

## **Sacral Defense of Secularism: The Political Theologies of Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar<sup>1</sup>**

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This paper discusses three post-revolutionary dissident political theologies in Iran. They all question the absolutist theology of the ruling clerics and utilize indigenous sources of scholarship to oppose the clerical hegemony. They have complementary emphases: whereas Soroush highlights the variable nature of religious knowledge, Shabestari and Kadivar underline its limited and multiple nature. They represent the maturing of the dialogue of the Iranian-Islamic thought with Western social and political philosophy, and as the coming of age of the indigenous Islamic political theology reclaiming its pluralistic and democratic elements. Together, they attack the totalitarian Islam, and call for a guarded and objective secularism, while preserving Islam's spiritual and cultural identity.

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**KEY WORDS:** political theology; Islam; secularism; religion.

### **CONTINUITIES OF PRE-MODERN AND MODERN POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF IRAN**

Although this essay is devoted to the political theology of the twentieth century Iran, I would like to highlight its continuities with traditional Iranian political thought at the outset. Iran, as I have argued elsewhere, may be

<sup>1</sup>By "secularism," I mean the so called "objective secularism" ala Daniel Bell, Robert Bellah, and Peter Berger, in the sense of modern differentiation of institutions, not the subjective secularism in the sense of cultural and psychological decimation of religion. I define the term political theology, following Leo Strauss's notion of political philosophy, as a form of theology that concerns the religious legitimacy or admissibility of government. Coining of this term for the case of Iran, and maybe for other oriental cultures as well, is useful in view of the fact that secular philosophical thought in the form of political philosophy, is not indigenous to most non-Western societies and thus political mediation has befallen theologians and religious thinkers.

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dubbed the cradle of theocracy just as Greece is known as the cradle of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Three instances should suffice to indicate the longevity of the Iranian penchant for government by divine approval. First is the mythological notion of “*Fare ye Izadi*,” (aura of divine approval) germane to the sources that Firdowsy used to compose his “Shahname” (Book of Kings). Second, there is the seventeenth century juxtaposition of the Shiite Utopian belief in the charismatic government of the infallible Imams with the ideology of righteous stewardship of the Safavid kings, dubbed “*Zil ol Allah*” (the shadow of God).<sup>2</sup> Finally, there exists the concept of clerical oversight in behalf of the absent Imam crystallized in the notion of “*Velayat e Ammeh*.” (General Trusteeship.) Thus, Ayatolla Khomeini’s thesis of “*Velayat e Motlagheh ye Faghih*” (Absolute mandate of the jurisconsult) that has been enshrined in Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitution, while a theological innovation, is not entirely alien to Iranian political culture.

However, the counterpart of this belief, the burgeoning anti authoritarian political theology of the last two decades, which I will discuss here, also taps into Iran’s pre modern political philosophy, namely, the Shiite traditionally pluralistic, and historically rebellious tendencies.<sup>3</sup> I will consider three distinct voices in the innovative discourses of secularism in Iran’s postrevolutionary political theology.

### **FIRST: ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH: “LUTHER OF ISLAM”<sup>4</sup>**

Abdolkarim Soroush, born in Iran, in 1945, into a traditionally learned merchant family and educated at Alavi high school, (that proved, in hindsight, to have been the intellectual incubator of most of the Islamic revolution’s lay elites) and the school of Pharmacology of the University of Tehran, emerged at the dawn of the Islamic Revolution from his post graduate studies in England, where he had integrated theories of Quine, Duem, Popper, and others within the framework of his vast Islamic learning. Soroush soon came to be known, first as one of the most prolific and eloquent intellectuals of the nascent Islamic Republic and then as one of the most ebullient and learned critics of the clerical rule in Iran.

Soroush is the most significant, the best known, and the most prolific of the three political theologians under my review; but for that very reason, and in view of the publication of my recent book on Soroush which includes eleven of his essays, an introduction and an interview with him concerning his intellectual biography,<sup>5</sup> I will devote less space here to his thought than would otherwise be the case.

Admitting the impossibility of doing justice to Soroush’s multifarious project, let me outline his major contributions to three fields: 1) the

epistemology and sociology of knowledge; 2) philosophical anthropology and political theory; and 3) ethics and social criticism.

