

**THE POTENTIAL FOR EVANGELICAL APPLICATION IN THE SHI'A
ISLAMIC DOCTRINE OF REVELATION**

Steve Curtis

President - Timothy Two Project International
www.timothytwo.org

Published in "Contextualization" - www.GlobalMissiology.org April 2012

Introduction

Evangelization in the Muslim world is a critical part of the Church's fulfillment of the Great Commission. In any evangelization strategy, it is helpful to identify a concept or a point of contact where the Christian may begin to introduce the lost person to Christ. Apart from Islam's monotheism, each of the contemporary expressions of Islam offers such points of contact for evangelism. Sunnis can relate to the strong, austere images of God; Sufis can relate to the mystical or relational aspects of Christianity. How, then, can Christians find a point of reference with Shi'a Islam?¹ The answer may be in their belief that God continues to guide and instruct through the revelation given to the imamate. The Shi'ite doctrine of revelation, with its concepts of "Light" and the "hidden" Imam, demonstrate an innate awareness of – and an acknowledgment of the need for – God's active and perpetual superintendence, upon which the Christian may be able to initiate an apologetic or evangelistic discourse.

The Origin and Rise of Shi'a Islam

After the death of Muhammad in A. D. 632, there was a disagreement over succession in the fledgling religion of Islam. One group (later to become known as the Sunni), believing that

¹ While elements of this paper will properly relate to different Shi'a sects as well, the principle thrust is concerned with the dominant Shi'a sect, the *Ithna Asharis* (Twelvers).

succession should be determined through Mohammad's tribe (Quraysh), held that Mohammad's uncle, Abu Bakr, was the rightful heir to the office of the caliphate, or supreme secular authority. On the other hand, a rival group (to become known as the Shi'a) held that the succession must be ordered according to Mohammad's bloodline. Thus, this group supported Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as Mohammad's chosen successor. The Shi'a aḥadith, the *Kitab Al-Kafi*, summarizes the point:

[The eighth Imam was asked] "Can Imamatus continue in uncles?"...[he replied] "No, it cannot happen."... "Can it continue in a brother?"... "No, it cannot happen."... "With who then it can continue?" He replied, "It will continue with my children."²

Eventually, in A. D. 658, Ali became the fourth Caliph of Islam (though Shi'a Islam considers Ali to be the *first* legitimate leader). Following the assassinations of Ali and his son Hasan, and following the civil war that resulted in the death of Ali's other son, Husain, on the plains of Kerbela, the schism between the two Islamic factions was complete.³

Over the ensuing decades, the Shi'ite (meaning "partisan to Ali"⁴) progressively improved in power and influence. The 'Abassid dynasty (750-945), in fact, was initially in favor of Shi'a Islam, though they soon aligned with Sunni Islam and even became persecutors of Shi'a.⁵ During this dynasty, the occultation of twelfth Imam is said to have taken place (this is discussed at length below). With the rise of the Buyid dynasty (10th – 11th centuries), Shi'a dominance expanded throughout most of modern-day Iran and Iraq, until the Seljuk Turks, who

² *Kitab Al-Kafi*, trans. Muhammad Sarwar, H 754, Ch. 63, h 3. All citations are from this translation and utilize the designations contained therein: <http://www.al-shia.org/html/eng/books/hadith/al-kafi/index.htm> [Accessed 10 December 2010].

³ Edward Sell, *The Faith of Islam* (London: Trübner & Co, 1880), 74.

⁴ George W. Braswell, *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 90.

⁵ *World Civilizations*, Washington State University (WSU Board of Regents, 2008): <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/SHIA/HIDDEN.HTM> [Accessed 02 December 2010].

were Sunnis, defeated the Buyids in the mid-11th century.⁶ At around the same time as the Buyids, the Hamdanids, another Shi'a dynasty, came into prominence in northern Iraq and eventually in Syria, as well. Though this area was similarly conquered by the Turks, it had the effect of creating a broad expansion of Shi'a Islamic thought throughout the Middle East.⁷

Finally, under the bold leadership of the young firebrand, Isma'il, the winds of change brought the Shi'ite into power once again. With the advent of Isma'il's Safavid dynasty in 1501, Shi'a Islam was established as the 'religion of state' in Iran.⁸ Isma'il claimed, at first, to be a representative of the Hidden Imam, and then actually claimed to *be* the Hidden Imam.⁹ He soon controlled all of Iran and enforced Shi'a Islam on all who lived there. Sunnis (who vastly outnumbered the Shi'a) were even ordered to curse the first three Caliphs. Thus was the schism between Sunni and Shi'a likely forever assured. While the trajectory of the schism was largely identified with physical and political conflict, the lasting barrier between the two factions remains, chiefly, their competing systems of doctrine.

