

## Divine Sovereignty: A Conceptual Flaw in the Political Theology of Contemporary Islamic Movements

Dr. Zia ul Haq

Assistant Professor, College of Shari'ah & Islamic Studies

University of Sharjah, UAE.

Email: [zulhaq@sharjah.ac.ae](mailto:zulhaq@sharjah.ac.ae)

ISSN (P): 2708-6577

ISSN (E): 2709-6157

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to examine the origins and repercussions of the concept of "divine sovereignty," which was central to the narrative and understanding of certain Islamic movements' political aspirations. The study provides insights on the concept of divine sovereignty, which has been used to justify the militancy of a number of Islamist revivalist groups. The scholar investigates the primary concepts utilized by contemporary radical groups, identifying both theoretical underpinnings and conceptual problems in the literature of these movements in their current context. The study traces the origins and intellectual sources of Islamic fundamentalism, while also exposing new flaws in the intellectual tradition of these extreme movements through an analytical and historical lens, presenting texts from proponents and opponents of the concept of divine sovereignty, as well as tracing the concept's evolution throughout Islamic history.*

**Keywords:** Hakimiyy'ah, Political thought, Islam, Mawdūdī, Qutūb, Tabari

### Introduction:

The term divine Sovereignty has gained popularity among Islamic scholars in recent decades, and various Islamic movements have adopted it as a theoretical framework for gaining power and confronting different political regimes.

The idea of hakimiyy'ah (divine sovereignty) is founded on the assumption that Allah is the solitary subject with the authority to provide direct (the principle of "legal domination") and indirect (the principle of "political domination") legislation to the Muslim community. (Pugachev 2018).<sup>1</sup>

Several Islamic revolutionary movements have founded their political ideology on several sensitive issues regarding rule ship raised in the holy Qur'ān, including divine sovereignty, the abode of peace and war, the concept of Jihad (Holy war), the concept of nation, and the project of Muslims supremacy over other religions. The purpose of this study is to examine these notions in their actual senses in light of the views of notable academics and to investigate why fundamentalists missed the true meanings of these conjunctions, which eventually resulted in a significant radical shift in Islamic political theology.

The necessity of the implementing of the divine law led to the concept of Jahiliyya'h another vital issue discussed in the holy Qur'ān and misinterpreted by the literalists paving the way for further confusion among Muslim youth. The word *Jahiliyya'h* (Ignorance) is appeared more than 1740 times in the *Tafseer Zilal al Qur'ān* authored by Sayyid Qutub, a high controversial Muslim political theorist and in its frequent usage depicts all the Muslims as Ignorant and nonconformists dissenting from the righteous path of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Therefore, he assumed that as the whole Umm'ah is now deviated from the righteous path and turned into Jahiliyy'ah, so

## **Divine Sovereignty: A Conceptual Flaw in the Political Theology of Contemporary Islamic Movements**

---

it is becoming necessary for them to abolish the ignorant society by any means and reestablish an Islamic society.

Sayyid Qutub asserts that Muslim societies have behaviorally regressed to the pre-Islamic stage, by abandoning the application of the divine law in their transactions and legislation, and whoever insists on abandonment and disavowal has reverted ideologically to ignorance. He contextualized all the verses on the subject into a single meaning; that is "Islam or ignorance, the sovereignty of God or the sovereignty of ignorant people."<sup>2</sup>

### **Hypothesis:**

The Islamic political theology of Abu ala Maududi is based on the concept of Hakimiyyah (Divine rule ship) and many contemporary Islamic movements have tried to include it in the constitutions of Islamic countries. So what is actually meant by divine rule ship? Is it as new political concept instituted by contemporary Muslims or does have its origin in the early Islamic political movements? Who is the ruling authority in the Islamic state? The study clarifies the answers for these questions.

### **Methodology**

The research relied on mix method including the historical, analytical and descriptive analysis of the concept of divine sovereignty in Islamic chronicles and its various interpretations throughout Islamic history.

