

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

MAHDAVIA (MAHDIISM)

THE SHIA' IDEA OF PROMISED SAVIOR A PHENOMENOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY

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Abstract

The idea of the promised savior has a prominent place in almost all religions. This idea in Islamic tradition is known as “Mahdaviia.” This title has driven of “Mahdi” that is an epithet for the Islamic expected savior. This title refers to a man who will come to save all human beings. He is a definite person who has been introduced by his name and family; he is a descendent of the prophet of Islam; his name is the same as the Prophet’s name, and his nickname is the same as him. So, Mahdaviia as a doctrine is not dedicated to Shia’s thought. Although Mahdaviia resides in the central part of the Shia’s theology, nearly all Islamic sects believe in it.

The idea of promised savior has an excellent station in Shia’s soteriology too; because Mahdi as an “Imam,” is a “Divine Guide” who has been chosen by Allah to restate the Islam and to guide humanity to truth. Furthermore, Mahdi is titled by “Gaem,” that means “one who will arise” and performs the uncompleted works and unsubstantiated aims of the all prophets and divine leaders. So Mahdiism is in the center part of Shia’s ideology.

Unlike Sunnis, Shias believe that Mahdi has born exactly in 25/9/864^{DC} and he is alive by the God’s miracle until now and would be alive till his uprising. According to Shia’s belief, he is the 11th descendant of Mohammad, the Prophet of Islam, from Ali and Fatemah, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad. As so, the idea of expected savior in Shia’ (Mahdaviia) among the other types of this idea in religions, is one of the most idealistic and also most bravely one.

Mahdaviia in Shiite concept has all of the characteristics and aspects of messianic thoughts. Although Mahdaviia essentially seems to be a “spiritual,” idea, Mahdi, according to Shia tradition has both the

spiritual and social aims. Besides spiritual salvation, it is promised that he will establish justice, security, prosperity and the domination of Good on Bad in the world. The Shia's expected savior, Mahdi, is obviously a person; nevertheless, the scope of his mission is not restricted to humanity and his resurrection is to influence all sides of the universe, as well as the natural world too.

Three Recommended English References

1. Landes, Richard, *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, Rutledge, 2000.
2. Bearman, TH., & Others, *The encyclopedia of Islam*, Netherlands, Leiden, 2000.
3. Sachedina, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shiism*, State University of New York Press. 1981.

The Structure of the lecture

This lecture is to be represented in three parts:

- Nomenclature and Terminology (Shia', Imam, Mahdaviaa , Mahdi, Messianism, ...)
- A typology of the Shiite Idea of the Expected Savior (A Typological Survey)
- The Status of Mahdiism in Shia's thought.

1) Nomenclature and Terminology

1-1) Shia' (Shiism/Tashayyo')

"Shia'" is one of the two great sects of Islam. In principle, "Shia'" had been a general term to call the followers of Imam Ali, the 1th Shia's leader. This term used as "al-Shia'",¹ or as an addition to Ali's name (the Shia' of Ali). But by the most of the second century (8th century^{DC}) the term was reminiscent of some important Shia's sects, like Zaidi, Ismaili and Ja'fari (the Twelver Shia'). Although "Shia'" became a special term for all sects which somehow believe in leadership (Imama) of Ali and his descendent, it seems that over time, the term "Shia'" was established especially for the followers of Shiite Ja'fari, the largest and most important Shiite sect, and in recent centuries it has been a definite term for them.

In this lecture, I mean by "Shia'" the Ja'fari or Twelver Shia'. In this way, Shia' sects such as Kaysanites, Zaydi, Ismaili, Waqifite and others, are not purpose here.

1-2) Imam and Imama

The word "Imam" literally means "front". It is a gerund of origin "amma" means "going to" and is cognate by the word "omm" (mother). The word in Arabic language relatively has a large application, such as front, leader, teacher, building thread and the road. (Lisan Al-arab, V1th, p. 224; Mu'jam O

¹. In Arabic language "AL" is used for definite subjects.