- 1) Soroush's magnum opus, entitled *The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of Shari'a* brings his almost encyclopedic knowledge of jurisprudence, history of ideas, hermeneutics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and sociology of knowledge to bear on such questions as, "to what extent ought we take the edicts deduced by Islamic Juristconsults as literal and immediate divine commandments?" His answer is to separate religion per se from religious knowledge. The former, the essence of religion, is perceived as beyond human reach, eternal and divine. The latter, religious knowledge, is a sincere and authentic but finite, limited, and fallible form of human knowledge. The clergy who have dealt with similar quandaries in their professional circles do not object to these discussions as such. They are, however, outraged by Soroush's recklessness for exposing the laity to such sensitive subjects. Soroush, in his turn, criticizes the practice of protecting humanly formulated knowledge by censoring its wider circulation.<sup>6</sup>
- 2) Soroush's political theory starts with a philosophical anthropology concerning human nature. In his rather pessimistic view of human nature Soroush appears to have been influenced by a modern tradition that starts with Thomas Hobbes and finds expression in the ideas of the framers of the American constitution.<sup>7</sup> That is, human beings are weak and susceptible to temptation, even predation. As such, they need a vigilant and transparent form of government. However, Soroush softens the pessimistic edge of this view of human nature with verses from *The Quran* and the poems of Rumi and Hafez concerning the fragility of the human condition. Soroush believes that the assumption of innate goodness of mankind, shared by anarchists, radical Marxists, and Islamic fundamentalists alike, underestimates the staying power of social evil, fosters the false hope that it can be extinguished, and discounts the necessity of a government of checks and balances to rein in the weaknesses of human nature.
- 3) Soroush's political philosophy remains close to the heart of the liberal tradition, ever championing the basic values of reason, liberty, freedom, and democracy. The main challenge is not to establish their value but to promote them as "primary values," as independent virtues, not handmaidens of political maxims and religious dogma. In his essay *Reason and Freedom*,<sup>8</sup> Soroush is at pains to demonstrate that freedom and justice are values in their own rights, regardless of their performance as instruments of attaining other ends.

Abdolkarim Soroush is also one of the boldest social critics of postrevolutionary Iran. As such, he has not minced words about the questionable office of the clergy (*rouhaniyat*) within the Islamic tradition where they perform no sacraments and have no mediating position in the relationship between man and God. He has also criticized the hegemony of what could be called “clerocracy” and its encroachment on the autonomy of academia in Iran.

Soroush sees contemporary Iran as a society in the grip of massive disenchantment. His own encyclopedic political theology is an expression of this despair from the official Islam advocated by the government. Soroush is the intellectual face of a new revivalism in Iran. Its political face can be seen in the sweeping victories of President Khatami in 1997 and 2001, as well as and the election of the new liberal minded parliament (*Majles*) in 2000. But the significance of Soroush’s work goes beyond the realpolitik of contemporary Iran. He belongs to a new and sophisticated brand of Islamic reformation that has its origin in the works of the late Mohammad Iqbal. Soroush’s views, informed by Western experience of modernization and secularization, and influenced by revolutionary and reform movements in the Islamic world, are not only illustrative and instructive from an intellectual point of view; they are also capable of revolutionizing Muslim theology and mass religiosity.

## **SECOND: MOJTAMED SHABESTARI: HARBINGER OF THE NEW “KALAM”<sup>9</sup>**

Born in Tabriz, in 1936, into a clerical family, Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari was educated as a seminarian in Qum. He stayed in the seminary for seventeen years, achieving both degrees of *Ijtihad* and Doctor of Philosophy. He was invited by Mohammad Beheshti (who was to become one of the main architects of the Islamic revolution of Iran) to take his place as the director of the Islamic center of Hamburg. Shabestari remained in that position from 1970 to 1979. While in Germany, he immersed himself in German philosophy and Catholic as well as Protestant Theology.<sup>10</sup> After the revolution he was briefly elected to the first consultative assembly (*Majles*) after the establishment of the Islamic republic, but thereafter he avoided politics and returned to editing journals, teaching, and writing. At the present time, he is a professor of theology in the University of Tehran.

