings, as was the case in Egypt, nonetheless 'Ali treated it similarly: "In those days, kings of Iran and Rome were their masters, banishing them from the lush arable lands around the Sea of Iraq toward arid areas of the inland." In another sermon, after a few complaints of

9. In the first days of Islam, these two principles were applied so completely that the second caliph ['Umar ibn al-Khattab, 634–644] was publically rebuked for wearing an extra garment, when everyone had received only one garment. He had to send for his son 'Abdullah to testify that his father's second garment was his, and that he had willingly given it to his father. On another occasion, when he asked to be corrected if he erred, he was reminded by his audience that he could be straightened by the sword if he diverged from the straight path.

his blessed heart concerning the hypocrisy and rebellion of the inhabitants of Iraq, in which he warned them that as a result of this behavior they will be deprived of his leadership and become slaves of Umayyad rule [661–750], he said: “And they will find the Umayyads evil masters after me.” ‘Ali used the word “master” instead of “steward” here. This is in agreement with scores of other traditions concerning the conversion of the form of government in early Islam. The prince of the oppressed, [‘Ali’s younger son] Husayn, equated obedience to the Umayyad leaders with abject slavery. In reply to the coarse and rude bunch of Kufans who had declared, “We have descended upon you by order of your cousin,” he replied: “I shall not give you my hand of allegiance as an inferior, nor shall I confess my allegiance to you as a slave. You have limited my options to two: death and servitude. And far be it from us to accept servitude. God has forbidden it to us, and to His Messenger, and to the faithful, and to the pure of heart, and to the proud souls, and to all those who prefer noble death to a life of servitude.” He echoed his father’s words: “How can a head bent before God be made to bend to any other?” Thus Husayn refused to acquiesce. In order to preserve his freedom and monotheism, he offered up his life, his property, and his family. He made this generous sacrifice for the liberation of the community of the faithful, to cleanse its body of the impurities of hedonistic passions. This is why all others in the history of Islam who have followed Husayn’s blessed precedent, who have made similar sacrifices, are called “resisters of injustice” and “heroes of freedom.” Truly, they are all grain pickers of this abundant harvest and dew drinkers of this vast ocean of resistance and freedom-seeking.

Husayn, peace be upon him and all those who were martyred with him, addressed Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi [a Kufan military officer], after Hurr had defected from the enemy and stood [with Husayn], ready to be martyred in his blessed stirrups: “You are the free one, Hurr, as your mother named you [Hurr means “free”]. You shall live as a free and heroic soul, in this world as well as the next.” Likewise, the verse [Sura 24, Verse 55] declares: “God has promised to make those of you who believe and do right, leaders in the land, as He had made those before them, and will establish their faith which He has chosen for them, and change their fear into security. They will worship Me and not associate any one with

Me. But those who disbelieve after this will be reprobates.” This verse as well as the closing clauses of the “Promulgation” prayer [a prominent piece of the Shi‘i liturgy] refer to the return of his holiness the twelfth Imam, the awaited Messiah—may our lives be sacrificed for him. The acquiescence of the *umma* to tyrants is likened here to polytheism. As Husayn himself stated, “I hold no allegiance to any tyrant of my time.” Also, interpretations of the blessed verse, “They consider their rabbis and monks as lords,” [Sura 9, Verse 31] hold that the verse refers to [Jews’ and Christians’] unquestioning obedience toward popes and their courtiers. *Taqlid* [imitation] of religious leaders who pretend to present true religion is no different from obedience to political tyrants. Either one is a form of idolatry. The above verse that rebukes imitation of the ill-intentioned clergy and ambitious and hedonist hypocrites, also leads us to the same conclusion. The difference between the two forms of obedience is that political tyranny is based on naked force, while religious tyranny is based on deviousness and chicanery. The difference leads us to believe that, in truth, the former is based on the control of bodies while the latter stems from the control of hearts.

This argument confirms the astuteness and accuracy of the argument of some of the experts of this science who divide tyranny into political and religious kinds. They consider them as interrelated and mutually protective of each other! It is also evident that uprooting this evil tree and liberation from this abject slavery—possible only through the heedfulness and awakening of the nation—is relatively easy in the case of political tyranny and extremely difficult in the case of religious tyranny, thus complicating resistance to the former form of tyranny as well.

The dismal condition of us Iranians is living testimony to the mutual support of these two forms of tyranny and slavery. The two are allied and mutually confederated. Thus the difficulty of getting rid of political tyranny is rooted in religious tyranny’s support of the political order. This will be, God willing, further explicated in the discussion of the methods of resisting the forces of absolutism.