Maghaïis Al-loghah, VIth, P. 29) Additionally, it applies for a variety of cases, among them are: “Imam e Adel” (a righteous leader), “Imam e Jore” (an oppressor leader), “Imam e hedayat” (a guided leader), “Imam e zalalah” (an error or obliquity leader), “Imam e jamaa’h” (congregational imam). (See: Al-tahghigh: v.1th, p. 137)

But in terms of the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition (Al-Sunnah), "Imam" has two meanings: first, a general sense that means “an ordinary religious, social or political leader;” and the second, one how has given a divine leadership which is responsible, in addition to the social functions, for the spiritual salvation of humanity. So, such a type of responsibility is assumed that, can only be authorized by the choice and guide of the Divine.²

The main Sunni Moslems have taken "Imam" in the general sense and partly equivalent with "caliph". (Subhi, 22-24) Thus, Sunni Moslems have considered the belief in Imam ("Imama") as an accessory doctrine (“Forooe’ Al-din”) and not as one of the tenets of Islam (“Osul A-ddin”). “Imama” in Sunni tradition although can be a religious position, but the duty of Imam in this position is not except the implementation of the law and protecting the Islamic nation (Omma). (Ibid., 25) While the concept of "Imama" in Shia’ has gone to emphasis on the second concept of the “Imam” in Qur'an, which only realizes by the divine guide and choice as a grace to special individuals.

In Shia’ tradition, Imam is deputy of God (Caliph of Allah's) as he is the deputy of the Prophet. That is why the Twelver Shia’ consider the status of “Imam” the same as the Prophet, except that he is not a prophet. Imam in this tradition has an “infallible,” character, meaning that he is “safe of any wrong-saying or wrongdoing”. Imam in his time is the one who nobody upper-hands him, and hence, the wisdom for whom is a gift from God, to be an authority and a witness of God among the people. Hence, anyone but God could choses Imam, and so, he has to be determined, appointed and authorized according to the God's command, by the Prophet himself or by previous Imam. Therefore, it is given that to follow the Imam and to obedience him, exactly is the following and the obedience God and necessarily leads to salvation. (Al-Coleini, 1, 199) The examples of “Imam” in Shiite tradition are determined and are unique in Ali and his eleven descendants from the Fatima Zahra’s generation, the first one is Al-Hasan, Ali’s first son, and the last one is Al-Mahdi, the expected savior.

1-3) The Idea of Expected Savior

The notion of “expected salvation”³ and the “promised Savior” is generally categorized with concepts such as messianism⁴, futurism and millenarianism⁵ (millennialism⁶ or chiliasm). This idea generally mean

² . See the Qoran’s narrative about Abraham, when God said him after a series of examinations: “I’ll make you an Imam for people.” (Baghara, 124) and he became only after that, a leader in special sense.

³ The idea of promised salvation in most cases - but not necessarily - is accompanied by a belief in personal (human) savior; but some types of this idea is going to herald only a good situation in the future.

to believe and hope for a savior to be coming, or a promised salvation to be realized in the future. So, the idea of expected savior is more general than “messianism”; because it is not the declaration of the coming of Christ only. Also, it is more particular than “futurism;” because it is more detailed than a generally good that would be realized in the future, rather it promises a “certain” and “definite” situation in the future. Also, the idea is deferent from “millennialism;” because it is not just a promise of returning Christ and establishing a 1,000-year reign of the saints on earth.

1- 4) Mahdi and Mahdiism

In the Islamic literature, the promised savior is mentioned as “Mahdi” and the belief in his emersion and uprising is called as “Mahdaviia” (Mahdiism). There is no difference between Shia’ and Sunni sects in this doctrine, as well as in this tow titles.

'Mahdi' in Shi'a tradition is sometimes accompanied with epithets and attributes such as: 'Alghaaem' (Upriser), 'Al- montazar' (Awaited) 'Al- mowood' (Promised), 'Saahebo-Al-zamaan' (Time Owner) and 'BaghiatAllaah' (God's Hoard). These epithets, is also mentioned alone in some cases to refer to him.

The word 'Mahdi' is a participle from the root "hoda" ('guidance'). 'Mahdi' literally refers to “someone who is guided” to virtue, truth and perfection and would be free from the wrong. So, in the beginnings of Islam, the title had been used for some persons like the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali, Imam Hussein and also the Caliphs, however, 'Mahdi' gradually became the idiomatic epithet of the man who will arise from the Prophet family, a leader that his emersion has been predicted by the Prophet for the future.

As Islamic Tradition declares, he would full the world of justice, after being full of oppression. He is guided immediately by God, and his victory is guaranteed by the Divine. With a slight differences, Sunni's and Shia's literature have quoted a great amount of Traditions (hadith) about Mahdi. An example of them is a Hadith that quoted by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, one of the most important jurists of Sunnis:

⁴ . Messianism is the belief in a messiah, a savior or redeemer. Many religions have such a messiah concept, like the Jewish Messiah (from which the term and meaning originates), the Christian Christ (the Greek translation of the Hebrew root word), the Muslim Mahdi and Isa (one of the Arabic names for Jesus), the Buddhist Maitreya, the Hindu Kalki, the Zoroastrian Saoshyant.

