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Abstract
This article studies the possibility of salvation for non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians in the legal and soteriological writings of Sayyid Ruḥ Allāh Khumaynī. The article concludes that the salvation of non-Muslims in Khumaynī's thought is not an indication that he subscribed to soteriological pluralism, but that his views were based on a popular distinction made among modern Ṣadrist rationalists that 'non-culpable' non-Muslims or non-Imāmīs – namely people who have not been fully exposed to the 'truth' of Islam - can be saved by virtue of God's mercy despite faulty beliefs and practices.

Keywords
Salvation, Soteriology, Imāmī, Khumaynī, Murtaḍā Muṭṭaharī, Islamic Law, non-Muslims, Sunnī

INTRODUCTION

It is no small wonder that a person finds salvation [on the Day of Judgment], rather what is of [great] wonder is a person who ends up damned despite the vastness of God's grace and mercy.
- ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn

On the Day of Resurrection God (Exalted is He!) will spread His grace and mercy to such an extent that even the Devil will relish in it.
– Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq

The salvation of people from non-Islamic traditions – as a matter of theological or legal discourse - has not been a prominent feature of the Imāmī tradition. Historically speaking, most discussions have revolved around the salvation of non-Imāmī sects, particularly proto-Sunnīs/Sunnīs.[1] Although the salvation of Sunnīs can be thought of as a matter of theology, most debates have taken place within the framework of legal discussions. The matter is important because in modern Imāmī circles, belief

[1] I define "proto-Sunnī" as a late Ummayad and early Abbasid period movement that contributed in the later formation of Sunnīsm proper. See Matthew J. Kuiper, "The Roots and Achievements of the Early Proto-Sunni Movement: A Profile and Interpretation," *The Muslim World* no. 1-2 (January/April 2014), 71. Sunnī Islam, as we know it today, mostly took root in the eleventh century under the guidance of the Seljuk Empire largely as a response to Shīʿism, see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 371-374.

in *imāmah* is considered to be a principle doctrine of faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*). As such, the status of Sunnīs *as Muslims* has direct legal ramifications from ritual purity rules to marriage laws. The dilemma is as follows: if Sunnīs do not believe in a core principle or creed of Islam, one which is categorized alongside belief in prophethood (*nubūwwa*), how can Sunnīs be deemed as Muslims?

Imāmī jurists in the last three centuries have for the most part redefined *uṣūl al-dīn* as *uṣūl al-madhhab* in their legal discourse, that is, from a principle doctrine of Islam to a principle doctrine of the Imāmī faith, meaning that a rejection of *imāmah* or *wilāyah* only takes a person out of the fold of Shīʿism or Imāmī Shīʿism and not Islam[2] unless a person knows the truth yet willingly rejects or opposes it out of spite or "love of the world" (*juhd*).[3] The doctrines of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and prophethood are distinguished from *imāmah* in so far as they are necessary requirements for being a Muslim (*ḍarūriyāt al-dīn*) thus putting them on a higher creedal pedestal than the latter. Rejecting the former will lead a person out of Islam but rejecting the latter does not have that effect in and of itself.

It is important to state that the legal category of being a 'Muslim' does not in and of itself guarantee salvation. Some Imāmī jurists have claimed that the categorization of Sunnīs as Muslims in *law* is only in relation to their legal status in this world and to make social transactions more expedient for Shīʿis but their rejection of *imāmah* may cause them to be raised as unbelievers (*kuffār*) in the Hereafter. In other words, Islam only defines a person's legal status in this world whereas *īmān* (one's ontological relationship with God) which *imāmah* is a necessary precondition to is what establishes a person's relationship with God and hence bringing about soteriological success.