Shi'ite Doctrine of Revelation

Muslims all agree that there has been revelation from God: through the prophets of the Bible and, finally, through Mohammad. There are two forms of revelation in Islamic thought: *wahy* and *ilham*. In the former, "the recipient knows the medium, i.e., the angel by whom he received the information."¹⁰ This is considered to be the case with the transmission of the Qur'an. As Saeed explains:

⁶ Christoph Marcinkowski, *Shi'ite Identities: Community and Culture in Changing Social Contexts* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2009), 69.

⁷ *World Civilizations*.

⁸ Marcinkowski, 70

⁹ *World Civilizations*.

¹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol 7. p.354*. Cited on Answering Islam website: <http://www.answering-islam.org/Index/index.html> [Accessed 12 December 2010].

God is the sole ‘author’ of the Qur’an and Muhammad’s role is reduced to that of a recipient of the sacred text and transmitter of it to his people. In its reception and transmission, then, Muhammad faithfully provides a ‘carbon copy’ of what has been dictated to him in the Arabic language, without addition or alteration. No credit is given to Muhammad; it all accrues to God.¹¹

Islamic Revelation: *Wahy* and *Ilham*

Wahy is not exclusively demonstrated in the Qur’an revelation, however, but is also understood to be that form of revelation by which, for instance, Moses and Jesus (and other prophets) received their messages from God.¹² In the latter form of revelation, *ilham*, “the recipient receives information from an unknown source and in an unknown way. This is the inspiration of saints and mystics.”¹³ Further, this is the form of revelation believed by Shi’a Islam to have been communicated through the imams and, to a lesser degree, to the ayatollahs of modern Shi’a Islam.

Imamah

The doctrine of Imamah, or the imamate, is a singularly important issue that divides Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. Well over a century ago, Sell observed that which continues to be obvious today; namely, that the difference on this point is “so great that there is no danger of even a political union between these two great branches of Islam.”¹⁴ The crux of the matter is the issue of authority. For the Sunni Muslims, there is “more reliance on law and jurisprudence,”¹⁵ while, as Kerr says, “For the Shi’a Muslims the principle figure of religious authority is the

¹¹ Abdullah Saeed, “Rethinking ‘Revelation’ as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur’an: A Qur’anic Perspective,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 93.

¹² Mohammad Ali Shomali, “Divine Revelation, a Shia Perspective on Divine Guidance and Human Understanding,” *Islamochristiana* 33 (Jan 2007): 122.

¹³ Al-Ghazali (*Answering Islam*).

¹⁴ Sell, 84.

¹⁵ Diane Morgan, *Essential Islam: a Comprehensive Guide to Belief and Practice* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010), 160.

Imam.”¹⁶ Indeed, the authority of the Imam is the authority of God, for “his word is the word of God and of the Prophet, and obedience to his order is incumbent.”¹⁷ Thus, Shi’a Islam places great stock in the aḥādith, as it is from these sources that the authoritative words of the Imams are found. Indeed, for Shi’a Islam, the normative value of a ḥadith is its universal application.¹⁸ The Shi’a believe that Mohammad was the last prophet, and the last to receive *wahy*; nevertheless, they believe that he instituted ‘the cycle of initiation’ to provide continual guidance. This role is believed to have been the purview of the imamate. The Imams, then, are recipients (and conduits) of *ilham* revelation; that is, through the imamate, the will of Allah is made known to the people. This is spelled out clearly in the *Kitab Al-Kafi*:

[Allah’s] creatures cannot see, touch, associate and directly communicate with Him. It proves that His deputies must be present among His creatures. It is His deputies and ambassadors who speak to people for Him and provide them guidance to protect their interests, to tell them what is beneficial to them and what are the best means of survival and what may cause their destruction. This proves the presence among people of those who conveys the commandments of the Creator . . . [and] also proves their presence among people in all times to ensure the availability of the people with Divine authority who would have the kind of knowledge that would establish their truthfulness and trustworthiness.”¹⁹