⁵ . Belief in the Christian millennium in which Jesus will reign on Earth and an ideal world will be achieved in the near future. According to Catholic Encyclopedia, the fundamental idea of millenarianism, as understood by Christian writers, may be set forth as follows: At the end of time Christ will return in all His splendour to gather together the just, to annihilate hostile powers, and to found a glorious kingdom on earth for the enjoyment of the highest spiritual and material blessings ; He Himself will reign as its king, and all the just, including the saints recalled to life, will participate in it. At the close of this kingdom the saints will enter heaven with Christ, while the wicked, who have also been resuscitated, will be condemned to eternal damnation. The duration of this glorious reign of Christ and His saints on earth, is frequently given as one thousand years. Hence it is commonly known as the "millennium", while the belief in the future realization of the kingdom is called "millenarianism" (or "chiliasm", from the Greek chilia , scil. etc). (Catholic Encyclopedia)

⁶ . Millennialism, also called millenarianism or chiliasm , the belief, expressed in the book of Revelation to John, the last book of the New Testament, that Christ will establish a 1,000-year reign of the saints on earth (the millennium) before the Last Judgment. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

"... The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: Hour [of the Resurrection] will not be set until the earth would be full of cruelty and enmity." He said: "Then, a man of my descendants (or my family) will arise and will full it of justice, as it would have been full of injustice and enmity." (Ibn Hanbal, Al-Mosnad, V.4th, P.73, Number 11313)

It seems that this idiomatic notion of the term "Mahdi" has been used from the time of Prophet Mohammad and has become later further stabilized. In addition to literally meaning of Mahdi, the idiomatic sense of the term applied to the Prophet of Islam. Some of the most important Islamic historical sources have reported that, Omar, the second Caliph, after hearing of the death of Prophet, denied it and said he will return as like as Moses, who went for forty days and nights to his Lord and was absent from the eyes of the people. (Al- Tabari, V.2th, P.232; In Athir, V.2th, P.323) According to historical reports, similarly denials later occurred in the death of others, claiming they were in the case of Mahdi.⁷

It seems that, although there was no total consensus of the term Mahdi, however, they were unanimously believe that Mahdi would be a savior how is just of the household of the Prophet.

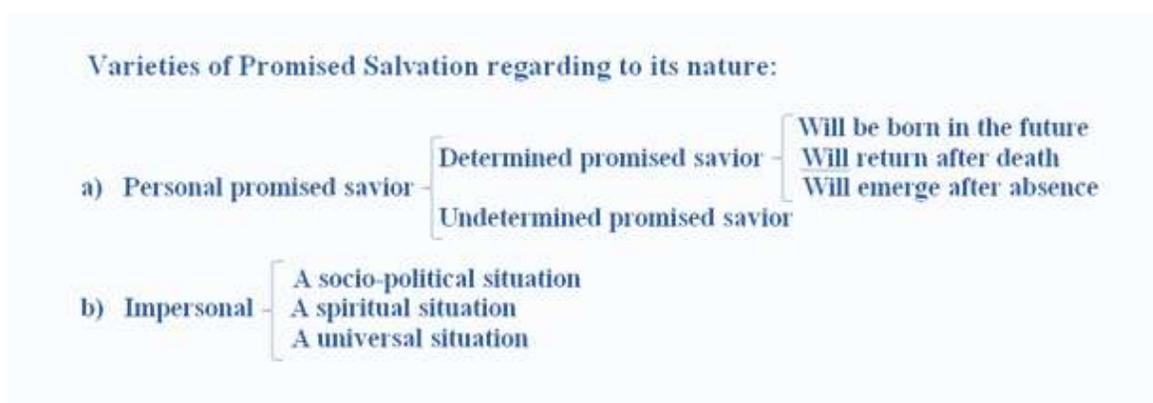
2) The typology of the Shiite idea of the promised savior (Mahdiism)

It would not be overstate to say that, the notion of the promised savior is one of the most pervasive humane thoughts. This idea can be found everywhere, from ancient religions and cultures to new religious movements. Irrespective of the idea of God, perhaps no thought is such universal as this idea. However, the idea of promised savior is not uniform in all cases; by an overview on religions of world, we will face to various forms of this thought.

From different considerations, the idea of promised savior has different species: the nature of Promised savior, the nature of what is promised, spirituality or sociality of the mission of promised savior, the geographical and demographical scope of his/her mission, his/her ideals, the cosmological role of the promised savior and how to achieve the promised salvation, are some elements that make this idea varying. So, considering the forgoing elements, we can specify the typological characteristics of Shiite Mahdiism, as a most detailed kind of this idea.