We can conclude that obedience to the autocratic orders of the rebellious tyrants of the *umma* and the bandits of the nation is not only an injustice to one’s own life and liberty, which are among the greatest endowments granted by God, holy be His names, to human beings. In addition, according to the explicit

text of the worthy Qur'an and the traditions of the infallible ones, it is tantamount to idolatry, taking associates with God, for God only deserves the attributes of ultimate possession of the creation, and unquestionable authority in whatever He deems necessary. He alone can be free of responsibility in what He does. All of these are among His holy attributes. He who arrogates these attributes for himself and usurps this status is not only a tyrant and a usurper of the station of stewardship, but also, according to holy texts, a pretender to the divine mantle and a transgressor to His inviolate realm. Conversely, liberation from such an abject servitude not only releases the soul from its vegetative state and animal status into the realm of noble humanity; it also brings one closer to monotheism and the worship of God and His true and exclusive names and attributes. That is why liberating the imprisoned and usurped nations from the yoke of slavery and abject servitude and leading them to their God-given rights and liberties has been among the most significant goals of the prophets, peace be upon them.

Moses and his brother Aaron, peace be upon them and upon our Prophet, according to the text of the holy Qur'an, [Sura 20, Verse 47] addressed the Pharaoh thus: "So let the Israelites come with us and do not oppress them." All they sought was to liberate the Israelites from slavery and torture, and take them to the holy land. They even guaranteed Pharaoh's continued reign and authority in his own land (as has been emphasized in ['Ali's] holy "sermon of disparagement" [of the devil]). Pharaoh's refusal and his persecution of the Israelites led to the drowning of the Pharaoh and his troops and the liberation of the Israelites. In his holy "sermon of disparagement," 'Ali, greetings to him, after the statements we have quoted above, argued that one of the advantages of the mission of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was liberation from the yokes [of the kings of Iran and Rome].

From the Prophet's biography, one recognizes the equality of a nation's people with their leaders in all laws and obligations and the great efforts of the Prophet, God's greetings be upon him, to establish this principle, thus guaranteeing the well-being of the *umma*.

Let us cite an example for each case. First, the principle of equality in property is evident in the incident in which [Muhammad's step-]daughter Zaynab [died 629] came to Medina and offered an heirloom

in order to purchase the freedom of her husband, Abu'l-'Asi [ibn al-Rabi', a non-Muslim who had been captured by the Muslims in battle]. When she approached with the heirloom, an ornament that she had inherited from her mother Khadija [the Prophet's wife, died 619], may peace be upon her, the Prophet wept and announced that he would free her husband without payment. Yet he was careful to ask whether all the Muslims would forego their share of the payment before he returned the heirloom [to Zaynab]. Second, the principle of equality in decrees is evident in the case in which [the Prophet] did not discriminate between his uncle 'Abbas [ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, died 652], his cousin 'Aqil [ibn Abi Talib, died circa 670], and other prisoners of war, when they were brought in front of him. They were given no special privileges, even in the binding of their hands and arms. Third, the principle of equality in punishment is evident in [the Prophet's] last sermon, when he asked all the faithful to exercise their right of just retribution if he has unfairly injured any of them. Someone claimed that [the Prophet's] riding crop had accidentally touched his shoulder during of the campaigns. The Prophet of Islam bared his shoulder and asked the man to retaliate if he wished. But the man was satisfied to kiss [the Prophet's] shoulder. Also, the Prophet once said in public that if my only daughter Fatima ever commits a crime, her punishment would not differ in the slightest from the punishment of any other wrong-doer.

It was for the revival of such a blessed tradition of leadership, and in order to abrogate the apostasy of discrimination in the distribution of favors, and to reverse the endowment of fiefs, and to uphold the principle of equality, that the commander of the faithful 'Ali encountered so many enmities and disturbances during his rule. Even senior disciples, such as 'Abdullah [Ibn] 'Abbas [an early Islamic scholar, 619–686] and Malik Ashtar [a great warrior, died 658] and the others, had been used to the practice of giving and accepting favors and discriminating based on the closeness of association [with the Prophet]. They preferred earlier Muslims such as the "Emigrants" [who accompanied Muhammad to Medina in 622] and the warriors of the battle of Badr [in 624] over later Muslims and newly converted Muslims like Iranians. So they would ask for favors [from 'Ali] and would, in every case, hear harsh rebukes. The story of 'Ali's refusal to provide for his needy brother from the treasury, his sharp rebuke of one of his

daughters who wanted to borrow a necklace from the treasury for one night, and his refusal to allow his own son to borrow some honey from the public stock—which made even his enemy, Mu'awiyya [who would soon found the Umayyad dynasty] weep and extol his virtue as a leader—and countless other similar stories are examples of the justice and equality in Islam that put all other proponents of these virtues to shame.