Although Shabestari has made a modest contribution to the introduction and application of modern hermeneutics to traditional Shiite theology and jurisprudence,<sup>11</sup> and thus to the proposition of *variability* of religious

knowledge, his most significant contribution seems to be his authoritative commentary on the essentially *limited* nature of religious knowledge and rules, and thus the necessity of complementing it with extra-religious sources.

Shabestari argues that distinguishing the eternal (values), from the changeable (instances and applications) in religion needs a kind of knowledge that is not, itself, contained in the rules of jurisprudential adjudication as developed in Islamic law (*Figh'h*). He laments the lack of such a body of knowledge in Islamic society:

Today we are deprived of a systematic legal philosophy, a comprehensive philosophy of ethics, a political philosophy, and a sound science of economics. Is it possible to rule on the universality and eternity of rules and values in the absence of definitive views of these disciplines?

In the same vein, Shabestari underscores the limited nature of religious knowledge in general, and religious jurisprudence, in particular:

The role of the Quran, the tradition, (*Sonnat*) and religious jurisprudence (*Figh'h*) in economic transactions and politics has been one of organizing and orienting, not of establishing... The science of jurisprudence emerged to... channel the flow of change... not to initiate it.

He thus concludes:

We are permitted, nay obligated to cast a new glance at the current problems of life and to present modern questions to the Quran and tradition.<sup>12</sup>

In Shabestari's view, what is essential and eternal is the general values of Islam not particular forms of their realization in any given time, (including the time of the prophet).<sup>13</sup>

The meaning of perfection of religion (*Ekmal e Din*) is not that it contains everything under the sun, so that if we were unable to find a specific item in it, we could go off calling it imperfect. It is not perfection for religion to function as a substitute for science, technology, and human deliberation.<sup>14</sup>

Shabestari goes a step farther than any of his clerical colleagues, suggesting that there has been a divine decree for a separation of religious values and secular realities:

God has accepted for the world to remain itself (in the secular sense of the term.) He has decreed to let the world be the world.<sup>15</sup>

Having established the foundation of his argument concerning the boundaries of religious knowledge, Shabestari proceeds to explore the fit between freedom, democracy, and Islam. Here, Shabestari makes an innovative leap:

I am of the opinion that it is high time that we let people know to what extent they can expect religion to solve their secular problems and to establish an advanced society... The necessity of a democratic government can not be derived from the

meaning of faith or the religious texts. However, since social realities demand such a form of government, people of faith must forge a relationship with this reality, reconcile themselves with its requirements, and follow a faithful life along its riverbed.”<sup>16</sup>

In his latest book, “*A-Critique of the Official Reading of Religion*” (December, 2000) Shabestari pursues his critique of religious absolutism as hermeneutically naive and realistically unworkable. Also, he launches a major defense of modern concept of human rights, although they have not been articulated in religious sources.<sup>17</sup>

Still, as he told me in an interview in Tehran in January of 2001,<sup>18</sup> his endeavor is one undertaken from within the Islamic tradition not from without. He hopes to transform the nature of religiosity without destroying its essential contours. This reminds one of the profound and far reaching accomplishments of the Christian theologians with whose works he is intimately familiar. He has chosen the path of soft and learned yet brave persuasion and argumentation to achieve his goal.

### **THIRD: POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF MOHSEN KADIVAR: THE TWO-EDGED SWORD<sup>19</sup>**

Mohsen Kadivar, born in Fasa in central Iran in 1959, left the university of Shiraz after a brief stint as a student of electrical engineering, and moved to the holy city of Qum to pursue classical clerical learning. He graduated at the top of his cohort and entered the post graduate (*dars e kharej*) studies from which he emerged with a “permission” of Ijtihad, the highest level of Shiite learning. He comes from a politically active family. His grandfather was a dissident under Reza Shah, his father, under Mohammad Reza Shah. Compared to Soroush and Shabestari, Kadivar’s views are less well known in the West but they are by no means less significant. There is a pronounced convergence and complementarity between his ideas and those of Soroush and Shabestari. What is distinct about Kadivar is his sole reliance on Islamic sources of scholarship. Even his reliance on Farsi sources is minimal. This constitutes, at once, his weakness and his strength.<sup>20</sup>