2-1) Mahdiism, considering the Nature of Its Promised Salvation

⁷ Among them, according to Nobakhti's Report, after the martyrdom of Imam Ali, a group of believers in his Imamate, denied his death claiming that he never die until to fill the earth with justice and equity. Then similar claims has been introduced about Mohammed Al-hanafiyya, Ali's son, Abu Hashim, Imam Al-Baaqhir, Zayd Ibn Ali, Mohammad Al-nafs Al-zakieh, Muhammad Ibn Ismail, the grandson of Imam Al-saadig, Imam Al-kazim and others, and "Mahdi" gradually attained an important position as a terms of the Islamic literature, particularly Shiite literature.



2-1-1) Personal or Impersonal

In some religions, the promise is the emerging of a “human” savior, whereas in the other, it may be the appearance of a political, social, spiritual or even a cosmological situation. So, in the first glance, we find the idea of promised savior of two types: personal and impersonal.

Although the Shiite idea of promised savior (Mahdiism) is personal however Mahdi will create a certain political, social, spiritual, and even cosmic revolution too.

2-1-2) Definite and Indefinite Promised Savior

Depending on several considerations, human Saviors are divided to several types: In some religions, the promised Savior is a special human with “unique” personal characteristics, so that in some cases he/she is mentioned by his/her parents' names and also the time and the place of birth. This type of promised saviors can be called as “determined promised savior”. It seems that the Christian Messiah and Saoshiant, the promised savior of Zoroastrian, are clear examples of this type.

But in others, promised savior is introduced simply by some qualities and characteristics, and so, anyone who has these features is applicable to be the very promised savior. This kind of the Promised saviors would be called as “undetermined savior”. Mahdi in the Sunni tradition is as such.

In this diversity, the promised savior of Twelver Shia’ has a higher level of personality and definiteness; because according to the most of traditional documents, he specifically is the immediate son of the Hasan al-Askari, the 11th Imam of Shia’. His name is the name of the Prophet, as his nickname is also the nickname of him. He has been born in the year 250^{AH}/864^{AD} and is alive now and will be alive until his uprising. (See: Majlesi, Behar, V.13)

2.1.3) Variates of the Definite Promised Savior, in Regard to the Situation before the Emergence

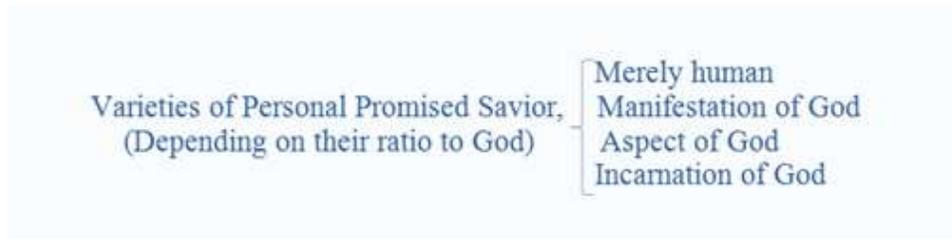
Various religions present the life condition of their savior in different species. The promised saviors in this regard are at least as three species:

1. Promised saviors that have not born yet and will born in the future, such as Messiah in the Jewish perspective, or Saoshiant in Zoroastrianism,

2. Promised saviors that had born and died and it is promised to “returning” after death; like Jesus Crist (Messiah) in Christianity.

3. Promised saviors that have born and absented or have ascended into another space and time to emerge at a certain time. Perhaps Buddhist Maitrya would be included in this kind of classification; because it is believed that he is waiting for his rising in a heaven named “Tushitha”. But undoubtedly the most striking example of this type is Mahdi in perspective of Twelver Shia’.

Varieties of Personal promised savior, regarding to his/her relation to God



Depending on the ratio between them and God, the personal promised saviors categorize at least in to four kinds: 1. merely human saviors, such as Mahdi in Sunni public vision; 2. promised saviors that are manifestations of God on the earth, such as Twelver Shia Mahdi; 3. Promised saviors that are an aspect of God, like Christ in the eyes of Christians; 4. promised saviors that are assumed to be incarnations or degrades of God on the earth, such as Kalki Avatāra, in Hinduism.