Elsewhere, it is written that, in order to know what Allah “likes and dislikes,” one must rely upon a “revelation or a messenger.”²⁰ Shi’a aḥādith, in fact, go so far as to declare that Allah would be “unjustified” in holding people accountable if there were no Imam who would teach

¹⁶ David Kerr, “The Unity and Variety in Islam,” in *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the World’s Religions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 331. There is, however, some disunity regarding this view within Shi’a scholarship; i.e., some Shi’a Qur’anic commentators do not consider the words of the “Companions” or the “Successors” to be any different from any other interpretation of the Qur’an. In such cases, then, the Shi’a understanding is closer to that of the Sunni, with a stronger emphasis on the Qur’an as the sole religious authority. Cf. M. J. Elmi, “The Views of Ṭabāṭabā’ī on Traditions (aḥādīth) and Occasions of Revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl) in Interpreting the Qur’an,” *Journal of Shi’ite Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2006): 52.

¹⁷ Sell, 78. quoting the *Hyāt-un-Nafīs*.

¹⁸ Jason Dean, “Révélation et Méthode Historique Chez ibn Ishāq,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 86, no. 4 (2006): 492. [“Alors que la valeur normative d’un hadith tient précisément à son universalité”].

¹⁹ *Kitab Al-Kafi*, H 412, Ch. 1, h 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, H 413, Ch. 1, h 2.

the people.²¹ Conversely, the role of Imam as teacher is necessary and even the one who worships Allah “assiduously” apart from the instruction of an Imam will find that his worship is unacceptable and, in fact, “he is lost and confused and Allah disdains his deeds.”²² Clearly, then, the role of Imam is of the very essence of Shi’a Islam.

With such a critical view of the imamate, it is not surprising that Shi’a Islam considers the Imams to be very special people, indeed. The aḥadith bear this out by noting that the imamate is a uniquely created order: “Allah has created us from *‘Illyin* (high above) and He has created our spirits from above that. He has created the spirit of our Shi‘as (followers) from *‘Illyin* and their bodies from below that.”²³ More specifically, it is written:

Allah has created us from the light of His greatness. Thereafter He shaped our form from a preserved and hidden clay under the Throne. Then He made that light to reside in that clay. We then were a spiritual creature of the human being species. He has not placed anything as a share from that which we were created in anyone else.²⁴

Having thus described the unique class of their creation, the Imams then claim for themselves “perfect understanding.”²⁵ They are able to claim such precisely because they are confident that Allah will always reveal to them all that they wish to know,²⁶ and they know all that the angels and even Mohammad himself have known.²⁷ Without such limitless knowledge, the Imams believed that they would certainly diminish progressively until they would be unable

²¹ Ibid., H 424, Ch. 4, h 1.

²² Ibid., H 971, Ch. 86, h 2.

²³ Ibid., H 1010, Ch. 94, h 1.

²⁴ Ibid., H 1011, Ch. 94, h 2.

²⁵ Ibid., H 711, Ch. 54, h 3.

²⁶ “When the Imam (a.s.) would will to know something Allah will grant him such knowledge.” Ibid., H 669, Ch. 46, h 3.

²⁷ Ibid., H 659, Ch. 44, h 1.

to fulfill the duties of their office;²⁸ thus, every Friday night, their souls were transported to the very throne of Allah, thus to return to their earthly bodies all the wiser.²⁹

The question then turns to the perpetuity of the imamate. A central tenet of Shi'a theology is the occultation of the twelfth Imam (discussed below). If the twelfth Imam has indeed been hidden since the tenth century, did the revelation cease at that time? Not according to the Kitab Al-Kafi, which says, "The earth has *never been without a person with Divine authority* who would teach people about the lawful and unlawful matters and call them to the path of Allah."³⁰ And, lest one suggest that this ḥadīth was written while the office of Imam was still visible and active, yet another ḥadīth makes clear that the revelation of the imamate will not cease before the end of time. In a commentary of sura 7:157 which says, in part, that the faithful Muslims will be the ones who "follow the light which has been sent down with [Muhammad]," it is written that "it is the Imams from the family of the Holy Prophet *up to the Day of judgment* who are called light in the above verse. They...are the light of Allah whom He sent down."³¹ How then, if the twelfth Imam was the last to hold that unique place, can the "light" of Allah continue to 'shine' on Muslims today? The answer can be found in a closer study of the Shi'a doctrine of the Hidden Imam.