Of nine published books of Kadivar, four are on political theology. Of these, one is a collection of essays, addresses, and articles, and the other three comprise a trilogy: The first volume of the trilogy, entitled “The Theories of State in the Shiite Jurisprudence” (*Nazarrieh haye Doulat dar Figh’h e Shi’eh*) encompasses a broad typology of religious opinions on the desired or permissible types of government in Shiite theology. Every single instance in this typology is either proposed or endorsed by the highest authorities in Shiite jurisprudence. Kadivar suggests two reasons for the

underdevelopment of Shiite political philosophy: the messianic hope for the imminent return of the hidden Imam and the stipulation of infallibility for the charismatic leaders (twelve Imams) in the traditional Shiite casuistry. He discerns four periods in the history of Shiite cogitations concerning political matters: 1) The era of development of the private and individual aspects of *Figh'h* from 11th to 17th centuries; 2) the era of coexistence of clerics and kings, from 17th to 19th centuries; 3) the era of constitutional government along with clerical oversight in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries; and 4) the era of the Islamic republic of Iran, from 1965 to the present. The most important feature of the first volume of Kadivar's trilogy is a typology of the types of government adumbrated in Shiite jurisprudential sources. Given the significance of this typology I will try to summarize it here:

**A. Theories of State Based on Immediate Divine Legitimacy:** (four theocratic types, in chronological order)

1. ***“Appointed Mandate of Jurisconsult” in Religious Matters (Shar'iat) Along with the Monarchic Mandate of Muslim Potentates in Secular Matters***

***(Saltanat E Mashrou'eh)***

**Proponents:** Mohammad Bagher Majlesi, Mirza ye Ghomi, Seyed e Kashfi, Sheikh Fadl ollah Nouri, Ayatollah Abdolkarim Haeri Yazdi.

2. ***“General Appointed Mandate of Jurisconsults”***

***(Velayat E Entesabi Ye Ammeh)***

**Proponents:** Molla Ahmad Naraghi, Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Najafi (Saheb Javaher) Ayatollahs Borujerdi, Golpayegani, Khomeini, (before the revolution)

3. ***“General Appointed Mandate of the Council of the ‘Sources of Immitation’”***

***(Velayat E Entesabi Ye Ammeh Ye Shora Ye Marje'eh Taghlid)***

**Proponents:** Ayatollahs: Javadi Amoli, Beheshti, Taheri Khorram Abadi

4. ***“Absolute Appointed Mandate of Jurisconsult”***

***Velayat e Entesabi ye Motlaghe ye Faghihan)***

**Proponent:** Ayatollah Khomeini (after revolution)

**B. Theories of State Based on Divine-Popular Legitimacy:** (five democratic types, in chronological order)

5. ***“Constitutional State”*** (with the permission and supervision of Jurisprudents)

- (Dowlat e Mashrouteh)***  
**Proponents:** Sheikh Esma'il Mahllati, Ayatollahs: Mazandarani, Tehrani, Tabataba'i, Khorasani, Na'ini
6. ***"Popular Stewardship Along with Clerical Oversight"***  
***(Khelafat e Mardom ba Nezarat e Marjaiat)***  
**Proponent:** Ayatollah Mohammad Bagher Sadr
7. ***"Elective Limited Mandate of Jurisprudents"***  
***(Velayat e Entekhabi ye Moghayyadeh ye Faghih)***  
**Proponent:** Ayatollahs Motahhari, Montazeri
8. ***"Islamic Elective State"***  
***(Dowlat e Entekhabi ye Eslami)***  
**Proponent:** Ayatollah Mohammad Bagher Sadr
9. ***"Collective Government by Proxy"***  
***(Vekalat e Malekan e Shakhsi ye Moshā)***  
**Proponent:** Ayatollah Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi

This typology does not include the completely apolitical views of grand Ayatollahs such as Sheikh Morteza Ansari, Sayed Ja'far Kashef ol Ghetā', and Abolghasem Khou'i who opposed any legitimate or clerically legitimized form of government in the absence of the infallible Imams or on the basis of clerical mandate over mature and sane individuals. The latter, through their negative political theology lend support to the purely democratic and objectively secular form of government (the last form enumerated in the above typology) proposed by Ayatollah Mehdi Yazdi. (Kadivar elaborates on this view in the second book in his trilogy, under the rubric of "the principle of no-mandate" *Asl e Adam e Velayat*).<sup>21</sup>

The significance of this typology in the context of the contemporary Iranian political discourse cannot be overestimated. The corpus of Shiite political theology, which the ruling clerics present as a monolith, an obelisk on which the hieroglyph of absolute mandate of the jurisconsult "*Velayat e Motlaghe ye Faghih*" is etched, turns into a fascinating prism in Kadivar's adroit hands, reflecting no less than nine distinct possible forms of government, all proposed and supported by most revered religious scholars and texts. Having revealed a menu of authoritative options for Islamic society, Kadivar launches his criticism of the most absolutist thesis.