Varieties of the Idea of Promised savior in regard to her/his function



Studying the promised saviors of religions in regard to the role they are responsible to, we would face more varieties. At first glance, we find the promised saviors as two species: A) saviors that their saving is individually, and no collective mobility or social changes is impute to them; and B) saviors that their saving is to be occurred through public movement and is done in a vast domain. The first group achieve mainly to “spiritual” salvation.

Perhaps it is not fault to regard the saving function of Christ throughout the history and before he return from the sky to Judge the world, as an example of this kind. According to the New Testament, Jesus' spiritual liberating continually accomplish during the history and through a mechanism of faith in him. (See: Romans, 3, 23-25; *The Interpreter's Bible* v.9, p. 428) Also, in Mahayana Buddhist tradition, it seems that the redemption by Maitrya (the Buddhist promised savior) is to be realized during a scheme

like this.⁸ But, as a brilliant sample of the public and collective savior, we can refer to Mahdi in Twelver Shia.

Types of collective Promised salvation

Collective Promised saviors constitute most of promised saviors of religions. By different considerations, these saviors divide to different types. In regard to their “social” or “spiritual” mission, the promise saviors of religions are as three species:

The Varieties of Collective Promised Saviors, in Regard to their Social Function

1. Merely Social Saviors
2. Socio-spiritual Saviors
3. Merely Spiritual Saviors

1. Promised saviors that aim merely societal liberation.

Some of the promised saviors mainly aim at providing justice and security or prosperity, or promise to give people social and national freedom and independence. The promised liberating of this group is solely (or predominantly) social. As examples of this type, we can refer to the promised savior of some American Indian new religious movements, like Taqui Oncoy movement and Huacas, that promised the restoration of Inca regime.⁹ Also, the promised savior of some new religious movements in Africa, such as MaiChaza and Johan Masowe¹⁰, seems to be as this type.

2. Promised saviors with both moral and societal mission.

From this aspect, Hindu and Zoroastrian Promised saviors are more eminent. The social liberation of these saviors usually occurs during the spiritual salvation, and in fact, the social liberation is as a necessary introduction or first requirement to achieve spiritual goals. Twelver Shia promised savior also is classified in this group.

3. Promise saviors that purely aim spiritual salvation.

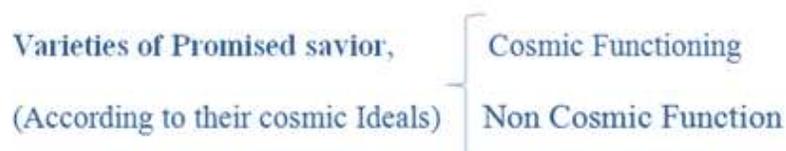
⁸ . See: Movahedian and others, “Typology of the Idea of the Promised Savior in Buddhism”, in *The Typology of the Idea the Promised*

Savior, p. 100-101; ۱۲۰، شومان، آیین بودا، ترجمه عسکری پاشایی،

⁹ Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, v. 13, p. 471.

¹⁰ Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, v. 1, 84.

In scope of this group there is no directly speaking about social justice, security and prosperity, though it is plausible that they pursue the social salvation for the sake of spiritual redemption. Likely the Taoist Promised savior is to be assigns in this group.¹¹



Locking again, we fined the religious idea of promise savior - in regard to if they see universal operates for the Savior or not – in to two categories:

- 1- Those that their optimum ideals is realization of a cosmic situation where all the universe, including human society and humanity, are transformed, and so their promised Savior is effective in the all world;
- 2- Those who aim only to human welfare.

Twelver Shia and Hindu idea of promised savior are the best typical examples of the first type.

The Typology of Mahdiism considering its essence

Studying the Idea of Promised Savior in religions regarding to the “essence” of what they promise, we would find at least eight types of this idea:

Varieties of the Idea of Promised Savior, regard to the content of promise

- God's Intervention in the World
- Fulfillment of God's will on earth
- Manifesting God on the Earth
- The harmony between God, man and the world
- Establishing justice, security and social welfare
- To setup freedom, independence and national lordship
- To realize General spiritual perfection
- Triumph of Good over Evil

1. God's Intervention in the world

¹¹. See “The typology of the Idea of promised Savior in Chinese religions”, Ibid.

When we consider the idea promised in some religions and schools, we find that they essentially declare the necessity of Intervention of God in the world. They assume that the modification of the world is outside the realm of human hands. This belief may be accompanied by a promise, or it may be just recognizing a historical necessity, or a psychological hope, or merely a wish and ideal that has been emphasized.