Īmān however, for other Imāmī jurists, can take on several meanings. In the narrower sense, it can be in reference to faith or belief in *imāmah* which Sunnīs lack. However, *īmān* - in the generic sense as described by some Imāmīs - denotes one's true belief and relationship with God and Islam's normative principles as described by the Qur'ān can *per se* be applicable to the normative Muslim and not just the Imāmī Shīʿi.[4]

For the more restrictive group of Imāmīs on the questions of salvation, the rejection of *imāmah* and the consequent damnation of non-Imāmīs is not specific to Sunnīs or non-Imāmī Shīʿis only, but may

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[2] Khumaynī makes a clear distinction between the two. He writes that "*imāmah* as understood by Imāmīs is not a necessary requirement for being a Muslim (*laysat min ḍarūriyāt al-dīn*)" but is, as he suggests "a [necessary] principle of Imāmī Shīʿism (*uṣūl al-madhhab*) and the one who rejects it is out of the fold of Imāmīsm and not Islam (*lā ʿan al-Islām*)." See Ruḥ Allāh Khumaynī, *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah*, 4 vols. (Qum: Muʾassasah-yi Tanẓīm va Nashr-i Āthār Imām Khumaynī, nd), III, 441. Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī (d. 1992) explains that the reason why belief in *imāmah* or *wilāyah* is not a necessary condition for being a Muslim is because it is generally seen as a theoretical matter (*masʾalah naẓariyah*) meaning that in so far as normative and generic Islam is involved, the creed does not hold the same epistemological might and certainty as *tawḥīd* or *nubūwwah* does. For this reason, al-Khūʾī concurs with the majority opinion that *imāmah* or *wilāyah*, although supremely emphasized by the Shī Imāms as the most significant pillar of the faith (since it is the "key" (*miftāḥ*) to all other doctrines), is still a condition for being Shīʿi only and not a necessary condition for being a Muslim, see Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *al-Tanqīḥ fī Sharḥ al-ʿUrwat al-Wuthqā*, 6 vols., ed. ʿMirzā ʿAlī Gharawī (Qum: Dār al-Hādī, 1418/[1997-1998]), II, 86.

[3] The following clause is not specific to knowingly rejecting *imāmah* only, but encompasses any article of faith or the law as the issue at hand is the person's *attitude* vis-à-vis the 'truth' and obedience to God and not *imāmah* per se.

[4] See for example Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *Aṣl al-Shīʿah wa Uṣūlihā*, ed. ʿAlāʾ Āl Jaʿfar (np: nd, 1415/1995), 209-211.

encompass much of humanity, be they Muslim or non-Muslim. A tradition attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is often utilized by this camp to support the claim to this effect. The tradition is as follows:

> ʿAbād b. Ziyād said: al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) said to me: O ʿAbād, no one is upon the creed of Abraham (*millat Ibrāhīm*) except for you (Shīʿis), God will not accept deeds except from you, and He will not forgive sins other than yours.[5]

The acceptance of deeds and forgiveness of sins is an intricate part of salvation in there Hereafter and avoiding damnation. The tradition suggests that this form of grace is the special privilege of Shīʿis only, or as understood by certain Imāmī scholars, Imāmī Shīʿīs only.[6] As such, not only do Sunnīs risk damnation for their rejection of *imāmah*, but so does any other religious group, including non-Muslims.

KHUMAYNĪ'S CONCEPTION OF NON-MUSLIM SALVATION

Since the Safavid-era, I have observed that the restriction of salvation to Imāmī Shīʿis has not sat comfortably with most Imāmī scholars of the rationalist trend (*uṣūlī*) as opposed to those who are more inclined towards the traditionist/scripturalist camp (*akhbārī*). Although the differences between the two groups have largely been about jurisprudence and the epistemology of law, their different methodologies have also had a bearing on their theological worldviews as well in so far as how far they are willing to go in order to accept philosophical speculation on theological, ontological and soteriological themes.

It seems to be that the former, namely the rationalists of a more Ṣadrist persuasion,[7] have been more open to such speculation have had a more difficult time with the more restrictive view of salvation in light of their understanding God's justice and mercy. If non-Muslims like Jews and Christians, let alone Sunnīs, live in a self-referential bubble whereby they are unable or unconvinced of Shīʿī or Muslim truths, how can they face damnation in the Hereafter when they are victims of their circumstances, ignorance or inability to understand? The more restrictive camp believes that like Sunnīs, the onus is on non-Muslims to research about the 'truth' of Islam (e.g. Imāmī Shīʿism). The rationalists who deem themselves as proponents of 'divine justice' (*ʿadl* or *ʿadliyah*), believe that this demand is unjust because most Imāmīs also live in a self-referential bubble and it would be unfair to expect this extra weight of responsibility when Imāmīs, for the most part, are advantaged simply by virtue of being born in the right time and place and not because of a special investigative merit.