The second volume of the trilogy, is entitled "*Hokumat e Velai*" or Government by mandate. This 432 page opus which Kadivar considers as the heart of his trilogy and the most scholarly book he has written<sup>22</sup> comprises a frontal and unabashed attack on the thesis of the "*Velayat e Motlagheh ye Faghih*" introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini and enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The work unfolds in two stages. The

first, lays bare the presuppositions of the concept of Velayat, which concerns the etymology of the term, its interpretation in mysticism (*Irfan*), philosophy (*Kalam*), jurisprudence (*Figh'h*), The Qur'an, and Tradition (*Sonnat*). In every instance, Kadivar discounts political implications of the term. He traces the first indication of the thesis to the writings of eighteenth and nineteenth century jurists namely, Mohaghegh e Karaki, Shahid Thani, and Ahmad Naraghi. Kadivar, thus determines the age of the concept as less than two centuries, a mere blinking of an eye compared to the age of Shiite jurisprudence.<sup>23</sup> But he reserves his most devastating attacks for the second part of the book that is devoted to the critical analysis of the proofs and confirmations of the principle of government by divine mandate. Here Kadivar proceeds in four sections; following the sources of adjudication in Shiite theology he sets up and knocks down the arguments for the Velayat e Faghih adduced from Quran, Tradition, (*Sonnat*) consensus of the Ulama, (*Ijma'*) and reason. (*Aghl*) He thus concludes:

The principle of Velayat e Faghih is neither intuitively obvious, nor rationally necessary. It is neither a requirement of religion (Din) nor a necessity for denomination (*Mazhab*). It is neither a part of Shiite general principles (*Osoul*), nor a component of detailed observances (*Forou'*) It is, by near consensus of Shiite *Ulama*, nothing more than a jurisprudential minor hypothesis and its proof is contingent upon reasons adduced from the four categories of Quran, Traditions, Consensus, and Reason"<sup>24</sup>

The third volume of Kadivar's trilogy is entitled: *Government by Appointment. (Hokoumat e Entesabi.)* It deals with practical consequences, disappointments, and disenchantments that the Government based on divine mandate has brought about.

In Kadivar's career we witness not only the voice of a gifted and brave clergyman, but a tradition of pluralism and debate in Shiite theology that allows such utterances. Once a *Mojtahed*, one is allowed, indeed expected, to contest the opinions of one's colleagues and the received wisdom of one's predecessors. Indeed, as radical as Kadivar's political theology is, due to his status as a *Mojtahed* with the right to issue verdicts and edicts, he has not been molested for these crucial writings that constitute the most specific and explicit refutation of the cornerstone of the theocratic element in Iran's constitution and form of government. Instead, he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, because of a sermon in which he railed against the so called "serial murders" of Iranian intellectuals and an interview in which he had alluded that Islamic Republic could be said to have partially reproduced the absolutist authority relations reminiscent of the Monarchic rule.<sup>25</sup> The charges, thus, were that he had implicitly implicated the clerical leadership of Iran in authorizing the murders, and that his comparison of the Islamic Republic and the Imperial regime of Iran verged

on sedition. But even against these charges Kadivar cited his authority as a Mojtehad to adjudicate and to inform:

As a student of religion, who, according to the explicit statement of my professors, has achieved the right to express jurisprudential opinion, I have announced that terrorism (known in classical text as “*gheliah*” and “*efk*”) is religiously prohibited”<sup>26</sup>

Even though this essay is limited to the comparison of the Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar, I would be remiss if I failed to mention an intriguing related line of reasoning in Iran’s postrevolutionary political theology. That is the sophisticated, and one might argue, almost sophistic, position of Said Hajjarian and Abdollah Nouri who endorse the letter of the principle of *Velayat e Motlagheh ye Faghih* but who argue that “logically” it can not be an autocratic institution for in that case it would be indistinguishable from tyranny. They suggest the principle can be upheld in literal terms but given a thoroughly democratic interpretation.