Hindu idea of the promised savior can be a representative of this type. According to Vaishnava Hindu beliefs, at the wane of the religion and virtue and conquest of the vice and cruelty, Vishnu (God) descends on the earth to destroy the roots of corruption and to restore justice and righteousness. The latest Avatar (descending of Vishnu) on the earth is in the case of a man, named Kalki. This model of the idea of promised savior is based on belief in the fact that in certain periods of time, the world would not be right without the direct intervention of God.

2. Fulfillment of God's will on the earth.

Unlike the above, what is predicted in some species of the idea of promised savior is not necessarily the intervention of God on the earth; it is rather the fulfillment of God's will on the earth. The God's will may be the victory of a particular race or the conquest of some weakened people, or generally the overcome of God believers against atheists. This may be accomplished by a national champion or some religious leaders, or perhaps achieved by mythological characters.

Although the victory and overcome itself is the matter in this type of the idea, but what is essential is the realization of the God's will. Perhaps Jewish thought of the promised Savior (Messiah) should be considered an example of this type.

3. God Expression on the Earth

In some cases, this expectation that God emerge on the earth, can be known as the essence of the idea of expected savior. The difference between this and the previous two types is that, the essential subject of them was "the modifying the world" and/or realizing a situation in it, that necessarily must be down by God's hand' or by his will, but in this type of the thought, the substantial idea is the 'emergence', 'expression' or 'manifestation' of God on the earth.

This manifestation may be in the form of realization of the qualities of God in a human being (such as a saint or a vicegerent (caliph) of God on the earth. The ultimate desire of this manifestation is to appearing of God's truth. Hence, in this thought, there is a "noetic" goal in the focus of the view. So, all the social and spiritual purposes (including, the establishment of justice and secure on the earth) would be considered as the branches and accessories of the realization of Divine truth on the earth. I think that the Twelver Shia's doctrine of the promised savior is exactly of this type.

4. The harmony between God, man and the world

Since, the root cause of all evils and afflictions, as some of certain religions and schools believe, is in the disruption of cosmic balance between man, nature and God, consequently, the exact way to salvation is to establish this balance and harmony again. This thought can be found in Confucius and Taoist idea of promised salvation.

In foresaid two religions - with some differences - the last ideal is coordination between man, God and nature, which is referred by terms such as "Great Moderation", "great (or transcendent) harmony", "Grate Peace", "world peace" or "golden age of moderation and harmony". This doctrine is based on the theory of "Tai Ping Ching", which according to it, the ideal situation in the world, would be realized by a heavenly leader.

5. Establishing justice, security and social welfare

Perhaps there are so many religions which their highest ideal is some form of justice, security and social welfare. They may desire the justice, security and prosperity for all people of the world, or for a certain nation, race or tribe. Although you can find this goal in most types of the idea of promised savior, but only some of them have focus on such a social ideal as their highest aim.

Some Sunni Moslem sects may be considered of this category. In the Sunni idea of promised savior although the set up a religious government and revive the Tradition of the Prophet (Al- Sunnah) is considered important, but it seems that they consider these goals as an introduction to that humanistic goal. Unlike this, the Sufis and Shia' see spiritual ideals more substantial in their idea of promised salvation.

6. Setting up the national freedom, independence and lordship

The central aim of some types of the idea of promised savior is providing or retaking the social benefits for their people and nation. Doctrine of the Messiah in Judaism is of this category. Some forms of the idea of promised savior in African and American Indian religions have also the same nature.

7. To realize General spiritual perfection

Unlike the previous two, the essential ideal in some species of the idea of promised savior sound as spiritual. Although these ideas might pursue social goals too, their focus is on the 'spirituality'. The typical example of this type is the doctrine of Maitreya, especially in the north Buddhism. According to this doctrine, Maitreya, the fifth Buddha, would emerge at the end of the world to help creatures. But he himself will not enter the grate salvation (Param Nirvāna) until he conveys all beings in to it.

Moreover, the doctrine of promised Savior in Christianity assumes primarily a spiritual function for Christ and for his return at the end of the world. Although Christianity has mentioned the issues such as "Last Judgment", but its ultimate ends is the perfection of all mankind and saving them from the shackles of sin.

8. Triumph of Good over Evil

The essence of the doctrine of promised savior in some religions is to destroy the evil and its manifestations and to spread the good in the universe. Good and evil in this doctrine may be purely ethical or both ethical and cosmological. Obviously, in such a system of thought, other issues, such as spiritual perfection, justice, security, prosperity, freedom and national dignity, would be formal or minor cases.

As a good example of this type we can refer to the doctrine of Saoshiant in Zoroastrianism. According to this doctrine, at the ultimate day that would be established by Saoshiant, the demon of fury and lay (doru) will destroy, and the angel of death (Vay) will tame for Saoshiant.