### **Literature Review:**

The twentieth century was marked by ideological clashes of several types, including socialism, capitalism, fascism, nationalism, and religion. As British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) described it as an "era of extremes". This conflict had a significant impact on all subsequent scholarship on state formation across the globe especially in the colonial societies".<sup>3</sup> In this era of extremes, the Middle East and the Islamic world were thrust into a completely new and distinct historical scenario." These were the historical circumstances in which Abu al-Ala al-Mawdūdī lived, and these political circumstances had a significant influence on the ideological propositions he crystallized and upon which he founded his Islamic political thought, as British colonialism altered the Islamic laws that had dominated India for seven centuries. Additionally, the position of National Congress leader "Gandhi," claimed that Islam was not a religion of reason, but one that was introduced to India via force and the sword.

Here the researchers unanimously attributed the idea of al-Hakimiyyah to Sayyid Abu Ala al-Mawdūdī which later on propagated by Sayyid Qutūb, however, after a careful study one can find that the idea was exploded by Ibn Taymiyyah in the first place when he divided monotheism into two parts: the belief in the unity of lordship and the unity of worship- so the oneness of lordship is believing in the God oneness in the affairs of creation and the sustenance of the universe etc and the Unity of worship is singled out for worship and obedience, without partners, equals, or even intermediaries. Ibn Taymiyyah argues that the unity of lordship was something acknowledged by the infidels of the Quraysh, but they used to force intermediaries to bring them closer to God. And since the Qur'ān text infidels them by taking the mediators, therefore, the concept of monotheism is not complete without the denial of obedience and worship of anything other than God.

The roots of divine sovereignty can also be traced in the Sunni school of thought, so the Ash'ari has of the opinion that the intelligibility of good and evil (husn wa qubh) are distinguished by divine law and the human reason is unable to categorize the actions into good or evil rather whoever governs our actions is the exclusively the God almighty. The reason could not distinguish well from evil. This

approach toward good and evil has completely banished human reason exclusively referring them to divine will.<sup>4</sup>

When Pakistan emerged as a new Islamic country on the world map after partition in 1947, Mawdūdī (1903–1979) began preaching the concept of divine sovereignty in the subcontinent. There was a discussion about the constitution of this newborn Islamic country, and Mawdūdī determined the source of constitution as divine sovereignty, and thus the basis of all the laws that followed, as being Divine in origin:

Mawdūdī articulated key ideas about the relationship between Islam and the modern state remaining energetically engaged in the Pakistan's proposed constitutional discussion. Abul A'la Mawdūdī felt that this new state envisioned by Mohammad Ali Jinnah would need a careful observation by religious figures to avoid the constitution of laws that might be considered contrary to Islamic teachings.<sup>5</sup> In this era we find he insists on the concept of divine sovereignty and suggests:

Islam admits of no sovereignty except that of God and, consequently, does not recognize any Law-giver other than Him.<sup>6</sup>

### **Problem Statement**

The holy Qur'ān states in several places that the divine sovereignty must prevail, and the Muslims should not follow any law other than that of God. Actually, the misinterpretation of such verses turned to be a hotbed for other issues which led to other questions like the fate of Muslims who implemented manmade law after the era of caliphs and especially in the colonial period. The necessity of existence of divine sovereignty required the presence of a group supposed to engage in a holy war against those who are ignorant of this divine sovereignty, or they were not such in a position for its implementation. Accordingly, it is assumed by the proponents of divine sovereignty that all those Muslims must be considered infidels and they must be forced back to the divine rule ship by force and the holy group should maintain their supremacy over the ignorant general Muslim public and they have the right to declare war against general public for the establishment of this divine state.

The aforementioned view of the divine sovereignty in the holy Qur'ān favors a direct offence against those Muslims who do not implement the divine sovereignty without any exception. This concept of Mawdudi later on borrowed and widely propagated by Sayyid Qutūb in his Tafseer titled as "*Zilal al-Qur'ān*". Both the scholars influenced a large number of Muslim audiences across the world especially in the subcontinent and middle east.