All these endeavors served to preserve this central pillar of Islam and discharge the great responsibility of leadership in Islam. It was with a similar motivation, and in order to follow the glorious example of the praiseworthy prophets and their trusted stewards, that the godly jurists and leaders of the Ja'fari [Shi'i] religion have resolved to free the faithful from the servitude of the tyrants in this auspicious age—which is, with God's help, the age in which the enslavement and decline of the Muslims are being terminated. They have resolved as well that in accordance with the maxim, "He who can't accomplish all should not abandon all," they ought to convert the form of government from possessive back to delegative. While the possessive form has caused the ruin of Islamic societies and the decline of Islamic states, the delegative form will protect against most forms of corruption and prevent the dominion of the infidels over the country. In this path [the religious leaders] have engaged in a struggle needed to protect the essence of Islam. Recognition of the need for change, and the brave, sober, and earnest attempt to bring about the end of absolutism and to replace it with limited government, has clearly sparked a backlash. The religious form of absolutism, in conformity with its ancient and ongoing duty to protect the evil tree of tyranny in the name of protecting religion, did its best to describe the life-sustaining principles of limited and responsible government in the most grotesque and reprehensible disguises—contrary to the Qur'an's warning: "Do not mix the false with the true, and hide the truth knowingly." [Sura 2, Verse 42] It portrayed the liberation of the nation from the clutches of unjust tyrants as illusory. (The reader of this essay knows such liberation to be the goal of all prophets and their just successors, and the origin of Islamic government, which was distorted by the evil tree of autocracy planted by the family of al-'As.) The proponents of religious despotism went farther and declared this struggle a denial of all moral limits and an attempt to spread apostasy. They even attributed

the outward appearance of women in the West (allowed by Christianity in places such as Russia, France, or Britain) to the political change from absolutism to constitutionalism, though this is as irrelevant to constitutional government as could be. Further, they mischaracterized the principle of equality of rights and powers, which the reader has learned from this essay to have been the practice of the Prophet of Islam and his just successors, for which 'Ali was martyred, as was his son Husayn. They said that this principle will erase all differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in affairs such as inheritance, marriage, even penal law; and that it denies any difference between children and adults, sane and insane, healthy and sick, the free and coerced, the able and the disabled, and so forth, in terms of their rights and duties. All of these issues, which are farther from the quest for constitutionalism than the sky is from the earth, they attached to the essence of this noble endeavor.

Because the salvation and prosperity of the nation, and the preservation of its essential rights, is contingent upon the limitation and responsibility of the government, they have mobilized to cloak this divine beneficence with ugliness. They do not realize that the sun cannot be covered over with mud, nor the Nile delta dammed with shovels. The Iranian nation—no matter how ignorant of the requirements of religion it is imagined to be, regardless of how unaware it may be of the evils of slavery and the advantages of liberty and equality—at least understands this much: Its sages and brave compatriots—be they clergymen, heroes, businessmen—would not have risen in order to achieve that which the proponents of religious despotism attribute to constitutionalism, but to attain freedom and equality. The leaders of the Ja'fari religion, too, had no motivation in authenticating this movement with such explicit edicts and orders, and in calling its enemies the enemies of the Imam of the age [the Hidden Imam], except to protect the essence of Islam and the integrity of the Islamic countries. This bunch of tyrants and oppressors of the *umma*, these depreciators of the *shari'a*, know full well that spreading corruption, anarchy, and debauchery can only strengthen the position of irresponsible, absolutist autocrats. They have no other objective in mind but to help their masters by committing these heinous acts. They know very well what we mean when we say that these so-called clerics "do more harm to the downtrodden Shi'is than the cursed troops of Yazid

[circa 642–683] did to Husayn, peace be upon him"! They know how much we are hurt by their alliance with tyrants. They recognize that the blessed verse of the Qur'an [Sura 3, Verse 187] speaks of them: "And remember when God took a promise from the people of the Book, to make it known to humankind, and not keep back any part of it, they set aside [the pledge] and sold it away for a little gain; but how wretched the bargain that they made." They must realize that in this world and in the Hereafter, nothing but scandal and damnation will result from their support of tyranny. This is God's unchanging tradition, as stated in the Qur'an: "Such was God's tradition among those before you, and you will not find any change in God's tradition." [Sura 33, Verse 62]

It is time to rein in our pen, to describe this scandal no further, for it is sure to affect its own kind [that is, even proconstitutional clergy will suffer]. We shall postpone revealing their fallacies to appropriate sections in our five chapters. We shall bring the introduction to an end at this juncture with the following summary of the five ensuing chapters:

First: The foundation of government in the religion of Islam and in other religions, as well as in the cogitations of nonreligious philosophers, the sages

of yore and thinkers of today, is none other than the second [constitutional] form. Devolution to the former [absolutist] form is among the apostasies of tyrannical rebels of all times and periods of history.

Second: During this period of the occultation [of the Hidden Imam], the *umma* is deprived of divine stewardship and [the Imam's] public representatives, whose rule has been usurped [by mortals]. Should one allow the former form of government to dominate—that is, compounded injustice, and usurpation upon usurpation—or is it incumbent upon Muslims to reduce the degree of injustice and usurpation?

Third: Based on the above-mentioned necessity to limit [the powers of] government, can one argue that the present form of constitutional government—based on the two principles of limitation of powers and responsibility of government—is the right answer and free of further limitations?

Fourth: Discussion and dispelling of some of the temptations and fallacies adduced against constitutional government.

Fifth: Explication of the conditions for the correctness and legitimacy of the process of electing the nation's representatives, and a summary of their responsibilities.