It may be some other ideals and believes which can be consider as the essence of the idea of promised savior; ideals such as stablishing World Government or setting up a superior social order. But it seems that we wouldn't be able to clearly demonstrate such aspirations at the center of their ideas.

Although more of these ideals is mentioned in Shia' idea of promised savior, but its central content seems to be manifesting of God on the earth.

Some other Variations of the idea of promised savior

Varieties of the idea of promised savior, in terms of the scope of the savior's mission

Varieties of the idea of promised savior in regard to the domain of their mission

Tribal
Local
Global

Religions are not the same in the geographic and demographic scope of the mission of their promised savior. In some religions, the ideal of promised savior is only the lordship or independence of some people, specific tribe or a particular nation, rather some religions promise justice, security and prosperity for all the peoples of the world. According to some explanations, Shiite ideal of promised savior is of this species.

Also, they may draw a "regional" mission for their promised Savior. For example, according to some Sunni interpretations of uprising of Mahdi, the scope of his mission will only include the Muslim world. But, many of the great religions assume a global and universal mission for their promised Savior. The idea of promised savior in Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism could be examples of such.

Twelver Shiite idea of promised savior is clearly thinking about a universal ideal, and in this respect, it should be counted an example of this kind.

Varieties of the idea of promised savior, regarding to the being innovator or renewer



The ideas of promised savior due to be renewer or being an innovator, divide into two categories: those that promise the renewal of what had been occurred in some times in the past (something like a “Utopia,” or an ancient kingdom, or a golden age); and those that promise a new ideal situation. The first group may be call as “Towards to Past,” and the latter as “Towards Future.”

Shia’ doctrine of promised savior is towards future; because it promises the perfect manifestation of God on the Earth, and this has never been occurred til now.

Varieties of the promised savior according to be final or sectionally



According to Shia’ doctrine, Mahdi, the promised savior of Islam, is to be emerge at the end of history.

3) The status of the idea of promised savior in Shia’ theology

Mahdi, the Twelver Shia’s promised savior, is an "Imam". So, if you want to know the status of the idea of Promised Savior in Shia thought, you have to focus on two facts: the first is that he is an "Imam"; and the other is that he is the Promised Savior. He as an "Imam" stands in a central position in the Twelver Shia’ thought. But Mahdi besides is the promised savior as well. These tow features have given him a more specific position among all Shiite Imams, and also have endowd a particular place to the whole idea of promised savior in Shi’a.

A) The status of the idea of promised savior in Shia’ theology, considering that Mahdi is an Imam.

“Imam” in Twelver Shia’ theology is considered as the central concept. According to some phenomenological studies, "Imam" and "Imama" (the belief that there would be a divine guide in each time in the history), are the essence of Twelver Shi’ism. (Re: Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guidance in First*

Shia', Hft-aasman, no??) So, Mahdi as an “Imam” and “Mahdiism” as the fulfillment of “Imama” in the history are located at the center of this religious thought.

According to a tradition (hadith) by Imam Reza (8th Shia’s Imam), Imam has the status of the Prophets, inheritance of successors, Caliph-hood of Allah, the Prophet's mission ...¹² Imam ... defenses of Allah's religion and invites to his way by wisdom and good preaching ... Imam is unique in his time, has no substitute, comparable or similar in knowledge and erudition ... Imam is the source of holiness, piety, pious, knowledge, devotion and specific understanding of the Prophets’ message ...

Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub Al-Koleini, one of important Shia’s scholars (dead in 3^{ed}/9th century) dedicated several chapters of his book, Al-Kaafi (one of the four main Shia’s literatures), to Imam’s characters. According to traditions of these chapters, the most important characteristics of the Imam of the Shia’ thought are as that:

1) Imam is witness for God (Allah) and his Prophet to the people:

Witness is someone that is either his/her act or sayings testify of anything or anyone else. So, the emersion of a Promised savior which is an Imam as well, in this sense that he is the witness of Allah and his prophet, would be the emersion of God and his prophet’s will in the world.

2) Imam is a guide:

One of the most prominent features of Imam is that he is a divine guide. Albeit, Prophet could be an Imam, but the description has been attributed to Imam to indicate the importance and centrality of this feature in Imam. Hence, the fact that the promised savior in Twelver Shiite thinking is an 'Imam', has this sense that, the emersion of Mahdi will be the emersion and realization of the full guide in the world, something that its conditions has not been fully realized until this time.