In this context Qarzawi states that the notion of expiation (Takfeer) is firstly registered in the Zilal al-Qur'ān.<sup>7</sup>

The notion of expiation is based in the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān in which God almighty says:

"ومن لم يحكم بما أنزل الله فأولئك هم الكافرون"<sup>8</sup>

Syed Qutūb interprets the above verse to mean that if a person does not follow Shariah law for whatever reason, he will be declared an infidel, regardless of whether he is in a position to do so or not, and regardless of whether he believes the commandment is true. Qutūb makes the following argument while interpreting Sur'ah al-Ma'ida'h, verse 44:

"إن الذي لا يحكم بما أنزل الله إنما يرفض ألوهية الله، فالألوهية من خصائصها ومن مقتضاها الحاكمة التشريعية ومن يحكم بغير ما أنزل الله يرفض ألوهية الله وخصائصها في جانب، ويدعي لنفسه هو حق الألوهية وخصائصها في جانب آخر. وماذا يكون الكفر إن لم يكن هو هذا وذاك؟"<sup>9</sup>

## Divine Sovereignty: A Conceptual Flaw in the Political Theology of Contemporary Islamic Movements

If he (Muslim) does not judge by what God has revealed and rejects the divinity of God, as the sovereignty is one of the characterizes of God which literally means legislative governance. Therefore, whoever rules other than what God has revealed rejects the divinity of God and its characteristics on one side, and claims for himself the right of divinity on the other side. What is disbelief if it is not this and that? This interpretation of verse 44 of Sur'ah al maida'h leads to the concept that any man-made law must be confronted with intensity until God's monotheism (Divinity) is achieved.

### Criticism

It is obvious that the preceding insight is based on haste and a limited understanding of the verse, and appears to be an ambitious approach toward expiation (Takfeer) and labeling Muslims as infidels, which contradicts the verse's general and widely expressed interpretation by the majority of prominent Muslim scholars.

As previously said, proponents of divine sovereignty saw it as a crucial aspect of Islamic religion and put it in the articles of faith. However, the vast majority of Muslim scholars throughout history and today agree that the Qur'ān is referring to those who dispute the divine law's validity and application. If they believe in the divine order's truth but are unable to carry it out for any reason, they are not considered infidels.

In this context Imam Razi suggests while interpreting the verse in Tafseer Kabir:

"وهذا إنما يتناول من أنكر بقلبه وجحد بلسانه. أما من عرف بقلبه كونه حكم الله وأقر بلسانه كونه حكم الله إلا أنه أتى بما يضاده فهو حاكم بما أنزل الله ولكنه تارك له. فلا يلزم دخوله تحت هذه الآية<sup>10</sup> .

"And this is only applicable to those who deny (Divine Sovereignty) with their hearts and deny it with their tongues. Whoever believes in the concept of divine sovereignty in his heart and accepts it with his tongue but does not act on it will be deemed a Muslim according to what God has revealed, but he will forsake it. Thus, such a person is not always the subject of this verse.

In the same manner, Imam Ghazali, in his interpretation of the verse, contends:

"المُرَادُ بِهِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مُكَدِّبًا بِهِ وَجَاهِدًا لَهُ أَوْ مَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِهِ مِنْ أَوْجَبَ عَلَيْهِ الْحُكْمَ بِهِ مِنْ أُمَّتِهِ<sup>11</sup> .

The verse (who does not rule according to what God has revealed) encompasses those who deny it and do not believe in it, as well as those who have the responsibility to carry out divine sovereignty but they ignore it intentionally.

Similarly Tafsir Razaq refers to the verse and refutes the Qutūb and Mawdūdī interpretation and concludes:

وَلَيْسَ كَمَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ<sup>12</sup> .

"It does not refer to genuine infidelity, in which a person denies God, His angels, or His Messengers."

Imam Tabari interprets the phrase in the same way, summarizing it as follows:

<sup>13</sup> ليس في أهل الإسلام منها شيء، هي في الكفار،

implying that the verse pertains to infidels rather than Muslims. While interpreting the said verse Ibn Ati'ah writes:

<sup>14</sup> وليس حكام المؤمنين إذا حكموا بغير الحق في أمر نكفروه بوجه،

The text does not imply that Muslim rulers are unbelievers if they do not follow the shari'ah law.