The following table provides a sketchy comparison of the abovementioned theologies:

	<i>Primary Discipline</i>	<i>Dialogue of Influences</i>	<i>Primary Contribution</i>
Soroush	Philosophy	Islam-critical rationalism (British)	Variable nature of religious knowledge
Shabestari	Theology	Islam-hermeneutics (German)	Limited nature of religious knowledge
Kadivar	Jurisprudence	Islam-casuistry of application	Plural nature of religious knowledge

## CONCLUSION

The complementarity and convergence of the three political theologies discussed in this paper is evident in the above table. Whereas Soroush emphasizes the variable nature of religious knowledge and Shabestari underlines the limited nature of it, Kadivar substantiates the multiple nature of religious theses. Each in his own way questions the absolutist and totalitarian theology of the ruling clerical elites in the Islamic Republic; and each utilizes indigenous sources of scholarship and erudition to oppose the hegemony of clerocracy in Iran. Soroush and Shabestari represent the maturing of the dialogue of the Iranian-Islamic thought with Western social and political philosophy and theology, while Kadivar represents the coming of age of indigenous Islamic political theology reclaiming and reinterpreting its pluralistic and democratic elements and relying on the contested nature of knowledge it produces. Together, they aim to critique the totalitarian Islam;

and thus to usher in a guarded and objective secularism,<sup>27</sup> while preserving Islam's spiritual precepts and cultural identity.

As I pointed out earlier, people like Shabestari and Soroush are the intellectual faces of the massive disenchantment of Iranians from the promises of theocracy, while President Khatami and the new reformist Majles represent its political face. As we enter a new millennium, the intransigence of the clerical establishment against the decisive electoral will of the people, expressed in the election of Khatami and the new Majles, its crackdown against reform minded newspapers, its jailing of journalists and intellectuals, and its increasingly belligerent and bellicose tone against democracy and reform is radicalizing the reform movement and its theological and political rhetoric. It is a portent of the darkening horizons of peaceful political reform that Kadivar in an interview remarked that the attempt by Khatami to compromise with and to rehabilitate the regime of *Velayat e Faghi'h* may have reached an impasse.<sup>28</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. At least this is the way Greek philosophers understood the contrast of the two cultures. See: Mahmoud Sadri, "The Sociological Implications of the notion of "Fareh ye Izadi" in: Kiyan, 5.22.
2. Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*.
3. Hamed Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785–1906*.
4. American Journalist Robin Wright and many after her have referred to Soroush as the Luther of Islam. A designation that indicates, above all, the level of attention Soroush's thought has deservedly found in the West.
5. *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: The Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, translated, edited, annotated, and with a critical introduction by Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, 2000: Oxford University Press, New York.
6. See his essay on "What the University Expects from the Hozeh" In: *Freedom, Reason and Democracy in Islam*.
7. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part one; Hamilton in: *Federalist Papers*. no. 10, 51.
8. In: *Freedom, Reason and Democracy in Islam*.
9. Shabestari identifies himself as a "Motekallem," a practitioner of "Kalam," a discipline, shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that seeks to determine "the relationship between the consciousness of divine revelation and the consciousness of human philosophy." Shabestari calls for a renewal of *Kalam* (*Kalam e Jadid*). Such a discipline would undertake a new assessment of the relationship between the divine and the human. *Din va Azadi*, p. 64.
10. There is ample evidence in his works that indicates that not only he has come into contact with the works of such contemporary Protestant theologians as Paul Tillich and Karl Barth and Catholic thinkers as Tyrell, but that he has engaged in comparing their contributions and opinions with such Islamic thinkers as Ibn Arabi. (*Hermeneutic, Ketab, Va Sonnat*, p. 132). He has published an essay entitled "Christian Theology" as well. Reprinted in *Iman va Azadi*, pp. 157–162.
11. For example, he unabashedly poses two of the most revered components of Shiite theology, that is, *Ijtihad* (religious adjudication) and *Tafsir*, (exegesis) as instances of the discipline of hermeneutics and urges the Islamic seminaries to "welcome hermeneutics with all their power and with utmost enthusiasm." True to his hermeneutic stance he argues: "It is a