The "Hidden" Imam

"The core of the Shi'ite religious world view is the Hidden Imam."³² According to Shi'a theology, this is the twelfth Imam, who went into hiding in the tenth century. His name is Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan, and his title is "al-Mahdi" which means "The Guided One." It is said

²⁸ Ibid., H 655, Ch. 43, h 1.

²⁹ Ibid., H 653, Ch. 42, h 2

³⁰ Ibid., H 430, Ch. 5, h 3; emphasis added.

³¹ Ibid., H 495, Ch. 13, h 1; emphasis added.

³² *World Civilizations*.

that he lives on the earth among people, though people around him do not perceive his true identity.³³ The central Shi'a doctrines concerning the Hidden Imam are those of his occultation (*ghaiba*) and his return (*raj'a*). While the return of the twelfth Imam figures prominently in Shi'a eschatology, the focus herein will be more narrowly concerned with the idea of his occultation, particularly as it relates to the ongoing direction and guidance he is thought to provide for the Islamic community.

Occultation (*ghaiba*)

The occultation is itself divided into two parts: the Lesser Occultation and the Greater Occultation. The Lesser (or Minor) Occultation (*ghaybat al-sughra*) began in A.D. 873 and lasted until A.D. 939. During this period of about seventy years, al-Mahdi communicated with the community through four special agents, known as “Gates,” who conveyed his wisdom to the people. The Greater (or Major) Occultation followed the first and “will continue as long as God wills it.”³⁴ During this time, there are no direct communications with al-Mahdi, though there are those ‘doctors of the law’ (*mujtahidun*) who, though they cannot see him, are able to access his guidance. In modern Iran, the “most senior” of these agents are the ayatollahs. Regarding the ayatollahs, Kerr notes, “It is they who have the right to interpret the Sharia and to make religious rulings”³⁵ A ḥadith explains it in this way:

(The one who will rise with Divine Authority) will have two disappearances. One of them will be for a short time and the other for a longer time. No one would know his place during the shorter disappearance except the special persons from his Shi'a. During his longer disappearance no one will see him except very special persons from his friends.³⁶

³³ The Shia.org website: <http://www.shia.org/mehdi.html#misc> [Accessed 13 December 2010].

³⁴ Shia.org.

³⁵ Kerr, 232.

³⁶ *Kitab Al-Kafi*, H 906, Ch. 80, h 19

Though there are disputes between Sunni and Shi'a scholars surrounding the parentage (and even the historical existence) of the twelfth Imam, Shi'a theology holds to the belief that he hid in a cellar (or, some say, a cave or even a well) from age six. During the ensuing seventy years, he maintained contact with the four Gates (*babs*): Uthman al Amir, Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Uthman, Abu'l Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh an Nawbakhti, and Abu'l Husayn Ali ibn Muhammad (known as Samarri).³⁷ It is purported that, near his death, Samarri provided a letter from al-Mahdi declaring that he, Samarri, was the last *Bab*. From that time onward, al-Mahdi would not be in direct contact with anyone, but would, rather, offer advice and/or intercession mediately through agents, such as the Mujtahids.

Light (*nur*)

The doctrine of light (*nur*) begins with the belief that, before the creation of the world, "God took a ray of light from the splendor of His own glory and united it to the body of Muhammad."³⁸ Thus, while the body of Muhammad was somehow kept hidden until the late sixth century, the *Núr-i-Muhammadí* – or, the 'Light of Muhammad' – pre-existed the world. In Shi'a theology, it is believed that this 'light' passed on through the genetic line to Ali, and, subsequently, to the rest of the imamate. Thus, for Shi'a Islam, "an infallible book is not sufficient. The infallible guide is needed."³⁹ In the early days of Islam, of course, the Shi'a understood the infallible guides to be the Imams. Since the occultation, however, the guide has taken the form of the Mujtahids, or scholars, who are "the trustees of the 'light of Muhammad' on behalf of the 'Hidden Imam.'"⁴⁰ As Cragg points out, "Only the Mujtahids, as mouthpieces of

³⁷ D. Josiya Negahban, "Muhammad al Mahdi," *LookLex Encyclopedia*: <http://icias.com/e.o/12thimam.htm> [Accessed 12 December 2010].