Ibn Kathir confirms the aforementioned interpretation of the text when he writes:

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلْتُ فَتَرَكَهُ عَمْدًا، أَوْ جَارَ وَهُوَ يَعْلَمُ، فَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ<sup>15</sup>

And whomever does not put into practice what I have revealed, or who deliberately ignores it while he is aware of it, will be included among those who deny.

The Mawdūdī and Qutūb interpretations of the preceding verse also contradict Allama Alusi's famous Tafseer Ruh al M'aani, in which he writes:

"الثلاث الآيات التي في المائة وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إلخ ليس في أهل الإسلام منها شيء هي في الكفار".<sup>16</sup>

What is mentioned in Sur'ah al Ma'aidah "And who did not apply what was revealed to them," is entirely about infidels, rather than Muslims.

The reading of Sur'ah Maid'ah verse 44 by Mawdūdī and Qutūb contradicts Ibn Abi Hatam, a well-known Qur'ān interpreter as well, who concludes:

"مَنْ حَكَمَ بِكِتَابِهِ الَّذِي كَتَبَهُ يَدِيهِ وَتَرَكَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ، وَرَعَمَ أَنَّ كِتَابَهُ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ قَدْ كَفَرَ".<sup>17</sup>

Whoever bases his decision on his own book, which he wrote himself, and rejects God's book, claiming that the book he produced is from God, has disbelieved.

Similarly, another renowned interpreter, Wahidi, associates this verse with Jews and confirms that it is not about Muslims, as he argues:

"نزلت في مَنْ غَيْرِ حَكْمِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْيَهُودِ وليس في أهل الإسلام منها ومن اللتين بعدها شيء".<sup>18</sup>

It was revealed concerning the Jews who reversed God's judgment, and there is nothing in this verse or the two verses following it that refers to Muslims."

According to the above discussion, Sayyid Qutūb goes against the majority of scholars in determining the issue of divine sovereignty, and his interpretation of the verse appears to be very similar to that of the Kharijites when they labeled Muslims as infidels and blamed them for not implementing divine sovereignty in light of the verse in discussion.

The interpretation of the cited verse by Mawdūdī and Qutūb is, in fact, a departure from the principles established by prominent scholars regarding the interpretation of divine law in the holy Qur'ān.

Rashid Ghannouchi, a contemporary Islamic political thinker, disagrees with this interpretation, saying:

Following that is the power that the people possess. The permissible scope of this power does not contradict divine law as stated in the Qur'ān and the Sunn'ah. (Ghannouchi 1993, 119).<sup>19</sup>

In the same manner, al-Hudaybi claims that neither the Qur'ān nor the Sunnah mention the concept of Hadkimiyyah.

"It is our strong view that there is no verse that implies the presence of hakimiyyah after a thorough search of the Prophet's credible (sahih) ahadith, we were unable to find a single hadith dealing with this word,"

This interpretation contradicts the ideology of mainstream Muslim thinkers throughout history, including the Prophet's companions. According to Sheikh Azhari, Muslim scholars followed a succession of statements and commands in order to interpret the verse 44 of Sur'ah al maida'h. "The most popular and widely accepted interpretation of the verse's connotation is that 'whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, denying its divinity, faith, and veracity, is categorically a Kafir. If a person considers this verse to be true, divine revelation, and divine mandate but fails to put its teaching into effect, he is not a Kafir.

### Conclusion:

The preceding discussion clearly demonstrates that Mawdudi and Qutub political theology contradicts the majority of Muslim academics, and both of them have interpreted Surah al Maa'dah verse 44 according to their own understanding and will, without consulting legitimate Tafsir sources. This kind of interpretation later led to

## Divine Sovereignty: A Conceptual Flaw in the Political Theology of Contemporary Islamic Movements

radical beliefs among Muslims. This reading of the verse emphasizes that failing to follow legal Islamic laws, even if one believes in them or is unable to do so for whatever reason, constitute infidelity. It is obvious that this is a strange notion, one that is extremely tight and limiting. Additionally, the study indicated that divine sovereignty, or "Hakimiyy'ah," is not a central aspect of religion; thus, someone who believes in God sovereignty but does not practice it in his life is not considered an infidel. On the basis of the aforementioned, it is proposed that contemporary Muslim scholars perform a critical investigation of Islamic political theological literature in order to oppose extreme ideologies in Islamic societies.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