- delusion to believe that one can empty the mind of all assumptions and suppositions and to access the Quran and tradition directly. Nobody can show an example of the success of such an endeavor . . . all commentators have reached conclusions based on their necessary mental limitations. (Ibid p. 8, 31, 135).
12. (*Hermeneutic, Ketab, Va Sonnat* pp. 47, 49, 56, 54, 62).
  13. "The status of the Quran and the (prophet and Imam's) tradition is to inspire us as the eternal sources of value not to instruct us as to specific forms and manners of life" (Ibid. p. 90). It is in this context that Shabestari argues that such issues as "*Ghesas*" (laws pertaining to revenge and restitution) were not legislated by the Quran but simply regulated, modified, and rationalized.
  14. Ibid. p. 234. This is where he comes closest to the theology of Harvey Cox, Niebuhr, Tillich, and Barth.
  15. *Iman va Azadi*, p. 67.
  16. Ibid, pp. 134, 192.
  17. Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari, *A Critique of the Official Reading of Religion*, 2000, Tarh e No Publications, Tehran, pp. 18, 22–29, 199–312.
  18. Unpublished interview, January 3, 2001, Tehran.
  19. In the text of his defense in the "Special Court of the Clergy" Kadivar made a statement that symbolizes both the source of his authority and the potential danger he poses to the theocratic rule in Iran: "To attribute to the *Mojtabeh* who rejects the veracity of the principle of the trusteeship of the jurist (*Velayat E Faghih*) a basic lack of jurisprudential knack is wielding a two edged sword, for the accused Mojtabeh has the power to pay back in kind." (*Baha ye Azadi*, p. 231).
  20. His most pivotal book, *Hokumat e Velai*, has eleven pages of Arabic references and only three pages of Farsi references. Infrequent references to Western sources (for example, in his book entitled *Nazarihe ha ye Hokumat dar Figh'h e Shi'eh*, pp. 45, 113) are to translations. Kadivar's lack of contact with the West may explain the fact that on social issues, he is more conservative than Soroush and Shabestari, even though politically he is in complete agreement with them.
  21. *Hokumat e Vela'i*, ch. 7, 8.
  22. *Baha ye Azadi* p. 97.
  23. The Pro camp includes: Seyed Mohammad Hassan Najafi, Seyed Mohammad Hossein Boroujerdi, Gholpayegani and Khomeini, the con camp too is loaded with religious authorities such as the following grand Ayatollahs: Sheik Ansari, the author of one of the most revered advanced texts of Shiite jurisprudence, Akhound Molla Mohammad Kazem Khorasani, Seid Mohsen Hakim, Seyed Ahmad Khonsari, and Seyed Abolghasem Khou'i.
  24. Ibid pp, 237. Kadivar reiterates the same statement in a variety of other arguments in this book: pp. 81, 98, 107, 232, 334. From among those who recognized any kind of trusteeship for jurists, the obvious majority of the experts' verdict limited such a mandate only to the cases of death, (*vali ye dam, vali ye ers*) juniority, or imbecility of the client. (*vali ye seghar, vali ye majnoon*) (p. 74).
  25. The sermon, entitled: "The religious prohibition of terrorism" was delivered in the Hossein Abad Mosque of Isfahan, in December of 1998 and the Interview was granted to "*Khordad*" a reformist newspaper, in January of 1999. The charges against Kadivar, as specified in the court verdict against him were: "1) propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and 2) spreading falsehoods and disturbing the public opinion" *Baha ye Azadi*, p. 121.
  26. Ibid. p. 119.
  27. I use the term "objective secularism" to denote institutional and functional separation of religion from politics. As such, it is distinct from "subjective secularism" which entails eradication of religion from culture and mind of the people. There is no evidence the two are linked either analytically or historically. Indeed, the experience of the West has demonstrated that subjective secularism did not result from the radical objective secularization of the society. Political Theology of Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar advocate only the former variety of secularism.
  28. Interview with Christiane Hoffman, for *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, August 2, 2000.

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