³⁸ Sell, 77.

³⁹ Sell, 79

⁴⁰ Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled By Truth* (Bishop Auckland: Pentland Press, 1992), 255.

the Hidden Imam, can achieve Ijtihad or law-definition. They alone have the correct key both to the Qur'an in exegesis, and to the Shari'ah in interpretation."⁴¹ They receive the revelation (*ilham*), ostensibly from al-Mahdi (who, in turn, is receiving *wahy* from Allah) and thus are, subsequently, qualified to lead the people.

Sell suggests that "the whole of Shi'a doctrine on this point [the perpetual guidance of the imamate] seems to show that there is in the human heart a natural desire for some Mediator – some Word of the Father, Who shall reveal Him to His children."⁴² Whether or not this is an accurate assessment of the Shi'a doctrine, it is nevertheless true that there is, within the human heart, a *sensus divinitatus* that is aware of the existence of God (Romans 1:19-20) and of our great need.

Further, there is, within Shi'a Islam, the understanding that intercession is essential to ultimate salvation. This can be seen in the elements of redemptive value placed on the virtual veneration of "saints" and, most especially, in the death of Husain at Kerbela, in which it is understood, at least in some sense, that he died "for the sins of Islam."⁴³ Miller goes on to quote Hugronje as saying that the Shi'a, "unable to believe that their leader [Husain] was conquered and killed against his will...have made the whole tragedy a predestined case of vicarious sacrifice."⁴⁴ The Shi'a, accepting the reality of a deity, do acknowledge the logical need for some revelation on the part of that deity if there is to be any hope of the creature understanding the mind and the will of the Creator. Also, the Shi'a understands intuitively that this revelation is somehow inextricably tied to the idea of redemption, though this notion is only dimly projected

⁴¹ Cragg, 201-202

⁴² Sell, 83.

⁴³ Roland E. Miller, "The Muslim Doctrine of Salvation," *The Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Study* 3, no 1-4 (1980): 184.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

across the doctrines of Islam. In the end, the Shi'ite is confronted with a terrible uncertainty about his personal, ultimate end. "They have understood that there is in Islam no satisfying way to God's house and no certainty that they will ultimately be saved."⁴⁵ The Shi'ite, then, finds himself upon the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand, he understands the necessity for divine revelation and redemption, while, on the other hand, the revelation he possesses and the redemption he imagines fail to fully satisfy his need or grant him any assurance of eternal life. The Christian may be able to further enlighten the Shi'a on this point, as he has a fuller grasp on the ideas of revelation and redemption through the doctrines of the written Word and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

A Christian Response

Salman Rushdie laments: "The One it's all about...absent as ever while we suffer in His Name."⁴⁶ This spiritual angst exists – of a necessity – in all who are not convinced of the active work of God in the world. Indeed, the Christian understands that a God Who is not there is no God at all. The Christian, however, need not contend with such a sense of despair and loneliness, for he sees, in the living Word of Scripture – and even more clearly in the Person of Christ – the ultimate immanence of God.

The written Word of God details and describes the active work of God throughout the ages. God is seen interacting with men, with nations, and with the world at large. He delivers captives, he defends His people against human foes, and He makes His abode in the very midst of those Whom He has created. The written Word of God tells us all of this and yet tells us far

⁴⁵ Ibid., 193.

⁴⁶ Cited in Cragg, 147.

more besides. The grand theme of the Bible is that God will invade His creation in the form of a man.