### References

- <sup>1</sup> . Pugachev, V. V. (2018). Abul A'la Mawdudi's concept of Hakimiyya and its critical assessment in Islamic legal-political thought. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Law*, 9(2), 230–241. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu14.2018.208>
- <sup>2</sup> . Abu S'aad, T. (2013, April 14). *مَن سبق سيد قطب بتجهيل المجتمعات؟*. www.hafyat.com. Retrieved , October 29, 2021, from <https://cdn.hafryat.com/ar/blog>
- <sup>3</sup> . *al Hakimiyy'ah wa al Jahiliyy'ah wa al Daula'h al Islamia'ah*. 2018, May 14). Retrieved , October 28, 2021, from <https://middle-east-online.com>
- <sup>4</sup> . Mominoun. (2015, October 21). *مفهوم الحاكمية عند سيد قطب بين جدل الديني والسياسي*. Mominoun, Without Borders. Retrieved October 29, 2021, from <https://www.mominoun.com/articles>
- <sup>5</sup> . Nelson, M. J. (2015). Islamic law in an islamic republic: What role for Parliament? *Constitution Writing, Religion and Democracy*, 13(3), 235–264. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107707443.010>
- <sup>6</sup> . 'Ala, M. S. A., & Ahmad, K. (1990). In *The Islamic law and Constitution* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 1–305). essay, Islamic Publications.
- <sup>7</sup> . Qardawi , Y. (2000, August 22). *ابن القريية والكتاب ملامح سيرة ومسيرة*. Noor Book, Cairo. Retrieved October 29, 2021, from <https://www.noor-book>
- <sup>8</sup> . Al-Maid'ah: 44
- <sup>9</sup> . Qutub, S. (n.d.). *Fi Zilal al Qur'an* , Dar al Shuruq. Cairo, Egypt 2013th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 889-899
- <sup>10</sup> . Razi, F. U. (2006). In *Mafatih al Ghaib*, Dar al Ghad al Arabi, Cairo, (3rd ed., Vol. 6, pp. 6–35
- <sup>11</sup> . Muhammed bin Muhammed, G. (1993). *Al Mustafa*, Darl al Kutub al Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 3rd ed., Vol. 1, pp.198-199
- <sup>12</sup> . Sanghani, A. R. (2001). In *Tafsir Abdel Razaq*, essay, Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyya'h, Beirut, Lebanon, 3rd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 20–21
- <sup>13</sup> . Tabari, M. bin J. (2005). *Jami al Bayan fi Tafsir aye al Qur'an*, Dar al Taribiyah wa al Turath, Mecca, KSA, 3rd ed., Vol. 10, pp. 346-347
- <sup>14</sup> . Ibn Ati'ah, A. H. (2005). *Al wajeer fi Tafsir al Kitab al Aziz*, Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 3rd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 95-96
- <sup>15</sup> . Ibn Kathir , I. bin U. (1999). *Tafsir al Qur'an Azeem*, Dar al Teeba, al Nasar City, Egypt, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 314-315

<sup>16</sup> . Alusi, M. bin A. (2006). In *Ruh al Ma'ani*, essay, Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyy'ah, Beirut, Lebanon, 5th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 314–315

<sup>17</sup> . Ibn Abi Hatam, A. R. (1999). *Tafsir al Qur'an al Azeem*, Maktabah Nazzar ibn al Baz, Mecca, KSA, 3rd ed., Vol. 4, pp. 1142-1143

<sup>18</sup> . Wahidi, A. bin A. (1994). *Al Wajeez fi Tafsir al Kitab al Aziz*, al Dar al Shami'ah, Damascus, 4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 314-321

<sup>19</sup> . Rachid, G. (2012). *Al Hurriyah al Amma'h fi Dawla al Islami'ah (Public Liberties in the Islamic State)*, Markaz al Dirasat al Wahda al Arabia, Tripoli, Vol. 1, pp. 112-134.