3) Imam is the successor (Caliph) of God on earth:

Caliph is he who plays a role at the place of anyone else. Thus, if we accept that the coming savior of Shia’ is an Imam, we must admit that Shia’ considers the emersion of Mahdi as the emersion of a man that his features, acts and sayings are as features, acts and sayings of God.

4) Imam is the light of God on earth:

Light is the symbol of truth. So if in Shia’ thought Imam is known as the Light of Almighty God, it is because of the fact that they consider him as embody and representative of Truth in the material world. Therefore, the Shia’s emphasis on Imamhood of Promised savior, imply that Mahdi’s revolution essentially has a noetic function and especially has the concept of 'the rise of the truth in the earth'.

5) Imam is the “proof” of God on earth:

¹² . The rest of this sentence is: ...the stature of the, Ali (1th Shia’s Imam whom consider as the “faithful people commander”) and the legacy of Hasan and Husayn (2nd and 3^{ed} Shia’s Imams)

Perhaps the most important feature of the Imam in Shia' thought, in terms of application and attention that have been done to it, is that he is 'HojjatAllaah' (The Proof of God). 'Hollah' literally means 'proof', that it naturally can be "on" something or "upon" something. It looks that, in the language of Shia' traditions, when they attribute 'Hojjah' to the imams or prophets, they generally mean the very literally meaning. So, the fact that Mahdi is an Imam, emphatically declare that the savior who Shia' promises is someone how what he say or do or is, is truth.

B) The status of the idea of promised savior in Shiite thought, in terms of Mahdi's personage

Referring to the features of the Mahdi and his resurrection, the place of the idea of promised savior in Twelver Shia's thought, can be better found. These features has been detectable in the traditions narrated about Mahdi and his resurrection by the Prophet Mohammad and the Imams.

Sheikh Saduq, one of the greatest Shiite scholars, (d. 381 AH/991 ^{DC}) has clearly stated in his famous book, Al-Eeteqadaat, that Twelver Shia's believes about Imam Mahdi, and this attitude has little changed in the history of the Twelver Shia' until now.

He first has numbered and named the Shiite Imams and added that, their latest of them is the Qaaem (one how will arise) and Sahib-Azzamaan (the time-owner). He specifically emphasized the Shiite belief that "the earth is never will be empty of Hojah (proof of God)". Then he has described the Shiite believe about Imam Mahdi and said:

"We believe that the proof of God on his earth and his successor on his creature at this time is the Al-montazar (waited: one how people are waiting him) Al-Gaaem (up riser) Mohammad bin Hassan bin Ali bin Mohammed bin Ali bin Musa bin Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ali bin Al-Hussein Bin Ali ibn Abi Talib, and he is whom Prophet of God has notified him of the name and lineage.

And it is he who will profuse the earth with justice and equity, as it was filled with tyranny. And it is who that God, in spite of the idol worshipers, will give his religion dominant over all religions by him. And he is whom that the Lord by his hands will conquer the East and West of the world, so there will be no place unless the call to prayer (azaan) reverberated there, and God's religion will be dominant everywhere.

And he is Mahdi that Prophet was revealed of him that, at the time of his emersion and resurrection, Jesus, son of Mary, will descends (from the heavens) and will pray by him, and the status of Jesus, son of Mary, who will follows Mahdi in prayer, would be the same as Ali's status of Prophet which followed Prophet in prayer and he was his deputy (Caliph).

And we believe that there would not be up riser but him. He would be in the absence till he will be in the world, and there would not be up riser but him even the period of his absence take long as long as world age; because the Prophet and the Imams (peace be upon them) guide us to his name and lineage, and foresaid of him clearly and exactly."

Results

According to all the above, the idea of promised Savior in Shia's thought, which is known by "Mahdaviia" (Mahdiism), is one of the most obvious examples of this idea in the religions world. Shiite Mahdiism on the one hand has almost all the features of this idea in itself; and on the other hand, it has been standing on a very important place in the structure of Shia's religious thought.

Shiite Promised savior is a personal savior that will coming to bring about a certain social, spiritual, and even cosmic situation. Therefore, the fact that he is a human being does not prevent the scope of his mission to pervade all human and natural world together.

In terms of specificity or not specificity, the promised savior of Twelver Shia' is not only specific, but is of the utmost dignity and determination.

Mahdi's characters also spends a most privileged situation to the idea of promised savior in Shiite thought; because of Mahdi as the "Imam" stands in the center of Shiite thought, and besides, he is how that would finish the mission of all the prophets and Imams as well.

RESOURCES

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اين اثير، تاريخ ابن اثير، ج ٢ ص ٣٢٣

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