Jesus Christ is the definitive expression of the God Who draws near. For the Christian, faith is not a frenetic act of the will, grasping in the dark at intangible objects to find its purchase. Faith is not only believing what *was*, it is believing what *is* and what *will be*. Further, the Christian faith does not demand another human to mediate between God and man, nor does it require another human to interpret the will and the Word of God. Jesus, as He neared the time of His return to the Father, solemnly vowed, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:18) This, He did, in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Belief in the active and personal omnipresence of the Holy Spirit of God is a key distinction that separates Christianity from Islam. The Shi’ite understands that God must be involved in His creation (through the light given to the imamate); however, his doctrine only takes him so far. Much as the Roman Catholic Church had consolidated all means of grace within her sphere and had insisted on standing between sinners and their Savior, so does the Shi’a doctrine of the imamate impose an obstacle between God and man. As Luther spoke against the “Three Walls” of papal abuse and boldly put forth the doctrine (later defined as the priesthood of all believers) that “we [Christians] are all consecrated priests,”⁴⁷ so does the Christian faith declare that all of humanity can approach the very throne room of God, provided that approach is submerged beneath the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Because we have, therefore, unimpeded access to the Father, we have also the confidence (insofar as our finite minds can grasp the infinite) that we can know God. We can know His will for our lives; we can know His power, His mercy, His grace, and His love. We can know God

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, “Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (1520),” J.H. Robinson, ed. *Readings in European History* (Boston: Ginn, 1906), 2.

because He made Himself known to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, and because the Holy Spirit is active in the hearts of all who have placed saving faith in the finished work of Christ.

Conclusion

Certainly, the Shi'a doctrines of guidance through revelation and the imamate are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to turn a Muslim to Christ; it is, after all, not clever arguments but God who turns men's hearts toward Himself. However, it is a valid apologetic that seeks to remove an obstacle to the faith or, similarly, seeks to build upon a previously stipulated concept. In evangelism to Shi'a Muslims, the Christian can use the stipulated fact of the logical and practical necessity of divine guidance to open a discussion into the area of the immanence of God through the Incarnation of Christ. Such discussions, even if they do not lead to the immediate fruit of conversion, may well lead to the planting of seeds that may yield that fruit in the future, in accordance with the timing and the will of God.

At the outset, the Shi'a Muslim can agree with the Christian that if there is a God, and if He is concerned with the affairs of humanity in any degree, He must not be wholly transcendent. The Shi'a, with the Christian, must reject a Deistic caricature of God, which Berkhof explains as the belief "that God is really present in creation *per potentiam* (with His power), but not *per essentiam et naturam* (with His very Being and nature), and acts upon the world from a distance."⁴⁸ The logical fallacy inherent in this theological construction is apparent to the Christian and to the Muslim, as well – yet particularly so with the Shi'a Muslim.

There must be a revelation – on that all Muslims would agree with Christianity; otherwise, there can be no knowledge whatsoever of God. Yet where the Shi'a parts ways with the Sunni – and, in the process, knowingly or unknowingly draws closer to the Christian – is in

⁴⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 61.

the conviction that there must be divine superintendence of this revelation if it is to have any profound application in the world. For Islam, as Francisco reminds the reader, “It is in the inscripturation of his word – and only there – that Allah becomes immanent in the spatio-temporal world.”⁴⁹ The Shi’a seek to make that word relevant through the revelation (*ilham*) given to the Mujtahids. The Christian alone, however, claims that it is God Himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, Who makes the revelation of the true Word relevant and, consequently, of the utmost importance.

The Christian who providentially finds himself in a time and place conducive to conversation with a Shi’ite Muslim would do well to have become acquainted with the unique formulations of Shi’a Islam. In so doing, he may realize that the Shi’a have a heightened sense of the importance of God’s active interaction in the world through various means of revelation. The Christian may then address this issue of revelatory interaction by introducing them to the Person of Jesus Christ or, in the case of those whose concepts of Christ are distorted, clarifying their misperceptions of Him.

Consistent with the sovereign will of God, this may lead to the Shi’a coming to the realization that God has indeed graciously condescended to reveal Himself to His creation and that, further, in that revelation, He has declared that people may be redeemed from the imprisonment of sin and assured of eternal life by simply placing their trust in the finished work of Christ on their behalf. This, then, is the challenge, the privilege, and the call of the Church: to declare the Truth of the Gospel to all who acknowledge their need and admit to their innate longing to know the One Who made them. The prayerful and prudent Christian may well find such objects of evangelism in that seemingly least likely of places: Shi’a Islam.

⁴⁹ Adam S. Francisco, “The Relevance of Islamic Theology,” *Logia: a journal of Lutheran Theology* 18, no. 4 (2009): 16.