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[5] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, 2 vols., ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥaddith (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1371/[1953]), I, 147; Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Tafṣīl Wasāʾil al-Shīʿah ilā Taḥṣīl Masāʾil al-Sharīʿah*, 30 vols., ed. Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt (Qum: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1409/[1988-1989]), I, 121.

[6] Taqī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī al-Qummī (d. 2016) utilizes this tradition to make a case that the deeds of Sunnīs or anyone who rejects *imāmah* will not be accepted by God nor will his/her sins be forgiven. See Taqī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī al-Qummī, *al-Dalāʾil fī Sharḥ Muntakhab al-Masāʾil*, 5 vols. (Qum: Kitābfurushī-i Maḥlātī, 1423/2002), I, 650-652.

[7] It would not be correct to state that modern *uṣulī*s or rationalists are more open to a less restrictive view of non-Imāmī salvation. However, among the rationalists that I have observed, the Sadrists, namely those who follow the school of Mullā Ṣadrā, tend to take the more open view of non-Imāmī or non-Muslim salvation. Among others in the twentieth and twenty-first century who have subscribed to a less restrictive view of salvation, the group includes Khumaynī, Murtaḍā Muṭahharī and ʿAbd Allāḥ Jawādī Āmulī and to some degree, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī.

Among the more authoritative jurists and sources of legal emulation (*marājiʿ*, sing. *marjaʿ*) in modern Imāmīsm, perhaps Sayyid Ruḥ Allāh Khumaynī (d. 1989) – the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran - has had the most succinct discussion on the matter in the so-called pro-*ʿadl* and more rationalist/philosophical stream of Imāmī scholarship. On the subject of non-Muslim salvation, Khumaynī divides them into two categories, laypeople and scholars. He writes:

> In terms of their lay followers (*ʿawām*), it is apparent that the religious challenges that exist [against their faith] do not cross their minds just like Muslim lay persons (*ʿawām al-muslimīn*). To the contrary, just as our Muslim lay followers believe in the correctness (*siḥḥah*) of their religion and the incorrectness (*buṭlān*) of other religions without the contrary crossing their minds because of the indoctrination and nature of the Islamic environment they grew up [and live in,] non-Muslim lay followers are the same and these two groups are no different than one another in this regard. The one who is certain of what he/she follows is excused (*maʿdhūr*) [from damnation and punishment in the Hereafter] and he/she is not disobedient or a sinner and such, a person cannot be punished and damned (*ʿuqūbah*) for following his/her religion.
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> As for their scholars (*ghayr ʿawāmihim*), by virtue of the indoctrinations (*talqīnāt*) they grew up with since childhood and the nature of a non-Muslim environment they were in, they have come to believe and be firmly convinced of their false religion to the extent that whenever something contrary comes to them they reject it with their reason that was molded and nurtured in the nature they grew up in which was in contrast to the truth. As such, a Jewish or Christian scholar, like a Muslim scholar, will not consider the proofs of others, and the invalidity of those proofs have become necessary and self-evident (*ḍarūrah*) to such a person because the truth of his/her own religion has become necessary and self-evident and the contrary to this is not even considered possible.
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> Indeed, among them are those who are culpable (*muqaṣṣiran*) if they [seriously see and] posit [a truth] contrary to their faith but out of hatred or bigotry do not [even] consider the proofs [that stand against the truth of their religion] just like [some of] the Jewish and Christian scholars in the beginning of Islam.
>
> To conclude, non-Muslims, like Muslims, can be non-culpable (*qāṣir*) – and they are in the majority - and some are culpable. And religious duties, in terms of creed and practice (*uṣūlan wa furūʿan*), is equally incumbent on all those who can be held responsible [e.g. in terms of their age and sanity] whether they are learned or ignorant, non-culpable or culpable. Non-Muslims will be held accountable and punished [by virtue of not upholding the proper] creed and practice but only when clear and convincing proofs have been presented to them (*qiyām al-ḥujjah*) and not in an absolute manner. As Muslims are to be punished for not upholding orthopraxy, it does not mean that they are punished without regard to being culpable or non-culpable. [In other words, they are to be punished only if they are culpable in so far as they reject the truth either by being presented and convinced by it or simply dismissing it out of bigotry without honest consideration.] Non-Muslims are to be regarded the same way based on the verdict of reason (*ḥukm al-ʿaql*) and the principles of the divine justice (*uṣūl al-ʿadliyah*).[8]

Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, Khumaynī's own student, provides a further expansion to his teacher's views:

[8] Ruḥ Allāh al-Khumaynī, *al-Makāsib al-Muḥarramah*, 2 vols., ed. Gurūh-i Pazhūhish-i Muʾassasah (Qum: Muʾassasah-yi Tanẓīm va Nashr-i Āthār-i Imām Khumaynī, 1415/1995), 200-201.

> When we say that such and such person is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, we do not consider the reality of the matter. In a geographical sense, those who live in a region and imitate and inherit from parents who are Muslim, we call them Muslims and others who live in different circumstances and through the imitation of their parents follow another religion or no religion at all; we call them non-Muslims. It should be known that this [type of religious faith] is of little value from the stand point of being Muslim or non-Muslim or being a disbeliever. Many of us are Muslims by virtue of imitation and geography. We are Muslim because our fathers and mothers were Muslims and were born and raised in a region in which its people were Muslims. Realistically speaking, that which is of value is real Islam and that is when a person submits to the truth from the heart, that is, the heart opens up when faced with the truth until that which is true he/she accepts and acts upon it whereby the Islam that is accepted is based on research and investigation on the one hand and submission and non-bigotry on the other.
>
> If someone is characterized by [the virtue] of submission, and for some reasons [the real truth] of Islam is hidden from him/her, he/she is non-culpable and God will never punish him/her and he/she will be saved from the hellfire. And God (Exalted is He!) says: "We do not punish a people until We have sent an apostle to them." (Q13:15). This means that it is impossible for God – the All-Generous and All-Wise – to punish someone if clear proofs [of the truth of Islam] have not been manifest to him/her.[9]
>
> According to Islamic scholars, from Avicenna to Mullā Ṣadrā, the majority of people who have not acknowledged the truth are non-culpable. If such people do not know God, they will not be damned even if they were not to go to heaven. And if they know God and believe in the Day of Judgment and perform sincere actions for the sake of God, they will receive the rewards for their good deeds. The only ones who will fall into hardship are those who are culpable [by knowingly denying the truth] and not those who are non-culpable.[10]

Later on, Muṭahharī brings forth the personal example of Christians he has observed in Iran. He states:

> If you look at the same distorted Christianity and go to the villages and towns [in Iran,] is every priest that you see a corrupt and dirty person? By God, among them seventy to eighty percent are people who with a single sense of faith (*īmān*), God-consciousness (*taqwā*) and sincerity (*khulūṣ*) in the name of Jesus and Mary have given righteousness, God-consciousness and purity to their people. Such people are non-culpable and they will go to heaven and so will their priests.[11]

What is missing both in Khumaynī's and Muṭahharī's discussion is what they mean by culpability and non-culpability. Is culpability simply a rejection of Islam once a person becomes aware of it? How about when a person is sincerely not convinced by its claims to truth? The most succinct explanation I have seen from the modern Ṣadrist rationalist camp has been from Mahdī Hādavī Tihrānī eho provides a good elucidation as to what Khumaynī and Muṭahharī meant by those terms. On the

[9] Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *Majmūʿah-yi Āthār-i Ustād Shahīd Muṭahharī*, 28 vols. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ṣadrā, 1390 H.Sh/2011), I, 293.
[10] Ibid., 342.
[11] Ibid., III, 439.

question of whether or not non-Muslims go to hell, Hādavī delineates culpability and non-culpability as follows:

> Those who do not believe in Islam can be classified into two groups:
>
> 1. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Muqassir*' (lit. '*culpable ignorant*'). These are non-believers to whom the message of Islam has reached and who have understood its truthfulness. However, they are not prepared to accept the truth due to their obstinacy and stubbornness. This group deserves to be punished in Hell.
>
> 2. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Qasir*' (lit. '*inculpable ignorant*'). These are non-believers to whom the message of Islam has not reached, or it has been presented to them in a very incomplete and untruthful manner. Such people will attain salvation if they are truthful to their own religion.[12]

Hādavī explains that those who are culpable deserve damnation because "despite having known the truth, they have chosen with their own free will to reject Islam."[13] As such, damnation is not predicated on simply rejecting Islam, but it is the manifest result of a what Imāmīs consider a disease of the metaphysical heart, one which is mainly rooted in a flaw in one's character, particularly pride (*takabbur*). In other words, for the Ṣadrist rationalists, the damned non-believer is the one who is convinced of the truth of Islam, but due to a 'sickness' (*maraḍ*) in his/her spiritual disposition, decides to reject it. Although adhering the proper religious doctrine is important, the primary determinant of one's salvation is one's ontological relationship with God which manifests itself in how one *behaves* vis-à-vis a perceived truth as well as how a person conducts himself/herself morally. One's relationship with the 'truth' and one's moral disposition (which culminated in one's obedience to God) is thus largely determined by a bifurcation of a particular mental and ontological state, that of pride (or arrogance) and humility (*khushūʿ*/*tawāḍūʿ*). Pride leads one to reject the truth despite it being apparent and it also leads one to moral corruption because a person sees himself/herself as above God's injunction towards charitable behavior. However, humility of the metaphysical heart leads the soul to submit to God and synchronize itself with his command towards charity and thus good moral conduct. It is in this sense that some Imāmī scholars have gone as far as claiming that *īmān*, that is to say a genuine ontological relationship with God, is possible for non-Muslims like Jews and Christians.[14]

CONCLUSION

Although salvation is deemed possible for non-Muslims, especially the Ahl al-Kitāb (e.g. Jews and Christians), it would be a mistake to conclude that Khumaynī (or Muṭahharī) is espousing a form of soteriological pluralism. Stephen Kaplan defines soteriological pluralism as follows:

> …I propose a different form of religious pluralism – namely, an ontological and soteriological pluralism. In this form of religious pluralism different individuals with different beliefs and with different religious practices each different ultimate conclusions to human existence – different soteriological conclusions. This model

[12] Mahdī Hādavī Tihrānī, *Faith and Reason: A Compendium of Fifty Questions & Answers Related to Islamic Theology, Jurisprudence and Other Themes* (Qum: n.p, 2013), 83-85.
[13] Ibid., 85.
[14] Perhaps a good example of a modern day Imāmī *marjaʿ* who explicitly holds this belief is Sayyid Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī. The crypto-Imāmī Ḥasan b. Farḥān al-Mālikī also holds this view.

> proposes that within one, and only one, metaphysical universe there can be different ontological natures. In this model, each of these equal and simultaneous ontological natures provide different individuals with the opportunity to achieve different soteriological ends – different forms of liberation or salvation. In this form of religious pluralism there are different paths and different summits.[15]

Khumaynī does not see the normative tenets of Islam as just one form or path to salvation. It is *the* path to salvation. If non-Muslims are allowed to enter heaven, they are allowed not because their beliefs are correct, but because they were victims of their circumstances and out of God's mercy (*raḥmah*) and justice they are forgiven for their shortcomings. According to Khumaynī, even in these circumstances, non-Muslims are given to opportunity to acknowledge that single path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and be granted entrance to paradise. Since non-culpable non-Muslims are not at fault per se for their erroneous creed, they are given an opportunity on the Day of Judgment to remedy their shortcomings. For Khumaynī, if they were to hypothetically refuse the divine truth of Islam on the Day of Judgment, then they would be deemed culpable on that Day and be damned by God. However, for a Ṣadrist like Khumaynī, a person's disposition to divine truth would be the sum of one's lifetime habits. If one were to lead a truly humble and charitable life, even as a non-Muslim, it would be unlikely that one would *not* submit to God and to the series of right creedal propositions.

[15] Stephen Kaplan, *Different Paths, Different Summits: A Model for Religious Pluralism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc,. 2002), 2.